

“The Trouble with History—It Never Is”: Interrogating Canadian White Identity  
in Daphne Marlatt’s *Ana Historic*

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## Abstract

In writing this thesis, I plotted where the streams of whiteness theory, life-writing theory and practice, and Daphne Marlatt's novel *Ana Historic* converge. In the introduction, I outline the development of my own subjectivity, focusing on my identification with multiple ethnic communities, and on my "racial" and working class identity. My second chapter surveys current whiteness theories, accepting some and rejecting others, and drawing significantly upon theory that is accessible and personal, a decision that undoubtedly resulted because of my working class practicality. In this chapter, I conclude that whiteness and white solipsism (theoretically comparable to Simone de Beauvoir's challenge that masculinity as the neutral and positive gender renders femininity and other gendered constructions negative), actually envelope multiple identities, but argue that the way in which whiteness is experienced by those on its margins is often monolithic. In the third chapter, I investigate Marlatt's biography and her life writing theory, arguing that her experience as a "once immigrant" foregrounds many issues relevant to the Canadian white identity, and that because her theory is so conscious of how identity is constructed, relying on fact and fiction, *Ana Historic* provides a portrait of white Canadian identity and the context in which that identity has been constructed. In Chapters 4 and 5, I apply the theories of life writing and whiteness to the characters of Ana, Ina, and Annie, challenging that their identities as "colonizer," "emigrant," and "immigrant," respectively, illustrate the evolution resulting in the current white Canadian identity. Further, because Marlatt chooses these characters who occupy different positions in history, she shows her reader that contemporary Canadian white identity has grown out of colonial times, creating a continuum. The history out of which each of these women emerges is never contained because aspects of their identity carry forward into subsequent generations.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my spouse and best friend, Egan, whose tremendous self-sacrifice for my education, and whose timely wit and constant wisdom are immeasurable gifts for which I am thankful daily, and to my two brilliant daughters, Themis and Jurnee. I hope that they will become women who appreciate the privileges they have earned, and that they will question and challenge their unfair advantages.

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## 1. Introduction

I can think of no better way to begin the introduction to my project on life writing and white, Canadian identity(ies) than to introduce myself. I was born in 1972 in Saskatchewan, and am a third-generation Canadian on both sides of my family. These are the facts, as bare as I can possibly present them. With only this knowledge, you, my reader, have begun to create a mental image of what I look like and who I am. While my year and place of birth, and my nationality contribute to who I am as a person, I am comprised of much more. What are the contributors to and markers of one's identity?

My great grandparents all immigrated to North America in the early 1900's. They were Mennonites who had been forced to leave one European/Soviet country after another because as pacifists they refused to serve in the local military units. With them, they brought their language (Low German, an oral language), their religious beliefs, their customs, and their traditional recipes. Because Mennonite emigrants settled in colonies, just as they had in "the old country," they were fairly isolated from external cultural influences. Consequently, many of the old ways have been preserved. I represent the first generation in my family that no longer speaks Low German. As a child, however, my grandparents taught me about the Mennonite beliefs, and my paternal grandmother passed along to me the many recipes that were

prepared by my ancestors. These recipes were accompanied by stories of previous generations and their lives, first in the Netherlands and Germany, and then in Ukraine, Poland, and Russia.

*Great Granny's "Peppernuts"*

<i>4 c corn syrup</i>	<i>3 tsp. cloves</i>
<i>2 c sugar</i>	<i>3 tsp. ginger</i>
<i>3 eggs</i>	<i>3 tsp. allspice</i>
<i>1 tsp. baking soda</i>	<i>3 tsp. nutmeg</i>
<i>2 Tbs. cinnamon</i>	<i>½ Tbs. baking powder</i>

*Combine above ingredients and mix in as much flour as possible. Roll into ropes, cut into segments approximately ½ inch square, and roll in palm of hand. Place on ungreased cookie sheets and bake at 400 F for 10 minutes.*

*In the old country, these hard little cookies were eaten instead of candy. They have no butter or lard and so they could be carried in the pockets with no risk of staining one's clothing. Because they have no oil or fat, they also do not go rancid. You can eat a peppernut made a year ago, and it will taste as good as the day it was baked.*

My biological father (with whom I have no contact) and mother were and are not practicing Mennonites. Rather, they were part of the Canadian version of the hippie movement. Within months of my birth, we moved from Regina to live in an abandoned church in a Saskatchewan hamlet. My mother hauled water from a well, while trying to avoid the snakes that curled up on the front steps (and which frequently chased mice across our floors, driving my mother atop counters and



furniture until they had passed). From my mother in particular, I learned an odd combination of values. The first set of values reflects her own strict upbringing: I was expected to be well-mannered, well-spoken, and respectful of my elders; to possess a sound work ethic; and to demonstrate integrity in everything that I do. The second set of values reflects the unstable Canadian political environment of the 1960's and 1970's. My mother encouraged me to question authority, to think critically about ideas that are presumed to be unquestionable, to treat all people equitably (in a 1970's, multicultural way, a distinction that I will address later on), and to challenge prevailing gender stereotypes. It was not long before I realized that these two sets of values often conflict with one another.

I have lived most of my life in Saskatchewan and Alberta, although I lived, with my mother and her second partner (my dad, but not biologically), out of a hippie-van in Mexico and Guatemala in 1975-76. There, we survived an earthquake (and its aftershocks) that eventually killed over 23,000 people. As our Guatemalan friends grieved their losses, our own families in Canada frantically tried to contact us through the Red Cross. We were believed to be dead.

My dad emigrated from the Netherlands when he was nine. In this family, my oma and opa (grandmother and grandfather) frequently spoke to me in Dutch. I was so submersed in Dutch culture that for many years, I believed this to be my heritage. I heard many stories about skating to school on the canals in the Netherlands and the war against the Nazis, and on Christmas Eve, I waited eagerly for Sinterklaas and his helpers, the Black Peters.

When I was seven, my mother met her third partner. He emigrated from China when he was seventeen, and for the year we were with him, I was deeply submerged in traditional Chinese culture while living in a small town of primarily white people. We lived in a trailer court on the outskirts of town, near the overgrown ball diamond. My mother learned to grow bok choy and other vegetables in an abandoned plot, and I can still make a perfect pot of steamed rice using only my fingers to gage the ratio of rice to water.

Although my family is reasonably educated and well read, we have always been part of the Canadian “working class.” Prior to becoming a homeowner two years ago, I had never lived in a home that was not rented. My mother is living with her fourth partner, my biological father with his fifth (or so), and my Dad is recently separated from his second. I have numerous “half” sisters and brothers, most of whom I do not know well, and several step (and ex-step) siblings. My childhood was thus tumultuous and challenging. I moved out on my own after my grade eleven year, dropped out of school and worked as a nurse’s aide. I had a daughter when I was eighteen, whereupon I returned to high school as a single parent, completed my diploma, and began university. When I was twenty-five, my partner and I got married in Mexico, and shortly thereafter, I completed my Bachelor’s degree in English.

And here I am.

In the spirit of Rousseau, I shall now make a prefaced confession. Many graduate students foster, to some degree or another, a belief that they do not belong in graduate school. They believe that through some administrative error they have

been accepted into a graduate program, and spend a good deal of time fretting about their incompetence compared to those graduate students who have legitimately earned a place within their department. My confession is this: I do not see myself as an academic or a scholar. While sitting in my undergraduate and graduate classes, I almost always felt that I had not read all of the “right” books, nor had I read the “right” theory, and at the same time felt my colleagues had somehow found time to read those books I had not managed to cover. While I understand a fair amount of the jargon within the discipline, I speak and write in a less traditional style. What is it about myself that validates my attempts to make a “valuable contribution” to the study of literature?

The only answer that I can offer is that I am a reader. I read voraciously and passionately. I read creatively and imaginatively. Characters in novels, plays, and poetry have been my dearest friends and my most fiendish foes. I have traveled this world and others while curled up under an afghan with a huge mug of tea, and I have visited the past and the future. I do not just read books, *I live them*, and the books I read change the way I move about in the world. When I am asked to respond to literature, I do so in the same manner that I read literature. My critical response includes a subjective, personal, and emotional reaction. Within the discipline of literature studies, we need students and instructors who are capable of understanding and inventing complex literary theory, but my moderate success in the university confirms to me that we also need readers who combine their right-from-the-gut reactions with their critical analyses. Further, I am a reminder to academia that what we do in the ivory tower must be translatable to life outside. Our work must not only

have meaning to our peers down the hall, or across the campus, but must also be visible and useful in our communities.<sup>1</sup>

For these reasons, I am proof that the proletariat has a right to read and respond to literature in our way, and more importantly, we may actually have something valuable to contribute to literary studies, expanding both the scholarship and the traditional conceptualization of a scholar. Like the editors of *The Intimate Critique*, I am resisting the “formal distance and conventional hierarchies” of academic discourse, which is “logical, controlled, framed, and contained” (Freedman, Frey, and Zauhar 2). Rather, I am committed to exploring my subject from an informal and unconventional position that, while logical, is also grounded in emotion and subjectivity. I propose to take risks rather than control or restrict my thinking, and to remove the rigid frames of conventional academic thinking in exchange for a method that recognizes the critic’s subjectivity as the fallible yet integral determinant of the project’s direction and outcome. I have also engaged with theory that is often highly personal, that is anecdotal, and that does not present itself as objective.

I first began experimenting with writing in this manner as an undergraduate student, after taking a women’s and gender studies class and a feminist critical theory class, where I was first exposed to life writing (or rather, was first taught to recognize life writing). It seemed to me hypocritical to believe that when discussing life writers and the many ways their sense of identity consciously and subconsciously influences their work, I could somehow ignore how my own sense of identity influences my critique of those writers and their written lives. I am very

fortunate to be working in a department whose faculty members encourage and facilitate such experimentation, and what was for me a “radical” way to complete an undergraduate essay assignment has now largely become my writing style. When I studied life writing theories, I learned about the two major schools of thought regarding the writer’s identity. The humanists assert that the writer is “autonomous and unified [ . . . ] at the centre of meaning and action [ . . . ] [and] a sovereign self, whose essential core of being transcends the outward signs of environmental and social conditioning” (Rice and Waugh 123). Conversely, poststructuralists refer to the writer as a “subject,” a term that “plays ambiguously between, on the one hand, *subject* as in the opposition subject/object, or subject as in grammar; and on the other hand, *subject* as in subject of the state, or subject to the law” (Rice and Waugh 123). When I write myself into an essay or a thesis chapter, I not only demonstrate that I bring all of my personal experiences to the academy, but I also demonstrate how the academy comes home with me, and alters the way that I behave in the world beyond the academy and interact with my community. I illustrate how, at the same time, I am subject and self; I am a product of my family, community, nation, and society, and yet I am sometimes, and ever so briefly, able to think outside of my previous subjectivity and effect change in my previously constituted subjectivity, and consequently my ways of understanding the world. And as I write myself into yet another project, and grunt and cry and sweat as I try to pull my academic and personal worlds onto the same page, I realize that I, like Daphne Marlatt, am “writing for [my] life” (“Self-Representation” 127).

*Have I forgotten anything significant?*

*Oh yes, and I am white. Well, truth be told, I am kind of a yellowish, olive, pinkish colour, and in the summer, I am very, very brown.*

*But I am White.*

I first became fascinated with life writing and theories of identity as an undergraduate student, perhaps because my own identity seemed such a hodgepodge of languages, cultural practices, political and religious perspectives, and even geographical locations. It was not until I was a graduate student, however, enrolled in a pedagogy course and reading bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress*, that it occurred to me that part of my identity included my whiteness. Hooks challenges white people to "interrogate the location from which they speak" (77), and argues that it is "crucial that 'whiteness' be studied, understood, [and] discussed" (43). My racial privilege (and the ignorance that so often accompanies that privilege) permitted me to accept whiteness as an invisible or neutral position. Since hooks disrupted my delusive self-perception, I have become obsessed with exploring whiteness in theory, in literature, and in spheres outside of the campus boundaries.

It wasn't long after reading hooks that I returned to a book that had deeply affected me, Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic*. When I first studied the book as an undergraduate, I was fascinated not only by Marlatt's investigation of mother/daughter relationships, lesbian identity, experimental language use, and patriarchal domination, but even more by her (re)writing of Canada's colonial history. Herself an immigrant, Marlatt's understanding of the colonization of Canada seemed particularly fresh and acute. While I read the book as a commentary

on colonization, I failed to recognize that Marlatt also begins to deconstruct the white colonizer, past and present. Now that I return to the book looking for whiteness, it is everywhere. Although she does not use the term “whiteness,” she interrogates it in much of her writing. In my study of her work I will focus primarily upon *Ana Historic*, but will also draw upon her writings in *Readings from the Labyrinth*.

I invite you, dear reader, to embark on a two-part adventure with me. First, through my eyes we will explore the many and conflicting notions of race, ethnicity, and whiteness. We will probe the similarities and differences between whiteness theory, generated predominately in the United States but also significantly by the British theorist Richard Dyer, and whiteness as theorized in Canadian society. We will then explore the writings of Daphne Marlatt, and how she consciously and subconsciously constructs the white identities of her characters. As we reach the conclusion of our adventure, it is my hope that we will have gathered along our journey tools that we can use beyond the page.

My goal is not to define whiteness succinctly, to dissect and categorize scientifically Marlatt’s writing, nor is it to solve the neocolonial woes of Canada. As a woman who has long been deeply troubled by the racism in my homeland, I am eager to “take more chances on the page [. . .] to move beyond [my] private conversations or formal, well-thought-out positions” and to muster “the guts to risk speaking [my] half-formed understandings and raw emotions” (Warland 192). In the halls and classes of the university, in the neighbourhood pubs, in the elementary schools, in the grocery stores, it seems to me that many people have stopped talking

about race and racism, either out of fear, shame, ignorance, or apathy. Consequently, the process of moving toward an antiracist Canada has been slowed. If in the risks that I am willing to take—exposing my half-formed ideas, my emotions, my mistakes, my ignorance, my learnings, and my new understandings— my writing sparks conversation, debate, or even conflict, about whiteness, race, or racism in Canada, then I have achieved my goal.



## 2. Developing a Nose for Whiteness

When people inquire about my thesis work and I explain my area of interest, they become noticeably uncomfortable. Whiteness is often like body odour—the people who emit it are usually unaware of the effect of their smell on those around them. If they are vaguely aware that their scent is displeasing, they seldom understand what causes the smell, and merely attempt to mask it with perfumes and deodorants. Further, discussion of one's body odour frequently results in embarrassment, confusion, denial, and shame. Such is the nature of whiteness—white people are seldom aware of their whiteness, seldom recognize and appreciate it as a social construct, and rarely notice how their whiteness affects those who do not share it or how it confers unearned advantage upon themselves. Even when people catch the occasional whiff of their own whiteness, they are less likely to investigate its origins and remedies than to mask its existence, deny its potency, deflect attention to another person/people, or become immobilized with shame.

When bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress* challenged me to study and understand whiteness, I must confess that I immediately thought she was referring to skin colour. Yet my skin is something that I was born with, over which I have no control, and certainly something that cannot be studied, understood, or interrogated from a theoretical perspective. But she also suggested that I need to “interrogate the

location from which [I] speak,” and I suddenly realized for the first time in my life that my whiteness is a location or a construction, and not merely a biologically determined physical characteristic. I also realized that whiteness needs to be an integral component in discussions about ~~raee~~ racism.<sup>2</sup>

After reading hooks’ passage on whiteness, I walked about in shock. How was it that I had never before detected my own whiteness? Why had I never before encountered whiteness theory in the feminist and post-colonial literature courses that I had taken in university? I concluded, in smug self-righteousness, that the answer to both of these questions is that the study of whiteness is relatively uncharted territory. Immediately obsessed, I began reading as much information as possible on the subject, and indeed, theorists such as Shelley Fisher Fishkin confirmed my beliefs, stating that the “idea of whiteness as a construct did not receive widespread attention until the 1990’s” (430). Suddenly, I knew what my thesis topic would be, and I promptly wrote my thesis proposal, confident that I would indeed “contribute new understandings to the existing body of knowledge in my field.” Not long afterward, while I was in the middle of researching, bell hooks again fanned the odour of whiteness toward my nostrils. In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, hooks reveals that the study of whiteness is generations old:

Although there has never been any official body of black people in the United States who have gathered as anthropologists and/or ethnographers to study whiteness, black folks have, from slavery on, shared in conversations with one another “special” knowledge of whiteness gleaned from close scrutiny of white people. (165)

The study of whiteness then, is not new; it is *new only to white people*. Further, few white people have even recognized themselves as racialized beings. I found it odd that I had never before identified, defined, or thought about my racial identity. And like some of the white women interviewed by Ruth Frankenberg in *White Women, Race Matters*, my introduction to white, antiracist, and neocolonial theory was made not by other white women, but by women of colour (Frankenberg 176-77).

## 2.1 Trying to Define Whiteness

My exploration of whiteness begins with trying to define it: So what is whiteness? Who is white? When I first asked myself these questions, they seemed very simple; if any part of my thesis would be unambiguous, it would be the definition of whiteness. It first seemed to me that whiteness is a racial category, just as “Black” or “Asian” are racial categories. In his book *Social Processes*, sociologist Tamotsu Shibutani explains:

One of the most pernicious superstitions of our time is the prevalent belief that human beings are divided into different “races.” Race is a popular concept that rests on false assumptions. Anthropologists agree that the units they study—people who share a common genetic makeup—do not coincide at all with what are commonly called “races” of humanity. (97)

Indeed, people have always tended to organize their worlds by placing those people and things with which they interact into “units” or categories. The need to create racial categories, however, stems from a much more sinister source than a mere desire for organization. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term race used to refer to “those of common lineage or ancestry [and] people of like coloring could be of different races” (Frye, *The Politics of Reality* 114). It was only when Europeans began global exploration, exploitation, and colonization that the term race assumed a more “colourful” definition. New ideas of race were employed in conjunction with the prevailing theories of primitivist discourse and dichotomous hierarchy that claimed that the masculine, elite, white Westerner is superior to the feminine, working class, non-white non-Westerner (Downe). Frankenberg and many other whiteness theorists emphasize the importance of acknowledging colonialism and imperialism as the mother and father of the contemporary North American white identity. The colonizers believed that the people they were ravaging were less than human, thereby justifying the act of colonialism and never questioning its inhumanity. Based upon unsubstantiated biological “evidence,” the white conquerors constructed a racial hierarchy that placed Caucasians at the top, and every other non-white group below them. Any non-Caucasian group was found “savage,” “uncivilized,” or less evolved. Colonial reasoning then deduced that those savage people needed to be governed, converted to Christianity, carried up the evolutionary ladder to civilization as the white man’s burden, and that their “unused” land and resources should be appropriated so that those resources would better serve humanity (or at the very least, the colonizing country). It is upon this belief in

clearly identifiable racial groups and their biologically predetermined characteristics that contemporary racism is founded. Yet Candace West and Sarah Fenstermaker assert:

There are no biological criteria (e.g. hormonal, chromosomal, or anatomical) that allow physicians to pronounce race assignment at birth, thereby sorting human beings into distinctive categories [. . .]. As in the case of sex characteristics, appearances are treated *as if they were indicative* of some underlying state. (376)

Thus, the assumption that whiteness is a biological racial category is complicated.<sup>3</sup> Race is not biological, but as Gayle Wald explains, “is itself a narrative” (192). I particularly enjoy Wald’s description of race because the metaphor reminds me that like a narrative, whiteness is *created or constructed and plotted* by people. Frye and others often critique masculinity, explaining: “maleness we have construed as something a human animal can be born with; masculinity we have construed as something a human animal can be trained to” (*Willful Virgin* 151). Whiteness, she argues, is like masculinity in that it is constructed. So my “white” skin colour is something with which I was born, but my whiteness is something that I have (often unwittingly) learned and performed.<sup>4</sup> Whiteness is also similar to masculinity in that Western culture encourages us to assume it as the norm, to leave it unchallenged, unquestioned, and even unrecognized. Adrienne Rich describes this practice as “white solipsism” which is the tendency to “think, imagine, and speak as if whiteness described the world” (qtd. in Spelman 116).

To define whiteness, then, is a challenging prospect; how does one begin to define something that for many simply does not exist beyond an insignificant designation of skin colour? In this regard, whiteness, as Mike Hill succinctly phrases it, “is sneaky” (“A Symposium on Whiteness” 115). Marilyn Frye assumes this challenge, often under the advisement of women of colour, and highlights some key characteristics of whiteness. Frye believes that white people consider themselves as “benevolent and good-willed, fair, honest and ethical” (*WV* 154), and that authority and whiteness are closely enmeshed (*WV* 156). This self-image, however subconscious, clearly echoes the beliefs conveyed in colonial racial hierarchies: white people are good, and white people should therefore be or assume authority because then everything they touch will also be good (and fair and honest and ethical). Peggy McIntosh elaborates upon white identity, recognizing that “whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow ‘them’ to be more like ‘us’”(32). A tension is created: on the one hand, whiteness tries to be invisible and unnoticed, while on the other, whiteness wants to be the standard for which all others are to strive, necessitating its recognition, at least on the part of some. Another tension is created because while all of those within Western society are supposed to strive to embody whiteness, very few are actually deemed acceptably white. For all its presumed benevolence and goodwill, whiteness is a gatekeeper and herein lies the key to understanding whiteness: more than anything, whiteness is first about comparison, and then about power.

## 2.2 White by Comparison

My dad is, among other things, a painter. I remember when I was a child watching him work in his studio, and he explained the colour wheel and colour theory. “White,” he said, “is not a colour. White is the absence of colour.” In Frankenberg’s interviews with white women, the same concept is used to characterize whiteness, for the women said of themselves that they ““did not have a culture”” (192). In her analysis, Frankenberg argues that “a far-reaching danger of whiteness coded as “no culture” is that it leaves in place whiteness as defining a set of normative cultural practices against which all are measured and into which all are expected to fit” (204). A corollary of this argument is that if whiteness has no culture, or is normative, then everything that is not white is then cultural or foreign or exotic, and outside of the norm. Such definitions of what is white (and what is not) are limiting and binary, and do not acknowledge the many locations of intersection and interplay amongst varying racial, cultural, and ethnic constructions.

I turned to the internet to corroborate my dad’s definition of the colour white, and what I discovered was a subtle, yet crucial difference in definitions. On the Sanford website, the colour white is defined not as the absence of colour, but actually a reflection of all colours.<sup>5</sup> How accurately does this definition apply to whiteness theory? If white is a reflection of all colours, then whiteness needs to construct other racial categories to exist. To varying degrees, the theorists of whiteness agree with this assertion. Sherene Razack refers to “interlocking systems of domination” (12); Frankenberg believes whiteness to be a “relational category”

(231); and West and Fenstermaker assert that racial identity is not a trait but “something that is accomplished in interaction with others” (372). Each theorist employs language which points to the humanly fabricated (and not biologically determined) nature of whiteness; “systems,” “categories,” and “[something] accomplished” are all results of social human activity. Nature, as I learned in first-year biology, is always moving towards entropy or chaos. The world only begins to assume an “organized” appearance (and, of course, this is a statement laden with Western thinking and values) when *humans* begin to impose “systems” and “categories” into which all things might be placed.<sup>6</sup> Further, to create categories, one must compare various items to one another, thereby determining which are similar, which are different, and to what degree.

Whiteness as white people *experience* it, then, may be an absence of culture, but the *construction* of whiteness has been dependent upon its comparison to other perceived racial groups. Shelley Fisher Fishkin contends that, historically, white writers have “constructed versions of their own identity [. . .] by defining themselves as unlike various racial and ethnic ‘others’” (432). This understanding of white self-definition is much like the Sanford definition of the colour white; the white object reflects, in the sense of appears to emit or send away from itself, all other colours to exist, rather than existing independent of all others. Whiteness, the construction, requires one or many “contrast colours” to be visible, and those contrast colours must be dark and evil and godless and hypersexual and possess innumerable other “bad” characteristics so that whiteness may indeed appear bright and pure and holy and innocent in comparison. Again, I have replicated a common binary in my



argument; whites are compared with non-whites, thereby essentializing each group. White becomes a homogenous category, and all those who do not qualify as “white” become, quite simply, “non-white.” This is an idea I will return to in my discussion of Canadian whiteness.

First, however, I must explore the second part of a statement I made earlier, that whiteness is about comparison, and also about power. As previously argued, whiteness as a social construction really began to take form in concert with global exploration and colonization. Susan Jacob, in her essay “Sharers in a Common Hell: The Colonial Text in Schreiner, Conrad, and Lessing,” asserts that “to affirm his [sic] superior culture it became necessary for the colonizer to denigrate that of the [N]ative [sic] to see it as different and inferior” (84). Colonizers compared their “superior” culture to that of the “inferior” Native, and in doing so defined their relationship and the respective statuses in that relationship. And when colonizers identified “the Native” as a savage, a slave, or a barbarian, thereby classifying the non-white as a subspecies to (white) humans, their act of naming or classification was an assertion of power.<sup>7</sup> The colonizers claim power in another, less obvious, manner during the act of naming, for while they name “the Native,” they do not name themselves. That the colonizers can ignore their own race or racial construction is in itself an act of white privilege. Because the colonizers and neocolonizers have never had to scrutinize their whiteness, they have also never had to “acknowledge [their whiteness] as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations” (George Lipsitz qtd. in Fisher Fishkin 429-30).

### 2.3 Power and Privilege

The question that leads logically from Lipsitz' quotation is What is the role of whiteness in the organization of social and cultural relations? In part, I have answered this question: in the Western world, whites are responsible for having established a social organization that places those who perform whiteness well in positions of power, while attempting to place in subordinate positions all of those who are not white or those who do/will not enact whiteness. Sherene Razack points out that "responses to subordinate groups are socially organized to sustain existing power arrangements" (8). Discussions of colonialism frequently focus on the historical events that involved one group colonizing another group and their land. More recent theories tend to acknowledge, as does Razack, what Frankenberg defines as "ongoing neocolonial relations" as a more accurate description of contemporary race relations (238). Marlatt herself warns that "presuming to speak from a 'post' position blinds us to the fact that things haven't really changed that much" (Carr 105). White colonialism and the scramble for social dominance are not ideas of the past but, rather, are ongoing dilemmas on both personal and systemic levels.

McIntosh, author of "White Privilege and Male Privilege," addresses the issue of white power by employing the metaphor of a backpack. She explains that "white privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks" (31). McIntosh qualifies her use of the definition

of white privilege, however, arguing that the term privilege is misleading because it implies a “favored state,” when in the case of white privilege, what she seeks to describe are “conferred dominance” and “unearned advantages.” She further clarifies her position by stipulating that even if whites enjoy conferred power, this privilege does not “confer moral strength” (as many assume), and that many marginalized groups have “actually become strong through *not* having all these unearned advantages [. . .] Members of so-called privileged groups can seem foolish, ridiculous, infantile, or dangerous” (35-36). McIntosh succeeds in reversing the powerful/powerless binary by pointing out that those who hold unearned power are not implicitly moral or superior, nor is their power absolute. Because whites view themselves as the morally superior group does not mean that those outside whiteness view them in the same way.

*A girlfriend of mine and I first met in a creative writing class in the summer. During a break, we began talking and realized that our histories were very similar in some ways: we were both from poor families, from small communities, were parents of young children, had completed at least part of our education as single parents, were survivors of childhood sexual assault, had had “bad” relationships, and yet here we both were, on the road to “success.” Boy, had we overcome some impossible odds and thrown “the statistics” all out of whack.*

*But in addition to our shared narrative, our stories also diverged. When she hit a rough patch in her early to mid teens and started to miss school, the principal of her school drove to her home and told her that she shouldn’t bother coming back. She was part “Indian,” after all, so really, what was the point of wasting everyone’s*

*time when she was just going to “drop out anyway?” When I hit similar rough patches, every effort was made on the part of teachers, administrators, and social agencies, to make sure that I wasn't lost.*

*We were both bright, creative, talented, loving women. The difference was that I had an invisible knapsack, and she didn't.*

#### 2.4 One or Many Identities?

To this point, I have been talking about whiteness as if it is a singular and unified entity or phenomenon, but this is an assumption that must also be interrogated. Is whiteness the same, regardless of age, gender, sexuality, or geographical location? When I first began looking for theories of whiteness, I discovered that most whiteness theorists are American. As I read their work, I found myself frequently jotting argumentative notes in the margins; often, I felt that either personally, provincially, or nationally, the theories did not represent the constructions of whiteness with which I am familiar.<sup>8</sup> Simply from a historical perspective, the United States and Canada are remarkably different. Indeed, while the colonization of the territory that was to become the States involved genocide and control of the Aboriginal population, it also relied heavily upon the slave trade and industry of those slaves, making Aboriginals even more invisible in American history.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, whiteness studies generated in the States tend to focus primarily on historical and current relationships between blacks and whites. Another consideration when thinking about American whiteness is that many Americans

embrace a “melting pot” philosophy in regard to race relations (race, ethnicity, and culture are pooled into an American identity that, in theory, is shared by all American citizens). Canada, the nation, rather than being based on an extensive history of slave trading, was initially built significantly upon the relationship between the colonizers and the Aboriginal Canadian populations, though official histories most often conceal this feature of the nation’s past. Further along in the colonization process, the relationship between whites and other ethnic groups also become important, as colonists had to “import” huge numbers of people from various ethnic groups to be used as cheap labourers and to populate the country (Steinberg 5-6). Canada became a country governed primarily by white, English- or French-speaking men, yet populated by displaced First Nations people and large communities of Ukrainian, German, Japanese, Polish, Italian, Irish, Chinese, and numerous other ethnic groups, both men and women, who were seen as less white than the English or French.

In the 1960s, the Canadian French petitioned the government for equal status with the English, resulting in a Royal Commission whose mandate was to “inquire into and report on the state of bilingualism and biculturalism in Canada” (Kallen 170). This commission “supported policy changes designed to entrench a Canada-wide policy based on an ideal of cultural dualism,” resulting in an outcry from the non-English and non-French Canadians who demanded recognition in the new policy (Kallen 171). In 1971, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau established a multicultural policy, emphasizing that “the preservation of cultural distinctiveness and of ethnic ties and identities, by individuals or groups, was to be a *voluntary* and *private*

matter” (Kallen 172). In 1988, Canada officially adopted the Canadian Multiculturalism Act to deal with the numerous ethnic and cultural groups living within its borders (Ng, *Anti-racism* xiii). It differed from the policy in that it made reference to “racial, as well as cultural equality,” to non-official as well as official languages, and included mention of Aboriginal peoples (Kallen 176).

A multicultural society is one that “celebrat[es] visual ‘ethnic’ and ‘cultural’ differences” (thus theoretically valuing each group equally), yet anti-racists like Roxana Ng charge that a multicultural society fails to examine how these differences are produced (*Antiracism* xiii). M. Nourbese Philip sharply criticizes the multicultural trend as something that “pretends to be what it is not—a mechanism to equalize all cultures within Canada” (*Frontiers* 181). Canadian multiculturalism was (and is) an attempt by policy makers to make equal all the cultural groups in Canada, yet Canada still officially privileges only two *language* groups. By adopting a multicultural policy, the Canadian government appeared to treat racial issues in a progressive and liberal manner, yet multicultural policy actually allowed those responsible for the “differences produced” (constructed) to continue to occupy positions of unearned power and advantage.

While Canadians “celebrate their differences” in kindergarten classes and multicultural festivals, they are supposed to ignore or forget the history of colonization, exploitation, and racism that resulted in the creation of a social hierarchy in Canada (and thanks to multicultural education in elementary and high schools, students today do not learn about this history to begin with, so they need not strain themselves to pretend that history does not exist). Simultaneously,

multiculturalism encourages people to emphasize, in a decontextualized form, for example, the very customs, religious beliefs, foods, and manners of dress, that identify them as not being entirely “white” (that is, without culture), which is, as some assert, synonymous with being Canadian. Philip states “‘Canadian’ means dominant white group surrounded by microcultures, some of which are brown, black or yellow” (*Frontiers* 155). Marnina Gonick narrows this definition even further, based upon her interaction with non-white Canadian children, arguing that “Canadian=blonde, English, [and] white”, as she reveals in her essay by the same title. What becomes evident to me is a large gap between multiculturalism as “official” policy, and multiculturalism as it is experienced by the people who live in this country.

*Philips’ and Gonick’s words follow me about for days. I think about all my years in the public school system. Peer groups were always formed based upon visual differences. In my elementary school, those who appeared “Asian” (not actually a homogenous group, but rather extremely diverse, ranging culturally, from Laotian to Vietnamese to Chinese) constituted one group, the Aboriginal students another, and the white children comprised a third, clearly defined group. Our multicultural education had not taught us-- (most pointedly, the white students) to “embrace our differences”; what we were taught was how to identify differences, how to exclude some children based upon these differences, and finally, how to see those people as different from ourselves-- and not that we might be different from them (referring back to the fundamental belief of whiteness, that it is the norm from*

*which all others deviate). And of course, multiculturalism, in part, taught us to look for differences in the first place.*

Certainly, multiculturalism, as opposed to assimilation or a “melting” pot, affects the way in which white and non-white groups interact with one another. What interests me equally, however, is whether multiculturalism affects the ways in which whites interact with one another. Is Canadian whiteness different than American (or European) whiteness because of multiculturalism, which should encourage us to distinguish amongst the various white ethnic groups and not just amongst those who are visibly “different”? This question is one of the first that came to mind when I first began thinking about whiteness. I believed that the cultural influences I experienced while growing up made me considerably different from many of my white peers. Our stories of the old country, our recipes, our cultural practices that had been handed down made me different from an Irish Canadian, or a Ukrainian Canadian, for example. These cultural relics, so fragile now and so gingerly handed down from generation to generation, also remind me that part of me is an immigrant, an outsider, a foreigner, and a colonizer, even though I was born on the Saskatchewan prairies.

I think that there are very distinct differences between white people, including ethnicity, that determine their place in the Canadian social hierarchy. It is important to acknowledge these differences or risk discounting the multitude of experiences and the knowledge amassed by white Canadians. Laura Donaldson, in her introduction to *Decolonizing Feminisms*, warns against (amongst other things)



meld[ing] all white women together into undifferentiated economic and sexual categories and [ . . . ] ignor[ing] the social stratifications that divide white women from each other as well as from women of color. Such a homogenous stance also fails to perceive how women who enjoy privileges accorded to middleclass whiteness can simultaneously experience sexual oppression. (2)

Donaldson already distinguishes between the white male and the white female experience and implicitly between white middleclass females and white females of other classes, but extends the differences among whites beyond gender and class. One branch of distinction that can be made amongst Canadian whites is that of ethnicity. In early Canadian texts, such as Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*, the Canadian settlers paid close attention to their neighbours' land of origin. Those who were American, or Irish, or Italian were often less respected than those of English descent.<sup>10</sup> Such distinctions are prevalent today, even if they do not manifest themselves in the same manner. Derogatory terms, jokes, and stereotypes exist for nearly every ethnic group, including those that are white.<sup>11</sup> Clearly, some whites perceive that there are culturally or religiously-based differences within the larger group, justifying micro-categories within the macro-category of whiteness. Frankenberg argues that similar, though seemingly more dramatic, dynamics are evident in the United States; there, whites who identify with an ethnicity become "not really white" and "not really American" (202).

One's ethnicity is not the only characteristic causing one to be demoted within, refused access to, or ousted from the inner circle of the "white club"; any one

of these penalties can occur based on any number of infractions (graduations of skin colour, religious beliefs, physical or mental disabilities, atypical sexuality, low economic status, or a refusal to espouse fundamental beliefs that support white supremacy). Dyer summarizes:

White as a skin colour is just as unstable, unbounded a category as white as a hue, and therein lies its strength. It enables whiteness to be presented as an apparently attainable, flexible, varied category, while setting up an always moveable criterion of inclusion. (57)

As previously mentioned, my childhood home was literate but economically disadvantaged. Looking back, I think that my working-class status, more than any other factor, made me feel excluded by many of my white peers. Theorists such as Matt Wray, Annalee Newitz, and Constance Penley have studied whiteness from an economic perspective and assert that “white trash” are perhaps the only whites who are cognizant of their racial identities. In their introduction to *White Trash: Race and Class in America*, editors Wray and Newitz reveal:

Because white trash is, for whites, the most visible and clearly marked form of whiteness, it can perhaps help to make all whites self-conscious of themselves as a racial and classed group [. . .]. White trash have the potential to perform the work of racial self-recognition and self-consciousness that bell hooks has found absent in dominant forms of whiteness. (4-5)

Perhaps the economic circumstances in my childhood formed that part of my consciousness that has always been (in varying degrees of awareness) concerned

with social inequalities and processes of marginalization. Caroline Heilbrun, in *Women's Lives: A View from the Threshold*, quotes Rosemary Reuther who wrote, “It is almost impossible for an individual alone to dissent from this culture. Alternate cultures and communities must be built up to support the dissenting consciousness” (34). My Mennonite heritage, linguistically, religiously, and culturally, has never been blatantly apparent to those with whom I interact. However, I have never been able to hide my relative poverty, and so I identified with an “alternate community.” When my grade school friends sported the latest fashions, ate designer lunches, and rode shiny new bicycles, I rode to school on a used bike, wearing second-hand or homemade clothing, in rubber boots so full of holes that I wore bread bags on my feet to keep them dry, and ate a filling and nutritious (but very uncool) lunch of cheese sandwiches and fruit. I was decidedly not part of the “in group”. The “invisibility” supposedly so inherent in my whiteness was not there; I was visible and vulnerable to other whites in some of the ways experienced by non-white peers.

The economically disadvantaged white, like the ethnicized white, or such whites as the disabled, the homosexual white, or the Jewish white, or the audible minority, must be identified as unsuccessfully white by the hegemonic white population because to include these people in the inner sanctum of whiteness would be to acknowledge “weakness,” fallibility, or vulnerability—an Achilles’ heel—thereby disrupting the illusion that whites are superior on all levels and in all areas. Indeed, in describing the state of white colonization in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Africa, Katherine Fishburn shrewdly notes that “colonizers must maintain absolute vigilance

over each other, even to the point, where need be, of sacrificing the weakest members” (3). Contemporary whiteness still follows a “one-drop rule” of sorts, as described by Valerie Babb in *The Meaning of Whiteness*. She explains:

Formed during the era of slavery and cemented during the Jim Crow era, this “rule” defined anyone having black ancestry, however remote or difficult to document, as “black.” The “one-drop rule” was distinctly North American. In other cultures, being white was conceived of as more of a social status. (180)

The “one-drop rule” protected white society from any possible “contamination” from a non-white gene pool; today, however, white society not only tries to segregate those whose “racial” contributions may disrupt its “purity,” but also social, political, sexual, religious, and other influences that may taint its attempts to portray itself as a homogenous and superior population.

Therefore, those who inhabit white skin but who possess characteristics (either deliberately or involuntarily) that do not aid in the perpetuation of the white dream of superiority and are cast to the periphery, may view white society from an alternative (and more critical) position. But just because “white trash have *the potential* to perform the work of racial self-recognition and self-consciousness,” it does not follow that they will do so (emphasis mine). While the marginalizing experience of living as white trash, for example, has the promise of connecting a segment of the white population with others who have been marginalized for different reasons, the realization of the promise is not a foregone conclusion. Constance Penley notes of American culture:

If you *are* white trash, then you must engage in the never-ending labor of distinguishing yourself, codifying your behavior so as to signify a difference from blackness that will, in spite of everything, express some miniscule, if pathetic, measure of your culture's superiority, at least to those above you who use the epithet "white trash" to emphasize just how beyond the pale you are. (90)

Even those who do not reap all the benefits of mainstream whiteness may still struggle to be identified with that group (or rather, struggle not to be identified with *non-white* groups). Further, even from the outer borders of whiteness, the marginalized whites in their complex and intersecting identities still contribute to whiteness as a whole. Marilyn Frye explains:

The white girl learns that whiteness<sup>12</sup> is dignity and respectability; she learns that whiteness is her aptitude for partnership with white men; she learns that partnership with white men is her salvation from the original position of Woman in patriarchy. Adopting and cultivating whiteness as an individual character seems to put it in the woman's own power to lever herself up out of a kind of nonbeing (the status of woman in a male supremacist social order) over into a kind of Being (the status of white in white supremacist social order). But whiteness does not save white women from the condition of *woman*. Quite the contrary. A white woman's whiteness is deeply involved in her oppression as a woman and works against her liberation. [. . .] [W]hite men may welcome our whiteness as endorsement of their

own values and as an expression of our loyalty to them. (*Willful Virgin* 160-61)

Frye contends that women (and I would add other marginalized, but white groups) are categorized as “nonbeings” until they adopt and “cultivate” whiteness: until a white, but marginalized, person exudes whiteness, she is entirely invisible to the patriarchy as a desirable object. Those who occupy alternative spaces have very real lives with very real experiences, but they are largely discounted and ignored by the hegemonic white patriarchy. Frye illuminates the multiplicity of people’s identities, and reveals how those on the margins still contribute to the greater social phenomenon of whiteness. Her description of being white but also woman (two positions of varying power and privilege) begins to describe the many intersections of white peoples’ experiences. One never has only a one dimensional identity, and these dimensions of identity sometimes complement and sometimes conflict with one another. One can be both powerful and privileged in one aspect of one’s identity while simultaneously experiencing oppression and discrimination in another. Second, when Frye describes white women embodying whiteness and joining in personal partnerships with men, thereby “endors[ing] their own [patriarchal] values,” a stronger light is shed on Penley’s assertion that being white trash (or, presumably, from another marginalized group) can result in a “never-ending labor of distinguishing [oneself].” The person on the margin, by “codifying” his or her behaviour to prove some degree of whiteness, endorses whiteness itself by treating it as a desirable goal to be attained, rather than a self-delusional, exclusionary, and discriminatory end.

## 2.5 Whiteness from the “Outside”

It appears to me then, that there are shades of whiteness: variations among white people determine that they are not a homogeneous mass, but rather have innumerable permutations of identities and relative powers and privileges. But how is whiteness experienced by those outside of it? From my own position as a white woman within a white-privileged culture who has read the opinions of, and discussed with, non-white Canadians, I imagine that the various intricacies and complexities of whiteness are far less apparent --or more appropriately, far less *important*--to one experiencing the negative effects of whiteness. Whether my great-grandparents came from Germany or Poland will not significantly effect my interaction with a non-white person. A metaphor, then, is the best way for me to describe my understanding of whiteness. Whiteness is like a human body that in its entirety as an organism affects its environment. In this manner, whiteness affects those who experience it: some may feel they are being acted upon by a monolithic entity. Some people outside the “body” of whiteness may see through its skin to the inner workings, to the individuals who comprise the white construction. But the human body is also made up of systems of organs and nerves and blood and cells that each constitute a separate functioning unit. If a pancreatic cell had a consciousness, I do not think it would be aware of what was being experienced by a cell of the right big toe. In this manner, whiteness is not a single, homogenous construction, but it is a conglomerate of disparate systems, a conglomerate that works together, ultimately,

(and whether known or unknown by the smaller units and systems) for the survival of the body as a whole.<sup>13</sup>

*Recently, my partner and I bought an old character home in a rough neighbourhood. Although the neighbourhood is situated on the riverbank (typically prime real estate), our community is considered “inner city,” and is feared and avoided by many people. The area is one of the older ones in Saskatoon, so the streets are canopied by hundred year-old elms, and many of the homes are once-magnificent two and three story character homes. The community members are, to a large extent, low and fixed income families. Nearly every house has at least one guard dog, and the sidewalks almost always yield some evidence of crime: spattered blood drops from a domestic fight, discarded condoms from the sex trade workers who frequent the strip two blocks away, uncapped syringes, and graffiti-emptied aerosol cans. Children run ill-clothed late into the night, riding too-big bikes and throwing rocks at garbage cans. Our street gutters are filled with trash, in part because people who walk through our neighbourhood don’t care about tossing their litter on the ground, but also because the city street cleaners never seem to make it over here from the suburban areas.<sup>14</sup>*

*I won’t lie to you; when we first moved into our home, I was uneasy about the neighbourhood, not because most of my neighbours are non-white, not because of the obvious poverty, but because of the stereotypes about my neighbourhood perpetuated by those outside the community, stereotypes which, for all my thinking on the topic, I had internalized. I had been taught to fear this community long before we ever bought our house. When we were applying for our home insurance to*



*accompany our mortgage, we soon discovered that no insurance company in the city would insure in this area, other than the provincial, government- run insurance company (and we had to pay higher premiums). Yet since moving in, we have found our neighbours to be friendly, always willing to offer a hand, and we have never experienced a break-in, vandalism, or violence.*

*But having read Dyer's and hooks' comments, I have to wonder if I haven't evoked fear in my neighbours. Physically, I am not very imposing, so I doubt that anyone would consider me a physical threat, but I don't think that this is to what Dyer and hooks are referring when they acknowledge "white terror"/ "terrorizing." From someone such as myself, white terror might manifest in a condescending air, overt and subtle racist comments and behaviour, or (but not limited to) a complicit cooperation with institutional forces that prove to be both socially and physically terrorizing (public education system, city police force currently under scrutiny for the freezing deaths of aboriginal men, justice system, etcetera). Does the Native girl down the block cast furtive sideways glances at me as I walk by because I am part of a white terror that has already affected her life?<sup>15</sup>*

## 2.6 Discovering Whiteness and Responsibility

Whiteness, then, while certainly connected to one's skin tone, is far more complex. To scratch only the surface, whiteness is about perception, power, privilege, racism, discrimination, and presumed moral righteousness. While the

white skin of whiteness is a biological factor that can never be changed, the ideology of whiteness is not. Frye, in the “White Woman Feminist,” remarks,

it is seeming to me that race (together with racism and race privilege) is apparently *constructed as* something inescapable. And it makes sense that it would be, since such a construction would best serve those served by race and racism. *Of course* race and racism are impossible to escape; of course a white person is always in the sticky web of privilege that permits only acts which reinforce (“reinscribe”) racism. This just means that some exit must be forced. That will require conceptual creativity, and perhaps conceptual violence. (150-51)

If the concepts of race and racial difference are socially constructed, then so too must be the racial categories such as whiteness, and the solutions to the inequities created by these constructions. The OED defines construction as “a thing constructed [. . . ] a *formation of the mind*” (880). “A thing constructed” and “a formation of the mind” are things that can be *deconstructed* (and *deconstructed*) and *unformed*; these things, then, are not inescapable. Yet I concur with Frye that whiteness and its by-products, racism and race privilege, are not *easily* escaped. Gayatri Spivak warns that “one cannot of course ‘choose’ to step out of ideology. The most responsible ‘choice’ seems to be to know it as best one can, recognize it as best one can, and, through one’s necessarily inadequate interpretation, to work to change it” (“The Politics of Interpretation” 120). I’ve paused on the word *responsible* every time I’ve reread this note, for it is the singular word that describes the role—my role—in researching,

working with, and writing about whiteness. I have spent thirty years living with unearned privilege when many others have not. I have spent thirty years contributing to the perpetuation of whiteness, and now that the inky net of so many writers has been flung over its invisible but massive shape, I have been made “newly accountable” (McIntosh 31). So many of the whiteness theorists whom I have read have spoken from a very personal, rather than objectively academic position, and always the words *responsibility* and *accountability* are part of what they have to say. Sherene Razack speaks of her own “racial” awareness most eloquently:

My goal is to move towards accountability, a process that begins with a recognition that we are implicated in systems of oppression that profoundly structure our understanding of one another. That is, we come to know and perform ourselves in ways that reproduce social hierarchies. Tracing our complicity in these systems requires that we shed notions of mastering differences, abandoning the idea that differences are pre-given, knowable, and existing in a social and historical vacuum. Instead, we invest our energies in exploring the histories, social relations, and conditions that structure groups unequally in relation to one another and *that shape what can be known, thought, and said.* (10)

While white accountability must be struggled with in the most personal and private corners of an individual’s psyche, there is also work to be done, simultaneously, in a more public manner. As a white Canadian, I have a responsibility to address the racism in my country; as a student of Canadian literature, I have a responsibility to

“trace our complicity in these systems of oppression” and I am morally compelled to “invest my energies in exploring the histories and social relations” in Canadian and other) literature that both reflect and often perpetuate “conditions that structure groups unequally.” The literature produced in Canada is a direct reflection (and often, reproduction) of the social systems and hierarchies at work in our country.

There is a process, to use Razack’s term, one goes through during, before, and after recognizing, interrogating, and trying to undo whiteness, and as I have learned, it is---well, the process is many things. Because one cannot become aware of whiteness and then become “newly accountable” on only a personal level, or only a public level—because this process, if genuine, necessitates change in all facets of one’s life—such awareness is both intellectually, but also emotionally and spiritually, draining and invigorating. For these reasons, I think, so many of the theorists abandon their often “objective” and jargon-laden language for one that tries to capture and reflect the inner revolution they have experienced. Such writings are filled with emotional anecdotes, confessions, and stumblings that try to convey their experiences. Acknowledging this process is important to me in the context of my project: white readers need to identify where the theorists, the writer of this project (myself), the author of the novel to be examined (Daphne Marlatt), and the characters *in* the book are situated regarding their awareness of whiteness. First, by identifying the almost predictable patterns inherent in the experience of whiteness awakening, readers are better able to interpret and employ the theoretical writing on the subject. Shortly after whiteness theorists publish essays, I am certain that their understandings and thoughts often change yet again in light of new information, new

experiences, or new global developments (such as September 11, 2001). This was most certainly my experience, as I have tried to replicate briefly in the opening of this chapter. Just as I felt confident that I understood the theory, I would read another article or have another conversation that would return my beliefs and assumptions to uncertainty. I have ceased trying to reach that elusive place of “knowing with certainty” what I think and believe, and instead welcome the constant internal growth that is integral to such a project. Having reached this point myself, I look at the theory surrounding the topic of whiteness with a gentler eye; yes, weaknesses in the arguments must be addressed or expanded upon, but the theorists are not talking about trochaic meter or other formal literary matters but about—in addition to literature and theory—their own humanity. Then, too, we must consider Marlatt’s position in the process (and the work she has done to reach this point) so that we are able to recognize when her characters reflect her actual thinking or when, through their actions and words, they reflect those qualities of which she is highly critical.

The first stage in understanding one’s own whiteness comes in the shift from no awareness of that whiteness at all, to becoming aware that one is a racialized being. Before reading bell hooks, I had no inkling that I participated in whiteness. People in this stage manifest their lack of awareness in many ways. One might be an overt racist. One might have recognized that in our social climate, feelings of overt racism should be hidden under a guise of “tolerance.”<sup>16</sup>

An acknowledgment of social inequalities and systemic discrimination draws one near the brink of discovering one’s whiteness, but this stage is fraught with

intellectual and emotional hazards that jeopardize the individual's capacity to move forward in the process. Some are inclined to claim that we are all raised in a racist society and therefore are all, inescapably, racist; if one stops here, this is both a woefully pathetic and inappropriate apology for racism but also an excuse to cease working toward an anti-racist nation (hooks, *Black Looks* 14). Others, once recognizing their own racist perspective, feel that the solution to the problem, as Frankenberg phrases it, is "color-evasiveness" (140). People caught in this stage of the process try desperately to pretend (and to convince others) that they "don't see colour." While not noticing colour or "difference" is certainly well-intentioned, the result is inevitably the inability to recognize whiteness and how whiteness has shaped and does shape Canada's social relations and hierarchies. bell hooks commented on her white students' amazement that "black people watch white people with a critical 'ethnographic' gaze," [amazement that] is itself an expression of racism. [ . . . ] They have a deep emotional investment in the myth of sameness" (*Black Looks* 167).

A component of colour-evasiveness is denial, another potential pitfall along the journey to white racialized self-awareness. Gail Griffin explains that denial has been especially problematic in (white) feminist thinking because when white women try to equate their gender issues to race issues, they enable themselves to "claim oppression rather than the power to oppress. As victims instead of perpetrators, they [can] claim innocence instead of being implicated" (12).<sup>17</sup> Razack sarcastically expands on this idea, suggesting that

with a little practice and the right information, we can all be innocent subjects, standing outside hierarchical social relations, who are not accountable for the past or implicated in the present. It is not our ableism, racism, sexism, or heterosexism that gets in the way of communicating, but *their* culture, *their* biology, or *their* lifestyle. (10)

This denial is, as Razack terms it, a “race to innocence; a belief that we are uninvolved in subordinating others” (14). Denial takes many forms, however, some of which will become evident as we explore *Ana Historic*.

Those who have managed to move beyond excuses, colour-evasiveness, and denial, are still at risk of negotiating race relations from a hierarchical perspective. While this perspective does begin to acknowledge white responsibility in social inequality, its odour is that of condescension. Razack suggests that for “white women, contact with non-white women reinforces the imperial idea that white women are more liberated than their sisters in the South. The white woman as savior of less fortunate women is [. . .] a narrative that is centuries old” (5). If the white critic assumes a savior position, then she focuses her attention on the “victim,” allowing herself to remain situated in a position of superiority, and no closer to grasping her own whiteness. Ann Russo argues that “typically when we (white women) raise the issue of racism, we tend to focus solely on the lives and experiences of women of color [. . .]. As a result, working on the problem of racism becomes a matter of ‘helping’ these women out, as if the problem of racism were ‘their’ problem” (299). Perhaps it is for this reason that critics such Russo choose to talk about “white supremacy” rather than “racism”; the object of scrutiny is

undoubtedly whiteness and the risk of the saviour syndrome is more likely averted as the critical focus is turned onto the white critic, rather than onto those “outside” of whiteness.

The most painful stage for one going through “the process,” however, is that of guilt and/or shame. In post-colonial writing, one frequently reads of “colonial guilt” that can be partially defined as an inner and often subconscious awareness of the violent, inequitable, and inhumane nature of colonial relations. The colonizer knows, on some level, that (s)he is “in the [colonized] world but not of it” (Lessing qtd. in Sprague 1). Colonial guilt has carried forward into neo-colonial times as white Canadians, for instance, try to reconcile their compassionate self-images with their individual and collective contributions to racism. Clare Holzman has worked hard to establish distinctions between the terms “guilt” and “shame,” and also to determine what function these feelings serve in antiracist work:

*Guilt is the discomfort I feel when I have done something that harms another person or violates a moral prohibition. Guilt, like anxiety, is a signal that something is amiss and needs to be corrected. [. . .] Guilt tells me that I have done something wrong and need to correct it or make reparation. Irrational guilt is either guilt over something I am not actually responsible for, or guilt whose intensity is disproportionate to the offense.*

*Shame is what I feel when I fail to live up to my ideals for myself. Shame, like guilt, is a signal that prompts me to change my behavior. The focus is not on the harm done to others, but on the defect in*



*myself. Shame involves feelings of exposure and an impulse to hide.*

[. . .] *Irrational shame is a feeling of having been exposed as a*

*fundamentally and irremediably defective human being.* (326)

I certainly experienced at least one significant bout of guilt when I became aware of my whiteness. For quite a while, I wanted no part of my white and ethnic heritage. In the past 100 years the Germans (although not my family in particular, as far as I know) have been responsible for some of the most heinous acts of inhumanity in written history. Once my family settled in Canada, their arrival necessarily meant the displacement of the First Nations people, because my family needed to farm to support the family. And from the Japanese internment camps to the residential schools, my government (largely white) has been responsible for legislated racism. Surely this is a soiled legacy to which few would want to lay claim. But Holzman reminds us that guilt is not a useless sensation; it can “signal that something is amiss and needs to be corrected.” Holzman’s definition of guilt was very useful for me at my time of overwhelming guilt because I was reminded that I cannot hold myself accountable for the actions of my ancestors; to do so would be “irrational.” Not only is such guilt irrational, but it is also fruitless. To become overwhelmed with guilt is to become immobilized, a stance from which no change can come. Further, such guilt is self-absorbed and if indulged, selfish, because the person wallowing in guilt does not expect him or herself to *do the work* required to “correct [the problem] or make reparation.” Daniel David Moses observes that guilt “sounds like the opposite thing to healing. It seems that you don’t want to heal, you want to keep the wound” (qtd. in Egan, “Book of Jessica” 17). To “heal the wound[s],” whites must move

beyond irrational guilt, letting it serve as an indicator of the need for change but not allowing it to linger and fester. Jean Perreault, in “White Feminist Guilt, Abject Scripts, and (Other) Transformative Necessities” recalls thinking about her antiracist work that “to do *anything* risks doing the *wrong* thing” (227). I think Perreault articulates a fear that many white antiracists experience, yet only our own privilege and comfort can stop us from making the logical leap to realize that risking doing the *wrong* thing is better than *not trying at all*.

Similarly, as I started to investigate my own whiteness, and as I became aware of the ways in which my language, actions, assumptions, and privileges contributed to a collective whiteness, I also felt shame and truly felt like a “fundamentally and irremediably human being.” And I am still troubled by the racist thoughts that flash through my head, uninvited, irrational, and yet shockingly there with mechanical reliability. Richard Dyer describes similar frustration and shock in that despite his antiracist beliefs, racist thoughts “pop” into his head (7). I remind myself, like Dyer, that these thoughts are not indicators of “who I really am” nor signs of my defectiveness or evilness as a human being, but rather are ideas, concepts, and stereotypes with which I have been bombarded since my first days on earth. My mother knew a couple who, for a (cruel) lark, taught their son from birth terms that were opposite to what is commonly understood. He said “down” for “up” and “stop” for “go.” I cannot begin to imagine the years it took for him to “unlearn” these upside-down conceptual frameworks, for unlearning is always much more difficult than learning something new. I imagine that as an adult, although he has learned to say “up” when he means “up,” that he has never managed to erase the

conceptual framework he originally learned. So it is with the minds of white people: even if they are aware that their whiteness is a construction and they resist its hierarchical ideologies, the framework of that construction forever remains in the background. Like the recovering alcoholic or anorexic, the white person is always in a process of recovery, and certain weaknesses from the illness can never be entirely purged.<sup>18</sup> Because the white is always in a process of discovery and recovery, however, does not mean that (s)he is forever “bad.” hooks teaches that as white people begin to address their whiteness, it is critical that they do so “without seeing [themselves] as bad, or all white people as bad, and all black people as good” (*Black Looks* 177). I have had to realize that the very nature of my whiteness—an identity that is socially constructed—means that others have also had a part in creating who I am. As Richard Dyer describes: “I did not invent racist thought, it is a part of the cultural non-consciousness that we all inhabit. One must take responsibility for it, but that is not the same as being responsible, that is, to blame for it” (7). This does not negate my personal responsibility, but it does save me from the irrational guilt and shame that would render further work impossible, superficial, or ineffective.<sup>19</sup>

The focus, then, for critics, writers, and myself, is to move beyond these preliminary but potentially static stages of recognizing whiteness, to a proactive analysis of white cultural behaviour and products. The purpose of such a focus is “to dislodge it [whiteness] from its centrality and authority, not to reinstate it (and much less, to make a show of reinstating it, when, like male power, it doesn’t actually need reinstating)” (Dyer 10). While Dyer directs his critical eye toward photographic and other visual representations of whiteness (such as in film), I turn my critical eye to a

novel, *Ana Historic*. The objective is not to see if images of white people can be found in the novel, but rather, to see how Marlatt constructs the identities of her white characters and how those identities are mutually shaping. I will search for evidence of unrealized white racial identities; the specifically Canadian historical context of whiteness, power, and privilege; “shades” of whiteness; whites using non-white groups for contrast to construct their whiteness; and the various stages of becoming cognizant of whiteness as a racial construct. I will, at the same time, try to be aware of how my experiences, identities, and subject position affect my reading process.

### 3. Daphne Marlatt: Her Life and Life-Writing

Marlatt, as an author, with her critical theory, and her poetry and prose (life) writing could not be better suited to my exploration of white Canadian identity and its construction. From a biographical standpoint, Marlatt has lived and does live a complex identity of which she is highly aware. Her subject position is, in part and simultaneously, that of the writer, the immigrant, the white Canadian, and the lesbian. In her critical theory she addresses (often in radical or experimental ways) each of these positions, providing the readers of her creative work with a myriad of tools with which to approach and understand her writing. Rarely have I encountered an author, writing in English, who is so competent in both the critical and creative spheres; Marlatt's critical work is rigorous, to use the terminology of academia, and yet her creative work is never bluntly didactic. Her poetry and prose are unique in that Marlatt combines fiction and autobiography not by accident, but in a manner that is always to a high degree aware of the challenges faced when constructing one's identity. So acute and critical are Marlatt's eye and word that each time I pick up my copy of *Ana Historic*, I chuckle to myself because beneath the title are the words "A Novel." Certainly, this labeling is not a publisher's addition intended to categorize the work, but instead is Marlatt's very conscious and somewhat wry description of the experimental genre contained between the front and back covers.

*Ana Historic* is fictitious<sup>20</sup> but there are many passages that are obviously autobiographical; by naming the work a novel, Marlatt draws attention to the fictive nature of recording and writing—of constructing—any person’s life or identity.<sup>21</sup>

Daphne Marlatt was born July 11, 1942, in Australia, but spent the first years of her childhood in Penang, Malaysia. She immigrated with her family to Vancouver in 1951. Her mother and maternal grandmother were both from a British colonial family and were born in India, while her father, also a British citizen, lived in India, Malta, Malaysia, and Australia (“Entering In” Marlatt 18-19). Marlatt recalls that her parents

referred to England as home, and yet they chose not to go home when they left Penang. I grew up with two nostalgias in our house: the nostalgia for England, which, having spent only some months there, i didn’t really understand; the nostalgia for Penang, which i could share, though it was effaced by my enthusiasm for *this* place here [. . .] I wanted to “belong,” to be “from” here but found there were differences not easy to bridge. (19)

A sense of “home,” and a desire for home when one is not there, is integral to Marlatt’s understanding of one’s national or regional allegiance. In her essay “Entering In: The Immigrant Imagination,” Marlatt explores the part of her identity that is connected to her parents’ and her own sense of “home.” The emigrant, Marlatt notes, is someone who is “looking back”; the emigrant mind is “rooted, bound up in, the place left, the ‘old country,’ ‘home’ and preoccupied with recreating that place, whether out of nostalgia (longing to return) or fury (that avenging spirit

that cannot let go of old wounds)” (17). Marlatt’s parents, although living in many countries but England, were emigrants because they were always looking over their shoulders to England as home.

In contrast to the emigrant, Marlatt, the immigrant, is “entering into something new” (“Entering In” 17). As Marlatt reveals, however, her transition from Penang to Vancouver was not an easy one, and although she was prepared to embrace her new country, its people were not so accepting of her. She recalls that in her home in Penang, five languages were spoken by her family and by the family servants.<sup>22</sup> When she moved to Vancouver, however, she was struck (at that time) by the “monocultural,” “WASP,” and “conservative” city that was “suspicious of newcomers” (“Entering In” 19). She was taunted in school because of her differences and so “for the sake of entry and acceptance, [she] denied for years [her] history and that of [her] parents” (“Entering In” 18). For Marlatt, to enter into something new necessarily meant giving up or concealing (at least temporarily) something old. She describes “coming to *be* Canadian” as a process that “involves a sort of amputation, a gradual loss of parts” (“Writing Our Way Through the Labyrinth” 36). This statement could not be more true for becoming or being a *white* Canadian. Unlike non-white Canadians, whose skin colour guarantees that they will never be wholly accepted by (white) Canadian society, white immigrants may be lured by the fact that their skin colour makes their total assimilation if not guaranteed, then certainly possible.

Marlatt’s colonial family, emigrant parents, and immigrant self are all evident, in altered forms (as Mrs. Ana Richards, Ina, and Annie, names that are

similar and yet distinguishable from one another), in *Ana Historic*. While I will look at these characters in depth in my subsequent chapters, I would like to assert that these characters have grown out of Marlatt's personal experience, and consider the way they function in the novel. What makes these characters so interesting is how they conceive of themselves as (white) Canadians. Mrs. Ana Richards, the colonial wife of 1873, represents not only the colonizers of Canada, but also general white neocolonial beliefs evident in all corners of the country today. Ina is the emigrant, the Canadian who is always "looking back" to her or his family's country of ethnic origin. In this character we see the troubles inherent in our superficial multiculturalism that encourages a romantic but irresponsible celebration of one's ethnic heritage.<sup>23</sup> Annie, the immigrant, embraces her new country, yet feels the compulsion to "amputate" her history, which is as problematic an internal conflict as living in nostalgia. Canadian whiteness, it seems, is directly linked to the imagination of the colonizer, the emigrant, and the immigrant.

Marlatt's use of these three characters whose identities are interwoven with each other throughout the text emphasizes her understanding that each woman's identity is at least partly constructed upon the history of her forbearers—their identities are contextual and interdependent. In the "Referential Aesthetic of Autobiography," Paul John Eakin says of autobiography that

[it] is, of course, a repetition of the past, but a repetition *with a difference*. [ . . . ] Repetition of the past is necessarily a supplement to it and never merely a mirror of it. Whenever it is performed, the act of repetition tacitly confirms that reality not yet made into the



referential fiction of autobiography—life as it is or was—is never entirely acceptable to the autobiographer. It is the made form of a life that brings acceptance or at least understanding. (138)

He expands on this idea in “Relational Selves, Relational Lives,” adding that repetition with a difference “affords an opportunity to set the story straight, to speak the unspoken, to repair the ruptures of the past” (73). Through Annie’s archival work/rewriting and simultaneous life-writing, we see Eakin’s theory in action; Annie reconstructs the pasts of Ana, Ina, and her own self, but forms those lives to make them acceptable. By acceptable, however, I do not necessarily mean more palatable or aesthetically pleasing, but acceptable in the sense that Annie feels she has set the story straight, spoken the unspoken, and repaired the ruptures (and omissions) of the past. In this regard, Annie’s self becomes one that is both “product and producer” (Perreault, “Autography/Transformation/Asymmetry” 194). Not only is Annie, the primary life-writer, the product of her family (Ina) and her culture (Ana), but she is also the producer of that identity as she reframes and reforms her predecessors’ stories.

Although Perreault appreciates Eakin’s assertions, such as his claim that the self is relational, she does challenge that he does not examine “self invention” when he examines selfhood (*Writing Selves* 6-7). Perhaps Perreault interprets Eakin’s allowance for setting the record straight, speaking the unspoken, and repairing the ruptures of the past as “factual” writing, rather than inventive. Eakin acknowledges, however, that the “pervasive initiative has been to establish autobiography as an imaginative art, with a special emphasis on its fictions” (“Referential Aesthetic” 129-

30). Perreault distinguishes between autobiography and autography arguing that the latter is not “necessarily concerned with the process or unfolding of life events,<sup>24</sup> but rather makes the writing itself an aspect of selfhood the writer experiences and brings into being” (*Writing Selves* 3-4). While both Eakin and Perreault acknowledge the fictional and creative tendencies in autobiographical writing, Perreault’s distinction between autobiography and “autography” emphasizes the writing itself, a distinction I feel Marlatt would make between her writing and other forms of autobiography. Marlatt creates self not only through an exploration of memories and relationships, but also through experimentation with writing and an exploration and (re)defining of how language functions for her as a life writer.

Marlatt also writes from a lesbian perspective; because white supremacy is often married to heterosexual supremacy, the lesbian perspective does reveal another valuable insight into Marlatt’s construction of character.<sup>25</sup> What I am about to present is a necessary simplification, in the interest of containing the scope and length of my project, of the intricacies of Marlatt’s experience. It seems to me, however, that Marlatt’s perception and subsequent construction of white identities in her characters is greatly enhanced because she is lesbian. Occasionally, Marlatt asserts that a lesbian is situated outside the dominant society, essentially occupying a place of marginalization. Typically, a marginalized space carries with it the connotations of being less privileged and also less powerful. At the same time, however, Marlatt also identifies with the thinking of other lesbian writers such as Nicole Brossard, stating that “lesbian culture tries to do something which . . . is unimaginable from within the dominant culture. We try to imagine the fullness of

who we might be outside of patriarchal reference” (Carr 105).<sup>26</sup> When the patriarchy is viewed (and critiqued and deconstructed and undermined) from a lesbian perspective, the critique is done from a more independent position than would be the case from a heterosexual vantage point, because unlike the heterosexual woman whose identity is necessarily constructed in relation to men and the patriarchy, the lesbian identity is constructed outside, or at least in resistance to, this framework. Perhaps because of her resistant position to the patriarchy, Marlatt identifies and is so concerned with the “cross-over lines” and “rift lines” among marginalized groups that are so categorized by (white) patriarchal society (“Unmaking/Remaking Poetry in Her Many Images” 83).<sup>27</sup>

At play in her work, then, is evidence of her

becoming aware of dialogue on the (many) fringes, listening to other women’s words, realities, [which] is to engage in a delicate balance between recognition of difference and recognition of shared ground. The balance between i and we—and neither capitalized nor capitalizing on the other. (“Difference Embracing” 137)

Her lowercase personal “i” represents her desire to eliminate the authoritative and unquestioned subject position and to replace it with one that acknowledges its place alongside, and not in a position of superiority to, other subjects. Susan Knutson argues that:

Marlatt’s “i” is an “i”/eye; a channel for perception, a conduit that gives voice to a woman’s senses: her eyes, ears and skin. Marlatt developed this “i” in explicit opposition to the blindly ethnocentric

and colonizing posture of white Europeans. The power relations that she criticizes include, but are not limited to, those of gender. (87)

Because she recognizes the tendency for the “blindly ethnocentric” white to posit him or herself in a position of authority over other groups, her writing interrogates and subverts these very tendencies. In an interview with Brenda Carr, Marlatt stresses the importance of “seeing the ways in which we are connected to other forms of life, to other races, other classes, [which is a way to] work against the domination of one over all others. The vision feminism embodies, it seems to me, is relational, promoting an equivalency of needs, not the privileging of one set” (106).<sup>28</sup> Rather than trying to string tenuous lines between people in an attempt to create a “fantasized solidarity,” Marlatt refuses to “overlook the pain of real differences in oppression” (*Telling It* 13), and hence produces writing that is “dangerous” or frightening to read because it opens the historical wounds that whiteness, in particular, has tried to ignore. Because themes of colonialism, power/domination, lesbianism, class, and ethnocentrism weave throughout Marlatt’s writing and theory, she responds to allegations that white feminists have disregarded the challenges faced by women whose identities are not the same as those of white, middle-class feminists.

Marlatt’s “i,” ever vigilant of its effect in the reader, is a subject that demonstrates a critical self-awareness not common in traditional Western literature (at or before the time that Marlatt wrote *Ana Historic*). Marlatt acknowledges that “any story, no matter how small, participates in larger cultural ones that to some extent determine it. The larger culture’s narratives perpetuate cultural assumptions,

if not obviously [. . .] then covertly in how these stories are told” (“Old Scripts” 63). Marlatt’s own autobiographical tale, as she tells it in her essays and shadows it in her fiction and poetry, is one of these “small” stories (the individual’s story) that both participates in and is “to some extent” determined by the larger cultural stories. Recalling the time when she was writing *Ana Historic*, Marlatt recollects: “whole phrases came back to me that were my mother’s, habitual phrases that sounded the very texture of who she is in me and through her the residue of my grandmother—and beyond her, who knows?” (“The In-Between” 116). Marlatt’s story is born out of her familial heritage, a story larger than her own, but *that* story is the product of the larger colonial and cultural heritage, a story that she has helped write, but that has also partially “written her”.

After “entering in[to]” Canada and becoming a Canadian citizen, Marlatt wrestled with her colonial heritage, presuming, perhaps, that to be Canadian and to be colonialist are mutually exclusive identities. In “Her(e) in the Labyrinth: Reading/Writing Theory (1992-1997),” Marlatt discusses this struggle and her subsequent epiphany, wondering, “How to dredge up from the backwaters what i so insistently & for so many years tried to drown so that i could become Canadian: non-imperial, ‘guiltless’ (i realize this is a neurosis Anglo-Canadians share, & a personal fetish too no doubt)” (197). Marlatt, an immigrant and the child of parents engaged in the colonial enterprise, initially believes that to be a (white) Canadian is to cast aside any ties to colonial guilt. Her realization, however, that colonial guilt is a personal fetish of the contemporary white Canadian, is a critical thrust behind my

assertion that to be a white Canadian is to embody the colonizer, the emigrant, and the immigrant.

Marlatt's colonial upbringing in Penang, before her arrival in Canada, contributed a great deal to her understanding of the ways in which white identity is constructed, an understanding that translates well to the Canadian context. White identity is not only built out of the white individual's self-perception, but it is also powerfully shaped by how others (non-whites) view that individual. Marlatt tells the story of standing in a Chinese tailor's shop as a young girl, and the wordless exchange she had with a young Malaysian girl:

i stared out between the blinds at the usual stream of shoppers, loiterers, hawkers. [. . .] Saw, for a long moment, a girl younger than me, hanging around the tea-stall across the way, called back by others but staring with that territorial rudeness i knew, staring between people and cars at me, the outsider in her father's (was it? her uncle's?) shop—while i, guardian of this gorgeous mother, just as rudely stared back. [. . .] The confines of colonialism, its rigid window frame i was trained to gaze out of, and another i gazing back from the edges of her own view, positing something outside my particular context. In this glimpse, glimpse only, do i make up what she feels? How else do i know who she might be? In the writing / reading / re-remembering that constitutes such glimpses, she alters me. (“For the Private Reader” 222)

This passage is rich with Marlatt's interpretation of the colonial or white/nonwhite relationship. When the young white girl locks eyes with her Malaysian counterpart, she immediately begins to translate the girl's behaviour. She imagines that the girl is "called back" by those around her, implying that the girl is hastily retrieved from her attempts to engage (in confrontation?) with the white child. Marlatt also believes that the girl is "staring with territorial rudeness," a look which the white girl saucily returns because she is the "guardian of [her] gorgeous mother" but also, perhaps, because she feels herself the object of another's gaze. Only seconds into her encounter with this girl, the child Marlatt ascribed to the Malaysian girl a hostile and territorial disposition toward Marlatt, the imperial child. While Marlatt may very well have interpreted the girl's look accurately, it is more important to note that as Marlatt defines the girl's behaviour, she is also defining *herself*. By noting that the girl is territorial, Marlatt recognizes that she (and her mother) are in someone else's land, and that she is the "outsider." Her use of the window metaphor to describe the colonial gaze is apt, not only denoting that the gaze (her gaze) is housed in a (social) construction, but also revealing it is through this window and its mediating pane that she has been trained to look, and that her sight is limited by its frame. Marlatt was unable to see beyond the limits of the colonial framework at that time. In the "writing/reading/re-membering" of the event, however, Marlatt not only employs her lowercase "i" to talk about herself, but also realizes that the other girl is "another i gazing back from the edges of her own view." As an adult, much changed by her life experiences, she sees beyond her own perspective and realizes that the girl with whom she shared that moment of tremendous personal impact is also an "i" with her

“own view.” When Marlatt admits that her view of the girl was merely a “glimpse,” perhaps she is also admitting her readiness as a child to make assumptions about the girl and her thoughts. Thus, when Marlatt asks, “Do i make up what she feels?” the question can be interpreted in two ways. First, and in the context of Marlatt as a child, Marlatt wonders if her presence in the girl’s father’s (uncle’s?) shop elicits an emotional response from the girl. But looking back, Marlatt wonders if she imagined (made up, invented) what the girl was feeling, thereby attributing to the girl territorial attitudes generated by Marlatt’s colonial window frame. When she asks, “How else do i know who she might be?” she recognizes that not only is her understanding of the Other girl based upon a “glimpse,” or an incomplete and insufficient knowledge base, but also that her understanding is blurred by her colonial vision. How could she possibly know the Malaysian girl outside of the white girl’s colonially-trained vision? Finally, when Marlatt concludes that in “the writing / reading / re-memering that constitutes such glimpses, she alters me,” Marlatt acknowledges, as many theorists have, that the “colonized” figure is not passive, but affects the colonizer and that writing about this figure is a transformative act.<sup>29</sup>

Razack discusses this idea regarding the white and Aboriginal relationship, asking “We may know how colonization changed Aboriginal people, but do we know how it changed, and continues to change, white people?” (19). Indeed, whites have been changed by colonization in Canada and are still being changed by neocolonial relations, and white identities are formed by the interaction with and relationships to Aboriginal people. For Marlatt, the act of “writing / reading / re-



remembering” the Other “alters” the white identity of her characters. Jessica Benjamin asserts that “at the very moment of realizing our own independence, we are dependant on another to recognize it” (qtd. in Eakin, “Relational Selves” 67). The formation of one’s racialized identity seems to provide a particularly poignant example of the “relational” nature of identity construction. As I asserted in Chapter One, although it is a highly problematic trait, the white identity seems to depend upon a comparison with non-white groups to define itself. Because writing, reading, and remembering are acts of creation, interpretation, and reconstruction (remembering), the Other that “alters” the white writing / reading / re-membering subject is imagined in this process, and that white subject has projected upon the Other his or her deliberate or subconscious misconceptions. The white subject defines itself then, in comparison to this *imagined* and not real Other. Donna Haraway, in “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” argues that “the Western eye has fundamentally been a wandering eye, a traveling lens. These peregrinations have often been violent and insistent on having mirrors for a conquering self—but not always” (586). In Haraway’s “but not always” lies Marlatt’s writing because she recognizes and subverts the white insistence on gazing into the “mirror” of the other.

The intricacies of “seeing” the Other ultimately reflect the subject engaging in that act. Haraway asks, “How to see? Where to see from? What limits to vision? What to see for? Whom to see with? Who gets to have more than one point of view? Who gets blinded? Who wears blinders? Who interprets the visual field?” (587), to which Marnina Gonick adds her paraphrase, “vision is therefore always a question of

the power to see” (94). Both Haraway and Gonick interrogate the act of seeing, moving beyond an investigation of who or what is seen, and toward a questioning of the seeing subject. Marlatt asks the same types of questions, and through her use of life writing interrogates herself (and others) as seeing subject. Life writing as a genre differs greatly from that of its precursor, autobiography, in that life writing is “the playground for new relationships both within and without the text,” whereas “autobiography proper,” as once believed, “requires too much unity of narrative, and too much ‘objective’ or reasoned thinking, too much author/ity of the author to be as irreverent as life writing can be” (Kadar 152).<sup>30</sup> While Marlatt’s life, experiences, and wisdom are certainly worthy of recording, life writing, not autobiography, is best suited to her subject matter, her style, and her purpose.

As previously discussed, Marlatt’s writing often focuses on the cross-over and rift lines among marginalized groups. She approaches her subject matter both as one who has experienced marginalization and as one who has occupied the position of privilege. She refuses to employ the authoritative “I,” and she refuses to feign a unified subject position, using the “i” as a symbol of her complex identity. This “split and contradictory self,” as Haraway names it, is “one who can interrogate positionings and be accountable, one who can construct and join rational conversations and fantastic imaginings that change history” (586). Marlatt’s subject matter often pivots upon notions of the self and identity that challenge those traditional in autobiography, and “interrogate[s] positionings,” striving to be accountable to herself and the reader. Finally, her handling of the self and identity contributes to both “rational and fantastic imaginings” that actually do, particularly

in the case of *Ana Historic*, “change history,” both through a reinterpretation and a re-imagining of that history.

Stylistically, Marlatt takes full advantage of the freedoms afforded in the genre of life writing. Marlatt’s most substantial body of work is represented in collections of poetry, and her poetic voice carries through into her works of fiction, *Ana Historic* and, to a lesser extent, *Taken*. For this reason, it seems doubly ironic that the cover of *Ana Historic* reads, “A Novel,” for the argument could be made that it is, in fact, an extended poem, a novel in poetry, or poetic prose. From poetry, Marlatt transposes into her novel experimental uses of white space, language, and a “narrative” that is disjointed or fragmented and deliberately incomplete. Yet Marlatt refers to the work not as poetry but as a fiction (or rather, “fictionalysis,” a term to which I will shortly return), and so we recognize that her use of experimental writing between the covers of her novel is a strategy that tells us she is uncomfortable assuming the authoritative position required to tell “the whole story.” In life writing, Marlatt notes:

We run up against the reductiveness of language which wants to separate truth from fiction, figure from ground, self from nothing. Who’s the creator here anyway? Maybe language after all, despite itself. But that’s only if we can subvert its mainline story, that black stands to white as woman to man. (“Self-Representation” 126)

For Marlatt, language is both the enemy and the ally of the self; traditional Western language is, in part, the very rigid window frame of colonialism, patriarchy, and heterosexism through which whites are trained to gaze. Its essentializing nature

prunes the branching self, “creating” a tidy and manageable narrative inside of which is trapped a life that has been forced into an unnatural shape reflecting the prevailing cultural ideologies. The English language is not *prêt à porter* for all those who speak and write in the language; using language without first subjecting it to critical scrutiny allows it to become the sole creator or the shaper of the self being written. But language can become the ally of the life writer if its “mainline story” is subverted. When used experimentally, and when its pre-written, ideologized qualities are broken open, allowing the self to be anything in between or outside of truth and fiction, figure and ground, or self and other, then language can function in a creatively positive manner rather than in a restricting or oppressive manner.

Marlatt’s own style of life writing subverts both the patriarchal and imperial English language and discourse that she employs in ways that suit her purposes, and the genre of autobiography in which some may mistakenly believe she works. Traditional readers of traditional autobiographies assume they are reading about whole lives recorded in the most truthful and objective manner possible. Critics frequently focus upon the purported truthfulness of the autobiographical work, citing the impossible challenges the writer faces to remain objective, to remember events accurately, and to select (and selectively omit) “relevant” segments of the life written. Marlatt, however, does not assume these responsibilities, for they are limiting, problematic, and further, impossible to fulfill. Instead, she says:

As they explore representations of identity women writers often consciously play with the notion of the autobiographer’s pact to tell the truth. They deliberately blur concepts of what constitutes fiction

and what constitutes documentary or, more largely, non-fiction, and, in the process, come up with a genre [fictionalysis] that stands on the threshold of announcing itself as something different from either.

(“Performing on the Stage of Her Text” 208)

Marlatt does not engage in writing that presents itself as more truthful than autobiography in the sense that problems with truth and objectivity are overcome, but rather she acknowledges that these challenges are inherent in the life writing process and then reflects this understanding in her life writing. In “Self-Representation and Fictionalysis,” Marlatt discusses how she has grafted into her writing the obstacles that might otherwise have made achieving self-representative results impossible:

Perhaps what we wake up to in autobiography is a beginning realization of the whole cloth of ourselves in connection with so many others. [. . .] It is exactly in the confluence of fiction (the self or selves we might be) and analysis (of the roles we have found ourselves in, defined in a complex socio-familial weave), it is in the confluence of these two that autobiography occurs, the writing self writing its way to life, whole life. [. . .] Autobiography is not separable from poetry for me on this ground I would call fictionalysis: a self-analysis that plays fictively with the primary images of one’s life, a fiction that uncovers analytically that territory where fact and fiction coincide.

(124)

Marlatt values the imagined self (selves) as the self (selves) that grows out of “the roles we have found ourselves in.” The imagined self may be one that comes from the writer’s re-membering, through the careful selection and omission of life events recorded, or out of something entirely “made-up,” a notion that she also explores in “Self-Representation and Fictionalysis.” She contemplates the relative value attributed to those things that are real and those things that are fictitious, that come out of “nothing”:

In our culture of ready-mades, making anything is an accomplishment, making something of yourself even more so, but add that little word “up” and you add speciousness, you add a sneer. Children learn that dressing themselves is an achievement, but dressing up is only play, child’s play as we say of something easy. Yet as children we know that play is not only easy, it is also absorbing and immensely serious, that play is the actual practice (not factual but *act-tual*) of who else we might be. (123-24)

According to Marlatt’s understanding of (Western?) society, the presence of anything other than the “factual” is regarded with suspicion and derision. In life writing, however, or in fictionalysis, there is room for “dressing up” in the many layers of identity that comprise the writing self. Because of Marlatt’s theory and practice of fictionalysis as a means of exploring the self (identity) and the intersecting “territory where fact and fiction coincide,” her work reflects a startling consciousness of the self as a socially constructed entity. The forces contributing to Marlatt’s identity-as-construction range from social and cultural influences to

contributions by her communities, and can be traced further to the influences of her family and, finally, to Marlatt's own creative and imagined self-construction: all of these are investigated, interrogated, and represented in Marlatt's writing. As Haraway says of subjectivity, "it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another" (586). Because Marlatt acknowledges that her identity is constructed (and imperfectly so), and because in *Ana Historic* she interrogates her identity through characters who represent aspects of herself or influences in her life, she is able to explore her identity in relation to other people.

Marlatt's purpose as a life writer is, ultimately, to "write for her life." For Marlatt, life writing accomplishes

the many small real-(other)-i-zations [that] can bring the unwritten, unrecognized, ahistoric ground of a life into being as a recognizable power or agency. This happens when we put together the disparate parts of our lives and begin to see the extensiveness of that cloth of connectedness we are woven into. Then we begin, paradoxically, to weave for ourselves the cloth of our life as we want it to be. For it is in the energetic imagining of all that we are that we can enact ourselves. ("Self-Representation and Fictionalysis" 127)

Marlatt seems to address her own needs as a writer "enacting herself" but also the needs of a greater community into which she has woven herself and been woven. Perreault suggests that "the embodied self articulated in the context of a feminist community is essential to that community and changes (a little at a time) the world"

(“Selves Intersecting” 132). Helen Buss, in her introduction to a life writing issue of *Prairie Fire*, also notes that life writers indeed fulfill the needs of their communities: “The autobiographer offers a portion of vulnerability of the personal self in a gesture of public testimony in order to facilitate some communal therapeutic purpose, to effect some change, some healing, some new ways of being in the world” (6). Indeed, in her many works, I would argue that Marlatt accomplishes each of these goals, and in *Ana Historic*, Marlatt accomplishes these goals as they specifically relate to the constructed white identity connected to and woven into Canadian society, showing ways of analyzing, rethinking, and hence changing this construction.



#### 4. The Colonial Canadian

Why, when I was deciding upon a writer who addresses Canadian whiteness in her work, did I select an author/poet who was not even born in this country? It is precisely *because* Marlatt writes from an immigrant-now-Canadian perspective that her writing amplifies the identity issues either consciously or subconsciously experienced by all non-Aboriginal Canadians. Whether *we*<sup>31</sup> are first or sixth generation Canadians, our ancestral ties can all be followed over land and water to other countries, ethnicities, and cultural groups. And because Canada is a state that encourages its citizens to celebrate and preserve their ethnic roots (albeit often in a superficial manner), *our* emigrant/immigrant history frames the manner in which *we* identify with our country and one another. The more distance non-Aboriginal Canadians have from their family's emigrant/immigrant experience the more tenuous that frame may be, but it still contains and shapes the thinking of the non-Aboriginal Canadian citizen. *We* are "ab-original in the new world" (*Ana Historic* 30), "away" from those people who originated in this land (Hawkins 1).

In *Ana Historic*, Marlatt conflates the eras and identities of three Canadian women, all of whom have British origins. Mrs. Ana Richards came to Vancouver in 1873, only two years after British Columbia joined Confederation. Annie, the primary narrator, and her mother, Ina, immigrated to British Columbia in the 1950s.

Despite the many differences among the women, however, Marlatt perceives many similarities that she uses to generate a colonial continuum;<sup>32</sup> one woman's voice blends into another's and for fleeting moments, readers are not certain if they are reading the words of Ana, Ina, or Annie. Through these three characters, Marlatt explores the thinking, experiences, and written history that have contributed to current white Canadian identities.

In its Canadian manifestation, whiteness is grounded in our emigrant/immigrant identities, but also and initially in our colonial history. Marlatt grounds both the emigrant/immigrant and the colonial voices in fragments of historical documents she uncovers, an activity that is mirrored when Annie uncovers historical data in a library's archives. The historical documents address life in and around the Moodyville logging camp, and are "factual" and confident; the men who documented the history through which Annie learns tell "the real story" of "the only important events in the world. a tale of their exploits hacked out against a silent backdrop of trees" (AH 28). Only events and names that were deemed of value were written down: details of logging operations; the names of recent arrivals to the Moodyville logging camp; detailed descriptions of the dimensions of, and construction materials used for, the vicarage; the arrival of a piano; and the boat, *Pearl's* loss in a local race. The details in these passages are often so tiny and trivial that it seems as though no aspect of Moodyville life in 1873 was left unwritten. Yet Annie grasps a loose thread and begins to tug when she reads: "*Miss Sweney was shortly succeeded by Mrs. Richards, who soon became Mrs. Ben Springer and cast her lot with the struggling little hamlet*" (AH 39). Annie wonders about this

woman, Mrs. Richards, who is never given a first name and whose arrival as the new school teacher is worth mention, but whose history beyond her marriage to Ben Springer is not written down and, hence, is seemingly of no value or interest.

Annie gives Mrs. Richards the first name, “Ana,” a variation of both Ina’s and her own name. Annie’s act of naming Mrs. Richards, of completing an incomplete record, is her first gesture toward reclaiming not lines, but whole pages of unwritten Canadian history. Pamela Banting, commenting on *Ana Historic*, observes that Marlatt’s

archival documents which support official history undergo a process we might call a form of translation, since the documentary language becomes denatured, provoked to yield its ideological biases. The language of history breaks down into its components, namely, the language of nominalization, categorization, hierarchization, domination, colonization, subordination and control. (125)

Certainly, Ana’s first name is omitted from the archives because of the “language of history” that summarily discounts her existence, and as part of the “nominalization, categorization, hierarchization, domination, colonization, subordination and control” of women’s lives. As Marlatt and Annie “translate” this history and imagine the first immigrant women’s experience, they also investigate Ana’s part in the colonization of the Canadian west: Marlatt explores both the racial tensions between Ana, the colonizer, and the Aboriginal people of British Columbia (the colonized), and Ana’s gendered identity colonized within a patriarchal society.

Two issues pertaining to colonial identity become prominent in the text. First, Ana constructs the First Nations people as Other: Ana's identity is based, in part, upon a white/non-white opposition. Second, Ana attempts to locate herself, a displaced English woman, in the physical space before inhabited only by white males, and before their arrival, inhabited only by Aboriginal peoples.

Through Ana, Marlatt explores the fears, both historical and contemporary, that many white people harbour of non-white people. Whites have perceived non-whites as physically or sexually threatening, violent, or unpredictable, a perception stemming, perhaps, from the traditional Western construction of non-whites as animalistic, barbaric, and uncivilized. These constructions or stereotypes, bell hooks remarks critically, "however inaccurate, are one form of representation. Like fictions, they are created to serve as substitutions, standing in for what is real" (*Black Looks* 170). As Ana walks through the forest of British Columbia, the racial fictions she carries with her become evident when she encounters two Siwash men.

Panicked, Ana wonders:

What should she say? [. . .] Were they drunk? 'They go crazy when they drink,' she heard Mrs. Patterson say. [. . .] Perhaps they were furious and meant to do her harm. She should say Good day, something civil, but she froze on the path as they approached, sick with the stories she had heard. [. . .] It was the sickness of fear and they knew it as they crowded past her as if she were a bush, a fern shaking in their way. (41-42)

Ana faces two obstacles. First, she struggles with the stories and stereotypes she has heard about Native people. Her fear stems not from any threatening move made by the men, but from the threatening image that has been projected upon the men by Mrs. Patterson and others, and that Ana has internalized. In “Remembering Fanon,” Homi Bhabha argues that the “white man does not merely deny what he fears and desires by projecting it on ‘them’. [. . .] [That] ‘they’ is always an evacuation and emptying of the ‘I’” (119). Self-conscious of being a strange person in a strange place, Ana empties her alienated “I” (a colonist whose mere presence implicates her in the displacement of the Aboriginal peoples) onto the men she encounters.<sup>33</sup> Her thoughts are merely the echoes of what other whites have told her, her evacuated “I” a collective construction.<sup>34</sup>

Ana, like most colonial (and later, neo-colonial) whites, does not recognize her fears of the Other as an “evacuation and emptying” of her individual or collective identity. To do so would be to acknowledge the social ugliness and fragility that is inherent in the white colonial identity and yet is contradictory to the way whites perceive themselves. Richard Dyer explains: “Socialized to believe the fantasy, that whiteness represents goodness and all that is benign and non-threatening, many white people assume that this is the way black people conceptualize whiteness” (qtd. in hooks, *Black Looks* 169 ). Hooks counters “that one fantasy of whiteness is that the threatening Other is always a terrorist. This projection enables many white people to imagine there is no representation of whiteness as terror, terrorizing” (*Black Looks* 174). Marlatt reveals traces of the white as terrorizing in a key passage with Ana, as the school teacher. As Ana tries to teach a Siwash child, Lily, the letter

“a,” the child “pull[s] her hand back, her small body drawn into itself and coiled like a spring away from the teacher’s desk, not touching it, not touching anything. She had felt Ana’s impatience and was embarrassed” (*AH* 91-92). Despite Ana’s attempts to maintain a judicious classroom—despite her “goodness” and “benign” and “non-threatening” ways—Lily withdraws from Ana’s contact, her vulnerability apparent to both Ana and the reader. In the same passage, Lily’s brother is terrorized by one of the white boys (and then, indirectly, by his father). Ana’s attempts to force the white students to respect the Native and Kanakan students are met with rebuke, not only from the white students but also from Danny’s father, a member of the school board. After Danny assaults Lily’s brother, all of the children, white and non-white, watch for Ana’s reaction, for she is the authority figure in the class. Although she tries to assert herself, Danny’s pointed comment (and threatening physical stance) ultimately communicate to the class that Ana, a white woman, is virtually powerless in the patriarchal colonial machine: “ ‘And I’m telling you, Ma’am, I’m not sitting next to any stinking halfbreed--’ extricating his full length from the schoolbench to face her. ‘My dad says I don’t have to neither, and he’s a Trustee’” (*AH* 92). Marlatt reveals the complexities of Ana’s colonial identity; while she is a colonizer, she does not wield the same power within colonial society that someone like Colonel Miller does, for reasons of gender, and possibly class. Dyer identifies the same duality in white women’s positions, arguing that they “simultaneously stand for white power and yet are shown to be unable to exercise it effectively or to change what they perceive to be its abuses” (30).

Marlatt does not restrict representations of the colonial fear of the Other to the passages pertaining to Ana, however. Similar fears are evident in the passages voiced by Ina, who passes her paranoia on to her daughter, Annie, thus creating a colonial continuum. The fears demonstrated by Ina are similar to Ana's, even though each woman occupies a very different place in time. Annie recalls her mother's warnings about "the woods," the wild and "anonymous territory" that lies beyond their house: "'never go into the woods with a man,' you said, 'and don't go into the woods alone'" (AH 18). For all three women, the woods are unknown and, based on the warnings of other whites (colonizers), are potentially dangerous. Not only do the warnings imply a physical threat but they also imply a sexual threat from men in general. For Annie and Ina, the woods are a place where a girl's sexual "purity" might be sullied, where one might become a "tramp, slut, [or] bitch" (AH 34). Yet Annie describes the woods, so feared by her mother, with erotic language: "the sougning, sighing of bodies, the cracks and chirps, odd rustles, something like breath escaping, [was] something inhuman i slipped through" (AH 18). Despite the patriarchal and colonial warnings to stay out of the woods and to stick to the paths, both Ana and Anna seek the woods as a refuge.

Annie "escape[s] to" the wood, a tract of land that bears no evidence of (patriarchal) development, also escaping her mother's conservative and critical eye. In this environment, Annie feels transformed and claims for herself a new identity: "i was native, i was the child who grew up with wolves, original lost girl, elusive, vanished from the world of men" (AH 18). In a later passage, Annie claims to be "feeling black" (AH 59). Annie's identification with non-white images and identities

grows out of Ana's similar identification with images and spaces that are in apparent "opposition" to her colonial roots. Through Annie's imagination, Ana admits that:

she writes as if she were living alone in the woods, her vision tried to trees and birds. she filters out the hive of human activity in which her 'cabin' sits [. . .] in the dark [. . .] she can overlook the stumps, the scarred face of the clearing that surrounds her, and see herself aboriginal in the new world (it is the old one she is at the end of). (*AH* 30)

Ana also confesses that her "keenest pleasure is to walk the woods, despite their [her fellow colonizers'] scolding me most roundly as to its dangers" (*AH* 31). These passages are both revealing and disturbing. Both Annie and Ana feel compelled toward identification with anti-colonial spaces. Although both characters are clearly situated as a white colonial or neo-colonial Canadian, neither perceives her own identity as so easily defined; each both trespasses and is trespassed upon. For Annie and Ana, their gender, sexuality, creativity, and other factors complicate their white colonial identities, and encourage them both to seek identification with and to trespass upon other/Other groups.

What troubles me about Ana's and Annie's identification with the non-white, however, is their tendency to appropriate the position of the non-white while forgetting or ignoring how they are implicated in the social mechanisms and institutions that work to oppress non-white Canadians. Ana sees herself as "alone in the woods," forgetting that those woods are already inhabited by the true native people of Canada. Similarly, Annie recalls a childhood memory of a foray into the



woods with her sister, as a journey “without history” during which they imagined they “were the first ones there, the first trespassers” (AH 19). Annie, like Ana, at first seems to disregard or forget about the people who lived on Canadian soil before the arrival of the colonizers. Indeed, this selective historical amnesia seems to cripple the minds of many white Canadians whose knowledge of Canadian history commences with the arrival of the first white people on Canadian soil, and not with the history of Canada’s Aboriginal populations. Frankenberg, in the very first pages of her book, insists that talking about whiteness involves talking about colonial and imperial history (7). For this reason, among many others, *Ana Historic* is a poignant critique of white identity in Canada, because Marlatt constructs her characters with an acute understanding of the (colonial) histories that have contributed to their ambivalent identities.

Ana’s and Annie’s shared and divergent colonial histories are emphasized with the passages that replicate actual historical documents. Initially, I struggled to determine whether Annie, a narrative persona, or Marlatt herself provides some of the commentary that accompanies (and interprets) these historical passages. The narrator (which narrator?) criticizes Ina

for not knowing there was first of all:

*‘a clearing three hundred and fifty yards along the shore, two hundred and fifty yards into the forest, boxed in by tall trees; damp, wet, the actual clearing littered with stumps and forest debris, and a profusion of undergrowth, including luxuriant skunk cabbage.’*

not knowing that there was first of all a mill and then:

*'three hotels: Deighton's, Sunnyside, and Joe Mannion's; one grocery store, and Chinese wash house, and lock-up.'* (AH 27)

If these words were Marlatt's, I would be greatly disturbed that she, too, would forget that there was something before the clearings and the buildings; if she could forget that these things were not "first". But I am then reassured that the narrative voice is either Annie's or that of a narrative persona, because later in the novel Annie finally learns that "we are the trespassers" (AH 87), acknowledging that she and her predecessor, Ana, are walking on land that has not always been theirs.

To return to Ana's encounter with the Siwash men, their construction as Other in Ana's mind is apparent because she consciously contemplates how she should respond to these men, rather than reacting in a natural and spontaneous fashion. She asks of herself, "What should [I] say?" and decides that she "should say Good day, [or] something civil." Ana embodies the social expectations of her culture. Had she met a Scottish logger on the path, she would have greeted him amiably and unselfconsciously, but because the men are not white, Ana questions her prescribed social "formulas." In her mind, she is not greeting men on the path, but *Indian* men, a situation which confuses her expectations of the social exchange. Ana confesses that she felt "fear[ful]," "ashamed," and "furious at herself" (42). Based upon actual (women's) autobiography written in the same era such as Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* or Anna Brownell Jameson's *Winter Studies and Summer*

*Rambles* in Canada, Ana's fear seems to be an authentic response. Yet her shame and anger seem to be twentieth-century projections onto a character who would not have recognized her foolishness. Indeed, Ana's shame and anger seem to stem from her realization that she was gullible to believe the gossip of Mrs. Patterson and the other immigrants.

What is problematic in this passage, however, is the way in which Marlatt uses Ana (herself a semi-fictive construction) to speculate upon the Siwash men's thoughts. Helen Buss warns that there are many ethical considerations to be made when "ghostwriting others' autobiographical expression" (26). Ana's narrative is, in many ways, a ghostwritten or fictitious autobiography. The character of Ana, and her life events, are often speculative on the part of Marlatt. Ana's character, however, also "creates" thoughts for the Others whom she encounters.

In the passage in which Ana meets the Siwash men, Ana believes that the men knew she was afraid as they pushed past her. Further on, Marlatt writes: "They were walking away slowly and only themselves, amused, she thought, with a kind of silent laughter. They had merely passed a white woman in the woods while she, she was sure to be killed" (42). While Ana is no longer frightened in the situation, the men's position of Other is reinforced by Ana's belief that they are laughing at her, and that they identify her as different from themselves because she is a "white woman in the woods." Through Ana's problematic speculation on the men's thoughts, Marlatt does honestly and adeptly capture the colonial/white tendency to presume to know what the Other thinks. Marlatt explores this tendency and its origins (at least, for Ana):

Once she [Ana] has been frightened by the Indian crone they called the Virgin Mary, who had risen like an apparition out of bush, and joining the trail with her basket of shoots, roots, whatever they were, had given her a singularly flat look, a look not at her but through, as if she were a bush or fern. At first she thought the old woman was blind, but no blind could find the path like that. There had been a large amount of sky in those eyes. [. . .] She would like to know what those eyes saw. (*AH* 96)

Again, Ana interprets an Aboriginal person's non-verbal communication in a negative light. In this passage, however, we learn that Ana's tendency to make assumptions about the Aboriginal person's intentions stems, at least in part, from her genuine curiosity about who that person is and why she is that way. But even when she wonders what it would be like to be that old woman and "what [her] eyes saw," she assumes (and rightfully so) that their experiences are different. In doing so, though, she disregards how she and the Indian crone might also share common ground. Dyer has identified, in the works of Toni Morrison, Edward Said and others, the assertion that

White discourse implacably reduces the non-white subject to being a function of the white subject, not allowing her/him space or autonomy, permitting neither the recognition of similarities nor the acceptance of differences except as a means for knowing the white self. (13)

As Ana realizes the differences (whether real or imagined) between herself and the Native people, her own identity as a white woman becomes more clear. Every time she notes how “they” are different, she does so by comparing them and their culture to herself and her culture. The Aboriginal people cannot be different in and of themselves—they must be different *from something else* (e.g. white people). Ruth Frankenberg’s study on whiteness revealed that whiteness “seem[s] comprehensible to many only by referring to the Others excluded from [this] categor[y]” (17). The ways in which the Aboriginal people are “different” define the ways in which white is “normal.” White people, in an environment composed of only white people, are not aware of their whiteness. It is an undetected yet significant part of their identities. When whites enter an environment composed of people with skin tones and cultural practices other than those with which the whites are familiar, however, they then presume that their collective identity is normative and that all others are deviations from this standard, rather than considering that they themselves are visually or culturally different.

Marlatt puts Ana in close proximity with Aboriginal characters, allowing Ana to illustrate how the white’s whiteness is affirmed when in the presence of someone non-nonwhite. Ana encounters Native and Kanakan children in her schoolroom, but she also has close exchanges with non-white people in more personal spaces. Ana remarks in her journal that she observed Ruth<sup>35</sup>:

pass her fingers slowly over the slate, as if the letters marked thereon might leap into her very skin. Our Magic is different from theirs, I see—And yet it cannot capture them—the quiet with which each

seems wrapt, a Grace ~~that~~—the Grace of direct perception, surely, untroubled by letters, by mirrors, by some foolish notion of themselves such as we suffer from. (*AH* 69)

Ruth, a Siwash woman bearing a Biblical name that “cannot be her real name” (has she been whitewashed?) relationship with Ana interests us not only because of what Ruth seems to reveal about Siwash identity, but also (and perhaps more so), what their relationship reveals about white identity (*AH* 69). Ana’s view of Ruth is romanticized when Ana uses Ruth as a contrast to Ana’s white culture. Where Ruth (and presumably other Siwash people) are not “troubled by letters, by mirrors, [or] by some foolish notion of [self],” Ana implies that whites are very much troubled by such things: the endless recording of events, the obsessive preoccupation with appearance and reputation, and the narcissism that can only be enjoyed by a privileged person. To a certain extent, certain colonial preoccupations must have, indeed, seemed peculiar and foolish to, for example, Aboriginal people. On the other hand, though, Ana reduces Ruth to a simpler being than herself, making assumptions about what does not trouble her, and never considering the types of thing that *might* be troubling her.

Ana is involved even more intimately with the Native people when she and Harriet, “the Indian Girl,” are present for the birth of Jeannie Alexander’s baby, the first white birth of Hastings Mill (*AH* 126). Ana, of course, is there as a guest, while Harriet’s role is that of a servant. In a surreal scene, Harriet carries out a rocker, cushions, and the “tea things” so that the (white) women might have proper tea while Jeannie nears labour. Harriet moves about “directly,” not announcing “her coming

or going at all” (*AH* 115). That Ana notices and finds worthy of remark Harriet’s movements indicates that Harriet’s ways of being in the social situation are noticeably different than those of the colonial women present. Again, Ana uses an Aboriginal woman as a measuring stick for her own identity. Harriet’s “direct” movements may remind Ana of her own tentative and hesitant movements, both in Britain, under the watchful eye of her father, and in the Canadian colony (and under the watchful eye of “fathers” such as school officials), where she is unsure of her place in the new society. Ana, it seems, feels accountable to a great many people: her father, her boss, her future husband, the other women of Hastings Mill, and the Aboriginal people with whom she engages.<sup>36</sup>

For Ana, undoubtedly, there are times when she feels she must record every movement and even every thought, as is apparent in her self-censuring struggle to “account for herself” (and always to her father) when she writes in her journal (*AH* 83). Moreover, the directness of Ana’s movements often seems encumbered by the weight of social (patriarchal and colonial) expectations and conventions to which she is also accountable, symbolized most effectively with the recurring motif of tea.<sup>37</sup> At times in the novel, tea appears as unremarkably as one might expect, such as when Ana feels it is tea she needs (“a good strong cup of Darjeeling”) before she can sit down to write in her journal. Tea reappears, following a colonial “grocery list,” as part of the social etiquette among the various women at Hastings Mill, as Ana records that she is to have “tea at Mrs. A’s with S., Mrs A. very big with child. S.—I am so to call her, formality she said will not withstand the rigours of life in ‘the bush’—S. is forthright by nature and perhaps by Yankee custom” (*AH* 113). While

Susan Patterson has no predilection toward observing strict social conventions (and hence insists that Ana call her by her first name), Ana dismisses this behaviour because Patterson is American, and also because of her intimate role as nurse and midwife.<sup>38</sup> Mrs. A (Jeannie Anderson) and the other women, however, still observe the formalities associated with tea. Tea is poured out of a “silver pot” (despite being in “the bush”), an image that contrasts the “civilized” with the “wild.”<sup>39</sup> Annie imagines (and projects from her own experience) the importance of tea to Ana’s social circle:

tea to be sipped, a saving grace. the reward of freight, lace at the cuff,  
backbone properly erect, extended on a silver plate a sigh (shared),  
small talk, small things in hand. conserves, preserves of energy  
lapped with the turning tide. to savour is to know how to pace, lacing  
fortitude and will with a temperate grace. (AH 115-16)

The language used to describe the taking of tea, as a symbol of colonial tradition, is heavy in two senses. The tea passages are laden with the paraphernalia of tea—one does not simply *drink* tea, one *performs* tea (as in the Japanese tea ceremony)—and so we learn of the gendered costume (“lace at the cuff”), the posture (“backbone properly erect”), the props (“silver plate”), and the foods (conserves and preserves). But the passages are also weighted with an overbearing sense of restraint (tea to be sipped and savoured, not gulped), of affectation (shared sighs and “small talk”), and of control (“lacing fortitude and will with a temperate grace”). The aforementioned passage reveals the desirable characteristics of the colonizer and the white: practicing



and conveying the impression of control and restraint (signs of superiority) through the vehicles of obvious social “grace,” pomp, and circumstance.<sup>40</sup>

Annie interprets, then, that Ana (and Annie?) were

having tea as if. manners maketh woman, into lady – the lady-would-rather, that indirect thing a pose, a mode of offering, circuitous.

figurehead, and having nothing. tea the liquid medium in which they breast the unspoken. going around in circles. claimed, unable to claim. boarded (up). (AH 116)

Here, the tea image boils; the simple motif becomes more complex. First tea functions as a domestic marker. Then it reveals its colonial roots, the social conventions tied to colonialism (and white identity) and its repressive and controlling nature. For Marlatt and Annie, these qualities seem to culminate in a repressive environment for women, even though these women exist within the inner sanctum of colonial society. Ana is always experiencing conflict between what is expected of her and her inclinations. Perhaps she feels that if she meets with the other wives for tea, sits properly, is well-mannered, and engages in the ever-circling conversations (that is, if she fulfils her social contract), then she can board up those wild tendencies of hers that are incongruous with the identity of a proper, white English woman.

And certainly, Ana’s experience and narrative illuminate the difference between being a colonial *man* and a colonial *woman*. While there are passages in which Ana reflects colonial thinking that could convincingly be that of a man or woman, there are also passages in which gender becomes a crucial component of Ana’s colonial identity (a complexity that is mirrored in both Annie and Ina’s

construction of their white identities). For Ana, the colonial woman, her identity is shaped by the social pressure to be a “proper” woman protecting and relinquishing her sexuality in socially acceptable ways, and by the control that the colonial men exercise over the colony.<sup>41</sup>

The proper English woman (and the ideal white woman) must, in essence, emulate perfection. Annie speculates that Ana—Mrs. Richards—“stood as straight as any tree” (*AH* 14), that she must have been “well-read [. . .] writing with a touch of the sublime, that nineteenth-century sense of grandeur, in her immaculate teacher’s handwriting” (*AH* 20). The social code of the time for a proper woman dictated not women, but “ladies”:

a word that has claimed so much from women trying to maintain it. the well-ironed linen, clean (lace at the cuffs, at the collar), well-tailored dresses and wraps, the antimacassars, lace tablecloths, the christening bonnets. Beyond that, a certain way of walking, of talking. and always that deference, that pleased attention to the men who gave them value, a station in life, a reason for existing. lady, *hlaēfdige*, kneader of bread, mistress of a household, lady of the manor, woman of good family, woman of refinement and gentle manners, a woman whose conduct conforms to a certain standard of propriety. (*AH* 32)

And Ana’s father, who thinks of her as a “Gentlewoman,” would be worried that she was living amongst such a “Rough Lot” (*AH* 55). Ana is struck with guilt when she suggests dancing at the schoolhouse party, self-conscious immediately that

“she had slipped, she a minister’s daughter.[ . . .] [S]he the school teacher, a model of propriety no doubt”(AH 72). Ana is (almost) inescapably cognizant of her father’s (and the colonial Fathers’) ever-critical gaze at her actions and their lack of conformity to a certain “standard of propriety.”

The pressure Ana feels to be the proper Englishwoman is suffocating, particularly when contrasted with the woman whom she feels herself to be. Ana’s language moves between expressions of captivity and repression, and expressions of freedom and the desire to seek that freedom. From the time when Ana first arrives at Hastings Mill on a ship, she is already “imagining herself free of history” (AH 14). Her time spent in the woods, a “colonial-free” zone, tempts her to lose her “English self” (AH 20) and she sees that she is “in the midst of freedom and yet not free, and could almost think how little is changed” (54). In the latter revelation, Ana discloses the complexity of her plight—to gain freedom, she must not only lose her English self, but also her (Western) female self. She laments, “she should have been born a man, she wanted too much. She wanted to be free or at least freer than she was, than she had managed to be” (AH 104). Gender and sexuality are as integral to Ana’s identity as is her status as a (white) colonist. Ana is not merely a colonist, but a female—and specifically, a “lady” colonist.

And most certainly, Ana senses that her gender influences her status in the colony. Ultimately, the colony is a man’s domain from which she might benefit, but which she cannot transcend or escape. The “city fathers” (28) are the “heroes” of the historical “roman / ce” (67). The city fathers are the ones who construct the mould into which the “Proper Lady” should fit, a mould that Ana fears she does not fit into,

both because of the way she thinks (desiring freedom) and because of her unmarried (although widowed) status. Annie, reading into Ana, criticizes this mould:

Proper, she says, Lady, capitalized, and it is barely sounded, the relationship between proper and property. [. . .] [S]he alone is without ‘protection,’ as they would say. subject then, to sly advances under the guise of moral detection, subject to agonizing [...]subject to self-doubt in a situation without clearly defined territory (because she is no one’s property, she is ‘free’ without being sexually free), she feels her differences from the other women. (AH 32)

Ana and Annie identify that within the colonial society, women are regarded as property (colonial law supports her observation), and to this notion is closely attached the understanding that as property, a woman’s sexuality is not her own.

Women (and men) understand that

*getting a husband – or in some cases a ‘protector’ – is for her [the proper lady] the most important of undertakings.[ . . .] She will free herself from the parental home, from her mother’s hold, she will open up her future, not by active conquest but by delivering herself up, passive and docile, into the hands of a new master. (AH 95)<sup>42</sup>*

Ana’s social environment often seems charged with a sexual tension derived from the expectation that she will be both a “decent” lady, kept “well-covered, her sexuality hidden” (AH 33), and yet also a married woman (having sex), adding to the colony’s (white) population.<sup>43</sup>

This tension is heightened by the implied sexual threat she perceives from many of the men in the colony, causing Ana, a young “available” woman, to become “preoccupied with the look the men give her. so many men and so few women in that place” (AH 54). And these “so many” men have come to Canada with very specific aims in mind, aims that reveal a great deal about the collective ethics and values held by the patriarchy. The men seek to devour the land and its resources for the benefit of the colony, and are remorseful only that they did not arrive sooner to log “the country that hadn’t been touched” (AH 63). This image hauntingly echoes that of a man eager to “deflower” a virgin, a disturbing and violent image. When running afraid through the wood, she wonders what or whom she fears. After dismissing a fear of bears or cougars, not surprisingly, she thinks that perhaps it is *men* whom she fears: “madmen,” “drunken seamen,” or “Indians running amok” (AH 96). Ana muses about the choice presented to her: either she may remain single and “free” and a “secret friend perhaps to Birdie Stewart” and destined then to a stained reputation and constantly at the mercy of the unwanted sexual gaze of the colonial men (AH 108) or she may succumb to the pressures to remarry, uttered even by Susan Patterson who exclaims, “I cannot imagine a woman as good with children as you who would wish to remain childless” (AH 119).<sup>44</sup> The colonial woman’s role is to support the colony’s men, and to expand the colony’s population through reproduction (and training of the children produced). The colony encourages, then, a fear of madmen, drunken seamen, and Indian (non-White) men, effectively scaring women into marriage with white patriarchs.

The social pressure to be a proper lady is not the only one that controls Ana's movements and causes her anxiety regarding her desires that conflict with her perceived obligations. The influences of religion (Christianity) are significant in Ana's self-construction. Marlatt brilliantly connects Ana's religious influences to her father (the patriarchal influence, both in a real and symbolic sense), who is a clergyman. Not only, then, does Ana feel obliged to answer to her father as a father figure, but figuratively, she also answers to the Christian God through him. From scattered references, Annie interprets that Ana's relationship with her father was bitter. He was "no doubt overbearing, a clergyman with absolute authority as to the real (at least in his eyes), he must have been appalled at the thought of his daughter leaving him for the wilds of Canada" (AH 55). Although Ana's independence and strong character are evident throughout the novel, I find this passage reveals much about Ana's identity. Ana's father was overbearing, and even more, was an "absolute authority," and yet—*and yet*—his daughter *left him*.

This courageous act on her part is not enough, however, to wrench her Father from her conscience or her journal. Although she "wrote for herself" (AH 20), she catches herself constantly "editing out" and "thinking about those possible others leaning over her shoulder as she writes" (AH 46), one of whom is, undoubtedly, her father. When she struggles "to account for herself" and what she "might say," she (sometimes) relies upon safe and conventional phrases such as "I am well" and "praise God," and shortly thereafter addresses her father in her journal. Because standard social conventions and deeply ingrained religious tenets are those things that first flood Ana's mind when she sits down to a blank page, we see how

significantly and thoroughly her father/Father has shaped her identity. And as Ana begins to explore her relative freedoms in Canada, her father's critical voice haunts her: "Ana, my wayward child, you are straying close to animism, souls in trees and other pagan notions. you, the daughter of a man of God. explain yourself" (AH 84). Ana recognizes the word "pagan" as one that is used by the Christians to dismiss any knowledge or way of being that is outside of the colonial norm, a realization to which she comes when she contemplates Ruth's fascination with the writing slate (AH 69). Ana's father articulates the utmost fear of the colonizing power: that the colonists will "go native," shrugging off their Christian, Western, "civilized" culture in exchange for the "wild," "uncontrolled / uncontrollable," and uncivilized culture of the Native people. In her role as widowed school teacher to "children familiar with eagles and bears, with killing accident, with salmonberry and vanilla leaf. children who knew nothing of Blair's Sermons, *The Young Lady's Friend*, or Shelley and Keats" (AH 84), Ana creates for herself a subject position that is not Native, but that does undercut the colonial position that she is expected to occupy.

Marlatt explores the colonial fear of what the colonists label as "wild" through the image of the bear. Throughout the novel, both in Ana's and Ina's time frames, the often frightful spectre of encountering a bear looms for any woman who contemplates wandering outside of her prescribed boundaries and into "the woods" (both real and symbolic). Ana frequently comments that she has been warned against bears and that she should fear bears, and yet she does not appear overly concerned about encountering one. When she awakens from a dream, she has dreamt not of being chased or mauled by a bear, but rather, of having shared a path with one.

Groggily, she remembers, “There were others there on other paths, there had been a bear” (*AH* 85). Annie does speculate that Ana pulls her “black shawl more tightly around [herself] at the thought of bears,” but generally Ana seems more fearful of men and the Native people (*AH* 104). Annie recalls her own lumbering memories of bears:

sometimes they would raid our garbage cans at night and the phones would ring all up and down the block, there’s a bear at the Potts’, keep the dogs and kids inside. excitement, peering through the windows out at streetlight pooling gravel. so they were real then? shambling shadows, garbage eaters, only a little larger than the Newfoundland next door. but something canny in them, resistant to attempts to scare them off, looking over their shoulders with contempt, four-footed men in shaggy suits intent on a meal. (*AH* 18)

While Annie’s bears are not tame, her description of them as “shambling shadows [and] garbage eaters” is less than fear-inspiring. So what has happened to “the wild” (the unknown people, land, animals, and climate) of Canada, symbolized by the bear, that it has evolved for the white Canadian from an image of terror to one of suspicion, spectacle, wariness, and even pity? I find the answer to this question in the history that Marlatt writes. Ana suddenly finds herself eye to “small, wild” eye with a bear, not on a forest path, but “chained to [George Black’s] verandah” (*AH* 103). This bear was not consistent with the animal about which she had heard:

Bears were said to be temperamental. You never knew when one would rear up from behind a bush and slash out at you. This one



looked sad and rather mangy squatting in the refuse of its own droppings with a chain around its neck, its great claws negligent against the planking. The way it sat on its haunches it could have been a child sitting on the floor with imaginary blocks, invisible letters. Except that its eyes were the eyes of a beast—immeasurably sad. Why would a man keep a bear? It wasn't tame but dying. (*AH* 103)

We can trace key elements of Annie's modern treatment of the bear back to this colonial (mis)treatment. When the colonists first arrived, they greatly feared the bears and, furthermore, the male colonists used that fear to control the female members of their population. For the "enterprising" and the "brave" men, however, control rather than fear of bears became desirable. Hence the efforts of people such as George Black to restrict, confine, and alter the bear, trying to force it to serve his purposes. Despite being captured, however, the bear was not "tame but dying;" the bear no longer walks as it had, but it passively resists its confinement by dying. Similarly, when colonists first arrived in Canada, they feared the Aboriginal people (and all other "foreign" aspects of Canada), generating for white people an identity characterized by the white heroic need to defeat the so-called savages. Once traders and politicians and other "enterprising" and "brave" people tried to control the movements and rights of Aboriginal people through legislation, the white identity changed from that of conqueror to that of benevolent saviour. Frankenberg identifies that the "classic colonialist view of the conquered society [is] a view of past glories

[of conquered nations] and present degradations (from which, within a colonialist ideology, it is the conqueror's duty to save the poor native)" (59).

Frankenberg expresses theoretically what Marlatt uncovers creatively in her work: the colonial process is ongoing, merely changing its appearance with more subtly-phrased legislature. Annie's exploration (excavation, exhumation) of Ana's and Ina's past is, in part, a self-discovery. Ana's difficulties with her identity, (lack of) freedom within a white, patriarchal society, expected treatment of the Other, and attempts to conform to repugnant social codes and expectations are all reflected in Annie's reflection upon Ina, and sometimes even in her self-reflection. Despite separation by time, the women's narrative threads seem enmeshed: "Ana / Ina / whose story is this? / (the difference of a single letter) / (the sharing of a not)" (*AH* 67).

## 5. Ina and Annie: The White Canadian as Emigrant and Immigrant

By using Marlatt's novel as a vehicle to explore constructions of Canadian whiteness, we can see that the characters of Ina and Annie seem to serve two particularly significant purposes. First, because they are situated in more recent eras than Ana, we see their racial construction not in a historical, but in a contemporary context. While the passages about Ana explore her colonial white identity, the passages on both Ina and Annie uncover a continuation of the colonization process, thereby substantiating critical assertions that Canadians currently live in neocolonial, rather than postcolonial times. Ina and Annie, being both emigrant and immigrant, illustrate the relationships that white Canadians have with their ancestral origins and with their "home and native land." The white Canadian is often torn between looking back and looking forward, an inner struggle that is personified in the two separate characters of Ina and Annie in *Ana Historic*.

Before looking more closely at the characters of Ina and Annie, I found it useful to identify how I, as a white Canadian, think about culture. There is a need to engage in such clarification because the word *culture* keeps surfacing in the writings of Frankenberg, Gonick, Steinberg, and Itwaru. The culture with which people identify (and within which they construct their identity) is directly related to the social group with which those people identify. Colonizers and emigrants are deeply

connected to their country of origin, and therefore attempt to perpetuate its cultural practices. Immigrants, conversely, are more interested in adopting the cultural practices of their new country's citizens.

Frankenberg's simple, yet crucial point, that culture is not static, will guide my discussion. I first realized the impact of this notion when I considered Frankenberg's statement that colonial discourse makes the "sharp distinction between modernity and tradition in which traditional societies [are] deemed repositories of culture and modern societies not so" (192). A "traditional" society is, in the hegemonic view, a less civilized society, while a "modern" society refers to a civilized and Western society. My experience is that white Canadians represent traditional and ethnic societies in anthropological terms, through media such as museum displays containing ancient costumes, weapons, and crockery, or textbooks detailing traditional customs and practices. The problem with such representations is that the viewing (and presumably modern) society is encouraged to see the traditional society as an artifact—the modern society depicts traditional culture as something frozen in time, thereby circumventing any possibility of recognizing the traditional society as dynamic, evolving, and animate, and enabling such value-laden (and inaccurate) labels as "traditional" and "modern."

Frankenberg's ideas about static (and dynamic) culture are equally fascinating when applied, however, to white Canadian society, whose members are either immigrants or are the descendants of immigrants and whose government has made it a national mandate to keep this foremost in our consciousness. Itwaru

defines the immigrant in terms that are consistent with both Ina's and Annie's experience when arriving in Canada:

The stranger categorized in the name and label "immigrant" is already invented as "immigrant," a distinction which is also synonymous, upon arrival. This person is no longer only a bearer of another history, but also has now become a particular *other*, the bearer of a label invented by the "host." This person has become the immigrant—this term of depersonalization which will brand her and him for the rest of their lives in the country of their adoption. (13-14)

White Canadians, who boast to the world of their country's multiculturalism and tolerance, succeed in creating amongst both white and non-white Canadians a "particular other" by labeling new Canadians "immigrant." This label forces both the "host" and the bearer of the label to sometimes be cognizant of the new Canadian's "other history" and other (non-Canadian) culture. Annie frequently connects images of her tea-breathed mother (*AH* 10) with the English and colonial cultural paraphernalia she brought with her to Canada: woolies and sweeties, hotties and hermits for tea (*AH* 23). Their British and colonial language, and their cultural materials and practices, are enough to set both Ina and Annie apart from mainstream white Canada. Despite being white, their status amongst other whites is lessened because they are culturally different from those who speak "Canadian".

Marnina Gonick asserts that to be "Canadian" is to be "anglo"; to be blonde, blue-eyed, English-speaking, and white. She also argues:

Those claiming anglo identity have projected ethnicity into others and thereby naturalize their own as generically Canadian. Thus, while multiculturalism may be a celebration of difference it is also a fossilization or romanticization of immigrant culture. (96)

Ina's and Annie's narratives indicate that apparently even those "claiming an anglo identity" are subject to exclusion from "true" Canadian society, for their accents, clothing, and food all state clearly to Canadian-born citizens that they are immigrants and not "native" Canadians.

But I am eager to explore Gonick's recognition of the Canadian practice of fossilizing or romanticizing immigrant culture. Indeed, the multicultural movement tried to erase the negative history of difference in Canada, thus creating the (romantic) façade of a country comfortable with its multi-ethnic composition. Another consequence of this romanticization, however, was the fossilization of those ethnic cultures. Steinberg suggests nonetheless that immigrants are "purveyors of authentic culture" (45). As different ethnic groups settled in Canada, they typically maintained many of their cultural practices. While they may have settled amongst people of the same ethnic origin, however, they were no longer in daily contact with their cultural homeland, and therefore their cultural pool was not fed by a spring of fresh cultural input from its original source. Perhaps it is for this reason that recent immigrants do not always feel welcomed as Canadians; the immigrant's "authentic culture" reminds "native" Canadians that their ancestors are not of Canada. The ideal Canadian, to qualify Gonick's definition, is one who identifies with an anglo identity, and who demonstrates no signs of unnaturalized "ethnicity." For Mrs. Ana

Richards, her English accent and culture would have been an asset for her in terms of claiming greater social status than whites of other ethnicities (such as the Scottish or Irish). But after the initial phase of colonization in Canada, any accent or other signs of difference potentially reduced one's social status.

While Canadians are certainly guilty of othering immigrants because of their foreign culture, those immigrants may sometimes be equally eager to maintain a distinction between themselves and their new countrymen. Ina, a depressed emigrant housewife in the 1950s, seems constantly at odds with her new homeland. When she is not lecturing Annie on the superiority of British language and customs, she is “criticizing [Canada] for its lack of culture” (AH 22). Annie recalls that “looking smart was part of [Ina's] identity [. . .] (‘Canadian women have no pride -- they look such frights on the street with their hair up in curlers’)” (AH 57), and later on, Ina chastises Annie with “you have no taste,” indicating her disapproval of her immigrant daughter's newly acquired Canadian ways (AH 57). For Ina, her perceived class superiority to that of her fellow Canadians contributes greatly to her identity as a white Canadian emigrant, even though Ina, her husband, and daughters suffered a tremendous financial loss when immigrating to Canada. Annie reports that Ina is reduced to spending hours “shopping for bargains, shopping department store basements or poring over Sears catalogues, dismissing things that looked ‘cheap,’ vainly trying to clothe [her daughters] with the class [she] had in the tropics where [her] clothes were handsewn by Chinese tailors” (AH 33). Ina's class obsession is not unrealistic, for certainly, wealth and social refinement are two of the criteria by which the “true whites” are selected and all others are tossed roughly down the rungs

of the social ladder. Class distinctions may determine “shades of white” among whites, however Marilyn Frye argues that “[people of color] do not generally indicate that class differences among white people make much difference to how people of color experience them” (*Willful Virgin* 159). Frye’s comment is consistent with my suspicion that regardless of most (all?) variations of white identity, non-whites experience whiteness as fairly monolithic.

Ina constantly distances herself from “Canadians,” emphasizing that she does not identify herself as one. Annie remembers her mother’s “dictionary, [her] immigrant weapon. [. . .] [R]eal? [she] said, what is ‘real cute’? Canadians don’t know how to speak proper English. real is an adjective, look” (*AH* 17). The irony, however, is that Ina has not arrived in Canada after a life in England but, rather, after having been raised in colonial outposts where her parents were stationed. Annie speculates on her mother’s most private thoughts and desires:

what did you dream, Ina, in your golfing skirt, demure knees, a pretty face they said at The Club, something immeasurably sad within those eyes. what did you imagine of a future so far away from your parents’ house in the tropics, their dogs, their servants, their endless games of Ouija at the mahogany table, tipped-up sherry glasses gliding mysteriously under fingers’ touch, letter by letter spelling out your fate: “you will die insane in a foreign country.” you were already in a foreign country where you didn’t belong. You had already been left in one, left at boarding school in a country they called “home” which was nothing like the India you remembered.



[ . . . ] [T]his was the life [in Canada] you chose, opening up your future to it so your children wouldn't have to leave, so *they could grow up in a country to which they belonged*. (italics mine AH 98)

Ina's English identity was founded on an already removed and romanticized conception of being English, an identity that influenced her daughters' self-perceptions. That Ina remembers a certain "India," indicates that she felt a degree of identification with that country, even though she was in a "foreign country where [she] didn't belong."<sup>45</sup> Quite obviously, Ina struggled with her own identity and ethnicity, and with which country she should call "home." I find it mysterious, then, that Annie believes her mother brought them to Canada, because it would be a "country to which they belonged." Why did Ina try to instill in her daughters her English mannerisms, values, and language—"o the cultural labyrinth of our inheritance, mother to daughter to mother" (AH 24) — if she wanted them to become convincing Canadians? Why did Ina feel her daughters would belong to Canada when she was always a foreigner, in every country she resided? Did she really want them to become Canadian when she constantly instilled in them a paranoia of setting foot outside of the house into the "wild" territory that was beyond her control?

So many of Annie's memories of her mother reflect Ina's preoccupation with appearance, image, and reputation, a symptom of Ina's identity crises, what Dyer and Frye both identify as the struggle to succeed at whiteness/whiteliness from the position as a *woman* in white culture. Countless hours of Ina's life are spent trying to convey the image of a perfect, refined, proper English woman, just as countless other white, middle-class, North American wives and mothers of the 1950s tried with

equal fervency to present an image of domestic perfection. In her struggle with her identity, Ina reveals how she is both “colonist” and “colonized,” a complicated subject position. While Ina desperately clutches at her English parentage as proof of social superiority, and while her efforts to appear well-to-do become a full-time job, the very middle-class people she tries to meet are the same people that set the gate-keeping and set the nearly unattainable standards that cause Ina tremendous psychological distress. In a post mortem address to her mother, Annie identifies Ina’s greatest internal disjunction between who she believes herself to be, and who she believes she is *supposed* to be:

you never lived alone. you went from your parents’ colonial house to boarding school, then back to your parents and into marriage with your own servants. always you lived surrounded by voices: quarrels, dreams, demands, the crises of others in several different languages. you never lived alone until you came here and found yourself suddenly placed with empty days on your hands, weeks and months of days alone in a house with all its chores crying out for you to do. the voices came from inside now, the way you whipped yourself into a frenzy of activity in the face of nothing.[ . . .] [Y]ou were always home where your place was, with the sawdust furnace, with the wood stove for heat, hanging clothes anywhere you could to dry them. filling up the silence with songs. black working songs, slave songs.

(*AH* 137)<sup>46</sup>

This passage reveals not only the dramatic transition Ina made from her childhood to her new Canadian home, but also Ina's desperate attempt, like that of the other homemakers of the 1950s, to imagine a perfect domestic sphere. Ina faces far more obstacles in this regard than her white, middle-class counterparts, because she does not have the same financial resources as those women. Ina's chores are made more tedious by this fact, because not only can she not afford domestic help, but neither can she afford the types of amenities (such as an electric clothes dryer) that might make her workload lighter.

And the same social expectations that make clear to Ina her failings as an aspiring white, anglo-middle-class woman are also responsible for medicalizing Ina's psychological response to her situation, punishing her for being incapable of completing the impossible task of forming a cohesive and acceptable (white female) identity from the myriad of emigrant experiences that form her sense of self. Annie details Ina's struggle:

That's your voice, Ina, lucid and critical, seeing through the conventions that surrounded you. and though you saw through them, you still didn't know what to do with the fear that found you alone on the far side of where you were 'supposed' to be. wrong, therefore. guilty of 'going to [sic] far.' (*AH* 135)

Ina, the patient, is "clearly identified as the 'sick' member of the family and the family is reassured they don't need to feel guilty or in any way responsible" (*AH* 145). While the white Canadian population has been responsible for countless acts of inhumanity against non-whites, Ina is a reminder that even those who wear the

skin like a consciously-donned article of clothing, and try to “perfect whiteness,” are not immune from the normalizing reach of white patriarchal medicine.

Unlike her mother, Annie, through her immigrant perspective, is embarrassed by the ethnicity that sets her apart from her school friends, and seeks to shrug off that ethnicity in exchange for what she perceives as Canadian-ness. To become Canadian, for Annie, is to look forward and to embrace something new, but, at least for a time, it also seems to demand that she sacrifice her history in exchange. Annie’s narrative thread that carries throughout and ultimately gives the novel the frame upon which the other narratives are stretched, repeatedly reveals the tension she feels as a woman whose identity is always shifting.

Annie’s language, interests, studies, and personal life are all discordant with the life-path that Ina had originally chosen for her daughter, one that supports the white narrative. Rather than employ the formal, standard English preferred by her mother, Annie’s (and Marlatt’s) narrative flouts all grammatical conventions.<sup>47</sup> Sentences do not begin with capitals (and what are presented as sentences are not always sentences); punctuation is used effectively, but not as a reader and Ina might anticipate; and the diction is clearly “Canadian” (while Annie treats Ina’s English colloquialisms with bemusement). Annie takes an interest in the details of historical Canadian documents, unlike Ina who was “never interested in any past outside of England’s” (*AH* 22). And when her interest leads to academic work on the subject, Annie imagines Ina’s critical voice chastising a methodology that “indulg[es] in outright speculation. [that] isn’t history, it’s pure invention,” accusing Annie of “simply making things up, out of a perverse desire to obscure the truth” (*AH* 55). In

every sense, Annie seems to fight her mother and her traditional, English colonial ways.

Yet the battle is not silent, nor is it won; despite all of Annie's efforts to hack away her English roots (with both Indian and Malay influences), evidence of her first self and her allegiance to Ina, her mother, continually betray Annie.<sup>48</sup> Much of this evidence appears before we even have finished the first twenty pages of the book. The contradictions, so heavily peppered in the first part of the novel, alert us to Annie's fractured sense of self. Seemingly simple and innocent slips such as referring to Ina as "Mummy" (rather than the conventional North American, "Mom") reveal that Ina's English is deeply imprinted in Annie's mind (*AH* 11). When Annie recalls her mother labeling her a "tomboy," Annie clarifies this label by exploring characters from classical English literature such as Robin Hood and Lancelot (*AH* 13). Annie also adopts her mother's love of libraries, books, and

historical novels, family history with its lurid stretches shaping the destiny of a nation. consoled by this, that the familial, the mundane, could actually have historic proportions? kings and queens in bed with you of an afternoon. rain, rain. (*AH* 16)

Annie also tries to emulate Ina's values and desires by "stay[ing] in the house as a good girl should" (*AH*16), "follow[ing] the plotline through, the story [Ina] had [Annie] enact" (*AH* 16), and "being initiated into a world of middle-class romance" (*AH* 97).

Annie the immigrant, however, tries to forget all these parts of herself so that she might belong to her new country.<sup>49</sup> Her desire to wipe out that part of her identity

that might differentiate her from the (apparently) homogenous, white Canadian culture is consistent with Gonick's assertion that the "fashioning of [a homogenous, white, English] national identity involve[s] a suppression of knowledge" (100). The suppression of knowledge to which Gonick refers is not only, as in Annie's case, the suppression of certain aspects of a self on a private level, but also a more systemic suppression of historical events (and more pointedly, historical injustices enacted by one group upon another). Richard, Annie's husband, reminds her that "one missing piece [of history] can change the shape of the whole picture." Annie responds, "but i'm no longer doing my part looking for missing pieces. at least not missing facts. not when there are missing persons in all this rubble" (AH 134). The missing persons are the "a-historic" ones who have no "speaking part" (AH 139), people such as Ana Richards who have been entirely buried, except for one sentence, under a mountain of patriarchal historical documents and details. And Annie refers to all the women just like Ana Richards who have also been lost under historical "rubble," obscuring the various components that went into the foundation of Canada as a whole.<sup>50</sup> Yet the missing pieces are also critical: the immigrants who have either voluntarily left behind, or felt it necessary to forsake, the pieces of themselves connected to their ancestral lands also erase pieces of the whole picture of Canada. Immigrants may push parts of themselves to the backs of their minds, but they still bring those "pieces" to Canada and add it to our cultural canvas. Eakin argues that "culture is the silent partner in the transaction" of negotiating a sense of selfhood," even, presumably, if the people negotiating their selfhood try to ignore or forget that part of their identities ("Relational Selves" 72).

How useful, however, is it to speak of Canada as a country of colonizers, immigrants, and emigrants, when many of its people are second- or third- generation Canadians and have no memories of the “old country,” its culture, or even its language? Canada is a country inhabited by actual colonizers, immigrants, and emigrants, but even those whites who were born in Canada can symbolically occupy one or more of these positions (as well as countless other positions constituted by sexuality or gender). I would like to consider these terms in light of Frankenberg’s assertion that culture is not static. The colonizer’s, the emigrant’s, and the immigrant’s cultural practices are no longer fed directly from their homeland. But their culture is a part of them that then *evolves* in their new country and is, then, as in the case of Ina and Annie, passed from one generation to the next. Culture and ethnicity are not “things” that are brought into Canada in suitcases and hatboxes, to be kept on a shelf and carefully brought out for special occasions, yellowing and becoming brittle over time. Instead, culture and ethnicity live in the people who come to this country and then change as these people interact with one another and with people already here. Each person’s “piece” then, is a critical part of understanding the greater puzzle of Canadian whiteness. An individual may or may not acknowledge that his/her ethnic background has had any significant impact on his/her life, but that ethnic group has contributed to the formation of (white) Canada, and brings with it a history that should not be ignored. Zoe’s character succinctly encapsulates the status of the contemporary white Canadian when she touches the back of Annie’s hand and says, “that’s the trouble with history—it never is [history]” (*AH* 132). To whitewash our colonial past in textbooks, classrooms and

conversations,<sup>51</sup> to disregard our immigrant composition, to ignore our immigrant imaginations is to naively believe that history forgotten will remain in the past. But history never *is* past, and to lose sight of this inevitability is, as many have reminded us, to condemn ourselves to make the same mistakes. Although born in Canada to parents born in Canada, I am, in part and at different times, the colonizer, the sentimental emigrant, and the forward-looking immigrant.

So where, after this discussion of emigrants and immigrants, do we position white Canadians in regard to their ethnicity and cultural heritage? On the side of our multicultural efforts, represented by the emigrants who choose to look back to the old country and remember the old ways, I identify a superficial fascination with static forms of culture, a fascination that is counter-productive when striving to improve race relations in Canada. In contrast, there are Canadians, represented by immigrants, who try to remedy this superficial fascination by aligning themselves with a singular national identity (Canadian), and who think about Canada's political and social future believing in national commonality among citizens. But this position is also potentially dangerous because whites are at risk of forgetting that Canada's current social hierarchies have developed out of decades of racial and ethnic tensions. Of course, no white individual believes entirely in one position or the other, but instead manifests characteristics of both the emigrant and the immigrant.

As represented by Ana, the Canadian white identity, whether forward- or backward-looking, is founded in the colonial history of our country. But Canadian colonial *history* (yet again) is not past—an hour spent in a high school social-studies



class, ten minutes spent reading the newspaper, or time spent listening to political commentary on a radio program reveals that colonialism is anything but in the past. Perhaps this is why issues of race, ethnicity, and identity are so topical and so sensitive in Canada. To interrogate white Canadian identity and to understand its social role in the country, whites must, like the emigrant, look back from where they have traveled, and recognize that their “heads are full of other people’s words” (AH 81). But whites can also recognize, like the immigrant, that there *is* something “without quotation marks” (AH 81). Recorded history, such as the British Columbia history that is interspersed among the passages about Ana, Ina, and Annie, is that which lies *within* quotation marks. That history clearly serves a colonial and patriarchal master, whereas the histories of Ana, Ina, and Annie, as imagined and written by Annie, are narratives that are *without* quotation marks. These stories have not been told before, that are grounded in the colonial story yet require imagination to make up their absence in the pages of “real” history. Likewise, whites can learn colonial history, yet should also, through alternate sources of information, seek to imagine and fill in those pages that were never written. They can chose to live in and by “history *and* imagination” (italics mine, AH 139).

Ana and Annie apply both their knowledge of history, and their imaginations as they literally construct their identities, through writing. Ana rails against her father and the patriarchy he represents, while Annie constantly tries to untangle her self from the historical webs in the library archives (and in her mother’s history). Marlatt clearly expresses to readers that the process of “writing themselves” is neither easy nor apolitical for either Ana or Annie. As mentioned in my

introduction, some critics of life writing believe that the writing self is “autonomous and unified” and that the “essential core of being transcends the outward signs of environmental and social conditioning,” while others assert that she is “*subject* as in subject of the state, or subject to the law” (Rice and Waugh 123). In *Ana Historic*, as in many of her other works, Marlatt does not restrict the theoretical underpinnings of her creative work to any one school of thought. In *Ana Historic*, in particular, Marlatt rejects the notion that the (writing) self can be *either* “autonomous and unified” *or* exclusively a “subject,” that is *subject to* external forces. Rather, the writing self is suspended somewhere between these two ideas, at times swaying more in one direction than the other.

Ana and Annie assert their autonomous selves through the act of recording their words on paper, despite self-conscious musings that “no one would ever follow that sentence” (*AH* 86). Autonomy, Annie interprets, is found in Ana’s act of “writing what would become a record,” and when “her hand hovered, her mind jumped. [and] she could have imagined anything and written it down as real forever—“ (*AH* 29-30). By both recording a voice that was not typically privileged in Ana’s time, and by controlling and manipulating and even imagining what is recorded, Ana (and Annie) generate a counter-narrative, a narrative that subverts the “history [that] is the real [i.e. widely accepted] story” (*AH* 28). And Annie, by finding Ana in the historical rubble and digging her story free, becomes the “I / my” who is “laying down tracks with facts rescued against the obscurity of bush” (*AH* 29), the “I” and “my” reclaiming a lost story.<sup>52</sup> Ana, Annie, Ina and Marlatt caution the reader that traditional history “is the historic voice (voice over), elegiac,

epithetic. a diminishing glance as the lid is closed firmly and finally shut. that was her. summed up. Ana historic” (AH 48). The cooperative act shared by Ana and Annie, however, is not the recording of traditional history, with its emphasis on recording “fact (f)act. the f stop of act. a still photo in the ongoing cinerama” (AH 31). Rather, they share in (re)creating or (re)presenting people, experiences, and emotions, in “imagining” all the elements that are missing from traditional history.

Ana’s autonomous act of life writing is not valued by the archivists, however, as are the stacks of newspaper articles from the same period. Annie fears that because life writing “is not history” (proper),

this is why, perhaps, they think her journal suspect at the archives.

“inauthentic,” fictional possibly, contrived later by a daughter who imagined (how ahistoric) her way into the unspoken world of her mother’s girlhood. [. . .] [A]nd her daughter? we know nothing of her, this possible interpreter of her mother’s place in that world. it’s hardly a record of that world, is it? no, it’s Mrs. Richard’s private world, at least that’s what they call it. that’s why it’s not historical – a document, yes, but not history. (AH 30-31)

The authenticity and value of the journal and its contents are scrutinized from multiple perspectives: Annie, the people at the archives, and even Ana question the (woman’s) journal’s “authenticity.” Marlatt aptly recognizes that no identity, no matter how strong and autonomous, is impervious to outside influences: any story has multiple voices, even if there is only one storyteller. Annie predicts that her husband Richard will scoff: “this is nothing, i imagine him saying. meaning

unreadable. because this nothing is a place he doesn't recognize, cut loose from history and its relentless progress towards some end. this is undefined territory, unaccountable. and so on edge" (AH 81). Richard invalidates not only the "accountability" of Ana's story and Annie's efforts to recuperate that story, but indirectly, also invalidates Annie's efforts to reconstruct her own identity through her ongoing remembrance of and literary dialogue with her mother, Ina. Annie's reading of Ana's life writing (and then her own life writing) cannot avoid being influenced by the negative opinions she gathers from those around her. Even at the time that Ana writes her journal, she, too, wavers under the critical gaze of another's eyes: "in the line that is not hers, that she composes in imagination for her father's benefit. her real story begins where nothing is conveyed" (AH 83). Marlatt teaches that even in life writing—writing one's life and writing *for* one's life—the most resolutely autonomous self is challenged and affected by the people, values, and social climate surrounding that individual. Because Marlatt foregrounds aspects of both the autonomous and the subjected identity in creating her characters, the manner in which those characters construct their white identities becomes equally rich and multilayered.

Annie's investment in recovering Ana's diary is as much personal as it is political; this act, in part, metaphorically represents how the modern white identity is founded in the colonial. While Ana's world sometimes seems so foreign to Annie, at other times, Annie's voice actually seems to blend with Ana's, making some of their experiences shared. When Annie notes, for example, that Ana feels "ab-original," I puzzle over whether this is an experience that Annie *attributes to* Ana, or whether

this feeling is indeed one that they both share since their identities cross over in that they are both white women in a patriarchal society. Undoubtedly, Annie deeply identifies with Ana, feeling “as if she could reach out and touch her, those lashes cast down over blue (brown?) eyes” (*AH* 45). To what degree Annie’s empathy for Ana influences Annie’s reading of Ana’s life story, however, is difficult to determine.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, just as Marlatt strives to blur the distinctions between time frames, so she blends the actual characters into one another for fleeting moments. Beyond that, however, Marlatt takes a truly radical leap and blurs the distinctions between her own life story and those of her characters. While many writers before her have employed the strategy of combining personal experience with fictitious writing, Marlatt draws the reader’s attention to this strategy. Rather than merely using her personal experiences as an unseen brick foundation upon which her story is constructed, Marlatt takes individual bricks and inserts them in the very walls of her story, making them conspicuous and impossible to ignore. Marlatt prods the reader to consciously recognize that the boundaries between the autobiographical and fiction, are not clear.

When starting this project, I naturally learned as much about Marlatt’s biography as possible. When I then started (re)reading *Ana Historic, Taken, Readings from the Labyrinth, Ghostworks*, and other collections of poetry, I quickly recognized transformed pieces of Marlatt’s life in each of these works. In *Ana Historic*, in particular, though, Marlatt deliberately makes these fragments more difficult to separate out. She assumes the role of master arborist, grafting the branches that are multiple voices, to create an interdependent narrative. Her skills

are so deft that ultimately her reader struggles to identify the original (autobiographical) narrative from the imagined narratives. I became acutely aware of this when I tried to determine where Annie is raised. Ina, we know, lived with her colonial parents in India (as did Marlatt's mother), but Annie also refers to her mother's clothes having been "handsewn by Chinese tailors" (AH 33). If referring to her mother's adult life, then does she imply that Annie was raised in a country like Malaysia, as she was?

Marlatt, I believe, makes the reading of the life writing(s) difficult for two reasons. First, she forces her reader to become alert and critical; a passive reader will not successfully reach the end of *Ana Historic*. We are constantly prodded to ask who is speaking, from what context, under what influences, and to what purpose. Second, Marlatt wants to emphasize that to try to compartmentalize our ideas is dangerous: instead, we should look for the crossings-over, back and forth, of imagination into fact, the objective into the subjective, and the colonial into the neocolonial. The layers of poetry and prose, imagination, fiction, fact, history, anecdote, masculinity, femininity and others, weave to create a novel that exemplifies the very process and struggle of constructing one's (white and female) identity.

## 6. Conclusion

Shortly before I started writing this conclusion, I was browsing our campus bookstore and happened upon Ashley W. Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's edited book, *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism*. Within that collection of essays, I encountered Margaret Andersen's "Whitewashing Race: A Critical Perspective on Whiteness." Andersen concedes that while whiteness studies broaden the analysis of "racial, gender, and class stratification" beyond the analysis of "people of color as victims," she still finds something "fundamentally disturbing about the growth of whiteness studies" (21).

I stopped reading for a moment. Did I really want to read the rest of the article? What if Andersen's critique undid my entire thesis project? How could I, in good conscience, submit the project if someone reasonably argued that whiteness studies were in any way dangerous? After all I had, after reading texts such as Roxanna Ng's *Anti-racism, Feminism, and Critical Approaches to Education*, come to regard conceptualizations such as multiculturalism as an outdated, useless, and even harmful. I read ahead, however, bracing myself for Andersen's critique. Throughout the essay, Andersen makes many excellent and perceptive points, most of which are encapsulated in the question, "Whose interests are served by the study of whiteness?" (Andersen 32). Andersen charges:

For many, participation in whiteness literature is itself a new form of privilege. Joe Kincheloe and Shieley Steinberg state that the key goal of whiteness studies is “creating a positive, proud, attractive, antiracist white identity that is empowered to travel in and out of racial/ethnic circles with confidence and empathy. (32)

As evidence that whiteness studies may be of more benefit to whites than to those groups that have had to endure whiteness, Andersen cites such concerns as whiteness studies being an avenue by which the “dominant” voice can sneak back to the centre, negating people’s real-world racialized experiences by declaring race as merely social construct, reducing whites to a monolithic category, or shifting focus from race to whiteness and from racism to “white privilege.” She also finds problematic the methodology in whiteness studies resulting in writing that is “narrative, autobiographical, and textual,” in which “little connection is made [. . .] to the operation of the state and economy in producing racial categories, since the focus tends to be overwhelmingly personal” (27).

Almost entirely, I agree that Andersen’s trepidation about whiteness studies demands serious consideration; however, at the same time the work accomplished in whiteness studies should not be tossed carelessly away. While it has been my experience that when talking about *racism*, the focus always drifts to those who are victims and not perpetrators of racism, I must also concede that in the wake of multicultural and anti-racist trends that put the nonwhite subject in “the limelight,”<sup>54</sup> I have heard too many cries of “reverse discrimination” (creating a white victim) and of “preferential treatment” (for non-whites). These complaints, indeed,



communicate to me an unwillingness on the part of white subjects to share the stage—academic, critical, theoretical—with nonwhite subjects. Yet I am not willing to concede that whiteness should not be placed centre stage (or perhaps more appropriately, under a microscope). While certainly to do so risks allowing whiteness and white voices once again to dominate discourse on race, whiteness cannot be left unexamined. As an invisible force (even if it is only invisible to whites themselves), whiteness will continue to permeate every nook and cranny of mainstream Canadian society. If we uncover the creature beneath the spell of invisibility, however, perhaps that creature will lose some of its insidious power. Andersen's concern, then, that the critics are making a conceptual shift from "racism" to "whiteness" can be (guardedly) found acceptable if the point of that shift is to offer a critique of that previously unexamined whiteness not only *in the spirit of*, but also *prompting* its undoing.

I agree, also, that exploring whiteness (or any race) merely as social construction and failing to acknowledge the implications of that construction on real lives is a terribly convenient strategy used by (white) theorists, whether knowingly or unknowingly employed. This strategy not only allows whiteness theorists to focus on their own "race" rather than on the more complex issues that arise where "races" interact and conflict, but more importantly, distances both theorists and readers from the very real ways in which racial differences manifest themselves. A great deal of my treatment of whiteness theory and Marlatt's text has focused on race as a social construction: Andersen reminds me that if I were to complete further work in the area, I should then extend my theoretical groundwork to more practical

considerations, perhaps by taking up work in an applied social science such as sociology. I qualify that statement by alluding to *future work*, because even after reading Andersen's essay, I believe that a racial identity is constructed on individual, community, and social levels. Theorizing race as a social construction is not a fruitless endeavour, but neither is it the only way to understand racial issues.

I do not agree, however, with Andersen's assertion that whiteness studies grow out of a conceptual shift away from race or from the "ways that white privilege functions without having to name anyone a racist" (26). I think that whiteness studies encourage whites to see themselves as racialized creatures, and then to see how they contribute to the racialization of other groups and how whites reap the unearned advantages of their racialization. Further, although Andersen finds the personal writing in whiteness theory inadequate or self-indulgent, I think that the anecdotal writing marks the most significant acknowledgement of the racist white—*the writer recognizes and admits to his/her own racist composition* rather than hiding behind a mask of objectivity.<sup>55</sup> Andersen agrees that "self-criticism must accompany white people's antiracist work [because] too often white progressives leave their own attitudes and behaviors unexamined while working against racism" (33). Most certainly, antiracist efforts must move beyond the personal, but to be authentic they must be grounded in personal change. Further, the theorists who take risks, who make themselves vulnerable by writing their own racial narrative, not only avoid deflecting responsibility to another party but also generate an environment that promotes and encourages other (white) theorists to take the same types of risks.

My answer to Andersen's question, "Whose interests are being served by whiteness studies?," is that the answer lies in the response to another question: "What has motivated the development of whiteness studies"? Much to what would be Andersen's chagrin if she knew of my response, I am certain, I choose to answer this question with a personal narrative. When I undertook this project, I will confess that my motives were twofold. I was, indeed, anxious to work on a subject that was relatively new. For professional survival, I felt I needed to become knowledgeable in an area in which there were fewer experts. But considerations for my professional future entered my mind only after years of studying, writing about, and working against racism. Canadian racism was an issue that I had addressed in my first-year essays and even as early as grade-school reports. What motivated me as a ten-year-old child to try to understand and address racism was not professional but human interest. Things in my world were not right, and I needed to understand why and then try to effect change. I reflect on those papers and arguments I engaged in over the years and marvel at how my thinking has changed, and only hope that I will marvel equally at the change in Canadian society I experience in the years to come. My own motivation for entering into whiteness studies is grounded in a desire not to "creat[e] a positive, proud, attractive, antiracist white identity that is empowered to travel in and out of racial/ethnic circles" but to alter my own thinking and behaviour, and further, to share what I have learned with other people.<sup>56</sup> Whiteness studies are motivated by a white desire to address the failings of white culture, and so, ideally, I would hope that everyone who is negatively affected by unexamined white culture (whites and non-whites) will find their "interests served" by its interrogation.

Andersen's difficulties with the trend to personalize whiteness studies pivot upon her concern that the critics declare their work finished once they have engaged in a personal interrogation of their racial identity. "But politics does not stop there," she cautions (33). I agree; indeed, not until I take my personal investigation and apply it to my family, community, and teaching, does my work become political. But this application has very naturally progressed from my work. The way I parent and teach my children is heavily influenced by what I have learned in whiteness studies. I respond publicly, via avenues such as the editorial column in the local newspaper, to race issues in our city, province, and country. My teaching in first-year English tutorials and my work at the Teaching and Learning Centre at my university reflect all that I have learned, grounded in the interrogation of my own racial identity. While the process, over years, of studying racism and discovering my own racial identity has been fraught with ignorance, naiveté, and misconceptions, my motive has always been to battle racism in my country. Whiteness studies has taught me that that battle must be joined within the white community and within the white self (my self), and that that community must recognize its privilege and systemic practices of perpetuating and initiating racist social and economic hierarchies.

In her novel *Ana Historic*, and in her critical writing in *Readings From the Labyrinth*, Marlatt executes the leap from personal to political that Andersen demands from work around (racial) identity studies. When I read *Ana Historic*, I was not looking for evidence of a white identity in the characters—in any piece of literature written by white authors, evidence of white identity is guaranteed. What intrigues me about Marlatt's writing is her awareness, revealed through life writing

and the identities created during that process, of the constructed elements of white racial and cultural identities. Marlatt's political action, based upon her personal and cultural understanding, manifests itself in her writing, which *is* her political action. Literature, while a welcome and comforting companion on a long train ride or dreary autumn day, can also be uncomfortable and a catalyst for change.

Marlatt's writing is a homemade "cloth of connectedness": her writing is homemade because she does not use language as a bolt of fabric that is ready to be applied to a factory-made pattern, but instead a raw resource that must be worked until it is appropriate for her purposes. Through her writings, she explores, reveals, and constructs the identity of the individual, but also examines how that individual relates and is connected to other "i's," whether they are found in history, the community, family, or her personal relationships. She walks the "shared ground" of the "i" and the "we," giving power to the unwritten, the unrecognized, and the unspoken, especially through Annie's character, who creates a life-writing story within a life-writing story.

As an immigrant, Marlatt has had the advantage of seeing Canada both as an outsider and as a Canadian citizen. She has known both the discomfort of not quite belonging, and the satisfaction of becoming an integral part of many Canadian "communities" (writing, lesbian, feminist, academic, and others). And because of her reflection upon her colonial childhood, she is confronting and working through issues such as colonial guilt and racial inequality. Marlatt's knowledge and experience in all of these issues forms, textures, and colours her constructions of identity. She is aware of her white identity, and how it is shaped by her childhood,

culture, community, family, relationships and by non-whites to whom she is connected. Using the voices of Ana, the colonial settler, Ina, the emigrant, and Annie the immigrant-now-Canadian, Marlatt reveals the complex and ongoing history and social dynamics that determine that white Canadian identity and contribute to current neocolonial “race” relations. While reflective and personal, *Ana Historic* is also a theoretical and political agent of social change.

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<sup>1</sup> Speaking about the accessibility of feminist literary criticism, Andrea Lebowitz argues:

A most basic aspect of the feminist literary critic's commitment is to audience, and to the definition of that audience. I do not believe that our work should be addressed only to others engaged in literary studies. Rather it should be accessible to all those who read, cry with, rage at, enjoy and learn from literature. And happily, there are many such readers. The distinctions between serious and popular literature so dear to the academic's heart are mercifully absent for the non-academic reader, who cheerfully keeps her Doris Lessing piled on the bedside table with the latest Harlequin romance. Early in the history of feminist literary criticism, Lillian Robinson attacked academic critics for eschewing political responsibilities. She, however, went on to wonder if the very act of writing literary criticism was futile, since it investigated literature which most people did not read. I think she was wrong to have this worry, for it seems to me that non-academics read and for all the right reasons—to see alternatives, to better understand their lives and to survive. Because of this, literary criticism is in a somewhat different position from other disciplines, since our “raw material” and “data” are accessible to the non-specialist. (29)

<sup>2</sup> On this occasion, it seems more appropriate to speak of white racism rather than race for it seems that white racism and not race is our intended focus when we talk about whiteness. When I use the term racism, then, it is with the understanding that racism originates, in the context of this paper, in whiteness, and is not, as Ann Russo corrects, “amorphous” (299).

<sup>3</sup> Roxana Ng offers ethnicity as an alternative term for race. She explains that “the indicators for ‘ethnicity’ as an analytical category are descent, common religion, and a shared feeling of belonging to the same group” (“Sex, Racism, Canadian Nationalism” 229). I would like to add to Ng's list of indicators sometimes shared cultural beliefs, practices, and/or language.

<sup>4</sup> Judith Butler explains how she conceptualizes *gendered* performativity:

There is a tendency to think that sexuality is either constructed or determined; to think that if it is constructed, it is in some sense free, and if it is determined, it is in some sense fixed. These oppositions do not describe the complexity of what is at stake in any effort to take account of the conditions under which sex and sexuality are assumed.

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The 'performative' dimension of construction is precisely the forced reiteration of norms. In this sense, then, it is not only that there are constraints to performativity; rather, constraint calls to be rethought as the very condition of performativity. Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it be equated with performance. Moreover, constraint is not necessarily that which sets a limit to performativity; constraint is, rather, that which impels and sustains performativity. (qtd. in Salih, 344)

<sup>5</sup> One of my committee members, Dr. Yin Liu, was able to clarify the discrepancy between the two definitions for me, explaining: "The difference between a painter's definition of white and a physicist's definition of white is simple. A painter is dealing with pigments, which reflect light [ . . . ] whereas a physicist is ordinarily dealing with emitted light itself. Emitted white light is composed of all colours...for a painter, however, white is what you get *before* you add pigment, and thus is considered the absence of all colours (i.e. the absence of all pigment)."

<sup>6</sup> The word organized, as I've used it here, connotes the categorization of all things, more specifically, alludes to the development and application of the scientific method and taxonomy by Western people.

<sup>7</sup> My supervisor, Susan Gingell, astutely pointed out that the male colonizer's act of naming mirrors Adam's naming of the animals, in the Book of Genesis.

<sup>8</sup> While I used a substantive amount of American white theory, I deliberately filtered the theory, rejecting that which did not seem relevant, and keeping that which seemed to have applications in the Canadian context. For example, I have avoided, where possible, theory that employs the black/white dichotomy, finding it problematic, as does Richard Dyer, because it "excludes a huge range of people who are neither white nor black" (11).

<sup>9</sup> Canada has its own history involving both black slavery and Aboriginal genocide, but for the moment, I wish to highlight what I believe to be the reason (s) why American whiteness theory tends to focus on a black/white dichotomy.

<sup>10</sup> Moodie enthusiastically addresses "British mothers of Canadian sons"(30), but her enthusiasm turns to disdain when she engages with "thin weasel-faced Yankee[s]" (92), or when she reflects on the Irish man she knows "with more wisdom than is generally exercised by Irish emigrants" (162).

<sup>11</sup> Such jokes and stereotypes directed toward white ethnic minorities, while detrimental, do not have the same impact since the white ethnic minority is always "white" but not always apparently "ethnic."

<sup>12</sup> Frye has coined the term "whiteness" as opposed to "whiteness" because of the comparisons she draws between the conceptions of gender and the conceptions of



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race. “Whitely” and “whiteness” are racially-specific terms that mirror those of “masculine” and “masculinity” as gender-specific terms (“White Woman Feminist” 151-52). Is it coincidental that in the word “whiteness” echoes the word “saintliness”?

<sup>13</sup> This metaphor breaks down, as Susan Gingell pointed out, when we consider that unlike the systems of whiteness, the systems of the body are not organized in a hierarchical manner. It occurred to me, though, that the body, when in shock, will “privilege” some systems and organs over others, diverting blood from the extremities to the essential organs to ensure the survival of the organism.

<sup>14</sup> I first wrote this story about two years ago. When I reread it now, as a member *of* the community, rather than someone who had recently moved *into* the community, I am uncomfortable with the way I depicted my neighbourhood. I have become defensive about the ways in which the media and others describe us and the place where we live—I have yet to read any positive depiction of that place. Why doesn’t anyone see the children who play outside all day, rather than sitting in front of television sets and video games? Why don’t reporters comment on the way the community members support one another in the event of a tragedy, like when a house fire claimed the lives of a mother and her two young children? Does no one see the young father who leaves in the dark winter morning everyday to go to his job? While it would be dangerous to ignore the social and economic problems that affect our neighbourhood, it is equally dangerous (and demoralizing) to be solely characterized by these problems.

<sup>15</sup> How much of myself do I project when I speculate on how others perceive me, and how much, I wonder is accurate (or perhaps, not accurate enough. Do I read “suspicious” in a glance that is really “angry?”)?

<sup>16</sup> The term tolerance is one that frequently appears in institutional mandates and mission statements, in educational goals and objectives, and innumerable other locations when referring to the coming together of people of multiple ethnicities. For years I found the word troubling and, in 1992, even pressed my daughter’s daycare to remove the word from its formal policy. I finally looked the word up in the *OED* and discovered that my discomfort with the word—for it felt patronizing—was legitimate. The definitions, while applicable to a wide range of disciplines (from forestry to physics), all describe a stronger entity “enduring,” “withstanding,” or “surviving despite” a “pain,” “hardship,” “poison,” potentially detrimental “environmental [condition],” or a “parasite or otherwise pathenogenic organism.” The more recent definition of the word as used in a social context is “the disposition to be patient or indulgent to the opinions or practices of others; freedom from bigotry or undue severity in judging the conduct of others; forbearance; catholicity of spirit.” When the word tolerance is used in a social context, one cannot ignore the preceding definitions nor the implication that tolerance is exhibited by the “benevolence” of the white majority.

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<sup>17</sup> One means of reaching denial is to focus on the “point system” of inequalities. This way of viewing social inequality focuses sometimes upon categorizing people as either oppressed *or* privileged (e.g. a black man is oppressed, but a white man is privileged) and/or trying to place people on a continuum of oppression *in comparison to other people* (the white woman may be oppressed as a woman but she is privileged as a white, so she is generally more privileged than her Aboriginal counterpart). The problem with this way of thinking is two-fold. First, it encourages people to situate other people in positions of greater and lesser power (positions that those people situated may not feel accurately represents who they are because of their autonomy and empowerment gained from sources outside the dominant culture) and second, the complexities of identity and community are ignored or oversimplified for the purpose of “organization.” Alicia Dojourne Oritz captures the complexity of identity when she declares, “I am a crowd, a one-woman march, procession, parade, masquerade” (qtd. in Neuman 222).

<sup>18</sup> Neither the analogy to the recovering alcoholic nor that to the recovering anorexic seems adequate by itself, for the “recovering white” is one who has both been filled with something toxic (racist thought), and also starved of something needed (racial self-awareness). I use both terms, then, to supplement one another.

<sup>19</sup> I feel it necessary to note that once I moved beyond my feelings of guilt and shame, I felt a feeling I have never experienced before, one for which I have no name. I would not call it a feeling of liberation or freedom, for as a “newly accountable” white person, I realized that I had, quite literally, a lifetime of work ahead of me. Yet I did feel that I had left behind emotions and beliefs that were detrimental or useless. To be able to let go of those things for which I had held myself responsible was a relief, and to be able to openly take responsibility for those things that I could and had to change was and is empowering. Rather than struggle to display that “I am not a racist,” I feel free to acknowledge the ways in which my white privilege and cultural upbringing have made me racist, and to move forward to address these flaws. No longer is there the fear of being uncovered or exposed, a repression or tension under which I was not even entirely aware I was living.

<sup>12</sup> In her essay “The In-Between is Reciprocal,” Marlatt names this work yet again, calling it “fictional autobiography” (116).

<sup>13</sup> Labeling *Ana Historic* “a novel” is also ironic since Marlatt’s writing undermines and subverts nearly every style and convention typical of the genre. The plot is fragmented and non-linear, the characters are often conflated, and the style is as much poetry as prose.

<sup>14</sup> In “Difference (em)bracing” and other writings, Marlatt reveals how close she was to the people in Penang who worked for her parents (134). Her *Amahs* were like family to the child Marlatt and had a significant impact on her development; they undoubtedly greatly contributed to the consciousness and concerns evident in her writing.

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<sup>23</sup> Antiracist critics such as Roxanna Ng find Canadian multiculturalism problematic because multiculturalism focuses on celebrating culture and “difference” without acknowledging social hierarchies, discriminatory practices, or trying to undo systemic racism. Eileen O’Brien explains, quoting bell hooks: “Whereas nonracists merely profess tolerant attitudes and think everyone should be treated equally, antiracists not only acknowledge that not everyone is treated equally but work ‘daily [and] vigilantly’ ...to combat this inequality” (253).

<sup>24</sup> See Susanna Egan’s *Patterns of Experience in Autobiography* for an analysis of the “unfolding of life events” in autobiography.

<sup>25</sup> To do Marlatt justice, and under ideal circumstances, I would need to be able to devote an entire chapter to lesbian theory and Marlatt’s contributions to this field, but for the sake of economy, I can only ever so briefly summarize her work that is most relevant to my task.

<sup>26</sup> It is important to note that because Marlatt was involved in a heterosexual adult relationship and gave birth to and raised a child, she has had (adult) experiences in both the realm of heterosexual and lesbian relationships, lending further credibility to her assertions since they are based on her ability to compare experiences.

<sup>27</sup> For a fascinating treatment of some of the lesbian issues at play in *Ana Historic*, see Heather Zwicker’s “Daphne Marlatt’s ‘Ana Historic’: Queering the Postcolonial Nation.” I found Zwicker’s analysis of Marlatt’s use of the Frankenstein and closet motifs particularly illuminating and engaging.

<sup>28</sup> Eakin suggests that the “first person of autobiography is truly plural in its origins,” a notion that we easily forget in the genre of autobiography because it “promotes an illusion of self-determination: *I* write my story; *I* say who I am; *I* create myself” (“Relational Selves” 63). Marlatt’s emphasis on connections and a “relational” vision suggests to me that her lowercase “i” might also serve to represent a plural (community), rather than the illusionary self-determined “I.” Rather than using the self-important and self-serving “I,” she transforms this personal pronoun into a new pronoun that represents those who share aspects of her identity.

<sup>29</sup> The term the colonized is as problematic as terms such as the oppressed, the victimized, or the marginalized, because it implies that the person occupying the position subjected to colonizing, oppression, or marginalization is powerless and that their subjectivity is limited to their being colonized persons, a notion that I am trying to undermine when I assert that “the colonized” person is not passive. Obviously, a new language is needed to refer to all parties involved in these complex relationships, a language that does not designate binary positions of white vs. non-white, powerful vs. powerless, or oppressor vs. oppressed.

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<sup>30</sup> Because Marlatt's writing so often focuses on sites where ideas intercept, blend, or continue, I believe she would challenge Kadar to present life writing as a genre that has grown out of autobiography, rather than as a genre that stands in opposition to it.

<sup>31</sup> I am using the italicized we to refer to the Canadians whose ancestors do not originate in Canada and the non-italicized we to refer to all Canadian residents.

<sup>32</sup> By colonial continuum, I intend to convey similar assertions made by those who argue for the term neo-colonialism rather than postcolonialism. Just as the term neo-colonialism indicates an understanding that colonialism is not a definable historical event that has reached an end, so the term colonial continuum recognizes that the colonialism is ongoing, and further, is evolutionary. Over the course of time, certain manifestations of colonialism have changed, but ultimately, the colonial goals remain very similar. Colonial goals are arguably divisible into the two categories. Etienne Balibar divides racism into "exclusive racism" which seeks to exterminate or eliminate a racial or ethnic group versus "inclusive racism" which seeks to oppress and exploit, "hierarchize and partition society," emphasizing that neither manifests in a "pure" form (39-40). Similarly, colonialism seems to have either exclusive or inclusive agendas. In the case of the colonization of Canada, the Aboriginal people and, later on, many of the other ethnic groups that came to comprise Canada were needed to open up to colonizers, populate, clear, and build upon the land, thus reflecting the aims of inclusive racism. At the same time, Gonick argues that the "naturalization of Canada as a white nation involves a suppression of knowledge about the overt efforts made by government authorities to limit the numbers of non-white citizens, as well as the brutal colonial activity directed against Aboriginal peoples. Racism seems to be operating as an instrument for securing social solidarity" (100). The colonial process in Canada involved and involves a push/pull between needing Others to occupy places on the lower rungs of the social order, and desiring to control the numbers of non-white Canadians, thereby ensuring the maintenance of white power. Because many details of Canadian colonial history are so often suppressed, whites are often prevented from seeing current race relations as a product of long-standing difficulties among ethnic groups, and further, fail to recognize that whites did and do contribute to the oppression of non-white groups. The colonial continuum places today's social discord in a historical context.

<sup>33</sup> One of my co-supervisors, Hilary Clark, pointed out that the Aboriginal men "crowded past" Ana, "asserting their space and right to existence (and perhaps, as well, their priority as men). I had, indeed, overlooked this poignant detail. I wonder, though, whether the men did crowd past Ana, whether Ana *felt* that they crowded past her, or whether Annie, in "making up" the scenario, did not *imagine* that the men crowded past Ana. Each interpretation is plausible, yet each carries with it significantly different implications.

<sup>34</sup> I was much surprised to discover in Heather Zwicker's article "Daphne Marlatt's 'Ana Historic': Queering the Postcolonial Nation," a section wherein she considers the same quotation I had also chosen. She, too, acknowledges that Ana struggles

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under the tension generated between stereotype and “its refutation.” And Zwicker, coincidentally, applies Bhabha’s theory to the passage, but instead she selects a quotation from “The Other Question.”

<sup>35</sup> Ruth is introduced as “her [Mrs. P.’s] Siwash woman,” clearly indicating Mrs. P.’s sense of “ownership” of Ruth, and the general appropriation and commodification, during the building of the colonial Canada, of non-whites for unpaid or ill-paid labour.

<sup>36</sup> I must note, too, that when Jeannie Anderson’s labour progresses and she becomes more uncomfortable, she comments to Ana, “What would I do without you, my dear? Things are always right when you’re here”, making Harriet invisible. Ana does not speak it aloud, but objects that it is Harriet “who makes them right” (*AH* 115). While Harriet’s movements are of interest to Ana, I believe that Jeannie’s comments express the social hierarchies of the time. The number of accomplishments that are routinely credited to white colonists and explorers but were actually achieved in significant part by the efforts (and suffering and sacrifices and deaths) of exploited non-white groups, are too many to count. The first Canadian example that comes to my mind is the completion of the Canadian Pacific railroad.

<sup>37</sup> Because the acquisition of tea was one of the primary goals of many of the early colonialists, Marlatt’s use of the image is particularly poignant.

<sup>38</sup> Mrs. Patterson seems to be everything Ana wishes for herself. Mrs. Patterson is “‘a soul attuned to the spirit of this place [. . .] bonnetless and ignorant of the cedar bits in her hair,’ singing with her girls on their way home from blackberry picking” (*AH* 65).

<sup>39</sup> Even Ana becomes self-conscious of the sharp contrast between English “civilization” and her new colonial home; she cannot overlook how out of place their “tea party” is in “the bush.” Ana comments, “They were surrounded by trees at the edge of the clearing, she knew that. By the dark of standing timber, rain forest, and everywhere trees were cleared the rapid growth of bramble, salal, salmonberry thicket – ‘bush.’ But they were sitting with English china, Scotch shortbread, their talk dancing the leafdance shadow and light of weather” (*AH* 118).

<sup>40</sup> Further examples of Marlatt’s interest in the colonial continuum become evident by following the tea motif from the passages that pertain to Ana into the passages with Ina. Here, too, in the immigrant who is driven to madness by, in part, her obsession with her appearance and reputation, tea is present. Ina, with her tea breath, is as haunted by the pressure to comply with white social conventions as is Ana. The passages that involve Annie and Zoe, however, frequently refer to cappuccino (*AH* 91), a “café” (141), and “coffee cups [that] grew cold and [were] well-licked” (151). Annie and Zoe seem ultimately to have escaped the tradition that haunts both Ana and Ina.

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<sup>41</sup> Dyer suggests:

White women thus carry on—or, in many narratives, betray—the hopes, achievements and characteristics of the race... White women's role in reproduction makes them at once privileged and subordinated in relation to the operation of white power in the world. (29)

<sup>42</sup> Why does this quotation refer to the woman's freeing herself from her "mother's hold," when the betrothed woman is transferred from her father's home (the patriarch) to the husband's home (the new master)? Perhaps because Annie, our primary narrator, was instructed in the ways of being a woman *through* her mother rather than her father, even though patriarchal interests were the ones being promoted and supported.

<sup>43</sup> Hastings Mill is noteworthy as the "site of first white birthing," a child who was "to be from the first. indigene. *ingenuus* (born in), native, natural, free(born) – at home from the beginning" (*AH* 126-7). Previous to the birth of Jeannie Anderson's son, "about the only births were Indian births" (*AH* 117). The devaluing "only" in the previous phrase indicates why it was "only" when the Anderson child was born that the area warranted an "English geographic name" and a "transplant label" (*AH* 127).

<sup>44</sup> Heather Zwicker argues very convincingly that "the dominant pedagogy of the ideal nation is that of assimilation." We are born, and then may experience "dislocation" as exiles or emigrants, or through differences such as race, gender, class, or sexuality. These "dislocations often precipitate dissent, which the nation-state then attempts to recuperate through such institutions as marriage, citizenship, or other forms of socioeconomic enfranchisement" (165). Ana's dislocation and dissent have her teetering between her "natural" state and a "naturalized" state (marriage and citizenship).

<sup>45</sup> Susan Gingell suggests that Ina believes her children will belong in Canada because she thinks of Canada as a white country, and because the British are the "best kind of white," they are sure to belong. Ina's depression may come in part, then, from her inability to reconcile her expectations of Canada with the reality of her situation.

<sup>46</sup> Marlatt's ironic use of the "black slave" songs is not lost on me, and yet I wonder where Ina would have had the occasion to learn these songs? How likely is it that she would have learned and sung these songs?

<sup>47</sup> Marlatt writes experimentally beyond the covers of *Ana Historic*, challenging socio-political assumptions evident in the conventions of standard English.

<sup>48</sup> Eakin suggests that a parent's story can "relay cultural scripts for the enrolment of a life" and that children are as marked by what they aren't told as what they are; they brood over withheld information" ("Relational Selves" 73). Annie's difficulty is that

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the cultural script handed over by her mother does not actually prepare her for the Canadian performance in which ironically, Ina so wants Annie to star.

<sup>49</sup> This “immigrant” way of thinking seems to reflect the expectations of the American system, whereby all new citizens forever abdicate their allegiance to their homelands and become simply “American.” In Canada, we claim that all new citizens are welcome to keep their culture alive, yet immigrants are ostracized when their culture is too strong, when their accents are difficult to understand, and when dominant culture feels its freedom is infringed upon by the needs and rights of other ethnicities. I am not arguing that we are no different than the United States; I strongly believe that although our multicultural-rather-than-melting-pot lacks conviction and that evidence for claims to be multicultural can be difficult to find in our institutions, at some level, we do aspire to a truly equitable multicultural society. Our attempts to achieve this society have been poor, but it is a goal worthy of pursuing.

<sup>50</sup> Annie refuses to become mired in factual details, focusing first on people who are entirely absent from the historical documents she reads. What I find troublesome is that in both Ina’s and Annie’s stories (both told from Annie’s perspective) the only mention of other people’s ethnicity is either when referring to the Malay(?) family that served Ina, Annie, and the rest of their family, or when mentioning “Canadians.” In the passages Annie writes about Ana, Annie finds it relevant to mention Ana’s interaction with Native and other non-English people; for Annie exploring the tension between Ana and these other cultural groups (the “Kanakas from the Pacific islands [...] and then there are always those roustabouts—Italians, Portuguese, Irish—you know what the Irish are like, my dear” [AH 15]) is integral to understanding Ana’s shaping identity. Why then, when referring to her own family and identity, can she only make reference to Others whose influence was felt so long in the past? Is Richard Siwash? Is Zoe West Indian? I imagine one of two reasons why Annie does not mention the ethnicities of those around her: either all of the people with whom she is interacting are white, in which case she does not feel the need to elaborate on their ethnicities, or else they are of different ethnicities, but Annie does not find their ethnic identities relevant to her contemporary story. If the former is the case, which I highly doubt, then the situation is problematic because Annie (and Marlatt?) allows the “whites” to return to an unchallenged, invisible, and normative position. If the latter is the case, then again, I may have difficulty with Marlatt’s approach. Quite possibly (and this would be consistent with even the most progressive [white] thinking of the decade), Marlatt wants to portray Annie as “colour blind.” Those who claim not to see people ‘of colour’ as different are often too uncomfortable to confront the history of racism that exists between themselves and those of other ethnicities. Marlatt may also have been trying, however, to look at Annie’s ethnicity and national identity in the absence of a “contrast group.” I don’t think there is enough evidence to decide between either of these last theories, and further, I wonder if the absence of any ethnic representation, outside of what I’ve previously mentioned, was even a deliberate choice on Marlatt’s part. Regardless, that absence or omission is interesting to note, particularly since it frequently occurs

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in white people's writing (and most often when the situation describes a private sphere), but for a wide variety of reasons.

<sup>51</sup> White Canadians have tried to erase non-white voices from all these places, but the effect that has been achieved is merely that of "whitewashing." A whitewash covers over, but fails to completely obscure that which was meant to be covered, leaving an impression of failed or incomplete concealment.

<sup>52</sup> Ironically, Annie, in her act of reclaiming a previously lost identity, "lays down tracks," an image that mirrors the railroad building efforts in early white Canada.

<sup>53</sup> Ina is chronologically sandwiched between two characters whose identities seem to depend heavily on their participation in life writing. Never does the reader learn of any attempts that Ina might have made to record her life—to assert her autonomous voice. Does her failure to write herself symbolize her failure to claim her identity, and thus partially explain her depression? Carolyn Steedman offers that "children are always episodes in someone else's narrative" (qtd. in Eakin, "Relational Selves" 68) to which Eakin adds that the "mother's self and story provide the key to her [the female lifewriter's] own" (68). In an odd way, Annie is Ina's life writer; Annie's life is a chapter of Ina's story, and Ina contributes significantly to Annie's story. Yet ultimately, Ina's story is never recorded from her own perspective.

<sup>54</sup> Another essayist in *White Out*, Charles Mills, points out that "whites see black interests as antagonistic to their own" (43). Perhaps because multiculturalism and antiracism privilege voices that were previously unheard, whites have illogically deduced that their voice(s) must now be silenced. This supposition would explain Anderson's assertion that whites believe they need to find ways to recentre themselves in the theoretical work around race.

<sup>55</sup> Just as white theorists must be cautious not to become mired in colonial guilt, so they must be careful not to let their personal "I's" eclipse other voices or ideas.

<sup>56</sup> An editorial note in my first draft asked if I was not "even a little" motivated by the lure of a "proud, attractive" white identity. I think at one point, as was inevitable, that I did experience a certain degree of self-satisfaction, that I had recognized and was now working on flaws in my perception that perhaps made me less of an ignorant person in any racial or ethnic circle. But this less than flattering effect was not what *motivated* (or continues to motivate) me in my work.



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