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Transactions in a Native Land: Mixed-Blood Identity and Indian Legacy in Louise Erdrich's Writing

1. Granddaughter of the Indians

An Indian-American writer of Chippewa and German descent, Louise Erdrich grew up near the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota and, like Albertine in *Love Medicine* (1987), while still young left for the city to become the hybrid personality that she writes about. Her husband, Michael Dorris, who collaborates with her on most of her fiction, went through a similar cultural transaction: although a member of the Modoc tribe on his father's side, he was raised in a white environment. Without entering further biographical details—which are, however, never superfluous in a writer whose *métis* art visibly mirrors her life (Coltelli 1990)—Erdrich, like many other contemporary Indian authors, was educated in a white university and writes "beyond the memories of a murdered generation" (Cook-Lynn 6). She writes about the displaced condition of Midwestern natives caught in complex intersections with the white world, following their loss of homeland and tribal family and their forced relocation into urban landscapes (Mohanty 19).

But the attention that has recently been given to Louise Erdrich rests on the false image of her as a native. The presentation of Erdrich as the survivor of an extinguished race ignores the fact that in her life two cultural spheres constantly interact, just as, in her work, the dialogue between natives and the Euro-Americans who "colonized" their lands is central. Erdrich, a half-breed Indian writer, presents cross-cultural figures based on the lore of her Native American and German immigrant origins and reproduces the complex interaction between minority and dominant cultures in America that Werner Sollors problematically locates not within but "beyond ethnicity."¹

Particularly in her crossblood portraits, Erdrich emphasizes the present bi-cultural, transitional identity of natives and the dynamic position of crossblood women who resist any idealization of their experience or any reductive identification with their cultural background.²

The ambivalent attitude Erdrich displays toward her ethnic identity was absent in the Chippewa autobiographers of the previous generation who tended to voice a nostalgic quest for native cultural roots, following the violent eradication from their Indian environment and their intensive exposure to white boarding schools and language.³ Unlike John Rogers/Chief Snow Cloud, who wrote about his Chippewa youth caught between two cultural settings, Erdrich has no Indian name. Like her Lulu, she is "the child of the invisible,"⁴ the granddaughter of a native matriarch who stands significantly in the background of her stories as the laconic reminder of a past life somehow still operating in her impulsive, wild-boned descendent. As do other contemporary writers who focus on minorities that have recently entered a book market commercializing ethnic difference, Erdrich questions the construction of a culturally pure Other which perpetuates the stereotype of the victim attached to the indigenous race. In particular, Erdrich challenges the biased, static view of native Americans as the anonymous representatives of an organic community, and the conception of Indians as an "amorphous, generalized collectivity" impermeable to historical changes (Smith and Watson *xvii*).⁵

Moving back and forth along these ethnocritical lines, Erdrich's novels simultaneously look at the traditions and values that once nurtured the Chippewa community and at the effects of the native's encounter with urban culture. This oscillating narrative movement enables the writer to embrace two conflicting visions at once.

Running counter to the white audience's expectations of native Indians as anthropological rarities, Louise Erdrich provides neither stories of Indian dispossession nor biographies designed to bring back to life the memories of her massacred race. Instead, she presents a variety of mixed-blood individuals, a number of displaced native subjectivities who constitute "the only trace of those who died and scattered" (*Tracks* 38), but who participate in their own social determination. In her Indian trilogy, which goes beyond the nostalgic recall of a lost organic world, her characters are often suspended between two

cultures, living as they do in a psychological limbo straddling the Chippewa reservations and their North Dakota-Minnesota surroundings. In *The Beet Queen* (1987), the forty-year saga which forms the second part of Erdrich's Indian trilogy, the setting is mostly urban and the protagonists are often caught in their permanent transaction with Argus, the town of Swedish immigrants where beet fields and highways have rapidly replaced the forests once inhabited by the natives. As the green motherland blurs its natural borders in the forced encounter with profit and urbanization, the reservation bears no resemblance to the enchanted woods which flourished before the genocide. The author makes no display of peace pipes or ghost dances in the novel; there are no red warriors with feathers, no tribal chiefs with exhaustive knowledge of healing herbs and animal habits (Magalener 95).

From another standpoint, another half-breed Chippewa writer, Gerald Vizenor, also challenges the pastoral idealization of his native world. With the corrosive black humor typical of the postmodern Indian *métis*, Vizenor turns the reservation from quintessential utopia into a decadent tourist attraction where swindles, casinos and bingo centers abound, and where natives are willing to pose in traditional costumes or to ride horses around Wounded Knee for the delight of white visitors and photographers (Vizenor 3-61).

In *The Beet Queen*, Erdrich recounts the fall of Russel, the "bull-chested" Chippewa hero, who returns wounded from the Korea war to what is left of his Indian tribe. In *Love Medicine*, the shamanic power of the medicine man proves ineffectual and the last hereditary leader of the tribe ends up posing naked for a rich woman painter, disconsolately portrayed in the act of falling backwards off a horse in a Hollywood B movie.

Even though, like Vizenor, she rejects the notion of a "pure" Indian culture, Erdrich does not reduce this culture to a postmodern parody of her tribal past, easily convertible into the simulacra of museum commodities, as does Vizenor in his tricksterish, masculine provocations. Adopting a less abrasive and cynical stance than Vizenor's, she retains a dynamic but quite profound sense of her cultural background. Her tone is intense and intimate, and she builds her narration on a series of short, interconnected lyric monologues that stand as echoes from native storytelling (Portelli 22).

Erdrich's account never runs the risk of falling a victim to her own irony. She strongly depends on her relatives' storytelling, on the family legends heard from her maternal grandparents on the Chippewa reservation. Her Indian trilogy, in particular, is an open attempt to come to terms with the legacy of her Indian forebears in order to find out what is still active or latent in the heritage of their half-breed, urbanized descent. The lyric enchantment of Erdrich's memorial discourse evokes a spiritual heritage profoundly embedded in experience, though impossible to be fully resumed and reconstructed. Set at the crossroads between two worlds, Erdrich's fiction becomes a decentered space of memoirs, a polyphonic discourse constitutive of a decolonized native identity.

2. *Partial transcriptions from a native language*

Writing at a time when Indian crossbloods are increasingly confessing their inadequacy to speak fully for their ancestors, Erdrich makes a tentative entrance into the labyrinthine tangles of her memories through a liminal form of "fictionalized recall" (Tanner 295) obliquely located between fiction and autobiography. Unable to resist her insistent "tug of memory," the author treats her Chippewa heritage in a semi-autobiographical mode which conveys simultaneously her desire and her failure to retain all the stories inherited from her native ancestors. By simulating partial transcriptions of what was originally narrated to her in oral form, Erdrich achieves the double aim of breaking the sequence of her vanishing memory while keeping the performative structure of storytelling almost intact.

Her Indian trilogy ranges from the Twenties to the present, portraying three North Dakotan Chippewa generations in a mosaic of opposite viewpoints but never reaching the diachronic structure of a saga. In her novels, memory seems unable to close the sacred tribal bond of mysticism and solidarity. The multi-voiced narrative fluctuates intermittently between past and present in a broken rhythm whose missing links the narrator, as in Leslie Silko's *Storyteller*, is never tempted to provide through either autobiography or fiction. The modern American Indian writer stands as a "self-appointed" autobiog-

rapher (Cook-Lynn 58) who is aware of writing nothing more than scattered "memoirs" in both the first and third persons. No focal narrator mediates among the multiple voices in the text. Lee Quinby opposes the conventional self-centered, autobiographical discourse to the dialogical use of memoirs made by postcolonial women writers, where the author's participation in the portraits of her people is perceptible, even though she mostly allows them to speak for themselves in an interconnected sequence of self-contained personal accounts.⁶ In accord with this polyphonic pattern, Erdrich turns each chapter into an autonomous section, producing a unique montage of self-portraits and alternating narrators. In *The Beet Queen* in particular, Native Americans and whites stand side by side rather than opposite, in a discontinuous flow of memory that does not shape the unified, coherent subjectivity of the autobiographer, but captures instead all the dreamlike, transcultural presences inhabiting her mind.

In the form of scattered memoirs and unrelated anecdotes, each voice provides an unfinished record of events that stresses the inadequacy of a centralized autobiographical perspective. Aiming at an effect of subjective and cultural displacement, Erdrich's narrative deliberately moves away from chronological order, leaving family links untraced and genealogical gaps between the three Indian generations unaccounted for. The confusion of temporal levels is symptomatic of this asymmetrical structure. The trilogy begins with a depiction of the reservation in *Love Medicine*, proceeds along an irregular temporal line with *The Beet Queen*, an urban narrative, and ends up with *Tracks*, a novel that spans the period from 1912 to the chilly Twenties, when the Chippewa tribes were forced to abandon their enchanted woods. This is also the time when the story line of the trilogy is supposed to begin. The broken rhythm reinforces the underlying idea that, today, Indian tradition can only be conveyed through a narrative patchwork which call never purport to be a complete history, following as it does tentative memorial paths toward an unfinished series of dramatic monologues.⁷

"There are no tracks in the Indian heaven," declares the indomitable spirit of Erdrich's Indian forefather in "Potchikoo's Life After Death" (*Baptism* 52). His ghost never stops talking to his half-breed descendent, drawing her back to her Indian roots and to the

mysteries of the woods. Haunted by her forebears in the same way as Maxine Hong Kingston is, Erdrich's non-epic but enchanted vision of Indian past and present is often conveyed through female voices. As in Kingston's memoirs, the narrating women have an ambivalent position with respect to their past. They represent a cross-cultural subjectivity which, on the one hand, is deprived of the spiritual bondage that kept natives strongly attached to the life of the forest and, on the other, is not negatively affected by the degradation of the tribe. Caught at the intersection of two power discourses, crossblood women seem to possess more than one code of resistance to alienation and despair: they function like hinges, ironically located across two borders of marginality.⁸ Both within and outside of the reservations, Erdrich's Chippewa female characters are, like the author, a mixture of European and native descent. They inhabit a shifting narrative space, a "frontier perspective," as Arnold Krupat calls it, where the two cultures problematically encounter each other, revealing their epistemological assumptions and reciprocal misrepresentations.⁹

As natives at a cultural crossroads, Erdrich's crossblood women manage to negotiate their own set of beliefs with the adjustments required off-reservation. Coming down from the reservation to the little town of Argus, they work out the transition from one world to another and prove to be far more apt in coming to terms with the urban working life than their disempowered male companions. In the marginalized reservation, alcoholism and impotence reverse the gender roles and the cultural stereotypes often projected on native communities by white observers. The muscular half-Chippewa Celestine, "handsome like a man" (64) and hardened by working in a butcher shop in *The Beet Queen*, and Fleur, the diver, with her powerful lungs and her indomitable courage in *Tracks*, are far more energetic characters than their disoriented male relatives, who remain secluded on the reservation and who, in contrast, fail to communicate and therefore to live in the sale remaining part of their world not taken away from their fathers. The Indian heroes seen in the act of casting poisoned arrows look defeated more by drunkenness and starvation than by the rifles of the confederate soldiers, while sturdy, revengeful matriarchs are able to confront the new life conditions and thus challenge the white stereotype of the inept squaw. As her mother did before her, Celestine comes to town to

run a shop with Mary, a white orphan whose ways also seem blunt and masculine when compared with those of her emasculated brother. The latter, in turn, shares the dispirited destiny of the native males on the reservation, who are quite oblivious of the heroic legacy of their ancestors.

The story of Indian dispossession in *Tracks*, and of the different reactions of males and females within the Chippewa community threatened by profit, is narrated by two storytellers: one is the brave tribal head of the past, widely celebrated for his deeds in the Chippewa oral tradition and presently weakened to starvation, and the other is a restless mixed-blood nun.

Nanapush, the old tenant of the forest who used to guide the buffalo hunt, has his monologue constantly interrupted by that of demented Pauline, a half-breed Catholic convert who exorcises her Chippewa origins by identifying with her half-white, Canadian side. Despite his refusal to sign the whites' settlement papers setting boundaries to his own land, the tribal head is almost crystallized in the proud defense of his territories. He survives to witness a world heading toward disappearance and to see his social landscape flattened, like the forest, into a "tribe of pressed trees... that can be scattered by a wind, diminished to ashes by one struck match" (225). As an ironic counterpoint to Nanapush's resistance to "indigenous colonialism" (Smith and Watson *xiii*), Pauline incarnates both the white and tribal features which converge in the ambivalent idiom of the mixed-blood. Moving among these representatives of a scattered race, Erdrich achieves a *métis* writing form through a "textual evocation of various conflicting codes" (Rainwater 406), a form which expresses the dilemma of her bicultural identity.

Through the use of a bilingual idiom in which the English and the Anishinabe languages often overlap, the mixed-blood author—whose omniscient voice is never directly heard—silently places herself at the intersection of Western and tribal systems of language and belief. The complex, many-stranded cultural fabric of her mixed-blood characters is often encapsulated in a spurious language woven from diverse national and cultural threads in which verbs are derived from Chippewa, and most nouns from French and Cree.

The religious level provides a further exemplary metaphorical

field in which to observe Native Americans in the process of shaping a new way of life and a new identity. Old, wise native women are often haunted by elements of Christian belief, and thus radically revise Judeo-Christian doctrines borrowed from the whites. Once intertwined with tribal traditions, the Christian creed becomes a new theology incorporating peyote, evangelism, and Creole forms of spirituality. In this way the shamanic visions and hallucinatory animism which characterize Native American spirituality (Zolla 417) adjust with a certain degree of independence to the new living conditions. For instance, the protagonist's wise, laconic grandmother in *The Crown of Columbus* is an eccentric convert in whose "unshakable universe... was ample room for Navajo chants and Jesus Christ, for directly competing—even conflicting—truths" (133).

A similar mixture of linguistic and religious codes—typical of a colonized indigenous population forced to reshape its own myths—is embodied by Pauline, the converted Chippewa nun. Her pagan use of the Christian religion is a strange compound of fanaticism, witchcraft and sensualism which she blindly turns against her own people. In her distorted, hybrid interpretation of Judeo-Christian theological and epistemological attitudes, this mixed-blood woman tracks down the "evil" spirit in the woods and moves toward the final acquisition of a fully Catholic spirituality. At the same time, in an attempt to sacrifice her pagan, magical powers, she castigates herself by wearing rough potato sacks in the name of a Christ "dressed in glowing white" (*Tracks* 140). In her alchemic combination of Catholic doctrine with tribal traditions and rituals, desire and religion become one and the same thing, and the sensuality of the Chippewa language—where "hunting game" and "flirting," the idea of killing a bear and that of using force in sexual intercourse, are expressed by the same term ("Jacklight," *Jacklight* 3)—is retained.

In her collection of poems, *Baptism of Desire* (1989), Erdrich similarly mixes sacred and profane languages, the magic religion of darkness and Christian myths. In her hallucinated vision often conveyed through an almost intoxicating use of metaphors, sensualism and religious devotion, Christian mysticism and peyotism coexist, echoing, in modified form, the native shamanic tradition. In "Fooling God," a profane, hybrid Saint Clare is spellbound by a Franciscan sermon and

becomes, like Mary Magdalene and Teresa of Avila, the holy symbol of a spirituality that does not transcend the body but resides in an immanent, corporeal "blackness of heaven" ("The Sacraments" 24).

The transformation of Christian saints into pagan characters is another instance of the simultaneous presence of alien codes in the crossblood's incestuous idiom. The composite linguistic and epistemological nature of this idiom ultimately produces a sense of epistemological irresolution that Catherine Rainwater identifies as a basic feature of Erdrich's *métis* writing (413). The lustful, blasphemous Saint Clare, who is profanely defined as the "patron saint of television," speaks words of skeptical heresy and concludes: "I must be a doubter in a city of belief" (3, 4).

One might wonder, at this point, what present-day American Indian culture as portrayed by Louise Erdrich consists of. One might further wonder whether this is, typically, a white question. There is no doubt that it is precisely that for old Nanapush, the proud, dispossessed medicine man portrayed in *Tracks*—while for Erdrich's decolonized half-breeds it represents a real dilemma. A white, postmodern cultural amnesia, however, is not what Erdrich is extending to the Indian world. Despite her search for a mixed-blood, postcolonial audience, her narrative maintains the features of a semi-autobiographical recall of native culture by means of an active, metamorphic agent of history which has the power to unsettle fixed racial categories.

Erdrich's dialogical view of the native cultural difference produces a convergence of indigenous and Western epistemes that is not identifiable with a blind removal of present power relations or with the acritical celebration of a new multicultural hegemony. The dual world that Erdrich's characters inhabit in their constant exchange with an alien civilization must not, however, be mistakenly understood as the ultimate effect of the Indian's cultural estrangement in their colonized territories. Indeed, far from sharing in a process of "assimilation" or from constituting the final stage of that forceful acculturation better known as "Indian termination," the close interaction of these characters with the white world represents the effort to integrate their ethnic difference in the present conditions of "indigenous colonialism." At the same time, it allows the writer to explore the effects of the interethnic encounter in a context of vastly unequal power relations.

Erdrich's light complexioned *métis* heroines, however, certainly do not advocate a docile conversion to the dominant Euro-American culture. In *Tracks*, at the end of the writer's quest for her ethnic roots, before the setting of boundaries in the woods, one of the sturdy Indian ancestors about to be dispossessed of her land is defined as "deliberately held in and half-tamed. But only half" (18). This sounds more like a warning than a compliant acceptance of defeat.

3. *The name of the crossblood*

Erdrich's stress on cultural ambivalence in the post-reservation Chippewa experience becomes a deconstructive, ethnocritical tool in *The Crown of Columbus* (1991), her parodic treatment of the colonialist theme of cross-cultural intermarriage. In this double-voiced novel, conceived for the quincentennial of Columbus' first voyage to America, Erdrich's linguistic and cultural *mésalliance* coincides with a revision of Pocahontas' myth of reconciliation. In another dialogical juxtaposition of white and Indian perspectives, a couple from two dissimilar cultural backgrounds mate, remaining distinct yet still involved, contiguous but always "hyphenated," and, in their intense interaction, produce a new, composite identity. The female protagonist—Vivian TwoStars, another crossblood woman, is rewriting the natives's first encounter with the European colonists. Significantly, she discovers two missing pages of Columbus' lost, unexpurgated diary—an important reference that Las Casas omitted in the transcription of the Barcelona copy. According to this document, Columbus apparently offered the aboriginal king a crown as a sign of recognition of his submission to the native sovereignty of those lands. Vivian exults: such a gesture of friendly acceptance and reconciliation ensuring obligation and loyalty reverses the aggressive image of the colonizing explorer. However, the "name of the crown" given to the natives proves to be a term just as cryptic and ambiguous as the profoundest meaning of the conquest/discovery of America, still the object of endless debate.¹⁰ In the reading of Roger Williams, the white male protagonist, the ambivalent crown alternatively stands for a rosary, for a tribute to the Spanish Queen, for the sign of the Cross which symbolizes her power, and, finally, for Christ's

sacrificial crown of thorns. Caught in the unending search for the original and true meaning of the word "crown," the novel, begun as a chance to rewrite the history of colonization, becomes a labyrinthine quest for meaning and identity, typical of postmodern speculative tales, drawing no conclusions and placing itself, like the mixed-blood protagonists, in a ubiquitous, suspensive position.¹¹ At the end, the half-breed Indian scholar and her white partner are finally reconciled through the reversible identity of Columbus and encounter one other at the cultural crossroads of their "border dialogue" (Chambers). However, what might sound like a compromising closure for a love-story which is not exempt from sentimental overtones, fosters in fact the conditions for a new sense of biculturalism committed to the necessary survival and nurturing of ethnic difference. Vivian, who embodies a varying degree of identification and dissociation from her Indian roots, finally joins Columbus, embracing a *métis* ethics which ultimately does not rely on a sense of pure ethnicity but, rather, on the unpredictable encounter with others.

In other words, the novel provocatively unifies cultural forces which initially recede from each other and questions the rigid cultural opposition that fatally locates "the relentlessly genocidal Euro-Americans" on one side and the "Hapless Native Americans" on the other (Krupat 19). In the direct confrontation of transcultural characters, ethnic clichés are shown to be inadequate and rigid white dichotomies are defied, for they artificially divide the biological indigenous life from the anthropological logos, myth from history, nature from civilization. The final suggestion is that cultural differences are better conceptualized in dialogical rather than oppositional terms.¹² For instance, in its liminal, ambivalent symbology and structure, Erdrich's (and Dorris') latest narrative produces a tension of gender and race power discourses through which oppressor and oppressed constantly exchange places. As earth and mind, city and forest, highway and land complement and substitute each other, the tale of ethnic mixing turns from a search for the identity of the colonized into an exploration of the biased assumptions of the colonizer. In this narrative, where episodes are narrated in the first person by the crossblood woman and by her white partner, the two protagonists acknowledge their mutual prejudices. On the other hand, the crossblood woman, whose body is "a bridge of our

intricate genetic possibilities" (212), gains intellectual recognition through a recovery of her cultural heritage, unexpectedly witnessing the conversion to native values of her self-centered, cerebral white scholar who finally turns into a stranger in his own land. The white anthropologist, as in Vincent Crapanzano's confrontation of the Moroccan in *Tubami*, must credit his half-breed companion with confronting him with his "crown" of power as a failure of understanding, and becomes, like his indigenous lover, a heretic, converted to an alien doctrine in his own world. The reader is finally led toward a *dénouement* in which native and white myths overlap and characters exchange their initial power roles: the ethnic woman establishes herself as a "native anthropologist" and the proud, established anthropologist comes to doubt his ethnocentric assumptions.

Although this encounter leaves the quest for historical truth about Columbus unsolved, it accomplishes the *métis* miracle of mutual discovery and understanding at a cultural crossroads of the American multiethnic society—a world of immigration and difference that Serres compares to an "ambidextre, triple" organism which does not fight what resides in itself (Serres 26). At the end of their unfinished quest for truth, the mismatched lovers become increasingly closer, like interchangeable poles of a foreign, decentered world where epistemological doubts dominate both the white and the red. The mysterious crown—the treasure that Columbus transported to the Indies—finally assumes the value of "the hope for equity and respect between worlds" (351).

Leading toward a message of interethnic solidarity, the story manages "to bridge codes that do not interface" (Rainwater 413), in a mode of magical realism which paradoxically incorporates myth and reality, the mundane and the magical, the fecund imagery pulsating in the woods as well as the strains of Argus' urban, working life.

In another reversal of ethnic stereotypes, Erdrich not only includes but widens Indian half-breeds in the spurious category of the "crossblood." Interestingly enough, Erdrich's mixed-blood Indians are often indistinguishable from dispossessed "white negroes." For instance, in *The Beet Queen*, the author attributes magic power and the ability to cause miracles to natives as well as to the displaced white orphans Karl and Mary Adare. In a magical scene quite in tune with

Indian hallucinatory sensibility, the two children symbolically witness their mother dissolve in the sky with a stranger, an aviator. The partial conversions, the problematic intermarriages, the large number of foundlings, cast-offs and cross-cultural adoptions that Erdrich describes, define an unclear parental state and a fairly lax determination of Indianness. Beside the indigenous population increasingly deprived of their tantric supernatural power, in Erdrich's fiction stand the number of Euro-American, Midwestern, unemployed people who are adopted by Indian tribes in her stories, who thus widen the space of their extended families.¹³ Moreover, throughout the trilogy we discover deserted white children adopted by Chippewa women like Marie Lazarre, living in tribal communities and presenting a confusing lineage with a number of separately raised half siblings.

Erdrich's incorporation of destitute and deserted white children into the spurious category of the "crossbloods" continues a long tradition of American writing, from William Faulkner to Maxine Hong Kingston, which portrays characters devoid of a definite identity, hybrid races that serve as hinges between two separate worlds equally menaced by disintegration. As a result, in the city just outside the reservation there is no marked difference between the urbanized half-breed Celestine and her white disoriented lover Karl, for they both partake of the same *métis* identity and are equally doomed to retrace their mother's pattern of loss.

Acting as an interpreter between two worlds, like the Benjaminian translator, Erdrich allows her "language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue" (Benjamin 81). In so doing, she achieves a double aim: on the one hand, she fosters the condition of an ethnic pluralism committed to the survival and nurturing of native culture in the dominant Euro-American culture; on the other, she casts a sympathetic eye upon the increasing number of poverty-stricken marginals from a Euro-American background who, on the anniversary of the invasion of America, inherit the crown of state which proclaims their cultural schizophrenia.

¹³ Soller's concern shifts from the notion of biological ethnicity to the observation of the dynamic cultural interplay of the codes of consent and descent in the United States. He criticizes today's ethnic revivalism as the sign of a renovated cultural

exclusivism. He devises a "fascist potential of ethnic movements in this reduction of complex authentic identity to contrastive one-dimensionality in the name of ethnicity" (28).

2 On the failure of rigid self-definitions, see Bhabha and Crapanzano.

3 See John Rogers. A late recovery of Indian identity also marks the experience of the urbanized Hopi mixed-blood Wendy Rose (see Giordano).

4 *Tracks 1*. Erdrich's works will henceforth be quoted in the text.

5 Coco Fusco appropriately speaks of a constant "fétichization de l'autre" in Western culture.

6 "Whereas autobiography promotes interiority and an ethical mandate to examine that interiority, memoirs promote an 'I', that is explicitly constituted in reports of the utterances and proceeding of others" (Quinby 299).

7 As Angela Carter puts it, "The impression is as of a river of memory bursting its banks and overflowing upon the page in an irresistible flood" (182).

8 In *Tracks*, Fleur is said to be "the one who closed the door and swung it open. Between the people and the gold-eyed creature in the lake, the spirit which they said was neither good nor bad but simply had an appetite, Fleur was the hinge" (139).

9 By "frontier perspective" Krupat means a moving back and forth across border ethnic lines" (Krupat 19).

10 Erdrich and Dorris' ambivalent account of Columbus' encounter with the natives adds fuel to the discussion that historiographers have been conducting on Columbus throughout this century. Todorov's negative and Morison's apologetic portraits of the voyager are examples of opposing views in the ongoing debate. I am indebted to Daniele Fiorentino for his suggestions on this subject.

11 In an interview, Erdrich acknowledges the influence of Calvino and the contemporary South American writers (Coltelli 1990, 48).

12 As Laura Coltelli points out, "The work of American Indians of the past few years reflects the Indian struggle to overcome the stereotype image in its various stages... created by white authors, from the vanishing race to the dispossessed and the social misfits, or the victim of the paralyzing cultural conflicts" (Coltelli 1988, 191). Giorgio Mariani also refers to a problematic "double liminality" in his contribution on American Indian contemporary writers in the forthcoming collection of essays edited by Paola Cabibbo.

13 In a recent interview, Blue Cloud pointed out that the adoptions of non-Indians in the old days meant that they entered the clan and "became us," in a world of extended families and dynamic relations (Brucach 36).

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