

## The Racialized Subject in James Tyman's *Inside Out*

**M**étis writer James Tyman's 1989 book, *Inside Out: An Autobiography of a Native Canadian*, is a combination of two well-established sub-genres in Canadian nonfiction: the prison confession narrative and the First Nations autobiography.<sup>1</sup> In his meditations on his own Native identity and his criminal behaviour, Tyman indirectly addresses the question of why there are so many First Nations men in Canadian prisons. But while the book's larger message may be considered to be sociological, it is first and foremost an account of the frightening realities of one Native man's experience, and it provides a visceral portrait of the ways in which racial stereotypes and the psychology of racial identity contribute to Tyman's criminal and self-destructive behavior. It also shows how cultural dislocation and cross-race adoption can affect the formation of identity. These issues could be examined from a number of theoretical viewpoints, but I have chosen in this study to undertake a psychoanalytic reading of the text, in order to uncover a symbolic vocabulary of racialized subjectivity.<sup>2</sup> As the title of the work indicates, Tyman addresses a problem that is very dear to psychoanalysis: the relation between the inside and the outside of the human subject. In his play with metaphors of interiority and exteriority, Tyman reveals a model of the racialized subject as a Möbius strip of identity, continually negotiating between inner experience and outer action and appearance. While *Inside Out* is on one level a compelling story of a Native man trying to stay alive on the dangerous streets of Saskatchewan's cities, it is also very much an interior drama about the development of identity in the face of violence, displacement, and racism.

Tyman's portrayal of his identity is complicated by two related events in his early life: the physical abuse he suffered at the hands of his biological father, and the boy's subsequent adoption, at the age of four, into a white middle-class family in southern Saskatchewan. His description of his early abuse shows it to constitute a trauma of the most extreme sort; it is so devastating to him that shortly after his adoption, he is unable to recall anything of his earlier life, and he even forgets his original name. Thus, quite literally, his adoption marks the beginning of a new identity and the repression of his former one. The only leakage between these two identities occurs in the dreams that the young boy experiences shortly after he arrives in the Tyman household, nightmares of helplessness in which, he says, "I would see him coming. I couldn't run from him. . ." (9). Even two decades later, when he writes the book, Tyman still has "no memories of the beatings and the abuse" (8). All he can do is reconstruct an imagined version of his early trauma, and he does so in the terrifying opening scene of the book, where he describes his drunken father beating him into unconsciousness. This invented scene is an appropriate allegory of the anonymous father's place in Tyman's psyche, since the father here is the violent agent of the very unconsciousness—the amnesia—from which the child never fully recovers. Tyman ends the imagined episode with the observation that "my father was too drunk to realize I was still unconscious" (7). In a very real sense, Tyman the writer is "still unconscious" of his early life even when he writes this sentence, at the age of twenty-four. The violence of the father has robbed him of his first four years of existence. In addition, this violence has had devastating effects on Tyman's sense of identity, and it may well be a catalyst for the violent behavior that Tyman himself exhibits in his youth and adulthood.

To the adoption agency, young Jimmy Tyman's installation into a relatively well-adjusted middle-class white family may have seemed like a much-needed antidote to the violence and instability of his early life. However, he experiences immediate difficulties in adjusting to his new identity. Only moments after realizing that he has forgotten his original name, the child looks at the white faces of his new family and concludes, "They look different. They stare at me like I'm different" (8). His awareness of this difference persists and even grows, despite the fact that his new parents accept him and love him as one of their own. This awareness is reinforced in his encounters with white children from the community, who say to him "you're Indian, aren't you?" (10). This identification from without, by members of the majority group, is the process by which his difference comes to have a name. When faced with

these questions, he says, “I didn’t know the difference, so I’d reply cheerfully, ‘Yeah’” (10). He accepts his status as “Indian” through the voices and the eyes of whites—and also, inevitably, through their prejudices, though he is not yet aware of them. He himself does not “know the difference” between Indian and white until he accepts the white point of view. This scene is reminiscent of a key moment of identification in Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, where Fanon describes a white child who sees him and says “Look, a Negro!” (112). The label carries with it a stunning power of objectification, and it becomes a defining crisis in Fanon’s theorization of black identity. He writes,

I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave ships. . . . (112)

The child’s repeated phrase becomes for Fanon a definition of himself as other—and this is a particular kind of otherness, burdened with centuries of colonial history and racist stereotypes. After this moment, he can no longer be simply “a man among other men” (Fanon 112); he becomes the embodiment of a symbol that has been created in the white imagination. While young James Tyman’s situation is certainly worlds away from that of Fanon, I believe that the two of them share a common reaction to the scene of white identification. When Tyman is labeled an Indian, the term is loaded with a history and a set of stereotypical assumptions which go far beyond his own knowledge. He will only gradually—and painfully—become acquainted with the symbolic value of his body in white society. But he has one immediate lesson in racial identity: after he has agreed that he is an Indian, the white children make a particularly cruel distinction by telling him, “your mom isn’t” (11). This statement goes further than the racial labeling which has preceded it, because it establishes a disjunction between his racial identity and his familial identity. His only response to such an observation is, “I couldn’t answer that” (11). Indeed, he is not able to answer that challenge for the next twenty years. He struggles to attain a sense of belonging in his family, but he is defeated again and again by the visible difference between himself and the Tymans, and by the ways in which the white community codes that difference. The perceived incongruity between his “Native” appearance and his connection to a white family creates an almost uncanny sense of doubled identity. He becomes an *unheimlich* presence in the Tyman home: he is accepted there, but the family never dis-

cusses his Native ancestry. As the family refuses to acknowledge his difference, they also reveal a willingness to overlook his ostracism from the larger community.

It is not surprising, then, that when he is first exposed to the negative values that attach to the word “Indian” in his society, he does his best to avoid this label. One way he does this is by befriending a white girl named Anita, who is unusual because she doesn’t ask him whether he is an Indian. Unlike the other kids, she seems not to recognize his difference. In fact, the two of them achieve a kind of solidarity through their mutual participation in racist comments *against* Native people. Tyman writes, “we used to joke about the stupid Indians with their dirty clothes and hair, sleeping in the tall weeds behind the hotel on Main Street” (11). As in many racially inflected jokes and slurs, the subtext of this exchange is a misguided attempt to form community: the two children denigrate the socially constructed other as a way of solidifying a sense of commonality between themselves. For young Jimmy, this involves a particularly blatant feat of racial erasure (a trick he might have learned from his adopted family).

However, the feeling of belonging that he derives from such scapegoating activity is always short-lived, because, he says, “when the day was over I’d look back in the mirror and there was that same dark skin. What was wrong?” (11) His resemblance to the objects of scorn causes him a crisis of belonging. His place in his white family and community is thrown into question by the appearance of “that same dark skin” in the mirror. This produces a split in his identity, not only between interior affect and external appearance, but also between the societal roles of persecutor and persecuted. The image of his body is a reminder that his adopted life with the Tymans involves a radical dissociation from his original Native identity.

On a theoretical level, Tyman’s reaction to this mirror image is also a potent symbolization of his situation as a person of colour in a world dominated by whiteness. It can be viewed as a mirror-stage of racialized subjectivity, in which the child identifies with the mirror image, as in Lacan, but also recognizes the self-image as the socially constructed other, the stereotypical scapegoat.<sup>3</sup> In this case, his identification with the mirror image is not a cause for jubilation, but rather for disconcerted amazement: “what was wrong?” This is not a celebration of having attained a place in the symbolic order, but rather a troubling recognition that his body occupies a marginal location in that order. This simultaneous recognition and estrangement is reminiscent of Fanon’s scene of racialized self-identification which we have

examined above. While Fanon's situation does not contain a literal mirror, the encounter traces a very similar trajectory: the child's statement "Look, a Negro!" causes Fanon to look at himself as if he were other. He describes this process by saying "I *subjected* myself to *objective* evaluation" (112, my emphasis), a description that could well apply to Tyman's situation in front of the mirror. The act of subjecting oneself, in this racialized model, paradoxically involves seeing oneself as an object, through the racist assumptions of the dominant community.

Further on in the same section of the book, the mirror becomes a nexus not only of self-questioning, but also of self-hatred for young Tyman. Once he enters school, the teasing of his white classmates leads him to

go home and look in the bathroom mirror and curse the color of my skin. Why couldn't I be like the other kids? My parents treated me with love, but at school I learned of the Indians and their savage ways, how they scalped people, how they'd tie you across an anthill until the insects ate you alive. (15)

The colour of his skin—the mark of his difference—becomes a kind of curse because of its symbolic meaning in a racist culture. While he feels that he is accepted at home, the contrast between his family's love and his community's scorn creates an incurable disjunction in his self-image. The stories of "Indians and their savage ways" are analogous to the racist symbols which Fanon perceives ("tom-toms, cannibalism" [112], and so on) when he encounters his blackness through the eyes of a white child. Young James doesn't *want* to identify with the negative aspects of the stereotypical Indian, but like Fanon hearing the child's label, "Negro," he is unable to avoid this identification. Later, when he accepts a life of crime, he is in a sense fulfilling the stereotypical prophecy of the mirror.

**W**hile Tyman's unconsciousness of his childhood identity can be seen as a necessary mechanism of defence against the original trauma of his father's violence, the very fact of his repressed identity becomes for the boy a kind of second-order trauma, because it leads to an utter dislocation from his own origins. He is not only displaced by the paternalistic white authorities (a displacement that echoes many episodes in the history of aboriginal-white relations in Canada), but he is also cut off from his earlier identity by the defence mechanism of his amnesia. The question of his origins, which is posed again and again by his peers and his teachers, comes to be a problem of primary importance for his current identity, but it remains a question which he cannot answer. He says,

I knew I had been adopted, but from where? Who was my mom? I tried to remember, but all that came to me [that is, all he could remember] was walking in the Tymans' front door. Kids at school asked me where I came from. A few teachers did, too. "From under a rock," I'd answer cheerfully. They would laugh and the questions would stop. (17)

He uses self-deprecating humour as a strategy of subversion here, to deny the validity of the questions and possibly also to rebel against the offensive implication that he doesn't belong where he is. But perhaps because of the persistence of such questions, he becomes increasingly bothered by his ignorance of his origins. He desires information about his past, but interestingly he does not ask his adoptive family to provide it—probably because he senses their unwillingness to discuss questions of racial identity.

At this point, Tyman reaches a defining point in his development: he discovers the adoption papers that Jim and Cecile Tyman have kept in their bedroom. It is a kind of primal scene, in which he comes face to face with the secret of his origins. He makes this discovery while searching for evidence of his adoptive brother's school marks, to see whether his own poor performance in school is typical:

I was fumbling through some papers when I came across a large brown envelope marked "Saskatchewan Social Services Department." My head went light. There was a letter with "adopt Indian Métis" in dark blue letters across the top. I must be a Métis Indian, I thought. I wondered what tribe that was. I knew we had Sioux Indians all around us on the reserves. But where was the Métis reserve? I read on: "Born in Ile-a-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan." Where the hell was that? My mom said I was born in Saskatoon. (25)

Young Jimmy is not only surprised to find out about his Métis ancestry; he is in fact largely ignorant of what the Métis are.<sup>4</sup> He has been until this point a generic "Indian" (as defined by the whites in Fort Qu'Appelle) rather than a member of a specific Native community. But unfortunately, since he knows nothing about the Métis, this new knowledge is not particularly useful in forming a sense of identity and community. Furthermore, he finds out that his adoptive mother has misinformed him about the place of his birth, and that the real, officially designated birthplace is somewhere that he has never even heard of. It is not surprising, then, that this discovery—which should, in theory, help him to solidify a sense of personal identity—actually serves to dislocate him further from his present circumstances, and perhaps even from his origins. He says, "Up until then I'd felt very close to my mother and father. Now I felt alienated" (25).

Still, he returns a few days later to "the drawer which contained my past"

(25), and he finds more information there, including letters which list a large number of diseases he had contracted as a child. “There were no names on these letters,” he says. “Just ‘the subject.’ ‘I’m a subject,’ I smiled to myself” (25). His reaction to this official label is difficult to gauge, largely because of the ambiguity of the word “subject”—an ambiguity which he may not fully understand at the time, but which nonetheless conditions his situation. Perhaps his smile is a bemused response to the absurdity of such a depersonalizing term. However, it is possible that he feels some satisfaction at the validation provided by this word, since in one definition a subject is an autonomous agent who occupies a given place in a community. His apparent amusement at being called a subject may be somewhat misplaced, since he does not yet comprehend the full extent of his subjection. In any case, it is significant that he discovers his forgotten original identity immediately after finding the above quoted designation of his status as a subject. This scene of discovery is described as follows:

Then finally I found some news: “Kenny Howard Martin was placed with William and Cecile Tyman on September 17, 1967. His new name will be James Kenneth Tyman.” I felt a heat rush. That was it! Now I know who I am! (25)

He not only learns his original name at this moment; he also learns that the state agency *gave* him his new name, or at least validated it, authorized it. He has been subjected to, and in a sense made a subject by, the white-dominated government authority—an authority against which he intuitively reacts in later life. However, the moment of his discovery is not described as a scene of trauma, but rather one of celebration. When he says “Now I know who I am,” he believes that he has indeed recovered his lost *ur*-self, and that it will serve as an anchor for his present identity. He has the government bureaucracy to thank for this discovery.

Unfortunately, however, the name “Kenny Howard Martin” remains little more than an empty signifier for Tyman in his subsequent life. This name does not bring back a rush of his early memories. In fact, he feels no particular identification with the name at all, probably because he has not known anyone with the last name “Martin,” and thus it does not provide any visible link to a community. So, after the initial sense of jubilation at discovering the trace of his previous identity, he realizes that the adoption papers have not told him who he is. In fact, his discovery serves to foreground the problem of his lost past. Documents prove to be insufficient to forge the link to his suppressed earlier self. In the final analysis, his apparent discovery becomes not an epiphany but rather a rupture in the fabric of his new identity. He says,

My emotions were in turmoil all that summer. I felt cheated by a mother I didn't even know. I felt deserted. I felt angry because the Tymans hadn't told me the truth. I felt resentment toward people who gave me a hard time about who I was. (26)

He reveals a recognition here that even if the official document *had* shown him who he was, this would not have stopped the racist comments and questions that are directed toward him from the majority white society. People would have continued to give him "a hard time" about his racial identity and his placement within a white family.

The disappointment engendered by this experience does not, however, lead him to abandon his search for his earlier identity. He continues to believe that if he connects with his "real" family, he will be restored to his original identity, or will at least be able to stabilize his current identity. This belief in the power of blood kinship, of biology, is quite striking throughout most of the text. It is only when he finally meets his biological mother, near the end of the narrative, that this belief in biology is tested. I will leave that definitive scene aside for the moment, however, in order to focus on some of the other crises of identity through which Tyman tries to work.

As we saw in his earlier racialized mirror-encounters, where his assumption of identity was simultaneously the adoption of a status as scapegoat, Tyman's identity during adolescence continues to be formulated in accordance with the stereotypical assumptions of others. Given his sense of difference from his adoptive family, and his inability to discuss the issue of race with them, this situation seems almost unavoidable for him. It may well be that identity is always given by the other, as Levinas has argued, but in Tyman's case this is perhaps more true than for most people.<sup>5</sup> His models of possible Native identities during his early life with the Tymans are basically the dominant racist stereotypes of his community. The white community continually expects him to play a role dictated by the symbolic value of his skin, and eventually he begins to believe in these expectations himself. The result is a stronger identification with the scapegoated mirror image, rather than with his role as a member of the Tyman family. Because of his adoption and his repression of early memories, he has no recollection of a sense of racial belonging—a family or community in which his appearance would not have been anomalous.<sup>6</sup> His adolescent subjectivity is in many ways cobbled together out of the prejudicial stereotypes of the white community, which he both internalizes and acts out. Only later does he realize that, because of this internalization, "I was myself a hardcore racist. . . . I hated my own people" (109).



The stereotypical Native images that are available to Tyman as models of behavior are contradictory, and they reflect the kind of ambivalence that white colonizers have held toward First Nations people since the earliest times of contact: the alternation between the noble savage and the plain old savage. The difference between these two contrary principles of nativeness is essentially the degree of submission that the Native person shows toward whites. According to Tyman, in Fort Qu'Appelle the "bad Indians" (34) are lazy, drunk, welfare-abusing criminals. The "good Indian" (34), on the other hand, is hard-working, punctual, and honest.<sup>7</sup> The "good Indian," like many representations of the noble savage, is the exception that proves the racist rule: he or she is "an Indian who has white friends" (68); one who does not threaten white authority. This exceptional status of the "good Indian" is demonstrated in a conversation between Tyman and a group of his white teenage friends:

"I want to get a gun and shoot all the Indians!" one of them exclaimed one day.  
 "Shoot all the Indians! What about me?"  
 "Oh, not you, Jim. You're a good Indian." (34)

One of the most shocking aspects of this incident is young Jim's reaction to it: he says "I was elated that he saw me as a good Indian" (34). He has internalized white racist values to such an extent that he does not question the main premise of the boy's initial sentence. Tyman is required to define himself as different from the whites, because of his appearance, but he seems also to be hoping to maintain a differentiation between himself and the other Native people who are the objects of white hatred.<sup>8</sup>

Once Tyman has earned the dubious honorific of "good Indian," he worries that people (that is, white people) might mistake him for one of the "bad Indians." However, immediately after voicing this concern, he describes his first break-and-enter, a crime that he commits with the help of two Native friends whom he describes as "darker than me" (34). In other words, he adopts the role of the "bad Indian." It is difficult not to surmise that this crime is somehow related to the extreme racist incident that Tyman has just described. Perhaps, consciously or unconsciously, he is rebelling against white racism through his crimes. In one case, he steals nearly five thousand dollars from the father of his white friends, a man who had forbidden his sons to associate with James. Tyman is quite clear about the retributive nature of this crime even before he commits it, declaring "I was going to get back at that racist bastard" (38). He is far from being a crusader for anti-racism here, but some of his crimes do seem to be vindictive in their intent,

and it is possible that his daytime role of the “good Indian” results in a repression of anger which is expressed through actions that would be associated with the “bad Indian.” He certainly does maintain a double life for a time, becoming a veritable Jekyll-and-Hyde of racial stereotypes: “To my family I was a hard-working, clean-cut youth. Then on weekends I was pulling three or four break and enters a night” (37). Even after he is caught and charged for this string of robberies, he struggles with the dual Native identities that he has adopted, trying diligently to be a “good Indian,” but then succumbing to rage and feelings of powerlessness, and acting out these emotions through violence and destruction.

Ironically, the first place where Tyman feels that he really belongs is in prison, where he is finally sent at age nineteen, after several other encounters with law-enforcement authorities. “I was quickly accepted among the inmates,” he writes. “I was a solid guy, good people, a bro to my fellow Indians who made up 75% of the unit’s population” (103). For the first time, he has a community in which he is not deemed “different” because of his appearance. He is a member of the majority. This experience seems to bolster his feelings of solidarity with Native people, but it also gives him the fatalistic sense that he has been destined to become the stereotypical “bad Indian.” He goes so far as to naturalize this idea, saying “I was born criminal, I guess” (128). This suggests that he has identified his origin with a racial stereotype, and that he believes he has inherited criminal tendencies from his unknown biological parents. In a sense, he begins to claim the image of the “bad Indian” as if it *were* his lost originary identity.

Other factors in Tyman’s choice of identity are the stereotypes which many of his Native friends perpetuate. They make a distinction between an “apple”—who is “red on the outside, white on the inside” (69)—and a “bro,” who is proud of his Native heritage. Unfortunately, since the traitorous “apple” is essentially the same as what whites define as the “good Indian,” Tyman assumes that being a “bro” means adopting the identity of the “bad Indian.” His dedication to a life of crime can in some ways be attributed to this misreading of the relationship between these stereotypes, so that he comes to believe he can only be proud of his racial identity if he makes himself into the opposite of the “good Indian.” Gradually, he casts off the image of the “apple” and adopts the identity of a hardened criminal. He breaks all ties with his adoptive family because, he says, “they were straight johns and I wanted nothing to do with them. I saw them as the enemy now” (121). After this, he goes on to become a pimp, a drug dealer, and an extremely

violent man. The last half of his narrative reveals a harrowing escalation of his criminal activities and his involvement in brutal beatings and knifings.

It is only when his life is out of control that he comes to question the stereotypical dualisms he has received from the white and Native communities. He does this with the help of his girlfriend, Donna, who is also Native, but who doesn't live within the restrictions of racial stereotypes. Over time, Donna comes to represent the possibility of an alternative Native community for Tyman, one which is something like a family and which is very different from the community of his Aboriginal friends in jail. But Donna is not only a symbol of potential community, she is also a perceptive commentator on the realities of racialized subjectivity, and she plays the role of analyst in Tyman's attempts to uncover the pathology of his distorted identity. He says of Donna, "she was my only link to sanity" (200), and this is no exaggeration. She is a link to sanity first of all because she affirms him and loves him, and second because he trusts her enough to confide in her—which is something he has never done with anyone. During a long stay in jail, he writes to Donna often, expressing his inner feelings:

I felt something when I wrote to her. It was strange. I'd never been to bed with her. I'd never done anything with her. I hadn't even seen her for over a year! But when I thought of her, there was a closeness. I started to confide in her. I told her about the past. I told her how I'd screwed up a good thing with my family. I told her about the deep hatred inside me. (183)

His communication with Donna allows him to bring his inner turmoil into the outer world without resorting to violence and crime, and it also allows him to gain a certain critical perspective on his behavior. He tells her about his desire to find his biological family, and she encourages him to pursue this goal when he is released from jail.

Donna's role as a listener is extremely important to Tyman's growing self-awareness, but she also goes beyond this, offering critical advice about the way he has constructed his identity. When he says that no one would want to hire a Native for a legitimate job, she says "Proud Indians aren't disgraced by their race" (205). When he expresses revulsion at white racism, she responds by challenging one of Tyman's own stereotypes about white people: "I know, Jim. But they're not all like that" (205). By refuting Tyman's belief in the omnipresence of white racism, Donna opens the possibility for him to imagine an identity that is not absolutely conditioned by prejudice. She goes further than this when she suggests that he is in some ways complicit with the racist white attitudes that he despises, since he is

playing the very role that racist stereotypes assign to the “bad Indian.” She says, “By killing yourself or someone else you’ll let them know that you were just another rank Indian. . . . You’re helping them hate you, Nichee Moose” (205). This analysis is extremely astute, since it subverts the simplistic stereotypes upon which he has based his identity, and it suggests that he is in fact somewhat responsible for upholding and performing those stereotypes. Most importantly, Donna’s analysis asserts that Tyman does have the ability to choose a role which is neither the “good Indian” nor the “bad Indian.” This scene is a turning point in Tyman’s self-knowledge, although he declines into further violence and self-destructiveness soon afterward. While I hesitate to push the analogy of Donna as analyst too far, it is worth noting that Tyman displays symptoms of resistance when, just after her analysis of his situation, he says “I didn’t want her to straighten me out again. Crime was too lucrative and too easy” (206). He stabs her shortly after this, when she refuses to become his prostitute—and this violent action might also be seen as a particularly extreme form of resistance to the insights she has offered.<sup>9</sup> It is not until after he experiences another symbolic death and rebirth that he is able to come to terms with her analysis.

Donna is quite literally Tyman’s savior, since she finds him when he has attempted suicide by overdose, and she keeps him from lapsing into unconsciousness, which would apparently be fatal. This scene is an interesting inversion of the imagined account of his originary trauma which begins the book: here, Donna keeps him awake in order to save his life, whereas in the imagined trauma, his father violently delivers unconsciousness to him, and in the process erases his early life. Both of these scenes involve a symbolic death and a rebirth into a new life, but in the later instance, the rebirth is a much more positive one. After recovering from his overdose, Tyman takes immediate steps to change his circumstances. “I’m trying to live straight and peaceful,” he says, “and it’s happening” (219). He gradually gives up on the prostitution business, finds a legitimate job, and signs up for a drug and alcohol abuse treatment program. He is not always successful in changing his behavior, but his attitude has definitely changed: he discards the fatalistic notion that he was “born criminal” (128), and he no longer conforms to the stereotypical roles of the “bad Indian.” In this final section of the book, Tyman manifests a belief in the possibility of self-determination, which enables him to take responsibility for his actions and his identity. Even after he has been convicted of a crime he didn’t commit, he refuses to revert to his earlier tactics of blaming the system. He says, “The hatred is gone. The

shame of being Indian is not there. The thought of living by crime once I get out isn't there" (226). By replacing shame with pride, he finds a positive way of identifying himself with Native communities—a way which is not entangled in stereotypical expectations.

It may be significant that Tyman finally meets his biological mother only after he has undergone this second rebirth and has begun coming to terms with his own responsibility for his actions and his identity. In an idealized narrative of the self, one might expect this kind of plot device as a reward for finding one's own way in the world, for settling on an identity that seems healthy—but in fact Tyman does not portray his reunion with his mother in such an ideal light. The scene is described in two brief paragraphs which are distinctly anticlimactic, especially when one considers the importance he has placed upon his biological family in previous years. At the end of the tearful meeting, he says, "She gave me her phone number and address. I never did phone her or go by her house on Thirty-Third Street" (220). His mother does not become the fount of his new self-respect and self-knowledge; she does not seem to fill the psychic void which he has always believed she would fill. He only learns a few details about the violence of his father in his early life, and he learns that his father was "a Frenchman" (221) rather than a Métis. He also hears that some of his siblings have grown up to be quite successful—which means that he had not, after all, been destined by genetics or by race to be a born criminal. After gaining this information, he seems to have little else to say to his mother.

Why would he feel this way, when he has expressed a desire to reconnect with his mother ever since he was separated from her? One rather straightforward answer to this question might be that he is unconsciously striking back at her. Though he knows intellectually that his mother was not to blame for the displacement he suffered, he may in a sense be abandoning *her* in return for his own abandonment. However, there is another possible explanation for this turn of events, an explanation which has a number of implications for an understanding of racialized subjectivity. Tyman's disillusionment after meeting his birth mother can be compared with his inability to relate to his "real" name after he had discovered it. When he had first made that discovery, he had said "Now I know who I am" (25), but soon afterward he realized that the name Kenny Howard Martin was just an empty signifier that did not in fact tell him who he was. He had been living under his adopted name for so long that he had in effect *become* James Tyman, and it was not possible or desirable to return to the original name.

His identity as it was practiced was more important to him than any ordinary label of identity. Now, when he meets his biological mother, he comes face to face with the ultimate symbol of his origins, a physical link to his racial identity and his lost childhood. But the experience is not the epiphany he had imagined. He writes,

I had found my mom, but it wasn't the meeting it was supposed to be. I don't know what I was expecting, but I was growing up. I was aware now of who was really my real mom: Cecile Tyman, the one who raised me, fed me, and loved me. It was wrong to think that Alice [his biological mother] was going to take over. I'd been lost all my life, but finding my biological mother wasn't going to change the way I lived. I realized that. (221)

This recognition scene is remarkable in several ways, but perhaps the most striking thing about it is Tyman's reversal of the meaning of the word "real" in relation to his mothers: he says that Cecile Tyman, not his biological mother, is "really my real mom." In this reversal of the real, he abandons the biologism which has made him feel as if he has been missing something essential, and he replaces this belief with a more pragmatic, praxis-oriented understanding of family roles. His criteria for this new "real" are performance and action, rather than origin and essence.<sup>10</sup> By this change, he extricates himself from the fantasy of ordinary grounding, the fantasy of unity with the mother's body—a unity in which he had continued to believe precisely because it was unavailable to him. He sees that Cecile Tyman has been performing the function of a mother to him for many years, and he is willing to accept this. She has become the real mother by playing the role of the mother. Such logic could also be applied to Tyman's understanding of himself. Along with his new acceptance of Cecile Tyman's familial role comes a recognition that he too must define himself by his actions rather than his essence. This emphasis on action prompts him to work toward maintaining an ethical relationship with the communities—both white and First Nations—to which he belongs.

That Tyman considers himself both a son of Cecile Tyman and a Native person suggests that he has come to define racial identity, too, as based more on performance than essence. This is not to say that he decides race is a fiction altogether, but rather that he recognizes it to be less firmly grounded than he had imagined it to be. As we have seen, Tyman had been in a sense performing his identity all along, but the early performances were based upon the expectations of others and upon his own belief in the deterministic power of biology. His "growing up" (221) can be seen to consist

partly in the recognition that his racial roles need not be dictated by others, or by essentialist categories. This disconnection from the originary notion of race leads him toward a view of racialized subjectivity based on what might be called *racial parody*, after Judith Butler's idea of "gender parody," which "reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without origin" (*Gender Trouble* 138). As in Butler's theorization of gender, Tyman's recognition of the untenability of essentialist racial qualities is a liberating experience, and perhaps even a curative one. Certainly, his definition of his own subjectivity becomes more fluid and self-directed in the final pages of the book.<sup>11</sup> Instead of acquiescing to the barrage of racist symbols in white culture which serve to categorize and essentialize him, he comes to see himself as what Homi Bhabha calls "the subject of enunciation" (36), speaking and performing his cultural difference, claiming his own place in the world rather than accepting the status of a cultural object. He does this most publicly by writing *Inside Out*, which can be seen as a direct result of his need to enunciate his own identity to a community of readers.

## NOTES

- 1 One other recent book that straddles these two genres is Rudy Wiebe and Yvonne Johnson's *Stolen Life*, although the collaborative aspect of this text differentiates it from *Inside Out*. Autobiography and autobiographical fiction are of course very common genres in Canadian First Nations writing, and they are particularly prevalent among Métis writers, such as Maria Campbell (*Halfbreed*), Lee Maracle (*Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel; I Am Woman*), and Beatrice Culleton (*April Raintree*). While the three aforementioned authors have received considerable attention from critics, Tyman's *Inside Out* has not yet been studied in detail, except in book reviews.
- 2 Psychoanalysis has sometimes been criticized as a Eurocentric discourse which might be complicit with the ideologies of white colonizers, and thus inappropriate to the study of postcolonial cultures, but I believe on the contrary that, as Fanon has shown, psychoanalysis can be very usefully applied to the idea of "race" in colonial and postcolonial situations. My intent here is not to enclose Tyman's experience in the hermetic envelope of a theoretical enterprise, but to discover what his narrative can tell us about the experience of racialized subjectivity. I am following the lead of several recent writers who have done exemplary work illuminating a psychoanalytic approach to race. The most noteworthy works in this area to date are Sander Gilman's *Freud, Race, and Gender*, Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter* (Chapter 6, pp. 167-85), and the anthology *The Psychoanalysis of Race*, edited by Christopher Lane. I would like to thank Gary Leonard and Julian Patrick for encouraging me to pursue this line of research.
- 3 See Lacan, "Mirror Stage," where he famously defines the mirror stage "as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that

takes place in the subject when he assumes an image" (2). My discussions of persecution and scapegoating are indebted to René Girard's work in *The Scapegoat*.

- 4 Tyman only gains a clear understanding of the term Métis four years after reading it in the government document. His Native friend Lorne informs him about the hybrid identity of the Métis, and Tyman's reaction to this knowledge is an expression of relief, because "I realized I was half white" (28). Despite this recognition, Tyman does not display much anxiety about his hybrid identity in the rest of the book, which is unusual among Métis authors, many of whom feel torn between white and Aboriginal identities. Tyman for the most part identifies himself as "Indian" rather than as Métis. This may be again related to the external judgments of others, since his skin is relatively dark (Lorne calls him "the darker version" [28] of the Métis), and he is therefore identified by others as unequivocally Native.
- 5 See the metaphysical role of the face of the other in Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*, especially 187-219.
- 6 Fanon describes the black person's existence within a black community as a precursor to the rupturing event of the white gaze, saying that "as long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others" (109). In Tyman's case, he has no recollection of ever being "among his own," so one can see that his entire experience in his new life is conditioned by the omnipresence of the white gaze and the stereotypical assumptions that go along with it.
- 7 It is perhaps significant that the "bad Indians" are plural, whereas the "good Indian" is singular—implying that in this racist stereotype, there are more "bad" ones than "good."
- 8 This is precisely the situation described by Homi Bhabha in a commentary on *Black Skin, White Masks*, when he describes the colonizer's "ambivalent use of 'different'—to be different from those that are different makes you the same" (44). Tyman can only feel accepted in this racist community through the circuitous route of being seen as "different from those who are different."
- 9 This kind of extreme resistance can be compared to what Freud calls "negative therapeutic reaction" (*Ego and the Id* 390), during which the patients "get worse during treatment instead of better" (390).
- 10 I use the word "performance" to invoke Judith Butler's sense of the performative, which "suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (*Gender Trouble* 139).
- 11 By the term "self-directed" I do not mean to posit a sudden self-discovery or self-mastery on Tyman's part, but rather a conception of identity as what Butler calls "an act" . . . which is both intentional and performative" (*Gender Trouble* 139). The addition of phenomenological intention gives the subject an active role in its own constitution, but this intention must still be formed and expressed through culturally and temporally determined "styles." Butler writes, "These styles are never fully self-styled, for styles have a history, and those histories condition and limit the possibilities" (*Gender Trouble* 139).

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