Women of the Dawn. By Bunny McBride. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1999. 160 pages. $25.00 cloth; $11.95 paper.

Combining psychological and anthropological interpretations of historical records and fictional speculations, *Women of the Dawn* tells the stories of four Wabanaki women called Molly. The first, Molly Mathilde (Marie Mathilde), lived during a major portion of the tumultuous era of the French-English conflict over self-appropriated seizures of First People lands and resources and the fourth, Molly Dellis (Mary Alice Nelson Archambaud), born at the turn of the past century lived long enough to witness the Civil Rights era. The fourth Molly was also the subject of author Bunny McBride's earlier biography, *Molly Spotted Elk: A Penobscot in Paris.* The other two Mollys, Molly Ockett (Marie Agathe) and Molly Molasses (Mary Pelagie) lived during the 1700s and 1800s. McBride attempts to illustrate how two lifelong experiences shared by the four Mollies from the mid 1600s through the late 1970s—the impact of Euro-American colonization and the breakdown of traditional Wabanaki culture—shaped the women's personalities and consequent behavior, in particular their resilience.

More attention to the lives and contributions of American Indian women is needed by sociologists, anthropologists, feminists, political scientists, and other scholars and is of growing interest to a lay audience. Written in a clear manner, easily accessible to lay audiences, *Women of the Dawn* adds another voice to the scientific and lay audience literatures.

Appealing to a larger audience than a scientific audience alone is a worthwhile endeavor and, for the most part, McBride succeeds when presenting historical materials such as her descriptions of the French and English conflict and wars. The author also acknowledges the need for culturally sensitive interpretations of American Indian life yet she often fails to meet her objective. Recognizing postmodern critiques of works about American Indians, in particular women, the author decries one-dimensional images of American Indian women (p. 3) although she opens her the novel/biography with an Indian-princess description of the fourth Molly who is described as "regal," an Eurocentric image. In addition, McBride's fixation on royalty is apparent throughout her short book. Physical images and Eurocentric values combined with psychological reductionism results in a biographical book that is often only one step above a mass-produced romance novel.

McBride gives each Mollys life a short chapter, a literary device which, of course, was partially shaped by the paucity of historical records about the first three women but leaves many questions unanswered. Using an Eurocentric psychological paradigm, McBride attempts to answer some of the questions about how each of the four women could have responded to both personal and cultural loss. However, the interpretations are sometimes trite, condescending, and/or melodramatic. A telling example is found in the scene illustrating how Molly Mathilde may have reacted to the news of her nine-year-old son's death in 1701. The author describes her running blindly through the woods, weeping, praying, and then wondering where his soul might be, in the Wabanaki spirit world or in a Christian heaven. Since Molly was brought up

in the Wabanaki world, she was not apt to run "blindly" through any woods. And as any parent who has lost a child to an untimely death, especially one where the parent is not present, knows, one is so stunned and so shocked that there is initially little physical activity. Finally, given the inclusive nature of American Indian spiritualities and the intelligence of Molly, she undoubtedly was not emotionally struggling over the fate of her son's soul albeit Eurocentric Christians, including her husband, may have found this question to be a psychological issue.

Value judgments about indigenous cultural mores and customs are often implied through the loaded connotations of adjectives and nouns. One example is found in the use of the adjective *extravagant* to describe the wedding feast given for the marriage of Molly Mathilde to Jean Vincent de St. Castin (p. 23). Traditional feasts are an enactment of the indigenous values of generosity and sharing rather than an indicator of extremism or wastefulness as indicated by McBride's puritanical use of the word *extravagant.* In another example, Molly Ockett, who lived between approximately 1740 and 1816 is pictured as stepping "gingerly" onto slick rocks as she left her canoe (p. 52). She would have proceeded carefully or even cautiously but she would have not stepped forth in the "ladylike" manner of an overprotected, upper-class white woman. Molly Molasses (circa 1775–1867) is repeatedly described as bitter, an adjective that glosses over and minimizes her great pain over the loss of Wabanaki culture and her heroic efforts to preserve remnants of that way of life.

The role of traditional women as bridge leaders who had major behind-the-scenes power is never recognized. In an extremely problematic interpretation, the first woman, Molly Mathilde, is presented as having no say in the decisions about warfare (p. 27) or other important social and political decisions. Her only influence would not have been found in the bedroom as implied in Molly Molasses' story (see, for instance, p. 81). The first Molly is also portrayed as having "no reference point" when her husband died in France (p. 35). A woman brought up in the traditional manner as she had been would have known that her compass point was not dependent upon one man nor were her accomplishments to be judged primarily on her relationship to him. Finally, but not the last telling example of the use of loaded descriptors is the choice of the anthropological concept of magic to describe medicine ways.

The author had access to a great deal of data about the last Molly's life yet without acknowledgement of the often unwarranted use of this 1948 diagnosis for American Indians, she uncritically accepted an Eurocentric diagnosis of "'Schizophrenia, Paranoid type'" (p. 95) for Molly Dellis who had suffered a lifetime of sexual and cultural discrimination, institutional racism and sexism, and the untimely death of her much beloved husband. Molly was apparently suffering from post traumatic stress syndrome, yet McBride never examines this very real possibility and how the diagnosis of schizophrenia could have only added to her suffering rather than facilitating the resolution of her grief and traumatization. In the end, the reader of *Women of the Dawn* is left with an image of four rather pitiful women who are psychologically impaired rather than amazingly resilient given the degree of ethnic stress each woman survived, usually with great dignity.

McBride's work is groundbreaking in its efforts to make American Indian women's life stories accessible to both academic and lay audiences. Its major shortcomings could be used as a starting point by a writer who is comfortably bicultural to provide a more sensitive and realistic historical, cultural, and personal portrayal of Wabanaki women.

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