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Review of *Outside Looking In: Viewing First Nations Peoples in Canadian Dramatic Television Series* by
Mary Jane Miller

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Outside Looking In: Viewing First Nations Peoples in Canadian Dramatic Television Series. By Mary Jane Miller. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2008. x + 492 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index, C\$95.00 cloth, C\$32.95 paper.

Mary Jane Miller sets out to answer the question “What are the stories that we tell and show to ourselves about Aboriginal peoples?” The strength of her book lies in its breadth—in particular, the timeframe she chose, spanning the past fifty years, for investigating the portrayal of Aboriginal peoples on Canadian television. As a result, she provides a comprehensive overview of dramatic children and adult series, from *Radisson* to *Forest Rangers* and *The Beachcombers*, describing characters, themes, and topics in great detail. Her key point is that these series have mostly been produced from the “outside looking in.” In other words, stories have been told from the dominant culture’s point of view and, consequently, too often through a lens of stereotypes and prejudice. In recent years, however, with dramatic series such as *The Rez* and *North of 60*, many important themes—from culture clashes to questions of identity and cultural appropriation—have found their way into dramatic story lines. This is partly due to Aboriginal cultural advisers working together with writers of television drama, but also as a result of a slow, gradual shift toward increasing awareness and self-reflexivity in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Yet *Outside Looking In* would benefit from clearly situating programs in the political-economic context that defines media production in Canada. First, where Miller maps out in great detail narrative complexities of individual episodes, she does not fully address the limitations of the television medium itself, its circumscribed character due to commercial imperatives and public service mandate (i.e., Canadian Broadcasting Corporation), which delimit themes and topics to only an acceptable spectrum of choices in order neither to offend advertisers nor to incite political fall-outs. Second, digital film and video opened

the space for many independent Aboriginal productions from the “inside out” during the 1990s. A more detailed discussion of these important contributions by Aboriginal and Inuit creators, in particular documentaries and film (e.g., *Atanarjuat, the Fast Runner*), would have further enriched Miller’s analysis.

Overall, Miller convincingly shows that dramatic representations of Aboriginals on Canadian television have significantly changed over the decades. In particular, important issues relating to Dene, Coast Salish, Anishinabe, and other Aboriginal communities were reframed and shown from new, different angles. The attention she pays

to the full cycle of production—including increasing audience interactivity (on program-related Web sites, for instance)—leads to greater understanding of how the series under discussion were received and possibly influenced by audiences and critics. Finally, Miller’s accessible and engaging writing style opens *Outside Looking In* to a wide readership interested in the area of Aboriginal media and representation.

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