

## **Fictional In-Betweenness in Deborah Larsen's *The White* (2003)**

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Fictional in-betweenness refers to the state of mind of those characters in various prose writings, who present themselves as biracial and trans-cultural shape-shifters. Among the wide spectrum of possible exciting approaches ranging from the sociological to the ethnographic one, the psychoanalytical examination of the individual hero/ine's change of identity may give a special view of trans-cultural transformations. In the following paper I call attention to a recent piece of fiction that is thematically closely tied to early American writing: Deborah Larsen's *The White* (2003), a contemporary novel that expands the early captivity narratives with a present-day psychoanalytical understanding of inter-cultural transfer and shape shifting.

In the 1820s five American books addressed the issue of inter-marriage: *Yamoyden* (1820) by James Eastburn and Robert Sands, James Seaver's *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* (1824), Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok* (1824), Catherine Maria Sedgewick's *Hope Leslie* (1827) and James Fenimore Cooper's *The Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish* (1829). All of these narratives reverse the prototypical paradigm of English husband and Indian wife by presenting the marriages of white women and Indian men. In the critic Rebecca Blaëvis Faery's view "The gender reversal makes the racial mixing more ideologically charged; the white woman, icon of the racial purity of the nation, had to remain closed to penetration by 'dark savages' if the white identity of the country was to be preserved (Faery 179)." Exactly this feature of such stories and the fictional challenge to white supremacy is one of the most exciting aspects of North-American literature.

Interestingly, although the critic Richard Vanderbeets gives “discrete historical and cultural significances of the Indian captivity narrative (Vanderbeets 549),” he provides a fairly thorough explanation of their shared features as follows:

- 1 ritual reenactments of practices, e.g. cannibalism, scalping, blood drinking (rituals of war and purification, medicine)
- 2 the hero(ine)’s archetypal journey of initiation
- 3 “undergoing a series of excruciating ordeals in passing from ignorance to knowledge (Vanderbeets 553)”
- 4 the pattern (essential structuring device) of separation/transformation/return or refusal to repatriate:

**SEPARATION** (abduction)

**TRANSFORMATION** (ordeal, accommodation, adoption)

- separation from one’s culture= symbolic death; rebirth= symbolic rebirth
- often adopted in the stead of a lost family member
- transformation process:

1. **ritual initiation ordeal** (e.g. run the gauntlet)
2. **gradual accommodation** of Indian modes and customs (e.g. food, firstly found disgusting, then partial compromise of hunger, finally full accommodation of Indian diet)
3. highly **ritualized adoption** into new culture (Vanderbeets 554)  
 “Deepest immersion into the alien culture (Vanderbeets 558)”, symbolic adoption to the tribe, complete for mostly those taken at an early age, some even conceal their white identity so as not to be returned by ex-family.

**RETURN** (escape, release, redemption) or refusal to be repatriated and a final decision made to stay with the tribe.

Although I can only partly agree with Vanderbeets regarding the limited historical significance of the captivity narratives, his above sketched scheme of shared narrative pattern is effectively applicable to recent literary texts, such as *The White*, too (see Chart STR later).

Following 29 editions of Mary Jamison’s captivity, Larsen’s *The White* appeared in 2003. The novel provides us with a 21st Century interpretation of the original story of the daughter of Irish immigrants living on the dangerous edge of the Pennsylvania frontier in 1758, at the time of the French and Indian War. The 16 year-old girl, captured along with her entire family and few neighbors by a raiding party of Shawnees and French mercenaries, experienced the murder and scalping of her kin and kind, then found herself adopted into a family of Senecas. Mary/Two-Falling-Voices lived as a member of the tribe for fifty years,

marrying twice, raising seven children, and at the end of her life allowing herself to be interviewed by a New York state physician and amateur historian, Jeames Seaver, who firstly wrote down her account.

As for its genre, *The White* is a captivity account, adventure tale, lyrical meditation on a woman's coming of age, frontier romance first was written as a screenplay, and then was transformed into a novel with poetics. "My novel is an invention, not a recreation," Larsen claims in an interview and adds: Mary Jemison's "voice was a gift, pure and simple. I just listened for the voice that wasn't obviously there, for the voice that lay between the lines in the narrative ([www.readinggroupguides.com/guides3/white2.asp#interview](http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides3/white2.asp#interview))." With her empathy and experience of a woman and ex-nun, the writer provides us with the womanly perspective of the Jemison story as an addition to and extension of Dr Seaver, the Latinist rhetorician's objectivizing white male discourse. The novelist underlines the lack of emotional understanding the previous narrative presents arguing: "How little of her lay on his pages. He had in no way captured her face (*W* 210)," the author claims. Larsen's approach to psychology as a critical element in her reconstruction of the character of Mary Jamison is demonstrated for instance in the section on her severe depression (*W* 26) in the initiation stage, the scene on her marital and child bearing doubts depicted by her internal dialogue with her fetus in the accommodation stage (*W* 68), or in the process of gradually blending Seneca Indian and Christian imagery and understanding of her hybrid culture and world (*W* 123) in the stage of total adoption and no return.

In my textual analysis I present how shape shifting and developing an in-between identity is textually marked in *The White*. The three parts of the novel are named after three valleys, each notifying a stage of Mary/Two-Falling-Voices's life and character development:

Buchanan Valley (-1758)	= captivity and stage of ritual initiation
Ohio Valley (1758-62)	= gradual accommodation
Genesee Valley (1762-1833)	= adoption, no return

By the same token, these valleys refer to Two-Falling-Voices' metaphorical habitats: two hill slopes, she is in between two cultures, with all the ups-and-downs of her life and identity formulation in that context.

In the analysis of the novel as well as counter-passage narratives in general, I have applied psychoanalytical criticism to better understand the

motivations and effects of trans-cultural shape shifting and developing a hybrid ethnic identity. I found that in the case of this particular novel the author attempts to provide a psychoanalytical insight into the counter-passing character that the original manuscript (i.e. Seaver's Jamison's biography) could not provide for a number of reasons. The heroine here is presented not only as a rather passive victim of circumstances, but also as an active, self-supporting, wise and very humane figure. Contemporary fiction and films (e.g. *Little Big Man*, *Dances with Wolves*, *The Scarlet Letter*), too, tend to expand our understanding of history and trans-cultural relations, especially passage rites, with the help of early and post-Freudian psychoanalysis.

Now let us turn our interest to the latter, and Larsen's *The White* in particular. In my view, three psychoanalytical aspects of the central character's development are worth investigating here: in accordance with the plot (action), what kind of challenges have to be faced by Mary/Two-Falling-Voices; what sort of emotions does she present; and finally, what characterizes her way of thinking and development (i.e. trans-cultural shape shifting). Chart STR below is to provide a sketchy view on the stages of ritual initiation, gradual accommodation and adoption, with special regards to the protagonist's action, challenges, emotions and impacts on her character development.

**Chart STR (separation/transformation/return?)**

	<b>action</b>	<b>Challenges</b>	<b>emotions attached</b>	<b>impact on Mary's character development</b>
<b>RITUAL INITIATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• taken captive at the age of 16</li> <li>• family scalped, murdered</li> <li>• separation</li> <li>• adopted by Shawnee Indians</li> <li>• factual tone about her family's relocation to Buffalo Creek reservation in 1831 and her death in 1833.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• experiencing violence, separation, alienation (physical and cultural)</li> <li>• language, customs different, little motivation to learn (hate, disgust, fear make her reject acculturation), almost all previous ties broken</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• shock, fear, suicidal thoughts vacuum→numb</li> <li>• accuses her father of having been over-optimistic (7) and mentally abandoning his family (12)</li> <li>• the only thing for sure: the "fields are just themselves (8)."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• wounded, wordless, emotionally numb</li> <li>• existential and philosophical confusion: "Where was God now (17)?" + wants to die (18)</li> <li>• Indian as generic term turning to a more specific knowledge, still strong Christian imagery</li> <li>• perceives the loss of the last symbolic remnants of her family (shawl, scalps, cake).</li> <li>• English language and the</li> </ul>

				Scripture→identity sustained
<b>GRADUAL ACCOMMODATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• getting used to food</li> <li>• peers (Branch and Slight Wind) introduce her to the tribal customs and lifestyle. Sisterhood is the only shared feeling, common identifier for her.</li> <li>• blankness of non-thought (26)."</li> <li>• dress, dipped in water (rebirth ritual)</li> <li>• involved more and more in tribal pursuits (work, hunting, communication)</li> <li>• getting married, but having a stillborn child</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• everything is new for her, she should adopt but still little motivation, attachment</li> <li>• husband is functional but not real emotional tie</li> <li>• first child dies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• curiosity, yet feels alien, different, confusion</li> <li>• sisters: empathy: feel she is a skeleton (41)</li> <li>• Slight-Wind encourages Mary by starting to pick up some English words—real sisterhood gesture.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• wounds are being healed, but still her pain is signified</li> <li>• Shawnee becomes a specific term applied individually on her peers</li> <li>• Mary becomes hesitant about her identity</li> <li>• real healing begins with sisters functioning as mediators in the "crossing game".</li> </ul>
<b>ADOPTION AND REFUSAL TO RETURN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• homemaking, establishing a real family and emotional ties, children born</li> <li>• (re)naming</li> <li>• getting active, developing real affection for people and the adoptive environment</li> <li>• cleaning and shifting rituals (Branch asks for the English word for 'scalp' (70) and Mary's reaction signifies a painful, dramatic outbreak of emotions:</li> <li>• Indian mother</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• marital doubts and childbirth and death (internal dialogue with her fetus (68)</li> <li>• occasionally on the brinks of Indian existence: 2 scalps, taboo for her, "You are not being your white parents' daughter in this...My white parents? (69)"</li> <li>• whitish daughter born early, dies</li> <li>• White men's execution festivity: others wonder if she is ready to accept</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• growing respect and love for her husband</li> <li>• maternal care</li> <li>• security and growing stability and emotional attachment</li> <li>• compromise, negotiated lifestyle and world view for her peace of mind</li> <li>• emotionally confused and then cathartic spiritual purification (68): understands and accepts that the early born child (=her shape shifting and healing processes are still incomplete, need</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• growing stability and emotional attachment that make her not wish to return to her former culture</li> <li>• becomes finally "genuinely American", similar to Grey Owl, the Métis or Standing - with-Fist (Dances with Wolves) who are considered by critics as archetypical, genuine Canadians and Americans since they merge both cultures in their selves.</li> <li>• her shift seems almost complete, but the real change comes only later.</li> </ul>

	<p>Bending Tree helps her in many ways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• second husband Hiokatoo gets interesting and wise for her, 5 more kids born</li> <li>• losing 3 sons Thomas, John, Jesse (due to transcultural clashes and impacts)</li> <li>• telling Seaver her story, tends to resist, paradigms that are different: “I hardly recognize myself in what you say (206).”</li> </ul>	<p>her new identity (101), question: are your wounds healed already?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• losing touch with white culture</li> <li>• the urge to tell her story is an intellectual challenge for the aging Mary.</li> <li>• changing politics→ her once firm position becomes shaky again (mediators=spies?, witch?)</li> </ul>	<p>some more experiences) that the kid must die. Besides, Sheninjee urges her to give an English name to their new child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When at the end of Part 2 whites approach, the word “Us? (91)” signifies the moment of recognition.</li> <li>• Sheninjee calls them “stinking white (92)” - &gt;hurts Mary and presents similar racial prejudice that the Shawnee could experience earlier. He cuts a white’s ear, making Mary beg him let the victim go and now certain in her position as a Shawnee woman (94).</li> <li>• Bending Tree gives her back her mother’s shawl and snowflakes begin to accumulate (97), notifying the break with her white past and turning into nostalgia, a very womanish way of healing past wounds.</li> <li>• able to tell intuitively her husband’s death (102), his death loosens her attachment, might leave the tribe (106), but Thomas keeps her back</li> <li>• Seneca Indian violence makes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sheninjee’s emphatic assistance and care changes her mind: “Who would wish for some other world? (76), she wants to own the land, which is ambivalent but surely a sign of optimism and acceptance, sense of belonging+ newly achieved balance of hybrid identity, in-betweenness. Real acculturation complete.</li> <li>• Sheninjee’s attack on the white guy advances her maturation and helps her locate herself as a mediator in between the two worlds (93).</li> <li>• Disparity between Biblical imagery and Aboriginal spirituality (109), finally chooses to stay away from “that white country (109)” for Thomas’s sake.</li> <li>• Seneca violence makes her revolt once more, finally, and helps her confirm her in-between identity.</li> <li>• The latter signifies her full maturation, self-trust and will-power, finally, to make her own choices with all the experience and wisdom she has gained on the way.</li> <li>• gradually loses track with white culture and saves a special blend of Good Spirits and Jesus (123).</li> <li>• Finally “she found herself pacing off a boundary...., the</li> </ul>
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			<p>her sick and again shaky about where she belongs (115)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• feels different from white women who “melt” in heat (107)</li> <li>• second marriage: little telling of the wedding or children being born. Now: mature personality, knowing what she wants She lives in an Indian way with all the necessary modifications that she needs to feel comfortable and happy (121).</li> <li>• feels as a three-legged doe named Doubt (138) +urged to keep things in balance.</li> <li>• tends to tell, retell and make up stories sometimes against rumor and false tales (165)</li> <li>• little reflection on the pain of losing her sons, by then probably the act of story telling started to function as an effective healing method.</li> <li>• uneasy about Seaver’s way of telling her story: “How little of her lay on his pages. He had in no way captured her face (210).”</li> </ul>	<p>fields of her own, “including one great hill and one great valley (176).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everywoman, no one, someone, owing her Gardow, down-and-up land, depending on where you see: valley or hill.</li> <li>• facing the question of group belonging she considered her experience and decided for the Genesee (190) kept along white stories.</li> </ul>
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As this chart presents, the protagonist’s unconscious motivations (e.g. the dramatic breakup of her father’s image, the shock of horrifying violence, the impacts of several childbirths and deaths as well as the

encouraging power of sisterhood) open up her psyche, imagination and revitalize her after the numbing shock of captivity, loss and alienation. However, in the course of her life among the Natives, each experience turns her into a more-and-more conscious, strong-willed and energetic agent who not only actively shapes her own life (fate), but is also capable to formulate her story within the limitations as well as outside Dr. Seaver's narrative.

Taking four quotes from the text, I would like to share a deeper understanding of the process of psychic, behavioral and social changes explained above, while the way how these processed are depicted and textually signified is highlighted as well.

- 1/ *"She did that which Branch told her to do; she took all of Slight-Wing's suggestions. The sisters looked for signs of at least momentary happiness in Two-Falling-Voices; they looked for frowns, for the softening of the eyes that comes with wonder; they looked for rapid breathing, an impatient movement of the hands. They looked in vain. She was almost completely devoid of gesture. Her face was blank, her voice was low and without inflection, she answered questions with the shortest of phrases. They never saw her weep (40)."*
- 2/ *"Why did you allow my father to enter you? Answer me. Why did you allow him? You allowed my father, you allowed a man whose race tore you from your young womanhood and from your valley, whose race held the dripping scalping knife above your mother's head, your own father's head, the heads of your brothers and sisters—(68)."*
- 3/ *"In reply, Mary wound a strand of her own hair around and around her hand. Then she jerked that length of hair suddenly and violently upward so that she winced at her own action. 'Scalped. Scalp' she said. And then she jerked the strand of hair upward once again and the gesture was at once steely, accusatory, and full of acknowledgement (71)."*
- 4/ *"'I was wrong, he [Black Coals] said. I only thought I was talking to a Seneca. Instead I've been talking to a white. You have not stood in the place of our dead brother after all. Inside yourself you stubbornly resist our ways.'*  
*'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? (116)"*

*...  
"My brother, let me make the few decisions in my power about my own life and death, about on what lands I will roam (117)."*

The first quote presents Mary as a passive, wordless, broken and blank victim of the circumstances, absolutely unable to react properly to her environment or to communicate, express her feelings and thoughts and listen to others. In the second situations the fetus in her womb is posing accusatory questions to her related to her commitments and/or the lack of them, her being a racial in-between, a cultural hybrid; in fact the image is a Freudian hypnotic (day)dream, since a mother often communicates with her fetus, however, here the unborn child's "talk" is more Mary's own soul talking to her ego on the verge of reality and dream.

The third quote provides us with an image of a hysteric woman and her cathartic symbolic action to break with the unbearable heritage of the past moment when she was violently torn from her family and exposed to brutality. She acts out an almost self-mutilating rebel and at the same time acknowledges the present as it is. As for the last quote, it shows the change from frustration in a situation in which Mary/Two-Falling-Voices's own husband turns out to be prejudiced against white folks and barbarous without thinking, into an extremely outspoken, strong view of the world and can stand up for (hybrid) herself, moreover, can make others accept her as she is. She is white, Seneca and a woman in the same person, as she declares here. From numbness to explicit self-expression, from wordlessness to speaking out, the stages of psychological change and the attached identity formulation are wonderfully staged in the text of Larsen's novel.

Studying fictional shape shifters, the psychoanalytical perspective of the central characters provides us with an understanding of the motivations behind intercultural transfer, its possible impact as well as all kinds of reactions of the original and new human environment. Elizabeth Wright enlists some significant factors (#1-8) that psychoanalytical examination of these texts should consider in her introduction to psychoanalytical criticism. In the following, these factors are investigated in the course of this particular piece of fiction.

In the discourse of colonial wars and captivity, **the force of history affecting the participants (#1) in both the psychoanalytic and literary**

**situation** is a fundamental issue. Similarly to other war fiction, the individual's extremely limited ability to shape his/her own fate is a major issue. As the story unfolds, the central character gradually gains power over her fate even among those severe circumstances, while at the end she becomes powerful and able to work against the so-called forces of history in her inner world shaped by the power of words. A correlated psychic feature of such stories is what since Freud we call the **desire, rooted in lack** (#2), for free land, respect, understanding and sympathy. Mary/Two-Falling-Voices, under the forces of history, piecemeal obtains all these valuable components of our sense of freedom but the road is challenging, as Chart STR presents. Besides, her personal fight for obtaining freedom and respect is counterparted by the transformation of her sense, knowledge and understanding of the power of language.

Both traditional psychoanalytical and postcolonial criticism investigate thoroughly **the discourse of (will to) power** (#3): since in captivity, deprived of any support from her original culture, language, ties, peer contact and spiritual support, there is a relative lack of personal sphere of action. In her complex situation, her highly ambivalent feelings are depicted by her action, words and inner thoughts, too. Indian savagery underlines her alienation that firstly naturally divert her desires away from her new environment and only after healing her wounds can she obtain new personal relationships and develop a feeling of trust and shared desires. Her unconscious, i.e. her **internalized set of power-relations** (#4) gets more sophisticated, and is partly depicted by her thoughts and action (see Chart STR). Out of the most regrettable, passive and occasionally unconscious victim position, Mary/Two-Falling-Voices develops a fully conscious, strong self which is capable of shaping her own life and position in the community. The fifth component that Wright considers relevant in the psychoanalytical examination of such texts is the **relationship between her unconscious and the existing social order** (#5), which is rather complex and constantly changing along the storyline. For sure, the process of maturation reveals a lot about her unconscious to herself as well, and from the time of her second marriage she proves to be able to even change the given social order by partly acting against the traditions and negotiating a happy medium between the two lifestyles and cultures.

Wright suggests that one should include the question: **what is repressed in our culture** (#6) in the textual analysis of such narratives. This issue surfaces here in the form of virtues she longs for: simplicity of

lifestyle appealing to environmentalists, Rousseauians and Thoreauians among many; as Robert Berkhofer claims, the vigorous minds and bodies and natural virtue free of the complexities and sophistication of modern civilization (Berkhofer 72) are appealing and stimulating for such a shape shifter.

The next factor that psychoanalytical criticism offers for examination in the text is **sexuality as a strategy of power and knowledge at a particular moment of history (#7)**. In a biracial context marriage means to be accepted both as a mature woman and as a member of the tribe. Although in this particular text sexuality is not explicitly discussed, only the lack of deep love and mutual understanding are signified by elimination, while in the case of the second marriage it is the number of children and the desire for them that are stated. Maybe due to Larsen's Christian orientation, a deeper analysis of sexuality was beyond question. The knowledge and power of biracial mediators, liaison persons in the particular colonial context of encounter between Native and European cultures is discussed elsewhere in detail. Here the author presents the process of getting aware of her own powers and knowledge in Mary's character.

**The linguistic practices that generate socio-cultural activity (#8)** seem to be perhaps one of the most exciting aspects of the text that psychoanalytical criticism helps to reveal. Mary's mother warns her to keep the Scripture and English language, however, she is unable to. She is numb, wordless for a long time, demonstrating her personal unconscious escape from the sign system of her captors, in fact the ultimate escape for the time being. Later in the transformation process she gets acquainted with the new communication system she is supposed to comprehend and use for survival and social prestige. She learns Shawnee language and shares English with her kids and adoptive sisters, eventually finding pleasure in trying to regain English (e.g. word games, rhymes), finally wishes her story to be recorded. She lets the men of letters put down her story, document her life, even if she is somewhat unsatisfied with the result. Like the fixation of a photo, it can fragmentarily save her image and she seems to call for some trans-historical retelling of her story with deeper understanding, which is provided by Larsen here.

Last but not least, another psychologically interesting feature of the counter-passage narrative of Jamison in the scope of Larsen's novel is the way the characteristic elements of **multiplicity, images of flowing consciousness, partial objects, fragmented experiences, memory and**

**feelings** tend to work up into certain **unifying processes**, for instance the search for order, similarity, wholeness, “assuming identity and completeness of objects and selves within conforming constraints and recognized limits (Wright 64).” According to psychoanalytical criticism, the personality of such a shape shifting character can be understood in terms of two poles:

1. schizophrenic (transform identity, shifting boundaries)
2. paranoid (pressed to territorialize, mark out, take possession of)

For Mary/Two-Falling-Voices, her personality is torn between on the one hand the paranoid urge to mark out her own position in the society as well as on the land, to take possession of a firm name, identity and piece of land that belongs to her exclusively, and on the other hand the schizophrenic urge to leave her ties behind and shift into a less limited existence. Besides the natural inclinations of any person to escape the captivity and find firm ground in the world, a woman is always somewhat more forced to seek for security, while trying to find her own unlimited peace of mind and happiness. The physical, mental and spiritual challenges almost drive her mad and suicidal at the crossroads of schizophrenic and paranoid pressures. Nevertheless, she is able to identify, elaborate and sustain some constant elements to grab: the land, human affection and respect and a positive, stable, self-supporting attitude towards life in general.

And so, in 1797, Mary, known to her French captors as l'autre, known to the Seneca as Two-Falling-Voices, known to her first husband as Two, known to her second husband as Two-Falling; known to her white neighbors as Mary; known to her white solicitor as Mrs. Jemison; known to her children as Mother; came to own land: more than ten thousand acres. (*W* 178)

Moreover, she realizes the power of language that no one can take away from her. It was Freud who discovered that psychoanalysis has to deal with the body caught up in the tropes and figures of language (*W* 175),” and the second half of the novel presents how this body can leap out of the encapsulated tropes of one language into the freedom of her own ways of telling.

The aging Mary cannot read any more and develops a keen interest in telling her story as well as languages, the power of language and telling and an excitement in formulating her in-between consciousness via language and blending cultural experiences by two languages, worlds,

experiences, she takes pride in that achievement and dreams of telling the whites one day about it. Her human environment is confused about her: is she a witch? A ghost? Surely her hybrid personality is quite difficult to pigeonhole for both communities. Her defense reaction is that she keeps telling stories (*W* 168), the world around her getting ferocious and too complex, she even develops her inner world through language, the act of telling (*W* 173) and un-telling (*W* 174) as means of spiritual defense of her privacy in a once alien world.

Following the textual analysis of the specific details regarding Mary Jamison's character transfiguration, an extended view on **attitudinal and behavioral identification in general** is aimed to present the **process of transculturation** and the correlated creation of a hybrid ethnic identity in the context of fictional in-betweenness.

Obviously, in the new captivity situation Mary's attitude towards whites and Indians, her family and peers is primarily shaped by preconceptions, like the prejudice that it is better dead than living with an Indian. The initial events even strengthen the same, for the brutality and loss she experiences turn her absolutely against her captors. The Noble Savage image of Cooperian sentimentalism clashes in the reader's mind with the naturalistic details of combat and savagery once we enter the tribal scenes. However, following Mary's life, we can share her sensitivity to cultural coding and received notions of race and color. Then in a semi-intentional acculturation stage of such stories, a part of the central character's former identity is eventually erased, also depicted by the heroine's temporary numbness (similarly to the popular movie heroine Standing with Fist in *Dances with Wolves*). Her previous cultural identifications are overwritten by Native culture and she experiences a kind of racial absorption. In the long run, she is forced to elaborate alternative modes of being, while her conversion is a temporary or permanent social strategy of survival.

Such a fictional character provides an example of what James Clifton calls an "alternative subculture available for inspection, testing, and at least temporary affiliation (Clifton 277)." By the time she becomes a 'white Indian', proto-feminist heroine through appropriation, our perceptions and understanding fluctuates with the ebbs and flows of the heroine's emotions, attitude and fate. The stories of **trans-culturation** depict "process where one gives something in exchange for getting something; the two parts of the equation are thereby modified. A new reality is produced. Transculturation is in a state of constant transmutation

(Vautier 269).” These trans-cultural texts prove us that identity, as well as the notion of race, are constructions. The so-called *métissage* texts call attention to the ambivalent hybrid identities continuously in a flux (Vautier 270). As Vautier claims, the life experience of the so-called “‘side-by-sideness’, leads to the possibility of sharing cultural experiences rather than ‘resisting’ the imposition of alien forms of culture (Vautier 269).” The ‘culture brokers’, liaison persons, biracial shape shifters in general all go through the inclinations of belonging, contributing, socializing surrounded by internal and external anomalies of all sorts.

In the process of developing a trans-cultural identity, fictional creation of a hybrid identity, the shape shifter’s victim position and internalized self-image is changing along with his/her imaginary relations to real relations. S/he shifts from the “state of shipwreck (Ghosh-Schellhorn 181)” in the “extremity of colonial alienation (Bhabha 114)” his/her displacement and alienation, through the self-awareness similar to a white Creole woman, a ‘white nigger’, confronting the challenges of Otherness and then shifting its boundaries (Bhabha 118). Bhabha calls attention to the “ambivalences of identification, antagonistic identities of political alienation and cultural discrimination (Bhabha 119)” and he adds that in this discourse “the Other must be seen as the necessary negation of a primordial identity—cultural and psychic—that introduces the system of differentiation which enables the ‘cultural’ to be signified as a linguistic, symbolic, historic reality (Bhabha 118–9).”

The way from being the Other to being ‘One of Us’ is symbolically implied in many ways. In *The White*, the cultural in-betweenness of the heroine is indicated in different ways. It is there for instance in verbal utterances, like Sheninjee telling Mary: “I am not white, but you are now truly one of our race (*W* 63),” as well as in symbolic action, objects and locations. As for the latter, the valley locations structuring the text and correlating Mary/Two-Falling-Voices’ figure with the topography of the land provide a symbolic example: “Two-Falling-Voices. Two voices, two pitches, two slopes (*W* 32).” Depending on the viewpoint one takes, her down-and-up land, Gardow, is a valley or hill, just like depending on one’s approach, she can be taken as a Native or white. However, I suppose the point of the story is to eliminate *either/or*-s and replace them by *both*, referring to the side-by-sideness of these cultures, instead of considering them in terms of opposition. The reviewing critic of the *Daily News* claims that “Being American is to wear a coat of many colors. Larsen’s novel is an instructive, winning reminder that the coat was once

woven from broadcloth and buckskin, feathers and silk, in a fabric as hard to unravel as it is to deny ([www.readinggroupguides.com/guides3/interview.asp](http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides3/interview.asp)).”

To take a broader look at racial self-identification and affirmation of newly obtained identity among the blurred racial lines of North-American societies, I quote a contemporary person, who shares the fictional character’s hybrid identity and presents how it feels to be not only fictionally in-between cultures.

The benefit [of being biracial] to my mind is that when you meet people, they can’t immediately pigeonhole you. Therefore, when I meet a person, clearly they notice that I am not White but they don’t identify me as a Black. And that confuses them. And probably if they are going to be dealing with me on an ongoing basis, it’s going to enter their minds.... [Not being able to pigeonhole me] forces people to approach me as an individual first until they can figure out who I am eventually... Anyway that’s an asset [not being pigeonholed]. And by the same token, that’s one of the drawbacks of being biracial, because when I see a Black person, I’m not immediately identified as being Black...When I see Black people, especially here in this town, I want to run up to them and say “Hey! Guess what, I know you don’t realize it, but I’m Black too, you can talk to me.” ...So that’s a drawback—you feel like people that you do identify with don’t necessarily immediately identify with you. (man born in 1965, self-identity: Afro-American, derived from an Afro-American father and an Asian Japanese mother) ([www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/secret/portraits/4.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/secret/portraits/4.html))

However, what is even more exciting about the whole phenomenon of counter-passage in the context of such fiction is the act of **refusing to return** to the original, socio-culturally superior majority culture of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture. During the colonial Indian wars, captives often refused to return to ‘civilization’ and sometimes were forcibly repatriated (e.g. Ohio Valley Indian campaign 1764). Frances Slocum (1778–1847) of a Pennsylvania Quaker family, at the age of five is stolen by Delaware Indians and given to a couple who had recently lost their daughter. She marries a native Indian, then returns to her adoptive parents and finally a reunion with her white family is arranged, where she chooses to remain with her people, the Miami Indians. She is respected by both Indians and pioneers and is referred to as the *White Rose of Miami*. Brandon poses the question why, and provides a dubious explanation: persons of lower social status, mostly ignorant folks forget their former connections due to the long cohabitation with Indians and preferred “easy

and unconstrained” existence to the “blessings of improved life (Brandon 253).”

I can partly agree with the above statement, for many of these ‘folks’ made a rather conscious decision to stay with the Natives, experiencing both cultures and developing strong emotional ties as well. The author Larson says in an interview: “The Mary of history was plainly concerned about her children’s welfare. My Mary—for *The White* is not a ‘history’ as such—chooses to remain on her lands for complicated reasons which accrue throughout her life (author interview [www.readinggroupguides.com/guides3/white2.asp#interview](http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides3/white2.asp#interview)).” In my view, the non-return culture brokers, shape shifters primarily acted under the pressure of circumstances (fate), however, other factors like prestige, virtues, love, being accustomed to, also make them shape-shift and not wish to return to whites.

Taking a brief overview on the latter, sociologists and literary critics investigate how social prestige and virtues attached to Native culture affect a white middle-class person’s preference and decision about his/her socio-cultural alliances. Goldstein discusses the concept of social prestige in detail and argues that “**deference** entails the acknowledgement (or lack thereof) of an individual’s worth or dignity (Goldstein 181),” while negative deference implies that one is regarded as unworthy, disreputable and undignified in a particular community. Our fictional shape shifters firstly face the problem of different sets of values of the two cultures they move in between, then they seek acknowledgement in the new one which takes shape in the social prestige they achieve. **Prestige** is a symbolic reward, the “subjective dimension of social stratification (Goldstein 182)” that greatly motivates how we locate ourselves in a community. It is influenced by the following factors: occupational role and accomplishment, wealth, income (and how is it attained), lifestyle, educational attainment, political or corporate power, family connections, possession of titles, ranks and ethnicity.

Besides the above practical motivations behind individual acculturation, an important additional factor appears that ideologically affect the shape shifter’s imagination about his/her encounter with the culture of the Other, and that is the **two sets of virtues** that formulate his/her perceptions of Indian culture. The first set refers to the pre-received images s/he had had access to prior to encountering Native culture, and the second is the more realistic set of virtues that s/he recognizes throughout the contact experience. In his seminal book entitled



*The White Man's Indian*, Berkhofer argues that whites tend to appreciate in Indian culture for its sexual innocence, equality of status, peaceful simplicity, healthful and bodies, "vigorous minds unsullied by the wiles, complexities, and sophistication of modern civilization...free of history's burdens, mostly following the so called primitivist tradition (Berkhofer 72)." The Canadian Daniel Francis in his *The Imaginary Indian* (1993) adds that there has been a widespread admiration for certain qualities like bravery, physical prowess, natural virtue—but all these belong mostly to the historical image of the Indian in the past, their only marketable image that sells well (Francis 176), what non-Natives think about being an Indian like, which is mostly an appropriated image (Francis 172). Agreeing with Vine Deloria, Francis adds: incapable of adjusting to the continent, searching for ways to feel at home, newcomers look at the image of the First Nations and seek solution for identity and alienation problems by going Native (Francis 189). Archibald Belaney/Grey Owl for instance is an archetypal Canadian, for he "connects through the wilderness with the New World (Francis 223)." Non-Native Canadians are trying in a way to become indigenous people themselves and to resolve their lingering sense of not belonging where they need to belong. By appropriating elements of Native culture, non-Natives have tried to establish a relationship with the country that pre-dates their arrival and validates their occupation of the land (Francis 190)."

Similarly, Little Big Man, Frances Slocum/the White Rose of Miami, or Mary/Two-Falling-Voices in *The White* present examples of archetypically American characters who leave somewhat behind their white origins and develop a fictionally in-between cultural mediator role that may help both 'paleface' and 'redskin' understand each other.

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