

# "WHEN YOU ADMIT YOU'RE A THIEF, THEN YOU CAN BE HONOURABLE"

*Native/Non-Native Collaboration in "The Book of Jessica"*

*Helen Hoy*

A SUBJECT MUCH BRUIED ABOUT JUST NOW in Canadian literary circles is the question of the appropriation of Native materials by non-Native authors.<sup>1</sup> This raises by implication the epistemological and cultural violence which can be done (is necessarily done?) to Native texts by non-Native readings of them. Is teaching and criticism of these texts, by non-Natives, another form of cultural appropriation? In Canadian literature, *The Book of Jessica*, a collaborative effort by Métis writer Maria Campbell and Scottish-Canadian actress/playwright Linda Griffiths excavating the problematics of their earlier collaboration on a script of Campbell's life, provides detailed ground for an investigation of these issues. A vexed and troubling text — from the placement of Griffiths' name first in the attributing of authorship, to the devolvement of ultimate editorial responsibility eventually to her — *The Book of Jessica*, in all its ambivalence, can be read as modelling aspects of the white scholar/Native writer relationship. From its material conditions of production to the implications of Campbell's extra-textual decision to put her energies into Native politics rather than the book, the text both glosses and itself enacts postcolonial problems of gatekeeping, cultural impasse, and imbalances of power, while simultaneously insisting on the mutual imperative to communicate. My article will pair this concrete enactment of the politics of cross-cultural communication with current postcolonial/feminist theory on issues of appropriation and what Gayatri Spivak calls "the epistemic violence of imperialism." It will study how the theory illuminates the practice and how the practice illuminates the theory.

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That's the abstract for this article, an academic take on the project. Let me try another voice.

At the 1991 Learned's in Kingston, I delivered a paper on teaching Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash*, for a joint CWSA/ACUTE panel on Pedagogical Approaches to Minority and Marginal Women's Literature. Although conceived otherwise, the panel consisted entirely of white women. I was acutely sensitive to the charge that the act of teaching *Slash*, the manner of teaching it, but most particularly the presumption and self-aggrandizement of delivering a paper on it were colonizing acts. I had been at two recent feminist conferences<sup>2</sup> in which self-critical, scrupulous — from my perspective — white women scholars had been powerfully challenged by Native women writers. Papers before my own at ACUTE, by Mathur, Srivastava, Goldie, and Varadharajan, continued to probe painfully what had ceased being an academic question for me. By the time of the special session "Woman, Native, Other," with CACLALS and ACQL, my cognitive dissonance was almost paralyzing. To take notes, as my academic training and research interests dictated, during Lenore Keeshig-Tobias' impassioned account of the place of Anishinabe story-telling felt grotesque. Even if Native protocol permitted the quoting of such material, to do so was to impress the comments into the service of a very different, even antithetical project. In Marcia Crosby's account of Haida challenges to Robert Bringhurst, I placed myself. Bringhurst had at least been learning the language and working collaboratively for years with Haida sculptor Bill Reid. Surprised by tears as I was thanking Keeshig-Tobias afterwards, I marked my crisis disconcertingly by weeping publicly under a tree by the lecture-hall door. The best I could do at articulation for a solicitous friend was my conclusion that "anything we do is a violation."

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"There is a false collapsing here of epistemology and appropriation. To know is not always to violate."

Asha Varadharajan, discussion period, Association of Canadian University Teachers of English, May 1991

"Educate yourself that you won't ever ever understand."

Ethel Gardiner, University of British Columbia First Nations' House of Learning, quoted by Aruna Srivastava, ACUTE, May 1991

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"How the theory illuminates the practice and how the practice illuminates the theory." But is *The Book of Jessica* the practice of cross-cultural interaction? Or is it the theory?

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## Take I : "The Book of Jessica" as textual appropriation

However well-intentioned, *The Book of Jessica* redeploys the strategies of intellectual colonialism. Originally conceived as a full collaboration, it has by the time of publication fallen back under Griffiths' editorial control. So it replicates the originary Native Informant/Master Discourse model of the play itself. (According to Diane Bessai, early programme notes for *Jessica* credited Campbell with the subject matter, Griffiths and director Paul Thompson with the dialogue and structure respectively [104]). Campbell's decision to run as President of the Métis Society of Saskatchewan and withdraw from the collaborative project, a decision only tersely acknowledged in the introductory "History" — and un glossed — speaks loudly in the vacuum created by her editorial absence. As a final refusal/indifference/signal of divided allegiance, an eloquently silent codicil to the text that resonates with earlier repudiations, it pushes against the reconciliatory drift of the narrative. Unrancorous post-publication interviews by Campbell (see Steed, for example) mute the contestatory impact of her defection, in that arena, but the decision functions as a disruption *textually* at least.

It is Griffiths, then, who provides the framing narrative — tellingly referring to herself three times in the opening line alone — and who selects both her own and Campbell's words, in what nevertheless purports to be a dialogue. Just as the programme credits for *Jessica* shift between 1981 and 1986 from three co-authors to "Written by: Linda Griffiths, in collaboration with Maria Campbell" (116), so the hierarchy of authorship for *The Book of Jessica* — Griffiths followed by Campbell — gives precedence to the one-time final formal setting-down-on-paper, to the value of individually exercised verbal and structural creativity and control. What has happened to Maria's gift of "her life, her philosophy and entry to her deepest self" (48) ? But, in one sense, that arrogation of pre-eminence on the title page speaks true. Given the editorial process, this story can now finally only be read as Griffiths'.

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"[The leftist colonist] will slowly realize that the only thing for him to do is to remain silent."

Albert Memmi (43)

"Silence can be 'oppressive' too."

Margery Fee (179)

or, something I came upon closer to home,

"... silence too — even respectful silence — can become a form of erasure."

Helen Hoy (99)

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Over the course of the conference, I reached my decision. I would not send out my paper on *Slash* for publication. Would I even send a copy to the colleagues who had requested one? I would return to the Graduate School my Grant-in-Aid for further research on Armstrong and other Canadian Native women writers and withdraw my notices of a research assistantship. I would abandon my research plan for a book in the area. Not because such work was fraught with political awkwardness and potential discredit (oh, really?) but because it was imperialist. It rewrote Native stories from the perspective of a cultural outsider. And did so at a time when Native readings of the same texts had much more restricted opportunities for formulation and dissemination. I would find work within my own culture (s) that needed doing—it could still be counter-hegemonic work—rather than contribute another layer to the colonialist in(ter)ventions that subsequent generations of Native readers and scholars would have to undo.

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"No human culture is inaccessible to someone who makes the effort to understand, to learn, to inhabit another world."

Henry Louis Gates ( i )

"the tendency to overvalue work by white scholars, coupled with the suggestion that such work constitutes the only relevant discourse, evades the issue of potential inaccessible locations — spaces white theorists cannot occupy."

bell hooks ( 55 )

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Other disturbing evidence of appropriation sprinkles the text of *The Book of Jessica*. Within a few lines of the opening, Griffiths refers to the "familiar arrowhead point in the pit of my stomach" (13). The image illustrates a facile tendency to adorn oneself with metaphors from the appropriate culture, a kind of intellectual souvenir-hunting that bedevils cross-cultural critics.<sup>3</sup> The gesture becomes more serious when Griffiths appropriates the Native ceremony of the give-away, the red cloth Maria has learned so painfully to surrender, as trope for Griffiths' letting go of something she cannot claim ever to have had: "The clearest give-away I have ever been involved in has been *Jessica*. . . . It's my red cloth" ( i n ). The deceptively objective third-person "History" extends this transposition of beneficiary and donor to *The Book of Jessica* itself: "Linda's contribution to [Campbell's] campaign is the editing and structuring of this book . . . the red cloth" (10). Using editorial privilege, Griffiths then author-izes this standpoint by entitling the second section of the book "The Red Cloth." The interpretative reversal here connects with the paradoxical inversion involved in her theatrical technique of 'sibyling.' Ostensibly the ultimate gesture of self-abnegation — acting as pure medium, a

"self-effacing vessel" (49), a blank so absolute that Griffiths feels absent as an emotional being — sibyling becomes the ultimate gesture of ingestion, an imperialist receptivity: "I was taught that you could open yourself to anything, anyone, let the energy pour through you, and something would happen. I was *ravenous* for those moments" (14; emphasis mine). Campbell herself identifies the stance as one of dangerous greediness (49). Are sibyls supposed to end up with copyright, with right of first refusal, with the position of director, with editorial *carte blanche*, with red cloth to give away?

Griffiths' account, moreover, contains disingenuousness — "the thing was already out of [Paul's] domain. It was on paper now, it had passed over to me or maybe you would say I'd taken it" (59) ; pernicious misreckoning — the designating of Campbell's hostility and other Native people's as racist ( 34, 48 ) ; evasion of responsibility — "Out of my paranoia and confusion came a little voice: 'Yes,' I said, 'I wouldn't mind having a first refusal on the part of Jessica . . .'" (54) ; unacknowledged perceptual blinkers — "Women appeared *from nowhere* and cooked a Métis feast (52 ; emphasis mine) ; and interruptions of Campbell at critical moments. It is doubtful whether, under Campbell's editorship, the text would have remained so narrowly focused on the *pas de deux* of Campbell and Griffiths, when, as Campbell reminds us, the play was many people. The insistent personalizing of the conflict as a struggle between two well-meaning individuals obscures too the broader social and economic forces at play. But even granting this emphasis, in the absence of editorial reciprocity, *The Book of Jessica* reproduces the inequitable power relations of the original collaboration.

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"it is also necessary to overcome the position of the white editor — or the white critic — as cultural gatekeeper."

Terry Goldie

"Endless second guessing about the latent imperialism of intruding upon other cultures only compounded matters, preventing or excusing these theorists from investigating what black, Hispanic, Asian and Native American artists were actually doing."

Robert Storr (qtd in hooks, 26)

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Towards the end of the Learneds, during one of those lamentable lapses in conference planning when the afternoon session ends with no friends in sight, I joined a stranger in the near-deserted cafeteria. She turned out to be Barbara Riley, Anishinabe elder and Co-ordinator of Native Social Work at Laurentian University. Over burritos, we talked. We sat until midnight, ignoring the discomfort of

our plastic, institutional chairs. Talking about children and grandchildren ; about the politics of Columbus quincennial grants; about balance between the intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual ; about appropriation of Native culture ; about growing up; about sweat lodges at the 1992 Learned; about the global crisis; about allegiances to place; about our work. The conversation was personal, not academic. I could feel easy countenancing, even promoting, the intensity and intimacy of our exchange because of the express understanding with myself that I had withdrawn from scholarship on things Native. More accurately, that resolution solidified further on the spot, out of the conviction that Barbara's own candour was predicated on a trust that I would not exploit it. She had spoken unhappily, for example, of some nearby white women social scientists based in Nicaragua, had associated herself with the Nicaraguan women, and insisted that the latter could well solve their own problems. Whatever clarifications I was groping towards, then, were for my own life, not for academic articles.

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"Maria: You were invited into that circle to help you understand, not to write a book about it."

Campbell and Griffiths (27)

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#### Take 2 : "The Book of Jessica" as postcolonial deposition

With illuminating candour, *The Book of Jessica* self-consciously documents the particularities of one extended cross-cultural endeavour, in all its wrong-headedness as well as accomplishment, precisely so as to scrutinize that practice. Some moments, like Griffiths' classic defense of the Sun Dance photograph as preservation of a dying culture, almost feel concocted to provide the full panoply of colonialist assumptions. (Notions of this text as artless spontaneity meet their most obvious hurdle with the intrusion of the Voice from the Middle of the Room, an absent presence, into the transcribed conversation.) Just as the play *Jessica* set out to create "a woman who was Maria, but not really," (17), so the book about the play intensifies the antithetical *personae* of white naïf — "Where was the exoticism of the books I'd been reading?" (22) — and street-wise Native — "What a bunch of garbage. ... It just sounds so ... much like a white professor introducing me at a convention of anthropologists" (18) —to throw into relief the postcolonial perplex. Arguments between Campbell and Griffiths, about the (literal) give-and-take of their collaboration, rehearse systematically the sites and tropes of Euro-American/Native contestation : land, treaties, ownership, concepts of time, religion, cultural copyright. Making her claim to *Jessica*, for instance, Griffiths voluntarily takes on metaphors as counterproductive as homesteading and sacred treaties.

Campbell in turn frames her objections in the language of conquest: "[Paul Thompson] came in between, the conqueror with his piece of paper, when we were both exhausted" (104). Even in the text's silences and suppressions — Griffiths' need not to know the deal Campbell struck with Thompson (42), for instance, or her repeated spurning of an undelivered, angry letter from Campbell, in one case at the moment of insisting that she wants everything said (62, 112) — *The Book of Jessica* signals us insistently with traces of its evasions. The final destabilizing of peaceful reconciliation — "Are we going to leave people with the faerie tale of it? Because the truth is, I am wrecked over doing this, I'm still afraid of you, still feel like your servant," says Griffiths (112) — is yet one more invitation to us to continue the anatomizing.

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I am an academic. I work alone. For my research, I work in libraries, with bibliographies, with books, with journals, with archives. Until very recently I had never collaborated on an article. By the time I submit my work to any public scrutiny, it feels finished, and I am not anxious for critiques necessitating extensive revision. Except at conferences, paper stands between me and those I write about, between me and those I write to, between me and those who write about me. Like the barricade of As that Alice Munro's Del Jordan stacks around herself (*Lives* 195). I write for other academics. At least in part, I write because the structures of my job require and reward it. I am comfortable in this world. I enjoy the intellectual autonomy and independence and self-direction. Over this area of my life, I have control. I feel safe. I am an academic.

I am a teacher.

I am a feminist.

I am a parent, and a parent of Native children.

I am a citizen of this badly messed-up world.

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"Why are you poking your white imagination into our culture? You will not learn anything new when that happens."

Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, "Woman, Native, Other"

"I'm surrounded by people saying silly things like 'I can't teach black writers.' . . . It's called 'education' because you learn."

Nikki Giovanni

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*The Book of Jessica* gives us — in place of a narrative of liberal self-scrutiny on the one hand or anti-colonial resilience on the other, either constructed in comfortable isolation from the other — the less usual and necessarily more nuanced

rendering of *mutual* disputation/negotiation in process. What could be static documentation is repeatedly problematized and transformed, through the dynamic of instant accountability, correction, and challenge. Confronted with an embodied reminder, in Griffiths, of "a society that takes and takes, a society that changes, rearranges, interprets and interprets some more, until there's nothing left but confusion" (91), Campbell must wrestle with her cultural ethic of generosity, of letting go and giving away. Griffiths must confess her determination to write *Jessica* without Campbell's blessing if necessary or her misrepresentations of how far she had gone with that undertaking, not simply to the reader, but, as she says about her sibyling, much more disconcertingly with the "subject" in the room. *Everything* is in the tension. With the ongoing interaction, comes also a greater pressure for mutuality. "[Y]ou have to be able to be honest about yourself too," insists Campbell. "You can't lay something out, and then say, 'Well, I can't do that because it might hurt some people.' . . . Why is it okay to lay my guts all over the table, but you can only take some of yours, and by the way, madam, let's make sure they're the pretty ones" (88).

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A few years ago, I watched the frustration of a white academic friend of mine as she tried to co-edit a collection of essays on aboriginal women. Editorial discussions were at cross-purposes, members of the collective failed to show up for the meetings or showed up unprepared, other issues edged out discussion of the articles. I was grateful that, for *The Native in Literature*, my co-editors had been fellow-academics and rather like-minded. If these other conference papers were ever to see publication, it seemed to me, those most active needed to take charge, and damn the collective process. I can only guess at the perspective from alternate locations, those of the students, activists, and Indian women: That publication in itself primarily served the academics. That there were more pressing priorities. That the articles aimed more to fit into an academic discourse than to inspire change for Native people. That a collection dominated by white perspectives was worse than no collection at all. That the editorial process was pedantic, intimidating, or misguided. That the power to be heard resided with the white academics — Or, perhaps, that the editing was proceeding exactly as it should. . . . I can only guess.

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Linda: "... the wolverine in me said ... 'I have the power to write that play and it will not be written the way I want unless I do it.'"

Maria: "It's easier to go and do it yourself, and face the conflict after . . . the hard words and stuff, but not the actual pain of trying to do it together."

Campbell and Griffiths (79, 98)

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In particular, *The Book of Jessica* re-views the discourse and practice of white scholarship, permitting us to track the disjunctures between what Barbara Smith calls "the pernicious ideology of professionalism" (26) and quite other cultural imperatives of artistic healing, responsibility to community, and personal balance. Griffiths and Campbell display goodwill, shared goals and assumptions including the conviction that the circle of grandmothers has no colour, and considerable personal investment and sacrifice. Griffiths suffers incapacitating back trouble and extended physical collapse; Campbell faces estrangement from her community, internal discord, and eventual temporary loss of self. (An entire poststructuralist/feminist/psychoanalytic paper on split and shared and overlapping selves, fluid and transgressed ego boundaries, and transposed subject positions, incidentally, is begging to be written on *The Book of Jessica*.) Nevertheless, the differing structures and demands of the communities to which they are answerable impinge divisively on Campbell and Griffiths' joint work. In Griffiths' case, specifically, we can instructively discern at work the inapposite requirements of career advancement, notions of individual creativity and intellectual property, pressures of a print culture, economics and legalities of publication.

In her sense of herself as an interpretive intermediary for Campbell's world — "Make me understand and I'll make an audience understand" (21) — Griffiths has something in common with the literary critic. In comments about her status as watcher and the unsuitability of her linear mental processes at a Native ceremony, she constructs herself self-deprecatingly in the place of the academic outsider. Simultaneously, in her desire not to be one with the other white people at the Native teachers' graduation, she functions as cultural tourist/scholar aspiring to be an insider. When she describes the loneliness of winning approval from no one, the ignominy of prying into the personal life of a stranger, the debilitating conjunction of audacity and ignorance her improvisations entail, the poignance of smuggling spiritual rituals into her life under the guise of research, or her vulnerability to Campbell's veto power, Griffiths' honesty illuminates the pain and risk and presumption of this borderlands position.

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"So the motive of friendship remains as both the only appropriate and understandable motive for white/Anglo feminists engaging in [theory jointly with feminists of colour]. If you enter the task out of friendship with us, then you will be moved to attain the appropriate reciprocity of care for your and our well-beings as whole beings, you will have a stake in us and in our world ..."

Elizabeth Spelman and Maria Lugones (581)

"I am automatically on guard whenever the white man enters 'Indian' country. What does he want this time? I ask. What is he looking for — adventure, danger,

material wealth, spiritual wealth (perhaps shamanistic power), a cause, a book, or maybe just a story?"

Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, "White Lies?" (67)

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As I read about White Buffalo Calf Woman in the play *Jessica*, I found myself wishing I had notes from the Anishinabe story-telling session where I had recently heard the same story. But I remembered rejecting note-taking at the time as clearly inappropriate. I remembered, as I had at the time, the reiterated Native injunction, "Listen carefully because you may not hear this again" (Keeshig-Tobias, "Woman"; Armstrong, 38). I remembered the middle-aged white woman at the same story-telling session, surreptitiously turning on and off a tape-recorder hidden in a paper bag, then refusing organizers' requests not to record the story-telling, insisting it was simply for her own personal research. I remembered the scholar scuttling along in a loping crouch beside the feet of a Blackfoot fancy dancer, to record the sound of the ankle-bells for his students back in Germany.

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"The question to ask is 'Whom does it serve?'"

Barbara Riley

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Griffiths' early hankering to hone the unedited transcripts of the improvisations for *Jessica* reveals "the contemplative *ego* of the writer" beginning to impose itself on the collective process (43 ; emphasis mine). In her drive to create (that overrides scruples about consultation), her explicit need as a writer for accomplishment, her pain that she cannot own *Jessica*, her desire not so much not to steal as not to be seen as stealing, her belief that she has singlehandedly kept the book project together, and her faith in the worth of her creation, she exposes the double-edged values that also impel/impale academia. At the same time, through Campbell, the text documents a countervailing ethos. Campbell invokes respect and a sense of the sacred in place of sophistry regarding entitlement to cultural material. She challenges the concept of creative ownership of *Jessica*. She questions the wisdom of rushing to subject powerful Native spiritual symbols to the same artistic exposure in the West that has depleted Western ones.

The legal contract and later the privately crafted script become tinderboxes because they so pointedly signal the shift from the personal contract between the collaborators to the world of white professionalism. Mainstream conditions of cultural production and reception, and the economic structures sustaining and rewarding them, reveal themselves as potent, though largely offstage, agents in this drama. 25th Street House Theatre's financial exigency and suspicion of eastern interests,

the precedence accorded autonomous authorship (played out in the overall trajectory of Griffiths' career from its beginnings in collective, improvisational drama ), and "standard" assumptions about literary ownership, presumed audience, textual integrity, royalties, film rights, and first refusal rights play themselves out before us on the bodies and psyches of the two women. When Griffiths accuses Campbell, "But you're not dedicated in the same way, because you would have let *Jessica* die" (78), she equates, in the presence of a self-proclaimed storyteller, the absence of a printed record with extinction. Cultural cross-purposes find a voice here. The two women are indeed not dedicated *in the same way*, and therein lies the conflict they expose.

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As my friend comforted me after the "Woman, Native, Other" panel last year, I was unhappily reminded of reproaches from black feminists about how, after confrontations over racism, white feminists rally to hearten their distressed white colleague, neglecting the pain of the woman of colour. The direction of my friend's reassurance was unsettling also, drawing some of its force from downplaying the import of what I had just heard. I have shown a similar solicitude myself afterwards for an unknown conference speaker, confronted during question period. Connecting through our shared location, I could read her, white, tenured, conference panelist, as beleaguered, in ways I failed to read the Native member of the audience, lone voice of indignation and dissension, hell-raiser in the academic atmosphere of restraint and good manners, where consternation at the breach of decorum could blot out the substance of her objections.

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"I am waiting to learn from [white feminist professors] the path of their resistance, of how it came to be that they were able to surrender the power to act as colonizers."

bell hooks (151)

"So much attention has been paid to analysis of why dominant feminist discourses have been inattentive to women of color that we have yet to see analyses which include these neglected perspectives."

Lynet Uttal (42)

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### Take 3 : "The Book of Jessica" as textual resistance

*The Book of Jessica* is Maria Campbell's book. It is her idea initially. The very substance and format of the book are determined by her ethos of mutual self-disclosure as fundamental to any true collaboration. Provoked by the inconsistency

of Griffiths' fascination exclusively with a Native past, arguing that she and Griffiths can find a meeting place only in an *exchange* of their ancestral histories, and contending that shared personal matters, like Griffiths' shoplifting, give her someone solid to interact with, she ensures that this text both theorizes and models a collaborative process of genuine exchange. Though deletions leave their traces — Griffiths' mother's alcoholism (?) cured through religion, for example — Griffiths is exposed in ways foreign to sibyls and researchers. The textual format of dialogue and interjections, in place of a monologic or synthesized narrative, develops naturally from this insistence on mutuality. The book's forthrightness too reflects Campbell's motive for persisting with a project this painful, the urgency of providing connections and hope in a period of global devastation.

Furthermore, the most eloquent piece of oratory in the book is Campbell's. In its historic concision and controlled passion, it necessarily infuses any reading of the entire collaboration and the book. The speech I mean is her caustic response to Griffiths' contention that the play *Jessica* lives thanks to Griffiths' authorship but requires Campbell's belated modifications and permission :

Now Wolverine is saying, "I took it. I gave it birth. I gave it life. It was mine and it would have died without me. I salvaged it. I built temples all over the place. I built high-rises all over the place. I put wheat fields out there. I produced it and if it wasn't for me, you would have let this land die. So I came along and I took what you were wasting and I made something productive out of it, because you weren't doing it, but I need you to tell me that I didn't steal anything, that I didn't take anything from you." (80)

Campbell inserts the narrative so forcibly and repeatedly into history, and into a colonial history, that the reader cannot help but read the collaboration as one moment in a centuries-long struggle.

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I have not been entirely honest about my crisis over researching Native literature — nor was I with myself at the time. My tormented sense of the impossibility of such work did not derive entirely from a conviction of an absolute epistemological impasse, an impenetrable barrier between cultural insider and outsider which I could only augment by presuming to breach. Nor from a conviction of the inevitability of a colonizing appropriation. Behind those concerns lurked an appalled glimpse of the momentous personal and methodological changes entailed in counteracting my cultural ignorance and presumption. Hell, I like my library fortress, my scholarly garrison. I don't even go out of my way to interview Alice Munro, when I'm writing on her. The negotiations, the accountability, the loss of control over my time, the necessity to function off my own turf, the depressingly poor prospects of ever getting it right were too daunting. (Yet I had felt dismissive of a colleague who simply dropped the idea of organizing a panel on writers of colour

when advised she should aim for diversity among the panelists.) A Native elder spoke to me about being affronted (admittedly during a contentious period) by an inappropriate request from another Indian — tendered publicly rather than privately beforehand — to open a meeting with a prayer. I could envision hundreds of such unwitting violations of protocol, big and small, hundreds of *public* failures of understanding, hundreds of come-uppances. "Everything we do is a violation," I might have said, "and the cost of changing that is too high."

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"Guilt is *not* a feeling. It is an intellectual mask to a feeling. Fear is a feeling — fear of losing one's power, fear of being accused, fear of a loss of status, control, knowledge. Fear is real. Possibly this is the emotional, non-theoretical place from which serious anti-racist work among white feminists can begin."

Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua (62)

"A non-imperialist feminism . . . requires that you be willing to devote a great part of your life to it and that you be willing to suffer alienation and self-disruption."

Elizabeth Spelman and Maria Lugones (576)

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It is Campbell's contribution too in *The Book of Jessica* which advances the much argued contemporary debate over appropriation of cultural materials beyond the reductive poles of imaginative autonomy on the one hand and retreat on the other. She does so through a deft turn on the trope of artistic theft:

Today, most art is ugly, because it's not responsible to the people it steals from. Real, honest-to-God true art steals from the people. It's a thief. . . . It comes in, and you don't even notice that it's there, and it walks off with all your stuff, but then it gives it back to you and heals you, empowers you, and it's beautiful. Seventy-five percent of the art that's out there steals, but it doesn't give anything back. It doesn't bring you joy. It doesn't heal you. It doesn't make you ask questions. . . . It takes your stuff and it hangs it up on the wall and it says, "Look what I've done. Isn't that wonderful. I'm an artist." (83-84)

By arguing that "you have to first admit you are a thief" and that thereafter "if you're an artist and you're not a healer, then you're not an artist" (82, 84), she shifts the focus, for the white writer, from a project of moral self-purification — demonstrating cultural sensitivity or entitlement — to one of political effectiveness. A presumed position of transgression, as a given, becomes, not grounds for profitless apology, but a responsibility incurred, the springboard for socially accountable art — or scholarship. In addition, Campbell's response to the Native ceremony which Griffiths keeps verging on violating through indiscretion points to a *modus vivendi*. To Griffiths' thwarted cry, "Alright, I'll cut it all out,"

Campbell replies, "No, not your experience. You're an artist, find a way to do it" (28). *The Book of Jessica* models that kind of art.

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In my own narrative, I have not named the scholar taping the fancy dancers, the particular conference speakers confronted by Native women, the colleague counter-acting Keeshig-Tobias' disturbing impact, the editor of the conference papers, the friend forswearing the panel on writers of colour. I have even omitted a revealing instance of neo-colonial defensiveness because, respecting the friend involved, I can find more sympathetic ways of explicating the comment and because I don't want to be seen as betraying personal conversations. I *have* named Lenore Keeshig-Tobias and Barbara Riley, and reported my conversation with Riley. The academics sit on panels with me, they provide me with citations and readings, they critique my work ; they are my colleagues and friends. From my academic aerie I am unlikely to cross paths with Keeshig-Tobias or Riley. Only at the moment of offering to send her a copy of this paper, did I become convinced that naming the elder offended by the invitation to pray would be indiscreet.

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*The Book of Jessica* vindicates Campbell's conviction that the Métis role of interpreter between cultures can be, for her, something other than a betrayal. Through her voice and presence, it both contests imperialist practices — "Don't do it," she warns Griffiths (29) —and affirms alternatives—"How about that, she finally heard me" (30).

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"You do not have to be me in order for us to fight alongside each other."

Audre Lorde (142)

"We will do it ourselves. In our own way. In our own time."

Barbara Riley

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Cameron; Gray; Keeshig-Tobias, "The Magic of Others"; Maracle; Nadler; Philip; Scheier, "Phrase Fraud?"; and "Whose Voice Is It Anyway?" A related debate is underway in Australia; see Bell, 15-16.

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<sup>2</sup> National Symposium on Aboriginal Women of Canada: Past, Present and Future, University of Lethbridge, Alberta, October 1989 and Im(ag)ining Women, University of Edmonton, Alberta, April 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Reviewers demonstrate a particular propensity for this costume imagery. See, for example, the comment that "[Thomas] King breaks down stereotypes about Indians as rhythmically as the drumbeat at a ceremonial gathering" (Bencivenga 13).

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## SLUMBER MUSIC

*Paddy McCallum*

*Love shall be our Lasting Theme  
 Love shall Every Soul Inflame  
 Always Now in Realms Above Ah,  
 Amen Redeeming Love*

Henry Alline (1748-1784)

I

Fallen Nature interposed. Edwards and  
 Whitefield on comprehending knees. Days  
 blown from calendars to cannonaded  
 trees. Shields of waves, black fire on the  
 wheeling western plains. Children  
 wandering deeper into untended streams.

Why, Alline,  
 have you come again?

*To urge the Sparks back into Flame.*