

## THE CHALLENGES OF TEACHING NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE AS PART OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE COURSE

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### Abstract

This paper focuses on the challenges of including Native American literature in the course on nineteenth century American literature. Survey literature courses often feature canonical works and exclude minority or contrarian voices. My literature survey course includes the creation stories of four Native American tribes originating from different parts of the U.S., together with the works of contemporary Native American writers reflecting on the pre-colonisation and colonisation periods of American history. The process of teaching the course foregrounded the tensions between the dominant white settler mentality and the political and social marginality of Native Americans, making my students aware of the importance of multivalent analyses of literary and historical texts. Throughout the course, we discussed prevalent stereotypes about Native Americans in American literature. The experience of teaching this course leads me to the conclusion that it is important to discuss various marginalised voices in the survey courses on nineteenth century American literature. These texts reflect themes related to race, gender, religion, and ownership of land that go beyond literature to include social, political and historical issues, helping our students develop a better understanding of American culture.

**Key words:** Native American literature, survey course, nineteenth century American literature

## ИЗАЗОВИ У УКЉУЧИВАЊУ ИНДИЈАНСКЕ КЊИЖЕВНОСТИ У ПРЕГЛЕДНИ КУРС АМЕРИЧКЕ КЊИЖЕВНОСТИ ДЕВЕТНАЕСТОГ ВЕКА

### Апстракт

Чланак анализира изазове које представља укључивање књижевности америчких Индијанаца у курс о америчкој књижевности 19. века. Упоредо са индијан-

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ским причама о стварању света, студенти су читали дела савремених индијанских писаца која се баве периодима пре и након колонизације северне Америке. Чланак се такође бави стереотипима о Индијанцима, пре свега оним о племенитом дивљаку и раси која изумире, које налазимо у америчкој књижевности 19. века. Студенти су преиспитивали сопствено виђење стереотипа о Индијанцима кроз популарну културу и читање два романа о периоду колонизације: „Мала кућа у прерији“ и „Девојчица са острва духова“. На основу коментара студената наведених у чланку, може се закључити да је важно укључивати текстове писаца из маргинализованих група у прегледне курсеве о књижевности. Ти текстови омогућују шире разматрање тема о раси, полу, религији и праву на имовину које превазилазе оквире књижевности и укључују друштвене, политичке и историјске теме, што помаже студентима да боље разумеју америчку културу.

**Кључне речи:** Индијанска књижевност, прегледни курс, америчка књижевност деветнаестог века

### *INTRODUCTION*

In this article, I will discuss the challenges faced by professors teaching Native American literature as part of a survey course on nineteenth century American literature. As I hope to show, the problems related to survey courses are multifaceted. The most obvious among these problems is the issue of falling into the usual trap of teaching only canonical works which, until recently, included literary texts written exclusively by white male middle class writers and, consequently, excluded the works written by women and ethnic minorities. This was an especially poignant question in nineteenth century literature, when voices from the margin were barely visible in public discourse. Another problem is making sure the students grasp the historical and cultural backgrounds of the works discussed, despite the relatively short period of time apportioned to each work due to the need to present the period in a wider scope. A survey course which aims at enabling the development of students' critical perspective should highlight the tensions between political and social marginality, and individual perspective, and should give students a personalised view of history.

### *METHODOLOGY*

My methodology focused on redesigning the survey course on nineteenth century American literature through the inclusion of Native American, African American and female authors. Although the voices of all these writers are important for the period in question, as a rule, the survey literature courses covering this period feature the works of white, male authors (Irving, Cooper, Poe, Melville, Emerson, Whitman) who are included in the canon of nineteenth century American literature. The usual exception is made for Emily Dickinson, as the sole representative of female writing in these courses. However, as noted by George and Barba-

ra Perkins (1999), the renowned editors of anthologies of American literature, we should try to “increase our representation of early American diversity with descriptions of Native American life” (xx), women’s issues and the experiences of American slaves.

The discussion of the methodology of the inclusion of all suppressed voices in a survey course would be too long, so this article focuses on the inclusion of Native American literature, since it reflects the problems involved in designing a more diverse survey course. Another theme I want to address is the method of incorporation of the works belonging to the category of contemporary Young Adults literature dealing with the period of the settlement of the Midwest, which can help students to better understand the topics mentioned in the works of nineteenth century white and Native American authors.

I placed the dominant themes of nineteenth century literature (American identity, Manifest Destiny, ownership of land) in a comparative perspective, illuminating them with texts from varied cultural backgrounds. The consideration of Native American history and culture in the nineteenth century also has to be connected to the issues pertaining to race, religion, gender, and the settling of the frontier. Fitz (2013, p. 125) suggests that the importance of the study of Native American literature extends far beyond the merely literary to embrace questions of historical, social, and political significance as well.

I have found it useful to combine teaching the creation stories of four Native American tribes originating in different parts of the U.S. with the works of contemporary Native American writers, since it helped me reflect on the pre-colonisation and colonisation periods of American history. In the course, I foregrounded the tensions between the dominant white settler mentality and the political and social marginality of Native Americans, making my students aware of the importance of multivalent analyses of literary and historical texts. Native American creation stories offer students a perspective which is very different from the dominant narrative of American colonisation, particularly in relation to the issue of land and its ownership. We examined the prevalent stereotypes about Native Americans in the American literature of the time. Juxtaposing these texts to Native American Creation stories opened up discussions on religion, the influence of Christianity and the treatment of women in Christian and Native American cultures.

### *THE DISCUSSION ON NATIVE AMERICAN CREATION STORIES*

#### *The Historical Background of Native American Creation Stories*

Bruce Michelson and Marjorie Pryse argue (1998, p. 72) that Native American creation stories may seem misplaced in a nineteenth century literature course, since versions of these stories date back to the nineteenth

and early twentieth century. However, including them in a nineteenth century literature course is pedagogically appropriate since the written narratives are transcriptions or translations of oral stories whose origin is much older than their written versions, and the worldview they present is markedly different from the worldview the colonisers brought with them.

Thus, the first issues that have to be addressed are the transition from the oral to the written medium, and the translation of Native American stories into English. The majority of Native Americans in the nineteenth century were illiterate, and their cultures were oral. Many of the stories are directly connected to the rituals they accompany, and they are revealed only to the initiated. "Informants rarely tell their stories to outsiders in the same way they would narrate them in a tribal gathering," which makes the versions of the stories handed down to transcribers problematic (Perkins & Perkins, 1999, p. 523) Even if the stories were written down by Native Americans, those who were literate were so due to the education they received in missionary schools, which presupposes the influence of Anglophone culture and Christianity on their writing. On the other hand, the first to transcribe stories were often missionaries who went to Native American territories in order to bring Christianity to Native Americans. In the process, they learned the rudiments of their language and tried to put down their stories.

However, instead of perceiving these stories "as obsolete and archaeological artefacts" (Michelson & Pryse, 1998, p. 71), my students and I became engaged in the debate on the transfer of knowledge and the influence of Christianity on Native Americans, connecting these issues to the present struggle of Native Americans in defining themselves in the dominant, Christian white culture. Therefore, my suggestion is to read Native American creation stories in a wider context instead of in a historical vacuum. This can be accomplished by using materials with different historical and cultural backgrounds, from elements of the pre-colonisation Native American tradition, and the nineteenth century American culture at the time of their recording, to elements of the present day European, Anglo-American and Native American contexts. As Michelson and Pryse argue, putting Native American creation stories side by side with European narratives of colonisation "allows students to view their own reading as encounters of cultures as well as historical persons." (1998, p. 71) For that reason, I gave my students texts from the period of the settling of the American Eastern coast, and we analysed the portrayal of Native Americans in them. We particularly focused on the works of John Smith and his romantic story about the Native American woman, Pocahontas, who allegedly saved him from death. Here we see the two prevalent trends in the representation of Native Americans – they are either represented as noble savages or as barbarians who were a threat to the European settling of North America. Smith's rendition of Pocahontas brought us to the Disney

version of the story, which many of my students are familiar with, and we analysed the way the stereotypical rendition of Native Americans stayed the same through the centuries.

While examining the students' perceptions of Native Americans, it came to light that most of them have been largely influenced by the images of Native Americans in the popular media. A lot of them grew up watching old western movies or reading comics, which means that they entertained the stereotypical images of Native Americans with headdresses, riding horses and dying more or less nobly while fighting American settlers. The stereotypes my students mentioned coincide with the centuries old portrayal of Native Americans in American culture, and the origins of these stereotypes certainly go back to the period of colonisation. Euro-Americans tended to view Native Americans through binary oppositions (either noble or savage) from their first encounters. Due to their prominent place in nineteenth century literature, and due to their later influence on American popular culture, I discussed these stereotypes with my students before I moved on to the analysis of the works that were part of my course.

#### *The Stereotypes of the Vanishing Indian and the Noble Savage*

In his book *The Inconvenient Indian*, Thomas King examines numerous examples from American literature, film and comics, and gives evidence that all Native American characters can be placed into three categories: the bloodthirsty savage, the noble savage, and the dying savage. As King explains:

The bloodthirsty savage was the most common. This was the familiar character who rode around wagon trains, burned settlers' cabins to the ground, bashed babies against trees, and trapped cowboys and soldiers in box canyons. The second type was the noble savage, an Indian who assisted Whites in their struggles with bloodthirsty Indians, spoke fluent English, and understood the basic precepts of supply-side capitalism. The dying Indian, on the other hand, was just that. Dying. Not from a wound. Not from any disease. This was the Indian who was simply worn out, who was well past his "best before" date, who had been pulled under by the rip tide of western expansion, drowned, and thrown up on the beach to rot. (King, 2012, p. 36-7)

Kathryn Fort explains that the concept of the vanishing (or dying) Indian "refers to a literary, historical, and cultural understanding of the clash between 'civilized' colonizers and 'savage' Indians" (2013, p. 309). It is related to the deaths of individual Native Americans, as well as the deaths of whole tribes, and the eventual assimilation of Native Americans into the white American society. In the nineteenth century American literature, the image of the vanishing Indian became ubiquitous. However, it must be pointed out that the conviction that Native Americans are inferior to the whites is the origin of the tropes of the vanishing Indian and the

noble savage. As one of the characters in Cooper's novel *The Deerslayer* comments: "God made whites at the top, blacks in the middle to be tolerated and made use of and placed Indians at the bottom of the hierarchy as only half human" (2018, p. 31). Similarly, Longfellow's poem *Hiawatha* features Indians who peacefully disappear, recognising the inevitability of the white man's progress.

The trope of the vanishing Indian encompasses the idea that Native Americans would eventually disappear due to diseases, famine and war, or that they would assimilate and melt into the dominant society after they had been 'civilised'. The trope of the noble Native American was created as another justification of this idea. He is noble because he recognises that the whites are superior to other races, and is willing to help them in their endeavours. That is why we often find the character of the noble savage as the sidekick of the white settler. The best example are certainly Cooper's hero Natty Bumppo and his Native American sidekick Chingachgook. Through the process of male bonding with the white male heroes, Native American characters have been co-opted into the dominant narrative of Manifest Destiny and the suppression of people who presented an obstacle to it.

*USING THE WORKS OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN AUTHORS  
AS PARALLELS TO THE WORKS OF NINETEENTH CENTURY  
WRITERS*

I invited my students to examine their perceptions of Native Americans and their portrayal in popular culture by reading two works which centre on the period of colonisation: Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie*, and Louise Erdrich's *The Birchbark House*. While both use the persona of a seven-year-old girl to depict the settling of the Midwest in the 1870s and 1880s, their approaches to racial and gendered agency in American history, and the tropes of the noble savage and the vanishing Indian, are diametrically opposite. I will use my students' written responses to these texts to illustrate how their perspective on this period and the protagonists changed after reading these works.

*Little House on the Prairie*

The book was published in 1930, and describes incidents from Laura Ingalls Wilder's childhood, focusing on the period between 1869 and 1871, when her family left their home in Wisconsin to settle on the territory of the Native American tribe Osage in Kansas. It is one of the most popular works of Young Adult literature (YAL) in the U.S. The TV show made after the series added to the popularity of the books. Discuss-

ing works of YA literature<sup>1</sup> alongside the classics of the nineteenth century proved to be equally rewarding and challenging. Katie Rybakova and Rikki Roccanti advocate for “using YAL as a scaffold for canonical literature” (2016, p. 32). In my experience, their claims that “adolescents can more easily relate to such works and that they provide easier access for struggling readers,” (2016, p. 32) proved to be true. My students connected with the works of Ingalls and Erdrich more readily, since they were able to identify with the child narrators and their coming of age stories. Therefore, it can be helpful to teach canonical texts alongside YA literature with similar themes.

Laura Ingalls Wilder’s culturally insensitive and racist sentiments reflect the general outlook on Native Americans characteristic of the period in which she lived and wrote her novels. For example, from the beginning, Laura’s parents explain to her and her sister that they are in Indian country, but that the Indians will not be there long and that the land would be open to settlers. As Pa says: “When white settlers come into a country, the Indians have to move on. [...] White people are going to settle this country, and we get the best land because we get here first and take our pick” (1971, p. 236-7). His explanation reflects the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, and he presents the settlers as instrumental in this plan. When Laura asks him whether the Indians would be upset if they were made to leave, Pa refuses to answer. As Kaye contends:

The narrative leads the reader to feel that the Ingalls are in the right. However, legally and by right of occupancy it is the Osages who are the owners of the land and the settlers who are the unwelcome and threatening intruders. (2000, p. 133)

The first trope we encounter in the novel is that of the Native American as a barbarian. On numerous occasions in the book, Laura describes Indians as “naked, wild men, fierce looking with snake like eyes” (1971, p. 134). Laura’s mother Caroline and the family’s neighbours hate Indians, and claim that the only good Indian is a dead Indian. There is a rumour that Native Americans will attack the settlers, until a warrior called Soldat du Chéne appears and orders the Osage not to kill the white people, but to leave instead. Pa calls him the ‘one good Indian’, confirming the stereotype of the noble savage.

When I provided the students with the historical background for this episode, they learned that Congress broke its treaty with the Osage in 1870, ordering them to move out of Kansas. As Kaye points out, the Osage did not actually plan to kill the settlers, no other tribes were help-

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<sup>1</sup> Young adult literature is defined by several characteristics: the protagonist is a teenager, the plot does not end in a ‘storybook’ happy ending, and the content is typically a coming-of-age story (Cole, 2008, p. 49).

ing them do that, and no heroic and peaceful Soldat du Chéne existed (2000, p. 135). The novel ends with the procession of the Osage leaving their homeland, solidifying the myth of the vanishing Indian.

The students' comments on the characters and the plot of the novel reveal that they observed its duplicity in the treatment of Native Americans. They described the Ingalls as people reaching for the American Dream, but commented that the fulfilment of the Dream came at the expense of the Indians, since the settlers were used by the government to push the Indians out of their territories. They also noted the settlers' sense of entitlement to the land which was not theirs, and the racism inherent in the settlers' comments about Native Americans. Some stated that the author is fair towards Indians because, although they were presented as savages, they are also portrayed as people who love their land. Interestingly, some students wrote that their initial perception of Indians coincided with that of the white settlers. Several described them as "Tall and red people". One student wrote: "They wear skunk skins, have naked chest and are barefoot, communicate with animal noises and smell bad". By the end of our analysis of the novel, the students remarked on the difference between the notion of the American Dream and the reality of the settling of the Midwest. Many were surprised by the harsh reality of the settlers' life, since they could often barely sustain themselves, and by the struggle of Native Americans to find their place in the West. One student remarked that the novel "walks the thin line between presenting the family as wholesome and some deeper issues like racism". They also noticed that the Indians in the novel are praised only when they leave their land so that the settlers can take it.

#### *Native American Creation Stories*

Native American creation stories represent a good way for students to gain insight into Native American tradition, because they "posit a general cultural outlook and offer perspectives on what life is and how to understand it" (Baym, 2003, p. 16). Before launching into a discussion about Native American stories, I emphasised to my students that one should not generalise about Native Americans. This can be achieved by taking materials from different tribes into consideration. I propose reading Native American stories intertextually, and creating parallels with other creation stories with which students are familiar, particularly the Bible.

We started with the Iroquois creation story. It depicts the Sky woman, who conceives independently and then descends into the lower world. After that, the Sky woman dies. The twins create the world, the stars, the sky and the planets out of parts of her body. Although they are rivals, they create equally. In comparison with the western worldview, we do not find the binary oppositions of good and evil or the concept of sin and punishment in the Iroquois story. The nether world is not described as hell, and its creatures are not demons meant to torture unfortunate souls.



They are helpful and participate in the creation in their own way. In comparison with the Bible, the Sky Woman's Immaculate Conception does not need to be heralded by an angel in order for the blame to be taken away from women, and it is not connected to God. Of special note is the importance of women in Iroquois life. Baym (2003) notes that:

Women owned the property and took responsibility for major decisions of social life. [...] The principal male figure in an Iroquois child's life was not the father but the mother's brother, and the image of mother-dominated families is established strongly in the creation legend. (Baym, 2003, p. 18)

There is also no distinction between the world and the Creator. Instead of one principal creator (God), there are many creators who can be placed in different categories (Sky woman, twins, animals etc.). We find such pantheistic approaches to creation in all Native American stories. Unlike the Christian God, who creates alone in six days, creation takes a longer time in the Iroquois story, and co-creators are indispensable in the process. Not only is the female body essential for creation but women are also created simultaneously as men. This is in stark opposition to the Biblical story about Adam and Eve.

In comparison with the Iroquois story, the Pima Creation story is about "the emergence of the world" (Michelson & Pryse, 1998, p. 72). The beginning of the Pima story corresponds to Genesis – the spirit floats over water in darkness, which prompts the students to ponder on the transcription and translation of Native American stories into English. The superimposition of the Christian master narrative on Native American materials is also evident in another part of the story, which deals with the flood. However, at some points, the Pima story diverges significantly from the Christian story. Unlike the infallible Christian God, the Pima deity, Juhwertamahkai, makes mistakes in his attempts to create the world and human beings. In Genesis, God declares Adam in charge of all creatures, thus giving him complete dominion over the world. In the Pima story, various medicine men and animals create independently, or they join efforts in creation. What is most significant is that they always show respect towards nature and its creatures. Nobody acts as a single ruler of the world.

The story of the flood describes the flood in terms of natural events, unlike the Bible, which blames sinful human behaviour for the disaster and presents the flood as the act of a displeased God. The flood occurs as the result of a misbalance created by a man that the Buzzard made, who sleeps with many women and has many children whom he abandons. When he starts courting the daughter of the South Doctor, she turns him into a woman who gives birth to a baby, and she turns into a man. This gender shift is seen as a way to teach the young man about the plight of women and his mistreatment of them. During the flood, the creators and the people escape through the holes in the earth to other, new

worlds they created, which may be an allusion to the territories of various tribes. But, sickness and conflict also escape through the holes, so the story can be interpreted as a way to explain both birth and death, and the struggle to create order out of chaos.

Like the Pima story, the Sioux creation story is about the ‘emergence of the world’, and features the Creating power, who is not pleased with the world because people are not acting as humans. He decides to make a new world – the third one, since he destroyed the previous ones. He starts by lighting his sacred pipe and singing four songs, which bring rain and life to earth. Akin to God in Genesis, he also floats above the water. However, this story also features the concept of co-creators. He sends different animals (a loon, an otter, a beaver, and a turtle) from his sacred pipe bag to fetch earth from water, and finally the turtle succeeds. With this lump of mud, the creator makes an island, singing ritual songs all the while. He takes all sort of animals, plants and birds out of his bag, and creates the shapes of men and women out of different coloured soil. This makes the origin of races immediately obvious, which is not the case with the Bible. He also creates a rainbow as a sign that there will be no more floods if the people live in peace with each other, and with all beings.

The Anishinabe creation story is comparable to the Sioux creation story. Kitchi Manitou unleashes the flood, and the trickster figure Nanaboozho survives. Similar to the creator in the Sioux story, he has animals (a loon, a helldiver, a mink, and a turtle) help him by diving into the water to retrieve a lump of soil. Nobody manages but the muskrat, although he is the smallest. The muskrat dies of his efforts, and Nanaboozho and all the animals mourn his sacrifice. The turtle offers its back so that it can bear the weight of the Earth. Thus, the first island was created, and all life from it. We see that for the Anishinabe, as in other Native American tribal religions, “man and the rest of creation are cooperative and respectful of the task set for them by the Great Spirit” (Deloria, 2003, p. 81). This task “is to determine the proper relationship that the people of the tribe must have with other living things and to develop the self-discipline within the tribal community so that man acts harmoniously with other creatures” (Deloria, 2003, p. 87). By comparison, “in the Christian religion both are doomed from shortly after the creation event until the end of the world” (Deloria, 2003, p. 81).

Native American creation stories teach us how people lived, and which aspects of their existence were especially significant for them. We likewise see the landscape they occupied, from the desert land of the Pima to the Great Lakes of the Anishinabe. I turned the attention of my students to these details, and they drew parallels among the stories and noted the differences which reflect the tribes’ culture and traditions. As Vine Deloria observes:

Indian tribal religions and Christianity differ considerably on numerous theological points, but a very major distinction that can be made between the two types of thinking concerns the idea of creation. Christianity has traditionally appeared to place its major emphasis on creation as a specific event while the Indian tribal religions could be said to consider creation as an ecosystem present in a definable place. (Deloria, 2003, p. 77)

We should also not forget that these were oral stories with many versions, firmly situated in the rituals of the tribes which told them. In order to better illustrate this to my students, I introduced them to Louise Erdrich's novel *The Birchbark House*, which utilises the Anishinabe creation myth.

#### *The Birchbark House*

Erdrich wrote *The Birchbark House* series as a counterpoint for *Little House on the Prairie*, which is another reason why I chose to discuss this work, so as to enable the students to draw parallels between them. Similar to the seven-year-old narrator in *Little House on the Prairie*, *The Birchbark House* is narrated by a seven-year-old, Omakayas, an Anishinabe girl who lives with her family on an island in Lake Superior. The novel describes an important historical period for the Anishinabe, as they are struggling with the white settlers' invasion, as well as a small pox epidemic. The plot is structured around the seasons – it starts in the summer of 1847, and ends in the summer of the following year. Omakayas and her family move to their birchbark house on the shores of the lake, and the readers get acquainted with the everyday activities of the Anishinabe. It soon becomes obvious how connected the Anishinabe are to nature, and how wholly dependent on it they are for everything, from materials for houses to food, clothes and heating.

Women, from the female hunter Tallow, who keeps the family alive during the period of hunger and the small pox epidemic, to Omakayas' grandmother Nokomis, play strong roles in the novel. As a healer, Nokomis teaches the children the songs and stories of their people. She tells them the story of creation, so that the children can learn that even the smallest person or animal, like the muskrat, counts and that they all have a role in creation. On a number of other occasions in the novel, the characters communicate with animals and the animals, in turn, help them survive. This presents a different outlook to the one present in Anglophone literature, where nature is seen as the dominion of men, to be conquered and controlled. My students noticed this difference and commented upon it in their essays about the novel. One wrote: "I did not know how important was the bond with nature for Anishinabe. They only took from nature when they really needed something and always gave thanks". Another stated that she "was surprised at how relevant women were for An-

ishinabe culture and how strong were the bonds within a family”. Another said: “The fresh take on animistic beliefs of the Native Americans is what deeply touched me: the strength of their link with nature is such that it dominates everything from their daily routines to their worldview. Their respect for animals and even trees they used for making house is extraordinary”.

Another important theme of the novel is hybrid identity. Omakayas’ father Deydey is half white, as well as Tallow, but they identify themselves as Anishinabe. Their hybrid identity does give them an advantage when dealing with the whites, and is the reason behind their literacy and knowledge of English. Erdrich eschews portraying all white people as negative characters and, instead, shows how the occupation of Anishinabe land, coupled with the diseases the white settlers brought with them, destroyed the tribal way of life. A large number of the Anishinabe in the novel die of small pox. Omakayas learns that the reason why she did not catch the disease was because she was the only one who survived the previous epidemic on Spirit Island, which had wiped out her whole tribe. She was adopted by her present family. At the end of the novel, she ponders who she is: “She was the girl from the Spirit Island. She lived in a birchbark house. This was the first day of the journey on which she would find out the truth of her future, who she was” (Erdrich, 2000, p. 222).

The novel, thus:

stands in stark contrast to most traditional adventure stories for children as the action is within, rather than without – or acting on the world. Much of the action is internal and reflective, as Omakayas matures and the prominent themes are of transformation, individual identity and facing fear. (Elser, 2019)

In addition, the classic theme of human beings vs. nature is different from the one present in Anglophone literature. Instead of acting against nature and trying to tame it, the Anishinabe live in unison with it. The comparison with *Little House on the Prairie*, and the parallels between Native American creation stories and the Bible become most useful here. While in Western culture, emphasis is on power over nature, and women and ethnic groups which are seen as different from the dominant white group, the focus in Native American cultures is on the equality and participation of all living beings, as already mentioned in a previous section of the paper. Erdrich depicts her characters as unique individuals, and they are so vivid in their triumphs and tribulations that they could not be further away from the tropes of the noble savage and the vanishing Indian. That is precisely the point behind the incorporation of Erdrich’s novel in the course. The students can see how Native American stories stay alive and evolve through numerous retellings, from oral stories and nineteenth century renditions, to a twenty-first century novel by a contemporary Native American female writer.

### CONCLUSION

As I hope I have shown, in order to successfully integrate texts from Native American cultures into the survey course on nineteenth century American literature, it is crucial to prepare students for the analysis of these materials by giving them historical and cultural contexts in which to place them. Students should be given a chance to recognise that they have been exposed to the stereotypes about Native Americans in popular culture, particularly film and comics, as well as the stereotypes in nineteenth century texts written by white authors, which are also part of the course. Identifying these stereotypes and discussing their origin helps students to understand their continuous influence on American culture. Contemporary novels, especially those belonging to the category of Young Adult Literature with which students can identify more readily, can be a way to approach Native American creation stories more easily. They can also help the students situate Native Americans in a specific period, and examine the different worldviews that shaped historical events. Providing the students with the perspectives of both the dominant white group and Native American tribes on the same period is also constructive and enriches the analyses of the course materials. As one of my students wrote at the end of the course: “After the reading of the stories their [Native American] traditions are not far away stories but the reality of these people who are now struggling to keep their people alive”.

My experience leads me to conclude that it is important to discuss not only Native American but also African American and other marginalised voices in our survey courses on nineteenth century American literature, instead of waiting to introduce them in courses on contemporary American literature and culture. These texts reflect themes related to race, gender, religion, and ownership of land that go beyond literature to include social, political and historical issues, helping our students develop a better understanding of American culture.

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## ИЗАЗОВИ У УКЉУЧИВАЊУ ИНДИЈАНСКЕ КЊИЖЕВНОСТИ У ПРЕГЛЕДНИ КУРС АМЕРИЧКЕ КЊИЖЕВНОСТИ ДЕВЕТНАЕСТОГ ВЕКА

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### Резиме

Чланак се бави укључивањем књижевности Индијанаца у прегледни курс о америчкој књижевности деветнаестог века. Будући да је методологија укључивања потиснутих гласова у прегледни курс превише комплексна, у овом чланку сам се ограничила на дискусију о проблемима у одабиру дела америчких Индијанаца и изазовима са којима сам се суочила током предавања о њима. Циљ ми је био да студенте упознам са важношћу мултивалентне анализе књижевних и историјских текстова, која за полазиште има различите перспективе – индијанске перспективе, и перспективу беле заједнице. Проучавали смо приче о стварању света четири индијанска племена, као и дела савремених америчких аутора који се баве периодом колонизације северноамеричког континента. Такође смо дискутовали дијаметрално супротне описе Индијанаца у два савремена књижевна дела која се баве колонизацијом. У чланку представљам и позитивне аспекте коришћења књижевности за младе, која може помоћи студентима да се поистовете са делима која су окосница прегледног курса америчке књижевности деветнаестог века. Сматрам да је у сваки прегледни курс из америчке књижевности важно укључити дела која се на различите начине баве категоријама расе, пола и класе, и која помажу нашим студентима да боље разумеју друштвене, политичке и историјске оквире анализе америчке културе.