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# INTERRACIAL RELATIONS –(RE)WRITING THE STEREOTYPE IN NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE LITERATURES: SUSANNA MOODIE, CATHARINE PARR TRAILL AND PAULINE JOHNSON

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INTERRACIAL RELATIONS --(RE)WRITING THE STEREOTYPE IN  
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### Abstract.

This paper aims to show how three nineteenth century Canadian women writers, Pauline Johnson, Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill, negotiated stereotypes when they depicted white/ Native encounters and interracial relations. Changes in perspectives in the contact narratives written by Traill and Moodie—*The Backwoods of Canada* (1836), *Canadian Crusoes* (1852), *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852)—will be analysed, emphasizing the positive vision of encounters between white and Native women as well as their recognition of Native presence and knowledge. Pauline Johnson’s strategies to challenge the stereotypes conveyed by the dominant discourse will be examined in five of her short stories, “As it was in the Beginning”, “A Red Girl’s Reasoning”, “My Mother”, “The Derelict” and “The Shagganappi”, emphasizing the role given to Native women and Mixed-race people. With her stories and Indian characters, Johnson wrote back to the dominant culture, proposing her own versions of First Nations Canadian heroines and of the new nation. Echoes, rather than oppositions, will be traced between the writings of these three women.

### Introduction

Pauline Johnson (1861-1913) was born in Ontario, to an English mother and a Mohawk father. By Canadian law she was Mohawk and although she had very limited knowledge of the Mohawk language, she was taught the traditions and culture of both heritages and during her career as a poet, writer, and entertainer she adopted her grandfather's Mohawk name to highlight her aboriginal descent. Several of her stories featured Native characters, and

although some were very idealistic, her depictions of aboriginal people were more realistic than those written by her contemporaries and by previous Canadian writers. Such stereotypical depictions can be found in the works of earlier writers Susanna Moodie and her sister Catharine Parr Traill. Traill and Moodie left England in 1832 to settle in the colony of Upper Canada where their husbands had been granted land. There, as was expected of those who settled in the new world, they wrote accounts of their lives and of their encounters with their Native neighbours, three Chippewa families. Their narratives, which reveal the influence of travel writing aimed at a British audience<sup>1</sup>, have been called “settlement narrative” or “contact narratives” (Gerson, 1997) to emphasize the fact that they are centrally concerned with settler/Native encounters in the ‘contact zone’ (Pratt, 1992) of the Canadian backwoods. Peter Hulme defines colonial discourse as an ensemble of texts, from bureaucratic documents, to fiction, to personal memoirs. Underlying the idea of colonial discourse, he argues, is “the presumption that during the colonial period, large parts of the non European world were *produced* for Europe” (Hulme, 1986: 2). Moodie and Traill were expected to produce their own version of the colonial encounter, and they expressed the dominant view of their times. Their accounts are filled with stereotypes and generalizing statements about “the Indians”. Replicating stereotypes of Native peoples played a key role in colonial discourse since the stereotype, as a major discourse strategy, is also a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always in place, already known and something that must be anxiously repeated (Bhabha, 1994: 95). A generation later, when Canada was no longer a colony, the stereotypes about Native Canadians were still prevalent in the dominant discourse and Johnson constantly challenged them in her stories and essays. The paper will focus on the way these three women writers negotiated with stereotypes and issues of identities and self-perception. I propose to analyse the strategies Johnson used to write back to the dominant culture, and the changes in perspective and visions to be found in the earlier texts which reflected the ambivalence of colonial discourse, or its “hybridity”, which Bhabha defines as the moment when “traces of the other denied culture” appear in colonial discourse (Bhabha, 1995: 162). These accounts of nineteenth century and early twentieth century Canada, which were also concerned with “the intricate processes of cultural contact, intrusion, fusion (...) disjunction (...) interaction and counteraction”(Young, 1995: 5) of the contact zone, ultimately revealed contradictory visions of Canada.

## Depictions of first encounters with Native Canadians

When they settled in Upper Ontario in 1832, Catharine Parr Traill and Susanna Moodie expected to see “Indians”, and their minds and imaginations were filled with pictures of what they would be like. As Hugh Honour’s *The Golden Land* shows, by the early nineteenth century, in European literature, painting and sculpture, the image of the bloodthirsty savage survived alongside that of the gentle, dispossessed Indian (Honour, 1975: 54-83; 117-137; 219-247). Moodie’s depiction of her Native friend Susan Moore as “the very *beau idéal* of savage life and unadorned nature” (Moodie 196; 197) shows that the stereotype of the noble savage was very much in her mind when she wrote. As her first description of her Chippewa neighbours makes it clear, she could not avoid duplicating the stereotype which comforted her vision of Native peoples as others and as an inferior race:

the men of this tribe are generally small of stature (...) The forehead is low and retreating, the observing faculties large, the intellectual ones scarcely developed (...) the eyes looking towards the temples, keen, snake-like and far apart; (...) the jaw-bone projective, massy, and brutal; the mouth expressing ferocity and sullen determination; the teeth large, even, and dazzlingly white. (186-7)

In colonial discourse, the construction of the colonized subject demands an articulation of forms of difference (Bhabha, 1994: 96), and Moodie’s description clearly underscores differences and otherness, and racial disparagement is sharp. Moodie focuses on traits that supposedly prove Indian ferocity and lack of intellectual capacities, a vision that she, as a white settler, needed to believe in. The depiction of the eyes that suggests a close kinship to animals also reinforces the stereotypical vision of the savage. Moodie’s description and her repeated use of the singular “the Indian” show that the Natives are as invisible in her accounts as they were in texts by her contemporaries (Gerson 1997: 7). Interestingly, when Traill describes the first encounter between her white and Indian heroes in her children’s book, *Canadian Crusoes*, she reduces her Indian heroine to a “shrinking figure”, whose face is concealed by her “raven black hair, which falls like a dark veil over her features” (Traill, 1986: 107), avoiding the problem of depicting the girl’s features. Traill reduces her instead to one recognizable trait, her “raven black” hair – a detail which also reveals that, once more, the savage race is depicted as entertaining a close kinship to animals.

Both Traill and Moodie refer to painters or describe Indian scenes as pictures, Moodie cites Reynolds when she describes her friend Susan to suggest she could have served as a model (197). Traill describes the Native children singing hymns in the wigwam as “a study for a painter (Traill, 1997: 157). Anna Jameson, a contemporary of the Strickland sisters, shared their tendency to anesthetize her Indian scenes. For instance, her description of a hunter who stands “leaning on his rifle, haughty and silent”, with a dead deer at his feet (Jameson 351) is, to her own admission, a “picture”, “just such as one Edwin Landseer would have delighted to paint” (351). Such pictures and vignettes would appeal to the British audience, but instead of offering a new or even personal vision of the New World, they duplicated existing stereotypical visions. In her fishing vignette for instance Traill depicts an Indian in full regalia, whose accessories make him both exotic and recognizable as an Indian:

The Indian, provided with his tomahawk, with which he makes an opening in the ice, a spear, his blanket, and a decoy-fish of wood, proceeds to the place he has fixed upon. (...) he will remain for hours, patiently watching the approach of his prey, which he strikes (...) as soon as it appears within the reach of his spear. (Traill, 1997: 116)

Traill's use of the present tense and of the singular “the Indian” merely fixes the object of her observation in a timeless present. We might also argue that such scenes served as postcards. In these early descriptions, the Indians are an extension of the landscape, an item in the postcard designed to illustrate life in Canada.

Johnson was aware of such expectations and stereotypes. She openly challenged them in her essays—for instance in “A Strong Race Opinion” (*Toronto Sunday Globe*, 1892), she derided the stereotypical Indian heroine of Canadian fiction, in “Mothers of a Great Red Race” (*Mother's Magazine*, 1908) she celebrated Iroquois women, attacking the notion of the so-called “savagery” of Native Canadians in the process— but she questioned them more subtly in her fiction, using them as material. She often adopted the point of view of the dominant culture, situating the Indian as other, which enabled her to destabilize the dominant discourse from within. Thus in the story entitled “My Mother” she used the English girl as focalizer to depict the encounter between a young Mohawk boy and a young English girl, which enabled her to expose the girl's preconceived notions of what an Indian should be like:

She had never seen an Indian, consequently, was trying to reform her ideas regarding them (...) she thought all Indians wore savage-looking clothes, had fierce eyes and stern, set mouths. The boy's eyes were narrow and shrewd, but warm and kindly, his lips were like a Cupid's bow. (Johnson, 1987: 32)

Johnson focuses on the same traits as Moodie did, in order to subtly challenge the stereotype. She also notes that the boy has fine features, a direct challenge to depictions of Indian animal-like faces. Here, the reference to Cupid, for instance, destabilizes this discourse by giving a European (and sexualised) trait to the young Indian boy. Clearly, the much-repeated encounter scene between Europe and Native America intersects with another literary *topos*, the romantic encounter. Johnson concludes the meeting scene by comparing George to “a brown gem” (33), a comparison that brings together both worlds. Johnson depicts George as some one who is at ease in both worlds, his English is as perfect as his table manners (32; 33) and he wears his white clothes and Indian clothing with the same ease: indeed, his clothes are said to “make but slight impression on him” ( 35).

For her theatrical performances Johnson put together an “Indian” costume, making no effort to replicate the actual clothing of any specific tribe (Gerson and Hoag, 2000: 110). However, she knew that the buckskin dress she wore and had accessorized with symbols of Indian culture such as fur pelts, medallions, a teeth necklace, and a hunting knife, would look very “Indian” to her audience. As a performer, Johnson recognized that the truth of identity is created by the costume, as a writer she challenged these beliefs. . In her depiction of George in his Mohawk costume, Johnson mentions his buckskin tunic, embroidered leggings, moccasins and a feather (34) but the conclusion of the portrait destabilizes the exotic trait by firmly asserting “he was every inch a man, a gentleman, a warrior” (34). Interestingly, “a man” comes first, so that the word order in the sentence re-establishes natural order. Johnson uses various strategies to challenge the dominant views of Native Canadians. For instance she might employ the vocabulary used by the British to refer to themselves, applying it to her Native characters, ultimately eroding the racial differences she pretends to underscore. George, the Mohawk boy, is seen by his white fiancée as:

a man, young, stalwart, handsome with an *aristocratic lineage* that bred him a Native gentleman, with a *grand old title* that had come down to him through six hundred years of *honor* in warfare and the *high places* of his people. (Johnson, 1913: 48, italics added).

The phrase “Native gentleman” is reminiscent of the cliché “nature’s gentleman”—a favorite phrase of Moodie’s (197)—but Johnson proves the cliché right by assimilating her blue-blooded Indian to white aristocracy since the cliché is placed within a web of words that were likely to be used by the English elite to refer to themselves. However, once more, the word that comes first is “man”, implying that clothing or skin color matter little. Johnson frequently uses the racialised vocabulary of her times, but she reclaims it by embellishing it with adjectives, which enables her to destabilize the racial discourse and visions the words connoted. For instance George is said to be “a magnificent type of Mohawk manhood” ( 33) and his Mixed-race son to “show the undeniable physique of the two great races from whence he came”(62). Notions of white superiority are thus repeatedly challenged for instance the Indian race is said to be “older than the composite English could ever boast” (62), reminding white readers that the English too were a composite race.

Johnson also plays with the idea that a character's disposition could be explained by his or her “race”. In “A Red Girl's Reasoning”, Christine's father warns the white boy she is about to marry that Christine's disposition is “as Native as her mother’s” (Johnson, 1987: 102), explaining her passionate behaviour by her Indian disposition, in other words, her Indian nature. The title of the story seems to reduce Christine to her race, however it also reads as an oxymoron since in the dominant discourse, Indians were frequently referred to as “children” –as Traill did in “Children of the Forest” (Traill, 1999: 103). Johnson's white protagonist sees his wife as a “childish” “ignorant” and “simple-minded” girl (120) however, the story reverses the vision of the “wild” red girl whose actions are governed by instinct and overturns the position of the superior white man. The young Englishman has “a fit of ridiculously childish temper” (119) while Christine is the one who uses logic when Charlie claims she disgraced him by revealing that her parents were married under Indian rites. Christine speaks up, challenging Charlie: “Why should I recognize the rites of your nation when you do not acknowledge the rites of mine? [...] “If their union is illegal, so is ours.” (117) The story, which depicts the troubles of an inter-racial marriage, also challenges the stereotypical depictions of Indian heroines in Canadian fiction.

### **Interracial marriage: rewriting the stereotype of the submissive Indian heroine**

In her 1892 essay, “A Strong Race Opinion: On the Indian Girl in Modern

Fiction” Johnson bemoaned the fact that Canadian authors depicting an Indian heroine merely duplicated existing fiction, resulting in the fact that there was only one “Indian” heroine in Canadian literature. As Johnson pointed out, this Indian heroine did not belong to any tribe, never had a surname, was always a chief’s daughter, was “always desperately in love with the young white hero” (Johnson, 2002: 179). There was only one plot as the white hero never married the Indian princess, marrying instead the inevitable white girl, so that there was only one fate for the Indian girl: suicide. Proposing other heroines and other plots, in other words, writing back, was all the more important to Johnson that literature served as a vehicle for the stereotype. The stereotypical plot that Johnson denounced was already a duplicate: it repeated the story of Inkle and Yarico that had been very popular in the eighteenth century (Hulme, 1986: 225-257) and reinforced the stereotype of the Indian as a noble savage whose innocence was taken advantage of. In “My Mother” Johnson rewrites the stereotype by having the white girl marry a Native boy and offering a very positive version of interracial marriage. In stories such as “A Red Girl’s Reasoning” , “As it was at the Beginning” and “The Derelict”, she wrote her own versions of the Indian heroine. The heroine of “A Red Girl’s Reasoning” is a young Mixed-race woman (she has a Native mother and an English father) who marries a young Englishman who is said to be “pathetically in love” with her (Johnson, 1913: 104) but who is incapable of seeing his wife. He becomes “blind with passion” when the crisis occurs (119) but an earlier passage suggests he has always been blind, as his feelings for her are not those of a lover, but of a collector of Indian things. In Charlie’s eyes, Christine is just an artefact that he, as a collector, desires: “As a boy he had had the Indian relic-hunting craze (...) as a man he consummated his predilections for Indianology by loving, winning and marrying the quiet little daughter of the English trader” (103). Gerson and Strong Boag argue that in this story marriage serves as a metaphor for mutual incomprehensibility of races (2000: 86) but this plot also enables Johnson to denounce the relations of power that interracial marriages could be based on or result in. Insisting that Christine worships her husband with an “almost abject devotion” (Johnson, 1987: 106), Johnson seems to present her readers with the stereotypical “dog-like”, “crouching”, “submissive” Indian heroine she derides in her essay (Johnson, 2002: 183). Yet very early in the narrative Christine indicates she will act if her husband “fails” her (108), a phrase that suggests possible deficiency or inadequacy in the boy, and the possibility that he might fall short of expectations. Christine is also asserting her right to punish him, which challenges their subaltern/dominant positions. She also challenges them when she tells

Charlie's brother that he "might come in handy for an exchange some day as Charlie does always say when he hoards up duplicate relics" (108). In other words, she turns the tables on Charlie, turning him into an artefact, and quoting his own words back to him. In this story, the balance of power is reversed.

"A Red Girl's Reasoning" dramatizes the hostility met by Native or Mixed-race women who marry white men. Christine's Indian blood is what makes her "new" (Johnson, 1987: 106) or interesting in other people's eyes: "the ladies said she was 'just the sweetest wildflower'" (105). The story exposes social hypocrisy when it is made apparent that her Native blood is also what cannot be mentioned. One of the women who professes to admire Christine and to find her "interesting" starts to question Christine but words soon fail her: "I'm fully interested in the Ind—in your people—your mother's people, I mean, but it always seems so personal, I suppose; and—a—a—" (109). The woman eventually stops speaking altogether as she cannot openly state what has so far been concealed under metaphors—admitting to the presence among them of a woman with Indian blood. Charlie too is proven to be hypocrite: although he professes to love his wife, the fact that he thinks she has "disgraced" him by revealing that her parents were not married under Christian rites suggests he desires her because she is Indian but also that he is ashamed of her because she is.

Johnson rewrites the stereotypical plot by having Christine pursue Charlie's own logic to its bitter end. Charlie claims he cannot recognize Indian rites and considers her parents' marriage invalid, so Christine declares their own marriage invalid and leaves him. When he begs for her forgiveness she will cling to her logic and refuse to forgive him, arguably, their separation seems to spell death for her, but she stands by her decision, which means that for this Indian girl, the mind wins over the heart, and logic over love. The story can also be read as an empowerment narrative since Christine asserts her right to repudiate her unworthy husband, an extraordinary gesture for a woman at the time. She also asserts herself as an Indian woman: when she speaks back she claims her own people, repeatedly saying "my people", "my race", "my forefathers" and "my ancestry" (115-6).

"At it was in the Beginning" offers yet another interesting variation of the doomed interracial union. The heroine, a young Cree girl, is also the narrator—a position which reinforces the tensions in the text. Although she is given a voice, she tells her story in the language she was forced to learn at the expense of her own language (she was made to give up Cree at the mission school). Johnson apparently follows the same plot as the novels she denounces: at the mission school the heroine falls in love with a white boy at

the very moment when she decides it is time for her to go back to her people. Esther, as she is known, is about to betray her own race, renouncing her people and her culture, including her tongue, out of love (Johnson, 1987: 149). When the boy tells his uncle (the priest at the mission) he wants to marry Esther, the man talks him out of it and suggests Laurence marry a white girl (151-4), which further recalls the stereotypical narrative. However Esther does not kill herself, instead killing the young man. In a narrative twist, she blames the old man for Laurence's death since *his* choice of words made her choose the weapon (an arrow head dipped in poison): "What had that terrible old man said I was like? A *strange* snake. A snake? The idea wound itself around me like the very coils of a serpent" (155-6). This heroine too can use the words that are either flung at her or used about her.

The end of the story indicates that Esther feels pain and remorse, dreaming every night of hell (156), which suggests she is not free of what she was taught at the mission school. She however blames the priest for this: "why did they teach me of it, only to fling me into it?" (156) and we might also argue that as a narrator she uses her knowledge to challenge the plot line. In spite of the Canadian context, Johnson sets the stage for a literary encounter, where the stereotypical Canadian plot encounters the original text. When Esther uses her position as narrator to revenge herself even further by writing the "seduction scene" (when the priest talks Laurence into abandoning her) she metaphorically turns the priest into an animal. He is first compared to a bird of prey about to pounce on a rat (153), then his eyes are said to "gr[o]w smaller, more glittering, more fascinating" (153) so that the priest turns into a snake, or rather Satan as the snake. Religious intertextuality is also suggested by numerous references to the priest's black book (144;150;151; 153;154) and by the title, which brings us back to "the beginning". However, the final words of the story suggest other intertextual possibilities connected with other canonical scripts. As the end makes it clear, Esther's story is not that of a revenge by an Indian woman, but by a *woman* (156). It is possible to see Johnson's heroine as an avatar of Medea, the *Barbarian* woman, who left her own people to follow Jason. She too took her revenge on him when he left her to marry one of his kind (a princess), using poison as a weapon. The plotline of Euripides's play would equally fit Johnson's story: the revenge of a woman who has been betrayed by her husband. Johnson uses an apparently childish narrator and simple story to further question readers' expectations of a Canadian/Indian story. The story is also a critique of social and religious hypocrisy—the priest who rejects Esther on account of her Indian blood also professes to love her— and of mission schools (which paved the way for subsequent residential schools)

where Native children were forbidden to speak their language and taught to despise their culture.

### **Encounters with Native women: the mystique of reciprocity in Traill's and Moodie's contact narratives**

Although they also told stories of white hostility towards Native friends, Catharine Parr Traill and Susanna Moodie offered a much more positive version of encounters in the contact zone. In their narratives the focus is on the friendly relations they themselves established with their Chippewa neighbors. Moodie and Traill – and this is also true of Jameson – admitted from the start that they could be an object of curiosity, and would be gazed at by the Native tribes. They also took pride in the fact that they were recognized by their Indian acquaintances when they met again. This was also true of Jameson who noted that “all those whom [she] had seen at Mackinaw recognised [her] immediately and their dusky faces brightened” (Jameson: 541). Moodie notes that her Indian visitors “soon grew friendly and communicative” (Moodie, 187). In their turn, Traill and Moodie identify Native individuals-- by names, and by their relations to one another. Their narratives do evince an interest in the First Nations peoples they met as individuals, which, according to Sara Mills, was the case in nineteenth century travel narratives by women, which “demand[ed] a recognition of the importance of interaction with members of other nations, not as representatives of the race (...) but as individuals.” (Mills, 1991: 97-9). As Gerson has pointed out, the focus in Moodie's and Traill's narratives was on Native women who received their affection, admiration and respect (Gerson, 1997: 12). Their narratives are rife with examples of friendly visits during which smiles and silent conversation overcome language barriers (Moodie 193-4; 197-8).

Traill seems bent on providing scenes that emblemize friendship and reciprocity. In *The Backwoods of Canada*, Traill notes that when she visits the Indian camp, Peter's wife invites her to sit down by her side, making room for her on her own blanket (Traill, 1997: 155; 207). A dynamics of reciprocity organizes the narrative of “A Visit to the Camp of the Chippewa Indians”, despite the emphasis on the exotic in the title. Traill is visited by Indian women who take her back with them to their camp and the story underscores the women's pleasure in being together. The story ends on a symbol of friendship when Traill is given a chain of perfumed grass which is placed around her neck, the Indian woman's words echoing the gesture:

“present for you; wear it for me” (Traill, 1981: 40). A similar principal of reciprocity clearly organises Anna Jameson's description of her encounter with the Indian mother of her half-cast friends: “she called me Nindannis, daughter, and I called her Neengai, mother” (Jameson 491). Reciprocity is equally strong in Traill's *Canadian Crusoes* as the white heroine teaches “Indiana”, her Indian friend, the English names of all the things that present themselves to view and Indiana soon begins “to enjoy *in her turn* the amusement arising from instructing Catharine and the boys” (Traill, 1986: 114, emphasis added).

The mystique of reciprocity is reinforced when touching is foregrounded as when Catharine braids Indiana's hair while Indiana adorns Catharine's hair with feathers in return (119). Touching is frequently mentioned if not foregrounded in these narratives, which, according to Margarete Rubik, was frequent in women's travel narratives (Rubik 44). In “A Visit to the Camp of the Chippewa Indians”, Traill mentions that young Anne fell asleep on her lap (Traill, 1981: 38); Anna Jameson describes how the mother of her half-cast friends took her in her arms when she was unwell, “soothing and caressing her” (491). In *Roughing it*, Moodie tells of an old woman who kisses her in return for her hospitality (194). Traill's and Moodie's narratives can be said to foreground an “ethics of touch”<sup>1</sup> as the sisters admit to being touched, both physically and *emotionally*, by their Indian friends. Moodie describes a moving parting scene, with her Indian friends gathering to see her off with the women coming to kiss her (324).

Encounters in the contact zone affected both colonizers and colonized (Pratt, 1992: 7) and both Traill and Moodie admitted to the fact they could learn from their Indian friends. In *Canadian Crusoes* both the white girl and the Indian girl are given agency, they are never depicted as helpless females who have to be cared for by the boys. Traditional gender positions and the stereotypical subaltern/ white position are challenged as Indiana's hunting and fishing skills help the four teenagers to survive for two years in the woods. Indiana turns into the white teenagers' instructor as Hector and Louis learn to imitate her (126). In other words, the white teenagers have to change and become more like the Indian girl: “they learn how to manufacture utensils, clothes, moccasins and snow-shoes (159) and “like the Indians”,

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<sup>1</sup>. I am indebted to Professor Margarete Rubik who presented a paper entitled “The ethics of touch” at the ESSE conference in [Istambul, September 2013](#), [arguing that that female travel narratives foreground touch](#). I have, in a forthcoming essay, argued that this holds true for Moodie and Traill: “[Did they go native? Representations of First Encounters and Personal Interrelations with First Nations Canadians in the writings of Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill](#)”, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, publication pending.

they learn how to season their food with the vinegar they make (157). *Canadian Crusoes* reveals Traill's admiration for Native ability to make use of nature's resources. In this respect, *Canadian Crusoes* differs greatly from the original text it evokes (which also tells of a first encounter between a white man and a Native): in Traill's text, Indian craft and technology are given prominence, secondly, technological knowledge and skills are passed from the Indian girl to the white teenagers.

### **Reclaiming hybridity**

In "Signs Taken for Wonders", Bhabha argues that hybridity is "a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of colonialist disavowal, so that other "denied knowledges" enter the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority" (Bhabha, 1994: 162). Traill's and Moodie's narratives can be read as hybrid texts as they recognize Native knowledge in ways that slightly destabilize the colonial discourse they construct. As I have argued,<sup>2,3</sup> Traill's representation of Native flora is a case in point. In *The Backwoods*, flowers and plants are first identified by botanical classifications, usually by their Latin names. Since Pratt has shown that descriptions of plants that rely on a European-based system of classification are not innocent (15-37) Traill's first descriptions can be said to express an attempt to create European order over Native chaos. However, Traill's use of local and Native names (Traill, 1997: 175) reveals a change in her vision, all the more so as she admits to Native 'knowledge' of plants. So does Moodie, who first refers to the Indians as being "skilful" in treating diseases and then comments on "their *knowledge* of the medicinal qualities of their plants" (202, my italics). Both women give concrete examples: (Moodie 202; Traill, 1997: 174;175). In *Canadian Crusoes* Indiana makes a tonic from the Canadian spice berry (Traill, 1986: 117) and an ointment from "the root of the *dulcamara*, or bitter-sweet" (117); she also teaches the white children to value Indian rice—the adjective is significant. The references to Indian knowledge of native plants ultimately challenge the view of Canada as a *terra nullius*. *Canadian Crusoes* will further challenge this view since its opening page admits to the prior presence of First Nations Canadians whose claims to the land are also acknowledged: "this now highly cultivated spot was an unbroken wilderness (...) which owned no other

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<sup>2</sup> I have argued this point in a forthcoming essay: "Did they go native? Representations of First Encounters and Personal Interrelations with First Nations Canadians in the writings of Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill", *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, publication pending.

possessors than the wandering hunting tribes of wild Indians, to whom the rights of the hunting grounds north of Lake Rice appertained, according to their forest laws” (1). *Canadian Crusoes* both historicizes the New World, setting her story in the 1770s, and provides a vision of its future. In *Canadian Crusoes*, the characters are referred to as "Canadians" (Traill, 1986: 162) and with the children's marriages (Indiana marries one of the white boys) the novel ends on a vision of Canada as a Mixed-raced nation. Interestingly, the structure of the last sentence cleverly suggests that Indiana and Hector had children without saying so since the possessive "their children" has to refer to the other couple, Louis and Catharine, who are the subject of the sentence (232).

At the time Johnson wrote, hybridity had long been, as Robert Young puts it, “a key issue for cultural debate” (Young, 1995: 6). “The Shagganappi” (1913), originally written for a boy's magazine, openly tackles the issue of miscegenation, and is an outspoken attack on prejudices, from within the dominant culture. A young Métis, Fireflint Larocque, is introduced to the Governor General as a “half-breed” (Johnson, 2002: 262) which angers the Governor General who retorts that the word “breed” cannot be used for human beings (262). With this story Johnson exposes the violence of the dominant discourse on Mixed-race people. Although the boy knows who his parents and his ancestry are (his father is half Cree and half French, and his mother is three-quarter Cree) the dominant discourse deprives the child—and therefore all Mixed-raced Canadians—of his identity, heritages and even of his humanity since he sees himself as “a thing”: “he was born to be a thing apart, with no nationality in the world to claim as a blood heritage. All his young life he had been accustomed to hear his parents and himself referred to as 'half-breeds'.”(262) Later, a boy at college will express a similar view, claiming that Larocque “isn't even a decent Indian” (281).

Not only had the place and identity of Mixed-raced people been critical from the beginning (Bayly, 1999: 20), but Mixed-race individuals were viewed as degenerate in the dominant discourse on miscegenation (Young, 1995: 15), it is for instance a view that Moodie expressed: “The mixture of European blood (...) produces a sad falling off from the original integrity of the Indian character. The half caste is generally a lying, vicious rogue, possessing the worst qualities of both parents in an eminent degree.” (202) For her part, Johnson did not attempt to avoid the issue of prejudice or hostility. In “The Shagganappi”, hostility towards Mixed-raced people is expressed through the voice of the white boy who refuses to befriend Larocque because he “hate[s] a mongrel” (271). However other voices challenge this view, from within the dominant discourse. First, the most

popular boy in college reminds his friends that Larocque's skin is "tinted not tainted" (271). Furthermore, Johnson gives prominent role to the Governor General (the highest authority in Canada): he is the one who gives the Métis boy pride of his heritages. The Governor General first addresses the issue of the boy's Indian blood in words that clearly evoke the strategies at work in "My Mother" as he uses racialized vocabulary as well as words such as "lineage":

'then you have blood in your veins the whole world might envy (...) The blood of old France *and* the blood of a *great* aboriginal race that is the offshoot of no other race in the world. The Indian blood is (...) unmixed for thousands of years, a blood that is distinct and exclusive. Few white people can claim such a *lineage*. Boy, try and remember that as you come of Red Indian blood, dashed with that of the first *great* soldiers, settlers and pioneers in this vast Dominion, that you have one of the proudest places and heritages in the world' (262-3, my emphasis).

The Governor General insists that this heritage is to be envied and has to be *claimed*. Secondly, he tells Fireflint Larocque that far from having no heritage at all, or from being a lesser human being as suggested by words such as "half-race", "half-blood" or "half-breed", he is all the richer from having *two* "great" heritages. The first time his double heritage is mentioned, his white blood is mentioned first, the second time, the Governor General reverses the order by citing his Indian blood first, and he also uses the same adjective, "great" for each race, making it impossible to see his Indian blood as tainting his white blood. However, the fact that Larocque keeps silent about Lady Bennington's Indian blood shows that he still feels some people might be ashamed of it. Hal Bennington is the one who tells his friends that his mother is half Indian, and that he is as proud of their ancestry as she is (281-282). With the character of Lady Bennington Johnson also suggests that there is no such thing as fixed white/ Native identities in Canadian society. She does not aim to overthrow the establishment, but rather to counter prejudices.

For her part, Jameson was much interested in two half cast women she befriended (Jameson 205; 405; 423) but although she found much to her liking in their features and airs, her descriptions nevertheless reveal underlying prejudices as Mrs. MacMurray's Indian features are said to be refined by her white blood (Jameson 205). The Indian blood is there to add exotic charm, which can be heard in the women's voices, whose intonation is "slightly foreign" (205; 405). However, in 1836, Jameson's description of

four French Canadians was already prophetic as to what Canada could be as a nation as she noted “they were all Canadian voyageurs *of the true breed*, that is half-breed, showing the Indian blood as strongly as the French” (526, my italics). Johnson would have found the notion of the Mixed race as the true breed much to her liking. Her “Shagganappi” clearly states her hopes for her country, her “ultimate aspirations for Canada” (Gerson & Strong Boag, 2000: 199). The Governor General insists that the boy's mixed-race identity makes him the symbol of the new nation: ‘You are a Canadian in the greatest sense of that great word.’ (263) repeating the message that is also foregrounded in “My Mother” (Johnson, 1913: 62). Choosing a story for children as a vehicle for this message reveals that Johnson's hopes lied in the next generation who would be able to challenge the racial divide between Native and European Canadians and come to see Canada as a Mixed-raced nation.

## **Conclusion**

Although Traill's and Moodie's depictions of their First Nations neighbours were at first organized by a dynamics of othering, duly underscoring exotic traits and replicating the stereotype, their narratives soon evinced an interest in their neighbors as individuals, and not types, resulting in much more positive accounts of interpersonal and friendly relations. Several accounts were organized by the dynamics of reciprocity, testifying to the possibility of overcoming the racial divide. Their narratives also evinced an interest in Native knowledge, craft and technology, undermining the colonized/ colonizer positions they also foregrounded. Not all of Pauline Johnson's stories offered a positive version of interracial relations, but while she often exposed white prejudices against a Native or Métis woman, she nevertheless offered her readers strong-willed female Native heroines who can be read as figures of resistance in empowerment narratives. Interestingly, Moodie's and Traill's narratives can also be read as empowerment narratives as their female characters gain freedom, independence and agency, which native women possessed. Like the Strickland sisters, Pauline Johnson spoke from within the dominant culture, which allowed her to offer dialogic narratives where Native voices and white voices challenge one another, and Native characters speak for themselves and speak back. Although it is quite clear that Traill and Moodie stopped depicting Canada as a *terra nullius*, their visions of Native peoples remained problematic, and they believed they were witnessing the end of a people; In stories such as “My Mother” or “The Shagganappi”, Johnson, by contrast, tried to express her belief in the new

nation.

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