

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

2006

Book Review: Travelling Knowledges: Positioning the Immigrant Reader of Aboriginal Literatures in Canada

Rob Appleford
University of Alberta

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Appleford, Rob, "Book Review: Travelling Knowledges: Positioning the Immigrant Reader of Aboriginal Literatures in Canada" (2006). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 54.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/54>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

the non-Aboriginal literary critic to develop sensitive models for approaching this creative and critical work, both in the classroom and in academic research. The question becomes: how can a non-Aboriginal critic use her “outsider” status in an enabling way when teaching and studying this culturally-specific material? In *Travelling Knowledges: Positioning the Im/Migrant Reader of Aboriginal Literatures in Canada*, Renate Eigenbrod has attempted to use her position as an “im/migrant” German scholar of Canadian Aboriginal literatures as a tool to unpack the “boundary-crossing” aspects of these texts. Rather than mounting an apology for studying Canadian Aboriginal texts and cultures, Eigenbrod has produced an extraordinarily wide-ranging and energizing *apologia* for her critical practice. In the process, she offers astute commentary on Canadian Aboriginal texts that are overlooked or misapprehended by both Canadian and international scholars.

Eigenbrod argues that much Canadian Aboriginal writing displays what she calls a “nomadic subjectivity,” where stories, languages, traditions, and identities reflect “non-static, yet rooted or anchored, consciousness.” Using her own position as a German immigrant—one who has lived in Canada and taught Aboriginal literatures and Aboriginal students for over two decades—as a constant touchstone, Eigenbrod explores the nomadic themes in work by authors such as Thomas King (Cherokee-Greek), Tomson Highway (Cree), Ruby Slipperjack (Anishnabe/Ojibway), Lee Maracle (Stóh:lo), and Maurice Kenny (Mohawk). Eigenbrod uses her concept of nomadic subjectivity to investigate both the “literary creativity” and the “fluid perceptions of culture” in Canadian Aboriginal texts. I would say the author is largely successful in this twinned endeavor, though there are points where the analysis appears strained (for example, when it treats certain characters in the literature as “real people,” or conflates the intentions of Aboriginal authors like King and Slipperjack, who have very different relationships to “their own people”). But overall, Eigenbrod’s book provides an invaluable model

Travelling Knowledges: Positioning the Im/Migrant Reader of Aboriginal Literatures in Canada. By Renate Eigenbrod. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2005. xvi + 280 pp. Illustrations, endnotes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 paper.

Canadian Aboriginal writing has blossomed in the past two decades and made a major contribution to the cultural life of both Aboriginal peoples and the general public. Given this wealth, it becomes necessary for

for the non-Aboriginal literary critic who seeks to enter into a usefully self-conscious dialogue with both Aboriginal voices and lived experience in Aboriginal communities.

ROB APPLEFORD
Department of English and Film Studies
University of Alberta