

Rhea Côté Robbins, ed. *Heliotrope: French Heritage Women Create*. Brewer, ME: Rheta Press, 2015. 340 pp. ISBN: 978-0-9668536-5-0.

Reviewed by
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Being of both Franco-American and Native-American descent and having grown up in New England, this reviewer found Rhea Côté Robbins' *Heliotrope: French Heritage Women Create*, on a personal level, a particularly meaningful collection of poems, essays, articles, short stories, photographs, and images. From a professional standpoint, it is a much-needed anthology that very adeptly draws attention to the little-heard, long-neglected, and often misunderstood voices of Franco-Americans, most especially Franco-American women. Produced as a means of celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the Franco-American Women's Institute (FAWI), this anthology showcases the present, active, diverse, and creative lives of over 130 women of French heritage and establishes connections for all who take an interest in understanding better the complexities of Franco-American culture.

Heliotrope is comprised of fifteen sections: Family/Testimony – *Famille/Témoignage* (in which Annie Proulx's "A Yard of Cloth" kicks off the collection); Foremothers/Heroines – *Aïeules/Héroïnes*; Truth Telling – *Dire la vérité*; Home/House – *Chez nous/Maison*; Occupation – *Travail*; Language – *Langue*; New Voices, Lost and Found Stories – *Nouvelles voix, Histoires perdues et trouvées*; Coming of Age – *Passage*; History – *Histoire*; Border – *La frontière*; Nature/Seasons – *Nature/Saisons*; Acadians/Cajuns – *Acadiennes/Cajuns*; Spirituality – *Spiritualité*; Heal/Healing/War – *Guérir/Guérison/Guerre*; and, Creativity – *La Créativité*. With such a rich assortment of creative works, both written and visual, there truly is something for everyone as the voices of women who identify themselves as Franco-American hail from France, Quebec, Acadia, New England, Louisiana and many other American states. The authors are Franco-American by birth, by marriage, by proximity, or from having come before the first French settlers in the New World, as is the case with the Métis, who were part Native American and part French, born out of the intermarriages between the Native American women and the French explorers (e.g. "Chasing Molly – Irene Bedard" by Colin W. Sargent). The vast majority of the contributions are written in English but there are still quite a few written in French (e.g., Ida Bourgoïn Roy's poem, "Trente ans Une Chose Spéciale M'appartiens "TON NOM"" or the poem "Les Feuilles" by Adèle

Saint-Pierre). While many of the contributions are written in English, there is a sprinkling of expressions in them that are rendered in French so as to reflect the reality of Franco-American culture and history. For example, Lisa Desjardins Michaud's short story "Ma Vie" depicts perfectly the situation when a child was caught between the language of one's parents, which was not considered to be "correct" French, and the English language used at school:

I am originally from the beautiful St. John Valley, a small town in Northern Maine called Van Buren. I was born there and lived there until the age of thirty. Born to French-speaking parents, in a French-speaking community. I spoke mostly French until the age of five when I started school. From then on I spoke mostly English, we were told that the French we spoke was not the "correct" French. My mother always insisted that we speak French, and that it was important to retain our mother tongue. After all, my grandparents who lived two houses from us spoke mostly French and understood very little English. In our household we spoke a mixture of both, French and English. My parents spoke to us in French, we replied in English. Everyone living in our small community communicated in a mixture of both ... it was not uncommon to hear someone say, "*On va prendre une ride au town,*" or "*On mange de la cake.*" And oh, how I love to hear that *mélange* of self-expression when I return home, it just warms the heart! (163)

In short, each contribution provides a heartfelt and insightful perspective and is rendered in a manner in keeping with Franco-American culture.

In conclusion, *Heliotrope* bursts with sensitivity to the plight of Franco-American women and their efforts to preserve their culture. The contributions are so rich in meaning that they can be read and enjoyed multiple times. Côté Robbins undertook a monumental task of assembling all these women's contributions and succeeded in producing an anthology that renders homage and justice to these women while substantiating the relevance of the French language in the United States and its importance to American culture and history.