

Horáková, Martina

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**Martina Horáková**

Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

## Writing Life and Baking Bread: Beth Brant's Multiple Identities in *Writing As Witness*

### Abstract

This paper examines the writings of the First Nations author Beth Brant, particularly her collection of critical and personal essays *Writing As Witness* (1994). Brant inscribes in her texts her multiple identities as an Indigenous writer, a Mohawk woman, and a lesbian feminist, representing sometimes conflicting, sometimes affirming intersections of ethnicity/race, gender, sexuality and religion. In addition, Brant's narrative strategies in the multi-generic pieces interweave her personal observations on her own life, on First Nations literature and history, on important concepts in First Nations spiritual existence, and on the contested positions that Native women occupy in contemporary Canadian society. Finally, the paper points to Brant's contribution to feminist discourse on women's sexuality and lesbian identity through her elaboration on the concept of Two-Spiritedness. I suggest that this particular collection promotes a specific writing style in the genre of personal non-fiction and life writing, which has recently gained popularity among Indigenous women writers.

### Résumé

Cet article examine l'œuvre de Beth Brant, l'auteur canadienne autochtone, en se penchant sur son recueil d'essais critiques et personnels *Writing As Witness* (1994). Dans ces textes Beth Brant inscrit ses identités multiples en tant qu'écrivain indigène, Mohawk et féministe lesbienne en y représentant des croisements soit contradictoires, soit affirmatifs de la race/ethnique, du sexe, de la sexualité et de la religion. En plus, ses stratégies narratives dans les textes multigénériques associent les observations personnelles de sa vie, autant de la littérature que de l'histoire des premières nations, des concepts importants de l'existence spirituelle des premières nations et des positions disputées que les femmes autochtones tiennent dans la société canadienne de nos jours. Finalement, l'article fait voir la contribution de l'auteur au discours féministe sur la sexualité féminine et l'identité lesbienne par l'intermédiaire de l'élaboration du concept de « deux esprits ». Je soutiens que ce recueil particulier promeut un style d'écriture particulier dans le genre des ouvrages généraux et ceux de « life writing » (l'écriture de la vie) qui ont gagné la popularité parmi les auteurs indigènes féminines.

In her preface to *Writing As Witness: Essay and Talk* (1994), a collection of critical and personal essays, the First Nations writer Beth Brant tackles the issue of her multiple identities. She identifies herself as “First Nations, feminist, lesbian, mixed-blood, urban, not educated in western ‘tradition’ ... a friend, a writer, a talker” (Brant, 1994, 3). Interestingly, she leaves

out her national (Canadian) identity, and instead puts emphasis on her Mohawk affiliation. This self-affirmation reappears constantly throughout Brant's text, not only to assert and celebrate the multiplicity and the shifting character of her identity but also to defy, I believe, the constructed and reductive binaries such as that of traditional/urban in relation to many Indigenous people. Using the text as a recent example, this paper is a reflection on the ways in which some contemporary Indigenous women writers and activists, such as Beth Brant, develop strategies of transgressing various genres, styles, and registers in order to explore the intersections of ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, class, place and religion in their creative non-fiction. I argue that many of these personal narratives, of which *Writing As Witness* is just one example, significantly contribute to establishing new forms of Indigenous women's writing. This new form, perhaps alluding to some mainstream feminist writers, highlights, as the subtitle of Brant's text suggests, the blending of the scholarly, the objective, the intellectual, the written with the everyday, the subjective, the physical and the oral. All this is transformed into a self-reflective cultural synthesis, which adapts Western literary forms in order to accommodate Indigenous women's life experiences.

## I write, therefore I am: being an indigenous writer

For Beth Brant, as well as for many other contemporary Indigenous authors, writing is a process of empowerment: it is a gift and privilege that creates power – a power, as Brant believes, “not *over* anything, but rather the power to speak” (Brant, 1994, 8). Perhaps in contrast to the Western notion of authorial individuality, writing for Brant implies the importance of the community and responsibility to be a witness to that community (70). Brant also echoes a notion common to many Indigenous writers and that is the idea of writing as means of healing the trauma, healing the broken circles (13), and of recovering from racism, sexism, homophobia and drug abuse (18). Having started to write when she turned forty, Brant is the author of many short stories, poems, experimental autobiographical narrative, personal creative non-fiction and collaborative life-writing, and the editor of the collection of Native women's feminist writings.<sup>1</sup> Her book *Writing As Witness* is an example of a multi-generic writing in which registers and styles are switched even within particular chapters. Essays of literary criticism, social and political commentaries and feminist critiques alternate with intimate personal memories of Brant's father, a lover, and a friend. Furthermore, these give space to re-writing history in the form of ironic and humorous re-telling of the story of Pocahontas from Pocahontas', and, eventually, an Indigenous perspective (84). All these essays are linked through the practice of storytelling, the tone ranging from mockery and irony to an activist's anger, which is eventually exchanged for intimacy and subjectivity. In addition, Brant's writing is strongly self-reflective, especially in the metatextual passages which address her own writing, explaining her motifs for particular plots, characters and their choices (68).

Apart from writing fiction and creative non-fiction, Brant also engages in writing literary

1) *A Gathering of Spirit: A Collection by North American Indian Women* (1984; Rev. ed. 1988), *Mohawk Trail* (1985), *Food & Spirits* (1991), *Writing As Witness: Essay and Talk* (1994), *I'll Sing 'till the Day I Die* (1995).



criticism, commenting on established as well as emerging Indigenous writers and storytellers. The first essay in *Writing As Witness*, entitled “The Good Red Road: Journeys of Homecoming in Native Woman’s Writing,” provides the author with space to present her critical analysis of Indigenous writing in North America, starting with an exploration of some of the poems by the Mohawk writer and poet Pauline Johnson. In this particular piece, Brant is actually writing back to Pauline Johnson: she claims Johnson as her literary foremother, celebrates her life, work and values anchored in the Indigenous community, and hails Johnson as a founder of the movement of First Nations women to write down their own stories. In her analysis of Johnson’s poetry (“The Cattle Thief”), Brant emphasizes Johnson’s revolutionary impulse and especially her anger and courage to counteract the misconceptions that non-Natives held about Mohawk people (Brant, 1994, 6). Brant also welcomes Johnson’s introduction of the image of strong, dignified, proud, spiritually empowered, but also angry First Nations women. While sharing Johnson’s nationalist claim of the Mohawk Nation ancestry, Brant at the same time discredits Canada’s attempt to appropriate Johnson as a national poet (7). This response to the literary predecessor, one of the increasingly frequent cases of one Indigenous writer re-reading and re-interpreting another Indigenous writer, contributes to establishing a positive (female) literary genealogy. This tendency continues with Brant’s effort to characterize the style and themes of Indigenous women’s writing and to offer an overview of its development. Brant cherishes the major writers such as Mourning Dove (Hum-Ishu-Ma, *Cogewa-The Half-Blood*, 1927) and Maria Campbell (*Half-Breed*, 1973) as well as very contemporary Native women writers whose names fill up several of Brant’s paragraphs. There is no doubt that Brant’s purpose here is to demonstrate the richness and diversity of contemporary Indigenous women’s narratives which rarely correspond to the mainstream publishers’ idea of “publishable” literature but which are nevertheless thriving. Brant glosses this textual flourishing laconically: “Pauline Johnson must be smiling” (14).

In writing about and promoting Indigenous literatures/cultures whilst simultaneously establishing connections with Indigenous literary predecessors in the form of “personalized” and “narrativized” cultural criticism, Brant’s style of writing resonates with other North American Indigenous writers such as Lee Maracle, Jeannette Armstrong, Patricia Monture Angus, Emma LaRoque, Paula Gunn Allen, Diane Glancy, Anna Lee Walters and others whose texts inhabit the space between critical writing, life writing, creative non-fiction and fiction. These authors are empowered by the writing process and are very self-reflective about the role and motives of their writing. Identifying themselves as members of a marginalized group, they also experience the process of writing as space where personal empowerment overlaps with political empowerment.<sup>2</sup> If the notion of a text/discourse as a site where knowledge and power are exercised is taken as a starting point, it is obvious that for Indigenous writers, similarly

2) The concept of the politics of empowerment is developed, for example, in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (1991) by African American feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins. Collins argues that Afrocentric feminist thought has contributed to the understanding of important connections among knowledge, consciousness and the politics of empowerment on two levels. First, by treating the paradigm of race, gender and class as interlocking systems of oppression, it “reconceptualizes the social relations of domination and resistance,” second, it offers subordinate groups new ways of knowing their own experience, which allows them to define their own reality, therefore empowers them (Collins, 222).

to other minority authors, writing turns into a means of recognition not only of themselves as individuals, but also of their political struggles resulting from their colonized histories. It is no surprise then that many Indigenous authors use textual space as a powerful weapon with which they can effectively inscribe social injustices, becoming, in the words of Paula Gunn Allen, “word warriors” (Allen, 1986, 51). I suggest that Indigenous women’s writing that voices Indigenous (feminist) thought is precisely this kind of textual space that empowers both the authors and other Indigenous women through placing their experience in the centre of the analysis and through providing appropriate (self-) definitions, (self-) representations and epistemological tools in order to theorize their existence.

## To voice difference: being an indigenous feminist

Beth Brant is one of the Indigenous women writers and activists who do engage in feminist debates, even though it is mostly to provoke a critical response to mainstream feminism, that is Western, mainly Anglo-American, first-world, second-wave feminist discourse, which has, until recently, been predominantly associated with white middle-class women. This response was formed already in the 1980s with a shift in the focus on the intersection of gender and ethnicity/race when diverse voices of women with different cultural and life experiences challenged mainstream feminism as a movement which has universalized women’s experience as that of an oppressed gender in the patriarchal system. The basic premise of the Indigenous critique of mainstream feminism, expressed by the Australian Indigenous scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson, claims that “an Indigenous woman’s point of view is informed by social worlds imbued with meaning grounded in knowledges of different realities from those of white women” (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, xvi). Similar views have led to the development of a specific stream in feminism that Julia Emberly, drawing on Theresa de Lauretis, calls “feminism as an *epistemology* of difference” (Emberly, 1993, 83, original emphasis). The experiential difference of Indigenous women in North America includes, for example, a government/church-imposed system of residential and boarding schools, training Indigenous women as domestic servants, culture and language dispossession, state-controlled family policies such as separating children from their communities, and forced sterilizations. Therefore the struggle to address the diversity of women’s political and personal experience becomes the driving force in many Indigenous women’s writing, and Beth Brant’s essays are no exception.<sup>3</sup> Already in *A Gathering of Spirit: A Collection by North American Indian Women*, an anthology of Indigenous women’s writings, Brant as an editor wanted to provide a forum for Indigenous feminist and lesbian writers, proposing that “this book has challenged non-Indian attitudes about Indian women” (Brant, 1988, 15).

Brant’s attitude to mainstream feminism, like that of Lee Maracle, for example, is somewhat ambivalent: on the one hand she is appreciative of the women’s studies programs and feminist presses for promoting and publishing Indigenous women’s writing. In the same breath, how-

3) Indigenous women supporting and participating (albeit critically) in feminist discourse include, for example, Indigenous lesbian feminists such as Beth Brant, Paula Gunn Allen and Chrystos, and academic scholars, writers and activists such as Joyce Green, Emma LaRoque, Devon A. Mihesuah, Andrea Smith, M. Annette Jaimés Guerrero, Patricia Monture Angus, Jeannette Armstrong, Lee Maracle, Tina Beads, and others.



ever, she criticizes the mainstream feminist agenda for centering too much on the Eurocentric models of theory and culture. Occasionally Brant presents sweeping criticisms, such as when articulating her anger and frustration about women's studies conferences, dismissing their iconization of "Virginia Woolf and Emily Dickinson ... as the matriarchs of feminist and/or women's literature" (Brant, 1994, 9). Brant continues in an uncompromising hyperbole: "Woolf was a racist, Dickinson was a woman of privilege who never left her house, nor had to deal with issues beyond which white dress to wear on a given day" (9). In spite of these critiques, Brant, together with other Indigenous women writers (for example, Maracle, Armstrong, and LaRoque) internalizes some of the feminist ideals and makes strategic alliances with the mainstream feminist agenda regarding certain issues. These issues predominantly include the struggles against sexism (Brant, 1994, 62) and homophobia, the focus on female physicality and sexuality, the recovery of respect for the wisdom of female ancestors, grandmothers, mothers, aunties, sisters (12), and finally a recent resonance with fields such as eco-feminism (61). In addition, Brant is most supportive of the flowering of Indigenous feminist writing which, in her view, encompasses "sovereignty, children, Earth, class, race, sexuality" (39) and all other aspects important for the survival of Indigenous communities. In general, I would suggest that Brant's work is especially illuminating in the context of the emerging Indigenous feminist discourse. As the recently published comparative study by Indigenous feminists in North America, New Zealand and Finland's Samiland *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* proves, Indigenous feminism is gaining its momentum as more and more Indigenous women do decide to self-identify as feminists and to engage in gender-based analyses, even though at a risk of their communities' rejection of feminism as "inauthentic, un-Aboriginal and in other ways deeply problematic for Indigenous peoples" (Green 15). But, as Green argues, Indigenous feminism is valuable precisely because it does not refuse to raise issues of colonialism, racism and sexism, and the "unpleasant synergy between these three violations of human rights" (20) and it does so in both settler and Indigenous communities. In this context, Brant's text formulates quite a spirited, gendered analysis of the complexities of being simultaneously Aboriginal, female and lesbian, and as such contributes to an ideological framework of both intellectual (theoretical) and activist (practical) work.

## **This is what I choose: being an indigenous lesbian**

One of the recurring themes in *Writing As Witness* is the issue of homophobia within Indigenous communities – an issue about which Brant, like her fellow writers Paula Gunn Allen and Lee Maracle, is very open and straightforward. She talks about homophobia as a disease that "has devastated my Indian family as surely as smallpox, alcohol, glue-sniffing and tuberculosis have devastated our Nations" (Brant, 1994, 44). Mirroring Paula Gunn Allen's earlier argument in *The Sacred Hoop*, Brant blames colonialism for imposing more or less alien concepts of patriarchy and homophobia onto some Indigenous communities in North America (58). The key strategy in resisting homophobia is grounded, as Brant suggests, in the recovery of the Two-Spirit tradition. The phenomenon of Two-Spiritness has been traditionally recognized in many, though not all, Indigenous societies and it characterizes,

according to a loose anthropological definition, individuals “anatomically normal but [assuming] the dress, occupations, and behavior of the other sex to effect a change in gender status. The shift was not complete; rather, it was a movement toward a somewhat intermediate status that combined social attributes of males and females” (Callender and Kochems 443). It needs to be emphasized, however, that a Two-Spirit person is not a transsexual nor a transvestite, which are Western concepts, and that Two-Spirit peoples’ identity is primarily based on spirituality and gender identity that distinguishes Two-Spiritness from what Euro-American culture terms as homosexuality (Prince-Hughes, 1998, 80).<sup>4</sup> Importantly, Brant points out the diversity of names for such persons in various Indigenous languages (Brant, 1994, 48) and asserts that the Two-Spirit tradition has typically welcomed all gender variations, including what we now call gays and lesbians. In addition, in some cultures Two-Spirits were even revered precisely because of their blurred genders and were believed to have transformative power (Brant 47, 58, 76).

Beth Brant is open about her “becoming” lesbian at the age of thirty-three, which she describes in the following way: “I was a feminist, an activist and largely occupied with discovering all things female. And one of those lovely discoveries was that I could love women sexually, emotionally, and spiritually – and all at once. This is why I choose to be lesbian” (Brant, 1994, 56-57). This emphasis on the freedom of choice of one’s sexuality and gender as something traditionally acceptable among Indigenous societies is an important statement for Indigenous women identifying as lesbians, serving as a kind of role model. In her essays in *Writing As Witness* dedicated to writing about her lesbian identity, Brant celebrates the depiction of erotic images in contemporary Indigenous lesbian writing (17) and in her own personal narrative she frequently comments on bodily pleasures, sexuality, and love-making, which she views as a ritual, as part of religious belief, comparing sighs and cries filling the air to a “communal prayer of thanksgiving” (55). By deliberately blending the sexual and the sacred, Brant openly challenges the strict Christian separation of the two (represented in the dichotomy of body/soul) and the restriction of physical love to the sphere of reproduction only. Brant refuses to perpetuate such separation: “As a creative human being who is also Native and Two-Spirit, I will not make a distinction between sexuality and spirituality. To separate them would mean to place these two words in competition with each other, to rate them in acquiescence to white-European thought, to deny the power of sex/spirit in my life, my work” (55). Even though the fusion of the Indigenous and the lesbian comes as something natural to Brant, she nevertheless admits it may pose a problem for some of her Indigenous heterosexual acquaintances (57). Similarly to her skepticism concerning cooperation with mainstream feminism, Brant

4) The discussion of gender fluidity in Indigenous communities in North America has been very complex, presenting various terms such as “berdache,” “two-spirit persons” or “two-spirits,” and “third” or “mixed gender.” Generally, the term “berdache” is today considered by some scholars and Indigenous people as misleading or even derogatory as it originally referred to an older concept of a “young boy who is kept as a passive sexual partner” and was applied by European explorers who encountered Indigenous gender categories that were confusing and shocking to them (Lovejoy, 1999). Therefore “berdache” has been replaced by some scholars and writers by the term “two-spirit people” (Prince-Hughes, 1998, 80). The origin of the term “berdache,” together with a detailed exploration of its definitions, roles, and tasks are provided in Walter Williams’s *The Spirit and the Flesh* (1992). An in-depth discussion of the phenomenon of Two-Spiritness among North American Indigenous communities can be found in *Two Spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality* (1997) by Sue-Ellen Jacobs, Wesley Thomas and Sabine Lang.



also rejects participation in mainstream gay and lesbian movements, in spite of their affiliated agenda, and rather calls for a re-invention of the Indigenous tradition of Two-Spiritedness.

## To decolonize the mind: being a Mohawk woman

Although gender and sexuality form important axes of her writing, Brant also argues passionately for a strong Indigenous, that is Mohawk, identity anchored in the pre-contact period, proclaiming that she “passionately believes in [her] people and in [their] continuing resistance to colonialism” (Brant, 1994, 3). The violent history of colonization and the project of decolonization, both physical and spiritual, are elements underlying all of the essays in *Writing As Witness*. This is not to say, however, that the stress on racial/ethnic difference competes with the emphasis on gender/sexuality; rather, Brant combines these two important aspects of one’s identity in actively promoting Indigenous women’s own circles of solidarity and support (16). In the passages aimed at the renewal of Indigenous voices, Brant employs an activist tone, often relying on rhetorical devices (for example, reiterating phrases such as “we should”, “we need”, “my people” or asking rhetorical questions) but also allowing for very subjective emotions such as anger, passion, blame, guilt. Some essays in *Writing As Witness* present a fierce critique of Eurocentrism, or more specifically “whitecentrism”, which foregrounds a critical analysis of white privileges. For example, Brant attacks various white interest groups for misusing and misrepresenting Indigenous symbols, knowledges, and histories. Brant adopts a tone of mockery and sarcasm to dismiss the New Age movement for appropriating Indigenous belief systems and commercializing the concept of shamanism (25-27). In another section Brant critiques the white feminist insistence that “Native religions have goddess figures”, arguing that it is “a European concept and has no place in our [Indigenous] beliefs” (30). Similarly, neither Christianity nor the Bible are spared critical accusations because they are held responsible for the collapse and destruction of Indigenous epistemology: “Through the use and enforcement of that book [the Bible], those written words, everything that *we* had known was shattered” (50, original emphasis). Finally, Brant is not afraid to become very confrontational, addressing directly the white, non-Indigenous readership: “I do not write for you who are white. I write for my own” (52). By emphasizing the abyss between “I/us” and “you/them” – an abyss that is extremely difficult to bridge in this context – Brant responds to Lee Maracle who in her collection of critical and personal feminist essays, *I Am Woman* (1988), also confronts the dominant society, especially white women within the larger women’s movement: “The women of the world are re-writing history with their bodies. White women of CanAmerica are a footnote to it all. I am not in the habit of concerning myself with footnotes. ... White women figure too largely in our minds. Let us stop chasing them and challenging their humanity at every turn. Let us begin by talking to each other about ourselves” (Maracle 139). Of course, Brant’s and Maracle’s assertions on this point are a little overstated, as both authors do write for white readership, although not primarily, and they deliberately address non-Indigenous audiences in a didactic way.

The strong engagement of Indigenous women writers and scholars in anti-racist and anti-colonial rhetoric parallels the development of critical whiteness theory which maintains that whiteness, as a privileged and invisible category, has become a norm against which other non-



white experience and epistemology is judged in the construction of identity, representation, subjectivity, nationalism, law, and culture (Moreton-Robinson, 2004, vii). In this interpretation, whiteness remains uninterrogated and unnamed as a “difference” or “the other”. Indigenous women writers, including Beth Brant and Lee Maracle, deliberately undermine the notion of Eurocentric, or Western, epistemology that has, as a norm, prevented other systems of knowledge from continuing to shape and determine the cultural, political and economic life of Indigenous populations in the settler colonies. The incommensurability of the two systems of knowledge, Western and Indigenous, has been articulated by a number of Indigenous scholars in a complex debate. The typical aim of Indigenous writers is frequently to resist the imposition of Western systems of knowledge and instead reconstruct Indigenous epistemology. The Mohawk scholar Patricia Monture Angus observes: “What is common among many Native American writers is our desire to write our resistance. This desire might sometimes be described as ‘decolonization’” (31). The suggestion to “decolonize the mind”, in other words to gradually develop an Indigenous system of knowledge, which would allow for an alternative critical framework for research methodologies, is voiced most notably in the work of the Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (4). Other recent Indigenous voices, nevertheless, promote a synthesis of the two critical approaches. As the First Nations scholar Marie Battiste points out, this synthesis is not only a matter of choice but it is vital for the survival and future development of Indigenous thought: “By harmonizing Indigenous knowledge with Eurocentric knowledge, they [Indigenous peoples] are attempting to heal their people, restore their inherent dignity, and apply fundamental human rights to their communities” (209). I would like to suggest that combining the genres of life writing/personal writing with academic/theoretical writing is one of the ways that may “harmonize” the epistemological differences or, using a metaphor, build a bridge to cross the epistemological abyss. After all, Indigenous writers such as Beth Brant do become cultural mediators between academia and Indigenous women without access to educational resources and theoretical discourse.

## Conclusion: writing life and baking bread

The journey through Beth Brant’s multiple identities arrives at its conclusion in the final essay of *Writing As Witness*. Entitled “Writing Life,” it eventually takes an openly personal turn. In this essay Brant juxtaposes two simple activities – writing and baking bread. She narrates how she is supposed to write a story but the writing is not going well so she decides to take a break and make bread instead, bustling back and forth between the desk space and the oven. Passages describing the often painful process of intellectual creativity alternate with sections which in a recipe-like manner describe the addition of ingredients to make a loaf of bread. These two parts are then narrated against Brant’s autobiographical narrative that threads through the entire text: the latter consists of fragmented memories of her parents, her childhood, how she became a writer through a transcendental experience, how she made a trip back to her community, how she published her first book – seemingly simple recollections that go through her mind when both writing and cooking. Writing represents here a creative, intellectual, luxurious activity while baking bread stands for the everyday, the physical, and the routine. Brant



deliberately employs metaphors and allusions to confuse the boundary between the two, to switch from one activity to the other. For example, she uses the words “mixing” and “kneading” in reference to cooking but these terms also point to the writing process where mixing the genres and kneading the words are natural parts of the procedure. In another example she ponders: “I begin to knead – pushing it away with the heels of my hands, pulling it towards me – I make a rhythm” (106). This image of making a rhythm obviously makes a connection to the process of writing poetry but it is also a very sensual, erotic reference to the ritual of love-making, in which the physical intervenes again. So in this *mélange* of various human activities linked through similar allusions and references, Brant ultimately transgresses the split between the exalted and the everyday, the intellectual and the bodily. I propose that this strategy to blend, to mix, to knead, to make a rhythm is symptomatic of contemporary Indigenous women’s creative non-fiction and life writing. On the one hand, there is a desire to articulate a genre of its own in which the history of ethnic minority groups, colonization and gender are the decisive factors in defining it thematically but, alternatively, there is also a tendency to incorporate the best from *écriture féminine*, as it was conceived and developed by the French feminists, and from the Indigenous tradition of storytelling.

In conclusion, as far as her multiple identities presented in *Writing As Witness* are concerned, Brant significantly refuses to privilege one identity over the others. For example, it is not possible to speculate that for her, fighting racism is more important than fighting sexism or homophobia (in other words, she does not seem to have preferences within these intersections of gender, ethnicity/race, or sexuality), which is a debate that has been prevalent among many mainstream feminists. Rather, depending on the subject of her writing, Brant strategically shifts her focus to one of her identities to provide a subjective and credible account. Drawing on the analysis of Brant’s personalized essays, I would suggest that similar texts by Indigenous women writers, with their commitments to Indigenous, feminist (lesbian), and oral culture’s principles, foregrounding difference, diversity and plurality, help to map the textual space in an evolving, de-centred field of Canadian literature.

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