UNCOMFORTABLE MIRRORS: RELIGION AND MIMETIC VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN NATIVE LITERATURE

by

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ABSTRACT

“Uncomfortable Mirrors: Religion and Mimetic Violence in Contemporary Canadian Native Literature”
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This study considers religion and mimetic violence in the work of four contemporary Canadian Native writers: Maria Campbell, Beatrice Culleton, Thomas King, and Basil Johnston. The mimetic violence examined is both social (the colonial attempt to remake the colonized into a reflection of the dominant culture) and personal (inter-Native conflict in which participants mirror one another in their struggle for a mutually coveted object). In order to investigate the former, I rely on the work of Homi K. Bhabha on colonial mimicry and hybridity; to examine the latter, I employ René Girard’s model of mimetic desire and violence. The principal academic contexts to this work are the study of Native literature and the academic study of religion, including the sub-field of Religion and Literature. After reviewing the relevant literature in these fields, and examining mimetic violence in key texts by the Native authors listed, I make several concluding points.

First, I argue that a causal link between colonial violence and inter-Native mimetic violence is evident in the category of Native literature labelled by Thomas King as “polemical.” This includes Campbell’s Halfbreed, Culleton’s In Search of April Raintree, and King’s own Green Grass, Running Water. Second, I find that Johnston’s Moose Meat & Wild Rice and Indian School Days generally take care to separate colonial mimesis from Native mimetic conflict. This work fits King’s “associational” category of
Native literature, and the disconnect evident in Johnston’s stories between the two forms of mimesis might stand as a defining feature of this category. Third, I assert that in none of the Native literature examined is religion viewed in a positive, idealist manner that assumes in its “true” manifestation it cannot be the cause of violence, which is the position taken by most religion scholars. I argue that the emphasis the Native texts place on the historic, material actions and effects of Christian individuals and institutions complements similar work being done by a minority of academics in the study of religion. Fourth, I propose possible avenues for the further investigation of mimesis in Native literature, which would use/focus on: metaphor-centred hermeneutical models; trickster figures and theories; and the conception of both Native and colonial identity. Finally, I argue that critics of Native literature have tended to idealize Native cultures, and that inter-Native mimetic violence offers a humanizing corrective to this perspective.
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Thomas King has suggested that it is good to begin stories with an apology, in case anyone’s feelings are hurt in the telling. He also asserts, repeatedly, the importance of minding one’s relations. So to everyone for what follows: I am sorry. And to my wife, family, friends, colleagues, students, teachers, and cats: once again, thank you all so very much.
We are the keepers of time. We must know the places of invasion in our histories and in ourselves so that we may illumine the paths of those who cannot see or who do not know. Because our pain is a “part of this land,” we are also the Uncomfortable Mirrors to Canadian society. And few can look at the glaring reflections our mirrors provide.

- Emma LaRocque
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Stories

1.1.1 Fort Albany First Nation

In October 1996, The Globe and Mail published a front-page story about the physical and sexual abuse of Native children at St. Anne’s residential school in Fort Albany First Nation, a community on the western shore of James Bay about 1000 kilometres north of Toronto (Moon, “Hundreds”). The school was operated from 1904 to 1973 by the Roman Catholic diocese of Moosonee and the Oblate order and the Grey Nuns. Complaints filed by former students included allegations of fondling, rape, forced abortions, whipping, and receiving shocks from a home-made electric chair. Reports of such abuse are of course sadly not atypical, with the somewhat notable exception of the fact that, along with priests and lay teachers, some of the accused in this instance were nuns.¹

After years of hearing such stories, perhaps the most surprising element of this piece for many non-Native Canadians would have been the report that members of the community were sharply divided over the question of whether or not charges should be

¹ This is not to say that nuns have not been elsewhere accused of physical and sexual abuse at residential schools, simply that few reports of such abuse gain much public notice. In Shingwauk’s Vision, J.R. Miller provides two other examples of extreme cruelty by nuns (325-326), but points out that, as yet, the evidence indicates that such crimes are dwarfed in number by those involving male school authorities (332). Miller’s text is one of the most detailed and comprehensive treatments of the residential school system in Canada, particularly in terms of its focus on the actual experiences of Native Canadians and the complicity of the Christian churches in the inherently abusive nature of the system. For more information on Canadian residential schools see Barman, Hébert and McCaskill (2 volumes); Grant, No End; Haig-Brown, Resistance; Milloy, National. Along with such academic studies, residential school testimonies provide detailed insiders’ accounts of a system that has had an inestimable effect on Canada’s aboriginal peoples. These accounts have emerged as a distinctive literary genre in their own right and encompass both traditional autobiographies and more complex fictionalized works. See, e.g., Tomson Highway’s Kiss of the Fur Queen; Linda Jaine’s collection, Residential Schools: The Stolen Years; Basil Johnston’s Indian School Days; Jane Willis’ Ganiesh. For an overview and discussion of residential school writing in Canada see McKegney, Magic; Scott, “Residential.”
laid. Interestingly, the former and current chiefs of Fort Albany typified the two sides of the issue. Edmund Metatawabin, who was chief of the Fort Albany band for eight years, supported the investigation and prosecution of the abusers. He also supported the recent return of Native religious traditions, a return initiated by some of the school’s victims who believed that it would help them recover more fully from their experiences. As might be expected, conditions at the school led many students to turn sharply away from Christianity.

And yet the majority of Fort Albany, including the succeeding chief Arthur Scott, remain devout, practicing Catholics. Although sympathetic to the victims’ sufferings, Scott felt that pressing charges would harm the community more than help it, largely by undermining people’s “trust and belief” in the church (A6). He further declared that, if the elders and the majority of the people agreed with his view, he would have a band council resolution passed under the Indian Act prohibiting outside authorities from entering the reserve. In this regard Scott declared, “This is Indian territory. We are talking about the majority of the people here. I don’t support the cause for reviving old wounds. My people like to move on” (A6).

The story of Fort Albany First Nation raises several important issues concerning the relationship between violence and religion for Native people in Canada. First and most obviously, there is the problem of judging whether or not Christianity itself is at all responsible for the kind of violence that took place at St. Anne’s or entirely separate from it. Did the horrors of the school occur in large or small part because of Christian beliefs and practices, or in spite of them? The former position is suggested to some extent by the

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2 Moon reports victims of abuse at the school as testifying that “the people who have made the most progress in their healing processes are those who adopted their own beliefs, including those who went back to their traditional beliefs and practices” (A6).
many students who vividly recall “the dour religious pictures of pain and suffering” that covered the school walls (A6). Many elders of the community, however, see the abusers as misguided “servants of God,” acting against the true spirit of their tradition (A6).

The second issue raised is the definition of violence itself, which in this context is highly contingent on one’s faith. For some, forcing elderly priests and nuns to face criminal charges is a way to facilitate healing; for others it represents in fact yet another crime, one that threatens to harm the current generation of children by violating their Catholic beliefs. And while all agree that abusing children is self-evidently abhorrent, not everyone would see the overall missionization of the community as an act of violence. This is to say that Native Christians, not surprisingly, are likely to view their conversion as a very good thing, perhaps the best and most important event in their lives. Billy Diamond, who was the Grand Chief of the Cree of Québec from 1974 until he converted to Pentecostal Christianity ten years later, represents such a viewpoint: “We were poor, we were broken-hearted, we were certainly captives. But we wanted to be free from the Department of Indian Affairs, to be free from the handouts. We wanted control, but we couldn’t get control until we surrendered, until as individuals we became free through the gospel of Jesus Christ” (qtd. in Dorsch 22).

Diamond’s testimonial suggests a third critical question, namely whether conversion to the religion of one’s colonizers necessarily means surrender to the (violent) process of colonization more generally. The answer to this question would seem obviously to be “yes”; as noted in the Globe article, the policy concerning church control of residential schools “was intended to force assimilation on the indigenous peoples and prepare them for subservient roles in the dominant white culture of the times” (A6). For
Diamond, however, resistance to colonial powers was apparently easier for him after conversion. Arthur Scott’s vow to prevent outside authorities from entering Fort Albany is tinged with a similar irony: he is threatening to assert the community’s rights and identity as Native people in part to safeguard beliefs that are specifically non-Native in origin, against representatives of the same culture that instilled those beliefs in the first place.  

Of course Scott is also trying to defend the town against some of its own members. This internal conflict may in fact be the most upsetting legacy of St. Anne’s, inscribing a pattern of self-destruction into the everyday existence of Fort Albany. And without a unified community to support them, caught up in the centre of a bitter dispute, the school’s victims may be disallowed a fair chance to heal. In this respect it does not matter in the end which group’s position is the “correct” one, if either, since both may be seen as contributing to the ongoing violence. This degree of coherence brings us to the fourth and final point, namely that although the two groups are intensely oppositional there also exist a number of important similarities between them: each is represented by a man who was chief; each defines itself principally in terms of religion; each sees the violence which took place at the school as the central threat to the community; and each group’s response to this threat is determined by its religious identity.

These parallels may or may not be meaningful in themselves, but at the very least they are striking enough to bear some consideration. This seems particularly true when

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Lisa Valentine relates a similar, although more permanent, protective stance among the Severn Ojibway of Lynx Lake, another Northern Ontario community. As in Fort Albany First Nation, this stance derives from an overriding desire to protect a specifically Christian identity; but this protection is not so much from non-Natives as from all other religious influences, including Native ones: “The community of Lynx Lake has been unique for its isolationist position towards outside, non-Anglican religious activities; no religious representative, individual or group, is welcome in Lynx Lake without official approval from the local clergy” (Making 129).
taking into account that they also correspond closely to the notion of “mimetic conflict” developed by René Girard, a man who remains the single most influential thinker on the subject of religion and violence. For Girard, mimetic conflict describes a situation in which individuals or groups within a society fight among themselves, while at the same time “the differences that constitute the society are dissolved” (“Mimesis” 11). The opposing sides increasingly resemble one another as the conflict escalates, to the point where the entire group is in danger of self-destruction (12-13). It is precisely this sort of situation that appears to be at the centre of the three issues noted above: questions about the responsibility of religion for causing violence; the definitions of violence; and the relationship between religion and colonization. Mimetic conflict is also very evident in the literature produced by many Native writers in Canada, literature that approaches in varying ways the dynamic of religion, mirroring, and internal violence that is evidenced in the story of Fort Albany First Nation.

1.1.2 Two Moose, Four Writers

An example of this literature is “Indian Smart: Moose Smart,” the first entry in Ojibway author Basil Johnston’s first collection of contemporary tales, *Moose Meat & Wild Rice*. The story concerns a fight that breaks out during a moose hunt. Six hungry Indians, in two canoes, are returning from an unsuccessful expedition when they suddenly come upon two very large, very appetizing, moose. Tired from their long, food-

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4 A detailed outline of Girard’s theory is provided in section 3.1.3.
5 Although the term “Indian” is obviously problematic for a great number of reasons, it is also a term that virtually every Native writer, including Johnston, uses at times when referring to North American Native people. As a result I will also use it at times when discussing these writers’ stories. Still, I bear in mind the words of Lenore Keeshig-Tobias: “How I loathe the term ‘Indian’ . . . ‘Indian’ is a term used to sell things—souvenirs, cigars, cigarettes, gasoline, cars . . . ‘Indian’ is a figment of the white man’s imagination” (qtd. in Wright, *Stolen* ix).
free expedition, one of them suggests throwing ropes around the moose and letting them pull the canoes to the shore before making the kill. An argument ensues that splits the group precisely in half: two men and one woman maintain that the plan is brilliant, that they will get the moose home while enjoying their leisure, “just like the white man” would do (15); the other two men and one woman first point out that the plan is disrespectful to the animals (“It’s bad enough we gonna kill that moose; don’t have to make fun of it” [14]), and later issue navigational warnings when it seems they are getting too close to the shore. The first three ignore these warnings, however; as a result the moose make it to shore at a gallop and all six hunters are dumped out of the canoes into the water.

The hunters’ positions, like the sides drawn in Fort Albany, are clearly related to each faction’s relationship to colonialism and, by extension, religion. The three in favour of roping the moose are quite delighted to have thought up a plan “worthy” of white folks; one of them muses, in fact, that “if they could only see us now they wouldn’t think Indians were so stupid” (16). Johnston is of course implying in the story that a central “white” trait is not so much ingenuity as laziness, a failing that he explicitly links to Christianity elsewhere in this collection of stories. He also notes that the white man’s religion, like the moose-roping plan, is typically imposed on others in an “evangelistic spirit” (9). The three opposed to this plan conversely seem more “traditionally” Native both in their respect for the moose and in their understanding of the environment, traits

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6 In “The Miracle,” e.g., Christian prayer is represented by one of the characters as a way of getting something that you want without having to work for it (Moose 53-54).
that Johnston definitively associates with Anishinaubae\textsuperscript{7} religion.\textsuperscript{8} Although such characteristics appear more positive than the ones linked to Christianity, in one sense the more traditional Indians don’t fare much better than their opponents: they get caught up just as easily in pointless fighting, and so who is right becomes more important than eating supper. As Girard would predict, this mimetic conflict ends badly for everyone: they all wind up cold, wet, and still hungry.

Along with mimetic violence, Johnston’s story further suggests the other three issues raised by the Fort Albany account. First, since the two positions are intimately tied to religious viewpoints, we may wonder to what degree either tradition is at all responsible for the fight. Second, the fight itself is motivated by a disagreement over whether or not using the moose to pull the canoes fits the definition of violence, in the specific sense of ethical mistreatment; that is to say, none of the characters object to killing the moose, it’s the question of disrespecting the animal that divides them. And third, it appears that the ones who proselytize the moose-roping plan believe that acting more like whites in some way constitutes an act of resistance: “if they could only see us now they wouldn’t think Indians were so stupid.”

“Indian Smart: Moose Smart” presents a narrative pattern that is often repeated in the works of Canadian Native writers. This pattern essentially involves the relation between religion and two forms of mimetic conflict: individual (i.e., inter-Native) and social (i.e., colonial). Examining this relation presents the opportunity for new understandings of both Canadian Native literature in general, and a number of prevailing

\textsuperscript{7} For a discussion of variations on the spellings of “Anishinaubae” and the attempts to standardize them, see Noori, “Native” 128-129. The spelling I use in this dissertation is the one offered by Johnston in \textit{The Manitous}.

\textsuperscript{8} Such associations are made throughout most of the entire text of \textit{Ojibway Heritage}. See, e.g., Johnston’s discussion of traditional Anishinaubae attitudes towards plants (32-45) and animals (53-58).
academic orientations. The suggestion that any given religion(s) may be fundamentally violent, for example, is still one that is rarely made directly by academics in the field. The present study considers, then, how four Canadian Native writers approach religion and mimetic violence, and how this approach adds a distinctive element to current scholarship on the issue.

The authors in question—Maria Campbell, Beatrice Culleton, Thomas King, and Basil Johnston—represent a range of both social/cultural backgrounds and writing styles, which provides an opportunity to consider the diversity of Canadian Native writing even while looking for possible patterns. These authors are also, arguably, among the most significant contemporary Canadian Native writers in English. I make this claim fully aware of how subjective the task of identifying “significant” literature in general, and Native literature in particular, really is. It is true, for example, that the four writers I have selected are regarded highly enough by anthologists and scholars that works by some or all of them appear in almost every collection or critical examination of Canadian Native

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9 The major difficulties involved in circumscribing (Native) literature and its importance are discussed in section 2.2. One might also question the usefulness of identifying specifically Canadian Native writers, given that the boundary between Canada and the United States is not inherently meaningful to this continent’s indigenous people. As Thomas King remarks during his interview with Constance Rooke, this border is “a line from somebody else’s imagination; it’s not my imagination. It divides people like the Mokawk into Canadian Mohawks and US Mohawks. They’re the same people” (72). Both the history of colonialism, however, and that of Native literature, are in many ways very different in each country. In the interviews that Hartmut Lutz conducted with 18 Native writers in Canada, e.g., every time that one of them identifies the most significant literary influence on them it is another Native writer in Canada. This despite the fact that three tremendously important Native works—N. Scott Momaday’s House Made of Dawn, James Welch’s Winter in the Blood, and Leslie Marmon Silko’s Ceremony—emerged in the U.S. before the majority of such writing in Canada really even began. Jeanette Armstrong is perhaps the most ambivalent author in this respect, as she does include Momaday, as well as Joy Harjo, in her list of influences, along with Canadians Lee Maracle and Maria Campbell (Interview 13, 25). And yet Armstrong still acknowledges the existence of national literary distinctions by noting that Maria Campbell and Beatrice Culleton “have produced novels of real significance in terms of Native literature in Canada” (qtd. in Godard, “Politics” 205). Emma LaRocque explicitly states that “there is an Aboriginal experience unique to the Canadian context” (“Teaching” 224), while—despite his ambivalence about the border—Thomas King asserts that he is a Canadian writer (Interview with Rooke 72), and reflects in some detail upon the differences between Canadian and American Native writing (Interview with Lutz 109-110). See also Eigenbrod and Episkenew, Introduction 8; Episkenew, “Socially” 52-53; Hoy, How 24-25; LaRocque, “Teaching” 224-225.
It is also possible to argue, however, that in fact none of them belongs on my list: for Campbell, Culleton, and Johnston, these arguments can most often be reduced to a belief that their work is not “literary” enough; for King, that he is not sufficiently “Native” (or even “Canadian”). And so I think it is useful to present both my own justifications for including these particular writers in this study, as well as the objections to my choices that may be raised.

Maria Campbell, to begin, is often and simply considered centrally responsible for inspiring in 1973 the rapid proliferation of Native writing that has been going on in Canada for the past 35 years. Her first work, the autobiographical *Halfbreed*, has been called in fact “the most important and seminal book authored by a Native person from Canada” (Lutz, *Contemporary* 41). Penny Petrone is slightly more subdued in her assessment, however, calling *Halfbreed* merely the “most acclaimed native autobiography” of the 1970s (*Native* 118; emphasis added). In fact, according to Agnes Grant, Campbell’s book “has never been taken seriously as literature” (“Contemporary” 128), while Kate Vangen asserts that “[Halfbreed’s] strength rests more with its power as the gutsy testimony of a life lived than as a polished narrative” (“Making” 189).

Campbell herself has said that she does not think of herself as a writer, but simply as someone whose “work is in the community” (Interview with Lutz 41). Yet *Halfbreed* continues to be discussed by both academics and other Native writers more than any other single Canadian Native text. It is in this respect that both Lenore Keeshig-Tobias...

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11 In “Post *Halfbreed*,” Janice Acoose outlines the general significance and impact of Campbell’s text.

12 Campbell made a similar comment during her 2002 presentation for the University of Toronto’s Aboriginal Studies Distinguished Lecture Series, explicitly identifying herself as someone who is not a writer, but an activist. See also Campbell’s interview with Doris Hillis, 56.
and Daniel David Moses refer to Campbell as “The Mother Of Us All” (Keeshig-Tobias, Interview 83), while Beth Cuthand maintains that “*Halfbreed* is a classic. If people are studying Canadian Native literature, they have to read it. *Halfbreed* is standard” (Interview 35).

Ten years after Campbell’s text appeared, Beatrice Culleton’s *In Search of April Raintree* took many of the themes and issues raised by *Halfbreed* and presented them in a more self-consciously novelistic form. Compared to Campbell’s work, however, *In Search of April Raintree* has been more often and more directly viewed as “unliterary.” As Helen Hoy points out, a large number of (non-Native) critics patronizingly regard Culleton as having an “honest” but “unsophisticated” style, implying that her work would not have received much attention were it not written by a Native woman (“Nothing” 155). Hoy herself admits that, for a long while, even she had found teaching Culleton’s text “embarrassing,” unable to fully “vindicate” the text to herself or her students in conventional academic and literary terms (173). Not surprisingly, she succeeded in validating the text precisely by recognizing the limits of such conventions:

> Within a modernist Western criticism, writing like Culleton’s that does not “distinguish” itself and its author (as different, as superior), writing that speaks with the voice of everyday, has its craft rendered invisible. . . . That illusion of transparency is one of [*Raintree’s*] accomplishments. But only one of its accomplishments. . . . *In Search of April Raintree* is a duplicitous (a multiplicitous?) book. In terms of author as well as
character, it both invites and disrupts notions of the real and of the self, of authenticity and of identity, of truth. (179)

As a result of such accomplishments *In Search of April Raintree* became crucial, according to Greg Young-Ing, in the development of “a uniquely Aboriginal form of literature” within Canada (“Aboriginal” 183). Kateri Damm similarly considers Culleton one of the “pioneers” of Canadian Native writing (“Says” 17). Arguably, the impact of *In Search of April Raintree* is evident simply from its constant association with *Halfbreed*; the texts are in fact very often discussed (or even just referred to) as a pair, seen to complement one another in terms of form, content and influence. According to Jo-Ann Thom, a significant number of Canadian Native writers have said that Culleton’s novel “influenced their literary development more than any other work of literature”—with the single exception, that is, of *Halfbreed* (“Effect” 295).

The two male writers that I will consider, Thomas King and Basil Johnston, present an important dichotomy. On the one hand, King has proven to be so successful that his work is often discussed and taught simply as literature, without the standard “Native” (or even “Canadian”) qualifier; according to a 2001 survey by *Quill and Quire*,

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13 Dawn Thompson discusses critiques of *In Search of April Raintree* similar to those cited by Hoy (“Typewriter”); she also maintains that “conventional literary-critical approaches to *April Raintree* may be obscuring its more radical effects” (“Technologies” 61). In this regard, Kateri Damm argues that the text’s “deceptively simple style” is part of Culleton’s critique of colonial abuse, functioning as “an extremely effective and genuine form for reflecting both the narrator’s and author’s cultural deprivations” (111).

14 It is also the first Canadian Native literary work to have a critical edition of the text produced (Suzack, Introduction 2).

15 I believe the pun is intended.

16 E.g., Acoose, “Post” 30; Currie, “Jeanette” 138; Cuthand, Interview 35; Damm, “Dispelling”; Donovan, *Coming* 19; Episkenew, “Socially”; Grant, “Contemporary”; Kelly, “Landscape” 123; “You” 164-176; LaRocque, Interview 195; “Preface” xviii; Lundgren, “Being”; Perreault and Vance, xi-xii; Ruffo, “Why” 117; Thom, “Effect”; Vevaina, “Articulating.” It is worth noting that Culleton’s text actually opens with an excerpt from a letter that Maria Campbell wrote to her in response to the manuscript for *In Search of April Raintree*, a fact that presumably has helped to cement in critics’ minds the connections between these two writers.
for example, *Green Grass, Running Water* was being taught in more Canadian Literature courses in Canada than any other work (Gunn, “King”). King has risen to such prominence that two of his short stories received critical attention from Margaret Atwood herself, who went so far as to call them “perfect” (“Double-Bladed” 244). Such praise is all the more significant because, as Atwood admits in the same article, she had previously omitted any mention of Native writers at all from her 1972 canon-forming overview of Canadian literature, *Survival* (243). With *Green Grass, Running Water*, King also produced one of the most written-about novels in Canada of the 1990s. He is, as a result, impossible to ignore. King is considered such a singularly important Canadian Native fiction writer that Canadian critics almost never mention that he is, in fact, American. He is also arguably one of the least “Native” writers in the country: King is of both Cherokee and Greek descent, and as he comments in his interview with Hartmut Lutz, he was not raised in an aboriginal community and has no close tribal ties (108-109).

These reflections on King bring us to the other hand, namely that although Basil Johnston is a “full-blooded” Anishinaabae, a member of the Cape Croker First Nation in Ontario, and the most published Native writer in Canada, his work remains almost

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17 An extensive list of works that examine King’s text is provided in section 4.4.
18 To be fair, this representation of King’s identity is supported by the author himself: “I am not originally from Canada, and the Cherokee certainly aren’t a Canadian tribe . . . I think of myself as a Native writer and a Canadian writer . . . all of my [work has been] published here in Canada, and [it] all has to do with Canadian material” (Interview with Lutz 107; cf. Interview with Rooke 72).
19 Jace Weaver reports that, in an interview, King said “he used to apologize when he was younger for his lack of strong tribal ties but that he stopped because he recognizes that there are ‘a number of other Native people who are in somewhat the same situation’” (Weaver, *That* 151). As this comment indicates, the issue of defining who is and who is not “Native” is a fairly complex one; as such it is considered in some detail in section 2.2.1.
completely unexamined by academics in any field. Both Native and non-Native commentators will very often refer to Johnston’s work, but provide no analysis or substantive discussion of it. Typically this is because they are using his writing solely as a source of ethnological or historical information. It is partly for this reason that I have chosen to focus on Johnston’s writings in greater depth than that of the other three authors. In addition, Johnston is one of the few aboriginal authors who have done much work with both contemporary and traditional stories. This means, in turn, that Johnston also deals more directly and extensively with both Native and Christian traditions in his work than any other Native writer in Canada. Raised on the Cape Croker reserve and educated in a residential school run by Jesuits, Johnston is as personally involved as may be possible in the issues with which I am concerned, and he approaches them in a distinctively complex manner that adds immensely to a discussion of religion and violence in Canadian Native literature.

1.2 Terms and Conditions

1.2.1 Religion and Violence

One of the most obvious and immediate difficulties of a project such as this one is definitional: the principal terms involved—religion, violence—are quite overloaded with multiple, mixed understandings. It is critical, therefore, that I explain my own views at the outset. The first point to note is that, for good reason, these terms are strongly,

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20 Aside from numerous articles and short stories, between 1976 and 2007 Johnston published 16 books, far more than any other Canadian Native author. Three of these are language texts (Ojibway Language Course, Ojibway Language Lexicon, and Anishinaubae Thesaurus), but the rest all tell stories in one form or another.

21 See, e.g., Giese, “Manitoulin”; Horne, Contemporary xxi; James, Locations 176-177; Restoule, “Indigenous” n. 3; Rogers, “Algonquian” 157; Ross, Dancing 84; Schmalz, Ojibwa 186, 244; “Understanding Treaties”; Young-Ing, “Aboriginal” 183.
perhaps inextricably, linked together in the minds of most people. It is virtually a commonplace to note that religion is centrally implicated in some of the bloodiest events in human history. In this regard it is not likely just a coincidence that a great percentage of sacred texts record, if not outright endorse, human slaughter. In the Hebrew Bible, for example, God commands the Israelites several times to completely destroy their enemies, including women, children and in one case all animals as well.\textsuperscript{22} Meanwhile the \textit{Bhagavad-Gita}, a central Hindu work, depicts the supreme deity Vishnu convincing the hero Arjuna to proceed, against his own desire for reconciliation, with an all-out war against members of his own clan.\textsuperscript{23}

More specifically relevant to this dissertation, it is important to note that similar relations between religion and violence frequently marked the colonization of the Americas by various European powers. The first Western military base in this hemisphere, in fact, was erected by Columbus and named “Navidad” (Zinn, \textit{People’s 3}). In his reports back to Spain, Columbus likewise celebrated with great piety his conquest over the first Natives he encountered: “Thus the eternal God, our Lord, gives victory to those who follow His way” (qtd. in Zinn 3). Even more to the point, he exclaimed: “Let us in the name of the Holy Trinity go on sending all the slaves that can be sold” (qtd. in Zinn 4).\textsuperscript{24} As Marc Ellis notes:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} “Thus says the LORD of hosts . . . ‘Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey’” (1 Sam 15:2-3). See also, e.g., Deut 7:2, 12:2, 20:17; Josh 9:24; Judg 21:1.
\item \textsuperscript{23} For other, similar accounts of sacred texts from a variety of traditions that exhort/justify human violence, see Aho, \textit{Religious}.
\item \textsuperscript{24} The most iconic incident connecting religion with the beginnings of colonization in Canada is not so overtly violent, but nevertheless telling, particularly in the mixing of Christian and military symbolism. In July 1534, after more than a week of discussions with the native Micmacs at the Bay of Chaleur, Jacques Cartier decided to mark the place and the occasion by having his men erect a cross that was thirty feet high. On it they fixed a shield with three \textit{fleurs-de-lys}, along with a wooden board stating “Long Live the King of France” (Miller, \textit{Skyscrapers 3}). According to Grant, this event marked “the first recorded presentation of
[A] central point—that these conquistadors were Christians who thought themselves on a Christian mission—is often denied. Certainly the adventurers most remembered in history—Christopher Columbus, Hernando Cortéz, and Francisco Pizarro—felt that they had been chosen by God for their mission. Columbus thought that he was being guided by divine providence; Cortéz was admired for his religiosity and scrupulous attention to prayer and devotions. The last action of Pizarro, who some historians believe to be the cruelest of the conquistadors, was to draw a cross with his own blood so that he could die with the cross before him. (Unholy 89-90)

Undoubtedly, Christianity was part of the general colonial efforts in the “new world,” and just as certainly, this role often involved the explicit support and/or incitement of oppression and brutality.  

Religion is of course also strongly linked to peace. Figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., loom as large as myths themselves in our collective consciousness as people who are understood to have practiced heroic acts of non-violence in specific accordance with their religious beliefs. Entire traditions, such as Jainism and Christian teaching to Indians within the present boundaries of Canada” (Moon 3). For further accounts and discussions of Christianity and colonialism in Canada see Adams, Prison 26-32; Cardinal, Unjust 68-75; Miller, Skyscrapers 17-20, 31-40, 136-151, 189-207; Trigger, “Jesuits”; Trigger, Natives 226-297, 321-341; Valentine, Making 128-166.

25 As Jamie Scott comments, “British colonial and imperial hegemony begins with the invasive appropriation of physical land and material resources, an offensive process Christianity often helped to justify, either explicitly, as the self-appointed ideology of British expansionism, or implicitly, as one hegemonic practice among many imported discourses of domination imposed upon an invaded cultural landscape” (“Praxis” 312; cf. Grant, Moon 204). Michael Prior’s The Bible and Colonialism provides by far the most detailed study of the ways in which the Bible has been used “to justify the conquest of land in different regions and at different periods” (11). More specifically, Prior investigates the history, meaning, and repercussions of the fact that “the biblical claim of the divine promise of land is integrally linked with the claim of divine approval for the extermination of the indigenous people” (287).
Quakerism, are centrally concerned with such principles. And other religions, which are not so exclusively peaceful, have nevertheless in many instances raised these principles to the level of doctrine. The notion of *ahimsa* that runs through Buddhism and Hinduism, as well as Jainism, exhorts non-violence and compassion towards others; in the West, Christians of various denominations look, like the Quakers, towards Jesus’ canonized exhortations to love their enemies and to treat others as they would like to be treated themselves (Matt 5:43-45, 7:12).

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, from the beginning of the invasion of the Americas there has been strong Christian opposition to the horrors instigated by Columbus and his successors. The first account of such a stance comes from Bartolomé de las Casas, whose writings form the primary source of information about what happened on the islands after Columbus. Las Casas was a young priest who initially owned a slave plantation in Cuba, but abandoned it to write volumes that passionately recorded and denounced Spanish colonialism. He explains, for example, how the men “thought nothing of knifing Indians by tens and twenties and of cutting slices off them to test the sharpness of their blades” (qtd. in Zinn, *People’s* 6). He estimates that “from 1494 to 1508, over three million people had perished from war, slavery, and the mines” (qtd. in Zinn 7). This was all the result of men he referred to as “so-called Christians,” who violated their religion’s teachings in committing “acts so foreign to human nature” (qtd. in Zinn 6-7).26

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26 In *Moon of Wintertime*, John Webster Grant argues for the existence of similarly peace-minded attitudes among missionaries in Canada. He states, e.g., that “the primary aim of the missionaries, one is constantly reminded in the *Relations*, was to save Indian souls . . . [from] the torments of a literally conceived hell” (31). Grant further commends a number of missionaries for “their genuine concern for the Indians, their dogged refusal to accept the general view that Indians were doomed to extinction, their recognition of the urgency of taking action to preserve Indian communities, and their willingness to resist pressures from white society” (205).
Given the above associations, it is not surprising that two opposing viewpoints tend to dominate any discussion of the relation between religion and violence. The first one assumes that the peaceful manifestations of religion represent its true “essence.” Religion itself then is a kind of abstract ideal that is inherently “good,” and so by definition cannot be implicated in anything “bad” such as violence. This way of thinking holds that a person or institution that claims to be religious but in fact engages in violence is not “truly” religious, only nominally so.27 It was in this spirit that Mohammed Abdullah responded to both the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the 1994 massacre of Muslims by a Jewish physician at the Cave of the Patriarchs Shrine in Hebron: “The people who made the World Trade Center bomb, they are not really Muslim. Muslims don’t blow up innocent people. The same with the doctor. He was either crazy or not a real Jew because real Jews do not kill innocent people” (qtd. in Ellis, Unholy 1-2).28 By the same line of reasoning, Catholics and Protestants killing each other in Ireland were not real Christians, while the members of Aum Shinrikyo who detonated

27 One of the most widespread views of religion in this vein argues that the original, historical “core” or “essence” of a given tradition is pure, but that this core is corrupted by the (material) process of institutionalization. British political writer Thomas Paine provides an important early modern example of such thinking. Working under the influence of the Enlightenment, he argued in the late 18th century that “all religions are in their nature kind and benign,” but that violent persecution “is always the strongly-marked feature of all . . . religions established by law” (Rights 138-139). Despite believing that “every religion is good” (Rights 323), therefore, Paine proclaimed that “all national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit” (Age 22).

28 Of course the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001 forced this issue to the forefront of Western public awareness in an unprecedented manner. Repeatedly, news reports and popular media sent out the message that only fanatics could have committed such acts of terror, that no truly religious person of any tradition could conceivably have been involved in the attacks. Maureen Dowd, e.g., declared in the New York Times that violence in the name of religion is “blasphemous,” “godless”; Thomas Friedman similarly argued in the Times that terrorism is not caused by religion, but “is driven by pure hatred and nihilism.” Even the satirical online news source The Onion appears to have played it (relatively) straight: in an article titled “God Angrily Clarifies ‘Don’t Kill’ Rule,” we are told: “God stressed that His remarks were not directed exclusively at Islamic extremists, but rather at anyone whose ideological zealotry overrides his or her ability to comprehend the core message of all world religions.” See also “Bad Religion”; Badawi, “Islam”; Lattin, “Televangelist”; Sullivan, “This.”
canisters of nerve gas in Tokyo were not real Buddhists.\textsuperscript{29} Such an outlook may be
categorized as idealist; founded upon a view of religion that appeals to non-physical, or
ideal, phenomena it is, strictly speaking, a matter of faith.\textsuperscript{30} It is also, as discussed in
section 3.1, the view that is most commonly held by academics who consider the topic of
religion and violence.

The second position holds, on the contrary, that religion and violence are so
closely and so often linked together as to suggest that religion is a prime cause of
violence, that it may in fact be \textit{inherently} violent. Thus, religious people and institutions
that are not violent are so in spite of their tradition, not because of it. \textit{Toronto Star}
columnist Frank Jones expresses this view very well for a popular audience:

\begin{quote}
From women and children blown up by fanatics in Algeria to people
stabbed and slashed in a Sikh temple in British Columbia, God’s name is
everywhere invoked when evil is done. . . . the Bible from end to end . . .
is all talk of punishment and vengeance. From Eve on, it is the expression
of man the destroyer, not woman the creator. . . . Is it just chance that the
United States, teeming with bellicose Christians . . . is so violent and
corrupt? . . . I can only conclude that this wobbly world’s best hope for a
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{29} Although volumes have been written on the religious conflicts in Ireland, not much material exists in
English about Aum Shinrikyo. For an account of both the Tokyo attack and the sect’s Buddhist
underpinnings, see Hall, \textit{Apocalypse} 76-110.

\textsuperscript{30} Note that actually being religious, in the sense of believing in a god or gods, etc., is not required in order
to espouse an idealist view of religion. Any characterization of religion as \textit{a priori} “good” must ultimately
make recourse to an abstract or ideal aspect of reality which can only be experienced subjectively. In this
sense, characterizing religion as innately, essentially \textit{anything} —including “violent,” “unjust” or just
generally “bad”— is by definition idealist. These other views are relatively uncommon, however; most
often, by far, the idealist understanding of religion is a positive one.
century of peace and harmony lies in putting God into ill-earned retirement. (“Does”)\(^{31}\)

This perspective is founded upon presuppositions that are to some extent diametrically opposed to those of the first. That is to say, instead of assuming that we must judge religion only on ideal grounds, divorced from the actual behaviour of the religious, this view assumes that such behaviour is our only genuine source of information, that we must judge religion on completely material grounds.\(^{32}\) Both views, however, tend to see religion as a single phenomenon: whether good or bad, all religions are essentially the same.

The present study expressly avoids committing to either of these extreme positions. I do not assume from the outset that religion is inherently anything, and so I do not believe that only one set of criteria, material or ideal, may be used to interpret it in any way that even attempts to be comprehensive. Instead, I would maintain that however one understands religion, this understanding cannot either be entirely separated from, nor completely limited to, the beliefs and actions of people who define themselves as religious. I would similarly side with scholars who do not see religions as somehow, in some way, all the same, but rather as extraordinarily diverse, constantly changing aspects

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\(^{31}\) I have not found a single commentator echoing Jones’ unqualified sentiments in the immediate wake of September 11, 2001. Less than a month before the attacks, though, Robert Scheer adopted a similarly materialist position in *The Nation*, declaring that “the pretense that religion is inevitably an ennobling experience stands in absurd denial of a harsh reality reported in daily headlines.” The past few years have seen a dramatic turn in this conversation, with views on religion almost identical to Jones’ once again appearing—especially as popularized by a group that has come to be known as the “New Atheists” (discussed further in section 3.1.2).

\(^{32}\) The material grounds in question, of course, are extremely negative ones; it would be just as easy to derive a favourable materialist opinion of religion, but this rarely happens. One might suppose that since religions themselves usually traffic in the unseen and the abstract, materialists are inclined to see them in a bad light (while idealists, as noted, take the opposite view).
of human cultural activity. This view applies both to different traditions and to the multiple groups that identify themselves with one sect; I agree, for example, with historian R. Scott Appleby’s assertion that “there is no ‘Islam,’ no ‘Christianity,’ no ‘Buddhism’—only Muslims, Christians, and Buddhists living in specific contingent contexts, possessed of multiple and mixed motives” (56).

Of course the deconstruction of the term “religion” can, and has, been pushed much further than this. Jonathan Z. Smith, in particular, has consistently maintained that there is in fact no such thing as religion per se. He famously argues in Imagining Religion that, although humanity “has had [its] entire history in which to imagine deities and modes of interaction with them,” the classification of all such imaginings and interactions as “religious” is a modern, Western preoccupation (xi). It is also one that does not observe and record its data as much as invent it; not in the sense of making up facts, but in the sense of identifying, comparing, and grouping data together as part of the manufactured category of religion. In this respect, “religion is solely the creation of the scholar’s study. It is created for the scholar’s analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no independent existence apart from the academy” (xi).

What then does the scholar of religion study? For Smith the primary focus is not, cannot be, religion itself, but rather “the imagination of religion” (xi; emphasis added). As William E. Arnal notes, “the academic future of religion as a concept will need to

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33 Malcolm Hamilton provides perhaps the most entertaining way of making this point in an academic context, by using a Peanuts cartoon in his introduction to The Sociology of Religion (1). Lucy: “All religions are basically alike . . . You know love your neighbour. They’re all alike. Just name any two and you’ll see . . . all alike.” Charlie Brown: “Melanesian Frog Worship and Christian Science.”

34 For further discussions of this topic see Arnal, “Definition”; Asad, “Construction”; McCutcheon, Manufacturing.
focus on deconstructing the category and analyzing its function within popular discourse, rather than assuming that the category has content and seeking to specify what that content is” (“Definition” 30). This is in fact my own intent, as I consider the presentation of religion in the works of Canadian Native authors; that is to say, I am concerned with categorizing some of the ways in which these authors “imagine” religion.

Regarding the meaning of “violence,” the first point to make clear is that it cannot be understood only as a physical act. As Robert MacAfee Brown argues, social structures that maintain inequity are also violent, including gender exclusive language, racist hiring practices, and economic systems that generate poverty and hopelessness (5-12). Brown thus defines violence as a “violation of personhood,” in the sense of “infringing upon or disregarding or abusing or denying” another person (7). This understanding is very useful as far as it goes, and in fact suits Brown’s own purposes perfectly. It fails however to struggle with the fact that the question of “violation” depends heavily on one’s perspective. Thus, missionary work may be seen as violence by those who disagree with its aims and presuppositions, while clearly those who think that people who do not believe in Jesus will burn in hell may see a refusal to missionize as an act of violence.35

This issue of perspective may be resolved somewhat by connecting Brown’s sense of violation more explicitly to the notion of power; that is, defining as violent the exercise of power by one party over another, whether explicitly to hurt them or else more implicitly to reinforce the hierarchal (structural) difference(s) between the two. Under these terms colonialism would always be understood as violent, regardless of arguments

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35 Michel Desjardins similarly raises the point, specifically in relation to Brown’s definition of violence, that “what may be ‘psychologically destructive’ for one person . . . may not be so to another . . . I may consider the insistence that women appear veiled in public to be a ‘violation of personhood,’ but many men and women, for instance, would have good reasons for disagreeing with me” (Peace 12-13).
which maintain that the subjugated indigenous population has “benefitted” from the experience. But this definition still founders when it is the colonized themselves who assert that they are satisfied with their current (colonial) cultural practices; and so when Euro-Canadians tell Natives to abandon Christianity and return to their “traditional” rituals and beliefs, they are in fact engaging in simply another attempt to define Natives, to violate them.\textsuperscript{36} This example suggests the impossibility of arriving at clear, scientific standards for deciding what is violent and what is not—that no matter how one defines “violation” individual and cultural perspectives remain deeply relevant, and may produce contradictory readings of any given situation that cannot be reconciled or resolved.

Brown’s definition is also limited somewhat by its insistence on considering violence purely in ethical terms; that is, it regards all violence as immoral. This sense of morality is invariably present in studies of violence in any field, studies that are

\textsuperscript{36} This is exactly the situation that Lisa Valentine describes as existing among the Severn Ojibway of Lynx Lake, a community so devoutly Christian that, for most of the people there, “to be Native is to be Anglican” (165). This understanding has been disrupted, however, by external theories of colonialism and identity. In particular, younger Ojibway in the area have begun adopting specifically non-Native views that “Christianity cannot be Native,” and so “those Natives who adopt Christianity as their primary religious affiliation are categorized as enculturated at best and deluded at worst” (163). See also James Treat’s extensive commentary on this topic:

Today, native Christians throughout the United States and Canada are continuing their centuries-long struggle for religious self-determination. Denominational missionaries have settled in native communities preaching a gospel of cultural conformity, condemning native religious history on the basis of ignorance, and dictating artificial criteria for institutional acceptability. Academic anthropologists have toured native communities looking for pure, primitive culture, dismissing native religious adaptability as tragic acculturation, and attempting to reduce human experience to ethnographic data. Government agents have dominated native communities in the service of colonial expansion, enforcing laws that restrict native religious freedom, and manipulating political power through bureaucratic patronage. Radical activists have defended native communities against these and other impositions, calling for the outright rejection of “the white man’s religion” and the immediate revival of esoteric indigenous traditions. Native Christians have been called heretical, inauthentic, assimilated, and uncommitted; they have long endured intrusive definitions of personal identity and have quietly pursued their own religious visions, often under the very noses of unsuspecting missionaries, anthropologists, agents, and activists. ("Native" 8-9)

Treat’s conclusion is a clear statement about the violent nature of such attempts at identity control: “To disregard Indian Christians, either as Indians or as Christians, is to deny their human agency, their religious independence, and—ultimately—their very lives” (10).
(arche) typically less concerned with philological issues than with redressing the suffering of human beings. As such they omit the fairly conventional (and non-moral) usage of the word: to describe, for example, natural occurrences (“a violent storm”), or particular motions (“shaking violently all over”). In this sense violence becomes a different kind of violation: the forceful disruption of a state of relative calm, a disruption that may have no connection to any notion of morality. Adding this understanding allows for broader and more subtle considerations of the term. The purported moose killing in Basil Johnston’s “Indian Smart: Moose Smart,” for example, is clearly violent, but it is presented as neither immoral nor unnatural. It is, in fact, both natural and necessary; only the perceived humiliation of the moose is considered by some of the hunters to be a “violation” in Brown’s sense. All of which raises the issue once again of perspective. In what follows, then, I will do my best to make at least my own position clear.

1.2.2 Victims and Executioners

It is also important that I clarify my position regarding a very straightforward example of violence, namely the atrocities involved in the colonization of the Americas. Howard Zinn begins A People’s History of the United States with an account of such violence in order to highlight the seriousness of the issues at stake in any academic undertaking that concerns conquest and genocide. He quotes from Columbus’ records of his first contact with the Arawaks in what is now known as the West Indies: “They do not bear arms, and do not know them. . . . With fifty men we could subjugate them and make them do whatever we want” (1). Zinn notes that Columbus and his men ultimately

37 What Columbus first made the Arawaks do is bring to him larger quantities of the gold they used as jewelry. Not realizing it only existed in very small amounts, he initiated a number of horrific policies to
exported and killed the Arawaks so quickly and efficiently that within two years only half of the original estimated population of 250,000 remained, a number that shrank to 500 by the year 1550. Within a century the entire native population was gone (4-5).  

Such information has obviously tended not to appear in popular accounts of Columbus. Zinn argues, however, that not only have, for example, public school texts routinely and exclusively depicted Columbus as a hero, but academics have also typically done a serious disservice to the other side of the story. He holds up *Christopher Columbus, Mariner*, by Samuel Eliot Morrison—“the Harvard historian . . . the most distinguished writer on Columbus” (7)—as an important example of such scholarship. Crucially, Morrison does not omit any reference to Columbus-as-murderer in this text; on the contrary, he notes that “the cruel policy” initiated by Columbus “resulted in complete genocide” (qtd. in Zinn 7). Zinn finds the remark scandalous, however, because it is the only one of its kind in a text that otherwise sings the seaman’s praises:  

One can lie outright about the past. Or one can omit facts which might lead to unacceptable conclusions. Morison does neither. He refuses to lie about Columbus. He does not omit the story of mass murder; indeed he describes it with the harshest word one can use: genocide.

38 Zinn’s account of Columbus and the effects of his arrival in the Western hemisphere are drawn primarily from Columbus’ own records (see, e.g., Columbus, *Four Journal; Log*). For additional resources on, and interpretations of, the man and his actions see Bedini, *Christopher; Columbus, Life; De Vorsey and Parker, In; Fernandez-Armesto, Columbus; Fiske, Discovery; Henige, In; Morison, Christopher; Provost, Columbus; Wilford, Mysterious.*  

39 Morison confesses, e.g., that what most interests him about Columbus are “the qualities that made him great—his indomitable will, his superb faith in God and in his own mission as the Christ-bearer to lands beyond the seas, his stubborn persistence despite neglect, poverty and discouragement” (qtd. in Zinn, 7).
But he does something else—he mentions the truth quickly and goes on to other things more important to him. . . . To state the facts, however, and then to bury them in a mass of other information is to say to the reader with a certain infectious calm: yes, mass murder took place, but it’s not that important—it should weigh very little in our final judgments; it should affect very little what we do in the world. (8)

Zinn’s objection to scholars like Morrison, then, is that the work they produce, regardless of intentions, promotes “the quiet acceptance of conquest and murder”; and consequently this kind of work is “one reason these atrocities are still with us” (9).

Zinn makes no pretense to an “objective” stance in his own work, arguing that all historians unavoidably select, emphasize, and distort (8). This is a notion that Jane Tompkins examines in greater detail in her consideration of Native history in relation to post-structuralist theory, “‘Indians’: Textualism, Morality, and the Problem of History.” Tompkins had struggled in her own research into this history, dominated as she was by the notion that “the historian can never escape the limitations of his or her own position in history” (73), and that indeed “all facts are theory dependent” (75). These views were in turn reinforced by the historical accounts she uncovered, accounts that were wildly contradictory and clearly biased (60-61). The more that Tompkins considered the impossibility of constructing any sort of reliable, defensible history of the colonization of North America, the more she was drawn back to a post-structuralist relativism that rendered her project virtually moot: “The effect of bringing perspectivism to bear on
history was to wipe out completely the subject matter of history. . . . everything is wiped out and you are left with nothing but a single idea—perspectivism itself” (75).

For Tompkins this was an unsatisfactory conclusion. However much historical accounts might vary, in the end she did believe in certain facts; specifically, she found that “there was no question about certain major catastrophes” (74). Tompkins did not doubt, for example, that “ninety percent of the native American population of New England died after the first hundred years of contact” (74). In the end she argues that, when dealing with some histories, “cultural and historical relativism is not a position that one can comfortably assume. The phenomenon to which these histories testify—conquest, massacre, and genocide . . . cry out for judgement” (73). Zinn similarly comments that

the history of any country, presented as the history of a family, conceals fierce conflicts of interest . . . between conquerors and conquered, masters and slaves, capitalists and workers, dominators and dominated in race and sex. And in such a world of conflict, a world of victims and executioners, it is the job of thinking people, as Albert Camus suggested, not to be on the side of the executioners. (People’s 9-10)

Zinn’s point, particularly as it applies to the history of North American colonialism, is an attractive one for a liberal non-Native academic. The main weakness of such a position, however, is pointed out by J.R. Miller in an article on residential schooling. He argues that, to focus simply on categories of “dominators and dominated” is to continue to see Native people “as objects rather than agents, victims rather than creators of their own history” (“Owen” 323; cf. Allen, Sacred 5). The importance of this
point should be self-evident, given that the objectification of Native people is itself a
crucial part of what made the kind of atrocities discussed by Zinn and Tompkins possible
in the first place. Since, in my dealings with Native literature—particularly as they relate
to religion and violence—it is necessary for me to have at least a basic grasp of the
historical issues at stake, I will attempt to keep both Tompkins’ and Miller’s viewpoints
in mind. That is, I will take into account both the immense crimes committed against the
Native people of Canada, along with the reality that, again in Miller’s words, these
people “have always been active, assertive contributors to the unfolding of Canadian
history” (Skyscrapers x).  

In practice, this stance means that throughout the discussions below I will be
operating under a few key assumptions that specifically concern matters of religion and
violence. First, in line with Tompkins’ own reflections, is the understanding that “major
catastrophes” did indeed result from the incursion of the Europeans; foremost among
these is the fact that the majority of the original inhabitants of North America were
destroyed, in what Ronald Wright and others have identified as “the greatest mortality in
history” (Stolen 14). The second point is that this atrocity should have no bearing on

40 Miller points to a number of Canadian scholars whose work contains a similar emphasis, including: G. Friesen, C.J. Jaenen, A.J. Ray, Bruce G. Trigger, Sylvia Van Kirk, and S.F. Wise (Skyscrapers ix). Among
the works in Canada that Miller cites elsewhere as promoting the standard “Native as victim” stance are:
Sealey and Kinness, Indians; Frideres, Native; Purich, Our (“Owen” 341 n. 2). Note that, in Margaret
Atwood’s 1972 overview of Canadian literature, Survival, she argues that the victor/victim dichotomy has
characterized virtually all depictions of Natives by white Canadian writers (91-92). It has such a powerful
hold on these writers’ imagination, in fact, that “the Indian emerges in Canadian literature as the ultimate
victim of social oppression and deprivation” (97; emphasis added).

41 Wright notes: “By 1600 . . . less than a tenth of the original population [of the Americas] remained.
Perhaps 90 million died, the equivalent, in today’s terms, to the loss of a billion” (14). According to
Dobyns, there was a population decline of approximately 95% within the first 130 years of contact
 (“Estimating”). For the most detailed collection of studies on this topic see William M. Denevan’s The
Native Population of the Americas in 1492. In his introduction to Part 1 of this collection, Denevan
summarizes the difficulties and methods involved in establishing pre-contact population numbers
 (“Estimating”). He notes that research estimates for all of the Americas and the Caribbean combined range
from about 10 million to about 100 million people, which among other things means that it is possible there
how we view pre-contact societies on this continent; it is patronizing and paternalistic, for example, to view such societies as “edenic.”

Pre-contact cultures had complex social structures, arts, economies, languages, etc.—and of course Native populations themselves at times engaged in violence, including torture and warfare. Finally, as the Globe and Mail article on Fort Albany First Nation makes clear, the Native response to colonialism generally, and Christianity in particular, is complex: although many specific factors of colonialism are clearly and irredeemably reprehensible, some Natives are very happy with some received aspects of European culture, including Christianity.

were more people in this region of the world at the time of contact than in Europe, which had a population between 60 and 80 million (3-4). As Denevan also notes, the biggest single cause of the depopulation of the Americas was introduced disease, but other factors included military action, mistreatment (including torture, forced labour, and massacres), starvation or malnutrition, loss of will to live (e.g., suicide, abortion), and slave shipments overseas (4-6). For similar accounts of the depopulation of the Americas see Dobyns, Their; Snow and Lanpheare, “European”; Stannard, American; Thornton, American; Trigger, Natives 231-242. Arguably the most influential overviews and critiques of other, ongoing, catastrophes of colonization specifically in Canada are provided by Adams, Prison; Cardinal, Unjust; Miller, Skyscrapers.

The general tradition of perceiving the indigenous people of North America and their descendents as “primitive” is old and well-established; for some general discussions, summaries and critiques of this history see Adams, Prison 3-18, 33-43; Barnett, Ignoble; Berkofer, White; Bird, Dressing; Drinnon, Facing; Francis, Imaginary; Pearce, Savagism; Trigger, Natives 3-49. This issue is specifically relevant to a discussion of Native literature, since, as outlined in section 2.1.2, this literature is invariably traced by critics to the traditional (i.e., pre-contact) oral narrative forms of indigenous people.

For general details and commentary on the complexities of various pre-contact Native societies, see Adams, Prison 12-18; Miller, Skyscrapers 3-20; Trigger, Natives 75-110; Wright, Stolen 3-140. For discussions specifically of pre-contact Native violence see Bamforth, “Indigenous”; Biolsi, “Ecological”; Haas and Creamer, Stress; Miller, Skyscrapers 10-12; Trigger, Natives 96-108; Willey, Prehistoric. In this regard, Miller’s comments in particular are important to bear in mind: “It has generally been believed in recent decades that warfare, like political organization, was limited in prehistoric times, while the genocidal conflicts among native groups in the historical period have been interpreted as being a consequence of the fur trade. This claim is motivated by a creditable opposition to viewing Indians as bloodthirsty savages. Yet it errs too far in the direction of a naïve ‘noble savage’ interpretation of their behaviour. It also continues to imply that Indian history, in the sense of substantial change, was a consequence of the arrival of the Europeans” (Natives 105; cf. Bamforth, “Indigenous” 95; King, “Godzilla” 11-12).

To cite just one other, particularly germane, example, the Canadian Native literary tradition itself is in part the product of both colonization in general and Christianity in particular. This is evident in the fact that the first Native writers in Canada (and the first to write in English) were all trained by the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in Southern Ontario in the early nineteenth century. This group included Peter Jones, the first Native Methodist minister in Canada (Petrone, First 77; cf. Dickason, “Many” 126).
1.2.3 Hermeneutics

The last point to make here is that my general approach to the Native texts that concern me derives primarily from the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur. In particular, I draw from Ricoeur’s notion of linguistic “worlds” and his theory of metaphor. Both of these are predicated on his understanding that human beings do not have unmediated access to reality, that reality is apprehended only through cultural signs, rules, and symbols—that is to say, through language. This apprehension forms the “world” in which we live, and by which we make sense of our experience. It is a constantly evolving world, both for any given culture and for particular individuals within that culture; not surprisingly, this evolution is greatly affected/effect by writing.

In virtually all of his work, Ricoeur exhibits a sustained interest in the relation between cultural worlds and two types of (textual) discourse, philosophic/literal and poetic/figurative. Each type represents a distinct way of interpreting the world and expressing this interpretation. Philosophic language is used to describe reality as directly, as scientifically, as possible. The poetic represents existence indirectly and, as such, deliberately redescribes it, creating a new meaning in the process. This redescription is

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45 Ricoeur has published literally hundreds of articles, essays, and books. His major works include La symbolique du mal; De l’interprétation: essai sur Freud; Conflit des interprétations; La métaphore vive; and the three-volume Temps et récit (translated, respectively, as The Symbolism of Evil; On Interpretation: Freud and Philosophy; The Conflict of Interpretations; The Rule of Metaphor; and Time and Narrative). For an extensive bibliography see Nordquist, Paul. For a summary of Ricoeur’s literary theory see Valdés, “Paul”; a concise general overview of his work and thought is provided by Klemm and Schweiker, “Meanings.” It may seem inappropriate to use French hermeneutics as a starting point to interpret Native literary works, raising as this practice does questions of appropriation and (cultural) colonization. These questions are not simple or straightforward, however, and are discussed in greater detail in section 2.1.

46 Time 1:57 (Temps 1: 91); cf. Rule 303-304 (La métaphore 384-385). Ricoeur’s view of language in this respect derives primarily from the work of Martin Heidegger (DiCenso, Hermeneutics 123).

47 See, e.g., Rule 84 (La métaphore 110). Note that in making such a distinction between discursive types, Ricoeur by no means is arguing that “literal” discourse represents unmediated access to “objective” reality.
crucial for Ricoeur, and dramatic; accordingly, he declares that “the role of most of our literature is, it seems, to destroy the world” (“Hermeneutical” 141).

This effect is brought about through metaphor. Ricoeur obviously understands the term to mean more than simply a rhetorical figure in which one noun is substituted for another; it is, instead, poetic discourse itself. He argues that the equation of dissimilar terms to which the term metaphor refers represents figurative language generally; in such language, that is, reality is equated with concepts, words, or images that are literally false. This equation produces a hermeneutic tension that Ricoeur refers to as “semantic impertinence” (Rule 195). Such tension by definition cannot be neatly resolved or fixed; instead, it demands repeated consideration, opening up “a possible way of looking at things” and impacting upon our given linguistic and existential modes of being (Interpretation 92). Figurative discourse thus deliberately reconfigures, or “destroys,” the world, in order to disclose “something new about reality” in a way that philosophy cannot (Interpretation 52-53).

Instead he maintains that the issue is one of linguistic conventions and usage (Rule 290-291 [La métaphore 369]), since “there is no standpoint outside of language” (Rule 304; originally, “il n’y a pas de lieu extérieur au langage” [La métaphore 385]). As James DiCenso explains, for Ricoeur “the literal itself is a product of cultural interpretations. The difference between the literal and the non-literal, the familiar and the strange, occurs in relation to the interpretive standpoint of the culturally located reader. This means that metaphorical tension is relative to hermeneutical context and is directly linked to the perspectives representative of cultural frames of reference” (Hermeneutics 134).

48 Originally: “C’est, semble-t-il, le rôle de la plus grande partie de notre littérature de détruire le monde” (“La fonction” 114).

49 Ricoeur quotes Monroe Beardsley’s assertion that metaphor is “a poem in miniature” (Interpretation 46). His theory of literature generally, then, is built upon the theory of metaphor. This is the subject of an entire text, La métaphore vive.

50 Originally: “l’impertinence sémantique” (La métaphore 246).

51 Cf. Ricoeur, “Hermeneutical” 141: “My thesis here is that the abolition of a first order reference [i.e., reference to the external world of time and place], an abolition effected by fiction and poetry, is the condition of possibility for the freeing of a second order reference, which reaches the world not only at the level of manipulable objects, but at the level that Husserl designated by the expression Lebenswelt [life-world] and Heidegger by the expression ‘being-in-the-world.’” Originally: “Ma thèse est ici que l’abolition d’une référence de premier rang, abolition opérée par la fiction et par la posie, est la condition de possibilité pour que soit libérée une référence de second rang, qui atteint le monde non plus seulement au niveau des
Since the poetic cannot simply be “translated” into literal or philosophic language, there remains “an irreducible difference between the two modes of discourse” (Rule 296). The work of hermeneutics is to negotiate this difference:

Interpretation is then a mode of discourse that functions at the intersection of two domains, metaphorical and speculative. It is a composite discourse, therefore, and as such cannot but feel the opposite pull of two rival demands. On one side, interpretation seeks the clarity of the concept; on the other, it hopes to preserve the dynamism of meaning that the concept holds and pins down. (Rule 303)

Ricoeur argues that these “rival demands” result in a “finite space of interpretations,” in which a text has multiple, but not endless, meanings (“World” 496; cf. Interpretation 79). These meanings must be logically defensible and grounded in the text itself, but that does not mean they cannot be contradictory: Ricoeur cites Hegel’s analysis of Antigone, in which he arrives at mutually exclusive conclusions, as an important example of such a reading (“World” 496). We must consequently “resist the temptation to believe that each

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52 Originally, “la différence irréductible entre les deux modes de discours” (La métaphore 375). Note in this regard that fully poetic language, in Ricoeur’s model, employs “tension metaphors” as opposed to allegories, or “metaphors of substitution.” Only the latter “are susceptible of a translation which could restore the literal signification”; the former “are not translatable because they create their meaning” (Interpretation 53).

53 Originally: “L’interprétation est alors une modalité de discours qui opère à l’intersection de deux mouvances, celle du métaphorique et celle du spéculatif. C’est donc un discours mixte qui, comme tel, ne peut pas ne pas subir l’attraction de deux exigences rivales. D’un côté elle veut la clarté du concept—de l’autre, elle cherche à préserver le dynamisme de la signification que le concept arrête et fixe” (La métaphore 383).

54 Ricoeur argues that “the right position has to be found, between the best of one’s own ‘expectations’ and the most complete information, the recognizable signs and signals of the text. Interpretation is a balance between these two” (“World” 495).
text has its own correct interpretation, its own static, hidden meaning;” and recognize that “reading is, first and foremost, a struggle with the text” (“World” 494, 495).

This struggle is different for each reader, as it depends upon a given individual’s pre-existing “world.” Interpretation is the result of a dialectic between this world and the world of the text, and encompasses what Ricoeur refers to as the “hermeneutical arc.” There are three moments in this arc: 1) the initial, immediate understanding of the text; 2) the critical exploration of the text (which validates or amends the initial understanding); and 3) the appropriation of meaning which puts the reader in dialogue with the text, and affects some change in the reader. All of these moments are, again, affected by the reader’s world; however, the third moment brings the text itself into that world, such that any subsequent reading of the text will be influenced by previous readings.

55 It is important to stress Ricoeur’s understanding that interpretive struggles and metaphorical discourse are not limited to imaginative or literary writing only. He notes, for example, that history itself generates multiple readings, “every one of which claims to present the truth, and none of which fully exhausts historical reality, because there is always a residue of reading capable of being taken up in another reading” (“World” 493).

56 For a full description of the hermeneutical arc see, e.g., Ricoeur, “What” 161-164 (“Qu’est-ce” 155-159); cf. Interpretation 73-75.

57 It is at the endpoint of this arc that I leave Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, since it is here that his work moves away from the realm of the text per se and acquires an intensely existential, individualist emphasis. For Ricoeur, what is ultimately of central importance is not textual meaning as such but the personal growth that results from the meeting of two worlds, from the reader’s encounter with (textual) alterity. He thus speaks of “exposing ourselves to the text and receiving from it an enlarged self” based upon “the world proposed. . . . [T]he subjectivity of the reader comes to itself only insofar as it is placed in suspense, unrealized, unpotentialised . . . As a reader, I find myself only by losing myself” (“Hermeneutical” 143-144 (“La fonction” 116-117); for discussions of this issue see Kearney, Paul).

This emphasis has two main corollaries that trouble me. First, Ricoeur’s model is predicated upon the assumption that any change in one’s world is always positive, always equivalent to “growth.” As Gerald Bruns argues, textual otherness for Ricoeur is never seriously threatening or damaging (35-39). Ricoeur states unequivocally, e.g., that “when a reader applies a text to himself . . . he is transformed; the becoming other in the act of reading is as important as is the recognition of self” (“World” 492-493). Ricoeur’s position in this regard is related to his general agreement with Aristotle that narratives essentially function to provide the contingent, chaotic nature of human existence with a sense of order and meaning (Time 2:7-28; Temps 2:17-48). He thus displays a noticeable impatience with more avant-garde, or postmodern, writing, that does not fit this definition (e.g., Time 2:22-28; Temps 2:38-48). Literature for Ricoeur should unsettle us, but not too much.

My second main objection to Ricoeur’s position is that, since the reader’s experience takes precedence over what a text actually says, Ricoeur adopts a disturbingly dismissive attitude towards the social and political realities to which a text may point, or in which it may be embedded. He explicitly states
It is self-evident that the worlds of most of the texts that I examine in this study differ in fundamental ways from my own. As a result, I have attempted to be as clear as possible about why and how I read these texts the way that I do, about the assumptions and understandings that inform my own hermeneutics. But even the most literal (that is to say, historical/autobiographical) of these texts is metaphoric at some level, and it is this aspect of the writing that I intend to examine. Significantly, the central trope of my study, mimetic conflict, in fact mirrors Ricoeur’s notion of metaphor itself: it essentially personifies the identification of non-identical terms, resulting in a semantic/dramatic tension that drives the narrative. The tension produced by mimetic conflict also results at times in the disclosure of a “new way of seeing,” both for the characters involved and (ideally) for the reader.

1.3 Thesis Overview

My exploration of these visions begins with two chapters that discuss the main academic contexts in which I place this project: (1) the study of Native literature, including considerations of what this term means and the issues involved when such study is done by non-Natives; and (2) views on the relation(s) between religion and violence, within both the larger academic study of religion, as well as the sub-field of Religion and Literature. This latter chapter provides the theoretical basis for my

in fact that interpretation requires a process of “atemporalization,” a willful and complete disregard for a text’s “ostensive reference” (Interpretation 92). This allows Ricoeur to declare unreservedly, e.g., that “the letters of Paul are no less addressed to me than to the Romans, the Galatians, the Corinthians, and the Ephesians. The meaning of a text is open to anyone who can read” (Interpretation 93). It is crucial, I believe, to stress that this question of context is not merely an academic one. To give just one example, Prior argues that the kind of “atemporal” reading advocated by Ricoeur is a key reason why “the particular violence of the Hebrew Scriptures has inspired violence, and has served as a model of, and for, persecution, subjugation and extermination for millennia beyond its own reality” (Bible 291).

58 For what is arguably the most detailed account of the imaginative/metaphorical nature of autobiography see Pascal, Design (cf. Godard, “Politics” 211; Maracle, I Am 3-4).
understanding of mimesis, including a consideration of the work of French theorist René Girard. Girard has written extensively on the origins and significance of the ruptures that threaten to overwhelm communities, literary and actual, and the ways in which hostile factions tend to mirror one another. Girard’s views, however, make virtually no allowance for the effects of colonialism on such phenomena. As a result I argue that his ideas profit significantly from the inclusion of conceptions formulated by Homi K. Bhabha, who has specifically considered colonialism as a form of mimetic violence.

Chapter Four uses these mimetic theories to examine three seminal Canadian Native works: Maria Campbell’s Halfbreed, Beatrice Culleton’s In Search of April Raintree, and Thomas King’s Green Grass, Running Water. This analysis is prefaced by a discussion of Margaret Atwood’s Cat’s Eye, which provides a useful point of contrast for the other texts as a novel which is also centrally concerned with religion, colonialism, and mimetic violence but which is produced by a (very influential, high-profile) non-Native writer. The result of this comparison is the development of a general theoretical framework for interpreting religion and mimetic conflict in Canadian Native literature. In Chapter Five, this framework is tested by applying it to several works by a single author, Basil Johnston, including both traditional as well as contemporary stories. I conclude my discussion in Chapter Six by commenting on the significance of this study for work on Canadian Native literature, as well as for studies in both religion and literature more broadly, and for academic considerations of religion and violence.

In the end, this project will make a number of significant scholarly contributions to the two general academic fields in which it is principally located: the study of North American Native literature and the study of religion. My thesis will add, for example, to
the very few examinations of Native literature from the perspective of the study of religion. In fact, as of 2008 I am aware of no other book-length work along these lines. There also exist less than a handful of analyses of the stories of Basil Johnston as stories, that give his work the same kind of treatment received by the writings of authors like Atwood or King; as noted, scholars instead refer to Johnston’s texts only for their assumed sociological or ethnographic value.

In terms of religion and violence, there are as yet few treatments of this issue within the field of religious studies that do not see violence as deeply antagonistic to the “essence” or “core” of virtually all traditions. In contrast, I do not take such an idealist, apologist stance; nor do I consider violence only in moral terms, which is standard for academic studies of the topic in most disciplines, and is certainly the case for the vast majority of religion scholars. My own approach to both religion and violence adds to the minority of studies that take their cue, as much as possible, from the works being examined. That is to say, I am concerned precisely with how the texts depict religion, violence, and the connection(s) between the two. Finally, this dissertation represents the first attempt to combine the two principal theories of mimetic conflict being used in any discipline—Girardian and “postcolonial” into a single, workable hypothesis. My position is that this hypothesis is one that might to some extent reasonably account for,

59 Of course I bring my own biases and preconceptions to this material (what Ricoeur would call my “world”), and so my understanding of the texts will always be mediated. Part of this mediation involves the explicit application of theoretical models of mimetic conflict to my sources to “discover” what they have to say about religion and violence. Still, my intent (in line with Ricoeur’s hermeneutical arc) is as much as possible to develop and modify these models in response to the texts.

60 The scare quotes here refer to the fact that, although most theorists who make use of Bhabha’s theories—including Bhabha himself—categorize their work as postcolonial, the term is a highly contested one (as discussed in section 3.2.3).
and come to an understanding of, the common presence of a heretofore disregarded aspect of Canadian Native literature, namely inter-Native mimetic violence.
CHAPTER TWO: NATIVE LITERATURE

2.1 Appropriation and Marginality

2.1.1 Critical Territory

One of the earliest and most influential critiques of non-Natives studying Native people and cultures is Vine Deloria, Jr.’s, first book, *Custer Died for Your Sins*. Published in 1969, *Custer* showcases Deloria’s anger and frustration with the interference of outsiders—particularly scholars—in the lives of Natives.61 This interference comes about primarily in the form of attempts to understand Native people, to fashion theories about their culture, their history, their problems. Deloria’s concern is that, despite changing with the academic wind and often bearing little relation to reality, these theories also tend to have no small degree of social and political influence: “The massive volume of useless knowledge produced by anthropologists attempting to capture real Indians in a network of theories has contributed substantially to the invisibility of Indian people today” (81).

The issue that Deloria was addressing cannot be reduced or simply equated to the question of whether “insiders” or “outsiders” can speak with more authority, insight, knowledge, etc., about a given community, culture, or tradition. This question, the emic/etic debate, remains a pressing one in the fields of religion and anthropology, but one that often misses the point. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has argued, insider/outsider arguments typically confuse the issue of ontology—in this case, the

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61 The significance of Deloria’s critique can be gauged in part by the fact that, almost 30 years after *Custer* was published, enough anthropologists believed it was still necessary and relevant to respond to the issues that Deloria raised to produce an entire text of collected essays, Biolsi and Zimmerman’s *Indians and Anthropologists*. 
identity of the theorists—with that of epistemology, the production of knowledge itself (In 253). In other words, the position that Deloria has taken against non-Natives theorizing about Natives is not so much about who these theorists are, but about the social and historical contexts, and consequences, of their work. Thus Barbara Godard writes that “discursive practices become oppressive when the group in power monopolizes the theoretical scene and there is no counter-discourse, there is no debate among differing discourses” (“Politics” 192-193).62 The main problem is not that, as outsiders, non-Natives are by definition wrong when they speak about Natives; the problem is one of control.63 The fact is that non-Native academics historically have been in a privileged position of authority to define Native people to other non-Natives, and to Native people themselves.64

To emphasize this point, Deloria cites the example of scholars who argued at one time that the reason the Oglala Sioux were plagued by a host of social ills—poor housing, poor economy, poor health care—was because they were “warriors without weapons” (Custer 90). The thesis was that the Oglala were incapable of adapting to a market

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62 Hartmut Lutz similarly points out what should be obvious, but is often overlooked, in discussions by non-Natives on the subject of writing for or about Natives: the “central issue . . . [is] the inequality of power between the two groups” (Contemporary 6).
63 It would in fact be somewhat odd for many Natives to argue in the abstract that no one from “outside” can really understand someone else, since this would mean that they in turn would be precluded from making a central observation about non-Natives: that they are at the very least heavily implicated in ongoing acts of colonization, and at worst deeply racist. As Métis scholar and poet Emma LaRocque puts it, white Canadians are convinced that they are “nice guys,” and so “cannot see themselves as colonizers, Natives as the colonized” (Interview 200-201).
64 Thus Deloria summarizes: “Over the years anthropologists have succeeded in burying Indian communities so completely beneath the mass of irrelevant information that the total impact of the scholarly community on Indian people has become one of simple authority. Many Indians have come to parrot the ideas of anthropologists because it appears that the anthropologists know everything about Indian communities” (Custer 82). Lenore Keeshig-Tobias attacks the same issue in her poem “Those Anthropologists,” in which she berates academics who “poke at our bones,/our social systems/and past events/try to tell us/who we are.” For summaries and critiques of academic views of Native people, and the effects of these views, see, e.g., Adams, Prison 1-8, 12-15; Mihesuah, Natives; Miller, Skyscrapers 96-98; Trigger, Natives 9-19.
economy lifestyle because deep in their souls they remained violently primitive. Those who accepted the thesis, Native and non-Native alike, consequently saw little value in trying to provide the community with capital, credit, employment, education, housing, or health care.\footnote{Not everyone accepted this theory, of course. Deloria notes that “some Indians, in a tongue-in-cheek manner for which Indians are justly famous, suggested that a subsidized wagon train be run through the reservation each morning at 9 A.M. and the reservation people paid a minimum wage for attacking it” (\textit{Custer} 91).} This example further points to what Deloria sees as the general pattern of non-Native (academic) understandings of Natives, namely that they are inevitably fixated on historical identity: “Indians must be redefined in terms that white men will accept, even if that means re-Indianizing them according to a white man’s idea of what they were like in the past and should logically become in the future” (\textit{Custer} 92).\footnote{Cf. Harold Cardinal’s comments on this topic: “[Some] people, both Indian and non-Indian, seem to feel that being Indian means being some sort of relic out of the past, a guy with a feathered headdress and beaded buckskin clothes, a buffalo hunter” (\textit{Unjust} 19). Although the absurdity of such a viewpoint is self-evident, Deloria’s commentary on it is still worth quoting: \textit{What, I ask, would a school board in Moline, Illinois, or Skokie, even, do if the scholarly community tried to reorient their educational system to conform with outmoded ideas of Sweden in the glory days of Gustavus Adolphus? Would they be expected to sing “Ein Feste Burg” and charge out of the mists at the Roman Catholics to save the Reformation every morning as school began? (\textit{Custer} 92; cf. Wright, \textit{Stolen} 9)}}

In his assessment of the discipline almost 30 years after these remarks appeared, Deloria still finds this fundamental attitude within anthropology:

[I]f I press any anthros in a prolonged discussion on exactly why they study Indians and other tribal peoples and why they study anthropology at all, I am almost always informed that tribal people represent an earlier stage of human accomplishment and that we can learn about our past by studying the way existing tribal peoples live. I continue to argue that this attitude is at the base of anthropology and will always be cited as justification for doing what anthros do . . . (“Conclusion” 214).
Deloria’s concern about non-Native definitions of Native people has been echoed repeatedly by Native writers in Canada. One of the effects of such definitions, for example, is that, since the vast majority of publishing companies are run by non-Natives, these writers consistently encounter difficulties getting their work into print if it does not meet certain expectations. Emma LaRocque recounts one piece of work that was returned “with a rejection slip that read, Not Indian enough”; conversely, she notes her suspicion in another case that one of her poems was accepted for publication, out of about 20 that were submitted, because it was the only one that contained a word in a Native language (“Preface” xix). Kateri Damm argues that publishers depend heavily upon stereotypes and so they, like other non-Native readers, “make numerous faulty and at times damaging assumptions about ‘Native’ writers and the types of literature we produce or ought to produce” (“Says” 14). In an extended discussion of this issue, Barbara Godard refers to Louis Althusser’s views in asserting that, “within a class society, relations of production are ‘relations of exploitation’ between antagonistic groups” (“Politics” 186; cf. Althusser, Lenin 128). Or in the words of Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, “the people who have control of your stories, control of your voice, also have control of your destiny, your culture” (Interview 81).

67 For discussions of this issue see Hoy, How 13-14; Godard, “Politics” 186-189; Harry, “Literature”; Horne, Contemporary 9-10; Johnston, “One” 12-15; Perreault and Vance, Foreword xii; Treuer, Native 190; Young-Ing, “Aboriginal.”
68 Beatrice Culleton recounts similar experiences of her own: “if people wanted something written from me, like a story by a Native writer, I would send that to them. But they are not interested, because it is not about Natives” (Interview with Lutz 105).
69 Basil Johnston reflects on the larger cultural impact of such publishing restrictions: “unless the writings, the essays, stories, plays, the papers of scholars, academics, lexicographers, grammarians, etymologists, playwrights, poets, novelists, composers, philosophers are published and distributed, they can never nurture growth in language or literature. . . . The publication of an ‘Indian’ book may not be a commercially profitable enterprise, but it would add to the nation’s intellectual and literary heritage” (“One” 15).
This control is also evidenced when non-Natives themselves attempt to tell Native stories.\textsuperscript{70} The most notorious modern example in Canada is W.P. Kinsella, who often assumes a Native voice in narratives that perpetuate a host of grotesque stereotypes—a fact that Kinsella apparently tries to obscure by often making them “good guys” in opposition to white “bad guys.”\textsuperscript{71} The novels of Rudy Wiebe, however, present a slightly more ambiguous picture: not only does Wiebe not assume a Native voice in his fiction, his Native characters play a central, positive role in his work that usually evades the typical “Indian” stereotypes. As a result Wiebe is admired, for example, by Keeshig-Tobias, who cannot stand Kinsella (Interview 79-80).\textsuperscript{72} However, such characterization still typically amounts to Wiebe using Natives to promote his own views; that is, he

\textsuperscript{70} As Greg Young-Ing points out, these two examples of control are of course interdependent; i.e., silencing Native authors helps promote non-Native Aboriginal writing, and vice versa (“Aboriginal” 181). For general discussions and examples of non-Native writers using Native characters and/or narratives, see Atwood, \textit{Survival} 90-106; Bentley; Fee, “Romantic”; Goldie, \textit{Fear}; Johnston, “Intolerable”; King, Interview with Rooke 70-71; MacDonald, “Red”; Mandel, “Imagining”; Monkman, \textit{Native}; New, “Editorial” 4-5; Treuer, \textit{Native} 177-182; Vevaina, “Articulating” 57-58.

\textsuperscript{71} Most of the stories in \textit{Dance Me Outside}, \textit{Born Indian}, and \textit{Scars} fit this pattern. In “Bones,” e.g., from the latter collection, the narrator Silas and his friends attempt to recover a skeleton taken from their reserve by archaeologists. The men belong to “The Hobbema Chapter of the Ermineskin Warrior Society,” a name that Silas says “make us think of war parties and do brave things” (15). This statement is impressive, raising in very few words the spectre of the Indian who is both violent and illiterate; the latter quality is emphasized to ridiculous extremes when we hear that Silas is the most literate member of the reserve (18). Perhaps most shockingly, Kinsella adds “alcoholic” to his list of generic Native traits by having Silas remark, after entering the museum, “All these fancy rooms make us real nervous. I bet the museum men be nervous and feel out of place if they was to meet with us in the beer parlour of the Queen’s Hotel in Calgary, which is the place downtown where \textit{all the Indians} hang around” (17; emphasis added).

In an interview with Constance Rooke, Thomas King declares, not surprisingly, that he finds much of Kinsella’s work “offensive” (70; cf. Interview with Lutz 111). Aside from the stereotyping, he is most bothered when non-Native writers like Kinsella “write poorly about Indians or use Indians for purposes that don’t really have anything to do with Indian people or Indian culture” (70). Kinsella actually admits to completely inventing much of his material, confessing even that his first Native stories were written having done no research at all (Murray, \textit{Fiction} 7). Facts for him are unimportant, though, because he thinks “stereotypes are reality.” And since he has a “talent . . . for putting [himself] in the position of another person,” he boasts: “I could write about any minority if I chose to do so” (Murray, \textit{Fiction} 7, 9).

\textsuperscript{72} Maria Campbell is similarly supportive of Wiebe. Discussing \textit{The Temptations of Big Bear} with him, e.g., she remarks, “when you wrote that novel, the spirit of Big Bear was speaking for you” (qtd. in Mandel, “Imagining” 45).
projects qualities and ideas that he admires onto aboriginal peoples, didactically opposing them to distasteful attributes of imagined whites.\(^{73}\)

A third category of appropriation involves writers whose non-Native characters employ Native myths, symbols, or rituals in some manner, usually in order to discover some inner truth. An important example of this type is Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing*, in which the protagonist goes on a kind of aboriginal spirit quest to get over a central trauma in her life. Although William Closson James has argued that Atwood is *not* (mis)appropriating Native culture in this novel (“You” 33-46),\(^{74}\) others, such as Hartmut Lutz, disagree:

\(^{73}\) Terrance Craig argues, e.g., that in *The Temptations of Big Bear* Wiebe uses the historical figure of Big Bear to advance his notions of a “genuine” religious stance, in contrast to the “anti-religion” of European colonizers (“Religious” 109-112). The invented nature of Big Bear’s character is further suggested by Thomas King, who points out the Eurocentric manner in which Wiebe presents him as an isolated figure, apart from his community (Interview with Rooke 70). Even Janne Korkka, who largely defends Wiebe from charges of appropriation (arguing, e.g., that Wiebe made a “genuine attempt to understand a person living in an alien cultural tradition”), grants that “there may well be something ‘Mennonite’ in Big Bear’s quest for peace, reflecting the author’s own background” (“Representation” 365). Wiebe himself denies any wrongdoing, and in particular asserts that he does not idealize Big Bear (“Looking” 9-10). Terry Goldie sums up the dichotomy presented by Wiebe’s work, arguing that while it remains in crucial ways locked within the standard semiotic framework that comprises non-Native representations of aboriginality, it nevertheless represents a singularity: “Unlike many other contemporary white Canadians who depict native peoples in their texts, Wiebe is seldom if ever attacked by native people in public or in conversation. His texts combine careful research and extraordinary sensitivity to native cultures” (*Fear* 213; cf. Fee, “Romantic” 28: “Despite his great attention to red culture and to historical fact, Wiebe is, ultimately, inevitably, both criticizing white exploitation and re-enacting it”).

\(^{74}\) Similarly, Diana Brydon defends Atwood’s use of Native traditions in *Surfacing* by suggesting that she is in fact critiquing precisely such appropriation, that the novel does not in other words wholly approve of the narrator’s actions and attitudes in this regard (“Beyond” 52). Janice Fiamengo agrees, and extends the argument further to posit that the novel’s main point is precisely to show that the narrator is far from innocent concerning the ongoing colonization of Canada’s Native peoples. She further maintains that this key point has been consistently missed by the majority of commentators on *Surfacing*, who see the novel’s ending as a wholly positive transformation of the narrator away from her position as helpless victim without recognizing the real, legitimate guilt that remains (“Postcolonial”). Barbara Godard discusses a more clearly onerous example of a non-Native work that appropriates (and stereotypes) Native traditions, Darlene Barry Quaife’s *Bone Bird* (“Politics” 190-192). The novel “follows the highly conventional plot of the ‘coming of age’ of a Mètis woman on Vancouver Island through the influence of her grandmother” (191). Quaife apparently wanted “to open up the audiences for native writers,” to share with these audiences “the sense of spirituality” that she believes whites have lost but Native cultures retain (191). One might argue that perhaps Quaife is simply ignorant of the ways in which she, as Godard notes (191), “reiterates all the codes of indigenization” (reflected, e.g., in her depiction of spirit quests and matriarchal wisdom). However, like Kinsella, Quaife admits to inventing most of the Native material in her novel, believing simply “that her interpretation of native spirituality is
Two, three hundred years of colonization and dispossession just disappear in this one person’s quest to find a meaningful way of worshipping at sacred places. . . . [Such writing] leaves out and displaces the whole historical process, and just acts as if any culture that there is, is for the having, and can be tapped into by whoever feels a need for that culture’s spirituality, regardless of history and the politics of oppression.

*(Contemporary 81)*

This charge is obviously a grave one, particularly since, as Godard points out, spirit quests have become “one of the high canonical forms of Canadian fiction” (“Politics” 189).

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75 These comments were made during Lutz’ interview of Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, who responded with an enthusiastic, “That’s right!” (82). Himani Bannerji likewise critiques Atwood’s appropriation/obliteration of indigenous people in *Surfacing* (“Geography” 296-297), while Elleke Boehmer remarks that “this method of borrowing, though obviously effective, [does] share problematic features with conventional colonist representations, in particular the tendency to make free with the cultural resources of native peoples in order to achieve European self-definition” (*Colonial* 218; see also Bannerji, “Geography” 296-297). For similar critiques of such borrowing, see Fee, “Romantic” 20-24, “Writing”; Godard, “Politics” 190-194; Grant, “Great”; Horne, *Contemporary* 7-9; Hoy, *How* 8; Keeshig-Tobias, “Magic” 175, “Stop”; Mandel, “Imagining”; Mukherjee, “Canadian” 429; Whitt, “Cultural.” Atwood herself, when asked why she used the Native rock paintings as she did in *Surfacing*, simply comments, “They were there. If you’re going to put a book in that setting, you’re then limited to what occurs in that setting, what you can find in that setting. . . . And if you’re going to make a novel with only four characters in it, set in a remote area of bush, and you want a place of significance to be in that novel, well, you don’t have a lot of choice” (Interview with Jan Garden Castro 225).

Atwood’s explanation aside, such literary choices still appear to have not a little in common with one of the most prevalent uses of (and motivations for) the appropriation of Native cultural forms, namely advertising (Francis, *Imaginary* 173-190). In this context, Philip Bellfry points out the “tragicomic” irony of the fact that he had to obtain legal permission to use various sports team logos for his essays (e.g., from the Washington Redskins and Atlanta Braves): “We lost most of our land, most of our ‘Aboriginal’ rights, many of our languages, most of our traditional cultural ways, our religion, our relationship to the land and the spirits of the land, and, it seems, that we’ve even lost control of much of our identity through the process of ‘trade-marking’ images of us, and elements of our culture” (“Permission” 30).

76 Ironically, as Godard further comments, Native literature itself has typically moved away from such “traditional” aboriginal story structures as the spirit quest, and “adopted entirely different formal strategies, discontinuous tales rather than coherently plotted quests, symbolic events rather than psychologized reactions” (“Politics” 190). Note that the (canonical) use of Native narrative forms by non-Native writers in Canada was facilitated in no small part by the work of Northrop Frye. As Eli Mandel points out, “[Frye’s] version of the literary tradition of Canadian poetry . . . turns out to be a version of the romantic fall into
As it happens, canonical forms appear not only in Atwood’s fiction but in her criticism as well; she produced, in fact, one of the first, highly influential, Canadian attempts at canon-making in 1972 with *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Her survey of CanLit, however, included no Native “imaginative” writing whatsoever. Reflecting on this fact some years later (in an article on Thomas King), Atwood writes that she “did not examine poetry and fiction written by Native writers in English, for the simple reason that [she] could not at that time find any” (“Double-Bladed” 243). To be fair, in the early 1970s there was not a lot of such writing popularly available—with the very notable exception of Pauline Johnson’s poetry. Working in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Johnson was the first Canadian Native author to be published, gaining international acclaim and selling more books than any aboriginal writer since (Young-Ing, “Aboriginal” 182). It is difficult then to understand Atwood’s failure to even mention Johnson, who was referred to variously by critics of her time as “perhaps the most unique figure in the literary world on this continent,” “the modern consciousness . . . and the antithetical quest for a return to an integrated being” (“Northrop” 285). Cf. Boehmer’s point that Frye “believed that the basis of Canadian identity and self-expression was to be found in the nation’s obsession with its vast natural world. . . . It is symptomatic of the settler condition that for [Frye and Atwood] identity was to be extracted from experiences of negation or loss. Colonial lack, in other words, could be converted into a source of self-definition” (*Colonial* 215).

This despite the fact that *Survival* actually contained a chapter on “First People,” which unfortunately was concerned only with the use of Native characters by non-Native writers. There is an unpleasant irony in the fact that *Survival* and *Surfacing* were published in the same year, and yet while in one text Atwood seems to have had little or no knowledge of the Native cultural community, in the other she was quite willing to imaginatively tap into this culture for her own purposes. Atwood in fact advocates such an approach in the pages of *Survival* itself, entreating (white) writers to make “use of the Indian . . . as a mediator between the whites and a Nature which is life-giving rather than death-dealing” (103).

Johnson’s substantial body of work includes *Flint and Feather, Canadian Born* and *Legends of Vancouver*. Aside from Johnson’s poetry, perhaps the most well-known Native literary work to appear not long before *Survival* would be Lee Maracle’s *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel*, published in 1970. There were, however, many other Native writers for Atwood to consider, including Peter Jones, George Copway, Peter Jacobs, John Ojjitcheka Brant-Sero, and Norval Morrisseau. For a brief but very useful survey of the history of Canadian Native writing in English, see Greg Young-Ing, “Aboriginal” 182-184. A more thorough, annotated listing comprises the content of Penny Petrone’s *Native Literature in Canada*.

Overview of Johnson’s life and work, including the social and political contexts of her poetry, can be found in Francis, *Imaginary* 111-123; Gray, *Flint*; Keller, *Pauline*; Petrone, *Native* 78-84; Strong-Boag and Gerson, *Paddling*. 
most popular figure in Canadian literature,” and even “the greatest living poetess” (qtd. in Francis, Imaginary 113).

Atwood is not alone in her oversight. The Canadian canon continues to exclude Native texts despite a proliferation of high profile, critically acclaimed aboriginal writers. By this I mean that, for example, Native authors do not often appear in general courses on “Canadian literature,” nor are they the subject of much mainstream critical debate or discussion. They also tend to be conspicuously absent from courses and texts that, like Atwood’s Survival, aim to provide a highly detailed, even exhaustive list of “important” Canadian authors. It is particularly striking to find that at times such omissions are not acknowledged even by (non-Native) discussions of the canon, discussions whose point, by definition, is to identify and analyze the constructed nature of their subject matter—a task virtually impossible without considering what has been left out of the hallowed lists. The frontispiece to Robert Lecker’s Canadian Canons (1991), for example, asserts that one of that text’s principal aims is to consider “the impact of canonical choices on marginalized groups that have traditionally been excluded from the canon.” And yet in

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80 More concretely, in 1961 Johnson became the first Canadian writer, the first Canadian woman, and the first Canadian Native to be honoured by a commemorative stamp (Petrone, Native 78; Strong-Boag and Gerson, Paddling 130).

81 W.J. Keith’s Canadian Literature in English (1985), e.g., omits any mention of Native writing, while David Stouck’s only Native reference in Major Canadian Authors (1988) is to Pauline Johnson. Johnson in fact becomes a kind of marker generally of the presence or absence of Canadian Native literature. After her initial prominence, she remained sufficiently well-known in 1965 to be mentioned in eight chapters of the first edition of the Literary History of Canada, edited by Klinck et al. (chapters 8, 14, 18, 19, 22, 26, 33, 39). However, by the time the second edition appeared in 1990 (ed. New et al.), Johnson’s importance had diminished to the point where she appears in only three chapters, none of which concern “serious” literature (i.e., 9: Children’s Literature, 10: Folklore, and 14: Life-Writing). Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson connect Johnson’s decline to the values promoted by academic modernism, including “detachment, alienated individualism, elitism, and formalism over emotion” (Paddling 123). These values generally excluded both women and Native writers from the canon of Canadian literature (122-124; cf. Gerson, “Anthologies” 56-60; Krupat, Voice 4, 45-47; Mukherjee, “Canadian”). For discussions of the canon issue in relation to Canadian Native literature see Episkewew, “Socially”; Fagan, “What”; Fee, “Aboriginal”; Godard, “Politics” 184-185; Grant, Introduction; Hoy, How 15-16; LaRocque, “Preface”; “Teaching”; McGrath, “Reassessing” 19-20; Monkmman, Native 3-5; New, “Editorial” 5-6; Perreault and Vance, Foreword; Petrone, Native 1-8.
this entire collection of essays, assembled by a key scholar on the topic, the exclusion of Native writers is only once mentioned, very briefly, and only in relation to drama:

Richard Paul Knowles observes that “plays by Canada’s native peoples are completely missing from the canon” (“Voices” 102).

There has been some improvement in this situation over the past few years, with articles on Canadian Native writing appearing in critical anthologies and literary journals with a degree of regularity. Some academic institutions, such as the University of Toronto, also occasionally offer courses on Native literature. But the surface here is still just being scratched. Until 1999 the only book-length critical study of any type to emerge in this area was Penny Petrone’s Native Literature in Canada, which itself is essentially a historical survey with a few commentaries throughout; since then, six full literary critical texts have been published. Post-secondary course offerings are arguably more problematic: for the 2007-08 academic year students at the University of Toronto could choose from only two Native literature options, for example, each charged with covering

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82 Oddly, however, Knowles himself only identifies the presence of Natives in the writing of two non-Native playwrights (Gwen Ringwood and George Ryga) while completely ignoring Tomson Highway’s seminal works The Rez Sisters and Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing. Even stranger, Knowles demonstrates awareness of Highway in a parenthetical remark pages later (long after the two “Native” paragraphs), but identifies him only as one of two modern writers “adapting conventions from . . . non-white cultures” (106). Published in 1991, Lecker’s text represents the first collection of essays to focus on Canadian literary canons; more recently, E.D. Blodgett’s 2003 attempt at analyzing the Canadian canon still omits virtually any mention of the exclusion of Native writers, making only two very passing references each to Thomas King (331, 334) and Pauline Johnson (46, 312).

83 See, e.g., Literary Pluralities (ed. Verduyn) and New Contexts of Canadian Criticism (ed. Heble et al.). These collections of literary criticism from the late 1990s are notable for the fact that they both contain numerous pieces concerning Native writings as part of a larger project on Canadian literature generally; i.e., they are not specifically “Native” collections.

84 Three other valuable texts that examine Canadian Native literature had been produced by this date; however one of them (Hartmut Lutz’s Contemporary Challenges) is a collection of interviews only, while the other two (W.H. New’s Native Writers and King et al.’s The Native in Literature) devote a significant amount of space to discussions of non-Native material.

85 These are: Dee Horne’s (misleadingly named) Contemporary American Indian Writing (1999), which in fact considers the work of writers who are all Canadian; Helen Hoy’s How Should I Read These? (2001); Renate Eigenbrod and Jo-Ann Episkewen’s Creating Community (2002); Arnold E. Davidson, Priscilla L. Walton, and Jennifer Andrews’ Border Crossings (2003); Renate Eigenbrod’s Travelling知识 (2005); and Sam McKeegney’s Magic Weapons (2007).
both American and Canadian authors; meanwhile, seven sections of Shakespeare were available.\textsuperscript{86} The importance of such arrangements is clearly far from minor, especially given the central role of Canadian universities in creating and supporting literary canons in this country.\textsuperscript{87}

And so if Native writers feel “like they have been speaking into a vacuum,” as LaRocque comments, “it is because we have. . . . The lonely echoes of our own words have been amplified by a strange but perhaps predictable colonial phenomenon: white intellectual judgement and shunning of Native intellectuals” (“Preface” xxii-xxiii). This phenomenon is “predictable,” of course, because as LaRocque also notes, “literature is political in that its linguistic and ideological transmission is defined and determined by those in power. This is why Shakespeare rather than Wisakehcha is classified as ‘classical’ in our school curriculums” (“Preface” xvi).\textsuperscript{88} Such an understanding of literary

\textsuperscript{86} During this same academic year, there were a total of 80 courses listed in English Department’s section of the University of Toronto’s \textit{Calendar for Arts & Science}, not counting independent studies courses and advanced reading seminars. In relation to such imbalances, Arun Mukherjee further notes that Native literature is typically grouped in with other non-European writings under the category of “post-colonial literature,” and that often just one academic will be assigned to teach all of this material. This arrangement not only “homogenizes and ghettoizes the literatures from non-European societies,” it produces the absurd situation of scholars “being saddled with the responsibility of teaching about two-thirds of the world” (“Whose” 7).


\textsuperscript{88} Cf. Linda Hutcheon: “literary history . . . can never be separated from other forms of history. The canon, whether formed deliberately or inadvertently, will always reflect the discourses out of which it derives: social, cultural, ideological” (\textit{Canadian} 189). For an extensive discussion of this issue in relation to Native literature see Krupat, \textit{Voice}. Terry Eagleton further argues that not only does the inclusion of specific texts, and the omission of others, in the sacred category of “literature” resonate with the value systems of the prevailing ruling class, but that the discourse of literary studies itself is inherently supportive of the status quo. This is because such discourse is primarily about “being able to talk and write in certain ways. . . . You can think or believe what you want, as long as you can speak this particular language” (\textit{Literary} 201). That is, placing the emphasis on the signifier and not the sign, on \textit{how} something is said over \textit{what} is said, effectively neuters discourse in any real political sense. And of course the entire question of choosing a canon, of defining what constitutes “literature,” typically rests on the question of \textit{how} texts are written (200-202). Arun Mukherjee adds to this theory by noting that much non-Western writing is in fact precisely about ideas and not technique; such texts are inherently threatening not only to the canon as made up of
canons has become virtually a truism in academia, and yet—if the case at hand is any indication—the transparency of the idea has yet to have a truly significant impact on the actual study and teaching of Canadian literature itself.

2.1.2 “taking our writing seriously”

This silence of (non-Native) literary scholars is the other side of the coin flipped by Deloria when he accuses anthropologists of saying too much: the attitudes of both academic groups towards Native people have apparently been largely predicated on the notion that they remain in some sense “primitive.” Native stories are thus considered “authentic”—and worthy of consideration—only if they similarly appear to have emerged from the mists of the past. So Anishinaubae author Daniel David Moses comments, “I’m always getting phone calls from people who want me to come and tell Native legends. I know Native legends but I really have a feeling that it’s not my right to go traipsing around, telling other people’s stories. This image of traditional Native storytelling places Native people in the museum with all the other extinct species” (“Preface” xiii). The same “museum” quality that makes traditional stories attractive to non-Natives also adheres to contemporary narratives, but in a manner that makes them specifically unappealing; that is to say, the imagined primitive aspects of these texts makes them, for a great many critics, ineligible for consideration as literature. Moses’ reference to “telling” Native stories points to the most oft-cited “primitive” aspect of aboriginal writing, its connection to oral culture. And there is general agreement among texts that reflect white (male) ruling class values, but also to the canon as that which props up, and is propped up by, the entire technique-centred discipline of literary studies (“Introduction” 3-6).

89 Emma LaRocque likewise recalls being interviewed by a CBC radio journalist who, after about an hour, suddenly realized “that he was speaking to a professor. He abruptly ended his interview with this request: ‘Could you tell me where I could find a real Métis storyteller?’” (“Preface” xxiii).
commentators on Native literature that this connection has, more than any other single factor, prejudiced non-Native literary scholars against aboriginal writing.\textsuperscript{90} As Bernd Peyer notes in \textit{The Tutor’d Mind}, such “linguistic imperialism” is related to the simple fact that contemporary Western societies continue to see writing as a defining characteristic of “civilization” (9).\textsuperscript{91}

A second crucial, self-defining feature of civilizations that has affected the reception of Native literature is that they change, \textit{progress}, through time. This is in contrast to primitive cultures, which are understood to have no history; that is to say, if

\textsuperscript{90} The connection between oral traditions and essentially all Native writing is constantly asserted by both Native writers and their critics (e.g., Akiwenzie-Damm, “this”; Allen, \textit{Sacred} 4; Blaeser, “Writing”; Brant, “Good” 85, 88; Brill de Ramírez, \textit{Contemporary} 1-6; Cuthand, “Transmitting” 54; Eigenbrod, “Oral”; Fife, Foreword; Hoy, \textit{How} 23; Krupat, \textit{Voice} 55; Ortiz, “Introduction” xiv; Peyer, \textit{Tutor’d} 14). Lutz additionally asserts that “the ties of modern Native literature to the oral tradition seem far stronger [in Canada than in the US],” because the production of this literature here is not so completely dominated by writers who are also academics (\textit{Contemporary} 7). The notion that white scholars have ignored Native literature as a result of the “primitive” overtones of this connection to orality is similarly widespread (e.g., Allen, \textit{Sacred} 54-66; Donovan, \textit{Coming} 46-48; Fee, “Aboriginal” 142-147, “Writing” 27; Godard, “Listening” 135-137; “Talking” 54-56; Grant, \textit{Our} viii-ix; Harjo and Bird, \textit{Reinventing} 20, 28; Krupat, \textit{Voice} 45-46; Thompson, “Typewriter”; Weaver, \textit{That} 20-22). François Paré suggests that there is in fact an oral quality to what he calls “petites” literatures in general: “the voice is the \textit{Other} of writing: in order to justify its legitimacy and ensure its long-term hegemony, writing must . . . repress this Other” (\textit{Exiguity} 21); originally: “la voix est l’Autre de l’écriture: pour fonder sa légitimité, assurer à long terme son hégémonie, l’écriture doit . . . refouler cet Autre” (\textit{Les littératures} 26).

\textsuperscript{91} J. Edward Chamberlin offers an excellent summary of this general perspective:

It has become almost a truism that writing—alphabetic writing in particular—marked an evolutionary advance. Writing frees the mind for original, abstract thought, the argument goes, while oral cultures are imprisoned in the present, uninterested in definitions, unable to make analytic distinctions and incapable of genuine self-consciousness. Oral cultures understand the world in magical rather than scientific terms, and those in such cultures who have any acquaintance whatsoever with writing are agonizingly aware of what they are missing. (If 19)

Chamberlin’s \textit{If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?} itself provides an important corrective to such an understanding. In general, the most thoughtful discussions of the relationship between orality and writing that I have encountered are contained in Murray and Rice’s \textit{Talking on the Page}, a collection of papers given at the 1996 Conference on Editorial Problems at the University of Toronto. Margery Fee’s “Writing Orality” not only adds another detailed and nuanced perspective to this conversation, but her list of references functions as an excellent beginning bibliography on the topic, particularly in relation to North American Native cultures and literatures. The standard starting point for such a bibliography is Walter J. Ong’s \textit{Orality and Literacy}, which, as Chamberlin notes, has been “regrettably influential” in perpetuating the “conventional wisdom” about the differences between these two forms of expression (If 242). Finally, Terry Goldie offers a detailed examination of the congruencies between Ong’s conceptions of orality and representations of “the Indigene” in (non-indigenous) literary productions from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (\textit{Fear} 107-126).
left on their own, these societies exist in a kind of stasis, a repeating cycle tied to the
natural world. Joan M. Vastokas points out that as art is tied to civilization it is similarly
dependent upon the sense of historical development. So until Native people are
understood to have a history, they will not be seen to produce anything that might be
considered “literature” (“Native” 7-35). Anthropologists, but not literary scholars, are
thus interested in Native cultural products because they are valuable as artefact, but not as
art. Accordingly, W.H. New comments that the activities of Native artists in Canada
have typically been “regarded (when acknowledged at all) as primitive, pagan, curious,
quaint, and collectible rather than as intrinsically artistic” (“Editorial” 7).

92 Two critical studies that discuss, and debunk, this view at length in relation to the fields of anthropology
and history are Renato Rosaldo’s Ilongot Headhunting and Bruce Trigger’s Natives and Newcomers. Trigger comments, e.g., that “the split between these two disciplines reflects the long-standing refusal of scholars to accept native peoples, whose ways of life they have viewed as primitive, unchanging, and inferior to their own, as adequate subjects for historical research” (Natives 5). Rosaldo in turn makes the point that anthropology’s “synchronic bias,” its “assumption that primitive cultures were timeless, as static as they were uniform,” was supported to no small extent by “the limitations imposed by the short term of field research” (Ilongot 10, 13). That is to say, the methods of anthropologists simply reinforced their assumptions, and vice versa.

93 In making this same point, David Treuer recounts his visit to an American exhibit of contemporary
Native art in the fall of 2000 (Native 153-158). The exhibit not only contained an essentialist/mystical
description of the event (153-154), but the museum’s gift shop was selling books on Native “spirituality”
along with maize, sweetgrass, sage, and turkey feathers. As Treuer observes, “I have never seen, for
example, during a Kandinsky exhibition, single-serving vials of vodka, babushkas, and mini-pots of caviar
in the gift shop. Nor, after viewing Degas at the Met did I notice tutus, ballet shoes, baguettes, or berets
next to the register” (157).

94 One might add “childish” to this list as well; cf. Emma LaRocque’s comment that her colleagues in the
English department at the University of Manitoba “assumed Native literature consisted mostly of ‘folktales’
and ‘children’s literature’” (“Teaching” 212). In general, the belief that Native literature is ignored because
it is perceived as “primitive” in some fashion is widespread; see, e.g., Allen, Sacred 4-5; Churchill,
“Literature”; Cornell, “Imposition”; Grant, “Contemporary” 124-126; Jannetta, Ethnopoetics 9; Johnston,
“One” 12-13; Krupat, Voice 7-9; LaRocque, “Teaching” 212; “Tides” 368; McGrath, 19; Monkman, Native
5, 161; Petrone, Native 1-5; Peyer, Tutor’d 13, 18; Strong-Boag and Gerson, Paddling 128-129; Treuer,
Native 157-158, 190-198. For the same reason, Anishinaabae critic Gerald Vizenor argues that attempts to
interpret Native writings that avoid contemporary Western literary theory are often problematic, because
the alternative typically involves recourse to anthropological models. This is why, e.g., “Claude Lévi-
Strauss and Alan Dundes have been cited more than Mikhail Bakhtin or Jean-François Lyotard in critical
studies of tribal literature” (Narrative x). Vizenor has himself done much to counter this trend, producing
work that as a whole provides an important argument for the position that writers such as Bakhtin and
Lyotard, along with Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva,
and Jean-Paul Sartre have something significant to contribute to our study of Native cultural products (see,
e.g., Crossbloods, Narrative Chance, Manifest Manners, and Fugitive Poses). Cf. Arnold Krupat’s
comment in his 1985 study, For Those Who Come After, that “those who do study Native American
Of course it is difficult to know with certainty why literary scholars have ignored Native writings, as critical silence is not easily interrogated; and yet it is unlikely that the omission of Native texts from their studies is the result simply of ignorance about the existence of such texts. Certainly Atwood—despite her comment about not being able to find any Native literature—was not unaware of Pauline Johnson’s work when she omitted the poet from *Survival*. She draws attention to the omission herself, while offering a possible excuse: “Why did I overlook Pauline Johnson? Perhaps because, being half-white, she somehow didn’t rate as the real thing, even among Natives” (“Double-Bladed” 243). This is a highly problematic remark: Atwood knew of Johnson’s work and was not willing to include it either on the basis of merit or importance, but she *would* have brought Johnson into the fold as *a Native writer* if she fit Atwood’s definition of what a Native writer should be.95 Referring to such practices as “ghettoization,” Emma LaRocque remarks on this problem in the larger context of Native studies:

> The lumping of our writing under the category “Native” means that our discussion of issues and ideas that are universally applicable may not reach the general public. For example, an analysis of the Canadian school system by a Native author is rarely placed under “education” or “sociology” or “social issues.” The poetry and poetic prose in much of the literatures have thus far tended to avoid critical theory as if it were indeed the French disease, a foreign corruption hostile or irrelevant to their local efforts” (xxviii-xxix).

95 One other irony in Atwood’s comment is that, during Johnson’s lifetime, she was in fact severely constrained by the (non-Native) public’s insistence that she fit *their* definition of a Native author (Francis, *Imaginary* 111-123; Harry, “Literature” 151; New, “Editorial” 5). Complaining about this situation in a letter, Johnson writes, “I could do so much better if they would only let me” (qtd. in Francis, *Imaginary* 116).
1970s is rarely, if ever, placed under poetry or literature proper. (“Preface” xviii)

While Deloria asks the “anthros” to keep quiet, therefore, other aboriginal commentators have called for scholars of any cultural background to talk more often, and more loudly, about Native literature. Perhaps most telling is the fact that, during his interviews with 18 Canadian Native writers, Hartmut Lutz repeatedly asks if non-Native critics should be silent on the topic of Native literature, and no one says “yes.” Lee Maracle’s comment is typical: “I don’t think it’s a good idea to be silent at any time” (Interview 177). Since, as Godard notes, “the [Euro-Canadian] cultural discourse legitimizes fictional form” (“Politics” 36), it may be that any study of Native literature—as literature—that is not inherently patronizing, dismissive, or racist, is (to put it bluntly) a good thing. LaRocque, for example, makes this point with some force: “I think the Native writers themselves cannot easily resolve this dilemma [of being marginalized] on their own. The mainstream intellectuals and critics . . . are going to have to start taking our writing seriously. When they do, we can begin to dialogue and not stay marginalized” (Interview 186).

Despite such sentiments non-Native critics have, as indicated, frequently abstained from dialogue. Two examples of such reticence are noteworthy simply

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96 In her discussion of Beatrice Culleton’s *In Search of Raintree*, Agnes Grant similarly comments that, “though the book is popular in Canadian as well as European markets, it is rarely referred to as ‘Canadian literature’; at best it is called ‘Native literature’” (“Contemporary” 129; cf. Thompson, “Technologies” 60-61). Basil Johnston thus observes that libraries “have a ‘reserve,’ a special place for Indian books and Indian authors” (Interview with Lutz 231). Helen Hoy reflects on the issue of ghettoization in reference to LaRocque’s comments above, as well as to similar statements by Lee Maracle and Joy Harjo (*How* 5-7). She notes that, while the specific issues and complaints raised by each writer differ in some ways, all three “object to being perceived primarily, and disproportionately, in terms of race” (6). Most pointed, perhaps, is Trinh T. Minh-ha’s remark about “Third World women” in general, that “everywhere we go, we become Someone’s private zoo” (*Woman* 82; qtd. in Hoy 6).
because the critics in question have in other regards made significant contributions to the study of Native literature in Canada. In the introduction to his collection of interviews, for example, Hartmut Lutz pointedly refuses to jump into the critical pool (Contemporary 6-7), despite the fact that, again, none of the authors with whom he spoke endorsed such silence. Terry Goldie expresses a similar hesitation in the preface to the Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English he put together with Daniel David Moses: Goldie added no commentary of his own to the collected writings, he explains, “because that would have been just one more white version of Native culture” (xii). Responding to a similar statement in Goldie’s earlier work, Fear and Temptation (217), Gary Boire remarks that “to refuse to comment point blank constitutes the worst form of liberal side-stepping imaginable. This abnegation of political/literary responsibility is straightforward nonsense—a comfortable middle-class liberal perspective that blinds itself to the existence and continuation of struggle” (“Sucking” 305; cf. Eigenbrod, “Not” 70).

Boire may be overstating the point somewhat, particularly since—as both Lutz and Goldie are assuredly aware—some Native commentators would strongly disagree with him. Carol Lee Sanchez, for example, clearly states her wish “that you [non-Indians] will strongly discourage or STOP the publication of any and all articles about Indians written by non-Indians, and publish work written by Indians about ourselves” (166).98 For my part, I have obviously chosen to disobey this injunction, but I am not disregarding it.

97 For discussions of this point by (non-Native) critics who have decided not to abstain, see Bentley, 88; Fee, “Upsetting” 178-179; Godard, “Politics” 186; Horne, Contemporary xxix-xxxi; Hoy, How 3-31 Leggat, “Native”; McGrath, 19-20.

98 It is actually rare to find such an unequivocal statement of this position. Somewhat qualified variations are more common, such as Maria Campbell’s wish, expressed while being interviewed by Hartmut Lutz, that white people would stop writing specifically about Native social difficulties and let Natives do that themselves (60). Jeannette Armstrong similarly resents “non-Indian people out there speaking on our behalf” (“Writing” 56).
In general, I have tried to bear in mind Lenore Keeshig-Tobias’ own response to Lutz’s question about the study of Native literature by non-Natives. Keeshig-Tobias, who has been one of the most passionate critics of appropriation, makes it clear that she does not make a priori decisions about who should and should not speak about Natives, but tries to judge on a case by case basis: “I think I always give people the benefit of a doubt, first. And if you prove yourself to be [laughs] an arsehole, I’ll tell you” (Interview 82).

2.2 Definitions

2.2.1 Dicto Simpliciter

Agnes Grant puts the matter succinctly: “We lack a definition of what Native literature is” (“Contemporary” 126). This predicament has of course not prevented scores of anthologies of “Native literature” from appearing in both the United States and Canada. Still, it is not uncommon for these texts to wrestle to some extent with the question of understanding what exactly is being anthologized; they typically arrive at some variation of the account that Grant provides for her own anthology, namely that Native literature consists of works by authors “of Métis or Native ancestry” (Our vi).

99 Along these lines, Susan Gingell considers “how much more hearable we [non-Native critics] might be in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit contexts if we modified our tendency to seek mastery of texts by showing a humility that is all too rarely a feature of current theoretical, critical, and pedagogical discourse” (“Absence” 107-108; cf. Hoy, How 18).

100 Thomas King similarly asserts that, “when we talk about contemporary Native literature, we talk as though we already have a definition for this body of literature when, in fact, we do not” (Introduction to All x). In her excellent survey of the various positions taken regarding the categorization of Native literature in Australia (“Aboriginal Identity and its Effects on Writing”), Anita Heiss also concludes that “the question of whether or not there is an ‘Aboriginal genre’ or ‘Aboriginal discourse’ as such is not clear” (224).

101 Examples in Canada only include Fife, Colour; Gedalof, Paper; Gooderham, I Am; Grant, Our; Joe and Choyce, Mi’kmaq; King, All; Maki, Let; Moses and Goldie, Anthropology; Perreault and Vance, Writing.

102 See, e.g., Gedalof, 10; Harjo and Bird, Introduction 26-27; Perreault and Vance, Foreword xii; Roman, Voices 10. Other wrestlings with the definition of (Canadian) Native literature are evidenced by Fagan, “What”; Horne, Contemporary xiii-xiv; Hoy, How 19-25; LaRocque, “Teaching” 218-226; Sewell, “Natives.” In each instance, although problems with the general category of “Native” are identified, the concept/construct of “Native literature” is still considered a useful one.
In Canada, arguably the most well known interrogation of this same definition comes from Thomas King himself, in the highly reflexive introduction to his own contribution to the anthology corpus, *All My Relations:*

We could simply say that Native literature is literature produced by Natives. . . . This definition—on the basis of race—however, makes a rather large assumption, a type of *dicto simpliciter.* 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. . . . We know, of course, that [it does] not. We know that this is a romantic, mystical, and, in many instances, a self-serving notion . . . (x-xi)

As King’s “of course” indicates, to some extent at least he is stating the obvious. For instance, viewing the original inhabitants of North America (and/or their descendents) as one people—a perspective clearly implied by the concept of “Native literature”—is a misleading, simplistic, entirely post-contact phenomenon. When Columbus, Cartier, *et al.* arrived in this hemisphere they encountered hundreds of distinct languages and cultures; attempting to describe such diversity with one word is, as King notes, “much like catching a genie in a bottle.” He adds: “These terms, ‘Indian’ and ‘Native,’ are historical and literary terms much like ‘continent and narrative,’ which seem to suggest specific, known quantities but which hint at vast geographies and varied voices” (*Native* 9).103

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103 Both King’s genie metaphor and his dismissal of the notion that Native people possess a quasi-mystical singularity suggest significant links to the problem of defining religion. In the context of similarly dismissing the notion that religion is inherently distinct, *sui generis,* e.g., Willi Braun employs precisely the same metaphor: “Let us abandon the eschatological hope, so tenaciously persistent in our field, that by some brilliant hermeneutical can-do we will spook the true genie out of the bottle. If ‘religion’ is substantively empty, then there is no genie in the bottle” (“Religion” 8).
A much less straightforward issue, however, involves the merits and possibilities of distinguishing “Natives” from “non-Natives.” For King, the answer clearly does not lie with the premise that being Native means possessing unique powers and perceptions. His critique of this notion comes by way of asking what we are to do with non-Native writers who genuinely know and understand more about indigenous cultures and histories than many Native writers; or conversely, with Native writers who have little or no such knowledge at all (All xi). On the other hand, the immensely influential (Native) critic Paul Gunn Allen does in fact see herself as belonging to a group of people that are absolutely, ontologically distinct. She declares in *The Sacred Hoop*, for example, that “there is a permanent wilderness in the blood of an Indian” (183), and that Native women in particular have “a solid, impregnable, and ineradicable orientation toward a spirit-informed view of the universe . . . This view is not merely private, for it is shared by all members of tribal psychic reality” (165).

Such statements make it clear that the issue of race is unavoidably part of this discussion, an issue which presents a number of sticky problems that King is likely trying to avoid. Some of these problems are articulated by Jodi Lundgren, who argues, for example, that since a positivist reification of “race” is at the heart of the colonial devastation wrought upon Native North Americans, any such reification is always dangerous (“Being” 63). As Jennifer Kelly suggests, however, it is possible to see

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104 King points to Jamake Highwater and himself as examples of both types of writers, respectively. King admits in his interview with Hartmut Lutz that he was not raised in an aboriginal community and has no close tribal ties; whereas Highwater is a non-Native who, in King’s opinion, “produced two of the very best books on Native art” (108-109). It is impressive that King would point to Highwater in this context, given how controversial he became for inventing his Native identity. Gerald Vizenor, for one, refers to Highwater as “the most tiresome Indian poser,” who, regardless of talent and imagination, ultimately accomplished his pretense “in the cause of dominance” (“Double” 155, 182).

105 Oddly, Lundgren makes this argument in opposition to King (not Allen), apparently misunderstanding his position. That King suggests bloodlines as a way of defining Natives is read by Lundgren to mean that
Allen’s essentialist position as not so much about ontology per se, but rather as an act of political resistance. Kelly thus quotes Gayatri Spivak: “it is not possible, within discourse, to escape essentializing somewhere . . . So then strategically you can look at essentialisms, not as descriptions of the way things are, but as something that one must adopt to produce a critique of anything” (Post-Colonial 51; qtd. in Kelly, “Landscape” 114).106 In his interview with Hartmut Lutz, King reveals that despite his interest in problematizing the category of “Native,” he still recognizes political reasons for distinguishing Natives from non-Natives: “it is important, I think, to keep those kinds of lines straight because otherwise we begin to have non-Natives doing the same that they have done for years and years, and that is to speak for Native people” (108-109).

Of course, many other very strong political arguments can be made in favour of pushing hard to distinguish Natives as clearly and definitively as possible from non-Natives. The most critical argument concerns the issue of aboriginal rights. The more elusive the terms “Native” or “Indian” become, the more difficult it also becomes, for example, to settle land claims fairly.107 It is no surprise in this regard that the Canadian federal government has since the mid-1800s created much controversy and confusion over the legal definition of Native identity. As set out in the Indian Act, this definition has

“Indianness is an inborn genetic trait” (62; emphasis added)—which is not at all King’s point, although it is clearly Allen’s. Julia Emberley also deals with this issue, and argues that racism is unavoidably implied by the term/category “Native literature” (140; cf. Sewell, “Natives” 20). In this regard she follows Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who has had an enormous impact on the discussion of race in literature and literary criticism (see, e.g., his seminal edited collection “Race,” Writing and Difference).

106 See also Kelly’s discussion of this issue in relation to similar comments by Canadian Native authors Jeanette Armstrong and Beth Cuthand (“Landscape” 121).

107 This point is made emphatically by Emma LaRocque (“Teaching” 221). Kristina Fagan likewise explains that her proposed research project on the history of the Labrador Métis Nation (of which she is a part) will not simply provide her with a better understanding of their literature, but will hopefully counter the provincial and federal governments’ refusal to recognize the existence of this Nation. “Because of this lack of government recognition,” she explains, “the Labrador Métis have no say in, for instance, the building of a highway through our people’s traplines and communities or the distribution of tourist fishing and hunting licenses on our land” (“What” 249).
been in constant flux, has very often been unfairly applied, and has caused a great deal of
conflict among Native people.\footnote{For detailed discussions of the Indian Act and its effects see Cardinal, \textit{Rebirth} 89-135; \textit{Unjust} 16-19; Emberley, \textit{Thresholds} 87-91; Fee, “Deploying” 212-217; Frideres, \textit{Native} 25-40; J. Green, “Sexual”; Hedican, \textit{Applied} 198-200; Jamieson, “Sex”; Lawrence, “\textit{Real}”; Leslie and Maguire, \textit{Historical}; Miller, \textit{Skyscrapers} 109-115; Silman, Introduction 12-14.} The importance of the \textit{Act} cannot be understated: as Hedican notes, it is “the foremost piece of legislation affecting Indians in Canada” (198), while Frideres refers to the \textit{Act} as “the most vicious mechanism of social control today” (37). Even if one disagrees with the kind of extreme position taken by Allen, then, it is not difficult to see why some would see it as useful, or even necessary, to vigorously oppose such state control using whatever rhetorical means are at hand. As Hedican argues, all processes which undermine the sociopolitical integrity of Natives also “bring into question their very right to exist” (211).\footnote{Kateri Damm comments on the further complexity of this situation: she argues that, in order to fight for the kind of integrity to which Hedican refers, Natives are under immense pressure to present a united front whether or not everyone concerned agrees with one another. And in order to present such an appearance of concord, they must (to some extent) in effect freeze their opinions, deny themselves the right to engage in the kind of free discourse that is necessary for growth and change (“Says” 14-15). As Dierdre Jordan points out, the crucial—yet typically very difficult—problem for such groups “is to find both a mode of theorizing that does not mythologize the group’s past in a way that prevents contemporary development and a commonly accepted site for theorizing” (“Education” 281).}

Even still, my own view is closer to King’s than to Allen’s. Which is to say that I recognize the value of the term “Native” as pointing to the existence of crucial historical, political, and cultural differences between two broad groups of people, the early inhabitants of North America and the Europeans who colonized them, without subscribing to anything like the notion of a distinct “race.” I also recognize that, while many differences continue to exist between the descendents of these groups, the fact that a great number of people who consider themselves, or are considered to be, aboriginal, also possess non-Native heritage, points to one of the obvious limits of the term. These limits are also of course inscribed by the immense diversity that has always marked
Native peoples and cultures. Jeannette Armstrong takes a similar position in her interview with Hartwig Isernhagen. She recognizes that there do exist common patterns in Native literature as a result of shared histories, particularly in relation to colonialism; at the same time, she is critical of the fact that “Indian literature, or Native American literatures, are lumped into one category as though there were such a thing, rather than many different cultures producing different kinds of literatures” (135-136).

2.2.2 Embracing Not Only

The obvious second problem usually raised in any attempt to categorize Native writing concerns the meaning of “literature” itself. At issue is the fact that this concept—in all its politicized, aestheticized, fetishized, glory—is historically alien to Native North Americans. Aboriginal authors therefore are by definition working in a cultural form that is not part of their own tradition, both in terms of writing itself, and the historically accepted genres that categorize Western literature: poetry, novel, short story, etc. They are also typically working in the language of one of their original (and ongoing) colonizers which, even if they grew up speaking this language, may present its own difficulties. As Emma LaRocque notes, for example, to a Native woman “English is like

\[\text{In her own discussion of the definition of “Aboriginality” (within the context of Native literature), Anita Heiss similarly acknowledges the current and historical distinctions between Native cultures (“Aboriginal” 207). Like King, however, she also understands that “there is a shared sense of Aboriginality nationally (and internationally with other Indigenous peoples), regardless of the geographical location or socio-economic experience of the individual” (207). See also Jace Weaver’s argument that, “in spite of the fact that Indian authors write from very diverse tribal and cultural backgrounds, there is to a remarkable degree a shared consciousness and identifiable worldview reflected in novels by American Indian authors” (That 26).}\]
an ideological onion whose stinging layers of racism and sexism must be peeled away before it can be fully enjoyed” (“Preface” xx).111

This situation makes it difficult for Western academics to classify Native works that do not fit their accepted sense of the literary, either in terms of style or form. One approach that some scholars have taken in addressing this problem is to cast their net as wide as possible, to welcome all Native writing as literature. Penny Petrone is thus not alone when she sees Native literature as “embracing not only imaginative prose and poetry but also letters, speeches, sermons, reports, petitions, diary entries, songs, essays, journals and travel writing, history, and autobiography” (First vii-viii).112 This position seems to me not unwise, and certainly some of the writings that I consider in the following chapters would not fit traditional Western notions of literature. However, I think it is also important to add three qualifying points to this seemingly straightforward way in which literary scholars have sought to come to terms with the cultural hegemony of their critical tools.

First, while anthologies of Native literature may indeed include reports, diary entries, etc., critics still rarely actually engage this material in any serious way; they instead reserve their attention for works that more clearly fit a traditional literary mold. It is no accident that the most heavily examined Native authors are those such as Thomas

111 LaRocque also adds that, ironically, “English is the new Native language, literally and politically. English is the common language of Aboriginal peoples. It is English that is serving to raise the political consciousness in our community; it is English that is serving to de-colonize and to unite Aboriginal peoples” (xxvi). This issue is discussed further in section 3.2.3 in regards to subversive mimicry.

112 Beth Brant adds an even less traditionally literary form to this list, i.e., recipes (“Good” 86), while Paula Gunn Allen includes lullabies and jokes (Sacred 74). For similarly broad categorizations see also Harjo and Bird, Introduction 28-29; Hoy, Hov 23-24; Krupat, Voice 202-232; Perreault and Vance, Foreword xii. Anthologies of Native literature that do in fact “embrace” writings that transcend typical Western genres include Grant, Our; Marsden, Crisp; Moses and Goldie, Anthology; Roman, Voices.
King, who holds a PhD in English and uses Latin phrases with impunity.\textsuperscript{113} No matter how many articles deal with the (actual or perceived) “Native” elements of King’s stories—their use of trickster figures or connections to oral storytelling, for instance\textsuperscript{114}—his work is also regarded very simply as “beautifully written” according to conventional/subjective Western standards (Atwood, “Double-Bladed” 244). It is also overflowing with the sort of tropes, references, and self-conscious irony that scholars of literature typically delight in unpacking.\textsuperscript{115} Again, this is in stark contrast to the critical silence surrounding the work of Basil Johnston, which is much less self-consciously “literary.” Beatrice Culleton’s \textit{In Search of April Raintree} similarly stands as a work that, as noted, is not taken seriously as literature by non-Native critics. Reviews of this work thus paradoxically locate the novel’s art precisely in its artlessness: “an earnest, artless journal-cum-fiction that is all the more powerful for its simplicity.”

\textellipsis At best, [such reviews] evince a difficulty in devising an aesthetic language to account for the text’s emotional power; at worst, condescension and nostalgia for the unmediated authenticity of the speaking “Other.” (Hoy, “Nothing” 155)

\textsuperscript{113} As Lutz comments while interviewing Thomas King, the same situation exists in the United States: “the most prominent writers in the US are people who are often English professors, who work within that Western literate and even academic tradition, and blend it with Native cultural elements they also have access to” (\textit{Contemporary} 163). Preeminent among such writers is N. Scott Momaday, who won the Pulitzer Prize right off the mark with his first novel, and also established the Native American Studies Program at Stanford University. For further comments on this situation see Episknew, “Socially” 52-54; Harjo and Bird, Introduction 27-29.

\textsuperscript{114} E.g., Bailey, “Arbitrary”; Fee and Flick; Linton, “And”; Matchie and Larson; Purdy, “Tricksters”; Ridington, “Coyote’s”; Truchan-Tataryn and Gingell, “Dances.”

\textsuperscript{115} For an exhaustively detailed list of literary and cultural allusions in \textit{Green Grass, Running Water}, e.g., see Flick, “Reading.” Commenting on this aspect of King’s text, Judith Leggatt suggests that King is in fact playing a joke on academics. As she points out, e.g., it is Coyote who remarks that the recurring water imagery in the stories being told within the novel must “mean something”; in so doing, “Coyote demonstrates the same academic curiosity as the Western literary critic, and in stories by Thomas King, Coyote is never particularly clever, or insightful” (“Native” 124).
Clearly, stepping outside of the traditional literary box is not as easy as simply broadening the definition of literature to include Native writers and works that otherwise might be completely ignored.

The second point to stress about this broadening is that, when effected by critics such as Petrone and Grant, it still constitutes the imposition of a non-Native view on Native culture. Such generosity may further be considered too open, and possibly even condescending, in its unwillingness to discriminate. In contrast, Jeannette Armstrong hopes that “First Nations Literature will be defined by First Nations writers, readers, academics and critics,” adding that such people should also be well-versed in current and traditional Native cultural forms (Looking 7; emphasis added). Armstrong’s comments imply that some Native authors and critics may be more selective than Petrone, may in fact have strong views on what does, or should, constitute “Native literature.”

In a number of instances this appears to be precisely the case. It is not just non-Natives, for example, who balk at the style of April Raintree: Cree author Beth Cuthand, for one, suggests that the text’s value is limited to “its sociological content” (Interview 35). Emma LaRocque likewise notes, in her preface to the anthology Writing the Circle, that her reaction to a number of pieces in the collection was much more critical than the non-Native editors’. This is both because, she admits, “I do believe in such a thing as literary excellence,” and because some of the material included in the anthology “may, however unconsciously, perpetuate stereotypes” (xxv).116 For quite a different reason, Leslie Marmon Silko expresses her passionate disapproval of Louise Erdrich’s Beet Queen. Silko regards the novel as an “academic, postmodern” dismissal of the political,

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116 In contrast, the editors of Writing the Circle explain that “no boundaries were made as to what forms writers could choose, nor were there any suggestions made about content, . . . Our aim has been to listen and to learn, not to restrict and define” (Perreault and Vance, Foreword xiii).
material causes of Native suffering (“Here’s” 178). The setting of Erdrich’s book, she argues, “is an oddly rarified place in which the individual’s own psyche, not racism or poverty, accounts for all conflict and tension” (180). As such she believes that, rather than be included with other Native writings, Beet Queen belongs on the “same shelf that holds the Collected Thoughts of Edwin Meese on First Amendment Rights and Grimm’s Fairy Tales” (184).

The third and last point worth adding to this discussion is simply that the definition of literature among Western critics is of course not exactly fixed to start with, and is not nearly as stable as some commentators on Native writing suggest.117 As discussed above in relation to the notion of canons, “literature” is and always has been a contingent, manufactured category whose content shifts over time and place. This point has been made perhaps most definitively by Terry Eagleton, in Literary Theory: An Introduction. Eagleton further maintains that the category “literature” is inescapably ideological118—and so it is not only Native writers that have been marginalized by its

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117 Agnes Grant, e.g., explicitly refers to this definition as “having fixed and unchanging attributes” (“Contemporary” 124), while Connie Fife exults that, because of Native writing, “there is no longer one [European] literary standard by which to judge the written word” (Preface). See also Armstrong, “Writing” 55; Brant, “Good” 84-85; Perreault and Vance, Foreword xi. For a concise discussion of the variability of the Western category of literature in the context of studying Native texts see Krupat, For 16-23. Krupat’s overview considers the contributions of critics such as Harold Bloom, Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, and J. Hillis Miller to the theoretical climate surrounding this issue.

118 Although his entire text is really devoted to making this argument, Eagleton provides a concise summary of these points as the conclusion to his opening comments: “If it will not do to see literature as an ‘objective,’ descriptive category, neither will it do to say that literature is just what people choose to call literature. For there is nothing at all whimsical about such kinds of value-judgements: they have their roots in deeper structures of belief which are as apparently unshakeable as the Empire State building. What we have uncovered so far, then, is not only that literature does not exist in the sense that insects do, and that the value-judgements by which it is constituted are historically variable, but that these value-judgements themselves have a close relation to social ideologies. They refer in the end not simply to private taste, but to the assumptions by which certain social groups exercise and maintain power over others” (Literary 16). Other seminal texts on the relations between literature, ideology, and authority include Gates, “Race”; Hutcheon, Canadian; Jameson, Political; Krupat, Voice; Said, World.
(mis)use. He thus advocates a criticism founded neither on ontology nor methodology, but on “strategy.” As he explains, “this means asking first not what the object is or how we should approach it, but why we should want to engage with it in the first place” (210). Since all signifying systems may play a role in shaping culture, in creating and maintaining power structures, behaviour patterns, beliefs, etc., no one system is inherently more valuable (or “literary”) than another. As such he rejects the notion that, for example, “Proust is always more worthy of study than television advertisements” (211).

2.3 Summary

The study of Native people and cultures by non-Natives has been too often marked by two colonizing positions: the imbalance of power, and the non-Native conviction that Native people remain in some sense “primitive.” Anthropologists have a history of paying too much attention to Native cultures, imposing definitions and theories upon them, while “mainstream” literary critics have tended to disregard Native textual productions altogether, rendering them almost invisible. Meanwhile, non-Native writers (and artists, corporations, baseball teams, etc.) have made free use of aboriginal stories, traditions, and historical figures for their own purposes. The situation appears to be improving in some respects, but slowly; and already, within literary studies, old dangers are resurfacing. As Judith Leggat points out, “Because the power relations between the writer whose texts are being studied and the academic who is studying them are not equal

119 Women make up the most obvious group whose writings have been excluded from serious consideration because of literary and political chauvinism. For discussions of this issue see Allison, *Skin*; Dybikowski, *in*; Gerson, “Anthologies”; Hunt, *Woman’s*; Robinson, “Treason”; Russ, *How*; Showalter, *New*. 
in the academic setting, the act of literary analysis can reinscribe colonialism” (“Native” 120).

It is not my intent, or desire, to further the marginalization of Canadian Native writers either by appropriating/colonizing their works or by ignoring them. My intent rather is to increase dialogue, and to assist in the process of what LaRocque refers to as “the legitimation of Aboriginal discourse” (“Teaching” 225). I do so, however, as an outsider; in the work that follows I have attempted to be clear about the fact that I am reading this literature as a non-Native, that I do not pretend to any insider knowledge about aboriginal cultures or communities, past or present. Of course as a non-Native, I will be excluded from understanding what are likely very significant aspects of Native literature. Whole pieces of cultural fabric—nuances of language, behaviour, humour—may be completely beyond my field of vision, let alone my comprehension. Yet Canadian Native literature is different for me in this respect than, say, much Polish or African literature might be. The difference is that this literature is, very often, specifically

120 See also Episkenew, “Socially”; Gingell, “Absence”; Hoy, How 13-18; LaRocque, “Teaching”; Maracle, “Post-Colonial.” This issue is discussed further in section 3.2.3, specifically in relation to postcolonial studies.

121 Dee Horne and Helen Hoy state their positions similarly (How 11; Contemporary xxi-xxii). Also, as Emma LaRocque points out, even Native critics are to some extent “outsiders,” in the sense that they do not have any special pre-given understanding of all Native people, traditions, etc.: “Being Cree does not make me some ‘natural’ expert on all things Cree, let alone non-Cree aboriginal cultures” (“Teaching” 212). LaRocque points to an important example of the potential for misunderstanding caused by lack of cultural familiarity in reference to In Search of April Raintree. As a Cree-Métis woman, she sees that the Raintree sisters “clearly do not have Red River Cree-Métis cultural identity.” Not surprisingly, then, LaRocque has “found it troublesome that non-Métis critics use Culleton’s novel as a standard of defining the Métis” (“Teaching” 222-223). For further examples and discussions of this issue, see Allen, Sacred 61-68; Hoy, How 198-199; Episkenew, “Socially” 64-66; Leggatt, “Native” 124-125; Mukherjee, Introduction xvii. In general I have tried to keep in mind Susan Gingell’s advice to non-Native critics of Native literature, namely to remain “open to the idea that there are things we do not and will not know, and to the likelihood that we will not even know that we don’t know them” (“Absence” 108). Rupert Ross appears to stand as an example of a non-Native commentator who has adopted such a position:

I therefore apologize at the outset to Native people, for I am very likely to misrepresent you. I cannot help but see you through my own culture’s eyes. . . . I will no doubt draw conclusions which you will find laughingly—or insultingly—incorrect. I am convinced, however, that we have no choice but to start talking about such things. (Dancing xxiii; emphasis in the original)
targeted to Natives and non-Natives. As LaRocque asserts, “both white and Native communities are implicated” in Native writing, and so “both are invited to hear” (“Preface” xxix). What I have to say about what I “hear” may thus have some value.

But to what am I listening? What, simply put, is “Native literature”? Not surprisingly, the same issues of colonialism arise in considering this question. What parameters will be drawn, and who has the authority to draw them? Thomas King avoids the problem of establishing overly-determined conditions or criteria for the term “Native” by proposing that we simply consider the works of authors who are to an unspecified degree “Native by ancestry” (All x), and who are “recognized by a community” as such (Interview 108). He states explicitly in fact that we should not impose any limits on what this means, that we “resist the temptation of trying to define a Native” (All xi). I find this approach much more useful and meaningful than abstract specifications. All four of the writers that I have selected for this study are simply, consistently understood by themselves and others—Natives and non-Natives, writers and critics—to be Native. One

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123 For example, the first words of Basil Johnston’s *Ojibway Heritage* appear in the frontispiece underneath a highly stylized drawing Johnston labels an “Ojibway logo.” These words are an explanation of the drawing’s symbolism, an explanation only necessary to those unfamiliar with Ojibway culture. Johnston’s preface then begins by referring to the book as part of the process by which “Native Peoples and their heritage are to be understood”—i.e., by non-Natives (7). Similarly, Maria Campbell declares in *Halfbreed* that she is writing “for all of you, to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country” (2). Margery Fee notes in an article from the late 1980s that a shift was at that time taking place in Canadian Native writing, such that recent works had become less concerned with “educating white audiences” as with presenting Native readers with an alternative worldview to that of the dominant discourse (“Upsetting” 169; similar views are expressed by Armstrong, “Words” 27-28; Campbell, “It’s” 265-266; Kelly, “Landscape” 119; Weaver, *That* 34-37, 161-162). That said, non-Native readers are still being addressed in key respects by many such texts; and so Lee Maracle declares both that she writes only for Natives (“Just” 40), and that “whites” should pay attention to Native writing (“Ramparts” 172).


125 Ojibway author and critic David Treuer makes a similar point but for a slightly different reason. For Treuer, worrying about a writer’s “Indianness” (*Native* 188) means playing an “endless and agonizing game of identity politics” (186). It also means “committing the sin of not treating literature as literature. We are, in effect, saying that writing doesn’t matter” (186). This issue in turn is of course connected to the problem of viewing Native cultural products as artefact and not as art: i.e., as long as literary works are valued primarily because they are thought to “contain some essence” of Native culture, they “are treated as objects, even relics of our cultures” (158).
of the results of this approach is that it sidesteps the very messy issue of blood quanta, of whether someone is “pure” enough to be “really” Native. At the 1995 meeting of the CSSR/SCER in Montréal, for example, I was challenged by a white academic for including two Métis writers in my discussion of Native literature precisely on the grounds that they were not “sufficiently” Native. However, the writers in question were Campbell and Culleton, who as noted are not only regarded by a huge range of other writers and critics as being more than sufficiently Native, but in fact as having been a defining force in Canadian Native literature.126

In terms of what may constitute this literature, I have decided not to exclude any manner of (Native) written work from this study. I take such a position in part because, like Eagleton, I do not see the category of “literature” as inherently meaningful in the first place. As noted above I am instead interested in how others regard this category; and most of the texts that I examine are already considered as “literature” in the vast majority of discussions that currently occur about Native writing. The single, important, exception to this rule involves many of the writings of Basil Johnston, particularly his more “traditional” stories. These have been virtually ignored by all critics of Native literature, whether or not the critics are Native themselves. This omission is important in itself, but I would like to specifically consider how the inclusion of all Johnson’s stories might affect the study of mimetic conflict in (Canadian) Native literature in general.

126 Kateri Damm maintains that mixed-blood writers have been similarly foundational in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States (“Says” 17). Additionally, as Howard Adams points out, “halfbreeds” in general have not typically had a choice about their identity, but have been defined by white society as wholly Native (Prison ix). To say at this point, then, that they do not qualify as “real” Native authors is absurd. There is also the irony, discussed by Maria Campbell, that since many Métis communities were not considered “Native enough” by the federal government, they were immune from sanctions imposed upon status Indians against practicing Native customs, and so were often better able to preserve such customs than “real” (i.e., legally defined) Natives (Interview with Lutz 47).
Before reaching that point, however, it is important to establish more precisely the context and content of what I am referring to when discussing “mimetic conflict.” Given the connection in Canadian Native literature between this concept and issues of religion and violence, I believe that a consideration of such issues is where the analysis of mimetic conflict in this literature should begin. In the next chapter, then, I consider the academic study of religion and violence, both generally and in the sub-field of Religion and Literature, and how this study relates to theories of mimesis.
CHAPTER THREE: RELIGION AND VIOLENCE

3.1 The Academic Study of Religion

3.1.1 The Enlightenment and Mr. Jones

In 1978, one of the most well known examples of religious violence from the twentieth century occurred in Jonestown, Guyana. Jonestown was established as a religious refuge from the perceived racism and ungodliness of the United States by Jim Jones, the founder of a Christian-socialist movement called Peoples Temple. On November 18, U.S. Congressman Leo Ryan and four members of his party, who had left California to investigate Jonestown, were shot to death by members of Jones’ community. Eleven others were wounded. Later that night, Jones began the systematic murder and mass suicide of every living creature in Jonestown; when it was all over, more than 900 people were dead.127

In Imagining Religion, Jonathan Z. Smith contends that although the media coverage of Jonestown was enormous, it was also quite skewed:

The press, by and large, featured the pornography of Jonestown—the initial focus on the daily revisions of the body count, the details on the condition of the corpses. Then, as more “background” information became available, space was taken over by lurid details of beatings, sexual humiliations, and public acts of perversion. (109)

Generally, Smith found that reference to Jones and to the Peoples Temple movement was dominated “by the language of fraud and insanity” (109). In the New York Times, for

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127 Aside from numerous media reports about Jonestown, details of the events are recounted in Hall, “Apocalypse” 18-38; and Smith, Imagining 105-109.
example, evangelist Billy Graham insisted that “it would be a sad mistake to identify [Jones’ movement] in any way with Christianity,” and furthered the climate of unreason by adding, “Mr. Jones was a slave of a diabolical supernatural power from which he refused to be set free” (Clark, “Billy”; qtd. in Smith 110). In contrast to such focused attention, the academic response to Jonestown was limited, even negligible. Thus Smith remarks in 1982 that, four years after Jonestown, he had “searched through the academic journals for some serious study, but in vain. Neither in them, nor in the hundreds of papers on the program of the American Academy of Religion . . . has there been any mention. . . . For the academy, it was if Jonestown had never happened” (109).

These two reactions—the media’s sustained treatment of Jonestown as bizarre, perverse, supernatural; and the academy’s silence—are highly significant to Smith in that both violate the Enlightenment agenda of reasoned inquiry. They suggest, in contrast to the principles of rational, scientific thought, that what happened at Jonestown can not, or should not, be understood in fully human terms. The irony of this position, most importantly with regard to the academic study of religion, is that the Enlightenment is directly responsible for the very existence of such study. In Smith’s view, turning against the Enlightenment’s cognitive ideals is a violation of the study of religion’s very reason for existence, and justification for the demise of the entire academic enterprise: “if we do not persist in the quest for intelligibility, there can be no human sciences, let alone, any place for the study of religion within them” (120).

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128 In a wonderful illustration of his position in this regard, Smith comments: “I find Billy Graham’s presence on the editorial pages of the New York Times a more stunning indication that the faith of the Enlightenment upon which the academy depends is in danger than the events in Jonestown!” (Imagining 110).

129 See also Imagining 102-104, 110.
The further irony of Smith’s commentary—albeit a point he does not raise himself—is that Enlightenment thinkers foundational to the academic enterprise had little difficulty themselves seeing religion as an essentially violent, or violating, force. These eighteenth-century *philosophes*, from Locke and Hobbes to Voltaire, Diderot, Hume, Kant, and Rousseau, considered most religious beliefs to represent an outmoded, outdated, and irrational manner of understanding and relating to the world. According to such a view, religions are “violent” in the sense of perpetuating ignorance and superstition; it was the basic goal of the Enlightenment to free human beings from this violence, to supplant religion with reason and science.\(^{130}\) The Enlightenment thinkers were not simply concerned with religion as a kind of philosophical violence, however, but also with its role in the death and brutalization of human beings. Their movement arose in fact partly as a reaction against the series of European religious wars in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.\(^{131}\)

\(^{130}\) As Bruce Lincoln remarks, the critique of religion advanced by the *philosophes* “is not incidental to or detachable from the bulk of their thought,” but is absolutely central to their “celebration of ‘reason’” (“Culture” 417). Lincoln notes that Kant himself made this point explicitly in his 1784 essay, “Was ist Aufklärung?” (“What is Enlightenment?”): “I have placed the main point of enlightenment—mankind’s exit from its self-imposed immaturity—primarily on religious matters” (qtd. in “Culture” 418). For additional discussions of religion’s crucial place as a focus of Enlightenment criticism, see Byrne, *Glory; Religion*; Dupré, *Enlightenment* 229-268; Manuel, *Eighteenth*; Porter, *Enlightenment* 29-37; Wokler, “Enlightenment.” This is not to say that the full range of Enlightenment attitudes towards religion can be simply equated to those of anti-religious skeptics. Many of the *philosophes* did in fact identify with, and often promote, some form of religious belief, although generally it was a type of rational Deism (Dupré, *Enlightenment* 243-256; Grell and Porter, *Toleration; Grimsley, Philosophy*; Porter, *Enlightenment* 31-34; Taylor, “Enlightenment”). In addition, Knud Haakonssen, following the work of J.G.A. Pocock, argues that although in general the Enlightenment resulted in the political disempowerment of religion, in certain instances (notably in England) it ultimately helped to preserve Church authority (“Enlightened” 2-4; see also Gilley, “Christianity”; Porter, “Enlightenment”; Young, *Religion* 1-15).

\(^{131}\) These wars were so severe that they “threatened the nations of Europe with social, political and cultural disintegration of unprecedented dimensions” (Lincoln, “Culture” 417). In the wake of such bloody conflict the Enlightenment project was undertaken “with the determination that such horrors would not be repeated” (“Culture” 417; see also Dupré, *Enlightenment* 248; Porter, *Enlightenment* 35; Wokler, “Enlightenment” 164-166, 179-180).
In accordance with the influence that the Enlightenment has had on the academy in general, and the study of religion in particular, it is not surprising to find that scholarship on the topic of religion and violence is, as Robert McAfee Brown comments, “virtually endless” (Religion 106).\textsuperscript{132} The main congruency between this vast body of work and Smith’s non-findings can be seen in the fact that, when academics do look at religious violence, they most often take an apologetic, idealist stance; that is to say, their work holds that, regardless of what havoc religious institutions or participants may wreak, this violence betrays the “essence” of the tradition(s) in question. As such their explorations of the possible connections between religion and violence are significantly restricted, or in the (extreme) case of Jonestown, virtually absent.\textsuperscript{133}

This same observation was made much more recently, in the editorial of a 2005 issue of Numen devoted entirely to the topic of religion and violence:

> Few subjects arouse more controversy than the connections between religion and violence, the controversies being due to the assumption that

\textsuperscript{132} Brown himself provides a fairly extensive bibliography of works on the subject published up until 1986 (Religion 103-114), while Christopher Candland does the same up until 1992 (Spirit). The most up-to-date list available is Charles Bellinger’s ongoing, online bibliography (“Religion”). Examples of works on religion and violence produced since the early 1990s include: Aho, Religious; Appleby, Ambivalence; Avalos, Fighting; Beuken and Kuschel, Religion; Bromley and Melton, Cults; Brown and Bohn, Christianity; Bruce, “Religion”; Catherwood, Why; Chase and Jacobs, Must; Cobban, “Religion”; de Vries, Religion; Deleury, Au péril; Desjardins, Peace; Diez de Velasco, “Theoretical”; Drury, Terror; Ellens, Destructive; Ellis, Unholy; Goldenberg, Returning; Griffith, War; Hall et al., Apocalypse; Hamerton-Kelly, Sacred; Juergensmeyer, Violence; Terror; Kakar, Colors; Kelsay and Johnson, Just; Kirk-Duggan, Refiner’s; Pagels, Origin; Partner, God; Prior, Bible; Rennie and Tite, Religion; Rossi, “Legitimation”; Schwartz, Curse; Smith and Wallace, Curing; Tambiah, Buddhism; Whitmer, Violence.

\textsuperscript{133} As a personal aside, this situation reminds me of a story told to me by a physicist that I knew years ago. He recounted a meeting with a scientist who was also a Christian, who explained that whenever he came across anything in his research that seemed to contradict his religious beliefs, he ignored it. As my friend explained, this person was no longer a scientist; whether or not one is religious, a scientist must always observe and record first, and theorize later. Thus Wonko the Sane remarks in Douglas Adams’ So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish: “The reason I call myself by my childhood name is to remind myself that a scientist must also be absolutely like a child. If he sees a thing, he must say that he sees it, whether it was what he thought he was going to see or not” (157). This problem is discussed further in section 3.1.3 specifically in relation to Girard, whose approach leads him to presume the meaning of a given myth even before he encounters it.
such links are either apparent or illegitimate. In the first case, it is claimed that it is not religion itself which is the cause for violence, but rather that the label “religion” is being used to validate economic, political or other interests. In the second case, even when it is assumed that it is religion itself that is at the heart of violent acts, it is still claimed that such involvement goes against the very nature of religion, constituting in fact its betrayal. (“Religiousness” 1)

Robert McAfee Brown’s work is itself an example of the latter approach. He asserts that “religious forces often use violence for evil ends” (Religion xxii), and that “there is no more potent creator of terroristic impulses than religious fanaticism” (xi). At the same time, Brown’s definition of “religion” centres on the New Testament accounts of Jesus’ commandments to love both God and neighbour (5). As a result he asserts, for example, that “God sides with the oppressed,” and so there is no way in which a truly religious person could support systems of injustice or inequity (94-96). In The Origin of Satan, Elaine Pagels similarly argues that xenophobic hatred is manifest and encouraged in the New Testament, but sees such attitudes as a later addition to Jesus’ original message of peace and love. Thus she declares, “Throughout the centuries, countless Christians listening to the gospels absorbed, along with the quite contrary sayings of Jesus, the association between the forces of evil and Jesus’ Jewish enemies” (xx; emphasis added). By way of conclusion, Pagels refers to “the struggle within Christian tradition between the profoundly human view that ‘otherness’ is evil and the words of Jesus that reconciliation is divine” (184). R. Scott Appleby is about as pointed as one may be in
asserting connections between religion and violence, while still managing in the end to defend religion. He states:

To interpret acts of violence and terrorism committed in the name of religion as necessarily motivated by other concerns and lacking in religious qualities is . . . an error. It is true, of course, that many such acts are transparently manipulative and self-serving, with little or no authentically religious motivation. . . . But to define all acts of “sacred violence” as ipso facto irreligious is to misunderstand religion and to underestimate its ability to underwrite deadly conflict on its own terms. (Ambivalence 30)

The point here would seem to be clear enough; but Appleby’s own conviction that violence is in fact “irreligious” is evident when he declares that “purveyors of violence . . . transgress against core precepts of the religious tradition” (16).

Feminist criticism of religion is also centrally concerned with violence, and in addition has arguably had the largest impact of any school of thought in the late twentieth century on how we understand religion. Here again, however, we frequently encounter an apologist stance. Mary Ann Rossi, for example, argues that there is an “injustice to all women inherent in Christianity” (56); as a result of this injustice, there is in turn “a strong connection between Christian upbringing and the acceptance of battering by women and men” (57). In general, Rossi describes the tradition as “a man-centered cult with the basic tenet of excluding half of the human race from full personhood” (56). Even while making her case, however, Rossi comments that this “cult” bears little relation to the “original

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134 For summaries and examples of feminist critiques of religion see Gross, Feminism; Juschka, Feminism; King, Religion; Warne, “Gender.”
version” of Christianity, which she asserts was “a religion rooted in equality and mutualty” (56). In *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, Rita Gross similarly critiques the ways in which Buddhism has endorsed the oppression and abuse of women. She too maintains these crimes violate the inherently peaceful “truth” of the historical Buddha, that “the key concepts of Buddhism, in every period of Buddhist intellectual development, are incompatible with gender hierarchy and with discrimination against women” (4).135 Cheryl Kirk-Duggan takes a broader view, using various feminist critical approaches to explore “the intersection of violence and religion” in general (*Refiner’s* xiii). This exploration is based, however, on an assumption that violence is in fact “blasphemous; it is an assault upon holiness, upon creation” (155).

My final example of this critical attitude is the largest, most ambitious single work on the subject of religion and violence yet to appear: the four volume *Destructive Power of Religion*, published in 2004 and edited by J. Harold Ellens. The work means to be definitive: according to comments by Archbishop Desmond Tutu included in each volume, “future work on this matter will need to begin with this publication. This will become a classic” (xv). In his Foreword, Martin E. Marty notes that what he “took away from the chapters, especially, is a sense of the pervasiveness of violence across the spectrum of religions” (xii). For him, these books show “there is a dark underside, a nether, shadowed side to every enduring and profound system of symbols and myths, hence to every religion” (xiii). Ellens himself explains that the project was an attempt to investigate this dark underside, “to see the unsacred in sacred scriptures” (Preface xviii).

135 In taking this position, Gross explicitly states that her presuppositions are in line with a majority of scholars concerned with gender issues and religion; she follows, that is, the distinction typically made “between historical context, which may well reflect very limited cultural conditions, and essential core teachings of the religious symbol system” (*Buddhism* 4; emphasis added).
The distinction here between “sacred” and “unsacred,” however, points to the work’s underlying—and within the study of religion, normative—inclination to regard violence as an aberration of religion. This perspective is made explicit when Ellens declares that in addition to their violent aspects these same sacred scriptures have “a more central message as well,” namely that “the real God is a God of unconditional grace—the only thing that works in life, for God or for humans” (Preface xix; emphasis added).

3.1.2 Marx and Freud

Such commentaries do not tell the entire story of course. Unapologetic considerations of religion and violence do exist, including those by Jonathan Z. Smith himself. Significantly, these works often depend upon groundwork laid by Karl Marx and/or Sigmund Freud. Although Enlightenment thinkers provided the beginnings of a scientific questioning of religion, and some strong early thoughts on its role in creating and perpetuating situations of ignorance, brutality and inequality, Marx and Freud put forth the first notable attempts to develop a systematic theory of this role. The

136 Other examples by religion scholars include Bromley and Melton, Cults; Desjardins, Peace; Ellis, Unholy; Goldenberg, Returning; Hall et al., Apocalypse; Hinnells, “Why”; Partner, God; Selengut, Sacred; Tambiah, Buddhism. In addition, the recent wave of (so-called) “New Atheists” has done much to popularize a view that is extremely similar to (and often explicitly derived from) that of many Enlightenment thinkers, i.e., that religion is an inherently primitive and violent cultural remnant that does nothing but retard or reverse the growth of human civilizations. The group (and its key publications) is typically identified as comprising Richard Dawkins (The God Delusion), Daniel Dennett (Breaking the Spell), Sam Harris (The End of Faith), and Christopher Hitchens (God is Not Great). Harris’ understanding of religion and violence is representative:

Religious violence is still with us because our religions are intrinsically hostile to one another. Where they appear otherwise, it is because secular knowledge and secular interests are restraining the most lethal improprieties of faith. It is time we acknowledged that no real foundation exists within the canons of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, or any of our other faiths for religious tolerance and religious diversity. (End 225)

In the context of the present study, a critical point to highlight is that none of the New Atheists are in fact scholars of religion. Dawkins is an evolutionary biologist; Dennett a philosopher of science; Harris a philosophy graduate studying neuroscience; and Hitchens an author/journalist. For further information and commentary on the group and their views see Aronson, “New”; Bunting, “New”; Wolf, “Church.”
significance of their work, which has affected the views of religion held by an
inestimable number of people, cannot be overstated.\textsuperscript{137}

Although Marx declared that “criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism”
(“Contribution” 41), he himself wrote relatively little on the topic. His major views are in
fact contained in the few pages that make up his introduction to the \textit{Contribution to the
Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of the Right}; and in fact most of what both Marx and
Engels—two extremely prolific writers—produced concerning religion is collected in one
slim volume, \textit{On Religion}.\textsuperscript{138} Marx’s understanding of the violent function of religion is
rooted in his theory of class conflict. Very simply, Marx saw religion as supporting social
structures that allow one class of people to dominate another; religious beliefs are “the
imaginary flowers” covering the chains of human oppression (“Contribution” 42). This
system of dominance has become in most societies the status quo. The ordinary workings
of these societies are thus inherently unjust and oppressive, and impossible to correct in
Marx’s opinion so long as religions hold sway over humanity.

Generally speaking, religion helps to maintain oppressive social systems in three
ways. First, religion functions as a kind of narcotic, lulling people into a passive state
filled with fantasies of an afterlife that represent a kind of reward after death. These
fantasies are, in many ways, inverted images of social reality, wherein those who suffer
most in this life reap the greatest benefits in the next one. Marx notes that people have
“been told that the sufferings of this life are not to be compared with the bliss of the
future, that suffering in patience and the bliss of hope are cardinal virtues” (“Leading”

\textsuperscript{137} Two of these people worth noting are in fact René Girard and Homi K. Bhabha. That is to say, there are
clear lines of descent from Marx to Bhabha and from Freud to Girard.

\textsuperscript{138} For overviews and critiques of Marx’s thoughts on religion see Green, “Religion”, Hamilton, \textit{Sociology
It is in this sense that religion, in Marx’s so-famous dictum, is “the opium of the people”: it dulls the pain of life while at the same time making it very difficult to fix the cause of this pain. Thus Marx concludes that “the abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness” (“Contribution” 42).

Second, religion provides a rationalization for the existing, unjust order. One such rationalization interprets suffering either as retribution for misdeeds or as a test of virtue. According to Marx, Christianity regards “all vile acts of the oppressors against the oppressed to be . . . the just punishment of original sin and other sins”; it also cheerily endorses the “trials that the Lord in his infinite wisdom imposes on those redeemed” (“Communism” 84). Together, these attitudes provide justification for any misery, whether endured by the pious and devout or the wicked and unrepentant. Another rationalization argues that existing socio-political authorities are divinely sanctioned and therefore must be obeyed. Christianity, for example, “does not decide on the correctness of the constitutions, for it knows no distinction between constitutions, it teaches, as religion must: Submit to the authority, for all authority is ordained by God” (“Leading” 37).

Finally, Marx argues that religion actively inculcates servile attitudes. These include such cardinal—and on the surface peace-promoting—values as humility and the

139 Marx does not explicitly refer to Rom 13:1, but the passage serves as a useful illustration of his point here: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God.” Although it would seem that the Hindu caste system would be an obvious target for Marx’s critique of religiously-supported legal oppression, in fact his comments on the subject were made in the context of more purely economic discussions, particularly concerning the division of labour. In volume one of Capital, e.g., he comments: “Castes and guilds arise from the action of the same natural law that regulates the differentiation of plants and animals into species and varieties, except that when a certain degree of development has been reached, the heredity of castes and exclusiveness of guilds are ordained as a law of society” (321). In this instance, it is the transformation of the economic situation which is primarily required to undo the caste system.
love of one’s enemies. These values may run against the natural human desire for justice, but such desires are regarded as blasphemous:

Do you consider it wrong to appeal to the courts when you are cheated?

But the apostle writes that that is wrong. Do you offer your right cheek when you are struck upon the left, or do you not institute proceedings for assault? Yet the Gospel forbids that. Do you not claim your reasonable right in this world? . . . Are not most of your court proceedings and the majority of civil laws concerned with property? But you have been told that your treasure is not of this world. (“Leading” 35)

Such submissive attitudes, if successfully transmitted to a dominated class of people, very clearly could function to help maintain an unjust social situation. Marx thus maintains that “the social principles of Christianity preach cowardice, self-contempt, abasement, submission, dejection, in a word all the qualities of the canaille” (“Communism” 84; see also “Leading” 35).

It is important to point out that, within the schema laid out by Marx, religion functions very differently for each class. For the dominated, religion offers compensation for suffering. For the dominant, religion legitimizes their privileged status and provides reassurance that this privilege is “natural,” not oppressive. This means in turn that, at least for the most part, Marx did not believe that the dominant classes necessarily use religion in a conscious, calculated manner in order to keep the lower orders subdued; they are, instead, as sincerely religious as the proletariat.140 This simply means that both

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140 That said, Marx still makes the point that the religion of the ruling classes is in many ways fundamentally hypocritical. This is because it conspicuously omits many key teachings passed onto the proletariat, notably the virtue of submissiveness, the redemptive nature of suffering, and the devaluation of material wealth (see, e.g., “Leading” 35; “Anti-Church” 128).
classes have, in Marx’s eyes, willingly embraced religion in a very powerful and ultimately destructive act of mass self-deception. It is in this sense that religion represents, for Marx, a kind of “false consciousness.”

For different reasons, Freud held a similarly low opinion of religion. He was somewhat more verbose than Marx, however, in voicing his thoughts on the topic, which he did primarily in four texts: *Totem and Taboo; The Future of an Illusion; Civilization and its Discontents;* and *Moses and Monotheism.*\(^{141}\) Perhaps the most well-known of Freud’s theories in this area is his contention that religion is inherently regressive, keeping human beings in a state of arrested psychic development. Freud argues, for example, that religious beliefs derive from wish-fulfillment and infantile desires, and are consequently illusory.\(^{142}\) These wishes and desires derive in turn from the anxiety and fear that adults experience in relation to the mysterious, threatening forces of normal human existence (disease, pain, death, etc.). Recalling the safety and security that we felt as children, when we trusted particularly in our fathers to protect us, we project a sense of patriarchal omnipotence upon an imagined deity.\(^{143}\) Along these lines, religion is related to violence in two ways. First, it very simply prevents people (or, perhaps, helps them to prevent themselves) from attaining psychological health or maturity.\(^{144}\) Second, the relief

\(^{141}\) For summaries, discussions, and critiques of Freud’s views on religion see Deigh, “Psychoanalysis”; DiCenso, *Other;* Hamilton, *Sociology* 54-66; Meissner, *Psychoanalysis* 21-133; Wallwork, “Psychoanalytic.”

\(^{142}\) Note that “illusory” in the Freudian sense does not necessarily mean “false.” Locating the origins of belief in a psychic process is not the same as proving that the object of belief is not real: we may pray to a protective God because we are afraid, but God may still exist (*Future* 48-49).

\(^{143}\) Freud explains this dynamic repeatedly in *Future of an Illusion* (23-27, 31-35, 47-48, 70-71). Elsewhere he concludes that “psychoanalytic investigation of the individual teaches with especial emphasis that god is in every case modelled after the father and our personal relation to our physical father, fluctuating and changing with him, and that god at bottom is nothing but an exalted father” (*Totem* 190).

\(^{144}\) Freud was optimistic that this situation could not obtain indefinitely, however, and “supposed that a turning-away from religion is bound to occur with the fatal inevitability of a process of growth” (*Future*
A similar violence is present in the moral, ethical edicts proscribed by religions. The problem is that such edicts are excessive, once again engendering a painful psychic process of guilt, anxiety and regression. By way of example, Freud points to Jesus’ command to love your neighbour as yourself (Civilization 56, 90). According to Freud, this is an entirely unnatural and impossible directive, since the normal emotions typically evoked by one’s fellow humans include envy, anger, greed, etc. (Civilization 58). Freud does not condone acting out such emotions—which would make life unbearably cruel and literally destroy society (Future 19-20)—but argues that we must at the very least admit their existence, and not force ourselves to attempt a kind of relation with our neighbour that we can never attain (Civilization 59, 90). Once again the issue is one of maturity, of recognizing the truth of our existence and attempting to deal with it directly; blindly following commandments, particularly ones that are extremely repressive, only leads to pain and depression (Civilization 89-90).

71). Although he was dedicated to helping this process along, Freud was not unsympathetic to the pain that people would face along the way:

They will, it is true, find themselves in a difficult situation. They will have to admit to themselves the full extent of their helplessness and their insignificance in the machinery of the universe; they can no longer be the object of tender care on the part of a beneficent Providence. They will be in the same position as a child who has left the parental house where he was so warm and comfortable. But surely infantilism is destined to be surmounted. Men cannot remain children forever; they must in the end go out into “hostile life.” We may call this “education to reality.” Need I confess to you that the sole purpose of my book is to point out the necessity for this forward step? (Future 81)

145 This cycle is further assisted by a key complication in Freud’s theory, namely the Oedipal Complex. That is, since in his view men both worship and hate their fathers, so do they have a similarly ambivalent attitude towards their gods. This ambivalence is a central concern of both Totem and Taboo and Moses and Monotheism.
The final way in which Freud deals directly with notions of religion and violence involves what is possibly the least accepted—but most entertaining—of all his theories; namely, his attempt to produce a historical account of religion’s origins. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud famously imagines a primordial horde made up of related “brothers” who, in classic Oedipal fashion, envy, fear and hate their father/leader. The horde consequently murders and eats the father (they are, of course, cannibals). The guilt from this act then leads the horde to transmute the hated father into a beloved god, and to “conciliate the injured father through subsequent obedience” (187). Out of this guilt also develop a number of associated rituals (for example, a reenactment of the original feast, as in Christian communion) and taboos (for example, against killing the tribal totem, which Freud explains is also unconsciously identified with the dead father). But the guilt is not easily or permanently assuaged; and so, according to Freud, “all later religions prove to be attempts to solve the same problem” (187).146

3.1.3 Mimetic Conflict

The attempt by Freud to locate the origin of religion in a historical act of violence is one of the key connections he shares with René Girard. Girard also regards religion as a limited, and ultimately ineffective, means of suppressing humanity’s naturally violent tendencies.147 In addition, after Marx and Freud, Girard is without question the most influential scholar on the subject of religion and violence. Girard’s views have provided

146 Freud’s last major work, *Moses and Monotheism*, is in fact an attempt to demonstrate this hypothesis with respect to Judaism; i.e., Freud argues that Jewish monotheism is based upon a repetition of the primal murder of the horde’s father, carried out against Moses.

147 Like Freud, Girard also pays a lot of attention to the myth of Oedipus, particularly in Chapter Three of *La violence et le sacré*. Perhaps one of the more telling pieces of evidence connecting Freud with Girard is that Girard spends an entire chapter of this same text (Chapter Seven) explaining how his mimetic theory differs from Freud’s views in significant ways.
both a theory about the origins and nature of human culture, and a method for interpreting
cultural forms, principally those of ritual, myth and literature. His ideas have had a
significant impact on thinkers in an enormous range and number of disciplines in both the
humanities and social sciences. He has published over a dozen books and upwards of a
hundred articles, book chapters, and interviews explaining and applying his theories,
which in turn have generated hundreds of studies by other scholars, as well as both a
journal, Contagion, and an annual conference sponsored by COV&R, the Colloquium on
Violence and Religion. ¹⁴⁸

Girard has stressed perhaps more than any other commentator the relation
between religion and violence. He has said, in fact, that the two are inextricable, that
“violence is the heart and secret soul of the sacred” (Violence 31) and even that “the
operations of violence and the sacred are ultimately the same process” (Violence 258).¹⁴⁹
The process with which Girard is concerned centres on two principal concepts, mimetic
desire and the scapegoat mechanism.¹⁵⁰ The former refers to Girard’s belief that human
desire is not original to individuals but always arises from the imitation of others: we
desire because others desire, and we desire what others desire (Deceit 14-16 [Mensonge
28-30]). A triangular relation is thus established between the object of desire, the model
of desire, and the imitator of desire (Deceit 2-3 [Mensonge 16]). This relation is

¹⁴⁸ This phenomenon began in earnest thirty-five years ago with the publication of the English translation
of Girard’s seminal work, La violence et le sacré. For bibliographies of works by Girard, as well as of
works by other critics that employ his ideas, see Golsan, René; Kirwan, Discovering. The most
comprehensive and up-to-date lists are provided by Dietmar Regensberger’s online “Bibliography of René
Girard” and “Bibliography of Literature on the Mimetic Theory of René Girard.”
¹⁴⁹ Originally: “C’est la violence qui constitue le coeur véritable et l’âme secrète du sacré”; “Le jeu du
sacré et celui de la violence ne font qu’un” (La violence 52, 357).
¹⁵⁰ These two concepts were first and most fully elaborated by Girard in, respectively, Mensonge
romantique et vérité romanesque and La violence et le sacré. Excellent summaries of Girard’s model in its
entirety are provided by Golsan, René; Hamerton-Kelly, “Religion”; Kirwan, Discovering. Perhaps the
most concise statement issued by Girard on his own theory is “Mimesis and Violence: Perspectives in
Cultural Criticism.”
ultimately conflictual, as the model and the imitator become rivals for the same object; the model thus becomes both adored and hated by the imitator, as one who is worthy of imitation and yet simultaneously (and paradoxically) an obstacle to the fulfillment of this imitation (Deceit 10-11 [Mensonge 24-25]).

As the rivalry between model and imitator increases, the potential for violence also increases even as the differences between the two diminish. The rivals become ever more hostile and ever more alike (“Mimesis” 12-13), transforming into what Girard calls “monstrous doubles” (Violence 161).151 The scale of this conflict can vary immensely: according to Girard, violence is highly contagious (that is to say, it is itself a mimetic process), and so any localized antagonism may potentially destroy an entire community (Violence 30-31 [La violence 50-52]; “Mimesis” 12-13). This would be brought about by a collapse of the social order, engendered by the extreme loss of differentiation between members of the group, as well as by the uncontrollable outbreak of retributive violence (Violence 14-15 [La violence 30-31]). There are only two possible outcomes to such a situation: the warring factions destroy one another, or else they sacrifice a scapegoat.

For the latter to occur, the disordered community must isolate an innocent person or persons and project upon them the blame for the violence that threatens the group (“Mimesis” 14-17). This act itself initiates the end of the conflict, as it unites the factions in a common cause (Violence 8 [La violence 21-22]; “Mimesis” 13). With the sacrifice (that is, destruction or exile) of those believed responsible for the social upheaval, order is restored. Girard maintains, however, that this process ironically transforms the victim into the community’s saviour. Consequently, the sacrifice of a scapegoat establishes an

151 “Les doubles monstrueux” (La violence 225).
ambivalence towards the victim, as they come to be viewed as the cause of both violence and peace ("Mimesis" 14). These feelings are so powerful, according to Girard, that the scapegoat often becomes deified in memory ("Anthropology" 269-271).

This deification is obviously one of the links in Girard’s model between religion and violence. Generally speaking, religion is implicated in the process of mimetic rivalry and scapegoating in two ways, as the initial sacrifice comes to generate both sacred rituals and myths. This happens principally because scapegoating is not an actual solution to the problem of mimetic rivalry but only a temporary salve; it must therefore be continuously repeated in symbolic, ritualized forms in order for the community to survive (Violence 92 [La violence 134-135]). Myths in turn keep the memory of the original sacrifice alive for the community, but in such a way that the scapegoat mechanism itself remains obscured ("Anthropology" 267; "Mimesis" 11). That is, these narratives are told from the perspective of those who believed that the scapegoat was in fact responsible for the community’s crisis. Both rituals and myths require bureaucratic support as well as cultural legitimation, which are provided by the institutions that have come to be designated as “religious.” Religions, in Girard’s view, thus come into existence precisely in order to perpetuate originary human violence.152

Significantly, Girard’s indictment of religion is not universal. With the publication of Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde, he began to argue that Christianity alone provides a way out of the vicious circle of mimetic rivalry and scapegoating. It does this primarily through the New Testament gospels, which, Girard

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152 This violence, once again, is perpetuated in order to stave off the much greater destruction that would result if the scapegoat mechanism were not in place. Thus Girard defines religion as “that obscurity that surrounds man’s efforts to defend himself by curative or preventative means against his own violence” (Violence 23; originally: “cette obscurité qui enveloppe en définitive toutes les ressources de l’homme contra sa propre violence, curatives aussi bien que préventives” [La violence 42]).
believes, are the only religious texts that facilitate awareness of these processes (Things 158-179 [Des choses 181-202]). This is because they are actually written with the perspective of the scapegoat in mind, and so present the killing of Jesus as the destruction of an innocent victim (Things 169-170 [Des choses 192]). Thus Girard argues that the New Testament account of Jesus is not only unlike all other myths, but in fact is “the only text that can bring an end to all of mythology” (Scapegoat 101). In other words, “Jesus dies, not as a sacrifice, but in order that there may be no more sacrifices” (Things 210). Girard identifies a similar, if less dramatic, perspective in selected stories of scapegoating from the “Old” Testament as well, particularly those concerning Joseph and Job. In this way, he sees that “a profound reflection is at work, everywhere in the Bible, regarding the ethical demands that a revelation of victimage and its refusal places upon human beings” (“Mimesis” 17).

The lofty place occupied by the Christian narrative in Girard’s scheme is in fact suggested by his earlier work on literature. Unlike mythology, literature is not doomed always and everywhere to reinforce the violent underpinnings of human culture. Instead, “great novels” are by definition those which reveal both the presence and the dangers of mimesis, and so encourage “the renunciation of metaphysical desire” (Deceit 293-294). They are like myths only insofar as the unity of their conclusions points to the presence of a single phenomenon at work (Deceit 293 [Mensonge 329]). This simply means that

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153 Originally: “le seul texte qui puisse venir à bout de toute mythologie” (Le bouc 148).
154 Originally: “Jésus meurt, non pas dans un sacrifice, mais contre tous les sacrifices, pour qu’il n’y ait plus de sacrifices” (Des choses 234). Girard’s position in this regard reveals him to be, at least to some extent, another theological apologist for religion. As such, he is inclined to distinguish between “the religion that comes from man” (“la religion qui vient de l’homme”) and “the religion that comes from God” (“[la religion] qui vient de Dieu”): the former promotes violence, the latter discourages it (Things 166 [Des choses 189]).
155 Originally: “le renoncement au désir métaphysique” (Mensonge 329).
for Girard, as Hayden White observes, “art makes manifest the truth concealed in myth” (“Ethnological” 5). The truth at stake here can in turn only be realized through a metaphorical death and rebirth which, according to Girard, points to the fact that “Christian symbolism is universal, for it alone is able to give form to the experience of the novel” (Deceit 310).

Several objections to Girard’s theories can, and have, been raised. One of the most frequently recurring complaints concerns the “totalizing” nature of his work. For Girard, as I have noted, all of human culture originates with scapegoating, while all myths and all rituals have only one possible meaning, which is simultaneously the concealment and perpetuation of this process. One of the obvious problems, then, with using Girard’s theory as an interpretive tool is that it will always yield the same results. This is most clearly evident in his own analyses of various stories, such as Isaac’s blessing of Jacob in Genesis and Odysseus’ escape from the Cyclops in the Odyssey. The former story involves sacrifice but no real violence; the latter has violence, but no sacrifice. Girard, however, maintains that both stories are about the saving effects of scapegoating, but incompletely so:

The two texts are mutually revealing: the Cyclops of the Odyssey underlines the fearful menace that hangs over the hero (and that remains obscure in the Genesis story); and the slaughter of the kids in Genesis,

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156 Originally: “le symbolisme Chrétien est universel car il est seul capable d’informer l’expérience Romanesque” (Mensonge 347).
157 A number of these objections are summarized by Golsan (René 111-124) and Kirwan (Discovering 87-111).
158 See, e.g., Heesterman, Broken 8; Kirwan, Discovering 95-97; Shea, “Victims” 257-259; Swanson, “Ungodly” 121; White, “Ethnological” 7.
159 This point is strongly made by Françoise Meltzer (“Response” 328). Also note Jean-Marie Domenach’s concern that, in general, Girard’s theory completely cuts off the possibility of further discoveries in the human sciences (“Voyage”).
along with the offering of the “savory meat,” clearly implies the sacrificial character of the flock, an aspect that might go unnoticed in the *Odyssey*.

*(Violence 6)*

In effect Girard is arguing that if an interpreter cannot find a given aspect of the scapegoat process in one story, they can always infer its presence by recourse to other texts. This is possible because, according to his theory, we know that these aspects were present in the original, historical, sacrifice.*"* Regardless of what a myth may appear to be telling us, then, it is always and only a deceitful recounting of victimage. This being the case, the question for Girard in confronting a new myth can never be, *What* are the possible meanings of the story?, but only, *How* does this myth disclose the same meaning as all other myths?

This situation poses another problem often identified as common to totalizing schema, which is the occlusion of cultures and systems of thought other than one’s own. Richard Kearney, for example, maintains that the absolute distinction that Girard establishes between biblical and non-biblical myths is not only unsound and reductive, but is itself a type of scapegoating (“Le mythe”).*"* He notes, for example, that the persecuted heroes of other myths, including Oedipus, Prometheus and Iphigenia, are, like

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160 Originally: “Les deux textes s’éclairent réciproquement; le Cyclope de l’*Odyssee* souligne la menace qui pèse sur le héros et qui reste obscure dans la *Genèse*; l’immolation des chevreaux, dans la *Genèse*, et l’offrande du plat savoureux dégagent un caractère sacrificiel qui risque de passer inaperçu dans la brebis de l’*Odyssee*” (*La violence* 20).

161 In fact, Girard explicitly and paradoxically maintains that their absence in the story only helps to confirm his thesis, part of which states that the scapegoat mechanism must be at least partially obscured in order to function (since by definition scapegoating requires that the victimizer is convinced of the victim’s guilt, and thus unaware that they are actually involved in scapegoating) (Girard, “Anthropology” 267; “Mimesis” 14; *Violence* 310 [*La violence* 430-431]).

162 As Tod Swanson puts it, “Girard makes the religions a disease for which Jesus Christ is the cure” (“Ungodly” 121).
Jesus, clearly regarded as innocent victims (41). Lucien Scubla similarly points out that, many centuries before Jesus, the Orphic tradition had vigorously condemned all forms of blood sacrifice (“Le christianisme”). Finally, Elizabeth Traube demonstrates that the Mambai myth of the Mau Lelu can be made to conform to Girard’s hypothesis, but only if the cultural context of the myth is completely ignored (“Incest”). Thus, she concludes, “while Girard may indeed impart order to the chaos of ethnographic facts he has created, he loses . . . the ability to tell us about cultural products themselves for the simple reason that he has annihilated the cultures which produced them” (45).

Not only is Girard’s treatment of non-biblical myths suspect, but his analysis of the Bible itself, particularly the New Testament Gospels, is problematic. He maintains, for example, that “the Gospels never speak of sacrifices except to cast them aside and refuse them all validity.” Even a surface reading of these texts shows this statement to be quite untrue, as Jesus himself advocates sacrifice on numerous occasions. Girard also affirms that, “if we keep to the [Gospel] passages that relate specifically to the Father of Jesus, they contain nothing which would justify attributing the least amount of

163 Swanson similarly asserts:

> The Gospel story of the innocently crucified Messiah seems unique only if one compares the literature of dominant cultures such as the Greeks with the literature of a scapegoated minority such as that of the early Christians. But if one compares the synoptic gospels with the Yekuana Watunna or with the Inca “Lament on the Death of Atahualpa,” the Watunna, or the literature of other colonized peoples, one finds numerous parallels. (“Ungodly” 133)

164 In a review of Girard’s most recent rehearsal of his theory, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, Michel Desjardins summarizes Girard’s general approach to the New Testament as one that “[belittles] current [biblical] scholarship while treating the Gospel texts as most scholars did in pre-modern times (e.g., interpreting them literally, taking the four as a unit, showing no concern for history or higher criticism, speaking about Jesus’ intentions)” (90).

165 My translation; originally: “Les Évangiles ne parlent jamais des sacrifices que pour les écarter et leur refuser toute validité” (Des choses 203; cf. Girard, Things 180).

166 This fact is highlighted by Scubla, who points, e.g., to Matt 5:23-4; 8:1-4; 26:17-19; and Mark 12:33 (“Le christianisme” 243-244; 255 n. 3; 256 n. 5, 7, 8).
violence to the deity” (*Things* 182).¹⁶⁷ This is a similarly contentious position, as Michel Desjardins’ work, for one, attests (*Peace* 70-72, 84-90). Most critical, of course, is Girard’s argument for Jesus as scapegoat. This argument depends upon the assumption that the gospel accounts of Jesus’ death are more or less historically accurate, that he was in *fact* an innocent victim persecuted by the Jews. However, as Burton Mack notes, these texts were produced some time after Jesus’ death by a group of people with particular interests and agendas and so cannot be read naively as “history.”¹⁶⁸ Given that crucifixion was a *Roman* form of execution, for example, the blame that the texts place on the Jews amounts in effect to a form of scapegoating, with the Christians as persecutors and the Jews as victims ("Innocent" 156). The “innocence” of Jesus can also be questioned on various grounds, including the very real possibilities that he stirred up strong sentiments against both the Jewish and Roman rulers of his day.¹⁶⁹ These charges are directly relevant to Girard’s notion that victims be specifically innocent of the crimes of which they are accused, which most often involve responsibility for social unrest.

Girard’s shortcomings in cultural and historical arenas are paralleled by the exclusionary attitude he displays in dealing with issues of sexual identity. Girard effectively marginalizes homosexuality, for example, by arguing that it derives from what amounts to a dysfunction of the (normative) mimetic process (*Things* 335-338 [*Des choses* 358-360]).¹⁷⁰ As Girard explains in his interview with Richard Golsan, it is

¹⁶⁷ Originally: “Si nous nous référons aux passages qui se rapportent directement au Père de Jésus, nous constaterons sans peine qu’il n’y a rien en eux qui permette d’attribuer à la divinité la moindre violence” (*Des choses* 206).

¹⁶⁸ Mack in fact upbraids Girard directly for ignoring “two hundred years of research” into the relations between history and the New Testament (“Innocent” 165).

¹⁶⁹ See, e.g., Desjardins, *Peace* 69, 72-76; Mack, “Innocent” 156.

¹⁷⁰ In making this point Girard also explicitly links homosexual propensities with both sadism and masochism (*Things* 326-335 [*Des choses* 350-357]).
“common sense” to “speak of an original orientation of sexual appetite toward the other sex of one’s own species” (René 137). Same-sex relations only occur when this orientation is overturned by an intense rivalry that results in the transference of desire from the disputed object (the opposite sex) to the model (one’s own sex) (138).

Homosexuality is in no sense a “natural” condition, therefore, as heterosexual desire is our “‘biological’ pre-orientation” (137).171

Girard’s treatment of women has come under fire for being similarly discriminatory.172 One significant fact about his work, for example, is that very little of it is seriously concerned with women in any direct way: Girard ignores them both as victims of violence and as authors to be studied.173 Girard has said in his defense that this is simply not true, citing two examples to prove his point (“Anthropology” 276).174 These examples, however, work somewhat against Girard, as they constitute virtually the only exceptions to what is clearly a male-biased rule. Women also do not appear as mimetic rivals in Girard’s work, although they are frequently present as the object of male desire, to be struggled over by the model and imitator in his triangular model.175 This charge is one that Girard does not deny; rather he justifies his position by arguing that it is actually

171 Girard at least does not deny that “there may be other forms of homosexuality” than the one for which he can account using his mimetic theory (Things 347; originally: “Je n’affirme pas, bien entendu, l’inexistence d’une homosexualité biologique” [Des choses 369]). As well, he acknowledges that a degree of same-sex attraction is quite common, as this theory suggests that “all sexual rivalry is . . . structurally homosexual” (Things 335; originally: “Toute rivalité sexuelle est . . . structurellement homosexuelle” [Des choses 358]). However, these remarks do not change the fact that Girard clearly regards homosexuality as aberrant.


173 Shea’s criticism of Girard in this regard is worth quoting: “Although women must comprise the largest constituency of any pool of victims, although their exhaustive experience with persecution in every stage of their lives, in every time, in every place might be imagined to produce insights into the system worthy of note, and although they have produced a considerable body of literature, Girard devotes a negligible portion of his work to the voice of these victims” (“Victims” 254).

174 The reference is to two myths that Girard has analyzed that both contain female victims. Regarding female authors, Girard has singled out the work of Virginia Woolf as meriting his admiration (Golsan, René 133).

175 This point is the focus of Moi’s critique of Girard (“Missing”).
based upon what he sees as women’s “moral superiority,” in the sense that it is men, for
the most part, who perpetuate violence (“Anthropology” 275). What this defense ignores,
of course, is that if women do not participate in mimetic rivalry, then according to
Girard’s own theory they also do not participate in the creation of culture. This is a point
that Girard himself has actually made, noting the “absence” of “the role of women in
general in the religious and cultural order.”

In the end, it may be that Girard is actually a poor guide to follow if one wishes to
make the most responsible use of his theory. For example, it is neither necessary nor
particularly coherent to exclude women from accounts of scapegoating and victimage.
Similarly, Girard’s theory does not really seem to depend, as he believes, on either the
supposedly singular virtues of Christianity or on the existence of an actual, historical act
of collective violence upon which the whole of human culture was founded. Mimesis and
scapegoating are highly prevalent in the cultural forms with which Girard is concerned,
and so it is a worthy enterprise in its own right to examine these processes as we discover
them. Despite the serious methodological objections that one can bring to them,
therefore, Girard’s ideas can provide much-needed assistance in tackling issues related to
mimetic violence that have been generally neglected by scholars both of religion and of

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176 My translation of the original: “Sur le rôle des femmes en général dans le religieux et l’ordre culturel, ou plutôt sur leur absence de rôle, rien n’est plus révélateur . . .” (La violence 198); cf. the published translation, which renders “absence de rôle” as “minor importance of that role” (Violence 140), a discrepancy pointed out by Shea (“Victims” 258, n. 23). Girard’s belief in this absence may account in part both for his low regard of women writers and for an odd interpretive moment in which Girard actually transforms an example of women perpetrators of violence such that they become men. This moment occurs during his analysis of The Bacchae, as Girard argues that the female followers of Dionysus were really male, and that the myth has attempted to conceal this (Violence 139 [La violence 197]). Reflecting on such odd exegeses, Shea decides that Girard should be numbered among the “many theorists of social, psychological, and moral development in the West, [who] while anxious to claim universality, have been faced with the impossibility of molding women’s experience to their models. Rather than abandon their theories, however, they have either dismissed women’s experience or downgraded it” (“Victims” 257).

177 It is thus not surprising to find Girard’s theories being incorporated by others into the examination of both women’s literature and issues of violence against women. See, e.g., Joplin, “Ritual”; Kirk-Duggan, “Gender”; Nowak, “Girardian”; Sedgwick, Between.
literature. This is exactly what I will do in Chapters Four and Five, after first reviewing the history of the sub-field of Religion and Literature itself, including the role that considerations of violence have played in its development.

3.2 Religion and Literature

3.2.1 Struggle and Doubt

The descriptor “Religion and Literature” would appear to suggest an impressive array of critical activities, as both terms in question refer to immense, and immensely complex, aspects of human culture. Certainly there is a great deal of academic work that might be seen to fit this rubric. Just within the study of literature itself there exist critical discussions of what may be referred to as the “sacrality” of literary canons, for example, as well as of the degree to which literary studies in general is shot through with religious influence and significance. Yet such discussions have not typically been part of the critical tradition that has become identified as Religion and Literature, a relatively minor branch of the larger academic study of religion. The first detailed account of this tradition was provided by David A. Hesla thirty years ago in his seminal article “Religion and Literature: The Second Stage.” Hesla’s concise, analytical history both described, and to a significant extent defined, “Religion and Literature,” and has become a common reference point for works in this area of study. In addition, although Hesla is not

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178 Edward Said, e.g., has complained of the “ahistorical, manifestly religious aestheticism” of much literary criticism, its “appeals to the extrahuman, the vague abstraction, the divine, the esoteric and secret” (The World 291-292). Jonathan Culler has similarly charged that “our most famous critics . . . make religion a substitute for literature” ("critic" 1328). For other commentaries on the arguably religious aspects of the mainstream study of English literature see, e.g., Bhabha, “Representation”; Crews, Pooh 53-62; Eagleton, Literary 22-30; Graff, Professing 24-25; Lindenberger, History 131-162; Nemoianu, “Literary.”

179 See, e.g., Detweiler and Jasper, Religion 16; Jasper, Study 136-137; McDonald, “Religion” 62; Morey, “Margaret”; Scott, “Praxis” 303-306; “Mapping” xvii, xviii. Other useful histories (and critiques) of early Religion and Literature studies are provided by Gunn, Interpretation 26-36; Miller, “Literature”; Ruland,
concerned with the issue of violence, a consideration of his text nevertheless reveals that
the position of Religion and Literature scholars on this topic is intimately tied to the
history of their sub-field as a whole.

Hesla classified work in Religion and Literature up to the point of his writing as
the “first stage” of the field, and wrote prophetically of the coming of the “second stage.”
To locate a rough beginning to the enterprise he pointed to T.S. Eliot’s appropriately-
titled piece from 1935, “Religion and Literature,” and Eliot’s assertion that “literary
criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological
standpoint” (93). Eliot’s point was that the true value of literature can only be found in its
religious meaning, and so consideration of this meaning is necessary for any criticism
that seriously aims to understand literature. He thus notes that “the ‘greatness’ of
literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards” (93), and proceeds to classify
numerous poets as “major” or “minor” according to the degree to which they treat “the
whole matter of poetry in a religious spirit” (97).180

Beyond a few such comments in this essay, however, Eliot did not do much with
his own suggestions; the first publications that went any distance towards implementing
them appeared in 1940, most notably Amos Wilder’s The Spiritual Aspects of the New
Poetry. Hesla argues that these works were a response not simply to Eliot, but to critical
developments in the separate arenas of literary studies and theology. In 1940, the former
was only just emerging as a distinct academic endeavor, defining itself against the then-

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180 Although his concern is centrally with “secular” literature, Eliot also notes that “the Bible has had a
literary influence upon English literature not because it has been considered as literature, but because it has
been considered as the report of the Word of God. And the fact that men of letters now discuss it as
‘literature’ probably indicates the end of its ‘literary’ influence” (“Religion” 96).
standard academic use of literature almost exclusively as a source of information about the past, valued and studied for what it revealed about authors and their socio-historical contexts (Hesla 184). The primary effort in the nascent literary studies was instead to argue that literature should be studied on its own terms, that is to say, as literature. The effort was a success, and in the process established the “autonomy” of literature (185).

Hesla notes two perceived consequences of this autonomy that generated concern about the new criticism among theologians, such as Wilder and Nathan A. Scott, Jr., who had strong literary interests:

First, [literary criticism] severed poetry from its connections with the lived life of both poet and reader. . . . Secondly . . . critical practice became a kind of game of hide-and-go-seek in which the critic’s task was to find the paradoxes and ambiguities which the poet—or, all unbeknownst to the poet, his language—had hidden in his poem. Too often the result was more a vain display of critical ingenuity than a reasoned commentary on the text. (186)\(^\text{181}\)

Viewed in this manner, literary criticism seemed off to a poor start: while yet an extremely young discipline, it already “stood in danger of becoming precious and arid” (186). One of the “basic motives” cited by Hesla in establishing the field of Religion and Literature, then, was “a protest against what was judged to be the preciousness and irrelevance” of the academic study of literature (187).\(^\text{182}\)

\(^{181}\) For examples of such views as expressed by Scott and Wilder see Scott, Broken 224; Modern 36; Rehearsals 38; Wilder, New 33-38; Spiritual xv-xix; Theology 27-29.

\(^{182}\) John J. McDonald notes the irony that such a perspective should in any way trace its beginnings to T.S. Eliot, an impassioned champion of literature’s autonomy (“Religion” 62-63).
This protest was directly in line, fittingly, with the Protestant, existential interests that characterized the changes occurring in theological circles at about the same time that academic literary criticism was taking shape. The most visible champions of these interests were Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich, who were reacting against what they saw as the traditional hegemony of institutional Christian theology. In its place they worked to create a theology of “relevance,” a theology that stressed the importance of cultural context, and of individual struggles with meaning and existence, over imposed dogma (Hesla 183). Tillich’s own existential theology, which has had by far the most direct influence of any individual’s work upon the study of Religion and Literature, is largely encapsulated in his view of faith as “the state of being ultimately concerned” (Dynamics 1). According to this view, faith is not limited to belief in the teachings of a particular religious tradition but is defined as whatever is most important to an individual, which may include wealth, nationalism, or even atheism (Dynamics 1-4).

This perspective laid the foundation for a criticism which located fundamental, religious expressions in ostensibly secular works of material culture. Tillich himself employed it frequently in analyzing the religious dimensions of modern visual art, that is

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183 Tillich first articulated this understanding of faith in his 1948 treatise The Protestant Era, and elaborated it much more fully in his three volume Systematic Theology (1951-1963). Although Tillich was a prolific writer, Dynamics of Faith arguably represents a concise, coherent distillation of his most important theological musings. The central place of these musings in early Religion and Literature analyses may be observed in Wilder’s comment in The New Voice that his text “represents a large amplification of the material and themes presented as the first Paul Tillich Commemoration Lectures,” lectures delivered at New Harmony, Indiana, which Wilder notes was the site of Tillich’s burial (11). A small sampling of other works in the field that explicitly cite Tillich’s thought as essential to their own approach include: Detweiler, Breaking; Four; Gunn, Interpretation; James, Locations; Pell, Faith; Scott, Broken; Craters; Negative; Vernon, Horizons; Wilder, Spiritual; Theology; Wright, Theology.

184 Tillich proposes, e.g., that “the fundamental symbol of our ultimate concern is God. It is always present in any act of faith, even if the act of faith includes the denial of God” (Dynamics 45). According to this way of thinking, true atheism is not the lack of belief in God, but “the attempt to remove any ultimate concern—to remain unconcerned about the meaning of one’s existence” (45).
to say, its connections to humanity’s “ultimate concerns.”¹⁸⁵ For a number of theologians, such as David Jasper, these views have for some time now provided the frame of reference for their literary engagements:

Literature and religion are never far apart. The greatest literary achievements of the West, from Aeschylus to Dante to Shakespeare, cut deeply into the soul of humanity and stir in us those ultimate questions of existence, truth, and beauty which can only be answered, if they are ever answered at all, by religious commitment or the equally passionate rejection of theology and its speculation. (Study ix)

In contrast to literary criticism, then, which strove to establish the autonomy of its subject, works in the first stage of Religion and Literature have used Tillich’s existential religiosity to argue in theological terms for literature’s extreme relevance to the lived life of human beings.

There is an important common element to the argument for relevance presented in works from the “first stage” of Religion and Literature that is not mentioned by Hesla. This element relates to Tillich’s distinction between “true” and “false” types of faith. While in theory faith is any ultimate concern, some concerns are—as odd as it may sound—more ultimate than others (Dynamics 10-12). Tillich tends to become mired in tautology in his attempts to explain this distinction,¹⁸⁶ but he does coherently and consistently stress that one of the indispensable characteristics of true faith is doubt.¹⁸⁷ This is because there is no ultimate concern, we are told, without “ultimate risk and

¹⁸⁵ See the comprehensive collection of Tillich’s views on this topic, On Art and Architecture.
¹⁸⁶ He states, e.g., that “in true faith the ultimate concern is a concern about the truly ultimate” (Dynamics 12).
¹⁸⁷ For a more detailed explanation of this view see Dynamics 16-22.
ultimate courage” (*Dynamics* 18). Certainty of belief is a refuge of final answers and secure meaning, and so precludes such risk; more negatively, certainty is static, stagnant. True faith, on the other hand, is dynamic, ecstatic: it suggests the sea rather than the harbour, and contains “the existential doubt . . . [that] is aware of the element of insecurity in every existential truth” (*Dynamics* 20).188

In keeping with much Protestant rhetoric, then, the crucial way in which literature was said to have theological and religious significance was in the way that it challenged and upset staid, safe, notions of existence. Unlike church doctrines, for example, viewed as authoritarian and irrelevant, dust falling from on high, any text that woke people up to “reality” was seen as truly sacred. Thus Wilder writes that “the work of the modern artist, however much of a shock it may at first represent for the religious institutions, ultimately helps to disillusion the believer with respect to his habitual standards of taste and imagination” (*Theology* 1). Wilder likewise maintains that “the secular world has . . . come of age in our time of troubles. Its wrestling with the deepest questions is authentic and desperate where too often the believers, the children of light, are still out of touch with the Word of God in this generation” (*Theology* 36).

This defining sense that such wrestling is what makes a work of literature not only religiously relevant, but in fact fundamentally religious, is shared in only slightly differing ways by the majority of Religion and Literature critics. This includes the men189

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188 Tillich makes a very similar point in *The Courage to Be*: “The ultimate source of the courage to be is the ‘God above God’; this is the result of our demand to transcend theism. Only if the God of theism is transcended can the anxiety of doubt and meaninglessness be taken into the courage to be” (186). This statement also ties in closely with Tillich’s “broken myth” thesis referred to below.

189 Not unlike many academic disciplines, Religion and Literature was initially dominated by male scholars. Unlike some, however, this situation has changed very little. That said, two relatively recent female scholars to emerge in the area are Tracy Fessenden (*Culture and Redemption*) and Ann-Janine Morey (*Religion and Sexuality in American Literature*). In addition, although Flannery O’Connor (as noted
who have emerged over the past sixty-five years as arguably the major scholars in the
field: Amos Wilder, Nathan A. Scott, Jr., Northrop Frye, Robert Detweiler, Giles Gunn,
and David Jasper. Jasper, for example, comments:

Can art and theology face and even embody the unacceptable, the
unbearable, the unutterable? This extreme and ultimate contradiction in
terms entails radical deconstruction which risks encountering the profound
unknowability of the divine not merely by detachment . . . but by
relinquishing any clinging to metaphysical illusion or rational possibility.

(“Introduction” 5)190

The widespread acceptance of this position among Religion and Literature scholars is
evident, I would contend, in the disproportionate amount of attention that has been paid
in their criticism to the stories of Flannery O’Connor, stories steeped in violent spiritual
confrontation and revelation.191 Nathan Scott describes O’Connor’s work as “an art that
very much wanted to wake the spirit’s sleep, to break that somnolence into which we flee
from the exactions of the moral life” (Craters 272). In turn, William Clossan James
comments:

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190 For other examples of such views see Detweiler, Breaking 189-190; Gunn, Culture 184-185;
“Introduction” 29; Jasper, Study 135; Scott, Broken 23; Craters 272; Wilder, Theology 88. Note that Gunn
is more self-reflexive than the other critics in this group in his considerations of literature along these lines.
In The Interpretation of Otherness, e.g., he remarks in a somewhat cautionary manner that Saul Bellow has
been critical of exactly this perspective: “When Bellow’s Herzog . . . objects to that ‘crisis mentality’ that
places greater faith in states of extremity than of normality, he is calling into question the very premises
upon which much of Scott’s criticism, and that of others like him, is based” (32).
191 Religion and Literature works that discuss (or focus entirely on) O’Connor’s stories include: Clasby,
New 153-163; Desmond, Risen; Detweiler, Breaking 68-69; Fickett and Gilbert, Flannery; Gentry,
Flannery; Giannone, “Flannery”; Grimes, “Analogy”; Jacobs, Theology 118-119; Kessler, Flannery;
Martin, “Flannery”; McMullen, Writing; Mooney, “Moments”; Pell, Faith 4-12; Raiger, “Large”; Scott,
Broken 222; Srigley, Flannery; Wright, Theology 121-127; Zornado, “Becoming.”
If Flannery O’Connor is right that “all good stories are about conversion, about a character’s changing,” and if religions “induce a selfhood in which a transformation is effected from an old self perceived as broken and awry to a new identity of ultimate integration and well-being,” then the sort of “passage from plight to redemption,” from “chaos to meaning” examined here is central to literature and to religion and to their point of intersection. 

(Locations 59).

What defines literature as “religious” from this point of view, then, is precisely related to a certain notion of metaphysical “violence”—that is to say, the truly sacred text confronts us, shakes us awake, initiates a death of the old self so that a new one might be born.

Northrop Frye has put forward a more fully elaborated example of this approach to literature that is worth considering in some detail. From his first book, Fearful Symmetry, a study of William Blake’s poetry, to his final (posthumous) publication, The Double Vision, Frye consistently wrote with great passion on what was arguably his central critical concern: the ways in which “the Bible had set up an imaginative framework—a mythological universe . . .—within which Western literature had operated down to the eighteenth century and is to a large extent still operating” (Great xi). Also,

192 Note that, of the Religion and Literature critics listed above, Northrop Frye is certainly the most widely influential. Frye is also unique among this group as having never identified himself explicitly with the study of Religion and Literature as a defined field, and yet a vast proportion of his work fits clearly within its rubric. In his preface to Seeing into the Life of Things, John L. Mahoney in fact lists Frye, along with Wilder and Scott, as one of those who laid “strong foundations” for the study of Religion and Literature with their “pioneering efforts” (xv-xvi). Indeed, Frye has been—and continues to be—cited by a vast number of Religion and Literature critics. See, e.g., Blodgett and Coward, Silence 71-77; Clasby, New xiv-xvi; Crossan, Dark 23-24, 32; Detweiler, Breaking 129-131; Gunn, Culture 139-140, 173-176; Otherness 3, 40, 45, 64-65; James, Locations 1-2, 12, 21, 29-30, 63-69, 93-94, 183-184; Jasper, Study 102, 114; LaFleur, Karma 123, 140; Pell, Faith 103; Scott, Broken 36, 84; Wilder, New 99; Wright, Theology 14, 37-38, 54; Ziolkowski, “Contrapuntal” 5.
despite the fact that Frye explicitly denies writing from either the perspective of theology or of Biblical scholarship (Great xi), which are precisely the perspectives from which the majority of Religion and Literature work has been done, his writings nevertheless strongly appear to advance in their own way the general concern of the field; they provide, that is, literary contexts for (in Jamie Scott’s phrase) the “existential reformulations of the Christian kerygma” (“Praxis” 303).

This perspective is signalled by the blurb on the back cover of the Penguin edition of The Great Code—a text that, along with its sequel Words with Power, represents Frye’s most explicit attempt to outline the Bible’s mythological universe. According to this blurb, Frye’s “highly original analysis shows the Bible as redeeming history with a visionary poetic perspective” (emphasis added). Frye’s argument is that this redemption is provided by the “theory of history, or more accurately of historical process,” suggested by the Christian Bible; namely, “that there is some meaning and point to history” (81). Such a theory runs directly counter to the notion of “endless time” that Frye locates in other major traditions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, and that he argues is humanity’s natural—that is, passively-received—cosmology (69-73). The problem with this “natural” view of time for Frye is that it is essentially nihilistic, suggesting a world in which change is dominated “by the single direction toward nothingness and death” (168).

In contrast, according to Frye the Biblical texts—and by extension literary works that adhere to the mythic framework of these texts—“are or include protests against any lotus-

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193 Frye’s theory of the Bible and history echoes earlier comments by Tillich (although Frye himself does not make this connection). In his Systematic Theology (Vol. 2), e.g., Tillich argues that “in Christianity the decisive event occurs in the center of history and that it is precisely the event that gives history a center; that Christianity is also aware of the ‘not yet,’ which is the main emphasis in Judaism; and that Christianity knows the revelatory possibilities in every moment of history” (728). This parallel is particularly interesting given the further similarities between Frye and Tillich that, as noted below, lead to both thinkers arguing for the superiority of Christianity over all other religions.
eating surrender to fate and the cycles of nature” (118). In his comments on Revelation, for example, Frye declares that “what is symbolized as the destruction of the order of nature is the destruction of the way of seeing that keeps man confined to the world of time and history as we know them” (136). Similarly, Frye’s understanding of Jesus as an agent of struggle, confrontation, and change demonstrates to him that “man has to fight his way out of history and not simply awaken from it.” Consequently, “Jesus was not simply the compassionate Jesus as Buddha was the compassionate Buddha” (133).

Frye’s criticism of non-Christian traditions, a criticism founded on the notion of the Christian Bible as the sacred text uniquely designed to snap people out of bucolic ignorance and into genuine understanding, brings us directly back to Tillich. Tillich similarly argues that Christianity is the one tradition whose central myth can awaken people to the truly infinite. He characterizes this myth as “broken,” able to lead people symbolically towards the ultimate while expressly discouraging understanding of the

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194 Surprisingly, Frye has rarely been brought to public account for such discriminatory remarks; certainly at the University of Toronto he continued to be regarded as visionary, not reactionary, at least up to the time of his death (significantly, in the university’s Pratt Library, there has hung for many years a painting of Frye that depicts him floating, in celestial composure, above the earth). Critiques of Frye are of course not unheard of, but almost all are aimed at the academic shortcomings of his literary theory, not at his religious prejudices. One of the very few pieces that takes up this latter issue is Joseph Gold’s article, “Biblical Symmetry: The Gospel According to Frye.” Gold argues, among other things, that Frye’s model of the Biblical narrative as a U-shaped “double mirror”—in which the NT provides the redemptive right-hand side of the U—is irredeemably anti-Semitic. For a critique of Frye’s (mis)use of the Bible from a textual and socio-historical perspective see Richardson, “Cracking”; for an analysis of the ideological and rhetorical underpinnings of Frye’s appropriation of various cultural materials see Manganaro, Myth 111-150.

195 Note that Judaism, despite its own obvious connections to both the Bible generally and Jesus’ prophetic bent in particular, is not spared from Frye’s critique of non-Christian traditions. In contrast to Jesus’ confrontational attitude, e.g., Frye points to “the general tendency of Judaism to come to terms with the secular power rather than colliding with it” (115).

196 Frye’s somewhat unnerving sense of the Bible’s willful agency in achieving this goal is evident throughout The Great Code. Following the remarks about Revelation quoted above, e.g., he declares: “This destruction is what the Scripture is intended to achieve” (136; emphasis added).
myth as literally depicting the ultimate.\footnote{In general, Tillich notes that “Christianity denies by its very nature any unbroken myth, because its presupposition is the first commandment: the affirmation of the ultimate as ultimate and the rejection of any kind of idolotry” \textit{(Dynamics} 50-51).} Such literalism undermines true faith by providing pat answers to fundamental questions, by discouraging doubt: “Those who live in an unbroken mythological world,” Tillich notes, “feel safe and certain. They resist, often fanatically, any attempt to introduce an element of uncertainty” \textit{(Dynamics} 51).

Taking his cue from the Biblical injunction against fashioning images of the divine, Tillich asserts that “faith, if it takes its symbols literally, becomes idolatrous” (52). Because the story of Christ depicts a transcendent, divine being as fragile to the point of being murdered, it represents the most fully realized example of a myth that explicitly resists being idolized:

That [religious] symbol is most adequate which expresses not only the ultimate but also its own lack of ultimacy. Christianity expresses itself in such a symbol \textit{in contrast to all other religions}, namely, in the Cross of the Christ. Jesus could not have been the Christ without sacrificing himself as Jesus to himself as the Christ. Any acceptance of Jesus as the Christ which is not acceptance of Jesus the crucified is a form of idolatry. (97-98; emphasis added)

Since according to Tillich no other religion has a symbol that undermines its own claims to ultimacy, therefore only Christianity—and in particular \textit{Protestant} Christianity—is founded upon a non-idolotrous, or broken, myth. As a result, Tillich, like Frye, can argue
(with the appearance of academic detachment) that his religion is “superior” to all others 
(Dynamics 54, 98). 198

3.2.2 From Post to Post

Although the work of the majority of scholars from the “first stage” of Religion and Literature depends upon the Tillichian notions of struggle and doubt, it is by no means as forthrightly discriminatory as that of either Frye or Tillich himself. It remains, however, devoutly Christian; Hesla’s vision of the second stage, on the other hand, is characterized specifically by the projected absence of apologetic Christian theology. In its place he believed that the critical perspective would derive more directly from the social and behavioural sciences (“Religion” 189). The most immediately apparent result of this shift would be simply that the word “religion” would no longer be used as a synonym for “Christianity.” Such a change would in turn signal a movement in the field towards a consideration of both non-Western traditions and non-Western literatures (189). 199

This consideration—the actual work of Religion and Literature scholars—would concomitantly reflect the more material concerns of the field’s new critical tools: “We

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198 Of course Tillich and Frye are far from unique in this regard, as a large proportion of religionists have advanced academic positions in favour of Christianity and against all other traditions. More illuminating, perhaps, is Jonathan Z. Smith’s argument (in his seminal work Drudgery Divine) that these positions also frequently derive from anti-Catholic prejudice. This argument in fact appears applicable to the work of both Tillich and Frye. Tillich specifically comments, e.g., that it is the issue of Christian idolatry that points to “the superiority of Protestant Christianity” over “the Roman Church” (Dynamics 98). For a detailed discussion of Frye’s antipathy towards Catholicism see Perkin, “Northrop.”

199 This move would also, presumably, involve the inclusion of women authors other than just Flannery O’Connor. Hesla does not mention (or perhaps notice) the androcentric orientation of Religion and Literature studies, but the issue is taken up well by Ann-Janine Morey (“Margaret”). Ironically—given the preoccupation of “first stage” critics with the existential value of having one’s beliefs challenged/shaken—Morey argues that “feminist postmodernism and women’s writing” have been marginalized precisely because they present a deep-rooted challenge to the status quo, to “conventional language and ontological structures” (506). This irony highlights the fact that critics in the field have been preoccupied with idealist concerns to the exclusion of material ones, which as noted below is directly relevant to their treatment of violence in literature.
shall be less interested in the ‘concretely existing individual,’ with his anxiety and ultimate concern, than in the many ways in which that individual is related to family, tribe, and society, and the ways in which these relations and the traditions which shape them have religious principles and consequences” (190).

Such study would represent a necessary, revised sense of the “relevance” of literature. Unfortunately, Hesla’s predictions were slightly ahead of their time. In the more than twenty-five years since his article appeared, for example, relatively little work has been published under the heading of “Religion and Literature” that seriously considers non-Western writings or religions. There was some early indication, however, that Hesla’s timing was almost perfect; most notably, the same year that his article appeared the Notre Dame English Journal added a subtitle: A Journal of Religion in Literature. This addition is significant in that the only other publications directly relevant to the field refer specifically to either Christianity or theology in their titles. In 1984 Notre Dame changed its name again, to simply Religion and Literature, and in so doing attempted to establish itself as the flagship journal in the area. Most significantly, perhaps, is that in his introductory discussion of the rechristened journal’s new identity, John J. McDonald strongly echoes Hesla’s prophecies. He states, for example, that “since there exists no clearly privileged system of belief recognized by all people who have had contact with it, Religion and Literature will refuse to advocate one privileged system either” (“Religion” 65). More concretely, McDonald declares the journal’s intention “to

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200 Ironically, as Hesla notes, this new stance to some extent would also align the field with the earlier (pre-“autonomy”) disposition of academic literary concerns, i.e., it would signal a “return to the study of biography and literary history” (“Religion” 189).

201 These journals are Christianity and Literature and Literature and Theology.

202 Readers were told explicitly in the first issue, e.g., that “Religion and Literature wants to lend definition to its field” (McDonald, “Religion” 69).
expand [its] horizons as quickly as possible to cultures other than Western ones,” and repeatedly emphasizes the importance of “comparative thinking” (68).

*Religion and Literature* has not lived up to McDonald’s promises. Between 1978 and 2007 (not including special issues), the journal published only *three* articles that concerned “cultures other than Western ones.” Of the various special issues, the only one to specifically focus on a discussion of any non-Western culture concerned “American Indian Literature and Spirituality” (26.1, 1994). Other issues that might have shown some promise, notably those on North American fiction (21.1, 1989) and women’s writing (23.3, 1991), discussed only Western works and only in the contexts of Jewish or Christian theology. In fact, the journal is not only Western, it is almost exclusively Christian, including just the occasional reference to Judaism and Islam.

Interestingly, in the index to volumes 18 to 28 of *Religion and Literature* (compiled by

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203 The articles are, in chronological order: Gail Hinich Sutherland, “Asvaghosa and Saigyo: A Comparison of Two Buddhist Poets” (1991); Sheila Hassell Hughes, “Falls of Desire/Leaps of Faith: Religious Syncretism in Louise Erdrich’s and Joy Harjo’s ‘Mixed-Blood’ Poetry” (2001); Hyangsoon Yi, “The Journey as Meditation: A Buddhist Reading of O Chong-hui’s ‘Words of Farewell’” (2002). This paucity of diversity is striking on its own terms, but is (to me) completely staggering in the context of the existence of a rich field of internationally-renowned, and religiously relevant, authors, all of whom have been disregarded by *Religion and Literature*. The list of such authors includes, e.g., Chinua Achebe, Rohinton Mistry, and (incredibly) Salman Rushdie.

204 Two other special issues contained one non-Western piece each. The volume on “Violence, Difference, Sacrifice” (25.2, 1993) includes Edith Wyschogrod’s “Killing the Cat: Beauty and Sacrifice in the Novels of Genet and Mishima”; and the “Pilgrimage in Literature of the Americas” issue (35.2-3, 2003) offers Kimberly M. Blaeser’s “Sacred Journey Cycles: Pilgrimage as Re-turning and Re-telling in American Indigenous Literatures.”

205 This focus in the special issue on women is somewhat belied by the introduction, which begins by noting that “across centuries, across cultures, across generations, women have constructed, reconstructed, and refigured their relation to divinity both from within and from without religious traditions, whether those traditions are Jewish, Afro-American, Christian, Native American, or Islamic” (Mullins 1). But considering the work of Toni Morrison and Zora Neale Hurston, both African-American writers, is as far as any of the articles go in considering writing from “across cultures.” The issue on North American fiction ventures even less far out on the comparative limb, examining as it does the writings of Flannery O’Connor, Margaret Atwood, Walker Percy, John Updike, and Chaim Potok. All other special issues have been consistently and explicitly traditional (i.e., Western/Christian) in their focus: e.g., “Christianity and Culture” (14.3, 1982); “Language, Literature and the Imagination in the Writings of Simone Weil” (17.2, 1985); “Literature and Religion in Ireland” (28.2-3, 1996); “The Book in Late Medieval England” (37.2, 2005).
Zan Ceeley with Julie Bixler), there is a category for Buddhism (which contains one article) but not for Christianity. The omission in itself suggests the omnipresence of the tradition, since if Christianity were included as a category, almost all of the journal’s articles would have had to have been listed under it.

*Religion and Literature* is not unique in its continued adherence to the framework of the field’s “first stage.” And to be fair, although the journal has not broadened itself culturally to any great extent, a significant percentage of its Christian-centred articles are not themselves theological treatises. But in many ways the continued publication of Christian studies of literature is not in itself problematic: it is the absence of alternative discourses that should be of serious concern, coupled with the continued insistence of some theological critics to identify themselves, implicitly or explicitly, not with theology but with the academic study of religion. Such is the case for even the new millennium’s additions to the field, including Robert Detweiler and David Jasper’s *Religion and Literature: A Reader*. Detweiler and Jasper, like Frye, deny that their work is “intended to be confessional,” asserting that “as far as possible [they] have sought to avoid religious biases” (xi). Yet signs of such bias are evident throughout the text, appearing even in the opening lines of the introduction:

> Literature and religion lie at the very roots of culture. Since the dawn of history . . . human speculation on the self and the universe was expressed through myths, stories, and poetry. The thought of the ancient world was

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206 Examples of Religion and Literature texts published since Hesla’s article appeared that remain both theological and exclusively Western in focus include: Clasby, *New*; Detweiler, *Art: Breaking*; Jacobs, *Theology*; Jasper, *Sacred; Study*; Jasper and Newlands, *Believing*; Jens and Küng, *Literature*; Wood, *Broken*; Wright, *Theology*. There have also appeared a few works that are not overtly theological, but which still focus only on Western literature, such as Gunn, *Culture*; James, *Locations*; Nemoianu and Royal, *Play*; and Pell, *Faith*. Just a handful of studies concentrate to any extent on non-Western writings; these include Blodgett and Coward, *Silence*; and Ziolkowski, *Literature*. However, both of these texts are unabashedly theological.
wrapped in the imagination and emerged in the oldest written texts that have survived, much of it in the familiar stories of the Hebrew Bible and in the even older texts that lie behind them. Later these literary traditions survived in exchanges with the emergent Western philosophy of the Greek world. And they continue to enliven reflection within Christianity and Judaism to the present day. (xi)

In a paragraph purporting to introduce the topic in terms as broad as possible (“Since the dawn of history”), Detweiler and Jasper turn immediately from broad generalizations to the specifics of the Bible and its attendant traditions, from the cosmic to the planetary, with the Bible at the core.207 Similarly, their list in Chapter 7 of the “great themes of literature and religion” carries particularly Biblical weight: death; conversion and ecstasy; love and evil; and visions of the end. Many of these themes are far from “great,” if present at all, in much contemporary writing produced, for example, in Japan or by Native North Americans.

Most frustrating, perhaps, is the fact that texts such as Detweiler and Jasper’s continue to list Hesla’s article as a significant reference, yet never do more than make the most cursory of gestures towards his entire notion of a “second stage.” Typically, this gesture involves some discussion of postmodernism. Wesley A. Kort, for example, has offered a thoughtful treatment of the possibilities that postmodernist discourses offer to the study of Religion and Literature. Kort sees in these discourses the tools for a more

207 Detweiler and Jasper do, however, comment on (and justify) their Western focus elsewhere (e.g., ix, xi). They also include a very few excerpts of non-Western texts, such as the Mayan Popul Vuh and the Hindu Prasna Upanishad. Yet the Bible is present in even these references: similarities between the Popul Vuh and the book of Genesis are pointed out, including “the notion that in the beginning, ‘nothing existed,’ and that somewhere in the beginning is the necessity of language, or ‘the word’” (24); we likewise learn that “in many ways [the Upanishads] are similar to the New Testament in their insistence on unity with the divine and the presence of the most High within us” (69).
open, more “radically democratic” approach to the field (“Religion” 577). This approach would be freed from “the old Tillichian paradigms,” paradigms that Kort identifies as “essentialist and foundationalist” (585). Yet Kort’s own approach, like his predecessors’, remains inextricably linked to Christian theology. His emphasis on post-modernism’s “non-foundationalism” and resistance to “certainty or closure” (576), for example, sounds more like Tillich than perhaps Kort would like to think. Additionally, the only religious texts to which he refers are biblical ones (583, 584, 585), while his final injunction for future studies in Religion and Literature is that they include “a more moral and theological analysis of place” (585; emphasis added).208

To Kort’s credit, his (postmodern) concerns with geography and politics go some distance towards breaking new theoretical ground in the field.209 Detweiler and Jasper, however, use postmodernism fully in the service of the “old Tillichian paradigms.” They begin with the proposition that “the central characteristic” of the shift from modernism to postmodernism “is the move from the rational and the organized into the fear of chaos and disorder” (174). Not missing a beat, they then suggest that this fear was felt “by the scribes and Pharisees who listened to the words of Jesus in the Gospel narratives and found the foundations of their world threatened, this disorder lodged within the very

208 Karl Kroeber represents another pertinent example of how the lines between what may appear to be competing perspectives can become blurred. A Native literary critic, Kroeber is not surprisingly quite antagonistic towards the totalizing impulses of many contemporary scholars; and yet he too subscribes to Tillich’s universalist/existential assumptions about the nature of religion. Thus Kroeber comments on the one hand that “the modern Lacanian, Marxist, structuralist, or deconstructionist critic becomes a kind of intellectual fundamentalist. Each presents us with the ‘truth’ or ‘principle’ whose universal character devalues the specific, localized, historical/cultural functions that in fact usually determine both the formal structure and the historical significance of any specific telling of any myth, however supposedly hallowed” (“Religion” 14). However, on the other hand—and in the same article—Kroeber also asserts, in classic Tillichian fashion, that “the deepest of religious faiths are built upon confrontation of uncertainties, both personal and social, not upon retreats into the security of unquestioning assertiveness, into mindless fundamentalism” (21).

209 For a discussion of this aspect of Kort’s article see Scott, “Praxis” 310-311.
order on which they had built their trust and security” (174). We have clearly returned to Tillich’s anti-institutional notions of broken myth and existential uncertainty. In a remarkable echo of Wilder’s use of these notions almost half a century earlier, Detweiler and Jasper conclude that

the Gospels . . . are pervaded by ironies that the traditions of theology have too often had neither the will nor the ability to recognize . . . and for that reason we have continually to turn to the poets and artists to identify and remind us of the grand irony at the heart of the greatest of all narratives—a truly postmodern moment at the heart of our program for religion and literature, which may offer a way through the human web of deceit and violence even yet. (176; emphasis added)

The literary violence that concerns these critics, then, remains the “violence” of Jesus: healing on the Sabbath, overturning the money-changers’ tables, defying religious authorities. Such a regressive attempt to (re-)authorize Christian theology using postmodern discourse is disheartening to those of us who, with Hesla, believe that it is past time for the field to move on.210

210 Other Religion and Literature works that make this same unfortunate attempt include: Detweiler, Breaking 61; “Torn”; Hopper, “Word”; Jacobs, Theology; Jasper, “Introduction”; Study 117-135; Kamboureli, “St. Teresa’s”; Klemm, “Back”; Polka, “Tragedy”; Wright, Theology 30-31. Note that this critical move is not unique to Religion and Literature scholarship, but has arguably become a feature of the broader study of religion. For a discussion and critique of this trend see McCutcheon, “My.” McCutcheon sees this situation as part of a more basic and enduring problem in the field, namely “that many scholars of religion have failed to understand just what it means to theorize and have most recently disguised this shortcoming through conveniently selective appropriation of the postmodern turn” (“My” 17). It may be worth speculating that this “enduring problem” is in turn related to the possibility that, as Jonathan Z. Smith comments, “Tillich remains the unacknowledged theoretician of our enterprise” (“Connections” 6). In her own critique of the similarities in content and structure between modernist and (mainstream) postmodernist theory, both in general and in relation to the field of Religion and Literature, Ann-Janine Morey further points to the “rigidly masculinist” nature of both enterprises: “The source and continuing inspiration for this covert embrace of the androcentric status quo in western literary traditions is Jewish-Christian monotheism” (“Margaret” 503).
It happens that postcolonial, rather than postmodern, concerns have provided the context for the only significant work that legitimately fits Hesla’s “second stage” description. This work is comprised principally of three collections of essays: Jamie S. Scott and Paul Simpson-Housley’s *Mapping the Sacred: Religion, Geography and Postcolonial Literatures*; Scott’s *And the Birds Began to Sing: Religion and Literature in Post-Colonial Culture*; and Susan VanZanten Gallagher’s *Postcolonial Literature and the Biblical Call to Justice*. Among other critical virtues, each of these collections presents sustained engagements with non-Western literatures, and none conflates the words “religion” and “Christianity.” In addition, the two collections by Scott (alone and with Simpson-Housley) are explicitly *not* theological,211 and although Gallagher’s text is a self-evidently Christian enterprise, much to her credit she is absolutely clear about her position in this regard.

Also to her credit is the excellent account that Gallagher provides in her introduction of postcolonial literary studies in general.212 Most usefully, she identifies numerous views of the term “postcolonial literature” itself and considers their various implications. Citing a number of key critics in the field,213 Gallagher suggests that the most common understanding of this literature is that it “originate[s] in countries that have experienced colonization,” and that it forms an “anticolonial discourse, a discourse that distances itself from and subversively refuses the tradition of the colonizer” (4-5). An

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211 I do have one theologically-related concern, however, about some of the essays in Scott’s *And the Birds Began to Sing*. As Scott himself notes, many of the authors in his collection take a “critical stance towards Christianity’s historical role as handmaiden to British colonialism and imperialism, a critical stance rooted in the assumption that a Christianity *tainted* by colonial and imperial ambition is in some sense a secularised Christianity” (“Praxis” 304; emphasis added). This suggests, again, an idealized *a priori* view of Christianity as a tradition that is inherently antithetical to “colonial and imperial ambitions.”

212 Additional overviews and histories of this area of study are provided by Boehmer, *Colonial*; Gahndhi, *Postcolonial*; Tabron, *Postcolonial*; Wisker, *Key*. For a history of the term “postcolonial” see Mishra and Hodge, “What.”

213 These are: Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Linda Hutcheon, Stephen Slemon, and Helen Tiffin.
important problem with this understanding, however, is that it is often untrue: as
Gallagher points out, while postcolonial literature “is frequently opposed to . . .
colonialism,” nevertheless “some postcolonial writers do adopt certain aspects of the
legacy of colonialism” (12, 6). She also notes that these writers may identify “other
injustices . . . as arising from indigenous traditions and practices” (12).

Gallagher herself attempts to avoid pigeonholing her subject matter as much as
possible. Refusing to limit her definition by functionalist concerns, she instead
categorizes postcolonial literature simply as “writing that emerges from peoples who
once were colonized by European powers, now have some form of political
independence, but continue to live with the negative economic and cultural legacy of
colonialism” (5). This legacy is of course intimately tied to religion. As Jamie Scott
notes, for example, “the imaginative portrayal of religious syncretism” found in the
literature considered in his own postcolonial volume, And the Birds Began to Sing,
“sometimes admits, sometimes denies, but almost always addresses Christian claims to
authority and authenticity in the context of the British colonial and imperial project”
(“Praxis” 309).214 Literary criticism that is focused on colonialism, then, returns us both
to Hesla’s notion of the second stage of Religion and Literature studies, as well as
(ironically) to the concerns of the first stage with “relevance,” that is to say, with the
connections between religion, literature, and actual human lives. Such criticism also
introduces to Religion and Literature studies for the first time in any significant way the
issue of violence in a very real, materialist, sense.

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214 To provide just one example: Chelva Kanaganayakam argues that, in Anita Desai’s Cry, the Peacock,
the Hindu priest is part of the text’s symbolic matrix that invokes religion “not as ritual, not as governing
principle, but as an integral aspect of ideology, as serving to preserve and perpetuate the power of
patriarchy, of the oppression of women, and of establishing a complicitous relationship with colonialism”
(“Widows” 273).
3.2.3 Colonial Mimicry

Considerations of colonialism also return us to the idea of mimetic conflict, but not as formulated by René Girard. One of the limitations of Girard’s theory is that it does not account for situations in which the model, not the imitator, begins the mimetic process. As postcolonial critics have pointed out, this is precisely what happens in colonization: the invaders set out to remake the native inhabitants into images of themselves.\(^{215}\) Such mimesis is indicated by the title, for example, of Frantz Fanon’s immensely influential 1952 examination of colonial race issues in the Antilles (where he was born): *Peau noire, masques blancs* (*Black Skin, White Masks*). Further, Fanon argues that the mimetic intentions of the colonizers are not simply (or only) forced upon the colonized, but in fact typically induce a desire within the colonized to become like those now in power; it creates a situation in which “the black man wants to be white” (9).\(^{216}\)

Despite the explicitly mimetic aims of the colonial project, however, there remains a

\(^{215}\) Despite what would appear to be obvious links between colonialism and a theory of mimetic violence, Tod Swanson is the only scholar to my knowledge to apply Girard’s concepts to a colonial situation (“Ungodly”). Specifically, he considers the Spanish Christian interaction with the Incas of Peru in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. After examining various historical records, Swanson argues that “both Spaniards and Indians evidently heightened the analogical similarities between their respective corporate identities” (127). Coincident with this increasing degree of mimesis was an escalating threat of violence against the native population (127). To justify this violence, however, the Spanish first had to (re-)establish “their diametrical opposition” to the Native culture, ascribing to them “many of the characteristics Girard associates with scapegoat victims,” such as monstrous appetites for sex and/or human flesh (128). Consequently, the invaders could justify the use of extreme force as necessary “to rescue the Indians from the unnatural violence that was both Christ’s opposite and his uncanny double” (129). Significantly, it was only after this particular wave of violence was complete “that the mimetic process began in earnest” (129):

> When the missionaries systematically planted the cross on local deities, native peoples across South America simply identified their cultural heroes with Jesus. And when this happened, in their minds at least, the entire native ethos gained the status of Christian revelation. By the same logic, everything that contrasted to the native ethos (namely white European culture) became a counter-image of Christ. This allowed for the reversal of white Christian scapegoating: Whites and not Indians were now portrayed by native peoples as demonic enemies of Christ. (130)

Swanson concludes with the hope that, through a consideration of such reversals, “Christian scapegoating can be partially unmasked and violent passions partially transformed” (136).

\(^{216}\) Originally: “Le Noir veut être Blanc” (*Peau* 27).
critical ambivalence at the heart of this project. This is because of the dualistic perspective of the colonizer that “white and black represent the two poles of a world” (44) and that, in the end, “white men consider themselves superior to black men” (10).217 Such ambivalence therefore points to another key difference between this dynamic and the one described by Girard, namely that the colonizers only ever desire partial imitation.

Precisely because of this incompleteness, Homi K. Bhabha refers to the process of colonial same-making not as mimesis, but as “mimicry.” Building on the conceptual foundations laid by Fanon,218 Bhabha has become undoubtedly the most important theorist of colonial mimicry.219 He defines this dynamic as “the [colonial] desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (“Of” 126). He further reworks this definition into the dictum, “Almost the same, but not white” (130). Again, the “not quite/not white” gap exists in part because of the

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217 Originally: “le Blanc et le Noir représentent les deux pôles d’un monde” (Peau 36); “des Blancs s’estiment supérieurs aux Noirs” (Peau 27).
218 Bhabha certainly owes an enormous critical debt to Fanon (although as noted below, several critics have accused him of deviating from Fanon’s work in important ways). He acknowledges and details this debt in “Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche, and the Colonial Condition,” written as the Foreword to the 1986 Pluto edition of Black Skin, White Masks, and reprinted as “Interrogating Identity: Frantz Fanon and the Postcolonial Prerogative” in Bhabha’s collection of essays, The Location of Culture. Among other words of praise, Bhabha asserts that it is “a memory of the history of race and racism, colonialism and the question of cultural identity, that Fanon reveals with greater profundity and poetry than any other writer” (“Interrogating” 90). Arguably the greatest single influence on Fanon’s views of colonialism, in turn, was Aimé Césaire, particularly his Discours sur le colonialisme (a quote from which begins Peau noire, masques blancs).
219 As with Girard’s originary influence on considerations of mimetic conflict, virtually any discussion of colonialism concerned with mimicry or hybridity (see below) refers back to Bhabha. For a sampling of assertions of Bhabha’s importance in this regard see Allen, Blood 18; Ben Beya, “Mimicry”; Ghandi, Postcolonial 149-150; Moore-Gilbert, Postcolonial 1; Rajan, “Excess”; San Juan, Beyond 25; Woods, Review; Young, Colonial 22-23. The most coherent and comprehensive account of Bhabha’s postcolonial theories (and critiques thereof) is provided by Moore-Gilbert, Postcolonial 114-151. Strikingly—and in contrast to Girard—Bhabha’s main ideas on colonial mimicry were put forward in only two key articles: “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse”; and “Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817.” Bhabha considers mimesis in one other context, namely the traditional literary one that theorizes the “mimetic relationship between language and reality” (“Representation” 113). Although this discussion does concern colonialism, it does not directly bear on issues of human mimesis or mimicry, so I will not take it into consideration here.
colonial view that the colonized are inherently, essentially, inferior. However, it also exists for a more purely practical reason, that is to say, because of the need for the colonizers to maintain authority over their subjects. Thus Bhabha asserts that, “in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal” (126).

Like Girard, Bhabha points to the issue of identity as underlying the relationship between the participants in the mimetic relationship. The element of difference that is fundamental to mimicry, though, means that colonial desire is for a valuation based on what the Other is not; that is, “mimicry rearticulates presence in terms of its ‘otherness,’ that which it disavows” (132). Bhabha explains:

The desire of colonial mimicry . . . has strategic objectives which I shall call the metonymy of presence. . . . As Lacan reminds us, mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization or repression of difference, but a form of resemblance that differs/defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically. (“Of” 130-131; cf. “Signs” 172)

This “form of resemblance” is something entirely new, a combination of the cultures of both colonized and colonizer. “Produced through the strategy of disavowal,” Bhabha notes, this new form represents “a discrimination between the mother culture and its bastards, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something different—a mutation, a hybrid” (“Signs” 159).
Ultimately, it is this hybrid form that most interests Bhabha, for it is here that he sees the greatest potential for subversion of colonial authority. In this regard, he defines “hybridity” as “the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects” ("Signs" 159). Hybridity poses a threat to colonial identity precisely because it results from “the partial representation/recognition of the colonial object” ("Of" 129); that is, it “reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority—its rules of recognition” ("Signs" 162). The ambivalence of colonial mimicry—the attempt to maintain both difference and similarity—therefore creates a tension that Bhabha points out can result in a view of the colonized as menacing.\(^{220}\) As hybridity “unsets the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power” ("Signs" 159), that very power may begin to see the “almost the same, but not quite” relation not so much as the means necessary to maintain authority, but as the lever by which that authority may be undermined.\(^{221}\)

One reason why mimicry can have such destabilizing consequences is that the “colonial object,” whatever form it may take, supports colonial identity/culture in a fundamental way. The partial representation of this object thus has the potential to radically undermine the colonial avowal of presence. Bhabha outlines this point by drawing an analogy between colonial desire and fetishism. That is, he argues that as with fetishism, colonial desire is fixated “on an object that masks . . . difference and restores

\(^{220}\) See, e.g., "Of" 127, 129; "Signs" 165, 172.

\(^{221}\) Bhabha thus observes that “in that other scene of colonial power . . . can be seen the twin figures of narcissism and paranoia that repeat furiously, uncontrollably” ("Of" 132; cf. "Signs" 164-165). He also points out that the subversive nature of hybridity means for him that “it is difficult to agree entirely with Fanon that the psychic choice is to ‘turn white or disappear.’ There is the more ambivalent, third choice: camouflage, mimicry, black skins/white masks” ("Signs" 172; cf. Fanon, \textit{Black} 100 [\textit{Peau} 100]).
an original presence” (“Other” 106). This original presence represents a “primal fantasy” of undifferentiated wholeness “that is always threatened by its division” (“Other” 107). Consequently:

The ambivalence of mimicry . . . suggests that the fetishized colonial culture is potentially and strategically an insurgent counter-appeal . . . Under cover of camouflage, mimicry, like the fetish, is a part-object that radically revalues the normative knowledges of the priority of race, writing, history. For the fetish mimes the forms of authority at the point at which it deauthorizes them. (“Of” 131-132)

For Bhabha, the most obviously potent “forms of authority” are “the founding objects of the Western world” (“Of” 132). As a result of colonial mimicry, these objects become equally potent in their disruption of colonial identity; they become, that is, “the erratic, eccentric, accidental objets trouvés of the colonial discourse—the part-objects of presence” (132).

As an authorizing, and authorial, discourse, religion by definition fits this sense of a “founding object” that plays a key role in the colonial enterprise. It is not surprising, then, that Bhabha concludes both of his key texts on colonial mimicry with a Christian missionary quote (“Of” 133; “Signs” 174). In fact, the title of one of these key texts refers to an encounter between “one of the earliest Indian catechists” and a group of about 500 Indian people engaged in reading and discussing copies of the Bible “translated into the Hindoostanee Tongue” (“Signs” 146). What primarily concerns Bhabha about religion is its use to both inscribe and subvert authority within the context of mimicry.²²² He argues,

²²² One important function of missionizing religions that Bhabha does not address, however, is their promotion of the dualistic worldview essential for maintaining the “not quite” gap so essential to colonial
for example, that accounts by the missionary Charles Grant in the eighteenth century of
his work in India showcase the belief that “it is, in fact, the ‘partial’ diffusion of
Christianity, and the ‘partial’ influence of moral improvements which will construct a
particularly appropriate form of colonial subjectivity” (“Of” 127). In Bhabha’s view, at
issue here for Grant were the “enunciatory assumptions” of Christianity: fully converted
natives, in other words, “might become turbulent for liberty” (“Of” 127).

As Bhabha points out, such hesitations to spread the entirety of the gospel did not
entirely prevent native “turbulence” in India. During the meeting of the catechist and the
group of 500, for example, the latter proclaim their refusal to take the Sacrament
“because the Europeans eat cow’s flesh, and this will never do for us” (“Signs” 148). For
Bhabha, such statements demonstrate how “disavowed knowledges return to make the
presence of authority uncertain” (“Signs” 171). The 1817 account of an unnamed
missionary in Bengal suggests the potential for the colonial “not quite” project to become
self-subverting in a very different manner. According to this missionary, “everyone
would gladly receive a Bible. And why?—that he may lay it up as a curiosity for a few
pice; or use it for waste paper” (qtd. in “Of” 133; “Signs” 174). In Bhabha’s reading of
this account, “the holiest of books . . . bearing both the standard of the cross and the
standard of empire finds itself strangely dismembered” (“Of” 133).

Bhabha’s notions of mimicry and hybridity have often been applied to the study
of literature, but not so often, as yet, to the study of literature and religion. Where these

authority and self-understanding. In The Bible and Colonialism, e.g., Michael Prior considers a diversity of
colonial histories, and from them identifies one of the key, biblically-derived justifications for conquest:
“The people (to be) conquered were of an inferior status, and the colonizers enjoyed an inalienable right to
resist opposition from the indigenes” (177).

223 This idea is reminiscent of Marx’s point, noted in section 3.1.2, that the religion of the ruling and
proletariat classes in a Christian society differ; the latter, e.g., absorb the servile virtues promoted by such
texts as Jesus’ sermon on the mount, virtues typically ignored by the elite.
applications have been made, the tendency is to focus on postcolonial literature as depicting the hybrid cultural form that resists colonial authority, and as such a form itself, with religion playing a key role in both resistance and hybridity. Patrick Holland, for example, makes use of Bhabha’s work in considering the ways in which the “post-colonial strategies of resistance” in Keri Hulme’s the bone people are connected to the novel’s attempts at “figuring of a new kind of family, a familial unit mediating between the white nuclear family of mainstream convention and the wider, communal unit—the marae—of Maori tradition and practice” (“Maybe” 115, 116). Examining two West Indian novels, Patrick Taylor argues that the ancestral African ceremonies in Paule Marshall’s Praisesong for the Widow and George Lamming’s Season of Adventure “do rewrite the history of the Western nation . . . In the work of both Marshall and Lamming, the stage is set for a new understanding of culture and a new approach to the state as people emerge with their own sense of their national possibilities” (“Post-Colonial” 204). Lastly, Fiona Coyle explores the intersection of Australian colonial boundaries and Aboriginal sacred space in two novels by Janette Turner Hospital. She argues that the encounter creates an ambiguous third, or hybrid space, that allows for possible re-mappings of colonial intentions and authority (“Third” 128-129).

Studies such as these demonstrate that both postcolonial criticism generally, and the work of Homi K. Bhabha in particular, have something of value to offer the study of Religion and Literature. However, there are a few issues that need to be addressed before such work can be responsibly undertaken. Two of these concern the term “postcolonial literature.” First, there is a difficulty with any definition of this literature that remains
fixed on the idea of colonization.224 While this might appear to be a reasonable fixation, the fact is that not only is literature produced by (previously or currently) colonized societies not always anti-colonial, it is also often not about colonialism at all.225 To claim otherwise is to limit and distort this literature in crucial ways by making assumptions about what it must concern; it is, as Arun Mukherjee suggests, to forge a new colonizing discourse:

[Post-colonial] theory insists that the subjectivity of the post-colonial cultures is inextricably tied to their erstwhile occupiers. It claims that we do nothing but search for or mourn the loss of our authentic pre-colonial identities or continuously resist the encroachments of the colonizers in our cultural space. . . . I would like to respond that our cultural productions are created in response to our own needs and we have many more than constantly to “parody” the imperialists. I agree with Aijaz Ahmad that our (I am thinking of Indian literatures here) literatures are about our “class structures, our familial ideologies, our management of bodies and sexualities, our ideologies, our silences.” (“Whose” 6)

As with other colonizing discourses, the “Other” is flattened by postcolonial categorization into a polemical object for use by the colonizer. Or as Mukherjee again puts it, “Postcolonial literature as a theoretical construct makes it very hard to think about

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224 As noted above, e.g., Susan Gallagher understands postcolonial literature as “writing that emerges from peoples who once were colonized by European powers, now have some form of political independence, but continue to live with the negative economic and cultural legacy of colonialism” (“Introduction” 5). Similarly colonialism-centred definitions are provided by Ashcroft et al., Empire 2; Boehmer, Colonial 3; Hutcheon, “Circling” 168; Slemon, “Modernism’s” 6.

225 Thomas King, e.g., has on at least two different occasions praised both Ruby Slipperjack’s Honour the Sun and Basil Johnston’s Indian School Days specifically for each text’s non-colonial focus (“Godzilla” 15; Interview with Lutz 110-111).
people living in postcolonial societies as having multidimensional lives” (“Introduction” xv).226

This problem is not solved by simply making further definitional adjustments. There is yet a second, although related, difficulty that concerns the entire concept of postcolonial writing, a difficulty that Susan Gallagher articulates in her rhetorical question: “By affixing one label to a multiplicity of literatures that have been produced in a number of markedly different historical contexts by people of different classes, religions, and genders, are we guilty of cultural insensitivity?” (5). Arun Mukherjee in turn argues that such labelling “creates a unitary post-colonial subject by erasing the differences between and within diverse post-colonial societies” (“Whose” 7; emphasis added). As a Nigerian author (quoted by Gallagher) asked at the 1992 MLA meeting, “Why not just call me a Nigerian author?” (5). The refusal within any generalizing postcolonial theory to clearly recognize such particularities again (ironically) suggests that this theory in the end perpetrates (to some extent at least) the same ideological crimes that it ostensibly means to critique.227

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226 For similar critiques of postcolonialism see Ahmad, “Jameson’s” 21; Brydon, “New” 93; Heiss, “Aboriginal” 225-226; King, “Godzilla”; Mukherjee, “First” 8. Judith Leggatt further argues that it is not sufficient for critics to simply assert that “postcolonial” merely applies to a particular historical situation, and disregard its attendant significations: “If I refuse to accept the argument that the words ‘he’ or ‘man’ include both men and women if the author says they do, then I cannot argue convincingly that the term ‘post-colonial’ implies neither that the colonial period has passed, nor that colonization is the sole focus of post-colonial studies. Obviously, language colours the way we see the world, and if the term postcolonialism seems to imply a focus on colonization, or a denial of current colonial conditions, then it can shape the way people look at the literature to which the term is applied” (“Native” 118). Bart Moore-Gilbert notes that because of “the elasticity of the concept ‘postcolonial’ . . . some commentators have begun to express anxiety that there may be a danger of it imploding as an analytic construct” (Postcolonial 11). For additional discussions of the definition of this concept and its possible usefulness (or lack thereof) see Bahri, “Once”; Hall, “When”; McClintock, “Angel”; Shohat, “Notes”; Slemon, “Scramble.”

227 For further discussions of this issue see Ahmad, In Theory 287-318; Moore-Gilbert, Postcolonial 26-33; San Juan, Beyond 22-25. Significantly, although postcolonial literary criticism is a deeply materialist (often explicitly Marxist) enterprise—concerned as it is with power structures, social conflict, and justice—its tendency to erase differences (to some extent at least) nevertheless links it to earlier, more idealist forms of literary interpretation. Such interpretations often valorized, e.g., “the Western artist-as-hero-creating-in-the-
This general criticism of postcolonial literary criticism has also been levelled specifically at Homi Bhabha’s model of mimicry and hybridity. Moore-Gilbert and San Juan, for example, point to the ways in which Bhabha’s essentializing of the post-colonial condition is evident in specific, egregious misreadings of Fanon (who, in contrast, consistently argues for the crucial necessity of socio-historical contexts in any analysis of colonialism). Chadwick Allen in turn directly and simply asserts that Bhabha’s model is “untenable . . . as a generalization across diverse cultures and across diverse histories of colonial encounters” (Blood 18). By way of example, he points to the indigenous minorities in New Zealand and North America who have worked to “re-recognize” colonial treaty discourse, rather than hybridize it (18). That is, a critical problem faced by these particular peoples has been the fact that the colonizers will not admit the validity of their own land contracts with the indigenes; resistance therefore comes in the form of reclaiming the treaties as originally produced and employed.

Even when partial mimesis, or mimicry, is understood to exist as a result of colonialism, it may not follow the schematic laid out by Bhabha. Resistance to colonialism from hybrid forms, for example, may develop in a much more conscious and isolation-of-his-soul type of works” (Mukherjee, “Introduction” 5), deriving from such works generalities about “the human condition.” Postcolonial criticism is thus marked by similar universalizing tendencies, effectively homogenizing literature “through its assumption of endless substitutability and comparability of post-colonial texts” (Mukherjee, “Whose” 7). Of course universalization is also precisely the point of “first stage” Religion and Literature activity; this is why, e.g., such activity rarely identifies in itself or its subject matter any ties to particular religious traditions. The goal instead is to demonstrate through the “concretely existing individual,” with their “anxiety and ultimate concern” (Hesla 190), universal truths about the existential nature of faith, suffering, love, etc.

Moore-Gilbert, Postcolonial 140-149; San Juan, Beyond 27-29. Cf. Jan Mohamed, “Economy” 79; Robinson, “Appropriation” 85; Young, White 144. A cognate criticism is that, in his universalizing zeal, Bhabha also ellides consideration of the ways in which differences of gender and class may affect his analysis (see, e.g., Holmlund, “Displacing” 5-8; McClintock, “Return” 2; Moore-Gilbert, Postcolonial 145-150).

Thus Allen summarizes: “literary occupations of treaty discourse do not seek to disrupt or displace the dominant colonial narrative but rather to realign its contemporary consumption with the terms of the relevant past, to assert that it has an ongoing rather than a narrowly limited situated authenticity” (Blood 22).
deliberate manner than he suggests. In her discussions of Canadian Native literature, Dee Horne argues that this literature intentionally employs hybridity as a counter-colonial strategy. As a result, Horne distinguishes between two “modes” of mimicry: “In colonial mimicry, the mimic imitates to become like another while in subversive modes of mimicry the mimic imitates to critique another” (Contemporary 13). Bhabha also does not appear to account for the possibility that the colonizer may employ hybridity in a similarly conscious manner to further their own agenda. In an account that is almost the direct opposite of Bhabha’s story about the Indian catechist, J.R. Miller suggests that this is exactly what the Jesuits did in Canada: they incorporated native beliefs into Christianity in order to make the new religion “more intelligible and attractive to the intended proselytes” (Skyscrapers 34). Elleke Boehmer likewise remarks, in a more general fashion, that the “colonial system of self-projection, what is also sometimes called the ‘Empire of the Same,’” has sometimes incorporated “limited shifts in attitude” such as “self-questioning” and “incorporations of the alien,” in order to help “preserve more fundamental continuities” (Colonial 156).

Perhaps the most pointed criticism of Bhabha’s views is that, in the end, they do the opposite of their stated intent and actually help to preserve current colonial situations. Nigel Gibson, for example, complains that Bhabha’s theories “privilege psychoanalytic moves and points of ambivalence,” and in the process disregard the more concrete,

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230 As a rule, subversive agency in Bhabha’s model appears to be the unconscious result of colonial mimetic slippage. There are evident ambiguities on this topic in his work, however, as discussed by Moore-Gilbert, Postcolonial 132-133; and Young, White 152.

231 Bhabha specifically asserts that this kind of deliberate hybridization of the colonial religion is untenable. He argues, in fact, that any demand on the part of the colonized for a hybrid religious form would “put the project of conversion in an impossible position,” because “any adaptation of the Bible was forbidden by the evidences of Christianity” (“Signs” 169).
directly emancipatory aims (and calls to action) of critics such as Fanon (“Thoughts”).

Drawing on Aijaz Ahmad’s impassioned criticism of postcolonial theory (from In Theory, “Politics,” and “Postcolonialism”), E. San Juan, Jr., likewise charges that the “metaphysics of textualism” espoused by postcolonial academics, including Bhabha, “mystifies the political/ideological effects of Western postmodernist hegemony and prevents change”; as such, they in fact “serve the interests of the global status quo” (Beyond 22). Pushing this perspective one step further, Linda Tuhiwai Smith accuses these critics of actually engaging themselves in a kind of colonial hegemony; she proclaims, that is, that postcolonialism is a “convenient invention of Western intellectuals which reinscribes their power to define the world” (Decolonizing 14).

As with the critiques of Girard’s understanding of mimetic conflict, there is significant merit in the above objections to postcolonial theory and the work of Homi Bhabha. Also like Girard’s theory, Bhabha’s model of mimicry and hybridity is most useful when such objections are borne in mind. There is an unarguably mimetic aspect to

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232 See also JanMohamed, “Economy” 59-61; Lazarus, “Disavowing”; Moore-Gilbert, Postcolonial 132-139; Robinson, “Appropriation.” Moore-Gilbert underlines the point with reference to the actual colonial history of India (which ostensibly provides Bhabha’s constant frame of reference); he notes, e.g., that “there is little material evidence that psychological guerrilla warfare of the kind which Bhabha describes as operating ‘strategically’ from within the subordinate formation was, in fact, particularly destabilizing for the colonizer” (Postcolonial 134). JanMohamed for his part takes issue with Bhabha’s notion of the “unity of the ‘colonial subject,’” a conception that “completely ignores Fanon’s definition of the conqueror/native relation as a ‘Manichean’ [dualistic] struggle—a definition that is not a fanciful metaphoric caricature but an accurate representation of a profound conflict” (“Economy” 59-60).

233 Moore-Gilbert provides a comparable analysis of this issue in relation to Bhabha’s work, examining the “deep-rooted problems” engendered by this work’s dependence upon Western postmodernist thinkers such as Arendt, Barthes, and Lacan (Postcolonial 128-130). Cf. Ahmad’s comment that “the dominant strands” of postcolonial theory “have been mobilized to domesticate, in institutional ways, the very forms of political dissent which those movements had sought to foreground, to displace an activist culture with a textual culture” (In Theory 1). See also Parry, “Signs”; Loomba, “Overworlding,” 309; Slemon and Tiffin, Introduction.

234 For similar critiques of post-colonial theory see Leggatt, “Native” 119; Spivak, “Can” 295; Taylor, “Post-Colonial” 200; Tiffin, “Transformative” 429-430. This criticism again (ironically) recalls Said’s Orientalism, a foundational postcolonial work which similarly argues that academic texts have an inherent authority “not easily dismissed,” and so “such texts can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe” (94).
the colonial project, for example; given the power dynamics of this project, it is quite reasonable to expect that, in at least some instances, its mimetic aspect will result in hybrid cultural forms that may, to some extent, be subversive. Chadwick Allen, for example, thus acknowledges that, despite its shortcomings, Bhabha’s model is “extremely useful for understanding the disruptive potential of discursive hybridity” (Blood 18). The point is to not assume that this always happens to every colonized society, and in the same way(s). In the end I do believe, and will argue, that notions of mimicry and hybridity are relevant to at least some works of Canadian Native literature; my intent, therefore, is to explore the degree to which such notions can add to an understanding of these works.

235 A prime example of such “subversive mimicry” is evidenced by the fact that many Native authors find it hateful but necessary to write in English. This literary situation is so central to many aboriginal authors’ understanding of what they do that Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird named their collection of Native women’s writing Reinventing the Enemy’s Language. As the title indicates, these writers believe that English cannot be used simply as it has been received by/imposed upon Native communities, but must be transformed (“hybridized”) in order to become truly useful to them. See also Armstrong, “Land”; Campbell, Interview with Lutz 48-50; Cuthand, “Transmitting”; Fife, Introduction; Harjo and Bird, Introduction; Maracle, “Just”; Ortiz, Interview 105; Vevaina, “Articulating” 57; Vizenor, Manifest 105-106; Weaver, That 160-164; Wong, Sending 154. Anna Marie Sewell is one of the few Native writers/critics who declares unreservedly, “I am glad that I speak English, because I can share ideas with people from many cultures . . . I also, with all its lumps and scars and evidence of the rise and fall of empires, find English beautiful” (“Natives” 30-31). It may be possible to view Sewell as the exception that proves the rule (i.e., that English is always used as a subversive hybrid form by Native authors); however, her example still shows that we cannot assume that the same principles of hybridity apply to all Native writers.

236 I am hardly the first to make this observation, of course. Typically, critics argue that this literature is hybrid in its combination of Native worldviews with European storytelling forms; and that it is “subversive” precisely because of its embodiment of the kinds of “denied knowledges” discussed by Bhabha. Penny Petrone, e.g., states that “Canada’s native writers have borrowed from Western traditions the form of autobiography, fiction, drama, and the essay . . . Like the archetypal figure, the trickster, native writers easily adopt a multiplicity of styles and forms to suit their purposes, and in so doing they are giving birth to a new literature . . . enabling us to hear voices most of us have not heard before” (Native 183-184). Additional references to such notions in relation to Canadian Native literature can be found in Brant, “Good” 83-85; Cairnie, “Writing”; Donovan, Coming 24-26, 47-48; Fee, “Upsetting”; Godard, “Politics” 220-221; Harjo and Bird, Introduction 22; Horne, Contemporary; “To”; Hoy, How 181-182; Jannetta, “Métis” 170-172; Jones, “Stolen”; Kayne, “Postcolonialism” 6-9; King, Introduction to All; Leggatt, “Native” 114-115; Lundgren, “Being” 71; Lundy, “Erasing”; Lutz, “Native” 33-34; Peyer, Tutor’d 16-18; Strong-Boag and Gerson, Paddling 36; Vevaina, “Articulating” 67-69. In addition, Arnold Krupat has been perhaps the most influential critic to argue for the inherently, subversively “mixed” nature of the Native autobiographical form. He describes it as “a ground where two cultures meet,” becoming, as such, “the textual equivalent of the frontier” (For 33; see also “Indian” 263; Interview 4; Voice 85). Given the
3.3 Summary

In terms of the academic study of religion, it seems that there remains much work to be done concerning the relation between religion and violence. Although the very beginnings of the modern study of religion can be traced to considerations of this issue, as put forth by a variety of Enlightenment figures, the discourse has definitely stalled. Currently, the vast majority of works on the topic take an apologist stance, and begin from the premise that religion and violence are incommensurate conceptions. René Girard’s personal, Christo-centric stance betrays some of this attitude; however, his broader considerations of religion do indeed take serious account of violence. Ultimately, his notion of mimetic conflict remains the single most influential theory of religion and violence within the academy.

Although somewhat marginalized within the larger academic study of religion, Religion and Literature scholars have not taken a much different path from their more mainstream counterparts when it comes to considering violence. That is to say, they too have idealized religion, and—whether implicitly or explicitly—promoted the view that religion should be considered as inherently antithetical to violence. However, the central way in which they have expressed their position in this regard is distinctive: reverberating with echoes of Paul Tillich’s apologist, existential theology, works in the field of

unequal power relations that characterized the actual/historic frontier, Krupat further notes (in apparent agreement with Bhabha) that the discursive function of this “bi-cultural composite” literature lies in its “oppositional potential” (For 33-35; see also “Indian” 262-263). In this context, Krupat is clear in his view that autobiography is a fundamentally European narrative form that “has no prior model in the collective practice of tribal cultures” (For 31; see also Bataille and Sands, American 3; Lundgren, “Being” 71). However, others have argued that this position depends on an overly narrow understanding of the category “autobiography,” and that pre-contact Native versions of this form did in fact exist (see, e.g., Brumble, American 21-47; Jannetta, “Métis” 171-172; Wong, “Pre-Literate”; Sending). Such arguments highlight the need for critics to avoid making automatic assumptions about which elements of a given text constitute either the “Native” or “Western” components.
Religion and Literature have virtually ignored the issue of actual/material violence, and have concentrated instead on the personal, transformative effects of metaphysical disruption. It has only been relatively recently, with the advent of a few “postcolonial” studies in the field, that any treatments of religion and literature have taken violence seriously. Within this context, Homi Bhabha’s understanding of colonial mimicry—which can be considered a particular form of mimetic conflict—offers an opportunity for understanding a dynamic of religion and violence in literature that is specific to colonial contexts.

While the theories of both Girard and Bhabha show much potential for the study at hand, they also have their drawbacks. As noted, one of the most common, and impassioned, criticisms of each theorist involves the “universalizing” nature of their work, their tendency to ignore historical or cultural particularities. My own intentions are to avoid flattening, erasing, universalizing. To this end, therefore, although much of my project does in fact concern colonialism, I will not use the term “postcolonial” to categorize the works in question; I will instead attempt to proceed in the same spirit as Thomas King as he constructs new, multiple categories to reflect the existing diversity in this literature:

As a Native writer, I lean towards terms such as tribal, interfusional, polemical, and associational to describe the range of Native writing. I prefer these terms for a variety of reasons: they tend to be less centred and do not, within the terms themselves, privilege one culture over another . . . [They also] do not depend on anomalies such as the arrival of Europeans in North America or the advent of non-Native literature in this
hemisphere, what Marie Baker likes to call “settler litter.” At the same time, these terms are not “bags,” into which we can collect and store the whole of Native literature. They are, more properly, vantage points from which we can see a particular landscape. (“Godzilla” 12)  

The other vantage point from which I will regard Native literature is that of mimetic conflict. The works of Girard and Bhabha clearly represent two distinct models of such conflict. However, significant correlations do exist between them. Aside from the obvious fact that both models are concerned with violence and doubling, they also overlap in their key conception of identity as dynamic, formed and altered in crucial ways through relationships and desire. For Girard the objects of this desire are those perceived by the imitator as innately bound up with the model’s essence; for Bhabha they are inescapably part of the colonial culture, history, power structure. For both theorists, such objects—cars, jobs, books, lovers—are understood by the model/colonized as the means for improvement in some sense. Simultaneously, however, the objects are denied to them (at least in part). For Girard, this is because the model understands that to give up the desired item is to surrender his (never her) identity; for Bhabha, (partial) denial is simply part of the crucial “not quite/not white” system. Religion for Bhabha appears as one of the most potent of these “objects.” As his missionary examples suggest, it a crucial factor in the ongoing violence of colonialism, but this fact also can also render religion a powerful tool for resisting colonial mimicry. For Girard religion does not typically appear

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237 As King’s commentary was published in 1990 it is actually not entirely accurate to describe his terms as “new.” That said, neither the terms themselves nor the idea behind them has gained much ground (for two exceptions see Leggatt, “Native” 114; and Truchan-Tataryn and Gingell, “Dances”). The literature to which King refers continues to be grouped in with other “postcolonial” writing, or regarded simply as “Native.” The latter of these is certainly the preferable approach, and often perfectly fine, but—as discussed in section 2.2.1—it still suggests a (misleading) degree of homogeneity among this literature.
as an object of desire, but nevertheless plays a similarly important and complex role: its
myths and rituals keep alive social structures that perpetuate mimetic violence, and yet he
sees the only solution to such violence as provided, in fact, by a particular religious
myth, the New Testament story of Jesus’ sacrifice.

Despite such congruencies, the theories of Girard and Bhabha clearly remain in
many ways very different. Girard’s attention is focused almost exclusively on the imitator
in the mimetic relationship, while Bhabha is strongly concerned, in very different ways,
with both model (colonizer) and imitator (colonized); Girard is at all times in favour of
inhibiting mimesis (since mimesis is the cause of religious violence), while for Bhabha
the mimetic gap is more ambivalent, being a source of both colonial violence and
indigenous subversion; Girard is ultimately, ostensibly interested in personal
transformation, Bhabha in social justice. Such differences suggest the impossibility of
actually bringing their respective models together in any useful fashion. However it
seems to me as if this is precisely what the works of a number of Canadian Native writers
enable and encourage us to do. In the following chapters, then, I trace the ways in which
both theories are most relevant to several such works. Doing so will not only illuminate
new ways of seeing this literature, but will also contribute to the development of the
study of Religion and Literature along non-apologist lines that take seriously the
complexities and importance of the issue of violence.
CHAPTER FOUR: COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

4.1 Cat’s Eye

I begin this chapter with a close examination of Margaret Atwood’s *Cat’s Eye* for several reasons. First, it provides a prime example of a Canadian literary work that demonstrates congruencies with key aspects of the theories of René Girard and Homi Bhabha considered above. Examining such congruencies in turn facilitates consideration as to how these theories might together be relevant to other narrative texts.

Second, as will become apparent, basic story elements of *Cat’s Eye* parallel key facets of at least two of the Native works below, *Halfbreed* and *In Search of April Raintree*. Finally, Margaret Atwood is a part of this country’s literary canon in a way that no Native author is (or is even close to being); she is arguably, in fact, Canada’s single most

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238 As others have pointed out, a great deal of Atwood’s writing in fact involves mimetic conflict and colonialism. To my knowledge, however, almost no one has examined these issues in relation to either Girard or Bhabha. There are two exceptions, both involving *The Robber Bride*: Donna L. Potts applies Girard’s views to the issue of sacrifice in this novel, but not mimetic conflict (“Old”); and Fiona Tolan considers Bhabha’s notions of hybridity and mimicry in examining how the characters in this novel “who perform the function of other to the white Canadian self . . . are characterised by a lack of stable identity or essence” (“Situating” 465). More typically, mimetic conflict in Atwood’s work is understood in terms first defined by Sherrill Grace in her highly influential work, *Violent Duality*. For Grace, Atwood’s representation of “violent duality” concerns “the distorting barriers between self and other” that need to be broken down in order “to establish a new complete self” (104). For interpretations of mimesis/duality in Atwood’s work along similar lines see Bromberg, “Two”; Cowart, “Bridge”; Lane, “Cordelia’s”; Mycak, *In Search*; Palumbo, “On”; Rao, *Strategies*; White, “Margaret.” In part, the issue of identity splitting is also frequently connected to the understanding that Atwood’s women are affected by various colonial forces, including patriarchy, British imperialism, and U.S. hegemony (see, e.g., Agnew, “Colonialism”; Brydon, “Beyond”; Fiamengo, “Postcolonial”; Massoura and Garner, “Language”; Sugars, “Saying”; Tolan, “Situating”; Zhang, “Postcolonial”). For comments by Atwood herself on the (post)colonial situation of women and/or Canadians, see “Dissecting” 13-14; “My Mother” 73; *Survival* 35-36, 95, 100-102.

239 Coincidentally, Renate Eigenbrod has also identified important connections between *Cat’s Eye* and two Canadian Native texts, Thomas King’s *Medicine River* and Ruby Slipperjack’s *Silent Words*. In addition to being written in the “autobiographical mode,” she argues, all three works view time “as a spatial concept rather than as a linear progression” (“Oral” 99). This latter similarity is perhaps even more applicable to King’s *Green Grass, Running Water*, although it is an aspect of the novels that I do not consider here.
important novelist. Her work in general, then, and *Cat’s Eye* in particular, provides a useful point of comparison and contrast from which to begin thinking about issues of religion, colonialism, and mimetic violence in Canadian Native literature.

Published in 1988, *Cat’s Eye* is one of Atwood’s most autobiographical works. The book in one sense is a *Künstlerroman*, a tale about the development of an artist—in this case the book’s narrator, Elaine Risley—whose recollections in *Cat’s Eye* are in part induced by an upcoming retrospective of her art, and who demonstrates many parallels with Atwood. Elaine recounts spending most of her 1940s childhood with her atheist family in the forests of northern Ontario and Québec, a result of her father’s work as an entomologist. When she is eight, Elaine’s father becomes a professor at the University of Toronto, and so her family moves to the city. She excels at science, but while in high school decides to be an artist. Aside from the fact that Atwood turned to writing, not painting, she shares these historical details with Elaine almost exactly.

A key aspect of Elaine’s artistic development hinges on her experiences of colonial mimesis after emerging from the woods with her family. She is first taught how to be a middle-class girl by Carol, Grace, and Cordelia, the three girls who befriend her in

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240 A useful study and overview of Atwood’s importance is provided by *Margaret Atwood: Works & Impact*, a collection of articles, photographs, and even cartoons commissioned and assembled in honour of the author’s 60th birthday in 1999. In his introduction to the text, Reingard N. Nischik calls Atwood “one of the most fascinating, versatile, and prolific authors of our time” (1), and notes that she “is the most frequently studied Canadian writer at the university level” (2). He also points out that *The Canadian 100* ranks Atwood as the fifth most influential Canadian of all time, by far the highest ranking of any writer (1). *The Canadian 100* itself asserts that “Atwood has been the public voice of Canadian letters for the past quarter century” (Rawlinson and Granatstein 32). For additional commentary on, and affirmation of, Atwood’s central importance within the Canadian (and international) literary canon see Cooke, “Lions” 16-17; Davey, “Canadian” 680; Gerson, “Changing” 892-893; Masterson, Review 181; Moss, “Haunting”; Moss, “Margaret”; Mullan, “This”; White, “Margaret” 53. The most complete account of the significance of *Cat’s Eye* itself, including its critical reception, is provided by Davidson, *Seeing* 13-31.

241 For references to (and discussions of) the autobiographical elements in *Cat’s Eye* see Atwood, Interview for *Oryx and Crake*; Cooke, “Reading”; Davidson, *Seeing* 14; Givner, “Names” 56-57; Grace, “Theory” 136; LeClaire, “Margaret”; Thurman, “When”; White, “Margaret” 61-64. Full biographies of Atwood have been produced by Cooke (*Margaret*) and Sullivan (*Red*).
Toronto. For Elaine these friendships represent exposure to a foreign culture, as she is “not used to girls, or familiar with their customs” (50). She does her best to fit in but feels “self-conscious, as if I’m only doing an imitation of a girl” (55; emphasis added). One of her friends’ activities involves cutting out pictures of women and household items from Eaton’s Catalogues and pasting them into scrapbooks. “‘My lady’s going to have this refrigerator,’ we say. ‘My lady’s getting this rug.’ ‘This is my lady’s umbrella’” (56-57). After the pictures have been pasted, Grace and Carol look at their scrapbooks and declare that the other’s is very good, and that their own is terrible. Elaine understands that the declarations are false, and in fact finds the whole game pointless and tiring, but is still drawn in by mimetic desire:

I begin to want things I’ve never wanted before: braids, a dressing gown, a purse of my own. . . . I see that there’s a whole world of girls and their doings that has been unknown to me, and that I can be part of it without making any effort at all. . . . All I have to do is sit on the floor and cut frying pans out of the Eaton’s Catalogue with embroidery scissors, and say I’ve done it badly. (57)

In addition to such initiations into middle-class girls’ culture, Elaine is exposed to the broader colonial experience of being a subject in the British Empire. In school, the children must draw the Union Jack, sing “God Save the King” and “Rule Britannia,” and

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242 For (brief) discussions of the female suburban colonization of Elaine see Stein, “Girls”; Palumbo, “On” 81-82.

243 In an echo of Homi Bhabha’s reference to the Bible in a missionary account from Bengal (noted in section 3.2.3), Elaine muses how odd it seems to her to “treat these catalogues with reverence,” since “up north they’re hung in outhouses for use as toilet paper” (56).
listen to proclamations that “the sun never sets on the British Empire” (83). Elaine discovers that she is also expected to attend church. Since her family does not do this, Elaine is invited by Grace’s father to go with them instead (100). Elaine learns that here too there are clearly expectations, modes of dress and behaviour she needs to imitate: she must wear a hat, recite memorized Bible stories, and sing hymns (e.g., 101, 103, 106, 131). She becomes confused during the service, and so copies her friend: “I watch what Grace does, and stand up when she stands up, sit when she sits” (103).

As Bhabha would predict, no matter how much work Elaine puts into her mimetic endeavours, she is always made aware that her attempts are “not quite” sufficient. She is taught, for example, that “we aren’t real Britons, because we are also Canadians. This isn’t quite as good” (84). Elaine is also constantly reminded by Grace and her mother, Mrs. Smeath, that she does not meet their religious expectations: she fails to wear a hat on her first day to church (101), and is made to feel “ashamed” for always failing to bring any other members of her family with her on Sunday (131). When she obtains perfect scores in her Bible quizzes Grace calls her a “goody-goody”; when she deliberately gets a lower score Cordelia criticizes her for “getting stupider” (131). Elaine declares, “I want to be good, to follow instructions, to do what Jesus bids” (132), but she can never measure up to, or even fully comprehend, the expectations placed on her: “it seems there is more to it, more things to be memorized, more songs to be sung, more nickels to be donated, before [God] can be truly appeased” (106).

Elaine’s most important, painful failures, however, involve her friends. From the beginning she is aware of her inadequate attempts at “imitating” a girl: “I sense that I am

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244 These are all experiences that Atwood recalls having herself while growing up in Canada (“Nationalism”).
always on the verge of some unforeseen, calamitous blunder” (50). Her desire to be accepted leads her to put up with cruel—at times frightening—emotional and psychological abuse. Mostly this abuse involves daily recriminations. Elaine recalls that her friends “comment on the kind of lunch I have, how I hold my sandwich, how I chew” (127). “I worry about what I’ve said today,” she remarks, “the expression on my face, how I walk, what I wear, because all of these things need improvement” (125). Elaine is effectively terrorized by Grace and Carol, and especially Cordelia, as they repeatedly proclaim that she is not good enough, not quite the same as them. She experiences a constant “sense of shame and failure” (113) and begins to hurt herself, peeling the skin off her feet and biting her hands and lips, making herself sick, making herself faint (e.g., 120, 135, 147, 169, 195). Not surprisingly Elaine comes to dream of a permanent escape from the bullying, and imagines committing suicide by drinking Javex or jumping off the bridge into the ravine, “smashing down there like a pumpkin” (166).

Elaine eventually rebels against her colonizers in two main ways, one notably Girardian, and one more in line with Bhabha’s model of hybridity. The latter is evident in her art, which often appears as a subversive hybrid cultural product.245 The elements of this hybridity include the fusion of science (Elaine’s home culture, as her father was an

245 The retrospective of Elaine’s art (the reason for her return to Toronto) takes place at a gallery actually called “Sub-Versions” (15). The fact that this name merely embodies “one of those puns that used to delight [Elaine] before they became so fashionable” (15), however, points to the idea that, unlike the art it contains, the gallery itself is not really that subversive. Elaine in fact declares that she always gets a “sinking feeling” upon entering galleries:

It’s the carpets that do it to me, the hush, the sanctimoniousness of it all: galleries are too much like churches, there’s too much reverence, you feel there should be some genuflecting going on. Also I don’t like it that this is where paintings end up, on these neutral-toned walls with the track lighting, sterilized, rendered safe and acceptable. It’s as if somebody’s been around spraying the paintings with air freshener, to kill the smell. The smell of blood on the wall. (89-90)

entomologist and her brother a physicist) and middle-class Anglo-Saxon Protestantism (the culture imposed upon her by friends and teachers). As the figure that Elaine associates most closely with the imposed/colonial culture Mrs. Smeath becomes Elaine’s most frequent target, sacrificed on the altar of her painting: in *Erbug, the Annunciation*, Mrs. Smeath appears naked and flying, with insect wings, the church spire in the distance and Mr. Smeath “stuck to her back like an asparagus beetle” (243); *Empire Bloomers* shows her alone, with a paring knife and a potato (242), wearing the “sacrosanct” dark-blue bloomers (85) of Elaine’s most oppressively pro-British teacher, Miss Lumley, “who somehow combines with her in a frightening symbiosis” (426); and through the four panels of *White Gift* with “THE•KINGDOM•OF•GOD•IS•WITHIN•YOU” stencilled on the bottom, Mrs. Smeath is gradually undressed to show her “Eaton’s flesh-coloured foundation garment”246 and her exposed heart, “the heart of a dying turtle: reptilian, dark-red, diseased” (372).247

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246 This reference continues the parallel between Atwood’s treatment of the Eaton’s catalogue and Bhabha’s references to the Christian Bible which, as noted, he describes as one of the “founding objects of the Western world” (“Of Mimicry” 132; emphasis in the original). The fact that Elaine does not think that Mrs. Smeath actually possessed such a garment (372) also emphasizes the connections she is drawing between the various colonial sources that affected and oppressed her, and in turn how Mrs. Smeath became to Elaine a cypher for all of them.

247 As the title of the painting *Annunciation* suggests, the link between the exposed heart of Mrs. Smeath in *White Gift* and traditional (Catholic) Mary iconography is not accidental; Mary is in fact a key figure for Elaine, in both her life and her art. After almost dying in a frozen creek, e.g., Elaine has a vision of a hooded woman with her heart “on the outside of her body” (203), whom she later comes to identify as Mary; this same figure then appears in the final painting described in the text, *Unified Field Theory*, holding an oversized cat’s eye marble (430-431). This and other paintings of Mary represent additional hybrid creations: as Sonia Gernes comments, Atwood in *Cat’s Eye* uses the mystical apparition of an empowering woman to underscore the damage inflicted on a young psyche by other children who themselves have been damaged by excesses in the patriarchal system. She sets the apparition in the context of Catholic iconography . . . but surrounds this religious figure with another kind of mysticism that is based on a rational/scientific view of the universe. (“Transcendent” 143)

For additional analyses of the figure of Mary in *Cat’s Eye* see Banerjee, “Atwood’s” 517-520; Chakravarty, “Mothers” 113-117; Davidson, *Seeing* 57-61; Gernes, “Transcendent” 143-155; Grace, “Theory” 137-138.
For Elaine, these paintings are personal attacks: in making them she “went for vengeance” (427). However we never know if Mrs. Smeath or any of the other objects of Elaine’s hatred feel her wrath. Instead, we see the reactions of another woman, “a stranger” (374) whom Elaine first mistakes for Mrs. Smeath, then her old friend Grace: “‘You are disgusting,’ she says [to Elaine]. ‘You are taking the Lord’s name in vain. Why do you want to hurt people?’” (373). The woman throws a bottle of ink at White Gift, an act that Elaine predicts will validate her as an artist: “I will be looked at, now, with respect: paintings that can . . . inspire such outraged violence, such uproar and display, must have an odd revolutionary power” (374; emphasis added). This very oddness, this ability to inspire outrage among the general public rather than confront oppression directly, appears congruent with the indirect, semiotic/psychological challenges to the status quo that Bhabha envisions.

Elaine’s Girardian response to her colonial suffering begins when she is finally able to actively engage Cordelia, and not just suffer abuse. The first turning point in their relationship along these lines comes when Cordelia goes too far with her punishments one winter, causing Elaine to fall through the ice in the ravine and almost freeze to death (199-205). The next time Cordelia tries to discipline her, Elaine simply turns and walks away: “I see that I don’t have to do what she says, and, worse and better, I’ve never had to do what she says” (207). The two remain apart for a couple of years but when they reconnect in high school their positions are reversed. Elaine now has the power, and the stakes are the same: she has gained popularity even while Cordelia lost it, using the same methods, the same verbal cruelty: “The girls are afraid of me,” Elaine reflects, “but they
know where it’s safest: beside me, half a step behind” (252). The person she tortures most, often just for “target practice,” is Cordelia (151; see also 264).

The inherently mimetic nature of Elaine and Cordelia’s bond is pointed out repeatedly by Atwood. The text is first of all filled with mimetic symbolism, particularly references to mirrors and twins,\(^{248}\) most often in relation to the two friends. Cordelia brings a mirror to school, for example, holds it up to Elaine’s face, and says, disgustedly, “Look at yourself! Just look!” (168). At the end of the novel Elaine arrives at an insight that echoes this incident: “I could give [Cordelia] something you can never have, except from another person: what you look like from outside. A reflection. . . . We are like the twins in old fables, each of whom has been given half a key” (434). As an adult, Elaine paints a picture of Cordelia called *Half a Face* (243); the painting contains all of Cordelia’s face, however, the implication being that the missing half belongs to Elaine. This point is made explicit in Elaine’s comment regarding Cordelia that “in some way we changed places, and I’ve forgotten when” (243).\(^ {249}\)

This switch, as noted, includes mutually-inflicted cruelty, which ultimately takes a decidedly sacrificial turn. In high school Elaine begins to shun her Cordelia (264); she avoids her socially, stops talking when forced into her company, and refuses to help her with homework (273). Cordelia soon after drops out of school and moves away; although Elaine does not appear directly responsible for this turn of events, her actions still recall Girard’s accounts of scapegoats being exiled. Eventually Elaine goes to see Cordelia and finds her miserable, unable to finish her high school courses, terrified of her future (274--

\(^{248}\) Mirrors appear, e.g., on 5, 19, 169, 227, 268, 430, 432; for twins, see 54, 181, 235, 249, 434.

\(^{249}\) An extra-textual link positing the two characters as one is suggested by Jessie Givner. Observing the connections between *Cat’s Eye* and *Anne of Green Gables*, Givner points out that at different times Anne calls herself both Elaine and Cordelia (“Names” 64).
Elaine then “harden[s] toward her. . . . Smarten up, I want to tell her. *Pull up your socks*” (277). Later, Cordelia is actually institutionalized after attempting suicide, and Elaine again visits her (376-382). She pleads for help to escape, but Elaine refuses (379-381). After this encounter, Elaine dreams of a decapitated mannequin holding Cordelia’s head wrapped in a white cloth. The dream refers to an event at a school play, when Cordelia mistakenly replaced a rotten cabbage wrapped in a white cloth—meant to represent Macbeth’s severed head hitting the stage floor with a dull thud—with a fresh cabbage, which instead bounced merrily away (263-264). This blunder mortified Cordelia, and became one more weapon that Elaine used against her (264). Elaine’s dream also points to the explicitly sacrificial epigraph to *Cat’s Eye*:

> When the Tukanas cut off her head, the old woman collected her own blood in her hands and blew it towards the sun.

> “My soul enters you, too!” she shouted.

> Since then anyone who kills receives in his body, without wanting or knowing it, the soul of his victim.

Similarly, after “sacrificing” her friend, Elaine as an adult is haunted constantly by the memory of Cordelia, a condition which she suffers throughout the entire novel.\(^{250}\) That is to say, although Elaine derives moments of satisfaction from her treatment of Cordelia, and then later of Mrs. Smeath, in accordance with Girard’s beliefs these actions do not

\(^{250}\) This haunting is evident from the very opening of *Cat’s Eye*, when Elaine first arrives in Toronto for her retrospective. She immediately reminisces about Cordelia, imagines what she would say to her, and speaks of having “conjured” her up (6). She also continually thinks she has actually spotted Cordelia: “I haven’t seen her for a long time. I wasn’t expecting to see her. But now that I’m back here I can hardly walk down a street without a glimpse of her, turning a corner, entering a door. It hardly goes without saying that these fragments of her . . . belong to women who, seen whole, are not Cordelia” (6).
The ending of *Cat’s Eye*, however, provides Elaine with an understanding of sacrifice and violence that allows her finally to move on. In a moment of clarity at her retrospective exhibition, Elaine receives a very Girardian insight into the degree to which retribution has contributed to the (mimetic) destruction that has defined such a large portion of her life. Looking at her work, she suddenly reflects:

Now I can see myself, through these painted eyes of Mrs. Smeath . . . I was unbaptized, a nest for demons: how could she know what germs of blasphemy and unfaith were breading in me? And yet she took me in.

Some of this must be true. I have not done it justice, or rather mercy. Instead I went for vengeance.

An eye for an eye leads only to more blindness. (427)

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251 One point to make here is that in Girard’s model the victims of sacrifice must be innocent, and yet it seems that both Cordelia and Mrs. Smeath are certainly guilty of crimes against Elaine. Significantly, however, Elaine is most cruel to Cordelia when she begins to see that her friend may herself have been a victim. She specifically begins to cut Cordelia out of her life, e.g., after Cordelia explains that the reason she used to dig holes in her backyard obsessively, until she got blisters, was because she wanted a place where she would be safe from her father’s anger (271). In fact there are hints throughout the text that all of Elaine’s bullying friends were themselves victims of violence, principally at the hands of their fathers (e.g., 51-52, 77, 176, 281). Thus Elaine observes, “All fathers except mine are invisible in daytime; daytime is ruled by mothers. But fathers come out at night. Darkness brings home the fathers, with their real unspeakable power” (176). Similarly, looking at the “painted eyes of Mrs. Smeath,” she comes to understand, or at least imagine, a different side to the woman:

I used to think these were self-righteous eyes . . . and they are. But they are also defeated eyes, uncertain and melancholy, heavy with unloved duty. The eyes of someone for whom God was a sadistic old man; the eyes of a small town threadbare decency. Mrs. Smeath was a transplant to the city, from somewhere a lot smaller. A displaced person, as I was. (427)

It is possible, then, to see the victims of Elaine’s revenge as people who, in Girard’s terms, are “innocent” in that they did not themselves begin the cycle of mimetic violence but rather seem to have carried it forward (even as Elaine herself does). That said, in Atwood’s terms *no one* is intrinsically innocent, since “being human inevitably involves being guilty” (“Dissecting” 13). In this respect, many of the characters in *Cat’s Eye* appear to embody the second of the four “victim positions” that Atwood outlines in *Survival*, namely refusing to take responsibility for one’s situation (37). One result of this response to suffering involves “passing your victimization along to others (Man kicks Child, Child kicks dog)” (38).
This insight subsequently leads to a vision of Cordelia as a child which prompts two responses from Elaine. The first is that she can be fully herself, individual and separate from Cordelia. Looking at the vision Elaine feels “the same shame, the sick feeling in my body . . . the same wish to be loved; the same loneliness; the same fear. But these are not my own emotions any more. They are Cordelia’s; as they always were” (443). Elaine’s second response is to forgive Cordelia: “I reach out my arms to her, bend down, hands open to show I have no weapon. It’s all right, I say to her. You can go home now” (443). At this moment Elaine stops being haunted, for “Cordelia is no longer there” (443). Elaine is thus ultimately able to (re)assert her differentiation from Cordelia, breaking the mimetic cycle; and she is also (using Girard’s terms) able reject her own mythology of victimage,\(^\text{252}\) which she manages through the act of forgiveness.

The Christian-ness of this gesture within the world of Cat’s Eye is highlighted by the novel’s explicit criticism of certain forms of this tradition in other regards. In the family of Grace Smeath, for example, Atwood presents us with a mocking look at a stereotypically superficial religion: the Smeaths are mean, selfish, materialistic, and ritual-centred. They care more about whether or not Elaine wears a hat and memorizes Bible verses than who she is, how she is doing. The Smeaths also, not surprisingly, have scapegoating tendencies themselves, revealed when Elaine overhears Grace’s mother talking about her. She learns that the family still considers her “exactly like a heathen” (192) and that, more importantly, they both know about and approve of the very real torments being inflicted upon Elaine by her friends: “It’s God’s punishment,” they say; “It serves her right” (193). Elaine’s immediate response is an intense hatred which leads

\(^{252}\text{Although not referring to Girard’s work, Sonia Gernes similarly notes that in both Cat’s Eye and Surfacing, “[Atwood’s] protagonists must demythologize the events of their lives in order to integrate present and former identities” (“Transcendent” 144; emphasis added).}
to a kind of agreement with Grace’s mother: “She is right, I am a heathen. I cannot forgive” (193). This agreement contains a clear rebuke against the kind of Christianity practiced by the Smeaths. Atwood has presented us with the distinction commonly made between material and ideal forms of religion: one is concerned with clothing and church attendance, the other with love and forgiveness; one is judgemental, the other accepting; one is false and the other is true. In Girard’s terms, one is ritualistic and violent, and the other is anti-sacrificial and peace-promoting. Elaine sees herself as a heathen because she cannot forgive; when she does learn forgiveness at the end of the novel, therefore, she becomes by implication “truly” Christian.253

253 A similar idealization of a particular view or aspect of Christianity is present in other Atwood novels, although as in Cat’s Eye it is not necessarily obvious. Thus, while Atwood’s censure of the tradition in many of her novels is certainly not difficult to find (and even forms the primary basis for an entire text, The Handmaid’s Tale), very few critics seem to have noticed the more positive representation lurking behind the disparagement. Ann-Janine Morey is one, however, who highlights this element in Atwood’s Surfacing. Although the narrator of this text is dismissive of Christianity, Morey maintains that “Christ and Christianity are not denied or erased [in the novel] but rather displaced and relocated by being washed clean of transcendent pretense” (“Margaret” 497; emphasis added). Concerning The Handmaid’s Tale itself, Anja Breuer points out that Gilead’s prayer machines exemplify a “hypocritical and superficial abuse of religion . . . in contrast with the way Offred [the heroine] uses prayers” (“Biblical”; emphasis added). Janet Karsten Lawson likewise suggests that the entire novel is in fact an exercise in applying Paul’s well-known distinction from 2 Cor 3:6 between the “letter of the law” (which kills) and the “spirit of the law” (which gives life) to contemporary North American Christianity. The architects of Gilead have, in other words, “remembered [their] traditions faithlessly — by the letter and without the spirit” (Lawson, “Margaret”).

This distinction between “letter” and “spirit” is one that Atwood herself makes explicitly in her interview with Bill Moyers, coming down of course in favour of spirit and noting that “a lot of religious groups . . . much prefer the letter.” In this same interview, Atwood further distinguishes between such groups and her (idealized) understanding of Jesus, suggesting that the reason Jesus did not write down his stories was because “once you write something down it becomes a permanent fixture and it becomes dogma.” In contrast, she supposes that Jesus “wanted to keep His spirit, the spirit of what He was saying . . . fluid rather than causing it to be fixed and permanent and therefore unchanging.” This comment in turn reflects back on Elaine’s opinion of art galleries cited above. By complaining that they are “too much like churches” as they render art “safe and acceptable” (90), she implies that Christian institutions are (unlike Jesus) not interested in change, or risk. Which is to say that churches, like art galleries, also want “to kill the smell . . . of blood on the wall” (90).
4.2 Halfbreed

Unlike Cat’s Eye, Maria Campbell’s seminal Halfbreed is explicitly, self-consciously, autobiographical. Campbell is not recounting her story for its own sake, however, but writes “to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country” (2). Campbell has said that the book started out as a letter to herself about everything that was bad in her life up to her mid-20s, and consequently contains a good deal of anger (Interview with Lutz 42, 53). She documents many instances in which her people are mistreated, scorned, or otherwise abused by whites; as a result of these experiences, she comments: “I never saw my father talk back to a white man unless he was drunk. I

254 As mentioned in section 1.1.2, Halfbreed is considered perhaps the key text in the study of contemporary Canadian Native literature. For a sampling of criticism on Campbell’s book see Acoose, “Halfbreed”; Culjak, “Searching” 139-146; Damm, “Dispelling”; Donovan, Coming 30-35; Harry, “(Re)membering” 6-26; Lundgren, “Being”; Slattery, “Border-Crossings”; Vangen, “Making.” Note that in my discussions of Halfbreed I will generally use “Campbell” to refer to the text’s author, and “Maria” when discussing the story’s narrator.

255 That said, Campbell still includes many details regarding “the happiness and beauty [she] had known as a child” (2). This part of her life principally involves the “really funny, wonderful, fantastic people” she grew up with (23)—friends and family members who laughed, danced, told great stories, and played practical jokes on one another (see, e.g., 18, 56, 62, 64). For further details about the origins of Halfbreed see Campbell, Interview with Hillis 44-45.

256 Halfbreed is full of such instances (36, 50, 84, 108, 123, 126). When Campbell is working at a restaurant, e.g., two small Native boys enter and immediately elicit a racist response:

About half-way down the room sat a group of white men who had just come out of the bar, drunk and noisy. The little boys caught my eye as soon as they walked in. The mother had come in with them, but when she saw all the people she stayed outside. The children stood there . . . As they started down the aisle one of the men yelled, “Watch it! The bow and arrows are coming.” The older child stopped for a second when everyone started to laugh, put his arm around his little brother and, with his head up, continued walking. The men laughed at them and the younger boy started to cry and they ran the rest of the way. (158-159)

Overall, Penny Petrone refers to Halfbreed as “a disturbing testimony to the ugliness of racism in Canada’s social history” (Native 120). For discussions of colonial racism and abuse in this text see Acoose, “Halfbreed”; Culjak, “Searching” 143-144; Damm, “Dispelling”; Episkenew, “Socially” 57-62; Harry, “(Re)membering” 8-11, 16-21; Lundgren, “Being” 72; Slattery, “Border-Crossings”; Vevaina, “Articulating” 59-68. It is also important, I think, to point out that Campbell frequently makes note of kind non-Natives that she encounters, many of whom provide crucial help to her at desperate points in her life. When she is institutionalized in a psychiatric hospital, for instance, Campbell meets a white ex-nurse named Trixie who is a fellow patient: “If it hadn’t been for Trixie and her friendship, I would have given up completely in that place” (165; for other, similar examples see 52, 71, 93, 105, 127, 134, 145, 170).
never saw him or any of our men walk with their heads held high before white people” (9).

Much of Campbell’s anger is directed at white Christians who, in congruence with Bhabha’s model, want Natives and “halfbreeds” to be like them but draw clear lines that are not to be crossed. As Maria points out, for example, “all our people were Roman Catholic” (28),257 but when she and her mother try to attend a church for whites they are quickly asked to leave (28). The local priest refuses to perform funeral services for Maria’s mother, a very devout Catholic, because her father forgot to have the Last Sacrament administered before she died (78). And in what amounts to a literal enactment of Bhabha’s “not quite/not white” paradigm, white Christian neighbours donate their cast-off goods to Maria’s community at Christmas, but then taunt the Métis for wearing their old clothes (27).

Also like Bhabha, Campbell specifically identifies religion as one of the most powerful tools used by colonizers for the oppression and control of Natives in Canada:

Our people talked against the government, their white neighbours and each other, but never against the church or the priest regardless of how bad they were. . . . I used to wonder why my mother was not even critical, because surely if a little girl could see the fat priest for what he was, then she could. But she accepted it all as she did so many things because it was sacred and of God. (31-32)

As a child, Maria hears a teacher use Native people as examples of those who are “poor in spirit” (61). “Big deal,” she retorts in anger. “So us poor Halfbreeds and Indians are to

257 This includes Maria’s mother and maternal grandmother, both of whom were educated in convents (15).
inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, but not till we’re dead” (61). This essentially Marxist understanding—that biblically-derived beliefs help to keep her people disempowered—is supplemented by reflections on the issue of religion and gender. As Maria becomes involved in Métis political groups and movements, she finds that many Native male leaders are unable to accept females who voice their opinions, who take a strong stand (e.g., 168, 170). She sees this attitude as a key obstacle to realizing crucial goals, and one that is again rooted in Church teachings: “The missionaries had impressed upon us the feeling that women were a source of evil. This belief . . . is still holding back the progress of our people today” (168).

Communal discord is a recurring theme in Halfbreed, and typically takes on the qualities of contagious, mimetic conflict described by Girard. When Maria comes home from school after being teased by white kids for eating gophers, she kicks at her mother and says she hates her, and her father, and “all of you no-good Halfbreeds” (50). After this incident, her great-grandmother Cheechum tells her the story of a group of Métis who tried to escape colonial rule by leaving their homes to begin new, free lives.

[B]ut because some of them said, “I want good clothes and horses and you no-good Halfbreeds are ruining it for me,” they lost their dream. She continued: “They fought each other just as you are fighting your mother and father today. The white man saw that was a more powerful weapon than anything else with which to beat the Halfbreeds, and he used it and

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258 For additional discussions on colonialism and Christianity in relation to Halfbreed see Acoose, “Halfbreed” 143-144; Campbell in Lutz 46-47; Donovan, Coming 31; Vevaina, “Articulating” 63. For commentaries on the relationship between colonialism and patriarchal attitudes of North American Native men towards Native women, see Buss, Mapping 140-142; Culleton, “I Decided” 331; Cuthand, Interview 39; Episkenew, “Socially” 59-60; Godard, “Politics” 202; Maracle, I Am 20; Vevaina, “Articulating” 67-68; Witt, “Native.”
still does today. Already they are using it on you. They try to make you hate your people.” (51)

Maria frequently witnesses this kind of internal conflict first-hand. She describes a common scene during trips into town when she was a young girl. Their men would return to camp late at night, singing and drinking. “Then all too soon one of the white men would bother the women. Our men would become angry, but instead of fighting the white men they beat their wives. . . . When that was over, they fought each other in the same way. Meanwhile the white men stood together in a group, laughing and drinking, sometimes dragging a woman away” (38).

A similar dynamic obtains during attempts at political activism. Maria’s father becomes involved in trying to create “a strong united voice that would demand justice for our people” (73). However, the only unity his efforts end up generating is an attitude of discrimination and ridicule towards him and his family that is mimetically linked to colonial oppression.

Some of our relatives wouldn’t visit or talk to us. Like the whites, they laughed and made jokes about Dad. The whites didn’t matter; I could accept their ridicule, but our own people I could not understand. Cheechum talked to me . . . “They laugh with the whites because it is the first time in their lives that the white man has talked to them like men.” It was so true. For the first time I saw whites inviting Halfbreeds to their

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259 Significantly, when no whites are involved the men in Campbell’s community still fight each other, but the spirit of these battles involves more fun, and no horror. She describes a dance one Christmas, “when suddenly a fight broke out. . . . Soon everyone was fighting and no one knew who was hitting who—Dad even punched out his own brother” (56). The lights go out and some of the women decide to open a trap door, and eventually all of the men left in the cabin end up in the cellar. “When everything had settled down, the women lit the lamps and laughed as they set the place to order” (56). Campbell summarizes: “We never had a dance without a good fight and we enjoyed and looked forward to it as much as the dancing” (57).
homes. Some days I saw them riding home together in cars, laughing and
drinking like brothers.” (74)

Cheechum also explains that some of the men working with her father had been hired by the government, “and that this had caused much fighting among our people, and had divided them” (75). Thus she warns that “when the government gives you something, they take all that you have in return—your pride, your dignity, all the things that make you a living soul. When they are sure they have everything, they give you a blanket to cover your shame” (159). During the early stages of her own political work, Maria sees this pattern repeated (178), and soon experiences it herself. She and her friend Marie are hired to participate in a government research project to improve conditions at the Saddle Lake Reserve in central Alberta. Marie proves disruptive, however, and is soon replaced. Maria is forced to choose between their friendship and the validation she gets from her job, and decides to “shut up and finish the work” (179)—that is to say, she accepts the “blanket.” In the end the Saddle Lake report hurts the community and helps the government (180), while Maria realizes the truth of Cheechum’s words: “Marie and I had been manipulated and divided just as my father and those leaders from my childhood had been. . . and today, when we should be working together, our feelings keep us apart” (180).

Campbell also recounts that, long before either of these events, the government used the same tactic during the Riel Rebellion. Riel and his followers were demanding that the government address their grievances. The government refused until Riel’s victory at Duck Luck, at which point they “issued land scripts to assure the Halfbreeds of their land claims. But these were issued purposely to a chosen few which caused a split within the Halfbreed ranks” (5). Soon after, government troops were able to overpower the divided force and capture, and hang, Riel (5-6). It is perhaps significant that, in all of these “divide and conquer” situations described by Campbell, a single person is isolated and sacrificed—Campbell’s father, Marie, Louis Riel—and their removal from the situation brings a measure of calm to a potentially (or already) unstable situation. Campbell does not dwell on this issue, but an apparently Girardian pattern of sacrifice does at times suggest itself in Halfbreed. However, as I note in section 4.5, it is important to keep in mind that the victim in each case is actually guilty of disturbing the (unjust) status quo.
Such division has a devastating effect on the course of Maria’s life, and documenting this effect is one of the key aims of *Halfbreed*. Maria is constantly torn between the love of her people and her shame and anger towards both them and herself. This shame leads her, even as a young girl, into dreams of escaping to “the big cities [she] had read about with good food and beautiful clothes” (87). She envies the possessions of her white friend, Karen, declaring: “my constant ambition was to finish school and take my family away to the city, giving them all Karen had and more” (94). It is only much later that she realizes that the objects of her desire, no matter how humble—“a toothbrush . . . a bowl of fruit on the table . . . a glass of milk and cookies” (133)—are nothing other than empty “symbols of white ideals and success” (134). By then it is too late. Reaching desperately for these symbols, Maria marries a white man who abandons her in Vancouver (133). She becomes a prostitute (133) and drug addict (136), living a life of squalour and depression that leads her to an aborted suicide attempt (162). Finally, Maria has a nervous breakdown, overdoses and blacks out, and is institutionalized in a psychiatric hospital (163).

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261 Campbell declares, e.g.: “I loved my people so much and missed them if I couldn’t see them often. I felt alive when I went to their parties, and I overflowed with happiness when we would all sit down and share a meal, yet I hated all of it as much as I loved it” (117; see also 103, 139, 143, 159). Thus Maureen Slattery comments: “For Campbell, self-hatred is the inner source of colonization” (“Border-Crossings”; see also Buss, *Mapping* 140-142; Damm, “Dispelling” 106-107; Episkenew, “Socially” 60-62; Godard, “Talking” 77, “Politics” 202.).

262 In contrast to her self-destructive desire for such items, Maria recounts the joy of discovery she regularly experienced at her great-grandmother’s home: “it was a great place to find all sorts of wonderful things that Cheechum had—little pouches, boxes, and cloth tied up containing pieces of bright cloth, beads, leather, roots and herbs, candy, and whatever else a little girl’s heart could desire” (17). The lure of colonial mimesis, unfortunately, overcomes Maria’s delight with such items. Similarly, she is content with her life until she meets white children and is identified by them as poor/deficient: “Lunch hours were really rough when we started school because we had not realized, until then, the difference in our diets. . . . They would tease and call, ‘Gophers, gophers, Road Allowance people eat gophers.’ We fought back of course but we were terribly hurt and above all ashamed” (46-47; emphasis added).

263 This dramatic turn in Maria’s life is punctuated by the shattering of yet another mimetically-oriented fantasy. After her new employer arranges a makeover for Maria—including expensive clothes and hair styling—she is horrified (134): “‘God,’ I thought, ‘this is how I’ve always wanted to look, but do the women who look like this ever feel like I do inside?’”
The mimetic nature of Maria’s personal ordeal is made apparent by a conversation at a ranch where she has found work in an attempt to escape her past. A man who comes to work for her boss, Cal, remembers her from Vancouver:

He remarked how much I looked like a girl he’d met there once.

Then he laughed and said, “Hell, she’d never be on a ranch cooking anyway.” Cal was there for supper that night and he knew I’d come from Vancouver. He casually asked what the girl had been doing? Before Ray had time to answer, Shawn, the other guy, cut in and said how some people certainly looked alike. He knew a guy in Belfast who could have passed for Cal’s twin. (149)

Eventually Maria’s own “twin” catches up with her, causing her to lose her job and begin the circle of despair and escape again. This circle is only halted when Maria comes to accept herself and other Natives, following Cheechum’s directive to “find yourself, and . . . find brothers and sisters” (184). She joins AA, becomes involved with Native political organizations, and works to establish a half-way house for street girls. Finally, Maria is able to declare: “The years of searching, loneliness and pain are over for me” (184).

She is also able, of course, to write Halfbreed itself, and it is this text that stands as the main hybrid cultural product that calls into question colonial authority.264 In part Campbell accomplishes this task by fulfilling her stated purpose at the story’s outset, namely “to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country” (2). Through

264 In this way Campbell’s text may be regarded as similar to the novels referred to in section 3.2.3, including the bone people, Praisesong for the Widow, and Season of Adventure. Note that Halfbreed is not the only subversive hybrid product at hand, however. The Native political organizations mentioned throughout Halfbreed may themselves be viewed in this same light. That is, such groups may resemble in many ways traditional (colonial) political organizations, but are to varying degrees constituted precisely of the kinds of “denied knowledges” that, in Bhabha’s framework, are fundamentally disruptive to colonialism.
the account of her experiences as a marginalized woman in Canada, she has created a work that “speaks the unspoken, the unspeakable” (Damm, “Dispelling” 108), one that is “able to inscribe the trace of an alternate subjectivity” (Buss, Mapping 144). It is also a work that introduces into mainstream discourse the “denied knowledge” of a powerfully subversive woman: Cheechum. She teaches Maria, for example, “to see beauty in all things . . . that inside each thing a spirit lived . . . that heaven and hell were man-made and here on earth” (82). This is a lesson that stays with Maria throughout her life:

I have never found peace in a church or in prayer. Perhaps Cheechum had a lot to do with that. Her philosophy was much more practical, soothing and exciting, and in her way I found comfort. She told me not to worry about the Devil, or where God lived, or what would happen after death. . . . She said it was a pure waste of time that could be used more constructively. (81-82)

By embracing life on earth, and dismissing the notion of reward and punishment after death, Cheechum robs colonial Christianity of a good deal of its oppressive power.

From the beginning of Maria’s story, we also understand that Cheechum is not subject to the same (colonial) mimetic forces that undermine her people. In addition to her refusal to become a Christian (11), she also will not “sleep on a bed or eat off a table” (16), and does not comply with government demands to leave the cabin that she built on

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265 For additional reflections on Halfbreed as a subversive hybrid text along these lines see Acoose, “Halfbreed” 140-141; “Post” 39; Buss, Mapping 144; Damm, “Dispelling” 108; Donovan, Coming 34; Emberley, Thresholds 160-164; Harry, “(Re)membering” 6-26; Jannetta, “Métis”; Kelly, “Landscape”; Lundgren, “Being” 71-77; Lutz, “Native” 34-35.

266 For commentaries on the central importance of Cheechum in Campbell’s story see Acoose, “Halfbreed” 144-145; Bataille and Sands, American 118-120; Buss, Mapping 143; Godard, “Listening” 152-153; “Talking” 71-72; Harry, “(Re)membering” 13-14; Kelly, “Landscape” 123; Slattery, “Border-Crossings.”
land later designated as part of Prince Albert National Park. As much as she is able to, she lives on her own terms: “Offers of relief from welfare were scorned and so was the old age pension. While she lived alone she hunted and trapped, planted a garden, and was completely self-sufficient” (11). Journeying in a car to Montreal Lake, Cheechum “blasted” Maria’s father specifically “for wanting to travel like a white man” (40; emphasis added).

Raised by Cheechum, Maria appears as one of the very few people in her community who fights back against the colonizers. For years, however, such acts remain isolated moments in Maria’s life, a life otherwise dominated, as noted above, by her (mimetic) desire for the trappings of white middle-class existence. It is not until she absorbs Cheechum’s most important teaching that she is able to take control of her life and begin the long-term work of effecting real change. This teaching is, in effect, a kind of non-imitative mimesis. It is composed of two elements. First, Cheechum tells Maria to “go out there and find what you want and take it, but always remember who you are and why you want it” (98). Understanding what we (really) want and why is easier said than done, however, as “each of us has to find himself in his own way and no one can do it for us” (175). The second element of Cheechum’s lesson affects not just Maria, but her community: “if our way of life were to improve I would have to find other people like

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267 The RCMP are actually sent to remove Cheechum from her cabin, but “she fired shots over their heads, threatening to hit them if they came any closer. They left her alone and she was never disturbed again” (10).
268 For example, to punish a hypocritical priest who would come to Maria’s home for Sunday dinner and eat all their food, leaving them only scraps, she strings rabbit wire across his path to trip him (29-30). When a pair of white children who drive to school in a horse-drawn caboose act “very authoritarian and superior” towards Maria’s family, she scares their horse so that it runs away, tipping over the caboose (52). A new teacher at school upbraids Maria’s brother for not being clean enough and takes him out of the room to wash/punish him. Maria hears him whimper and finds him bleeding at the neck and wrists from the violent scrubbing, so she snatches the brush and attacks the teacher with it (88). Significantly, in each of these cases Maria’s act of resistance pays off: the priest stops coming for dinner (30); the “superior” children eventually relent and even try to be friendly (52); and the teacher never bothers them again (88).
myself, and together try to find an alternative” (167; emphasis added). This is exactly what she does, discovering people who are “like her” rather than trying to imitate others.²⁶⁹ By the end of Halfbreed she has succeeded in following Cheechum’s advice. She has renounced a mimetically-based sense of identity and become part of something larger than herself, an engaged community that enables her to live with dignity and genuine purpose: “I have brothers and sisters, all over the country. I no longer need my blanket to survive” (184).

4.3 In Search of April Raintree

As with Campbell’s text, Beatrice Culleton’s In Search of April Raintree presents the first-person account of a Métis woman struggling with her identity and the difficulties of her life.²⁷⁰ Although more fictionalized than Halfbreed, the book is still highly autobiographical in several respects. Generally, the overlaps between fiction and reality centre on the author’s experiences being raised in foster homes as a result of her parents’ alcoholism (Interview with Lutz 97). More specifically, Culleton explains that she was

²⁶⁹ Cheechum even specifically casts doubt upon the value of imitating her. Thus she says to Maria: “‘Since you were a baby you’ve had to learn the hard way. You’re like me.’ When I replied, ‘There’s nobody I’d rather be like than you,’ she smiled and said, ‘I wonder if that’s so good’” (175). In her interview with Doris Hillis, Campbell comments further on this complexly mimetic relationship with Cheechum: “Sometimes I find it difficult to know whether my thoughts are my own or whether they have come from her words. The one thing she gave me—the most important of all . . . is expressed in our language ka tip aim meaning ‘we who own ourselves.’ That means you have to own yourself” (48; emphasis in the original).

driven to write about the ordeals of April and her sister, Cheryl, by the suicides of two of her own sisters (Interview with Lutz 97-100).\textsuperscript{271} She based both characters on aspects of her own personality (“I decided” 317), and wrote the novel in order to try and understand the trials that she and her family had gone through (“I decided” 312).\textsuperscript{272}

Similar to *Halfbreed*, *In Search of April Raintree* foregrounds the destructive impact of colonialism on Native people in Canada. Although some examples of abuse and prejudice in the two books are quite similar,\textsuperscript{273} Culleton generally points to less personal, and more systemic, examples of discrimination and mistreatment. In fact, both April and Cheryl pointedly experience a good deal of care and love in their lives from white/Christian friends, social workers, teachers, foster families, and—perhaps most tellingly—even police.\textsuperscript{274} The most insidious (and ultimately devastating) effects of colonialism in the novel instead result from more generally dispersed beliefs about Native people and their history. At several points in her life, for example, April encounters people who assume that Native women are sexually promiscuous, a point often underscored with the epithet “squaw” (e.g., 40, 72, 79, 107, 143). Along these lines, both

\textsuperscript{271} See also Culleton, “I decided” 311; Interview with Garrod 81, 86; Mosionier, “Special” 248.

\textsuperscript{272} That said, Culleton worked to distance her story from real people and events: “I didn’t write about my own sisters because they had family, and I didn’t want to write about and intrude on the privacy of other people. So, of course, that’s why I wrote fiction. I didn’t write about my family at all” (“I decided” 312; see also Culleton, Interview with Garrod 88-89, 91; cf. Mosionier, “Special” 248). The last page of Culleton’s novel actually contains a note outlining some of the key similarities and differences between the author’s life and that of April Raintree; the note ends by pointedly affirming the *fictional* character of the narrative (228). For discussions of the autobiographical aspects (and significance) of *In Search of April Raintree* see Barton, “Write”; Damm, “Dispelling” 108-109; Ferguson, “Native” 41; Hoy, “Nothing”; Kelly, “You” 164, 167-168; Moher, “April”; Petrone, *Native* 140; Sigurdson, “Métis”; Thompson, “Typewriter” 93-97.

\textsuperscript{273} On a couple of occasions, e.g., April is called a “squaw” (40, 72); she also comments on “what being native was like in middle-class surroundings. Sometimes service was deliberately slow. Sometimes I’d overhear comments like, ‘Who let the Indians off the reservation?’” (107). She receives the most explicitly racist treatment from a corrupt and abusive white Catholic foster family, the DeRosiers (see, e.g., 39, 41, 44), and from the men who rape her (see below), but such experiences of overt individual racism in the lives of April and Cheryl are actually the exception, not the rule.

\textsuperscript{274} See, e.g., 23, 27, 32, 72, 73, 82, 87, 147. It is also worth noting that Culleton and her parents—like Campbell and her family—are in fact Catholic (“I decided” 315; Interview with Garrod 88).
sisters are given an apparently well-intentioned warning about “native girl’ [sic]
syndrome,” meant to help them avoid becoming alcoholics, drug addicts and prostitutes,
like “many other native girls” (66-67). They also receive continual instruction at school
in “how the Indians scalped, tortured and massacred brave white explorers” (57). Because
Culleton’s novel shows such colonial views to be both deeply entrenched and highly
destructive, Agnes Grant considers it to be “one of the most scathing indictments of
Canadian society that has ever been written” (“Contemporary” 129).275

Having absorbed the colonial representations of Native people, April is not
surprised to learn that they “were known as savages. So anything to do with Indians, I
despised. And here I was supposed to be part-Indian” (44-45). Cheryl responds
differently, searching for alternate views and writing impassioned essays to her sister,
including one praising Louis Riel. When April reads the essay, however, rather than
feeling pride or admiration for Riel’s attempts to obtain justice for Indians and
Halfbreeds, she can only see that the piece “proved [her] point once again. White
superiority had conquered in the end” (95). Overall, April learns that “being a half-breed
meant being poor and dirty. It meant being weak and having to drink. It meant being ugly
and stupid” (49). As a result, she declares to Cheryl that she is “ashamed,” that she “can’t
accept being a Métis” (110-111). April ultimately attempts to distance herself as much as
possible from any connection with Native people: she tells her friends that her parents
died in a plane crash (90); she schemes to prevent anyone she knows from meeting her

275 Helen Hoy similarly remarks that “the novel’s attention to the hegemonic construction of Native reality
is relentless” (“Nothing” 162). For discussions of systemic colonial racism and abuse in In Search of April
Raintree see Damm, “Dispelling” 110-112; Donovan, Coming 28-30; Episkenew, “Socially” 62-65; Fee,
“Deploying”; Grant, “Abuse” 240-246; Horne, Contemporary 72-75; Kelly, “You” 169-172; Lundgren,
“Being” 63-65; Perreault, “In”; Vevaina, “Articulating.”
darker-skinned sister (92); and when talking with Cheryl about Métis families she has met, declares: “They are a disgusting people” (120; emphasis added).276

April’s severe attempt to divorce herself from other Natives is intertwined with an equally extreme form of colonial desire. Even as a very young girl in Winnipeg, April is drawn towards the local white children and away from the Native ones. She notes that the latter were “dirty-looking and they dressed in real raggedy clothes. I didn’t care to play with them at all. The other group was white-skinned and I used to envy them, especially the girls with blond hair and blue eyes” (15). She imagines that these white children “were very rich and lived in big, beautiful houses.”277 As she grows older, April realizes that, because of her relatively light skin colour, she “could pass for a pure white person”; she makes plans to change the spelling of her name to Raintry, which “could pass for Irish,” and imagines being rich, so that she can “live just like a real white person” (49). She dreams of all the material things she associates with white culture—“a beautiful home, a big fancy car and the most gorgeous clothing ever” (100)—all the while “reading books on proper etiquette, preparing myself for my promising future in white society” (107). It is no surprise that Cheryl ultimately accuses April of seeing the world “through white man’s eyes” (115).278

276 For commentaries on the link between colonial constructions of Native identity and April’s shame and self-hatred see Damm, “Says” 20; “Dispelling” 96; Grant, “Abuse” 245-246; Horne, Contemporary 77-78; Kelly, “You” 169, 172; LaRocque, “Teaching” 216; Lundgren, “Being” 64-65; Vevaina, “Articulating” 65.

277 In fact, given the time and place of the playground encounters—Jarvis Avenue in the 1950s—it is highly unlikely that April would have met anyone of significant affluence or social status in this park (Episkenew, “Socially” 64-65). The novel itself does not provide any evidence to validate April’s perception of the white children as rich, which further underscores a view of this perception as based more on colonial desire than any actual trappings of wealth.

278 In this respect, April precisely fits Dee Horne’s (Bhabha-derived) definition of “colonial mimics,” those who “internalize colonialism and learn to see themselves, either wholly or partially, through the lens of settlers” (Contemporary 11). Horne details the role that shame plays in such identification (114-115), as “colonial mimics evaluate themselves in relation not only to those in their American Indian community but also to those settlers who perceive them as inferior” (114). Horne also refers to a common pejorative for
In accord with Maria Campbell’s experience, colonial desire in *In Search of April Raintree* leads to mimetic conflict, in this case between April and Cheryl. However, their mimetic connection is initially disguised by the novel’s emphasis on the differences between the two: differences of skin colour, for one, as we are reminded throughout the novel that Cheryl is much darker than her sister (e.g., 49, 115). Also, the two are fostered by quite dissimilar families—Cheryl is raised in two very loving homes, while April has a brief experience with a kind family (23-37) before being sent to another, very cruel one (38-87). The sisters also harbour, from a very early age, quite separate desires: April wishes to be independent and wealthy, while Cheryl wants to become a social worker to help other Native girls like themselves (101). These diverging ambitions of course point to the most important distinction between the sisters: while April is ashamed to be Métis and pretends to be white, Cheryl is deeply proud of her heritage and resentful of the treatment of Natives by the dominant colonial culture (see, for example, 57, 75, 77, 85).

As the novel progresses, however, April gradually begins to see how similar she is to her sister, how much the differences between them are mostly of her own, desperate, creation.\(^{279}\) This awakening does not come easy. As an adult April first lives the life of wealth she so desperately wanted, which she enters by marrying into a rich white Toronto family. This family takes her in, teaches her how to behave (113). However, April cuts

\(^{279}\) Note however that critics of this novel, like April, refuse to acknowledge the similarities between the sisters. This issue is discussed in detail in section 6.2.
her ties with her colonizers when she finds out that her husband is having an affair, and—in a scene that parallels Elaine’s experience with Mrs. Smeath in *Cat’s Eye*—overhears her mother-in-law talking to her husband’s mistress about her, saying that she approves of the affair because she “would simply dread being grandmother to a bunch of little half-breeds” (126). In this moment April experiences fully the state of being “almost the same, but not white.” The episode leads April to return, lonely and betrayed, to her sister, which begins the unravelling of their differences. She comes to realize the real truth behind her casual observation on their surface appearance: “we could have been almost identical twins, except for our skin-coloring” (115).

The first, crucial point towards this end is made in brutally literal fashion, as April is mistaken for her sister by a gang of rapists (182-183). April won’t talk about the rape to anyone, however, and we learn that Cheryl also keeps painful secrets buried; as April reflects at one point, “I lie to protect her and she lies to protect me, and we both lose out” (205). One of Cheryl’s secrets is that she has become a prostitute; after this fact is revealed, she accuses April of having similarly “prostituted” herself for her husband’s money, of being in effect “a high-classed call girl” (197). Just as April has always been ashamed of Cheryl for her unapologetic Native-ness, we learn that Cheryl is likewise ashamed of her sister for being “a bigot against [her] own people” (193). Both sisters deny a part of their heritage; April of course struggles to disconnect from her Native side, but Cheryl works just as hard to disavow her “whiteness,” wishing that she and April

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280 Helen Hoy also identifies this event as the turning point in the sisters’ relationship. As she remarks, “the critical moment of cross-over is the rape scene, with the interchange between protagonists enacted physically, as it will thereafter be enacted psychologically and politically” (“Nothing” 168).
“were whole Indians.”\textsuperscript{281} In accordance with Girard’s model, the uncovering of these similarities is entwined in the growing animosity that erupts between the sisters. Their most bitter fights are about money, but what is really at stake is self-worth: to Cheryl, April is the white colonial power that denies Native people their full humanity, while Cheryl links April to a Native world of degradation that she wants desperately to escape. Their hostility climaxes in a violent fight which ends as Cheryl strikes her sister in the face and sends her flying, then storms out of the house (199-200). A few days later, April finds out that Cheryl has killed herself (209).

The novel connects these events to Christianity by implicating a broadly-formed understanding of the tradition in creating the conditions that lead to April and Cheryl’s enmity, their shattered lives, and to Cheryl’s death. In accordance with Marx’s views, for example, April learns at church that she must accept suffering as God’s will and “turn the other cheek” (42). The Christian view of history also robs Native people of their humanity, presenting them as savages who tortured missionaries and so deserved to be subjugated (44). Overall, we are presented with “white churches sitting back in idle, rich comfort, preaching what ought to be, but making sure it isn’t” (197).\textsuperscript{282} Christian institutions and ideologies appear, in other words, as a vital part of the power structure that demands Natives be as white as possible, yet excludes them from any positions of

\textsuperscript{281} For discussions of Cheryl’s attitude in this regard see Culleton, “I decided” 319-320; Interview with Lutz 100; Creal, “What” 255-256; Dumm, “Dispelling” 96; Donovan, \textit{Coming} 29; Fee, “Upsetting” 171; Horne, \textit{Contemporary} 80-81; Thom, “Effects” 298-299; Zwicker, “Limits” 327-328. Cheryl’s desire to be “whole” is also evident in the fantasies she constructs about her parents, whom she never really knew. She imagines that her father “would have been a chief or warrior in the olden days if he had been a pure Indian,” and that her mother would have been “an Indian princess” (91). These fantasies play a crucial role in Cheryl’s ultimate spiral into depression and suicide, as she discovers that her parents in reality fall far short of her hopes and expectations (see, e.g., 217-218, 224). This discovery leads her to disparage Native people in general, resulting in another mimetic connection between Cheryl and her sister: “I feel like April does, I despise these people, these gutter creatures” (215).

\textsuperscript{282} In her interview with Makeda Silvera, Culleton pointedly critiques such “paternalistic attitudes on the part of the Church” (“I decided” 330).
authority or influence. Significantly, such an understanding of Christianity in the novel is only ever voiced by Cheryl. April refuses to validate her sister’s view, maintaining instead that Native people “should have stood up for their rights instead of letting themselves be walked on” (170); consequently, she argues, they suffer “because they allow it to happen to them” (120).

Culleton’s critique of this position is presented most strikingly through April’s response to being raped. She feels defiled, joyless, virtually paralyzed with shame (150, 165, 177, 190); as she explains, “I had been touched by evil and from now on it would always be a part of me” (150). April almost does not bring the case to court, and even then finds herself telling the defense attorney that she barely, if at all, resisted her attackers (179). The clear implication of this assertion is that she could be seen as complying with the assault, that she was therefore responsible for what happened to her. In fact, however, April fought back passionately, elbowing (139), biting (141), and

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283 This perspective also shows up in the novel indirectly: April’s first job out of high school is working as a legal secretary for “Mr. Lord” (97), e.g., and she refers to her mother-in-law as “Mother Superior” (113). Although Culleton does not explicitly give the same weight to Christianity’s role in the colonial oppression of Native people as Campbell does, the novel nevertheless clearly and unambiguously indicts the tradition. Consequently, I am surprised that there is no discussion whatsoever of this issue in any of the more than three dozen commentaries on In Search of April Raintree that I have encountered. In fact, I have found only one passing reference to the issue: as part of a list of colonial acts that are seen to cause problems for April and Cheryl, Michael Creal includes “the missionary work of churches” (“What” 251). Perhaps more striking than the complete absence of even such a reference in any other article on Culleton’s novel, both Jennifer Kelly and Commi S. Vevaina raise the issue of Christianity and colonialism in pieces that discuss In Search of April Raintree, but neither connects these points to the text itself. Vevaina, e.g., points to the damage to Native people (evident in both Halfbreed and Jeanette Armstrong’s Slash) that is caused by the Church’s “racist disregard and disrespect for Native religion” (“Articulating” 63). Meanwhile, Kelly reflects that her experience of encountering student responses to the text “has made visible to me how predominantly Christian perspectives of (individual) judgment, guilt, punishment, and redemption . . . are structured into the education system’s evaluative criteria and circulate as norm” (“You” 176); however, she does not seem to consider how these perspectives also inform the novel itself, and not just its reception.

285 Although April’s viewpoint might appear unusually extreme (or it least, it may appear so to a non-Native reader), her comment actually echoes one of Maria’s own statements in Halfbreed: “The drunken Indian men I saw would fill me with a blinding hatred; I blamed them for what had happened to me, to the little girl who had died from an overdose of drugs, and for all the girls who were on the city streets. If they had only fought back, instead of giving up, these things would never have happened” (143).
scratching (141) the rapists, managing at one point to draw blood (142). She only succumbs after a merciless beating, after which she thinks, “I don’t think I could have fought anymore, even if my life had depended on it” (143). Even then, April manages to see and remember the license plate number of the rapists’ car after being dumped in the middle of nowhere (145), an act which leads to their arrest and prosecution.

The parallel with April’s own criticism of Native people is clear, suggesting that they too did not simply “allow it to happen to them,” and have likewise been “touched by evil.” This evil comes of course from colonial invasion, a kind of cultural rape. The connection between April’s experience and the colonization of Native people is underlined by the fact that the rapists refer to her repeatedly as “Indian” (141), “savage” (142), and “squaw” (140, 143, 145). In addition, Cheryl writes a paper about colonialism that contains striking parallels to April’s assault. She states that the Native people fought to defend themselves and were called “savages” (168), and that as a result of the environmental devastation European invaders have wreaked upon the continent, the “rivers bleed,” the “winds moan,” and the “land vomits up the poisons which have been fed into it” (169). During her rape April also bleeds (144), moans (143), and vomits (144). Such connections speak again to the systemic and far-reaching nature of the colonial abuse that Culleton depicts. The fact that “good” whites/Christians exist, therefore, is ultimately irrelevant in the face of their historic complicity in acts of

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286 Because of such epithets, Cumming notes that the assault on April “is more centrally about her rape as a Native person—and through her, I believe, about the ‘rape’ of all Native peoples” (“Only” 314). Other commentators who have made this connection include Clarke, “Revisioning” 141; Damm, “Dispelling” 110-111; Fee, “Deploying” 220-223, “Upsetting” 176; Horne, Contemporary 84.

287 As Cumming points out, April actually vomits three times in the novel: when she is first removed from her parents’ care; when she is raped; and when she is required to describe the rape in court (“Only” 315). In each case, he argues, “vomiting symbolizes [April’s] reaction . . . to her helplessness in the face of the representatives of white hegemony” (316).
genocidal violence, their ongoing complicity in perpetuating harmful, false views of Native people and colonial history, and their attendant responsibility for many of the problems faced by women like April and Cheryl Raintree.

A key way in which *In Search of April Raintree* approaches this systemic violence is specifically to redress the false messages about Natives that cause such pain throughout the novel, bringing to light the repressed knowledge that offers a real challenge to these messages. Like *Halfbreed*, Culleton’s novel can thus be seen in part as a hybrid product that dramatizes the process of repression in a European art form (the novel) while simultaneously giving voice to the Native-centred ideas and perspectives that colonial authority has denied.288 It does this most often through the character of Cheryl, who from a very young age opposes and subverts the standard teachings about Natives: “Your history books don’t say how the white people destroyed the Indian way of life. That’s all you white people can do is teach a bunch of lies to cover your own tracks” (57). In one of her many letters to April on this topic, Cheryl rages:

288 Or in Dawn Thompson’s words, *In Search of April Raintree* represents “a complex interchange between two cultural and semiotic systems that works towards social change not only through its didactic content, but through its epistemological process” (“Typewriter” 101; see also Kelly, “Landscape” 113; Lundgren, “Being”; Thompson, “Technologies” 60-65; “Typewriter” 91-92). Other critics have suggested that the novel also embodies subversive hybridity in the form of its narrator, a Native woman who (as noted) sees the world through “white eyes.” For example, Emberley argues that “the situating of a hegemonic racist discourse within the figure of a Métis woman, April, produces a dislocation in the re-presentation of a unified, coherent subjectivity” (Thresholds 162; see also Eigenbrod, “Oral” 98; Fee, “Upsetting” 176; Horne, Contemporary 84; Hoy, “Nothing” 160, 179; Kelly, “Landscape” 119). Regardless of the way(s) in which the novel’s hybridity is viewed, it is important to keep in mind that the protagonists (and author) of *In Search of April Raintree* grew up with no connection to any Native/Métis traditions or communities. Consequently, it is their experiences of racism and abuse as Native-identified women that informs the text’s “Nativeness,” and not their (imagined) connection to Métis culture. In this respect, the Raintree sisters differ in a crucial way from Maria in *Halfbreed*; in fact, after meeting an Elder, April pointedly reflects: “If I’d had such a grandmother when I was growing up, maybe I wouldn’t have been so mixed up” (175). For discussions of this issue see Acoose, “Problem” 228, 235; Culleton, Interview with Garrod 92; Damm, “Dispelling” 111-112; Episkewew, “Socially” 64; LaRocque, “Teaching” 222-223; Lundgren, “Being” 63; Petrone, *Native* 140; Thom, “Effect” 297. LaRocque in particular is troubled that “non-Métis critics use Culleton’s novel as a standard of defining the Métis” (“Teaching” 223). Although she does not identify any such critics, one example is Kathleen Donovan, who declares that the text draws on “the strong Metis oral tradition,” and that it references the “Metis tradition of visiting other families for dancing and singing” (*Coming* 26, 27).
It makes me mad the way they portray native people. It makes me wish those whitemen had never come here. But then we would not have been born. At least the Indians would have been left in peace. Nothing those tribes ever did to each other matches what the whites have done to them. . . . history should be an unbiased representation of the facts. And if they show one side, they ought to show the other side equally. Anyway, that’s why I’m writing the Métis side of things. (84-85)

Unfortunately, Cheryl has trouble finding an audience for this “other” point of view; even April will not listen to her (e.g., 78, 95). When she speaks out in elementary school against having to “learn this garbage about the Indian people” (57), Cheryl is beaten with a strap by the principal (58). At university, she writes the crucial piece on environmental destruction that contains the implicit parallels to April’s rape, but “they wouldn’t publish it because they said it was too controversial” (168). In this text Cheryl critiques the destructive prejudice, hypocrisy and self-interest of colonialism (168-170); of course, because it appears in April Raintree it does in fact get published. And so Culleton is able to transcend—at least to some extent—the restrictions on disseminating repressed perspectives that Cheryl cannot.

Slowly, after the trauma of being raped, April does at last begin to listen to Cheryl and to start looking at the world through “Native eyes.” She gives Cheryl a copy of Dee

289 Jeanette Armstrong strongly echoes Cheryl’s perspective when she argues that it is specifically because of colonial abuse that “what is commonly referred to as the ‘social problems’ of Native peoples emerged” (“Disempowerment” 142). For this reason, she further asserts that “the dispelling of lies and the telling of what really happened until everyone, including our own people understands that this condition did not happen through choice or some cultural defect on our part, is important” (144). Taking inspiration from these words, Kateri Damm likewise draws a direct connection between Armstrong’s essay and Culleton’s text (“Dispelling and Telling”).

290 For discussions of the ways in which In Search of April Raintree challenges and subverts colonial forms of knowledge and understanding see Armstrong, “Disempowerment” 144; Damm, “Dispelling” 96-98; Kelly, “Landscape”; Thompson, “Technologies” 63; “Typewriter” 99.
Brown’s *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (155); she tells her new (white) boyfriend that she is Métis (156); she connects with the local Native community for the first time and has a transformative experience at a Pow Wow: “It went deeper than just hearing and seeing. I felt good. I felt alive. There were stirrings of pride, regret and even an inner peace. For the first time in my life, I felt as if all of that was part of me, as if I was a part of it” (166). At the Friendship Centre, April meets an Elder who helps her continue this journey:

The old woman suddenly reached towards me and put her hand on mine. . .
. . I saw in her eyes that deep simple wisdom of which Cheryl had spoken.
And I no longer found her touch distasteful. . . . She had seen something in me that was special, that was deserving of her respect. . . . I had this overwhelming feeling that a mystical spiritual occurrence had just taken place. (174-175)

Finally, in her anger and grief over Cheryl’s death, April rails against the forces that “had torn apart the lives of our people” (214; emphasis added). The next day the significance of this wording hits her: “The denial had been lifted from my spirit. It was tragic that it had taken Cheryl’s death to bring me to accept my identity.291 But no, Cheryl had once said, ‘All life dies to give new life’” (228).292 The novel ends with April’s proud,

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291 Several commentators have pointed out the emphasis that the novel places on experience in achieving any significant personal/political growth or change. In April’s case, she is pushed towards the acceptance of the Métis aspect of her identity not because of Cheryl’s essays or pleas, but as a result of her rape, her positive encounters with Natives at the Pow Wow and the Friendship Centre, and Cheryl’s suicide. Similarly, it can be argued that readers are more likely to be moved by the emotional impact of Culleton’s text than by its ideas. As Zwicker remarks, “it is the record of how racism hurts people that brings about political mobilization in *In Search of April Raintree*” (“Canadian” 152; for additional comments along these lines see Cumming, “Only” 313-315; Fee, “Deploying” 220-223; Mosionier, “Special” 249; Suzack, Introduction 1; Thompson, “Typewriter” 97-98; Zwicker, “Limits” 323).
292 Because April does appear to be “reborn” as a result of losing her sister, Julia Emberley describes Cheryl’s death as “sacrificial” (*Thresholds* 162). This “sacrifice” does not conform to Girard’s scheme,
impassioned vow to help create a better future: “I would strive for it. For my sister and her son. For my parents. For my people” (228).

4.4 Green Grass, Running Water

As noted in Chapter One, Thomas King’s Green Grass, Running Water has attracted an exceptional amount of critical attention. It is an extremely dense text, filled with allusions to, and modifications of, traditional Native and Christian stories as well as “classics” of Western literature (including Moby Dick, The Last of the Mohicans, and Robinson Crusoe). Unlike Halfbreed and April Raintree, King’s novel does not focus on a single person but deals with a wide range of characters—most of whom are Native, all of whom are fictional. The stories of these characters revolve around a dam that has been built outside a Blackfoot reserve in Alberta. This dam threatens the way of life of the people on the reserve, but it remains dormant because of the efforts of one man, the (subtly-named) Eli Stands Alone. Through a series of unusual/impossible events the dam in the end is destroyed; Eli unfortunately is killed as a result, since at this point in the narrative he is living in a cabin at the dam’s base (414, 420).

The dam is one example of the novel’s trope of containment, a trope used to highlight and critique abusive colonial attitudes generally, and colonial religious

however, since for him the term can only describe the destruction of an innocent third party who is (mis-) identified as the cause of the mimetic struggle.

viewpoints in particular. In this vein King also presents a series of Biblical figures who enforce boundaries and rules, figures who are all patriarchal, despotic and abusive. The first one of these is GOD, who is revealed to be a (backwards) dog from Coyote’s dream with delusions of grandeur (2). This GOD sees the garden of Ahdamn and First Woman—a sacred Navajo figure—and claims it for his own; he is furious at them for eating his food, which he says violates “Christian Rules,” and so he evicts them (69). Noah is similarly petulant and tyrannical and also likes to oust people—including his own family—for disobeying Christian Rules, even if this means their deaths (145-148). The first of these rules, we are told, is “Thou Shalt Have Big Breasts” (147); and so when Changing Woman falls onto his boat, Noah demands that she disrobe and chases her around shouting, “Time for procreating!” (145-147). The arch-angel Gabriel forms the most explicit link in the novel between sacred and profane colonial authority, as indicated by his business card: on one side it reads “A.A. Gabriel, Heavenly Host”; on the other, “A.A. Gabriel, Canadian Security and Intelligence Service” (269-270). Gabriel meets Thought Woman, and asks her if she has any fruit or plants, any firearms, any alcohol or

294 Although containment is arguably the novel’s central metaphor, I have uncovered no detailed analysis of its role and meaning in Green Grass, Running Water. Darrell Peters does highlight the importance of another example of this trope, the prison at Fort Marion in Florida: as he notes, the site “becomes King’s symbol for the ill-treatment of Native Americans during the colonization of this continent. This prison housed mostly Plains people, and aside from being a simple cage, it was also a torture chamber” (“Beyond” 71). Carlton Smith further argues that the figure of Coyote functions in King’s novel “as a disruptive semiotic element that resists colonial representations and stories of containment” (“Coyote” 531). Finally, Margery Fee and Jane Flick provide a detailed discussion of the related notion of borders in Green Grass, Running Water (“Coyote”); for commentaries on the notion of borders in King’s work more generally see Davidson et al., Border; Derry, “Of.”

295 Chester, “Green” 46; Ridington, “Coyote’s” 351. In addition to First Woman, King interpolates three other figures from various Native traditions into Biblical/literary narratives: Changing Woman (Navajo), Thought Woman (Pueblo), and Old Woman (Blackfoot, Dunneza) (Chester, “Green” 46). As both Bailey (“Arbitrary” 44) and Donaldson (“Noah” 32) point out, though, the elements of these traditional narratives that appear in Green Grass, Running Water are as “authentic” as their Biblical counterparts; i.e., King is playing with everybody’s toys.
cigarettes. Then he tries to get Thought Woman to sign a treaty and, like Noah, to have sex with him (271).

Just as the Biblical men in the novel are always trying to control others, so do the colonial powers on earth try to contain Native people—in hospitals, jails, reserves, stories, corporate jobs, etc. However, as in April Raintree, the main focus of containment in Green Grass, Running Water is actually discourse—specifically, representations of Native people and cultures in history, literature, and film. This focus is first indicated by the fact that the four Native Elders who narrate the four creation stories, and who wander through the “earthly” ones, have adopted the names of iconic American characters whose stories have been critical in establishing Native stereotypes/caricatures: the Lone Ranger, Ishmael, Hawkeye, and Robinson Crusoe.

Not only does each of these figures have an indigenous “assistant” in their original

296 This mythic abuse of authority is paralleled by a human one in which a family tries to cross the border into the United States for a Sun Dance, and the guards confiscate their sacred outfits. When the father protests that it isn’t right to throw the outfits on the ground, the guards explain that they decide what is right and what is not right, and threaten to throw the whole family in jail (257). The sexual harassment element of the story also has an earthly counterpart, as a white customer in the Dead Dog Café keeps trying to grope the owner/waitress Latisha (130-131).

297 Also like the efforts of the Biblical figures, these colonial attempts in the novel tend to at the very least fail, if not completely backfire. The most prominent act of resistance to colonial control is by Eli Stands Alone, who as mentioned insists on living in his cabin at the base of the dam to prevent it from being used; this act is instrumental in allowing the water pressure to build to the point where the dam is destroyed.

298 King has in fact displayed a keen interest in this topic since the beginning of his academic career. Discussing in his doctoral dissertation the emergence of Native literature, e.g., he asserts that “the main difficulty that confronted Indian writers was the well-defined, well-rooted images and assumptions that had, over the years, been constructed by non-Indians, authenticated by history and literature, and sanctified by the popular mind” (“Inventing” 101; qtd. in Davidson et al., Border 5-6). For discussions of the ways in which Green Grass, Running Water examines colonial representations of Natives see Cox, “All”; Gómez-Vega, “Subverting” 2-4, 10-11; Horne, “To” 263-265; Peters, “Beyond”; Purdy, “Tricksters” 114-116; Smith, “Coyote.”

299 Robinson Crusoe is a particularly powerful literary allusion. He first appeared in the 1719 British novel by Daniel Defoe, considered by some to be the first English novel ever published (“Robinson”). Defoe’s text was an immediate success, running through four editions in the first year alone; within a short time, “it had reached an audience as wide as any book ever written in English” (“Robinson”). The character was later featured in several eponymous American films and television series, as well as being prominently referenced by The Swiss Family Robinson and the Gilligan’s Island theme song (“like Robinson Crusoe, it’s as primitive as can be”). In other words, Crusoe is a figure that has saturated European and North American popular culture for almost three hundred years.
stories, but in each case it is also a specifically colonial project of conquest that these Natives are aiding, whether it be Western expansion or the domination/destruction of the natural world. In addition, two of these “assistants,” Tonto and Chingachgook, are clearly manifestations of the “vanishing Indian” idea—Chingachgook is in fact the name of the character explicitly labelled in James Fenimore Cooper’s novel as the last of the Mohicans. Overall, the explicitly dualistic attitude towards Natives promoted by such narratives is summed up in King’s novel by the “real” Hawkeye, Nathaniel Bumppo, who rhymes off a list of “Indian gifts” and “white gifts” (392): “Indians can run fast. Indians can endure pain. Indians have quick reflexes. Indians don’t talk much. Indians have good eyesight. Indians have agile bodies” (393). On the other hand: “Whites are patient. Whites are spiritual. Whites are cognitive. Whites are philosophical. Whites are sophisticated. Whites are sensitive” (393). Exegesis of these lists does not pose a great challenge to Bumppo’s conversation partner: “So, says Old Woman. Whites are superior, and Indians are inferior” (393).

The superiority of whites is indicated in the other forms of discourse directly encountered by various characters throughout the novel, particularly Western novels and movies. In the former, the well-worn plot of a book given to Eli involves a white woman captured by Iron Eyes, “the most notorious Indian in the territory, the Mysterious Warrior” (162). Before he even reads the book, Eli knows what will happen: Iron Eyes and the woman will fall in love but Iron Eyes will be forced to choose between her and his people; he will pick the latter, “because it was the noble thing to do and because Western writers seldom let Indians sleep with whites” (199), and he will ultimately die in
battle against white men. The repetitively colonial nature of these stories is well-represented by King’s description of the narrative’s climax (218):

Iron Eyes attacked the soldiers.

The cavalry came riding over the hill.

Etc., etc., etc.

Flip, flip, flip.

At a crucial narrative point in King’s own book, several people in different places simultaneously watch the same film—a Western titled, not coincidentally, *The Mysterious Warrior*.300 In addition to John Wayne, Richard Widmark, and Maureen O’Hara the movie stars Portland Looking Bear,301 father of one of *Green Grass, Running Water*’s main figures, Charlie. Portland’s movie character ultimately leads a group of Native warriors against white soldiers headed by Wayne and Widmark, who are all trapped; but as in the book the cavalry suddenly, typically, appears to “save” the day and kill the Natives (223). As Eli’s nephew Lionel thinks to himself about these films: “Every one was the same as the others. Predictable” (318).302

As it happens, the mimetic effect of these “predictable” colonial representations is actually manifested most dramatically by Lionel, who knew by the age of six “what he

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300 This film does not exist—it is clearly meant to stand for the many, many similar films, with similar or identical actors, that do exist (although John Purdy asserts that it is a representation of Ruth Beebe Hill’s novel *Hanta Yo* [“Tricksters” 116]). The connection between the literary and cinematic representations of Native people is further underscored by the fact that the book that Eli reads about the “Mysterious Warrior” is explicitly stamped with a banner that reads, “based on the award-winning movie” (160).

301 Portland forms another link between film and book since, in order to find work as an actor, Portland changes his name to “Iron Eyes” (150).

302 Because of this predictability, John Dominic Crossan actually uses the representation/denigration of Natives in Hollywood films as an example of what he means by “myth” (as opposed to “parable”) in his analysis of story, *Dark Interval* (48-51). Crossan points to the “pattern which emerged with repeated and relentless inevitability from the entire corpus of ‘cowboys and Indians films,’” a pattern that shows “a structure of contemptuous chauvinism” towards Indians (49). Drawing on the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Crossan defines the function of myth as the mediation of opposite or irreconcilable terms (51); thus, Native characters in westerns must die, in order “to save society from miscegenation” (50).
wanted to be. John Wayne. Not the actor, but the character . . . The John Wayne who
saved stagecoaches and wagon trains from Indian attacks” (241).303 Lionel is also given a
leather jacket for his birthday by the novel’s four Elders, which makes him “look a little
like John Wayne” (303). One of Lionel’s first jobs is working for the Department of
Indian Affairs (DIA); his supervisor is Duncan Scott (55), a character named for the
historical deputy superintendent of the DIA who is infamous for writing poems about the
“vanishing Indian,” even while enforcing often brutal policies designed to make such an
idea into reality—including the forced relocation of Native children to residential
schools.304 Scott sends Lionel to give a paper in Salt Lake City on “Indian Education,” at a
conference that happens to occur during the second month of the Wounded Knee
occupation (55); and so instead of the expected audience of teachers and bureaucrats,
Lionel finds himself facing “a room jammed with Indians dressed in jeans and ribbon
shirts” (56). His distance from this group of focused, politicized Natives is emphasized
by his discomfort standing in front of them “in his three-piece suit” (56). In other words,

303 Despite the central importance of Lionel’s mimetic desire in King’s text, very few critics have paid it
much attention. Gómez-Vega (“Subverting” 12) and Peters (“Beyond” 75) briefly remark on Lionel’s
situation, but only Horne offers any substantive analysis of what she terms the book’s “mimic men”—a
group that, in addition to Lionel, includes Eli, Charlie, and Portland (“To” 268-271). Horne further points
out that there are no female mimics at all in the novel; instead, “King presents strong, self-possessed
women who not only refuse to assimilate but also subvert settler culture” (269). This latter group includes
both the four sacred figures of First Woman et al., as well as the more earthly Alberta, Latisha, Babo, and
Norma.

304 Scott’s literary and political influence was immense. He belonged to the group of self-titled
“Confederation Poets” and is described by the Canadian Poetry Archive as “one of the major Canadian
literary figures of the late 19th and early 20th centuries” (Milner, “Duncan”). “The Onondaga Madonna” is
a prime example of his “vanishing Indian” verse: Scott refers to the title character as the member of a
“weird and waning race,” whose child is the “latest promise of her nation’s doom” (Poems 230). As the
head of the DIA, Scott was responsible for implementing some of the most repressive assimilation policies
against Native people in Canadian history. He declared, e.g.: “I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do
not think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to
stand alone. . . . Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been
absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department” (qtd. in Leslie
and Maguire, Historical 114). For further details about (and discussions of) Scott’s life and work see
Bentley, “Shadows”; Milner, “Duncan”; Titley, Narrow.
as the novel progresses we become more and more aware of why, in the opening scene, Lionel’s aunt Norma says to him: “if you weren’t my sister’s boy, and if I didn’t see you born with my own eyes, I would sometimes think you were white” (7). Of course Lionel, like Maria Campbell and April Raintree, is still “not quite” white enough. When he accidentally ends up in a van with members of the American Indian Movement, for example, he is unceremoniously released from his DIA job (60).

Also like Maria and April, Lionel is involved in a clearly mimetic contest: he is fighting with his cousin Charlie for the affections of a University of Calgary history professor, Alberta Frank.305 The similarities between the two men are evident early on: both select violent films to watch with Alberta (that she hates), and both live more than 200 kilometers away from her (44). When Alberta tells Charlie that she can’t see him one weekend because she’s spending the time with Lionel, Charlie demeans his cousin for selling stereos and televisions for a man named “Buffalo” Bill Bursum (43). Alberta points out that Charlie used to work for Bill as well—in fact, Lionel was specifically hired to replace his cousin (80)—but Charlie defends himself by saying, “I got out and made something of myself” (43). As it happens, he has “made” something of himself by becoming a lawyer; specifically, a lawyer who works for the company trying to get the

305 Of course, this conflict may only be “clearly” mimetic to a reader wearing Girard-tinted glasses: despite the wealth of criticism on King’s text, I have uncovered no other reference to this element of the novel. The other mimetic struggle in Green Grass, Running Water—which has also been completely ignored as a mimetic struggle—is similar to that in Halfbreed: Eli Stands Alone is presented as man deeply conflicted about his identity, who fights for his family and his people at the end of his life, but who, before this point, turns away from them out of shame. He lives most of his life teaching Shakespeare at the University of Toronto, married to a white woman and never returning home more than once despite his wife’s requests (62-63, 260, 264). Thinking about the one time he did visit his family, Eli mainly recalls the “people who looked at him suspiciously, as though he were a stranger, a tourist who had somehow sneaked into camp” (261). Crucially, he is accused numerous times by his sister Norma of becoming white (e.g., 36, 113); but when he does return home (after his wife’s death and his own retirement), Eli reflects: “In the end, he had become what he had always been. . . . An Indian back on the reserve” (262). The specifically mimetic nature of Eli’s internal conflict is indicated when he looks at himself in the mirror and pointedly, unsuccessfully, tries to improve his reflection (164).
dam running. In other words, despite Charlie’s conviction that he and Lionel could not be more different (182), both men are employed by people connected to the ongoing colonization of Natives. Both are also clearly ashamed of their roots (e.g., 43, 57, 152, 319), and Bursum himself asserts that Lionel and Charlie “weren’t really Indians anymore” (187). As the two struggle with one another, and with their sense of self, they both wrongly believe that Alberta is the answer to their problems. The mimetic rivalry between them ends, however, with the destruction of the dam. Since Charlie’s employers only hired him for the dam case—“because he was Blackfoot and Eli was Blackfoot” (116)—Charlie loses his job and decides to go see his father in California for the first time in years (421). Lionel also finds himself out of work, as he decides to quit selling TVs and instead help rebuild Eli’s cabin for his aunt to live in (421-423).306

The religious context of the men’s mimetic rivalry is most clearly dramatized by a scene in which Bill Bursum creates a massive display of 200 television sets arranged in the shape of North America. The novel’s description of the sets, when turned on, recalls the opening of Genesis: they “glowed silver, creating a sense of space and great emptiness” (127).307 Bursum in fact thinks to himself that “it was like having the universe

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306 Although the change in Lionel and Charlie happens suddenly to an extent, it is prefigured by an episode at the Sun Dance in which Lionel, Eli, and Latisha confront Latisha’s (white) ex-husband, George, who is taking pictures of the ceremony (384-387). Lionel and Eli manage to destroy George’s film and send him on his way, at which point the Lone Ranger says, “Well grandson, . . . that’s about as much as we can do for you” (387). Lionel appears unimpressed with the way in which the four Elders have “fixed” his life (“Have I missed something?” [387]), but by facing off against George—a wife-beating racist who believes that he, not the members of the community, has the right to control their representation (384-385)—he has confronted a manifestation of colonial oppression for the first time in his life, and done so in the service of his relations. In addition, this act of resistance has a mimetic aspect to it: Eli’s uncle Orville had also confronted a white man photographing the Sun Dance years ago, but that man had managed to get away with his film (139-143). Lionel’s movement from colonial to Native mimesis thus recalls Cheechum’s advice to Maria in Halfbreed to find herself, and others like her; and so Lionel “finds himself” on his birthday, removing the John Wayne jacket that had begun to feel as if it were “suffocating him” (382).

307 The first lines of Genesis famously read: “In the beginning . . . the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep . . . Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (1:1-3).
there on the wall, being able to see everything, being in control” (128), and explains to his assistant that for customers, looking at the display will be “like being in church. Or at the movies” (129). Bursum also reflects that “The Map” was a perfect manifestation of “power and control—the essences of effective advertising” (128). King thus connects politics, consumerism, religion, colonialism and popular culture, at the same time as he shows the degree to which Bursum was right about Charlie and Lionel: as his employees they had been significantly remade in his image, and had, in many respects, ceased to be “Indian.” When their colonial employment ends, therefore, Lionel and Charlie implicitly leave behind the kind of Western religious worldview represented by Bursum, and instead, like Eli, they “come home” (421).

Although Lionel and Charlie in the end divorce themselves from Bursum and his ilk, neither of them are generally inclined to be very confrontational when it comes to colonial structures or representatives. 

King himself points to this passage near the opening of the novel, as the Lone Ranger starts to recite Gen. 1:1-2, but is interrupted: “‘That’s the wrong story,’ said Ishmael. ‘That story comes later’” (14).

308 The other white man/God figure in the novel is Dr. Joseph Hovaugh, who runs the psychiatric hospital from which the four Elders escape. Not only does his name evoke that of “Jehovah” (i.e., J. Hovaugh), but at one point he is (sarcastically) referred to as “Dr. Joseph God Almighty Hovaugh” (220). Like Bursum, Hovaugh is also obsessed with power and control, suggested in part by his similar pre-occupation with maps (e.g., 389). As some critics have argued, Hovaugh also demonstrates attributes that link him with Northrop Frye (“Green” 49-50; Ridington, “Coyote’s” 350).

309 In fact at a later point in the novel Lionel reflects: “[The Map] was more than advertising, Bursum had told him. It was a concept, a concept that lay at the heart of business and Western civilization” (298).

310 Significantly, the notion of “home” in Green Grass, Running Water is not exclusively or specifically identified with the Blackfoot Reserve near Blossom, Alberta—Charlie, e.g., returns to his father in California. In an interview with Jace Weaver, King in fact takes issue with the (stereo-)typically over-determined concept of the reserve in literature: “there are Indians upon Indians in novels who go off the reservation into the city and are destroyed, who come back to the reserve and can’t make it. I think that’s bullshit myself. In reality there are a lot of Indians who go off the reserve, who come back to the reserve, who work, who go off the reserve again, who keep going back and forth, and they manage” (qtd. in Weaver, That 150).

311 Lionel’s incident with George at the Sun Dance is the single exception to this rule, which is of course what makes it so significant (even though Lionel himself is, as noted, unaware of this significance).
however, takes a more direct approach, and in fact appears to fit Bhabha’s sense of subversive hybridity more exactly than any of the texts yet examined. As noted, King plays with a variety of contemporary North America’s “founding objects” — movies, television, literature, the Bible—demonstrating the ways in which such “objects” have supported colonial projects while at the same time upending their viewpoints, characters, and narrative elements. As evidenced by the encounters between Noah and Changing Woman, and Gabriel and Thought Woman, King accomplishes this specifically by representing them “partially,” mixing colonial texts with identifiably Native viewpoints, characters, and narrative elements. The resultant stories are often very funny, but their message is darkly similar to that of April Raintree: Christian traditions, texts, and values.

312 In Gerry Turcotte’s words, “Thomas King’s writing is a type of guerilla warfare—a counter-discursive resistance to a victory that has never been conceded by all the parties involved” (“Re-Marking” 8).
314 King’s treatment of the Bible is also cognate with Bhabha’s account of this “holiest of books” being “dismembered” into toilet paper (“Of Mimicry” 133). That is to say, Green Grass, Running Water contains a running gag that connects Biblical objects, as well as colonial ones, to toilets. Noah’s boat, e.g., is like a toilet: “white” and “full of poop” (144, 145). Instead of “television store,” Lionel’s father says that his son works at “that toilet store” (170). The dam itself is described as “an immense porcelain wall, white and glistening” (110), and Eli specifically remarks that it reminds him of a toilet (136). Again, the point (in part at least) is to highlight colonial attempts at control/repression—as well as the belief in being pure, undefiled—attempts well symbolized by the toilet. As King implies, however, such attempts (and beliefs) become much more difficult when the toilets stop working, a regular occurrence in Green Grass, Running Water (e.g., 88, 107, 135). Thus, throughout the novel water is everywhere, and it is rising (e.g., 24, 97, 98, 106, 154, 253, 284): something is backed up, is not draining well, and it is getting worse. And so the dammed lake becomes overfilled to the point where the dam/toilet finally bursts, restoring the natural order as “the water rolled on as it had for eternity” (415). Cf. Gananath Obeysekere’s critique of modern anthropology, which he sees as unwilling and unable to integrate the pain of human life into its models; as such, it is “like a bourgeois bathroom: everything is tidy, everything smells clean, and the shit is flushed into the dark, rat-infested sewers that line the belly of the city” (Work 288).
315 As Dee Horne summarizes, King combines “elements of the Aboriginal oral tradition with the settler novel genre,” and in doing so “critiques settler culture and its rules of recognition” (“To” 260). For discussions of King’s subversive hybridization of canonical Western literature see Cox, “All” 231-240; Donaldson, “Noah” 37-38; Gómez-Vega, “Subverting” 9-10; Ridington, “Coyote’s” 355-358; Turcotte, “Re-Marking” 6-7. For discussions of this same strategy as applied to Biblical texts see Bailey, “Arbitrary” 46-48; Cox, “All” 222-231; Donaldson, “Noah”; Gómez-Vega, “Subverting” 5-9; Horne, “To” 261-262; Lamont-Stewart, “Androgyny” 116; Peters, “Beyond” 71, 73-74; Turcotte, “Re-Marking” 10-12; Wilke, “Re-Writing.”
have often lent themselves to the rape and murder of those with alternative viewpoints and less power, including Native people. By satirizing and deconstructing key stories in Western culture, however, King is also (apparently) attempting to reverse their effects. One of the novel’s most critical scenes, for example, involves the four Elders changing the ending of *The Mysterious Warrior* so that the Indians win. Just before this change occurs, when the film is proceeding as usual and the Natives appear doomed, Bursum shouts “Hooray” while Charlie expresses shame and unease at seeing his father on the screen (319-320); when the cavalry suddenly disappears, however, and the warriors start to win, Bursum shouts “Jesus!” in frustration and disbelief while Charlie quietly evinces a newfound pride: “Get ‘em, Dad,” he hisses (322). The revised cinematic climax thus gives the Native characters in *Green Grass, Running Water* “the ability to resist the narrative constructed for them and fight back, just as King’s novels fight back” (Peters, “Beyond” 75).316

As the revised film suggests, King does more than simply “subvert” colonial representations in the sense that Bhabha indicates—he supplants them. The Native warriors do not just survive, they kill John Wayne. Similarly, we come to learn that the four Elders calling themselves the Lone Ranger, Ishmael, Robinson Crusoe, and Hawkeye are in fact First Woman, Changing Woman, Thought Woman, and Old Woman. In other words, not only do these women refuse to be identified as Native “sidekicks,” they appropriate the names of the white colonial men whose narratives have caused so

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316 For commentaries on the central importance of this moment in King’s text see Gómez-Vega, “Subverting” 10-11; Purdy, “Tricksters” 115-116; Smith, “Coyote” 515-516; Turcotte, “Re-Marking” 16-17.
many problems. In the “real” world, this dynamic is evident when Clifford Sifton, the man responsible for the dam’s construction, argues that Eli and his community “aren’t real Indians” because they “drive cars, watch television, go to hockey games.” “And,” he says to Eli, “you speak as good English as me.” “Better,” responds Eli. “And I speak Blackfoot too” (141). The dam itself is actually destroyed because three cars smash into its side as an earthquake hits—“a Nissan, a Pinto, and a Karmann-Ghia” (407); this figuration suggests, in Laura Donaldson’s words, “a washing away of Columbus’s colonial heritage” (“Noah” 40). King similarly “washes away” Judeo-Christian claims to epistemological and ontological authority by making the Biblical god a creation of Coyote’s dreaming imagination. In fact, when the four Elders are discussing Coyote’s possible role in both the dam-destroying earthquake and Alberta’s mysterious pregnancy, we learn that Coyote’s creative intervention in Western religion extends perhaps to the beginnings of the New Testament as well (416):

317 In this way, Cox argues, King “dramatically shifts the colonial perspectives of the original texts and subsequently interrogates the cultural, political, and ideological foundations of the cultures that informed their production” (“All” 231). See also Bailey, “Arbitrary” 48; Horne, “To” 261; Lamont-Stewart, “Androgyny” 124-128; Linton, “And”; Peters, “Beyond” 73-76.
318 Eli’s demonstrated superiority over Clifford Sifton is even more resonant in light of the fact that the latter character is named for the man who, from 1896 to 1905, was Superintendent of Indian Affairs and Interior Minister of Canada. As Florence Stratton notes, Sifton was responsible for “recruiting tens of thousands of settlers from Britain, the United States, and central Europe” and “was in charge of negotiations for Treaty 8, which involved the ceding of a huge tract of land: all of central and northern Alberta, part of northern Saskatchewan and British Columbia, the western portion of the North West Territories, and the eastern part of the Yukon” (“Cartographic” 94).
319 For additional comments on the symbolic meaning of this event in the novel see Cox, “All” 237; Gómez-Vega, “Subverting” 10; Lamont-Stewart, “Androgyny” 127-128; Peters, “Beyond” 77.
320 In his introduction to All My Relations, King explicitly remarks that, in general, the figure of the trickster allows Native writers “to create a particular kind of world in which the Judeo-Christian concern with good and evil and order and disorder is replaced with the more Native concern for balance and harmony” (xiii; emphasis added). In terms of its impact on colonial perspectives, King’s revision of Genesis in Green Grass, Running Water is typically seen as rendering the Biblical text “a powerless source of the worldview many colonizers invoked as justification for violence and domination” (Cox, “All” 226; see also Bailey, “Arbitrary” 46; Donaldson, “Noah” 28, 32; Lamont-Stewart, “Androgyny” 116).
“I didn’t do it, says Coyote. . . .

“The last time you fooled around like this,” said Robinson Crusoe,

“the world got very wet.”

“And we had to start all over again,” said Hawkeye.

“I didn’t do anything,” says Coyote. “I just sang a little.”

“Oh, boy,” said the Lone Ranger.

“I just danced a little, too,” says Coyote.

“Oh, boy,” said Ishmael.

“But I was helpful, too,” says Coyote. “That woman who wanted a baby. Now, that was helpful.”

“Helpful!” said Robinson Crusoe. “You remember the last time you did that?” . . .

“We haven’t straightened out that mess yet,” said Hawkeye.

### 4.5 Summary and Hypothesis

Clearly, there are elements in each of the above four texts that correspond to both theories of mimetic conflict at hand. On the Girardian side, we see escalating conflicts tied to increasing degrees of mimesis between individual characters. These conflicts in turn threaten the integrity/stability of the protagonists’ communities, both the relatively small and contained units of *Cat’s Eye* and *In Search of April Raintree*, and the larger Métis/Blackfoot populations in *Halfbreed* and *Green Grass, Running Water*. The conflicts also have a particular focus: Elaine and Cordelia each want social standing/authority; Maria battles for respectable employment; April and Cheryl fight over
money; and Lionel and Charlie play tug-of-war with Alberta. These battles also result in a sacrifice of sorts, as Cordelia is institutionalized, Marie is fired from the job at Saddle Lake, Cheryl commits suicide, and Eli Stands Alone drowns. In the end, the participants disengage from the cycle of violence when they come to a final (usually painful) awareness of the harm caused by mimetic desire, coupled with a recognition of their “real”/non-colonial identity.

The “objects” of these mimetic conflicts lead us neatly into Bhabha’s world, as each is a kind of colonial talisman, connected to white middle-class values and/or material culture. This culture ranges from purses in Eaton’s Catalogues and bowls of fruit on the table, to having a “beautiful home” or a university professor girlfriend whose name recalls the appropriation of Aboriginal land. Such colonial desire is both abetted and inhibited by Christian teachings and institutions, which promote the (dualistic) view that the characters in each of the texts are in some way(s) deficient and so need to do and have more, but that in the end they will still never be good enough, never truly “equal” to the those in the dominant society. This gap between colonized and colonizer is used constantly as a means of oppression: Elaine is mercilessly teased for her failure to behave like a “real” girl/Christian; Maria is humiliated for wearing other kids’ clothing; April’s upscale marriage is sabotaged; and Charlie’s law job evaporates when his firm no longer needs him to get the dam operational. However, the texts that recount these abuses also depict and/or embody forms of hybrid resistance against the colonial representations that make such de-humanizing treatment possible.

Despite such links between all four texts and the ideas of Girard and Bhabha, it is the ways in which the works diverge from these ideas that suggest how to usefully
integrate the two theories in relation to Canadian Native literature. The first such
divergence concerns the fact that only *Cat’s Eye* presents us with a sacrifice that seems
reasonably Girardian. Participating in the social and physical exile of her friend, Elaine
experiences intermittent peace overshadowed by a haunted anxiety; there is no real
resolution until she understands that Cordelia was innocent in her way, lonely and afraid
just as Elaine herself was. In the texts by Campbell, Culleton, and King, however, we see
that Marie, Cheryl, and Eli Stands Alone are in fact all “guilty”—that is, each of them is
accused of (and punished for) causing a disturbance, of upsetting the status quo, and in
every instance the charge is justified.

Second, it is clear that in each of the Native texts, a crucial element in the
protagonists’ ability to resolve their conflicts is to (re)join their respective communities.
As Hoy notes, for example, April Raintree’s “final claim to have accepted her identity
has less to do with some essence she discovers in herself (or other Métis or Native
people) than with her mobilization of the relations, historic and present, in which she
finds herself” (“Nothing” 177). This is far from an unusual plot development for a Native
work of literature,³²¹ but it directly contravenes Girard’s model in its promotion of
positive mimesis: Maria, Cheryl, and Lionel all become *more* like others in their

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³²¹ In his extensive examination of this issue, *That the People Might Live*, Jace Weaver in fact asserts that
“the single thing that most defines Indian literatures relates to this sense of community and commitment to
it” (43). Weaver argues that this focus on community is simply and crucially a function of the reality of
Native cultures, past and present (*That* 37-45), a point with which Fee agrees: “Identity for Native people is
not a personal decision, and the community makes it clear that individuals are responsible for the cultural
survival of the group” (“Deploying” 216). For further reflections on the central role of community in
Native literature see Hobson, “Introduction” 9-11; King, Introduction to *All* xiii-xiv; Krupat, *Voice* 162-
163; Lutz, *Contemporary* 99; Owens, *Other* 5, 11; Ruppert, *Mediation* 28; Trafzer, *Earth* 7, 21; Vevaina,
“Articulating” 68; Zwicker, “Canadian” 152. Note, however, that in *Green Grass, Running Water* King
cautions that such a focus on community relations in Native culture, although often accurate and
meaningful, can also be tied to racist stereotypes. Thus, when the four elders enter his electronics store, Bill
Bursum assumes that they are members of Lionel’s family:

“Ah, they’re not really relations,” said Lionel.
“Everyone’s related, grandson,” said the Lone Ranger.
“That’s right,” said Bursum. “That’s the way things are with Indians.” (298)
community, not less. In the context of mimetic conflict, groups for Girard are only good for banding together to destroy the imagined infidels in their midst, not for producing resolutions to conflict. Such resolutions can only result from the explicit embrace of Christian idea(l)s (as defined by Girard)—which brings us to the third deviation.

The final resolution presented in *Cat’s Eye* is, again, the only one examined that accords with Girard’s vision: it is ultimately an idealized aspect of colonial religion (i.e., forgiveness) that rescues Elaine. In fact, the novel specifically suggests that Elaine’s more direct methods of retaliating against her colonizers/mimetic rivals does not solve any of her problems, but only causes new ones. It is only when Elaine can move beyond art-as-vengeance, for example, that she comes to an understanding of her relationship with both Mrs. Smeath and Cordelia that ends the haunting she has endured for so many years. In contrast, the various Native protagonists all experience or witness the success of confronting colonial abuse. They all also explicitly turn away from any form of Christianity, (re)turning instead to Native worldviews, ceremonies, traditions.322

The rejection of Christian views and practices by these characters may, however, indicate that Girard’s other solution to mimetic violence is in evidence. It may be, that is, that the tradition itself is in fact being scapegoated, that once the mimetically duelling figures blame some form(s) or representative(s) of Christianity for their struggles, peace ensues. But although some of the characters do hold this religion responsible for many of their problems, their perspectives are more complex than the scapegoating explanation.

322 In this regard, the protagonists of *Cat’s Eye* and *Halfbreed* both receive spiritual assistance from the figure of a powerful, iconic female figure that neatly dramatizes the crucial difference between these texts. After Elaine falls into the creek and believes she is going to die, the Virgin Mary offers salvation: “You can go home now, she says. It will be all right” (203). When Maria finally decides that she can’t live as an addict any longer she goes through a terrible withdrawal, but although she is alone she feels another’s presence: “my Cheechum was with me the whole time. I could feel her presence in the room and I wasn’t afraid” (144). In other words, we see Elaine rescued by a(n idealized) representative of Christianity, while Maria is comforted by a member of her own family.
allows. Maria rails against “the church” often, but sees colonialism as a much more basic human trait, to the extent of believing that if Natives were ever in charge “we would only end up oppressing someone else” (184).

April likewise turns her back on Christianity but is never shown as explicitly faulting it for causing the fights with her sister. And Lionel and Charlie never give any outward sign that they hold anyone or anything other than themselves responsible for their feuding. There is the further problem that, again, the scapegoat must be chosen arbitrarily, it must be innocent of the charges laid—and it would be very difficult to argue that Christian people, institutions, and ideologies have not been responsible for a great deal of Native suffering.

In the context of Bhabha’s understanding of colonialism, the endings of these texts are much more reasonable. If the characters’ fighting is primarily the result of a mimetic relation with the colonial authorities, it would seem obvious that they might best stop the violence by undermining this relation and embracing an alternate/indigenous worldview, at least to some degree. And yet this move takes place without the elements of overt “menace” suggested by Bhabha. That is, the literature itself may embody a form of subversive hybridity, but this dynamic is not explicitly apparent within the narratives. In each case the characters, after all their struggles, more or less just disengage themselves from any colonizing relations. Lionel and Charlie epitomize this movement, as they let go of their most damaging colonial ties and look forward to the prospect of simply re-connecting with their families. In a text as filled with satire and grand gestures as King’s—a text that presents key biblical figures as insane despots and climaxes with a

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323 Maria’s comments are echoed by Beatrice Culleton during her interview with Hartmut Lutz: “If it were, say, the Indians and they were oppressing the white people, I would be angry with the Indians, of course. It’s the injustice that people do to each other!” (103).
major character drowning because a dam is smashed by three cars that evoke the Niña, the Pinta, and the Santa María—such quietness is striking.

A final, basic problem is that neither Girard nor Bhabha fully anticipate the central notion of colonized people engaged in mimetic contests with one another. For Bhabha, the focus is almost exclusively on the relations between colonized and colonizer. According to Girard’s theory, if the primary target of imitation in Native literature is the colonizer, then this should similarly lead to direct competition between Natives and non-Natives. And yet in the above texts there is virtually no such competition—again with the single exception of Cat’s Eye. Cordelia is Elaine’s colonizer and mimetic rival. The reason for this situation seems obvious, and is again suggested by Bhabha: the main characters in Atwood’s novel are both young, white, middle-class girls, whereas there is a crucial socio-political power differential between colonizer and colonized in the Native texts. This of course is the “gap” described by Bhabha, which

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324 As noted in section 3.2.3, this focus is a common feature of postcolonial approaches, one which arguably “flattens” and “reduces” the cultures of colonized societies. In the context of conflict between members of these societies, such constant attention on the colonized/colonizer dynamic also disregards critical differences that exist among the former. Thus Mukherjee asserts: “In its terminology like ‘the oppressed,’ ‘the colonized peoples,’ and ‘the indigenous,’ to describe postcolonial societies, the theory suppresses internal hierarchies and divisions in these societies. It does a great disservice to the minorities in these societies by deflecting attention away from their oppression by using a unitary vocabulary” (“Interrogating” 18-19).

325 Elaine’s use of science as the “home culture” component of her hybrid artworks also does not quite match Bhabha’s vision, for the similar reason that both “science” and “Christianity” are elements of the dominant cultural worldview(s). In fact, it is possible to argue that Atwood’s overall discourse on colonialism—as evidenced in her poetry and fiction—regularly omits consideration of the crucial differences between the various colonial subjects she identifies, i.e., Canadians, women, Natives. As Yaying Zhang comments, “while ‘national’ writers such as Atwood might have seen themselves as the disempowered, writing to decolonize the marginal space they occupy as Canadian writers, their victim positioning served to disavow and externalize minoritized subjects” (“Postcolonial”; see also Tolan, “Situating” 456-457; note that this is a criticism that Mukherjee makes of postcolonial theorists more generally [“Interrogating” 18]). As noted in section 2.1.1, a few critics have made the case that such a reading of Atwood’s work misses her emphasis on “Canada’s complicity in colonization, in the genocide and marginalization of the country’s indigenous inhabitants” (Brydon, “Beyond” 52; see also Fiamengo, “Postcolonial”). However valid this rebuttal may or may not be, in Cat’s Eye such an emphasis is entirely absent; to the extent that colonialism is considered in this novel, it is done so entirely in terms of characters
is supported/inscribed by colonial religious perspectives, and which both inhibits any sort of direct, sustained antagonism and limits colonial mimesis itself.

Taking into account these notions of power and difference, it is possible to make modifications to the theories of both Girard and Bhabha that would in many ways account for the mimetic dynamics of *Halfbreed*, *In Search of April Raintree* and *Green Grass, Running Water*. These modifications can best be represented visually. The basic form of Girard’s model is triangular: model (M) and imitator (I) struggle over an object (O):

![Triangle Diagram](attachment:triangle_diagram.png)

A simplified version of Bhabha’s model can also be diagrammed. In this case the form is vertical, with the model (colonizer) and imitator (colonized) vying for the same object, which is tied to colonial identity. The difference in power is marked by a horizontal barrier to show that the imitator likely has little chance of obtaining the object; the barrier also indicates that both direct conflict and full mimesis are discouraged:

![Vertical Diagram](attachment:vertical_diagram.png)

of relatively equivalent socio-political standing. This focus creates a dynamic that differs in critical ways from that evident in works by Native writers considering the issue of colonialism.
Combining the above figures yields the following possibility:

In this new model, the object desired by the colonized again stands for colonial identity. The colonized are both encouraged to, and prevented from, fully obtaining it, and so they begin to resemble and resent *one another* in a competition for success and happiness. Inter-colonized mimetic conflict thus occurs, which stops only when the object is no longer sought as a means to gain self-worth, when the imitative effects of colonialism are resisted.

As noted, such resistance is often effected through the recovery of communal ties and traditional perspectives, a process that both facilitates, and is supported by, the production of hybrid cultural forms, and that also showcases the *constructive* (and non-violent) possibilities of inter-Native mimetic developments. For the characters in at least three key Canadian Native texts, this is exactly what happens to them: they each leave an individualized Christian world and remember, in crucial ways, the presence and power of their relations. In doing so they point to a number of issues involving Canadian Native literature not yet considered by this study, including: the conception of the “self”; the discursive function of the mimetic conflict trope; and what significance the treatment of religion and violence in this literature may hold for the study of religion generally. These issues will be addressed in Chapter Six. In the meantime, my task is to see whether or
not—or to what extent—the patterns of religion and mimetic conflict evident in the Native texts examined in this chapter apply also to the work of a fourth writer, Basil Johnston.
Basil Johnston became a writer early in his 25 years as an ethnologist at the Royal Ontario Museum. In his interview with Hartmut Lutz, Johnston explicitly connects the origin of his writing career to a desire to help non-Natives gain a better understanding of the realities and complexities of Native culture:

I was asked to be a guest simply to look at this display that was mounted by a group of grade five/six students, Churchill Avenue Public School in North York in 1972, which they mounted after studying an Indian unit in depth for six weeks. It was a marvellous display. Over in one corner was this huge tepee and in front of this tepee was this young guy. A young chief wearing a paper headdress, with arms folded in the traditional Blackfoot manner. . . . Then I observed that he looked morose. “How come you look so sad, chief?” And he looked around to see that there were no teachers within the vicinity and he explained, “Sir, I am bored!” “How so, chief?” “Before we started this program on Indians, I always thought Indians were neat, always wanted to be an Indian. But, sir, after six weeks of studying tepees . . . is that all there is, sir?”

That is when I started to write! (223)

The basic problem with what the children were taught, Johnston argues, is that the “Indian unit” was fundamentally superficial. That is, it represented the typical non-Natives approach to viewing Natives “in terms of their physical existence,” as if “Indians

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326 For biographical information on Johnston, see “Basil”; Johnston, Indian; Lutz, Contemporary 229.
327 Johnston also recounts this story in “Is” 54-55; Manitou xii.
were incapable of meditating upon or grasping the abstract” (“Is” 55). To gain insight into “the spiritual and the intellectual, aesthetic side of Indian culture”—indeed, any culture—requires exposure to a people’s literature, to their stories (“Is” 56).

In attempting to facilitate this exposure to Anishinaabae stories, Johnston has become in fact the most prolific Native author in Canada. His writings include essays, short stories, autobiography, biography, film scripts, language books, and traditional Native tales. Although Johnston’s anecdote about the schoolboy suggests that he is writing primarily for non-Natives, much of his work—most obviously the texts written in Ojibway—is directed at Native readers. Given the volume and diversity of Johnston’s output, it is not surprising that some of his writing does not directly involve mimetic conflict. That said, most of his key texts do connect to the topic at hand, particularly his first two contemporary works, _Moose Meat & Wild Rice_ (1978) and _Indian School Days_

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328 In _The Manitous_, Johnston locates the origin of this conception with the arrival of the first missionaries in North America (1-2). He argues that these colonists misinterpreted Anishinaabae religious beliefs as shallow and “primitive,” and so came to believe “that the aboriginal mind was incapable of conceiving or expressing any but the simplest of the abstract” (2; see also Johnston, Foreward x; “One” 11-12). Emma LaRocque similarly asserts that, “to this day, inept and ideologically informed translations of legends or myths are infantilizing Aboriginal literatures” (Preface xvi). See also Noori, “Native” 129-130.

329 Johnston’s commitment to this point may be indicated by the frequency with which he raises it—see, e.g., “One” 13; _Manitous xiii; Ojibway Heritage_ 7.

330 As Margaret Noori remarks, “Recording and perpetuating the stories and language of the Anishinaabe is [Johnston’s] life’s work” (“Native” 100). In recognition of these efforts to promote, preserve, and contribute to Native culture and communities Johnston has received several honours, including the Centennial Medal in 1967, the Order of Ontario in 1989, and the National Aboriginal Achievement Award in 2004 (“Basil”; Lutz, _Contemporary_ 229). However, as mentioned, his writing has received virtually no scholarly attention aside from brief citations and book reviews. The few exceptions include McKegney, _Magic_ 101-106; Murphy, “Knowledge” 15-31; Noori, “Native” 98-137; Rymhs, “Residential”; Scott, “Colonial.”

331 The mixed nature of Johnston’s expected audience is well represented in his preface to _The Manitous_: Stories about the manitous allow native people to understand their cultural and spiritual heritage and enable them to see the worth and relevance of their ideas, institutions, perceptions, and value. Once they see the worth and relevance of their heritage, they may be inspired to restore it in their lives. Perhaps other people will find worth in our understandings as well. (xiii)

Similarly, Johnston addresses _Moose Meat & Wild Rice_ both “to all good Moose Meat people” and “to the white man” (9; cf. Interview with Lutz 233).
In this chapter I will explore the ways in which these connections both follow and deviate from the model proposed in Chapter Four, highlighting the latter with relevant segments of Johnston’s traditional story collections.

5.1 Moose Meat & Wild Rice

*Moose Meat & Wild Rice* opens with a preface that clearly establishes the main context of the book’s stories as colonial/mimetic. The second sentence in *Moose Meat*, for example, notes that the titular Indian reserve is “westernized in outward appearance” (7). We learn that this situation is, at least in part, the result of colonial force, since even before the residents came to live at the reserve,

they had already adopted a number of West European customs, techniques, and approaches into their way of life. Some were imposed upon them. Once incarcerated on the reserve, Moose Meat Indians were expected to advance even more quickly. Missionaries and government agents were assigned to assist in, hasten, and ensure the success of their advance. (7)

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332 Both of these texts consist of discreet stories that might be considered fictionalized history. According to Johnston’s preface to *Moose Meat & Wild Rice*, e.g., “this story is a kind of history although it is not intended to be such” (9). Still, he asserts, “All the stories recounted in this book are true: all are based on events that have occurred” (187). *Indian School Days* is somewhat more precise about its historical connections, presenting as it does Johnston’s memoir of residential school life. Two of the stories in *Moose Meat*—“The Root of Evil” and “The Wedding”—also appear, in only slightly different form, in the later text (*Indian* 123-136). As Jamie Scott points out, the fictionalized aspect of Johnston’s school account—its “mixed generic status”—is indicated by the ways in which oral sources are translated into written ones, Native pronunciation is anglicized, and conversations in which Johnston was not a participant are imagined (“Colonial” 150). Deena Rymhs further identifies such features with the tradition of “memoir” writing generally, a form in which the narrator “moves freely among the rhetorical stances of participant, spectator, and historian” (“Residential” 62).

333 The main collections I will be drawing from are *Ojibway Heritage* (1976), *Ojibway Ceremonies* (1983), *The Manitou* (1995), and the four small books published by the Royal Ontario Museum (*Bear-Walker, Mermaids, Star-Man, Tales*). Because the titles of the first two texts begin with the same word, when referencing them I will use the initials *OH* and *OC*. 186
Johnston also asserts, however, that the “Moose Meaters” were “eager . . . to acquire what the white man had to offer” (7; emphasis added). The first object identified for acquisition in the preface is in fact religion, which was pursued so enthusiastically that the people now espoused as many variations of Christianity “as were available to them” (7-8). Johnston also tells us that, as a result of travels beyond the reserve, “Moose Meaters discovered more about the white man and his new and startling inventions, which they eagerly imported to the reserve upon their inevitable return” (8). Despite such mimetic efforts, there remains a gap between Natives and colonizers:

Better English, service in war, correct deportment, the right to vote, proper dress, social graces, and even new insights did not enhance conditions or the circumstances of the people of Moose Meat Point, nor improve their relations with white people.

Instead, matters seemed to get worse. (8)

Johnston ends his preface by (sarcastically) dedicating the book “especially to the white man, without whose customs and evangelistic spirit the events recounted would not have occurred” (Moose 9; emphasis added).

“Indian Smart: Moose Smart,” the story that opens Moose Meat & Wild Rice, immediately dramatizes many of the themes established in the preface; it also nicely fits the model of religion and mimetic conflict derived from Halfbreed, In Search of April Raintree, and Green Grass, Running Water. As noted in section 1.1.2, mimetic conflict in this story is explicitly caused by the desire to be “just like the white man” (15). By using the moose to pull them through the water, the Indians are imitating both the colonial view

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334 In part, this situation is symbolized by the many characters in the text with biblical names: Adam (26), John (37, 120), Abraham (103), Ezekiel (114), Mary (114), and even Almighty (90).
of humans as superior to/removed from nature, and the colonial talent for avoiding work. Ultimately, by grafting a “white” approach onto a traditional Native activity—moose hunting—the group enacts an (unsuccessful) hybridized effort to overcome the “not quite/not white” barrier: “if they could only see us now they wouldn’t think Indians were so stupid” (16).

Using modern/white ideas and technology to “improve” traditional Native culture provides the driving force of the narratives in Part One of Moose Meat & Wild Rice. In “The Honey Pot,” for example, three men construct a rubber suit in order to steal some honey from bees. The story is in fact a clever refashioning of the Genesis account of the expulsion of the first humans from Eden. A character named Adam attempts to get the honey out of the stump of a tree, but the plan fails and all three friends are driven out of the forest by the insects, condemned to experience much suffering as they dive into the lake. Johnston’s message clearly is that the men’s failing is not—as in Genesis—that they have attempted to steal (knowledge) from nature, but that they have lost the (traditional) knowledge about nature that their community once possessed. Adam’s friend, for example, believes that smoke puts bees “right to sleep,” and also recalls that his grandfather—“or somebody”—told him that “if you run fast you can outrun bees anytime” (28). Both of these items of bee lore are proven completely false in the course of the story. Finally, although the men have argued throughout the escapade, they present the appearance of much greater mimetic conflict while thrashing around in the water.

As mentioned, Johnston elsewhere links this “talent” explicitly to Christian prayer. In “The Miracle,” e.g., two friends Fred and Rufus fight over who gets to carry home a new pipe for Rufus’ grandmother. The pipe is broken, and Fred suggests that they should “pray for a miracle” to fix it. To explain the notion of miracle to his younger friend, Fred refers to Jesus’ multiplication of bread and fishes. Rufus retorts that his grandmother can also “make more” bread and that this is expressly not a miracle (53), which underscores the understanding that prayer is about getting what you want without having to work for it.
during the bee attack: as a tourist boat comes into view a white observer exclaims in alarm, “Those Indians are killing one another!” (30).

Two other tales of failed inventions that follow a similar pattern concern bean wine and a harness-pulley apparatus to hoist up a pig for slaughter. In one, a Moose Meater named Luffus is away from home and, in return for received hospitality, provides his hostess Pearl with a recipe for wine that uses various ingredients of colonial origin, including yeast cakes, raisins, refined sugar, glass jars, and “Boston” beans (22). Pearl, who demonstrates excellent command of a successful Native technique for catching and cooking snow-birds (21-22), is delighted “at the thought of expanding her culinary knowledge” (22). Due to a miscommunication, however, she seals the jars while the beans are fermenting, and the resulting explosions lead the people to assert that Luffus “tried to kill us” (24). Despite his apologies, Luffus is never again invited for a feast of snow-birds (25). In the other story, the slaughter harness is explicitly identified as one of the “better ways of hog-killing devised by the clever white man” (38). In addition, to construct the apparatus items have to be obtained from “a prosperous white farmer” and “the local minister” (39), while—just like the moose-roping plan—the whole idea is put forward as a labour-saving device (38). In the end the branch used to hoist the pig breaks, causing the animal to come crashing down; much chaos ensues (41). The story concludes not with standard mimetic violence, but with the united communal judgement evidenced by “twenty or so Indians, howling with laughter” (41).

The most typically Girardian match-up results from two friends competing for the affections of a young woman on a very hot day. Both men are in their late teens and unemployed (42), both pointedly display a desire for ice-cream (42), and both believe the
woman in question—nicknamed “Power Pack”—recognizes each man’s “superiority” over the other (43). Although all involved are members of the reserve, Power Pack’s symbolic colonial ties are evident from the fact that she is first spied walking “toward the Indian Agents’ corner” (42), and at the end of the story is “hugging the Agent’s mailbox” (47). The friends decide that whichever one of them can find them both a job will “win” Power Pack. The unnaturalness of this contest is manifested when they approach “Uncle John” about cutting his hay; John first experiences “astonishment” that anyone would be looking for manual labour on such a hot day, and then points out that most of his hay is cut and he doesn’t need any more (44). Eventually he agrees to the request and sends them out to the fields with a pair of horses; but because of the heat the two men decide to take a break, stripping off their clothes and swimming in the adjacent lake (45-46). This leaves the horses unsupervised and free to leave, running “past the Indian Agent’s Office” (46) with their ostensible keepers in (hot) naked pursuit. The two friends thus become objects of ridicule and censure from “the assembled ladies” on the agent’s verandah, as well from the object of their affection, Power Pack (47).

The Moose Meat stories that explicitly concern Christianity illustrate, not surprisingly, the religious context of colonial mimesis. In these stories, “white” values and beliefs are most often imposed by non-Natives in specific opposition to traditional Native customs and worldviews (as opposed to the “invention” stories, in which technological advances are imported by Moose Meaters themselves). When Yellow Cloud converts to Christianity, for example, he receives “religious instructions” that include “purging old superstitions” such as “idolatrous beliefs in personal patrons . . . and

336 The colonial element of the contest is emphasized even further when the “loser” thinks to himself that he “was happy enough with the prospect of making some money,” and also that he “might pick up a white girl” later and best his friend after all (45).
the primacy of plants and animals” (58). In their place he must accept the Ten
Commandments, and put his trust in “angels, saints, and guardians” (58). When two
young people wishing to get married express concern that they “belong to the same
totem,” the Catholic priest asserts that totems mean nothing, thus “dismissing several
thousand years of Ojibway history” (102). Reassured, the couple are free to have a
wedding “just like white people” (102).

The last example of religion and mimesis concerns Kitug-Aunquot’s conversion
to Catholicism by the Ojibway-speaking missionary, Father Beauchamp. The mimetic
imposition at issue for the new convert is “the number of obligatory fasting days,” which
seems, to him, “designed more to foster perpetual hunger and suffering rather than the
growth of grace and piety” (81). Kitug-Aunquot does his best to adhere to the
requirements, but one day the missionary finds him at home on a Friday eating balogna,
and explodes: “Don’t you know that if you were to DIE NOW, you would go STRAIGHT TO
HELL and BURN FOREVER?” (83). Unfazed, Kitug-Aunquot maintains that bologna is not
meat but Beauchamp says this is nonsense, accuses him of being a “wicked, sinful old
man,” and departs in anger (83). Later, he agrees to help the church with a wood-cutting
exercise, but instead of showing up with lumber he deposits load after load of sawdust.
Beauchamp is again incensed and demands do know what is going on; in response, his
indignant parishioner states “with a twinkle in his eye” that if bologna is meat, then
sawdust is wood, a statement that elicits an amused response from his fellow Moose
Meaters (84).

It is possible to see Kitug-Aunquot’s encounter with the missionary as a form of
hybrid resistance. In this instance, he has combined the logic of the priest’s argument
about bologna with a sense of humour that represents—and is appreciated by—the local community. A similar act of resistance appears in “What is Sin?”, a story that actually opens with a summary of the mimetic position taken by colonizing teachers, religious leaders, and government representatives: “You must adopt white man’s ways; you must become civilized; you must become Christian. Better off that way” (72). However, despite “all their efforts . . . to become Westernized,” the Moose Meaters found that “every impediment was placed in the way either to prevent or retard their rapid acculturation” (72). The not quite/not white gap outlined by Bhabha is clearly in full effect:

When and where the white people could drink and be merry, the Moose Meaters could not; when and where the white people could play cards and gamble, the Moose Meaters could not without committing sin; when and where white people could dance, the Moose Meaters could not without pain of sin. . . .

. . . Even though a large number ceased speaking Ojibway for the sake of English they were not invited to white homes; despite forsaking their own religious practices and beliefs and embracing several shades of Christianity, the Moose Meaters and their kind were still heathen; and although they married whites, their sons and daughters were never white enough to find acceptance in white society. (73)³³⁷

³³⁷ Most of the explicit dramatizations of the not quite/not white divide are presented in Part Three of Moose Meat & Wild Rice, a section titled “Getting Along and Ahead Outside the Reserve”:

• “How Would You Like Your Eggs?”: We hear again that Natives are told to learn English in order “get along with whites” and obtain their “respect” (113). However the Indians who do learn English find, like the story’s protagonist Ben Cabooge, that “it made precious little difference” and “they continued to encounter difficulties” (113).
Despite the prohibitions on activities they enjoy the Natives continue to practice them in secret, leading of course to a confrontation with the colonial authority intent on maintaining a degree of difference between the two groups. The particular forbidden activity with which the story is concerned, the one cherished above all others, is square dancing, “condemned by Canon Law as immoral and as an immediate and remote occasion for sin” (73). As practiced by the people of Moose Meat Point, square dancing becomes a hybrid form in itself, since to “the various refined and prescribed movements” of the dance—as imported from Europe—were “added jumping, pirouettes, leap-frog, stamping, clucking hooting, whistling, yelling and a hundred other little refinements” (73). Johnston explicitly comments, in fact, that “anthropologists and behavioural scientists alike would have been enthralled by the ingenious admixture of two disparate cultures” (73).

Despite the people’s attempts at secrecy, however, the priest always seems to track down their square dancing parties, screaming: “SINNERS! YOU SINNERS! DANCING! DRINKING!” (74). Eventually, he singles out the fiddler, Pitawaniquot, as the most deserving of judgement: “If it weren’t for you and that accursed instrument of sin, these people would not be committing sin tonight or any other night” (76). Pitawaniquot is both terrified and saddened, since he had only wanted to “add to the enjoyment” of the parties

• “Good Thing We Know Them People”: A mute man from the reserve is captured by residents of “Blunder Bay” as a Japanese spy. The townfolk note the similarities in manner between the man and the local Indians, and declare that it’s a “good thing we know all them people from Moose Meat Point, or we’d really by [sic] fooled” (128).
• “Don’t Call Me No Name!”: Two Native men return to Canada after WWII to find that it is illegal for anyone to serve them alcohol. Not surprisingly, the discovery leads to indignation: “How come its [sic] okay to fight with you white men, but it’s not okay to drink with you guys” (121).
• “They Don’t Want No Indians”: Zubyaeh McMac identifies an unknown corpse as a Moose Meat resident who moved away years ago, but he can’t get any help from either the federal or provincial authorities in getting the body released from the morgue. Zubyaeh accuses each party of “hiding behind jurisdiction. You want Indians to integrate, then you don’t want them to. Nobody wants them; nobody wants us” (134).
Pitawaniquot may not have exactly believed that his guilt could be transferred to another, but he was moved by this selfless act on the part of his friend. He was glad. The Ojibway may have forgotten many of their traditions but assuming responsibility for others and taking blame were not among them. (77)

The dancing continues but the priest again locates his flock no matter how hard they try to hide. A “war council” is held to solve the problem, and the people decide—like Kitug-Aunquot—to use the priest’s logic against him, reasoning that if the fiddler is responsible for the dancing, then the priest’s horse is to blame for him disrupting their parties. And so the next time the priest appears, at a dance deliberately held in a remote location, a posted sentry unhitches his horse and sends it off into the night (78-79). The priest never crashes another party, “and the Moose Meaters became even more accomplished in dancing” (79).

Throughout *Moose Meat & Wild Rice*, a consistent pattern emerges with regards to colonialism and mimesis. When the desire to act “like the white man” is evidenced by Natives themselves, the effort both fails and produces inter-Native mimetic conflict. When colonial ideas are imposed from without, however, the Native response typically comprises a successful attempt at hybrid resistance. In this regard, key aspects of colonial discourse are revised specifically in order to “estrange the basis of its authority—its rules of recognition” (Bhabha, “Signs” 162). A common element in both types of stories,
however, is that the not quite/not white gap is always maintained: the Moose Meaters are either unable to successfully adopt white technology, attitudes, or approaches, or else the colonial powers themselves expressly inhibit full mimetic acculturation. In addition, the community always unites in the end against the one(s) attempting to bring about colonial mimesis, whether Native hunter or white priest.338

5.2 Indian School Days

Published in 1988, Johnston’s account of his time at a Christian residential school in Spanish, Ontario, from 1939-1944 and 1947-1950,339 proved immensely influential. Arguably the most detailed account of such an experience that had yet appeared (Evans, Review 57), Indian School Days “initiated an explosion of writing about residential schools in Canada” (Rymhs, “Residential” 58; cf. Wasserman, “God” 25). As with Moose Meat & Wild Rice, Johnston opens the book by establishing colonial mimesis as a key theme. He asserts that residential schools in Canada were expressly intended to “un-Indianize” the students, and that the “line generally taken by the instructors was that Indian culture was inferior” (7). The ultimate goal of the schools was, of course, to participate in the process of Native acculturation, so that “Indians and whites” would participate in the process of Native acculturation, so that “Indians and whites” would

338 Unlike the protagonists of the Native texts considered in Chapter Four, the characters in Moose Meat & Wild Rice are not shown rejoining their community as an intrinsic part of the solution to their mimetic difficulties. Likely this fact has much to do with Johnston’s intent to showcase narratives that are funny in a particularly unsubtle way (Interview with Lutz 233), which means that they tend to end in the chaos of failed ambitions rather than the peace of reconciliation and return. Still, the importance and meaning of community underlies all of the stories, and is in fact highlighted in the book’s preface: “Moose Meaters have gone from the reserve for various purposes and for varying lengths of time. They have always returned, as they will always return, no matter what. Moose Meat Point is home” (7). Thus, when people laugh at those who introduce to the community new ways of killing moose or pigs, e.g., there is no sense that the unfortunate innovators have permanently damaged their communal ties. In fact, such responses may be seen specifically as inclusive, given that Johnston identifies a key trait of Moose Meaters as “a wonderful sense of humour” (9).

339 When Johnston first arrives at the school it is called St. Peter Claver’s; when he returns it had become the Garnier Residential School.
become “one in language, one in pursuits, tastes, ambitions, and hopes” (7). More specifically, the school that Johnston attended was established “in 1825 by secular priests of the Roman Catholic Church as part of an extensive missionary effort to convert the Indians of Manitoulin Island” (9).

Johnston experiences attempts at colonial same-making from the moment he arrives at the school, when he is ordered to shell peas as part of a group of boys named for an NHL team (24). In terms of actual sports, the students play only the colonial games of hockey, football, softball, basketball, and boxing (37, 207). Their respective Native cultures are suppressed as much as they can be: the students are forbidden to “speak Indian” (105), for example, while hope obtains among the school’s priests that “at least some of [the boys’] coarser manners might be expurgated” (169). In sum, the Natives are told: “You can’t live the way your ancestors did . . . From now on you must do things the civilized way, the moral, Christian way” (128). To this end, the boys follow their teachers at mass as they drop “in united genuflection” (31); study The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, Ivanhoe, Treasure Island, and Great Expectations (64); learn to enunciate English words “as a learned man would, and not as some illiterate might” (65); perform H.M.S. Pinafore and The Pirates of Penzance (183); and absorb lessons on Western table manners and dancing styles (226-230).

Such colonial mimesis in residential schools “was achieved through strict discipline and rigorous punishment” (7). As soon as Johnston arrives at the school, for

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340 The one game that appears to be an invention of the boys themselves, “mushpot,” is cut short by the priests “too soon . . . jis’ when we were having fun” (43).
341 Although Johnston does not dwell on this issue in Indian School Days, the loss of Native languages, and the role that residential schools have played in this loss, has occupied a great deal of his attention and concern for many years. His thoughts on the subject are well expressed in the article, “One Generation From Extinction.” For additional commentary on this issue specifically in relation to Johnston’s own views see Vevaina, “Articulating” 56; Kelly, “Landscape” 115.
example, he is forced to clean the toilets, “vile with the reek of human waste” (33). He notes several other instances of punishment, often for seemingly minor offences such as whispering a single word when told to be quiet, returning to the dormitory to retrieve a forgotten item, or smoking (e.g., 44, 108, 159-161). For such crimes, “punishment was swift and arbitrary, administered by means of various weapons at hand—a ruler, a rod, a bell, a pointer, the open hand, the closed fist, a leather riding boot” (138). 342 Students also do not have enough to eat, which combines with their feelings of abandonment such that “the abiding condition was hunger, physical and emotional” (137).343

Even if by comparison with the abuse and maltreatment inflicted upon little boys in other institutions,344 the boys at Spanish received less malevolent treatment, the sense of hurt and alienation was not in any proportion diminished. Most of the boys were already hurt . . . [they] needed less of a heavy hand, a heavy foot, heavy words, and more of

342 As Thomas King points out (“Godzilla” 15), Johnston also takes care to document many instances in which individual priests and teachers do show the boys genuine kindness. For example, “there were two young men who, by disposition and temperament, were well suited to look after the little ones. The first was Father ‘Barney’ Mayhew, S.J., a man of tremendous compassion and understanding” (61). For other examples see 39, 44, 64, 82, 90, 189, 232, 233.

343 Johnston’s account of the great “Bean Rebellion” in fact highlights the emotional side of this complaint. When Boston baked beans—“the only decent food we get all week” (225)—are taken off the menu, a group of the senior boys, including Johnston, take their grievance to the school master, Father Oliver. Oliver, however, points out the degree to which their cause is groundless: “You've all grown since you’ve been here. No one has ever got sick from the meals served; no one has died. You all look mighty healthy to me” (238). The boys not only concur with this assessment, they also refuse the opportunity to leave that Oliver offers to them (237-238). Still, the context of the rebellion shows that the abuse about which they are complaining is really the lack of respect and affection they constantly endure. Leading up to their confrontation with Father Oliver, e.g., the boys discuss how they are “sick and tired of getting pushed around, ordered around” (235), asserting that they are “not dogs” (234). They explicitly acknowledge from the start, in fact, that losing the beans is “only a little thing” in itself, but that it is part of a larger pattern of neglect (225). As Lisa Emmerich remarks, “limited rations are reminders that the Native Canadian students found other essentials in short supply at Indian schools: patience, compassion, good humour, sympathy, and understanding” (Review 219).

344 Johnston makes note of reports, e.g., that “at Shingwauk Residential School little boys were forced to stand in line, hands joined, to receive shocks from an electric socket” (7).
affection, approbation, companionship, praise, guidance, trust, laughter, regard, love, tenderness. (7)

Through it all, the school keeps to a rigidly defined timetable. Johnston describes how each day is organized into discreet segments separated by “bells and whistles, gongs and clappers,” which to him come to symbolize “obedience, conformity, dependence, subservience, uniformity” (43).

Given these conditions, it is not surprising to find Johnston regularly using prison terms for the school and its students: “Our treatment implied that we were little better than felons or potential felons” (138). The prison trope further relates to the religious context of the students’ situation, namely the Catholic notion of inherent guilt, that all are “sinners” (54). Any student at confession who claims to have done nothing wrong, for example, is immediately brought up short by this presumption of guilt: “How dare you say such a thing . . . You are a sinner like everyone else. No one can go without sin for a week” (55). The “black book” held by each priest thus becomes one of their key

345 Johnston also refers to the school as an “institution” in this sense (25, 41) and to the students as both “inmates” (19, 23, 26) and “felons” (21, 99, 137). For comments on this issue in Indian School Days see Evans, Review; Scott, “Colonial” 151-152; for a detailed study of the prison trope in this and other Native writings see Rymhs, From. Note that, as Thomas King points out, to some extent the priests are also depicted as “prisoners of sorts, because they are German Jesuits who were stuck in Canada during the Second World War” (Interview with Lutz 111; cf. Johnston, Indian 8). We are further told that many of them are unable to show affection “because their system, the system of the Jesuits, prevented them from doing so” (Indian 7); Johnston notes in this regard that the teachers, like the students, “were under close observation” (8; cf. 44). “In such a system and in the circumstances,” in other words, “it was easier for scholastics and priests to appear to be indifferent, insensitive to and even intolerant of human distress, real or imagined” (8). See also Parker, Review 239.

346 In “Appropriating Guilt,” Deena Rymhs considers the ways in which Canadian “residential school and prison narratives explore guilt as a colonial construct” (113), highlighting the Christian framework of this construct (see also Rymhs, “Residential” 64-65). Johnston himself points out the degree to which the presumption of guilt is entirely antithetical to traditional Ojibway understandings:

The men and women who were created as the last and most dependent of all beings took a name in its collective form, “Anishnabae,” for themselves. Such a designation represented their understanding of the fundamental goodness of human nature derived from the supposition that men and women generally meant well in all their undertakings and aspirations. The name also represented the good opinion they had of themselves as men and women of merit. . . . The belief in the innate goodness of human nature
“instruments of control and oppression” (43), since it is in this book that proof of each boy’s crimes is recorded (e.g., 22, 38, 44, 112). However, despite the professed belief that “only the angels and the saints” are truly innocent (55), the priests themselves are not regarded, or treated, by one another as “felons.” This difference is a key example of Bhabha’s not quite/not white gap, evident throughout *Indian School Days*. For example: to help stave off hunger the boys must eat a raw turnip or slice of cabbage once a day, but the priests do not (38); every Thursday is ostensibly a school holiday, but it is “not really a day off, except for the teachers” (48); and the students—similar to Maria’s community in *Halfbreed*—have nothing but second-hand clothing and equipment, for which they are ridiculed by their white peers (203).

Not surprisingly, such privation seems to generate a degree of colonial desire for better things. When the students from the nearby girls’ school come by for religious services, for example, the boys are “incited to envy” by their “fine dresses, fine coats, fine hats, fine shoes” (58-59; see also 81). This desire is of course the last piece of the mimetic conflict puzzle. In fact, even before he is sent to the residential school, Johnston experiences such conflict with his friend Charlie as a result of their competing desire to escape punishment for truancy (15-17). The mimetic elements of their discord—aside from together rebelling against the teacher’s insistence on conformity to the colonial education system—include hunting (14), punishment (17-18), mutual betrayal, and the remained, and conferred on men and women a sense of worth, equality, and pride.

(Foreword x-xi; cf. “How” 48; *Manitous* xvi)

Rupert Ross refers to this “fundamental perception of the nature of humanity” in Anishinaubae tradition as the “doctrine of original sanctity” (165), the importance and meaning of which he discusses in some detail (*Dancing* 165-184).

347 Significantly, the first priest that Johnston encounters upon arrival at the school is Father Buck, but because of his German accent the boy hears his name as “Father Book” (22; emphasis added).

348 When the teacher sends a fellow student to call the boys back to school, Charlie tricks Basil into dropping his pants, a humiliating prank that fills him with the desire for revenge (16). Basil is eventually caught
pronouncement that they “both deserve to be in Spanish” (17). Once Johnston *is* in Spanish, the mimetic context of all further fighting is immediately and permanently established: “All the boys were dressed alike in beige corduroy riding breeches, beige shirts, grey woollen socks and black leather work boots; all were dark and dirty, their heads shaved bald” (22). As well, the boys are referred to as numbers (34), and typically “came from broken homes” (19). And most, if not all, fight. When Johnston first arrives and is placed in the NHL pea-shelling team, he gets into a punching match with his teammate over the speed of his efforts (24-25); when an escape attempt by three boys goes awry, two of them end up “eager for revenge” on the third (101); and in fact at any moment one student might deliberately provoke another to battle—“to prove his worth or avenge some wrong”—by literally walking up to him “with a chip on his shoulder” (41).

The mimetic consequence of such conflict in the larger context of inter-Native relationships is alluded to by Johnston’s parodic description of an impromptu paint fight: “Victor and vanquished dripped from head to toe in blood incarnadine, and the Spanish River ran red” (85).³⁴⁹

Once in a while, however, the boys’ ire *is* directed at the priests rather than at one another. When the student who is shaving Johnston’s head is told to hurry up, he responds: “Take my time if I wan’ to. No white man’s gonna make me hurry” (23). Such “dawdling” in fact constitutes the main form of “passive resistance” against the school authorities (30). When it is time for the students to move to the next phase of their day, and threatened with a beating, at which point he lies and says that Charlie bullied him into skipping school (17).

³⁴⁹ With the understanding that the boys’ fighting is directly related to their situation at the school, it is ironic that at one point they receive a very Girardian sermon from one of the priests about the dangers of mimetic conflict. Like Girard, Father Belanger asserts that anger at another can act like a virus as it “breeds envy, revenge, prejudice, and becomes hate,” which in turn becomes all-consuming war (55-56).
for example, they linger in the hall; and yet, while “they may have appeared to be waiting, the boys were in reality exercising a form of quiet disobedience, directed against bells, priests, school and, in the abstract, all authority, civil and religious” (29-30). Still, the school’s “inmates” rarely confront the priests head on. Their secondary manner of colonial resistance, therefore, is less direct and appears in hybrid cultural form: sports. Using cast-off equipment and ill-fitting uniforms, and with their “pride and dignity to uphold” (206), the boys win championships against white teams in baseball (63), football (206), and hockey (208). The Native element of their success is indicated first by the fact that a student’s hockey prowess is paralleled with his hunting skills (14). The link between these two cultural practices is made explicit by Johnston when describing the “keenly awaited” issuing of hockey sticks to the boys: “They looked at the trueness of the shaft as a hunter looks down the barrel of a rifle to check the alignment of the sights” (76).

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350 Within the context of Johnston’s other writings, it is also possible to see the boys’ unresponsiveness as a means of asserting their indigenous sense of time in the face of colonial schedule-making: “The Anishnabeg often took days, weeks, or even months to think about some matter before giving answer. They had long experience with the consequences of instant decisions. Even though an urgent issue, or another person’s needs were involved, it was always better to take time” (OC 80).

351 This is not to say that the boys spend their time simply obeying orders and following rules. Much of Johnston’s text is given over to episodes of secret rebellion which, as Robley Evans points out, possess tremendous narrative significance:

What [the school] did produce was a counterculture among the boys, and it is the detailed anecdotes of subversion that dominate the story, a narratival breakdown into a more idiosyncratic and personal experience once the opening pattern of obedience has been established. . . . The narrative literally escapes from the chronological structure of the opening chapters and takes on the episodic rhythm of the boys’ secretive and imaginative lives. Just as the story begins with the truant’s act of rebellion in skipping school, its secret life continues with accounts of boys racing the farm horses at nights on the back roads, having rotten potato fights when they should have been at work in the kitchen, and slyly dumping the choir director out of her sled into the snow. (Review 56-57)

352 Dorothy Parker further points out that, since some of the boys go on to professional careers in hockey, this sport may have been “the only successful vocational training that existed at the school” (Review 239).

353 The winning combination of Native skills and colonial games also extends to Bridge, which allows two of the boys a chance to dominate the powers-that-be in at least one arena. At first they “played according to the system they were taught,” but then develop their own system of bidding which is virtually unbeatable.
The sports teams are important for the boys not only as “a symbol for winning,” however, but as “a catalyst that created a bond of friendship and brotherhood; the medium by which they inspired one another” (63). This is a bond that, in turn, specifically helps to insulate them against the forces of colonial mimesis. As Thomas King remarks, “While the boys . . . are not blood relations, Johnston shows how they band together as a family unity for identity, security, and affection, creating a communal sanctuary that offers protection from the well-meaning but assimilationist ideas of the Jesuits” (Introduction to All xiv). This crucial sense of the value of community is driven home in the final pages of Indian School Days, as Basil and his peers become possibly “the first full [secondary school] graduating class of Indian students in Canada” (242). At the ceremony Joe Peter Pangwish, chief of the largest reserve in the area, speaks to the students: “Do something for your people,” he tells them; in response, the boys “solemnly promised to do so” (242). The concluding words of the text reinforce the sense that the students’ shared (colonial) experiences at school have bound them closely as a group: “‘We toughed it out, didn’t we? They couldn’t break us down, could they?’ Dominic said with pride, as we shook hands; he would not—could not—say ‘Farewell’ or ‘Goodbye’ or ‘Au revoir’” (243).

(198). This dominance in cards recalls Eli Stand Alone’s linguistic superiority over Clifford Sifton in Green Grass, Running Water (141).

354 Cf. Rymhs, “Residential” 60: “Johnston’s extended description of the students’ defiance of the priests’ authority, his subversion of official discourses, and his affirmation of collective solidarity all serve to articulate a collective identity in opposition to the residential school system.”

355 The significance of this ending as a collective response of survival and subversion is considered by Emmerich, 219-220; Rymhs, “Residential” 68; Scott, “Colonial” 152.
5.3 Deviations from the Model

Although the stories discussed in this chapter do fit the model derived in Chapter Four in many ways, they also contain key elements that diverge from it. An example of such deviation is evident in the pattern of colonial mimesis in *Moose Meat & Wild Rice*. Very simply, whenever such mimesis is depicted as enforced or encouraged by a white person, it is successfully resisted; whenever it is introduced by a Native, it is unsuccessfully accepted, a move that ends in disaster as well as the ridicule of the idea’s proponent. In both instances, the Natives ultimately end up no more “like the white man” than they were at the beginning. In fact, the differences between the two cultures are *reinscribed* as a result of attempts at colonial mimesis, but not in the sense of Bhabha’s “not quite/not white” gap; instead, the differences protect and maintain precisely those traditional practices and ideas that Johnston himself is explicitly attempting to preserve and promote through his writing. Overall, in fact, Johnston unambiguously asserts the failure of colonial mimesis in both *Moose Meat & Wild Rice* and *Indian School Days*. The residential school, for example, “existed for two reasons . . . One was to train Indian youth for some vocation,” and the other “was to foster religious vocations”; however, “the school produced neither tradesmen nor priests” (*Indian* 26-27).356 Similarly, “while many aspects of Indian life changed over the years, the basic nature of the Ojibway of

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356 Jamie Scott identifies a key moment pointing to the failure of colonial mimesis at the conclusion of *Indian School Days* (241-242), when Johnston discovers that his valedictorian speech is locked in a drawer: “Forced to extemporize, he was able to present the address verbatim, a success he attributed not to the intervention of the Christian God to whom he had been obliged to pray every morning and evening at Spanish, but to ‘Kitchi-manitou,’ who ‘must have taken pity on the audience and me in this moment of disaster’” (“Colonial” 152). Johnston’s speech itself identifies the need for he and his fellow graduates to use their education to safeguard their “rights as first citizens of the country” (241). According to J.R. Miller, this is exactly what has happened across Canada: “Ironically, one of the most powerful effects of the residential school has been its role in molding Native students into political leaders as well as defenders of the traditional culture” (*Shingwauk’s* 430; qtd. in Scott, “Colonial” 156).
Moose Meat Point remained essentially the same”; “above all,” we are told, they still “possessed a wonderful sense of humour” (Moose 8-9).

The story “What is Sin?” complicates this picture somewhat by presenting a colonial practice enthusiastically embraced and transformed by Natives, but with no negative consequences (that is to say, no explosions, bee attacks, nude horse chasing, etc.). Although it is possible to argue that the dancing can be seen as a form of hybrid resistance, the story itself asserts that the dancing was embraced for an entirely different—and entirely straightforward—reason. Simply put, the residents of Moose Meat Point had fun dancing. This sense of fun is also identified as traditional to the community: “Often the celebration did not need a reason. Ojibway have always been willing and excellent celebrants” (74). In a similar manner, the residential school boys enjoy sports; all of them, in fact, derive “fun and benefit from baseball, softball, touch football, basketball, and hockey” (37). For one of the boys, hockey is the “only thing he loves” (141). Additionally, in joining their hunting skills with colonial sport techniques, the students are keeping alive Native practices that they would not otherwise be able to engage in. This situation obtains to an even further degree regarding square dancing. The Moose Meat form of this custom does not simply include Native practices, but in fact recovers them; the movements added to European square dancing are derived, that is, from war rituals “long in disuse but not forgotten” (73). In other words, by adopting colonial practices that align with Native ones, the characters in the end appear less colonized, not more.

357 Margaret Noori provides a brief discussion of this text’s depiction of the “futile [colonial] attempts to change the people of Moose Meat Point” (“Native” 104).
358 Johnston states, in fact, that the dancers would have been more than happy to dance non-subversively, that “had the church permitted dancing, the Moose Meaters might not have resorted to clandestine meetings” (74).
Not only is colonial mimesis typically unsuccessful in Johnston’s tales, but it also often does not result in genuine inter-Native mimetic conflict. In the *Moose Meat* stories that show a non-Native attempting to impose colonial change upon the community, there is no evidence of such conflict at all. In the stories that depict *Natives* importing colonial ideas, however, such conflict is (as noted above) certainly suggested. And yet, unlike the mimetic battles in *Halfbreed, In Search of April Raintree, and Green Grass, Running Water*, the ones in Johnston’s stories are typically resolved almost immediately, and often only *appear* to be mimetic conflicts in the first place. The men thrashing about in the water, for example, are being attacked only by bees, not by one another (29). Similarly, when the bean wine explodes, the people only *think* that Luffus is trying to kill them; when he explains and apologizes, he is able to regain his companion’s friendship (25). The degree to which the (apparently) mimetic conflicts are *not* serious is suggested by the fact that, in several instances, these situations result in laughter (e.g., 41, 48, 71).

Fights among the boys of *Indian School Days* also do not quite fit the model under consideration. According to Johnston, these scraps were primarily motivated not by colonial desire, but by the need “to infuse some excitement into the monotony of institutional life” (41). Johnston in fact explicitly asserts that the boys in general did not evince mimetic desire for the trappings of colonialism, but rather were focused simply on returning to their communities:

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359 Relief of monotony is in fact one of *Indian School Days*’ recurring themes. Often it is the boys, however, who provide relief to those outside the school. For example, for the people living in the town of Spanish, “the monotony of their existence” was typically broken only by the Native students’ sports contests and theatrical performances (1, 3). When choir director Miss Leutsch is brought over from the girls’ school in the winter, the two boys pulling her sled often run much faster and less carefully than she would prefer. Still, “the careening rides that the sister endured from time to time were about the only thrills that she must have had in decades of pious existence” (58).
To talk, as I imagine *other boys our age* did, about the latest adventure of Batman or the exploits of the Shadow; or to compare the relative merits of a Packard and a Studebaker; or to speculate on the earning powers of lawyers, doctors and engineers; or even to contemplate our future careers, professional or otherwise, was beyond our experience and imagining. Our *sole aspiration* was to be rescued or released (it didn’t matter which) from Spanish, and to be restored to our families and homes. That was the sum total of our ambitions. (53; emphasis added)

Likewise, although the boys do envy the “fine coats,” etc., of the students at the nearby girls’ school, the expressed need is not so much material as emotional: “often did we wish we were under the care of nuns or that the priests had been endowed with as much humanity, understanding and compassion as the Daughters of Mary” (59).

This disconnect in Johnston’s modern work between mimetic violence and colonial mimesis is also found, not surprisingly, in his traditional narratives. That is to say, the Anishinaubae stories of mimetic conflict that Johnston relates make no mention of, and have no evident relation to, the arrival of Europeans in North America.360 As such, they may shed further light on such conflict in the contemporary tales. Note that, although these stories may be considered part of the mythic universe of the Anishinaubae, I make no assumptions about their “transparency”—that is to say, the degree to which they do, or do not, accurately represent traditional cultural practices, narratives, beliefs,

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360 This is not to say that Johnston makes no reference at all to this subject in his traditional collections, or that colonialism has not impacted them in any way; for a brief discussion of this issue see Noori, “Native” 112-113, 138. Explicit references to colonialism appear in these texts quite often in fact; see, e.g., *Bear-Walker* 61-64; *Manitous* xi, xxiii, 1, 7-8, 178-193, 235-237; *OC* 37, 157-175. That said, the traditional stories of mimetic conflict with which I am concerned here do not themselves explicitly engage colonialism in any way.
My interest in Johnston’s (re)tellings here concerns the metaphoric “world of the text” (in Ricoeur’s terms) that he is presenting.

The mimetic element of these traditional accounts is invariably demonstrated either by the family relation of the combatants—as with fights between brothers—and/or by the ways in which they are evenly matched as warriors. The fight between Nanabush and a bear provides a typical example of the latter: “First Nanabush would hit the bear; then the bear would hit Nanabush” (*Bear-Walker* 34); “Nanabush threw the bear” and then “the bear sent Nanabush flying” (34, 36); the combatants “hurled rocks at one another” (36) and “dragged each other” (37). Likewise, when Nanabush fights his father, “neither could overcome the other . . . They were spirits . . . gods . . . and therefore

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*361* In contrast, several commentators on Johnston’s traditional stories either assert, or assume, precisely such transparency. We are assured, e.g., that through these stories Johnston “lets the Ojibway tradition speak for itself” (Mengelkoch, Review 60); that his “voice and presence . . . are not unlike those of the tribal storyteller” (Miller, Review 62); and that his work provides “glimpses into the culture of the Ojibway” (Van Eck, Review 593). For similar appraisals see Child, Review; Kramer, “First”; Peschel, Review. A few reviewers, however, draw attention to Johnston’s role in selecting, constructing, and translating the stories. Christopher Vecsey, e.g., argues that “Johnston’s perception of Ojibway traditions is often too self-consciously schematic, too schooled, to represent a thoroughly pre-contact Ojibway heritage . . . His tales and interpretations are modern, substantially removed from traditional Ojibway life which changed irrevocably in the past hundred years” (209-210). See also Brown, Review; Methot, Review; Ridington, “Sacred.” Johnston himself, in the final words of his epilogue to *Moose Meat & Wild Rice*, addresses some of the difficulties involved in conveying in written English form stories received orally in Ojibway: “The stories as written cannot adequately convey the real nature or impart the scope of that sense of wit and humour that forms an integral part of the Ojibway people and their character. The limits of translation act as an effective bar to a fuller exposition of Ojibway humour” (188).

The only sustained analysis of Johnston’s traditional stories of which I am aware is Noori, “Native” 98-137. Although her discourse at times suggests she herself is making assumptions about the transparency of these stories—using terms such as “recording” (100), “recounts” (101), and “gathered” (102) to describe the ways in which Johnston interacts with oral narratives—Noori also explicitly asserts that Johnston elaborates and redefines these stories (103), offers multiple versions of certain stories for heuristic purposes (124), and “edits scenes and characters” (124); it would be a “misinterpretation,” therefore, to “think his work is ethnography rather than literature” (137).

*362* In this regard, my approach to Johnston’s presentation of sacred Anishinaubae narratives is also consonant with a number of current views within the academic study of religion concerning myths generally, views well summarized (and championed) by Russell McCutcheon (“Myth”). McCutcheon asserts, e.g., that myths represent “ordinary human means of fashioning and authorizing their lived-in and believed-in ‘worlds’” (200). For further discussions of the study of myth, see Lincoln, *Theorizing*; Mack, *Who; McCutcheon, “Methods”*; Segal, *Theories*; Sienkewicz, *Theories*.

*363* In Johnston’s more recent texts (e.g., *The Manitou)*, he refers to this figure as Nana’b’oozoo, not Nanabush. I will use the latter spelling, however, since this is how it appears in the majority of Johnston’s stories.
equal” (OC 165-166). The mimetic aspect of this particular fight is further emphasized in one account when the father specifically transforms himself into a younger man, like his son (Manitous 66). Finally, when the spirit of the dawn confronts the spirit of evening, he stops the sun in the sky and taunts, “can you match that?” (OH 30; emphasis added). Of course his adversary is more than up to the challenge, and so their battle continues without end, because “neither medicine man was more powerful than the other” (OH 31).364

Overall, traditional mimetic conflict stories fall roughly into two groups. In the first, the battle is related to natural phenomena in some manner. The fight between Nanabush and the bear, for example, creates a river, a lake, and ultimately red willows (Bear-Walker 36, 37). When the children of the Thunderbirds fight, they accidentally create Hudson Bay and all the lakes in northern Ontario, as well as fireflies (Tales 45; Honour 65). The struggle between dawn and evening of course represents the daily cycles of light and darkness. This fight is paralleled by the one between the spirit of winter and that of summer, who have forever engaged “in a contest in which there was no victor, no vanquished” (OH 29). Even the origin of corn is depicted as a fight, this time between a stranger named Mandamin and the young man who shows him hospitality. “Equal in determination and strength they fought on equal terms” (OH 36); eventually the stranger is defeated, and from his grave grows corn, never seen before. “You have not killed Mandamin,” the young man is told; “you have given him life in a new form” (OH 38).365

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364 Additional stories that include mimetic clashes can be found in Manitous 32-34, 195-219; OC 36-40, 96-100; OH 18-19, 28-30, 34-38, 154-156, 163-165; Tales 17-25, 40-45.
365 For other versions of this story see Honour 40-41; Manitous 104-105.
The second group of mimetic conflict stories are those connected more directly to human culture and values. When the fight ends between Nanabush and his father, the latter produces a pipe of peace, which he gives to his son “as a symbol of their reconciliation,” and to “promote its use among the Anishinaubae people” (*Manitous* 68). The battle between an ordinary man and Makataeshigun, the Spirit of the Underworld, results in the creation of medicine (*OC* 96-100),\(^{366}\) while the war between the Anishinaubae and the Dakota produces the drum ceremony (*OC* 36-40). Nanabush’s brother Pukawiss plays a prank on him, the two fight, and Nanabush unintentionally kills his brother in anger; the victim’s spirit remains, however, and “from then on, Pukawiss lived out his duty to tantalize and provoke the pretentious” (*Manitous* 34).\(^{367}\) Finally, Pauguk’s fate stands as an explicit lesson against acquisitive mimetic violence (*Manitous* 195-219).\(^{368}\) Attracted to his brother’s wife Beewun, Pauguk conspires to kill his brother and claim her for himself. Upon hearing the news of her husband’s death, however, Beewun drowns herself; Pauguk is subsequently rejected by the community and drowns as well. Unfortunately, because of his crime he is also rejected by the Land of Souls, and condemned to haunt the earth forever in agony.

There are three main points to be drawn from these traditional accounts of mimetic conflict that provide some interpretive insight into the contemporary stories. First, it is apparent that, although such conflict may not in itself be desirable, it frequently produces positive results. Whether these results include ritual tools or practices, aspects of the natural world, or lessons in self-improvement, they all derive from mimetic

\(^{366}\) Although Makataeshigun is more powerful than the mortal, their fight is nevertheless recounted in mimetic fashion as their respective victims mirror one another: each warrior first kills the other man’s eldest son, then daughter, then wife (*OC* 97-98).

\(^{367}\) For other versions of this story see *OH* 154-156; *Honour* 32-34.

\(^{368}\) For another version of this story see *OH* 163-165.
violence.\footnote{369} Similarly, the fights among the boys at the residential school allow them to not only break the monotony of institutional life, but exercise a degree of freedom and control over their own actions otherwise denied to them.\footnote{370} The mimetic conflict and often violent endings of the *Moose Meat* stories in which a Native person introduces colonial practices are positive in a slightly different sense: they imply that perhaps, hopefully, such practices will not be tried again for some time, if ever. This violence, in other words, may function to jar Native characters and readers alike out of a desire to incorporate inappropriate colonial ideas into their lives, or at least start them along that path.\footnote{371} The second point relates precisely to Johnston’s sense of what constitutes “inappropriate” colonial ideas. His traditional stories repeatedly promote certain key

\footnote{369} This notion in turn relates to the broader view that sometimes struggle and violence are necessary for growth, meaning, etc. The thunderbirds, e.g., “stoke fires to regenerate the forests” (*Manitous* 120; cf. *Manitous* 102). When the earth is destroyed by flood, several animals attempt to retrieve a clutch of soil but fail (and in some accounts, die) before the lowly muskrat succeeds, enabling Sky Woman to recreate the world (*Manitous* xv, *OH* 13-15). The vision quest may be the most important example of this dynamic in the human world; Johnston takes care to point out the physical suffering and deprivation that must be endured before a man or woman may even hope to receive a spiritual indication of their destiny and purpose in life (*OC* 43-55; *OH* 119-121, 125-126). For additional examples of this idea see *Bear-Walker* 7-15; *Manitous* 10, 12, 31-32; 100-105; *OH* 50-51, 80-81; *Tales* 12-16.

\footnote{370} Johnston explicitly comments, in fact, that it is this lack of freedom that the students take exception to and rebel against most often. “Perhaps more than anything else,” he recalls, “the boys resented the never-ending surveillance” (137). Consequently, “no regulation . . . was broken as often as the out-of-bounds rule” (108-109). In this regard, it is significant that when the students exercise the choice, as Johnston does, to enrol in the newly-created high school (166, 178, 184), no further fights are recounted. Similarly, the boys “were no longer preoccupied with leaving ‘the place’ now that they had some control over their lives and their destinies” (183-184).

\footnote{371} As such, Johnston’s stories provide an interesting point of comparison and contrast to those of Flannery O’Connor. Like O’Connor, Johnston is apparently attempting to use violence to induce insight into, and acceptance, of the (traditional/religious) values that he regards as important for meaningful living. Unlike O’Connor, however, he does not actually depict such an epiphany. This may in turn reflect a belief that people tend to gain key understandings gradually, and not in a sudden flash of inspiration. This view is explicitly reflected in Johnston’s description of the aging Nanabush: as he “got older, he committed fewer and fewer misdeeds and bumbled less often. And if he hurt someone, he was invariably sorry. He learned, but slowly, as do most men and women” (*Manitous* 94-95; cf. *OH* 132-133).
values, which in turn spill over into his modern narratives. When Nanabush fights the bear, for example, he does so with respect and out of hunger (Bear-Walker 34) and is rewarded in the end with food. However, he shows greed when eating “and very soon suffered from the runs” (Bear-Walker 37). He fights his father out of a conviction that “evildoers ought to be made to undo the harms and injuries that they had done and to make amends” (Manitous 60), and is rewarded with the Peace Pipe; but he kills his brother Pukawis because he is too proud and cannot take a joke, and is punished first with grief, and then with spiritual taunting (Manitous 32-34). These values of respect, moderation, justice, and humour, among others, appear consistently through Johnston’s Anishinaubae stories. It is not surprising, then, that the colonial practices that go awry in Moose Meat & Wild Rice include those that show a lack of respect (for moose, bees, pigs) or moderation (constant fasting, working on an excessively hot day). Similarly, the boys of Indian School Days constantly reject the cultural changes imposed on them by the priests, in part due to their teachers’ abiding self-seriousness and unjust treatment of the students. The two main colonial practices that are successfully adopted by

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372 In this regard, Johnston comments that Anishinaubae elders traditionally “teach, not by moralizing or by admonishing but by telling stories” (OC 126; see also Manitous 171; OH 122).
373 Virtually all of the traditional stories told by Johnston promote one or more of these values, along with the importance of community, kindness, and generosity. As presented in Johnston’s The Manitous, the Weendigo provides one of the more extreme examples of how such ideals are encouraged, in this case by way of a figure that embodies their opposite (221-237). A monster who was once human, the Weendigo attempts to satisfy its never-ending hunger by feeding off people, eating its victims alive as it cares nothing for the suffering of others (222). According to Johnston, “the term ‘Weendigo’ . . . may be derived from ween dagoh, which means ‘solely for self,’ or from ween n’d’igooh, which means ‘fat’ or ‘excess.’” (222).
374 Clearly, Kitug-Aunquot believes that there is an immoderate amount of fasting required by the Catholic Church: “fifty-two Fridays, forty days more during Lent, to which were added Rogation days—all were designed more to foster perpetual hunger and suffering than the growth of grace and piety. One day in three to be spend in self-denial, was too much” (Moose 81).
375 Examples of such behaviour abound. The boys make the German priests a particular target for their air of severity and self-importance, whispering “Nazi” loud enough to be heard, but not caught; eventually, the priests “learned that it was better to grit their teeth and to bear whatever names the boys called them” (46-47). A particularly unjust punishment occurs when Basil and a friend are sentenced to 32 lashes on their hands for smoking (159-161). Note only were the boys not smoking, but to (literally) add insult to injury
characters in these texts, however, are those that relate to a (traditional) sense of communal play: dancing and sports.

Finally, Johnston’s traditional stories present an understanding of mimetic violence as an inherent part of the created order. It is not only inscribed in, and the cause of, various natural phenomena, but Nanabush himself is (as noted) a frequent participant in mimetic battles.\footnote{Johnston also indicates violence in general as an unfortunate, but ever-present aspect of human life and culture. He does not shy away, e.g., from accounts of pre-colonial inter-Native violence. The most extreme example is the genocide of “the Catbird People, who opposed the Anishinaubek, [and] were wiped from the face of the earth” (Manitous xvii). Johnston also does not hesitate to show that violence and religion were not traditionally considered separate aspects of existence: “The frequent use of ritual during Indian war expeditions emphasized the fact that a battle could be seen as a sacred mission” (OC 59).} When the characters in Johnston’s modern tales engage in such battles, then, they are to some extent imitating the Anishinaubae’s most sacred figure.\footnote{More than any other being, Johnston asserts, Nanabush is regarded as “a hero, a manitou, a guardian of the weak, caring, daring, and cunning” (Manitous 93). The people’s traditional reverence for, and identification with, “the central figure in Anishinaubae literature” (Foreword xii) is perhaps most poignantly illustrated by the story of his departure: In the end, years later, Nana’b’oozoo left his home, his family, and his village, accompanied only by his grandmother aboard his canoe. No one was on shore to bid him farewell. Some say that he left his village and the people in disappointment, heart-broken by their rejection of him . . . Because of the present generation’s indifference to its language, traditions, and heritage, the spirit of Nana’b’oozoo is unlikely to return . . . (Manitous 95)} This figure is revered, in turn, as a result of his dual nature:

The last son was Nanabush, an orphan. He was one of us and yet he also belonged to the spirit world. He would be man one time, and spirit another. He could be foolish, but he could also be wise and kind. During his life he taught us what we ought and ought not to do. He taught the art of healing and the manner of knowledge and the greatest of human virtues: kindness. His spirit is with us still. (OC 165)

\[\text{the priest does not believe them. Instead, their suffering is made worse by their assertions of innocence: they are “punished for truth instead of being rewarded . . . It was better to tell a lie than the truth when our teachers preferred to believe their own biases” (160).}\]

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Precisely because of the duality he embodies—failure and success, greed and selflessness, “one moment blithe and sunny, the next gloomy and malevolent” (*Manitous* 52)—Nanabush is himself a mimetic trope, a figurative mirror: “the Anishnabeg came to love and understand Nanabush. They see in him, themselves” (*OH* 20).\(^{378}\) This power of reflection similarity extends to some very specific aspects of Johnston’s modern texts: like some of the Moose Meaters, for example, Nanabush has a tendency to come up with clever plans that backfire; like the students in Spanish, he is always hungry.\(^{379}\) For Johnston, contemporary mimetic conflict may therefore embody a traditional storytelling form that has as much to do with his characters’ struggles with their own humanity/duality as it does with colonialism, and maybe more. Nanabush’s stories, after all, often function explicitly as teaching devices in this regard, demonstrating “what we ought and ought not to do.”\(^{380}\)

### 5.4 Summary

Many of the contemporary stories of Basil Johnston, like key texts by Maria Campbell, Beatrice Culleton, and Thomas King, appear to dramatize the ways in which colonial mimesis can result in inter-Native mimetic conflict. Once again, religion

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\(^{378}\) For additional descriptions of the ways in which Nanabush mirrors humanity, see “How” 46-49; *Manitous* 51-52, 78, 80, 94; “One” 13.

\(^{379}\) Specifically reminiscent of the characters in “Indian Smart: Moose Smart,” e.g., Nana’b’oozoo concocted elaborate schemes to reduce the time and the labour expended in hunting ducks. He wanted the entire flock, not just one. What better way was there than to steal upon them underwater, bind their legs together and then tow them to shore? But the moment that the ducks felt the tow-line, they took flight and bore Nana’b’oozoo into the skies. Nana’b’oozoo weakened, lost his hold and tumbled into a lake. (“How” 49)

\(^{380}\) For other examples of Nanabush’s plans that end badly see *Manitous* 34, 81, 88-90, 94; *Tales* 46-55. Stories about, and references to, his legendary hunger can be found in *Bear-Walker* 34, 50; *Manitous* 11, 57, 78, 90; *Star-Man* 53-57.

\(^{380}\) Johnston specifically asserts, in fact, that “Kitche Manitou sent Nanabush to teach the Anishnabeg” (*OH* 17). See also *Manitous* 94-95; *OH* 80-81, 159.
provides a crucial context for this dynamic, used on the one hand by settlers to justify the
colonial enterprise while simultaneously devaluing Native people and cultures, and on the
other by those same Natives to resist such constructions and affirm their own
perspectives. These stories, that is, typically reject the imposition of practices and
viewpoints associated with colonialism, including the varieties of Christianity to which
the Anishinaubae have been exposed. Instead, the value of indigenous traditions and
communities is celebrated, as when the Moose Meaters hold a square dance, or Basil
thanks Kitchi-manitou for helping him remember the words of his graduation speech.

And yet, Johnston’s stories in certain key ways do not fit the same patterns as the
other Canadian Native works. Instead, Johnston often keeps separate the two types of
mimetic violence, colonial and inter-Native. Dramatizations of the former tend to follow
Bhabha’s basic ideas about mimicry and hybrid resistance. Tales of inter-Native violence,
however, only parallel Girard’s model up to a point, since as noted the resolutions to
these conflicts are resolutely communal and non-Christian, just as they are in Halfbreed,
In Search of April Raintree, and Green Grass, Running Water. Unlike those texts,
however, Johnston’s work provides a specific link between mimetic conflict and
traditional Native stories and beliefs. In this regard, among the writers being considered
in this study, Johnston is unique in presenting mimetic conflict as (at times) natural,
positive, and even fun(ny). He is also the only author to suggest that—as with the boys’
fights in Indian School Days—mimetic conflict may sometimes function to subvert
colonial structures and intents, instead of facilitating them.

Such uniqueness in turn highlights two important hermeneutical points that may
be self-evident, but still bear mentioning. First, models must always be used with caution.
Even though, as demonstrated, it is possible to make the hypothesis from Chapter Four fit Johnston’s contemporary stories almost exactly, doing so misses and/or obscures key elements of these stories that suggest alternative understandings of mimetic violence. Doing so would also, in at least one crucial instance, be dismissive of the text’s own explanation for such violence: namely, Johnston’s assertion that the boys at school fight to relieve their boredom. It is fundamentally patronizing, in other words, to submit that the “real” reason the boys are fighting is because of the competitive colonial desire instilled in them by their experiences at the residential school. The second hermeneutical point, then, is simply that all Canadian Native stories about mimetic violence do not take the same view of the subject. This idea, in turn, may help us derive, or at least supplement, a taxonomy of Canadian Native literature in a manner that is specifically connected to mimetic violence.

Two of Thomas King’s four categorizations from “Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial” are relevant here, “polemical” and “associational.” Polemical literature, in King’s figuration, “concerns itself with the clash of Native and non-Native cultures or with the championing of Native values over non-Native values” (13). This literature, in other words, is very much about colonialism, “the imposition of non-Native expectations and insistences (political, social, scientific) on Native communities and the methods of resistance employed by Native people in order to maintain both their communities and their cultures” (13). Associational literature, on the other hand, is precisely not about colonialism in any fundamental way: “it avoids centring the story on the non-Native

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381 In a similar hermeneutical spirit, J. Edward Chamberlin writes: “Much contemporary criticism is so preoccupied with encoded meanings and deep structures and political themes that it forgets about these surface meanings. . . . As the anthropologist Renato Rosaldo insists, and Julie Cruikshank has wisely reminded us, we need to get back to that simple discipline of looking at (and listening to) texts, rather than always looking through or around or behind or underneath them” (“Doing” 78, 86).
community or on a conflict between the two cultures, concentrating instead on the daily activities and intricacies of Native life” (14). Such literature “eschews judgements and conclusions,” and “helps to remind us of the continuing values of our cultures” (14).

King specifically cites *Halfbreed* and *In Search of April Raintree* as examples of polemical literature (13), and *Indian School Days* as associational (14). The first two categorizations may appear uncontroversial, but I have always balked somewhat at King’s interpretation of Johnston’s memoir. While I agree with him that “the boys are not portrayed as hapless victims, and the Jesuits are not cast as uncaring jailors” (15), I am skeptical of his assertion that Johnston “defuses most of the conflicts by refusing to make easy judgements” (15). After all, the introduction to *Indian School Days* itself is unambiguously critical of the Indian Agent (5), the policy to “un-Indianize” the population (7), the standard colonial view that “Indian culture was inferior” (7), and the official, paternalistic regard for Natives as “wards of the Crown” (12), an attitude that made it easy to remove children from their families for their own good, leaving behind heartache, anguish, suffering, and alienation (8).

382 The way in which both this text and

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382 On the other hand, Menno Boldt is critical of Johnston’s text because it does not make such “emotional and mental pain . . . a *central* part of the story” (“Residential” 312; emphasis added). Instead, Johnston appears to treat such pain as “incidental,” and in so doing “has evaded or repressed the true meaning of his experience” (312). That is, even though Johnston explicitly identifies the trauma that he and other residential school students experienced, and condemns colonial structures for inflicting such suffering, he does not focus on these experiences. It is this focus, I think, that King is trying to get at in his own assessment. Thus Deena Rymhs comments that, despite its “mild, nostalgic tone,” *Indian School Days* “is a much more resistant text than it might appear” (“Residential” 59). Significantly, Boldt’s response accords precisely with King’s definition of associational literature as refusing to “pander to non-Native expectations concerning the glamour and/or horror of Native life” (“Godzilla” 14). Overall, Jamie Scott’s appraisal of *Indian School Days* is the closest to my own. Scott clearly indicates the ways in which Johnston’s text is critical of the students’ colonial treatment; however, Johnston’s determination to be fair entails a refusal to play upon the guilt-ridden posture of such white neo-colonial fictions as [Rudy Wiebe’s] *First and Vital Candle*. This refusal enables Johnston to offer a more fully rounded portrayal of indigenous peoples in their encounters with the colonial and neo-colonial religious establishment. . . . [*Indian School Days*] demands that we see and hear the sights and sounds of Native boys as Native boys, even though and exactly at the point at which the dominant elements of their
Moose Meat & Wild Rice approach mimetic violence, however, does in fact seem to fit King’s categorization, even if this agreement is not entirely congruent with his arguments for making it.

I propose, then, a slight modification to King’s definitions for these two categories of Native writing. Polemical literature remains concerned with the often problematic interaction between Native and non-Native cultures, typically expressing a clear preference for the former. In addition, it may be defined as literature that dramatizes a causal relationship between colonial mimesis and inter-Native mimetic violence, and the resultant hybrid forms of cultural resistance. This literature would of course include, in addition to Campbell’s and Culleton’s texts, Green Grass, Running Water itself. As for associational literature, it can still be understood to focus “on the daily activities and intricacies of Native life.” However, while it may eschew “judgements and conclusions,” it may also make such judgements, explicitly or implicitly. More importantly, to the extent that it depicts colonial mimesis, this element is not causally linked to inter-Native mimetic violence in any definitive sense. This disconnect thus becomes a way in which such literature shifts the focus away from colonialism per se, and places it instead on the lives—the successes, tragedies, desires, failures, pranks, joys, and struggles—of Native individuals and communities themselves.

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383 Aspects of King’s novel may also be considered “interfusional” for the ways in which they represent “a blending of oral and written literature” (“Godzilla” 13). For a discussion of his One Good Story, That One as interfusional literature see Truchan-Tataryn and Gingell, “Dances.” King thus appears to stand alongside the authors he identifies—Gerald Vizenor and Craig Kee Strete—who are producing work that his four categories of Native literature “do not comfortably contain” (“Godzilla” 16).
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Summaries and Wish Lists

6.1.1 Religion and Violence

As I have attempted to demonstrate, the sub-field of Religion and Literature embodies much of the promise, and many of the problems, of the academic study of religion as a whole. On the positive side—to put the matter as pedantically as possible—the concept of “religion” remains important, therefore studying this concept is important:

The profound differences between human worldviews have not been erased by information technology or international business networks, with their appearance of having so easily unified the surface of the globe. Beneath the surface, the earth is still a patchwork of bounded loyalties and hallowed mythologies, a checkerboard of collective, sacred identities. The theater of ethnic and religious diversity has not gone away. The variety of human worlds, with all their conflicts, is still there. (Paden, Religious vii)

In his Foreword to Amir Hussain’s Oil and Water, Derek Evans makes the point even more urgently: “The deeper we step into the 21st century, the clearer it becomes that if we are to survive as a species . . . we must take seriously the reality and significance of the world’s great spiritual traditions” (7). This variety of traditions, of human worlds, finds (not surprisingly) a variety of expressions, in art, music, food, ritual, architecture, film, and of course literature. To study “religion,” then, means to study such expressions.

Which brings us to the problems. A consideration of work in Religion and Literature since the enterprise began in 1935 points towards one crucial parallel with the
larger discipline of religion studies, namely that both apparently remain haunted by the
ghost of Paul Tillich. Russell McCutcheon in fact argues that one ironic value to
academic courses and studies that fit the “Religion and . . .” rubric (Religion and Ethics;
Religion and Gender; Religion and Culture; etc.) is precisely that they highlight the
theoretical poverty of the study of religion generally. That is to say, such studies
perpetuate

a rather naive, and simply outdated, view that religions are socially
autonomous, acontextual systems that make manifest an essential impulse
or drive of deeply numinous value. In other words, from the outset this
rubric presupposes that religion can hardly be explained as a result of
social, political, or psychological processes and instead can only be
understood to manifest in culture, in politics, in literature, and so on,
especially religious or transcendent values and feelings. (“Redescribing”
180)\textsuperscript{384}

In keeping with their connection to the groundwork laid by Tillich, these presuppositions
have led Religion and Literature critics to embrace and promote a de-mythologizing
Protestant theology. In practice, this has meant focusing almost exclusively on the ways
in which ostensibly secular texts embody a “truly” religious perspective, one of
existential uncertainty symbolized and inculcated by tropes of death and rebirth. This
perspective continues to dominate the field, despite the fact that in 1978 David Hesla

\textsuperscript{384} McCutcheon makes this point as part of his argument that the “Religion and . . .” category can be
rehabilitated to become a “site where a redescription of our field can profitably take place” (184). By way
of example, he proposes that courses on religion and film can provide the opportunity to promote an
understanding of religion as “an active process and part of the sociocultural mix” through a corresponding
understanding of film—“much like myth itself—as a contemporary medium whereby human communities
construct and contest their ever-changing and emotionally charged social identities” (184).
identified it as a defining feature of the “first stage” of Religion and Literature, which he (prematurely) foresaw as ending many, many years ago.

My desire for the field therefore can be summarized by the simple request that it progress, finally and fully, into the second stage. To accomplish this, critics need to pay attention to literatures connected to communities that are not specifically or exclusively Christian; and they need to do this work in a manner that is not itself a manifestation of theology, Tillichian or otherwise. The potential richness of such an endeavor—which could include consideration of the religions and literatures of the entire world—is self-evidently dizzying. As the articles in Scott’s *And the Birds Began to Sing* as well as Scott and Simpson-Housley’s *Mapping the Sacred* attest, it is both possible and necessary to do Religion and Literature work that is relevant, academically responsible, and truly global. In terms of subject matter alone, for example, the former text contains articles that consider representations of Hindu, Maori, Voodoo, and Muslim traditions, among others, in the works of writers from Africa, the Caribbean, India, and New Zealand. I sincerely hope that my thesis has also contributed to this small, but hopefully growing, body of second stage criticism.

This call for the academic study of religion to be itself less “religious,” to put aside *a priori* assumptions about the object of its inquiry, is not simply an abstract matter of theoretical consideration. As the quotes by Paden and Evans both indicate—and as perhaps every conscious person in the world is aware—the importance of studying religion often concerns conflict of varying degrees, kinds, and urgencies. This work is fettered, however, when theological biases dictate at the outset that religion and violence be considered incommensurate terms. That said, at least a few recent religion scholars
have taken a different stance. Marc Ellis, for example, rejects the most common argument for separating religion from violence, namely that the foundational texts are somehow free from taint:

If the history of Christianity is infected with atrocity, is the New Testament itself safe from that history? Or if the holy texts themselves are part and parcel of this history, can they be read today without including these events of death as part of the tradition’s canon? The history of Christianity may evolve from the texts themselves and surely they cannot be read as if this history had not occurred. (Unholy xvi)385

Ellis’ comments on specifically religious texts also correspond to Bhabha’s own vision of writing in general. He proposes that “the category of literature, as of its history, is necessary and thoroughly mediated: that its reality is not given but produced; its meanings transformative, historical and relational rather than revelatory” (“Representation” 96). This view in turn runs counter to that of most Religion and Literature critics, who tend to see texts precisely as revelatory.386 Most importantly—as the present study has disclosed—such revelation is typically understood to occur in the context of literary violence; it is precisely this violence, in other words, that can help shock us out of our habitual, moribund existences and into what “first stage” critics envisage as genuine spiritual engagement with the world.

385 Stanley Tambiah takes a similar position in his discussion of Buddhism’s responsibility for the violence in Sri Lanka: “All too often a certain type of scholarship . . . has essentialized Buddhism in terms of its ‘pristine’ teachings and has viewed all subsequent historical developments, especially those of a political kind, as deviations and distortions from the canonical form” (Buddhism 3).

386 Note that Bhabha here is rebutting the view of literature scholars in general, not specifically those involved with the academic study of religion. A number of (non-Native) scholars who agree with Bhabha’s position are listed in section 3.2.1.
In contrast, the Canadian Native writings I have examined take a much different view of religion and violence than either religion scholars generally, or those within the Religion and Literature arena. It would be exceedingly difficult to argue, for example, that among these texts religion is viewed/presented as inherently opposed to violence. Instead, Christian institutions, beliefs, and people are clearly indicted as initiating, and perpetuating, the ongoing horrors of colonialism. Communities are torn apart; people are stripped of self-respect; children are taken from their families; languages are erased; individuals and cultures are raped. In referencing or depicting such violence, however, the works in question typically do not essentialize Christianity, either positively or negatively. Like Ellis, for example, they accept the existence of both “good” and “bad” Christians as part of the historic whole. Their views are based not on idealist notions of a tradition’s imagined “core,” but on how it has affected their lives. Further, the works by Campbell et al. explode the view of literature as revelatory, challenging us instead to see all three components of the present inquiry—violence, religion, literature—as relational. Brutality, oppression, and conflict in their texts are not symbolic literary devices meant to induce struggles with abstract questions about meaning and transcendence; such violence is a real factor in their lives and communities, and it has long been connected to various forms of Christianity. The consideration of such issues by these and other Native authors provides a significant opportunity for the academic study of religion to reconsider some of its basic working assumptions, and finally move beyond them.

The way in which I have reconsidered these assumptions, of course, has depended upon the theories of mimetic violence promoted by René Girard and Homi Bhabha. In

387 When Thomas King depicts Noah, Jesus, and even God as chauvinistic, power-hungry despots, e.g., he is clearly thinking along the same lines as Ellis, “including these events of death as part of the tradition’s canon.”
combination, these theories have—despite their own critical limitations—proven very useful in highlighting and understanding connections between religion, colonial mimesis, and inter-Native mimetic conflict in specific Canadian Native texts. This exercise in turn has reflected back upon the theories themselves. It has uncovered (literary) resolutions to mimetic conflict, for example, that are very much at odds with Girard’s individualistic crypto-theology. It has also demonstrated the existence of hybrid anti-colonial texts that are far less overt or “menacing” in their narrated opposition/de-colonization than Bhabha anticipates. It has affirmed the value, and the meaning, of working not with generalizations but with particularities, both cultural (Native/Canadian) and literary (polemical/associational). Finally, in contrast to the assumptions of both Girard and Bhabha, this exercise has shown that it is possible for some authors (such as Basil Johnston), whose work opposes both colonialism and acquisitive mimesis, to nevertheless depict mimetic violence in ways that are not always strictly negative.

6.1.2 Native Literature

Just as I hope for more second stage Religion and Literature work to be attempted, so do I hope that more work generally is done with Native literature. This means in part to continue the non-ghettoizing process of including such literature in, for example, studies of—and courses on—Canadian literature generally. Further, I entreat scholars to expand their range, to examine different writers (such as Basil Johnston) and different types of writing (myth retellings, jokes, songs, recipes). One of the key obstacles to the spread of Native literature among (mainly, but not exclusively) non-

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388 The critical cue in this regard can be taken from anthologies of Native literature, which in general are much more inclusive than critics of this literature have been (e.g., Fife, Colour; King, All; Moses and Goldie, Anthology; Perreault and Vance, Writing; Petrone, Native).
Native critics and readers, however, may be simple awareness of writers and texts. In Canada, there has been no attempt to survey the field since Penny Petrone’s *Native Literature in Canada* was published in 1990 (!). Still, the usefulness of another text like Petrone’s is debatable; a better way to help facilitate the dissemination of Native literature might instead be the creation of a *website* that fully and clearly lists authors, their works, secondary sources, and any relevant online resources.

There are currently two such websites but both are limited; neither allows a distinction between Canadian and American authors, for example, and neither includes much in the way of secondary sources aside from a few links. The “Native American Authors Project” (http://www.ipl.org/div/natam), in addition, only lists an author’s books, omitting poems, short stories, etc. It is also out of date (Basil Johnston’s *Honour Earth Mother* [2003] is missing) and not entirely complete, especially regarding Canadian authors (Emma LaRocque, Harry Robinson, and Grey Young-Ing are all absent). Much less complete in terms of its directory (no listing for Beatrice Culleton!?) but in other ways more promising, is the Native American Authors section of “NativeWiki” (http://www.nativewiki.org). This site is better organized and generally more up-to-date, which is not surprising for a wiki; and because it *is* a wiki, it can be *kept* current by the contributions of scholars and authors themselves. Further, as an inherently communal site, it resists the univocality of more traditional literary surveys and annotated bibliographies. At this moment, however, it appears that a substantial input of time and energy is required to make NativeWiki truly viable as a means of “spreading the (Native) word.”
My wish for increased critical activity regarding Native writing has two key, related, caveats. First, the literature must be taken seriously as literature, not patronizingly regarded as the simple echoes of oral cultures incapable of abstract thought, and/or as windows through which it is possible to glimpse past glories or present tragedies. Second, it is incumbent on non-Native scholars to also take seriously the contributions of Native critics of Native literature. Such an approach, as Kimberly Blaeser suggests, would to some extent mitigate against non-Native readers simply re-enacting modes of colonial preemption:

It seeks a critical voice and method which moves from the culturally-centred text outward toward the frontier of “border” studies, rather than an external critical voice and method which seeks to penetrate, appropriate, colonize or conquer the cultural center, and thereby, change the stories or remake the literary meaning. (“Native” 53)

Of course, the models of mimetic conflict that have formed the critical foundation of my own analysis of Native literature are not at all Native themselves. However, that is only because at this point Indigenous theories on this topic have not yet been developed. Still, whenever possible I have tried to take my hermeneutical cues from both Native critics and from the texts at hand. These texts are clearly, and repeatedly, concerned with mimesis, and in ways that at times rebuke the models in question. With luck, my

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389 As it happens, many of these critics are authors themselves. Within Canada this group includes, e.g., Janice Acoose, Jeannette Armstrong, Kateri Damm, Thomas King, Emma LaRocque, Lee Maracle, Armand Garnet Ruffo, and Greg Young-Ing. Two of the most influential texts to contribute to the body of Native analyses of North American Native literature are Armstrong’s *Looking at the Words of our People*, and its “sequel,” Ruffo’s *Adressing Our Words*.

comments and observations about mimetic conflict in Native literature may engage some Native critics, and begin a conversation on the subject.

This conversation could start, perhaps, with my argument that the ideas of Girard and Bhabha together show us a previously undisclosed pattern of religion and mimetic violence at work in some of the most important and influential examples of Canadian Native literature. For polemical literature, this pattern includes a definite link between colonial religious mimesis and inter-Native mimetic conflict; for associational literature, it does not. This difference may further stand as a defining feature for these Native literary categories, which in turn adds to the potential usefulness and relevance of the categories themselves. For polemical literature, that is, the presence and resolution of mimetic conflict among Native characters is one of the key ways in which it addresses and refutes colonial impositions. For associational literature, however, the disconnect between colonialism and mimetic conflict among Native characters specifically functions to concentrate attention less on non-Native interference, and more on “the daily activities and intricacies of Native life” (“Godzilla” 14). However, further study on mimetic violence in associational Native literature is required in order to provide sufficient data to support, reject, or adjust this understanding of the category. Further study is also required of mimetic violence in other modes of Native writing—such as tribal or interfusional—which as yet has not even begun, and which represents a very wide field for potential investigation.

As well as considering mimesis in additional texts, there are a number of additional ways in which to approach the topic in Native literature that would be fruitful. As mentioned in Chapter One, for example, mimetic conflict appears congruent with
Ricoeur’s theory of metaphor as the production of meaning through the equation of non-identical terms. The idea of tension-derived significations has in fact been employed by scholars of Native writing, but not in reference either to Ricoeur’s work or mimetic conflict itself. For example, in her own discussion of Native literature, Julia Emberley cites Mikhail Bakhtin’s consideration of discourse as “an arena of battle between two voices” (*Problems* 193; qtd. in Emberley, *Thresholds* 162). Similarly, in the preface to her analysis of works by Lee Maracle and Jeannette Armstrong, Barbara Godard asserts that meaning “exists agonistically,” that it is not fixed but shifts according to the terms of the discursive framework (“Politics” 195). Reflections such as these seem very much in line with both the semantic possibilities of mimetic conflict, and with Ricoeur’s own understanding that metaphoric tension is able to uncover “something new about reality” (*Interpretation* 52-53).

One potential drawback of Ricoeur’s work is that it provides us, obviously, with another non-Native hermeneutic. As strongly suggested by the figure of Nanabush in Basil Johnston’s stories, however, a more Indigenous theoretical approach to mimesis could involve trickster-centred analyses.\(^{391}\) For Johnston, that is, Nanabush is not only a reflection of humanity but is a shapeshifter who can imitate all beings:

Nanabush was a messenger of Kitche Manitou; an intermediary on earth between different species of beings; and, an advocate for the Anishnabeg.

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\(^{391}\) Although to my knowledge no one has considered the figure of the trickster in relation to mimesis in Native literature, a great deal of academic and narrative material on this figure is extant. Carlton Smith provides a very brief overview of the shift in scholarly treatments of the trickster, from the anthropological to the semiotic (“Coyote” 517-518). Further discussions and examples of trickster stories are provided by, e.g., Bright, *Coyote*; “Natural”; Hynes and Doty, *Mythical*; Radin, *Trickster*.  

To fulfil his purpose Nanabush had powers of transformation. At will and need, he could become a corporeal being of any species such as a willow tree, a beaver, a stump, or even a cloud.

Great and astonishing as was the power of self transformation, it had limitations. For Nanabush, in assuming another form, had to suffer the nature and the limitations of that form. (Johnston, *OH* 159-160; cf. 19-20)

Johnston’s account connects Nanabush’s mimetic abilities to notions of mediation/discourse and inherent/diverse limits, which are in turn identified as fundamentally religious principles. These notions are echoed by King, who asserts in his Introduction to *All My Relations* that Native writers use trickster figures to promote cultural concerns with “balance and harmony . . . the nature of the world and the relatedness of all things” (xiii). Such concerns are very likely relevant to the presence of mimetic violence in Native literature, given the fact that, for example, Nanabush participates in more episodes of this violence by far than any other being in the stories of Basil Johnston.

One example of this relevance may involve figures drawn in imitation of the trickster who—like Johnston’s Nanabush—not only embody a range of human qualities and experiences, but are often able to overcome those which are especially negative or harmful. Thus King (again) comments:

Rather than create characters who are inferior and dying, Native writers have consciously created Native characters who are resourceful, vibrant, and tenacious. Like their traditional trickster figures, contemporary Native characters are frequently tricked, beaten up, robbed, deserted, wounded,
and ridiculed, but, unlike the historical and contemporary native characters in white fiction, these characters survive and persevere, and, in many cases, prosper. (King, “Introduction” 8)

As such, these characters resist the specifically colonial definition and erasure evident in non-Native representations. With reference to the work of Gerald Vizenor, Carlton Smith likewise notes the “liberative” qualities of the literary trickster: “As a comically disruptive sign, Coyote forces us to consider how interpretations and ‘readings’ of the world are ceaselessly influenced by issues related to colonial representation and power, and how meaning and significance can mutate when conventional categories of perception shift” (“Coyote” 516). The trickster, in sum, appears as an inherently mimetic figure who performs a range of critical discursive functions, from affirming traditional worldviews and value systems, to undermining colonial significations, to

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392 Although in Chapter Two I opposed King with Paula Gunn Allen in terms of their definitions of “Native,” in this context the two have strikingly similar viewpoints. Thus Allen writes: Coyote tales abound all over native America, and he has been taken up by contemporary American Indian poets as a metaphor for all the foolishness and the anger that have characterized American Indian life in the centuries since invasion. He is also a metaphor for continuance, for Coyote survives and a large part of his bag of survival tricks is his irreverence. Because of this irreverence for everything—sex, family bonding, sacred things, even life itself—Coyote survives. . . . it is this spirit of the trickster-creator that keeps Indians alive and vital in the face of horror. (Sacred 158)

393 Such resistance by the Native-character-as-trickster may also be symbolized by Johnston’s stories in The Manitous of Nanabush fighting the Weendigo. In these encounters, Nanabush is always outmatched but, on the verge of defeat and death, he miraculously manages to both survive and overcome his adversary (92, 231-233; cf. By Canoe 21, 32-34). The colonial link is provided by Johnston himself, who uses the Weendigo as a metaphor for the first European settlers (179) and then asserts that the monsters have been “reincarnated as corporations, conglomerates, and multinationals” (235). “Perhaps,” he concludes, “some champion, some manitou, will fell them [the modern Weendigoes], as Nana’b’oozoo did in the past” (237).

394 In making this point, Smith cites Vizenor’s notion of the “semiotic trickster” who “is a healer and comic liberator . . . not an artifact or real victim in oral summaries . . [but] a communal sign in imagination” (Narrative 204). Anne Doueihi proposes a roughly similar, semiotically-oriented, interpretation: “Trickster stories point to the way ordinary, conventional reality is an illusory construction produced out of a particular univocal interpretation of phenomena appearing as signs. This deeper wisdom about the linguisticality of our constructed world and the illusoriness of that construction is where trickster stories open onto the sacred” (“Inhabiting” 194). As an aside, it is perhaps worth noting that Vizenor has been quite critical of King’s own use of Coyote figures in his fiction, arguing that they are not complex enough, that they are mere “trickster silhouettes” (Manifest 91).
highlighting the ways in which various constructions of reality are related to their linguistic, socio-political contexts.\(^{395}\)

One of these specific constructions is that of identity, which comprises the penultimate avenue for further investigation of this subject that I would like to propose. All of the Native literature examined in this study is fundamentally concerned with the question of identity, and quite pointedly explores it through representations of mimesis. In *Halfbreed*, for example, these representations are a key part of the way in which Campbell shows “how her identity has been constructed for her” (Acoose, “*Halfbreed*” 139). The dynamic of identity formation in relation to mimetic conflict is of course most clearly dramatized in *In Search of April Raintree*, as the narrator is caught between the mimetic options promoted by the dominant culture and her sister. In the end, of course, April discovers the will and the power to define herself, and, like the protagonists in the texts of Campbell, King, and Johnston, this definition is tied to community relations:

Native American conceptions of the self tend toward integrative rather than oppositional relations with others. Whereas the modern West has tended to define personal identity as involving the successful mediation of an opposition between the individual and society, Native Americans have instead tended to define themselves as persons by successfully integrating themselves into the relevant social groupings—kin, clan, band, etc.—of their respective societies. (Krupat, Introduction 4)

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\(^{395}\) Trickster figures also obviously make much use of humour. One application of such humour often remarked upon by critics is that of effectively resisting, deflating, and otherwise undermining colonial worldviews. For a small sampling of comments about this application in Native literature see Atwood, “Double-Bladed”; Davidson et al., *Border* 3; Fee, “Upsetting” 127-128; Gómez-Vega, “Subverting” 1-2; Horne, *Contemporary* 22, 148; Jannetta, *Introduction* 118-129; Vangen, “Making.”
As Krupat intimates, identity formation in much Native literature is specifically non-oppositional, which in turn is often demonstrated by characters removing themselves from webs of mimetic conflict. That is to say, as long as identity is perceived as an individual pursuit, then others are easily regarded as both models for, and obstacles to, the attainment of this identity. Formation of the self, in this conception, becomes a (mimetic) contest. Consequently, when identity is understood in relation to one’s community—as it is in the Native texts examined in this thesis—when it is integrative and reciprocal, it is not only not a contest, it is also non-imitative.

The process through which Maria, April, Lionel, and Basil arrive at their final notions of self further suggests that identity—like the trickster figure—is also inherently fluid, changeable. Thus Helen Hoy summarizes Culleton’s narrative as “one of unstable (and even exchanged) subject positions repeatedly renegotiated in response to social and discursive practices. . . . The self constructed in the novel is multiple, provisional, discontinuous, and shared” (“Nothing” 168). This notion in turn is arguably anti-colonial, since the “same as but less than” settler formulation of Native identity depends upon the reliable construction of “a single fixed identity that disavows differences of those they have colonized”; in contrast, much Native literature “demonstrates that any single fixed concept of identity as cohesive and stable is flawed” (Horne, Contemporary 83). In fact, Native texts appear to do more than demonstrate this concept: they participate themselves in the act of destabilizing and recreating identity. They embody, that is, “a performative, narrative, nonmimetic epistemology” (Thompson, “Technologies” 65).

Thus Janice Acoose specifically affirms that Campbell resists colonial definitions in part

“through the act of writing” (“Halfbreed” 139). In reference to Native autobiography, Hertha Dawn Wong similarly declares: “Stories of our lives . . . shape our identity. Self-narration is part of the process of self-construction and self-representation” (Sending vi).

Of course, Native literature does not only utilize mimetic conflict in the service of conceiving Native identity, but also—as befits the trope in question—as a means of reflecting Native conceptions of colonial identity back at non-Native readers. As I have argued, texts by Campbell, Culleton, King, and Johnston all correspond with Bhabha’s notion of signifying cultural forms that threaten settler authority through “the partial representation/recognition of the colonial object” (“Of Mimicry” 129). Such representation leads Margaret Atwood to comment, in her discussion of Thomas King’s work, “The comfortable thing about a people who do not have a literary voice, or at least not one you can hear or understand, is that you never have to listen to what they are saying about you” (“Double-Bladed” 244). Non-Native readers are thus confronted both by Native understandings of the dominant culture couched in the terms of that culture, as well as with the destabilization of their own constructions of Native identity itself.397

Thus Louis Owens asserts that Native authors “are insisting that rather than looking to this literature for reflections of what they expect to see—their own constructed Indianness—[non-Native] readers must look past their mirroring consciousness to the other side” (Mixedblood 24). When Maria Campbell, for example, recounts being ashamed of eating gophers only because she saw herself in the white children’s eyes (Halfbreed 46-47), the account itself (ideally) functions to shame white readers in turn, as

397 This dynamic has further implications for those settler readers for whom “the Native has come to bear the burden of the Other, all that the modern white person is lacking. Identity for this white person is acquired through this encounter with alterity” (Godard, “Politics” 190). When such readers are confronted by characters who cannot be made to fit their projected/imagined notions of “Nativeness,” they may be forced to look more directly at themselves in their struggles with identity and absence.
they see themselves in her eyes. When the angel Gabriel appears as an employee of CSIS, encouraging Thought Woman both to have sex with him and to sign a treaty (King, *Green* 269-272), Euro-Canadians may be induced to reconsider long-held assumptions about their religion, their history, their government, and their own roles in colonialism. These may not be easy adjustments to make. Thus Emma LaRocque describes Native writers as “the Uncomfortable Mirrors to Canadian society. And few can look at the glaring reflections our mirrors provide” (“Preface” xxvii).

### 6.2 The Dualistic Paradox

#### 6.2.1 Through Non-Native Eyes

There is one last consideration of religion and violence in Canadian Native literature that I would like both to entertain and to offer up for further study. This consideration begins with the observation— noted at various times throughout this thesis—that, although a number of critics have drawn from the work of Homi Bhabha in their analyses of Native literature, no one has offered any significant commentary on the dynamic that connects to Girard’s theories, namely inter-Native mimetic conflict. Given the prevalence of such conflict in high profile Canadian Native texts, such a critical omission is striking. I believe that a starting point for gaining insight into this oversight is provided by Dee Horne’s article, “To Know the Difference: Mimicry, Satire, and Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water*.” Horne’s focus is the dualistic world of the colonizer, the “us/them, superior/inferior” construction in which settlers are the civilized “masters” who “must be slavishly imitated” by the brutish Natives (255).398 Through

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398 Following Fanon (*Wretched*) and JanMohamed (“Economy”), Horne refers to this construction as a “Manichaean opposition” (“To” 255). This terminology has gained a strong foothold in “postcolonial”
their “creative hybrid texts,” however, Native authors are seen to subvert this oppositional discourse. Critically, according to Horne this subversion is accomplished not by reversing the opposition—whereby of course Natives would be superior to non-Natives—but by “deconstruct[ing]” it (255).

Horne’s example of a hybrid text that accomplishes this feat is *Green Grass, Running Water*. Thomas King would in many ways appear to be an ideal choice for such an exercise since he has expressed strikingly similar views himself about subverting writings generally, and—like the term “postcolonial” itself—it is problematic. Specifically, it is an oversimplification and misrepresentation of the complex and variegated worldview evinced by the actual Manichaeans themselves. As a preface to his attempt to redress this critical phenomenon, Jason David BeDuhn comments:

> We are in danger of losing the Manichaeans. The adherents of this extinct world religion have been brought before our eyes again only in this century, in the form of the lacunous utterances of their tattered books and the faded images of their faces on scraps of a once-accomplished art. This is all that remains of one of the major forces in religious history, a world religion on a scale that rivaled the more familiar members of that elite category: Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. . . . But the modern passion for history has taken long strides toward retrieving the Manichaeana story. . . . Nevertheless, in the attempt to recover this lost world, to make it speak to the present, we are in danger of all too quickly consigning the Manichaeans to a more permanent oblivion. Our well-meaning attempt to make sense of an alien tradition threatens to entomb it in the role of perpetual handmaiden to our interpretive philosophies, and to the living religions which, as shapers of those philosophies, have found yet another way to bury the heretics. We have been too quick to enshrine the Manichaeana tradition as an –ism, comfortably nested in a web of interpretation that locates Manichaeana in it relation to other, better-known dualisms, asceticisms, Gnosticisms, mysticisms, and syncretisms. Dissected and dispersed in this way, Manicheanism evaporates into a curious assemblage of doctrinal trivia. (*Manichaean* ix-x).

The title of BeDuhn’s text (*The Manichaean Body*) itself contradicts one of the common misunderstandings of the tradition, that it was grounded in the opposition of spirit and matter, and that “to be a Manichaean is the antithesis of being a body” (xiv).

Bart Moore-Gilbert similarly affirms—with reference to the work of both Julia Kristeva and Gayatri Spivak—that “those who oppose the dominant power on its own terms or in its own language are necessarily caught up in its logic and thus perpetuate it” (*Postcolonial* 139). See also J. Edward Chamberlin’s reflections on his experience with the Aboriginal History Project that he coordinated for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples:

> The privileging of one account over another, the privileging of written over oral traditions, the privileging of metropolitan and academic historical criteria over the longstanding historical conventions of local Aboriginal communities—these are the pernicious legacies of settler history, which need to be revised and reversed. But simply reversing the roles in some generalized reaction against this may do little more than encourage a kind of essentializing and exoticizing and homogenizing of Aboriginal voices. And revising the record, while it may replace one orthodoxy with another, also maintains the role of the metropolitan tradition as the certifier of standards. (“Doing” 84)
us/them perspectives. Most pointedly, in his interview with Hartmut Lutz he asserts that “once you get involved in ‘whose culture is better?’, and in the politics of Native/non-Native relationships . . . you get suckered into beginning to look at the world through non-Native eyes” (111). However, this statement itself suggests an inherent contradiction in King’s stance, since it clearly implies that looking at the world through non-Native eyes is inferior, and, therefore, that Native perspectives are better. In making this very statement, then, has King been paradoxically “suckered” into looking at the world through non-Native eyes?

The existence of this apparent contradiction seems to be further supported by the ways in which—as argued in section 4.4—Green Grass, Running Water supplants colonial representations, to the point of implying that Coyote was responsible for the birth of Jesus. This view of the novel is cognate with Horne’s own conclusions about Green Grass, Running Water:

King not only satirizes settler culture and its mimic men but also imagiNatively re-presents an alterNative discourse—one that is neither patriarchal nor capitalistic (with the underlying and self-perpetuating ideas of progress, individualism, and consumerism). He re-presents a First Nations perspective and a world in which men and women are equal; relations are important; community, sharing, and consideration are valued;

400 As already noted, King also praises Johnston’s Indian School Days precisely for avoiding moral dualisms, for “refusing to make easy judgements” (“Godzilla” 15). Similarly, he maintains that Ruby Slipperjack’s Honour the Sun makes no attempt to “glorify traditional Native life. . . . Within the novel the narrator neither posits the superiority of Native culture over non-Native culture nor suggests that the ills that beset the community come from outside it” (“Godzilla” 15; see also King, Interview with Lutz 110-111). Whether or not one agrees entirely with these assessments, the point is that King is identifying a position that he admires, i.e., non-dualism.
ceremonies, dreams and vision are not only prophetic but also redemptive and healing; and tricksters attempt to unbend what is bent. (“To” 270-271)

It seems clear from this analysis that, after all, Horne does in fact see King as stating that “Native culture is better.” From the tone of her article, it would also appear that Horne agrees with King on this point. As such I think that she has done, and sees King doing, exactly what she and King have said should not be done, namely reversed the terms of the colonial dualistic construction.401

It is precisely this continued adherence to a dualistic viewpoint that I believe underlies the critical refusal to engage mimetic conflict in Canadian Native literature. That is to say, scholars of this literature have, like Horne, tended to look at it through a lens that supports their own idealization of Native people and culture, and concomitant denouncement or critique of Western/colonial people and culture. It is difficult to examine (or perhaps even acknowledge) inter-Native conflict when using such a lens, because in most cases this element of the text may not form the easiest link to colonial oppression, and almost certainly not to Native superiority. The only (partial) exception to this rule involves In Search of April Raintree, in which the tension between the two sisters forms such a central element of the novel that it is unavoidable. In this case, however, blame for the conflict is still invariably and entirely laid at the doorstep of

401 In a similar way, Percy Walton unconvincingly asserts that King’s Medicine River “avoids prioritizing native culture over other cultures,” that it “privileges instead an inclusive and collective process that does not rest upon cultural superiority/inferiority” (“Tell” 79). However, as Darrell Peters argues, in this work (as in Green Grass, Running Water) King to some extent is “making a statement of cultural superiority by placing Native cultures in opposition to the dominant ‘other,’” thereby “constructing the new margins Walton denies” (“Beyond” 68).
colonialism, which has created the conditions that force Native women like April and Cheryl to make an impossible choice: assimilate or be destroyed.\textsuperscript{402}

An important drawback of this dualistic approach—Natives good, colonists bad—is that it greatly diminishes, if not eliminates, any responsibility such characters have for the negative aspects of their lives. In doing so, it ellides the common critical understanding noted above that the protagonists (and authors) of Native literature do have the power to construct their own identity, and do not have to simply accept colonial definitions. This approach, in others words, regards characters like the Raintree sisters—in the words of J.R. Miller cited in Chapter One—“as objects rather than agents, victims rather than creators of their own history” (“Owen” 323).\textsuperscript{403} Significantly, a similar notion is actually voiced by April herself, who argues that Cheryl puts “too much blame on white men for everything” (170), that “life is what you make it,” and that all people, including Natives, “are responsible for their lives” (120). Virtually every analysis of Culleton’s text, however, dismisses this perspective and sides with Cheryl against

\textsuperscript{402} See, e.g., Damm, “Dispelling” 108-112; Donovan, \textit{Coming} 28-30; Fee, “Deploying”; “Upsetting” 171; Grant, “Abuse”; Horne, \textit{Contemporary} 72-75; Lundgren, “Being” 63-65; Vevainia, “Articulating” 62-67. The existence of inter-Native conflict as a result of colonial forces has occasionally (but rarely) also been remarked upon in relation to other Canadian Native texts. In discussing works by Lee Maracle and Jeanette Armstrong, e.g., Barbara Godard describes the dynamic of colonial mimicry that turns to self-violence among the colonized because of the barriers imposed by a racist society (“Politics” 202). Janice Acoose similarly asserts, in relation to \textit{Halfbreed}, that “colonized people turning on their own people is symptomatic of the colonial disease” (\textit{Halfbreed”} 149). For additional, similar comments in relation to Canadian Native literature see Armstrong, “Racism” 79-80; Buss, \textit{Mapping} 140; Lundgren, “Being” 68.

\textsuperscript{403} During the rape trial, the prosecutor in fact specifically identifies April as “the poor victim” (184), a characterization to which she strongly objects: “It sounded overly dramatic. It sounded like he wanted them to say the defendant was guilty on the grounds that I was such a pitiful creature. I wanted him found guilty because of what he had done” (184-185). Along similar lines, but in an entirely different context, Drew Hayden Taylor describes in “Seeing Red” how he was encouraged by the changed response of “people of pallor” (23) to two of his comedies, both staged in Port Dover, Ontario. At the earlier play, the non-Native audience was silent when confronted with Native humour, precisely because “they were used to seeing the tragic, downtrodden, and victimized Indian” (25). At the subsequent production, however, the audience “laughed from the moment the lights went down. No waiting for permission or dealing with political guilt. In a scant six years, colour-denied people had learned it’s OK to laugh at Native comedies. . . . The public looks at us now as being almost three-dimensional!” (27).
April, focusing only on the ways in which the novel does indeed show how colonialism has contributed to Native suffering. The refusal of scholars to entertain the degree to which April may be right about responsibility may further account for the fact that, while they do not ignore the conflict between her and Cheryl, they do not recognize its mimetic nature. This is a complex situation to be sure, but the fact remains that at the end of the novel, April attains a position that is different from the one either she or her sister previously held. April embraces her Métis identity and no longer wants to pass as white, but she also does not appear to idealize Native people and culture as Cheryl did.

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404 Margery Fee provides the most complex illustration of this stance, as she explicitly recognizes the novel’s critique of both April and Cheryl’s positions, but still sides with the latter. She asserts, e.g., that “Culleton’s discourse rejects whiteness or Nativeness as simple, clearcut identities” (Deploying 217), and that “the need to undermine the ‘manichean aesthetic’” is at the “heart” of In Search of April Raintree (“Upsetting” 170). Fee further notes that “April doesn’t like either side of the binary stereotypes she sees herself as caught between: a racist, materialist white, or a ‘drunken Indian . . . on Main Street,’” but argues that “Cheryl shows her that the binary itself is a flawed construct” (217; emphasis added). Her evidence for this statement is Cheryl’s response to a question at a party from a rich white woman about her Native identity:

“What is the proper word for people like you?”

“Women,” Cheryl replied instantly.

“No, no, I mean nationality?”

“Oh, I’m sorry. We’re Canadians,” Cheryl smiled sweetly. (Culleton, In 116)

This conversation allows Fee to construct a position very much like Horne’s conclusions about Green Grass, Running Water, in the sense that she can identify Cheryl—the clear representative of “Nativeness” in the novel—as the sister who sees through the harmful, white, dualistic worldview embodied by April. Fee is certainly correct to point out that Cheryl is being transgressive in her answers about identity. However the conversation is just a game to Cheryl, meant to dislocate her white interrogators; it does not represent the way in which the character really sees herself, or her community. In fact, Cheryl lives in a binary world just as much as her sister does, and April does not transcend this world because of party banter, but because she is raped and Cheryl commits suicide.

Although several critics (including Fee) take note of Cheryl’s idealization of Native people and culture (e.g., Creal, “What” 255-256; Damm, “Dispelling” 96; Donovan, Coming 29; Fee, “Upsetting” 171; Thom, “Effects” 298-299; Zwicker, “Limits” 327-328), Horne herself is ironically one of the very few who provide substantive criticism of the character’s adherence to a dualistic framework (Contemporary 78-80). She argues, e.g., that Cheryl “still perceives history entirely in relation to the colonial structure. In this respect, Cheryl’s historical accounts and her metaphoric images elsewhere in the text fail to deconstruct or displace colonial stereotypes because she is merely reversing, rather than revisioning, the structural basis of the colonial relationship” (80).


406 Helen Hoy comes the closest to this recognition, but even she will only refer to the “interchange” that occurs between the characters after April is raped (“Nothing” 168).
As Culleton herself says about the sisters before this endpoint, “one goes too far one way and the other goes too far the other way” (Interview with Lutz 100).

Again, it is perhaps because they go “too far one way” themselves that critics of Native literature have tended, like Cheryl, to reinforce a dualistic worldview through their emphasis on the (very real) violence of colonialism, an emphasis that leads them to either ignore inter-Native conflict or else to locate the source of such conflict only in colonial histories, attitudes, institutions. In Green Grass, Running Water, for example, it is much easier to talk about the novel’s explicit references to treaties, unjust imprisonment, and destruction of Native religion, than to consider the very un-dramatic romantic rivalry between Lionel and Charlie—characters who are often not very likeable⁴⁰⁷—that ultimately goes nowhere. Such a focus may also (of course) explain why the works most often examined by critics of Native literature are precisely those that fit King’s “polemical” category, why so few “associational” texts—like those of Basil Johnston and Ruby Slipperjack—are considered in any depth. Most of Johnston’s stories are as filled with inter-Native (mimetic) conflict as In Search of April Raintree, for example, but unlike the fight between April and Cheryl, the ties between such conflict and colonialism are often tenuous at best.

⁴⁰⁷ Neither man, e.g., can be bothered to exercise enough consideration for the supposed object of their affection to pick movies to watch that Alberta actually enjoys, or to stock food in their apartment that she might want to eat (43). Lionel is also presented as a chronic procrastinator, who is given regular opportunities to go back to university but keeps putting off the application each year until it is too late (82). For his part, Charlie is a materialistic narcissist who cannot understand Alberta’s interest in Lionel, since he is “better looking” than his rival, and has “the better job, the better education. He made more money. Drove a better car. Better clothes. Better, better, better” (182).
6.2.2 Reading in Colour

It is my contention, then, that for studies of Native literature to progress, dualistic reading practices need to be transcended. A key obstacle to this development, however, often appears to be Native literature itself. In line with Horne’s statements about *Green Grass, Running Water*, that is, many of these works—most obviously the polemical ones—do in fact appear to obviously and explicitly side with Native culture against colonial culture. However, if one of the positive aspects of an Aboriginal worldview is (ostensibly) its *non*-dualistic quality, is it possible to reconcile this quality with the literature’s wholly negative view of colonialism? That is to say, is it possible for critics and authors of Native literature to critique non-Natives for being oppositional and dualistic without being themselves oppositional and dualistic? I think that it is, but in a way that belies both Horne’s conclusions about *Green Grass, Running Water* and King’s own comments about the issue.

To approach this question, I want to consider one last mimetic relationship—between Canada and the United States—in one last story, King’s “The Open Car.” Told as non-fiction, this story is in part about a train trip that King and his wife Helen take to New York. Helen is “a staunch nationalist,” and the “the only pleasure she takes in going from one country (home) to the other (the evil empire) is in telling the guards . . . that she is Canadian” (148). The open car of the title is on the train; it is the (ironically-named) place where immigration officials detain people for intense questioning when crossing from one country to the other. At the American border, guards arrive with dogs and work their way through the train quickly. They stop at a young black man in front of King and his wife and ask him a lot questions; the young man answers quietly and patiently, but is
ordered into the open car (149). On the trip back from New York Helen anticipates a more civilized border experience; however, “the Canadian guards looked pretty much the same as the American guards” (151), and while they are without dogs, they do have guns (152). They also work their way quickly through the train, and stop when they come to an East Indian couple; after some questioning they order this couple, too, into the open car (153).

There is another open car in the story, a Plymouth convertible that King’s mother owned when he was a child in California. His mother got the car because she wanted to travel; she “believed that traveling was broadening, that by visiting other people and other places you became more tolerant and understanding. And she believed that travel was magic” (148). In keeping with this sense of openness, the car is the only item in the story associated with fluids. When King’s mother rode in the car, for example, she always wore a yellow scarf “that floated above the back seat” (151). Every Saturday the family would “get up early and wash the car” (152). When asked where they would like to go in the car, King and his brother say Donner Lake or the ocean (152).

King contrasts such images of fluidity and freedom with a clear critique of the hard-edged, wrong-headed tendency to contain people reflected by officials on both sides of the border. In fact, he goes after colonial values and culture with such vigour that he is even willing to say that his own wife participates in the us/them dualism inscribed by national boundaries. He further points out that she is wrong to do so: Canadian and American immigration officials, it seems, are equally racist and fascistic. In other words, they share a mimetic (not dualistic) relationship in which they are opposed not to one another, but to a minoritized “Other.” I would like to suggest, however, that things are
not wholly as they seem. That is, although King consistently torpedoes non-Natives with an apparently joyful lack of restraint, he does so using Native characters and narrators who have serious faults of their own.

In “The Open Car,” for example, King himself admits to being mistaken about important details of his narrative. One of the main concerns for him and his wife is that they have packed apples for the trip, and remember too late that they are not allowed to bring fruit across the border (148). They are not caught. At the end of the story, however, Helen asks her husband what the Americans would have done if they had found the oranges (155). Similarly, King’s mother explains that he has got most of the facts wrong about their old car. Most crucially, she reminds him that the Plymouth was a hardtop, not a convertible (155); it wasn’t, in other words, an open car at all. Just as Helen’s dualism is undermined by the reality of the Canadian border guards, King’s own dualism—the freedom and tolerance of his family opposed to the oppression and close-mindedness of colonial regimes—now seems at question.

In a similar way, Green Grass, Running Water is a novel fairly bursting with flawed (Native) characters, including all of the sacred figures. To begin, Horne is right that in this text King presents “tricksters [who] attempt to unbend what is bent.” What she glosses over, however, is the fact that such attempts—just like many of those in Basil Johnston’s stories, both modern and traditional—frequently lead to disaster. In fact, “unbending” for Coyote typically means interfering in the world so that it reflects his own desires; that is to say, it tends to be a vain, self-indulgent, and inherently mimetic endeavour with no real thought for possible consequences. His actions also, at times,

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408 Also, while the “I” of this text is not shown up in exactly the same way as in “The Open Car,” nevertheless “we find King poking fun at his own narrator with the same glee with which he lampoons the non-Native icons of culture” (Bailey, “Arbitrary” 46).
reflect qualities of Western/colonial hierarchical thinking (Horne, “To” 261, 267; Linton, “And” 223). The four sacred women are similarly not free from blemish. This is most obvious in the stories of how each one falls into the Water World: First Woman falls because she is too busy telling others how to behave (“straighten up . . . mind your relations”) and looking for things to fix; being thus distracted she walks off the edge of the Sky World (39). Changing Woman is also self-absorbed: she is so enthralled with her own beauty, as reflected in the water from the world below, that she leans over to get a better look and loses her grip. Thought Woman and Old Woman are not so vain or conceited, but each also falls through their own carelessness (231, 329). 409

Arguably, it is precisely through such characterizations that King is attempting to reverse and “deconstruct” oppositional, dualist perspectives. By presenting key figures from the Bible as monstrous and inhumane he of course turns the tables on Western religion; to complete the reversal, though, King should present the competing Native figures as inhumanly perfect. Instead he gives us deities who are deeply, humanly imperfect, as displaying character traits that are in fact to an extent unlikeable (vanity, egotism, etc.). Additionally, by pulling the rug out from under himself in “The Open

409 The four sacred figures are portrayed as imperfect in other ways as well. As King himself comments, “I wanted to make sure when I worked with the old Indians that the sense of control that is there in the universe was marginal at best. Within Native cosmology there isn’t that sort of omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence that you have in a Judeo-Christian world” (qtd. In Weaver, That 149). Patricia Linton discusses this same feature of the characters (“And” 221), noting in this regard that they are explicitly fallible (“And” 228; see, e.g., King, Green 29: “Are we lost again? Have we made another mistake?”). In addition, Linda Lamont-Stewart argues that, because these figures appear to cross or transcend a number of boundaries—being viewed by different characters as both women and men; adopting colonial names (the Lone Ranger, etc); and existing in both the mythic and “real” worlds—they “destabilize the system of binary logic upon which a variety of patriarchal and imperialist structures of power and authority are founded” (“Androgyne” 116). However, Lamont-Stewart herself to an extent reinscribes this system precisely by contrasting such “patriarchal and imperialist structures” with the “more inclusive and equitable cultural configuration” proposed by King’s text (128). As well, all of the above qualities—having limited powers, making mistakes, transcending boundaries—are not necessarily unlikeable. It is my contention, however, that it is the specifically negative aspects of these sacred figures that provides the more radical opportunity for transcending the us/Them dualistic framework.
Car,” King executes what may be an even more daring narrative manoeuvre. He decentralizes authority and truth in the narrative in such a way that it is technically impossible for us to know for sure what actually happened.

Still, this reading itself isn’t quite true: we know of course that King understands that colonial attitudes, actions, and institutions exist and that they are dehumanizing in a specifically us/them dualistic manner. While he may have been wrong about the apples and the convertible, and even about whether or not the guards on the train had guns, his general sense of the guards’ actions and attitudes is not likely to be very far from the truth. Similarly, in Green Grass, Running Water King is engaged in considering the hideously destructive, genocidal impact that settlers have had upon Native life and culture. It would seem impossible to do justice to this history without rendering severe judgement against those responsible for such violence. By undermining his own narrative authority as well as the authority of sacred Aboriginal figures, King is

410 This notion of “truth” in fact corresponds well with Basil Johnston’s definition:

When an “Anishinaubae” says that someone is telling the truth, he says “w’däeb-awae.” But the expression is not just a mere confirmation of a speaker’s veracity. It is at the same time a philosophical proposition that, in saying, a speaker casts his words and his voice only as far as his vocabulary and his perception will enable him. In so doing the tribe was denying that there was absolute truth; that the best a speaker could achieve and a listener expect was the highest degree of accuracy. (“One” 12; cf. Foreword xii; “How” 47; Manitou 241)

In his introduction to Indian School Days, Johnston further declares that his memoir is set forth in this same spirit, that it “is as accurate as memory and affect and bias will allow” (11). Barbara Godard cites a similar comment by Lenore Keeshig-Tobias to the effect that Native writings specifically challenge the traditional (mimetic) understanding of literature; that is, this work “posits the word as a process of knowing, provisional and partial, rather than as revealed knowledge itself, and aims to produce texts in performance that would create truth as interpretation rather than those in the Western mimetic tradition that reveal truth as pre-established knowledge” (“Politics” 184; cf. Thompson, “Technologies” 62).

411 King’s situation here is similar to the one in which Jane Tompkins found herself when attempting to adduce a defensibly coherent history of post-contact Native-colonial encounters (as described in section 1.2.2). That is, while her theoretical tools led her to relativize all subject positions, doing so effectively negated the history—and the ongoing experience—of real, lived suffering (“Indians” 73-75). In a similar vein, Arun Mukherjee points out that, “while Maria Campbell or Toni Morrison may challenge Eurocentric history, they want us to believe the truth claims of the history they themselves are providing” (“Whose” 4). For similar arguments about the ways in which much Native literature both questions absolutist historical accounts while still asserting the reality of certain key events, see Hoy, “Nothing” 174-177; Kelly, “Landscape” 115; Krupat, Voice 199; LaRocque, “Teaching” 215; Thompson, “Typewriter” 92, 97.
apparently trying to maintain a very tricky position, simultaneously questioning Native positions while making clear moral indictments against colonizing non-Natives. He may not always be entirely successful in this attempt, but it is conceivable that he makes it precisely to avoid falling wholly into the dualistic trap: to render necessary judgement without simply re-inscribing oppositional terms, without becoming himself implicated in the same destructive, us/them worldview that he is resisting.

A final example of this attempt involves the fact that, when the four elders “fix” *The Mysterious Warrior*, they do not simply change it so that the Indians beat the cowboys: they change it from black and white into colour (321). This shift seems in part to mean simply that the world depicted by the film has become more complex, less dualistic. In this context, consider the deaths of the film’s Hollywood stars: “John Wayne looked down and stared stupidly at the arrow in his thigh, shaking his head in amazement and disbelief as two bullets ripped through his chest and out the back of his jacket. Richard Widmark collapsed facedown in the sand, his hands clutching at an arrow buried in his throat” (322). I may be wrong, but this description does not seem to call out for unqualified celebration; it seems, rather, to suggest the horror of war, no matter who dies or who wins. When Coyote sees the new ending, he shouts “Yahoo” (322); however, while watching the original ending, he similarly shouts “Hooray” (320). Both responses, I think, are problematic. As much as we may want the Natives to (finally!) triumph, as much as such a reversal is needed, maybe this is not enough. Maybe we need to adjust our perspectives in a more fundamental way, to see the full humanness of all the characters, and colour our readings just as *The Mysterious Warrior* is coloured.
6.2.3 Mimesis Terminus

In the end, Native literature (rather than criticism of this literature) appears better able, and more inclined, to promote a variety of viewpoints on a complex situation.\footnote{Note that, to some extent, this disparity hearkens back to Ricoeur’s ideas about philosophic and poetic writing, and “la différence irréductible entre les deux modes de discours” (La métaphore 375).} It can promote, for example, an understanding of the role that colonialism plays in the destruction of Native peoples’ lives, along with a sense of the responsibility that these people themselves have for their lives, wrapped up in an understanding of the common, flawed humanity of both colonizer and colonized. It is precisely this commonality, the mimetic linking of colonized and colonizer, that allows much of this literature to genuinely transcend (to an extent at least) binary constructions. In other words, Native authors are positing a “same as” relationship with the “not quite” aspect removed; mimesis, in this regard, becomes an emphatically anti-dualistic narrative figure. Thus April Raintree considers the fact that she sees the negative aspects of both white people and Native people: “Maybe that’s what being a half-breed was all about,” she reflects, “being a critic-at-large” (125). More pointedly, Halfbreed’s Maria considers the mimetic implications of political reversal, namely that Natives in power would be the same as non-Natives: “I realize that an armed revolution of Native people will never come about; even if such a thing were possible what would we achieve? We would only end up oppressing someone else” (184). It is possible that the revised film ending in Green Grass, Running Water echoes exactly this sentiment; if so, when Lionel gets rid of John Wayne’s jacket he is rejecting not only colonial mimesis but also perhaps the desire to “oppress someone else,” since the jacket in question quite pointedly has two holes in the back from where Wayne was shot dead (302). Basil Johnston takes a different approach,
simply and repeatedly undermining colonial us/them perspectives by commenting on the ways in which many of the priests in the residential school were, just like the boys, orphans, cultural outsiders, prisoners of a system they did not create (e.g., 9, 68, 74, 165).

In terms of connecting such notions to religion, Campbell, Culleton, King and Johnston keep their focus first on the crippling, missionizing dualism of Christian people and institutions, and secondly on the ways in which Native traditions help the protagonists to resist—and finally overcome—such efforts. Rather than accept their identification as the inferior, shame-filled “them” in the colonial binary construction, for example, the protagonists typically find a way to move beyond the construction through a renewed sense of self-worth. With Cheechum as her model and inspiration Maria in the end no longer needs her blanket to survive (Halfbreed 184); when April attends the Pow Wow she feels a sense of pride for the first time in her life (In 166); by confronting George’s photographic appropriation of the Sun Dance, Lionel actually stands up to colonial injustice instead of once again capitulating to it (Green 384-387); and Basil puts the lie to the Indian Agent’s assessment of him as one of the “bad kids” (Indian 22), thanking Kitchi-manitou for helping him deliver perhaps the first Native high school valedictory address in Canada (241-242). All of these achievements undermine, but do not reverse, a dualistic viewpoint simply by affirming the value of the Native characters in a way that does not necessitate the devaluing (in any essentialized way) of the non-Native ones.

To this function of Aboriginal traditions King, as argued, includes a consideration of Native divinities as imperfect, blemished. This view of course corresponds well to Johnston’s frequent depictions of Nanabush as vain, greedy, stupid, arrogant, prideful,
etc. But, like Thought Woman et al., Nanabush also acts at times out of genuine good intentions, a desire to help others; that is to say, he embodies a series of contradictions. Along these lines, Johnston comments on the use of animals in Anishinaubae storytelling:

> Often animal beings were presented as contraries, or contradictions. One time the bear represented good; another, he imaged evil. This portrayed a fact of being and life, that there are two aspects to everything, appearing as opposites. Birth and death, youth and old age, day and night, man and woman, water and fire, wind and rock, sadness and joy, triumph and defeat, body and soul-spirit, good and evil. (OH 58)

In this conception, a range of competing qualities and desires are understood as existing within individual beings, a conception often symbolized by mimetic conflict. Thus the wholeness of the day is represented as a struggle between light and darkness, while the conflict between the human desire to deflate an overblown ego, and the fear of being deflated ourselves, is manifest in Nanabush’s fight against his bother Pukawiss.

All of this is to say that mimetic violence in Native literature generally—including both associational and polemical works—is not only and always about colonialism. April and Cheryl’s antipathy is not just a result of evangelical settler culture, but a reflection of the fact that sometimes stubbornness and ego can cause tremendous pain to those we love. Similarly, while Lionel and Charlie’s battle has its symbolic colonial ties, it is also in part the story of two self-involved, immature men who mistakenly think that being with a responsible, intelligent woman will solve their problems. These struggles are a reflection, in other words, of the ways in which Native characters are not simply the embodiment of idealistic anti-colonial values of harmony,
balance, etc., but are in fact fully human. In other words, mimetic conflict in Native literature can function in a manner analogous to April Raintree herself, as a critique of both non-Natives and Natives. For those of us who unblinkingly condemn colonialism, it can often be the latter critique that is the most destabilizing. It is not a negative vision of Euro-Canadians in Native literature that causes us concern, but that we find any negative representations of Native people, history, and traditions so troubling that we are, in fact, often unable to see them at all. It is in this more subtle and complex way that such literature really upsets our dualistic worldview, and in which its various mirrors become more fully—and radically—uncomfortable.
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