

WRITERS AND STORYTELLERS: LEE MARACLE, ELIANE POTIGUARA AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF INDIGENOUS LITERATURES IN CANADA AND IN BRAZIL

ESCRITORAS E CONTADORAS DE ESTÓRIAS: LEE MARACLE, ELIANE POTIGUARA E A CONSOLIDAÇÃO DAS LITERATURAS INDÍGENAS NO CANADÁ E NO BRASIL

Rubelise da Cunha¹

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Abstract: This article proposes a reading of *Bobbi Lee, Indian rebel* (1975) and *I am woman* (1988), by Lee Maracle (Salish, Canada), and *Metade cara, metade máscara* (2004), by Eliane Potiguara (Potiguara, Brasil) from the perspective of literary genres as performances that construct knowledge (John Frow, 2005). Maracle's and Potiguara's books are representative of a Native Renaissance in the Americas, which signals the moment of development and consolidation of Indigenous Literature as a field of literary studies. These texts present autobiographical and testimonial characteristics as well as recover aspects from traditional Indigenous storytelling, which Maracle defines as oratory (2007). The authors' process of writing evinces a search for a literary aesthetics according to a Western tradition, at the same time that they recover and reaffirm Indigenous traditional ways of constructing knowledge.

Keywords: indigenous literature; storytelling; oratory; autobiographic writing

Resumo: Este artigo apresenta uma leitura das obras *Bobbi Lee, Indian rebel* (1975) e *I am woman*, de Lee Maracle (Salish, Canadá), e da obra *Metade cara, metade máscara* (2004), de Eliane Potiguara (Potiguara, Brasil) a partir da concepção do gênero literário como performance que constrói conhecimento (John Frow, 2005). As obras das autoras são representativas do que se denominou a “Renascença Indígena” nas Américas, ou seja, o momento de desenvolvimento e consolidação da Literatura Indígena como área dos estudos literários. Tais obras são marcadas pela recorrência de características autobiográficas e testemunhais, assim como a recuperação de aspectos das narrativas tradicionais

índigenas, advindas da oralidade, o que Maracle denomina de oratória (2007). Os processos empreendidos pelas autoras na escrita das obras evidencia a busca por uma estética literária dentro dos moldes ocidentais, ao mesmo tempo em que resgatam e reafirmam os modos tradicionais indígenas de construção do conhecimento.

Palavras-chave: literatura ameríndia; narração de estórias; oratória; escrita autobiográfica.

One of the great concerns for the inclusion of literary works written by Indigenous authors in a Western concept of literature regards literary genres. In her essay “Oratory on oratory,” Lee Maracle highlights the hierarchical aspect involved in genre theory by pointing to its compromise with colonialism and associates definitions of genre with the constitution of a colonizing canon in literature. However, she also stresses that today “the colonized are free to challenge this House of Lords” (2007, p. 56), and it is by the contribution of Indigenous writers and critics, and the teachings they provide from their specific nations and cultures that a dialogue with genre theory emerges, in which the exercise of classifying and constructing hierarchies is replaced by the experience of learning with the stories told.

In his book *Genre*, John Frow elaborates a concept that connects genre to performance. He explains that his concept of genre as a performative structure that shapes the world in the very process of putting it into speech (2005, p.18) is very close to what Michel Foucault calls discourse – “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (1989, p. 49), and it is a medium or system of representation that fosters the comprehension of cultural phenomena. Frow explores how genres actively generate and shape knowledge of the world, so that they become “a form of symbolic action: the generic organization of language, image, gestures, and sound makes things happen by actively shaping the way we understand the world” (2005, p. 2). If, according to Frow, genre is a performative structure, a category in motion which constructs knowledge, the ground is open for the development of a genre theory that emerges from Indigenous understandings of literature and storytelling. And it is exactly when Maracle questions the traditional classification process involved in the designation of genres that she develops a study of story and oratory in contrast to Western models, showing

how it is much more effective and profitable to see themselves through the story (2007, p. 55), and not through Western paradigms. Although it is fundamental to acknowledge that she refers specifically to Salish storytelling and oratory, she also contributes to a questioning of preconceived Western literary approaches to Indigenous literatures generally, pointing to the meaning and function of stories. Maracle's theorizing about storytelling takes into account the written texts, which become the rememberers of the story in the modern world (2007, p. 67), and she develops her argument through a perspective that acknowledges the story, the listener/reader and the process of transformation that results from this experience. Her focus on story as a genre also establishes a dialogue with the concept of genre as performance, or as language that acts and is transformative: "The point of hearing (and now reading) story is to study it in and of itself, to examine the context in which it is told, to understand the obstacles to being that it presents, and then to see ourselves through the story, that is, transform ourselves in accordance with our agreement with and understanding of the story" (MARACLE, 2007, p. 55).

J. Edward Chamberlin recognizes the importance of storytelling for a definition of culture. In his book *If this is your land, where are your stories?* (2003), he stresses the necessity of acknowledging storytelling as performance, a ceremony in which not only the words, but also the gestures and the elements used construct meaning. Storytelling and storytellers are part of Indigenous cultures as well as part of Western and many other cultures all over the world, and stories are exactly what approximate "Them" and "Us", as well as what set us apart. According to Chamberlin, it is also in the realm of reality *and* imagination, oral *and* written, that Aboriginal literature exists. He develops a theoretical analysis of storytelling and its importance for the definition of culture, and deconstructs the Western oppositions of science *versus* literature, theory *versus* fiction, oral *versus* written. Telling stories involves a collective construction of knowledge, and the written texts recover the oral performance of storytelling. For Indigenous peoples, stories are not only fiction in a Western sense, or an artistic mode. They are beyond our concept of literature, and involve the idea that the construction of knowledge for Indigenous peoples can only be achieved by the storytelling practice. Stories bring visions and creation. Hence, telling stories is a sacred and spiritual practice, which involves, in our Western terms, religious, ontological, and philosophical as well as literary concerns. For this reason, the passage from traditional storytelling

into literature inevitably involves a process of translation into another medium of communication.

Understanding genre as performance is also a possibility to understand literature as storytelling, and genres as different ways to construct knowledge, which will create different meanings for diverse cultures. Frow's and Chamberlin's ideas are an important background for the study of Indigenous literatures because both scholars focus on the function of literary performances rather than on parameters to describe and classify literary texts. Such an approach corroborates Maracle's opinion that the story, and not Western categories, should be the focus in the study of Indigenous literatures.

The second half of the twentieth century has witnessed the flourishing of Indigenous literature in the Americas. Lee Maracle's first book *Bobbi Lee, Indian rebel*, first published in 1975, is a very important mark for Indigenous literature in Canada. It was published in the years of great effervescence of Indigenous literary writing, which have also been called the Native Renaissance, as Penny Petrone points out in *Native literature in Canada: from the oral tradition to the present* (1990). Criticism has given much attention to this work, focusing on issues of authorship, women's and minority literature, and post coloniality. Although a reading of this work from the perspective of testimonial literature enriches the understanding of Maracle's work, such as the one developed by Laura J. Beard in "Giving voice: autobiographical/testimonial literature by First Nations Women of British Columbia" (2000), my objective is to approach Maracle's two first works, *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel* and *I am woman* (1988), as well as the book *Metade cara, metade máscara* (Half face, half mask), by the Brazilian Indigenous writer Eliane Potiguara, from the perspective that Maracle, Frow and Chamberlin invite us to read genre and literature. While Beard recognizes that in testimonials "the self is defined not in individual terms but in collective terms, as part of a collective struggle and a communal identity" (2000, p. 65), my aim is to acknowledge the autobiographical and testimonial characteristics that are present in these three books in what they inherit from traditional storytelling in the cultural background of the two women writers.

Lee Maracle was first recognized by her autobiography *Bobbi Lee, Indian rebel* (1975) and her book *I am woman* (1988). These publications are emblematic of how her writing integrates Western genres and storytelling structu-

rally and thematically, as well as of how her words engage in an act of political resistance. *Bobbi Lee, Indian rebel* is a first person narration of Bobbi Lee's life story – from turbulent childhood and adolescence, into her travelling to other parts of Canada and the United States, until her participation in the Red Power Movement, and her transformation into an agent of political resistance and an Indigenous writer. Although the book was first published in 1975, it is the second edition from 1990 that best explains her process of writing as well as the struggle to find ways of expressing her Indigenous voice – which not only means giving voice to Lee Maracle as a representative of her people, but also transforming the genre into a form that acknowledges Indigenous forms of expression and construction of knowledge. Besides the Foreword written by Jeannette Armstrong, Maracle adds three sections to this edition: Dedication, Prologue and Epilogue. Maracle begins the Prologue by saying that “There are two voices in the pages of this book, mine and Donald Barnett's. As-told-tos between whites and Natives rarely work, when they do, it's wonderful, when they don't it's a disaster for the Native. Don never intended it to be a disaster for me” (1990, p. 19). The idea for the book started in a class to learn how to tell other people's life history. As a collaborative work, Maracle explains that there were “disagreements over what to include and what to exclude, disagreements over wording, voice. In the end, the voice that reached the paper was Don's, the information alone was mine” (1990, p. 19). In “‘A life has only one author’: twice told Aboriginal life narratives,” Sophie McCall analyzes the two editions of *Bobbi Lee, Indian rebel*, showing how the prologue to the 1990 edition contests the editorial control maintained in the first edition by Don Barnett, the recorder of the interview from which the book was originated. According to McCall, Maracle implies that Barnett's role as editor was heavy-handed and unilateral, but at the same time her own contradictory self-positionings indicate that her understanding of her life story is also partial, changing over time in response to changes in historical and political contexts. Such an analysis reveals how the republication of a text can make the reader aware that various versions of a life story spring from the struggle for narrative control within a collaborative relationship. Hence, one of the great values of Maracle's autobiography is exactly that of showing the Native struggle for voice and representation, not only in Canadian society, but specifically in the publishing market.

The partnership between Maracle and Barnett in the writing of *Bobbi Lee* is part of Maracle's trajectory to get command of her voice, which will be completely expressed in her second book, *I am woman*. The Prologue to the second edition of *Bobbi Lee* shows how Maracle struggles to find a medium to express herself:

He did inspire me to get command of my voice. He believed I had great potential, but was quite raw. He also tried to groom me to 'lead' people to political struggle. But his idea of political struggle was riddled with arrogance, something I loathed, but knew I too was full of. I jumped ship before I got too caught up in his style of organization with its centralist leadership. I have not figured out what kind of organization we need to pull us out of the mess we are in, but I know the existing forms don't work. In leaving, I decided to seek out that 'lonely attic' in which writing, theory, story and life is imagined and put on paper. (1990, p. 20)

Maracle's anxiety about the difficulty to express herself in the existing forms leads her to her theoretical and literary journey into a written form that accomplishes the tradition of oratory and storytelling. The fact that *Bobbi Lee* is a product of a dialogue between an orator, teller – Lee, and an audience – Don and the readers, is a first exercise in Maracle's development of her concept of oratory in Indigenous writing. In her Foreword to the 1990 edition, Jeannette Armstrong stresses the oral roots of this text and how Maracle's voice represents a collective history: "This book spoken and then edited into written form, is reflective of the wonderful orality that the spoken version must have been delivered in. In the movement of the life story of Bobbi Lee, what unfolds is the story of many natives during those times" (1990, p. 15).

The partnership between Lee Maracle and Don Barnett in the writing of *Bobbi Lee* has also been observed in the work developed by anthropologists and Indigenous storytellers in the recovery of oral history. In her collaborative work with three female Elders between 1974 and the 1980s, Julie Cruikshank provides insights into the function of stories for the Yukon people. Her work is published in the coauthored book entitled *Life lived like a story* (1990) and in a subsequent book called *The social life of stories: narrative and knowledge in the Yukon Ter-*

ritory (1998). In this second book, she comments that one of the many things these women taught her is that “their narratives do far more than entertain. If one has optimistic stories about the past, they showed, one can draw on internal resources to survive and make sense of arbitrary forces that might otherwise seem overwhelming” (1998, p. xii). Cruikshank shows how the story constitutes much more than the words pronounced or the narrative told, since it has a practical and fundamental role in the lives of these peoples. When acknowledging the storytelling practice of Mrs. Sidney, one of the three Elders, she states that “when potential for conflict emerges among people with different perspectives, successful resolution often involves demonstrating how a story can reframe a divisive issue by providing a broader context for evaluating such issues” (1998, p. xv). Her ideas converge with the meaning that Maracle attributes to stories as being fundamental for the healing and survival of the people. Cruikshank also mentions the relationship established between the communities and the transcribed texts, and how the Yukon Elder storytellers point to writing as just one more way to tell their stories and to make them part of their social practice: “Written texts become points of reference narrators can allude to when they want to make socially significant statements to family members, to other members of their community, or to the larger world about the potential of stories to make us reevaluate situations we think we understand” (1998, p. xiv).

Cruikshank’s concept of written texts as points of references can be approximated to Maracle’s concept of books, or written texts, as rememberers of the story in the modern world (2007, p. 67). As an Indigenous intellectual and activist, Maracle recognizes the importance of expressing herself through writing, at the same time that her writing engages in the function of traditional storytelling. Her life story is meaningful to be told because it exemplifies the colonial conflict from the perspective of Indigenous women in Canada, in an attempt to provide a context to reevaluate colonial history in Canada, as well as points of reference to other members of the community or to the larger world. In her epilogue to the 1990 edition of *Bobbi Lee*, Maracle not only acknowledges the young Bobbi Lee from a distance in time, but also aligns herself with the struggle of her community in a collective way. She explains that the manuscript in her hand “found its way to an old box where it lay buried year after year, until my memories came back and I could be sure of who I really was” (1990, p. 199). Fifteen years later, Maracle

is critical of herself when she realizes “how unreliable a child’s memory is. I was a child when this book first hit the press, at least in the sense I was not an adult. Somewhere along the line, I had been bent the wrong way as a child and stayed bent in the wrong direction until the inability to walk woke me up” (1990, p. 200).

Maracle’s works are centered on the trickster Raven, a mythological figure that belongs to Indigenous cultures from the West Coast in Canada. In her preface to the new edition of the short story collection *Sojourner’s truth & other stories*, published in a single volume with the novel *Sundogs* in 1999, she states that in her internal stories, stories that deal with the internal world, Raven calls upon the listener/reader to see him/herself in this story and to respond to creation, to ‘being’ (p. 14). To be Raven, the catalyst of internal transformation, Maracle points out that the reader must have a clear picture of the external conditions of that world and his/her relationship to it. That is why her narratives are grounded in the real, and physical action becomes a primary aim before a change in the internal world, the world of ideas and theories, is achieved. Susie O’Brien points out that the meaning created by the contract established in the preface, through which each reader has the freedom to draw their own conclusions, does not emerge from an unequivocal discourse or by the sacred power of its words; rather, “it must be negotiated within the historical space in which the functions of reader, writer and text are produced” (1995, p. 89). This is also Cruikshank’s position regarding oral history, since she considers the cultural place of production is a key element for understanding the story. Hence, it is by conveying a sense that speech and action are continuous, an argument defended by Edward W. Said in *The world, the text, and the critic* (1983) when he discusses criticism and theory, that Maracle points to the importance of the reader to grasp the physical metaphor of political action embedded in the written text. In a sense, as Susie O’Brien states, Maracle’s literature is committed as a means of survival, and of being political in an active, rather than a theoretical sense (1995, p. 93).

Raven is the great architect of transformation in Salish storytelling and culture, and Maracle recovers traditional knowledge so that readers also become agents of transformation in Canadian society. The final words of the epilogue to *Bobbi Lee* reveal the revolutionary function of Maracle’s narrative. She recognizes that racism has de-humanized us all. It not only affects Indigenous people, but “keeps white people separated from each other. It keeps white people either

feeling sorry for us or using us as a scapegoat for whatever frustrations this society creates in them” (1990, p. 240). Maracle end her life story by allying herself with Canadians and humanity when she engages Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers in the fight against racism and sexism. She expects the reader to have the active role of the audience in a storytelling performance:

We, I, we, will take on the struggle for self-determination and in so doing, will lay the foundation, the brick that you can build on in undoing the mess we are all in. But so long as your home needs cleaning, don't come to mine, broom in hand. Don't wait for me to jump up, put my back to the plough, whenever racism shows itself. You need to get out there and object, all by yourself. (1990, p. 241)

Laura Beard mentions that the second edition of *Bobbi Lee: Indian rebel* “ends abruptly, with no closure to the original manuscript. Bobbi Lee’s life story is presented not as one that has achieved full significance but rather one that is still seeking significance and meaning. A Western desire for an ending, or at least the sense of an ending, is frustrated” (2000, p. 78). Maracle’s search for meaning in life is part of her search for a written performance that incorporates the characteristics of storytelling and oratory. As Michael Wood explains in his article “The last night of all”, “although all complete stories by definition have an ending, there are many ways of stopping before reaching completion, and there are many reasons for not wanting a story to end, whether we are writers or readers, tellers or listeners” (2007, 1395). Maracle’s avoidance of orthodox conclusions is a strategy to incorporate the notion that a story should not end, but rather create the necessity of repetition and continuation for the maintenance and survival of traditional knowledge.

The second edition of *Bobbi Lee* is emblematic of Maracle’s anxiety to find a medium to express herself and contribute to the internal transformation of Indigenous people in Canadian society, but it is in *I am woman* that she develops a hybrid genre that encompasses poetry, stories and essays to accomplish the function of traditional storytelling and oratory. In her preface to the second edition of *I am woman*, she states that this book represents her personal struggle with womanhood, culture, traditional spiritual beliefs and political sovereignty (1996,

p. vii), in a sense that it continues the narrative of a life story performed in *Bobbi Lee*, and reaffirms her commitment to a collective struggle and the transformation of the listener/reader when in contact with her writing:

I and other Native women ought to come by our perceptions of spirituality, culture womanhood and sovereignty from a place free of sexist and racist influence. My point of view is presented in poetry and stories, and couched not so carefully in essays. My original intention was to empower Native women to take to heart their own personal struggle for Native feminist being. (1996, p. vii)

Maracle defends the idea that her writing results from her knowledge of Indigenous storytelling when she mentions *I am woman* in her interview with Hartmut Lutz (1991). She affirms that she could not conceive writing about politics and sociology without story and poetry, because that is the way her culture and her people understand it. Hence, the blending of what we consider different genres from a Western point of view in *I am woman* becomes simply one discourse when viewed through the lens of Salish storytelling.

Bobbi Lee, Indian rebel and *I am woman* engage in the concept of oral history and oratory since their stories reframe the colonial conflict and provide a broader context for evaluating colonialism and Native resistance in Canada. The fact that Maracle aligns herself with the Mohawk warriors at Oka in the opening preface to the 1990 version of *Bobbi Lee* is very significant in demonstrating that her text participates in resistance to internal colonialism. The Oka crisis has become a symbol of First Nations sovereignty over land and community and has profoundly changed the relations between First Nations and Canada. The preface was written while she was at the Oka Peace Camp, on September 9, 1990, and the first paragraph shows the importance of this crisis as an outcome of something that has happened for 400 years: “The tension is thick, heavy with the reality that here on the eastern end of the country there have been 400 years – 400 years of colonial battering” (1990, p. 5). As McCall (2002) recognizes, the word “tension” also explains the conflict of voices from which Maracle’s writing emerges: the conflict between colonizers and colonized, between the editor and the writer, as well as the conflict between the first and the second editions.

In Maracle's hybrid genre, poetry has the important role of engaging the reader/listener in colonial resistance, so that the internal and private poetic experience prompts social transformation. In *I am woman*, Maracle challenges a concept of poetry as a subjective and intimate genre so that it engages in the practice of oratory. In the chapter entitled "My love", she discusses issues regarding women's freedom to love. In her poem "Ghosts", she challenges the reader to face the ghosts in his/her closet – the ghosts of jealousy, insecurity, rage, terror. In an ironic invitation to drink to the ghosts in the closet, Maracle urges the reader to face his/her own prejudices, which include the rejection of homosexual love. However, in her use of the pronoun "we", she considers the speaker as part of this community, so that a communal fight is achieved, as we observe in the last verses of the poem:

If we ever stop celebrating
the ghosts in our closet
we will be forced to face
the enemy
and really fight.

TOGETHER (1996, p. 35).

In *I am woman*, Maracle states that "[t]he dictates of patriarchy demand that beneath the Native male comes the Native female. The dictates of racism are that Native men are beneath white women and Native females are not fit to be referred to as women" (1996, p. 17-18). She mentions the specific situation of Indigenous women in Canadian society, showing that gender, and not only race, must be taken into consideration when we discuss colonization. She engages with other women in the world to fight against oppression. In one of the last chapters of *I am woman*, entitled "The Women's Movement", she stresses that "the road to freedom is paved with the intimate knowledge of the oppressed" (1996, p. 139), a knowledge she acquires when in contact not only with Indigenous women in Canada, but with women worldwide: "we are part of a global movement of women in the world, struggling for emancipation. Women worldwide will define the movement, and we are among them" (1996, p. 137). She condemns the white feminist movement as one that "sees the majority as the periphery and the

minority as the centre” (1996, p. 138), but recognizes the contribution of other women around the globe: “I did not come to this clearing alone. Hundreds walked alongside me – Black, Asian and Native women whose tide of knowledge was bestowed upon me are the key to every Can American’s emancipation” (1996, p. 139). Maracle finishes her book in a very optimistic way with the poem “Perseverance”, in which a dandelion resists the coldness of concrete and survives on the streets of Toronto. The astonishment of the speaker is the recognition that “There is a flower in Toronto” (1996, p. 140). The dandelion, which becomes a “dandy lion” in the last verses of the poem, is the metaphor of Native resistance in big cities in Canada, because “for this dandy lion, it takes but a seed,/ a little acid rain, a whole lot of fight and a/ Black desire to limp along and scraggle forward” (1996, p. 140). For Maracle, people are like flowers, and the dandelion “are plain but have a multiplicity about them that makes them valuable” (1996, p. 141). She defines herself as a warrior, “a sturdy little flower, fearing nothing, including death”, who sought writing as “a means to expunge myself of the misery I had worked so hard to collect” (1996, p. 142).

Eliane Potiguara is part of this global movement of women mentioned by Maracle, and her writing also performs the function of oratory since it aims at the transformation of Indigenous people in their fight against colonial oppression in Brazil. In “Lee Maracle e Potiguara: escritoras canadenses e brasileiras discutem suas construções identitárias a partir de posições descentradas”, Liane Schneider approximates the writings of Potiguara and Maracle, since both engage in political resistance against colonial oppression: “two women that faced the difficulties related to the physical and geographical displacement of Indigenous groups, who saw in literature a possibility to reevaluate their problems of ethnic identity and national belonging” (2007, p. 2)². She also mentions the hybrid aspect of *Bobbi Lee, I am woman* and *Metade cara, metade máscara*, whose genre is complex and difficult to classify according to traditional parameters in Western literature. Schneider’s comments reaffirm that both authors invite us to read their writing from a different perspective, in which genre feeds itself in the cultural knowledge of traditional storytelling.

Activism and writing are part of Potiguara’s trajectory in the defense of human and women’s rights in Brazil. She was nominated as one of the “Ten Women of the Year 1988” by the Council of Women of Brazil for the creation of

the first organization for Indigenous women in the country: GRUMIN (group for Indigenous women and education). Her first book *A terra é mãe do índio* (1989) was awarded by the Pen Club of England and translated into English. In *Metade cara, metade máscara* (2004), Potiguara combines poetry, storytelling and the recovery of her life story as representative of the history of Indigenous women in Brazil. As Graça Graúna explains in her Foreword to the book, Potiguara's objective is to spread and discuss the tradition of oral and written discourses through histories, stories, philosophy, rights in a sense that Indigenous literature is recognized as an important Brazilian way of thinking (2004, p. 18). Therefore, her writing becomes a performance engaged in the construction of knowledge that is culturally located and transformative both for Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers. Graúna considers Potiguara's work a form of critical writing, which she calls "*crítica-escritura*", since the author is committed to the construction of knowledge. Her writing incorporates a group of voices that are connected by the ancestral knowledge of Indigenous traditions, and reveals the close relation between myth and poetry, history and memory, place and nation, identity and alterity. Graúna also mentions that the first poem in Portuguese by an indigenous writer, entitled "Identidade indígena" (Indigenous identity), was written in Brazil in the 1970's, a historical moment which is relevant for the reaffirmation of Indigenous literature both in Brazil and in Canada.

In *Metade cara, metade máscara*, Potiguara rewrites events that happened in Brazil in the 18th century and their consequences for Indigenous peoples. Her rewriting of Brazilian history is intertwined with autobiographical events and poems she has written in the last decades as a response to "historical facts". In her hybrid discourse of history and fiction, Potiguara introduces the reader to two young characters that become the guides of the story she constructs: the lovers Jurupiranga and Cunhataí. As Schneider recognizes, the lovers' story is a frame for the stories that Potiguara presents in her book (2007, p. 3). Her accounts of the history of Indigenous oppression in Brazil are permeated by the narrative poems about the lovers, and each historical fact has consequences in their lives: the period of invasions causes their separation, and the period of national rebellion is connected to their feelings of pain and revolt. The changes that affect Indigenous women negatively after colonization are represented by Cunhataí's despair.

Potiguara's work signals a moment of recognition and study of Indigenous literature in Brazil. Such a moment is influenced by perspectives that acknowledge the importance of oral traditions for the formation of Brazilian literature. In his book *Meu destino é ser onça* (2009), Alberto Mussa recovers the myths of creation from the Tupinambá nation and states that "mythical narratives constitute the literary genre par excellence" (p. 71), therefore it is fundamental to dive into the mythology of the first inhabitants of Brazil so that we can reevaluate concepts of Brazilian literature and Brazilian identity. In Brazil, Indigenous literature are published in a Western format, at the same time that there is a great commitment to the preservation of oral cultures and traditions. Maria Inês de Almeida and Sônia Queiroz (2004) point to the insertion of oral narratives in the history of Brazilian literature since the XIX century, especially in the work developed by Sílvia Romero. Not only Indigenous oral literature, but written texts, as the ones Almeida and Queiroz call "books from the woods" (*livros da floresta*), are part of Brazilian literary history (2004, p. 193). More recently, as Almeida and Queiroz point out, the organization of a group of Indigenous writers in Brazil has certified the Indigenous participation in a concept of Brazilian literature. In *Desocidentada: experiência literária em terra indígena* (2009), Maria Inês de Almeida defines Indigenous literature through a concept that associates literature with something beyond what is conceived as writing in Western terms. This concept connects Indigenous writing to the land, which she calls "literaterra", a term formed by the words "literature" (*literatura*) and "land" (*terra*). Almeida stresses that the literature produced by Indigenous writers in Brazil is strictly related to their sense of who they are in their connection to the land: "The great difference between 'occidental' writing and the writing of Indians is that, for them, the body of writing, our body, and the body of the land, are integrated, in multiplied ways" (2009, p. 24). For her, a concept of literature that is originated in mythology performs the connection between the Earth and the divine, because all myths represent the experience of men on Earth, devising geographies (2009, p. 27).

In *Metade cara, metade máscara*, Potiguara demonstrates how the suffering of the people is the suffering of the land. In her account of the invasion of Indigenous territories and the migration of Indigenous people, she describes the consequences faced by her family and her ancestors. The story teller narrates the trajectory of the girl who started writing by the influence of her grandmother's

stories (2004, p. 26), which shows that Potiguara's mission as a writer is to maintain the storytelling tradition of her ancestors. This narrative is followed by the first poem about Cunhataí and Jurupiranga: "Ato de amor entre povos", which narrates the lovers' separation and was first published by Potiguara in 1982. The pain of separation permeates the poems in this first chapter, in which the marginal condition of Indigenous women is exposed. In the poem entitled "Brasil", the female speaker questions: "What can I do with my Indian face?/And my hair/ And my wrinkles/ And my history/ And my secrets?" (2004, p. 34). In the last stanzas, the belly of the Indigenous woman becomes the land, the Brazilian territory:

(...) Brazilian belly
Sacred womb
Brazilian people.

Womb that conceived
The Brazilian people
Today is alone...
The belly of the fecund mother
And the songs that were sung before
Today are war shouts
Against the filthy massacre. (2004, p. 35)

Although both authors mention the marginal position and the suffering of Indigenous women in their societies, Maracle and Potiguara finish their books *I am woman* and *Metade cara, metade máscara* with the feelings of perseverance and hope. In *Metade cara, metade máscara*, the change from despair to hope happens when Cunhataí listens to the voices of ancestors, who will guide her to recover and preserve her identity. A connection between the power of women and the strength of ancestral knowledge is established. The necessity of an organized movement of resistance is realized when the knowledge about the Potiguara nation is recovered, and it is by the example of First Nations in Canada that this possibility is envisioned:

The paths and answers for a new world are in the acquisition and recognition of the traditional knowledges of the *first nations* from this huge and

luminous blue asteroid against the internal and external enemy. The Indigenous Peoples of Canada, for example, have created for decades, as a form of resistance, a movement, an organization called *The First Nations*, as a way to show and reinforce that the first peoples in the Canadian territory were and are the Indigenous peoples from there (2004, p. 84).

It is Tupã, the Indigenous God, who shows Cunhataí and Jurupiranga the path to recover identity, which requires that they honor the land, culture and spirituality. Jurupiranga is the warrior who wants to persist in his fight against the oppressors, reencounter his people and rebuild their nation in peace and love. Tupã shows that Indigenous writers need to dive into native tradition in order to reconstruct their identity. In a dream, he shows Jurupiranga how Indigenous people will be integrated into Brazilian society, and reveals the important mission of Indigenous writers: “the Indigenous university full of young people, future anthropologists, scientists, historians, journalists, judges, tellers of their own history” (2004, p. 129). The union of Cunhataí and Jurupiranga in the last chapter of *Metade cara, metade máscara* signals their victory and the recovery of their identity, the divine, the spirit and love. Their mythical union represents eternal love and the preservation of Indigenous identity. Cunhataí is very hopeful in the future for a conscious Indigenous nation: “They [the Potiguaras] will give me the honor of the Name/ HOPE – my man!/ Of an endless homeland” (2004, p. 138).

The optimism of Potiguara’s hopeful perspective in the end of *Metade cara, metade máscara*, as well as Maracle’s metaphor of persistence in the figure of the dandelion that survives on the streets of Toronto in the end of *I am woman*, demonstrate how their writings engage in the recovery of Indigenous women’s power in society. In *Bobbi Lee: Indian rebel*, Maracle narrates her trajectory from childhood into adulthood and political agency, but the feeling that persists in her narrative is still of anger, whose function is to call people into rebellion and political agency so that this power is regained. Her epilogue to the second edition in 1990 shows that although this first book focuses on herself as a warrior who is in search of her power of expression, when she wrote the originals in 1975 her inside “was indigenous, but the outside was covered with a foreign code of conduct, its sensibility and its cold behavior” (1990, p. 200). Therefore, she recognizes the importance of the epilogue, since

it is intended to fill in the missing pieces that came alive in my memory through the long process of unraveling that began in 1975 – the year I realized I was too young to write *Volume Two* with any accuracy. Some of those memories are partially accounted for in *I Am Woman* the rest are inserted here on the final pages I will ever write about Bobbi. (1990, p. 201)

Bobbi Lee's feeling of revolt is also faced by Potiguara in her healing process, a trajectory that both writers face so that they can recover their traditions and integrate ancestral knowledge into their writing. Cunhataí's movement from despair into hope in Potiguara's poems, as well as Maracle's recovery of ancestral knowledge that is contained in oratory, point to the necessity of an internal spiritual rebirth. Potiguara believes that the change inside us only happens when we identify the internal enemy (sometimes the enemy is ourselves) and we reject it (2004, p. 57). This spiritual rebirth involves there conciliation with ancestral roots and the recovery of storytelling traditions. That is why both writers cannot write literature unless they integrate their traditional forms of construction of knowledge into literary genres, so that their hybrid texts are able to perform the function of traditional storytelling. Potiguara also analyzes her writing critically, and as Maracle realizes in her process of writing *Bobbi Lee* and *I am woman*, she recognizes that traditional Western categories cannot transmit their knowledge unless they are transformed into a performance in which the voice of Indigenous people can be heard: "(...) I mix prose and poetry. I mix truth and reaction. History and outburst. Life and indigenous voice, the fight for survival" (POTIGUARA, 2004, p. 18). In *Metade cara, metade máscara*, the critical discussions that follow the poems, such as the one about the poem "O segredo das mulheres" (The secret of women), exemplify the necessity of integrating traditional knowledge into poetic writing. "Stories, songs, children,/ Home traditions/The feeling of the land where they were born/The elders' stories" are the secret that "grandmothers and mothers hid in the bellies" (2004, p. 69), and they have transmitted it from one generation to the next. In her critical account, the narrator explains that Cunhataí's symbology shows her commitment to all Indigenous women in Brazil: "Her pain, her dissatisfaction, and consciousness as a woman is the same brought by women warriors of today, who are now organizing themselves" (2004, p. 69-70).

In her Foreword to *Metade cara, metade máscara*, Graúna states that in poetry or storytelling, Potiguara's view of Indigenous people in her works is the result of a combination of ancestral knowledges and modern times (2004, p. 20), which points to her integration of traditional and modern forms of discourse. This mixture of genres is observed in Maracle's *Bobbi Lee: Indian rebel and I am woman*. For them, literature is meaningful when it is a result of life experience, an aspect that is fundamental for oral history, which connects mythical narratives to the lives of the peoples. Besides, storytelling performance as a genre is a hybrid form which allows the coexistence of different forms of discourse. Therefore, her writings contribute to a study of literary genres from a perspective that acknowledges literature as a space for transgression and dialogue with pre-established categories, recovery of diverse forms of cultural expression and construction of knowledge.

Cruikshank's insight that narratives or stories "are inevitably locally grounded, highly particular, and culturally specific" (1998, p. xiii) establishes a dialogue with the function that Frow attributes to the literary genre, which is inevitably a result of the context in which it is produced. As intellectuals who are committed to the empowerment of Indigenous people in their societies, Maracle and Potiguara present in their writings characteristics from both the Western literary tradition as well as from Indigenous traditional storytelling. Almeida's concept of "literaterra", as well as Maracle's concept of written texts as "rememberers of the story in the modern world", point to a connection between literature and something beyond the written text, in a way that literature performs a function that has been attributed to oral history – that is, the connection with the land, which also implies a sacred connection with ancestral knowledge. In this sense, the two authors assume the pedagogical role attributed to storytellers, and their texts become performance, or a discourse that is action and promotes not only transformation in society and politics, but also the possibility of creating different forms of literary expression and construction of knowledge.

Notes

¹ Universidade Federal do Rio Grande (FURG). rubelisecunha@furg.br

² All quotations from original texts in Portuguese were translated by the author of this article.

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