

# *Native Boy's Bluest Eye: Drew Hayden Taylor and Jordan Wheeler between Politics and Myth*

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• *Mirosława Ziaja-Buchholtz* •

*Résumé:* Le présent article analyse les stratégies narratives de deux auteurs autochtones du Canada anglais, Drew Hayden Taylor et Jordan Wheeler. Tous deux s'ingénient à créer, mais d'une manière opposée, une identité particulière chez leurs jeunes héros d'origine amérindienne. Le premier donne une résonance mythologique aux questions politiques tandis que le second investit le mythe d'une dimension politique.

*Summary:* This paper compares the literary strategies of two contemporary Native authors: Drew Hayden Taylor and Jordan Wheeler. It argues that in an attempt to create an identity for juvenile protagonists of Native background, the former mythologizes politics and the latter politicizes myth. While the paper focuses on two texts published in the same anthology, it also offers glimpses of other pieces by the two authors.

Whether Drew Hayden Taylor and Jordan Wheeler will make it into the canon of Canadian or world literature is written in the stars, impossible to predict at this point. It will depend on their literary creativity in the coming years, their readers' receptiveness, as well as on volatile political configurations affecting production, distribution, and consumption of literature. So far, Drew Hayden Taylor, a recipient of an Honours Diploma in Broadcasting, has written plays and scripts for television documentaries, whereas Jordan Wheeler, likewise involved in video, film, and popular theatre, has been best known for his short fiction addressed to young adults. Two of their short pieces, "Pretty Like a White Boy: The Adventures of a Blue Eyed Ojibway" by Taylor and "A Mountain Legend" by Wheeler, found their way into the second edition of *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English* (1998). Focusing on these two texts, with occasional glimpses at a few other pieces, I will try to show how the

two authors negotiate between politics and myth in order to constitute identity for their protagonists.

"Pretty Like a White Boy" by Taylor defies classification in terms of genre. Written in the first person and explicitly identifying the narrator with the author, the text encourages the belief that it is an autobiography, only to subvert this belief by means of exaggeration. Indeed, some of the episodes, names, and titles of plays mentioned in the narrative reappear in the biographical note on Taylor at the end of the anthology. While the text constitutes an act of self-creation through self-narration, it is also concerned with the relationship between the narrator and the society which is divided in terms of race and culture. The narrator discovers in himself the doubleness reproducing this division. The process enacted by Taylor's text is a difficult one because "the Other" (whether white or native) is inevitably part of "self." To signal this difficulty, the narrator refrains from simply introducing himself to the readers. Instead, his name is pronounced in the tone of disbelief by someone who expects him to look like a native Canadian if he avows this identity:

Picture this, the picture calls for the casting of seventeenth-century Mohawk warriors living in a traditional longhouse. The casting director calls the name 'Drew Hayden Taylor' and I enter.

The casting director, the producer, and the film's director look up from the table and see my face, blue eyes flashing in anticipation.... Anyway, there would be a quick flush of confusion, a recheck of the papers, and a hesitant 'Mr Taylor?' Then they would ask if I was at the right audition. It was always the same. (437)

Thus, apart from being or pretending to be an autobiographical narrative, "Pretty Like a White Boy" is a problem story that seeks to present and solve an existential dilemma besetting the narrator. The bulk of the text consists of episodes in which he is mistaken for white by white and native people alike. The third generic dimension of Taylor's narrative derives from its humour, which from the very beginning hinges on the juxtaposition of the high and the low, the abstract and the material. The high-flown opening statement on kindred spirits and role models in this wide, wide world is exemplified and at the same time parodied by the announcement that the one who touched the narrator "in some peculiar and yet poignant way" was Kermit the Frog (436). While satirical writing rests on the dichotomy of reality and fiction, Taylor's narrator, who cannot fully relate to either native or white tradition, ends up perceiving both as fiction. He knows that a true Ojibway would appreciate frogs as a delicacy, but he prefers to identify with the personified frog Kermit, especially with Kermit's lament "It's Not Easy Being Green." Metaphorically speaking, Taylor's narrator is like a frog, an amphibian who moves between two worlds. Like Kermit, he is involved in a game of substitution ("animals filling in for humans, chil-

dren filling in for adults, cartoon characters filling in for live-action actors, TV characters filling in for film stars" [Kinder 64]). Since his racial identity is ambiguous, he can only play roles imposed by natives and whites: these are always the roles of "the other." Thus, the children on the Reserve make him play the cowboy, the bad guy, whereas a white student in "the big bad city" asks him what kind of horse an athletic native Canadian might prefer. Situated at the crossfire of gazes between the colonizer and the colonial subject, the narrator seems to exemplify the scenario outlined by Homi Bhabha: "as discrimination turns into the assertion of the hybrid, the insignnia of authority becom[e] a mask, a mockery" (120).

Although he has no Ojibway appearance, Taylor's narrator prides himself on having "the heart and spirit of an Ojibway storyteller" (436). He does not explain in detail what this might mean, but an answer to this question can be found in Basil H. Johnston's Introduction to a collection of Ojibway legends. Johnston names "humour and the art of story-telling" as one of the gifts the Ojibway received from their deities. "Although the themes are far-ranging and often deep and serious," he argues, "the storytellers could always relate the stories with humour" (7). Sheila Egoff and Judith Saltman corroborate this statement, extend it to other native peoples, and try to dissect the mechanism of comedy. They claim that "Indian legends often lack the dignity that is found in other mythologies" because the heroes of these narratives achieve their aims through trickery or even mischief (186). The drift of Daniel David Moses's argument is similar: speaking on behalf of native people, as Johnston did, he argues that "[t]he trickster is the embodiment of our sense of humour about the way we live our lives. It's a very central part of our attitude that things are funny even though horrible things happen" (xxii).

These observations apply to Taylor's narrator, even though the term "humour" requires qualifying adjectives. His sense of humour is scathing, acidulous, irreverent; it verges on sarcasm and satire. It is aimed at political correctness when he translates the saying "Honest Injun" into exaggerated PC "honest aboriginal." Its target is the underprivileged people's defeatism when he wonders, tongue in cheek, whether to blame his lack of success as an actor on his Caucasian appearance or his insufficient skill. He ridicules easy excuses, without sparing himself. Throughout the text he employs staple satirical devices, such as distancing, reduction, violation of taboo, shock treatment, as well as the juxtaposition of *amplificatio* and *diminutio* (i.e., the clash of opposites such as pride and shame, the godly and the animalistic). For example, he narrates the story of his mother's rape with sarcastic nonchalance: "You see, I'm the product of a white father I never knew, and an Ojibway woman who evidently couldn't run fast enough" (436). Instead of complaining about his impoverished childhood, he recalls: "I had a fairly happy childhood, frolicking through the bullrushes" (436). Equipped with a basic knowledge of Greek mythology

and of the Old Testament, I recognize in these two vignettes versions of two powerful images: of Leda and the Swan, and of the foundling Moses discovered in the bullrushes. The subtlety of these mythical allusions, stripped of their ambiguity and poetic gloss, is, however, a trap. Lured by a neat analogy, I stop halfway and ask: What right have I to impose Greek mythology or Judaic tradition on the experience of an Ojibway boy? None. It seems so much more crucial to respect the narrator's need to create by mimicry his own myths out of the popular contemporary story of a personified frog, Kermit.

Not only does the narrator distance himself from the two worlds he has access to, but he also reduces the two cultures to two main icons each. He identifies native tradition with respect for Elders and love of land, whereas white civilisation means to him Italian food and breast implants. By assigning the spiritual to the native tradition and the bodily to the white, he defines the opposition of the white and the native as the duality of body and soul. He thus replaces the historical and contingent view of the social conflict between races with the timeless dichotomy of body and soul on the level of individual experience. Identifying with the bodily, the narrator appears equally irreverent about white and native Elders. He parodies a biblical quotation (439), but he also asks in the context of his fondness for Italian food: "Wasn't there a warrior at Oka named Lasagna?" (438). His provocative sense of humour contrasts sharply with serious studies of the Oka crisis (e.g., Maurice Tugwell and John Thompson's *The Legacy of Oka* [1991]), and exemplifies the emotional consequence of hybridity (understood as the mingling of cultural signs and practices) and divided loyalty. The narrator cannot uphold the native tradition of respect for elders if his relation to his immediate elder, his father, is disturbed. Living in a one-parent, less than nuclear family, he only knows his mother, and never refers to her people. This is a vivid contrast to numerous narratives for young adults in which children of mixed marriages find the repository of native values and tradition in their grandparents' communities. *The Ghost Dance Caper* (1978) by Monica Hughes and *Storm Child* (1985) by Brenda Bellingham are a case in point. Clearly, there is no one who could help him cope with his anxiety. Sarcastic about the mixture of white and red blood in his veins, he calls himself "a Pink Man" and immediately envisages ostracism if he ventured to share this private thought with others (436). Although the narrator uses the abstract concept of "severe identity crisis," his attempts to improve his situation are either imaginary or skin-deep: in an act of despair, he considers having his status card tattooed on his forehead, and "one depressing spring evening" he dyes his hair black.

Nevertheless, the text is much more than a gossipy account of past misadventures; its humorous tone covers up despair. The narrator repeatedly buttonholes the readers, addressing them in a conversational fashion ("you see"), anticipating their questions ("The reason for such a dramatic

act, you may ask?"), inviting their empathy ("Let's face it people"). This constant call for the readers' attention is an ambiguous manoeuvre that may be interpreted in two ways. One possibility is to view these constant appeals for attention as an attempt to fashion the text as an oral narrative, thus tapping on the old tradition of a clown, who is "permitted to challenge sacred and vested authority" (Leeming 118), or on the relatively new tradition of a stand-up comic tale, which performs "the function of defining what is normal in a society and calling attention to its problems, via laughter-inducing ridicule" (Leeming 433). However, the persistent but-tonholing may just as well signify a desperate need for a witness to the process the narrator is undergoing, for someone who could help him prove his identity. Taylor's text is a way to the self, a means of determining the identity of the "narrated person," who is, at least partly, Taylor himself. Thus, the readers are perversely encouraged to laugh at a tormented man, whose private anxiety is knotted up with public conflicts.

Even though Taylor's text seems to be self-centred, his tragi-comic lament has political underpinnings. He discloses his motivation in his conclusion, speaking at first in negative terms: "Now let me make this clear, I'm not writing this for sympathy, or out of anger, or even some need for self-glorification." Then he defines his project in a performative speech, employing the present tense:

For as you read this, a new Nation is born. This is a declaration of independence, my declaration of independence.

I've spent too many years explaining who and what I am repeatedly, so as of this moment, I officially secede from both races. I plan to start my own separate nation. Because I am half Ojibway, and half Caucasian, we will be called Occasions. And I, of course, since I'm founding the new nation, will be a Special Occasion. (439)

His act of asserting personal freedom is at the same time an act of submission to ready-made political blueprints, all of them of American provenance. Both the American Declaration of Independence and the secession of southern states, evoked in the quotation above, were repeatable experiments that set patterns for political behaviour. In addition, the sentence "a new Nation is born" echoes David Wark Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). While apparently drawing on American models, however, Taylor in fact distorts and mocks them. Cutting both ways, the text is at the same time a parody of creation tales, in which native folklore abounds. Unable to fit in either the white or the native tradition, even though intimately related to both, Taylor's narrator has recourse to extreme individualism. His assertion of individual freedom amounts to admitting the failure of political endeavours to codify behaviour in a multicultural society.

In his mock-political text, Taylor tricks his readers into believing that it is possible to laugh at serious insoluble dilemmas. But laughter is only

possible if history is reduced to its timeless mythic essentials. Although the narrator refers to historical events that polarized attitudes (e.g., the Oka crisis, the American Civil War), he never mentions dates or gives his account of events, instead treating these names as abstract concepts detached from their political context. Thus the empirical evolves into the conceptual. The immediacy and uniqueness of historical experience is condensed in a transcultural myth about constituting identity. In terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis, this process is paralleled by the narrator's transition from the Imaginary to the Symbolic, through the discovery of the patriarchal law (Lacan 4; Green and LeBihan 164-65). The father may be absent, but he remains an abstract cause of the boy's dilemmas. To the non-native readers, Taylor's text appears merely disrespectful and sarcastic. Read in the context of Suzanne Lundquist's illuminating remarks on sacred humour in native folklore, however, Taylor's narrator emerges as a clown who performs a spiritual ceremony. His humour is sacred because it aims at healing (Lundquist 27-28).

The healing humour of Taylor's text seems to run against the grain of contentions made by postcolonial theoreticians, most notably Edward Said, that a new type of knowledge should be able to "analyze plural objects as such rather than offering forms of integrated understanding that simply comprehend them within totalizing schemas" (Young 11). The episodes from the narrator's life, paralleled by crucial events from the history of diverse nations, reveal Taylor's totalizing mythopoeic urge; his narrative is meant to help him understand his world through reducing the complexity of racial conflicts on psychological and social levels to "schemas," and — in the Ojibway fashion — through ridiculing the "schemas." Laurence Coupe recognizes in myth-making and in myth-reading a drive towards completion and unity (6-8), and views with scepticism two basic aspects of myth: paradigm and perfection. Precisely these two appear to be the aim Taylor's narrator seeks to achieve.

Taylor's extravaganza, anthologized in 1998, differs widely from his serious, politically involved early plays, such as *Toronto at Dreamer's Rock* and *Education is Our Right*. These two topical one-act plays were published in 1990 as Taylor's first book. Although the tone, the outcome, and the political message differ widely from one play to the other, both texts exemplify the same formula: the juxtaposition of the past, the present, and the future of native Canadians. *Toronto at Dreamer's Rock* consists of dialogues between three sixteen-year-old aboriginal boys. Rusty, a boy from the present, dominates the scene; he is the first one to appear, the most voluble and the most complex of the three. The other two, Keesic, a boy from the past, and Michael, a boy from the future, may in fact function as an externalization of Rusty's identity crisis. One day Rusty climbs a sacred mountain, listening to his walkman. Although previously celebrated as a magic site, where "[a]ll things are possible" (33) and as a destination for vision

quests, the mountain, called Dreamer's Rock, means to him nothing more than a quiet place where he can enjoy his beer store.

Resembling the narrator in "Pretty Like a White Boy," Rusty plays the role of a clown. Verging on sarcasm, his humour often consists in juxtapositions of high-sounding ideals, and common, low pursuits. This is true about the very first sentence the boy utters on reaching the summit: "My home, my people, my beer store" (13). A crow starts cawing, but the boy, who clearly ignores the native tradition, treats it as a nuisance, rather than the Creator's messenger. He shouts: "Hit the road, crow. Fly, hit the sky. Can't you crows understand English? Then try some Indian. Kiss my geed, you stupid crow" (14). As if in response to this offensive offer, another boy appears, repeats Rusty's last sentence and comments on it in his native language. The English translation of his statement follows in square brackets. The boy says: "[I know what a geed is, but what does the rest of it mean?]" (14). For a while the two boys speak to each other, but at cross purposes, because they do not understand the other boy's language. When Rusty touches the Indian of the past, the two boys tumble, and when they get up again, the boy of the past speaks English. He realises, however, that it is not his language. Stage directions refer to Keesic's futile attempts to regain his previous linguistic competence, "Keesic grabs his own throat, terrified at the words coming out" (16), and later, "Keesic, not believing or understanding the new language he is speaking, grabs his throat and struggles to talk his own language, but he has forgotten it" (17). When Rusty offers Keesic some of his beer, and the boy of the past hesitantly accepts it, the story of white and native relations in a nutshell has been recreated, with the boy of the present figuring as the embodiment of white arrogance. By touching Keesic, he takes possession; by making Keesic speak English, he destabilises his identity; and by encouraging Keesic to drink alcohol, he destroys his system of values.

In comparison with the irreverent and sarcastic Rusty, the other two boys are too serious and too perfect to be true; while Keesic holds on to his tradition, Michael seeks refuge in his scholarly pursuits. Since Keesic is Odawa, and Michael is "mostly Odawa," the two boys are also closest to each other and purest racially (38). By contrast, Rusty is all mixed blood; half Odawa, half Ojibway, "and I think there's supposed to be some Pottawatami floating around in my blood somewhere, too" (38). The other two boys have their sets of maxims to guide them through life; for example, Keesic believes that people's names should have "a purpose or meaning" (22), and Michael, who studies history, argues that "[t]hose who don't remember the past are condemned to relive it" (42). These maxims reflect on Rusty, who is deeply moored in modern life, and strongly Americanized; for instance, his literary and cultural allusions come from *The Wizard of Oz* and "Rip van Winkle" ("It ain't Kansas" [22]; "Who are you? Rip van Gregor?" [27]). Although responsible for humour in the play, Rusty is the

most irritable of the three boys; he is the only one to lose his temper and swear. Luckily, he has Michael to provide a rational explanation for his anger: according to the sophisticated boy of the future, Rusty's aggressive behaviour is a strategy to divert people's attention from something he is protecting with his anger (45). Once his strategy has been exposed, Rusty speaks openly about his inability to fit into either native or white life because he is terrible at school and no good at hunting. Paradoxically, while revealing his difficulties, Rusty realizes and speaks for the first time about his identity, calling himself an Indian (46-47).

Unlike Taylor's anthologized extravaganza and the play entitled *Education is Our Right, Toronto at Dreamer's Rock* has a truly happy ending. It predicts economic improvement and self-government for the Odawa. At the end, the boy of the present, Rusty, receives gifts from the other boys; a hide pouch that will keep him strong and healthy from Keesic and a newspaper clipping from Michael. The clipping contains the prophecy that Rusty will become the first Grand Chief of the Aboriginal Government (72). The linguistic and cultural conflicts are resolved at the end of the play: Keesic can speak his language again, and Rusty can communicate with him now. Still more politically involved than the other play, and less optimistic, *Education is Our Right* borrows from Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* and from the medieval morality play *Everyman*, in which abstract notions are personified and evil deeds are punished. Unlike *Toronto at Dreamer's Rock*, which takes an internal view of challenges facing native Canadians, *Education is Our Right* exposes political conflicts between the native people and the white. The play constitutes a straightforward indictment of Pierre Cadieux, the then Federal Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, and his cap on post-secondary education for native students (78).

"A Mountain Legend" by Jordan Wheeler resembles Taylor's *Toronto at Dreamer's Rock* in the sense of being constructed around the motif of the vision quest. In both cases, the native boy who undertakes such a quest is a reluctant, unlikely hero. Both Rusty of Taylor's play and Jason of Wheeler's short story need an external impulse to discover their ethnic identity. Like *Toronto at Dreamer's Rock*, "A Mountain Legend" is set in a magic place, at the foot of a sacred mountain. A group of boys, aged eight to twelve, are on a three-day camping trip. The boys are trapped between two cultures. From their camping site, they can see both the city and the mountain. Gathered around the fire, they roast marshmallows and listen to stories. There were no adults in Taylor's *Toronto at Dreamer's Rock*, and the three boys, or three embodiments of one boy, had to sort out their own problems without the intrusion of adults, white or native. By contrast, in Wheeler's narrative, adults figure prominently. Most of them are "counsellors," one of them is identified as a "caretaker." As the story unfolds, these generic names acquire a symbolic significance; the "counsellors" stand for the white system of education, the "caretaker" proves to be the guardian of traditional na-

tive values. The latter is easily recognizable as a native Canadian first by his appearance (“long, black braided hair” [451]) and then by the story he narrates. Once the younger boys have left, he tells the twelve-year-olds “a legend about this mountain once told by the mountain itself.” Far from claiming the authority for himself, he locates it in the personified sacred mountain. The caretaker recounts the story of a twelve-year-old native boy who, according to the legend, tried to climb the mountain in search of an eagle and a vision. His quest ended in defeat; as he was climbing, he “fell to his death, releasing a terrible cry” (451). His spirit was believed to wander the mountains ever since. The story has a definite addressee; while narrating, the caretaker watches one of the young campers, the only native boy among them, whose name is Jason. As if to evaluate his chances, the narrator compares Jason with other boys and pronounces him “smaller than the others” and “wide-eyed and nervous” (452).

The counsellors announce the time for sleep, but the caretaker’s story lingers on in the native boy’s imagination. It also incites the white campers to dare him to climb the mountain, and “prove himself an Indian” (453). Thus, the white boys impose on Jason the role of a native, even though his lifestyle does not differ from theirs. It is no wonder that he feels an outside force pushing him when he sets out to reach the eagle’s nest. The standards of behaviour set by the native caretaker are one part of this force, the jeers of white boys another. The personified mountain whispers a warning as he moves up, and yet it seems to hang on to him (456). Jason reaches the eagle’s nest, but the screech of the mother eagle scares him, he loses his footing, and he falls off the ledge. Unlike the boy of the past, however, he keeps hanging. The situation is hopeless until the legend comes alive and the boy of the past extends his hand and saves Jason. “The two boys faced one another, looking into each other’s eyes. The descendant gaining pride in being Indian, and the ancestor completing the quest he had begun hundreds of years earlier” (456). The happy ending comes as a surprise because the atmosphere pervading the whole text is ominous. For one thing, the legend narrated by the caretaker ends in catastrophe. For another, the mountain appears towering and menacing, the native boy too weak to meet the challenge. The narrative of a contemporary boy meeting the spirit of his ancestor and completing his ancestor’s mission is a myth in the sense of acting as a lens through which one can “discover the reality that exists beyond the limits of simple linear perception” (Paula Gunn Allen, qtd. in Lundquist 29). The happy ending, however, performs a political function because it reassures the juvenile reader that it is possible to come to terms with the past and to set things right. Drawing on traditional narratives, Wheeler not only improves their endings but also their structures. Egoff and Saltman’s argument that the Indian legend is “full of loose ends,” that it is “a mélange of anecdotes rather than a unified narrative, patterned after dreams rather than following conscious development” (186), does not

apply to Wheeler's tales.

The motif of a native boy entering a forbidden place, often haunted by a legendary spirit (e.g., a leprechaun or a girl cheated by her brother) reappears in some other narratives by Wheeler, such as "The Troll" or "Ebony Forest" (King and Wheeler). In both of them, the native boy overcomes fear and redresses the wrong done in the past. He talks to the spirits of the past and helps them find rest. The effect of the boy's activity is to bring closure to old legends and, by doing so, to free the present from the ghosts of the past. Sheila Egoff's argument that in contemporary children's literature "the supernatural breaks into the real world with a resultant commingling of fantasy and reality" (27) applies to Wheeler's tales, but it does not explain his political aim. While celebrating the narrative traditions of the native people, Wheeler keeps an eye on the present racial conflicts, and seeks ways of educating native children so that they can face future challenges. Set in contemporary Canada, and exemplifying what might be called "magical realism," which is often employed in postcolonial writing (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 28), Wheeler's tales perform a didactic, socializing function, analogous to the role of traditional fairy tales of the white people. His narratives present harsh reality and enormous challenges, but they assure the young reader that a happy ending, however unlikely it may appear, is possible. In constructing tales that look back to the past and yet remain deeply concerned with the present and the future of the native people, Wheeler, just like his heroes, undoes the wrongs done by white fiction to native children, the wrongs about which George Clutesi and Herbert Kohl complained in their critical texts almost thirty years apart. While Clutesi objected to those texts by white authors that foster anxiety in the native child (11), Kohl protested against juvenile fiction that portrays, sanctions, or even models inequity (4).

And yet, it would be a mistake to praise Wheeler for facile optimism. Although his narratives end in the young native hero's success, none of them is a humorous tale. Wheeler's attempt to write a funny story, a short rhymed narrative for young children entitled *Just a Walk*, resulted in anything but serene humour. The book is advertized on the back cover as "a delightful children's story." Grossly misrepresented, it is said to feature "a young boy named Chuck who goes on a walk which turns into an all day adventure of unbelievable proportions, as he encounters different animals, birds and fish who transport him throughout their environments." This description makes the story appear harmless, even though the adult reader has reasons to be horrified by scenes of exaggerated victimization of a child who is recognizable as a native boy in the accompanying illustrations. The boy's ambiguous name (the noun means "dear" but the meanings of the verb range from "give a pat or caress" to "throw away, discard") reflects the tension between playfulness and struggle for survival. The boy is consistently presented as an underdog: he "didn't know" (1), "didn't look"

(3), "couldn't swim" (4), "hadn't a chance" (8). He is repeatedly "grabbed" and "dropped," he falls down several times (2, 3, 5, 10, 22), and his adventure comes to an end when he lands in a puddle of muck in his own backyard (26). Even though this simple tale is addressed to a very young audience, it seems to inscribe the inferiority of the colonized in the self-castigating fashion characteristic of Taylor's "Pretty Like a White Boy." In both, the reader is tricked into laughing about the horrible experience of a likeable person. Both authors put to test the reader's power of sympathy because, in keeping with native tradition, in both narratives laughter comes from shock.

The two anthologized texts by Taylor and Wheeler complement each other. Both are concerned with the issue of identity in the postcolonial context. While the former thematizes deformation, displacement, and subversion as mechanisms of hybridity, the latter seeks to overcome hybridity in reconstituting, and not merely reclaiming the past (in defiance of the postcolonial slogan "You can't go home again"). The former mythologizes politics by rendering historical events timeless and transcultural, by reformulating political conflicts as the opposition of body and soul, and by investing his political endeavours with the sacred authority of a clown. The latter politicizes myth by offering a happy ending to eternal challenges inscribed in the context of contemporary racial tensions. The proportions of myth and politics vary in Taylor's and Wheeler's other texts, but the two authors always seem to oscillate between these two poles. The timeless myth seems to be the exact opposite of the time-bound politics, and yet, they have more in common than one might suspect. Myth, unlike fairy tale, is invested with authority. Narrating a sacred history, myth "sets examples for human beings that enable them to codify and order their lives" (Zipes 1; a different wording but the same message is to be found in Nodelman 264). Thus, both politics and myth set parameters for the discourse of power, values, and codes of social behaviour. Although Taylor's narrator figures as a clown and Wheeler's narrator accepts the role of a helping spirit, both of them seek to assist the native boy in his attempts to live with his blue eyes, which are a complex symbol of deracination, innocence, and victimization.

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*Mirosława Ziaja-Buchholtz graduated from the Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland (MA in English) and Brandeis University, USA (PhD in English and American Literature). She has conducted research in Canadian children's literature first in the International Youth Library in Germany and then in the Toronto Public Library.*