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Hartmut Lutz

Contemporary Achievements

Contextualizing Canadian Aboriginal Literatures



Table of Contents

About this book.....	9
I. SURVEYS OF CANADIAN NATIVE LITERATURES.....	19
The Beginnings of Contemporary Aboriginal Literature in Canada 1967-1972.....	21
Canadian Multicultural Literatures: Ethnic Minorities and "alterNatives"	70
Aboriginal Literatures in Canada: Multiculturalism and Fourth World Decolonization	83
II. PEOPLES, STORIES, AND PLACES	105
Race, or Place? The Palimpsest of Space in Western Canadian Fiction, from Salverson to Cariou	107
For Indigenes "the land is deep in time," but for the Immigrants "the language has no Mother"	121
Whom Do You Eat?— Thoughts on the Columbian Exchange, and "How Food Was Given"	142
III. INDIANS AND GERMANS.....	155
German Indianthusiasm: A Socially Constructed German National(ist) Myth	157
Receptions of Indigenous Canadian Literatures in Germany.....	175
"Okay, I'll be their annual Indian for next year"— Thoughts on the Marketing of a Canadian Indian Icon in Germany.....	190
IV. MÉTIS AND OTHERS	205
"Inventing" Canada's Aboriginal Peoples: Métis Moving From Invisibility to International Interaction.....	207
Identity as Interface: Fact and Fiction in the Autobiographical Writings of Howard Adams (1921-2001).....	222
Not "Neither-Nor" but "Both, and More?": A Transnational Reading of Chicana and Métis Autobiografictions by Sandra Cisneros and Howard Adams	241

V. INUIT AND OTHERS	261
Unfit for the European Environment: The Tragedy of Abraham and Other Inuit from Labrador in Hagenbeck's <i>Völkerschau</i> , 1880-1881	263
Sagas of Northern Contacts and Magic Realism: From Historical Conflicts to Fictional Conciliations.....	281
BIBLIOGRAPHY	297
INDEX.....	321

In Memoriam

Jack D. Forbes
(1934 – 2011)

and

Renate Eigenbrod
(1944 – 2014)

About this book

From Challenges to Achievements

In the fall of 1991 a book was published in Canada containing the conversations I had enjoyed with eighteen Canadian Native authors. These conversations were recorded between September 1989 and January 1991. The authors spoke about their works and the situation of Aboriginal literature and politics in their country, at a period during which the so-called Oka Crisis forced Canadian society to acknowledge and to address the grievances of Aboriginal peoples. Catching the spirit of those years, the conversations in our book challenged English departments at Canadian universities to no longer exclude the works of Native writers from their curricular canon. The title we gave that book 25 years ago, *Contemporary Challenges (Conversations with Canadian Native Authors)*, reflects that challenge.

Today, a quarter of a century later, the situation has changed dramatically. While the vestiges of colonialism are still all too present in Indigenous—non-Indigenous relations, there have been various steps, taken by Canadian courts and governmental agencies, to mitigate the most damaging effects of colonial policies, or to at least acknowledge past injustices. Reacting to mounting pressure from Aboriginal communities and their supporters, the Canadian prime minister in 2008 officially apologized to the victims of residential schools. Reconciliation, healing, and partnership have become prominent objectives in official policies.

In academia the changes are amazing. Many universities and colleges throughout Canada have established Native (or Indigenous) Studies programs and departments. While twenty five-years ago there were less than a handful of Aboriginal scholars in Canada holding a PhD, today their numbers are counted in scores. While in the beginning Indigenous scholars had to struggle hard to even get into academic institutions, today some academic institutions actively seek out Indigenous applicants to fill vacancies, especially in education, Indigenous studies, and other “soft sciences.” In literature, the process has clearly moved beyond the earlier tokenism, and Canadian Literature today is unthinkable without the works of First Nations, Inuit and Métis authors. Indigenous literature has expanded from early protests and laments to cultural nationalist self-assertiveness, and more recently it has moved beyond identity politics to

embrace multi- and transnational networking on a global scale. Currently Western academia is beginning at last to attempt opening its discourse to Aboriginal knowledges and research paradigms. Given that this process of recognition and assertion of the Aboriginal presence in Canadian culture and politics has only taken less than a quarter of a century for its move from obscurity to prominence, the multiple achievements by Métis, First Nation and Inuit activists, scholars and writers are absolutely astounding. The title of this book, *Contemporary Achievements (Contextualizing Canadian Aboriginal Literatures)*, celebrates these achievements.

In memoriam

I dedicate this collection of articles to the memory of two eminent scholars and close personal friends, who passed away in recent years: Jack D. Forbes and Renate Eigenbrod. Both, in their own ways, had profound influences on the development of Native American Studies, and Indigenous Literatures in Canada, respectively. May this book help to remember their achievements and express my lasting gratitude for what they did for so many of us who are engaged in Aboriginal studies.

My own move into Native American Studies began 40 years ago when, in 1975 after a PhD in English Literature, I began researching racism in children's books with a focus on the portrayal of American Indians. One day in my research at the John F. Kennedy Library in (West) Berlin in 1979 I "discovered" Jack Forbes. I stumbled across a quotation by him, which really struck me. Only a day later a friend gave me a tape recording of a speech by the same Jack Forbes about "Machiavellianism and Captive Nations", a radical anti-European critique of colonialism, which electrified me, and I resolved to contact him. I found Jack's address and decided to write to him as soon as my research month in Berlin would be over. But Jack beat me to it.

On returning home to my family, there was a letter from that same Jack Forbes, addressed to "Hartmut Lutz, University of Osnabrück, West Germany", asking me to help him find a translator for his manuscript, *A World Ruled by Cannibals: The Wetiko Disease of Aggression, Violence, and Imperialism*. So he "discovered" me at about the same time that I "discovered" him (Jack had stumbled across a small report about a paper on Indian stereotyping which I had given at an international conference in 1978). We often marvelled at this coincidence later. Jack became my most influential teacher in Native American Studies, when I spent a year at the Tecumseh Center at the University of California Davis in 1979/80, and we

later met again in various places in Britain, California, and Germany. We remained fast friends, even if there were periods when we did not see each other for years. Students and I translated his *Wetiko*-book and had it published in Germany (1981), and, unbeknownst to him, I later copy-edited his novel *Red Blood* (1997) for Theytus Books in Canada, and did a reader's report for University of Illinois Press of his study *The American Discovery of Europe* (2007). I remember Jack as an incredibly sharp, creative, versatile, and productive thinker and writer, who was immensely proud of his Native American heritage, and who turned out ideas and books that were unorthodox and innovative. As a teacher and colleague, he managed to plant those seeds of curiosity and doubt in the minds of his students and friends, which are the sine qua non of academic enquiry and radical scholarship. Even when we did not always agree on everything, we remained friends throughout, and I shall always feel humbled and grateful to him for writing a contribution to a Festschrift published at the occasion of my retirement in 2011, even at a time when he was already fatally ill and facing the end of his own life. Thank you, Jack!

I met Renate Eigenbrod for the first time in October 1989 during my second research trip to Canada. I had already visited Thunder Bay two years earlier, meeting with Penny Petrone, but nobody had directed me to Renate, who already then was teaching Literature to Aboriginal students as a sessional lecturer for Lakehead University. This time we had exchanged letters before my visit, and on October 2nd 1989 her husband Dieter picked me up from the airport, and Renate welcomed me to their home and hosted me. In her ever so hospitable way, and in her very active and supportive fashion, she organized a party at her house, so that I could meet with George Kenny and other members of the local Native artists and writers community, including Ahmoo Angecone (who has since become a lifelong friend). The next morning she took me along to an Anishnabe syllabics class taught by George Kenny at the local Indian friendship centre. After lunch she facilitated an interview with author Ruby Slipperjack (Farrell), and then drove me to the airport in time for my connection to Ottawa. I later fully realized that such active, selfless, and enthusiastic support for all things related to Native Studies was typical of her.

Renate and I connected well. We were both born towards the end of World War II in Northern Germany, fully conscious of German guilt and determined not to let fascism gain ground again, and both with a typically German penchant for "Indians." Renate's commitment to Native Studies

and to Canadian Indigenous literatures, was both “applied”, e.g. enjoying to interact with real people in- and outside academia as an authentic and empathizing fellow human being, and it was “abstract”, e.g. theorizing post-coloniality and astutely reflecting her own positionality as a non-Native scholar. While she was doing her PhD at the University of Greifswald, I never experienced her as a candidate to supervise, but rather as a research partner to dialogue with in our area of mutual interest. Witnessing Renate in Winnipeg, I was happy to see her have come fully into her own, networking and interacting with fellow scholars and friends, in her accommodating, creative, exuberant and inspiring manner. This year, on March 2nd 2014 in Vancouver, after the Aboriginal Roundtable conference, which she and Jo-Ann Episkenew had founded originally, Renate, my wife Ruth, Isabelle St. Armand, and I had a longer private meeting over tea, catching up and talking about our families and mutual friends. Since I had by then been retired from German university service since 2011, I was curious to know when Renate was expecting to retire. She seemed shocked at the question, and she responded most emphatically: “No, I cannot retire. No way! I’m needed.”—Rather than lamenting the gaping hole Renate left, we should be grateful for her legacy of unremitting engagement for Native Studies. *Herzlichen Dank*, Renate!

History of this manuscript

The articles contained in this book were originally published in scattered collections and journals during and after 2002—the year my previous book of essays, *Approaches*, came out with this publisher. I had originally hoped to have this collection appear in Canada, and I submitted an earlier draft version to University of Manitoba Press, indicating which changes I still wanted to make before final submission. However, that plan fell through for two reasons. While one of the peer reviewers suggested to “publish the manuscript as is”, the other reviewer suggested a re-submission after having made almost exactly those revisions, which I had already told the publisher I intended to make. I was somewhat disgruntled after that, unwilling to go through the entire rigmarole of submission and reviewing once again. So, when eventually the very helpful editor, David Carr, admitted that he would not be able to raise any funding for this publication from the Canada Council, because of my lack of Canadian citizenship, I just thought “Okay, I don’t need that!” And I withdrew and sulked.

Much later, back in Germany, Martin Kuester, to whom I had whined about my Canadian experience, just remarked: "So what?! And why don't you publish it in my series?" --That sounded like a very attractive option indeed, given that Martin Kuester agreed to allow free range to structure and format the manuscript in the way you see it now, and given that I had enjoyed working very congenially with Michael Friedrichs of Wißner Verlag before. But I still dreaded and loathed the nitty-gritty business of standardizing the fourteen individual manuscripts into one format and entering all the sources into one comprehensive bibliography. But when my Szczecin colleague and friend Weronika Suchacka offered to undertake that work, this book finally got on its way. I cannot adequately express in any words how grateful I am to Weronika Suchacka who, despite her job as a lecturer and many other pressing commitments, diligently undertook this painstaking task, and who slaved away at the manuscripts for several months, always maintaining close editorial contact with me via the net. So, here is the result!

Contents of this book

The focus of the following collection of articles is on contextualization. Works of Aboriginal literature and individual authors are discussed in their historical contexts or in a comparative approach in relation to works and writers of Indigenous and/or non-Aboriginal origin. The individual articles are arranged in five thematic clusters, but they may be read individually, independent of each other.

The first cluster provides "Surveys of Canadian Native Literatures", beginning with a long article which was originally researched and written at the National Archives in Ottawa, to provide the first chapter in *History of Canadian Indigenous Literature*, a book which I dreamt about but will never finish. This article provides a very detailed account of what happened in Aboriginal publishing in Canada between 1967 and 1972, and its perhaps pedestrian enumeration of so many little known texts, may not be interesting to some readers, who may be better advised to begin with one of the following articles in that cluster, which deal with the position of Native Literature within the Canadian multicultural canon, and which discuss the works by Aboriginal authors as part of a literature that is indigenous in Canada in a way no other literature is.

A second bunch of articles, "Peoples, Stories, and Places", deal with a topic that has preoccupied me for many years, i.e. the relationship between land, language, history and ethnicity. For a central European like me, whose

ancestral family ties to places were uprooted repeatedly by wars, expulsions and ethnic cleansings, it is difficult to assess how a lasting and trans-generational collective relationship to given regions and places seems formative in the development of ethnic identity. Repeatedly it happened to me that by learning about certain incidents in Native American history, e.g. "The Trail of Tears", I came also to look at European history and realized that many of the hardships I found so shocking on Turtle Island, had actually happened in similar ways and to often much larger numbers of people in Europe in the past. Gradually I came to understand in ever more complex and nuanced ways, how continued territorial residency has profoundly moulded ethnic identity on Turtle Island. In the process, my understanding became increasingly influenced by the works of Jeannette Armstrong, who in her many interventions has repeatedly explained that the land provides not only the material means of survival, but that the existing life-forms on the land, if observed and communicated over generations, entail all the teachings necessary for human survival. Indigenous ethnicity, I learned, is not a matter of biological "race" but the result of learning and place, and if understood in such a way, we all need to "re-indigenize" in order to survive on this planet.

The third group of articles deals with "Indians and Germans." It contextualizes historically and ideologically the phenomenon I came to call "German Indianthusiasm". While Indianthusiasm is not an exclusively German phenomenon, it certainly may serve as a key towards understanding developments in our own history, and it continues to be functional even today. This may be seen when looking at the reception of Indigenous authors' texts in Germany in general, and more specifically when studying the avenues it provides for the marketing of "Indians" and "Indian cultures" in this country. Native authors, artists and performers have been quick to identify and utilize "Indianthusiasm" as a marketing venue. Indians remain popular in Germany.

Métis, by contrast, are hardly known to others outside of Canada. The fourth thematic cluster in this collection, "Métis and Others", begins by exploring the "invisibility" in Germany of Canadian Métis as a distinct ethnic group and nation, and it documents that why there are some very gradual changes in the reception of Métis culture in our country, this perception is often still framed and partially obliterated by the cliché we have of Indians. A second article in this cluster tries to understand the fleeting, hybrid and often painfully shifting identity, as lived and as

fictionalized by one of Canada's most famous and politically most radical Métis writers: Howard Adams. The concluding article contrasts the histories, cultures and literatures of two indigenous North American ethnicities, who both came into being through colonial contacts: the Métis in Canada and the Chicanas/Chicanos in the U.S. American-Mexican borderlands. A transnational reading compares the "autobiografictions" by Sandra Cisneros and Howard Adams.

Under the rubric "Inuit and Others" the fifth and last thematic cluster contextualizes two historical moments in Inuit-European contact situations. The first article presents and discusses the tragic history of eight Inuit from Labrador who were exhibited (and died) in European zoos in 1880/81. We know about them through the diary of one of their members, Abraham Ulrikab. This earliest autobiographical text by an Inuit author exists in a German translation by a Moravian missionary, which Greifswald students and I translated into English and published in Canada. The concluding article in this cluster then goes way back in history by a thousand years to the first encounters between Inuit and Vikings, as they were recorded later in two Icelandic sagas, which in turn provided the inter-textual sources of Joan Clark's "historiographic metafiction" reflecting that event. The article then concentrates on two contemporary texts by Indigenous authors, Bernard Assiniwi and Rachel Quitsualik, who revisit and revision that historical encounter in a most humanist and surprisingly conciliatory way.

When contextualised together, the articles may demonstrate how Indigenous Literature in Canada has truly grown and expanded over the last quarter of a century. The challenge by Canadian Native authors has been met. No longer need First Nations, Métis and Inuit writers fear exclusion from and by the mainstream. While there may always remain the danger that a few most prominent writers become tokenized as academia's "pets," the creativity and dynamism of Aboriginal authors today, and the scope and diversity of their achievements, are far too great and powerful to be relegated ever again to an academic niche or sink into the bathos of obscurity.

Thanks

Over the years there have been far too many helpful individuals on either side of the Atlantic, to be mentioned in total and individually at this point. Those who were directly influential for a specific article are, I hope, duly mentioned in connection with it, and if there are some who find that they

have been omitted, I hereby ask them for their forgiveness; they are not excluded intentionally.

As always, my greatest thanks go to my wife Ruth, who has always supported me in my work and has given me the freedom to travel abroad and often to be absent for many months in a row. Besides, she has hosted and served as guide for many, many visitors from Turtle Island. When I say that my career in Native Studies would not have been possible without her, I mean that literally, and my gratitude and love of more than forty years will remain with her to the end. Ruth and I compiled the index for this book together.

I would also like to thank my doctoral students and colleagues on either side of the Atlantic for the discussions and learning experiences we had together, for the help they provided, and for the fun our dialogues entailed. Lore Erf, Barbara Haible, Marco Briese, Stefanie von Berg, Kerstin Knopf, Jo-Ann Episkenew, Jeannette Armstrong and the late Renate Eigenbrod with their doctoral dissertations contributed to the growth and my understanding of Indigenous studies, while others, like Antje Thiersch, Heike Gerds, Christiane Kollenberg, Jörg Behrendt, Heike Bast and Weronika Suchacka, with their theses on works by authors marginalized on account of their ethnicity, gender or sexual preference, each have opened new areas of understanding for me, which influence my thinking, and which I am equally grateful for—and this goes also for what I learned about the Hollywood Western from Martin Holtz. It is most gratifying to see that a new generation of scholars, who dedicated (parts of) their research to Indigenous studies, were able to obtain professorships in Germany and Canada: Jeannette Armstrong, Renate Eigenbrod, Jo-Ann Episkenew, Kerstin Knopf and Gesa Mackenthun. Right on!

My lasting thanks go also to organisations which over the years have supported my research in and about Canada: The International Council for Canadian Studies (ICCS) and the Gesellschaft für Kanada-Studien (GKS) for Faculty Research and Faculty Enrichment Fellowships, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) for a year long guest professorship at the then Saskatchewan Indian Federated College at the University of Regina, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), and the University of Ottawa for the 2003 Diefenbaker Award, the Izaak Walton Killam Foundation and the University of Calgary for the 2012-2013 Visiting Fellowship. Of course, there are many helpful individuals facilitating such research opportunities as nominators and administrators, of whom I will here only mention by

name Bernie Selinger (Regina), Wladimir Krysinski and Anne Brisset (Ottawa) and Florentine Strzelczyk (Calgary). I have given up on listing more of the many helpful individuals, because over the years and continents there were hundreds, and I am bound to leave somebody out, who would deserve much better.

When it comes to publishing this book in particular, I would like to thank Warren Cariou and David Carr (both in Winnipeg), as well as the two anonymous reviewers of University of Manitoba Press for their serious (but lastly abortive) efforts to get this book out in Canada. That I am immensely grateful to Martin Kuester I have stressed already, and that cooperating with Michael Friedrichs is always a pleasure, needs no further mention, but most of all I am indebted to Weronika Suchacka for her careful and untiring copy editing of this manuscript.

Thank you all!

Bömitz, Vorpommern, November 2014
Hartmut Lutz

INDEX

- Aboriginal(s),
 artist(s), 11, 21, 23, 24, 37, 51-54, 58, 189,
 190, 191, 208
 identity, 28n, 37, 56, 64, 64n, 68, 92, 236
 scholars, 9, 30n, 39, 40, 93, 147
 studies, 10
- Abraham (Ulrikab), 15, 194-196, 263-280
- Acco, Anne, 98
- Acoose, Janice, 28, 30n, 93
- Adams, Howard,
 autobiography, 88, 222-240, 241-259
 “bread and butter,” 37, 59,
 “The Colonized Halfbreed,” 230, 231,
 235
 “Halfbreed,” 55n, 209, 226, 231, 239, 240
 Malcolm X, 234-235
 Métis author, 15, 94, 95, 181
 Otapawyl, 56n, 221, 223, 226, 237, 238,
 239, 252, 255n, 256, 258n, 259
 political radical, 55, 219, 228, 230, 233,
 238, 255n, 259
 Prison of Grass, 57, 239, 249, 251, 252
 revolutionary nationalism, 224, 228, 255,
 256
- Ademar, Faye, 181
- Africadian, 77, 77n, 127
- African Canadian(s), 33, 34, 76, 77, 78, 127,
 128
 “African continuum,” 78
- AIM (American Indian Movement), 35, 36,
 173, 180, 181, 186
- Akwesasne Notes, 34, 54, 181
- Akiwenzie-Damm, Kateri, 54, 54n, 70n, 93
- Alexander, Lincoln, 33
- Algonquin, 54, 83, 178, 182, 190, 290
- Allen, Paula Gunn, 43n, 187n
- Almighty Voice, 47, 224, 224n
 as character in Adams’s *Otapawyl*, 224-
 226, 229, 230, 232, 257-259
- Alter, Peter, 162, 176n
 “AlterNative,” 5, 70,
- Anahareo (Gertrud Bernard), 178, 179, 179n
- Anaya, Rodolfo, 248
- Anderson, Kim, 93, 243n
- Angecone, Ahmoo, 11
- Angel, 123
- Anishnabe(g), 84, 99, 178, 238
 art, 46, 49, 53, 58
 author, 65, 52, 53, 65, 141, 179n, 182, 184,
 202n
 language, 220
 literature, 44, 62
 (Ojibway/Chippewa), 28, 44, 49, 51n, 83,
 84, 93, 141, 178, 217
 oral tradition, 44, 52, 100, 102, 103, 147
 syllabics, 11
- anthropologist(y), 28, 42, 44, 87, 130, 146,
 265, 273, 279
- anti-Judaism, 162, 172, 176n
- anti-racism, 76, 79, 80, 249
- anti-Semitism, 157, 159, 162, 167, 172, 173
- Anzaldúa, Gloria, 79, 187n, 239, 248, 249
- Apache, 108, 129, 160, 168, 169, 177
- appropriation, 26, 27,
 of culture, 56, 104, 110, 138, 142, 146, 199,
 282
 of land/materials, 99, 143, 146
 of Native voice, 31, 44, 98, 116n, 133, 140,
 183
- Aquash, Anna Mae, 181
- Arima, Eugene, 49
- Armstrong, Jeannette, 14, 16, 21, 45n, 57n,
 91, 129, 181, 184
 and Lally Grauer, 21, 62, 93, 140n
 Constructing Indigeneity, 147, 151, 153
 ecology, 92, 117, 117n
 “How Food Was Given,” 131, 132, 150
 land, 92, 117, 117n, 118, 121, 150
 Looking at the Words, 92
 “oraliture,” 130, 130n, 147
 poetry, 95, 98, 187, 188
 Slash, 34, 65, 88, 181, 185-187
 Syilx (Okanagan) speaker, 43, 64n, 117,
 129
- Arnason, David, 71, 138, 138n
- Arnott, Joanne, 134
- Ashcroft, Bill, 78n, 87, 122n, 252n
- Asian Canadian(s), 72, 75, 187
- Asikinack, Bill, 25
- Assiniboine, 46, 47, 97, 216

INDEX

- Assiniwi, Bernard, 15, 54, 281, 290-293, 296
 Atleo, Shawn, 141
 Atwood, Margaret, 26, 70, 113, 138, 283
 Austria, 30n, 157n, 204, 208
 Austro-Hungarian, 126, 138n
 "authentic(ity)," 45, 109, 110, 117, 173, 178,
 191, 200, 202n, 203, 203n, 218, 225, 282
 "autobiografiction," 15, 241-259
 autobiography, 49, 88, 234, 278
 Adams, 223-228, 235, 237, 253, 255n, 256
 Bartleman, 258n
 Campbell, 185n, 220, 237, 242n, 249
 Culleton, 249
 "Franklinian", 48, 227, 235, 277
 Hagenbeck, 196n
 Inuit, 278, 288
 Long Lance, 170, 178, 198
 Malcolm X, 233, 235
 Maracle, 34, 219
 Nakano, 73
 Pelletier, 185
 Redsky, 46
 Tyman, 74
 Winnemucca, 39n
 Aylward, David, 72
 Aziz, Nurjehan, 75
Aztlán, 244, 245

 Babcock, Barbara, 27n
 Bärtsch, Claus-Ekkehard, 162, 176n
 Bahbah, Homi, 121
 Bak, Hans, 54n
 Baker, Brenda, 75n
 Bakker, Peter, 83, 84, 220
 Bannerji, Himani, 75, 76
 "barbarians," 164, 166, 173, 192, 208
 Barnett, Louise K., 168n
 Bartleman, James, 231, 238, 258n
 Basile, Joseph, 217n
 Basile, Marie-Jeanne, 44
 Basso, Keith, 108, 121, 128, 129
 Bast, Heike, 16, 78n
 Bataille, Gretchen M., 278
 Batoche, 222, 224, 244, 245, 246, 258n, 259
 Batt, Shirley, 59
 Bauer, George W., 41, 42
 Baumgartner, Walter, 286
 Becker, Jörg, 32n
 Begamudré, Ven, 75
 Benedict, Nona, 65
 Benson, Mel, 58
 Beothuk, 63, 289-293, 296
 Berding, Helmut, 163n
 Berg, Stefanie von, 16, 35n, 189n
 Berghoff, Peter, 162
 Berkhofer, Robert F., 28n, 142n, 192n, 209
 Berthold-Bond, Daniel, 108n
 BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs), 32, 161n
 Biegert, Claus, 131, 178, 180n, 183, 219
 bilingual, 249, 252
 editions/collections, 44, 49, 53, 72, 94, 98,
 99, 183, 184, 187
 Billington, Ray Allen, 209
 Birdsell, Sandra, 126, 139n
 Bissoondath, Neil, 75
 Black, Ayanna, 78
 Black(s), 32n, 33, 34, 57, 72n, 74, 76-78, 127,
 128, 187n, 233, 234, 235, 247, 255
 Blackfeet (USA), 197, 216
 Blackfoot (Canada), 178, 196-201
 Kainai (Blackfoot), 197
 Piikani (Peigan), 197, 199
 Siksika (Blood), 24, 178, 197, 198
 Black Loyalists, 77, 127
 Blohm, Hans-Ludwig, 265n, 266
 "blood-and-soil" (Nazi ideology), 111, 115,
 118
 Blue Cloud, Peter, 183, 184
 Blum, Martha, 126, 138n, 139n
 Bodmer, Karl, 176, 196, 197, 209, 215, 217
 Bohlinger, Janine, 189n
 Bolz, Peter, 195n
 Booth, Annie L., 117n
 "borderlands," 15, 78, 79, 209, 239, 241, 248,
 249
 Bourgeault, Ron, 33n
 Bowering, George, 27
 Boyden, Joseph, 140, 150
 Bradley-St.Cyr, Ruth, 266, 279n
 Brady, Jim, 33, 219n, 244
 Brand, Dionne, 76, 78, 79
 Breinig, Helmbrecht, 190n
 Briese, Marco, 16, 96
 Brown, Dee, 96n, 180n
 Brown, Nancy Marie, 285n
 Bruce, Skyros, 62
 Bruchac, Joseph, 36
 Bruns, Jantje, 264n

- Buck, Lawrence, 163n
 "buckskin curtain," 57, 87
 Bujnowska, Ewelina, 121n
- Callicot, J., 117n
 Calloway, Colin, 121, 128, 157n, 191
 Campbell, Alexander, 210
 Campbell, Lucky, 127
 Campbell, Lydia, 279
 Campbell, Maria, 57n, 70n, 109n, 219, 219n, 235
 Halfbreed, 74, 88, 160, 182, 185, 186, 220, 226, 234-239, 242, 249
 interview, 24, 30n, 56, 122, 133, 138, 246n
 language and Mother, 122, 123, 138
 Riel's People, 250n
 Road Allowance People, 122
- Canada Council, 16, 22, 26, 70, 85, 190
 Canadian
 constitution, 83, 86, 89, 90, 104, 141, 181, 207
 government, 9, 22, 24, 25, 26, 37n, 56, 57, 72, 84, 85, 141, 222, 243
 canon, 9, 13, 23, 26, 126, 282
 literary, 29, 34, 63, 72, 76, 79, 91, 115, 296
- Capilano, Chief Joe, 38, 39
 capitalis(m/t), 57, 117, 118, 126, 128, 143, 152, 160, 191, 192, 229, 238, 240, 256
capitkw, 131, 149, 151, 153
 Cardinal, Harold, 56, 57, 87, 235n
 Cardinal-Schubert, Joane, 33n
 Caribbean, 74-78, 86, 128, 143, 208
 Cariou, Warren, 17, 93, 107, 119, 125, 140
 Carmichael, Stokely, 32n
 Carolan-Brozy, Sandra, 35n, 74n, 189, 234n, 278
 Carpenter, Edmund, 60
 Castellano, (Brant-), Marlene, 65
 Castillo, Ana, 249
 Catawba, 178, 198
 Catlin, George, 196, 197, 209
 Charbonneau, Toussaint, 215, 216
 Cheechoo, Shirley, 181
 Cherokee, 198, 201, 202, 204
 Cheyenne (Tsistsistas), 97, 179, 196
 Chiappeli, Fredy, 144
 Chicana/Chicano, 15, 34, 67, 187n
 autobiography, 237, 239, 241- 259
 Chief Eagle, Dallas, 35
 Chinese (Canadians), 73, 74
 Chong, Denise, 74
 Choy, Wayson, 74
 Chrétien, Jean, 25, 26
 Christadler, Marieluise, 169
 Christian, Barbara, 77
 chronotope, see "place"
 Chwin, Stefan, 125
 Cisneros, Sandra, 15, 241, 249, 251, 252, 259
 Clark, Ella Elizabeth, 40, 41, 43
 Clark, Joan, 15, 140, 281, 284, 287-290, 296
 Clarke, Austin, 76, 128
 Clarke, George Elliott, 76, 77
 Clarkson, Adrienne, 291
 class, 74, 103, 107n, 112, 213, 214, 236, 237, 240
 and colour, 72
 and gender, 75, 94, 170, 176, 249
 and race, see "race"
 and religion, 94, 126
 middle, 26, 41, 71, 76, 78, 113, 168, 187, 228, 229, 237, 238, 255, 257-259
 working-, 219
- Clunn, Tony, 165n
 Clutesi, George, 21, 22, 59, 60, 62, 87, 88
 Potlatch, 22, 65-68, 87
 Son of Raven, 22, 50, 51, 52, 87, 184, 185
 code-switching, 67, 95, 99
 Cody, William F. (Buffalo Bill), 97, 196, 197
 Cohen, Andrew, 89
 Cohen, Leonard, 26, 28
 Colin, Susie, 208
 collaboration, 43, 44, 49, 74n, 278, 279
 collaborative, 40
 authorship, 46, 87, 280
 autobiography, 35, 74, 184, 189
 editions, 44, 49, 58, 278
- colonialism, 10, 135, 170n, 177, 243, 250, 291
 effects of, 9, 85, 131, 136, 184, 232, 263
 gaze, 268, 272
 internal, 33, 39, 56, 57, 81, 88, 90, 161n, 222, 236
 psychopathology of, 224, 229, 230, 253, 258
 "colonial-imperialist denial," 137f, 139
 colour, 71, 72, 99, 103, 126, 197, 204, 273, 285
 People(s) of, 24, 33, 34, 59, 71, 172
 women of, 76, 187
 writers of, 72, 74, 76, 79, 126, 187

INDEX

- Columbian Exchange, 92, 142, 143
 “conscientization” (Adams), 222, 232, 233, 235, 237, 238
 consciousness raising (literature), 55, 59, 65, 70
 conqu(e)ror(st), 112, 165, 244, 245, 250, 258
conquista, 245
Contemporary Challenges, 9, 89n, 92, 93
 Cooper, James Fenimore, 168n, 176, 194, 196
 Copway, George (Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh), 193, 194
 Cortez, Hernando, 245, 250
 Cox, Jay, 27n
 Coyote, 27, 183, 253
 Crate, Joan, 88
 Cree, 114, 216, 217
 activists, 56, 81, 87, 89, 181, 224, 258
 James Bay, 41
 language, 84, 147, 220
 literature, 41, 74, 290
 Naskapi-, 41
 poet, 24n, 182, 190
 Sandy Lake, 46
 syllabics, 46
 women, 83, 93
 Croatan, 178, 198
 Crosby, Alfred. W., 143, 144
 Cuba, 199n, 254
 Culleton (Mosionier), Beatrice, 70, 98, 181, 186, 234n
 April Raintree, 65, 88, 185, 220, 236, 237, 238, 239, 249
 Custer, General Armstrong, 96, 97
 Cuthand, Beth, 24n, 94, 95, 140, 184
 Czech, 157n, 220

 Dabydeen, Cyril, 74, 75
 Däwes, Birgit, 189n
 Dakota (Sioux), 84, 217
 Danay, Richard Glazer, 196
 Danish, 100n, 123, 124, 212n
 Daniels, Greg, 95, 96, 98
 Daniels, Shirley, 64
 decoloniz(e)ation), 40
 Fourth World, 83, 152n
 literature, 78, 88, 92, 93, 187
 Delaware, 99, 182
 Deloria, Philip, 28n, 109, 203n
 Deloria, Vine Jr., 131n, 151

 Dempsey, Hugh A, 24
 DePasquale, Paul, 93, 141n
 Desbarats, Peter, 42, 51
 Dewdney, Selwyn, 49
 diaspora(s)/diasporic, 72, 80, 121n, 137, 247, 249
 Dickson, Lovat, 179n
 Diedrich, Maria, 76n
 Diefenbaker, John, 16, 24, 279n
 Dion, Joe, 219n
 Dirthrower, Anderson, 58
 Dobbin, Murray, 33, 34
 Douglass, Frederick, 234
 Douglass, R.M., 122n
 Dumont, Gabriel, 93, 218n, 219n, 221, 244
 Dumont, Marilyn, 98
 Dunk, Hermann von, 162,167
 Dunn, Willie, 56
 Dvorak, Bostjan, 220

 Eber, Dorothy, 278
 Egoﬀ, Sheila, 29
 Eider (river), 123, 124, 125, 269
 Eigenbrod, Renate, 7, 10, 11, 12, 16, 93, 121, 140n, 141n, 189n, 202n
 Eirik the Red, 284
 Saga of, 285n, 286, 292
 Eiriksdottir, Freydis, 284, 287-290, 296
 Elizabeth, Shayla, 140n
 Elliott, Lorris, 71n, 76, 78
 Ellison, Ralph, 71
 Elsner (Moravian Brother), 269, 270
 Engel, Elmar, 179n
 Engels, Friedrich, 191n
 England, 123n, 127, 167, 179, 180, 268, 294
 Enlightenment, 132, 151, 152, 153, 161, 162, 173, 281, 282
 Ensslen, Klaus, 234, 235, 238
 environmental ethics, 108, 130, 131n, 132, 141, 145-150, 153
 Episkenew, Jo-Ann, 12, 16, 37, 85, 93, 95, 98, 131n, 135n, 141n, 189n, 218n, 246n, 250
 Erasmus, George, 181
 Erickson, Sheila, 58, 59
 Ertler, Klaus, 121, 207n
 essentialis(m/t), 71, 118, 140, 167, 173, 177, 239
 ethnic,
 cleansings, 14, 109, 125, 139

- identity, 37, 109, 160, 202n, 220, 236, 239
- ethnicity, 16, 127, 133, 159, 164, 167, 201, 237, 240, 243
- and class, 94, 126, 249
- and gender, 16, 38f, 94, 126, 249
- and occupation, 212n, 214, 217
- Indigenous, 14, 153, 296
- invention of, 163, 164
- racial, 71, 173, 249
- ethnocentric, 41, 113, 120, 192n, 273, 285
- ethnocid(al/e), 24, 38, 45, 110, 115, 180, 181
- ethnogenesis, 207, 209, 244n
- ethnographer, 40, 45, 278
- ethnographic, 48, 59, 66
- agenda, 54
- descriptions, etc., 47, 50, 60
- 'Ksan, 53
- show(s) (see also "*Völkerschaulen*"), 268, 269, 271, 272
- texts, etc., 36, 164
- ethnograph(y/ies), 42, 46, 147, 167, 272, 273
- ethnophobic, 162, 173
- ethnopoiesis, 72, 131, 133, 163, 166, 244
- eurocentric, 26, 34, 51, 81, 119, 152, 178, 182, 272, 282
- Ewers, John C., 196, 209
- exceptionalism, 134
- immigrant, 134, 136
- Indian-German, 170
- Indigenous, 134, 135
- Noah's, 103
- Fadden (Kahionhes), John, 54
- Fanon, Frantz, 250, 251, 254
- Fedorick, Joy Asham, 95, 98
- Feest, Christian F., 157n, 180n, 195n, 204, 208, 241n, 263
- feminism, 76, 187n, 220, 249, 285n, 288
- feminist,
- literature, 76, 91, 138, 142n, 185, 187n, 248, 250, 252, 283
- scholars, 75, 77, 187n
- Fiddler, Don, 181
- Fiedler, Leslie, 168
- Fiero, Charles E., 44
- First Nations,
- author (s)/writer(s), 15, 37, 39, 70n, 88, 91, 93, 98, 117, 181, 184, 291
- poetry, 62, 67, 88, 98
- Forbes, Jack D., 7, 10
- founding nation(s), 23, 81, 89, 126, 127
- Fourth World, 5, 33, 57, 83, 87, 88, 91, 93, 94, 98, 104, 152n, 243, 244, 254
- Forster, E.M., 27
- Francis, Daniel, 28n, 110, 192n
- Frazer, Barb, 181
- Freeman, Minnie Aodla, 235n, 278, 279
- French, 160, 161, 162, 165, 172
- colonialists, 86, 137, 209, 211, 226
- fur traders, 83
- language, 45, 55, 65, 83, 84, 107, 110n, 127, 135, 137, 138, 160n, 164, 209n, 210n, 215, 216, 220, 242
- nation, 81, 107, 161, 162, 165, 214, 218, 242
- Freud, Sigmund, 112, 134n, 135n
- Friedrichmeyer, Sara, 168n
- frontier romance, 168
- Frye, Northrop, 26, 29, 113
- Gabriel Dumont Institute Press, 93, 218n
- Gabryś, Marcin, 121n
- Gaines, Ernest, 76
- Gallagher, Terry, 49
- Galtung, Johan, 32n
- Gardner, Ethel B., 184
- Gatti, Maurizio, 28n, 37n, 38n
- Geeson, Kristin, 179n
- Gemünden, Gerd, 157n, 160n, 191
- George, Amy Marie, 63
- George, Chief Dan, 21, 22, 30, 31, 65
- George, Phil, 64
- German, 15, 23, 135n, 139n, 183, 185, 188, 207, 214, 219, 234, 265
- Canadian(s), 71, 184
- culture, 32, 65, 178, 179, 195, 201
- ideology, 157, 167, 170, 171, 172
- Indianthusiasm, 14, 176, 177, 191, 197, 198, 203
- Nazi, 73n, 177, 179
- translation into, 177-179, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 189, 219, 242
- University, 12, 98, 108n, 189, 221, 265f
- Germans, 79, 109n, 122, 126, 176, 177, 178, 180, 181, 201, 210
- Germans and Indians, 12, 175, 181, 184, 190, 193, 199, 220

INDEX

- Germany, 10, 13, 14, 16, 52, 73n, 89n, 111, 176, 178, 181, 185, 187, 188, 189, 193, 194, 199, 210, 241n, 263
- Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker, 181
- Gill, Stephen, 75n
- Gitskan ('Ksan), 53
- Gladstone, Jim, 24
- Goldie, Terry, 38, 81, 82n, 93, 140n
- Goldstick, Miles, 181n
- Gooderham, Kent, 58
- Goto, Hiromi, 73
- Goudie, Elizabeth, 235n, 278
- Grady, Wayne, 290
- Graffenried, Friedrich von, 210-215, 217
- Grant, Cuthbert, 209
- Grass, Günther, 125
- Grauer, Lally, 62, 93, 140n
- Green, Alma, 235n
- Greenland, 83, 196, 267, 272-274, 284, 287, 289, 292n, 293-295
- Greenlanders*, 271, 272, 285-288, 293
Saga of the, 284, 286, 287
- Greifswald University students, who translated Abraham's diary, 279n
- Grey Owl (Archibald Stansfeld Belaney), 178, 179, 180
- Griffith, Rudyard, 78n, 87, 122n, 252n
- Grimm Brothers, 162, 163
- Grimm, Nancy, 189n
- Grollmuß, Kathrin, 264, 279n
- Gross, Konrad, 122, 173, 175n, 222n, 246n, 290n
- Grove, Frederick Philip, 113, 115
- Gruber, Eva, 189n
- Grünberger, Hans, 161, 163, 164
- Gudrid, 284, 285, 286
- Gudsteinsdottir, Gudrun, 111n
- Gunnars, Kristjana, 71, 75n
- Haddelsey, Vincent, 50
- Hagenbeck, 267, 277, 280
 Carl, 196, 263, 271, 272, 273, 275, 276
 Zoo, 194, 195, 263
- Haible, Barbara, 16, 172
- Haida, 53n
- Hailstone, Vivian, 146
- Haisla, 50
- Hale, Nanette L., 263n
- "Halfbreeds," 30, 55, 88, 122, 199, 209-211, 212n, 214, 216, 217, 218n, 221, 223, 226, 232, 239-245, 258, 259
- Halfe, Louise, 140
- Hamilton, Murray, 56, 207n, 218n, 221, 223, 233, 235n
- Harjo, Joy, 98
- Harper, Elijah, 81, 83n, 89
- Harris, Claire, 78, 128, 187n
- Haudenosaunee (see also Iroquois), 28, 54, 84, 101, 128, 131, 132, 150n, 197
- Haug, Wolfgang Fritz, 191n, 192, 193n, 203, 204
- Head, Harold, 76
- Hebron (Labrador), 194, 263, 264, 265n, 266, 275-277
- Heimbecker, Donna, 56, 221, 223, 253n
- Herms, Dieter, 237n, 241n, 248n
- Herrnhuter*, see Moravian
- Heyden, Ulrich van der, 176
- higher education, 25, 226, 227
- high language, 43, 43n, 129
- Highway, Tomson, 27, 88, 91, 147, 181
- Hill, Lawrence, 78, 127
- Hinojosa, Rolando, 245n, 248
- Hispanic(s), 247, 248
- historical novel, 35, 78, 114, 125, 127, 150n, 186, 290f
- historical romance, 70, 113
- historiographic metafiction, 15, 116, 140, 281, 283, 284, 287-289, 291, 293
- Hitler, Adolf, 111, 171, 177, 180, 202
- Holle-Scherer, Herta, 52n
- Holocaust, 73n, 109, 138n, 139, 158n
- home, 10, 85, 107, 108n, 109, 134, 135, 139, 198, 234, 259
 and Native land, 86, 245
 culture, 80, 81, 235, 238
- Hong Kingston, Maxine, 187n
- Honour, Hugh, 144
- Houser, Allan, 60
- Houston, James, 65
- Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), 209, 214, 242
- Hughes, Langston, 81
- Humishuma (also Hum-Ishu-Ma, "Mourning Dove," Christine Quintasket), 39n, 186
- Hungary, 83n

- Hungry Wolf, Adolf, 199n, 201, 202
Hungry Wolf, Beverly, 199n
Hunkpapa, 47, 96
Huntley, Audrey, 186, 187
Hupa, 146, 150
Hutcheon, Linda, 77, 79, 283, 287, 293
hybrid(ity), 14, 66, 78, 79, 91, 114, 220, 223, 244, 249, 252, 259, 296
- Iceland, 111, 163, 281, 285, 286, 287, 294
Icelanders, 163, 286, 287, 288, 293
Icelandic, 70, 71, 111, 112, 113, 289
 authors, 71, 111, 138
 sagas, 15, 167, 281-285, 290, 296
immigrants, 80, 85n, 86, 110, 121, 125, 127-129, 134-138, 140
 African, 86
 Asian, 86
 British, 23
 Caribbean, 77, 86
 Icelandic, 71, 111
 non-European, 126
 Scottish, 210
 Swiss, 210
 Ukrainian, 135
Indianertümelei, 157, 159, 160, 172, 173, 176, 179, 191, 199, 201, 201n, 204
Indianistik, 160, 176
"Indian lament," 21, 57, 63, 67, 99, 293
Indianthusiasm, 14, 157n, 159, 160, 167, 170, 173, 176, 193, 194, 200n, 201, 220
 German, 14, 157, 159, 160, 169, 176, 182, 198, 201, 202
Indigeneity, 30n, 121, 126, 128, 129, 131, 153, 164, 173, 184, 242, 249
Ingstad, Helge and Anne Stine, 284
Inkster, Rene, 221
"interactive indigenization," 137, 138n, 140f
interface identity, 222, 223, 225, 230, 232, 239
intertextual, 61, 184, 201, 296
Inuit, 24, 25, 49, 54n, 55, 80, 83, 84, 87, 128n, 142, 195, 207, 219n, 243n, 248n, 266
 autobiography, 278, 279, 280
 author(s)/writer(s), 9, 10, 15, 31, 37, 70n, 81, 281, 290, 291
 European/Viking contacts, 15, 284-286, 290-296
 in Europe, 194-196, 263-277
 literature (poetry/prose), 60, 68, 81, 182, 183, 265, 265n, 278, 279
 (residential) schools, 25, 32n, 53
Inuktitut, 49, 55, 83, 84, 194, 254, 265n, 267, 279, 294
invisibility, 14, 71, 113n, 207
Irish, 83, 242, 292, 293
Iroquois (see also Haudenosaunee), 28, 51, 54, 84, 128n, 150n
Italian, 71, 127, 144
ius sanguinis, 167
ius solis, 167
- Jacobs, Harvey L., 117n
Jacobs, Landau, Pell, 33
Jacobsen, Johan Adrian, 194-196, 263-265n, 267, 268, 271, 275, 277, 280
Jameson, Anna Brownell, 218
Jannetta, Armando E., 189n, 220, 234n, 242, 250, 258
Japanese (Canadians), 72, 73, 115, 116
Jenness, Diamond, 40, 41
Jennings, Francis, 143
Jewish, 71, 126, 138, 139, 158, 162, 167
Jew(s), 58, 73, 157, 159, 162, 173, 174, 268
Joe, Rita, 26, 30, 31, 70, 94, 184
Johansen, Bruce, 212n
Johnson, Carolyn, 241
Johnson, E. Pauline (see also Tekahionwake), 38-40, 64,
Johnson, Yvonne, 74, 140n
Johnston, Basil, 38, 47n, 53, 65, 147, 184, 279
Johnston, Patronella, 42, 53
Josie, Edith, 55
Jütting, Renate, 266
- Kaiser, Rudolf, 183
Kahnawake, 29, 90, 91, 183, 196, 197
Kals, Elisabeth, 108n
Kambourel, Smaro, 79, 80
Kanesatake, 90, 91
Kapasheshit, Philip, 41
Karahasan, Devrim, 221, 243n, 244n
Karak, 146, 150
Karrer, Wolfgang, 33n, 66, 67, 78, 236, 237
Keahey, Deborah, 109n, 112n
Kearns, Judith, 75
Keefer, see "Kulyk Keefer"
Keeshig-Tobias, Lenore, 27, 95, 182

INDEX

- Kegedonce Press, 93
 Kelly/Kinew, Peter, 189
 Kennedy, Dan (Ochankugahe), 46-48
 Kenny, George, 11, 202n
 Keon, Orville, 62
 Keon, Ronald, 62
 Keon, Wayne, 62
 King, Martin Luther, 255n
 King, Thomas, 91, 131n, 199n, 201, 202, 243
 Truth & Bright Water, 201
 Kiriak, Illia, 70, 139
 Kitagawa, Muriel, 72n
 Klinck, Karl F., 29
 Klooss, Wolfgang, 78, 142n, 189, 220, 222n,
 234n, 236, 237, 247n, 251, 283, 288
 Knopf, Kerstin, 16, 121n, 142n, 145n, 189n,
 255n
 Kobayashi, Cassandra, 73
 Kogawa, Joy, 72, 73, 115, 116
 Kollenberg, Christiane, 16, 255n
 Kolodny, Annette, 169
 Kostash, Myrna, 75n
 Kraft, Marion, 78
 Krapf, Ludwig, 164
 Krause, Judith, 75n
 Kretschmer (Moravian Brother), 264, 265n,
 266, 267, 280
 Kroetsch, Robert, 26, 116, 140
 Krupat, Arnold, 35
 Kuester, Martin, 175n
 Kulyk Keefer, Janice, 70, 79, 126, 134, 135,
 139n
 Kwakiutl, 50

 Labrador, 15, 84, 194, 263-266, 269, 271, 273,
 275, 278, 279, 283, 284
 Labradorian(s), 195, 266
 Ladah, Yasmin, 75
 LaDuke, Winona, 81, 82, 118, 141
 Lakota (Sioux), 28n, 64, 96-98, 102, 131n, 151,
 196, 197, 212n
 Lamer, Chief Justice (Van der Peet decision),
 86
 Lampe, Johannes M., 266
 land (see also "place"), 23, 33, 86, 110, 135,
 143, 153
 and culture, 45n, 104, 118, 133
 and ethnicity, 13, 81, 116
 and history, 13, 45n, 112, 115, 117, 119,
 121, 125, 139
 and identity, 14, 64, 68, 92, 109, 116, 123,
 140
 and indigeneity, 129, 141
 and language, 13, 45n, 92, 116, 117, 121,
 123, 134, 150
 as home, 64, 101, 269, 276n
 as life-sustaining, 130, 132, 133, 145
 as mother, 121ff.
 as property, 21, 25, 81, 112, 117, 127, 128,
 207, 210, 244, 245, 246
 as sacred, 128, 130
 as teacher, 129
 relationship to, 45n, 56, 82, 131, 137, 141,
 147, 232
 land ethic(s), 92, 108n, 117n, 139, 141
la raza, 242, 250
 LaRocque, Emma, 33n, 57n, 93, 141n, 184,
 235n
 Lau, Evelyn, 74
 Laurence, Margaret, 26, 29, 30, 31, 113, 114,
 115
 Lee, Bennett, 73
 Lee, Ronald, 74
 Lee, Sky, 73
 Lennox, Sara, 168n
 Lewis and Clarke, 215, 215n, 216
 Lewis, Richard, 60
 liminal(ity), 78, 241, 249, 259
 lingua franca, 84, 189, 248
 Lischke, Ute, 218
 literacy, 37, 38, 63, 92, 134, 268, 278
 Little Big Horn battle, 96, 196
 Löschnigg, Martin, 121, 207n
 Long, Silvester, see "Long Lance"
 Long Lance, Buffalo Child (Silvester Long),
 170, 177, 178, 180, 198, 224n
 Lorde, Audre, 76
 Loucheaux, 55
 Lowes, Warren, 144, 145
 Lubbers, Klaus, 192n
 Ludwig, Klemens, 183
 Lumbee, 178, 198
 Lund, Allen A., 167
 Lysenko, Vera, 70, 139

 Mackenthun, Gesa, 16, 142n
 Maestas, Roberto, 212n

- Mages, Andrea, 210, 212, 219n, 279
- magic realism, 66, 117, 134n, 182, 281-284, 289, 296
- Malcolm X, 233-235, 238, 254, 255n
- Malinche, 169, 250
- Mandamin, Tony, 58
- Manich(ean/aeism), 66, 97, 121n, 132, 152, 282
- Manuel, George, 65, 87
- Maracle, Lee, 39, 57n, 91, 98, 182, 235
Bobby Lee, 34, 74, 185, 219
 I am Woman, 88
 Interview with, 40, 89, 92
 "theories coming through stories," 92, 151
 "writing our way home," 89, 252n
- Mårald, Elisabeth, 79
- Maria, 263
- Markoosie, 68
- Martens, Klaus, 70n
- Marxism, 191n,
- May, Karl, 160, 168-173, 177, 185, 191, 196, 200n, 202
- Mayr, Suzette, 79
- McDougall, Mederic, 238
- McGifford, Diane, 75
- McGrath, Robin, 55n, 263n, 265
- McKague, Ormont, 33n
- McLaren, David, 99
- McLeod, Neal, 93
- McNab, David T., 30n, 218
- McNulty, Gerald E., 44
- Medicine Line (U.S.A.-Canada border), 96-98
- Meech Lake Accord, 81, 89, 91
- Mennonite, 71, 126, 138
- Meridian*, 78, 277n
- Messer, Leah, 95, 184
- Metayer, Maurice, 49, 182, 278
- Métis,
 author(s)/writer(s), 9, 10, 15, 31, 37, 70n, 81, 93, 95, 98, 122, 125, 134, 181, 219, 220, 230, 238
 culture, 14, 30, 80, 83, 122, 220, 241, 243, 248, 249, 251, 256, 259
 people, 24, 80, 81, 83, 87, 122, 207, 214, 217-219, 226, 239, 241-246, 248, 250, 251
- Metz, Annkatrin, 142
- Mexican(s), 15, 242, 245, 247, 250, 252
- Micmac, 42
- Mielke, Andreas, 163n
- Miki, Roy, 72n, 73, 74
- "miscegenation," 179, 210, 242, 249, 250
- missionar(y/ies), 36, 40, 56, 64, 87, 183, 278, 290nf
 Jesuit, 28
 Methodist, 193
 Moravian, 15, 194, 196, 263-266, 269, 273-277, 280
 Oblate, 182
- Mitchif, 83, 84, 93, 209n, 220, 244, 248
- Moebius, Joachim, 208
- Mohawk, 28, 38, 39, 54, 81, 90, 178, 183, 196, 197
- Momaday, N. Scott, 34, 35, 36, 117
- Montagnais (Innu), 42-44, 84
- Montoya, José, 245n, 248
- Moore, Gordon, 64
- Moraga, Cherrie, 187n, 249
- Moravians (*Herrnhuter*), 15, 194, 263-266, 268, 269, 271, 273-277, 280
- Moritsugu, Kim, 73
- Morrell, Carol, 77
- Morrison, Toni, 71n, 76, 187n
- Morrisseau, Norval, 24, 49
- Morrissey, Kim, 75n
- mosaic, Canadian, 23, 80, 81, 107, 126
- Moses, Daniel David, 38, 81, 82, 88, 91, 93, 94, 99-103, 140n, 182, 183, 224n
- Mosse, George L., 166, 168
- Mountain Horse, Mike, 235n
- Mowat, Farley, 281
- Müller, Markus M., 142
- Münkler, Herfried, 161, 163, 164
- Mukherjee, Arun, 75
- Mukherjee, Bharati, 75
- multicultural(ism), 24n, 78, 83, 121n, 122n, 128, 138n, 139, 140, 152n, 212, 244, 249, 296
 canon, 13, 126
 literature, 5, 70, 72, 79
 as national policy, 23, 71, 76, 80, 81, 86, 90, 94, 104, 107, 120, 251
- Munro, Alice, 26, 75n
- Muskogee, 147
- Myre, Isabelle, 54

INDEX

- Nabokov, Peter, 125, 128, 129
 Nakano, Takeo Ujo, 73
 Nanugak, Agnes, 49
 Naskapi, 41-43
 nationalism/nationalist, 86, 107, 111, 112, 243, 249
 Canadian, 22, 23n, 70, 80, 86, 108, 111, 115, 119f, 238
 cultural, 9, 26, 35, 71, 92, 93, 94, 104, 200, 242, 245, 248, 249, 250, 251, 259
 German, 23n, 161, 164, 166, 167, 168, 170, 173, 175, 177
 revolutionary, 224, 228, 255, 256
 Native (American) Studies, 10, 11, 12, 16, 34, 65, 91, 142, 147, 157n, 189, 192n, 222, 241, 246n, 254
 Navajo, 129
 Naylor, Gloria, 76
 Nêhiyawak (see also "Cree"), 84
 Nelson, Robert M, 117, 121, 129
 "Newcomers" (B. Trigger), 85, 115, 121n, 123, 125, 136, 139, 144, 149, 184
 Nez Percé, 118
 Nichols, Silkirtis (Buffalo Child), 198, 204
 Nochasak (Noggasak), 194, 195, 270
 Nochasak, Zippie, 266
 Nolan, Yvette, 182, 190, 191n
 Nootka (Nu-cha-nulth), 50, 51, 65, 67, 84, 87
 Norris, Malcolm, 33, 244
 Norse(men), 41, 112, 284, 285, 291, 293, 294
 North West Company, 209, 210n, 211, 244
 "nostalgic reconstruction," 138-140
 Nsyilxcen (Okanagan language), 129, 130, 131, 147, 150, 151
 Nu-cha-nulth (Nootka), 84, 87
 Nungak, Zebede, 49
 Nurse, Donna Baily, 76

OBEMA (Osnabrück Bilingual Editions of Minority Authors), 94, 183, 184, 187
 Obomsawin, Alanis, 56, 91n
 Ochankugahe, 46-48
 Odawa, 184
 Ojig (Beavon), Daphne, 53
 Offa, 123, 124
 Oglala Sioux, 58
 Ohoveluk, Mona, 49
 Oiwa, Keibo, 73
 Oka, 9, 81, 89, 90, 91, 94, 189

 Okanagan (see also "Syilx"), 28n, 43n, 64n, 84, 95, 117, 118, 129-131, 133, 147, 149, 151, 153, 181, 186
 "old country," 80f, 116
 Omatsu, Maryka, 73
 Ondaatje, Michael, 75
 Ong, Walter J., 151
 Oonark, 60
 Oppenheim, Clarence, 64
 "oraliture" (J. Armstrong), 130, 131n, 147
 oral tradition(s), 38, 46, 49-52, 54, 55, 68, 76, 87, 93, 94, 99-101, 126, 188, 278, 281, 284
 and ethnic identity, 37, 93, 94, 130, 147
 and history, 129, 219n, 239,
 and knowledge transmission, 130, 132, 133, 147-151, 279
 and non-Aboriginal editors, 40-43, 59, 63, 182, 282
 and place, 108, 122, 123, 128, 134, 136-138
 as "legends"/"myths", 36, 99-101, 131, 148
 collaborative, 44-46, 48, 49
 extinction of, 38, 279f
 orator(s), 21, 39, 41, 65, 88, 228
 orator(y/ies), 35, 59, 89n, 222
 orature, 37, 38, 40, 42-44, 48-50, 52n, 54, 58, 62
 Osborne, Ralph, 58
 Ostenso, Martha, 112, 113, 115, 116
otro lado, 247, 249, 251-255, 259
 Ott, Konrad, 108, 147

 Padmanab, S., 75n
 Paingo, 194, 195, 263, 264, 270, 274, 277
 palimpsest, see "place"
 Parameswaran, Uma, 75
 Parker, Quannah, 232
 passing, 179, 198, 228, 229, 230, 236-238, 244, 255, 295
 Pearce, Roy Harvey, 164n
 Peek, Walther W., 65
 Peepre, Mari, 79
 Pelletier, Wilfred, 56, 58, 184, 185, 235n
 Pemmican Press/Publisher, 49f, 93
 Pennier, Henry, 88
 petroglyphs, 37, 51, 138
 Petrone, Penny, 11, 193, 265
 Peyser, Bernd C., 193, 278

Philip, Marlene Nourbese, 77, 128, 187n
 Piapot, Chief, 47
 pictograph(s), 37, 61
 Pitseolak, Peter, 235n, 278
 Pitsula, James M., 222
 place,
 and history, 66, 113, 114, 119, 140, 284
 and identity, 64n, 107, 110, 110n, 119,
 120, 129, 131, 133, 134, 141, 150
 and knowledge, 117
 and people, 13, 105
 and stories, 13, 105, 108, 122, 122n, 123,
 125, 128, 129, 133, 240
 as chronotop(e/ical), 108, 114, 115, 118,
 119
 as geography, 11, 115, 123, 124, 125, 165,
 167, 252
 as home, 14, 60, 100, 107, 108, 109, 111,
 134, 138, 203n, 235, 240, 254
 as mnemonic, 125, 128
 as palimpsest, 107, 108, 109n, 112, 113,
 114, 116, 118, 119, 125, 138, 140
 as *tmix*^w, 130, 132f, 139, 150
 old-, 125, 127, 128, 134, 135, 138, 139
 out of space, 107, 109, 112, 121, 125
 Platz, Norbert, 108n
 Pocahontas, 169, 295
 Pogrom, 138n, 181
 Poland, 83n, 157n, 158n
 Polish, 126, 138, 139n
 Poole, Ted, 58, 184
 Portillo Trambley, Estella, 248f
 Posluns, Michael, 87
 post-colonial(ity), 12, 36, 75, 78, 85, 87, 88,
 109, 116, 122, 135n, 242, 249, 290, 296
 postmodern(ist), 28, 62, 66, 70, 73, 75, 77, 79,
 91, 115, 128, 140, 173, 201, 281, 287, 288,
 296
 potlatch, 21, 50, 51, 66-68, 87
 prairie realism, 70, 111, 113, 115, 138
 Préfontaine, Darren, 22, 207n, 218n
 Prewett, Frank, 51, 64, 65
 Prussia, 144, 161, 165, 264
 Purdy, Al, 183

 Quill, Norman, 44
 Quitsualik, Rachel, 15, 281, 290, 291, 293-296

 “race”, 33, 71, 79, 80, 107n, 108n, 119, 171,
 172, 197, 237, 239, 250, 272
 and authors, 39, 80, 211
 and biology, 14, 236, 273, 295
 and class, 74, 75, 76, 78, 103, 126, 170,
 214, 234, 237
 and ethnicity, 32n, 249
 and gender, 75, 78, 103, 126, 170
 and nationality, 75, 170
 and place, 107, 120, 125n, 133, 141, 236,
 296
 and sexual expression, 74, 75, 78, 103
 racism, 71, 80, 88, 103, 107n, 185, 187n, 211,
 228, 229, 232, 236, 237, 252, 263, 274
 and sexism, 28, 75, 95, 252
 in Canada, 33n, 75n, 80
 in Germany, 157, 161, 170, 173
 personal/individual, 32, 33, 199
 reverse, 199, 200
 structural/systemic, 31, 32, 33, 34, 108n,
 182, 199, 229
 Ratt, Adele, 181
 Ray, Carl, 46
 Redbird, Duke, 51, 56, 64, 65, 235n
 Red Power, 35, 55,
 Remie, Cornelius, 54n
 residential school(s), 9, 24, 25, 32n, 37, 38, 40,
 47, 59, 88, 102, 129, 279
 Revolution, 40
 American, 127
 French, 161, 162
 Industrial, 144
 Quiet, 23
 revolutionary, 168, 221, 228, 233, 234, 259
 nationalism, 224, 228, 255, 256
 Richardson, Boyce, 33n
 Richmond, Marion, 77, 79
 Rieder, Hans Rudolf, 170, 171, 178, 224n
 Riel, Louis (David), 189, 218, 219n, 220, 244,
 247, 250, 251, 254, 256
 Rindisbacher, Peter, 209, 214
 Rivera, Thomas, 248
 Rivet, France, 264, 280
 Robertson, Marion, 42
 Robinson, Gordon, 50, 53
 Rose, Wendy, 277
 Ross, Sinclair, 113
 Rough, Stanley, 50
 Rowland, V., 63, 64

INDEX

- Ruffo, Armand Garnet, 89n, 92n, 98, 179n
 Ruiz, Thomas Rafico, 247
 Runnels, Dennis, 118
 Russia, 157n, 294
 Ryan, Alan, 27n
 Ryga, George, 26, 29, 30, 31, 70
 Rzepa, Agnieszka, 134n, 135n, 142n, 281n
- Sacajawea, 215, 216
 Sainte- Marie, Buffy, 63
 Sakamoto, Kerri, 73
 Salverson, Laura Goodman, 70f, 107, 111, 113, 115, 118, 138, 281
 Sam, Marlow, 186n
 Sanders, Thomas E., 65
 Sands, Kathleen Mullen, 278
 Sanner, Hans-Ulrich, 195n
 Sara, 194, 195, 263, 269, 270
 Sarkowsky, Katja, 129
 sash (Métis), 37, 216, 242, 225, 239
 Saulteaux, 24, 52
 Saunders, Doris, 266, 279
 Savard, Rémi, 42
 Saxo Grammaticus, 124
 Schauwecker, Franz, 172
 Schleswig-Holstein, 123, 212n
 Schlüter, Wolfgang, 165n
 Schmidt, Arno, 169n
 Schneider, Isabella, 189n
 Schöler, Bo, 100
 Schowalter, Lutz, 142
 Schulz, Hermann, 185
 Schulze-Thulin, Axel, 180n
 Schwartz, Herbert T., 49
 Scottish, 30, 83, 210, 233, 292, 293
 See, Klaus von, 163
 self-determination, 22, 25, 33, 36, 52, 109, 193, 204, 222, 226
 Selkirk, Thomas Douglas, 210, 214
 Semple, Robert, 209, 211
 Settler(s), 21, 27, 45, 68, 107, 118, 119, 136, 140, 214, 258, 295
 culture, 23, 41
 nation, 22
 society, 85, 109, 110
 Sewid, James, 68
 sexism, 28, 32n, 95
 sexual abuse, 28, 29, 185
 Shackleton, Mark, 27n
- Shanawdithit, 291
 Shawnee, 179
 Shikatani, Gerry, 72
 Shoshone, 60, 215
 Sieg, Kathrin, 169, 177, 201
 Sikora, Tomasz, 121n
 Sikorska, Liliana, 281n
 Silko, Leslie (Marmon), 100, 117, 140, 147n
silvaticus, 65, 164, 177, 180, 208
 Sinclair, Niigaanwewidam, 93, 141n
 Sioui, Georges E., 182
 Sitting Bull (Tatanka Yotanka), 47, 96-98, 172, 179
 Six Nations (also Haudenosaunee, Iroquois, Five Nations), 84, 131
 skid row, 25, 74, 186, 278, 279
skræling, 283, 285, 286, 289-291, 293, 294, 296
 Sleil Waututh, 62
 Slipperjack (Farrell), Ruby, 11, 88
 Small, Lillian, 41, 42
 Smith, Donald B., 178, 179n, 198, 224n
 Snow, Chief John, 235n
 Sørensen, Troels, 124
 Sollors, Werner, 163, 168n, 170, 204, 251
 Speare, Jean E., 49, 50
 Speer, Albert, 171
 Stachniak, Ewa, 126, 139n
 Standing Bear, 47n
 Steffler, John, 140
 Stegner, Wallace, 119
 Stein, Gertrude, 61, 62
 stereotype, 27, 190, 199, 201n, 220, 272
 and gender, 79
 and racism, 41
 as other, 27, 111, 157
 as perceptual frame, 26, 175
 as romantic, 30, 31, 111
 dual, 165
 "Indian," 10, 28, 31, 39, 99, 111, 131n, 157, 160, 183, 191, 194, 200, 202, 210, 292
 "White man," 65, 200, 202, 294
 Sterling, Mary Jane, 64
 Steuben, Fritz (pseud. Erhard Wittek), 172, 179, 180
 Stevens, James R., 46, 48
 Stevenson, Frederik, 58
 Stirling, Shirley, 47n
 Stolen Sisters, 29, 95

- Sto:lo (Salish), 39, 151
 Stump, Sarain, 60-62
 subaltern(s/ity), 23n, 86, 87, 88, 91, 152, 249
 Suchacka, Weronika, 13, 16, 17, 83n, 135n
 Suggars, Cynthia, 142n
 Sun Bear, 204
 Sweden, 157n, 295
 Swift, Jonathan, 28
 Syilx (Okanagan), 28, 43, 64, 84, 95, 129-132, 147-151, 153, 181
- Tacitus, Publius Cornelius, 164-167, 170, 174, 177, 180
 Tahoma, Quincy, 60
 Talbot, Steve, 180n
 Tappage, Mary Augusta, 50
 Tate, Anne Caren, 53
 Taylor, Drew Hayden, 91, 98, 182
 Taylor, Garth J., 265, 268
 Taylor, Helga, 265
teatro campesino, 34, 248
 Tecumseh, 11, 172, 177, 179, 180, 254
 Tehanetorens, 131n
 Tekahionwake (see also E. Pauline Johnson), 38
 Tekakwitha, Kateri, 28, 28n
 termination policy, 25, 32
 Terrianiak (Tiggianiak), 194, 195, 263, 264, 270, 273, 275, 277, 280
 Terry, Saul, 63
 Tetso, John, 235n
 Theweleit, Klaus, 170
 Theytus Books, 11, 92, 93, 131n, 144
 Thiersch, Antje, 16, 283
 Thode-Arora, Hilke, 266
 Thom, Jo-Ann (see also Episkenew), 98, 184
 Thomsen, Robert, 124, 263n
 Thrasher, Anthony Apakark, 74, 235n, 278
 Tiffin, Helen, 78n, 87, 122n, 252n
 Tinsley, Sean A., 290n
 Tlinget, 53n
tmix^w, see "place as *tmix^w*"
 Tobias, 263, 268, 271, 272, 276
 Toelken, Barre, 146
 Tokarczuk, Olga, 125
 token(ism/ize), 9, 15, 23, 26, 91, 92
 Toombs, Farrell, 58
 Tough, Frank, 246n
- trauma(ta), 138n, 139, 194, 196, 203n, 238, 257, 279
 collective, 63, 72, 115, 126, 135, 136
 of colonization, 30, 31, 37, 129, 135, 137
 of internment, 72, 115
 of migration, 126, 127, 128, 136
 trans-generational, 30
- tribal specific literature (see also "nationalism, cultural"), 84, 92, 93, 95, 99, 129, 147, 188
- Trigger, Bruce, 85, 125, 136n, 139
 Trudeau, Pierre Elliott, 21, 23, 24n, 25, 56, 86
 Turner, Joan, 77
 Turtle Island, 14, 16, 23, 35, 62, 63, 100, 101, 123, 128, 134, 137, 140, 241
 Tyman, James, 74
 Tynes, Maxine, 77
- Ukrainian, 31, 70, 126, 135n, 138, 139n
 Ulrikab, see "Abraham"
 Ulrike, 194, 263, 267, 269, 276
- Valdez, Luis, 242, 248
 Valgardson, W.D., 71, 138
 Van Steen, Marcus, 39
 Vermette, Katherena, 98
 Viking(s), 15, 165, 167n, 284-286, 289-296
 Vinland, 283, 284, 285n, 288, 289, 293
 Virchow, Rudolf, 195, 264, 271, 273, 274, 277
 visibility, 71, 127, 236, 237, 239
 ethnic, 71, 107n, 108n, 237
Völkerkunde (see also "ethnography"), 264, 273
Völkerschau (see also "ethnographic show")
 6, 195, 263, 266, 271, 272, 280
 Völkl, Yvonne, 121n
 Vollmer, Helmut J., 183
- Wagamese, Richard, 141
 Wagner, Richard, 167
 Wah, Fred, 73, 80
 Waldman, Carl, 96n
Waldmensch (see also "*silvaticus*"), 65, 208
 Walker, Alice, 76, 187n, 249, 277n
 Wallace, Ann, 76, 77
 Wannabee (want-to-be), 199, 202, 203, 204
 Warrior, Emma Lee, 109n, 199, 200, 202
 Watchman, Renae, 200
 Watson, Sheila, 26, 27

INDEX

- Waubageshik, 65
Weatherford, Jack, 142, 144
Weaver, Jace, 143n, 150n
Welch, James, 117, 140
Welsh, Christine, 75n, 186f
Welsh, Joe, 75n
Wendat (Huron), 182
White Paper, 21, 24-26, 31, 56
Wiebe, Rudy, 74, 75n, 116, 140
Wied, Maximilian zu, 176, 215-217
Wilder Mann, 65, 208
Williams, Gerry, 140
Williamson, Janice, 77
Willis, Jane, 47n, 88, 235n
Wilson, Edmund, 180n
Wilson, Michael D., 89n
Wimmer, Rainer, 108n
Winnemucca (Hopkins), Sarah, 39n
"Winnetou", 160, 168-172, 177, 193, 204
winter count, 35, 37
Wolfe, Alexander, 52
Wolff, Andrea, 175n
Womack, Craig S., 147
womanis(m/t), 76, 77, 78, 249, 250
women of colour, see "colour, women of"
Wong-Chu, Jim, 73, 74
Wounded Knee, 96n, 97, 180, 196
Wright, Ronald, 144
"writing back," 83n, 87, 88, 89, 91, 92, 93, 94, 98, 252
"writing beyond," 83n, 93, 94, 98
"writing home," 83n, 89n, 92, 93, 94, 98, 99, 252
Württemberg, Paul Wilhelm von, 176, 214, 215
Yee, Paul, 73
Yerxa, Leo, 59
Young-Ing, Greg, 95, 182, 184, 190
Yurok, 146, 150
Zagratzki, Uwe, 83n
Zantop, Susanne, 157n, 167, 168n, 177, 191
Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Bonnin), 39n