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Who is Inadian enough? : The Problem of Authenticity in Contemporary Canadian and American Gone Indian Stories

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WHO IS INDIAN ENOUGH?

The Problem of Authenticity in Contemporary Canadian and American Gone Indian Stories

White man knows that he is an alien and he knows that North America is Indian—and he will never let go of the Indian image because he thinks that by some clever manipulation he can achieve an authenticity that cannot ever be his.

Vine Deloria Jr. 'American Fantasy'

Readers of Canadian literature may recognize the presence of what Margaret Atwood has called the 'Grey Owl Syndrome' (Atwood, 1995: 35–61) often addressed in post-colonial writing.¹ One discerns a similar trend in American literature as well. However, interdisciplinary critical attention devoted to the problem of transculturation, its background, process and impact so far has been limited. There are well-known treatises on playing (the white man's) Indian, for instance by Robert Berkhofer, James Clifton, Terry Goldie and Daniel Francis. Powerful Native-born cultural critics like Philip J. Deloria and Ward Churchill approached the topic from ethnic and political perspectives. The Canadian John Berry has explored ethnic change from a cross-cultural psychological perspective

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1. For instance, in Robert Kroetsch's ironic *Gone Indian* (1973) or Armand Ruffo's wonderful long verse entitled *Grey Owl: the Mystery of Archibald Belaney* (1996), the postmodern deconstruction and retelling of Archie Belaney/Grey Owl's shape-shifter life, based on Belaney's autobiographical fictions, including *The Men of the Last Frontier* (1931), *Pilgrims of the Wild* (1934) or the *Tales of an Empty Cabin* (1936) and Lovat Dickson's *Half-Breed—The Story of Grey Owl (Wa-Sha-Quon-Asin)* (1939) and *Wilderness Man: The Strange Story of Grey Owl* (1973).

which I have also adopted—along with other psychological approaches—in my extended studies.² However, the problem of authenticity and authentication in the transculturation presented by literary texts has not yet been given the critical attention it merits.

Among other critics, Deloria claims that authenticity is a central problem of all passing experiences. As a part of a larger research project on recent North-American indigenization novels, I focus here on some contemporary 'going Indian' stories that present various aspects of ethnic /trans-cultural shape-shifting and the problem of authenticity in particular. The non-Native Canadian Philip Kreiner's *Contact Prints* (1987), the environmentalist and '(Mostly) White Guy' Robert Hunter's *Red Blood* (1999), and the partly Ojibwa Luise Erdrich's *The Painted Drum* (2005) depict three different types of passing/Othering experienced by our contemporaries in the framework of a modernist, a popular, and postmodernist piece of fiction respectively. Whether it is someone recognizing the mercantile power of Indianness, the spiritual force of Native culture or a deeper level of genetic, spiritual and mythological identification, the core/locus of identity, the cultural umbilical cord that someone recognizes as an essential need, the reader is invited to explore, on the one hand, the difference between masking, superficial identification and acculturation/integration, even values attached to mainstream and ethnic minority culture, and on the other hand, his/her own identity concept and cultural attachments.

Let us take a look at the problem of authenticity itself, from both Native and non-Native critical positions, and then I would like to offer an analytical method that may further an understanding of this central issue in the context of specific works of literature. As for the American scenario, Philip Deloria's invaluable book *Playing Indian* provides us with the history of the literary Indian that is one with the creation of the national

2. See, for instance, J. A. Kadar, 'Archie, Who Are You Fooling, Anyway?—Fluid Narrative and Identity in Armand Garnet Ruffo's *Grey Owl*: The Mystery of Archibald Belaney' (2008: 35–56).

American epic (Deloria, 1998: 73) and its quest for authenticity. From the time of the fraternal societies (e.g. the New York Tammany, the Society of the Red Man, the Improved Order of the Red Man), which presented themselves as wisdom keepers of the vanishing race and the founding fathers of the New American man, while also expressing the anxieties of the new republic (Deloria, 1998: 58), there have always been individuals and groups who pursued Indianness in various forms. More recently, primitivism has been turned into a new ideology that suggests that Indians refused to vanish. The failure on the part of real Natives to meet the Noble Savage or Vanishing Indian image has made many non-Natives believe that it is not Natives who disappeared but their original culture, while Natives themselves should be viewed as inauthentic holders of their traditions (Deloria, 1998: 69–70, 91). Consequently, non-Natives can claim equal access and the right to practice the Native lifestyle. The racist implications of such an ideology are readily apparent.

Contemporary Native intellectuals have given voice to their concern about the authenticity issue and its embodiments, such as the definition of Indian blood quantum, the ‘Indian enough?’ question related to both urban and reservation Natives, the impact of Pow Wow Trails as well as the ‘dangerously indistinguishable’ (Churchill, 1992: 143) urban laborer Natives who face the confusion and doubts about their authenticity in the eyes of fellow non-Native laborers, who are weekend warriors, or those who refuse Native validation. Furthermore, what really concerns those who study the various forms of distortions in many walks of life (e.g. literary hoaxes, unauthorized healers, Indian authenticators, wannabes, white shamans as well as some academics who call themselves Indian experts) is that they claim a deep understanding of, and exclusive access to, Native culture, take Native spirituality as a common human possession (Churchill, 1992: 193), and become ‘Culture vultures: genocide with good intentions’ (Churchill, 1992: 185). The mechanisms of legitimating non-Native playing with Indianness and its means are discussed elsewhere. What is central in the problem of authentication

related to playing Indian is that the desire to become Indian and tailor reality to an image (Churchill, 1992: 33) is as old as the desire to become American (Deloria, 1998: 185), based, as it is, on the fundamental idea of the marriage of savage and civilized elements, with ever renewing tools of legitimation, both physical and intellectual: 'chipped off fragments of Indianness, put them into new contexts, and turned them to new users' (Deloria, 1998: 179). Churchill adds that the trick we can observe these days is that there is no more repression, but repackaging and even promotion, incorporation of Native perspectives 'to ease the tension between worlds' (Churchill, 1992: 143).

Even at the turn of the 20th-21st centuries, the phenomenon of playing Indian, claiming some extent of due access to Native American culture, is still widespread and has taken updated forms, such as New Age spiritualism and the movie *Avatar*. Recently, the powerful Red Power movement has claimed rights over the legitimation and access to Native culture, urging us to pose some authenticating questions to those claiming personal access to Native culture, such as who that person is representing, what is his/her clan affiliation and who instructed him/her. Native critics like David Treuer argue that perhaps frauds hurt, especially native writers, for they do not have the opportunity to write a review in any major magazine, 'unless they lard their prose (as do Nasijj and Alexie and Carter) with perceived Indianisms and authenticating marks' (Treuer, 2006: 190). Wendy Rose, the acclaimed Hopi writer, adds her feelings related to the authenticity problem and white shaman poets as follows:

As a poet, I am continually frustrated by the restrictions placed on my work by the same people who insist that poets should not be restricted. It is expected—indeed, *demande*d—that I do a little 'Indian dance,' a shuffle and scrape to please the tourists (as well as the anthropologists). Organizers of readings continually ask me to wear beadwork and turquoise, to dress in buckskin (my people don't wear much buckskin; we have cultivated cotton for thousands of years), (Linda Zoontjens quoting the 'Native American Elders' Reactions to Castaneda and "Don Juan") and to read poems conveying pastoral or 'natural' images. I am often asked to 'tell a story' and 'place things in a spiritual framework'.

Simply *being* Indian—a real, live, breathing, up-to-date Indian person—is not enough. In fact, other than my genetics, this is the precise opposite of what is desired. The expectation is that I adopt, and thereby validate, the ‘persona’ of some mythic ‘Indian being’ who never was. The requirement is that I act to negate the reality of my—and my people’s—existence in favor of a script developed within the fantasies of our oppressors. (Rose, 1992: 413)

These fantasies, however, are one side of the literary world. The other side, I believe, is the microcosm of those post-colonial literary pieces that radically reshape the preconceived fixities of race, cultural difference, binary oppositions, grand narratives and other ideologically attuned frames of mind.

Ideological concern over identity is discussed elsewhere in detail. In the following analyses, I would like to offer a method for the study of how fictional characters struggle with their own quests for identity, meaningful existence or other benefits, and face the central problem of authenticity regarding their relationship with Native American culture. Below I experiment with the application of narrative psychology in the study of transcultural identity formulation in literary texts. Anna de Fina suggests that we should explore how characters build relationships between identities and actions in ‘storied’ worlds (de Fina, 2006: 351).

Firstly, I apply Peter T. F. Raggatt’s personality web protocol (PWP) (Raggatt, 2006: 22), to explore the shape-shifting fictional characters’ most enduring personal attachments (to people, objects, events, orientations), the information clusters and strength of association that comprise the particular character’s web of attachments grouped into voices of the self, for instance, a humiliated self, an activist, manhood or femininity. Combining these aspects with the cluster of marital, vocational, social, ideological, ethical and avocational commitments that Harold D. Grotevant recommends as focal points of inquiry (1994: 166), one obtains a picture of the given character’s social web protocol. Another relevant feature is the character’s attitude towards his/her own whiteness. The next question is the personal positioning (ego-recognized identity) and social positioning (alter-ascribed

identity) that locate the character for us in the fictional universe of the text.

Shifting our attention from the character to the text as the site of identity development, I would like to adopt two more approaches. One is the comparison suggested by Ed de St. Aubin (*et al.*) in 'A Narrative Exploration of Personal Ideology and Identity' of normative and humanistic ideology dimensions. The authors differentiate between the normative and humanistic life stories on the basis of the selfing processes they present. The latter is the process of organizing one's life material (memories, possessions, personal attributes, aspirations and significant others) into a life story (St. Aubin, 2006: 235). While primarily normative life stories reveal a need for control, social recognition and alter-inspection with a basically moral interest, the humanistic stories present fluid and open selfing, introspection and self-development based on interpersonal relationships, altogether functioning like psychotherapy (St. Aubin, 2006: 235-44). St. Aubin remarks that in case one wishes to balance normative expectations with personal traits, escapist fantasies may emerge, imaginary lives that are present only in the normative narratives, but not in the humanistic ones (St. Aubin, 2006: 241).

The other approach in the study of indigenization stories with regards to the question of authenticity is Guy A. M. Widdershoven's classification of narrative identity types, according to which the closed type presents one's life as a coherent totality without discontinuities, deviations and deep crises, while in such biographies and historiographies events contribute to a specific outcome. The second type is open, without any final conclusion to reach. Meaning is built up gradually, the character of the quest experiences various actions, passions and crises. The third type is similar to the second, but it is radically open, like most postmodern narratives. They are endless tales with innumerable variations in which the importance of events is questioned (Widdershoven, 1994: 111-4). The chart presented on the facing page offers a summary of these foci which will be examined in the context of the three abovementioned novels.

Analysis points	<i>Contact Prints</i>	<i>Red Blood</i>	<i>Painted Drum</i>
Attachments (Raggatt) –to people –to objects –to events –body orientation commitments (Grotevant) (marital, vocational, soc., ideol., ethical, avocational)			
Indigenizing character's attitude to his/her own whiteness (Kadar)			
Positioning (Raggatt) Personal (ego-recognized identity) Social (alter ascribe identity)			
Narrative: normative or humanistic (St.Aubin)			
Narrative identity type (Widdershoven) (closed/open/radically open)			

Moving into the actual world of the literary texts, we will see three different types of passing/Othering processes. In the first one, the heroine recognizes the mercantile power of Indianness, the second presents a protagonist who understands and acquires the spiritual force of Native culture, while in the third the central character immerses herself in Native culture on the deeper level of genetic, spiritual and mythological identification. These novels are all indigenization stories based on authentic, direct contact experiences of various kinds, but none could be called escapist fantasy, like the real gone Indian that misses this direct contact. They differ substantially, however, in the function and extent of passing, as explained below.

PHILLIP KREINER'S *CONTACT PRINTS* (1987):
AN IRONICAL SPIT IN THE FACE OF CLAIMS FOR AUTHENTICITY

Someone would have noticed the parallels between my Lucy-Otterpelt-cum-Winnie-Beaver act and the 'Totem Tom-Tom' production number from Indian Love Call, then exposed me on the fifth estate ... Joe, I tell you in all sincerity, I had to flee. I owed it to my art to flee. Winnie Beaver is dead now, but her masks are accruing in value. (Kreiner, 1987: 213)

Kreiner's novel focuses on two characters moving in the frontier of the Cree and non-Native world: Joe, who is a sojourner to an almost vanishing small Cree town, where he works as a teacher and takes pictures of his experiences, and Iris, alias Winnie Beaver, the Indian impostor artist who sells her Cree masks to Americans and Germans, utilizing the mercantile power of Indianness. Joe is a visitor, supposedly a passive observer, while Iris is quite active, and her personality is marked as a liminal being, a shape shifter. However, as the story unfolds, we can see Joe's gradual immersion in a Native Cree way of seeing the world, while Iris is stuck in her original white Anglo cultural attitude, which exploits the relationships provided by colonial discourse. She does not present any significant character development. Her vision of herself and the world, including the Cree people, does not change in the course of her experiences among them.

I focus on her character, because it offers an ironic interrogation of the problem of authenticity related to going Indian.

Iris Bickle seems to have a minimal attachment to people or ideas, and whatever attachments she does have are essentially practical ones, primarily of a vocational nature. She does not pursue any ideological or ethical commitments. She is quite sarcastic about her vocation, apparently proud of her profound understanding of the colonial agenda of playing Indian and making money off the ignorance of other white folks. However, she is very attached to one specific type of objects: masks, more exactly her 'own' Cree mask replicas, which sell like hot cakes. The 'artifakery' (Deloria, 1998: 184) of the masks serves as a tool for the legitimation of her access to the culture and the spirits they represent. Furthermore, the masks in post-colonial pluralistic societies, especially in Canada, stand for an expression of respect for Native culture, and there is a widespread attempt in these societies to neutralize ethno-cultural difference and tension by incorporating the culture of the Other into the larger body of Canadian culture. In Kreiner's words: Winnie Beaver's 'early masks are part of the Hydro Company's corporate art collection' (1987: 75). Paradoxically, the company is building a dam that would destroy the Cree village and make the villagers move, for 'an Eskimo isn't covered under the terms of the Relocation Agreement' (Kreiner, 1987: 98). So the company's collection of Native artifacts is a means of purchasing a kind of atonement for drastically altering the human and natural environment. In addition, exhibiting the masks is at the same time an expression of the fixed colonial boundaries between 'primitive' and 'civilized' cultures, the well-known cultural appropriation of the Western art establishment. So far, I have mentioned some of the relevant social functions of the masks in the context of Canadian postcolonial politics. However, their function as a means with which to conceal, alter or authenticate the identity of an individual is another interesting issue.

As for the nature of masks and masking, i.e. dressing in feathers (ethnic trans-dressing), they appear as a major authentication tool for most of the Gone Indian stories.

Péter Müller has some relevant insights concerning the operation of the mask. It gives new life and can make one live: when pressing one's face into the mask, the transformation and attainment of a sense of 'he is me' is tedious, like giving life through labor. Applying the mask is a learned and emotional process, yet there is no way to identify entirely with the new persona. In the mirror one can see the person one has become, and one may begin to feel as him. Nevertheless, there is a danger: one may immerse oneself too deeply in the role, going beyond and forgetting who s/he is (Müller, 2009: 264–5). Iris, unquestionably, is not lost in her mask; she does not identify with it too deeply. Instead she seems to explore the opportunities given by possible selves, alternative identities, what Michelle Stem Cook calls 'the impossible me' (2000: 65).



In the story world of *Contact Prints*, Iris's passing is occasional: she creates and sells the masks, but actually masks herself as the interpreter of Lucy Otterpelt, a young Cree woman whom she presents as Winnie Beaver to deceive the German journalists of the *Sterne* magazine. The journalists not only stand for non-Native intellectuals of a 'big blond *übermensch* type' studying Native culture, but also represent Europeans enthusiastic for everything Indian (Kreiner, 1987: 144). It is quite funny how Lucy's Cree words are 'translated' into English, since Iris makes sure that her words are not only politically correct but also ensure the merchandize value of the product she is selling, i.e., the masks, the story behind them and the spirituality one hopes to obtain through them. She applies other props, such as Indian-like jewels and fake rituals. The scene in which Winnie is asked about her art offers a concise example of how this works in the framework of authenticating her 'arts' and adjusting reality to her interests. She replies in Cree, narrating what she would do in bed with the journalist, while Iris translates:

It's only white people who confer the name 'art' upon my masks, which are functional, not 'artistic' in intent, having religious connotations within my culture. The thought that my masks hang in galleries all over the world, contributing to the white man's aesthetic discourse is genuinely problematic, if not downright embarrassing to me. My own people do not consider me to be an artist. (Kreiner, 1987: 149)

Now let us turn our interest towards the indigenizing character's attitude to whiteness. Two situations present two important faces of Iris, her impostor trades and the ambiguities on which her character is built. One is related to Joe, since he makes both Iris and himself face their own whiteness. The invisibility of whiteness and the fact that it becomes visible only through the gaze of another culture are discussed elsewhere, as are the Indianness paradigm (built on stereotypical projections) and the recognition of the epistemological power of distancing a group of people and labeling them as Others. Iris provokes Joe to take a more active role, but he shows little enthusiasm: 'What do you want me to do? Dress up like a Chingatchcook and join you in a public abdication of power' (Kreiner, 1987: 9)? Joe seems more responsible and less enthusiastic about playing the Indian game Iris is pursuing, although she does realize that her material urges have perhaps led her too far: 'I wanted the money, now it is too late to stop' (140).

The other facet Iris presents us is that of the Mexican artist selling 'authentic' Mayan silkscreen prints to tourists in Cancún under the label 'Under the Volcano: *Artesanías Indígenas Mexicanas*-exotic without being threatening' (Kreiner, 1987:243). Her marketing genius makes her seek a Canadian partner in business. She argues in her letter to Joe: 'You won't believe how hungry Americans are for authentic Indian art in the Mayan style. Next fall in Acapulco I plan to launch my new Aztec line' (214). Both facets prove her success in going between two or more cultures and utilizing all, without actually committing herself to any. Her personal positioning and her ego-recognized identity show us a firm, stable concept of identity at the core and a constantly fluctuating gel-like entity surrounding this core. 'They love me in Germany' (Kreiner, 1987: 141), and 'They want an Indian princess ... I'll give them one. I'll give them an Indian princess they'll

never forget' (Kreiner, 1987: 144), she adds. Her social (alter ascribed) identity, therefore, is liminal, make-believe, or rather: believe-whatever-you-wish type. In the signature scene of the novel, Iris is sarcastic about the epistemology of colonial discourse: 'But such is the strength of the human mind, its singular capacity to impose interpretation simply because it wants to interpret, that they ate up my bullshit like dung beetles coming off starvation diet' (Kreiner, 1987: 144). This hunger for aboriginal spirituality is presented in Hunter's *Red Blood*, too. However, in Kreiner's text, authenticity is constantly sustained, interrogated, negated and then the quest for it, for any firm hold on it, is absolutely devalued.

Finally, taking a look at the text as site, i.e. the type of narrative that Kreiner had created and its relationship with the problem of authenticity, I believe that this is a normative narrative, with outer expectations, conventions and preconceptions almost exclusively shaping the central character's life. She is aware of this fact, though she, like many other gone Indian figures, seems to be an intercultural mediator, a supposedly open-minded teacher and visitor to the North and the Cree. Her conscious, manipulative use of masking obviously makes her non-authentic. Yet since she is honest at least to Joe and herself about it, and since she ironically signifies in the discourse that she plays a game with white consumers and not the Natives, I would argue that her voice is inauthentic only with regards to her ethnic identity and role playing. The narrative identity type is somewhat open, surely not radically open, for at least Joe's vision of himself and the world around him changes over time, while Iris presents no significant change or development at all, in fact the impact of her activity re-fixes color lines.

ROBERT HUNTER'S *RED BLOOD: ONE (MOSTLY) WHITE GUY'S ENCOUNTERS WITH THE NATIVE WORLD* (1999) –
OR FANCYING WITH SOME NATIVE ROOTS
ON A JOURNEY TO CONTEMPORARY NATIVE REALITY

[s]cholars would not be impressed, however, and I knew this, and fretted, fearing an exposé of how I had taken a generic

Indian yarn and bent it to suit my eco-agenda—my God, what could be more shameless? ... New Age guilt. (Hunter, 1999: 44–5)

Hunter's *Red Blood* could be read as a popular treatise on an 'almost Indian' experience. However, in the context of gone Indian literature and the problem of authenticity, I would argue that it is not the artistic merits but the approach that makes this text remarkable, since it indicates an important tendency, i.e. an environmentalist New Age agenda merged with an understanding of Native spirituality. Moreover, it also calls attention to another important North-American phenomenon these days: the quest for roots among those with some indigenous ancestry ('Indian blood'). The narrator is aware of the nature of his quest for this spirituality, a more comforting identity, a critical attitude towards the pitfalls of late capitalist modern societies, a close-to-nature attitude, a welcoming community, something vital to struggle for, and the healing of grief over lost beloved ones. Moreover, his voice sounds honest about the perplexities of ethnic relations, current politics, and social tendencies, as well as his own occasional confusion concerning where he belongs. Nevertheless, like all white persons who play Indian, he has the assuring certainty of his choice to move in and out of his ethnic role, his alternative identity any time he wishes, and this, as we know, is a prerogative of white persons only. To stay invisible is one option, and to go Indian (or adopt any other ethnic identity) another. Actually, this freedom of choice seems to be another traditional prerogative of whiteness. Hunter's narrator enjoys entering the funfair of playing Indian and trying out various ways of acting Indian, like trying various funfair facilities. The events he participates in serve as sites to prove his identification and strength, as well as his views on Natives and Anglo-America/Canada.

Homi Bhabha's foreword to Fanon's *Black Skin, White Mask* (1986) considers the rhetoric of resistance as a gesture to solidarity only, which makes present something that is in fact

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absent (Bhabha, 1986: xvii). This ambivalence further snowballs as the Indian image unfolds as an imitation of reality, a subversion, camouflage, i.e., manipulated representation (Bhabha, 1986: xxiii). The 'rhetoric of resistance as a gesture to solidarity only': one can only wonder whether Hunter would

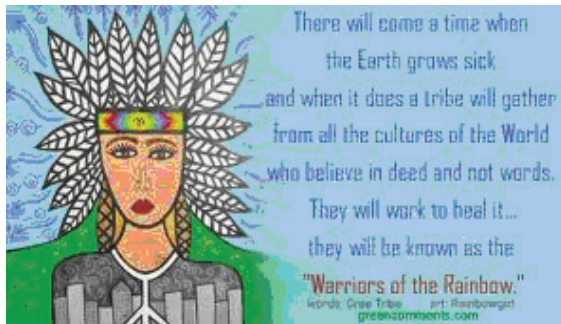
<http://www.google.hu/imgres?imgurl=http://walkingwithwolf.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/greenpeace-activist-bob-hunter>



subscribe to this point of view. His narrator has developed a number of attachments and various fluctuating commitments. In fact, the whole text unfolds on the pull and push dynamics of ethnic encounters, interaction and change. We can assume from the outset of the story that playing with Indianness will remain a game for the narrator, an activity he can disrupt and leave his red mask behind,

returning to 'full blood' whiteness (or a racially invisible stance) with a pinch of exotic/romantic/environmentalist primitivism/Indianness/Otherness. But certainly he will not stay with any Native band for a lifetime, and he will not totally identify with First Nation values at the price of giving up his original cultural roots and affiliations, some proof of which could be his occasionally racist utterances.

Among the narrator's commitments, his familiar relations receive less attention than the public sphere of his life.



<http://www.greencomments.com/graphic/cal/Art/rainbow-warrior>

His mother's death ('Your mother went into the Great Sweat Lodge in the Sky and slammed the door behind her' [Hunter, 1999: 13]) and the mourning ritual in which Indian spiritual healing plays a major role is the basic situation, but shortly after that he joins an environmentalist battle and also becomes involved in tribal activities, accepting a role as a strategic advisor of band manager Bob Royer (Calihoo)

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and his council, then Indian chief, administrator, bureaucrat, and a co-author with Royer of *Occupied Canada*, a book Hunter wrote in complete ignorance of his Huron blood. His ideological and ethical commitments surface as the various events of his life present him with challenging decisions.

Now let us take a brief look at some of the events through which the narrator's sense of ethnic identity, Indianness and whiteness, unfold and his attitude to authenticity is revealed. He goes through some transformative experiences that stimulate his spiritual development and approach to Native culture. For instance, once he is saved by a Native with whom he has absolutely nothing in common, 'Or so [he thinks] at the time' (Hunter, 1999: 7), then a totem talks to him. His reactions are ambivalent, which he explains as follows: 'The truth was, by then I was afraid of these Native guys. Just like I was afraid of magic. Afraid of inexplicable coincidences that suggested a higher level of order at work in the universe that one could directly perceive. I didn't want to hear from old eco-war buddies' (Hunter, 1999: 50). He got positive feedback on his move towards Native people related to his being accepted by a community with which he temporarily identified: 'I got... Indian. I spoke to the Brothers as a brother. I was one with them... I became proud. I was indignant. I was aggrieved on behalf of my people. Fortunately, on another level, as they say, I was fully aware that I was also probably crazy from decades of substance abuse, and was just slightly out of control. Harmless, of course' (Hunter, 1999: 157). Authentication is important for him. He wonders if a warrior is eligible to join the Eagle Clan of the Gitksan if he participates in a battle (Hunter, 1999: 162). However, he has a nervous breakdown after a sweat lodge experience (Hunter, 1999: 50-1) that was similar to the famous movie scene of *Clear Cut*, in which the transformation of the white Anglo-Canadian bureaucrat is equally ambivalent and troublesome. The same confusion and uncertainty is discernible when Hunter joins the environmentalist struggles under a merged Indian and Greenpeace agenda. 'There was a good damned chance this was a genuine Warrior thing, anarchistic, out-of-control, on the cusp between

absurdity and eco-occultism, sheer Indian weirdness' (Hunter, 1999: 60).

The notion of 'sheer Indian weirdness' constantly alienates him from the Native people he meets and befriends. Furthermore, there is an interesting side-stream of implied thought: Native people occasionally also play Indian, that is, when in a power game a generic white man's Indianness is convincing enough or even better than presenting oneself as a real member of a certain aboriginal community, some Native individuals also go Indian: 'Art[hur] has fully assumed a Gitksan alter ego, clad in a ceremonial vest with his bear-tooth necklace, plume of eagle feathers, and war paint' (Hunter, 1999: 172), while the chief also nods, plays the game (Hunter, 1999: 186). One can realize here that the question of authenticity is not exclusively related to non-Native people and their decisions to play Indian.

It is important to raise two questions related to authenticity: one is the central character's ethnic identity and notion of Indianness, going Indian and its authenticity with regards to the reality base and direct contact with Native people. The other is the honest attitude towards their own comprehension of ethnic transformations and relations. The duality of voice characterizes both Iris in Kreiner's novel and Hunter's narratory voice: on the pages of his autobiography Hunter admits his confusing feelings about identifying with some Native issues, and Iris is also honest to Joe about her shams. Hunter writes: 'And I, who have been playing Indian since I can remember, am being invited to join the battle on the Indians' side. A moment of destiny, surely. At least, if nothing else, a great working-out of a boyhood fantasy. Do the genes remember?' (Hunter, 1999: 161). In another passage, he contends: 'Walking onboard dressed in war paint and feathers and claiming it. Right under their noses. *Fuck you. This boat is ours. You owe us, baby.* In their face' (Hunter, 1999: 158-9).

The we/they disparity, the binary opposition of red and white worlds, and ethnic identity as communal, generic, as well as the shared attitude to be honest when communicating with fellow white people underlines the racial implications

of both central characters. Their temporary shape shifting, though it is based on very different motivations, has more to do with a generic Indian image, white man's Indian/Eskimo, than specific experiences of contact with a particular Native American or Inuit band. Hunter explains: 'we have deliberately named no tribe in this story because we want it to mean the same to all tribes, to all the Indians' (Hunter, 1999: 43). 'Scholars would not be impressed, however, and I knew this, and fretted, fearing an exposé of how I had taken a generic Indian yarn and bent it to suit my eco-agenda—my God, what could be more shameless? ... New Age guilt' (Hunter, 1999: 44–5). Essentializing the Indian and doing so as an insider-outsider put him in paradoxical situations. For instance, he makes a Native man wear the clothes of a different tribe on board of the ship, for it does not matter, the point is to look Indian: 'Any Indian. ... I am beginning to feel like the producer of a small scale traveling show My identity has fragmented. I am a reporter/activist, insider /outsider, director/narrator, manipulator/observer, participant /witness, exercising what you might call multiple "either-or" functions. ... This is a new one for us. A role-reversal' (Hunter, 1999: 164). The disparity between personal (ego-recognized) and social (alter ascribed) identity is resolved by the above transformation strategies and the act of telling his own story, his narrative version of identity development.

It is not only Indianness and authentic ethnic identity that the narrative centers around, but also whiteness and Hunter's narrator's growing understanding of what it means. The inner voice of the environmentalist Indian warrior tells a lot about it: 'I'm the guy in the yachting whites who looks like he can afford a lawyer, and therefore maybe even a yacht' (Hunter, 1999: 167); 'I am used to power, unconsciously' (Hunter, 1999: 168). When his naïve enthusiasm about fighting for a good cause gets him into serious trouble, this 'old peacenik' (Hunter, 1999: 230) wishes to be safely back at his job in Toronto (Hunter, 1999: 263). His whiteness, therefore, is on the one hand his original culture of which he is critical and against which he rebels as a 'candidate for eco-saint-

hood' (Hunter, 1999: 212), but on the other hand it is a safe ground to return to from the troubled waters of intercultural clashes with a renewed sense of radicalism, 'which, for us, might equate with identity' (Hunter, 1999: 207), as he admits. The overall implication of the book, like that of many others, is that the seemingly open-minded and non-racist protagonist reinforces long-standing racial stereotypes and the walls between races, no matter how much Huron blood he may happen to find in himself in the meantime. The narrative matches this approach, for despite its rebellious, loud anti-colonialism, it is run by social norms and expectations, the fear of not properly locating himself on the trajectory of ethnic relations and social prestige or getting into inconvenient situations due to his shifting identity. Consequently, the narrative identity type is open, but not radically.

Hunter's novel follows a long tradition of literary texts that reveal white man's need to get closer to First Nations' culture and identify with a selection of features ascribed as characteristics of that culture. Moreover, the narrator's quest for new ways to utilize Native spirituality follows the standards of the same tradition, as well as the Millennial/New Age para-esoteric and eco-friendly episteme that so many North-Americans and Europeans have pursued in their search for an improved self, identity, human and natural environment. The real family ties that the narrator discovers on his journey, however, do not necessarily make him part of Native America/Canada today, for he is not ready to acculturate if acculturation entails a loss of the comforts he has enjoyed in his white social sphere. Therefore, his short visit in *that* world, the world of the Other, does not resolve any ethno-cultural boundaries at all. His limited authentic first-hand experiences would not give him access to an authentic hybrid identity, and indeed he may never have sought anything of the sort in the first place.

LOUISE ERDRICH'S *THE PAINTED DRUM* (2005): THE MYTHIC
 UMBILICAL CORD RECONNECTING FAYE
 WITH HER ETHNO-CULTURAL ORIGINS

I've always been a little curious about Kit's passion to be an Indian. It seems a lonely obsession, I never see him with other Indians or would-be Natives. And as the point is to have a tribe and belong to a specific people, I wonder what he gets out of his fantasy. But of course, he explains on the way home, his search is about making some connection. Only connect, he says, absurdly, and adds, maybe E. M. Forster was an Iroquois at heart. Once he knows for certain where to connect, maybe everything about him will fall into place. Then again, maybe Kit Tatro irritates me because at some level I understand his longing and confusion all too well. (Erdrich, 2005: 53)

Erdrich's novel addresses a fundamental question: who is Indian enough? In search of her own answer, the author presents a beautiful web of intertwining stories of edgewalkers, different people in cultural transits on the trajectory (mind-scape) of a contemporary mental Frontier. These edgewalkers, as Nina Boyd Krebs argues, recognize certain intercultural patterns and then make choices across them (Boyd Krebs, 1999: 64), while they are never in both cultures at the same time. Their self-awareness is remarkable, the way they embrace conflicting faces of personal history (Boyd Krebs, 1999: 67), while their success depends on this awareness and their flexibility, the risk of being alone, their willingness to accept help, seek sacred paths, recognize commonalities, honor their own complexities, and pay attention as they step back and forth (Boyd Krebs, 1999: 69–72). The last feature of edgewalkers (presented in her view by protagonist Faye Travers) is the capacity to tolerate anxiety (or its lack) (Boyd Krebs, 1999: 65).

Faye's attachments to people and objects offer glimpses into her culturally in-between world. First of all, her mother, who is 'perfectly assimilated, cold-blooded and analytical about the reservation present, and utterly dismissive of history' (Erdrich, 2005: 59), represents the non-traditional urban Native people who reject being identified as the ethnic Other and prefer the comforts of a more assimilated life at the price

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of losing touch with tribal traditions and ties. However, when travelling together with Faye and the drum, she also somewhat reconnects with the Pillagers and tribal history. As for Faye's father, he was a professor of philosophy with a troubled family reputation. He married Faye's mother in part because 'he was fascinated with her background, I think, as though she had some mythical connection to the natural world that he lacked and loved' (Erdrich, 2005: 80). He explains: 'Your mother is the Renaissance and I am the Reformation' (Erdrich, 2005: 81). Thus Faye's early life was marked by the ambiguity of a real Native person's refusal of her Native past and identity on the one hand and an outsider's keen interest in Native culture on the other. She is the fruit of this strange intercultural setup. The family descends from an Indian agent who worked on the North Dakota Ojibwe reservation, home to her mother's family. An Indian agent and Native Americans, how can the child of such a relationship cope with her family history? Besides, her ex-partner, Kurt Krahn is amazed to learn after a long time that Faye is half-blood: his reaction depicts the ignorance of someone she loved and someone who lives right next door to some First Nations: 'I thought you guys were, like, Korean or something' (Erdrich, 2005: 58). So, Faye finds herself identified as someone 'not Indian enough', someone living in *Zwischenraum*—'the space between'. As we can see, authenticity is ironically interrogated here, the real Native person is somewhat ashamed to reveal that she belongs to a culture in which others are only slightly interested.

Two more exciting edgewalkers appear on the wonderful palette of the novel. (Squaw Man) Kit (Everett) Tatro, an Indian agent hoarder and collector with an inclination to grab what he finds (Erdrich, 2005: 31), is convinced that he is an Indian without any tribal blood, for his family came over after the Mayflower, and Simon Jack, 'The Ornamental Man', is a trapper who went Indian and lived with a band. In both cases the author signifies the shape-shifting character's masking strategies. As for Tatro, 'his name is really Everett. He's nicknamed Kit. He's got an Indian name, too, one that sounds like something from an old gunslinger movie or a Karl May novel. It might be White Owl,

same as the drugstore cigars' (Erdrich, 2005: 51). To look authentic, he wears eclectic clothes and accessories: amulets, bear claws, herbs and bones. He has a painted tipi in his yard and goes hunting 'Indian style'. Like Grey Owl, he was a great womanizer who apparently lived alone, doing some research on his genealogy (Erdrich, 2005: 52) to check his Iroquois blood ... Faye's reaction challenges this attempt to construct a symbolic ethnic identity: '*I believe, I am convinced, even saved, that to throw myself into Native traditions as Kit Tatro wishes so sincerely to do, is not my character*' (Erdrich, 2005: 269). The vision of becoming a brand-name ethnic entity for her seems like a good trial of a new skin, an alternative identity that makes a person perhaps more present with a 'new gravity. It really seems like he is someone' (Erdrich, 2005: 267). However, this ethnic branding does not work so easily with her. Her transformation and identification with her truer self takes more time, effort, pain and knowledge of myths and the past.

The second shape-shifter who plays with Indianness but then stays with a Native tribe is Simon Jack. He is like a mad trapper of the Canadian literary imagination. His vanity and mannerisms make him an unusual but still accepted member of his tribe. However, when his attempts to exploit his opportunities among the Natives (especially women) are revealed, the power of sisterhood and mythic forces slowly kill him and make him disappear in a unique, magical-realistic way. He seemed to have enslaved his wife and lover, while the two of them finally make him their slave and bury the living dead with pity by sewing a wonderful dance outfit to cover his body. On the threshold of reality and myth, past and present, Faye receives these stories and creates her own patchwork of identity based on these traces, with the help of a magic object to which she gradually develops an attachment: the painted drum.

As an estate appraiser, Faye evaluates past artifacts in a small New Hampshire town. The Native American antiquities that she has found made her curious to know more about the relationships between the dead and the living, between her own ancestors and herself. When she finds some earrings that her mom bought from an auction, she refers to Edward

Curtis's photos (Erdrich, 2005: 67), the archetypal frozen stereotypes of the white man's Indian. These objects cast light on colonial encounters and trans-cultural experiences, too. Faye creates a collage of past traces out of people, stories and objects, like Gail Anderson-Dargatz's fictional character Beth Weeks in *The Cure of Death by Lightning* (1996). For instance, Faye finds a box of kerchiefs, a memorabilia of a lifetime of tears, and finds out their story. Her attachment to objects seems like a substitute for real personal relationships, but with the drum a new kind of attachment seems to have developed: this powerful yet delicate magic tool with symbols and powers she does not recognize at first.



<http://www.native-drums.ca>

She can hear its sound. She is a good listener, the person authorized by the spirits of lost children to give new life to this unique painted drum. She seems to have extra-sensory skills, or at least an outstanding sensibility for trans-cultural and transpersonal relationships. For instance, she can see the shadow of death over her

sister. She does not develop strong personal relationships in the fictional world of the novel, at least not traditional ones. She develops attachments to ideas, such as her keen interest in roots. In fact her process of going Indian is mythical and spiritual, without the common physical markers of ethnicity, such as clothes or public rituals.

Turning now to the indigenizing protagonist's attitude to her own whiteness and Indianness, more exactly the white component of her ethnic identity and her identification with her Native blood, Faye is a non-traditional Ojibwe who positions herself as in the following terms: 'I am a boundary to something else, but I don't know what' (Erdrich, 2005: 118). Her personal, ego-recognized identity (e.g. Erdrich, 2005: 50) is emphatically fluid throughout the narrative, while her alter-ascribed social identity is mostly confusing for her peers, but more transparent for those who have trans-historical visions and profound experi-

Special Issue
*Decoding
American Cultures
in the Global Context*

RIAS VOL. 6, SPRING-FALL Nº 1-2/2013

ences with her family's past. Faye has a communicative block when asked about her ethnic identity that derives from negative experiences with the non-authentic edgewalkers around her: 'Every time I've been tempted to tell him that my mother is an actual American Indian, an Ojibwe, something about Kit Tatro has stopped me' (Erdrich, 2005: 52). Furthermore, the mostly negative reality of contemporary reservation life (for instance references to Indian health care, the pow wow outfit business, the lack of protection and security for Native Americans) also adds to a reserved attitude towards her identification as a Native American person. The fabulously rich mythic culture and its past is to balance the harsh reality of contemporary Native American life, in which Faye and the rest of the novel's edgewalkers serve as indicators of power relations as well as mediators to open doors that are otherwise firmly locked in the episteme of red and white relations. The humanistic type of this narrative reveals a new, radically open narrative identity type that differs from the models of identity seen in the other two novels under discussion.

However, for our major point of interest, i.e. authenticity in these indigenization stories, the non-Native Kreiner's *Contact Prints* from the 1980s, the environmentalist and '(Mostly) White Guy' Hunter's *Red Blood* from the 1990s, and the partly Ojibwa Erdrich's *The Painted Drum* from the early 2000s depict three different types of passing/Othering, three different authorial approaches to race relations, and three narrative identities that consider the problem of authenticity relevant to various extents. Kreiner's ironic fiction is an early recognition at the peaks of multiculturalism in Canada of the ambiguous and supposedly non-racist ethnic relations behind labels like pluralism and diversity and the ongoing but less visible colonial practices that Indianness and whiteness denote. Iris/Winnie Beaver's sarcastic attitude to exploiting Native arts and culture for her material benefit and her disregard for authenticity make her an extreme representative example of neo-colonialism and Indianness.

The 1990s provided the matured hipsters and eco-warriors a perspective from which to look back on their achievements

and the process of utilizing Indianness in their quest for identity and ecological agendas. For them, direct contact with Native Canadians and Americans was as relevant as the combination of Native spirituality and green movements in their ideological struggle for a better world and an improved identity. For Hunter, who happened to find some real blood relations with the Huron as a kind of bonus, authenticity is not a central problem, for he understands that fellow white men with interests to struggle against would ignore the nuances of Native culture anyway. Indianness signaled by generic markers would do, too, such as the feathers he asks real Natives to wear in order to imitate an 'Indian look' when they fight for their rights.

The Millennium has seen the publication of wonderful works of US and Canadian literature in which one finds sophisticated approaches to Indianness that are thought-provoking in their complexity and ambiguity and ambivalence. This may be due to post-modern and post-colonial criticism and developments in the social sciences, or perhaps two or three decades of experiences with multiculturalism and ethnic pluralism as a promoted national ideology in both countries nurtured greater awareness among writers and made them more likely to address questions concerning the gap between plausible ideas of tolerance and diversity as beautiful and the reality of the lingering colonial heritage that is interwoven in the everyday communications, stereotypes and politics of difference. Erdrich's richly woven cobweb of past and present and edgewalkers who move like spiders on the web of the narrator's imagination offers a number of approaches to the problems of cultural appropriation and authenticity. Instead of asking who is Indian enough, she explores who wants to be Indian and why (or why not), as well as addressing the question of how can one cope with symbolic, alternative, refused or newly gained senses of ethnic identity, with or without the claim of authenticity.

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