

# The Great Canadian (and Australian) Secret: The Limits of Non-Indigenous Knowledge and Representation

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The trouble with knowing was that it wouldn't end there. What did you do with what you knew? You could hide it away again, but you'd know that you'd done that. You couldn't ever go back to not-knowing.

*Kate Grenville*

Searching for the Secret River

**I**N THE PUBLIC DISCOURSE THAT HAS EMERGED in response to Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the residential school legacy is frequently referred to as Canada's "dark secret," as an occluded or repressed form of knowledge that the reconciliation process promises to "reveal" or "expose." But despite the prevalence of this rhetoric of secrecy and revelation—the actual term "secret" figures prominently in newspaper articles, academic studies, cinematic texts, and online blogs on the topic—the legacy of residential schooling has not entered the public consciousness of non-Indigenous Canadians to nearly the same extent as the legacy of the Stolen Generations, as it is called, has entered that of non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>1</sup> Whereas a grassroots movement has flourished in Australia even as (and perhaps because) an official apology and compensation were

<sup>1</sup> While the discourse of haunting prevails in academic discourse on residential school narratives—perhaps a function of the critical purchase of Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, as Cynthia Sugars and Gerry Turcotte speculate in their editors'

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withheld by the former federal government,<sup>2</sup> the Canadian administration of Stephen Harper delivered an apology seemingly pre-emptively, at least in relation to any widespread public pressure, but, thus far, there has been negligible community participation in reconciliation initiatives. Perhaps the failure of reconciliation to inspire forms of non-Indigenous activism in Canada can be attributed in part to the interrupted and as yet incomplete work of the TRC, which in 2008 temporarily halted its work as a result of the resignation of former chair Harry Laforme. Yet the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) collected and published plenty of testimonies well over a decade ago, and thus far non-Indigenous Canadians have been emotionally and politically disengaged from, and relatively uninformed about, the legacies of residential schooling. Whereas the *Bringing Them Home* (BTH) report, published by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in 1997, became the best-selling government document in Australian history and galvanized what is now known as the Sorry Movement, in my home country of Canada most non-Indigenous people remain willfully ignorant of this country's parallel history of colonialism.

In both Australia and Canada, Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their homes and communities throughout much of the twentieth century as part of a systematic, state-led policy of assimilation. The BTH report records the removal—or more accurately, abduction—of hundreds of Aboriginal children and their massive relocation in government institutions, church organizations, and white foster homes between 1910 and 1970. By way of comparison, the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996) documents the forced relocation of countless Aboriginal children from across the country into government-led, church-adminis-

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introduction to *Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic*—the rhetoric of the secret (which shares in common certain theoretical concerns with haunting, such as trauma and memory) circulates more freely in the wider social sphere. To cite one of several possible examples: Kevin Annett's award-winning documentary on residential schools, *Unrepentant*, advertises itself as an exposé of Canada's "dirty secret"—a phrase that has been conspicuously recycled in popular media coverage. The rhetoric of secrecy has particularly framed media accounts of the suspected mass graves of Aboriginal children from residential schools.

2 The Rudd government did apologize in 2008, a full ten years after the Howard administration's refusal to meet this particular recommendation of the *Bringing Them Home* report. That the Australian example has influenced Canadian policy on redress is evident in Prime Minister Harper's and Chuck Strahl's (Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs) repeated references to the Australian apology as a kind of yardstick in the weeks leading up to the June 2008 apology.

tered residential schools between 1920 and 1980. Both government documents reproduce and analyze the testimonies of survivors as part of a larger national project of bringing the “secret,” as it were, of settler colonial violence out into the open, with the ostensible aim of promoting Aboriginal healing and promoting reconciliation. Although the *BTH* report has not (yet) translated into the transformation of Indigenous social and material conditions—a process that will certainly exceed the limited time span that frames official policy—it has arguably achieved its pedagogical aim of educating non-Indigenous Australians of colonialism and its ongoing effects. The publication of survivor testimonies served as the impetus for various forms of non-Indigenous activism, ranging from the signature of Sorry Books—blank journal-type books that allowed people to inscribe personal apologies—to participation in nationwide marches and demonstrations on National Sorry Day—a designated day of commemoration begun in 1998 and continued every year since. Although the Sorry Books, along with other aspects of the Sorry Movement, have been summarily dismissed by critics as a series of uncritical displays of sentimentalism,<sup>3</sup> I would concur with Gail Jones in her view that they “ought seriously to be considered within the genre of the poetics of political dissent” (164). Indeed, for all its limits, the Sorry Movement in Australia finally confronted the beneficiaries of the colonial legacy with the traumatic knowledge of their responsibility, namely by positioning those beneficiaries as witnesses to the testimonies of Stolen Generation survivors. While national reconciliation in Australia has afflicted non-Indigenous Australians with a profound sense of anxiety about their place in the nation—to the extent even of producing an intensified racism among a minority that resentfully constructs Aboriginality as an unjustly privileged category<sup>4</sup>—it has also discontinued the “innocent ignorance” upon which colonial domination is dependent. Analyzing constructs of whiteness and Aboriginality in Australian and

3 Eva Mackey, for example, employs an anthropological definition of the apology as a “diplomatic or political act” (66) as part of her argument that the apologies issued by non-Indigenous Australians functioned mainly to assuage a guilt-afflicted settler conscience. While Mackey’s analysis is attentive to the capacity for the apology to further marginalize Indigenous peoples, its treatment of questions of motive and intentionality is arguably reductive.

4 Haydie Gooder and Jane M. Jacobs persuasively argue that the call for a national apology in Australia, and the various personal and collective apologies that emerged in response to such a call, have had the effect of further unsettling an “always already” unsettled settler subject. In suggesting that the apology is a form of the excitable speech theorized by Judith Butler, Gooder and Jacobs also draw attention to forms of saying that implicate the unsayable by bringing to the fore material questions of possession and dispossession. See “On the Bor-

Canadian contexts, Margery Fee and Lynette Russell insist that “As long as this ‘innocent ignorance’ continues, so can colonization, to the advantage of the majority that believes colonization to be something that happened in the distant past. No productive conversation can take place” (193). A productive conversation or, rather, series of conversations have at last begun in Australia in the form of the various inscriptions of personal and collective apology offered in response to the testimonies collected in *BTH*. While modest, these linguistic acts serve to expose and acknowledge state-sanctioned colonial secrets and in doing so have commenced a dialogue about the ongoing effects of colonialism.

Such a conversation does not seem to have begun in Canada. Although reams of survivor testimonies have been published and disseminated in various outlets over the course of the last decade<sup>5</sup>—a trend that has been paralleled by an unprecedented literary preoccupation with residential “survivorship” among Native writers—non-Indigenous Canadians have not accepted the burden of speaking their relation to colonialism or confessing their complicity. For many Native activists and their allies, however, the process of reconciliation cannot so much as begin without widespread non-Indigenous engagement and mobilization.<sup>6</sup> To claim that non-Indigenous peoples have a significant role to play is not to deny that the process must privilege survivor’s concerns but, rather, to take seriously Paulette Regan’s call for reconciliation to “profoundly disturb a dominant culture history and mindset that ‘misrecognizes’ and disrespects the oral histories, cultures and legal traditions of Indigenous peoples” (Regan 43). Thus far, non-Indigenous Canadians have refused to move from misrecognition into some heightened degree of awareness, perhaps because collective denial supports a neo-colonial system of white privilege and entitlement.

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der of the Unsayable’: The Apology in Postcolonizing Australia,” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 2 (2000): 229–47.

5 The Aboriginal Healing Foundation has compiled an extensive online bibliography of residential school resources, including survivor testimonies; see [www.ahf.ca/publications/residential-schools-resources](http://www.ahf.ca/publications/residential-schools-resources).

6 See, in addition to Regan, Brian Rice and Anna Snyder’s “Reconciliation in the Context of a Settler Society: Healing the Legacy of Colonialism in Canada,” *From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools* (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008), 43–63; Ravi de Costa, “Reconciliation and Neoliberalism,” Canadian Political Science Association Annual Conference, Carleton University, 2009 ([www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2009/deCosta.pdf](http://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2009/deCosta.pdf)); Roger Simon, “Worrying Together: The Problematics of Listening and the Educative Responsibilities of the IRSTRC,” *Reconciling Canada: Historical Injustices and the Contemporary Culture of Redress*, eds. Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

## The Secret as the “Unsayable”

While I do not wish to construct a reductive binary between non-Indigenous Canadians and those in Australia—or to give the impression that non-Indigenous Australians have suddenly become enlightened where their relationship to Aboriginal peoples is concerned—it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that it is in this matter of non-Indigenous (mis)recognition that the difference between the Australian and Canadian reconciliation processes is most salient, for despite the rhetoric of revelation and exposure that surrounds the Canadian TRC, non-Indigenous Canadians persist in protecting the “secret” of colonial genocide. Given the prevalence of the rhetoric of secrecy in TRC-related discourse, I use the term “secret” very deliberately here and not to imply a lack of intentionality or a private, individualized level of knowledge production but, on the contrary, a willful ignorance collectively maintained and cultivated by a national community politically invested in its own misrecognition. The history of colonial genocide in Canada is what might be called an open secret: something that is publicly known but treated as unknown. To say that the secret of colonial genocide is treated as unknown is, of course, quite different from saying that it is treated as unknowable, although the question of representation lies at the heart of the question of non-Indigenous subjectivity.

In what follows here, I suggest that the (post)colonial secret occupies the liminal zone that Judith Butler associates with what she calls the “unsayable” in *The Politics of Excitable Speech*.<sup>7</sup> Writing of hate speech, Butler draws attention to “the kind of speaking that takes place on the borders of the unsayable” (41). Although Butler’s concern is with a linguistic act that might seem, in its language-orientedness, to have nothing remotely to do with secrets, secrecy is fundamentally characterized by a tension between speaking and not-speaking. Indeed, secrecy is paradoxical insofar as it is only through circulation and dissemination that the secret is constituted as such. In their now-renowned study of the contemporary politics of Australian Aboriginal sacred-secret traditions, Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs note that “Secrecy is always a matter of demonstration or

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<sup>7</sup> My adaptation of Butler’s concept of the “unsayable” is inspired by Haydie Gooder and Jane M. Jacob’s use of Butler’s ideas to theorize the unsayability of sorry in the instance of the Australian apology. Their description of the apology as an “utterance located on the border between that which feels absolutely necessary to say and that which feels too risky to say” (231) is richly descriptive of the paradox of the secret.

performance. So in the case of the Aboriginal sacred, a dialogic relation is constructed between secrecy and publicity.[...] After all, secrets cannot be secrets until they are spoken about as such” (25). Although the residential school system is *not* the Aboriginal sacred, Gelder and Jacob’s definition of the secret as knowledge that shifts uneasily between exposition and disclosure is instructive for considering the Canadian national community’s reluctance—or perhaps more accurately, refusal—to name and speak the silence of colonial genocide. In the context of residential schooling, however, one needs to account for the role of power relations in creating and maintaining this tension; the settler subject’s refusal to speak must be recognized as a refusal to confront and speak publicly about the conditions of non-Indigenous privilege.

But at this point in my analysis, one might ask: Is colonial genocide really *still* a secret? Some observers have pointed to Stephen Harper’s apology to residential school survivors as a moment of collective admission and revelation. But using Harper’s apology as a yardstick of postcolonial progress not only reduces the agency of power to a singular subject—something Butler warns us against in her theorization of hate speech—it also overlooks the telltale absences and gaps inherent in his script which signal its repetition of the paradoxical structure of the secret. Harper’s apology refused to speak the repressed knowledge of colonial genocide even as in form and language it positioned itself as a full and complete divulgence of the Canadian government’s direct participation in, and responsibility for, the residential school policy. That the language of colonialism and genocide was singularly missing from his speech, and replaced with the more benign language of “mistakes,” should raise concerns that exceed the issue of the apology itself. In this, Harper’s apology invokes and undermines the dominant settler culture’s claim to know and speak publicly the “truth” of its treatment of Indigenous peoples even as it paradoxically re-entrenches its position of misrecognition and fabrication.

Even assuming that the settler culture (or one of its representatives) was willing to name the secret of colonial genocide, there is nevertheless the problematic of representation. How does one speak about or present forms of knowledge that have been deliberately forgotten, elided, or repressed? For as Stephen Pritchard writes in an article that elaborates upon Gelder and Jacob’s examination of the Australian state’s treatment of Aboriginal sacred secrets, “[T]he unknowability of the secret marks an impasse or the limit (within/without, before/after) of representation itself” (418). This limit becomes particularly insurmountable when one considers that non-Indigenous peoples have lost many of their collective memories

of colonialism through decades, if not centuries, of repressing and denying the mass violence of settler colonialism. So while it may be possible to account for the knowledge of colonial genocide, there are gaps and silences that will inevitably be left unaccounted for. Moreover, to reduce the narrative of colonialism to the terms of legal discourse—through the language of genocide and war crimes—requires “nam[ing] and present[ing] the unnameable and unpresentable,” when as Pritchard perceives, there is the “need to maintain an impossible distinction between the secret-as-it-appears or the secret-as-effect and the secret-itself” (418).

### Reading the Trope of the Secret: Grenville and Jones

This distinction between the epistemology of the secret and its ontological manifestations and effects is complicated in the work of two non-Indigenous Australian novelists. Both Kate Grenville’s *Secret River* and Gail Jones’s *Sorry* employ the trope of the secret as part of a narrative project of “remembering” and “renarrating” the history of settler invasion and Aboriginal dispossession. While non-Indigenous fiction may function as a too convenient site for the retelling of secrets in its capacity for aesthetic distance and detachment—and should therefore supplement rather than supplant other forms of truth production—it nevertheless constitutes a complex archive for reading settler culture’s ways of grappling with such history. Written in the aftermath of Australia’s Sorry Movement, Grenville’s and Jones’s novels form part of a larger creative endeavour among non-Indigenous writers to represent and engage with reconciliation politics that currently has no equivalent in Euro-Canadian literature. Both texts have at their narrative centres a secret concerning the unspeakable horrors committed against Aboriginal people that is protected by the settler-protagonist, and both insist on not only the impossibility but also the *necessity* of (re)presenting that secret.

Kate Grenville’s novel, the title of which directly borrows from Stanner Boyer’s famous announcement in a 1968 lecture that “there is a secret river of blood in Australian history,”<sup>8</sup> was initially intended as a memoir-exposé of her convict ancestor’s implication in Indigenous dispossession and thus

8 Grenville has acknowledged the influence of Boyer’s lecture in numerous interviews, maintaining in an interview with Romona Koval that her decision to adapt his language for her title reflects her desire to register

the fact that Australian history does have a series of secrets in it. There are cupboards in Australian history that we have just drawn a curtain over; we sort of know they’re there but we sort of don’t want to look at them. Other parts, we’ve drawn the curtain back with great pride—Gallipoli, the first planting of the flag by Captain

a response to the demands of the Sorry Movement in Australia. In what was a painstaking process that she detailingly renders in *Searching for the Secret River* (2006), an account of researching and writing the novel, Grenville initially composed her manuscript as a memoir only to recognize after the fact that it demanded to be rewritten as fiction. By turning to fiction as her final medium, she transforms “the secret river of blood in her family” into “the secret river of blood in Australian history,” translating the practice of recalling the repressed contents of her ancestry into an act of recalling the repressed contents of Australian national mythology. As a discursive trope, the secret in *Secret River* functions on several different registers at once. It evokes the stereotype of the indigene as secretive and mysterious and the “strangeness” and “unknowability” of the Aboriginal sacred. It also refers to the appalling secrets that remain unspoken by Will Thornton, the protagonist, who deliberately conceals from Sal, his wife—with whom he otherwise shares an open, trusting relationship—the “outrages and deprivations” (95) that he has witnessed during his journeys along the Hawkesbury River. In a catastrophic, climactic scene toward the end of the novel, Thornhill participates in a planned massacre of the Aboriginals whose land has been increasingly encroached upon as a result of white settlement but whom he nevertheless views as a threat to his future prosperity and security. The brutality of this massacre introduces “a great shocked silence” (309) into the narrative and the lives of the characters—a description that invokes Stanner’s term “The Great Australian Silence.” This silence permeates the landscape and is maintained by Thornhill’s descendants and the settler culture at large. That the dispossession and genocide of Aboriginal peoples is the edifice upon which the Australian nation has been built is indicated by the allegorical significance of Thorn-

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Cook, the gold rushes—all that stuff. We’re happy to look in those cupboards, but there are other cupboards that make us uncomfortable, and for 200 years we’ve just chosen not to look at them too closely. So this is a book, in some way, about those cupboards, it opens a couple of those cupboards and looks into them in a judgment neutral way, but I hope a clear-eyed way, because my feeling is that until we are prepared to look at all those slightly hidden, slightly secret places in our history, we can’t actually make much progress into the future.

While Grenville’s language of progress betrays a humanist politics that may seem worrisome in its faith in Enlightenment notions of truth and emancipation, her literary works, including *Secret River*, attest to what might be called a posthumanist politics that recognizes the limits but also the necessity of a liberal humanist vocabulary for protesting acts of injustice.



hill building his house precisely on the rock art and the corroboree that he earlier recognized as forms of expression that encoded complex cultural meanings untranslatable to the settler invader: “He knew it was there, and his children might remember, but his children’s children would walk about on floorboards, and never know what was beneath their feet” (316). This “innocent ignorance” (Fee and Russell) draws attention to the haunting of settler culture by the secrets of the past, which Grenville figures through the “painful scars” inflicted from the massacre on the bodies not only of Thornhill and the other settlers but also on Long Jack, the lone Aboriginal man to survive its horrors. These scars are all that remain. The secret is carefully protected by Thornhill, and any signs of its occurrence become effaced not only from the landscape but also from the historical record: “Nothing was written on the ground. Nor was it written on any page. But the blankness itself might tell the story to anyone who had eyes to see” (325). This blankness—the secret gaps, occluded histories, and suppressed memories—constitute the forgotten colonial archive that must be opened if reconciliation is even to begin.

What needs asking, however, is how the process of revelation begins in settler culture if there is an unwillingness to remember, a disinclination to return to unpalatable memories that dismantle settler claims to belonging. The final words of Grenville’s novel describe Will Thornhill as “watching, into the dark,” aware that his claim to the land is fragile and paranoid about the potential return of its Indigenous custodians. The opening words of Jones’s novel begin with the whisper of a protagonist whose mouth is “deformed” (15) by its long silence and whose voice is contorted by long periods of speechlessness. At the centre of *Sorry* is a young protagonist, Perdita, who suffers from pathological stuttering brought on by the secret that the novel reveals in its final pages: her murder of her father, which she had mis-remembered as performed by Mary, her Aboriginal friend and caregiver. Perdita is the daughter of an English anthropologist, Nicholas Keene, whose object of research is the Aboriginal people he despises as primitive, and an increasingly deranged English mother, Stella, who incessantly recites Shakespeare but shares no emotional connection to her daughter. Her only human connection is to Billy, a young boy whose deafness stigmatizes him, and the various Aboriginal women who perform the maternal duties for her incapable mother. The secret operates here on multiple registers: it refers to the secret knowledge of the Aborigines, which Nicholas seeks to decode and classify; the “secret understandings and unspoken allegiances” (41) that bind Perdita and Mary in a relationship of sisterly solidarity; her father’s rapes of the various Aboriginal women,

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including Mary, who care for her; and ultimately the repressed memory, sealed off even from Perdita herself, of her murder of her father and subsequent responsibility for Mary's imprisonment.

*Sorry* is clearly informed by—one might say haunted by—the Sorry Movement and the national reconciliation process in Australia. The title cues us to its intended function as an apologetic or restitutive aesthetic object offered, as Jones writes in her acknowledgements, “in the spirit of reconciliation and in gratitude for all that indigenous Australians have given to others in their country” (np). The narrative is preceded by a note on “Sorry,” in which Jones explains that the term “has dense and complicated meanings in Australia” (np), which she glosses by way of a brief overview of the Sorry Movement. Yet, the novel's discursive trope of the secret functions to create ties of female solidarity between Perdita and Mary that arguably cover over the power imbalances that have informed, and continue to inform, the colonial legacy. Whereas Nicholas and Stella function as complex allegories for England—with the former representing the arrogant and imperial attitude of the metropolis toward Indigenous peoples and the latter its distance and disconnection from the settler colony—Perdita is an allegorical figure for Australia's settler community. Her name literally translates as “lost,” and as an embodiment of the settler condition of exile and estrangement Perdita finds solace in the arms of Aboriginal female caregivers. Disconnected from her parents physically and emotionally, she experiences “bodily correspondence” and “touch and exchange” (31) from the Aboriginal women who care for her from the time she is an infant: “If it were not [for these women] who raised me, I would never have known what it is like to lie against a breast, to sense skin as a gift, to feel the throb of a low pulse at the base of the neck, to listen, in intimate and sweet propinquity, to air entering and leaving a resting body” (41). These women, including Mary, fill the void of her mother's emotional and, at times, physical absence, offering quasi-familial connections and standing in as surrogate mothers and sisters. While Perdita insists that Mary is “not a substitution—since one person can never, after all, replace another” (61), she is a positive, affirming female *presence* in a life defined by maternal loss and absence. Jones thus realigns personal loyalties and communal ties, with Mary, Perdita, and Billy described as their “own little group, like another family, lovingly inclined together” (68).

This readjustment of conventional notions of identity offers the white characters of Perdita and Billy access to the secret metaphysical and spiritual knowledge of Indigenous peoples. According to Mary, her people, the *kartiya*, “knew everything about the world, every big important thing,

and every single little thing” (71). By virtue of her association with Mary, Perdita is given a measure of insight into the “*big* questions” and the “*other* questions,” enabling her to enter into the desert people’s knowledge that her father fails to anthropologically uncover and record. Through her preternatural connection to the natural world and her extensive kinship relations, Mary lends Perdita a connection to the land that legitimates and *indigenizes* her claim to the land: “There was an entire universe, she was discovering, of the visible and the invisible, the unconcealed and the concealed, some fundamental hinge to all this hotchpotch[...]. For Mary there was authority in signs Perdita had never seen before; there were pronouncements in tiny sounds and revelations in glimpses” (72). In learning to read the previously indecipherable signs of the sacred world using Mary as her guide, Perdita gains the authority that she attributes to the signs themselves—an authority that implicitly shores up support for her allegorical representation of the young Australian nation. In other words, the reader finds in Perdita a settler subject who is partially exempted from responsibility for her role in Indigenous suffering by virtue of her indigenization. Although the novel does not ultimately allow or endorse such exemption—as she is the figure with whom the disproportionate share of responsibility for Mary’s imprisonment lies—Perdita’s engagement with Indigenous forms of knowledge functions as a strategy for distancing her from blame or accountability. If Perdita’s maternal inheritance is the archaic language of Shakespeare and pedagogically pointless lessons in geography and history, Mary offers her an Indigenous inheritance, a rightful claim to the perceived knowledge of the land possessed by Indigenous peoples.

Perdita’s stuttering, however, suggests a complexity to Jones’s metaphor of secrecy that my reading thus far has yet to acknowledge. Perdita’s stuttering itself is a kind of text, as it were: it contains meanings hidden beyond or beneath the surface and thus demands to be decoded and interpreted. It is only by returning to the scene of the trauma with Dr Oblov and “realiz[ing], with a force of a revelation, that she was not at all sure who killed [Nicholas]” that she begins to approach the “gap and shapelessness to her own lost history” (178) and is finally cured of her stutter. What is fascinating about the psychotherapy sessions leading up to this revelatory moment is that Perdita continually feels physically ill every time she approaches the point of revelation; the effort to speak that which appears fundamentally unspeakable gives rise to a visceral experience of nausea, “an upheaval of seasickness” (177). The secret here is associated with what Julia Kristeva has now famously called the abject: it is knowledge which,

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put simply, the settler subject tries desperately to reject or repudiate even as it haunts the inner limits of her subjectivity. In Kristeva's theory, the abject refers to all that the subject tries desperately to get rid of in the search to become social: blood, excrement, tears, shit, vomit, etc. This process, which she names abjection, is always paradoxical and never entirely successful: traces of the abject persistently remain, despite the perpetual attempt to obliterate them. The role of the abject in delimiting the boundaries not only within but also between imperialism's subjects—a process described by Anne McClintock in her brilliant extension of Kristeva's ideas—is repeatedly played out in Jones's text. Nicholas Keane, for example, dreams that he shits himself and "comes undone" upon consuming an Aboriginal family's victuals; later, he is disgusted by the physicality of Stella's pregnancy and childbirth and is overwhelmed with a wave of nausea at the sight of her placenta in an uncanny moment in which the boundaries of self and other threaten to dissolve. Perdita's secret of her own culpability also functions as a site of the uncanny in that it presents her with something that is familiar and yet foreign: Perdita *knows* that she is culpable and yet is devastated by her confrontation of this repressed knowledge. By implication, the knowledge of settler responsibility for colonial genocide is devastating and will surely unsettle the psychological as well as collective boundaries that delimit the non-Indigenous subject, and yet this knowledge must be un-forgotten if reconciliation is to stand a chance. The remembrance of these acts may not lead automatically, if at all, to reconciliation or any of its various cognates—apology, forgiveness, restitution. Perdita never does reach the point of uttering the word sorry to Mary, despite her final ability to recollect the details of the traumatic event that frames the novel. Remembrance may not lead to the telos of reconciliation. And yet, the impossible task of remembering is a very preliminary step in a reconciliation process that must be conceived as an open-ended, perpetually ongoing, and always unfinished conversation.

### **Listening for the Secrets and Stutterings: Thoughts on Pedagogy**

If teaching is an act of "listen[ing] for the 'stutterings,' the unexpected dialects and misspeakings, the unpredicted articulations" (Giroux 20), introducing these texts into the classroom can open up a conversation about uncomfortable issues of white privilege, complicity, and responsibility. In my experience of teaching an upper-level undergraduate course in Postcolonial Literature—the first term of which is devoted exclusively

to a study of Aboriginal literature and literary representations of Aboriginality from Canada and Australia—I have found that the classroom often becomes a space of testimony or disclosure, a space of secret-sharing, as students wrestle with the politics of identity. The discussion of residential schooling also becomes a moment of secret-sharing. Because a handful of students enroll in my course without much awareness of the residential school legacy and its intergenerational effects—a bereftness of knowledge that indicates the limits of civic education and pedagogy where colonialism is concerned—my attempt to place the texts we are reading within that context functions as a powerful moment of revelation for students, the majority of whom are not Native despite the strong presence of Ojibway and Odaha students at Georgian College, out of which the Laurentian University program operates. This revelatory moment involves a conflict-ridden recognition—often for the first time—of the extraordinarily racist history that has informed the Canadian government’s interactions with Aboriginal peoples across the country. Although the residential school legacy is only one chapter in the story of Euro-Christian Canada’s genocide of Indigenous peoples, it is, as Sam McKegney asserts in *Magic Weapons: Aboriginal Writers Remaking History after Residential School*, “a particularly brutal, oppressive, and encompassing one” (17), which, perhaps for this reason, arrests non-Indigenous students, generating a range of powerful affective responses including shock, bewilderment, sorrow, anxiety, and guilt. The strong emotional as well as intellectual responses that discussions of residential schooling arouse offer the pedagogical benefit of opening up a productive dialogue about the enduring legacy of Canadian state-sanctioned racism. While these conversations can be profoundly destabilizing for all, in my experience they function as a starting point for genuine learning about the structures of racism that sustain white privilege and Indigenous oppression.

As a mixed-blood person of Irish, English, and Ojibway descent, my experience of teaching this course has been attended by personal feelings of ambivalence and anxiety. Often I am reluctant to disclose my own investment in the material—my maternal grandmother was a residential school survivor who died a tragic death at an early age—because of my heightened awareness of the complex politics of disclosure. While naming one’s ancestors and introducing oneself before speaking are important protocols in Aboriginal cultures in Canada and Australia, and while locating oneself in relation to the material at hand has become a convention in academic research about Native cultures, I am palpably uncomfortable about publicly identifying myself as a mixed-blood person for a host of

reasons. Perhaps the most compelling of these reasons, to my mind, has to do with my relatives' treatment of their Métis identity as an embarrassing family secret—something to be hidden away and covered over and certainly never acknowledged openly. To assert my Métis identity in the context of the postcolonial classroom or the postcolonial academic conference, as opposed to a casual conversation with a neighbour or friend, can feel like a self-serving and opportunistic move in light of this familial secrecy. Given what Rey Chow has correctly identified as the fetishization of the other among First World intellectuals, I worry that to acknowledge this identity in one of the few contexts where otherness can be personally empowering (if in a limited, contested way) not only conveniently reclaims it for professional advantage. It also belies the benefits of white privilege that I have been afforded by virtue of my ability to “pass,” and this at a time when the settler-invader population is finally being called upon to own up to their role in the ongoing suffering of Indigenous peoples. On the other hand, I am reminded by colleagues and friends that to continue to elide my Métis identity is to forget that my family engaged in practices of repression as a response to colonial assimilationist pulls, as well as to allow this government-mandated project of assimilation some measure of success. To continue this elision is also, in my view, to perform a disservice to the memory of my grandmother. I offer these autobiographical notes not only in the way of a belated introduction—appropriately, as secrets are by their very nature, always offered belatedly—but also as a personal commentary on the complexity of disclosure, which, after colonialism, can never be a politically neutral or transparent affair. While I have by no means resolved my feelings of ambivalence and uncertainty regarding personal disclosures of identity, and know that I must continue to struggle with them, I prefer using the literary text as a channel into discussions of politics and identity not only because it allows me to avoid the exhibitionist dangers inherent in self-disclosure but also because it offers a means of discussing the relationship between repressed knowledge and (the limits of) representation. Literary texts, moreover, can constitute the “kind of saying that takes place on the border of the unsayable,” a saying that in unsettling our perspectives and identities allows us to “think about worlds that might one day become thinkable, sayable, legible” (Butler 41). Indeed, non-Indigenous fiction that attempts to represent the unrepresentable knowledge of colonial genocide has the potential to open up new worlds by making imaginable the kinds of worlds to which a vision of reconciliation is committed.

Introducing such fiction in the classroom can function pedagogically in potentially radical ways, forcing a return to the traumatic scene of the colonial encounter and a subsequent realization of non-Indigenous responsibility. Indeed, it is only by returning imaginatively to this moment and recovering the lost or forgotten colonial archive that members of the settler majority can even begin to move toward the possibility of reconciliation. Texts such as those by Grenville and Jones confront the non-Indigenous reader with the spectre of indigenization: what Terry Goldie defines as the settler appropriation of indigeneity as a result of a perception of loss. But, in doing so, they heed Len Findlay's very different sense of the word in his call to "always indigenize!": this is literature that pries open the repressed contents of settler narratives, leaving readers with the daunting but necessary task of piecing together the wreckage.

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