

JUDIT ÁGNES KÁDÁR

ARCHIE, WHO ARE YOU FOOLING, ANYWAY?—FLUID
NARRATIVE AND IDENTITY IN ARMAND GARNET
RUFFO'S *GREY OWL: THE MYSTERY OF ARCHIBALD
BELANEY* (1996)

Archibald Belaney alias Grey Owl: hero of early 20th Century Canadian environmentalism, and anti-hero of the partly Ojibway Canadian writer Armand Ruffo's *Grey Owl: The Mystery of Archibald Belaney* (1996—further referred to as *GO*). Why is his cross-cultural transformation such an excitement still today? What is the main motivation of a young middle-class Englishman going Indian? Does he really develop an alter ego, an indigenized identity, or does he remain a fake celebrity Indian, just a bit more powerful character than a cigar store wooden Indian? Or did he mostly dwell in the vacuum of a culturally in-between world where he was always a misfit? How did he utilize his understanding of the epistemological uncertainties of his age regarding the ethnic divide between whites and the culture of the Other, and how can a contemporary author challenge this attempted myth making? What can we learn about American and European relations in the view of this shape shifting figure? And finally, who needs the myths of Indianness based on ideologically attuned stereotypes and why? Who is he fooling, anyway?

The present paper would like to convince the reader that the story of Grey Owl alias Archibald Belaney, the Indian wannabe impostor and popular cultural figure, has received a distinctly sophisticated, new narrative presentation by Armand Ruffo, a poetic experimentation with masking and unmasking. Firstly Belaney's cross-cultural (trans-ethnic) transformation is analyzed (1), then the power and implication of his character are detailed (2), followed by an overview of Ruffo's narrative

unmasking (3) and some closing remarks on the epistemological trickster and racialization in Ruffo's Grey Owl text (4).

1. Cross-cultural (Trans-Ethnic) Transformation

Belaney's transformation is voluntary and deliberate, like that of William Johnson/Warraghiagey and Silvester Long/Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance. His ethnic change is partial, but, when discussing the Grey Owl Syndrom Caucasian Canadian writers, Margaret Atwood argues that, as opposed to Earnest Thompson Seton/Black Wolf, founder of the *Woodcraft Indian* movement, who did not wish to fully identify with the natives and develop a native identity, Belaney truly longed for obtaining such an identity, to become Indian (48), partly because of his escapist motivations, and partly because he did not really wish to return to Europe. In that sense he is quite similar to Sylvester Long Lance, who interestingly attempts to leave his biracial (Afro-American and white) identity and develop a surrogate Indian identity (see: Donald Smith: "From Sylvester Long to Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance" in James Clifton: *Being and Becoming Indian: Bibliographical Studies of North American Frontiers* and in Smith's *Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance, the Glorious Impostor*.) Their motivations and skills to learn and acculturate were truly remarkable, while both suffered from the consequences of their racial passing. Finally Belaney/Grey Owl finds himself in an identity vacuum on the borderland of two cultures, like May Dodd in Jim Ferguson's *One Thousand White Women: The Journal of May Dodd* (1998) or Mary Jemison/Tow-Falling-Voices in Deborah Larsen's *The White* (2002), who both refuse to exclusively belong to either Anglo or Native Indian culture and decide to create their own microcosmic world of in-between ethno-cultural identity. Nevertheless, both May Dodd and Mary Jemison go through a natural process of indigenization, while Archibald Belaney had made a deliberate choice to mask himself as the Other, as the one who fulfills the dominant expectations about what the Native Other should be like.

For a short note, I would like to apply Michelle Stem Coock's theory of "The Impossible Me" (55–56) on the central figure of Ruffo's book, in order to illuminate the complex fundamental motivations of such a permanent shape shifting.

The *impossible me*, as I define it, can emerge as a copy mechanism when newly acquired, unexplored options tempt or pressure an

individual to compromise existential identities formed in a context devoid of those options. Conversely, when an individual suffers a loss of options because the new structural context imposes restrictions, the *impossible me* can become a mechanism of resistance to social control. In both instances, an individual rejects potential modes of adaptation by constructing impossibility. (Stem Cook 56)

I believe that Belaney's early childhood experiences, as will be explained later on, stimulated such a resistance to the social control of his Victorian upbringing as well as a resistance deriving from a child's impossibility of understanding why his parents had left him. Under the restrictions, loss of options that his aunts' world had offered him, he has created an unreal Indian personality for himself, an "*impossible me*" that seemed more comfortable and successful than anything England of the day could have offered for him, though he was constantly threatened by being recognized as a fake Indian. Being a nice Englishman was equally impossible for him as becoming a 100% Indian, therefore, he tended to diminish the chance of an unsuccessful conformist identity with developing a risky but more promising, unique prospective identity, a romantic, mythic and fictional one which has proved to be extremely attractive, fascinating and successful on both continents. Stem Cook explains it as follows: "Invoking impossibility eliminates the threat of an identity that seems to be incompatible with the self by inventing a structure that denies the self the option of incorporating that identity" (55).

As for the process of Belaney's transformation and misconstruction of identity, the author provides us with four phases called the "Beginning," "Transformation," "Journey," and "No Retreat". Just like any other indigenization story in the North American context of ethno-cultural encounters, the first period ("Beginning") includes on the one hand a distancing and break from his original English middle class family and home, and also a brainstorming about New World opportunities, fancying with idealized Indian images based on stereotypes and creating his own "imitationist performances" (Green 43). On the other hand, this phase also includes the actual travelling and home making in Ontario, the initial shape shifting, going Indian as for external markers of ethnicity and for creating his own Indian ways, as well as creating new relationships, establishing personal ties with native Canadians.

Interestingly, here the North (=Canada? North America?) means possibility (*GO* 12) and future, while the past (=England? Hastings? His aunts and the lack of his parents?) is to be closed down as only

imagination, not reality any longer. We can see how deliberate he is in shaping his own imagination, setting up new goals and escapes and also starting his new life in Canada with some ethnic studies at Tema-Augama Anishnabai. He is a good listener and learner of native lifestyle, behaviour and physical features, perhaps less of native spirituality, as Dagmar Wernitznig remarks (106). She adds that Belaney “aimed to create a parallel Indian universe for himself from the start, freely copying what he liked, while ignoring what he did not” (Wernitznig 99). He wants “to remake himself” (*GO* 18) and the band he meets is ready to accept him as a mediator and call him Little Owl, denoting his skill to learn Indian ways. He quickly realizes that the best way to acculturate is to have a native female companion, so his Caribou Clan girlfriend is the first to teach him the language and manners, while “She watches/ him struggling with himself” (*GO* 19), too. All his wives seem to function as supporters of Belaney’s myth creation, however, his attitude towards relationships proves irresponsible and present him as a rather weak character. He tends to leave them no matter what, even a pregnant girlfriend, while marrying another woman, denoting his constant uncertainties and tendency to escape any static setup in his life. He keeps escaping “The law,/ the women, the past, get rid of it all” (*GO* 22). Besides, he is a heavy drinker and occasional trouble maker, who tries to escape not only family ties but the police and even ends up in the army that did not prove a real escape for him either.

We can see two problems here. One is that he deliberately selects some aspects of Native Indian lifestyle that he wants to acculturate to, like outlooks and a close-to-nature attitude, while he ignores some other important aspects of native culture, like spiritualism. Right from the beginning, he follows and recreates stereotypical images and not his real experiences with the Natives, so no substantial identification, acceptance and satisfaction about his transformation can be achieved. Moreover, he seems constantly confused about his identity, roles, goals and personal helpers, therefore no fulfilled life and happiness is possible for him either. The other main problem is that his transformation has always aimed at the public: English and Canadian audiences of his shows, readers of his nature books and policy makers on both continents. However, having an enormous public attention does not necessarily force him to be honest and authentic but more to provide them with what they want to get: the Hollywood Indian turned environmentalist, while very few really care how authentic he is: the most ironic example is his Indian war dance,

which apparently used to be unknown among the Natives and his dancing skills are rather unique to say the least... We will see the consequences later on in his life and afterlife.

The second phase called “Transformation” takes place at Lake Temagami. Since 1925, a somewhat more prevalent change is visible in Belaney’s character. His second wife, Gertrude Bernard, the urbanized Mohawk woman joins him in his myth making efforts: Gertie becomes Anahareo of her “Jesse James,” the woman whom probably he loves the deepest and shares charismatic features with, too. However, their relationship is uncertain, for by 1928 she is bored in the wilderness and leaves him (*GO* 48–49). Belaney is the president, treasurer and sole member of the Beaver People Society... He speaks and writes for some environmental concerns, like the protection of the beaver. As for his worldly interests, he is a passionate conservationist, his speech at Metis-Sur-La-Mer fort marks the beginning of his career as a public speaker. He realizes that in order to make money he needs to give speeches and write, which initially is not his cup of tea at all. He often lacks inspiration, but under material pressures he does his best to provide that “public service.” Since 1929, he is taken more and more as an Indian, and he identifies with another aspect of Indian lifestyle: Anahareo, the “prototypical agent of feminine emotionality and Indian Mother Earth philosophy” (Wernitznig 100) opens his eyes to the fact that the diminishing hunting opportunities decrease his business opportunities, too, so making ends meet becomes a challenge (*GO* 60) for him. Besides the predominantly materialistic urges, Belaney’s “beaver/Bambi syndrome *a la* Indianness” (Wernitznig 102) formulates an ironic opposition of reality versus fantasy in his character.

In this phase we can observe Belaney’s mythic transformation: when on stage, he is such a devoted actor that he fully identifies with his role—not any realistic Native Indian image: “He Who Walks By Night” is now a person more and more lost to the world of illusions he created about himself, lost for his wife as well, who starts to call him Grey Owl, too. In that sense he is as successful as William Johnson presented in Fintan O’Toole’s *White Savage: William Johnson and the Invention of America* (2005): both of them had perfectly learned the cross-cultural communication skills that has made them powerful mediators, culture brokers and businessmen, though Johnson can shift back-and-forth in his two roles (American patriarch Frontier man and Iroquois sachem), while Belaney sticks to his fake Indian identity and poses in that no matter

where he is. In 1935, Gertie returns and finds him even more lost to his thoughts and writing. Belaney is bewildered by publishers' demands, realizes what Wernitznig calls his "Indian marketability" (*GO* 101), and truly becomes a celebrity writer of supposed Indian origins. He is getting more distanced from his public as well as his personal companions, a larger-than-life figure ("I am the Voice of Nature" [*GO* 107]) whose real personality is gradually shrinking to an exhausted and lonely, escapist showman. Grey Owl, the environmentalist Indian now is a commodity with an easy to sell myth and some political influence.

Johnson in O'Toole's *White Savage* is a self-made Indian, too, although he does not lie about his origins and his goal is to obtain as much political influence and economic power as possible. His "swinger shifting" between his Mohawk and white positions depends on the given situation and historic moment, ensuring his growing power and advantageous political position. Consequently, he seems to be happier with his achievements and more content with the identity variables he has developed, since he enjoys the advantages of both cultures and deliberately ignores what he considers as disadvantages in either. He can always escape a community/situation and shift into the other one temporarily, without having any serious moral, ethical or emotional concerns. Belaney, however, goes fake Indian and does not wish to return to whiteness at all. He truly hopes to develop an ideal Native identity and image, but while the latter is easier to achieve, the former makes him rather a split personality with an almost schizophrenic mental state, driving him to spiritual a physical weakness. Nevertheless, both of them create their own myths, enjoy the prestige and advantages of being mediators and are remarkably familiar with both cultures. The most interesting question regarding this transformation is: how is this myth actually made, what are its components, public feedbacks, impacts and what are its implications to the ways we perceive reality and race relations in particular.

The third phase of Belaney's indigenization is referred to as the "Journey." One can see that these phases are not clear cut but overlapping, therefore the same alienation and mystification processes continue. What changes is the growing sense of ambiguity inside and outside: Belaney becomes a Native Canadian Ambassador and a well-known public speaker, due to his companion, Lovat Dickson's work. However, the more others believe and celebrate his Indianness, the more entrapped he is, the more confused and lonely, surrounded only by his lies. He is

afraid of being called a liar (*GO* 104), paranoid about this risk factor of his shows, he is haunted and hunted (*GO* 106) at the same time. Geoffrey Turner, the Oxford ethnographer, is the first white man to doubt him. He calls him a “cigar store wooden Indian” (*GO* 111). Belaney admits the shaky authenticity of his new Indian self and knows that all is about how we see and what we want to see (*GO* 112). He cannot give up now, in order to achieve his goals he must carry on playing Indian. He is challenged from outside as well as from within himself: he is mentally exhausted and develops visions of old acquaintances, wives coming to question him (*GO* 120), while he also worries that Indians do not need him (*GO* 122). Then in London he meets a young Indian from Western Canada, John Tootosis, and gladly sees some change of tone in the Indian’s self-representation, which makes him want to help them in Canada at the Ministry of Indian Affairs, too. He acknowledges: “These are not the Indians the British public wants to see./ Not the Indian I represent. No tomahawks and fancy riding” (*GO* 127). He dines with Prime Minister MacKenzie King and the Minister of the Interior, where he promotes conservation. However, even when talking for THEM, the Natives, he is not ONE OF THEM, but much more someone out of both the white and native society, a mediator lost in the vacuum of the in-between world he has created.

The forth phase of his transformation is entitled “No Retreat.” Around 1936, he becomes quite sick and extremely exhausted, and also too political in some decision makers’ eyes. His fifth wife, Yvonne Perrier/Silver Moon is eventually another companion in myth-making, who experiences the aging celebrity’s last period of life. Belaney cannot afford to pass up the publicity (*GO* 148) and prepares for a second trip in England. He participates in a glorious party at the Buckingham Palace, represents Canadian wildlife, and feels young again! But the next pages show his exhaustion and his mentally disturbed state of mind. He developed parallel fantasies: talks and thinks in his own Indian way and keeps track of his commitments in the calendar (*GO* 175-176). His psychic transformation is presented in a wonderful lyrical episode entitled “Night,” where the schizophrenic aspect of his character is revealed: “He is me” (*GO* 188), like any showman or businessman. The once imaginary Indian is now internalized, merged in his personality, however, the HE and ME parts are still separate.

More and more people question his character. The journalist Mort Fellman reveals his secret, but Belaney by then identifies with his own

vision of the Natives and finds his surroundings unable to understand him. He is attracted to a fatal trap: presenting himself with his new identity in Hastings, the place where he was brought up. His vanity to prove himself and to others that he made it as someone remarkable, ignoring the fact that he deceives his relatives, ex wife and himself, clashes with the threat that the same folks can recognize and unveil him (*GO* 181). He returns to Mississauga, the home of beginning and ending, a poetic place (*GO* 165) that may keep his immortal and posthumous glory (*GO* 166). He entraps himself and must experience a tragic fall, if not in Hastings, then some time later on. That actually happens in his afterlife, when some papers start to inquire the rumours about his origins. Nevertheless, journalists have allowed for his white-lied identity and tended to appreciate his environmental achievements, considering the former a less significant aspect of the Grey Owl lifework.

2. The Power and Implication of His Character

On the front page of Ruffo's text, N. Scott Momaday claims: "an Indian is an idea ... a moral idea." Belaney is a tangible example of the constructed nature of race and ethnicity, even if he is a very ambivalent figure of Trans-Atlantic cultural encounters. To understand the broad implications of such shape shifters and ethnic passing processes, contemporary post-colonial cultural theory and literary criticism provides us some major help, for instance Homi Bhabha's theory "Of Mimicry and Man" in *The Location of Culture* (1994) explains not only some masking motivations and strategies, but also the "desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 122). Beyond the broader spectrum of all indigenization stories and experiences, others focus on the First Nations' presence and image in white Eurocentric writings and other fields of culture. Robert Berkhofer in *The White Man's Indian* (1979) analyses the ideology behind the white man's image of the Native Americans in arts (Part 3), while in Part 4 entitled "European Primitivism, the Noble Savage, and the American Indian" he further studies the virtues and values clashed in the modernist and post-colonial discourses, and also calls attention to the criticism of European social institutions, authority and social inequality that most of the Gone Indian stories imply. Philip Deloria in his *Playing Indian* (1998) addresses the issue of authenticity as a central problem of

all temporary and permanent passing experiences, including “hobby Indians” of all sorts in Central Europe, Canada and the United States.

However, with the consideration of all the above-mentioned theoretical findings, now our present investigation focuses on the individual and micro-social experience of Belaney’s passing: how the color line is produced and reproduced through various social technologies of embodiment, identification, and representation in the context of Ruffo’s narrative. On a short note, firstly we take a look at Belaney’s companions and their perspective presented in Ruffo’s textual interpretation of Grey Owl’s story, followed by a more extensive analysis of the actual narrative strategies he applies finally merged in a wonderful fluid structure and a cavalcade of voices.

The more than thirty minor characters surrounding Belaney from his childhood witness his transformation, all adding some relevant hints about the motivations, characteristic features, induced power, impact and relevance of Grey Owl’s unique personal history. Ruffo occasionally distances them, like Aunt Ada, whom the narrator addresses in third person singular, or makes the reader share the perspective of the given person by giving him/her a first person singular voice (e.g. Bill Guppy, Marie Girard, Annie Espaniel). The rest of the characters enter the game where the author is an invisible journalist interviewing the memory traces Belaney has left in the hearts and minds of these people. This reconstruction of the fragmented facts are emplotted in a scrap book-like narrative which is ever changing, epistemologically challenging and demands the reader’s evaluation of the provided perspectives and opinions.

The circle of childhood and early youth friends and family constantly function as a point of reference Belaney tests himself against, i.e. the success of his transformation, the credibility of his newly obtained identity and the meaning, impact of this passing. Aunt Ada, with her strict Victorian views on Archie’s upbringing, made him someone with self-respect, however, Ruffo adds, “Who he denies is Archibald Belaney” (*GO* 14). The McCormicks, Margaret and George and Henry Hopkin are the first of his friends to recognize his uniqueness as well as his going Indian and becoming estranged.

As for his acquaintances in Canada, they all find him strange but still support his myth-making for one reason or another. The ambivalence in their opinions is a permanent feature of these narratives. For example Bill Draper, the ranger calls him a “pseudo bushman” (*GO* 32) and considers

him a good listener, Jack Leve, his Bisco friend is amazed by Belaney's environmentalist and oratory skills (*GO* 39), Bill Cartier calls Belaney a "half-breed Apache" (*GO* 47) and also "Mr Confident" (*GO* 47), especially when Anahareo's love helped him. The post-master Jean Noel is astonished on seeing the letter about Belaney's first publication in the British *Country Life*, implying that Grey Owl can apparently write—what an Indian! The Espaniels contribute a lot to his actual transformation: give him his new name, dye his hair, even prepare war dance clothes that no Indian ever worn before... Annie Espaniel adds: "So I say, Archie, What's an Indian War Dance? None/ Of us Indian people have had one of those recently./ For Archie that's OK" (*GO* 37). They know him: his sufferings, drunken states and occasional happiness. They also give some feedback to him, for instance Belaney honestly asks Jane's opinion on his tales, and she replies: "Honestly? Sounds like a lot of north wind blowing" (*GO* 156).

The circle of wives and other female companions emphasize the Janus face of the Belaney/Grey Owl character: they know the man in person with all his weaknesses, desires and shortcomings, while at the same time they all add their own contribution to the mythic greatness and celebrated Otherness of the same person. Ivy Holmes is the first to uncover his strange, secretive and reclusive nature, cannot understand him, cannot get through the wall he surrounds himself with. Gertrude Bernard/Anahareo develops her native identity for Belaney's sake, and like many of the powerful liberal and energetic women on the side of a charismatic man, she also supports his myth making and PR. She admires him for his rhetoric, power and environmentalism. She joins him in the mystery making adventure, and even the Natives need the mediator couple (*GO* 53). However, as a young woman in the woods, she gets extremely bored, cannot tolerate Belaney's writing obsession, so all in all she encourages and supports him, but she is not with him in the spiritual sense of the word. In that respect Yvonne Perrier-O'Neil (Belaney)/Silver Moon, his last wife is similar: she loves him, respects the celebrity person in him, but she is tired of taking care of the aging, boozing, worn out celebrity, besides, she feels bad about the loneliness, pain and regret destroying her husband.

A professional protector and co-creator of the Grey Owl myth is Lovat Dickson, the organizer of Belaney's stay in Europe and the publisher of his works. Dickson knows him probably more than anyone else and has to tolerate at least as much as his wives when witnessing the ups and downs

of Grey Owl's life. He believes that Belaney is a visionary and fanatic person and passionately defends Grey Owl's integrity against the charges of fraud and impostor in *Half-Breed* (1939). As for Ruffo's narrative, Dickson is concerned about Belaney: "If Archie had been a week, vain character he would soon have become an out-and-out drunk—there were plenty of them in the North—and descended step-by-step into apathy and sloth. But he had this vision of a perfect world which was being fatally blemished by people in authority" (Dickson 118).

Another set of characters function as challengers for the central character: they expose him to public attention, test his authenticity, criticize his counterfeit, express the general uncertainty surrounding his passing and identity. Dave White Stone for instance thinks: "Indian, can't say he is,/ can't say he isn't. Speaks the language though" (*GO* 66). Some white officers, rangers and contacts present him as a gone wild ("bushed") rugged individualist. They occasionally fraternize with him, escort him, manage his publications and shows, or simply give him some drink when he wants to escape: Joe Hassak, bartender sees a lot ... and believes that "he's obviously got a lot of whiteman in him./ .../ (Maybe there's more Indian in him than I think.)" (*GO* 131). Finally, there are the ones who seriously doubt his authenticity and myth, like the earlier mentioned Oxford ethnographer Geoffrey Turner, or Mort Fellman, who interviewed Grey Owl and found him suspicious, while he hopes to have the story of the decade (*GO* 157) in the bag.

As for Belaney's native acquaintances, they accept him as not really one of them but still someone doing something valuable for them: for Donalda Legace, Belaney is the best thing in her life is to meet him in person. Other Natives respect the mediator and try to ignore his clumsy ways of acting like an Indian: "Wa-Sha-Quon-Asin, we say, dance with us, as you can [emphasis added]" (*GO* 146). Finally, a young Indian in London, John Tootosis, summarizes the general native attitude towards the Grey Owl phenomenon:

An Indian can tell who's Indian.
Grey Owl can't sing or dance.
But he is doing good
and when we meet
I call him Brother. (*GO* 128)

Not quite Native, yet accepted as a pseudo-relative, one with strange habits, and predominantly positive attitudes, who cares about the rest? Indians do not mind being somewhat fooled—at least Belaney thinks so.

3. Ruffo's Narrative Unmasking

Long verse as a poetic and narrative form is extremely popular in recent Canadian writing. Perhaps its popularity is partly due to the freedom of opening towards the short story form combined with poetic expressivity and lyrical power, as well as its potential to host open-ended ideas and fluidity. Ruffo as a native writer deconstructs the Grey Owl myth, but at the same time does not only challenge the white Englishman Indian wannabe's heroic reputation, but also adds a psychoanalytical understanding of his possible motivations and emotions attached to the transformations and experiences he goes through. It is what a post-colonial interdisciplinary analysis may reveal.

The structure is traditional, consisting of four parts, four phases of the central character's transformation and life, implying four seasons that symbolically reflect those changes. The typography, for instance the in-line beginning set versus run-on lines signifies MOVE, CHANGE, RUN AWAY and MOVE TO (DAY-)DREAM WORLD. For example pages 8-9 and pages 86-87 contain sections referring to Gertie's running away and Belaney's constant move, or the ribbon of place names followed by the last line: "No pool of calm. No rest. No power but will. I go on." on page 190 depicts Belaney's attitude to move away, instability, spiritual homelessness, and an ever changing concept of identity.

Another interesting narrative method Ruffo applies is ellipsis: untold details and occasional breaks in the fluidity of narration imply the construction efforts and obstacles in one's story making, the fragmented nature of memory collection partly due to some wounds one tends to conceal by un-telling, and partly due to the less relevant nature of some details, again signifying the emplotting strategies (selection, arrangement) we all make when retelling some stories. For example, Archie dating the Caribou Clan girl is given first person singular voice and then let loose with his own ways of shaping his memory traces:

And so one morning I tell my wife Angele I'll be gone
[...]
and send a few dollars back to my wife.
It is the least I can do. I mean I want to go back but...

[...]
and then ... things happen which I've no control over.
War breaks out in Europe.
I get piss drunk and in trouble with the law.
My girl friend gets pregnant. (GO 21)

Yet another example is when Marie Girard leaves for the bush and Archie. There are some untold years and then in the same sentence she tells the reader she does not believe what they say about Belaney's assumed crime (GO 25), this is how we learn about his issue with the police. Their baby is born, Belaney is long gone, Marie is still in love, has TB, and that's all we are told. This simple but tragic and beautiful diction is a lot more telling than hundreds of descriptive pages in any book. In the section entitled "Archie and Ivy" one can read: "Married February 10, 1917—/ Separated September 19, 1917" (GO 29). It sounds like an epitaph: factual and economical, yet it triggers in our imagination all the stories we have possibly heard about such short-lived marriages. Another instance of ellipsis and un-telling breaking the narrative flow is the mention of Belaney's relationship with Anahareo: silences seem to connect them (GO 53). Whenever they speak, it is a Chekavian parallel talk, not a real dialogue: separately they both love the other but cannot live together. For a final example of ellipsis, let us remember the scene when Annie Espaniel tells Belaney about the loss of Alex, the one he proudly called his dad (GO 163). As one can see, the previously hardly mentioned Alex had become a pseudo father figure for Belaney, which apparently also implies the bad relationship and the lack of contact with his biological father. Then without too much explanation, a certain Jonny Jero appears and without any mention of his relations with Belaney, he introduces himself as: "My mother was Marie Girard,/ my father, I never met,/ Archie Baloney [emphasis added]" (GO 82). So we can see how Belaney's missing father turned him to a similar missing father figure himself, and although no details are provided, no lamentation on the whys and hows, still in the vacuum of information-deprived comprehension something deeper is understood.

I would like to call attention to a central structural element that formulates the main axis of this long verse narrative: the *invisible scrap book*. Ruffo provides the reader with a wide range of perspectives in the form of photos, notes, letters, interview-like sections where Belaney's contemporaries, more or less close relations share their impressions, abstracts from books, articles on and by Archibald Belaney/Grey Owl and

even rumours, oral myths surrounding his character. The self-reflexive references in the text draw a parallel between the writing process, unearthing the memory traces and revealing layers of Belaney's identity. This un-layering of the Grey Owl myth presents the author as somebody one step ahead of the reader in his explorations, who is ready to share his findings and offer them for interpretation and appreciation. The reader can imagine the author collecting, selecting, arranging and "mentally digesting" the material with the curiosity and excitement we may have when trying to remember, select and impose some order on the fragments of our own personal past and retell it to someone dear.

Archival memory.
Paper brittle as autumn, unearthed
across the desk, files scattered.
Words floating like smoke
smell of moccasins you are wearing
carrying you on
to the beginning. (introductory pages)

The various articles (e.g. "Biographical Article Appearing in *Canadian Forests and Outdoors*, March, 1931"), abstracts (e.g. "The Adventurous Career of Grey Owl [Wa-Shee-Quon-Asier]") document and celebrate the fake Indian Grey Owl's life and magnify his myth. Among the scrap book pieces, though, one can find a really exciting intertextual game: a series of sent and unsent letters written by Gertie and Archie which formulate a kind of lyrical dialogue: Gertie's questions to Archie function as a mirror to face, then Belaney's notes, undated reply and finally his letter to Lovat Dickson present the closing of the Gertie relationship (*GO* 136-38). The most emotional part of the text is his letter to Gertie: he is struggling with letting her go and still needing her (*GO* 89).

Among the remarkable narrative techniques applied here, the unique dramatized dialogues are worth mentioning, for instance Aunt Ada's words: "Not like that, Archibald! How many times must/ I tell you? Now do it again, this time properly./ [...] / If there is only one this I will not tolerate, it is disobedience./ Are you listening Archibald? One, two, three.... Now begin again" (*GO* 8). Here the small boy's aunt acts the role of power bearer ruling his life, which makes Archie rebel against her, but we can learn the facet of this rebel only later on from other intertextual sections. Since this early childhood experience our anti-hero is constantly facing the problem of ambivalent image, communication and the correlated doubt: "Archie, who are you fooling, anyway?" The text

reflects this fluctuation of inner thoughts v. others' views, honesty v. disguise, love and care v. neglect, idealism v. materialism, real Native v. fake Indian disparities. The prosaic sections (e.g. pages 126–27) are more descriptive, sound more objective and rational, while the lyrical parts (e.g. pages 90, 101, 125, 139, 171) are related to the world of emotions, dreams and very subjective positions. However, beyond the modernist binary oppositions, Ruffo's text shows us all the shades, the hyphens and complexities of Belaney's world. Here we should remark the power of irony and Ruffo's skill to play with blurring generic boundaries, the merge of drama and long verse mentioned above (*GO* 8), the merge of poetry and fiction in "Mirror," the scene where Belaney is paddling on a lake and his fragmented image in the water reflects the glassy broken vision of his figure and identity (*GO* 139), or the sarcastic riddle "Grey Owl, Grey Owl" (*GO* 171) which sounds like a combination of Poe's "The Raven" and the saying "mirror, mirror on the wall" in the tale and a nursery rhyme, with all the irony these intertextual references and image combinations contain.

Finally two vocal sources of information must receive more attention: Belaney's own notes the author found in some documents or created based on his understanding of the Grey Owl figure, and the author's own comments addressing Belaney either in second or third person singular.

As for Belaney's voice in the text presented by his notes, they provide us clues to understand his motivations, doubts, confusion, escape mechanisms, traps and tricks and often answer a hiatus of the story line with short remarks. A special function of these notes is to bring us closer to the real Belaney driven by his vanity, materialism, escapist urges, great ideas/ideals, shaky ethical considerations, ethnic identity and honest emotions, for example as presented in the below quote:

They have rated me the best outdoor writer there is and the greatest authority on Canadian wildlife and forest lore living today. Yet there are better bushmen everywhere; the people I learned from for instance. And I tell them that too, giving the Indian about 90% of the credit. (*GO* 87)

His frustrations revealed by this quote are manifold: his underlying accusation of his parents, his guilt-complex for leaving his children and wives, the solitary nature of celebrity life, the seclusion of hotel rooms, the risk of being recognized, the publishers' demands bewildering him, exhaustion, the growing sense of contradictions and the constant exposure

to ethnic identification and justification. “I feel as an Indian, think/ as an Indian, all my ways/ are Indian, my heart is Indian” (GO 83). This certainty of positive identification is rather rare in the text, and even the occasional positive feedbacks cannot make him feel better. “*The Times* calls me a new Canadian Ambassador” (GO 102). Success still suffocates him further without the solace of his wilderness home. His isolation creates an “Insurmountable wall I never overcome,/ which exists only in imagination/ until at last discover no wall, too late” (GO 114). The shortening notes become more poetic, more abstract with age and experience (e.g. GO 187). He is increasingly lost in his thoughts, broken body and fantasies.

The author’s notes provide a psychoanalytical insight without the pretence of knowing all about Belaney. Exploring the story through Grey Owl’s journeys is a journey for both the writer and the reader. There is an interesting relationship established between the narrator and the central figure, an almost friendly proximity reflected in the statement: “for you/ there is no peace” (GO 28) or in the question: “who is he fooling” (GO 29)? The author unveils all of Belaney’s motivations, escapes, his manipulation strategies, stages of shape shifting and overall impact in his own time and afterlife. The section entitled “Romantic” explains the simple wisdom behind selling the demanded Indian image, with references to Cooper’s novels and the whole knowhow to “Butter the facts./ [...] to get the message/ across” (GO 110). Furthermore, in the section entitled “Why I Write” Ruffo’s understanding of Belaney’s motivations are summarized as follows:

So I can live in the past,
earn a living,
protect the beaver,
publicize conservation,
attract attention,
sell 35,000 copies in 3 months,
give 138 lectures in 88 days,
travel over 4,350 miles,
wear feather,
wear make-up,
play Indian—no
be Indian,
get to go to pow wows, get to tour Britain,
meet the King & Queen,
become famous,
become alcoholic,

leave a legacy,
lose a wife,
be lonely. (*GO* 135)

All in all, taking all the scrap book items, perspectives and wisdom into consideration, the question who Grey Owl was fooling is pretty much answered for us: both his audiences and himself, but how? What does he share with other mediators and culture brokers out of the motivations and outcomes mentioned in the above quote? What is the epistemological trickster, the one who has played on people's uncertainty regarding his ethnic origins, doing to our conscious? And finally, what is the broader implication of his shape shifting to ethno-cultural change and racialization in particular?

4. Epistemological Trickster and Racialization

In my view, through challenging and de/constructing the Grey Owl myth in a fragmented, fluid long verse format, Ruffo's narrative provides a wonderful artistic presentation of a broader socio-cultural phenomenon of the colonial discourses: the seemingly anti-racial implication of the indigenization stories does not actually blur the color divides but in their overall impact they underline their validity. In their essay entitled "The (In)Visible Whiteness of Being" Leda Cooks and Elizabeth Fullon argue that "the challenge of whiteness studies lies not in any individual trying to change his or her communication patterns; rather we need to understand the ways that communication about whiteness is embedded in our social fabric" (139). It is the very outcome of the post-colonial retellings of shape shifting, more particularly gone Indian stories of both fictional and historic characters.

Samira Kawash in "The Epistemology of Race: Knowledge, Visibility, and Passing" explores the "contextual anxiety surrounding the possibility of passing the color line" (126), hybridity, blurred color lines versus segregation, race passing, the perception of whiteness and the knowledge of Otherness, gives her view on racial impostors and ambivalent bodies, geographies of the Color Line. To pass means to disguise one's self. In addition, "while the individual decision to pass has profound effects on that individual and on those around her or him, at the same time this actual occurrence of passing, the lives and experiences of individuals who pass, is culturally invisible" (Kawash 128). Ruffo makes this passing

visible for us with all the correlated notions of hyphenatedness, self-reflexively projected Otherness and epistemological doubts.

Grey Owl?
Wa-Sha-Quon-Asin?
Archibald Stansfeld Belaney?
Whiteman? Redman?
Who's speaking? You tell
as you now break your pledge and stand and rush
to the mirror and make your Indian face.
Who are you speaking as? Who are you
speaking for? You rip the noose
from yours neck and fling it into the corner. (*GO* 68-69)

Larsen's *The White* poses a similar uncertainty of identity, image and social position regarding Mary/Two-Falling-Voices' figure:

“Whose ways? Yours? Your mother's? The old chief's? I am white—“

“That is clear.”

“And I am Seneca. And I am a woman. What happened to the idea for which we are known here—that our men and women are good partners. Why does a woman rejoice when she finds it is the Seneca who have taken her a prisoner?

[...]

My brother, let me make the few decisions in my power about my own life and death, about on what lands I will roam.” (Larsen 116-17)

However, as one can see here, the heroine takes some control over her life, and later her afterlife as well, when asking for a 21st century retelling of her story by the first woman writer, after some twenty-seven other, less satisfactory and more partial interpretations. Mary takes control of how others see her and also the interpretive versions' validity and focus her story may receive. In that sense, by the last part of her life, she becomes a wise and experienced shaper of her own story and concept of identity.

As for Belaney, he similarly acknowledges the power of telling, shaping others' understanding of a projected image. He is an epistemological trickster, a self-made man who is also helped by the climate of his age and the popular need for celebrity Indians. The French Canadians call him *Sauvage* and he dislikes it (*GO* 70), though it is part of the image he recreated.

Strangers want to visit me.
They announce that I'm the first
to promote conservation:
the beaver,
the forests, the
Indian
way of life.

I begin by singing my Indian name Grey Owl,
and saying I was adopted by the Ojibway,
and that for 15 years I spoke nothing but Indian;
then, before I know it, I have Apache blood.
Finally I'm calling myself an Indian writer. (*GO* 71)

The white lies are justified by his audience's craving for romantic primitivism that they could not have found any more in real Native Americans. The author makes Grey Owl acknowledge that he is fake and fools others, this happens to be taken for granted. Ruffo also underlines that what really matters is not how others see Belaney but the OTHER THEY PROJECT ON HIM. It seems his environment had an appetite for some living legend, was ready to take him as a native for granted and even attached further features to his myth, which have obviously more to do with the "illustration" (Hollywood) Indian than with any actual Native community. But who cares anyway? He provided the public myth that white folks needed, without taking the trouble of checking his identity and/or the authenticity of his character and story.

Another identity-related problem with the Belaney-like characters is that they cannot avoid being in conflict constantly with their environment and themselves, too. Since he did not fully indigenize himself, he cannot avoid being lost in the vacuum of the culturally in-between position he placed himself into, which is never a real escape but simple and never ending entrapment and estrangement from any human environment. Finally, he also loses the ability to control his own story and myth, therefore the misconstruction of his Indian identity results in confusion at all levels and aspects of his personality.

As for the authenticity of his ethnic identity, at this point we may wish to consider two arguments when judging Belaney's passing, and actually Ruffo provides us a lot of hints to understand both. On the one hand, Belaney's own definition of his ethnicity is based on his assumption that what really matters is perhaps less visible for others: "I feel as an Indian, think/ as an Indian, all my ways/ are Indian, my heart is Indian" (*GO* 83).

On the other hand, only recent sociology and cross-cultural psychology have explored the phenomenon of symbolic ethnicity, the conscious choice of one's ethnic affiliations, their changing motivations and types, for instance Herbert Gans' "Symbolic Ethnicity" and Étienne Balibar's "Fictive Ethnicity and Ideal Nation," or Michael Hecter's "Ethnicity and Rational Choice Theory" all appearing in the seminal essay collection entitled *Ethnicity* (1996). Applying these findings on the study of passing narrative characters and ethnic shape shifters will be an exciting new approach in literary criticism, too. Still keeping Belaney in mind, one must also see the moral and ideological complexity of this shifting: although he represents Native America and Mother Nature for his public, he cannot get rid of his fundamentally racist approach that formulates the indispensable wall between him and the world of the natives. In *The Man of the Last Frontier* Belaney argues: "Left to his own devices in civilization the Indian is a child let loose in a house of terrors.... The few words of English he learns consist mainly of profanity, so we have the illuminating object-lesson of a race just emerging from a state of savagery turning to the languages of the white man for oaths that their own does not contain" (*GO* 19). This predominantly racist approach to the Natives is just another proof of his ambivalent life and transformation.

The well-known superiority complex of the white man in the colonial discourse is not only not challenged, but even underlined by Belaney. In addition, Wernitznig has remarkably noticed: Belaney "successfully managed to out-Indian his native contemporaries [emphasis added], perpetuating a post-colonially problematic symbiosis of natives and nature in white, foremost European, perception" (*GO* 105). As we can see here, in its impact, Grey Owl's figure and stories have had similar impact to that of J. F. Cooper and other writers obsessed about the Noble Savage imagery. In "Writing Off the Indian," Chapter 3 of *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (1993), Daniel Francis argues that Cooper, the Canadian missionary image-makers and Noble Savage literature as such virtually emptied the need for and interest in ethnographical and sociological knowledge about real Natives. Such literature has served the colonial ideological agenda of the Vanishing Indian, which implies in short: "the only good Indians were traditional Indians, who existed only in the past, and assimilated Indians, who were not Indians at all. Any other Indian had vanished" (Francis 60). Francis also analysed the correlated phenomenon of marketing Indianism in his book. Why does this idealized Indianism sell so well even today? Why

are these gone Indian stories still so attractive for us? Wernitznig gives us a clue: “For late-twentieth-century Western societies Indians are neo-noble loincloth bearers with additional spiritual qualities, which, naturally, they only retain to enlighten non-native wisdom seekers” (Wernitznig 115). The basic problem such stories and popular illustration Indians reveal is that they re-establish the existing racial divides. Serving the needs of those longing for the intellectual excitement and ideological opportunism of romantic primitivism is the basis of Belaney’s career as a fake Indian orator and environmentalist writer. Providing some historical justification and challenging ethnic preconceptions are possible outcomes of Ruffo’s book embedded in a rich and exciting piece of literature.

WORKS CITED

- Atwood, Margaret. *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature*. Oxford: Claredon, 1995.
- Balibar, Étienne. “Fictive Ethnicity and Ideal Nation.” *Ethnicity*. John Hutchinson and A.D. Smith Eds. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996. 164–7.
- Berkhofer, Robert. *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*. New York: Vintage, 1979.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Clifton, James A. *Being and Becoming Indian: Biographical Studies of North American Frontiers*. Chicago: Dorsey, 1989.
- Cooks, Leda and Elizabeth Fullon. “The (In)Visible Whiteness of Being: Stories of Selves in Sojourn.” *Intercultural Alliances: Critical Transformations*. Mary Jane Collier ed. Sage: U Denver P, 2003.
- Deloria, Philip J. *Playing Indian*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1998.
- Dickson, Lovat. *Half-Breed—The Story of Grey Owl (Wa-Sha-Quon-Asin)*. Toronto: Key Porter, 1939.
- . *Wilderness Man: The Strange Story of Grey Owl*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1973.
- Ferguson, Jim. *One Thousand White Women: The Journal of May Dodd*. New York: St Martin’s Griffin, 1998.
- Francis, Daniel. *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, 1993.
- Gans, Herbert J. “Symbolic Ethnicity.” *Ethnicity*. John Hutchinson and A.D. Smith Eds. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996. 146–54.
- Green, Rayna. “The Tribe Called Wannabee: Playing Indian in America and Europe.” *Folklore* 99:1 1988. 30–55.

- Grey Owl (Archibald Belaney). *The Man of the Last Frontier*. London: Country Life, 1931. 155, 211.
- Hecter, Michael. "Ethnicity and Rational Choice Theory" *Ethnicity*. John Hutchinson and A.D. Smith Eds. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996. 90–7.
- Kawash, Samira. "The Epistemology of Race: Knowledge, Visibility, and Passing." *Dislocating the Color Line: Identity, Hybridity, and Singularity in African-American Narratives*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1997.
- Larsen, Deborah. *The White*. New York: Knopf, 2002.
- O'Toole, Fintan. *White Savage: William Johnson and the Invention of America*. London: Faber and Faber, 2005.
- Ruffo, Armand Garnet. *Grey Owl: the Mystery of Archibald Belaney*. Regina, SK: Coteau, (1996) 2006.
- Smith, Donald B. *Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance, the Glorious Impostor*. Red Deer, AB: Red Deer, 2000.
- Stem Cook, Michelle. "The Impossible Me: Misconstructing Structural Constraint and Individual Volition." *Self and Identity through the Life Course in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Timothy J. Ovens ed. Stamford, CT: Jai, 2000.
- Wernitznig, Dagmar. *Europe's Indians, Indians in Europe: European Perceptions and Appropriations of Native American Cultures from Pocahontas to the Present*. Lanham, MA: UP of America, 2007.