see a useful American study that includes reference to Canadian works, fiction that shares with American sources the portrayal of a common feminine experience, the settlement of the west.

Helen M. Buss  
Department of English  
University of Manitoba


Historical and cultural research is an intimate process for those Métis people who sift through archival collections and dusty documents for fragments of our past. It is a treasure hunt which occasionally yields legal ammunition for the ongoing political discussions with the federal government or a document signed one hundred years ago that has signatures from your own community. The faces that stare out from photographs taken in the nineteenth century are often startlingly familiar, with features that can still be seen on the faces of our children. Our history also lives for us in the stories that seem so vivid. There was an old man from Fort Qu’Appelle who remembered his parents crying on the day that Louis Riel died. A woman told my husband about his grandmother’s family coming across the Missouri to settle in the Qu’Appelle valley. The old uncle who had told her remembered crossing the Missouri hanging on to the tail of a horse. I love being able to take those stories and match them with information gathered through more conventional sources. It is a highly personal search and it is because of this intimacy that *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America* came as an abrupt change.

The book’s fourteen contributors approach their subject with a scholarly distance that is somewhat disconcerting. As Marcel Giraud, Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer Brown point out, Métis peoples have only recently become an object of scholarly curiosity and we are unused to being examined with such scrutiny. Having one’s origins described with words such as “hybridization” and “métissage” made me feel somewhat like an exotic breed of cattle or a new strain of wheat. To add to my discomfort, the authors disposed of our upper case “M” which rankled my nationalistic hackles as it would no doubt do to Canadians of French or British ancestry. However, as I was drawn into the book I became more and more interested. By the time I put it down, I was convinced that this is one of the most significant books written about the Métis in recent years.

There are several reasons for considering this book to be a literary landmark of sorts. The most important is that this book finally departs from an endless fascination with the political struggles of the Métis, the character of Louis Riel and a research focus that emphasizes a mere twenty years in a four-hundred-year history. The book also lays to rest four per-
stistent misconceptions which have seriously limited and restricted the teaching and writing which have become part of several university programmes: the Métis as a prairie phenomenon, the Métis as a Canadian phenomenon, the supposed division between the French-speaking Métis and Scots half-breeds, and the Red River Settlement as a Métis Garden of Eden. The contributions in this book highlight the diversity and complexity which has so often been glossed over in a preamble to the political events that made Canadian history. The research surfaced in this very credible book will do much to improve the quality of future writing and study.

Although the overall quality of each contribution is very good, several are of particular interest. The rich detail in Olive Dickason's "From 'One Nation' in the Northeast to 'New Nation' in the Northwest: A look at the emergence of the métis" and Jacqueline Peterson's "Many roads to Red River: Métis genesis in the Great Lakes region, 1680-1815" will provide others with the incentive to delve into the early beginnings. Irene Spry, in "The métis and mixed-bloods of Rupert's Land before 1870" describes what the Métis community has always known, that people of Scots and French ancestry have always intermarried and shared a common community. She describes the divisions which existed between groups more accurately and with greater insight than previous authors. The late Verne Dusenberry's moving account of the American Métis of Montana, John Long's discussion of the fur trade families of northeastern Ontario, and Trudy Nicks and Kenneth Morgan's description of the evolution of the people of Grande Cache, Alberta, create a solid impression of diversity and broaden the usual focus on the Prairies. "What if Mama is an Indian?": The cultural ambivalence of the Alexander Ross family, "Sylvia Van Kirk's contribution, describes an experience that is still common today. Many first generation half-breeds and adopted or foster children can identify with James Ross's personal difficulties of over one hundred years ago. Severe identity problems are still encountered by children who are raised with negative attitudes towards their "Indianness."

The book shares one weakness with the greater body of writing available on the Métis. There are only two contributions on cultural life. "In search of métis art" by Ted Brasser is an overview of his pioneer efforts in the identification of artifacts of Métis manufacture in museum collections which have done much to gain acceptance and recognition for the unique stylistic heritage of Métis art. John Crawford's article describes linguistic developments.

In a more general sense, the editors have done an excellent job of coordinating and organizing such diverse contributions. Many such collections lack the coherence and consistent development of theme and idea that is found in this book. Each contribution builds on those previous and follows in a natural sequence. The documentation that follows each chapter makes the book a worthwhile investment for anyone interested in follow-
ing the authors into this broader, more diverse approach to the research of Métis people. The illustrations, maps and colour plates enrich the book and increase its value to the serious student. Several of these have never been published before. Of special interest are Victor Lytwyn and Connie Peterson’s maps which outline settlement patterns across North America.

This book will be an important addition to any collection. My only caution to other readers is to remember that we are real people who are here now, not just an historical phenomenon to be analysed. With the exception of Dusenberry’s “Waiting for a day that never comes: The dispossessed métis of Montana,” this book will not often give you a sense of us. Perhaps that is why, in spite of its wealth of valuable information, parts of it are mildly offensive. Yet, I will use my copy often. Several chapters have already set new directions for my own research and teaching. It is a resource, a reference book; not a portrait or a family album.

Sherry Farrell Racette
Gabriel Dumont Institute
Regina


Publishers of original records and documents confront new and difficult problems when they turn their attention from earlier eras to recent events. In earlier centuries, the makers of history recorded their thoughts and secrets in private diaries, recounted their travels in remarkable journals, and wrote treatises on public affairs in forceful letters. No one would deny the delights of Pepys, the usefulness of Greville, the fascinations in Hearne. And, whatever one’s opinion of Sir John A. Macdonald or W.C. Van Horne, one must admire the lucidity of their analyses and the strength of their opinions as expressed in their vast daily correspondence. But what happens to these sources in our century? As this volume makes plain (and such exceptions as the Mackenzie King diaries prove the rule), the state becomes one of the most fertile sources of the written word. What a tragedy for the reader: “In reply I beg to inform”; “upon receipt of the evidence asked for within twenty days from this date”; “enclosed herewith is a copy of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulations in which provision is made for the manner in which application shall be made for a lease of...” — this is not the stuff to speed the pulse. When W.S. Herron, the beleaguered champion of this volume, achieved a great victory, the moment was revealed in an Interior Department memo:

As a very large expenditure in boring operations appears to have been incurred on Mr. Herron’s locations, and as he would appear to have been one of the pioneers in petroleum development in Alberta, I think the Department might be justified in accepting the expenditure shown to have been incurred in boring operations on these locations as satisfaction of the rental for the second and third years of the term of the leases above enumerated, and applying such payments as have been made in cash on account of the rental for succeeding years, and in