Eng 122

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10/30/14

# Vocabulary

Orality

the quality of being communicated by spoken words

Authenticity

“genuine” or “done in the traditional way”

# You’re Not the Indian I had in Mind

It’s a chapter from *Truth About Stories*: an book of essays and Massey Lecture – a national event. They are a services of lectures on a specific theme broadcast on CBC. It is a multi-layered event. Must get book of essays published and lecture them. Massey Lectures were a way to promote Canadian culture and literature.

Thomas King was the first Aboriginal person to give a Massey lecture.

## Contrast with “Borders”

In “Borders”, the mother is very steadfast and stubborn, meanwhile King is a bit more balanced and willing to explore other opinions.

“Borders” is more passive – the narrator is just reporting what’s happening; meanwhile King is very active, being mostly the protagonist of his own stories.

Both seem very intimate – like he’s have a conversation with *you*!

## Themes

The idea of being Indian – *looking* Indian.

Focused on physical/visual appearances.

More explicitly talking about racism and *colonization*!

How other cultures can not appear to be stereotypes of themselves, and yet be *accepted* as being authentic to their race/culture/ethnicity, MEANWHILE, aboriginal people seem to be forced to appear like *some* of them appeared 200 years ago.

What are the dangers of racial authenticity?

His ideas with Curtis are mixed. He has the idea that there is some serious value in the work that Curtis did… then again, it may have been a misguided effort due to going in with an idea for what he’s looking for and coercing the environment around him to make it happen. He was capturing an illusion. He tried to take a picture of what *he* thought aboriginal looked like.

What Curtis’s image depict:

* Idea that aboriginals are dying out
* natives as physically strong and noble
* *The other*: depicts an entirely outside culture, when they’re really… not
* savages – dude is just not even wearing a shirt
* Solemn and wise
* Separates them from the rest of western culture
* allusion to culture through necklaces and jewelry
* girl shows innocence, yet solemness.
* e’rbody looks wise and serious
* Maybe there’s a lack of understanding between white photographer and aboriginals
* Look like mugshots: documentation
* romanticizes native culture
* It’s *not* just imaginary – but it’s not a thing that is worn all the time. These ideas didn’t just come from nowhere.

## The Lone Ranger

* “Oh sure, there are nice indjyans.”
* White people are hierarchically superior to natives
* Even at their best, they’re not at the level of the white people
  + At least he’s not being as white as possible to be good.
* He doesn’t speak in full sentences and does not use nominative case pronouns for some strange reason.

## Back to King

38-40: Just simply normal to be racial discriminated!

The target of racism doesn’t have to be accurate. Others are others!

Speaks about appearance

Your visibility is going to come back to haunt you in the wrong way.

King has this need to look Indian, plus a fear of looking Indian.

* As noted, he fears he might appear like the aboriginals in danger of poverty that are statistically more likely to be

# Images of “Aboriginalness”

Wise

Solemn

Inferior

Broken English

Leather & other forms of animals as clothing

Horse-riding/close to nature

Different & separate from white people

Helpful to white people (sometimes)

## Practicalities

“blood status” \* laws around aboriginal people \* how “Indian” you are matters for rights, law, and support \* This is a huge issue for the Métis – French + aboriginal. \* This is determined by the Canadian government \* Being recognizably aboriginal has a big impact on the aboriginal community.

Difference between middle-class and lower-class aboriginals \* Aboriginal women more likely to be murdered/missing \* more aboriginals are imprisoned and for longer \* more likely to have their children take away \* visible race can contribute to social justice

Present day over reorientation in crimes

“Do with it what you will” – every essay ends with those lines. You can’t claim ignorance now. You have to think about these issues!

King writes in an accessible way, and tells stories, but he’s always “moving on” – he’s not explicitly angry. He uses humour to invite you to think of things without turning you off the idea. “Can you believe that this is happening?” Underlying theme is that nothing has changed – the image was already seen before the image was taken.

Reason the essay sounds like a conversation: Oral narratives important to lots of aboriginal culture. Brings an aboriginal way of thinking into the mainstream. He’s weaving this story for us, carefully guiding us through to his point.