# ISKWEKWAK--KAH' KI YAW NI WAHKOMAKANAK:

# NEITHER INDIAN PRINCESSES NOR SQUAW DRUDGES

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ABSTRACT

This thesis works towards deconstructing stereotypical images of Indigenous women that frequent the pages of popular literature. It calls attention to the ideological foundation of Euro-Canadian literature, which is informed by a White-christian-patriarchy. That literature, as an institution of the Euro-Canadian nation, propagates images of Indigenous women as Indian princesses, squaw drudges, suffering helpless victims, tawny temptresses, and loose squaws. Consequently, Euro-Canadian literature imprisons us in images that foster both racist and sexist stereotypes and that encourage violence against us. Margaret Laurence's short story "The Loons" and William Patrick Kinsella's "Linda Star" provide illuminating examples of some of those images. While these writers do not represent all non-Indigenous people who write about Indigenous women, both of these writers are extremely popular Canadian writers whose stories are often read in elementary schools, high schools, and universities. At the centre of this thesis is Maria Campbell's semi-autobiographical Halfbreed. Campbell's Halfbreed significantly challenges Euro-Canadian literature's White-christian-patriarchal ideology by contextualizing the narrative in an Indigenous-gynocratic ideology. Her book destabilized White-Euro-Canadian liberals' complacency when, as an Indigenous woman, Campbell named Euro-Canadians oppressors and identified Euro-Canadian power structures that illegally, unjustly, and intolerably imposed on her people's way of life. This thesis

concludes that Campbell's Halfbreed encouraged many Indigenous people to appropriate the White-Euro-Canadian colonizer's English language to write ourselves out of oppression by re-claiming our self--which is ideologically rooted in autochthonous and gynocratic cultures.

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Loving appreciation to my partner Clem Chartier, my children Blair and Blue Pelletier, and my mother Harriet Acoose whose reassuring presence and spiritual strength encouraged and supported me.

. . . fenced in and forced to give up everything that had meaning to [our] life . . . But under the long snows of despair the little spark of our ancient beliefs and pride kept glowing, just barely sometimes, waiting for a warm wind to blow that spark into a flame again. (Mary Crow Dog, 6)

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# INTRODUCTION

Prior to speaking, or in this case writing, according to my Anishnabe and Nehiowak/Metis traditions, I am compelled to speak of "my relations." According to the christian patriarchy, my name is Janice Acoose, but more recently I was renamed, according to our own ways in the Sundance ceremony, MISWONIHKWEKESIK (Great/Red Sky Woman).

My Koochum's name was Madeline O'Soup; she was the adopted daughter of Chief O'Soup from O'Soup Reserve (now referred to as Cowessess Reserve). She and her husband, my Mooshum Paul Acoose, raised my father (as well as his eight brothers and sisters) in the traditions of the Anishnabe. These traditions, which were preserved and passed on from our ancestors were intruded on by four generations of christian patriarchal practices, at the Indian residential schools, and in the community by the priest and Indian agent and subsequently Department of Indian Affairs bureaucrats. Not surprisingly beyond my Koochum's and Mooshum's generation, I only have knowledge of my greatgrandfather Samuel Acoose and my great-greatgrandfather Quewich.

My mother's name is Harriet (Beaudin) Acoose; her mother, Philomene (Desjarlais) Beaudin, and her father, Fidele Beaudin, raised my mother in accord with Metis values, beliefs, and traditions. Fidele, who was born to culturally French parents, was orphaned as a young boy and thus raised by priests who belonged to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate order at Lebret, Saskatchewan. Thus, christianity significantly altered my

mother's people's way of life. In fact, the teachings of the Catholic church were used to subvert the power of women in both my mother's and father's families. My mother's maternal grandmother, Therese Pittwawekanepitt Pelletier (the daughter of Philomene Pittwawekanepitt and Dosithe Pelletier) whom my brothers and sisters lovingly referred to as Down Koochum (because she lived down the hill from my grandmother's house), was a vital source of knowledge and power in the Crooked Lake area. Her knowledge of and skills with roots and herbs, as well as expertise in midwifery, have kept her memory alive in the homes of many Nehiowak/Metis and Anishnabe. Her husband Jimmy (Jacques) Desjarlais, my Mooshum Jimmy, who was born to Bernard Desjarlais and Marie (Morin) Perreault of the Red River's St. Eustache parish is also fondly remembered.

As indicated earlier, the White-Euro-Canadian-christian patriarchy, through institutions like the Catholic church, the residential and public school systems, and the federal government's Department of Indian Affairs has long been a source of ideological confusion, economic oppression, social disparity, and political confusion within my family, community, and nations. However, by naming and recognizing the coercive and oppressive roots of the patriarchal institutions, I have been able to reconnect to the vital source of my strength: my family, my relations. Indeed, my right to speak about issues pertaining to Indigenous women in Canada stems from the knowledge and connection to all my relations.

Inspiration for this thesis originally came from my stubborn determination to enlighten non-Indigenous peoples about the ways of the Anishnabe and Nehiowak/Metis, our history, our strength, our beauty, and our survival. Growing up in communities that were lovingly enriched by centuries of distinct cultural ways, I had no idea that we were so-called oppressed peoples. Moreover, the women in my family fit none of the White stereotypes of Indigenous women: they were extremely powerful, resourceful, and dynamic women who vitally contributed to the survival of my family, communities, and nations.

As a female descendant of these very influential women, I feel honourably compelled to carry on our ways. However, as an English graduate student, writing in the colonizer's English language is simultaneously painful and liberating. The pain is frustratingly excruciating because I feel and relate to things from an Anishnabe and Nehiowak/Metis centre, which has been placed in my being through a familial lineage that represents thousands of years of survival in this part of the world. Although I cannot speak the languages of my ancestors, the ideologies, philosophies, values, and beliefs embodied in those languages have been transmitted to my being. But, too often, the knowledge and understanding of the ways of my ancestors is contradicted by images constructed within the White-Euro-Canadian-christian patriarchy's language, which calls them in English Saulteaux/Ojibway, Cree, and Halfbreed. Moreover, four generations of my family have been exposed to that patriarchy's

cruelty, manipulative controls, segregation through the reserve system and Metis community farms, dehumanization and despiritualization through the christian residential schools, and other less overt but just as genocidal assimilative programs. Consequently, my mind no longer directs my voice to speak our original languages, although the desire and knowledge are present.

The only recourse, for me at this time, is to use the English language to convey the reality of the Indigenous peoples, as represented by Indigenous women who continue to survive and give us life. In this way, writing in the colonizer's language is liberating because the process involved in doing research and writing in the patriarchy's primary institution of knowledge, the university, and specifically the English Department, which most represents its culture, encourages re-creation, re-naming, and empowerment of both Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples.

Throughout this thesis common terms such as Indian, Native/native, First Nations, Halfbreed/halfbreed, and Aboriginal/aboriginal appear in quotation marks. Since these words name the White-European-christian patriarchy's constructs of Indigenous peoples, I use the more politically appropriate term, Indigenous.

Maria Campbell's Halfbreed, the text at the critical centre of this thesis, contextualizes Indigenous people's social, political, and economic reality and is an important document

which initiated re-creation, re-naming, and empowerment for many Indigenous women writers.

Chapter One maintains that in Euro-Canadian literature Indigenous women are imprisoned in stereotypical images that perpetuate racism and sexism and that foster cultural attitudes that encourage violence against Indigenous women. It also argues that those stereotypical images function within the Euro-Canadian state as ideological state apparatuses that disempower Indigenous women. This chapter attempts to de-construct those images by offering significant information that re-constructs Indigenous women's realities.

Chapter Two works towards de-constructing those stereotypic images by providing examples of very powerful female spirits and warriors. This chapter also explores the relationship between literature and society; analyzes the power of image; and discusses some of the popular images of "Indian, halfbreed, and Native" women that appeared in Canadian literature prior to the publication of Maria Campbell's Halfbreed.

Chapter Three focuses on Margaret Laurence and William Patrick Kinsella, two very popular and influential Canadian writers. This chapter argues that the images of Indigenous women in Laurence's short story "The Loons" and Kinsella's "Linda Star" objectify and dehumanize Indigenous women and thus foster cultural attitudes that encourage violence against us.

Chapter Four asserts that Maria Campbell's 1974 autobiographical Halfbreed intervened in the Euro-Canadian

literary tradition and challenged existing stereotypes of Indigenous women by contextualizing the writing in an Indigenous spiritual, social, political, and economic way of life. Campbell's Halfbreed encourages other Indigenous women to begin writing, to re-claim, and to re-connect to our own ideology, and thus our de-colonized selves.

Chapter Five refers to numerous contemporary Indigenous writers. It also suggests that their work grows out of various culturally distinct centres and thus continues to challenge non-Indigenous writers' stereotypical images of Indigenous women.

## CHAPTER ONE: WHY INDIGENOUS WOMEN?

In selected works of Canadian fiction Indigenous women are imprisoned in images that perpetuate racist and sexist stereotypes.[1] Stereotypic images of Indian princesses, squaw drudges, suffering helpless victims, tawny temptresses, or loose squaws falsify Indigenous women's realities and suggest in a subliminal way that those stereotypical images are Indigenous women. As a consequence, those images foster cultural attitudes that encourage sexual, physical, verbal, or psychological violence against Indigenous women. Stereotypic images of Indigenous women also function as sentinels that guard and protect the White-christian-patriarchal power structure (and now the White-christian-matriarchal power structure) against any threatening disturbances that might upset the status quo.[2]

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[1] As Indigenous peoples (living within the confines of North America), we believe that our bodies are created from the land we live on and hence, the land is also our relatives who came before us and those who come after us. Thus, this thesis uses the more politically appropriate term Indigenous to describe generally the peoples that are more commonly referred to as native, Indian, First Nations, aboriginal, native American, or native Canadian. It should also be noted that Indigenous is capitalized throughout this thesis because it represents specific peoples and thus functions as a proper noun. The term Indigenous should not be confused with specific peoples' names for themselves. When the context warrants it, names like Anishnabe (Saulteaux/Ojibway), Nehiowak (Cree), Dene (Chipweyan), Haudenasaune (Six Nations Confederacy), and Kanien' Keha:Ka (Mohawk) will be used.

[2] Throughout this thesis the word christian is not capitalized. Writing from an Indigenous ideology, I do not recognize this word as a respected authority. Moreover, as an Indigenous woman whose spirituality, culture, values, and beliefs

Throughout the brutal history of Indigenous-White relations, the power held by Indigenous women constantly threatened the White-European-christian-patriarchy. Indigenous women's roles were, according to Paula Gunn Allen's The Sacred Hoop, constructed in gynocratic or woman-centred cultures. She maintains that "the colonizer saw . . . that as long as women held unquestioned power of such magnitude, attempts at total conquest of the continents were bound to fail" (3). Therefore, the White-European-christian-patriarchal power structure--represented throughout history by colonial government officials, missionaries, and merchants--attempted to usurp Indigenous women's power, albeit not always consciously or deliberately. Throughout these struggles Indigenous women survived and demonstrated their autonomy through courageous acts of self-government and self-determination. In 1971 and 1977 respectively, Jeannette Corbiere-Lavell (Anishnabe) and Sandra Lovelace (Maliseet) radically altered the archaic Indian Act by legally challenging its discriminatory policies against "Indian" women.[3] In 1991, Kanien' Keha:Ka (Mohawk) women were vital to the defense, maintenance of peace, and ongoing negotiations

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were brutally repressed by christian forces, I deliberately challenge its so called authority and deliberately de-construct its power base.

[3] Prior to the efforts of Corbiere-Lavell and Lovelace and the subsequent 1985 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, "Indian" women, as defined by the Indian Act, who married "non-Indian" men lost their legal rights as "Indians" and thus became "non-status Indians." However, "non-Indian" women who married "Indian" men became legal "Indian" women.

during the Mohawks' stand-off with the Canadian Army at Oka, Quebec. In 1991, the Assembly of First Nations' newly elected national chief, Ovide Mercredi, was not officially recognized until the Assembly's Council of Women Elders (Haudenosaunee, Nehiowak, Anishnabe) raised him up into office. Despite these obvious manifestations of Indigenous women's vital role within the communities and larger society, the English-Canadian-patriarchy continues to misrepresent and diminish our lives.

In "Our World: According to Ossennontion and Skonaganleh:ra," Ossennontion/Marlyn Kane (former president of the Native Women's Association of Canada) writes about non-Indigenous Canadians, saying "We must somehow get them to empty their heads of what they know about us" (7). Ossennontion insists:

> Woman has had a traditional role as Centre, maintaining the fire--the fire which is at the centre of our beliefs. She is the Keeper of the Culture. She has been able to play that role, even in a home divided. She has maintained that role even though church dogma has suggested that our families need be structured in a different way; that we teach "Dick and Jane;" that there are certain aspirations that young boys should have, and differing and somehow lesser ones that young girls should have. She has maintained her role despite intermarriage which caused her to be cut off from her roots, both legislatively and sometimes

> physically. Her home has been divided as a result of education. A wholesale taking away of our children to schools diminished her role and her 100% right to teach her children, by imposing laws which require her to hand over that child, who comes home and checks everything her mother says in the context of what the teacher said, and this, when teachers are poorly equipped to deal, from our perspective-an aboriginal perspective--with what the children should be taught. (12)

In schools, English-Canadian literature institutionalizes the English-Canadian-White-patriarchal power structure through the language, which Emma LaRocque's preface to Writing the Circle describes as "an ideological onion whose stinging layers of racism and sexism must be peeled away" (xx). LaRocque also maintains that "literature is political in that its linguistic and ideological transmission is defined and determined by those in power" (xvi). In order to maintain power, the English-Canadian patriarchy employs stereotypical representations of Indigenous women, which according to "Indians and Native Americans in the Movies: A History of Stereotypes, Distortions, and Displacements" by Hartmut Lutz, "serve as ideological constructs to justify inequality and to uphold the status quo" (32). English-Canadian literature therefore must be de-constructed and decolonized so that Indigenous women can be liberated from such false images as those of the Indian princess,

the squaw drudge, the suffering and helpless victim, and the loose squaw. Such images continue to imprison us in racist and sexist stereotypes and therefore, according to Patricia Albers's "New Perspectives on Plains Indian Women," obscure fundamental realities about women's status and role (8).

In Canada, the roots of English-Canadian literature are nourished by centuries of christian orthodoxy that justifies and sanctions a White-male rule premised on the hierarchy of God-King-man-boy. De-constructing and decolonizing literary traditions firmly planted in the age-old power structure requires both sub-verting the colonizer's language and re-naming and re-defining people and places based on the Indigenous peoples' own ideological context. In many respects, re-naming and re-defining the original peoples will be the most challenging because languages and cultures have been traumatized by close to five hundred years of physical, emotional, and spiritual coercion. Nevertheless, recognizing that "language has the power to shape our experiences" it is vitally important that Indigenous women appropriate the English language in order to represent our experiences (Katz & Horsman, 119).

The word Indigenous is used throughout this thesis to name the peoples and their ancestors who believe that their bodies were created from specific land within the areas now known as Canada and the United States. While we are distinguished by many different cultures, we share ideological assumptions about our relationship to the land, in the same way that capitalism or

communism unites specific peoples. The Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues recognized in Indigenous Peoples: A Global Quest For Justice that "what is shared by most indigenous peoples is a world view which incorporates as its dearest principle a custodial concept of land and natural resources" (10). The formation of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples in 1975 institutionalized this common ideology.

Among contemporary Indigenous writers who reside in North America, this ideology transmits what Thomas King describes (in the book by the same name) as the "All My Relations" philosophy. This philosophy, as King describes it,

> is at first a reminder of who we are and of our relationship with both our family and our relatives. It also reminds us of the extended relationship we share with all human beings. But the relationships that Native people see go further, the web of kinship extending to the animals, to the birds, to the fish, to the plants, to all the animate and inanimate forms that can be seen or imagined. More than that, "all my relations" is an encouragement for us to accept the responsibilities we have within this universal family by living our lives in a harmonious and moral manner (a common admonishment is to say of someone that they act as if they have no relations). (ix)

This philosophy, albeit not always visible in every Indigenous person's life, is nevertheless constant in our spiritual lives, ceremonies, rituals, and old languages.

Within the old language systems, particularly among the Plains Nehiowak cultures, Kah Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak expresses a way of life that embodies a non-hierarchical association between Elders, women, men, and children.[4] In the prefatory "Note on Nanabush" in Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing, Tomson Highway, who grew up on his "Cree" father's trapline in northwestern Manitoba, maintains that in relation to White cultures "the most explicit distinguishing feature between the North American Indian languages and the European languages is that in Indian (e.g. Cree, Ojibway), there is no gender" (12). Highway reinforces awareness of the absence of gender within these languages when he refers to our mythology or system of thought, in which the central hero figure "is theoretically neither exclusively male nor exclusively female, or is both simultaneously" (12). Highway indirectly refers to this way of living together as relations by expressing the connectedness of all "Indians" by his usage of the pronoun our.

This connectedness, or unity among all forms of life within the environment, essentially describes the philosophical aspect of living together as relations that premises much of contemporary Indigenous peoples' writing. In the literature,

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[4] The Plains cultures are predominantly Nehiowe and within this language system all my relations is expressed as Kah Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak.

this philosophy or way of life is symbolized by a circle. Paula Gunn Allen explains that her mother's teachings that "'life is a circle, and everything has its place in it'" nourished The Sacred Hoop (1). Those teachings instruct "that animals, insects, and plants are to be treated with the kind of respect one customarily accords to high-status adults" (1). Similarly, the anthology of "Native" women of western Canada appropriately titled Writing the Circle implies that "Natives" can heal themselves by writing themselves back into the "circle of life" or by re-rooting themselves in a Kah Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak way of life. Emma LaRocque's preface to this anthology draws attention to "Indians [who] acknowledged and practised a host of distinctions, yet maintained a functional connectedness between parts." (xx). Thomas King's All My Relations identifies the contemporary "Native" writers' source of inspiration as a way of life that incorporates living together as relations. Beatrice Medicine and Patricia Albers's The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women offers unique information about "Plains Indian Women" whose existence is marked as half of the population who are women but who in patriarchal culture are hidden in the androcentric term "Indian." Kerrie Charnley's "Concepts of Anger, Identity and Power and the Vision in the Writings and Voices of First Nations Women," printed in the premiere issue of Gatherings: The En'Owkin Journal of First North American Peoples, while it affirms that within "First Nations" there are many diverse and ever changing cultures, the term also expresses a unifying

"Indian" world view where things are whole co-operative and balanced (18). As an outsider writing about Indigenous peoples' writings, Hartmut Lutz recognizes that in many writers' work there is indeed a philosophical expression of living together as relations and it is symbolized as a circle. In his discussion on "The Circle as Philosophical and Structural Concept in Native American Fiction," Lutz refers to numerous writers: Philip Deere, a former spiritual advisor and teacher to the American Indian Movement (AIM), who "never tired of stressing the importance of the circle as the basis of 'the Indian Way of Life'; Paula Gunn Allen of The Sacred Hoop; Lakota Sioux Elder Black Elk of Black Elk Speaks, who maintains that the circle "is multidimensional, laterally encompassing earth, sun and moon, spiritually the natural and the supernatural and 'horizontally' spanning all beings on this earth, both animate and inanimate"; and Vine Delora Jr. who insists that "in a tribal sense there is no difference between an individual's and the tribe's identity" (85-86).

Articulating changes to the so-called "natives'" way of life, Algerian psychologist Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth establishes a psychological context and examines the relationship between the colonizer and the "native" (in Fanon's usage this word is synonymous with colonized Indigenous people). He understands that the European colonizer had to use the strategy of disempowering the "native" to establish and maintain control. Thus, he writes,

> Europe has multiplied divisions and opposing groups, has fashioned classes and sometimes even racial prejudices, and has endeavoured by every means to bring about and intensify the stratification of colonized societies. (11)

After strategically disconnecting the "native" from his or her source of power, the colonizer constructs an image that serves imperialist purposes:

> the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil . . . . The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is . . . the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil. He is the corrosive element, destroying all that comes near him; he is the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality; he is the depository of maleficent powers . . . . (41)

Educated within a European-patriarchal tradition, Fanon uses the pronoun <u>he</u> to describe the "native." The pronoun <u>he</u> as a generic reference for he or she is quite commonly used in the Euro-Canadian and Euro-American tradition. Also, as indicated previously, the term "native" is synonymous with terms like "Indian" in the North American context.

In the North American context, Patricia Albers's study cites popular writers such as John Ewer, Robert Berkhoffer Jr., and

John Price who write about images and the "Indian." Her study examines Plains "Indian" women; Albers asserts that "for most Americans and Europeans, the Plains Indian is the quintessential symbol of 'Indianness,' and in relation to the Plains Indians the image that most predominantly appears in popular stereotyping is that of men" (1). Albers insists that "it is the male-dominated universe of native diplomacy, warfare, and hunting that has captured the attention of national image-makers" (2). According to Albers, this male-dominated Euro-centric view of the "Indian" or the "native" has almost totally effaced from history the lives of Indigenous women.

Indigenous women's lives were effaced in very profound ways through the residential school system and christian missionaries. The residential schools and the missionaries conspired to remove the gynocratic influence from the spiritual, political, economic, and social realms of Indigenous peoples' lives. Tomson Highway's Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing offers a glimpse into this complex and misunderstood area. Employing the crucifix as the symbol of christianity, and Nanabush/Patsy Pegahmahgahbow as the symbolic representation of "Indian" spirituality, Highway attempts to communicate christianity's brutal rape of Indigenous peoples' spirituality. Compared to the rape scene in Highway's play, which is extremely brutal but quick and committed by a young boy suffering from fetal alcohol syndrome, Whites' attempts to impose christianity on Indigenous peoples, our families, communities, and nations, were spiritually, emotionally,

physically, and psychologically much more prolonged and much more torturously coercive. For example, during the early contact period many Indigenous peoples' immune systems were weakened by new diseases thoughtlessly and ignorantly spread by explorers and missionaries. As coercive agents, missionaries took advantage of spiritually and physically weakened individuals by offering them relief through baptism into the faith.[5] After large numbers abandoned their own spiritual/medicine people who were seemingly helpless against the dreaded diseases, the subsequent transition to a White-christian-patriarchal rule seemed inevitable. A perusal of the Jesuit Relations (a compilation of the missionaries' correspondence to their home office) would certainly leave one with the impression that christianization efforts had succeeded. However, as Eleanor Leacock's "Montagnais Women and the Jesuit Program for Colonization" makes clear, there are significant contradictions in the interpretations of primary sources. In this article, Leacock compares "European observers who did not know personally the people about whom they were writing" and who thus wrote about "Indian" women as slaves, to "a man who knew the Montagnais-Naskapi well and recognized that women controlled their own work and made decisions accordingly" (45). Similarly, Priscilla Buffalohead's "Farmers Warriors

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[5] The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents is full of references to individuals suffering from grave illnesses and missionaries offering to save them through redemptive baptism. Also, John Webster Grant's account of missionary activity since 1534 in Moon of Wintertime makes references to this practice.

Traders: A Fresh Look at Ojibway Women" maintains that the early primary sources

> spanning the period from the mid-17th to the early 20th century, were written for the most part by men who represented the successive colonialist regimes of France, Great Britain, and America. Taken together, these sources provide biased and often contradictory images of native women as well as valuable insights into their lives. (236)

Buffalohead's article encourages the construction of positive images of Indigenous women by calling attention to dynamic and resourceful women. (244) Thus, while some scholars would assert that christian missionaries successfully usurped power from women in Indigenous societies, a re-visiting of the old texts with an understanding of the woman-centred way of living together as relations might enhance the reader's understanding of Indigenous societies in a way that less informed readings could not.

Euro-Canadian literature, taking its inspiration from many of these early primary sources, imprisons women in images that perpetuate the White-Euro-Canadian-patriarchal stereotypes. In The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon explains the reason:

> Since none may enslave, rob, or kill his fellow man without committing a crime, they lay down the principle that the native is not one of our fellow men [and women] . . . the order is given to reduce the inhabitants of the annexed country to the level

> of superior monkeys in order to justify the settlers' treatment of them . . . Everything will be done to wipe out their traditions, to substitute our language for theirs and to destroy their culture without giving them ours. (15)

Within the colonizer's cultural context, images like the romantic Indian princess, the denigrated squaw drudge, the erotic tawny temptress, and the hopeless suffering victim are constructed to distort the reality of Indigenous women and justify social, political, economic, and spiritual oppression. There have been many attempts to suppress Indigenous women's voices. A common fallacy is that Indigenous women have not spoken. bell hooks writes in Talking Back:

> Within feminist circles, silence is often seen as the sexist "right speech of womanhood"--the sign of woman's submission to patriarchal authority. This emphasis on woman's silence may be an accurate remembering of what has taken place in the households of women from WASP backgrounds in the United States [and in Canada], but in black communities (and diverse ethnic communities), women have not been silent. (6)

Indeed, Gretchen Bataille's "Transformation of Tradition: Autobiographical Works by American Indian Women" insists that "Indian" women have not been silent but for "Those who until recently assumed the inferiority of all women did not spare the

American Indian woman" (85).

Emma LaRocque points out that publishers "influenced by uncomprehending critics and audiences . . . controlled the type of material that was published," and hence male writers like Harold Cardinal, Howard Adams, George Manuel, Duke Redbird, Wilfred Pelletier, or Waubageshig were privileged over Indigenous women writers who were struggling to give voice to their lives (xiii). The suppression of their voices is also reflected in the manipulative controls and labels that define what is or is not literature. As a result, Indigenous women are excluded from the privileged ranks of writers of literature by the White literary establishment that does not accept them as authors of their own realities. Until very recently Indigenous women were thought of as voiceless, illiterate, the worst of the oppressed, and in some cases, not worth mentioning.

Instead of encouraging Indigenous women to articulate their experiences through the written word, publishers encouraged others to write about and for them. Thus, as Howard Adams' Prison of Grass reflects, the "Flowing golden hair . . . [the] lovely white face . . . pale skin, thin lips, and gorgeous big blue eyes" (142) became the standard for goodness, virtue, and beauty, while "all native girls became undesirable" and associated with oppression (142). This "white ideal," as Adams describes it, is symptomatic of the colonial mind and personality articulated by Frantz Fanon. Instead of listening and hearing the voices of early writers like Emma LaRocque, Beatrice

Culleton, Paula Gunn Allen, and Maria Campbell, the White literary establishment dismissed Indigenous women's writings and the strong autonomous images of surviving women were compromised by images constructed in relation to the white ideal. They were reduced to characters in novels like Margaret Laurence's "vaguely embarrassing" (97) and "drunk and disorderly" (106) Metis, Piquette Tonnerre, or William Patrick Kinsella's whore, Linda Starr, who grosses "never less than $100 a day" (71). Even though, as Emma LaRocque insists in the preface to Writing the Circle, people like herself, Maria Campbell, and Beatrice Culleton were producing literature and offering more positive images based on their reality as Indigenous women struggling and surviving rape, beatings, alcohol and drug addictions, economic and political oppression, their writings were dismissed as "biased" and "bitter" (xvii). LaRocque points out that "our anger, legitimate as it was and is, was exaggerated as 'militant' and used as an excuse not to hear us. There was little comprehension of an articulate anger reflecting an awakening and a call to liberation" (xvii).

Another method used to suppress the voices of Indigenous women, as Bataille's discussion reveals is to use "a single life to illuminate a culture" (87). Maria Campbell's autobiographical Halfbreed is a good example of this practice. While Halfbreed established a new literary trend by revising and redefining Indigenous women's experiences in literature, it was not accepted or defined as good literature. LaRocque maintains that it was

instead reduced to "grist for social workers" (xviii). One could argue however that Campbell's book feeds into the stereotypical representations of the erotic tawny temptress, the miserable squaw drudge, and even the helpless suffering victim. Indeed, if Halfbreed is read through White-Euro-Canadian-patriarchal glasses, its images satisfy ideological prejudices about Indigenous women. However, one must approach Campbell's text with the kind of re-visioning Adrienne Rich advocates, "of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (18). In Hartmut Lutz's Contemporary Challenges: Conversations with Contemporary Canadian Native Writers Jeanette Armstrong, Beth Cuthand, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, Beatrice Culleton, and Emma LaRocque refer to Halfbreed as a vehicle which encouraged other Indigenous women to speak out. In order to appreciate Campbell's text in that way however, one must understand Indigenous women's vital role previous to White-European-christian impositions.

Despite cultural impositions and ideological constructs the reality is that Indigenous women have been and continue to be strong. In recent years their voices have been talking back through texts like Lee Maracle's Bobby Lee: Indian Rebel, I Am Woman, Sojourner's Truth; Marie Annharte Baker's Being On the Moon; Jeannette Armstrong's Slash; Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine, Beet Queen, and Tracks; Mary Crow Dog's (co-authored by Richard Erdoes) Lakota Woman; Agnes Grant's Our Bit of Truth; the contemporary western Canadian "Native" women's anthology Writing

the Circle; and Beth Cuthand's Voices in the Waterfall.

Within many of the creation stories of the original peoples, the woman is first; she is, according to the Kanien' Keha:Ka, "the first being to come amongst our relatives" (Osennontion and Skonaganleh:ra, 8). Paula Gunn Allen maintains "this spirit, this power of intelligence, has many names and many emblems" (13). She is called Old Spider Woman, Serpent Woman, Corn Woman, and Earth Woman. She is also represented by the Hopi both as Hard Beings Woman who lives in the worlds of the moon and stars, from where she "breathes life into male and female effigies that become the parents of the Hopi" (14), and Thought Woman who gave birth to creation and Human Beings. The Haudenesaunee remember Sky Woman and Grandmother Turtle. The Lakota acknowledge White Buffalo Calf Woman who brought them wakan or the sacred pipe.

This chapter has shown how prior to the imposition of christianity, Indigenous cultures centred on women, their languages reflected this fact, and popular cultural images reinforced their centrality. The voices of Indigenous peoples who have kept alive the sanctity and universal power of Mother Earth through which all things flow are not exclusively academics and writers; they are people who have inherited their knowledge and right to speak from a familial lineage that recounts thousands of years of survival. Unfortunately, our ways of being, seeing, and doing were intruded upon by extremely powerful imperialistic forces and colonial agents. Euro-Canadian literature, as an institution of colonialism, employs

stereotypical images of Indigenous women which distort our realities and diminish our status. Thus, stereotypical images must be de-constructed to understand those realities.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE, IMAGE, AND SOCIETAL VALUES

Prior to the publication of Maria Campbell's autobiographical Halfbreed and the more recent publications of Indigenous authors, Indigenous women were generally represented in Canadian literature as Indian princesses or squaw drudges. References to the Indian princess and squaw drudge invoke very powerful images that encourage stereotypes and thus foster cultural attitudes that affect the relations between Indigenous women and Canadian society. In an attempt to locate the roots of the Indian princess and the squaw drudge image, this chapter explores the social history of these polemical images by looking to some European literary traditions in which they were constructed and the relationship between literature and society with the intent of offering some theories about how White-Euro-Canadian-christian ideology constructs images of "Indian, halfbreed, or native" women. It also examines the power of image--or more specifically and relative to the discussion--images of "Indian, halfbreed, or native" women in Canadian literature and some of the popular images of "Indian, halfbreed, and native" women in Canadian literature prior to the publication of Halfbreed.

As indicated in the first chapter, Indigenous peoples' beings are firmly rooted in this land, now referred to as Canada. Our languages connect us in a symbiotic way to these roots and the languages embody our histories, philosophies, and spiritual, political, social, and economic traditions. Utilizing these

languages, since the beginning of time, one generation after another transmitted their peoples' stories through the oral tradition. These stories constitute our literature, which, as indicated previously, is based on an autochthonous relationship with and continuing connection to the land.[1]

Several stories relate mythological accounts of very important female deities and spirits. Paula Gunn Allen's The Sacred Hoop, Spider Woman's Granddaughters, and Grandmothers of the Light provide comprehensive reviews of specific Indigenous peoples' myths of female deities and superhuman spirits. Similarly, many of the legends within Indigenous peoples' cultures refer to very strong women warriors, powerful and influential women who helped change the course of history, as well as women who liaised with newcomers and thus helped them survive. For example, Marla Power's "Sex Roles and Social Structures" discusses the White Buffalo Calf Woman who, according to the author represents Lakota cultures and all humanity, and "who brings the sacred pipe and the seven sacred rites and thereby guarantees that the people will live long with relations" (203). Beatrice Medicine's "'Warrior Women'--Sex Role Alternatives for Plains Indian Women" maintains that among Plains

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1 For a more thorough discussion of Indigenous peoples' ideology, literature, or way of being, refer to: The Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues, Indigenous Peoples: A Global Quest for Justice, London and New Jersey, 1977; Thomas King, All My Relations (Introduction), Oakville, Ontario, 1987; Paula Gunn Allen, The Sacred Hoop, Boston, 1986; Paula Gunn Allen, Spider Woman's Granddaughters, New York, 1989; Emma LaRocque, Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada (Preface), Edmonton, 1990.

Indian Cultures "there was considerable variation in the roles of women and men" (267). Medicine, citing numerous studies, refers to the Lakota, Navajo, Blackfoot, Kutenai, Tlingit, Ottawa, Peigan, Gros Ventres and Cheyenne cultures where some women's roles as warriors challenge prevailing myths about Indigenous women. Similarly, Loraine Littlefield's "Women Traders in the Maritime Fur Trade" challenges existing stereotypic images of Indigenous women by explaining that among the Haida, Nootka, Tlingit, and Tsimshian the role of women in trade "was not a new behaviour arising out of the fur trade and its introduction of new trade goods but a continuation of women's traditional role that had included their active participation in the exchange of goods" (173). Among the Anishnabe (Ojibwe, Saulteaux, or Chippewa) there are many legends of very powerful women warriors. In terms of an academic reference, Priscilla Buffalohead's "Farmers, Warriors, Traders: A Fresh Look at Ojibway Women" provides an interesting basis for comparison to the traditionally accepted missionary's accounts. Also, as indicated previously, many Indigenous women helped the European immigrants survive and this is reflected in Raymond William Stedman's "La Belle Sauvage" and Sylvia Van Kirk's Many Tender Ties.

In its images of women, Indigenous peoples' literature is very different from European and Euro-Canadian literature. European and Euro-Canadian literatures grew out of the so-called book of God, wherein the social ordering of christian members is based on the very stringent and powerfully protected God-Monarch-

Man-Boy-woman hierarchy. In such a christian dogmatic tradition, women are merely appendages to men and are generally represented as innocent and pure virginal types or as fallen women. Even the first mother, according to a very narrow christian traditionalist Biblical interpretation, immaculately conceived the first child Jesus and thus maintained her virginal state. The christian fundamentalists' obsession with purity and virginal innocence has created an extremely problematic situation for most women. Indeed, the power structures in most major christian religions advocate that women should try to maintain a virginal state until after marriage. After marriage, women are encouraged to engage in sexual activity primarily to reproduce.

During the early history of Canada, christian fundamentalism informed the ideology of the developing nation. As a consequence, the slowly evolving Canadian literary canon absorbed a European-christian-fundamental ideological base; generally in terms of the culturally-French Canadians, it was Catholicism and in terms of the culturally-English Canadians, it was Protestantism. As colonial ties to Great Britain and France weakened, Canadian literature began to develop a character of its own. However, despite the former colonies' severance from their metropolitan cultures, much Canadian literature continued to draw on its fundamental European christian ideology for cultural and literary values.

Subsequently, liberalism modified and to some extent replaced the earlier christian dogmatism, but the new ideology

continued to justify imperialist practices, including the context of literary texts. Liberalism, Paul Cappon writes in the introduction to In Our Own House, "shapes the dominant ideology in North America" and as a consequence also colours "the author's view of literature" (24). Cappon explains that liberalism "has its roots firmly in the intellectual tradition of empiro-positivism," which was originally inspired by the European "philosophers and scientists of the Renaissance and of the Enlightenment" (13). Empiro-positivism, as Cappon describes it, "assumes that reality is empirical, that reality is a question of establishing all the observable facts which describe it" (13). Liberalism was born out of an ongoing struggle with the Church authorities. The decline of the Church's power, combined with the simultaneous growth of scientific knowledge, is accompanied by the shift from feudalism to capitalism. Thus, empiro-positivism became the popular mode of thought "concurrent with the bourgeois revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth" century Europe, Cappon maintains (13). The principles forwarded by bourgeois society are equality, competition, and individualism.

In "Literature and Society," Ngugi Wa Thiong'o maintains that the dream of white liberals is one day to unite black and white "without going through the agony of violent reckoning" (20). Referring to the naivete of this preposterous idea, he writes:

> liberalism has always been the sugary ideology of

> imperialism: it fosters the illusion in the exploited of the possibilities of peaceful settlement and painless escape from imperialist violence which anyway is not called violence but law and order. Liberalism blurs all antagonistic class contradictions, all the contradictions between imperialist domination and the struggle for national liberation, seeing in the revolutionary violence of the former, the degradation of humanity . . . . (20)

Cappon insists that Liberalism has "completely dominated the American academic tradition; and from it has passed to Canada by way of the colonial connexion as manifested at the level of ideology and education" (17).

Ideology, in a very basic definition as a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular group, is of primary importance in relation to the search for the roots of the Indian princess and squaw drudge images. Robert Berkhoffer's The Whiteman's Indian posits that when the European explorers, fuelled by the adventurous dreams of expansionism and potential mercantile profits, landed in what they subsequently referred to as the Americas, they comprehended the "New World and its peoples in terms of their own familiar conceptual categories and values" (4). These concepts, as indicated previously, were at that time based on a White-European-christian-patriarchal 15th-century vision of the world. That world, previous to Columbus's historic voyage, was extremely limited. Columbus, Berkhoffer writes,

vividly coloured his descriptions of the New World inhabitants. In fact, "the initial image of the Indian, like the word itself, came from the pen of Columbus" (5).

The most detailed New World ethnography however came from Amerigo Vespucci's Mundus Novus (published about 1504-1505). Vespucci's writings may well have provided Europeans with useful information about so-called New World peoples, but he also constructed Indigenous women's lives from within his own White-European-christian-male biased ideology. Observing Indigenous women from his very male-centred base, he writes:

> the women as I have said go about naked and are very libidinous; yet they have bodies which are tolerably beautiful and cleanly. Nor are they so unsightly as one might perchance imagine; for, inasmuch as they are plump, their ugliness is the less apparent, which indeed is for the most part concealed by the excellence of their bodily structure. It was to us a matter of astonishment that none was to be seen among them who had a flabby breast, and those who had borne children were not to be distinguished from virgins by the shape and shrinking of the womb; and in the other parts of the body similar things were seen of which in the interest of modesty I make no mention. When they had the opportunity of copulating with Christians, urged by excessive lust, they defiled and prostituted themselves. (9)

Vespucci's words are useful for this discussion because he expresses an obvious physical attraction for the Indigenous women he encountered. However, his christian sense of morality conflicts with desire and thus he suggests that it is the women who are lusty and given to prostituting themselves. These kinds of ethnocentric observations and subsequent writings informed the early White-European-christian ideology, and thus affected the way that Indigenous women have come to be represented. Indigenous women's lives are still constructed within this very male-centred White-European-christian, and now a White-Euro-Canadian-christian, ideology. This ideology informs Canadian institutions which disseminate stereotypical images of Indigenous women that are based on binary opposites: good or bad.

In the historical context, Indigenous women were stereotyped as good when European interests were furthered by some sort of liaison with Indigenous women. However, before a so-called good christian Whiteman could have relations with an Indian woman, she had to be elevated beyond an ordinary woman's status. In most historical references the Indian woman was thus accorded the status of royalty. For example, Dona Marina, the Aztec Indian who liaised with Hernando Cortes, is described as the daughter of a "native" nobleman. Pocahontas, who supposedly saved John Smith from a torturous death, is described as Princess Pocahontas. According to Raymond William Stedman's <u>Shadows of the Indian</u> "the princess legend . . . [originated] with the mythical representative of the New World called America," which

was represented in "a facsimile of a late sixteenth-century illustration" by an artist known as Stradanus. This particular drawing shows a "lightly clad [New World] maiden ris[ing] from her hammock to greet Americus Vespucci" (32). Similarly, Stedman presents images of scantily clothed Indigenous women which appeared in illustrations symbolising the New World of 1581 (an Amazonian type woman with spear and severed head), 1594 (a regal looking woman with bow and arrow sitting on top of an armadillo), and 1644 (a regal type woman in a carriage pulled by two armadillos). Angelika Maeser-Lemieux's "The Metis in the Fiction of Margaret Laurence: From Outcast to Consort" drawing on Native American writer Rayna Green's "The Pocahontas Perplex: The Image of Indian Women in American Culture," points out that

> from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth centuries, the Indian Queen was presented as a symbol of the Americas which, after the colonial period in the United States, became divided into the figures of Princess and Squaw. (125)

The bad Indigenous woman or squaw drudge image provided justification for imperialistic expansion and the subsequent explorers', fur traders', and christian missionaries' specific agendas. Raymond William Stedman maintains that these women were to men like Columbus the same as animals. (21) Indeed, Maeser-Lemieux explains that "the shadowy side of the archetype is represented as savage and, above all, lustful" (125).

The good and bad--princess and squaw drudge images appear

throughout the pages of Euro-Canadian history and literature. For inspiration about pre-Canadian Indigenous peoples, many writers refer to the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) documents and the Jesuit Relations. While the HBC documents are merely records of business transactions between the HBC and the Indian fur traders and the Jesuit Relations merely correspondence from the colonial outpost to the Jesuit's home office (usually written to request more financial and human resources and thus the missionary's conditions were greatly exaggerated), these two primary sources are generally referred to as historical authorities. For example, in an effort to describe relations between "Indian" men, company men, and "Indian" women, Peter C. Newman's controversial The Company of Adventurers relies heavily on the fur trade records. Newman writes:

> There were many long and happy unions, but George Nelson, an observant Nor'Wester, quoted the bitter lament of an Indian who hoped to pass off his second wife to a white man because he considered her to have been debauched by past associations with them. "They take women, not for wives--but use them as Sluts--to satisfy the animal lust, and when they are satiated, they cast them off, and another one takes her for the same purpose--and by and by casts her off again, and so she will go on until she becomes an old woman, soiled by everyone who chuses to use her. She is foolish--she has no

> understanding, no sense, no shame." (271)

As a result of continued reliance on these fallacious recordings of so-called history, Canadian history books and literature are filled with the 1985 Newman type: "attractive tawny-skinned [Indian] women willing and proud to express their uninhibited sexuality" (272).

Beatrice Culleton's In Search of April Raintree calls attention to this ridiculously ethnocentric idea, which has unfortunately rooted itself in too many Euro-Canadians' belief system. Culleton employs the literary character Mrs. Semple--who functions as April Raintree's social worker--to give voice to that ethnocentrism. Mrs. Semple refers to it as the "native girl syndrome" and in comments spitefully directed at April, she lectures:

> You girls are headed in that direction [the native girl syndrome] . . . when you get out on your own, you get pregnant right away or you can't get jobs. So you'll start with alcohol and drugs. From there, you get into shoplifting and prostitution and in and out of jails. You'll live with men who abuse you. And on it goes. You'll end up . . . living off society [and going] . . . the same route as so many other native girls . . . skid row! (66)

Culleton's novel subverts the "native" girl syndrome, the squaw drudge, and "Indian" princess by contextualizing Indigenous women's lives in a social, political, and economic reality that

is too often imposed by White-Euro-Canadian power structures.

Do stereotypical images really affect our values, beliefs, and attitudes? In Wolff and Routh's The Sociology of Literature: Theoretical Approaches, Joan Rockwell's "A Theory of Literature in Society: The Hermeneutic Approach" suggests that "what we read does affect us as a sort of persuasive experience" (34). Using the universal existence of censorship as an example, she writes,

> The universal existence of censorship ought to be a proof that all societies, or at least the policy-making rulers, believe that representations of human action, even when known to be fictional, may have some potentially dangerous influence on people's beliefs, and consequently (possibly) on their social behaviour. (34)

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o suggests that while many people naively look upon literature as merely something that belongs to a surreal or metaphysical realm, it is much more. Thiong'o argues that literature does "shape our attitudes to life" (6). He writes:

> the product of a writer's pen both reflects reality and also attempts to persuade us to take a certain attitude to that reality. The persuasion can be a direct appeal on behalf of a writer's open doctrine or it can be an indirect appeal through "influencing the imagination, feelings and actions of the recipient" in a certain way toward certain goals and

> a set of values, consciously or unconsciously held by him. (7)

Examining the role of literature in relation to colonization, in his essay on "Literature and Society," Thiong'o connects literature to the system of oppression and genocide. He maintains that literature is a "subtle weapon because literature works through influencing emotions, the imagination, the consciousness of a people" (15). Thiong'o also explains that the western ruling classes reflected themselves, their images, and their history in the literature, while the colonized only saw "distorted image[s] of themselves and of their history" in the colonizer's constructions (36).

Gerald Wilkinson's "Colonialism Through the Media" makes the point that one of the ways of achieving colonial hegemony was by controlling "Indian peoples' psychology, their image of themselves, their values, and the course of their cultures" (29). Hartmut Lutz's "'Indians' and Native Americans in the Movies: A History of Stereotypes, Distortions, and Displacements" insists that "Knowledge about Indian cultures and history among non-native children is extremely limited and stereotyped due to a continued process of distortions and displacements in literature" (31).

Literature, in this context, functions as ideology. Janet Wolff's "Art as Ideology" maintains that

> ideological forms are not only ideas, cultural values and religious beliefs, but also their

> embodiment in cultural institutions (schools, churches, art galleries, legal systems, political parties), and in cultural artifacts (texts, paintings, buildings, and so on). (55)

Indeed, when literature expresses and conforms to the aesthetic codes and conventions of the dominant group within society, it functions as an ideological state apparatus. Thus, literature as an ideological state apparatus must protect and serve its masters: the state and the dominant or ruling elite.

While the relationship between literature and ideology is not this simple or direct, suffice it to say that where Indigenous women are concerned, the images of the good/bad or Indian princess/squaw drudge served the interests of the state and the ruling elite. As indicated previously, when the explorers first landed in the so-called New World, those images served their interests and fit into an ideological system the newcomers could understand. European women were generally understood according to Biblical standards of good and bad and therefore so were the "Indian" women the explorers encountered. Thus, Indigenous women were generally represented as good "Indian" Princesses or bad squaw drudges.

## CHAPTER THREE: PRE-HALFBREED: IMAGES OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN SELECTED NON-INDIGENOUS WRITERS' FICTION

In the early morning hours of November 13, 1971, Helen Betty Osborne was grabbed off the street and forced into a car with four men who were intent on finding "an Indian girl with whom to drink and have sex" (Manitoba Justice Inquiry, 14). Osborne's body was found the next morning. She had been brutally beaten and sexually assaulted; the autopsy reported that "Osborne suffered a vicious beating, particularly to her face" (11). It also stated:

> Along with well over 50 stab wounds, her skull, cheekbones and palate were broken, her lungs were damaged, and one kidney was torn. Her body showed extensive bruising. The massive number of puncture wounds to the head and torso confirmed other evidence that was presented at the trial which suggested that a screwdriver was at least one weapon used. The other weapon or weapons presumably were hands or feet or some other blunt instrument. (Manitoba Justice Inquiry, 11)

The report later concludes that Helen Betty Osborne

> fell victim to vicious stereotypes born of ignorance and aggression when she was picked up by four drunken men looking for sex. Her attackers seemed to be operating on the assumption that Aboriginal women were promiscuous and open to enticement through alcohol or violence. It is evident that the

> men who abducted Osborne believed that young Aboriginal women were objects with no human value beyond sexual gratification.
>
> (Manitoba Justice Inquiry, "Osborne," 52)

In "Tides, Towns and Trains" Emma LaRocque writes "the image of the sexually loose 'squaw' renders all Native girls and women vulnerable to gross sexual, physical and/or verbal violence" (87). She also writes:

> stereotyping is so prevalent that I, as a Native and as a woman, have often felt it was not safe to walk our streets, to ride in taxis or trains, to go to a hospital or to meet a police officer alone. I have not felt safe in my own community. (87)

As the Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Inquiry reveals, stereotypic images--as standardized visual pictures held in common by members of a group that represent an oversimplified picture of another group[1]--can produce bizarre attitudes and behaviours.

Since the very beginning of relations between White-European-christian newcomers and the Indigenous peoples, Indigenous women have been grossly misrepresented, primarily by male writers whose ideological foundation privileges men over women. As a result, Indigenous women are continually viewed

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[1] For a more in depth discussion of stereotypes and Indians see Fraser J. Pakes "Seeing With the Stereotypic Eye: The Visual Image of the Plains Indian." Native Studies Review, 1(2), 1985.

through a value system that represents women somewhere between good and bad, or the madonna and whore.[2] Indeed, Indigenous women are represented as good/Indian princesses when they help to further the goals (and desires) of non-Indigenous peoples, and as bad/whores when they threaten the stability of the status quo. Gordon Johnston's "An Intolerable Burden of Meaning: Native Peoples in White Fiction" explains that princesses are "idealized, self-sacrificing soul mates; 'squaws' are perfect drudges and sexual conveniences" (54). In "The Disappearing Debate: Racism and Censorship" Marlene Nourbese Philip writes

> traditionally, the unfettered nature of the imagination has done very little to affect the portrayal of women by men in the arts. By and large this portrayal has conformed closely to patriarchal visions of women . . . .in a racist, sexist, and classist society, the imagination, if left unexamined, can and does serve the ruling class of the time . . . .The danger with writers carrying their unfettered imaginations into another culture--particularly one like the Native Canadian culture which theirs has oppressed and exploited -

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[2] For a more thorough discussion of the good/bad madonna/whore dichotomy see Jane Ussher's the psychology of the female body; Rayna Green's "The Pocahontas Perplex: The Image of Indian Women in American Culture," Sweetgrass, (July/August); and Angelika Maeser-Lemieux's "The Metis in the Fiction of Margaret Laurence: From Outcast to Consort" The Native in Literature: Canadian and Comparative Perspectives, Winnipeg: ECW Press.

> is that without careful thought, they are likely to perpetuate stereotypical and one-dimensional views of that culture. (215)

In much of Canadian literature, the images of Indigenous women that are constructed objectify and dehumanize them. As a consequence, these images foster cultural attitudes that legitimize rape and other similar kinds of violence against Indigenous women. This chapter examines two very different non-Indigenous writers' short stories for images of Indigenous women: William Patrick Kinsella's "Linda Star" and Margaret Laurence's "The Loons." In Kinsella's "Linda Star," Linda is constructed as an Indigenous "Indian" woman who is a demoralized and promiscuous indigent who falls prey to her seemingly inherent weaknesses. Kinsella's Linda Star is not merely a woman gone bad; she appears to be naturally bad. In Margaret Laurence's "The Loons," Piquette Tonnerre epitomizes most of the stereotypic images of Indigenous women, at one time or another, throughout the course of the narrative and particularly when the images serve to satisfy the White protagonist's needs. The following discussion will attempt to show how both Laurence's and Kinsella's constructions of Indigenous women objectify, dehumanize, and render them objects to be acted upon, and thus foster cultural attitudes that affect the way society relates to Indigenous women.

While these writers do not represent all White writers who write about Indigenous women, Laurence and Kinsella are extremely

popular Canadian writers whose work continues to influence society. Some Euro-Canadian literary critics maintain that Laurence's images of Indigenous people (specifically the Metis) are positive and sympathetic. Some even argue that Kinsella's images are sympathetic and positive, while others identify the images as problematic. For example, George Woodcock's "Prairie Writers and the Metis: Rudy Wiebe and Margaret Laurence" suggests that the Metis in Laurence's novels

> are not introduced merely to heighten the local colour of the prairie setting . . . even when they are not major characters . . . [they] play important roles in affecting the attitudes, the actions and even the fates of the people involved with them. (95)

Woodcock's comment is useful but it certainly does not represent the whole picture. Angelika Maeser-Lemieux's "The Metis in the Fiction of Margaret Laurence: From Outcast to Consort" points out that the Metis in the fiction of Margaret Laurence

> serve as a metaphor for the alienated and repressed part of the individual and collective psyche in patriarchal culture . . . . The Metis functions as a psychopomp, a heightener of consciousness, who incorporates both European and aboriginal worlds in his person and thus mediates the archaic element in the psyche and culture to the heroine (and indirectly to her community). He embodies a

> "primordial image" from the unconscious which compensates for the one-sidedness of the conscious outlook of the prevailing cultural norm. (116)

Eli Mandel's "Imagining Natives: White Perspectives on Native Peoples" specifically refers to both Margaret Laurence's and William Patrick Kinsella's writings about Indigenous peoples "as sympathetic to the Native" (44). Gordon Johnston however refers to the "ambivalent and uneasy response of many to the Indians in the work of W.P. Kinsella" (52). He further explains that Kinsella's stories

> are part of a larger, looser communal reality. Sometimes endings are purposely not provided by Silas the storyteller or by Kinsella the author. The effect is of destabilized expectations and reactions; we have no final sense of how funny or how disturbing a story is. What seems tragic in one context will seem hilarious in another, and we struggle uncomfortably with morally ambivalent events . . . (62)

Perhaps one might naively assume that readers can distinguish real Indigenous women from Kinsella's and Laurence's images. Gordon Johnston argues that most ordinary readers can not. He insists that few non-Indigenous peoples will understand the differences unless "there is a clear understanding . . . of the symbolic intent of the story" (50); unfortunately, with both of these writers' work, there is no guarantee that readers can

comprehend symbolic intent.

Thomas King writes, in the introduction to All My Relations, that up until recently

> Most Canadians have only seen Natives through the eyes of non-Native writers, and, while many of these portrayals have been sympathetic, they have also been limited in their variety of characters, themes, structures, and images. (xi)

As indicated in a previous chapter, Indigenous women have been constructed as creatures of nature, temptresses, or femme fatales, Indian princesses, squaw drudges, or suffering victims.

William Patrick Kinsella's short story "Linda Star" objectifies and dehumanizes Indigenous/Indian women and thus renders them objects to be acted upon. Furthermore, it can be argued that Kinsella's constructions of Indigenous women foster cultural attitudes that legitimize violence and abuse of Indigenous women. Prior to "Linda Star" in Dance Me Outside, Kinsella's text is overloaded with violence and abusive behaviours, and most of the violence and abuse is directed towards Indigenous women. For example, in "Illianna Comes Home" Kinsella's Eathen Firstrider "polishes the big blade of his hunting knife on his jeans and talks about taking scalps" in preparation for when Illianna--and the Whiteman she has married--come home. (6) He also writes in "Dance Me Outside" about Little Margaret Wolfchild who left a dance with "some white guys in a car" who "cut her belly with a knife and sort of stuffed her body

in a garbage can" (21). The events from that particular short story frighteningly parallel the Helen Betty Osborne case. For example, just as Helen Betty Osborne was viciously and brutally murdered, so too was Little Margaret Wolfchild. As Osborne's killers escaped justice (at least for several years), so did Wolfchild's murderer. Lastly, just as the justice system failed Osborne so did it fail Wolfchild. Indeed, Kinsella writes "they only charged Clarence with manslaughter [and] . . . the jury is all men from Wetaskiwin and there ain't no Indians on it" (22).

Although Kinsella's Silas Ermineskin of "Linda Star" is not represented as a violent man, he has very few favourable qualities. Kinsella represents him as a sort of backwoods reserve boy who comes to the big city. Once he arrives, Silas meets up with a supposedly fast-talking and somewhat more sophisticated "Indian" woman, whom Kinsella constructs as a prostitute. Her pimp, protector, and sometime lover is a rude and arrogant Whiteman named Clifton Black.

While the primary plot appears to focus on Calgary street life, there is also a sub-plot at work that subverts the primary plot by privileging the White ideal. Indeed, while Kinsella appears to be trying to portray life on the street by representing the characters and events based on the street people's ideological values, he implicitly promotes a White ideal. Even though the White ideal is not strongly and explicitly represented, Kinsella very cleverly promotes it by foregrounding the street people's values and then ultimately

judging those values against a White ideal. For example, Linda Star is described as a girl who smiles at Silas "real nice but real bold" (69). The implication is that there is an appropriate and acceptable way of smiling, reserved for respectable women. Similarly, Kinsella describes Linda as a competent no less than $100 a day hooker, but this description conflicts with Linda's dream of marriage, babies, and a chicken farm (a dream that ironically resembles what all White-middle-class-christian women are supposed to want). Also, when Silas decides to go back home, he does so only because his real love, Sadie One Wound, is waiting for him. Otherwise, Silas thinks he could give it a try with Linda. (79) That message implies that a virtuous and devoted woman back home is preferable to what Linda Star, the street woman, can provide. It is important to note that he decides to go home to Sadie One Wound, who embodies White-middle-class-christian values like loyalty, devotion, patience, and virtue. Perhaps Kinsella constructs Indigenous people as objects to justify appropriating the Indigenous/Cree/male which voice speaks as Silas Ermineskin.[3] Ermineskin, who also

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[3] Currently, there are major efforts underway by many Indigenous peoples to protect our cultural stories from people like William Patrick Kinsella. Indigenous writers like Lenore-Keeshig-Tobias, Marie Annharte Baker, Sue Deranger, and Maria Campbell refer to non-Indigenous people who appropriate Indigenous voices or materials as nothing more than thieves (Globe and Mail, January 26, 1990, 7; and Regina Leader Post, April 19, 1990, 6). Writer Rudy Wiebe is appalled that Kinsella continues to write about Hobbema, the Ermineskin Reserve, using names like Buffalo and Coyote which he maintains are not fictional at all, because they are real people who live less than an hour from Edmonton.

functions as the protagonist and narrator, symbolically represents a type of contemporary, comic noble savage. However, unlike most Indigenous men who are intelligent enough to get into technical colleges, Silas Ermineskin speaks a very elementary kind of English.

The use of language in this short story is very problematic. For example, Linda Star must have assertively--perhaps even aggressively--articulated her intent, engaged in monetary exchange, and exercised specific skills in order to make never "less than $100 a day," as she boasts to Silas (71). Yet, Kinsella would have us believe that Linda Star communicates her personal needs to Silas in a very child-like voice. Expressing her feelings to Silas, Linda says:

> Silas, I is like for us to get married . . . we could go away someplace where nobody knows us . . . or we could go back to where you live . . . I don't think I would mind live on a reserve if I with you . . . I go anywhere you want me to. (73)

In this passage, language functions as an agent of the White ideal subtext and thus dehumanizes the object or character Linda.

Linda Star, as an objectified character, experiences extreme forms of victimization and abuse in relationships where she is dominated by men. Linda tells Silas that at home on the reserve, prior to coming to the city, my "father he used to beat up me and my sister all the time and that ain't all he used to do either" (70). After the abusive relationship with her father,

she enters into a relationship with Clifton Black. Linda describes her relationship with Clifton to Silas. She says:

> Clifton over there is kind of my old man . . . We don't live together or nothing but he looks out for me if a trick gives me trouble and he take a real interest in me, you know what I mean. I give him some of my money and we get it on once in a while. (70-71)

Clearly, Clifton has no romantic or enduring feelings for Linda. In fact, without hesitation he makes his position very clear to Silas: Linda is his property; she is his whore who makes him money. To stay in control, Clifton justifies his callousness by dehumanizing Linda. After asking Silas if Linda talked about settling down on a chicken farm with him, Clifton coldly replies "All whores are supposed to want to own chicken farms . . . All whores get ideas in their heads like that once in a while" (74).

Kinsella would have us believe that Linda, in a subsequent relationship with Silas, engages in a sexual relationship with what appears to be almost no thought. After their first night together, she moves into his place and begins to talk about marriage and babies. Her lack of thought suggests irresponsibility and immorality, at least from a White-christian-middle-class point of view. Thus, there appears to be justification for objectifying Linda Star.

Linda, as an object that is acted upon, passively submits to victimization. In the role of victim, she allows Clifton to

manipulate her physically, emotionally, and psychologically. He uses her body for sexual gratification and economic exploitation; he manipulates her emotions to exploit her economically and politically; and he tries to control her by creating a psychological dependence.

Clifton feels the need to prove his power over Linda when he notices her attraction to Silas. During a drug bust in Silas's room, Clifton seizes the opportunity to show Silas to whom Linda really belongs. When the police enter Silas's room, he sees "Clifton hand Linda the little package and say stuff it. Linda reach down the front of her jeans and put it between her legs" (76). The police begin to pressure Linda; they tell her that Clifton was being watched so they know he picked up some dope. They try to encourage her to tell them where the dope is and whose it is, but Linda doesn't speak. After some time at the police station, Clifton, knowing that the package Linda was hiding was not a narcotic, smugly says "Hey, man. I can't let you bust my chick . . . I'll take my own weight. The stuffs mine" (77). Then he turns and says to Linda "Give em the stuff, baby" (77). Subsequently, he tells Silas, "I could have cleared the air right away but I seen the chance to show you who Linda really belongs to" (78).

Linda also internalises the objectification and dehumanization of her self. For example, in a conversation with Silas she tells him, "You have to kick my ass, Silas, or you never get me out of your bed" (72). In addition to this, she

encourages Clifton's exploitation, manipulation, and abuse by refusing to leave him. Linda has convinced herself that she cannot function successfully without a man. Indeed, she tells Silas after he has clearly broken off with her, "I do love you, Silas . . . You could be wrong, Silas. Maybe I could be Lena Starblanket again, with the right guy" (79).

Linda Star is represented as a character with some redeeming qualities, however. For example, she tells Silas that she does not usually like to take out a married trick. Also, at one point, Linda appears to be able to control her life and thus tells Silas that she does not owe Clifton anything (72).

Nevertheless, Linda Star's redeeming qualities do not excuse or justify William Patrick Kinsella's irresponsible attitudes as a writer. Constructing characters like Linda Star--without shedding light on the social, political, or economic realities of Indigenous women--encourages and reinforces negative stereotypes of Indigenous women and thus fosters cultural attitudes that legitimize violence.

In Margaret Laurence's "The Loons," protagonist Vanessa MacLeod functions as the narrator. She is a young White-christian-lower-middle-class girl whose understanding of reality is filtered through a racist, classist, and male-privileged ideological value system. Vanessa is represented as a somewhat autonomous subject whereas Piquette Tonnerre is represented as an object who is consistently acted upon, and thus treated as such.

Vanessa, as the narrator and constructor of events within

the story, constructs Piquette's life out of Vanessa's own value system. Thus, Piquette never quite seems to measure up to Vanessa's White ideal standards. Throughout the story the Tonnerre family is frequently judged and compared to the privileged MacLeods. For example, Vanessa, describes her own home in "The Sound of the Singing" (the first short story in A Bird in the House). She writes:

> That house in Manawaka is the one which, more than any other, I carry with me. Known to the rest of the town as "the old Connor place" and to the family as the Brick House, it was plain as the winter turnips in its root cellar, sparsely windowed as some crusader's embattled fortress in a heathen wilderness, its rooms in a perpetual gloom except in the brief height of summer. Many other brick structures had existed in Manawaka for as much as half a century, but at the time when my grandfather built his house, part dwelling place and part massive monument, it had been the first of its kind. (1)

In comparison to the MacLeod's fortress-type home, Vanessa describes Piquette's home as a shack "made of poplar poles and chinked with mud" (96). She remembers that as the Tonnerres had increased

> their settlement had been added to, until the clearing at the foot of the townhill was a chaos of

> lean-tos, wooden packing cases, warped lumber, discarded car tires, ramshackle chicken coops, tangled strands of barbed wire and rusty tin cans. (96)

Piquette and her family are continually dehumanized and represented as objects of contempt because they never seem to quite measure up to the MacLeod's White ideal.[4] Even their language, according to Vanessa, does not belong to them. Unlike many of the historical and contemporary Metis who characteristically cling to their Mitchif language, the Metis in Laurence's fiction are people whose language is "neither Cree nor French" (96). Similarly, in terms of their Metis heritage, Laurence's narrator insists "they did not belong among the Cree of the Galloping Mountain reservation, further north, and they did not belong among the Scots-Irish and Ukrainians of Manawaka, either" (96). What is unfortunately not envisioned is that they have their own space in Canada--which too many have died fighting to keep--just as the Cree and the Whites do.

Piquette also functions as an object of the protagonist's adventurous spirit. Thus, Vanessa subsequently envisages a more interesting and exciting identity that she imposes on Piquette. Vanessa incorrectly assumes that the Tonnerre family, whom she had always heard were "halfbreeds, were actually Indians, or as near as made no difference" (100). Invoking the over-used

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[4] For an interesting and more thorough discussion of the White ideal in relation to the Metis see Dr. Howard Adams' Prison of Grass, (141-144).

romantic daughter of the forest stereotype (a kind of princess of nature), Vanessa imagines that "Piquette sprang from the people of Big Bear and Poundmaker, of Tecumseh, of the Iroquois who had eaten Father Brebeuf's heart" and thus the young Halfbreed girl becomes a compelling and potentially exciting companion (100).

Throughout the narrative, Piquette is constructed as an object; she lacks qualities vital to an autonomous subject. Indeed, Vanessa variously describes Piquette as acted upon. At one point Vanessa sees her,

> sitting on the swing, her lame leg held stiffly out, and her other foot scuffing the ground as she swung slowly back and forth. Her long hair hung black and straight around her shoulders, and her broad-coarse featured face bore no expression--it was blank, as though she no longer dwelt within her own skull, as though she had gone elsewhere. (99-100)

In this passage, Vanessa's White-christian-middle class values influence her vision and therefore she looks upon Piquette only as an empty shell. Moreover, Vanessa is repulsed by what she thinks is left of Piquette's seemingly pathetic and unhealthy body. After several attempts to arouse Piquette's supposedly Indian connection to the land, Vanessa concludes "that as an "Indian" Piquette was a dead loss" (102). Piquette soon loses her appeal and thus Vanessa dismisses Piquette from her mind. She justifies her behaviour toward Piquette by thinking that "I could not reach Piquette at all, and I soon lost interest in

trying" (103).

Vanessa remembers Piquette as an impoverished young woman without hope, a helpless victim of racism and patriarchal dominance. As the daughter of Lazarus Tonnerre, Piquette is born into a family whose only maternal relative, her mother, abandoned her. Her paternal relatives are described as men who worked

> at odd jobs or as section hands on the C.P.R., . . . [and who] lived on relief. In the summers, one of the Tonnerre youngsters, with a face that seemed totally unfamiliar with laughter, would knock at the doors of the town's brick houses and offer for sale a lard-pail full of bruised wild strawberries, and if he got as much as a quarter he would grab the coin and run before the customer had time to change her mind. Sometimes old Jules, or his son Lazarus, would get mixed up in a Saturday-night brawl, and would hit out at whoever was nearest, or howl drunkenly among the offended shoppers on Main Street, and then the Mountie would put them for the night in the barred cell underneath the Court House, and the next morning they would be quiet again. (96-97)

Piquette, surrounded by patriarchal rulers, moves from one male dominated situation to another. In her early years, she functions as housekeeper, cook, and laundress for her brothers

and father. Even when Dr. MacLeod intervenes and suggests that she accompany his family to Diamond Lake, Piquette merely moves from one form of domination to another.

At first Dr. MacLeod's wife and mother reject the idea of Piquette spending the summer. In fact, Vanessa's mother responds quickly; she ignorantly assumes that Piquette will infect her children, if not with her disease, then with lice (which she automatically assumes Piquette is infected with). Dr. MacLeod quickly changes his tactics and uses Piquette as an object, explaining that she can "be company for Vanessa" (98). While the doctor's initial concern for Piquette appears quite genuine, Piquette is subsequently used as leverage to keep Dr.MacLeod's mother from joining the doctor, his wife, and children. Vanessa remembers that when her mother was presented with a choice between spending the summer with Grandmother MacLeod and Piquette, Piquette won "hands down, nits or not" (98).

In later years, Vanessa remembers seeing Piquette in a new way; in fact, she is pleasantly surprised by Piquette's almost friendly demeanour. After Piquette tells Vanessa about her upcoming marriage to "an English fella, [who] works in the stockyards in the city," Vanessa realizes the Halfbreed girl has "been forced to seek the very things she so bitterly rejected" (105). She remembers that

> for the merest instant, then, I saw her. I really did see her, for the first and only time in all the years we had both lived in the same town. Her

> defiant face, momentarily, became unguarded and unmasked, and in her eyes there was a terrifying hope. (105)

Predictably, Piquette's marriage ends in failure. So, seemingly without many resources and few skills, she returns to Manawaka, to an impoverished life, and with additional dependants. In the end, no longer able to function in the narrow confines of the White-christian-lower-middle class marginal space, Piquette dies; according to Vanessa's mother, a victim of her own vices. (106)

Angelika Maeser-Lemieux's "The Metis in the Fiction of Margaret Laurence: From Outcast to Consort," employing Rayna Green's "The Pocahontas Perplex: The Image of the Indian Women in American Culture," explains why relations between White men and Indigenous women never succeed. She points out that "the shadow side of the [princess] archetype is represented as savage and, above all, lustful" (125). Lemieux, quoting Green, explains that the squaw is defined only in relation to the male figure and "generally, the white male lover leaves her, and, in response, the Indian woman dies heart-broken or commits suicide" (125). Relying on Green's arguments, Lemieux writes "to be 'good,' she must defy her own people, exile herself from them, become white, and perhaps suffer death" (125). In relation to the squaw role, according to Green, Indigenous women are too often forced to "share in the same vices attributed to Indian men--drunkenness, stupidity, thievery--and they live in shacks on the edge of town rather than in a woodland paradise" (125-126).

Piquette's death is Margaret Laurence's ultimate act of reducing the "halfbreed" girl to an object. Unfortunately, Piquette Tonnerre is not represented as a survivor who overcomes intolerable situations, like so many real Indigenous women. Instead, she is represented as a "halfbreed" girl who passively succumbs to social forces beyond her control that have seemingly victimized Piquette all her life. Certainly, some non-Indigenous readers (and perhaps even some Indigenous readers) may think that Laurence deliberately depicts Piquette as a victim, however, as an Indigenous woman reader, I am offended by Laurence's depiction of Piquette as a helpless victim.

Moreover, Margaret Laurence's depiction of Piquette Tonnerre is very problematic because few readers understand the way that Indigenous women's lives are constructed within the White-Euro-Canadian-christian-patriarchal ideology. Angelika Maeser-Lemieux suggests that Piquette is described "in degraded sensual imagery that contrasts to the 'good' woman of the patriarchy in whom lust and other vices are presumably absent" (124). Thus, the way that Piquette is treated and her subsequent death appear to be justifiable.

Similarly, W.P. Kinsella's Linda Star is presented as an immoral character who encourages men to use her for sexual gratification. By dehumanizing Linda Star and constructing her as an object, Kinsella covertly promotes violence against Indigenous women. What is most frightening about Kinsella's work, and even very dangerous, is that there are too many non-

Indigenous peoples who assume that all Indigenous women are like Linda Star.

Certainly the men who brutally murdered Helen Betty Osborne were influenced and encouraged by the squaw stereotype and believed that Indigenous women are promiscuous and only too willing to party and have sex. Do readers of fiction understand that literary characters like Margaret Laurence's Piquette Tonnerre and William Patrick Kinsella's have little to do with real Indigenous women? Gordon Johnston argues that many readers cannot distinguish between real people and the characters in fiction. In fact, he insists that "it is the exceptional student these days who can see [characters like] Uncas and Magua in The Last of the Mohicans as anything but realistic and, hence, as inaccurate, racist distortions" (51). He also points out that the

> symbolic figures which have come to be believed . . . need to be challenged, [and] deconstructed . . . because the figures themselves come to be regarded as real. . . . many writers of popular fictions, . . . either exploit or use uncritically . . . racist images and, so, perpetuate the problem. (51)

In "Sexism and the Social Construction of Knowledge" Margaret Anderson explains that there is

> a relationship between images and reality, either because images reflect social values . . . or because images create social ideals upon which

> people model their behaviour and attitudes. Moreover, these images are produced by working people; even if we see them as social myths, they are connected to the social systems in which they are created. (29)

Also, in Gordon Johnston's "An Intolerable Burden of Meaning: Native People in White Fiction," the author maintains that

> the stories that white authors tell of Native peoples have, for the most part, been symbolic in nature [and] . . . The nature and force of images of Indians have been derived from the symbolic code or language of this debate rather than from any understanding of the Indians themselves. (50)

Referring to romantic fiction of the 19th century, Johnston also suggests that there is probably no chance of literary characters being accepted as a realistic or unrealistic portrayal of "Indian" peoples' lives. However, he does caution that:

> there is now a danger, because romantic fictions are also cousins to the novel, and the novel is the clearest indicator of the rise of realism as an aesthetic mode in the nineteenth century. If there is any kind of confusion in writers or readers about the two kinds of storytelling, then Indians who are symbolic figures from the world of romance, will come to be regarded as realistic or mimetic . . . And so these

> symbolic figures which have come to be believed--the rapist, the grunting animal, the stoic sufferer, the visionary seer, [the promiscuous/inherently bad/whore/evil/lustful/amoral woman] and all the rest--need to be challenged, deconstructed, not because the symbolic values they stand for are unimportant, but because the figures themselves have come to be regarded as real. (51)

The real danger, as the Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba concluded, is that racist images and stereotypes--which are generally born of ignorance--encourage cultural attitudes that justify violence against Indigenous women. How many readers understand the way that Indigenous women's lives are constructed within the White-Euro-Canadian-christian ideology? Can readers who are ignorant of Indigenous people's ways, and the social, political, and economic realities of our lives, understand why so many of us are confined to living in sub-standard conditions?

How many non-Indigenous writers understand that even though there are extreme poverty, many social problems, and often just a little hope, that Indigenous peoples also have love and compassion for each other? How many of those writers see the strength, determination, and beauty of our peoples? Few non-Indigenous writers, if any, prior to Maria Campbell's Halfbreed articulated this reality.

# CHAPTER FOUR: HALFBREED: A REVISITING OF MARIA CAMPBELL'S TEXT FROM AN INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE

Indigenous people who reside within the country now known as Canada have roots in this land that can most appropriately be described as immemorial. Over the years, our peoples maintained a curatorial relationship to the land and the land reciprocated by providing for our needs. Because of this relationship to the land, and for many contemporary Indigenous peoples, the memory of it, we were able to survive despite many very deliberate genocidal attempts to do away with our cultures.[1] Nonetheless, Indigenous peoples' very numerous and distinct cultures have been transmitted from one generation to another through languages, songs, dances, traditional economic practices, and governing structures. These specific Indigenous ways continue to provide a spiritual, social, political, and economic context that distinguishes Indigenous peoples from non-Indigenous peoples and thus contributes to the formulation of the self. Throughout the long history of relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in North America, many writers and scholars have attempted to articulate this complex relationship. In Canada, numerous non-Indigenous writers and scholars continue this

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[1] In Canada these genocidal policies were initiated by a very paternalistic colonial government for the so-called good of Indigenous peoples. For example, the Indian Residential School system was utilized in Canada to supposedly "civilize" and "christianize" Indigenous peoples. Also, throughout Canadian history various Acts of Parliament were passed to do away with Indigenous peoples. In relation to the Metis, land was taken from us unjustly (some even say illegally) through the scrip system.

tradition through educational institutions and the media. However, few (if any) non-Indigenous writers and scholars have had extensive first-hand knowledge of our ways and thus were and are unable to correctly represent our distinct social, political, and economic ways of life. Some of these writers misrepresented specific Indigenous peoples by imposing their own Eurocentric world view, while others fragmented our ways by writing about only one aspect of a specific Indigenous culture. Over the years, the political ramifications of this kind of representation contributed to the formulation of social, political, and economic ideals upon which non-Indigenous peoples modelled very racist and sexist attitudes and behaviours. Currently, as many contemporary Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples agree, this situation is extremely problematic.

Maria Campbell's 1973 autobiographically-based Halfbreed intervened in the Canadian literary tradition that had, until then, constructed Indigenous women in ways that were contrary to our real lived experiences. Campbell's text challenges existing stereotypes and images of Indigenous women by providing a vivid spiritual, social, political, and economic context of her own Halfbreed (and to a limited extent Cree Indian) way of life.[2] As one of the first Indigenous women speaking out, or writing her

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[2] Prior to the imposition of the Indian Act, Indigenous peoples had a simple way of identifying individuals. If a person lived among Indigenous peoples and respected our ways, values, and beliefs, they were generally accepted as one of the people. Currently, the Canadian constitution recognizes the Metis, which is synonymous with Halfbreed, as one of the Aboriginal (Indigenous) peoples of Canada.

way out of what Adrienne Rich's "When We Dead Awaken" describes as the assumptions that women are drenched in (18), Campbell begins to understand how her identity has been constructed for her. Through the act of writing, the author begins to search her past for evidence of her authentic self. Inevitably, she helps other Indigenous women to begin the same kind of re-clamation and re-connection of their selves. In this way, Ms. Campbell's somewhat fictional autobiography is extremely important because it functions as an important model for achieving wholeness and connectedness for Indigenous women in North America, who were like so many other Indigenous peoples, as Howard Adams maintains in Prison of Grass, very "isolated and individualized people" (178). Lastly, her text is an important legacy for Indigenous women because it represents Indigenous women in the persons of Cheechum, Grannie Campbell, Qua Chich, Grannie Dubuque, and her mother to a somewhat lesser extent, as survivors of the oppressive colonial regime, and abusive relationships, as well as systemic racism and sexism.

Maria Campbell's text intervened in a literary tradition that had constructed Indigenous women's lives from within a White-Euro-Canadian-christian patriarchy. Her text, albeit written in the English colonizer's language and thus seemingly privileging the patriarchal hierarchy, consistently resists conforming to the christian patriarchy. The author's first act of resistance manifests itself in the construction of her text. As so many previously colonized writers (who are variously cited

throughout this thesis and who have struggled to de-colonize themselves) maintain, the act of writing is a political act that can encourage de-colonization. In this context, Campbell is one of the first few Indigenous women who appropriated the colonizer's language to name her oppressors, identify the oppressor's unjust systems, laws, and processes, and subsequently work towards de-colonization. Ms. Campbell prefaces her text by defiantly addressing members of the colonial world. She asserts, "I write this for all of you, to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country" (2). Campbell's reference to herself as a Halfbreed disturbs many liberal White-Euro-Canadians who think of the term as derogatory and are thus puzzled by her continued use of it. Howard Adams (a staunch Metis activist originally from the Duck Lake area and one of the first Indigenous people to achieve a doctorate in the Euro-Canadian educational system) writes:

> To the whites of Canada, "Metis" means a light-coloured Indian. In Canadian history, "halfbreed" refers specifically to the group of people who are part Indian and part white. These halfbreed people did not have a choice as to whether they would be Indians or white or in-between; society defined them as members of the native society and it still does today. Halfbreed was the original name used by white traders in the early fur-trading years, but today this word has become unacceptable to

> mainstream society. To whites, halfbreed became a vulgar expression, so they adopted the name Metis--the French expression for mixed blood--which seems to be a more polite term. Most hinterland natives, however, still use halfbreed or simply "breed", while urban natives use Metis. (ix)

Maria Campbell, and many other contemporary people, still use the term Halfbreed; some refer to themselves as Halfbreeds with a strong nationalistic pride, while others use the term as a kind of blatant reminder of Canadian society's racism towards them.[3]

Campbell's language, which repeatedly shifts from English to Mitchif to Cree, is an important site of resistance. Examples of this resistance are most evident in Campbell's names for her female relatives. Her greatest influence and confidante, whose name and term of reference according to the English-Canadian patriarchy is greatgrandmother Campbell, is fondly referred to in Mitchif as Cheechum. Another maternal relative, who according to the patriarchy is the author's great-aunt, is simply referred to as Qua Chich.

Campbell's text also resists conformity to the Euro-Canadian patriarchy by looking back at her life with a re-awakened self. In doing so, she challenges the White-christian-patriarchal constructs of Indigenous women, which are both racist and sexist, by firmly contextualizing her book as proceeding from a

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[3] For example, Howard Adams much more so as a gesture of defiance refers to himself as a Halfbreed or a Breed. My mother and her relatives also refer to themselves as Halfbreeds.

Halfbreed-Indigenous ideology. This context is embodied in the author's very strong sense of community and family, or as Thomas King describes it in the preface to All My Relations, the web of "kinship that radiate[s] from a Native sense of family" (xiii). By firmly rooting the text in her Halfbreed-Indigenous ideology, Campbell challenges the squaw drudge, Indian princess, and suffering victim images because she remembers the women in her family as resourceful and dynamic women who were vital to their community.

The author maintains that her Cheechum is her greatest source of inspiration, strength, and love. She remembers Cheechum as a small woman who tenaciously clung to her own way of life despite numerous and powerful threats from the various agents of colonization. She writes,

> Cheechum hated to see the settlers come, and as they settled on what she believed was our land, she ignored them and refused to acknowledge them even when passing on the road. She would not become a Christian, saying firmly that she had married a Christian and if there was such a thing as hell then she had lived there; nothing after death could be worse! (15)

That christian is the author's greatgrandfather Campbell, who the old people called "Chee-pie-hoos" or "Evil-spirit-jumping-up-and-down" (14). The author implies that Chee-pie-hoos, who came from Edinburgh, Scotland and ran a Hudson's Bay store, regarded

Cheechum as a loose woman in accord with the stereotype of Indigenous women as whores. Indeed, old man Campbell's White-Euro-christian patriarchal influence encouraged him to think that his "wife was having affairs with all the Halfbreeds in the area" (14). Although Cheechum married the Scottish immigrant, Campbell insists that the old lady defiantly resisted any kind of domination. During the 1885 Resistance at Batoche and while greatgrandfather Campbell worked with the North West Mounted Police, Campbell maintains that Cheechum collected information, ammunition, and supplies to give to the so-called rebels. When the old man found out, he punished his wife by stripping her naked and beating her in public. Some time after, Great Grandpa Campbell died mysteriously and Cheechum went to live with her mother's people in the area now known as Prince Albert National Park. Cheechum's mother's people were, according to Campbell, "Indian," even though "they were never part of a reserve, as they weren't present when the treaty-makers came" (15). The author proudly remembers that Cheechum scorned offers of so-called help in the form of welfare and old age pension. Instead, the old woman remained completely self-sufficient and therefore hunted, trapped, and planted a garden. Campbell writes, Cheechum

> built a cabin beside Maria Lake and raised her son. Years later when the area was designated for the Park, the government asked her to leave. She refused, and when all peaceful methods failed the RCMP were sent. She locked her door, loaded her

> rifle, and when they arrived she fired shots over their heads, threatening to hit them if they came any closer. They left her alone and she was never disturbed again. (15)

The subsequent marriage of her son, Maria's Grandpa Campbell, to a "Vandal" woman whose family had been involved in the 1885 Resistance marks a continuation of Cheechum's pattern of resistance.[4] Campbell describes grandmother Campbell as a fiercely strong woman who after her husband's death "went to a white community . . . to cut brush for seventy-five cents an acre" (16). Grandma Campbell kept her children warm while they worked by wisely choosing to wrap their feet in an Indigenous way with rabbit skins and moccasins, as well as using material (old papers) from the White culture. Her adaptive powers are vitally important and grandmother Campbell conforms to the powerful, dynamic, and resourceful women pattern that the author subsequently adheres to. Grannie Campbell, the author remembers, was also very physically strong. She writes, "Because they (Grannie Campbell and her children) had only one team of horses and Dad used these to work for other people, Grannie on many occasions pulled the plough herself" (16). Grannie Campbell, like Cheechum, was totally self-sufficient; in fact, when Maria's father suggested that he could take care of her "she became quite

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[4] Many Metis people distinguish between a rebellion and a resistance. We say that a rebellion connotes an armed resistance by rebels; however Louis Riel and the Metis were not rebels. In fact, they legitimately formed a provisional government for the Territories.

angry and said he had a family to worry about and what she did was none of his business" (17). Till she was quite old, "she brushed and cleared the settlers' land, picked their stones, delivered their babies, and looked after them when they were sick" (17).

The representation of Grannie Campbell's older sister, Qua Chich, also resists the stereotypic images of Indigenous women because she survives the government's treaty-making interventions, relocation to an Indian reserve, a marriage which left her widowed, and destitution and poverty which afflicted her sisters and brothers. Campbell remembers Qua Chich as a strange old lady who cussed at her dog in Cree. Also, according to the author, Qua Chich was considered quite wealthy because "she owned many cows and horses as well as a big two-storey house" (22). Qua Chich maintained her home and property long after her husband's death. While Campbell remembers that "she was stingy with money, and if someone was desperate enough to ask for help she would draw up formal papers and demand a signature," Qua Chich's business skills exemplify another aspect of the strong and resourceful women who pattern the author's family (23).

The variety of female personalities Campbell presents in the book resists the very limited and confining stereotypical images that imprison Indigenous women. Campbell's mother, whom she describes as "quiet and gentle, never outgoing and noisy like the other women" also challenges the very limiting stereotypical princess/squaw images (17). While the author acknowledges that

her mother, like so many others "was always busy cooking," the author recognizes that she was quite unlike the other Metis women because "she loved books and music and spent many hours reading to us" (17).

The author's maternal grandmother also resists the stereotypical confines that non-Indigenous peoples construct for Indigenous women. Campbell describes her as "a treaty Indian woman, different from Grannie Campbell because she was raised in a convent" (18). Campbell's Grannie Dubuque marries Pierre Dubuque, a French immigrant who "arranged his marriage . . . through the nuns at the convent" (15).

In her early years, Campbell cannot comprehend the devastating damage christianity has inflicted on her culture. However, as a young de-colonizing writer looking back upon her life with fresh eyes, she begins to understand how christianity has constructed and defined her in accord with the patriarchy. Indeed, she realizes that christianity is a powerful agent of colonization and therefore it constantly attempts to impose controls. As indicated previously, the author's mother and grandmother Dubuque were both raised in convents and thus christianity severely eroded any connection they may have had to their original way of life. Grannie Dubuque's life was arranged by the convent nuns who married her off to Pierre Dubuque. Campbell remembers that her people never talked "against the church or the priest regardless of how bad they were" (32). Remembering her mother's undaunting and unquestioning faith in

God, even when the fat priest selfishly eats what little food they have, Campbell recalls that her mother "accepted it all as she did so many things because it was sacred and of God" (32). The priest by comparison showed no respect for what was sacred to the them. Campbell bitterly remembers that he took things "from the Indian's Sundance Pole, . . . [things] that belonged to the Great Spirit" (30). Unlike the mother, Cheechum clearly understood the power politics manifested in the priest's actions and thus thoroughly resisted domination. Campbell insists that Cheechum hated the church, the Catholic God, and the priest. The author writes, "Cheechum would often say scornfully of this God that he took more money from us than the Hudson's Bay store" (32).

As an Indigenous woman, Cheechum's knowledge, values, and belief system, unlike christian dogmatism, was derived from a closeness to the land. As a result of her closeness to the land, Cheechum had tremendous insight into human relations, as well as a rich understanding of plants and animals. Having lived through many kinds of changes, she was extremely opinionated about the politics of war, the church, the role of men and women, and the government. After Campbell's mother dies, she finds comfort in Cheechum's words. She writes:

> I have never found peace in a church or in prayer. Perhaps Cheechum had a lot to do with that. Her philosophy was much more practical, soothing and exciting, and in her way I found comfort. She told

me not to worry about the Devil, or where God lived, or what would happen after death. She said that regardless of how hard I might pray or how many hours I spent on my knees, I had no choice in what would happen to me or when I die. She said it was a pure waste of time that could be used more constructively. She taught me to see beauty in all things around me; that inside each thing a spirit lived, that it was vital too, regardless of whether it was only a leaf or a blade of grass, and by recognizing its life and beauty I was accepting God. She said that each time I did something it was a prayer, regardless of whether it was good or bad; that heaven and hell were man-made and here on earth; that there was no death, only that the body becomes old from life on earth and that the soul must be reborn, because it is young; that when my body became old my spirit would leave and I'd come back and live again. She said God lives in you and looks like you, and not to worry about him floating around in a beard and white cloak; that the Devil lives in you and all things, and that he looks like you and not like a cow. She often shook her head at the pictures I gave her of God, angels and devils and the things they did. She laughed when she saw the picture of the Devil turning people

> over with a fork in the depth of Hell's fire, and remarked that it was no wonder those people looked so unhappy, if that's what they believed in. Her explanation made much more sense than anything Christianity had ever taught me. (72-73)

Cheechum's simple ways were often contradicted by Campbell's maternal relatives whom the author describes as both strict Catholics and superstitious "Indians." Also, contrary to Cheechum's subtle teachings about striving for spiritual and cultural riches, Grannie Dubuque often implicitly encouraged the author and her siblings to ambitiously seek out material wealth. Campbell writes that while Grannie Dubuque visited she encouraged them to pretend they were rich. Although their food was only meat, potatoes, bannock, lard, and tea, Grannie Dubuque urged them to pretend they were eating fancy salads and dishes like chicken-a-la-king on a fancy table cloth. (80) If only briefly, Campbell's maternal grandmother allowed them to forget their poverty but the harsh reality of their lives often intruded upon their games. Moreover, Grannie Dubuque's idealization of White culture only reminded Maria's family of unattainable goals.

To a certain extent, Campbell's language reflects the author's subtle conformity to the White-Euro-Canadian-christian patriarchy when she begins to fragment Indigenous peoples. Referring to the differences between "Treaty Indian" and "Halfbreed" women, she makes broad generalizations that are more stereotypical than factual; the author explains that "Treaty

Indian women don't express their opinions, Halfbreed women do" (27). Those differences, according to Campbell, represent part of a pattern between "Indian" and "Metis" people. She elaborates the differences in the following passage:

> There was never much love lost between Indians and Halfbreeds. They were completely different from us--quiet when we were noisy, dignified even at dances and get-togethers. Indians were very passive--they would get angry at things done to them but would never fight back, whereas Halfbreeds were quick-tempered--quick to fight, but quick to forgive and forget.
>
> The Indians' religion was very precious to them and to the Halfbreeds, but we never took it as seriously. We all went to the Indians' sundances and special gatherings, but somehow we never fitted in. We were always the poor relatives, the awp-pee-tow-koosons [half people]. They laughed and scorned us. They had land and security, we had nothing. As Daddy put it, "No pot to piss in or a window to throw it out." They would tolerate us unless they were drinking and then they would try to fight, but received many sound beatings from us. However, their old people, our "Mushooms" (grandfathers) and "Kokums" (grandmothers) were good. They were prejudiced, but because we were kin they came to

> visit and our people treated them with respect. (26-27)

In later years, more wisely looking back upon life, in a conversation with Hartmut Lutz in Contemporary Challenges, Ms. Campbell insists that "when it comes to Aboriginal people in Canada, we have the church to 'thank' in all areas, whether we are Metis, non-status or whatever, for the dilemma that we are in now!" (47). Indeed, she insists that the Catholic church has always been "the 'man coming in front of' the colonizer" (47). A more articulate and mature Campblell explains to Lutz that up until 20 years ago "the priest had total power in the community . . . . It is still there, but not the kind of influence they had before" (46). She also points out that because the church has been losing control, it is now incorporating Indigenous ceremonies and rituals. Campbell astutely maintains

> But that's the history of Christianity. When you can't completely oppress a people, if you are losing them, then you incorporate their spiritual beliefs. And that's even uglier than the other way, because then people think "Oh,well, now it's okay, because the priest is now doing our ceremonies."
>
> So the priest ends up becoming the shaman in the community. (47)

If her comments sound bitter, one must try to examine those comments from within Campbell's own cultural context. As a young girl, Campbell's dreams, hopes, and ambitions are shattered by

christian patriarchal intrusions, her mother's death, extreme poverty, racism, and sexism.

Maria Campbell was 33 years old when she wrote her story. It grew out of her anger and frustrations. In the interview with Hartmut Lutz she talks about the writing process which led to Halfbreed:

> When I started to write Halfbreed I didn't know I was going to write a book. I was very angry, very frustrated.
>
> I wrote the book after I had the dream! I had no money, and I was on the verge of being kicked out of my house, had no food, and I decided to go back out in the street and work. I went out one night and sat in a bar. And I just couldn't, because I knew that if I went back to that, I'd be back on drugs again.
>
> I always carry paper in my bag, and I started writing a letter because I had to have somebody to talk to, and there was nobody to talk to. And that was how I wrote Halfbreed. (53)

Her writing thus becomes an act of resistance. Through the construction of her text, Campbell looks back upon her life with a renewed vision and a stronger connection to those powerful, resourceful, and dynamic women who came before her. What she writes has rarely been said by Indigenous women in North America. The racism and sexism that she suffers is something that too many

Indigenous women have suffered. Her voice allows this suffering to be heard. Campbell has first-hand knowledge of this suffering and has survived the genocidal attempts to do away with her people's ways, and survived too the colonial oppression, abusive men, and systemic racism and sexism. She refuses to let her ancestors' sufferings be white-washed by liberal do-gooders. Speaking with Lutz she states:

> Canada's history, the history of Canadians, is that they are killing us with their liberal gentleness. Helping us, being kind to us. "We don't have horrible racism in this country," is one of the things they say. They tell us, "We never had slavery here, we never had this," but some of the horrible things that have happened are worse, or every bit as bad. Because the kinds of things that have happened to Aboriginal people in Canada are things that were so "nice" that nobody's ever bothered to record them because they were done in such a "nice" way, or if they were recorded they were changed. It's okay to report the atrocities of other countries, and what they do to their peoples, but heaven forbid that Canadians would ever do something like that!
>
> We were busy in the 1940s hearing about the horrible things Germany was doing. Nobody ever would believe that in Saskatchewan at the same time people were loaded into cattle cars, not having

> bathrooms or facilities, and were carted off, hauled some place, and dumped off in the middle of the snow--and some of those people dying. We never hear about things like that because Canada doesn't do things like that. We need to write those stories ourselves. (58-59)

Her voice refuses to let Canada erase what has been done to her people. But, she also addresses the way Indigenous people have internalised colonialism. Remembering Cheechum's words, she writes in Halfbreed:

> Many years ago, she [Cheechum] said, when she was only a little girl, the Halfbreeds came west. They left good homes behind in their search for a place where they could live as they wished. Later a leader arose from these people who said that if they worked hard and fought for what they believed in they would win against all odds. Despite the hardships, they gave all they had for this one desperate chance of being free, but because some of them said, "I want good clothes and horses and you no-good Halfbreeds are ruining it for me," they lost their dream. She continued: "They fought each other just as you are fighting your mother and father today. The white man saw that was a more powerful weapon than anything else with which to beat the Halfbreeds, and he used it and still does

> today. Already they are using it on you. They try to make you hate your people. (47)

In this passage, Campbell points to colonialism internalized and manifested in family violence, and Metis privileging the White ideal--symptoms of the colonial disease. When she remembers how her father was beaten and died inside after unsuccessfully attempting to politicize their community, she writes with anger and a real sense of loss:

> Daddy started to drink that summer and I began to grow up. Our whole lives, and those of our people, started to go downhill. We had always been poor, but we'd had love and laughter and warmth to share with each other. We didn't have even that anymore, and we were poorer than ever. Daddy still trapped, but only because it was an escape for him. He would be gone for long periods at a time, then when he was home he drank and often brought white men home with him. Sometimes he'd hit Mom, and she would take the baby and run away until he was sober. He seldom smiled and he hardly ever talked to us unless it was to yell. When he sobered up he'd try to make up, but it never lasted long. Once he even slapped Cheechum. (67)

The author's family had lived through extreme poverty but they were able to stay together and help each other. Maria maintains that when the people lost their collective dreams and their hopes

they lost their self-respect. Her father lost self-respect after his own people turned on him. As Frantz Fanon in The Wretched of the Earth and Dr. Howard Adams in Prison of Grass argue, colonized people turning on their own people is symptomatic of the colonial disease.

Campbell also remembers being victimized by colonialism when as a child she internalised the White ideals. Wishing for what the Germans and Swedes possessed, she thought they

> must be the richest and most beautiful on earth. They could buy pretty cloth for dresses, ate apples and oranges, and they had toothbrushes and brushed their teeth every day. (27)

This dream--which represents idealization of White culture--carries her all the way to Vancouver where she once again remembers childhood dreams of "toothbrushes and pretty dresses, oranges and apples, and a happy family sitting around the kitchen table talking about . . . tomorrow" (114). Many hopes and dreams shatter as she remembers the men and women who were bought off or silenced by the government. The most prominent symbol of the government's co-opting is embodied in the Indian in the suit. During her re-awakening, recounted towards the end of her narrative, she meets many Indigenous people who have sold their dreams. Witnessing the way the oppressor uses Indigenous neo-colonial puppet rulers to further the goals of the colonial oppressor, Campbell is devastated.

However, she does not allow herself to be beaten. Like the

very strong, vital, and resourceful women within her family, she survives. Campbell survives colonial rule in its absolutely worst oppressive states, abusive men, systemic racism and sexism, and drugs and alcohol addiction. She does not die a victim of Canadian society's racism and sexism, like Margaret Laurence's beaten-down Piquette Tonnerre, or a hopeless whore with no strength or determination to liberate herself, like William Patrick Kinsella's Linda Star. As a survivor, she leaves an important legacy for other Indigenous women.

More importantly because of Campbell's courageous gestures to speak out, to name her oppressors, and to re-claim her self, she lifts the cloak of silence from other Indigenous women who find themselves prisoners in similar situations. For example, many contemporary Indigenous women who are writers look to Maria Campbell's text as the one which encouraged them to also speak out, name their oppressors, and re-claim their selves. As a result, many of these writers found comfort in solidarity with other Indigenous women. Thus, just as Campbell's Cheechum wisely foretold, she did find her self and many more sisters and brothers.

# CHAPTER FIVE: POST HALFBREED: INDIGENOUS WRITERS AS AUTHORS OF THEIR OWN REALITIES

Maria Campbell's Halfbreed (1973) encouraged many Indigenous people to begin writing and her text initiated the process of representing Indigenous women both positively and knowledgeably. Many contemporary Indigenous writers like Jeannette Armstrong, Beth Cuthand, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, Daniel David Moses, Jordan Wheeler, Emma LaRocque, Beatrice Culleton, Thomas King, Lee Maracle, Tomson Highway, Basil Johnson, Ruby Slipperyjack and Marie Baker write from culturally distinct positions that challenge non-Indigenous writers' stereotypical images of Indigenous women. Thus, Halfbreed both established a new literary trend that encouraged Indigenous writers to create more realistic images of Indigenous women and forced Euro-Canadian readers of literature to re-examine their former beliefs.

In Contemporary Challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native Authors, Lutz writes "Native writing in Canada, especially in the last year, . . . is so vital, there's so much coming out! It's almost exploding. It's so powerful and it's so multidimensional" (175). By way of introductory remarks, in the preface to Maria Campbell's interview, Lutz describes Halfbreed as "a best seller and still . . . the most important and seminal book authored by a Native person from Canada" (41). In conversation with Ms. Campbell, Lutz insists that although she may not see herself as a writer, "with Halfbreed . . . [she] really started something" (42). The majority of the writers interviewed by Lutz agree. Jeannette Armstrong describes

Halfbreed as "an important book in terms of Native literature" (25). Beth Cuthand insists that "Halfbreed is a classic. If people are studying Canadian Native literature, they have to read it. Halfbreed is a standard" (35). Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, citing the importance of Campbell's contribution to other Indigenous writers, uses Daniel David Moses's words to describe her as "The Mother Of Us All" (83). One of the most recently published young Indigenous authors, Jordan Wheeler, maintains that Halfbreed "still has a record as the bestselling first book by anybody in Canadian history" (74). In the preface to Writing the Circle, Emma LaRocque describes both Beatrice Culleton's autobiographical In Search of April Raintree and Halfbreed as "powerful mirrors to Canadian society" (xviii).

While Halfbreed is often cited as one of "Native" literature's earliest accomplishments, according to Lutz, "Native" literature is not new. In the preface to Contemporary Challenges, Lutz summarizes approximately thirty years of literary accomplishments by Indigenous writers.

Citing Emily Pauline Johnson as one of the first "Native" writers, Lutz locates the roots of "Native" literature early in the 20th century. He maintains that although there was no written literature by "Native" people, the oral tradition enriched the literature in the century between "treaty making and the present" (2). According to Lutz, "Native" people's voices were absent from the written literature until the 1960s. However, he insists that even those early attempts by "Native"

writers were "heavily edited by non-Native missionaries, anthropologists, and hobbyists . . . [who] tended to represent Native 'tales' from the igloo, the smokehouse, or the campfire as 'quaint' or 'exotic,' fit for ethnological inquiry but not for serious literary studying" (2). Lutz refers to the accomplishments of "Native" writers in the early 1970s like Harold Cardinal's 1969 Unjust Society, Maria Campbell's 1973 Halfbreed, and Howard Adams' 1975 Prisoner of Grass, and suggests that those books were dismissed as protest literature so they were "not really considered part of Canadian 'literature' as defined by English departments and literary scholars in the mainstream" (2). By contrast, Lutz insists that currently there are exciting additions to Canadian literature because more "Native" people are writing and articulating their own realities. As examples, he cites the 1987 special "Native" volume of Canadian Fiction Magazine 60), edited by Thomas King; The Native in Literature: Canadian and Comparative Perspectives anthology, edited by Thomas King, Helen Hoy, and Cheryl Calver; the University of British Columbia's 1990 Canadian Literature; and Penny Petrone's survey of "Native" literature in Native Literature in Canada. In terms of drama, Lutz calls attention to Tomson Highway (Rez Sisters), Daniel David Moses, and Drew Taylor. Specifically, in regards to Indigenous women writers, he cites Beatrice Culleton's 1983 In Search of April Raintree; Jeanette Armstrong's 1985 Slash; Ruby Slipperyjack's 1987 Honour the Sun; and Joan Crate's 1989 Breathing Water; Lee Maracle's

1988 I Am Woman, 1990 reprint of Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel, and Sojourner's Truth; Lenore Keeshig-Tobias's 1988 magazine Trickster; and Maria Campbell's (and co-author Linda Griffith's) 1989 Book of Jessica. Lutz also refers to Marie Annharte Baker and Sue Deranger who "campaigned against Jeanne Perreault and Sylvia Vance's anthology Writing the Circle" (3). In comparison to Vance and Perrault's book, he cites books published by "Native" pressess such as Theytus Books which collaborated with En'Owkin Centre in Penticton to produce such anthologies as Seventh Generation (1989) and Gatherings, and Pemmican Press which produced the anthology Our Bit of Truth (1990). Lutz also calls attention to Thomas King's All My Relations 1990, and his first novel Medicine River 1990. He describes King as "the most successful Native promoter/writer of First Nations literature in Canada to date" (4). As for more recent writers to come into "Native" literature, Lutz refers to Jordan Wheeler and his "first monograph, the three novellas in Brothers in Arms," poets Bruce Chester (Paper Radio, 1986), Daniel David Moses (The White Line, 1990), Joan Crate (Pale as Real Ladies, 1989), Marie Annharte Baker (Being on the Moon, 1990), Beth Cuthand (Horsedance to Emerald Mountain, 1987 and Voices in the Waterfall, 1989), and Wayne Keon (Sweetgrass II, 1990).

Many of these contemporary Indigenous writers challenge non-Indigenous writers' way of seeing and subsequently writing about Indigenous women. Contemporary Indigenous writers positively and knowledgeably construct aspects of their cultures

that have been previously misrepresented by outsiders who knew little about the cultures about which they wrote.[1] In this way, Indigenous writers following the example of Maria Campbell's Halfbreed significantly challenge literary trends. Writing from places of strength--their own specific cultures--these writers provide an abundance of new ways to see and thus understand Indigenous peoples. Emma LaRocque strongly emphasizes that

> there are just a thousand angles from which to see Native people--our vastness, our diversity, our different personalities, never mind, just plainly, our humanity. White North America, not to mention white European peoples, haven't even begun to see us. (198)

LaRocque's calling attention to the "thousand angles from which to see Native people" challenges the former monolithic "Indian" so prevalent in Euro-Canadian literature. However, while there are numerous cultural differences among Indigenous peoples, there are also some very basic similarities.

As indicated in Chapter One, Indigenous peoples share a common ideology premised on autochthony. This Indigenous ideology significantly challenges many Euro-Canadians' formerly held beliefs about Indigenous peoples, who were prior to Maria Campbell's Halfbreed, depicted in Canadian literature as pagans

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[1] See for example: W.P. Kinsella's Dance Me Outside, Margaret Laurence's "The Loons" in A Bird in the House, Wallace Stegner's Wolf Willow, W.O. Mitchell's Jake and the Kid, Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese.

with no moral base, no rules, no values, and no developed political, social, or economic systems. In the interview with Hartmut Lutz, Jeannette Armstrong explains that "with Native people . . . it's difficult for us to look at things in a separate way. Everything is part of something else. Everything is part of a continuum of other things: a whole" (16). Thomas King concurs; he suggests, with

> Native society there is the sense that everything is part of a living chain and you have to pay attention to what happens with the animals, with the environment. The world as an organic flow . . . we have a particular sense of that physical world that is so much a part of culture and so much a part of the ceremonies and everything else. They are connected. (116)

This connectedness, for most Indigenous people, influences our way of seeing, being, and doing. It also challenges the traditionally held beliefs about Indigenous peoples reflected in Canadian literature: that they are a dying race, suffering victims with no hope of survival, or "Natives" bound and determined to assimilate and make it in the White world. Lee Maracle maintains:

> For us, thinking is a complete and total process. In a sweat, or the Big House or wherever, around the pipe you harness all your energy, physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual, and you

> retreat into solitude to work out the nature of your particular solidarity with creation. And you retreat into lineage, as well, because the farther backward in time you travel, the more grandmothers you have, the farther forward, the more grandchildren! You actually represent an infinite number of people, and the only physical manifestation is yourself. Also, you own your own "house" and that's all you own. It's this "house" that I live in. The "I" that lives in here is the thinking "I," the being "I," the "I" that understands creation, understands that the object of life is solidarity, understands that there are consequences for every action. (172)

This peculiar way of relating to the environment, of seeing, being and doing has significantly influenced Indigenous writers. Tomson Highway insists that Indigenous peoples have a mythology thousands of years old. Even though it has been severely eroded by christian missionaries and their religion, Highway insists that the spirit of it has survived and is becoming even stronger. (91). In "Tides, Towns, and Trains" Emma Larocque explains that "Native" cultures are "inextricably related to lands and resources" while she insists that Euro-Canadian culture "continues to invade these lands and resources, pulling the ground from under Native cultures, [and] creating a power/powerless relationship" (79). For many Indigenous writers,

the act of writing thus becomes an act of resistance, an act of re-empowerment. Lee Maracle maintains that when Indigenous people write, we are "reclaiming our house, our lineage house, our selves" (Lutz, 176). Emma LaRocque reinforces this idea. She insists that she took up writing in grade eight out of a need to "self-express because there was so much about our history and about our lives that . . . has been disregarded, infantilized, and falsified" (Lutz, 181). LaRocque maintains, consequently, that "I think I had this missionary zeal to tell about our humanity because Indian-ness was so dehumanized and Metis-ness didn't even exist" (181). Speaking with Lutz, LaRocque calls attention to her particular source of power, her strength. She explains that she comes "from a background of beautiful oral literature. Both my grandmother and my mother were fantastic storytellers and I think that influenced me" (183). Tomson Highway refers to his source of strength and influence in the preface to Geoffrey York's summary of the events at Oka in The Dispossessed. He writes:

> my parents are strong, beautiful people, as are my numerous brothers and sisters. And they all, except for three, speak nothing but Cree and, in the case of my parents, Chipewyan. The white people whom I happened to meet and associate with along the way were, almost without exception, tremendously supportive and encouraging. With their help, I am now, like many Indians of my generation, able to

> go back to help my people--equipped, this time, with the wisdom of Homer and Faulkner and Shakespeare and Bach and Beethoven and Rembrandt and McLuhan and many other thinkers, artists, and philosophers of the white world, but equipped, as well, with the wisdom and the vision of Big Bear and Black Elk and Chief Seattle and Tom Fiddler and Joe Highway and the medicine people, the visionaries of my ancestry--and the Cree language in all its power and beauty. At all times I have had the Trickster sitting beside me. In Cree we call him/her Weesageechak . . . it is just unfortunate that his/her first meeting, seven lifetimes ago, with the central hero figure from that other mythology--Christian mythology-was so shocking and resulted in so many unpleasant occurrences. (ix)

As Tomson Highway's writing demonstrates, Indigenous peoples in Canada tenaciously clung to our cultures, our way of seeing, being, and doing. Despite 400 years of cultural invasions, Indigenous cultures have survived and are very much alive, in one way, through the mythology. During those invasions however the mythology went underground and consequently contemporary Indigenous peoples' spirits are infused with it. Indeed, Highway insists that "There is a spirituality that still is so powerful and beautiful and passionate!" (Lutz, 91).

Indigenous cultures and languages have survived, according

to Maria Campbell, because of our relationship to the land, "the Mother" (Lutz, 163). This maternal language base distinguishes Indigenous peoples' languages and cultures, and therefore the writing, from non-Indigenous peoples' language and writings which are rooted in a patriarchal hierarchy. Campbell maintains that for about four or five years she was very frustrated with her writing, or lack of it. She says:

> I blamed the English language, because I felt that the language was manipulating me.
>
> So I went to the old man who's been my mentor, my teacher, my grandfather, . . . I had talked to him about storytelling, but I never talked to him about what I felt the language was doing to me; going to him as a writer to another writer. And he just laughed, probably thinking, "Why didn't she come here a long time ago!" "It's really simple," he said, "why you have trouble with the English language, it's because the language has no Mother. This language lost its Mother a long time ago, and what you have to do is, put the Mother back in the language!" And then I went away, and I thought, "Now, how am I going to put the Mother back in the language?" Because, in our language and in our culture, as well as Indian people's culture, Mother is the land. (Lutz, 49)

While a number of Indigenous peoples, in their writing,

proclaim their re-connection to the Mother, many writers engage themselves in the struggle against systemic and institutional racism. In Writing the Circle's preface Emma LaRocque calls attention to the various types of "power politics in literature" that for too many years dis-empowered Indigenous peoples by dismissing, romanticizing, censoring, and labelling us" (xvi-xvii). She insists that Indigenous peoples were not rendered voiceless despite very deliberate and institutionally sanctioned attempts to silence us. Indeed, Indigenous peoples continue to write albeit often from the "margins" or from a position of "resistance."[2]

Basil Johnson, a writer from the Anishnabe nation, describes the process which led to his various texts. He explains:

> I was asked to start an Indian program in a museum which I carried out by teaching in the galleries and going out to the communities. I realized that neither students nor teachers were prepared to study, or to listen to a presentation, because the books available to them were poor in quality and in content. I . . . look[ed] at this display that was mounted by a group of grade five/six students, . . . which they mounted after studying an Indian unit in

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[2] For a more informed discussion of resistance or margin writing see Agnes Grant's "Contemporary Native Women's Voices in Literature," Noel Elizabeth Currie's "Jeannette Armstrong & the Colonial Legacy" and Barbara Godard's "The Politics of Representation: Some Native Canadian Women Writers" in Native Writers and Canadian Writing.

> depth for six weeks. It was a marvellous display. Over in one corner... a young chief wearing a paper headdress, with arms folded in the "traditional" manner of a Blackfoot chief and he had on his lapel with a cardboard label with the word "Blackfoot." So I went over to this little guy because he was all by himself. . . Then I observed that he looked morose. "How come you look so sad, chief?" And he looked around to see that there were no teachers within the vicinity, and he explained, "Sir, . . . I always thought Indians were neat, always wanted to be an Indian. But, sir, after six weeks of studying teepees that my team and I selected from these six aspects," he said, "is that all there is, sir?" That is when I started to write! I wasn't even thinking about categories, I simply thought, there is a need for Ojibway Heritage. After that was finished, there was a need for Ojibway Ceremonies, and that became fiction simply because there was a fictional character in the thing that is based on ceremonies and rituals. Then it was Moose Meat and Wild Rice because Native people like humour, not subtle humour like Canadians want. (233)

Contrary to the "Natives" in White-Canadian writers' fiction, a good majority of Indigenous peoples' texts thematically deal with survival of individuals, communities, and nations, just as

Johnson's texts do. Thomas King, in his introduction to Canadian Fiction Magazine 60, argues that images constructed by "Native" writers are "quite unlike the historical and contemporary Native characters in white fiction" (8). He maintains that

> Rather than create characters who are inferior and dying, Native writers have consciously created Native characters who are resourceful, vibrant, and tenacious. Like traditional trickster figures, contemporary Native characters are frequently tricked, beaten up, robbed, deserted, wounded, and ridiculed, but, unlike the historical and contemporary Native characters in white fiction, these characters survive and persevere, and, in many cases, prosper. Contemporary Native literature abounds with characters who are crushed and broken by circumstances and disasters, but very few of them perish. Whatever the damage, contemporary characters, like their traditional trickster relations, rise from their own wreckage to begin again. (8)

Putting the Trickster back among Indigenous peoples re-establishes harmony and balance to Indigenous peoples' way of being, seeing, and doing. The Trickster, according to Tomson Highway, is an "extraordinary figure" without whom "the core of Indian culture would be gone forever" (Dry Lips, 13). Indeed, Highway writes:

> The dream world of North American Indian mythology is inhabited by the most fantastic creatures, beings and events. Foremost among these beings is the "Trickster," as pivotal and important a figure in our world as Christ is in the realm of Christian mythology. "Weesageechak" in Cree, "Nanabush" in Ojibway, "Raven" in others, "Coyote" in still others, this Trickster goes by many names and many guises. In fact, he can assume any guise he chooses. Essentially a comic, clownish sort of character, his role is to teach us about the nature and the meaning of existence on the planet Earth; he straddles the consciousness of man and that of God, the Great Spirit. (12)

Lenore Keeshig-Tobias explains that the Trickster is also a "Teacher . . . a paradox; Christ-like in a way. Except that from our Teacher, we learn through the Teacher's mistakes as well as the Teacher's virtues" (Lutz, 85). As both Keeshig-Tobias and Highway suggest, Trickster, as the central culture hero for "Native" people, is comparable to Christ, the central cultural hero of christianity's first book, the bible.

This very basic difference distinguishes Indigenous peoples' writing from non-Indigenous peoples' writing: the former primarily grows out of a gynocratic-circular-harmonious way of life while non-Indigenous peoples' writing in Canada has primarily grown out of a christian-patriarchal hierarchy.

Contemporary Indigenous writers who write from this ideological base thus challenge Canadian literary traditions by creating more knowledgeable and positive images that grow out of this ideology. Also, contemporary writers are constructing characters and plots based on Trickster, who can adopt any guise and is not confined to a specific gender. In addition, unlike the Trickster's christian counterpart, her/his/its motivation is neither solely altruistic nor virtuous: Trickster manifestations function just as easily doing unkindly, suspicious, and sometimes cruel deeds as she/he/it does doing kind and virtuous deeds. Perhaps the most important aspect of contemporary Indigenous peoples' writing that distinguishes our writing from non-Indigenous peoples is the Trickster who endures all: the survivor.

Not surprisingly, a group of concerned Indigenous writers (Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, Daniel David Moses, Tomson Highway) are diligently working to re-establish the Trickster in their stories, drama, and poetry. In Contemporary Challenges Lenore Keeshig-Tobias explains that those writers organized the Committee to Re-Establish Trickster. Keeshig-Tobias suggests that prior to the establishment of that Committee many of those writers were frustrated because they were unable to find issues, forms, symbols, or structures in their work they could understand. She also insists that the Committee was necessary for Indigenous writers to continue writing because it encouraged them to believe in their work and support one another. Indeed, Tomson Highway, in The Dispossessed, maintains that we of this

generation, of contemporary Indigenous writers are

> Ever so little by little, . . .picking the Trickster, that ancient clown, up from under that legendary beer table on Main Street in Winnipeg or Hastings Street in Vancouver, and will soon have her standing firmly up on his own two feet so she can make us laugh and dance again. Because, contrary to the viewpoint presented by that other hero figure, what she says foremost is that we are here to have one hell of a good time. (ix)

Many Indigenous writers maintain that Trickster survives incredibly challenging experiences only to live and begin again. Just as the traditional Trickster culture hero/fixer-upper survived great odds, contemporary Indigenous writers are writing their cultures back into stability and thereby assuring survival.

Maria Campbell's own journey--from a healthy and whole child to an unhealthy and unwhole woman and finally to recovered woman--is in some ways, reminiscent of that of the Trickster. Also, as one of the first Indigenous women who successfully utilized the colonizer's language to articulate her oppression, she significantly altered the way that non-Indigenous peoples looked upon Indigenous people. Canadians forever thereafter were forced to rethink their former beliefs because as Penny Petrone writes of Halfbreed in Native Literature in Canada, "it is a disturbing testimony to the ugliness of racism in Canada's social history" (120). Campbell's story, albeit woven with tremendous pain and

suffering, is one of survival and subsequent liberation. Appropriately, she follows Louis Riel, who prophesied at the time of his execution in 1885 that one hundred years later his people would rise up, and the artists, musicians, and visionaries would lead the way. Similarly, among the original peoples, numerous spiritual and medicine people in the past have spoken of a revival of Indigenous cultures through the efforts of the artists, musicians, poets, and visionaries of the seventh generation. As this chapter has clearly shown, the movement initiated by Maria Campbell's Halfbreed is growing ever stronger. Indeed, as Tomson Highway writes in The Dispossessed "it's an exciting time to be alive, seven lifetimes after that first meeting [European contact]. I look forward to every minute of it" (ix).

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