Afterword

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The essays in this special issue of *English Studies in Canada* employ a variety of scholarly approaches to engage with Canada's unfolding reconciliation process—clearly no small undertaking. Yet, this work, and this collection, is of monumental importance to Indigenous people and to the future of our relationships with the people of Canada. It is also of great importance to the descendents of settlers and other immigrants who make up the rest of Canada's population. Unfortunately, most know little about residential schools, and too many do not care. As my mother used to tell me, "Ignorance is bliss." Bliss, in this instance, is predicated on erasure and denial of Canada's colonial past and present. Worse yet, the Government of Canada continues to perpetuate this ignorance through its public denial of our shared history.

In their introduction, Pauline Wakeham and Jennifer Henderson confront Canadian policies, practices, and strategies of denial by holding up for critical examination Prime Minister Stephen Harper's claim that Canada has no colonial history. They go on to theorize the ideological foundation of Canada's apology to residential school survivors and find it lacking in substance and action. They argue that the limitations placed on the mandate and operations of the Indian Residential School Truth

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and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) serves to preserve and protect Canada's liberal reputation and continues to deny its history of privilege and oppression. Indeed, the Government of Canada has effectively muzzled the survivors through its design of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's processes, in which all truth telling that names victimizers must be done in camera. Wakeham and Henderson's analysis reveals that reconciliation, Canadian style, has been distorted into a hegemonic process whose ideological foundation is an "implied phantasmatic past of harmony and equitable relations between Canada and First Peoples" (xxx). Clearly, this does not bode well for the many residential school survivors who are placing so much hope in the TRC.

For better or for worse, the truth and reconciliation process is specific to the damage done in the Indian residential schools, not in the colonial system that created them. As Wakeham and Henderson aptly point out, Prime Minister Harper's apology makes no mention of residential schools as an oppressive "colonial technology strategically and violently employed" (McKegney 21), nor does he ever use the term "colonialism." It is hard to imagine how anyone could claim that Canada has no history of colonialism, given that the new nation-state of Canada was built on Indigenous peoples' land. Hard to imagine, but that is precisely what Prime Minister Harper has said. Prime Minister Harper's 2008 apology was a momentous gift to the Aboriginal people of Canada, especially those who attended residential schools. By denying Canada's colonial past in 2009 and refusing to continue funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation in 2010, the Prime Minister is, in effect, taking that gift back. I'm embarrassed to say that, when I was a child, we labeled people who gave something and then took it back as "Indian givers"! As children, we reproduced the colonial stereotypes that surrounded us, the colonial stereotypes that rewrote the incredible generosity of Indigenous peoples toward colonizing "newcomers" as a narrative of European benevolence and superiority. In today's Canada, this irony is further crystallized: it is the Prime Minister who has taken back Canada's gift of apology. How shameful. Clearly, scholarly engagement in the discourse surrounding the truth and reconciliation process is critical.

In 1993, Anishinaubae scholar Kimberly Blaeser published her groundbreaking article "Native Literature: Seeking a Critical Center." In it, she advised us to look within the stories for the keys to interpretation of Indigenous literature. Following her advice, I have tried to apply her theories to my studies and have found that one work of literature can often inform my reading of another. Even more informative, however, have been stories

from my family and community. The oral tradition is alive and well, even if too many people cannot speak their languages and do not know the traditional stories. Nevertheless, our cultures do continue in our stories and our modes of telling. As I try to understand the issues that are excluded from the discourse of reconciliation, I find myself turning more often to family and community stories. To that end, I will share a family story with you, one that is not directly about residential school but which has informed my thinking about the complex issues surrounding reconciliation.

I grew up in Transcona, a small town that has since been absorbed by the city of Winnipeg. My grandparents moved there when they realized that they could not make a living farming. After World War I, my Métis grandfather had returned to Canada with the hopes of farming. Unfortunately, he had no land. When his Scottish war bride arrived two years after his return, they rented a piece of bush land on the boundaries of Long Plain Reserve. Unfortunately, continued occupancy was dependent on clearing the land by hand without money to hire help or to buy machinery and, certainly, without government assistance. According to my grandmother, her husband was working himself to death. Eventually they gave up and moved to Transcona where light-skinned Métis could deny their ancestry and blend in with the masses of olive-skinned immigrants working in the CNR shops. As a result, I grew up six blocks from the front entrance of those shops, just a few blocks from my grandparents and my mother's childhood home.

My grandfather always hated the city and yearned for life on the land. When I was six, he retired from his work at the CNR and couldn't leave the city quickly enough. My grandparents moved to a small town, not far from Sioux Valley Reserve, and my mom and I would drive through the reserve on our way to visit my grandparents every summer. Many questions came to mind as we drove along the dusty gravel road through the reserve. I rarely saw people, although I'd met some who would come to help my mom's uncles with their farms. What I did see were little houses, which I'd later learn were called "mud shacks." These poplar log houses were mudded with clay. Many of them even had grass growing from their roofs. Perhaps, if I had been an adult, I might have thought that they looked like structures from the Third World. To my young eyes—and remember I was a city girl, if Transcona could be called a city—these tiny houses looked exotic. My child's mind wondered who lived there and how did they live. And why did Indians live in such poverty? Poverty, too, was exotic. An avid reader of English children's novels, I was curious about class and imagined my Métis family to be upper middle class! Only when

I became an adult did I realize that upper middle class people were not Métis living in sight of the CNR shops. And, as an adult, I've come to learn more about mud shacks because I married a man who spent his early years living in one. I've also learned about the moral certitude underlying Canada's Indian policies.

My husband, Clayton Episkenew, tells a story of his childhood home on the Standing Buffalo First Nation in the Qu'Appelle Valley in Saskatchewan. His childhood home was like those little houses in Sioux Valley that fascinated me. It was a one-room poplar log structure with a bed in one corner for the parents and another for his sisters. My husband slept on the floor wrapped in an old buffalo robe lined with green felt on a homemade mattress that his mother had made by stuffing a blanket with feathers from mallard and pintail ducks. He remembers falling asleep by the wood stove that was so hot it glowed red, yet by morning the house was so cold that the water would be frozen in the bucket. He also remembers going to sleep with his dad, Paul Whiteman, telling stories of the Dakota people and Iktomi the trickster and feeling safe because he was close to his family. The family had no income except money earned doing odd jobs such as clearing roots and rocks from farmers' fields. Although his family was certainly poor, my husband had a happy childhood before he was taken to residential school.

For four years, my father-in-law had gone to the Regina Industrial School, the predecessor of the Lebret Indian Residential School. Although he never learned to read or write there, my father-in-law learned carpentry and built his family's mud shack home. He could not, however, finish the job without the women in the community doing their part. The construction work was divided according to gender. The men would build the log frame, and then the women would take over the finishing. My husband remembers the women asking him to go up the hill with the horse and wagon to the clay bank and bring down a load of clay to mud the house. The women would mix the clay with straw and water and then cover the house, just like icing a cake. They made sure that no holes remained to let the cold Saskatchewan winter wind blow through. He remembers trying to help them, but they laughed and shooed him away. The women took pride in their ability to contribute, and little boys had no place doing women's work.

When he was nearly twelve years old, my husband tells me that his much older brother brought their dad news that would change their lives in more ways than they could ever imagine. "Dad," his brother said, "You can get a new house. They'll give you a house." My father-in-law was con-

fused, "Why do I need a house? I've already got a house. I built our house myself." But the young man thought he was bringing his father good news. He was sure that this would be best for his dad and would not be deterred. My brother-in-law, like all of his siblings, had attended residential school and learned there that the white man's ways were, by definition, superior. This was the not-so-hidden curriculum of the residential school. Eventually my father-in-law relented, and the family moved into a board house supplied by the Department of Indian Affairs. The year was 1960, just one year before Indians were transformed into Canadian citizens even though they'd never asked for citizenship.

Life for my husband's family changed when they moved into the government house. The Indian Affairs house was not built with the same love, attention, and expertise as the mud shack had been. It was cold and drafty. And the family lost its closeness. Although the family was not geographically dispersed by the new government house, the house itself introduced separations. My husband had his own room, as did his parents and his sisters. The children no longer went to sleep listening to stories of the Dakota and of Iktomi. My husband remembers his father spending more and more time alone in his room, only coming out to see if anyone was there. He had lost his usefulness. My husband also remembers that, shortly after moving into the Indian Affairs' house, he began climbing out his bedroom window at night to sneak away with his friends. The family situation deteriorated after the move.

When I hear this story, I wonder how my father-in-law felt when his son, no doubt having been influenced by his residential school experience, came to persuade his dad to accept a government house. What was the subtext of the message that he heard?

The house that you built for your family is not good enough.

The government can provide your family with a house that is superior to yours.

You are not capable of building a house of the same quality as the one that the white people will build for you.

You are not capable of building a house that is good enough for your family.

You are not good enough.

I do not believe that the powers that be in the Government of Canada set out to send that message to First Nations men, yet I believe that, at some You are not good enough.

level, these are the messages that my father-in-law absorbed when he accepted the Indian Affairs' house.

My husband let me share this story with you to show the consequences of government policies based on moral certitude. Where the little mud shacks seemed exotic to me and my child's thinking, to the policymakers they were evidence of the backwardness, moral failings, and inferiority of Aboriginal people. Thus, the offer of a government house was grounded in the moral certitude that the white way is, by definition, the superior way. This story also suggests a need for a critical reappraisal of the reconciliation process. Yes, there is a need for the survivors of residential schools to speak their truth and have Canadians acknowledge and affirm that truth. Yet, the residential schools were only one element of Canada's colonial policies, and the damage of such seemingly benign policies as the one that gave my father-in-law a government house is evident to this day in Indigenous communities. Indeed, many Indigenous communities are situated in the middle of forests, where sometimes more than twenty people share a poorly constructed government house and old diseases, such as tuberculosis, continue to flourish (Skerritt A8). Sadly, few people believe that they have the agency to build their own houses because the subtext of the messages that my father-in-law heard has been passed down to generations of grandchildren and great-grandchildren. This brings us back to the legacy of residential schools and the need for a reconciliation process that will bring awareness of the moral certitude in the superiority of whiteness that continues to this day, albeit in various guises, in Indigenous peoples' relationships with governments.

The topic of this special edition of *English Studies in Canada* is Aboriginal redress. To me, redress must support decolonization, which requires individual and collective action. According to Linda Goulet, "decolonization means restructuring our relationships with ourselves, our families, our communities, and with the larger society." Colonization has profoundly injured Indigenous people, individually and collectively. "Colonial technologies" (McKegney 21), such as residential schools, were designed to break Aboriginal communities by destroying relationships. Although healing from the injuries of colonialism must begin with the individual, there must be understanding and support from the larger community, and the relationships with the larger community must also be healed. Individuals cannot heal by themselves. The healing process always consists of more than one person and is often a community endeavour. Individuals who take control of their healing gain agency and empowerment, yet healing alone is not enough.

Healing from the injuries that colonialism has caused is important, but it must be accompanied by political change that leads to social justice for Indigenous people. As Emma LaRocque so wisely warns us, "We must remain vigilant against being 'psychologized' just as we must remain alert to being exclusively politicized (and culturalized, for that matter)" (170). For LaRocque, being "psychologized" is another way of constructing Indigenous people as people with problems, a dangerously short leap to being identified once again as "The [Indian] Problem." Indigenous people have no need to be identified as "The Indian Problem" again in the new millennium. Yet, Indigenous people and communities need to heal from the injuries of colonialism, and structures and systems based on white privilege must change so that they stop inflicting injuries.

The settler government cannot heal us, and why would we think that they could? It was their policies that caused these injuries in the first instance, and their policies and practices continue to cause us pain. And, this brings us back to reconciliation. Although I have every confidence that the chair, the commissioners, and the staff of the TRC will do their very best to help achieve reconciliation in this country, I fear that they will be fighting an uphill battle. The Government of Canada continues to perpetuate an attitude of moral certitude that it knows what is best for Indigenous people. Unwilling to admit to the full spectrum of Canada's past mistakes in its dealings with Indigenous people, our government seems unable to grasp that those mistakes continue to have consequences for people. Policies of rehousing continue to this day in many supposedly well-meaning, so-called benevolent gestures that nevertheless measure Indigenous people according to white or Euro-Canadian standards. Reconciliation means decolonizing the "house" of government and its standards for measuring Indigenous peoples' cultures, beliefs, and practices. Reconciliation means empowering those Indigenous people who, like my father-in-law, lack agency because they still believe that they are not good enough. Reconciliation means understanding that there are many ways to be good enough and that the white way is not the standard by which all of humanity must measure themselves.

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