

Exposing the Eugenic Reader: Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* and Settler Self-Education

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MÉTIS¹ WRITER AND COMMUNITY WORKER Maria Campbell's groundbreaking 1973 autobiography, *Halfbreed*, has been framed as historically important for many reasons: as a best-seller in the age of Canadian literary nationalism, as a textual example of nationalist Métis identity or hybridity, as a resistant text written for white readers or as a community-building work for Indigenous authors, and, more recently, as part of an ongoing demonstration of Indigenous intellectual traditions.² Indeed, as Kristina Fagan (NunatuKavut) and her students suggest in their reading of the reception of *Halfbreed*, "part of *Halfbreed*'s lasting appeal seems to be its ability to serve a wide array of purposes" (268). With Alix Shield's recent uncovering of the section of *Halfbreed* that publishers excised from the final version of the text (see Reder and Shield), and editor Kim Anderson's (Métis) forthcoming reissue of the text originally approved by Campbell for McClelland and Stewart, Helen Hoy's question in 2001 arises once more: *How should I read this text?* After all, *Halfbreed* was written by a Métis woman but is claimed by settler feminists, postcolonial scholars, and Indigenous communities today. In particular, as a settler scholar, I am interested in what revisiting *Halfbreed*'s forty-year literary history can teach settler readers about how to approach a much-needed self-education through Indigenous literatures.

In this essay, I suggest that a commonly overlooked aspect of Campbell's text is significant for settler readers approaching *Halfbreed* as a form of self-education: Campbell's stay in 1963 in the Alberta Hospital in Edmonton, an institution that worked in cooperation with the Alberta Eugenics Board. I contend that this section of *Halfbreed* is important because it explicitly ties Campbell's narrative to the eugenic history of Alberta and, when placed alongside the literary/critical history of *Halfbreed*, points to the long-standing bias toward eugenic inter-

pretive practices held by communities that read Indigenous literatures primarily as a way to learn about the Canadian nation. Eugenic interpretations of *Halfbreed* continue to position Indigenous characters and communities within paradigms that deny them futurity, despite textual content or scholarly discourse that suggests otherwise, and as a result fail to facilitate institutional change. To demonstrate the importance of Canadian eugenics as a context for the reception of *Halfbreed*, I first lay out Campbell's depiction of the Alberta Hospital in the context of Canadian eugenic practices. I then turn to the publication history of *Halfbreed* and the "literary eugenics" of the interpretive community that published and disseminated the text. Finally, I suggest that revisiting the literary practices of settlers from the height of cultural nationalism is important at *this* historical moment because said histories can illuminate how settler self-education might avoid the patterns that it has reproduced in the past.

The Eugenic Context of *Halfbreed*

Campbell's depiction of life at the Alberta Hospital in Edmonton is ambiguous. In *Halfbreed*, Campbell arrives at the hospital after a mental breakdown brought on by the fear that her partner will discover her history of survival sex work. On the one hand, she describes the hospital as "a dull lifeless place. They fed us, and made sure we harmed no one, otherwise we were left alone" (163). In a ward with "women like [herself]," Campbell alludes to the fact that some women felt safer in the hospital and were "feign[ing] insanity" in order to avoid release (163). She humanizes the patients by describing how some of them found friendship and solidarity despite their diagnoses (164). By the end of her time in the hospital, Campbell "felt good and strong — no longer confused" (166). She has also become involved in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), which leads her to the Native Friendship Centre in Edmonton and from there to the people who will be a part of the Indigenous movement in Alberta (167). *Halfbreed* speaks of her going on to work with men in the Prince Albert Penitentiary (170), her dream of establishing a halfway house "where girls could come when they were in trouble" (175), and her interactions with the Canadian Indian Youth Council, the government-sponsored Community Development project, and the Métis Association of Alberta, among other organizations.

On the other hand, Campbell describes the horrors of mental insti-

tutions in the 1960s. In one memorable scene, sent upstairs to help “feed the grannies,” she describes the conditions in which the elderly permanent residents of the hospital live:

I will never forget that room or those people for as long as I live. There was one big huge room. The walls and floor were painted grey, and tied to a number of round pillars were old women in all stages of undress. Some just sat on the floor and stared at nothing. Some played with themselves, some were crying and babbling, and some were crouched as if they were afraid they were going to be kicked. They were all skinny and whitish-looking, with stringy hair and watery eyes. The smell of urine and disinfectant was everywhere. (164)

Campbell is kicked by a nurse when she cannot feed one of the “vegetables,” as the nurse calls the elderly women, fast enough (164). Trixie — a former psychiatric nurse admitted to the hospital after attempting suicide — helps Campbell to complete her task. Based upon this experience, Campbell claims that the staff seemed to be just as sick as the patients, for whom they did not have time. Although Campbell’s time at the Alberta Hospital is often read as a stepping stone toward the relationships that were significant in her later political life, I suggest that this scene is also significant because it places *Halfbreed* within the unnamed history of eugenics that haunts the text as well as its reception.

The Alberta Hospital in Edmonton (formerly called the Oliver Mental Hospital), along with the more infamous Provincial Training School for Mental Defectives (later known as the Michener Centre) and the Alberta Hospital in Ponoka, was a hub for twentieth-century eugenics in Alberta. In *The Eugenic Mind Project* (2017), which traces the ongoing influence of eugenics in contemporary social and medical practices, Robert Wilson defines eugenics as “a science of human improvement or betterment — and as a social movement. Its central and most distinctive aim [is] to construct and use scientific knowledge and technology to regulate the sorts of people there [will] be in future generations, primarily by enhancing and restricting the reproduction of different sorts of people in the present generation” (5). From 1928 to 1972, the Alberta Eugenics Board implemented the Sexual Sterilization Act, using the two Alberta Hospitals and the Michener Centre as its headquarters. The act specified that the medical superintendent of a mental hospital could recommend an inmate eligible for release to the Eugenics

Board as a candidate for sexual sterilization (Province of Alberta sec. 4). The Eugenics Board would then determine whether the individual was “at risk” of having children with a “disability” and, if so, recommend sterilization surgery in order to “eliminate” the transmission of such an “evil” (sec. 5). The act stated that either the individual selected for sterilization or her or his guardian or representative had to give consent for the procedure (sec. 6). The legislation also specified that the physicians or surgeons who performed sterilization surgeries could not be held criminally liable (sec. 7). However, the case of *Muir v Alberta* (1996) revealed that the conditions laid out by the Sexual Sterilization Act were often ignored and that patients were often sterilized upon entrance to a facility regardless of the heredity of their condition and without their knowledge or consent, and many of them found out only in adulthood that they had been sterilized (Wilson 15).

The impact of the Sexual Sterilization Act was substantial. The Eugenics Board received 4,785 recommendations for sterilization, and it was carried out in more than 2,800 cases (Grekul 251, 248). There is also evidence that Indigenous women were disproportionately targeted for sterilization in Alberta between 1928 and 1972 (249).³ Claudia Malacrida’s research on the Michener Centre notes that Métis children and the children of new Ukrainian immigrants were sometimes admitted to the centre after being picked up on charges of playing hooky or loitering (184). In the case of adults, those who entered mental institutions during Campbell’s time at the Alberta Hospital were at times merely not conforming to the moral laws of the day (loitering, displaying public drunkenness, engaging in unapproved economic activity, or performing sex work) (Grekul 257). Malacrida’s research connects the history of eugenics in Alberta to both the “short” history of eugenics, dating back to Francis Galton’s 1883 adaptation of Darwin’s artificial selection in order to move toward “‘race’ betterment” as a solution to “pauperism” and “criminality” (Wilson 29), and the ideological groundwork of colonial mentalities, later pursued as a racial science. As Megan Vaughan argues in her work on the diagnosis of illness in colonial Africa, in colonized societies “the need to objectify and distance the ‘Other’ in the form of the madman or the leper . . . was less urgent . . . [because] every colonial person was in some sense . . . already ‘Other’” (10). Rather, the colonial diagnostic project was to describe and pathologize the colonized so as to define them as inherently different

from Europeans. In a colonial context, then, resistance to the norms of the occupying culture becomes a sign of madness.

Unlike many eugenic policies in the United States, the 1928 legislation in Alberta did not specify particular biological traits that warranted sterilization; rather, the Sexual Sterilization Act could be applied to anyone in a “mental hospital” who might risk “the multiplication of the evil by transmission of the disability to progeny” (qtd. in Wilson 66). The “evil” passed on to progeny could therefore be defined in biological, racial, or moral terms. The religious judgment embedded in the act itself not only claims that the future would be inherently better without someone with a stigmatized characteristic but also implies a moral imperative of those in power to eradicate the perceived threat posed by the procreation of select individuals. The 1937 amendment to the legislation expanded the domain of eugenic policy outside mental hospitals to “mental hygiene clinics” (also called guidance clinics). These travelling clinics visited schools and conducted assessments of the mental abilities of students; under this system, a “psychotic” person needed to give consent for their confinement, but a person with “mental defects” (someone judged to have incomplete development of mental faculties before the age of eighteen) did not (Wilson 67).

I am approaching *Halfbreed* through the history of eugenics in Alberta in order to demonstrate the severity of the policies in place during the time depicted in *Halfbreed*, as well as during the time that Campbell wrote the text, and to position the reissuing of the text as an important opportunity to revisit this history. According to Wilson, the eugenic project in Canada included “the relationship between eugenic thinking and racism and ethnocentrism . . . both manifest in national immigration policies and implicit in assimilationist policies directed in part at Indigenous peoples within national boundaries” (39). In this light, we can see that eugenic practices were in place in residential schools and within the foster care system as well as in projects such as the sexual sterilization program (39). Campbell’s autobiography brings several of these strands together: mental institutions, residential schools, the foster care system, systemic poverty, and racialized and gendered stereotypes of Indigenous women.

Read through the history of eugenics, *Halfbreed* traces the reasons that a Métis child might end up loitering or playing hooky.⁴ Racism among settler teachers and students is one factor that might affect a

Métis child's attendance. Campbell identifies settlers' prevalent view of "halfbreed" children as being "feeble minded." For example, on the first day of school,

Alex Vandal, the village joker, . . . told Daddy that he was going to act retarded because the whites thought we were anyway, so when his son's name was called he shuffled over. The teacher asked for the first name. Alex replied, "Boy." Then he looked dumbly around and finally yelled at his wife in French and Cree. "Oh, the name is Paul." The teacher then asked whether Paul knew his ABC's? "No." "Does he count?" "No." "Does he know his prayers?" "No." "Does your son believe in Jesus Christ?" "No." "Don't you believe in Jesus?" "I don't know, I never saw the god." Our people looked straight ahead trying not to laugh and the whites were tittering. Alex and Paul returned to their seats all smiles. (48)

On a more serious note, in other instances, a parent's loss of livelihood because of the dispossession of land and the loss of hunting rights might mean that older siblings needed to stay home to care for children and the household rather than attend school. When her father is charged with living in a common-law relationship with his housekeeper, Campbell has to stay home from school, especially since, when she tries to attend school, her youngest brother almost asphyxiates because of an accident (105). These conditions mean not only that Métis children are not given the same educational opportunities but also that the Campbell family lives in fear of social services taking away their children. Campbell's father's closest settler friends even seek to solve the Campbell family's struggles by offering to adopt Campbell's siblings (105). The other option, which receives only brief discussion, is residential school, but despite their hardship the Campbell family never attempts to send a child to residential school after Campbell's short time there. In contrast, while valuing some aspects of a Western education, Campbell lays out the significant value of traditional knowledge and skills acquired not through school but through time spent with adults in her community (18).

Furthermore, as Shawna Ferris puts forward, "Maria's story . . . argues that systemic racism breeds violence and hopelessness, that social and political systems are too often prejudiced and corrupt, that crime pays, and that for certain female populations dreams do not come true" (131). Campbell's story shows how sex work, alcoholism, and drug

addiction, which at one time or another have been seen as evidence of mental deficiency, stem from histories of dispossession, displacement, and the practice of cultural genocide. In this light, when Campbell calls in *Halfbreed* for people to “set aside their differences and come together as one” (184), part of what she is asking is for people to overcome the eugenic racism that has influenced her life.

However, reading this eugenic history in *Halfbreed* is also plagued by a problem; this reading can act as a kind of “literary eugenics” that encourages interpretations of the text in support of the view that the violence of colonization has irreparably damaged Campbell’s community and that once again denies Indigenous people futurity. In her recent work on ethnography, Eve Tuck calls for an end to “damage-centred research” that often “intends to document people’s pain and brokenness in order to hold those in power accountable for their oppression” but, in the process, often “reinforces and reinscribes a one-dimensional notion of [Indigenous] people as depleted, ruined, and hopeless” (409). Indeed, on similar grounds, Jo-Ann Episkenew (Métis) notes that,

Although many Aboriginal readers can identify with the first part of *Halfbreed* — the story of Campbell’s community — a large number respond negatively to Campbell’s personal story which contains confessions of prostitution and drug addiction. . . . [H]er words anger many Aboriginal readers because they believe that, when considered in the context of her confessions, these words substantiate the very stereotypes that plague Aboriginal women in this country. (“Effect” 298)

A close look at the publishing and reception history of *Halfbreed* highlights the need to be cognizant of the pervasiveness of what I call *damage-centred reading practices*, which are motivated by a desire to learn about injustice but reproduce the idea of inevitably damaged Indigenous subjects, if settlers are to use *Halfbreed* as a tool for self-education.

The Original Publication of *Halfbreed*: Eugenic Editing, Eugenic Reading

I contend that the eugenic context that I have outlined presents an “interpretive issue” that settler readers influenced by Canadian literary nationalism encountered when they attempted to read *Halfbreed* for the purpose of self-education in 1973 (Titchkosky 9). Stanley Fish

defines an “interpretive community” as a group of people who approach a text with the same “particular purposes and goals” (14) and therefore produce similar meaning from a text. I suggest that a large interpretive community of settler readers in the 1970s read *Halfbreed* in order to learn about Campbell’s community but approached the text with the ingrained notion that Indigenous people were irreparably damaged. Rather than being a problem of individual racism, this idea was widespread; it pervaded the eugenic ideologies that plagued public policy and, as I will discuss, the dominant depictions of Indigenous people in the literary works of the day.

Halfbreed was published at the height of Canadian literary nationalism by Jack McClelland, whose “forceful effort[s] strove] to provide an essential means for Canadian culture and identity to find vigorous and enduring expression” (King xxiii). McClelland’s involvement and the timing of the publication suggest that the dominant interpretive community in Canada was reading and promoting *Halfbreed* in the spirit of the Massey Commission of 1951: that is, to foster Canadian culture by pursuing “adult education” during one’s leisure time by studying literary “works of genuine merit” as a “matter of [one’s] own free choice” (Canada 7, 5). Viewed as a uniquely *Canadian* story, *Halfbreed* was a valuable addition to McClelland’s collection, which worked to promote Canadian content and culture in the face of both British literary history and large American publishers. Therefore, I describe the people who initially published, promoted, and wrote the most widespread reviews of *Halfbreed* as a text that could teach *Canadians* about *Canada* as part of a *nationally invested* interpretive community.

The heavy hand of such a community, and its tendency toward damage-centred interpretations, can be traced in the publication history of Campbell’s text. Campbell noted in an interview with Konrad Gross and Hartmut Lutz in 1989 that *Halfbreed* was originally composed as a “letter” that she wrote to herself (42) and that a friend read and with her permission submitted to publishers. The manuscript was passed from Jim Douglas of the young publishing house Douglas and McIntyre to the more established Jack McClelland at McClelland and Stewart because, as Douglas wrote to McClelland, the publisher of this “extraordinary” and “important” text “should be you” (qtd. in Edwards). Douglas’s praise for Campbell’s text and his urging of McClelland to publish it imply that Douglas thought it would be of interest to

McClelland's reading audience. The interactions between McClelland and Douglas and the former's role in publishing the text firmly place *Halfbreed* within the history of Canadian national literature and its nation-building project. A cultural nationalist approach is laden with the baggage of damage-centred interpretive practices because the justification of the Canadian nation-state is predicated on the disappearance or assimilation of Indigenous populations. As Daniel Coleman states, the performance of civility, which he identifies as the unifying idea behind a dominant Canadian national imaginary, includes a "cherishing of evil memories, an elegiac discourse by which Canadians demonstrate their civil sensibilities through mourning the traumatic, but supposedly necessary, losses that were inevitable along the path of [Canadian] progress" (29). I suggest that this "social pathology" of perpetual "elegiac discourse" means that national interpretive communities come to be closely paired with damage-centred textual interpretations that might have good intentions in documenting oppression but make little room for the agency of those whom they consider oppressed (Coleman 30, 29). From the perspective of performing "civility," it is possible for settler readers to mourn the plight of Campbell's people while considering that plight to be the inevitable outcome of the progress of civilization.

Viewing Campbell's text as part of the mass of Canadian literature that he was shrewdly accruing, McClelland assumed that her motivation for writing *Halfbreed* was to educate settlers about the plight of her people. His response to Douglas on 30 November 1971 reveals that McClelland saw in the long manuscript (two thousand pages) the making of a "national bestseller" that could "create real impact" if it was reworked into what he called a "biography with a purpose" designed to mobilize settler sympathy. McClelland advised Campbell to keep and expand what he identified as the "unique and devastating" content from her childhood and to cut the vast majority of the text save for her return to her childhood home as an adult and any suggestions that she might want to make about how to help her people. He also latched on to the "colourful" nature of her material, suggesting that the exoticism of the text, the foreignness of Campbell's community for the settler reader, was part of the appeal of the text.

This pairing of *Halfbreed*'s affective power and "colourful" content is significant. As Janice Acoose (Anishinaabekwe-Métis-Nehiowé) argues in her analysis of Canadian literary depictions of Indigenous women in

the 1970s, “In much of Canadian literature, the images of Indigenous women that are constructed perpetuate unrealistic and derogatory ideas, which consequently foster cultural attitudes that legitimize rape and other kinds of violence against us” (*Iskwewak* 71). Acoose continues that, *despite* sympathetic portrayals of Indigenous characters by authors such as Margaret Laurence (also published by McClelland), white constructions of Indigenous women “have been variously portrayed as creatures of nature, temptresses or femme fatales, Indian princesses, easy squaws, or suffering, helpless victims” (74). It is important, I think, that the limits that Acoose articulates reveal the popular depictions of Indigenous women to be both eroticized and perpetually contained within a “sad” story. The affective expectation of a nationally invested interpretive community in Canada at this time is for an Indigenous woman to be both exciting and tragic. Sara Ahmed argues that the affect associated with different objects “sustains or preserves the connection between certain ideas, values, and objects” (230). The affective economy of depictions of Indigenous women in Canadian literature therefore provides the expectation that an Indigenous female character will be the lead in a tragic or, in McClelland’s words, “devastating” story. Defining affect within the historical materialist tradition as “the product of the repetition and sedimentation of ideology” (Gorman 309), this affective expectation makes visible the ideology of nationally invested interpretive communities, specifically the expectations that many settler readers brought to Campbell’s text.

McClelland’s most substantial critique of the manuscript was that Campbell suggests a connection between her experiences of oppression as a “halfbreed” woman, her survival sex work, and addiction, as well as, in his words, her problems with “so many married men.” McClelland assumed that her adult experiences of racism and the Canadian colonial legacy could make Campbell “unsympathetic” to readers and therefore endanger what he assumed to be her cause. Behind the restructuring of her book was the demand that, if Campbell wanted to keep her content, she had to make the connections between colonial racism, poverty, sex work, addiction, and the sexualization of Indigenous women in a way that settler readers could understand and validate. Since the text does include more of the post-childhood material than McClelland originally suggested should remain, the 1973 text prompts the question “In which ways did Campbell challenge McClelland’s suggestions?” Although the

original manuscript is not available for scholarly comparison, the ability of *Halfbreed* to forge the connections that McClelland was missing is part of the text's historical impact.

Even though Campbell was mostly happy with *Halfbreed* (Interview 47), the first section of the book, which McClelland requested that Campbell add (Chapters 1-15), seems to shift the affective impact of the text. As Ferris points out, this section works to “balance out the darkness and anger of the story Campbell initially produced” (131). Pointing out the lack of scholarly attention to the chapters of *Halfbreed* that narrate Campbell's experience of survival sex work, Ferris argues that focusing on the chapters written after McClelland's involvement risks ignoring the “cultural critique offered by Campbell's text [that] hinges on the ways that Maria's experiences as a survival sex worker and criminal in Vancouver help her to value her experiences in her family and her rural Saskatchewan community” (131). It is also important to give weight to the fact that Campbell approved Chapters 1-15; the power of the “happy” though “poor” childhood context of her final version refutes the implication that her people are inherently doomed. For the purposes of examining the politics of damage-centred readings, it is most troubling that “a whole section was taken out of the book that . . . [Campbell] had insisted . . . stay there” (Interview 42). The version of the text that she approved included her rape, as a young teenager, by RCMP officers. This section, excised from Chapter 12 of the autobiography, includes Campbell being confronted and raped in her home by two RCMP officers looking for evidence of her father's poaching. Her brother Robbie attempts to intervene, but fails. When Campbell's Grannie finds her, she says that they cannot go to the police because no one will believe them; rather, influenced by the stereotypes of promiscuous Indigenous women and violent Indigenous men, the courts will assume that Campbell has been “messing around” with Métis boys (Campbell, qtd. in Reder and Shield).

As Deanna Reder (Cree-Métis) and Alix Shield point out, inclusion of the RCMP “incident” significantly changes both the start and the end of the autobiography. Campbell's brave inclusion of her rape brings new light to her statement that “If I was to know peace I would have to search within myself. That is when I decided to write about my life” (*Halfbreed* 2). The rape also significantly changes the “fate” of the Campbell family. As Reder notes, “While in the published ver-

sion there is no explanation for Robbie's subsequent rebelliousness that saw him placed 'in fifteen foster homes' before eventually moving to Alaska (147), the excised passage could explain his lifelong hatred for the police and his later convictions for assaulting them" (Reder and Shield). Similarly, the excised passage sheds light on Grannie's "subsequent and unexplained departure [that] resulted in the breakup of the entire family" and suggests that Campbell's "lack of legal or social outlets to speak about the rape compounds her inability to voice her anger and pain until it erupts in self-damaging ways. In fact, her unmentioned physical and sexual assault by the police troubles the rest of the narrative." I would add that, when Campbell's story is read without her rape by an interpretive community that expects a "devastating" story about a damaged community, it is more likely that *Halfbreed* will be read as a tale of the inevitable disintegration of her family. However, with the rape included, her family breakdown stems from a specific violent event that goes unaddressed because of the racism of settler culture. As a result, when the RCMP "incident" is included, it is more difficult to read Campbell's narrative through a damage-centred interpretive lens.

Although the publishers and Campbell's lawyer disagreed on the potential legal ramifications of including the rape, what interests me is the limit of what settler readers are willing to consume and the emotional labour placed upon Campbell in the publishers' discussion of her manuscript. While, in Douglas's words, it was necessary for Campbell to "let herself be publicised, her past exposed, her family life jeopardized" in order to educate the public (qtd. in Edwards), it is seemingly not acceptable for high-profile businessmen, the RCMP, or important publishers to come under scrutiny for their actions. Rather, the emotional work of accepting the publisher's decision post-publication and the pressure to republish and re-explain were placed firmly on Campbell, who said in 1989 that "Some day I would like to re-do the whole [text] . . . but . . . am not ready to do it yet" (Interview 42-43).

It is perhaps unsurprising that McClelland accurately assessed what would attract many settler readers and how they would interpret the text. A 1973 *Maclean's* piece by Campbell, entitled "Lessons of Defeat," was included in a feature spread edited by Peter C. Newman entitled "The Native Condition: A Canadian Tragedy." Newman's introductory note to Campbell's contribution claims that the book will educate settlers about the "little bands of Indians and Métis [whom we see] as

we drive into such towns and cities as Fort McLeod and Prince Albert” and the despair and defeat that they experience (Newman 27). Cornelia Holbert’s often-cited 1973 review states that “*Halfbreed* . . . is shocking, not because of what Maria Campbell has been, . . . but because the hand that holds the book trembles at what it has done” (344). As Shield notes, it is clear that the book was publicized based upon the idea that Campbell was the “victim” of “injustice” (Reder and Shield) — but only the kind of injustice that might be well received (i.e., not a victim of rape by RCMP officers). When the rape is not included in the narrative, the “injustice” that Campbell speaks out against appears to be limited to the poverty of her community as it struggles to maintain a way of life and the consequences of that poverty for Campbell. Furthermore, the ending of the text, in which Campbell returns to her home, is more easily interpreted as an opportunity for the reader to envision the disintegration of her community rather than a brave return to a site of adolescent trauma in search of healing.

Both McClelland and the 1973 reviews preclude multiple readings of Campbell’s political motivation in favour of damage-centred interpretations. Douglas cites a better future for “young girls” as one of Campbell’s main motivations, which McClelland did not privilege (qtd. in Edwards). And, as Fagan and her students note, though the issue of *Maclean’s* in which Campbell’s book is reviewed alongside interviews with other Indigenous writers depicts Indigenous people as “tragically doomed” (qtd. in Fagan et al. 258), the Indigenous authors themselves express a “deep-seated faith in their Aboriginal cultural values both philosophically and as a practical way of life” (Redbird qtd. in Fagan et al. 258). Similarly, Campbell has more recently hoped that her work inspires young Indigenous women in the way that Pauline Johnson’s 1895 poem “The Cattle Thief” inspired her (Reder and Shield). And Cheryl Suzack (Batchewana First Nation) has argued that, in the context of 1973, *Halfbreed* can be read as a text that calls for a “coalition of Aboriginal women’s identity” in direct response to the 1969 White Paper that disenfranchised many Indigenous women. In short, damage-centred readings of *Halfbreed* can be seen as an interpretive problem that some Indigenous readers identified as early as *Halfbreed*’s initial publication. As host of *Our Native Land* (CBC) Beth Paul notes, nationally invested readers in 1973 *did* want to learn about Indigenous lives; however, as the publication history of *Halfbreed* suggests, readers from

the dominant interpretive community in Canada were prepared to hear from the right kind of subject: a victim who reinforced the eugenic stereotype of a defeated race, not the story of a woman calling a community to come together in political action.

Self-Educating without Damage-Centred Reading Today

Within the context of 1970s eugenic practices and their accompanying ideologies, nationally invested readers often engaged in damage-centred reading and editing practices. This engagement meant that, even as readers and editors were legitimately interested in “helping” Campbell further her cause, they interpreted it within a paradigm that assumed the irreparable damage of her people. However, as Wilson argues, eugenic thought is “not only explicitly in the squalid quarters of the ignorant, the xenophobic, and the extreme, but also more implicitly in mainstream contemporary thought and social practice” (26). With the uncovering of the missing passage from *Halfbreed*, we are not immediately free from damage-centred interpretations of *Halfbreed* that deny the possibility and importance of addressing political change in the present. Campbell’s rape is included in *The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation*, the 1982 dramatic adaptation of *Halfbreed* by Campbell and settler actor-playwright Linda Griffiths. Inclusion of the rape is discussed in their reflection on the creative process, the “Spiritual Things” section of *The Book of Jessica*, and points to the exhausting implications of dealing with the “trembling hand” of white fragility as settlers engage in self-education (Holbert 344).

The Book of Jessica frames the improvisational development of the rape scene as a process of education for Griffiths that begins as Campbell gives what she “didn’t want to give” (46); Campbell then acknowledges the growth of Griffiths when she demonstrates the healing of finding a matriarchal spiritual connection through an improvised ritual dance; Campbell validates the hard work of Griffiths by stating that they “started fresh again” (47). But this moment of connection is quickly complicated by the public performance of the play in Saskatoon. Campbell begins to feel violated by the “greediness” of Griffiths for her stories and becomes increasingly concerned about “what is going to happen to Linda,” whose engagement with the material has led her to a state of intense vulnerability. Campbell says to Griffiths, “You looked as though, if I just touched you, you’d have shattered like a fine piece

of glass. But at the same time you were asking me to fill that glass with wine" (48). Here we seem to have a reversal of roles: Griffiths is the one who is fragile and weak. Wanting to be told that she has "done good" by educating herself, she becomes the focus of the creative process. Concerned about how her community will experience the staging of her life story, Campbell cannot communicate her concerns to Griffiths because doing so would be like "hitting" and irreparably "shattering" her (48-49). The moment of relationship balance that might have been found in "teaching" Griffiths appears to have quickly passed as the emotional labour of both dealing with her white fragility and caring for her own community fall on Campbell. Like Holbert's review of the text, the importance of *The Book of Jessica* for Campbell's community is effaced by the effect that performing the play has on the white settler artist. The consequences of focusing on the ability of Campbell's texts to set the settler's hand "trembling" might be illuminated by Toni Morrison's question in 1990 in regard to the representation of blackness in American literature: "[W]hat happens in that violent self-serving act of [pouring rhetorical acid on the fingers of the black hand to destroy its prints, to] the hands, the fingers, the finger-prints of the one who does the pouring? Do they remain acid-free?" (46). Erasing the importance of Campbell's work outside its ability to evoke a response in settlers is "violent" and "self-serving" in that it effaces the existence of Indigenous reading communities for whom the text has done important work or has been threatening because of the risk of damage-centred readings; at the same time, this reading reduces settler readers to subjects who can only pity and wallow in shame about a *past* wrong rather than engage in ongoing relationship work in the present.

In her interview in 1989 with Gross and Lutz, just as *The Book of Jessica* was being released, Campbell stated that "I worked with a non-Native writer, and I'll never do it again. . . . I had to take her on a journey with me. . . . And it's been very painful. There was no respect for the place that I came from" (57). So, though the focus of *The Book of Jessica* directly ties Campbell's struggles with addiction and survival sex work to the trauma of her rape and locates healing in traditional cultural practices, the balance of the relationship between Griffiths and Campbell is not inherently restored. This is perhaps most evident in the politics of publishing *The Book of Jessica*, which Griffiths ended up

editing and publishing on her own while Campbell turned to serving the political needs of her community.

In reflecting on her work in the 1970s and 1980s, Campbell claimed that, before we can “sit across the table from each other as equals,” we have to do the work of acknowledging where each of us comes from (Interview 60). More recently, Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) has written that “Indigenous literatures matter because *Indigenous peoples matter*” (211). These statements are inherently anti-eugenic; they demand that settler readers do their research to acknowledge who produced texts and the multiple literary conversations in which they participate. As Episkenew stated in 2002 in a discussion on the politics of reading *Halfbreed*, “what [scholars] often forget is the ideology that they bring to their reading. . . . Most are members of the colonizer culture and, therefore, cannot possibly share the same ideology as Aboriginal people, whether they be the authors who create the literature, the people about whom they write, or the few Aboriginal students in their classes” (“Socially” 54). This need for both context and self-reflection is also what texts that emerged from the complex and convoluted Indigenous-settler literary interactions from the 1970s teach us about how to move forward in our relationship with one another.

In her recent book *Memory Serves: Oratories*, Lee Maracle (Stó:lō) asserts that, though Indigenous literatures contain “the necessary cultural knowledge that can address [Indigenous] liberation,” institutional change and the transfer of resources are necessary in order to support the study of the “originary culture based readings” that are part of the work of Indigenous resurgence (216). The importance of these readings is highlighted when such readings of *Halfbreed* are compared with damage-centred readings of Campbell’s life story. For example, Acoose’s attempt to “model a culture-specific theoretical approach [and] reveal the *possibilities* for the interpretation of indigenous literatures” considers Campbell’s work to be a “Nehiowîwin-Métis cultural revitalization project” that “initiated the practice of carrying to written English important elements of culture, dynamic storytelling ancestors, and a distinct language” (“Honouring” 217, 225). Reder investigates *Halfbreed* as an Indigenous autobiography that models the *nêhiyâwiwin* intellectual tradition of *wâhkotowin* or kinship (170). Reder and Acoose read *Halfbreed* as evidence of enduring, complex, and culturally specific literary traditions; although these readings are not concerned primarily with

settler education, implicitly they refute the assumption of inevitable continuing Indigenous oppression and brokenness.

Justice claims that Indigenous literatures “are at least as concerned with developing or articulating relationships with, among, and between Indigenous readers as they are with communicating our humanity to colonial society, if not more so” (xix). The eugenic history of *Halfbreed* emphasizes the importance of this statement. Although nationally invested interpretive communities would benefit from paying attention to the history of eugenics that haunts the context of Campbell’s story, this history is most important at *this* historical moment because it both exposes the horrors of history and emphasizes the importance of reading Indigenous literatures as existing for more than a settler education limited to pity or an emotional response to the past.

The literary history of *Halfbreed* can teach settler readers that, in order to avoid damage-centred interpretive practices, we need to make financial and institutional space for resurgence-based readings. It is especially important for us to do the work of finding engaged and respectful ways of reading Indigenous texts when it comes to the new wave of students sitting in literature classes who come educated about the residential school system but expect histories of Indigenous trauma rather than visions of resurgence. We need to work strategically, in this moment, to privilege non-settler-focused readings of the text. We need to confront continually the insistent patterns of interpretation that return us to damage-centred readings of eugenic history. This stance might acknowledge that we need to make space for “originary culture”-based readings of Indigenous texts as well as practise being in relationships through listening, respecting, taking upon ourselves the emotional and intellectual processes of learning where we have come from, and admitting complicity in the institutions and traditions of white supremacy — perhaps then, as Campbell suggests, we can come eventually to the table as equals in relation to one another.

AUTHOR’S NOTE

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NOTES

¹ I refer to Maria Campbell as Métis because that is how she has most recently referred to herself. Her identities and ties to multiple communities have been discussed at length (Episkenew, "Socially"; Fagan et al.).

² On Métis identity, see Culjak and Ruffo (Ojibwe). On hybridity, see Cairnie; Kaup; and Lundgren. On *Halfbreed* as a resistant text written for white readers, see Acoose, *Iskwewak*; Lundgren; and Vangen. On *Halfbreed* as a community-building work for Indigenous authors, see Episkenew (both articles); LaRocque (Cree-Métis); and Suzack. On Campbell's work as part of an ongoing demonstration of Indigenous intellectual traditions, see Acoose, "Honouring *Ni'Wahkomakanak*"; and Reder.

³ Significantly, there were reports in 2015-16 that Indigenous women in Saskatchewan had been sterilized without or with dubious consent (Wilson 23).

⁴ Campbell spent her childhood in Saskatchewan, not Alberta. Saskatchewan passed eugenic sterilization legislation in the 1930s, but a change in government meant that the policy was never put into effect (Wilson 12).

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