around himself. He slept there for the night and finished walking to the reserve in the morning. My brothers-in-law found it necessary to do the same thing from time to time. This land is our home, and Indigenous people have learned to do what they must to survive. I didn't tell this to my professor, however. Somehow, at the time, I felt embarrassed to reveal that I—and my people—still live this way at the end of the twentieth century. Somehow my husband's story smacked of poverty and social problems and all the things that I was sure that my professors associated with Indigenous people. Even worse, what if I told him and he didn't believe me? What if he accused me of telling or believing tall tales? His was the voice of authority. How could I convince him that my voice contained authority, too? So I silenced my voice, kept my knowledge to myself, and tried to always be cognizant that my professors knew nothing of Indigenous realities. I followed the rules, tried to anticipate their objections, and wrote "objective" literary analyses that did not reflect my community context.

Over the last few years, I have become increasingly aware that many interpretations of the works of Canadian Indigenous literature lack a fundamental understanding of the ideological context in which the works were written. Worse yet, because the authors of these interpretations are educated people with academic positions at prestigious universities, the general public deems their voices to be ones of authority. However, these interpretations are grounded in the ideology of the colonizer culture, not the ideology of the colonized people who are the authors and subjects of the texts being interpreted. It is important to remember that colonization is not only militaristic, economic, and political; it is also psychological, social, and spiritual.[7] No matter how well intended, interpretations that lack a fundamental understanding of Indigenous people as survivors of colonization can inadvertently become weapons of colonization themselves because their authors' voices become the voices of authority that could easily overpower the voices of Indigenous people. That is not to say that only Indigenous people should be interpreting and critiquing Indigenous literature. What I am saying is that non-Indigenous scholars need to be cognizant of the authority that society accords their voices. It is inevitable, then, that their literary interpretations will have an effect not only on the perceptions that settler Canadians have of Indigenous society but that Indigenous people have of ourselves. It is important that scholars examine the ideological baggage they bring to their readings and counter it by looking outside the texts into the contexts in which they were written to glean some kind of understanding of the ideology of the people whose works they interpret. It is not acceptable to remain secure in the ivory towers writing objective critical articles because these articles, imbued with the voice of authority, have an effect on the social situation of the Indigenous people who are their subjects.

As I said earlier, choosing Canadian Indigenous literature as a field of study has its own challenges, especially when Indigenous people are able to write back.

Scholars are not unfamiliar with the requirement to provide students with an understanding of the social, political, and cultural context out of which the texts that they teach arise. Indeed, any class on Shakespeare would not be complete without a comprehensive examination of the political and religious situation in Elizabethan England, no doubt comprised of information that the instructor has gathered from books in the library. These scholars need not worry that there just might be an Elizabethan enrolled in his or her class and that Elizabethan student just might dispute the information given in the lecture. However, this might very well occur in a class on contemporary Indigenous literature. And, to further complicate things, the instructor cannot always count on the information on the context of Indigenous literature that she or he has found in the library. At best it is likely to be incomplete and at worst inaccurate. Nevertheless, if one examines the *text* of works of Indigenous literature without examining the *context* from which it is written, Indigenous people become abstractions, metaphors that signify whatever the critic is able to prove they signify. However, to write in this way shows a lack of social responsibility because it has an effect on the living people who are the subjects of Indigenous literature. To really understand the context of the literature, then, scholars must leave the ivory tower and talk to Indigenous people. This must be done with care and respect.

non-Status Indians' access to education was inconsistent. They were allowed to attend residential schools if there were vacancies, but forced to leave when the schools became full of status Indians.[4] If living near town, they found themselves at the mercy of the white property owners who could deny their children access to school, which they often did, especially if the Métis families did not own property.[5] Canadian Indigenous literature reflects this history. Most early writers, therefore, were not well educated and could not be expected to be familiar with the language of academia. Later writers, although more educated, are cognizant that many of their people are not, and so they write in a way that their works are accessible to a variety of educational levels and not solely for an academic audience.

Today many literary scholars choose to teach Canadian Indigenous literature as witnessed by the growing number of "Native Lit" sessions at mainstream academic conferences. It is only a matter of time before works of Indigenous literature begin to appear regularly in anthologies of Canadian literature. Canadian Indigenous literature is knocking on the door of the Canadian literary canon, and scholars are already publishing articles about this new area. The challenge scholars face is finding something to say about these works of literature when their context is often alien to them.

Even before works of Canadian Indigenous literature begin to make regular appearances in anthologies of Canadian literature, articles about them have begun to form a canon of interpretations. Although scholars write ostensibly to analyze works of literature to make them better understood, we also write to refute or augment the ideas presented in the critical writings that precede ours. And so, critical works beget more critical works, and often the literary works that are their subjects become mere examples illustrating the critical thoughts of the academics who create them. I see this happening with Canadian Indigenous literature, and as an Indigenous academic it concerns me.

When analyzing literary works, most scholars are very conscious that ideology is embedded in the text; what they often forget is the ideology that they bring to their reading. I use the term "ideology" to refer to those ideas and beliefs that we take so for granted that we do not hold them up for critical examination and consider them to be "just the way it is." Interpretations are grounded in this kind of ideology. It is important to note that almost all of the scholars who create these interpretations are not Indigenous people. Most are members of settler culture and, therefore, cannot possibly share the same ideology as Indigenous people, whether they are the authors who create the literature, the people about whom they write, or the few Indigenous students in their classes. Let me give you an example from my own experience.[6]

As an undergraduate student majoring in English, I registered in a class in literary analysis based on New Criticism. The assigned text was an anthology

entitled *Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing*, 2nd edition (1989), which included Leslie Marmon Silko's story "Lullaby" (1981). "Lullaby" was the topic of the first writing assignment the professor gave the class. Although I cannot remember the topic of the assignment, I can remember my grade. I received a D+/C–, which I remember vividly because it hurt my pride. At the end of the essay the professor left a note explaining that my low mark resulted from my not addressing the suicide at the end of the story. I was dumbfounded because in my interpretation there was no suicide. I asked my professor to explain. My professor, a Montreal anglophone, pointed out that, at the end of the story, the central character Ayah, an older Dine (Navajo) woman, wraps herself and her drunken husband, Chato, in a blanket, curls up beside a rock, and prepares to go to sleep. Because this happens on a freezing night, she is, therefore, committing suicide. The text, he said, clearly reveals that the old woman, unable to bear the weight of her tragic life, chooses death for herself and her husband. I suspected that he had heard stories of old Native people who, weary of life, walk out into the wilderness to die. If one is analyzing only the text of "Lullaby," this is a plausible interpretation. What is missing, however, is the context of both text and readers.

It is important to consider the context of "Lullaby," in that both Silko and her characters are Indigenous to the American Southwest. The land that seemed so frightening and dangerous to my professor is their home. Ayah and Chato live in a hogan, a structure made out of rocks, earth, and wood, which is as much a part of the land as the cluster of rocks beside which they spent the night. It is not suicidal for them to take shelter beside these rocks and cover themselves with their blankets; indeed, they carry blankets along with them for just such an occasion. They are old people, and despite their tragic lives, they have survived. To an Indigenous reader, "Lullaby" is not a story of suicide; it is one of survival, albeit filled with references to the suffering that results from a lifetime of colonization and oppression.

As a reader, my context differs radically from that of my professor. Although I too spent my early years in a large urban centre, I moved to northern Saskatchewan as a teenager. What is a cold winter night in Arizona, would likely be a nice day in late autumn in Saskatchewan. I have lived with trappers who regularly go out on foot to check their trap lines regardless of the weather. Sometimes they sleep out in the bush—albeit by a fire—wrapped in blankets in temperatures falling below -20°C. This is how Indigenous people who live on the land exist; this is how we have always lived. My husband grew up on a reserve near Fort Qu'Appelle in southern Saskatchewan. He tells a story of how he walked from Fort Qu'Appelle to Muscowepetung Reserve, a distance of about forty kilometers, one cold winter night. When he found that he was too tired to go on, he made a shelter in a farmer's field by piling bales of hay

The winds are your brothers,
they sing to you.
Sleep,
sleep.
We are together always.
We are together always.
There never was a time
when this
was not so.

"Notes on Leslie Marmon Silko's 'Lullaby': Socially Responsible Criticism"

Jo-Ann Episkenew

Métis scholar Jo-Ann Episkenew was born in Manitoba but lived most of her adult life in Saskatchewan. She was a professor of English at the First Nations University of Canada before she served as Director of the Indigenous Peoples' Health Research Centre from 2010 until 2016, when she died unexpectedly at the age of sixty-three. As an English professor working in the area of health research, she applied literary analysis skills—close readings of texts—to study the connection between story and healing in her work with Indigenous youth. She was the author of many articles in the fields of health and literary and cultural criticism, as well as the award-winning book *Taking Back Our Spirits: Indigenous Literature, Public Policy, and Healing* (2009). In 2015, she was the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Women of Distinction YWCA Regina; in 2016, she received the nationally broadcast Inspire Award for Education.

In her essay Episkenew argues that too often, scholars and students focus on analyzing the ideologies within a text without acknowledging how the ideologies they themselves bring to the page shape their interpretations profoundly. She writes: "When analyzing literary works, most scholars are very conscious that ideology is embedded in the text; what they often forget is the ideology that they bring to their reading." Episkenew's challenge to the reader is to develop more self-reflexive strategies of reading and to meaningfully acknowledge how social positioning and personal experiences influence how we interpret texts.

* * *

During my most cynical moments I believe that the literary canon—that collection of "great" works of literature—is merely a creation of academics looking for teachable works of literature, and publishers looking for the profits that are likely to ensue if their texts are taught in university English classes. Works of literature, then, become incorporated into the canon when a substantial number of academics teach them. At some point in our development, most burgeoning academics infer—or are told—that we must have a specialization, we must claim our "turf" if you will, that area in which we will become experts. Our future tenure and promotion depend on it. As a result, we look for some area of study that piques our interest and, with luck, has enough room to enable us to carve out an intellectual space for ourselves. If Shakespeare is our passion, our challenge is a large one; after all, it is hard to make a space for one's self in such an occupied area. Clearly it is easier to find a space in an area that is new and unoccupied, one like the area of Canadian Indigenous Literature. That choice, however, brings with it its own challenges.

Unlike its relative south of the border, writing by Canadian Indigenous authors still occupies the literary margins of the canon. While the works of Native American authors, such as Leslie Marmon Silko, N. Scott Momaday, and Louise Erdrich, appear in every new anthology of modern American literature, the works of Canadian Indigenous writers, especially early writers, such as George Clutesi, Maria Campbell, and Beatrice Culleton Mosionier, are absent. In the U.S., the canonized Native American writers are well educated in a western sense and are often academics themselves. Although their works include many allusions to Native American epistemology, they are complex in a way with which literary scholars are comfortable. We can find a reason for the differences between Canadian and U.S. Indigenous literatures when we examine the social and political context from which they came into being.

Although governments on both sides of the forty-ninth parallel used education as a weapon of colonization, they wielded this weapon in different manners. Both colonial governments chose to use residential schools, or boarding schools as they were called in the U.S., as a strategy to assimilate the Indians; however, in the U.S., many Native Americans[1] were encouraged to obtain further education—usually in the trades—after finishing boarding school. To further its goal of assimilation, the U.S. Government passed the Indian Relocation Act in 1956 to gain access to resource-rich reservations. As a result, relocated Native Americans were educated in mainstream schools, and eventually many found their way into universities. In Canada, attitudes were much different, and First Nations people were sent back to their reserves when their tenure at residential school was complete. Smaller and rarely rich in natural resources, reserve land was not coveted to the same extent. It was valued more as a place to confine First Nations people. First Nations people were typically discouraged from attempting to gain access to higher education, and Métis people were often denied access to any education at all.[2] In the unlikely event that they did gain access to a university, status Indians could