

THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN THE
LIFE WRITING OF NATIVE CANADIAN WOMEN

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in English

University of Regina

by

Kevin John Kardynal

Regina, Saskatchewan

July, 1999

Copyright 1999: Kevin J. Kardynal



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-54716-7

Canada

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN THE
LIFE WRITING OF NATIVE CANADIAN WOMEN

by Kevin J. Kardynal

This thesis addresses the topic of identity construction in life writing by Native Canadian women. It posits that the methods used by Native Canadian women to create identity in their texts tend to share certain qualities, and that these qualities comprise a broader characteristic, referred to here as polyvalence. Polyvalence is used to describe a state of simultaneous coexistence within a single being, structure, or concept. The specific manifestations of polyvalence examined here are: the multiplicity of identity within the self; the location of identity both within the self and in others; textual and narrative fragmentation, and; the melding of oral and written tradition. These four aspects are explored as they pertain to four texts: Maria Campbell's Halfbreed, Beatrice Culleton's In Search of April Raintree, Lee Maracle's Sundogs, and Joanne Arnett's Breasting the Waves. The texts constitute a broad spectrum of life writing, from the relatively conventional style of autobiography to works usually classified as fiction.

The narrators of the four texts each experience a crisis

of identity, usually near the beginning of the text. The ways in which each character reacts to this crisis define the direction of each story. The texts describe resolution in terms of healing, and the healing act tends to involve the narrator's acceptance of the polyvalence of various aspects of herself--a piecing together of disparate parts into a unified whole. Even in works of different scope or format, the methods used to convey identity vary little, yet the identities created within the texts remain vividly distinct. The authors have, through the polyvalence inherent in these life writings, expressed identity in a manner that is exceptionally well suited to their unique situations; these particular expressions would be impossible without polyvalence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express sincere gratitude and appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Bernard Selinger, for the time, effort, and care he has invested in this project. I would also like to thank my readers, Gail Bowen and Joanne Thom, for their patience, guidance, and assistance throughout the preparation of this thesis.

I must also express my appreciation to my family and friends for all their encouragement and support. Special thanks are due to my wife, Dawn Margaret, who has been supportive and understanding from the beginning of this project to its completion.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. MARIA CAMPBELL: <u>HALFBREED</u>	26
III. BEATRICE CULLETON: <u>IN SEARCH OF APRIL RAIN TREE</u>	49
IV. LEE MARACLE: <u>SUNDOGS</u>	68
V. JOANNE ARNOTT: <u>BREASTING THE WAVES</u>	91
VI. CONCLUSION	108
BIBLIOGRAPHY	120

I. INTRODUCTION

Historically, predominantly Western notions and practices of autobiography have set the standard by which subsequent writings are gauged. These notions and practices have largely arisen from the literary and critical works of white European middle-to-upper class heterosexual males; the result has been that works which tell the life stories of people from substantially different contexts have been marginalized, measured as inferior or less important in comparison to the norm. According to Helen Buss, women's autobiographical writing does not conform to traditional norms, whether the norm is defined by humanist or post-structuralist theory (4). The humanist theories of autobiography, as delineated by Georges Gusdorf, for example, emphasize the autonomous individual, contending that autobiographers thrive only in climates which promote self-accomplishment and reflection. The poststructuralist view, as represented by Paul de Man, stresses that autobiography creates order from the chaos of existence through each autobiographer's unique metaphor; the desired coherence of the narrative depends on the internal coherence with which the author perceives himself. Because, customarily, women's social roles have not fit well with the concepts of the isolated individual or the unitary, cohesive life-metaphor, neither position satisfactorily addresses women's autobiographical writing; Buss feels that "both versions exclude women's experience by their assumption of a

history and cultural experience that is male and, by implication, a subjectivity that is gendered male" (Buss 5). It is partially for this reason that Buss has adopted the term, "life writing," as a designation which is not strictly bound by the tenets associated with autobiography. The methods traditionally used to discuss and understand autobiography have thus hindered the study of female autobiographical writing, but have compelled feminist critics to develop new tools and methodologies.¹ If the methods used to examine women's autobiographical writing have required re-evaluation, Native autobiographical writing necessitates some further adjustment. Native people writing their life stories is a relatively recent development because, prior to contact with Europeans, the Native Canadian/American people had neither the alphabetic system nor the individualistic sense of self which supposedly facilitates the writing of one's life story. The first wave of autobiographical writing by Native people was produced almost entirely through their collaborating with or telling their stories to Euramerican writers, often through an intermediate translator. More recently, as greater numbers of Native people have become skilled at writing in English and/or French--and as acculturation/assimilation has ingrained in them European concepts of selfhood--a corresponding quantity of their autobiographical writings have been written by the author alone.

Although some Native Canadian women had written their own stories earlier than Maria Campbell's ground-breaking novel, Halfbreed (1973), this text is generally recognized as the most important work both in terms of inspiring Native women to write their stories and of demonstrating to publishers that these stories could be of great interest to (and thus viably marketable to) the general Canadian public. Not long after the publication of Halfbreed came Lee Maracle's Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel which, although similar in nature to Halfbreed, told unique stories. Subsequently, several other life stories with similar structures were published across Canada, such as Ruby Slipperjack's Honour the Sun and Beatrice Culleton's In Search of April Raintree. Other less explicitly autobiographical life writings followed, such as Beth Brant's Mohawk Trail and Joan Crate's Breathing Water. Many of the authors who have written one form of autobiographical text have gone on to write other kinds of autobiographical texts: Lee Maracle, for example, followed Bobbi Lee with a sociopolitical collection of essays, stories and poems titled I Am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism; Maria Campbell went on to collaborate with Linda Griffiths to produce the stage play, Jessica, and the frank and personal published account of that collaboration, The Book of Jessica: The Healing Circle of a Woman's Autobiography. Despite the recent proliferation of books, most still tend to be published by smaller independent publishers and perhaps do not receive

the same distribution that a larger company might provide. Though the availability of Native Canadian women's life writing has increased steadily over the past few decades, the selection of works to choose from is still relatively small compared to that of autobiographical writing by people from other cultures.

Scholarly interest in Native autobiographical writing has typically been less than abundant; however, there has been a marked increase in interest over the past several years. Women's life writing in general has not received the same attention as that of men, and Native women's autobiographical writing has been studied still less. Barbara Godard has written extensively on writings by Native Canadian women, though touching only tangentially on the autobiographical aspects of their texts. Jennifer Kelly, in her "The Landscape of Grandmother: A Reading of Subjectivit(y)ies in Contemporary North American Native Women's Writing in English," an examination that includes Campbell's Halfbreed and Culleton's April Raintree, posits that the formation of Native women's identity in texts tends toward a constant shifting and re-building, the identity manifesting itself within several concurrent voices; full identification with any one autonomous element is resisted. Several other critics, such as Helen Hoy and Susanne Egan, have examined single works of Native Canadian life writing. However, there remains a scarcity of Canadian studies akin to J. Browdy de Hernandez' "Writing For

Survival: Continuity and Change in Four Contemporary Native American Women's Autobiographies," a study which encompasses several works of life writing by American Native women. There is no comparable study devoted to Native Canadian women in particular. It is with this in mind that the present study has been conceived and executed.²

Since all autobiographical writing is concerned, to a greater or lesser extent, with the formation of character or the construction of identity, I have chosen to examine four Canadian Native women's texts in order to elucidate the way these texts regard identity formation--ways that are quite different from other established methods. The texts were chosen not merely to demonstrate how well they exemplify a particular theory of identity construction, but rather to examine as wide and varied a range of life-writing as is feasible. An extremely influential work, Halfbreed is an important baseline to examine; because it follows the model of the conventional European autobiography quite closely, the relatively subtle alterations Campbell makes stand out in sharp relief. Beatrice Culleton's In Search of April Raintree was selected partly because it, like Halfbreed, is a widely read and analyzed novel, but primarily for the unique author-subject relationship contained in it. The text is not classified as autobiography, and Culleton denies that it was intended to be autobiographical; yet parallels between her own life and that of her character are far too prevalent to be

coincidental--given this knowledge, the means by which Culleton constructs identity is especially interesting. Lee Maracle's Sundogs is even less "autobiographical" (in the strictest sense), being ostensibly a work of pure fiction. Nevertheless, the novel's protagonist is still informed by Maracle's life experience; the novel explores identity in much the same way as the other works, and uses much the same method to construct this identity. Joanne Arnett's Breasting the Waves is unique among the four texts in that the cohesive singular narrative format has been rejected in favour of a disjunctive series of short compositions which have no explicit narrative ties to each other. The creation of identity works very differently here--yet the techniques, and the results, have much in common with the other texts. I believe that by examining four such diverse yet similar texts, the parallels I found in the way that identity is constructed in each of them may shed light on the qualities particularly suited to Native Canadian women's life writing in general.

The inclusion of two works which are not ostensibly "autobiographical," In Search of April Raintree and Sundogs, is purposeful; the life stories of Native Canadian women do not always neatly fit within the parameters of the term. The designation, "life writing," is far more appropriate to the identities these women create, for it is potentially far more inclusive than the standard term, "autobiography." Shirley Neuman notes that under traditional "autobiographical"

strictures exists the notion that "the 'successful' autobiography is the one that re-presents a fully autonomous, individuated self" (Neuman 221) deemed the norm for men's autobiography. This criterion is often inapplicable or inadequate regarding life stories of marginalized people. J. Browdy de Hernandez maintains that the "typical individual 'hero' of the standard Euramerican autobiography is absent" (Browdy de Hernandez 41) in much Native life writing, because such a character thrives best in the chronologically linear cause-and-effect narrative of the Euramerican works. For example, because, as I contend, identity is generally depicted in Native works as a concurrent series of relations, to individuals, groups, and nature, a multitude of voices proliferate, voices whose importance would detract from the linearity of the "hero's" story. The more inclusive term, "life writing," allows us to treat works both with and without autonomous characters with equal importance, as it does not carry the inflexible connotations of "autobiography." I take "life writing" to stand for all recorded information in textual form which seeks to represent a person's life experiences, no matter how incomplete the time frame or how limited the range of experiences presented--regardless, too, of the degree of referentiality to the author's "real" self.

The fact that the writers I have chosen to discuss are Métis is more a matter of coincidence than design. Certainly,

the multiple racial identifications that a Métis author or character may hold lend themselves well to the discussion of multi-faceted identity in literature; yet I hasten to point out that non-Métis Native authors and characters may also experience the conflict between cultures within themselves, as many aspects of the dominant (white) culture are integrated into their identities through assimilation and acculturation. Even a factor as basic as writing a text in English as opposed to a Native language indicates the influence of another culture on that text. While a Métis person clearly has a more direct link to another culture, those cultures may also play a part in shaping the identities of non-Métis Native people.

Much in the same way as Helen Buss has provided new and more appropriate tools with which to discuss women's autobiographical writing, I wish to explore new, more specific ways to analyze Native Canadian women's life writing. I believe that the manner in which these women construct identity in their texts is similar; moreover, the methods used can be subsumed under a single encompassing term: polyvalent. McCormick, Waller, and Flower define polyvalent as "having many meanings" (12). They refer to the process of reading a text as literature (as opposed to reading for strictly unambiguous factual information), during which words, phrases, sentences, or passages can contain multiple meanings simultaneously --finding and interpreting these meanings becomes part of the reading experience. By extension, this

term becomes a particularly apt one to describe the constant flux of simultaneity/ambiguity entrenched in the identities that these authors create. I will explore four key polyvalent aspects of the four selected texts, demonstrating how each author utilizes them to provide a vivid sense of identity. I do not intend to assert that polyvalence is exclusive to Native Canadian women's life writing--to be sure, similar occurrences can be found in a great many other varieties of writing--but rather, that the degree to which it is found and the particular manifestations of it establish a pattern that is unique to their writing and, more importantly, distinctively useful to the textual expression of their experience and their construction of identity.

The first polyvalent aspect is that the character's identity constructed in the text is multiple, defined in simultaneously present degrees of identification with groups such as women, Natives, non-Natives, Canadians, the middle-class, lesbians, et cetera. Estelle Jelinek points out that it is precisely "[t]he multidimensionality of women's socially conditioned roles" that forms the "pattern of diffusion and diversity" (17) often found in women's life writing. If these writers are also Native, their ambivalence in identifying with certain groups is complicated by the suppression of traditional Native cultures through assimilation. As Jennifer Kelly points out, the

shifting combinations of racial, economic, gender, and cultural representations [to which I would add inter-relational, sexual, and political] resist attempts to "fix" or essentialize Native women's identity--providing instead a constant negotiation and mediation of identity (115).

Not only does this refusal to essentialize identity potentially enlighten the non-Native audience, who may not be aware of the complex dynamic of forces involved in a Native woman's self-concept, it also reaffirms to Native readers that "there must be a better way to think about themselves than that presented by the dominant discourse" (Fee 169). Fee points out that Jeannette Armstrong's Slash, for example, features a character who negotiates identity, figuring out who he is and is not through experience and observation; a "faith that process and struggle are more important than conclusive settlements or final answers pervades the novel" (174).

Campbell's Halfbreed, long proven to be an essential and influential work of Native women's life-writing, is an outstanding example of an author creating a character that is all but impossible to reduce to conventional stereotypes. The tight level of interconnectedness that Campbell has achieved with the various facets of her protagonist creates a vivid sense of reality, allowing readers to relate easily and comfortably to the character. As with many of the works

discussed, Campbell's "Maria" has a difficult time coming to terms with the Native aspects of her heritage. Though she has a deep skin-tone, she also has distinctly European features, and she quickly becomes aware that she is different; her subsequent envy of her white neighbours' lifestyles and the mocking that the Natives and Métis receive from them compel her to reject that component of her being. Her overcoming the negative associations that she makes with Métis people--and thus subconsciously, herself--becomes a focus of the narrative.

Breasting the Waves delineates identity much differently than the other works discussed here, as it adopts a form which is unique among the works discussed: several shorter compositions organized into a single text. This format allows for a more in-depth exploration of the various elements of Arnott's identity, though at the risk of failing to provide a sustainable illusion of simultaneity among those elements. Unlike the novel format, in which the narrative may deftly oscillate between several different personality facets, giving the impression that they are concurrent, a collection is far more restricted because of the limited focus and shorter length of the individual pieces. Fortunately, Arnott is generally successful; the proximity of the various short pieces allows the reader to make connections between them and, even within the pieces themselves, Arnott's character never seems one-dimensional, flat, or stereotypical. Arnott's

"Joanne" is also caught between Native and white cultures, and she explores the dual-ness at length. Much of the work deals with the process of reconciling and reclaiming the various parts of her heritage, sexuality, womanhood, motherhood, and several other components of her--components that she had been told were, in many cases, mutually exclusive.

In the case of April in In Search of April Raintree, group identifications (or, to be more precise, seemingly irrational destructive group identifications) are the crux of her identity dilemma. She internalizes stereotypes which in turn compels her to associate certain groups together exclusively. She thus rejects the Native part of herself since, to her, Natives are almost always impoverished alcoholics. While her sister Cheryl has internalized a similar world-view (they had been raised near each other though not always in the same household), she responds in a different manner, romanticizing and over-identifying with Métis culture. The development of the narrative focuses largely on the process both of the sisters work through, a re-thinking or re-negotiation of their identities, with April finding strength and renewal in self-discovery, and Cheryl proving incapable of dealing with the disillusionment regarding her family (and by extension, herself).

Although Marianne in Maracle's Sundogs faces problems regarding identifications of race which are very similar to those of the other novels' protagonists (Marianne is a Métis),

she possesses a confidence in her heritage that goes well beyond that of the other protagonists. She is more aware of the racism which buffets her from all corners, and her dilemma is far more subtle. She discovers that she feels disconnected from her people, that she has become assimilated into mainstream (white) culture without even knowing it. This incomplete feeling leaves her susceptible to the temptations of white culture--she is light skinned enough to "pass," and thus enjoy at least partial freedom from discrimination. Similar to the other protagonists, Marianne sees several instances of abusive behaviour within her family and Métis community, which further weakens her resolve. The narrative becomes an account of her journey towards establishing the connections and obtaining the information she needs to accept herself completely.

Native Canadian women's life writing is also polyvalent in that, to a greater degree than most autobiographical writing in general, identity is located not solely within the main character. The interactions with, and the reactions and viewpoints of, other characters are certainly integral to any autobiographical subject, but in Native Canadian women's life writing they often embody significant components of the subject's identity. Native Canadian women writers tend to depict identity as not merely self-defined, but communal. They often situate identity in the ties to the people who

surround the main character. J. Browdy de Hernandez observes that in Native American women's autobiographical writing, the "self exists only in a complex web of relationships to other people. . . all of which have a part in the construction of the autobiographical identity" (Browdy de Hernandez 40); this applies equally well to Canadian works. The words (silences) and actions (inactions) of others help define the character, as opposed to an egocentric transmission of one's internalized self-image.

For instance, Culleton's In Search of April Raintree "contains two voices, April as narrator and the interpolated voice of her sister Cheryl" (Hoy 160), dependent on each other to tell the full story. Culleton has devised a unique subject for examination, one which is actually two people, similar in essence but developing along markedly different tangents. Not only are the two sisters given broad quarter to comment on each other--Cheryl often points out characteristics of April that April herself would never have introduced into the narrative--but they also represent different paths taken by girls who started out essentially similar: they are nearly the same person, their destinies far divided by their reactions to external circumstances.

Even when the subject is ostensibly autonomous, as with Campbell's Halfbreed, there is also an implied presence(s) (in this case, Campbell's "Cheechum," or "great-grandmother") that provides insight into other facets of the subject's identity.

For example, critic Jodi Lundgren indicates that Cheechum's sadness in the novel at points when she listens to Campbell stems from Cheechum's awareness that Campbell is fixated on material wealth (Lundgren 75). Cheechum represents an ideal that, eventually, Campbell holds to be indispensable. Though she initially rejects her teachings, Campbell comes to realize that Cheechum was all that had saved her from complete self-destruction. Also, a great deal of her autobiography --notably, the first two chapters--is devoted not to her story, but to that of her people, her community, and her relatives. Ultimately, it is only after Campbell has accepted her people once again, instead of rejecting them and running away, that she starts to heal and accept herself for who she truly is.

Sundogs' Marianne perceives herself as being isolated, shut out from her people first by exclusion and then, as she dwells on the negative elements of her immediate community, by choice. She eventually discovers the detrimental effect her solipsistic attitude has had on her self-concept, and realizes that the connections were always present; she just had not actively sought and explored them. Once she actively decides to participate in the Peace Run, an event which solidifies the connection between her and her people, she quickly begins to understand the interrelation her identity has with the group identity she also shares. Acceptance of herself is dependent upon acceptance of her people.

A crucial part of reclaiming identity, we are told in Breasting the Waves, is connecting with others who may or may not have had the same experiences as ourselves. Arnott focuses on no single person who fulfils this role, as the previous two works have, but rather demonstrates how several others have played this role for her in the past: her sister, her best friend, and even the man who beat and raped her while on a hitch-hiking expedition. With each of these persons, Arnott devotes most if not the entirety of a sub-section to their relation with Joanne, exploring their views of her and the part they played (and continue to play) in the re/formation of her identity. Even outside of such sections, there are several instances of dialogue through which much is learned about Joanne (both by the reader and by Joanne herself) through the words of others. Healing, it is explained, requires more than the self to be most effective.

Third, the text itself is often fragmented, with non-linear narratives or episodic divisions juxtaposed to form a whole. As opposed to the homogenous, straightforward linear progression--what Helen Hoy calls, the "seamless, unitary narrative" (Hoy 160)--of traditional European/Euramerican life-writing works, these texts are often disjointed, chronologically jumbled, missing gaps in the narrative, or lacking obvious connection between events. In the case of collections of poetry, short stories, prose, or essays, units

are even more distinctly separate. When read as a unit, however, the combinations of fragments form an illusory simultaneity which sharpens the sense of self presented. Differing and even conflicting facets of personality are allowed to develop, and yet merge into a unitary whole.

The most obvious occurrence of fragmentation in the four works discussed is, clearly, the very structure of Breasting the Waves; being a collection of distinct pieces, it naturally lacks the connective threads that an intended cohesive narrative might otherwise have. Arnott further subverts expectations by arranging the pieces in an order that defies chronological linearity. Indeed, the pieces seem to have little semblance of order--an in-depth reading, however, reveals that the pieces do generally relate in some way to adjacent pieces, colouring our interpretations of them. Sentence fragmentation is also prevalent, which is notable considering the largely academic tone of many of the pieces.

Perhaps the most prolific device Campbell uses in Halfbreed is her calculated disregard for chronological linearity. Though the novel generally follows a sequential time-line, events are inserted at several locations, not because they occur in the same time frame as the surrounding events, but because they are related in some other way, as the insertions nearly always affect the reader's interpretation of the encompassing details. The chapters, too, are very short, riddled with colloquialisms and frequent editorializing.

These also affect the presentation of Campbell's protagonist, lending an immediacy to the events at hand.

In Search of April Raintree is also written in a colloquial style. As with the other works, the conversational tone breathes life into the events described. Furthermore, the implicit (albeit never quite fully realized) split between the two sisters/protagonists adds a deeper level of resonance, as facets of each woman are revealed through the words of the other. The fragmentation of chronological linearity, as exemplified by the extensive, detailed excerpts from Cheryl's journal which April reads at length, proves crucial to understanding the self-destructive nature of Cheryl's previous actions.

Fragmentation in Maracle's Sundogs is not nearly as prevalent as in the other texts; still, it is an essential part of the novel, and works in ways similar to the other works. The text, when read, is orally evocative, as Maracle uses sentence fragments extensively to create an informal tone. Through the use of recollections, she does disrupt the linearity of the timeline, though the overall effect is relatively minimal. Perhaps the most effective use of fragmentation, however, is the metaphoric comparison which Marianne makes between her soul and broken shards of material (90). She likens her psychological discomfort to an inability to put the puzzle-like pieces of herself together--she cannot make sense of all the conflicting facets of her identity. The

putting of those pieces together ultimately becomes the impetus which drives the novel's action.

Fourth, characteristics of the oral and written traditions may be combined to produce a new, distinct voice in each text. Often, Native Canadian women's life-writing is an intermediate between the two modes, informed with the epistemologies of the oral tradition, yet working within the parameters of a text. Jahner asserts that juxtaposition of traditional ideas with ordinary happenings is often employed much in the same way a Native storyteller would make a point to a listener: "the hearing of a familiar event retold in a new way sheds light on the immediate concern to which the traditional element is juxtaposed" (73). Kelly argues that the use of silence in the works "embeds the performance aspect of an oral literary tradition within a written text" (121-122). Additionally, the loosely structured, often conversational nature of the narratives also sets them apart from the traditional autobiographical standard. By simultaneously referring to both traditions, the texts retroactively bridge the gap between traditional and imposed³ story, allowing for the creation of a new discourse particularly unique and relevant to Native readers.

Though Campbell's Halfbreed is one of the most "traditional" of Native women's autobiographical writings, following the European model closely in several respects, it

nevertheless demonstrates certain properties common to traditional oral storytelling. Her people's story is given precedence over her own. This is in keeping with the traditional Native view that an individual person's story was unimportant except in its reflection on the person's tribe (Eigenbrod 98). The story in general and, specifically, the frequent digressions into secondary stories achieve another objective common with traditional oral storytelling: they serve as instructive examples. Though not overly didactic or prescriptive, they act to provide guidance, much in the same way a tale would traditionally be told to transmit certain expectations of social behaviour without having to relate a multitude of variant examples.

Culleton's In Search of April Raintree, like the other works examined here, exhibits characteristics of an oral narrative simply by way of its colloquial style and the fragmented nature of the text. In this work especially, the attention-directing aspects such as italics and underlining are used to great effect to simulate the stresses and other idiosyncrasies of speech, contributing to the overall effect of an oral storytelling. Certain sections, most notably the speech that Cheryl writes which is delivered to us in full without commentary, are singularly evocative of the oral form. Even Cheryl's correspondence and her journal entries (read posthumously) are informal enough as to convey the sensation of aural experience.

Maracle's treatment of oral storytelling in Sundogs is unique because she not only melds elements of the oral tradition with her written work but, also, through her characters, comments on the oral transmission of historical fact. As noted above, the narrative is very casual, evocative of conversational speech. The deadpan one-word unspoken reaction to various events adds humour to the story at hand, much in the way a traditional oral storyteller might add commentary to his tale. Through reference to popular culture, however, Maracle indirectly explains the schism which afflicts Marianne as partially attributable to the sources from which she receives her knowledge about life. She uses the stories of pop icons liberally, yet cannot comprehend the lessons within the Métis stories her family tells. Her beginning to understand the stories of her people is a crucial step towards becoming whole.

The colloquial nature of Arnott's Breasting the Waves is especially notable given the relatively formal tone of most of the essays. Elements evocative of oral storytelling are common: she often addresses the audience directly in what would seem to be an otherwise dry lecture, or she uses sentence fragments for impact and emphasis. Arnott addresses the relationship between oral and written literature much more clearly than the other works here discussed, going so far as to equate the forms in one piece (n. 9, 42). A few pieces are also taken directly (or, at least, we are given no indication

to the contrary) from speeches that Arnott herself has given at various times; this would seem to demonstrate that Arnott has a desire to convey some aspects of the oral in her written works.

There are probably as many reasons for Native Canadian women writers to create life writings as there are texts; each author has her own peculiar combination of circumstances which motivates her to write a life-story. The way that identity is constructed is often similar in each of their works, however. The simultaneous co-existence of the characters' identifications is central to our understanding of each character's personality. The situation of identity outside as well as inside of the characters' perceived selves concurrently is equally crucial. The various forms of fragmentation allow sharp focus on each aspect of identity which co-exists within the whole, while evoking a sense of incompleteness that signals the simultaneous presence of other fragments. The melding of elements of oral literature with the written form is particularly relevant, given the historic cultural importance of the oral form in Native communication. Keeping these facts in mind, it is clear that this polyvalence, or rather, the remarkable degree to which it is present, demonstrates that Native Canadian women are, as we might expect considering their marginalized status, constructing their identity in ways which differ significantly

from "mainstream" writers. Thus, if we are to gain a richer appreciation of the intricacies of identity in Native Canadian women's life writing, we must alter our ways of thinking about the autobiographical self. What may seem like a multitude of disjointed roles which detract from the coherence of a narrative may actually enhance the depiction of a character, if those roles are recognized as existing simultaneously within that character. Focus shifted to other characters or groups, often for extended portions of text, is often read as a diversion from the life story of the main character; yet if examined with a realization of how much of the identity of the main character can be located in those others, the change in focus can be illuminatingly revealing of the main character herself. Aspects often held to be flaws, such as fragmentation of narrative, syntax and arrangement of printed text, should not be dismissed or overlooked but explored for the nuances of personality and progression that they can convey. A text read or examined with a cognizance of the elements of oral literature present within it could seem more expressive and effective than if read solely as a piece of written literature. Reading and analyzing these works with an awareness of their polyvalence is crucial, for only then can we fully appreciate and value the manner in which a sense of identity is created within them.

ENDNOTES

1. The inadequacy of these tools has prompted modern feminist critics to utilize, among other things, several variations of Lacan's mirror-theory, and has motivated Buss herself to devise the mapping metaphor--the autobiography's relationship to the autobiographer's life echoing that of various forms of maps to their represented terrain--that has proven well suited to discourse on women's identity creation.
2. Although it is true that most of the observations and the analysis drawn from these works by Native Canadian women may be equally applied to texts by Native American women, only Canadian works will be examined here. Despite the similarities and common experiences that exist between Native Canadians and Native Americans, the two countries do in fact differ in the way they relate to their indigenous people; events such as the Meech Lake Accord blockage and the Oka standoff, for example, impact Canadian Natives to a greater degree, and in a different way, than their American counterparts. This shared experience, while perhaps not the most crucial similarity, remains a relevant commonality which is embedded into each of their texts.
3. This refers to the fact that written story/history has been imposed on and ingrained into Natives by the dominant white culture, to the extent that it is necessary for Native

storytellers to use the print medium if they wish to reach a substantially large number of people.

II. MARIA CAMPBELL: HALFBREED

Although Maria Campbell's¹ Halfbreed may superficially resemble a typical Euramerican autobiography² (more so, perhaps, than most other recent life writing by Métis women), on closer examination the work proves to be fundamentally very different. Halfbreed is an example of life-writing with a character that resists being read as simplistic, because of the complex nature of the character's self-definition. To use Shirley Neuman's terminology, Campbell's narrative avoids the reductive tendencies of self-representational categories³ by having those present categories constantly "leak" (Neuman 222) into each other. The narrative is certainly self-centered, as Campbell details her personal experiences, yet large blocks of text are devoted to events and situations that have little to do with her in any direct sense. Rather than expressing a steady stream of her feelings, reactions and self-interpretations, she chooses to let other voices speak, sometimes directly in dialogue, sometimes through her retelling of others' stories. Although the narrative has an overarching chronologically linear framework, Campbell consistently subverts this flow by inserting events out of sequence (usually to great polemic effect), or with off-hand editorializing comments which keep the reader constantly aware that the events are being retold with the benefit of hindsight and foreknowledge. The conversational style of these comments

and the general colloquial touch Campbell lends to the narrative evoke the sense of an oral performance, contrasting with yet complementing the parts of her work more consistent with the written tradition.

Much of Campbell's narrative deals with the conflict she experienced in identifying with her Métis people; of Métis life, she notes that she "hated all of it as much as [she] loved it" (102).⁴ Campbell emphatically affirms the love and pride she feels for her culture in several instances, often by having her make glowing, lionizing generalizations about the Métis. For instance, Campbell claims that Métis people "produced the best and most fearless fighting men--and the best looking women" (25). She further boasts that "[n]o one can play a fiddle and guitar like a Halfbreed. They can make these instruments come alive--laugh, cry and shout" (100). The positive value judgements implicit in such editorializing disruptions of the retrospective narrative give the impression that even at a young age, Campbell had formed strong identifications with her people, despite the fact that she was not always as proud of them as she later became.

Even with the fondness she has for her family and community, Campbell encounters obstacles to fully identifying with her heritage. Campbell first hints at her dissatisfaction when the family visits a native community at Montreal Lake, and she discovers that many of the natives there were "blue-eyed" with otherwise dark features like

Campbell herself; she notes that this fact made her feel that she "had finally found [her] kin" (41). The fact that she and the others in her community recognize that she is different in appearance (and that, correspondingly, the others treat her differently), and the repeated references to her running away (59,77) denote the start of Campbell's drift from her Métis identity. Further exposure to the white settlers' way of life leads Campbell to express actual shame for her people. After being teased for eating gophers for lunch at school, she recalls "coming home and saying ugly things to Mom. She took me in her arms and tried to hold me, but I kicked her and said that I hated her, Daddy, and 'all of you no-good Halfbreeds' " (47).

Campbell demonstrates through similar experiences that she had begun to associate being Métis with several undesirable traits. Through continued exposure to poverty in Native communities, she comes to know that to be Métis means to be poor, a condition which she does not intend to remain in. She feels that "there was no worse sin in this country than to be poor" (56), and wishes to go "where there was no poverty . . . and lead a gay, rich, exciting life" (77). Though Campbell does not state it outright, fulfilment of these desires would entail severing ties with the Métis community.

Campbell also comes to link being Métis with being ugly, an attitude reinforced by her childhood experiences. Playing

a game called "Roman Empire," the young Campbell wants to act the role of Cleopatra, but it is given to her "white-skinned, red-haired cousin" (18), because Campbell is deemed too dark and unattractive for the part. When Campbell's first major crush on a boy turns to heartbreak because he dates another girl, she reasons that because of her Métis features she "had no chance with anyone" (83). Campbell shows how closely she had identified Native features with ugliness in a description of her first Christmas dance, where she enters escorted by Sophie, a poor Métis woman, and a classmate asks whether Sophie is Campbell's mother:

Everyone started to snicker and I looked at [the classmate] and said, "That old ugly Indian?" and laughed until I saw Sophie's face. She looked so rejected as she walked to a bench and sat down that I felt shame and hatred for her, myself and the people around me. I could almost see Cheechum standing beside me with a switch saying, "They make you hate what you are." (90)

Until this point, she had adopted a sufficiently "white" appearance to fit in (even comparing herself to "Elizabeth Taylor" [89]). Sophie serves as a reminder of what she truly is, and that which she does not want to be.

Campbell comes to believe that alcoholism comes along with being a Métis, a belief also reinforced by repeated examples. Campbell initially describes, almost nonchalantly,

scenes of alcoholic binging (the story of the party at Old Yes-Sant Arcand's (51-52), where her father engages in a drunken fist fight with his own brother, is laced with humourous overtones), even though she has witnessed first-hand the ill effects alcohol has had on her people, notably during the trips to town when each night the men would get drunk and beat the women and each other (37). "I longed for something different . . ." Campbell explains, "I didn't want my brothers to be like the men around us, who just lived each day with nothing to look forward to except the weekend drunks" (86). Her desire to distance herself and her family from the catastrophes of alcoholism extends to a desire to distance herself from being Métis altogether. The notion of her people as merely powerless victims (even her own father begins to get drunk and beat her mother [67]), obscures the importance of her heritage, since her legacy includes the inescapable negative parts as well as the positive ones.

Cheechum, the great-grandmother and confidante who attempts to guide Campbell through her conflict, embodies the ideal state of accepting Métis identity while working to change material circumstances. "Go out there and find what you want and take it," Cheechum tells Campbell, "but always remember who you are and why you want it" (86, emphasis mine). Yet, Campbell has already accepted that the life she wants exists only outside of the Métis world. She dreams of going to the "city" (38,59), which she associates with wealth and

happiness. For a husband, she chooses a white man whom she hardly knows over the Métis man she loves (104), since she requires someone who can provide well for her brothers and sisters, and give her more than "shacks, kids, no food, and both of us fighting" (101). She enters a life of prostitution, thinking that money is the "only thing this rotten world recognizes and respects" (134). Only after her nervous breakdown does she come to learn that she has misinterpreted Cheechum's words, that she can accept her identity as a Métis and still work towards having a better life. Realizing this, she concludes that she must "find other people like myself, and together try to find an alternative" (143).

Although Campbell's acceptance of her value as a Métis person is critical to her illustration of herself as a woman recovering her racial identity, she ensures that her character is also distinctly identifiable as a woman as well. An event as commonplace as the onset of Campbell's menstrual cycle and her discovery of its purpose is detailed at great length (83-85), though never is it implied that the fear and confusion she experiences is unique to the Métis experience. Portraying her as an emerging woman in this sense allows us to understand her as more than simply "Métis." All aspects of Campbell's character are intrinsically linked, and Campbell explores them thoroughly and distinctly enough to ensure that reading her as a stereotypical Native, stereotypical woman, or any other

stereotypical role is impossible. Being a woman also complicates the desire for political activism that Cheechum has nurtured in her from an early age (66). When Campbell attempts to speak in a political forum alongside a male Native leader and friend, people, including the leader, shun her. Campbell wistfully reflects that she has

met many Native leaders who have treated me the same and I've learned to accept it. I realize now that the system that fucked me up fucked up our men even worse. The missionaries had impressed upon us the feeling that women were a source of evil. This belief, combined with the ancient Indian recognition of the power of women, is still holding back the progress of our people today (144).

She yearns for respect both as a woman, and in spite of being a woman. While being a woman is an important part of her overall identity, she does not want the stereotypes that others attach to her when they see her as a woman--the categorization prevents others from accepting other important aspects of her individuality, and thus denies her self-expression. Campbell uses incidents such as the above example to show that stereotyping and reductionism come not from her own but from other people's perceptions, and are inappropriately applied to her, and, by extension, to other Métis women. This is the triumph of Campbell's text: it is

extremely difficult to read her character only as a Métis, or only as a woman, or only as poor, or only as anything else.

Though there can be no doubt that Campbell's character is well-rounded, the identity she has constructed in the text is not entirely an autonomous one. Campbell's autobiography is atypical in that large portions of it are devoted to people and events that have little, if anything, to do with her directly. Campbell does not appear at all in the first chapter, and only once (in a flash-forward to a childhood scene) in the second before her birth in the third. The greater portion of the first two chapters is devoted to histories of her Métis people as a whole and her family respectively. While unusual, this conspicuous absence serves a purpose; it situates the character of Campbell both within her immediate family and her race.⁵

Even after Campbell becomes a character in the narrative, Campbell does not accord herself the attention autobiographical subjects generally receive. Rather, she continues on to write about members of her family and the "funny, wonderful, fantastic people" (25) she grew up with, Campbell herself occurring almost as an afterthought in several cases. Although the effect is initially somewhat disconcerting, because it seems that Campbell is concealing or holding back her character (who, after all, is the focus of our interest), as Campbell eases into her story we see the relevance of this mass of description. The community of

people Campbell lives within is so important to her sense of identity that the community, both the good and the bad, is her identity. Communal existence is an "essential characteristic of tribal cultures" (Eigenbrod 98), necessary in Campbell's case for her health and sense of self. Her spiralling descent into a world of alcoholism, drug abuse, prostitution, and mental instability can be traced to the schism Campbell recognizes long after the fact: "I'd thought I was too good for my people;" she recalls, "I had married so I could have something better" (120). By rejecting this oneness with her family and community, she has rejected not only that which she has seen hurting her people, the drinking, shame, poverty, and violence, she has also rejected what she later realizes she needs in order to heal as a whole person.

Campbell's self-destructiveness starts once she turns her back on her community and her people, out of fear and shame. She begins to see her people as "no-good Halfbreeds" (47), and becomes increasingly more self-centered and individualistic. Yet every time that she spurns her people out of pride, her great-grandmother Cheechum returns (alternately as a physical presence or as a memory) to dissuade her; for example, when she decides to move in with an abusive drug addict (while trying to finance her own drug habit) rather than go back to the family and community that she "was too good for" (120), she recalls one night,

I found myself thinking of Cheechum and of my childhood. I remembered her saying, "You can have anything you want if you want it bad enough." I got up and went for a walk and suddenly it was all so clear. I could quit if I made up my mind. (124)

Cheechum's continuing presence saves Campbell from further hardship or harm, because Campbell's thoughts of Cheechum are sometimes all that stop her from taking potentially fatal actions.

Campbell identifies very closely with Cheechum, to such a degree that the two almost seem as one in some descriptions. After visiting Cheechum once Campbell has recovered from her nervous breakdown, Campbell claims, "We didn't have to talk-- Cheechum understood my feelings" (149). When Cheechum remarks, "Since you were a baby you've had to learn the hard way. You're like me," Campbell replies, "There's nobody I'd rather be like than you" (149). According to Jennifer Kelly, the narrative is "framed by the figure of Cheechum as individual and communal; the text is dedicated not only to Campbell's grandmother, 'Cheechum,' but to 'Cheechum's children'" (Kelly 123). In a sense, Campbell is writing about all Métis women (she states in the book's introduction, "I write this for all of you, to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country" [8]); Cheechum embodies these women's traditional group sensibilities which are

gradually being lost to assimilation, as Campbell herself lost them for a time.

Even when Cheechum herself is not present, Cheechum functions as a kind of conscience, a part of Campbell that reminds her of the moral standards to which she should adhere. After Cheechum moves away from the family, she only shows up in the narrative as a physical presence a few times, but Campbell mentions her in at least ten instances. Immediately after the point in the narrative at which Campbell phones Lil, the madam who introduces her to prostitution, she inserts a flashback to a childhood conversation with Cheechum. In the flashback, a young Campbell tells Cheechum of all the materialistic goals she aspires to, prompting Cheechum to "look at her and see the toothbrushes, fruit and all those other symbols of white ideals of success and say sadly, 'You'll have them, my girl, you'll have them'" (116). Although Cheechum does not distinctly dissuade Campbell from aspiring to her goal, the sadness she expresses represents a strong implicit condemnation. Campbell's positioning of the flashback at this point in the narrative also demonstrates that she uses Cheechum as a moral guidepost, signifying that she feels shame over becoming a prostitute.

Campbell comes to realize that "if our [Halfbreeds'] way of life were to improve I would have to find other people like myself, and together try to find an alternative" (143). This is a philosophy gleaned directly from Cheechum, and even

though Campbell had endured several hardships before she could accept it, she eventually came to understand that this is an essential part of her that is dangerous to suppress. "The years of searching, loneliness and pain are over for me," Campbell resolves at the close of the text. "Cheechum said, 'You'll find yourself, and you'll find brothers and sisters.' I have brothers and sisters, all over the country. I no longer need my blanket to survive" (157). Even the fact that she repeatedly speaks of a blanket as a metaphor for shame (137, 150, 156) attests to the importance of Cheechum (who gave Campbell this blanket metaphor) in defining the way Campbell thinks about herself.

Textually, Halfbreed follows a fairly conventional structure, yet the text is riddled with fragmentation. Often, though not always, this fragmentation is found in conjunction with devices common to oral narrative. Though the chapters are for the most part chronologically sequential, they are very short in general (an average of under seven pages per chapter). This brevity reflects the somewhat disjointed, episodic nature of the narrative. In fact, the very text itself may be considered a fragment, in that Campbell's life is further documented in the stage play, Jessica, and in the book resulting from her collaboration with Linda Griffiths, The Book of Jessica. These three works taken together provide a more complete (though still incomplete) impression of Campbell's life than any one of them does individually.

Although as a whole it may only tell part of Campbell's life story, the very text of Halfbreed alone provides ample evidence of fragmentation. Campbell's narrative is atypical of autobiographies in general (though not unusual for Native women's autobiographies) in that the events narrated seem to abruptly shift time and place, rather than follow a conventional linear sequence. As stated, Campbell's birth is not mentioned until Chapter 3. This, in itself, is perhaps not terribly unusual; it is not entirely unheard of for autobiographers to detail the lives of their predecessors before starting in on their own. Campbell is doing something more, however, since in between the descriptions of her elders she inserts anecdotes from the present (13), and her childhood (17-18). Though on the surface it appears unstructured and random, this narrative technique is actually quite effective in demonstrating the links between the various periods, the inter-connectedness. She describes her father as "warm, happy, always laughing and singing, but I saw him change over the years" (17). Placed between portraits of Campbell's sadistic, possessive paternal great-grandfather and an incident that shows how deeply racism and self-loathing was ingrained in her and her playmates, this comment takes on another dimension of meaning, as the causes of her father's change are soundly implied.

At one point in Chapter 20, Campbell goes to great lengths to convey the sense of desperation and hopelessness

she feels then. She is pregnant (the baby's father is serving a life-term prison sentence), physically exhausted from working at two dead-end jobs, and psychologically distressed from striving toward a level of success that seems increasingly unattainable. She describes a suicide attempt and a visit to a female ex-convict for an illegal abortion, which she decides against at the last minute. This is a powerful section, but rather than following it with a description of the immediate effects these events had on her life, Campbell chooses to digress into an anecdote about meeting the ex-convict several years later, as the woman served a third prison term. She notes that she

didn't see this woman again until years later, when I went as a representative of the Métis Association of Alberta to speak to the Women's Section of Fort Saskatchewan jail. . . She grabbed my hand as I walked by and said, "You made it, Maria. I knew you would" (132).

With this, all dramatic tension that has been built by her moving account has been completely undercut. Naturally, the reader can infer that Campbell will overcome these problems from the simple fact that she has survived to write the autobiography; however, the sudden revelation of the outcome in mid-narrative is very jarring, especially since Campbell goes on to detail more hardships and the process whereby she

overcame them. If this were strictly a traditional sequential narrative then, it would fail to sustain interest with passages such as these, because Campbell so frequently "gives away" the endings to her various story threads. Yet Campbell succeeds in providing an event-based "narrative juxtaposition" (Jahner 158) that allows deeper insight into the personal significance of certain events over the course of her life. By using this method, the "connectedness" of incidents is highlighted,⁶ since story threads need not be kept separate until they conclude at the end of the novel.

The closing of Chapter 1 features the most unusual textual deviance of the entire book. The last paragraph (or the last six, depending on how you choose to read it) consists of one sentence followed by five indented sentences, each set apart from the other by a space. Without directly stating a conclusion or even a reason for doing so, Campbell makes five separate statements:

The history books say that the Halfbreeds were defeated at Batoche in 1884.

Louis Riel was hanged in November of 1885. Charge: high treason.

Gabriel Dumont and a handful of men escaped to Montana.

Poundmaker and Big Bear surrendered, were charged with treason, and sentenced to jail for three years.

The other Halfbreeds escaped to the empty pockets of North Saskatchewan.

The total cost to the federal government to stop the Rebellion was \$5,000,000 (11).

Clearly, Campbell has a purpose in adopting such atypical form, since she uses it in her text only once; we are to pay special attention at this point. Here, fragmentation reflects some of the style inherent in oral narrative. The spaces between statements would seem to approximate the pauses in an oral storyteller's narrative, as they add appropriate emphasis. Even the abbreviated form found in the pseudo-sentence, "Charge: high treason," foregoes rules of syntax in favour of a staccato burst of information, reminiscent of a dispassionate speaker stating indisputable fact. Perhaps most importantly, Campbell has set up an implicit opposition to the Eurocentric "history books"⁷ in the first sentence of this passage. That she has done so using text is not contradictory, but rather necessary, since written forms have superseded oral ones; her purpose, however, is consistent with oral tradition, which is primarily concerned with the transmission of historical facts, values, and culture. Indeed, Renate Eigenbrod notes that "the literature created by Aboriginal people in writing has served the same purpose as the oral act of 'remembering it' " (91). Since the Métis' ancestral memory is now resident more in history books than in elders' tales, Campbell must contradict the textually, historically established defeat of the "Halfbreeds" with her

text, her story. In the remainder of the novel, she proceeds to accomplish this task.

"I'm a storyteller from an oral tradition," Campbell explains, "but. . . my language isn't even English" (Jessica 72). The expressiveness of her writings may be limited somewhat by the confines of the written word, yet Campbell still manages to convey several aspects of oral storytelling in Halfbreed. Even though the text is basically an expression of her own life experiences, as we have seen, Campbell begins it not with a story specific to herself, but a story of her people. This is consistent with the Native tradition of oral storytelling, in which tribal stories are given precedence over personal ones. Rather than assume the readers' knowledge of historical "facts," she chooses to re-tell the history from the Métis perspective. She then proceeds to a more specific (but far from egocentric) history, naming and writing about specific members of her family, much in the way family members and other tribespeople are commonly discussed first in traditional oral performances (Jahner 159).

The conversational style of Campbell's narrative also sets it apart from the traditional, Eurocentric-style autobiography. She engages the reader by addressing him directly: "I know that poverty is not ours alone. Your people have it too, but in those earlier days you at least had dreams, you had a tomorrow" (13). One of her favourite techniques, as mentioned above, is to relate an anecdote from

her past, and follow it up with an aside explaining the relevance of the story to her present life. After the point in the novel at which her mother dies, Campbell begins to discuss her father's religious practices. She notes that prayer "made Dad feel better . . . comforted him and helped him to carry on" (72). Initially, one cannot help but wonder if this foreshadows a religious awakening for Campbell; indeed, she later encounters other religious figures who might very well have influenced her. Yet without warning, Campbell switches tense, noting that "Dad is still religious in his own way, but I have never found peace in a church or in prayer" (72). Although this practice can be frustrating at times, as it deflates any dramatic tension built by her story by revealing the eventual outcome, it proves to be an ingenious technique in helping to direct our attention, narrowing our focus. In this case, Campbell's father's grief is highlighted, as are Cheechum's religious philosophies (which contradict Campbell's father's).

Campbell does, however, have a tendency to supplement her narrative with asides that hammer a point home, perhaps with unnecessary force. These asides are reminiscent of oral storytelling, as Campbell addresses the reader directly, often in a familiar tone. After a financially destitute and desperate Campbell places a telephone call to Lil, who we later find out turns Campbell into a prostitute, Campbell digresses to say "I could say at this point that I was

innocent and had no idea what I was getting into. I have even tried to make myself believe this but that would be lying. I did know" (115-116). Often, this editorializing seems to have the sole purpose of imprinting Campbell's current beliefs over the events of the narrative simply to argue a point. For instance, Campbell breaks from a description of her time as a prostitute to recall:

When I think back to that time and those people, I realize now that poor people, both white and Native, who are trapped within a certain kind of life, can never look to the business and political leaders of this country for help. Regardless of what they promise, they'll never change things, because they are involved in and perpetuate in private the very things that they condemn in public. (118)

Such political rhetoric contributes little to our understanding of Campbell's situation, particularly since her conflict with unfair authority figures has already been well documented in the novel. However, retelling events in a narrative to make a statement concerning a contemporary situation is appropriate to Native oral storytelling conventions, and to that end, the digression is effective.

Campbell's Halfbreed, then, is polyvalent in several respects. Her character identifies with various groups simultaneously, maintaining a complex enough balance between

identifications to avoid appearing stereotypical. In fact, the apparent incompatibility that Campbell perceives between the Native part of her and her desire for the upper-class wealth and lifestyle available to whites is the root of her identity conflict and resulting downfall. Campbell's desertion of her family, friends, and community is demonstrated to have an unhealthy effect on her, as we find how important these things are for her balanced sense of self. The continual references to Cheechum not only show that Campbell locates identity in her (she serves as a conscience and role model), but they also act as an indicator of Campbell's communal identity; when the ties to her community are strong, she heeds Cheechum's advice, but as she distances herself from her people, she rejects the valuable guidance.

Aside from the character of Campbell, the text itself is polyvalent; both the physical format and the narrative are fragmented, and as such used to great advantage by Campbell to relate her unique experience. The episodic, chronologically jumbled format highlights the inter-connectedness between all the aspects of her life and her story. In all of this, traces of the oral storytelling tradition "leak" into the text. The emphasis on the communal, the episodic nature of the text, the colloquialisms, and the direct addressing of the audience all suggest qualities of an oral performance. Campbell states in the introduction that she "writes this for all of you, to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country"

(8). The success of her undertaking may be gauged not merely by the literary and critical success of her autobiography, but by the crucial influence she has had on subsequent Native Canadian women authors⁸ as well.

ENDNOTES

1. From this point on, I will use "Campbell" to refer to the author and main character of the text; other relatives with the same surname will be denoted by their relationship to Campbell, or by their first names.
2. I recognize that Euramerican autobiographies assume a wide variety of forms and styles; the generalization in this comment is necessary to make a distinction.
3. In order to represent the constructed autobiographical self in terms of any specific role (such as a character's class, gender, or sexuality), the text must be structured in a way that necessarily excludes other aspects of the self to some degree, for the sake of clarity. In other words, focusing strongly on one fragment of personality tends to reduce the attention devoted to other, equally important fragments.
4. The page numbers given for all quotations and excerpts from Halfbreed are taken from the 1978 McClelland & Stewart edition.
5. Certainly this applies primarily to the Métis people, although it should also be noted that Maria has an affinity for the "Indian" people as well. Not only does Campbell document the Indian heritage in her, but she also spends many subsequent

pages detailing the life and activities of Indian people along with the Métis.

6. See Eigenbrod (94) for a detailed explanation of the role of connectedness in traditional Native story.
7. Text as a means to record historical truth was, of course, introduced to/imposed on Native Canadians, who relied entirely on oral histories for the transmission of facts. Campbell's implicit opposition here stems from the perversion of historical truth that the shift to written history has imprinted in the minds of both Native and non-Native people. Note that Campbell describes Cheechum telling Maria corrective (hi)stories, and telling her, "'Because they killed Riel they think they have killed us too, but some day, my girl, it will be different' " (15).
8. Of course, Campbell has influenced many others through her writing, but several Native Canadian women writers in particular have testified to the inspirational role of her works, and those writers are, after all, the focus of this thesis.

III. BEATRICE CULLETON¹: IN SEARCH OF APRIL RAINTREE

Beatrice Culleton's first novel, In Search of April Raintree, is similar in structure and style to Campbell's Halfbreed, and in much the same way details a woman's passage from shame to acceptance and even celebration of being Native. Unlike Campbell's work, however, In Search of April Raintree is not explicitly an autobiography. Although the story is based on her personal experiences, and in several instances mirrors her own life, Culleton has explained that the text was ultimately fictionalized, since "if it were going to be an autobiography, it would certainly hurt some people" (Garrod 89). The act of shifting genres from non-fiction to fiction has not impeded her ability to express the hardship inherent in finding a Métis identity; in fact, it has allowed her the freedom to explore divergent paths of identity, as exemplified by April and her sister. The text follows many of the guidelines of traditional Eurocentric autobiography, probably as a result of the influence of European-style texts on Culleton as she matured.² Yet such conventions do not restrict the novel, a fact evident in the very fragmented, colloquial narrative style and in the subversion of linear chronology in several places. Such literary freedom allows a multi-faceted depiction of an individual, using the liberties of fiction to enhance the presented experience of coming to terms with one's identity as a Native Canadian woman.

In Search of April Raintree brings the issue of group identification to the forefront, delineating the struggles of both April and her sister, Cheryl, to reconcile the conflicting notions of racial identity they encounter. Culleton herself has admitted that as she wrote, the book "wasn't going to be about a search for identity. But while I was writing that's what I realized about myself: that I had to accept my identity, not to make everything right or things like that" (Lutz 98). The light-skinned April has difficulty accepting her identity, since she has internalized stereotypes which lead her to make sweeping generalizations about certain groups of people; for her, all Natives are alcoholics and extremely poor, while only a person who is white may be upper-class and a professional. Her fight to disassociate her sense of self from the stereotypical image of the poor, drunk, and incompetent Native compels her to exclude other parts of her identity unnecessarily and, as we discover later in the novel, in a manner detrimental to her self-acceptance and interactions with others. On the other hand, April's dark-skinned but otherwise almost identical sister, Cheryl, romanticizes Métis identity and strongly identifies with it. Cheryl's struggle begins with her first-hand discovery of the real problems that form the basis of the blanketing stereotypes about Métis people. When the ugly reality she finds challenges her sense of self, Cheryl begins to identify

with it to the extreme, becoming the very model of the stereotype she earlier rejected.

Initially, April's understanding of the roles of daughter and parent is quite simple; in her young mind, relationships between the two are sustained through mere affection. Although April and Cheryl have been taken from their alcoholic parents and put into foster homes, during one of their visitation periods with their parents April notes that she "loved them and they loved me. And there were no questions of ties or loyalties. Just family" (32). The betrayal she feels when her parents fail to appear for a scheduled meeting, combined with the racist taunts of white children, helps to form her understanding of what it means to be Métis:

[W]hat I'd read and what I'd heard indicated that Métis and Indians were inclined to be alcoholics. That's because they were a weak people... [W]hen I grew up, I wouldn't be poor; I'd be rich. Being a half-breed meant being poor and dirty. It meant being weak and having to drink. It meant being ugly and stupid. It meant living off white people. And giving your children to white people to look after. (49)

The associations that April makes here determine how she governs her life from this point. Her social worker, Mrs. Semple, had explained the "native girl syndrome" to the sisters:

It starts out with the fighting, the running away, the lies. Next come the accusations that everyone in the world is against you. There are the sullen uncooperative silences, the feeling sorry for yourselves. And when you go on your own, you get pregnant right away or you can't find or keep 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 like your parents, living off society . . . Now, you're going the same route as many other native girls. If you don't smarten up, you'll end up in the same place they do. Skid row! (66-67)

April finds it necessary to avoid the "native girl syndrome" at all costs, even though her desire to distance herself from the stereotype leads her to over-compensate by blindly pursuing money, status, and white acceptance. In a life decision similar to Maria's in Halfbreed, April enters a hasty marriage with a philandering white businessman simply as a means to attain her ideal lifestyle (109-111). Also, the obvious distaste and shame April expresses at having such a visibly Métis sister repels Cheryl, who eventually commits suicide.

Even though the development of racial identity is a central theme of the novel, Culleton distinctly shows that

identity consists of more than race. Her intent to demonstrate that there are other, equally valid ways to define oneself is evident in the following exchange:

"Oh, I've read about Indians. Beautiful people they are. But you're not exactly Indians are you? What is the proper word for people like you?" one asked.

"Women," Cheryl replied instantly.

"No, no, I mean nationality?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. We're Canadians," Cheryl smiled sweetly. (116)

Although it is Cheryl the woman is addressing, and Cheryl who has the boldness to make the woman's ignorance evident, the phrasing ("you're not exactly Indians are you") clearly shows this conversation is about April as well. Ultimately, Culleton demonstrates that race, for all its importance, is but a single factor in the formation of identity, not the only factor. Culleton completely avoids all tendencies to romanticize the condition of being Native; Helen Hoy rhetorically asks whether since "April comes to Métis identity at the moment that Cheryl abandons it and [since] the itinerary of April's Nativeness is the inverse of her sister's, can the narrative be said to posit any fundamental Métis reality?" (Hoy 167) The answer is a little more complicated than the implied negative: although there is certainly no fixed universal concept of reality that applies

equally to all Métis people, there are several external conditions that tend to impact on many Métis people in similar ways, such as poverty and prejudice³--the difference is in how each individual deals with her circumstances, as the rift between April and Cheryl bears out. In Culleton's exploration of these individual responses, we are exposed to more universal experiences in the women's lives--experiences which transcend race.

Like Culleton herself, April is a rape survivor. Although April does not realize it until long after she has been raped, she was attacked only because she had been mistakenly identified as her sister. At the instigation of an enemy of Cheryl's, three young men seek to confront Cheryl but grab April instead, not realizing that they have the wrong sister; the episode quickly deteriorates as the men proceed to beat, degrade, and rape her repeatedly. A substantial part of In Search of April Raintree is devoted to exploring the issues of intimacy and trust that her rape brings up. Although, as a story device, the rape functions primarily to make April question the sense of security she has in being able to pass as "white" (the attack was meant for her quite visibly Native sister, and the rapists repeatedly called her "squaw," much to April's puzzlement [161]), Culleton goes far beyond questions of race identification to explore the effects of the rape on other aspects of April's life. She describes it as a "double assault" (160) that lingers psychologically after the physical

damage has mended. The violation has impaired her ability to feel both comfortable with intimacy and complete as a woman; she has been "deranged by those rapists" (177). When Roger, a former co-worker, begins to take an interest in April, she alternately welcomes him and pushes him away. She overreacts to a simple, gentle attempt to kiss her (163), and accepts as fact that she can't bear the children she yearns for because she feels too "scared to . . . to ever let a man get close" (189). Ironically, even though April is clearly overcoming her shame in her Métis heritage as part of her healing, Culleton presents the after-effects of the rape with enough detail and candor that the experience stands apart from April's struggle for racial identity. Yet as she reconciles her ambivalence over identifying herself as a Métis, it becomes evident that the same self-assurance and love that she needs to be able to accept her race is also required if she is to accept herself as a complete woman.

Although April is ostensibly the main character of the novel, in that hers is the first-person perspective used to tell the story, she is not the sole focus. Culleton has crafted a unique doubled subject in the two sisters April and Cheryl; with the exception of the period that April spends in Toronto⁴, Cheryl's story is presented alongside of April's. Subtly but strongly, Culleton implies that the sisters are, in essence, nearly identical. Of their appearance, April notes, "we could have been almost identical twins, except for our

skin-colouring" (115). The differences apparent in their personalities and attitudes can be traced back to this key divergence. Whereas April is able to pass unquestioned as a white girl, Cheryl's heritage is impossible to deny.⁵ Looking at herself, April observes that "[a] lot of pure white people tanned just like this. Poor Cheryl. She would never be able to disguise her brown skin as just a tan" (49). When presented with positive depictions of Métis and Indian people, such as those found in the books owned by the MacAdams, Cheryl's foster family, Cheryl latches on to these notions as a means to think positively about herself, while April can retreat to her fantasy of being a white girl, and reject such depictions outright when she is presented with them.

In order to adopt a self-image that she can accept, April renounces the relationship she has with her sister. "How was I going to pass for a white person when I had a Métis sister?" she laments, "Especially when she was so proud of what she was?" (49). She does not yet realize how detrimental this denial is to her sense of self, as she not only rejects her sister, but, by extension, the part of herself that her sister represents as well. Cheryl gives April books and essays favourable to Native views of history, but these only serve as catalysts to April's denial.

The turning point of April's self-concept occurs during the visit to the Friendship Centre when she meets White Thunderbird Woman, an Elder. As they are introduced, April

does not realize that White Thunderbird Woman is a respected and revered figure; she only sees an old Indian woman whose hands "looked rusted and old. Her fingers were swollen at the joints, disfigured, [and] the veins stood out" (174). In essence, April sees the same ugliness in the old woman that she has seen in the drunken, squalid Natives she has met, hated, and tried to distance herself from. But when White Thunderbird Woman takes April by the hand and looks into her eyes, a transformation occurs:

I saw in her eyes that deep simple wisdom of which Cheryl had spoken. And I no longer found her touch distasteful. Without speaking a word to me, the woman imparted her message with her eyes. She had seen something in me that was deserving of her respect. I wondered what she could possibly have found in me that could have warranted her respect. I just stood there, humbled. At the same time I had this overwhelming feeling that a mystical spiritual occurrence had just taken place (174-175).

As Margery Fee notes, April is being "hailed as part of a generation, not just as [an] individual" (Fee 172). A connection occurs between her and this old Native woman, a bond previously unthinkable to April, but too powerful to deny. From this point on, her attitude toward her Métis-ness changes (albeit gradually) as she begins to accept who she is and to see herself as an integral part of a larger community.

For the first time, April can openly admit to herself that she is a Métis: "It was a part of me. I was part-Indian" (175, emphasis Culleton's). Culleton's placement of this significant event at this point in the novel would seem to indicate that informed acceptance of the self does indeed have positive effects on all other aspects of April's life. April needs to heal, both from the trauma of her rape and from her ongoing identity schism, and from this point on the positive steps she takes toward that goal attest to the vital importance of the event to her recovery.

One of the ways that Culleton calls attention to April's building sense of communal identity is through her use of the plural possessive, "our." Repeatedly, April begins speaking in the singular form and then switches to the plural. For example, April mentions that she and Cheryl "would go horsebackriding [sic] a lot more often than we had been doing. It was one way for me of getting her into my car. Our car" (173). The brevity of the fragment, "our car," gives the impression that this is not so much a reluctant admission (after all, Cheryl only helped to select the car, not to pay for it) as it is a correction of her previous attitude. As April begins to recognize her connectedness to her sister and her people, the singular possessive does not ring true, and must be emended. Her sense of communal identity builds through the narrative until she reaches a point at which empathy for her people overcomes her. After Cheryl commits

suicide, April smashes a bottle of alcohol to bits, screaming at it, "I hate you for what you've done to my people! Our people!"⁶ (214). The fact that she now includes herself when she refers to the Métis people represents the complete acceptance of that component of her identity; later, April muses, "I remembered that during the night I had used the words 'MY PEOPLE, OUR PEOPLE'⁷ and meant them. The denial had been lifted from my spirit" (228). The book ends with a promise from April to work towards a better life, not just for herself, but for all of her people.

As Helen Hoy states, "In Search of April Raintree is not a seamless, unitary narrative" (160); that is to say, the novel is not limited to one single, totalizing voice, nor is it composed of a single narrative thread progressing forward from a fixed point with no breaks. Though, to be certain, Culleton has structured the novel in a generally conventional, linear fashion, elements of fragmentation leak in and permeate the narrative. Perhaps the most obvious manifestation is in the splitting of the story between April and Cheryl; although April's life predominates the text, a substantial amount of narrative is devoted to Cheryl's story. Culleton's smooth transitions make the "scattering of stories" (Hoy 166) seem cohesive, yet the narrative threads are distinct though intertwined. In the beginning, April herself is able to tell the story for both of the sisters, but by the second chapter, when the girls are separated, Culleton drops any omniscience

in favour of having Cheryl tell her own story, in her own words.

Once Cheryl becomes old enough to compose written letters to April, the telling of her story moves from brief excerpts of conversation between the sisters to an even more segregated epistolary form. The blank lines inserted before and after these letters set them apart from the surrounding text, and highlight the differences in the narrative path each sister takes. Cheryl's speeches on the Métis people are similarly spaced apart from the main body, and are especially indicative of the sisters' conflicting attitudes, as they are, in every case, immediately followed by April's commentary and refutation. The written piece which Cheryl delivers as oratory during the pow-wow (168-170) is textually set off as well, although subsequently emphasis is placed not only on the different existing attitudes of the sisters, but on how their attitudes change after the pow-wow; April begins to feel "alive" (172), to feel a kinship with her people again, while Cheryl's efforts at community involvement are sparked but seem to wane shortly after.

Culleton even subtly subverts the chronological linearity of her narrative. In the final chapter, Chapter Seventeen, April is packing away Cheryl's belongings in the aftermath of her suicide, when she finds the journals that Cheryl had persistently kept up in order to record her life. The great majority of the text in this chapter is taken up by the

verbatim printing of these journal entries, with a modicum of comment from April. Although it is being read in the narrative present, of course, the journal is, in effect, Cheryl's posthumous voice from the past, inserting a story segment out of order. In this instance, the juxtaposition of narrative threads leads easily to a comparison of how the two women's lives developed. April is now able to note the presence of the "natural family instinct" (221) in Cheryl and the corresponding lack of it in herself. As noted earlier, both sisters have equally self-destructive flaws, but April has been granted the opportunity to learn from Cheryl's experiences and to emulate the healthy aspects of Cheryl's behaviour and identifications. April concludes that "[i]t was tragic that it had taken Cheryl's death to bring me to accept my identity. But no, Cheryl had once said, 'All life dies to give new life'" (228). The power of Cheryl's words has transformed April, in effect granting her a rebirth out of her sister's tragedy.

Certainly, the true-to-life style with which the narrator relates the story is strongly reminiscent of an oral storytelling. The diction and syntax are conversational and colloquial, so much so, in fact, that it is remarkably easy to imagine the words being spoken aloud as they are read. Culleton's word choice, for instance, is often very realistic-sounding at the expense of literary propriety, as in a description of Cheryl's eyes as "reddish, dopey looking"

(192), or euphemisms such as "his thing" (13) for "penis", and "go to bed" (105) for "have sex". A copious use of sentence fragments also serves to emulate natural speech patterns, as in the following passage: "Cheryl's long hair had been her pride and glory. Had been her pride and glory." (59, emphasis Culleton's). Note too, the use of italics and repetition in the above quotation to further simulate the stresses of spoken words. In fact, the novel begins and ends with sentence fragments, starting with, "Memories." (9) and concluding with, "For my sister and her son. For my parents. For my people." (228). Admittedly, such fragments are striking in their brevity, which helps to capture a reader's eye; however, they so effectively represent an oral performance here that they are surely meant to evoke an aural simulation.

The manner in which April addresses the audience directly through frequent editorializing solidifies the aspect of oral performance. For instance, she lets the reader in on the planned direction of her narrative before she proceeds with it: "I think it's best to go back in my life before I go forward" (9). She even asks, however facetiously, that we pardon her inadequate descriptions: "But from the moment I saw their house, excuse me, mansion..." (112). In another similarity to Maria in Campbell's Halfbreed, April digresses frequently on tangents not completely or directly relevant to the progression of the narrative. In reference to the colloquial term for melancholy, April muses, "Actually, I

don't know why they say "blue" when it's more like grey" (124). During the aftermath of her rape, April tells us that "rapists abused their victims both physically and mentally. Some victims' minds really did snap after a brutal sexual assault" (160). Though it is informative and connected to the events at hand, the statement has no direct relevance to the narrative line of her story, since April is not one of the victims whose mind has "snapped." This digression is, however, consistent with the traditions of Native oral performance, as it signifies a potential transmission of social awareness (Jahner, "Transitional Narratives and Cultural Continuity," 160).

Culleton's second version of her novel, an edition revised partially in order to meet the requirements for a high-school text, entitled simply April Raintree, contains the same basic story with slight but significant alterations. For instance, whereas in the original April's vomiting after the rape (144-145) is purely an involuntary reaction to the degradation the men inflict on her, in the revised edition she feigns vomiting as a calculated strategy to escape her attackers and get their license plate number. Hoy views the doubled text as a "recognition of the plurality" (Hoy 170) inherent in the story, and compares it to an oral text, which "varies with occasion, season, audience, function, and time" (170). Although certainly some of the changes, notably the toned down language⁸, may have simply been changed out of

necessity, since Manitoba Education would not allow a school edition of the text to remain unexpurgated, April's increased initiative in the revision was not mandated; it would seem that, like an oral storyteller, Culleton has told her basic story but adapted it to fit the particular circumstances of the telling.

In Search of April Raintree is a polyvalent text on multiple levels. Not only are the characters themselves, most notably April and Cheryl, embroiled in a struggle against stereotypical racial identification, they are also presented from a number of opposing directions which afford a more detailed insight into their lives. Both sisters wish to identify with specific respective groups (the Métis for Cheryl and the rich white upper-class for April) so strongly that they neglect the other aspects of themselves and are shocked when the reality of their situations does not measure up to their idealized fantasies. April must come to accept that she is also a Métis; Cheryl, tragically, cannot cope with the full revelation that many Métis people, even her parents, were desperate alcoholics beyond her help. Events taken out of sequence, as for example those detailed in Cheryl's journal at the close of the novel, help to convey more immediate insight into the characters' motivations and into the consequences of their actions; April's reading of the journal so soon after Cheryl's death makes the self-destructive path Cheryl took more comprehensible in light of her previous mettle.

Furthermore, the attention paid to both April and Cheryl respectively indicates another realm of polyvalence, in which the two sisters represent different paths and possibilities experienced by Canadian Métis women.

As with Halfbreed, the colloquial nature of the narrative is reminiscent of oral performance, perhaps even more so due to the highly fragmented nature of the narration and the frequency with which April directly addresses the audience. The self-descriptive term used in the novel's back cover blurb, "autobiographical fiction," is appropriate, since while Culleton has certainly fabricated much of the content, she has also created an eminently believable and multi-faceted life story which presents its subject with an acuity unique to both genres.

ENDNOTES

1. Although I recognize that the author currently wishes to be known as Beatrice Mosionier, I have chosen to refer to her by the name which is most closely associated with the text, that which she used as she wrote it.
2. See Garrod, 87.
3. I in no way mean to imply that Métis people are monolithically by definition poor, etc.; I merely intend to point out that these conditions are very often faced by Métis people, and thus the terms apply in a strictly general sense.
4. Culleton has admitted in an interview (Garrod 90) that she only wrote this section in order to separate the two sisters, so that April would not immediately find out about Cheryl's successful search for their parents, her alcoholism, and her prostitution.
5. April mentions that "no one in my class knew of my heritage" (45), while Cheryl remarks that she has to deal with "all the bad stuff," from white students because she is "different from them" (45).
6. To be fair, it should be noted that "Our people!" does not appear in the version of In Search of April Raintree used here, although it does appear in April Raintree, p. 172. However, given that April later refers to saying the phrase (228) it would seem that the omission is merely an unintended oversight.

7. Also to be fair, April Raintree prints these words in lower-case.
8. For example, "specifics of breast, crotch, and penis disappear," and the word "bastards" is replaced with "scumbags" (Hoy, n13).

IV. LEE MARACLE: SUNDOGS

Lee Maracle's Sundogs is a very different sort of text from the previous two works discussed. It is probably the least explicitly autobiographical of all four works examined in this study, because it describes situations and events in ways which make clear that this is primarily a story about the fictional main character Marianne Carpenter, not about Maracle herself as subject (Marianne's age, for example, a crucial element in forming her impetus for self-discovery, is far less than Maracle's would have been at the time of the Meech Lake Accord filibuster). In fact, Maracle's earlier Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel would seem a much more obvious choice of works for a study of life writing, as it is more explicitly autobiographical and resembles conventional works of the genre. However, the inclusion of Maria Campbell's Halfbreed, an exemplar of candidly autobiographical writing by Native Canadian women, confers a certain redundancy upon the valuable, but similar, text. This analysis, which examines identity creation in several of life-writing's permutations, is better served by the more fictitious Sundogs.

Despite the fictive nature of the work (the authorial blurb on the back cover proclaims, "Sundogs is Lee Maracle's first novel"), Maracle does admit that the novel has thematic underpinnings taken from her personal experiences.¹ Although the novel does not satisfy the most commonly held textual

rules associated with autobiography, does not attempt to show the narrator and the author to be one and the same (and in fact, does not even claim the two to have similar ages or features), the creation of identity within the novel is very comparable to that of other life writings. It contains an "unrelativized first-person perspective, [is] strongly confessional², and encourage[s] reader identification" (Felski 93), elements which critic Rita Felski has noted can "encourage an interpretation of the text as the expression, in essence, of the views and experiences of the writing subject" (Felski 93) when they occur within the proper context of reception. Sundogs, while generally read as fiction, constructs and conveys identity in a manner that facilitates interpretation of the text as life writing. And, as Felski observes, there has been a shift within feminist criticism of life writing prioritizing the

representative aspects of the author's experience rather than her unique individuality . . . allowing for the inclusion of fictive but representative episodes distilled from the lives of other women (Felski 94).

Writing "fictive but representative episodes" is the only way that Maracle can portray the coming of age of a woman as young as Marianne while still preserving the modern sociopolitical context that is so integral to that experience. It is

Maracle's admitted personal investment of herself in the work, but more importantly the polyvalence used both in the construction of Marianne's story and in Marianne herself, that warrant the book's inclusion in this study.

The dilemma of identity facing Marianne is eloquently expressed by Mike Myers in the preface: "[Sundogs] shows the reader Aboriginal people as real humans who are buffeted by many forces and factors and our ongoing struggle to make sense of it all" (preface, ii). Marianne, like many young Native women in Canada, feels caught between the culture of her heritage and the one into which she has been socialized; she is compelled to identify variously with different groups yet unable to reconcile the simultaneous existence of those identifications within herself. Sundogs details the process by which Marianne comes to "make sense of it all" (ii). She uses a metaphor of shards, or puzzle pieces, to illustrate her inner conflict:

I try to collect the broken pieces of my insides and put them back together. It isn't possible. I was never familiar with the pattern of my soul. I can't arrange the pieces in any coherent order. They float about wanting to be ordered. Each time I think I have it I find out several pieces don't fit and the whole fabric of me falls apart. (90)

This lack of self-knowledge results in Marianne's unhappiness and her constant awkward social interactions. She cannot shake the spectre of self-doubt until she truly understands her self; to do that, she must balance the "nutty worlds we straddle" (80).

The novel starts in a fashion that gives no hint of Marianne's ancestry; in fact, if anything, her descriptions and observations make her seem indistinguishable from any member of the dominant culture. When Marianne finally does identify herself culturally, her phrasing even separates herself from her race for a moment: "shame burns holes in whatever sympathy I have for Indians" (3). The key word here is sympathy; Marianne struggles with the fact that she feels disconnected from her people, able to feel sympathy for them, but not to empathize with them. It is no wonder that Marianne slips into discussions about Natives as if she were not Native herself, because she is insecure regarding the claim she has to her culture. In pure intellectual terms, Marianne is not ambivalent at all about her race. While it is true that her mother is Métis (4), and her father is white (213), Marianne makes no mention of the white/French components of her heritage, nor does she make reference to herself as anything other than Native. Visually, she is identifiably Native. She comments at one point, "At home I am not Indian enough and at school I am too much Indian" (10). It is this incomplete identification with the two cultures that tears at Marianne

from opposing directions, and causes her to question who she truly is. Despite knowing that she is Native, Marianne still maintains a certain distance and aloofness towards her own people. She is shamed by the number of Native people collecting social assistance (3), and despite the fact that she has come to cheer her mother on in her rants against white authority figures (79), her "heart . . . is still ashamed of [her] mother, and her challenges to those people embarrass [her] still" (78). Marianne is vaguely conscious of the degree to which she has been assimilated into mainstream (white) culture, but she finds it difficult to either articulate or accept the fact that she has been assimilated . Repeatedly, she demonstrates a strong aversion to white people or practices that are typically identified with white people. For example, Marianne explains how, as Natives, "[w]e love it when white folks get tangled in their complex rules and regulations" (65). While talking to James, a white character, a casual question prompts the thought, "I know white people value money, but this strikes me as odd--a penny for your thoughts" (87). Considering that Marianne has quite clearly indicated from the start of the novel that she is more than well acquainted with "white" social structures and language, these comments cannot be read as mere innocuous observation; rather, they should be seen as attempts to define herself by defining what she is not, using broad generalizations to polarize the two races. However, when her boss and lover,

Mark, invites her to move in with him, her insistence on being courted leads Mark to point out the origin of the concept of courtship and how deeply it is ingrained into her:

"That's mighty white of you."

"Shut up. Shut the fuck up... You..." I am up now and scrambling for my clothes, throwing them on in a hurried rage. . . . "Maybe you see dark meat and don't think of my right to be..." Be what? Treated like a white girl, taken to dinner, adorned with flowers and endless phone calls--dated? (117)

As her ambivalence indicates, her distrust of white culture conflicts with the governing rules of conduct instilled in her by that culture. Furthermore, her experiences concerning the way Native women are treated in relationships leave her with no alternate frame of reference, so the best she can do is try to silence Mark and escape quickly.

The character of James, a white classmate in the sociology course that Marianne attends, represents the temptation for Marianne to slip complacently into a relatively comfortable assimilated existence guided by the values and social codes of white society. The pinnacle of this temptation occurs when Marianne has an alternately intoxicating and nauseating experience in a small eatery with James, who is described as "big and blond. . . tanned and unblemished" (81). During the course of their discussion, it

becomes obvious to Marianne that James is sexually interested in her. Though she ultimately rejects his rudimentary advances, leaving only a tiny window of opportunity for future encounters, she is also flattered by the attention, and her aversion toward white people and culture weakens. At one point she realizes that

[t]he absence of control he lacked in the shaping of his life makes me want to alter the core of my being. I can't help filling up with empathy for this lost lad, who can't feel the same about the world, can't think beyond its surface and the tension of the moment. (85, emphasis mine)

It is noteworthy that although Marianne previously could not empathize with her people on social assistance, she is now seized involuntarily with empathy for James. The ease with which she extends her heretofore guarded empathy to James reveals the similarities in the way their personalities have been shaped; the differences she elucidates ultimately highlight the fact that she, too, has often felt lost and caught up in the immediacy of events. As the lure of surrender to white culture tempts Marianne, James continues to be a presence in the novel, both physically and later metaphorically. This is perhaps best illustrated when pride and love for her people becomes difficult; at a particularly weak moment for Marianne, when it seems that her relationship

with Mark is irretrievably lost, her memory flashes back to an imagined fantasy of James' windswept hair set against ocean whitecaps (85). She laments, "I wish I had not cancelled blond against green as a possible alternative" (137).

Another factor that works against her acceptance of Native heritage is the perception of (cultural) betrayal by her brother, Rudy. Much space in the novel is devoted to Marianne's attempts to reconcile her feelings towards Rudy, who has become an alcoholic and a philanderer, and has physically abused his wife, Paula, and their children. In addition to the very personal betrayal Marianne feels at Rudy's actions, she also sees him as the embodiment of betrayal by Native men in general of Native women, families, and communities.

I think about Rudy. He could be so sweet, but he is also clear. He is a man. He is the head of the household. I think about that. The head of the household, as though his wife had no mind in her own home. It is his money, his time, his, his... Resistance of the mildest sort from Paula to any of his dominions opens a chasm between himself and his wife. His wife. I watch Mark and see Rudy transformed from a mild mannered benevolent patriarch to an incensed master when challenged. I wonder how close Mark is to this same pattern. (80)

Marianne recognizes a pattern of systematic abuse of Native women by Native men, and doubts whether it is possible for Native men to completely avoid becoming abusive. On the other hand, when she thinks of James, because of her own racial prejudices she "cannot imagine him walloping some woman the way Rudy had" (81). This naturally causes her to shrink from identifying with the Native component of her heritage; however, while she is conscious of what she believes to be her complicity in Rudy's downfall, she has difficulty finding the strength to love Rudy, and to love herself:

We had to love the enemy to hate ourselves. Rudy, his swagger sounds the death knell between himself and our family, his family. . . . The daughter who ignores her mother, fails to see inside her soul, re-dreams old visions into new escape, hands her brother the knife that cuts the cord and rips asunder the sacred bond of family.
(70)

Marianne is the daughter in question; she feels that through distancing herself from her family, she is at least partially responsible for creating further discord among the rest of them.

Marianne's alienation becomes the principal dilemma of the novel. She feels cast adrift, unable to identify satisfactorily with even the members of her immediate family, much less her larger cultural community. Her inability to

discern the connections between herself and others is well summarized in Marianne's comments regarding her mother, who becomes enraged and upset at the announcement that the Premier is cutting back on welfare payments, a tactic that will hurt many poor Native people. "I can't get past this," Marianne laments, "can't break through wondering why she is so sad about people she has never met" (4). Certainly, Marianne's detached attitude does not apply only to people she does not know personally; she feels isolated and disconnected from her family as well. She discerns an almost palpable bond between the other members of her family, a sense that they have shared experiences which unite them, experiences which she may never have. "I feel like a complete stranger caught in a room full of people I don't know" (60), she complains.

Marianne does not yet understand the beneficial effects that building connections to her family will have upon her understanding of herself. "I realize now that [my jewellery was] given to me by my brothers and sisters and my aunt because they thought they ought to," Marianne muses. "A family sense of duty I lacked guided them. Wheee" (71). She feels as though her family has held back something from her, some knowledge given to each of her older siblings, but kept from her, because she is the "Baby" (35). She commits social faux pas after faux pas³ and blames it, for the most part, on her family's failure to properly educate her about expected social conduct within the family. It is only when she begins

to acknowledge her own failure to actively seek such knowledge that she begins to receive it. After Marianne's aunt Mary announces that she has investigated Mark and found that he is married, Marianne begins yelling at her. She is cut short by her eldest sister Lacey, who asks her, "Where did you get the notion that you were holy, sacrosanct and disconnected from the rest of us?" (134). The question affects her deeply, but the rage of the moment prevents her from fully accepting Mary's reasoning. Only when her mother explains to her that she was waiting for Marianne to choose her Native heritage (147-148) does Marianne take the necessary steps toward self-discovery, an exploration of the component of herself she has neglected for all of her years.

Marianne announces that she will be participating in the Run For Peace (148) to Oka, much to her mother's approval.

In the alienated distance between myself and my family wanders this great need to reconnect with my origins. The run for peace holds promise. It promises in every step across the country to fill me with affection for my own. It promises to give me the courage to take up the broken thread of my aborted past and march forward into life from a place where I am both familiar and accepted. (163-164)

She participates in a traditional sweat lodge ceremony (168-169), and is a full-fledged runner until the run is aborted

because of the increasing threat of violence. However, even though the run is not completed, Marianne has received a spiritual awakening comparable to that associated with a traditional vision quest. Her view of communal identity has been radically altered: "The knowledge of the family is a shared one. I get the impression that the whole family participates in the development of their collective thinking. Sundogs, impossible reflections mirrored under extraordinary circumstances" (200). Marianne is beginning to understand that individual identity exists, but only in a complex relation with other individuals. Like a skein of thread, "[e]ach strand spins itself in its own direction independent of the others and, yet, is bound by a sense of cooperation and equality between them. Sundogs" (201).

The young woman who once could not comprehend her mother's concern for her people on social assistance has now come to speak in almost effusive terms of her love for all people:

You don't fall in love with a man. It is manhood--glorious humanity--you come to love. Love for humanity sharpens your love for the individual and this love dulls the blade of Hollywood romantic desperation until it dissipates and love for the human soul divine is recreated. (211)

As this passage suggests, Marianne has begun to perceive and understand her connection not only to her immediate family or cultural group, but to all people. This awareness frees her to see past popular-culture concepts of proper conduct and attitude, and finally to be able to love openly. Aspiring to and adhering to "Hollywood" ideals has distanced Marianne from her family; by according less value to these ideals, she can begin to accept others who do not meet these standards, and reconcile differing aspects of herself.

Regarding the layout of the text, Sundogs is the least fragmented of the four works discussed in this study; indeed, the lack of chapter divisions of any kind would seem to indicate less fragmentation than most novels of any type. However, the stream-of-consciousness style of narrative which Maracle attempts to convey is punctuated by pronounced breaks, most expediently when a large span of inconsequential time is required to pass, but also when the narrative jumps into past events via Marianne's memory. Perhaps the most lengthy and crucial example of timeline fragmentation occurs shortly after Marianne makes the decision to participate in the Peace Run. For six pages (157-162), Marianne recounts incident after incident, taking time after each one to recontextualize it. The section is especially notable since, unlike most of her other sojourns into the past, much of this departure is a review of events that have taken place within the scope of the novel itself. It is the juxtaposition of these events that

makes their connection evident, through re-contextualizing them so that Marianne's progress is clear. For instance, Marianne first repeatedly mentions Mark's assertion, "I have never courted a Native woman" (157), analyzing it in an attempt to determine some truth. She follows that with memories of her mother telling stories, memories within memories, of the flu epidemic that devastated her village as a child; Marianne notes that at the time she "was not even curious enough to ask how she survived" (159). Then, returning to past events she has already related, she recalls James' uninvited visit to her house, his cavalier remark, "'I just thought I would stop by,' the words line up next to Mark's and spell out the same meaning. . . Just drop by; she'll be there waiting for small doses of neglect" (159). Although Marianne explains it sufficiently, the connection is an easy one to make in any case. The cycle of unworthiness has been perpetuated within and without, and she is both victim and perpetrator. The collage of memories here highlights the fact that although Marianne herself has undergone a remarkable metamorphosis, little has changed in the treatment of Natives over the course of her self-examination.

Ironically, it is the absence of physical fragmentation in the printed text that most draws attention to the lack of connective threads between events. For example, at one point, Marianne is describing a heated family conversation at their

home, explaining in great detail where people are standing and what they are saying. In the midst of this, a paragraph begins: "There are over a dozen people working in this office" (61). The reader may very well be wondering what office she is referring to, since there is no mention of her leaving her home. Eventually, details are supplied and we learn that Marianne is at her workplace. This technique is more than a device to make the reader pay closer attention, although it accomplishes this; by running together scenes in this manner, Maracle affords us a more immediate, simultaneous presentation of Marianne, showing us the similarities and differences between the person(a) she is at home and the one she is at work (or in other situations). Especially considering the connective element of Elijah Harper, who is an indirect presence in both of these locales, the melding of scenes emphasizes Marianne's reactions to similar stimuli under differing situations. We find throughout the novel that although her family members are strong supporters of Elijah Harper, Marianne constantly expresses a doubtful attitude concerning his ability to succeed, an attitude that is more prevalent at the office. Yet, the bulk of the learning she has done on the subject has been primarily at the office. As Marianne later discovers, her failure to absorb the predominant attitudes about Elijah Harper within her home is symptomatic of her failure to unconditionally love the Native component of herself and others.

Maracle uses techniques similar to those used in traditional oral storytelling to weave her narrative while simultaneously commenting on the process of oral story through her characters. Most obviously, the very comfortable, colloquial tone of the narrative is reminiscent of conversation (albeit one-sided) with a familiar confidante. The consistent use of sentence fragments as mentioned above creates a very natural tone and does not detract from the rhythm of the narrative flow, as formal full sentences might. The unspoken reactions the narrator has to events in the novel⁴ convey a sense of immediacy to the story, which draws the reader in and sustains interest in the manner of good oral storytellers.

Within the story as well, Maracle makes some indirect statements about oral transmission of history and values. Time and again, Marianne's reference points are shown to be based on pop culture icons. She describes her mother's anger as a "distinct Joan Crawford sort of rage" (103). After reminiscing on her ill-treatment at the hands of white boys while she was in high school, Marianne remarks, "Tennessee Williams once said truth is a desperate thing and I need truth desperately" (125). Meanwhile, she ignores the lessons about truth that her niece Dorry has learned and tries to convey to her:

. . . [Dorry] launches into her own mini lecture repeating Momma's dictum of honesty. No mess is too

great that truth can't fix it; besides, if you leave it too long other dirt just keeps getting mixed up with the original mess; then cleaning requires ordering it out and tossing it all item by item--sounds painful. I still don't feel like listening to Momma so I block the sound of the rest of Dorry's lecture and retreat to marvelous self-pity. (131)

When Marianne reveals to her family that she and Mark have been sexually intimate, the women react with bawdy jubilation; during their celebration they "prance about the room mimicking Marilyn Monroe's walk and feel gorgeous" (122). Maracle does not call to attention at the time that Marianne's chosen frame of reference for feeling "gorgeous" is a white pop culture icon, but she later realizes the damage that adherence to such standards of beauty has done to her people. Confronting Mark about his ill-treatment of Native women (he physically abused his wife before they separated), she wishes that there were "[n]o Marilyn Monroe images to lie, just us. . . Why don't you look at us and see...?" (141). Finally, once Marianne has completed her role in the Run For Peace, and come to a full acceptance of her self, she understand how shallow these misguided perceptions of what is desirable are, and more importantly, how these perceptions come to be instilled:

I listen [in reminiscence] to the conversations of white girls in high school locker rooms and blush at the focus on sex, style, and aesthetic looks.

I hear voices run by who is cute, cool, and who is a hunk. The boys are bodies to them, no substance, just bodies without character, history or family. I think about the world of television, stereos, video games, and spectator sports they come from and stop wondering about the shallowness of white youth. (188-189)

The relentless bombardment on Native women and men, via mass media, of materialistic and cosmetic concerns have detracted from things of greater importance, such as character, tradition and respect for elders.

Marianne is resentful over what she perceives to be an closed social circle among the older members of her family. "They speak our language," she notes bitterly. My language, the one they hoarded and kept from me as though I were unworthy of my ancient self" (113). Even when they do speak in her first and only language, English, she complains that they speak in "riddles"⁵ that she apparently lacks the proper cultural conditioning to understand. After a drunken Rudy shows up on Marianne's family's doorstep cursing and vomiting, and is violently ejected, Ol' Johnny, a suitor of Marianne's mother, tells a story of a man who insults a large woman and is later found dead. The story brings laughter and seems to

lighten everyone's mood, except Marianne's. She is incredulous:

Everyone hmns, like they all got it. I cannot sink my teeth into a philosophy so complacent about death. Do they actually believe death is so commonplace or did I miss something. There must be something more to the story that Mark isn't saying. Who are these people I call my own? (101)

Later in the novel, when Marianne's mother explains that had she never taught her the language because she thought Marianne "could chose [sic]--my language or theirs" (148) when she grew up, Marianne finally breaks through to understanding, accepting the fact that she must make an effort, a conscious choice, to reconnect with her roots. This leads to her going on the Run For Peace, which, for her, opens up a new outlook on the function of language:

I no longer feel cheated of my language. It is more than language. Words, language, communicate the internal self to the external world. I had not known who this internal self was and so I could not present myself. Paise Platte, blackened by night and fog forces me to retreat to another world of vision; another kind of sight is born; that sight, that way of looking at my self is who I am. Words cannot describe this process. It is felt knowledge, a private universe of sentient being and

it separates us from the external world and draws spider webs of silk between our personal universe and the people who nurture us. (194-195)

Marianne now realizes that it is not the medium that is most important, but the message itself that needs to be transmitted; it does not matter in which language the storyteller speaks, as long as the story is understood. "I decide to learn my mom's language, not her Indigenous language, but her philosophical language, her language of logic" (198). This philosophical language is precisely what Marianne needs to understand the stories of her family. Through expressing her desire to know these stories, her feelings of alienation from her family can now dissipate.

Sundogs is a far more dynamic text than Halfbreed or In Search of April Raintree, primarily because it is, for the most part, not told in retrospect like the other two texts. Of course, the non-autobiographical nature and tone of the work sets it apart; however, Maracle creates an identity, a life that is every bit as vivid, perhaps even more so in some instances. Undoubtedly, her success is partially attributable to the fact that Maracle is presenting a story within a much shorter time frame than the other two, allowing her to go into far greater detail. She can, and does, use the space to explore Marianne's thoughts in greater detail, to depict more clearly the struggle between the warring factions of her personality. Her complex web of (inter-)relations with family

members and others is reflected on, and we are informed in more explicit terms than is usual about the connections she has to those people. The polyvalence of the text is markedly more subtle than in the texts discussed thus far, but no less important to the creation of Marianne's identity; in fact, the subtlety is precisely what evokes the sense of simultaneity in disparate fragments. Aspects of oral literature are, much like Marianne's sense of communal identity, very explicitly dealt with as actual subject matter, allowing Maracle to use oral elements to discuss the use of oral elements. Maracle thus succeeds in presenting a polyvalent subject. The fact that her subject is fictional is more than adequately compensated for by the well rounded and eminently believable presentation.

ENDNOTES

1. Mentioned in Maracle, Lee, Interview with Patti Hartford. Magnetic tape. Open Learning Center.
2. Felski defines "confession" for her purposes as "a type of autobiographical writing which signals its intention to foreground the most personal and intimate details of the author's life" (Felski 87). I do not mean to imply that Sundogs indicates any clear intention to reveal details of Maracle's life, only that the text is written in that style.
3. For example, Marianne takes the side of Rita's husband when the couple separates, without considering the consequences his abusive behaviour would have on Rita, an oversight for which she is caustically chastised (31); she asks Monique why she and Joseph have never had children, in disregard of the traditional view that childlessness was a precursor to divorce (103), which also elicits a harsh reaction.
4. Examples of such reactions are the response of "No fair," to Marianne's thoughts of Native students huddled together quietly in a corner while boisterous white students romp about loudly (41), or the word "Chaos" which sums up her opinion on the fact that virtue and morals seem to be unrewarding hindrances (25).

5. Marianne describes the way her mother and the rest of her family talks as "riddles . . . poetry that I have to turn over and over before I can figure it out" (13). Such "riddles" include the story about Big Lu and the man who was killed after he insulted her (101), or Joseph's statement that the deceased Lorry "is a dancer" (144); these riddles continue through most of the book.

V. JOANNE ARNOTT: BREASTING THE WAVES

Joanne Arnett's Breasting the Waves is, by the standards of most autobiographical works, the least conventional of the four texts discussed in this paper. The book is comprised of twenty-three separate units, which range in nature from anecdote to essay to prose/poetry. There is no explicit narrative thread linking the units, nor are they arranged in chronological order or in any immediately discernable progressive sequence. It would therefore seem that the work hardly qualifies as life writing, at least when viewed in light of the criteria generally agreed to be characteristic of life writing. Yet even though the book may lack the narrative flow and the cause-and-effect style of storytelling found in most autobiographical writing, Breasting the Waves is unquestionably a work of life writing. Although Arnett does not adhere to the normal conventions of autobiography in her text, she nevertheless sets forth several intensely personal passages that, when combined, convey a powerful sense of self. By Arnett's own admission, the book is "creative non-fiction" (8). Although the events and thoughts recorded are, ostensibly, at least, based in fact, Arnett takes creative license both in their ordering and in the choice of events to be discussed. The segregation of the text into relatively isolated and specific types of personal explorations does not detract from the clarity of the presented identity as a whole. Arnett's reorganization tends to hone the individual facets of personality presented, because she can isolate

each aspect enough to fully explore it without overwhelming the reader with unnecessary detail.

Breasting the Waves elucidates the challenge of making sense of all the disparate threads of reality, of discovering who one is by reconciling various levels of the self. In much the same way as the personalities of the other texts' protagonists are revealed to us, several different aspects of Arnott's identity are explored in turn; however, in this case, the various facets are clearly segregated, because of the divisions between units and the relatively more focused nature of each unit. Though the individual components of self necessarily mix and merge throughout her writing, the format which Arnott has chosen to convey/create her life is well suited to focus on the aspects individually.

Arnott posits that the concept of who we are is "endlessly divisible" (18), and that we are indeed divided. The fragments created by that division are artificially compelled by external circumstances such as racism and gender stereotyping to oppose each other, rather than to synergize as a healthy, potent bodymind.¹ Much of this book describes the (ongoing) process of healing these rifts, or, where they cannot be completely healed, of learning to understand and cope with them.

Like other characters of mixed-race heritage, such as Halfbreed's Maria or In Search of April Raintree's April, Arnott describes her experience of being caught between two cultures. In the retrospective and philosophical essay, "The Country-Born," she writes of being "accepted by no one, claimed by neither side,

spurned by both" (67). Although both her European and Native heritages are always simultaneously present, it is the inability of others to accept or process that simultaneity which compels Arnott and others like her to suppress part of their lineage, and thus part of themselves. "Within the Western mindset," she reflects,

we are always asked to choose, to be one or another of an endless array of polar opposites. People with multiple heritages bow to the pressure to choose at the risk of great damage to our beings. We are both Native and European, we take part in some of the experiences of both groups. (67-68)

This tendency towards a "sliding identity" (78) fosters an uncertainty, a dis-ease entrenched in one's self-awareness, which Arnott insists is widespread among people of mixed heritage, and which has been a major obstacle in her own life.

Reflecting on her own childhood in "Wild Girls: A Resurrection," Arnott explains that she grew up in a place where "several distinct societies met, overlapped; [yet] there were as many or more differences and gaps that, for a girl already several times displaced, felt dangerous" (56). Living and maturing in such an environment, she is buffeted by a disorienting array of models upon which to base her self-perception: white people often treat her as inferior, once they find out that she is Métis; other mixed-heritage people, such as her parents, seek to promote the European components of their lineage at the expense of the Native ones; still other mixed-heritage people outside her family reveal their

ancestry and appearance to be a source of pride, not shame. The awareness of being "not quite Indians/not quite white" (52) does not, unfortunately, leave a third viable option (pride in being Métis). Since she cannot accept the duality, this awareness forces her to identify exclusively with one of the two groups.

Complicating Arnott's ambivalence regarding which race to identify with is the fact that her skin is an ambiguous enough shade to earn her the designation of "generic exotic" (67). Unlike Métis with more telling features, she can opt to "pass" (59) as a darker European, if she so desires. Conversely, she is dark enough to deny her European blood as well, albeit perhaps too light-complexioned to completely avoid suspicion. She internalizes the conflicting notions that she observes and that others teach to her, and the internalization makes her choice all the more difficult. In "The Country-Born," she writes,

The impact of dissonance, of embodying opposed information, and the emotional impact with which that information was initially shared--laid in, embedded, imposed--is to frequently feel inauthentic, like a liar. (58-59)

Given that each of the options she perceived as being open to her excluded a portion of her being, such a feeling of fraudulence is completely understandable. It is only as she begins to reclaim the aspects of herself that have been suppressed--a process which owes much to her various writings, this book included--that Arnott can

accept her racial composition and feel secure as a Métis person, with no need to choose which line of descent to adopt.

An issue such as racial identity never exists in isolation, however, and Arnott takes pains to weave it with her other simultaneously coexisting crises of self. For example, the various notions of womanhood, physicality/sexuality, and motherhood which she struggles to reconcile, are all affected by each other as well as by her racial identifications. In "Tales of a Weeping Womb," Arnott writes, "In living the proof [that menstruation and heterosexual sex meant she had the power to create life²] on a daily basis, I reconnected with many aspects of myself previously lost, damaged or buried under duress" (98). These suppressed fragments of her persona are not specifically itemized in "Tales of a Weeping Womb," but rather are discussed at various points throughout the text. At one such point, Arnott recollects that being raised in a primarily female household gave her the "initial impression that being female was both normal and okay. Reaching the age of reason and schooling, from my seventh year on, I was roundly disabused of that notion" (107). In the formative years to follow, she was sexually abused and raped by family members (as were her sisters). Arnott suggests that the indifference and disbelief that the girls faced when they reached out for help might be attributed to the fact that the "authorities [they] dealt with were white. They were also all men against three young women [Arnott and her sisters³], further colluding in the righteous suppression of wild girls" (52). The abuse and indifference that

Arnott faced distorted or repressed central parts of her persona, creating internal conflict which distorted her self-concept unhealthily--a nearly inevitable effect, given the dearth of alternative coping strategies and skills made available to her.

The healing process described in the book centres around what Arnott refers to as "reclaiming" (23 and elsewhere) parts of herself. This procedure is an overt action, a choosing to define one's self by one's own terms; Breasting the Waves as an entity may be perceived as a manifestation of this self-determination. The text is a public declaration of her intent to embrace her "Native heritage, [her] roots, [her] Indian-ness" (64), and to "reclaim [. . .] the rightness of [her] being in the world as [an] embodied wom[a]n in this place and time" (97). In describing the reclaiming and celebration of her corporeal self, she succinctly encapsulates the effect of recovering the lost portions of herself:

A great separation had developed between my bodymind and the hyper-intellectual fragment of mind I identified with, calling into question the term "individual." My life became a battleground for the two opposed aspects of myself. What empowered me as a writer and what has empowered my writings has been allowing a collapsing of that opposition and a re-knitting of my person into a more unified whole. (138)

The discord between aspects of self, Arnott suggests, stems from an unnatural and unhealthy compulsion to suppress or deny those aspects; the irreconcilability of this denial with the intrinsic

nature of such aspects is "crazy-making" (58). Once these qualities can be accepted, and even embraced, the persona is once more in concord, and thus can operate more effectively.

Another necessity for a healthy, unified self, Arnott posits, is a connectedness to others. In "Double Take: A Poet Represents Her Poem," she states that

[i]t is not true that we are individual. In body and mind, we are endlessly divisible, and we do become divided when our experiential worlds and the spoken, agreed-upon reality are consistently incongruent. Nor is it true that we are alone in this world; isolation is one of the greatest tools used to disempower people(s), and within the cult of the individual we as people, as communities, remain fragmented.
(18)

The first two sentences refer, of course, to a person's capacity to become divided; yet the rest of the passage indicates that Arnott also feels that our connectedness to others prevents us from being "individual." At several points in the text, she touches on the abuse that she and her sisters have suffered (and in Arnott's case, suppressed); repeatedly, the development of her identity is mentioned in the context of the sisters' connectedness.

As in her discussions on racial identity, Arnott's objective is to promote healing. "Relate,"⁴ she advises other abuse survivors, "Make connections in all directions--then with now, you with me, other with self" (33). Healing may be possible when done

in isolation, but the personal recovering/reclaiming experience she relates has been sparked and catalyzed by her close relationships. She tells of the realization and mending that began around the time of her second pregnancy, when the women in her family

began for the first time to really acknowledge consciously, and to one another, that incest and violent sexual abuse is intrinsic to our shared family experiences. Coming to consciousness individually, and as a group, has required an amazing degree of persistence and has released huge amounts of energy, often as rage. (16)

Strangely, in order to heal, she has needed help from one who was responsible for hurting her in the first place.⁵ In "Wasting Time," we read of the "past violations" committed on Arnott by her older sister, including "intimidations, tricking [her] with words, putting her mouth on [Arnott's] breast, [and] burning [her] on both arms with cigarettes" (71). But the shared experience they both have of abuse by their father and his friends has created a commonality that, when it is necessary for healing, transcends those transgressions. The distrust between them is evident in the short piece, "Ahoy, Métis!", where Arnott's response to the older sister's "forc[ed] jollity" (143) is curt at best. Still, she notes that the sister is making an effort to bridge the gap, to trust again. Arnott then realizes that it sounds strange to hear her sister talk about their Métis heritage. This is another step towards the reclamation of Arnott's racial identity, one in which

her sister has played--and will continue to play--a crucial part.

Commonalities similar to those between Arnott and her sisters also link Arnott and Zorka, a former best friend. Arnott writes that the two were connected through "Disaster and girlhood. . . Disastrous girlhood" (84). Though Arnott never specifies precisely what "calamities" (85) the two girls experienced in tandem, the repeated parallels that she cites give the impression that Zorka had also been at least physically, and perhaps sexually, abused. She also credits Zorka for a crucial role in Arnott's healing, confidently claiming that their "strategies [were] among the very best for survivors" (84, emphasis Arnott's). Strangely, the piece concludes with Arnott "releasing" (87) Zorka from the bond they share/d. The two have been estranged for a decade, and Arnott is now stronger. Still, as hinted at towards the end of the piece, Zorka, despite her absence, will remain a part of who Arnott is. Arnott explains this as she expounds upon her views of identity much later in the book:

People are porous. We are organized structures both as individuals and at every other level, and we are intimately connected to every other element and every other presence and every other absence in the world. In our least powerful moments, as in our most powerful moments, we are connected. In our absences as well as our presences, we have an influence, an impact on the rest of the world. (132)

Breasting the Waves is unique among Native women's autobiographical work, insofar as it does not merely contain aspects of fragmentation, but is itself designed so as to highlight its innate fragmentation. The story-units could have been combined into a single narrative, or at least into an ordered, ascending sequence of narratives; Arnott has chosen not to do this, instead grouping her sub-sections with no regard for style similarities, chronological order, or (debatably) subject matter. It is notable that although the text is divided into what might seem to be an arrangement of sections and chapters reminiscent of literary tradition, the divisions are far from traditional. The introduction and four large units are divided by single pages, blank on both sides except for a wave icon, and the individual stories/essays each begin on a fresh page, their titles in a large, bold font. Nowhere in the work are these divisions referred to by the common literary designations of "chapter" and "section". Arnott's chosen term for her stories/essays is the more functional description, "piece" (8), a term which simultaneously emphasizes the separateness and connectedness of the units.

Arnott's description of the healing process works equally well to describe the process of identity creation taking place in this novel: the exploration of her various personality aspects is not sequential, "not a staircase, but rather [analogous to] points on the wheel, steps in a spiral" (34, emphasis Arnott's). The pieces need not be ordered in sequence, for identity itself is not a sequential progression; rather, it exists in multiple simultaneous

progressions, constantly changing, at varying rates and sometimes in direct opposition to an earlier change. Each piece colours the readers' perceptions of the one adjacent. The facets of identity are not ordered in any fashion, but still must each be glimpsed in turn to truly gain awareness of the entirety.

As with the texts examined previously, though perhaps to a greater extent, Arnott uses sentence fragmentation (for example, "In a fit of compassion" [73], "Separate" [87]) and colloquial language ("Mutt. Half-breed. Heinz 57. Wannabe" [78, emphasis Arnott's]). In a piece like "Something Impressive," the fragmentation is mixed with repetition--the recurrence of the fragment, "Something impressive," or simply, "Impressive" (125 onwards)--and used for powerful emphasis. In this piece, the "impressive" mantra is used as an ironic, near-sarcastic commentary, to convey the true import of occurrences such as abortion, abuse, and self-hatred. Since the word usually carries positive connotations, its use highlights the fact that these are not generally considered positive acts. By the repetition, Arnott expresses how profoundly these occurrences have affected her self-image; in the most literal sense, they truly were "impressive" to her.

The fragmentation apparent in Breasting the Waves is also the clearest manifestation of an oral storytelling characteristic within the text. Unlike the three works previously discussed, there is no attempt at a consistent, linear narrative throughout; although the other texts are comprised of strings of fragments to

various degrees, none of them matches the disjunctiveness which typifies the story-units in this collection. These individual units are decidedly more suited to an oral re-telling than the chapters (or lack thereof) of the other texts, whose lengths would make them something of an exercise in loquacity.

As in the previous works discussed, however, the narrator steps out of story and addresses her audience quite frequently--in fact, many of the pieces are little more than extended commentary, with hardly any story to speak of. Of course, the collection makes no claim to be anything more or less than a mix of stories, essays, and undefined combinations of the two. However, the elements of storytelling are so pervasive, even in what would seem to be academic-style essays, that they call attention to the connection Arnott has with her audience. In one piece, she clarifies the definition of a term by referencing a dictionary; yet rather than simply defining the term in a footnote (the title of the dictionary is given a footnote, however) or using a typical citation in the body of the piece, she simply gives the definition after the casual qualifier, "According to this dictionary here. . ." (37). Indicating a physical object in this manner is clearly a fruitless endeavour since a reader cannot, of course, see the dictionary in question; however, the phrasing does much to convey the sense of a storyteller's physical presence--the reader can easily imagine himself listening, rather than merely reading.

Several of the other pieces share the distinction of being orally evocative, but for a slightly different reason; Arnott has

included written transcripts (or working copies, perhaps) of two talks given in 1994. If they have been altered or edited in any way before their inclusion in this collection, it is not immediately evident; the language used is still appropriate to and reminiscent of a speaking engagement (for example, "We are speaking today about issues. . ." [125]). The decision not to make the pieces conform to a more conventional written form was surely a conscious one, given Arnott's attitude toward storytelling; she claims that "[i]t is the act of listening that makes story manifest, makes it happen" (39, emphasis mine). Even in the more scholarly essays, Arnott's words evoke an aural quality, and in this sense, she reclaims--and adapts for a new audience--a tradition of oral storytelling.

The book is self-referential, as when Arnott comments freely on "'A Trip in the Autumn,' the oldest piece in this collection and the only one that transgresses the loose rules of creative non-fiction" (8). Such self-editorializing is not at all uncommon in writers' prefaces or introductions--however, Arnott does so after her "Acknowledgements" (viii-x; these too are referenced in "Healing Circle" [10]), well into her first piece, eight pages within the text proper. Arnott could have chosen to separate this piece from the others in the same manner as the "Acknowledgments," but the fact that this is where the body of the text begins indicates that her discussion of the stories is part of the story. The identity she creates through the text is not comprised of neat

little separate anecdotal packages, but rather of elements which bleed through the rest of the book as well.

Arnott addresses the relationship between the oral and written traditions more directly than any of the authors discussed previously. This is especially evident in the piece entitled, "Storytelling: A Constellation," where Arnott suggests that

[i]f you can imagine someone listening, hearing you out, then you can tell your stories on paper, or peck them into computers, or pluck them from the strings of your guitar. . . With practice you can recreate that magic on purpose, inventing the listening as well as the telling, and setting traps that will recreate your imaginings in the lives of others" (39).

This last line is punctuated by a footnote, which reads, "For example, written, published, performed works" (n. 9, 42). This is a reliable indicator that Arnott is comfortable with the merging of oral tradition with literature, as well as merging it with other forms of expression. In both traditions, it is the end result--the listening itself, the conveyance of these facts and concepts--which is desired.

Though Breasting the Waves is less familiar to most people than the other three works discussed in this paper, surely greater recognition will come with time. The book belongs alongside the more acclaimed works, however, and certainly deserves mention in any discussion of identity creation in Native Canadian women's life

writings. The work occupies a unique and needed niche, being a creative non-fiction book not driven by an unfolding, linear narrative, yet autobiographical nonetheless. The book is about healing as much as anything else. And healing, especially healing from multiple forms of damage, is not always straightforward and sequential. Wounds, at least the kind of wounds Arnott dwells on, reopen, linger, sometimes take a lifetime to heal, or never heal completely. Arnott avoids a trivializing encapsulation of this process, ironically by structuring her work in independent (though connected) segmented pieces. In this manner, various aspects of Arnott's identity are expressed with appropriate clarity, yet the process of healing may be (and is) revisited all through the text, allowing the observant reader to note its slow evolution. As Arnott writes, "I am one hundred percent who I am" (66); the form she has chosen to tell (this part of) her story frees her from using generalizations that might otherwise obscure the identity she wishes to convey.

ENDNOTES

1. This term appears on page 71 ("Wasting Time"), and several subsequent places in the text; yet although the word has not quite made its way into general parlance, I have chosen not to set it off with quotation marks here or elsewhere in this chapter. My justification for this usage is that the term, signifying the synergistic union between the physical and mental aspects of a person, is sufficiently central to Arnott's concepts of identity/identity formation so as not to require constant referencing.
2. This is perhaps an oversimplification of what is said; Arnott's own words on pgs. 97-98 do her concepts far more justice. At the risk of further obfuscating her ideas, I suggest that she means to convey that the birth of her children has caused her to question and alter her notions about babies, motherhood, menstruation, sexuality, and womanhood, since birth is an act at which all of these concepts intersect.
3. To clarify, this and all further references to "Arnott" designate only Joanne Arnott, not any of her sisters or other relatives.
4. This fragment is italicized in the text.
5. Though the recollections of abuse on page 71 are ambiguously stated, because Joanne is having flashbacks which result in

her confusing her sister for her father ("For long moments, I don't know whose neck and shoulders I'm rubbing"), I believe that the use of the feminine pronoun indicates that Arnott intends us to read the list of acts as actually committed by her sister.

VI. CONCLUSION

Our ways of thinking about autobiographical writing have changed dramatically over the past few decades. To be more precise, new avenues of thought concerning autobiographical writing have become increasingly more accessible and accepted by scholars and critics as a whole. For as much as these new approaches to the genre have gained popularity, the comforting familiarity of traditional autobiographical theory has maintained a place extant within the current body of criticism. To a certain extent, this is a desirable state, for such orthodox modes of discussion are particularly well suited to understanding how certain autobiographical writings work. Yet, even so, the hegemony from which these scholarly conventions arose has skewed the development of autobiographical theory toward autobiographical writing by white, middle-to-upper class males--those who have tended to be the greatest beneficiaries of that hegemony. A paradigm shift has been needed to accord full due to autobiographical works by persons considered to be marginalized. To a degree, such a shift has certainly occurred. The tendency toward the use of the term, "life writing," for example, has widened the scope of what would be considered autobiographical to include the life records of those persons who did not (or do not) necessarily have the means to publish an autobiography in the traditional sense; items such as pioneer women's diaries,

slave journals, even oral histories have all been re-examined as instruments of self-reflection.

Although some of the most significant critical advances of recent times have occurred in the re-evaluation of the life writings of Native people, these works have, perhaps predictably, still not received as much examination as works by other groups, and have certainly not been exhaustively studied. Life writing by Native Canadian women, an even smaller subset of writers (and thus also less studied), is unique in the high degree of its many manifestations of polyvalence, and should thus be analyzed not merely in accordance with the criteria for examining more traditional European-style autobiographies, but rather with the differing modes of identity construction taken into account. Evaluation may then be done on a more fair and appropriate basis, as texts written with such a level of polyvalence may fall short by more conventional standards of success.

While the construction of a stable, fixed identity may be a desired goal, if not the whole purpose, of a traditional autobiography, it does not accurately reflect the sense of self which Native Canadian women authors wish to convey. In the case of the four texts which I have chosen to discuss, each of the primary characters must face an internal conflict which affects the vast majority of Natives living in Canada today: the characters are rooted in one culture, bombarded by the overwhelming influence of another, seeking to find a

manageable balance. In all four works discussed here, the main characters are women caught between two worlds, receiving mixed signals from both, and correspondingly confused about what to do. Again in all four, the process through which the primary characters sort out and reconcile these conflicting parts of their identity becomes a central part of the text. It may be noted that the preponderance of Métis characters in the texts I have chosen to study magnifies the degree of importance accorded to the twinning of cultural identification, by reason of the characters' dual heritages; however, I in no way mean to suggest that the conclusions in this study do not apply to Native characters not of mixed heritage. For both types of characters, the pressure from the dominant culture to conform and the desire to maintain a besieged tradition are at odds, and the conflict demands hard, life-altering choices.

Campbell's Maria and Culleton's April share similar patterns in their multiple cultural identifications. Both face intense social condemnation of the Native portion of their heritage, which they internalize as hatred and denial of that aspect of their selves. Both also come to reject that condemnation and find (albeit in different ways) a liveable means of straddling the two cultures that permits them the freedom to reject neither. Maracle's Marianne faces a slightly different dilemma, but the problem is essentially the same. Almost from the outset, she is aware of her situation,

cognisant that her identity is fragmented, disordered. She faces the temptations of white culture, into which she has already been well indoctrinated, just as the meaning of Native culture eludes her. Ultimately, it is her decision to take action, define herself, rather than judge herself against others' definitions, that helps her unify her disparate parts.

Arnott's text differs from the others in that the various episodes of Joanne's life, the distinct fragments of who she is, are loosely scattered throughout the text, given no linearity. When pieced together as a whole, the fragments reveal the same cultural dichotomy present in the other texts. In one written piece ("Wild Girls: A Resurrection"), we find that from her youth, she has developed negative associations with being Native; in another ("The Country-Born"), she demonstrates her awareness of the destructive nature of those associations. And in a piece separate from the other two ("Speak Out, For Example"), she demonstrates a current, active attempt to assert her racial self-definition, by outlining her expectations of others. Though the full process of finding herself is implied, not explicitly stated, it is there to be found; perhaps more importantly, those past selves, with all their uncertainties, are demonstrated to be a vital part of what Arnott has become.

We must also note that although this cultural schism may be the most prominent (and most debilitating) example of the polyvalence of identity, it is by no means a solitary one.

Specifically, Campbell mentions the doubled burden that Métis women experience as opposed to Métis men (144). Arnott and Culleton also describe the compounding negative effect of being a woman and a Native; part of this duality is the doubled discrimination and displaced anger that some Native males have vented on Native women. The character of Rudy in Sundogs may be the most iconic representation of this, directing the frustration instilled in him through systemic discrimination towards his wife Paula. The role of woman is another part of the complex network of identity, and even that role is further bifurcated into roles which differ, and often conflict. Yet that is but one other example; a myriad of other roles exist, with a myriad more permutations. Nevertheless, because of factors such as cultural differences and racism, the roles are unique in the case of Native Canadian women. For this reason, it is particularly crucial that life writing by Native Canadian women explore the dynamics between these differing modes of self-identification.

The autonomous subject, generally deemed desirable by traditional autobiographical standards, is also rather incompatible with the identities Native Canadian women shape in their life writing. In all of the works studied here, solipsism has been depicted as harmful, and connectedness has been shown to be recuperative and healthy. Marianne's quest for solace in Sundogs is a prime example of this pattern; the crux of the novel becomes first her inability to relate to

other people of Native heritage, shifting to the point at which she needs to relate to fellow Natives. She is originally frustrated, unable to understand even the most basic of Native cultural aspects. That changes when she decides to actively seek out her culture instead of waiting for it to come to her. The symbolic act of participating in the Run For Peace makes her a valued part of her cultural group.

Connectedness plays similar crucial roles in Breasting the Waves and In Search of April Raintree. Arnott emphasizes the role of connectedness in the healing process; while healing may be possible without it, the human connections make the healing process far more rapid and more expedient. These links function in a similar way in Culleton's text, as the people around April are key to her recovery after she is raped. However, this work has the more powerful link between sisters who were so physically alike, except for skin tone, as to be twins (115). In many ways, the story told is Cheryl's as much as April's; the two may be seen as the story's "alternate endings", their divergent paths based on a few small but crucial changes. The changes--an alteration in skin tone and access to different teachings about Native culture--are especially relevant ones for Native people, changes which may not necessarily have had as profound an effect on non-Native characters.

Campbell's Maria quite explicitly rejects her people, and much of Halfbreed deals with the consequences of that action. The Natives' poverty, alcoholism, and ill-treatment of each other blind Maria to the segment of her community that supports one another. She comes to realize that because part of her is within them, her desertion has only compounded her misery. The end of her self-destructive ways and the beginning of healing occurs when Maria takes steps to reconnect with her people, but these steps would not have been possible without the guidance of her great grandmother, Cheechum. The two characters possess a unique relationship within which Cheechum functions as Maria's conscience, providing moral guidance in accordance with her people's ways. This guidance continues even when they are apart, and also after Cheechum's death. While the relationship between the two characters does not fit conventional autobiography's model of the autonomous narrator, this arrangement nevertheless represents an accepted reality in Native Canadian cultures.

Fragmentation, which has often been thought to be inappropriate to the coherent and cohesive presentation of a life story, is a necessary part of these women's texts. Of course, this fragmentation takes diverse forms; yet each form, though achieving different effects, works in a similar fashion. Perhaps the most jarring to readers weaned on traditional autobiography, though ironically one of the most functional, is chronological and sequential discontinuity, in

which parts of a story are told out of order and/or with little connective elements to show their relation. The most obvious and ubiquitous example of this is found in the structure of Breasting the Waves; the self-contained pieces are organized with no regard to chronological order or, seemingly, to commonality, and no attempt is made to provide a transition from one piece to the next. This subverts the search for cause-and-effect explanations of Joanne's identity formation, a process habitual to readers of autobiography. No part is privileged over another; all contribute equally to form her overall identity.

Both Halfbreed and In Search of April Raintree shift linearity as well, although in different ways. Campbell chooses to have her narrator abruptly break into anecdotes which seem only tangentially related to the current narrative thread--although more often than not, the tangents do add depth to the main story. Culleton's attempts are more subtle, with large sections of the text devoted to the reading of Cheryl's journal; in effect, she tells the latter portion of her story only after she has died. Yet the comparisons to be drawn between the two sisters are facilitated in this manner, as April is allowed self-perceptive insight that further explains the sisters' divergent paths, insight which she did not have earlier on in the narrative.

The work which deviates the most in regard to chronological or sequential fragmentation is Sundogs. In

fact, there are no chapter or section divisions of any sort to be found in the novel. But although the paragraphs are crammed together with nary a blank line between them, fragmentation is evident, in this case precisely because there are no breaks; the abrupt shift in subject without the expected break in the text calls attention to the absences of transitions. Jaunts into Marianne's memory, too, provide narrative discontinuity in a way which superficially preserves the illusion of chronological linearity. Also, on the syntactic level, sentence fragmentation brings an immediacy and sense of authenticity to these life stories, as it addresses the reader in realistic human terms. These other manifestations are common to all four works studied here; they are also devices which, in the strictest of autobiographical tradition, would be deemed inappropriate or at best, unnecessary.

Of a particularly unique suitability to Native women's stories is the melding of elements of oral literature/storytelling with the written word. Though authors of many cultures, including European-based ones, may reflect similar oral traditions in their life writing, the central importance of oral forms to traditional Native culture imbues these aspects of contemporary Native Canadian women's texts with special meaning. Each of the four texts here studied employs this melding, although in slightly different ways and to differing effect. As mentioned above, sentence

fragmentation, in addition to colloquialisms, informal phrasings, and irregular diction, contributes to providing an atmosphere suggesting conversation--or, at times, of the experience of aurally listening to a storyteller.

Culleton's further integration of oral storytelling techniques into her life writing is restricted primarily to extensive editorializing, as her narrator frequently addresses the reader. As in the other works, most notably Arnott's, these addresses generally transmit some variety of cultural knowledge or awareness, a practice found in Native oral storytelling tradition. Campbell adds to this by beginning her story in a very traditional way, as she devotes the entire first chapter and the great majority of the second to the extensive story of her people, family and community. In the tradition of Native oral literature, this both accords primacy to the tribe and to the family over the individual. Maracle further provides a very interesting veiled commentary on oral transmission of values, through Marianne's gradual shift from using pop culture references to interpret her reality to a slow but sure understanding of the obscure, often cryptic tales told frequently by her family.

Initially, the point of this study was to determine whether the manners in which Native Canadian women construct identity in their life writing were both similar enough to each other and distinct enough from the writings of other groups to warrant a more customized schema for examination.

I believe that identity construction has indeed proven similar in the texts examined. Further, it seems evident that these life writings are broadly and intensely polyvalent, which necessitates that we use that polyvalence as a factor in evaluating them, so as not to confuse eloquent expressions of identity for carelessness, ineptitude, or inexperience in writing--mistakes which, using the guideposts of traditional autobiography, are all too likely to occur. Yet this is only the beginning of much-needed study. A more thorough investigation of why the differences in writing style are so particularly suited to Native Canadian women, taking into account sociological, economic, cultural, and historical factors, would be welcome. The evolution of Native life writing has been documented to an extent by Arnold Krupat and others, but a deeper understanding of the modern writers especially, and specifically the developmental history of polyvalence as a writing tool, is needed. Also, the distinctions and differences, if any relevant ones exist, between the polyvalence in texts by Canadian versus American Native women should be studied.

Generalizations rarely apply without exception; this is certainly the case with life writing. Therefore, I hasten to indicate that naturally, the high degree of polyvalence found in most Native Canadian women's life writing may not be present, at least to the same degree, in all life writing by this group. Indeed, there is certainly evidence of similar

manifestations of polyvalence in life writing by persons of all cultures, most especially in recent times, perhaps even occasionally manifesting in ways as pronounced as in the four works explored here. However, my aim has been to illustrate the consistency of a high level of polyvalence in life writing by Native Canadian women, even in texts which differ greatly in nature from one another. The evidence of this consistency is, I believe, irrefutable. Indeed, in the texts examined here as well as others which had to be excluded for the sake of obtaining a broad spectrum of formats, polyvalence has not only proved evident in quantity, but has also helped to express each person's life in terms which are particularly apt. Thus, by studying the use of polyvalence in Native Canadian women's life writing, we legitimize a necessarily unique style of self-expression. We must seek out the polyvalence in Native Canadian women's life stories, for in doing so, we gain a more complete understanding of who these women are.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Armstrong, Jeanette. Interview with Patti Hartford. Open University Course English 102 - Native Indian Literature I. Tape 7A. Audiocassette. Open Learning Agency, 12 Feb. 1993.
- _____. Slash. Penticton, BC: Theytus, 1985.
- Arnott, Joanne. Breasting the Waves. Vancouver: Press Gang, 1995.
- Bowerbank, Sylvia, and Dolores Nawagesic Wawia. "Literature and Criticism by Native and Métis Women in Canada." Feminist Studies 30 (1994): 565-581.
- Brant, Beth. Interview with Patti Hartford. Open University Course English 102 - Native Indian Literature 1. Tape 5B. Audiocassette. Open Learning Agency, 16 Feb. 1993.
- Browdy de Hernandez, J. "Writing For Survival: Continuity and Change in Four Contemporary Native American Women's Autobiographies," Wicazo SA Review 10 (1990 Fall): 40-62.
- Buss, Helen M. "The Different Voice of Canadian Feminist Autobiographers." Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly 13 (1990 Spring): 154-167.
- _____. Mapping Our Selves: Canadian Women's Autobiography in English. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1994.

- Campbell, Maria. Halfbreed. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart-Bantam, 1979.
- _____. Interview with Patti Hartford. Open University Course English 102 - Native Indian Literature 1. Tape 3B. Audiocassette. Open Learning Agency, 16 Feb, 1993.
- Cole, Sally. "Anthropological Lives: The Reflexive Tradition in a Social Science." Kadar 113-127.
- Cuero, Delfina. The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero: A Diogueno Indian, as told to Florence C. Shipek. Rosalie Pinto Robertson, Interpreter. California: Malki Museum P, 1978. 67 p.
- Currie, Noel Elizabeth. "Jeannette Armstrong & the Colonial Legacy." Canadian Literature 124-125 (1990 Spring-Summer): 138-152.
- Fee, Margery. "Upsetting Fake Ideas: Jeannette Armstrong's Slash and Beatrice Culleton's April Raintree." Canadian Literature 124-125 (1990 Spring-Summer): 168-180.
- Felski, Rita. Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1984. 222 p.
- Freeman, Victoria. "The Body of Our People: An Interview with Jeannette Armstrong." Paragraph 14.3 (1992): 9-12.
- Gould, Janice. "The Problem of Being 'Indian': One Mixed-Blood's Dilemma." Smith and Watson, 81-87.

- _____. "Disobedience (in Language) in Texts by Lesbian Native Americans." ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature 25 (January 1994): 32-44.
- Hale, Janet Campbell. Bloodlines: Odyssey of a Native Daughter. New York: Random House, 1995. 187 p.
- Hoy, Helen. "'Nothing But the Truth': Discursive Transparency in Beatrice Culleton." ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature 25 (January 1994): 155-184.
- Jahner, Elaine. "Intermediate Forms Between Oral and Written Literature." Studies in American Indian Literature: Critical Essays and Course Designs. Ed. Paula Gunn Allen. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1983. 66-74.
- Jelinek, Estelle C. "Introduction: Women's Autobiography and the Male Tradition." Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism. Ed. Estelle Jelinek. Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1980. 1-20.
- Kadar, Marlene. Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1992.
- Kelly, Jennifer. "Coming Out of the House: A Conversation with Lee Maracle." ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature 25 (January 1994): 73-88.
- _____. "The Landscape of Grandmother: A Reading of Subjectivit(y)ies in Contemporary North American Native Women's Writing in English." World Literature Written in English 31 (1991): 112-128.

- Krupat, Arnold, ed. Native American Autobiography: an Anthology. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1994. 546 p.
- _____. For Those Who Came After: a Study of Native American Autobiography. Berkely: U of California P, 1985. 167 p.
- Lundgren, Jodi. "'Being a Half-breed': Discourses of Race and Cultural Syncreticity in the Works of Three Métis Women Writers." Textual Studies in Canada 8 (1994 Winter): 62-77.
- Maracle, Lee. Interview with Patti Hartford. Open University Course English 102 - Native Indian Literature 1. Tape 4B. Audiocassette. Open Learning Agency, 19 Feb. 1993.
- _____. Sundogs. Penticton, BC: Theytus, 1992.
- McCormick, Kathleen, Gary Waller, and Linda Flower. Reading Texts: Reading, Writing, Responding. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Co., 1987.
- Mountain Wolf Woman. Mountain Wolf Woman, sister of Crashing Thunder: the Autobiography of a Winnebago Indian. Nancy Oestreich Lurie, ed. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1966. 142 p.
- Mourning Dove. Mourning Dove: A Salishan Autobiography. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1990. 265 p.
- Neuman, Shirley. "Autobiography: From Different Poetics to a Poetics of Differences." Kadar 213-320.
- O'Brien, Lynne Woods. Plains Indian Autobiographies. Boise, Idaho: Boise State College, 1973. 48 p.

- O'Brien, Susie. "'Please Eunice, Don't Be Ignorant': The White Reader as Trickster in Lee Maracle's Fiction." Textual Studies in Canada 8 (1994 Winter): 82-96.
- Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson, eds. De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiographies. Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis P, 1992.
- Stanton, Domna. "Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?" The Female Autograph. Domna Stanton, ed. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987. 3-20.
- Stott, Jon C. "A Conversation with Maria Campbell." Canadian Children's Literature 31 (1983): 15-22.
- Watson, Julie, and Sidonie Smith. "De/Colonization and the Politics of Discourse in Women's Autobiographical Practices." Smith and Watson, xxxi.
- Wong, Hertha Dawn. Sending My Heart Back Across the Years: Tradition and Innovation in Native American Autobiography. New York: Oxford UP, 1002. 246 p.