

*Maria Campbell: Essays on Her Works*. Jolene Armstrong (Ed) Toronto, ON: Guernica Editions, 2012. 192 pp. \$20 Canada/US. ISBN: 9781550716481

Like many others, I was introduced to Canadian Métis author Maria Campbell through her debut 1973 autobiography *Half-breed*. Over the past forty years *Half-breed* has become a fundamental racial, cultural, and feminist literary reference in many North American classrooms. Since writing *Half-breed*, Campbell has authored six additional books, been a radio broadcaster, filmmaker, playwright, Elder, Assistant Professor, and outspoken advocate for Métis and women's rights. She has also been awarded four honorary doctorate degrees and is the recipient of numerous prestigious awards including the 2006 Distinguished Canadian Award. Hence, *Maria Campbell: Essays on Her Works* edited by Jolene Armstrong (2012) is a collection of essays from teachers, writers, and scholars which aims to explore and honor Campbell's extensive body of work spanning print, film, and stage.

This collection of essays begins with an introduction from editor Jolene Armstrong which provides a short synopsis of each of the essays included in the book, as well as a brief discussion of how she, and many others, have been inspired and impacted by Campbell's works. In this introduction Armstrong, an Associate Professor in English at Athabasca University, states that Campbell's book *Half-breed* is more than an autobiography — it also provides an insightful counter-narrative of Métis history and identity in Canada that had been previously recorded by non-Métis people. Following Armstrong's brief introduction, the essays in this collection begin with "One Small Medicine: An Interview with Maria Campbell" a transcribed interview from 2003 between Susan Gingell and Maria Campbell focusing on Campbell's 1995 book *Stories of the Road Allowance People*. This interview delves into Maria Campbell's role as a storyteller and the intricacies she identifies of translating and publishing oral Métis narratives.

The meaning of words, how they are interpreted, and who owns the stories developed from those words are central focuses of the remaining six essays. Kerstin Knopf's essay "Joseph you know him he don trus dah Anglais – Or: English as Postcolonial Language in Canadian Indigenous Films" explores anti-colonial strategies for accurately portraying Aboriginal language and culture in films using examples from the film version of Campbell's *Stories of the Road Allowance People*. Inspired by re-telling her father's oral stories to her children, Campbell wanted to translate and publish these stories using the dialect and rhythm familiar to many Métis Elders. She decided to re-tell these traditional oral stories using a narrative Métis dialect, not grammatically correct English, in both the book and film versions. Knopf outlines that though using traditional Aboriginal dialects in book and film may limit the potential audience for such works, it helps the stories maintain their original cultural knowledge and context.

Dylan Miner and Melissa Lam both explore Campbell's usage of the word half-

breed. Miner's essay "Halfbreed Theory: Maria Campbell's Storytelling as Indigenous Knowledge and *Une Petite Michin*" views Campbell's work from a Bakhtinian dialogical framework. Miner also introduces readers to Halfbreed Theory which acknowledges Métis self-identification as mixed-ancestry people with collective and communal histories that are not the same as Aboriginal or settler histories, though these histories may intersect with and be influenced by each other. Melissa Lam's essay "Blunt Constructions: Métis Literature in Canada" explores Campbell's revolutionary use of the word half-breed as the title of her debut book as a way to challenge the word's common derogatory meaning and proudly reflect the unique Métis place between Aboriginal and settler identities. Lam also uses Campbell's autobiographical narrative *Half-breed* to explore how women's autobiographies can be used as legitimate counter-narratives to repressive historical accounts. Campbell's autobiography re-evaluates historical Métis issues such as land ownership, racial stereotyping, and Métis self-identity issues of not being distinctively Aboriginal or a settler, but rather a unique mixture of the two groups.

The theatrical play *Jessica* is another profound work of Campbell's that explores Métis self-identity, how stories are retold, and who owns these stories. The collaborative nature of this play's development provides insight into the complex relations of power and authorship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal collaborators. Michael Lahey, Helen Hoy, and Laura J. Murray's essays in this collection focus on the collaborative processes between Campbell and non-Aboriginal playwright Linda Griffiths in the 1980s to create *Jessica*, loosely based on *Half-breed*. Lahey's essay "What's Been Missing: Fragile Resolutions in Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell's Play *Jessica*" explores the play's creation, while Hoy and Murray concentrate on *The Book of Jessica*, a subsequent book by Campbell and Griffiths detailing the issues and conflicts that developed as they created *Jessica* together.

Lahey interprets the play as a multifaceted narrative that portrays how the non-Aboriginal influences of the modern world impact Jessica's struggles to reconnect with her Métis heritage after years of abuse, addiction, family separation, oppression, prostitution, and racism. Issues that obviously derived from Campbell's own experiences in *Half-breed*. Hoy's complicated essay "When You Admit You're a Thief: Maria Campbell and Linda Griffiths' *The Book of Jessica*" explores important issues of authorship and textual violence surrounding Aboriginal texts based on Campbell and Griffiths' collaboration and ensuing conflicts over *Jessica*. Murray's essay "Economies of Experience in *The Book of Jessica*" continues exploring the collaboration and conflict between Campbell and Griffiths, but also includes director Paul Thompson's involvement in creating *The Book of Jessica*. Murray introduces the concept of trade as it pertains to the various exchanges that took place between these three collaborators, and encourages readers to ponder whether or not these exchanges were fair for all parties involved.

*Maria Campbell: Essays on Her Works* is a collection of scholarly essays that expertly showcase the immense impact of Campbell's literary, film, and theatre contributions

to understanding the history of exclusion and suppression that Métis people have faced in Canada. However, it is disappointing that this collection overlooks her important contributions as a political activist for racial, cultural, and feminist issues in Canada. A deeper analysis of Campbell's political work on Métis issues and rights in Canada, and the influence this work has had on emerging Métis leaders, would have been an interesting and insightful addition to this collection. Overall, this collection encourages readers to ponder issues of Métis history, literature, identity, and culture and it would be a valuable read for scholars interested in exploring Aboriginal literature and story-telling and others who are interested in developing a better understanding of the complex history of Canada's Métis people.

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