Whose Story is It, Anyway? Or… Power and Difference in *The Book of Jessica*: Implications for Theories of Collaboration

David Jefferess
University of Michigan

> *Jessica* was an experience so complex, inspiring and horrific that Maria Campbell and I wrote a book about it—*The Book of Jessica*—which is about process, theatrical, personal, and political.
>
> ***Linda Griffiths, "Process"***

> It was co-written by myself and Linda Griffiths. We spent a lot of time talking about what we were going to do and how we were going to do it. I had to take Linda through the experince before we started to write it.
>
> ***Maria Campbell, "You"***

In the above epigraphs, Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell describe their collaboration. I begin with these two epigraphs, for I feel they imply not only the trauma of creating the play *Jessica* and the complex relations of power between the two women, but also the way in which Maria and Linda's dialogues in *The Book of Jessica* trouble theories of collaborative authorship. I want to write about *The Book of Jessica* as a collaboratively written text and about the implications of this text for the theory of collaboration. However, there seems to be no way of evading the quandary of having to speak about either Maria or Linda, and not both together. Co-authored, *The Book of Jessica* is a text about the process of writing the play *Jessica,* a play about a Métis woman's life. *The Book* is a text about how, and in which, two women from different cultural and social backgrounds work together, and it is a product which reflects the process of its construction. Yet, in contrast to the common expectations of collaboratively

ESC 29.3-4 (September/December 2003): 220–241

written texts, in *The Book of Jessica* the subjectivities of the co-authors, the "I" and "I", cannot be merged into a neat authorial "we". Unlike many other collaboratively written texts, both academic and creative—about which I might write, for instance, "*they* are concerned with …"—constructing Linda and Maria as a "they" seems much more problematic; their union is always already ruptured. There is Maria and there is Linda. I belabour the point that as collaborators Linda and Maria are together-yet-apart for I wish to investigate the relations of power between Campbell and Griffiths in order to problematize dominant notions of collaborative writing. The stories of the writing of *Jessica* and *The Book of Jessica*, told, for the most part, in dialogue form in *The Book,* recount a long and tumultuous process, revealing ever shifting, tense and ambivalent relations of power between the two authors. The concern of much theorising of collaboration has been the intimacy and unity of a collaborative team, in resistance to, as Ede and Lunsford characterise it, "the pervasive commonsense assumption that writing is inherently a solitary, individual act" (5), so much so that "difference" in collaboration has received little attention.

David Jefferess is currently pursuing post-doctoral studies at the University of Michigan. His recent publications include postcolonial critiques of development and child rights discourse and Canadian identity. His dissertation, from McMaster University, is entitled *Changing the Story: Postcolonial Studies and Resistance.*

It is this "difference"—of culture, class, education, personal experience—which is likely the reason why *The Book of Jessica* is rarely read as a collaboration or, if it is, as a "collaborative process which breaks down, or nearly does" (Boardman 29). In her treatment of the text, Jeanne Perreault approaches the book as Linda Griffiths' story, and Diane Bessai attributes the authorship of the play to Linda alone. Similarly, Kathleen Venema, Susanna Egan and Helen Hoy each read Maria Campbell's role in *The Book of Jessica* as that of resister to Griffiths' story. Although the text is characterised as "collaboratively" written, Griffiths' voice is privileged or regarded as dominant in the text, and the relationship between Campbell and Griffiths is often constructed in binary terms: Object/Subject, Examined/Examiner, Exploited/Exploiter.[1] Grounding my reading of *The Book of Jessica* in the collaborative model of "talk" and in postcolonial critiques of power, difference and identity, in this article I wish to recover the text as a collaboration and in so doing expand and clarify the concept of collaborative authorship; the collaborators of *The Book of Jessica* are neither equal nor like-minded, and *The Book* is a text in which the individual subjectivities of its collaborators do not merge. Rather than an obstacle to successful collaboration, however, I argue that Maria and

1 One exception to this critical perspective is "Journeys and Transformations" in which Blanca Chester and Valerie Dudoward do treat the text as a collaboration, discussing (largely in dialogue form) such issues as appropriation, authenticity, Canadian identity and Native spirituality in "Jessica" and *The Book of Jessica.*

Linda's differences require a form of sharing that must confront difference and power.

Griffiths and Campbell's dialogues do not fit neatly within theories of collaboration that assume the commonalties of the participants.

In *The Book of Jessica,* Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell speak with and respond to one another. The text is composed of three distinct sections following a seemingly objective "third person" historical chronology written by Linda. The third section is the play *Jessica,* but in this article I will concentrate upon the first two sections, collaborative reflections upon the writing of the play.[2] In the first section, "Spiritual Things," Linda's first-person narrative frames dialogues between the two—presumably taped conversations—and is interrupted at times by Maria's voice—presumably written responses to Linda's narrative. The second section, "The Red Cloth," is composed entirely of excerpts of conversations between the two women organised under descriptive headings. The reader of the text is privy to a dialogue as Michael Holquist defines the concept: a series of utterances and replies, and most importantly the relation between the two (38). While critics of *The Book of Jessica* have closely scrutinised the utterances and replies of the collaborators, this "relation between the two," which I will discuss below, has received little attention.

Griffiths and Campbell's dialogues do not fit neatly within theories of collaboration that assume the commonalties of the participants as a precondition and which rarely interrogate the effect of "difference" upon or within collaborative writing. In "The Role of Talk in the Writing Process of Intimate Collaboration," Mary Alm characterises the "talk" model as "intimate collaboration," a process which is intense and demanding, and a mode in which women are more comfortable as it exhibits lower levels of dominance than other modes of discourse (128). Further, Alm contends that "intimate collaboration" is "best suited for those sharing equal access to power and privilege" (135). Taking this position a step farther, Janet Ellerby and Barbara Waxman argue that while collaboration must be self-reflexive so as to allow for difference and so as not to become "mere conformity, mindless harmony, or political correctness" (214) they answer their rhetorical question, "Would our collaboration work if we

2 While *The Book of Jessica* concerns the production of the play *Jessica,* the voices of the other participants or collaborators in the play's creation, such as Paul Thompson, Graham Greene, Tantoo Cardinal and Bob Bainborough, are, with the exception of a long passage attributed to Thompson, erased in the text. While I refer to the events of the improvisational development of *Jessica,* my concern is with the way these events are represented in the collaboration between Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell to produce *The Book of Jessica.*

were not both feminists?" with "Probably not" (219).[3] Such conceptions of collaboration limit the practice to an act performed by those who are "equal" and like-minded. *The Book of Jessica,* however, provides a challenge to such narrow constructions of the act of collaboration, for the ambivalent relations of power and privilege based upon cultural and personal differences impede Maria and Linda from achieving Alm's notion of "intimate collaboration," though, I argue, their collaboration does reveal another sort of "intimacy."

Collaborative writing has been posited as an explicitly political act which subverts the Western concept of the Author as individual, solitary creator of a text.[4] It challenges binaries of self/other, subject/object, and private/public. In recent writings on the experience of collaboration and collaboratively written texts, two distinct models have developed to envision this challenge to the solitary Author, that of collaboration as "intercourse" and that of "talk." For many writing teams, to collaborate is to merge individual subjectivities into a collective "we."[5] Wayne Koestenbaum and Lorraine York, for instance, each privilege this "I" + "I" = "We" as the ideal of collaboration, conceiving of it through homo-erotic and lesbian metaphors, respectively. Koestenbaum argues that "men who collaborate engage in a metaphorical sexual intercourse, and that the text they balance between them is alternately the child of their sexual union, and a shared woman" (3). However, the metaphor of "love-making"—a textual intercourse in which two writing bodies become one—or simply the adoption of a first person plural voice seems only to reinscribe the authority and control over meaning by the writer*s* of a text. While York maintains "that the texts that are most fully collaborative in terms of subverting author-itarian discourses are explicitly lesbian" (154), collaboratively written texts which mimic the monologic voice of the single-author

3 A number of critics have argued that collaboration is essentially a feminist practice, and more specifically women's practice, due to the socialisation of women to be more cooperative and self-sacrificing. See, for example, Doane and Hodges (53).

4 For many critics and collaborators the subversive possibilities of collaboration—the recognition of the act as necessarily political—is foregrounded in their theory. See, for example, Schlau and Arenal, Ellerby and Waxman, and Leonardi and Pope.

5 The adoption of the first person plural "we" is common in many critical collaborations. For instance, see Hutcheon and Hutcheon, Ellerby and Waxman, Kaplan and Rose, Doane and Hodges. Similarly, creative collaborators, such as Suniti Namjoshi and Gillian Hanscombe do not demarcate their poems in *Flesh and Paper* and adopt the use of "we" in their introduction to the collection.

paradigm through the replacement of "I" for "we," and texts which do not announce in their product the process of writing, seem not to subvert *author*itarian discourses at all.

The "conversational" model of collaboration seems to provide much more of a challenge to the traditional relationship between the Author and the Reader and to conceptions of the Author's authority over meaning. For instance, writing of renga poetry, Dôre Michelut states: "Readers of the renga who are not internal readers … are palpably robbed of what the Western reader takes for granted: the writer's construction of an identifiable, specific audience within the text. Because the renga event happens and resolves within the text, the reading is as present and continuous as the writing" (Michelut 111). The product and process of writing here become simultaneous as the reader is able to alter the text in its creation.[6] With a "reader" who is a participant in the act of "writing," the "author's" responsibility to the "reader" for the utterance is much more pronounced than in traditional forms of writing. While renga subverts the binaries of Reader/Author and product/process, the value of the text for the outside reader is limited, as the exchange of meaning and ideas takes place between the participants. Nonetheless, renga and statement-response or conversational forms of collaborative writing make possible a mutual exchange for the participants in the collaboration. Although the text, in many respects, is scarcely different from other texts—it is an object a reader picks up and reads, seeking to interpret the text's "meaning"—the form of the text mimics the process of its production, modelling an alternative to the Sender/Receptor model of writing/reading.

Mikhail Bakhtin describes how two participants in a dialogue each have knowledge—for instance information or experience—that the other does not, which he calls a "surplus of seeing," and how there is the opportunity to share this knowledge through dialogue (Holquist 36). In their article, "'All Concord's Born of Contraries': Marital Methodologies," Linda and Michael Hutcheon describe their collaboration on *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death* (1996) in a traditional narrative voice, the "I" replaced with "we." They describe their writing together as a process in which each has her/his individual role but which is grounded in "talk." During their din-

6 "Renga is a process involving two or more people writing one poem together by alternately linking images or concepts to create a sequence. Since the writers are present to each other, the writing happens simultaneously in aural-oral, read-written language. To maintain the mutual presence this writing requires, the rengaists meet on the divided page and retain individual identity by requesting from each other a committed response" (Michelut 105).

ner-table discussions the “surplus of seeing” of each is shared with the other leading to the production of a text which is, they contend, “radically different from what either of us would produce separately” (Hutcheon 60). Although their writing process is polyphonic, the written product is monovocal (64). The dialogic act of their writing allows for a sharing of their “surpluses of seeing” but the product of this process reinscribes the *author*itarian model of writing.

Edward Said identifies authorship with power. In *Beginnings* (1975), he connects “authority”—as a power to enforce obedience—with the traditional notion of the author, summarising the function of the author as the creator and owner of a text with power over its meaning (83). In contrast to conventional conceptions of power as dominance or control over others or ideas,[7] Hannah Arendt argues that power “’corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert’” (qtd. in Harstock 218). Although Arendt is discussing political formations, her contention that tyranny results from “the powerlessness of subjects who have lost the human capacity to speak and act together” (Harstock 219) provides an image of power as capability rather than control and as a collective rather than individual utterance. As Helene Keyssar argues, Bakhtin’s dialogism is the key to the depriviliging of absolute authoritarian discourses (89) as diverse discourses intermingle with and interanimate each other thereby avoiding a controlling authorial point of view (95). Through a dialogic mode of discourse, the notion of authorship and thereby authorial power is challenged. If collaboration is to be a *subversive political act,* as critics have characterised it, however, I believe that the textual product must necessarily announce its process. While conversational models of collaboration retain the authorial “I,” the relation of this speaking subject to another speaking subject demystifies the authorial presence and replaces the authority of the subject with the uttered exchange of the collaborators.[8]

If collaboration is to be a *subversive political act,* as critics have characterised it, however, I believe that the textual product must necessarily announce its process.

7 A number of critics have challenged the notion of power as dominance and posited an alternative notion of power as capability, often emphasising community or interdependence over models of power which concentrate upon the individual. For instance, see hooks (83, 89), Carroll (588, 604), and Gilligan (22, 167).

8 I recognise that my assertion that “conversational” models of collaboration necessarily challenge the authority of the author is open to criticism. For instance, while bell hooks and Cornell West’s *Breaking Bread: Insurgent Black Intellectual Life* (1991) models conversation between Black men and women, it may be argued that their dialogues are constructed to present a monologic message.

Criticism of *Jessica* and *The Book of Jessica* has been provocative, in particular the work of Jeanne Perreault, Kathleen Venema and Helen Hoy, who interrogate the construction of white racial subjectivity, the self-other/Linda-Maria relationship, and the issue of appropriation, respectively. While each critic provides an insightful reading of an aspect of the text, none reads the text within the context of the theory of collaboration. For instance, Jeanne Perreault argues: "Griffiths's revisiting of that time and her interactions with Campbell invite a close look at that process of coming to racial consciousness (of a sort), and offer a fuller understanding of what it might mean to name one's self 'white'" (15). Similarly, Venema states, "*The Book of 'Jessica'* can be read as the record of the way Griffiths's theatrical and enormously appropriative 'theory of the subject' was critically and fundamentally disrupted by Maria Campbell, the uniquely, inimitably, and persistently *present* 'othered subject'" (35, original emphasis). In each case, the book is analysed within the framework of the single-author paradigm and through a critical gaze which constructs a dominant Linda and an exploited Maria, privileging the experience and subjectivity of Linda. Reading the text within such a critical perspective, Maria can only ever be the resistant "other" to the *author*itative Linda.[9]

The relations of power between Linda and Maria, particularly in terms of "control" over/within *The Book of Jessica,* deserve analysis. Helen Hoy argues that "[o]riginally conceived as a full collaboration, [*The Book*] has by the time of publication fallen back under Griffiths' editorial control. So it replicates the originary Native Informant/Master Discourse model of the play itself" (26). In the title of this article, I ask "Whose story is it, anyway?" One of the tensions which informs *The Book* is a conflicting notion of ownership. For Linda, her reworking of the collaboratively written *Jessica* is characterised as her "red cloth," something of value to her which she is willing to give away (111). While the initial suggestion to write a book about the process of writing *Jessica* was made by Maria—as a possible means of catharsis following the difficult relationship she and Linda shared in creating and producing the play—the completion of *The Book* becomes Linda's mission, both as a result of Maria's unwillingness—or inability due to other commitments—to share equally the task, and because of Linda's desire to, as Maria describes it, own and control the story:

9 Pastor as well as Dibb also construct the Griffiths/Campbell relationship as oppositional.

> I started reading this manuscript and halfway through it, I thought, "Not again, I'm starting to feel angry, a sense of losing. What am I reading this for, because what I have to say is not going to make a difference anyway. She's going to do it the way she wants. She's going to make changes … and she'll do it any way she can, by crying … getting crippled up…." (67, original ellipses)

The Book of Jessica details the struggle over ownership and attribution indicative of the collaborative writing of both *Jessica* and *The Book of Jessica,* and, particularly, Paul Thompson's "process" of theatre production. While *The Book of Jessica* is co-signed, and so Maria must be assumed to have agreed to its contents, it is not collaborative in the sense that it is the product of "equal and like-minded" collaborators. As much as Maria and Linda contemplate exploitation and privilege in *The Book,* the text nonetheless reflects this unequal relationship without resolving it.

In "Spiritual Things," Linda's narrative describing the ceremony she attended with Maria is continually interrupted by Maria's angry voice reminding her of earlier warnings not to turn the ceremony into a subject for journalism. I think it is justifiable to read these passages as the dominant voice's *statement* and the *response* of the resistant voice. However, it is also important to consider the *relation* between the statement and the response. While the passage may be read as the solitary and differentiated voices of the exploiter and the exploited, the passage reflects the failure of both participants to communicate, and to even attempt to bridge the gap of cultural difference. In this first section of the book, in a number of instances when significant events are represented—for instance, Linda's "browning up" experiment and the contractual issue of whether Linda should have the right of first refusal on playing Jessica in subsequent productions—Linda speaks for Maria, paraphrasing her words. In "The Red Cloth" section, however, it is arguable that Maria's voice dominates, and although it may be presumed that Linda constructed these excerpts of dialogues and created their headings, in most cases it is Maria's voice which begins these sub-sections and so her voice which initiates their content. Speaking of the "contact zone" of the colonial encounter, Mary Louise Pratt argues that these "zones" are "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other" (4). Linda Griffiths' voice is not dominant in both "Spiritual Things" and "The Red Cloth," as Kathleen Venema claims (34). Maria and Linda both initiate conversation and interrupt one another. While there is a meeting of difference in these sections, cultural and otherwise, in the relation between Maria's state-

ments and Linda's responses, and vice versa, to what extent are the two women able to genuinely grapple with these differences, to listen and to understand?

Because it is Linda's cultural and racial identity which has been the focus of much criticism of *The Book,* I will begin my discussion of cultural difference with her before going on to discuss Maria and how the subjectivities of the two women are interdependent in the book. First, though, I want to foreground this discussion of cultural difference within collaborative writing. In one of the few collaborative articles concerning cultural difference and collaborative writing, "Beyond Feminism: An Intercultural Challenge for Transforming the Academy," Paula D. Nesbitt and Linda E. Thomas interrogate the typical North American writing relationship between a white woman and a woman of colour. Because "white culture" is dominant in North America, the woman of colour necessarily has an understanding of the "other's" culture which is not reciprocated by her white collaborator. Thomas contends that the woman of colour takes risks any time she works with a white woman and argues that the burden of self-education rests upon the white woman to understand what it means to be marginalized in a culture in which whites are dominant; in practice, however, as much as the woman of colour is collaborating, she is constantly in the position of educating the person with whom she is working (45). The participants in such a collaboration are not equal; the woman of colour is burdened with being an object of examination as much as a partner and burdened with a responsibility that should be that of the white collaborator.

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In their collection of poems, *Flesh and Paper* (1986), Suniti Namjoshi and Gillian Hanscombe use a statement-response structure in which no distinctions are made as to the "author" of lines, stanzas, poems. Emphasising in the introduction to their collection that the poems are a response to the heterosexual (male) dominance of the written word, the cultural differences between the two are largely silenced within a text which is predominantly concerned with imagining the possibilities of a lesbian utopian space. In the final section, however, "In this kind country," written after their visit to Namjoshi's nation of origin, India, their differences in cultural background are finally voiced. In "I see what I can," a speaker, presumably Hanscombe, describes the act of being a witness in a foreign place and in the final line of the poem represents her own "otherness," entering a shrine, "Untutored, unenlightened, I do not shed my shoes" (22). She is an outsider, ignorant of proper behaviour, but she places the responsibility to learn customary practice upon the "other." She does not shed her shoes

because no one told her to. In "Was it quite like that?" a speaker states: "I'm white. I'm western civilization. I'm Christendom / … I'm / barbarism: misplacing, renaming. I'm us, not them" (22, 24–25). While, in this poem, Hanscombe and Namjoshi seem to recognise that such a construction of "whiteness" is superficial and essentialized, in the collection, the impact of cultural difference on their own relationship is not confronted. Such easy constructions of "us" and "them" elide the ever ambivalent relationship between "self" and "other" as well as the ever shifting and developing positions of cultural identity.

Stuart Hall suggests that there are two ways of thinking about cultural identity. The dominant position maintains that cultural identity is fixed as a shared history and ancestry. Hall contends, however, that identity is not an essence but a positioning: "This second position recognises that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute 'what we really are'.… We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about 'one experience, one identity', without acknowledging its other side—the ruptures and discontinuities …" (394, original emphasis). In this second sense, cultural identity is a matter of "becoming" as well as "being." As in the above example of *Flesh and Paper,* Griffiths's and Campbell's treatment of their own cultural difference and critical treatments of difference in the text are largely confined to Hall's first notion of cultural identity; identity as something to know or discover.

While Jeanne Perreault, in her treatment of Linda's realisation of her "whiteness," recognises that self and other are marked by extremes of difference and conflation (16), by concentrating on Linda's raced subjectivity, she reinscribes a binary in which the white "self" is privileged and is constructed against a fixed "other." I do not mean to infer that Perreault's treatment of Linda's reflections on recognising her raced subjectivity is inaccurate. In fact, Linda's relationship with Maria forces her, for the first time, to recognize herself as racialized, "white" in relation to the Native other. While the act of examining an "other" in order to "sibyl" them on the stage was part of the "process" of improvisationally developed theatre in which Griffiths was trained, in the workshops developing *Jessica* she was confronted for the first time with examining a racial "other" and with having the subject of her examination in the room during the improvs. She writes of the discomfort of this experience: "Every time I'd go at all that Native stuff I'd be cringing inside. To have the 'subject' in the room, plus, they're Native and I'm as white as the driven snow, the clouds on the prairie, whatever. I mean, it's outrageous when I think about it" (*Book* 33).

Ross Chambers argues that one's racial subjectivity is a matter of context and since "whites" are dominant in North America, they have the privilege of normalcy and of being the examiner rather than the examined (142). In the explicit examination of the "other"/Maria during the development of the play, Griffiths is confronted for the first time with her whiteness, specifically in terms of a history of white dominance in Canada. In *The Book of Jessica* she remembers the guilt that accompanied this recognition. Recalling to Maria their visits to Native communities, Linda states: "To visit reservations and see people sitting like that in front of these falling down pay-off houses, to see their faces and know my people had done this to them … the shame of it, the shock" (37). The relationship between Linda and Maria during the "process" of creating *Jessica* fits the Nesbitt and Thomas paradigm of the non-white collaborator having to educate her white counterpart. In this case, Linda's "sibyling" of her Native collaborator exposes ever more clearly the appropriation inherent in the act, and the history of exploitation and injustice of which she is a part due to her race. Linda recognizes her "whiteness" in terms of a racial inheritance, or a group-based identity that is primarily historical, rather than as a sign of her privilege in Canadian society and power in her relationship with Maria.

However, it is not simply Maria's presence as racial "other" that allows Linda to recognise her own racialized subjectivity. Throughout *The Book of Jessica,* Campbell assumes and articulates a conception of identity confined to race and heritage. In discussing the idea of white people as "ghosts" Maria criticises those who take part in ceremonies, such as Orange parades, without taking the responsibility to understand the origins and significance of the rite (*Book* 96). In her critique of Western feminist scholarship as colonial discourse, Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues that constructions of relations between men and women within the juridico-discursive model of power critiqued by Michel Foucault "[lock] all revolutionary struggles into binary structures" and assumes, in the context of her argument, that women are a homogeneous group or category, also known as "the oppressed" (213). While Campbell does recognise the importance of being responsible in learning cultural history, it is this history which defines the subject, and it is a history fixed within a binary of oppressor and oppressed: "How can you help them, when you refuse to recognize your history?" she asks Linda. "Once you recognize that you were robbed, then you have a place to begin" (98). In contrast, Stuart Hall contends that "[f]ar from being grounded in mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves

into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (394). For *both* Griffiths and Campbell the other is always already "other." There is Linda/White and there is Maria/Native.

Despite their close relationship in producing the play, in Maria's and in Linda's eyes, the other is always a member of "them." Maria says to Linda: "Then I'd be defending *you* to my friends saying, 'You think *they* stole from us, *our* strength, *our* culture, the mother, all of it, but look what *they* stole from her. She never got any of that teaching, not like we did, it happened to *us* only a hundred years ago, it happened to *them* thousands of years ago'" (*Book* 70, emphasis added). Maria is attempting to make a connection between her group cultural experience and Linda's heritage as Welsh, a group exploited and oppressed by the English, but a group with which Linda does not identify herself. Rather, as I have discussed above, Linda associates herself with the "oppressor." The innocence and purity which mask Linda's naiveté and ignorance is symbolised in the figure of the Virgin Mary. Yet, while Maria wishes to mark Linda as oppressed due to her Welsh ancestry, it is Maria who names Linda the Virgin Mary. Maria says of Linda: "She always looked like the Virgin Mary, passive, a blank look in her eyes, smiling, she never stopped smiling, smiled so much I just wanted to smack her and smack her so she'd stop that smiling.… She walked around like a missionary, begging for something with one hand—give it to me, tell me about it …" (*Book* 15). The image of the Virgin Mary is a metonym for the oppression of Native peoples by Europeans and by the dominant culture in contemporary Canada, and so being associated with this image, Linda becomes little more than a metonym for the oppressive "other."

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Similarly, however, Linda envisions Native peoples as a homogeneous group representable through the image of the spiritual. Having had lunch with a group of Native people, Linda describes the same people, as they prepare for a ceremony, as "utterly different.… They were now what I imagined 'Native' to be. They were powerful, about to be in the presence of the spirits" (27). This idealisation of the spiritual nature of Native peoples leads Linda to envision the play as necessarily about Native spirituality, though in these dialogues Maria states that the play was not supposed to be about Native spirituality but about a woman seeking balance as she struggles with two cultures (17). Throughout the excerpted conversations, these alternate understandings of the purpose of the play are revealed, but these differences in understanding are never dealt with. In the text, the women describe the process of making *Jessica* and reflect upon this

process, but the barriers which limited their understanding during the production of the play remain.

Each recognises the other as an "other"—Native or White—and for each, the individual characteristics and experiences of the other are conflated with the group to which she belongs. While Linda seems to idealise Native culture and to interpret her experiences with Maria and other Native participants in the process through the lens of these expectations, to her, the personal experiences Maria shares become the experience of all Native peoples. Reflecting upon the weeks she spent "studying" Maria, Linda states: "Then I saw your culture, and it was like a treasure chest opening up, and the maniac romantic in me just dived up to my elbows" (85). While "Native culture" informs the play, *Jessica* is ostensibly the acting out of a series of traumas based upon Maria's experiences of rape, prostitution, drug-addiction and domestic abuse; a story about the experiences of a particular "Métis woman" becomes necessarily a story (only) about Native suffering.[10] Whether the play is the story of a fictional Native woman or the autobiography of Maria is confused by both the participants and the play's critics, alike. Associating identity with cultural heritage, Maria says to Linda: "I figured you'd know more than me about your history, where you came from, and that we'd exchange. It took me ages to realize that you didn't know about that stuff, and then I was appalled" (36). The preoccupations of both women with group identity, both their own and the other's, precludes a recognition of the other, Maria as Maria, Linda as Linda and the way in which their gendered, racialized and class identities inform power and privilege within their relationship.

The origin of the relationship between Maria and Linda—and Paul Thompson—is the hope for an "exchange." Maria was to share her experiences and knowledge, her "bag of goodness knows what" (16), in order to create a play about a Native woman, and in return she would receive skills in play-writing. Although Linda lists the barriers which separate her from Maria, including race, class, culture, social work, political work, and the street, among others she is not aware of (21), the reading of Maria's life as (only) Native *culture,* the "colonising" impetus of Paul Thompson's "process," and Maria's own expectations of Linda's identity as (only) *cultural* heritage, limit the possibilities for a genuine and equal exchange in the way envisioned by theories of collaborative writing. Maria says to Linda:

10 While Maria is of Métis heritage and does refer to her white ancestry in *The Book of Jessica,* the character Jessica and consequently Maria as well are characterized as Native.

"the first time it was your job, you were the actress, or whatever, and it was set up for me to give you all my stuff, and for you to.... But why did we go so far? And what about now? Why are you doing this, what's in it for you? It can't just be one way anymore Linda, you have to show me something" (72, original ellipses). While the process they talk about in *The Book of Jessica* may be represented, with certain limitations, within the coloniser/colonised, centre/margin paradigm, the act of conversing alters the power relationship of such a paradigm.

Before turning to how Maria and Linda, because of their differences, are intimately interconnected, I would like to underscore the conflict of which Maria and Linda speak and which shapes their discussions throughout the book. Recalling their first meeting, Linda calls Maria "quiet and dignified," and continues: "She had the kind of energy that turned me into an enthusiastic cheerleader, full of excited questions and a terror of silence." To this, Maria responds: "She didn't know that I was totally freaked out by her, I was scared to open my mouth for fear I'd say something stupid.... When I think of her thinking of me as dignified and quiet, it sounds so romantic.... I wonder how many people know it's just better sometimes to be quiet for fear you'll appear the fool" (19). Unlike many other collaborative works, both critical and creative, which focus upon similarities and, whether monovocal or dialogical, speaking "together," this text is punctuated with anger, hurt and the unwillingness or inability to share. While these prejudices about, and lack of understanding of, the other seem understandable in the early part of a relationship, such a gap of understanding is revealed throughout the book. During the making of *Jessica* such moments of misunderstanding led to the desire for violence, or actual physical conflict. In recalling an incident during rehearsals, Linda states: "with all the racial tension in the air, I was afraid it would appear racist if I said what I felt." To this, Maria remembers: "That was when I tried to hit you with my cowboy boot.... I think it was Paul that pulled me off, maybe it was Tantoo" (50–51). On a couple of occasions, Maria suggests that a letter she wrote to Linda but never mailed be included in the text. It was written after Linda sent her the rewritten playscript of *Jessica* and it expressed her anger that Linda had taken the liberty of undertaking such a project alone. Linda refuses to read the letter.

Similarly, as the process of making *Jessica* is described, Maria is continually frustrated with Linda's failure to fulfil the exchange. Lamenting that Linda did not bring her own "spiritual stuff" to the rehearsals, Linda responds: "I did, but mine turned out to be ... theatrical" (37, original ellipses). In their discussion of the possibilities for communication and

connection between people of diverse backgrounds, Maria Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman state: "It would seem that if the outsider wants you to understand how she sees you and you have given your account of how you see yourself to her, there is a possibility of genuine dialogue between the two. It also seems that the lack of reciprocity could bar genuine dialogue" (577). The tension which permeates the text, however, reveals the lack of a genuine exchange between the two, a failure of reciprocity which is symbolised by their failure, at the time of the event and in its telling, to literally "come to terms," to formulate a contract concerning the play.

The conversations of *The Book of Jessica,* however, reveal a collaborative interdependence or intimate connection that is marked by difference rather than harmony.

The conversations of *The Book of Jessica,* however, reveal a collaborative interdependence or intimate connection that is marked by difference rather than harmony; their collaboration reveals the interdependence of subjects within a structure of unequal power rather than the "merging" of individual subjectivities. Maria's and Linda's argument over whether to include the description of the ceremony in the text, to which I referred above, concludes with a breakthrough:

> **Linda** You're saying, "You wanted something," and I'm saying, "Then respect that I wanted something," and you're saying, "Then respect the something you wanted."
>
> **Maria** How about that, she finally heard me. (30)

Mutually acknowledged moments of understanding, like this, are few in the text. In their conversations—the "relation between the statements and responses"—however, they are able to articulate their differences. In one of the more significant of these conversations, Maria and Linda are able to depart briefly from the self-absorbed voices which dominate in the text by speaking through, at least for a moment, the voice of a symbolic character developed for the play, Wolverine. Discussing her rewriting of *Jessica* and her desire for both Maria's feedback and her blessing, Linda characterises herself as Wolverine and so, to share her feelings about the act, Maria responds, using Wolverine's voice. She communicates that she believes Linda has attempted to perform an act of colonisation, justifying her appropriation by saying, "I came along and took what you were wasting and I made something productive out of it" (80). Here, Linda and Maria depart from the I/You, Self/Other binary which dominates their discussions by inhabiting a shared identity, that of Wolverine. Although this conversation does not lead to a mutually recognised resolution, it does reveal that despite the conflicts which arise from "difference," the existence of the play and the book reflects the interdependence of the two women.

While their interdependence is that of a relationship of distinctly unequal power relations, as I will argue below, *The Book of Jessica* reveals the ambivalence of these relations of power and the way in which Maria's and Linda's "differences" allow for opportunities of "seeing" not possible in models of collaboration in which the ideal is the merging of authorial subjectivities. Linda's and Maria's collaboration does not resemble the prominent feminist collaborations which have been the focus of the theory of collaborative writing. It does not fit Alm's paradigm of an "intimate collaboration." Nonetheless, I wish to characterise *The Book of Jessica* as an act of love. Maria says to Linda, "we're stuck to each other like Siamese twins ..." and Linda replies, "I know, Maria, I know ..." (64). This love then is not that of the "lovemaking" metaphor of collaboration discussed above; nor is it the redemptive love to which bell hooks and Cornell West are committed as a practice, which they announce in the dedication to their collection of dialogues, *Breaking Bread: Insurgent Black Intellectual Life* (1991). Yet, in the emotion of its content and the trauma of its telling, *The Book of Jessica* reveals a connection between its collaborators not evident, or not recognized, in other collaborative works.

The nature of the improvisational "process" of theatre devised by Paul Thompson, and utilised in the creation of *Jessica* requires the actor, in this case Linda, to "sibyl" the "other"; to examine, to act out, to appropriate the voice of the other. Colonial relations of power, however, are never as straightforward and one-way as the coloniser/colonised construction; in other words, the discursive will to power of the coloniser is always already disrupted and the relations of power between the coloniser and colonised are, to use Homi K. Bhabha's term, "ambivalent." Pratt argues that in studying the "contact zone" of the colonial encounter, one must treat relations of coloniser and colonised "not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power" (7). Consequently, readings of *The Book of Jessica* which postulate Linda Griffiths' dominance, especially in the context of the theatrical "process," are legitimate, yet problematic. The act of conversing, and the fact that the product of their labour reflects its process, reveals the copresence and interaction of the two women and, therefore, the ambivalence of their positions within a colonial paradigm, as well. While Paul Thompson's "process" may be understood as an inherently exploitative act in which a subject (Linda) desires/has the power to study and construct an object (Maria), in the practice of the "process," Linda's subjectivity should not be privileged nor her "power over" Maria assumed.

Maria is not (only) the "other" against which Linda constructs her subjectivity. Rather, the nature of the "process" of creating *Jessica*—the shifting and tense relations of power between Griffiths and Campbell—reveal in *The Book of Jessica* individual subjectivities which are interdependent. In *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World* (1990), Michael Holquist compares the pronoun "I" with the single "eye" of the fates in Greek mythology: "In order to have her own vision, each must use the means by which the others see … in order to see ourselves, we must appropriate the vision of others" (28). Similarly, in her treatment of *The Book of Jessica,* Susanna Egan cites Ong as suggesting that in oral cultures, the self is only visible through the eyes of others (18). Much of the conflict and tension articulated in *The Book of Jessica* derives from the recognition of subjectivity, one's own identity, through the gaze. Each is an aspect of the other's "surplus of seeing," so through their interaction they are able to share this surplus; they see something of themselves not otherwise visible or knowable. In other words "Linda" and "Maria" become intimately connected through the I/eye.

Maria's frustration with, and anger towards, Linda derives from witnessing Linda step upon the stage to perform Maria/Jessica. On one level, Linda's "sibyling" of Maria is very much an act of appropriation, the white woman examining the woman of colour and "stealing" her voice, representing her. Maria, however, is distressed by this performance because in Linda she sees herself: "[D]o you realize how appalled I was at myself when I heard you say those things? You were playing back my own self-hatred. I was making a joke about something that really hurt me and when Jessica said those things she was so flip, and I'd think, 'How could I say something like that?'" (31). While Maria goes on to contend that this self-hatred is a result of white oppression, it is a white woman, Linda, who enables Maria to see herself. Maria's subjectivity as Native is defined against the white Linda; she comes to a sense of herself through the other. Yet, in these moments—or "contact zones"—in which Linda performs on the stage, the "other" reflects the "self," the gaze of the eye allows the "I" to be seen.

Similarly, what Linda's eye sees alters her. She writes, for instance, that years after the production of the play she recognises the earth as a being rather than a thing and feels a kinship with Native peoples (57). Having Maria in the room, watching her every movement, makes Linda ever-conscious in her performance that she does not share the experiences of the woman she is "performing"; she is not the "I" of the "eye." While the experience of "sibyling" Maria upon the stage alters her world-view, it also leads her to recognise herself: "I was battering against a stubborn, rebellious, self-hating character who was struggling with her own power.

It was Maria, of course, or Jessica. It never occured to me, not for years, that it was me" (31). Like Maria, the intimate relationship of the "eye" with the "I" allows Linda to confront her own subjectivity. Carol Singley and Susan Sweeney suggest that "[i]f one's voice exists only in dialogue with other voices, then it is impossible to conceive of the self except in relation to others" (68). For Linda and Maria, however, the self is not simply known in relation to the "other," but *in connection to* that other. "Self" and "other" then become interconnected and interdependent in a way that is not accounted for in a critical approach to the text which constructs the relationship as only exploitative, Maria only an object. Although in the text itself, the individual subjectivities of the collaborators—the "Linda" and "Maria"—are clearly demarcated, in the telling of their story, the story of the making of a play and a story of self-realisation, the signs of their individual subjectivities are much less secure. To return to Pratt's argument that within the "contact zone" copresence and interaction should be privileged over separateness, in the statements and responses of Maria's and Linda's dialogues their *differences* are revealed, but in the relation between their utterances their *difference* may be explored.

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In discussing their own collaborations, Joyce Elbrecht and Lydia Fakundiny describe the world of their collaborations as neither one's nor the other's: "the 'I' stretching—extending—to the place of the other, the place where the other is also 'I,' as though 'you' were somehow bypassed in the process—or, overpassed, like a gap across which 'I' always extend myself to 'I'" (249). Similarly, Darlene Dralus and Jen Shelton trouble the distinction between "I" and "you," self and other. For these writers, women collaborating on a work about their experiences of childhood sexual abuse, refuse to be "reduced to a seamless whole, either of us, let alone the two of us" (23), and question the composition of their collaboration: "Is it 'I' and 'I' who make up this 'we'? Or is it 'I' and 'you,' and if so, who is the 'I' and who is the 'you'?" (30). "I" and "you" seem to dominate *The Book of Jessica* rather than one or the other of the collaborators. And in this collaboration, so often this relationship is adversarial: "I" versus "you."

Throughout this article I have been tentative about using third person plural pronouns—though such pronouns seem to have emerged in the last few pages—as I see the relationship between Linda and Maria as together-yet-apart. At times, however, both women refer to themselves in the third person. Linda writes, "I want to write about 'her.' A 'her' who was an actress and an improvisor and a kind of adventurer who stumbled into something more profound, more terrifying, more personal and more political than anything else she ever wanted to know" (13). Speaking of the effect on her

of making *Jessica,* Maria, too, recognises herself through the third person pronoun: "[I]t all confused me, shook up my easy theories, and I ended up with fears and uncertainties I thought I had already dealt with. I had to deal with 'her' and she wasn't easy" (32). Perhaps then, this allows me a way of dealing with Maria and Linda at the same time and avoiding having to privilege one voice over the other. The experience they share in *The Book of Jessica* forces both to regard themselves not as "I" but with the "eye," to recognise themselves from the outside**.** For Maria and Linda, collaboration cannot be a merging of their subjectivities; their differences, and the unequal relations of power these differences are embedded in, do not allow it. Yet, the *Book of Jessica* is nonetheless an example of collaboration, an example of another sort of intimacy.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Lorraine York for her guidance and support during the writing of this article.

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