

Road Work: Destabilizing National Myth in North American Narratives of Mobility

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the historical contexts of the American road narrative and the way that those contexts, as well as the genre more broadly, have been incorporated into Canadian road texts. Canadian road narratives often draw on the nation building that many American texts are invested in producing. Nation building, however, is not as central to those journeys undertaken by people of colour and Indigenous and Native American travellers. Accordingly, I will be making a conceptual distinction between the road narrative and what I call narratives of mobility. I make this distinction because often in these texts, Indigenous and Native American peoples as well as people of colour are forced to travel as a means of claiming space. Space, of course, conceptualized broadly and reaching beyond just the physical and inclusive of social and cultural as well. The claiming of space in these texts is also accompanied by a reckoning with constructions of nation and the traveller's place within constructs of national identity. In examining these narratives, I will also be drawing on the emerging field of mobility studies to create a more nuanced discussion of the unique experience of movement in relation to the narrative myth of nation. Additionally, the narrative of mobility offers a fruitful genre through which to employ transnational study because it is tied to the process of nation-building, and yet the experiences presented within the texts often unsettle national narratives. I examine *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac and *This is My Country Too* by John A. Williams to situate the road narrative genre's American influences. I then turn to *Volkswagen Blues* by Jacques Poulin to demonstrate the way that those American influences permeate borders and represent the cross-cultural exchange that is central to North American transnationalism. I also use *The Motorcyclist* by George Elliot Clarke and *Days by Moonlight* by André Alexis to further investigate the way that narratives of mobility are always engaged in the process of destabilizing national myth,

particularly when the traveler is a person of colour. Finally, I examine *Slash* by Jeanette Armstrong, *Green Grass Running Water* by Thomas King, and *Four Souls* by Louise Erdrich which engage with questions of nation, sovereignty, and borders through mobility. I argue that these are narratives of mobility in which the traveller reflects on their identity and relationship to nation. As they move through the varied landscapes and encounter an array of people and experiences, they begin to disentangle and destabilize prescribed narratives about national history and identity.

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Introduction

Sal Paradise, the protagonist of Jack Kerouac's famed 1957 road narrative *On the Road*, imagines a long and endless road as a kind of utopian space: limitless possibility, opportunity, and experience. He romanticizes it so deeply that the vast distances that they must travel are irrelevant: "We had longer ways to go, but no matter, the road is life" (212). Paradise, and subsequently Kerouac himself, see the road as a space where life is lived more fully, a sentiment shared by Sal's traveling companion, Dean Moriarty. Sal's statement, however, is indicative of the larger function of the genre. Both author and barely disguised narrator seem only marginally aware of the implications of a life lived as a transient, and the quote above expresses much of the sentimentality that accompanied road journeys produced through the late 20th and early 21st century in North America. While Kerouac's text was a groundbreaking work, the narrative of leaving home in search of meaning was not in any way new. In the late twentieth century the road narrative experiences a shift. Unlike Kerouac's Sal who takes to the road seeking solace from inner turmoil, the narrator of the road narrative becomes one who is seeking liberation from oppression in the road journey.

The texts under study here, however, are not road narratives in the sense of the young white man whose privilege allows him to travel safely and freely throughout his country or continent. In Chapter 1, I will be examining Kerouac's *On the Road* alongside John A. Williams' *This is My Country Too* (1964), a narrative of mobility written by a Black author during a similar time period. Chapter 2 refocuses on Canadian and Quebecois narratives of mobility and examines Jacques Poulin's *Volkswagen Blues* (1984) and examines the complex intersection of nation, national identity, and narratives of national history, particularly when travellers feel alienated from larger constructions of nation as Quebecois and Innu. Chapter 3 takes up the

complexities of feeling othered by constructions of nation through an examination of narratives of mobility written by and about Black Canadians. George Elliot Clarke's *The Motorcyclist* (2016) and André Alexis' *Days by Moonlight* (2019) examine different regions of Canada, their histories, and the way that Black Canada has been historically absented from narratives of national history and identity. Identity, for the purpose of this dissertation is defined as "a conception of personhood" (Anderson) or a person's sense of self. This is of course, in the context of the narrative of mobility, influenced by constructions of national identity. Finally, Chapter 4 examines Indigenous and Native American narratives of mobility. Louise Erdrich's *Four Souls* (2001), Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash* (1985), and Thomas King's *Green Grass Running Water* (1993) deal the way that both mobility and immobility can respond to land claim issues, state-imposed borders, and constructions of nation that render Indigenous and Native American people ahistorical.

Accordingly, I will be making a conceptual distinction between the road narrative and what I call narratives of mobility. I make this distinction because often in these texts, Indigenous and Native American peoples as well as people of colour are forced to travel as a means of claiming space. Space, of course, reaching beyond just the physical and inclusive of social and cultural as well. To situate my own discussion of space, I'll be drawing on the work of Henri Lefebvre and Katherine McKittrick whose discussions of social space provide a framework for the way that I examine the construction of space on the road. Lefebvre outlines the way in which space can be constructed socially while McKittrick draws attention to black geographies and social spaces that have historically been excluded from cultural mappings of social space. The claiming of space in these texts is also accompanied by a reckoning with constructions of nation and the traveller's place within constructs of national identity. In examining these narratives, I

will also be drawing on the emerging field of mobility studies to create a more nuanced discussion of the unique experience of movement in relation to the narrative myth of nation.

While the road narrative is considered a distinctly American genre, I propose that a reading of Canadian road narratives that emphasize mobility complicates easy national narratives of multicultural cohesion.

While there has always been scholarship emerging around the American road and the role that it plays not only in literature but also in cultural consciousness writ large, there is an emerging academic interest in work done on mobility and movement in Canadian cultural production. While Kerouac sets a precedent of exploring the nation as a way of claiming American identity, many contemporary road narratives do not fit into this project of nation building through cultural production and consumption. There are some popular works about the Canadian road that use stereotypical productions of Canadianness to create a nationalistic road trip, such as the film *One Week* directed by Michael McGowan and starring Joshua Jackson. Jackson's character Ben Tyler is diagnosed with terminal cancer and chooses to deal with the news by abandoning his fiancée in order to embark on a cross-Canada road trip after being urged to do so by Tim Hortons' annual Roll Up the Rim game. Before the game was fully digitized, Tim Horton's customers could roll the rim on their coffee cups after consuming their beverage to learn if they had won a range of prizes. In Ben's case, rather than a prize, the rim simply urges Ben to "Go West Young Man." The film is filled with such clichés of both genre and Canadiana. During a stopover in a small town Ben happens upon the championship trophy of the National Hockey League (NHL), the Stanley Cup, in an empty hockey arena and ventures to touch the greatest possible achievement of what many consider the national sport. Later on in his journey, he meets a man outside of his motel who has successfully overcome cancer, which presents Ben

with some optimism given his own situation. This hopeful insight is delivered by none other than Gord Downie, frontman for iconic Canadian band, *The Tragically Hip*. Downie's advice in the film advice is rooted in his real experience. He had a very public battle with brain cancer until his death in 2017. Drawing on Canadian cultural productions such as Tim Horton's, the Stanley Cup, and *The Tragically Hip* among others, *One Week* (2008) is representative of a particular style of road journey. As Katherine Ann Roberts points out in her book *West/Border/Road* (2018), the film relies heavily on the commodification of Canadian identity to stand in for authentic experiences.

While Roberts' book focuses on the Canadian road narrative in film, many of the tropes she discusses apply across mediums. The nexus of Roberts' argument is her framing of the connection between the western as a genre, the border as a motif, and the road narrative. In doing so, she also identifies the importance of the border in Canadian cultural production. She writes that: "Investing the border with added symbolic importance to soothe anxieties over a perceived loss of national significance is a long-standing tradition in Canadian popular culture" (4). Building on Roberts' discussion of cultural commodification, I see cultural consumption as part of the legacy of the Americanness of the genre. *One Week* uses Canadian cultural production to signify Canadian identity, just as several American road narratives use American products and cultural productions to signify Americanness. In Joan Didion's *Play It as It Lays* (1970), for example, Maria Wyeth always brings a Diet Coke with her on her aimless drives. In *Blue Highways: A Journey into America* (1982), author William Least Heat-Moon craves highway diners with a variety of calendars on the walls.

Other texts trace journeys made by assorted Americans of note, such as Bonnie and Clyde, John Steinbeck, and of course innumerable texts that seek to replicate the experience of

Westward Expansion. Commodification of history is one of the driving factors of travel, and road narratives are no exception. As Steinbeck remarks when he finally sees Yellowstone National Park, in *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* (1962), it is “no more representative of America than Disneyland” (161) equating the experience of viewing something that is thought of as a space of sublime natural beauty with visiting a commercial theme park. Alternatively, in John Krakauer’s *Into the Wild* (1996), Christopher McCandless leaves behind his comfortable life in search of a more authentic experience of being but ultimately replicates the experience of the Gold Rush frontiersman. He relies far less on physical commodities to achieve his goal, but his desire for what he believes to be a simpler existence is clearly rooted in a nostalgic longing for settler-colonial expansion. Each of these texts are exemplary American road narratives and each one uses myths of American nation-building, American cultural productions, and American identity constructions to present a distinctly American journey. The American road narrative is one in which cultural markers are used in order to present a unified national identity. As Roberts argues and *One Week* demonstrates, certain contemporary Canadian road narratives embrace the act of consuming cultural products as a means of establishing a national identity. The texts examined in this dissertation, however, reject simple constructions of nation and national identity and insist instead on using mobility to demonstrate the complexities of nation and the multiplicity of identities that exist within national borders. Rather than consuming constructions of Canadianness, these texts work to complicate the very construction of Canadianness and insist on the plurality of Canadian identities.

Traditionally, the open road is thought of as a place of freedom and escape. It represents modernity and progress and yet, at the same time, is a means of leaving behind the city in favour of pastoral landscapes and solitary reflection. The ideological space of the road is always

ambiguous, in the sense that it reflects the infrastructure of a society, and therefore has been constructed in such a way that controls and directs citizens and yet is perceived in the cultural consciousness as a space that represents freedom. It is not uncommon for function and perception to differ, however in many contemporary road narratives, the road produces a specific narrative that invokes American ideals: freedom, individuality, and in most cases Westward expansion. While the road itself is static and pre-determined, the types of mobility that it offers can be varied which is part of the allure of the road narrative as a genre. The texts that I will be examining in this dissertation are exemplary of the variation that exists within the genre. Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* is a contemporary touchstone for the genre and the influence of the text can be seen in so much of the literature that followed. Kerouac's influence on all road literature that follows is undeniable, but his groundwork has since been built on in productive ways by authors of different backgrounds. The road narrative offers comfort given that the journeys can only follow so many paths, and yet the picaresque nature also creates a variety of scenarios, encounters, and challenges. No two road narratives are ever precisely the same even if the routes followed are identical. In Jacques Poulin's *Volkswagen Blues*, for example, Jack seeks to replicate the route of his childhood hero, the coureur de bois, Étienne Brûlé. His companion Pitsémine is a Métis woman who not only functions as something of a guide for Jack, which mirrors the experience Brûlé would have had, but she must also explain to him the impact of Westward expansion on First Nations peoples. The negative effects of Brûlé's actions are often overlooked in the histories of the explorer that the pair study so closely. While they use Brûlé's trajectory, the experience is entirely different. Pitsémine insists that Jack reckon with the realities of settler-colonial history rather than blindly idolizing his childhood hero.

In many contemporary road narratives, travelers of different races, genders, and socioeconomic statuses do not disrupt the ambiguity that the space of the road represents, only draw attention to structures of power and notions of freedom in different ways. The road presents innumerable functions, however, for the purpose of this dissertation it is a space of liminality that is fraught with potential. There is a sense of excitement and passion that accompanies the beginning of each journey whether or not some kind of goal is achieved. In Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*, the road is most often where the elders appear in order to guide the characters. In *Four Souls* (2004) by Louise Erdrich, the road allows the protagonist, Fleur, to shed her identity and adopt a persona more suited to the task of revenge. In Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash* (1985) the protagonist, Tommy, embraces the anonymity of the road, leaving behind his past when he is imprisoned and continues to introduce himself by his nickname to the new people he encounters. In Kerouac, the potentiality of these liminal spaces is recognized as "IT," an ethereal quality that the Beats attempt to represent through their work, and which Sal believes is to be found somewhere along the route of the American highways. I read this "IT" as not simply a representation of ecstatic energy as it is conceived of by Dean Moriarty, but rather the possibility afforded by the space of the road as articulated by Sal: "all the golden land's ahead of you and all kinds of unforeseen events wait lurking to surprise you and make you glad you're alive to see" (135). There is hope and promise in what the road represents for Sal and in spite of the somewhat treacherous optimism expressed by Kerouac, mobility continues to dovetail with notions of opportunity in the literature of the road.

This is of course rooted in older American notions of Westward expansion and Manifest Destiny wherein the opportunities of the New World were not as lucrative as they may have seemed for colonists and therefore further expansion into the continent was necessary in order to

achieve prosperity. The West continues to occupy cultural understanding as a space of potential and in spite of the distinctly anti-capitalist ideals of the Beats, Kerouac is not exempt from this pull toward California. This distinction is important given that Sal sets out not because he feels that there is financial success to be found but because there is simply a limitless potential in mobility. Each of the textual examples presented above demonstrates the possibilities afforded by the road. The road functions, in these texts, as a potentially transformative space for travellers. These transformations often occur on a personal level but given the alignment of the road narrative with the nation, transformations are often revealing of the constructedness of nation and national identity and its relationship to personal identity.

“Arrival at nationhood”: Constructing the Nation

In order to situate a discussion of nation and national literatures, I will refer to some foundational texts that outline the complex relationship between the novel form and nationalistic thought. Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* is the text that is most often referenced in scholarly discussions about constructions of nation through and by national literatures. He describes the novel as “The movement of a solitary hero through a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside. The picaresque *tour d’horizon*...is nonetheless not a *tour du monde*. The horizon is clearly bounded” (35). Anderson’s description is doubly significant in the context of the narrative of mobility, strengthening the link between the road narrative and the process of nation-building. In the introduction to *Nation and Narration*, Homi K. Bhabha expands on and critiques Anderson’s argument, writing:

The 'locality' of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as 'other' in relation to what is outside or beyond it. The boundary is Janus-faced and the problem of outside/inside must always itself be a process of hybridity, incorporating new 'people' in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning and, inevitably, in the political process, producing unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation. (4)

Here, Bhabha extrapolates from what Anderson posits about the horizon of the work and suggests that nation-building is not simply a dialectical process in which the nation invents itself in relation to the "other," but also must always be engaged in a process of remediating the contours of nation as populations become more diverse. The nation is not a static construction, and it is sustained by its transnational counterparts. In his contribution to *Nation and Narration*, Timothy Brennan echoes Bhabha and Anderson when he writes that the nation is simultaneously a unified construction and a multifaceted one: "The idea of nationhood is not only a political plea, but a formal binding together of disparate elements. And out of the multiplicities of culture, race, and political structures, grows also a repeated dialectic of uniformity and specificity: of world culture and national culture, of family and of people" (62). Brennan here is fleshing out the complexity of the way in which nation is constructed as an entity unifying diverse populations but doing so in relation to and tension with the other. These discussions, rooted in Anderson, lay the framework for the way in which I will be approaching nation, national identity, and national literature in this dissertation.

While I am arguing that the narrative of mobility destabilizes straightforward constructions of nation, I am borrowing from Mary Helen McMurrin, whose term nation-novel is particularly useful for examining national literatures. Once again drawing on Benedict

Anderson, McMurrin examines the way that the emergence of the nation-novel dovetails with the emergence of transnationalism in literature. Using the example of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) as a novel that was imagined as articulating "Englishness," her discussion examines the simultaneity of the creation of both national and transnational literatures. She writes that, in the eighteenth century, the rising popularity of the novel as a form presented an opportunity for nation to be "bundled" by "circulating as a cohesive unity" (534). These unities, however, existed in relation to the productions of other nations: "the English novel, the French novel, soon the American novel, and so on... bore the mark of modern nationness, but that nationness was enabled by the relation among nations" (534). Richardson firmly believed in the Englishness of his text, and yet when it was translated and read in Europe, many rejected the claim of specificity and felt that they could relate to the novel without being English.

Richardson's novel did not, as he imagined, portray a uniquely English story because human experience is not bounded by national borders. McMurrin's primary interest is the translation of novels as exemplary of transnationalism, and this is of course an important discussion when considering the mobility of the text itself as a cultural production. I will be drawing on two strands of McMurrin's work: her use of the term nation-novel, and her discussion of transnational literatures. I will return to the latter, as the creation and impact of the nation-novel in North America must first be addressed.

The dual influence of the nation-novel and the tradition of American road narratives is reflected in Canadian road novels. The scholarship about Canadian travel narratives often outlines the way that travel through and across nations continues to be paired with meditations about the character of the nation. While travel narratives differ in style, they have certainly influenced the nationalist sentiment often expressed in contemporary road narratives. Kevin

Flynn's work on nineteenth century travel narratives examines this tradition in travel narratives written by tourists who embarked on the Canadian Pacific Railway. Flynn argues that the completion of the CPR was central to the production of a cohesive national literature: "With the railway's advent, travel narratives started to represent the country as it had rarely been seen before, in a more or less straight line from east to west through the window of a speeding train" (191). These texts attempted to narrativize the progress of Canada as a nation while also participating in the process of nation-building. Flynn argues that these narratives are "if not the absolute origin, then at least the most easily recognizable roots of a Canadian nationalism embedded in the might of the machine and the special power of the book to propagate it" (191). Significantly, these narratives were often produced by British tourists and as a result, Flynn argues, "it is clear that they were intended as guidebooks...for those who wished to participate in imagining the community that would become the nation" (191). The contemporary travel narrative in Canada, as traced back to the railway narratives examined by Flynn, emerges from this legacy of mobility as a way of reckoning with the nation and national identity. Moreover, the tradition of travel writing in Canada, charted from early settler narratives and journals of exploration, continues to be a transnational project in which the nation is explored and imagined by newcomers or tourists.

The narratives that Flynn examines, such as Stuart Cumberland's *The Queen's Highway from Ocean to Ocean* (1887) and the narrative written by J.W.C. Haldane, are a part of the transnational literature that is outlined by Mary Helen McMurrin in which the nation is imagined and packaged to be consumed in relation to the other. However, Flynn notes that Canadians were incredibly anxious about how their country was perceived by visitors this was part of the reason that Canadians made up such a large part of the audience of these works. Not only does Flynn's

work establish the notion of Canadian mobility as a part of the nation-building project, but it also explores an anxiety about the way Canada is experienced, understood, and presented by others. While travelling by rail is a wholly different experience than road travel, the CPR functions as the precursor to the Trans-Canada Highway.

Anxieties around perceptions of Canada have not entirely dissipated in contemporary Canadian society, rather, it has taken on new forms. Popularly, Canadians desire to be perceived as polite, welcoming, and progressive. The narrative of Canadian diversity and inclusion is a central part of the messaging projected by the government and thus foundational to the way that many Canadians perceive the nation. It is important, at this point, to distinguish between nation and the state. A nation emerges when a group of people share a geography, history, culture, and language. In Canada, there are two official languages shared by the majority of Canadians: English and French. The state are those apparatuses that govern the nation. These are government institutions that determine borders, laws, and policies.

In *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada* (2000), Smaro Kamboureli uses the term “sedative politics” to tackle the way that the official state policy of multiculturalism functions in Canada. Given that Kamboureli succinctly articulates the history and outcomes of the legislation it is worth quoting at length here:

When the Canadian government introduced multiculturalism as an official policy in 1971, entrenched it in the Charter of Rights in 1982, and tabled the Canadian Multiculturalism Act in 1988, it made substantial proclamations of responsibility concerning ethnic diversity. The Multiculturalism Act (also known as Bill C-93) recognizes the cultural diversity that constitutes Canada, but it does so by practising a sedative politics, a politics that attempts to recognize ethnic differences, but only in a contained fashion, in order to

manage them. It pays tribute to diversity and suggests ways of celebrating it, thus responding to the clarion call of ethnic communities for recognition. Yet it does so without disturbing the conventional articulation of the Canadian dominant society. The Act sets out to perform the impossible act of balancing differences, in the process of allowing the state to become self-congratulatory, if not complacent, about its handling of ethnicity. (82)

Kamboureli demonstrates the way that narratives about Canadian national identity are entrenched in and supported by the state through government policy. The state draws on conceptions of nation in order to direct policy and uses national narratives of inclusivity to introduce policies that do not necessarily affect change. However, as a result, there is a reliance on these narratives rather than actual efforts towards a multicultural nation and the legislation serves instead to reaffirm the narratives about the nation as inclusive and welcoming.

Kamboureli's work on sedative politics and the function of multiculturalism in Canada is a useful way of approaching some of the works I am engaging with in this dissertation. She argues that "although terms used in discussing ethnicity have changed, it would be safe to argue that minoritarian Canadians still remain Other to the national imaginary. In the realm of media discourse, they continue to be defined in terms of a counternarrative that now changes, now erodes, what Canadian identity is presumed to mean" (84). While Kamboureli's text was written over 20 years ago, contemporary narratives of mobility such as André Alexis' *Days by Moonlight* (2018), demonstrate that sedative politics are still being practiced today. The concern that Canadian identity constructions are tenuous and unstable becomes useful and productive in narratives of mobility in North America. The texts examined in this dissertation present the multicultural and diverse populations that travellers encounter when they go on the road. In an

effort to experience the nation, travellers are often confronted with the reality that constructions of nation are unstable. Rather than reaffirming constrictive definitions of Canadian identity, these works present the potentiality of diversity and transnationalism, while also critiquing an anxious insistence on a commitment to multiculturalism. The majority of the Canadian narratives of mobility discussed in this dissertation are written by Black Canadians and Indigenous peoples and present experiences of the cultural other using a genre that is closely tied to the construction of nation and national identity.

Nation, as demonstrated by Anderson and scholars that follow (Bhabha, Brennan, and McMurrin), is always constructed in relation to the other; therefore, definitions of nation are never static. Constructions of nation are unified despite the ever-changing contours of what defines a nation. National literature is one of the ways in which nation is defined and continuously redefined. The road narrative is particularly tied to the process of nation-building, nationalism, and national identity and therefore is particularly well-suited to an interrogation of the way in which nation is articulated. The parameters that constitute what can be considered Canadian Literature are always shifting. As a result, Canadian Literary scholarship confirms Anderson's argument and recognizes that an ever-changing nation cannot rely on a static definition. Contemporary North American narratives of mobility, however, often transgress borders and move fluidly between nations and these movements often reveal that, shifting definitions or not, constructions of nation are unstable. In an increasingly globalized world, the nation as a category has become far more nebulous and road journeys are particularly revealing of the multiplicity of identities that exist within the state-prescribed borders of the nation.

Transnationalism

Returning once again to Mary Helen McMurrin's discussion, the transnational is imbricated in the construction of nation. Moreover, transnational movement is often a defining feature of the North American road narrative. McMurrin examines the way that the nation develops in relation to the other through the production of translated literature. Nation, in this dissertation, is characterized as distinct from those spaces, peoples, and identities that exist beyond prescribed borders. In North America, the exchange between nations is facilitated by the common language but dominated by American cultural productions¹. The literary discipline still relies quite heavily on the nation as a category of analysis, and transnational study does not supplant this structure, but rather offers a productive framework for stimulating new considerations of the way that literature and culture circulates. Transnational literary study, as Paul Jay writes, "has productively complicated the nationalist paradigm long dominant in these fields, transformed the nature of the locations we study, and focused our attention on forms of cultural production that take place in the liminal spaces between real and imagined borders" (1). Nation and national identity are not produced in a vacuum, particularly in North America (specifically Canada and the United States) where shared culture, language, and customs create a network of cross-cultural exchange where nations rely on one another for a number of economic and social reasons. In Chapter 2, I examine more closely how transnational turn in literary study has shifted discussions about Canadian Literature. The transnational turn destabilizes but still functions in relation to the nation as a category. In the introduction to *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*, Jay argues that "we have increasingly come to recognize

¹ This is complicated by the fact that French is also an official language in Canada. This tension is explored in Chapter 2.

[that] the locations we study...are not fixed, static, or unchanging. We create the locations we study, and this recognition ought to encourage us to continue to remap the geographies of literary and cultural forms” (4). It accounts for the slippery nature of national identity which, as Paul Jay argues, must always be re-created and remapped in order to account for ever changing populations. The narrative of mobility offers a fruitful genre through which to employ transnational study because it is tied to the process of nation-building and yet the experiences presented within the texts often unsettle national narratives.

I posit that the transnational turn is a productive framework through which to study narratives of mobility written by or about Indigenous peoples, Native Americans, and peoples of colour. The narrative of mobility as examined in this dissertation presents what Susan McWilliams Barndt calls a *theoros* figure, a traveller who is sent to observe the way that other city-states function. However, in the texts discussed in this dissertation, the *theoros* is typically someone who is othered by their race or social class. As *theoros*, their journeys and interactions provide them with wisdom about how the construction of nation and national identity contrasts with the lived experiences of citizens. Destabilizing traditional narratives of Canadian history and identity produces space for a multiplicity of experiences and identities that can be a part of, but not constrained by, a national literature. Many of the texts examined in this dissertation are also not constrained by the boundaries of nation, and cross into neighbouring countries as a part of their examination of nation. The border, as Jay writes, functions as a liminal space in many of these texts and productively complicates clear distinctions of nation.

Many of the journeys discussed in this dissertation cross and re-cross borders between Canada, the United States, and sometimes Mexico. The border functions as a productive space to consider constructions of nation and identity as they relate to the other. In *Border Crossings:*

Thomas King's Cultural Inversions, Davidson, Andrews, and Walton write that "To be 'in-between' the borders...suggests that one is able to recognize those borders and the 'identity' they distinguish, yet still hold another view that can encompass and subvert them. As a result, being inside/outside the borders allows for an understanding of what the borders are delineating, at the same time that it allows for a critique of their seeming stability" (17). Movement beyond nation, then, is a part of understanding how national identity is constructed and packaged. Like Jay, they are arguing that liminal spaces produce possibility and potential for reframing understandings of identity. As such, narratives of mobility productively unsettle narrative history and national identity through their proximity to as well as distance from the nation. In *Volkswagen Blues*, for example, Jack is forced to reconsider his understanding of colonial history while following the route taken by Étienne Brûlé, which destabilizes his conception of Québécois and Canadian identity and history. The border is not only revelatory of the construction and narrativization of history and identity, but it also disregards pre-colonial mappings of North America. It restricts the mobility of Indigenous and Native American peoples whose cultural connections often extend across borders. This is explored in both "Borders" and *Green Grass, Running Water* by Thomas King. Borders are not only liminal spaces that produce critique and consideration of nation, but they also restrict mobility and sometimes deny individuals freedom of movement. While borders delineate the imposed boundaries of nation, they also function as sites of conflict and productive tension in narratives of mobility that provoke reflection and reassessment of perceptions surrounding nation and identity. Similarly, mobility takes place in liminal spaces, the traveller is always in transit and heading toward a destination. The liminality of mobility therefore suggests that there is productivity and potentiality in movement. Before examining the relationship between nation and the narrative of mobility, I must first outline some of the existing

scholarship on the road narrative genre to offer insight into established conversations about gender, race, class, identity, and nation as articulated in road stories.

Building Infrastructure: Scholarship of the North American Road

Ronald Primeau's *Romance of the Road: The Literature of the American Highway* (1996) is both a scholarly text foundational to the study of American road narratives, but also one that is driven by the nostalgia so central to the genre. Primeau traces the history of American road literature, which draws on the traditions of "travel, quest, and adventures narratives" (5). He draws on Joseph Campbell's monomyth, the picaresque, the Bildungsroman, and pilgrimage narratives to illustrate the way that the road narrative genre is characterized. Primeau is interested in the characteristics that draw a rather vague genre together. Given that he is writing in 1996, his text is reflective of his desire to establish the genre as worthy of serious academic attention. He lays out parameters, conventions, and narrative patterns in order to give structure to the study of the road narrative. The texts that he focuses on are largely road narratives written by men. While there is a chapter dedicated to travellers of colour and one where he examines women's road narratives, they feel disconnected from his larger discussion. As one reviewer writes, Primeau's chapter about women's road narratives "is perhaps the least developed" section of the book (Browne 97).

Deborah Paes de Barros argues that Primeau reinforces the notion that the traveler is a kind of lone hero who "proceed[s] with fixed purpose and endless innocence and optimism, an optimism and a rewarded faith that is finally shared with the readers of the narrative" (3). She suggests that Primeau's text shies away from criticism of the genre and only briefly discusses the subjectivity of the individual on the road. I agree with Paes de Barros' criticism of Primeau's

text. His love of the genre is obvious and therefore he seems to have difficulty critiquing the homogeneity of travellers that characterize early 20th century road narratives. Paes de Barros, however, takes up Primeau's work and fleshes out areas of inquiry that Primeau leaves untouched in her book *Fast Cars and Bad Girls: Nomadic Subjects and Women's Road Stories* (2004). In the text, she engages with the way that Primeau attempted but fell short of real engagement with the experience of otherness. Paes de Barros writes that "[the] mythic and optimistic road" presented by Primeau "is a space generally accorded to white males. In accounts of the American road narrative, women and people of color occupy only a liminal periphery. Women and minority authors have historically been largely dismissed from discussions of road literature" (3). Another critique of previous scholarship that she presents is rooted in the fact that the space of the road is treated as static and unchanging. Paes de Barros argues that women's experience of this space, then, is seen as something that ought to fit into those preconceived understandings of travel described by Primeau. The road remains a heroic space that women must fit into: "women are constructed within generic expectations. They function as diversion, scenery and romantic support for the hero's larger quest...women exist typically as objects rather than subjects" (4). Paes de Barros' work largely focuses on overturning this outdated understanding of the road and its function. While I do not discuss women's road narratives in depth in this dissertation, it is important to acknowledge that their experiences are vastly different from those of male travelers. Women are often forced out of the domestic space for reasons beyond their control and the road, rather than signifying possibility and freedom, often presents danger and uncertainty. The threat of physical and sexual violence is far more present in women's road narratives and their journeys are rarely for the sake of self-discovery or meandering considerations of identity. The privilege of considering oneself in relation to the

spaces they travel through is largely reserved for male travelers. Paes de Barros sees contemporary women's mobility as deeply related to concepts of motherhood and maternity, which is clear in a number of novels such as *Anywhere But Here* (1986), *The Bean Trees* (1988), and *Play It As It Lays* (1970), but I see this as secondary to more universal concerns that arise when women travel alone or with other women. In *Thelma and Louise* (1991), for example, the primary threat is the patriarchal justice system as well as the obvious sexual violence that sets the women on their flight from the domestic space. The focus on relationships between mothers and daughters may characterize some female narratives of mobility, particularly of the late 1980s and the early 1990s, but I think it is important to consider these narratives through multiple lenses.

Ann Brigham's text *American Road Narratives: Reimagining Mobility in Literature and Film* (2015), builds on the work of Deborah Paes de Barros in her discussion of texts about mothers and daughters, Brigham views this sort of narrative as one that "bring[s] domesticity out into the open" (14) given that women were more frequently becoming protagonists of road narratives after World War II and toward the end of the twentieth century. A number of these texts (Simpson, Kingsolver, even Didion) were written during a time when a disengagement with traditional values of the nuclear family was still at the forefront of the white liberal woman's notion of equality. This focus on a feminism that is not yet intersectional excludes the travel and mobility narratives of women of colour and places the disillusioned white woman at the forefront of the discussion thereby replicating many of the issues that these scholars point out in Kerouac and his descendants. Brigham's text is useful due to her discussion of the fact that "identity and mobility are mutually constitutive" (Brigham 153). Therefore, the narrative of mobility is "shaped by who is on the road rather than what defines mobility in a sociohistorical moment" (153). I agree with this assertion, and my own analysis of narratives of mobility is rooted in

Brigham's discussion of the influence that identity has on the experience of a journey. Identity is a complex construction in the narrative of mobility, particularly in Canadian literature. In the American tradition, as articulated by Steinbeck and Kerouac and explored by Brigham, to travel across the nation is to connect with the nation and reaffirm constructions of national identity. Given that the Canadian road narrative is influenced by the American tradition, road narratives like *One Week* reflect the notion that travelling the Trans-Canada Highway is a Canadian experience.

The tradition of connecting to the nation through road travel is further explored in Susan McWilliams Barndt's book *The American Road Trip and American Political Thought* (2020), where she connects the American road narrative to the Greek tradition of *theoros*, in which an appointed representative traveled to different city-states to learn about their social and cultural practices. *Theoros* would return home and the wisdom they had acquired from their travels would grant them insight to "consider the range of political possibilities that exist in the world" (xvi). Barndt argues that this tradition becomes embedded in the American road trip to explore American political thought in practical terms. Barndt suggests that American political thought shies away from philosophical tradition and therefore "Literature has been a key vehicle for American political philosophy because of its capacity to engage as well as instruct...in a culture where more apparent forms of philosophizing are rarely tolerated, if not openly derided" (xviii). The American road narrative, Barndt argues, "simultaneously work to create and affirm the zeitgeist...They are posited explicitly as intellectual or spiritual journeys through the landscape, and particularly as journeys in search of the meaning of the United States of America itself" (xviii). However, Barndt expands beyond the significance of the road trip itself and demonstrates that the uniformity of American roads creates a site of shared experience and recognition, which

creates a narrative that is both personal and relatable (xxi). While each traveller may have varied and unique experiences, they often visit familiar sites on well-travelled highways. The function of the relatability, then, Barndt posits is that road trips “are an American tradition, a practice and ritual that can make one, in partaking, feel like part of a national community” (xxvii). Echoing Brigham’s argument about the connection between mobility and identity in the American cultural imagination, Barndt establishes a method of examining the literature of the American road as an attempt to connect with the nation writ large.

The Canadian road narrative is indebted to the American tradition and explores many similar issues and concerns about nation and identity. Katherine Ann Roberts’ *West/Border/Road: Nation and Genre in Contemporary Canadian Narrative* (2018) explores the relationship between American cultural production and the way that Canadian road narratives adopt tropes and characteristics of the genre in attempt to respond to and subvert American notions of Canadianness. Roberts examines the western, the border narrative, and the road genre to explore the ways that Canada has adopted and responded to traditionally American cultural productions and how Canadian fiction navigates the relationship to their southern neighbours. I find Roberts’ discussion of the border narrative and the road narratives particularly illuminating in terms of bridging a discussion between scholarship about American road narratives and the work being done on specifically Canadian road narratives. Roberts argues that: “Contemporary Canadian iterations of these national genres...[offer] scholars a wealth of material from which to reflect on the national conversation about Canadian identity and culture and the enduringly ambivalent Canadian-American relationship” (4). Roberts’ work sees these national genres as productive sites for examining, critiquing, and reframing Canada as a nation in relation to the other (primarily the United States). Ultimately, Roberts sees the use of a traditionally American

genre, the road narrative, as offering a framework for “how Canadian cultural practitioners can *nationalize* the power of the western, border, and road genres” (23). Roberts’ discussion sees the dialectical relationship between Canadian and American cultural production as a productive space for mapping the contours of the nation. She recognizes, as do many Canadianists, the relationship between Canada and the United States as fraught but tied to one another in positive ways. Rather than insist on re-inscribing Canadian identity as distinct from and in opposition to American identity, Roberts reaffirms the argument that national identities on both sides of the border benefit from cross-cultural exchange.

Heather Macfarlane’s recent work on Canadian road narratives, *Divided Highways: Road Narrative and Nationhood in Canada* (2019) is an influential text in the area of Canadian road narratives. For the purpose of her study, Macfarlane divides Canadian road narratives into three categories: English, French, and Indigenous. This is a useful structure to examine differing experiences of road travel in Canada and, drawing on Margery Fee, she roots it in a history of colonialism as a way of the complicating national literatures in light of the legacies of England and France and the “enduring presence of Indigenous peoples” (3). Macfarlane positions the centrality of the road narrative to the nationalist project, writing: “The process of physically covering ground and telling stories about it thus connects the personal to the collective. The act of writing road trip narratives is therefore also nationalistic, or representative of literary nationalism, since telling stories about real places reflects an exploration and claiming of the land, or conversely, the process of being claimed *by* the land” (4-5). Macfarlane is primarily interested in the way that the Canadian road narrative promotes nation-to-nation dialogue. She explains she uses the term nation loosely because “because it is [her] goal that its definition remains fluid” which allows for a more inclusive construction (6). She also makes clear that her

conception of nation aligns with “Indigenous literary nationalists...who celebrate sovereignty” (6). Thus, Macfarlane structures her discussion of Canadian road narratives as interested in the nation as a construction of and reaction to colonization. She rejects the imposition of the U.S.-Canadian border where Indigenous literatures are concerned, which is something I elaborate on in my own work in Chapter 4. I draw on Macfarlane’s scholarship and attempt to work through some of the same issues that she addresses in her work. I see my dissertation as building on Macfarlane’s discussion and employing the frameworks of transnationalism, the production of space, and mobility studies in order to suggest that the narrative of mobility presents the possibility of destabilizing outdated constructions of nation that rely on narratives of inclusion to project diversity rather than reconstituting a national identity that is reflective of the populace.

The difficulty faced by most scholars is the amorphous nature of not only nation, but also of the road narrative. It can be seen as a genre, but one that is difficult to define given the multiplicity of forms of travel, identities, and types of journeys. Much has been written about the subjectivity of the traveller and the way that that shapes the experience of the road, but the road itself as both a concrete and a constructed space requires more critical attention.

Theorizing Road Space and Movement

Mobility studies is still an emerging field of scholarship that examines the culture of human mobility and the ways that it has changed throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Tim Cresswell’s text *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (2006) is a founding text in the area of mobility studies. Cresswell discusses the fact that mobility is a term that is often used in academic discourse but still lacks a specific definition (2). While the term itself may still be nebulous, the study reveals “how imaginations of mobility have informed

judgements about people and their practices over the last several centuries in the Western world” (Cresswell 2). In the Foreword to Philip Vannini’s edited collection *The Cultures of Alternative Mobilities: Routes Less Travelled* (2009), Ole B. Jensen defines what he calls “critical mobilities thinking” as the study of “mobilities as *culture*, *alternative ways* of practicing mobilities, and the *plurality* of mobilities” (Vannini xv). Jensen also argues in his foreword that “sites of movement may be thought of as potentially political sites” (xviii). Mobility studies provides a framework for conceptualizing mobility as a political act. Therefore, while the narrative of mobility can be conceptualized as an act of resistance against dominant narratives of nation and national identity. This notion is connected to earlier scholarship which conceptualizes space as produced and productive for destabilizing social and cultural norms.

Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* (1974) begins to lay the groundwork for theorizing space by posing the question: “To what extent may *a* space be read or decoded?” (17). He goes on to elaborate that “If indeed spatial codes have existed, each characterizing a particular spatial/social practice, and if these codifications have been *produced* along with the space corresponding to them, the job of theory is to elucidate their rise, their role, and their demise” (17). It is my intention to decode the social space of the road as well as the function that is embedded in popular notions of the “open road,” and why it has been coded as a space of limitless possibility. Lefebvre’s text is an inquiry into the reading and understanding of spaces and an interrogation of the way that the findings could be applied to social space in the real world. Lefebvre’s argument recognizes that space is often examined in relation to literature, but the insights produced can be applied to the real world:

When codes worked up from literary texts are applied to spaces — to urban spaces, say — we remain, as may easily be shown, on the purely descriptive level. Any attempt to

use such codes as a means of deciphering social space must surely reduce that space itself to the status of *message*, and the inhabiting of it to the status of *reading*. This is to evade both history and practice. Yet did there not at one time, between the sixteenth century (the Renaissance - and the Renaissance city) and the nineteenth century, exist a code at once architectural, urbanistic and political, constituting a language common to country people and townspeople, to the authorities and artists — a code which allowed space not only to be ‘read’ but also to be constructed? If indeed there was such a code, how did it come into being? And when, how and why did it disappear? (7).

Lefebvre argues that we not only have the framework to define, read, and understand spaces, but historically, we have been capable of constructing spaces. That is, space can be socially produced and therefore space must be examined in relation to the social world in which it exists. This also suggests that space is malleable and exists in a dialectical relationship with social life. The basis of his argument is foundational to my own discussion of the texts under study in this dissertation. However, given that my primary texts are largely written by people of colour and Indigenous peoples, I will be pairing it with more recent discussions about the production of space written by academics such as Katherine McKittrick. As Paul Jay suggests, the transnational encourages us to remap geographies, and McKittrick’s work productively examines Black Canadian geographies and the remapping of social and historical spaces to acknowledge histories that have been underrepresented. It is necessary then, to examine the particular space that is being socially produced in these texts. Each novel examined in this dissertation explores various parts of North America, specifically Canada and the United States. While there are regional differences in various parts of each nation, the shared social and cultural values as well as language makes them easily comparable. In fact, regional differences arise as a result of the

vast size of both countries, and sheer size is often a driving force in the desire to experience the nation by driving.

Embracing Vastness: Driving through the Nation

The size of the nation is often one of the reasons that travellers desire to embark on cross-country travel. Returning to Brigham, *American Road Narratives* begins with a discussion of the way that Americans return to cross-country vehicle travel following times of upheaval such as September 11, 2001. Fear of air travel and heightened airport security play a large role in this shift, but Brigham also points out the way that a surge of nationalism correlates to the desire to see and experience one's country through vehicle travel. Given that the road narrative is a genre that is so closely aligned with a distinctly American tradition of westward expansion and the allure of the frontier, Katherine Ann Roberts argues, by contrast, that many Canadian road narratives have responded by characterizing Canada as a vast, unoccupied, and breathtaking landscape (293). In many ways this mimics and functions as a response to the notion of Manifest Destiny that characterizes American mobility. Canadian nationalism rejects the notion that the nation is simply a part of the United States and also a fear that Canada could simply be swallowed by its neighbour. However, the concept of *terra nullius* also reinforces the erasure of Indigenous peoples in Canada and settler-colonials rely on it to justify claiming land in the name of European monarchs. Whereas Kerouac's loosely autobiographical Sal is naively uncritical of the implications that accompany the ease with which he travels, he believes deeply that his experience is akin to any other journey and imagines that his experiences would be no different from any other traveller. He fails to reflect on the fact that his privilege as a middle-class white man allows him access to spaces that could be uncomfortable, closed, or even hostile to

marginalized peoples. While Sal's descriptions of people of colour often include racial slurs, and therefore are problematic to modern readers, in some ways what Kerouac is voicing through Sal is a desire to understand the experience of the cultural other. Recalling Susan McWilliams Barndt's figuring of the traveller as *theoros*, *On the Road* offers insight into the socio-cultural climate of America in the 1950s where conservatism birthed reactionary movements like the Beats and, eventually, the Hippies. Kerouac's novel provides a unique array of stories and experiences through Sal's encounters with the other (raced, classed, and even gendered) and illustrate the diversity of the nation despite a cultural insistence on uniformity evidenced by suburban living, popular culture of the time, and the emergence of the marketing industry.

The sense of freedom and possibility that Sal Paradise experiences on the road is not nearly as heady for John A. Williams in *This is My Country Too* (1965). In the journalistic memoir, Williams also acts as *theoros* in order to report on whether anything has changed for African Americans in the southern United States in the wake of the Civil Rights movement. Williams recalls in the text that he caused such disbelief as a Black man driving a car in the South that some people swerved or spun off the road while gawking at him. The act of driving in the deep South as an African American in the early 1960s was in and of itself a political act. As suggested by Ole B. Jensen, mobility functions a political act and therefore, Williams' choice to claim space in a vehicle is pointed. The possibility in this act is the attempt to normalize not only driving, but driving for 'leisure,' something that was thought of as exclusive to financially capable white people.

Similarly, in narratives of mobility about Native American and Indigenous peoples the act of driving is political when the driver is Native American or Indigenous. Philip Deloria (Dakota Sioux), in *Indians in Unexpected Places* (2004) writes about the way in which Native

Americans are perceived in relation to automobility. He points out that historically, the cultural notion of the savage creates a perception of an existence outside of time. These “primitive” peoples are thought of as outside of time and incapable of modernizing. Deloria notes the discomfort felt by white observers of the modern or technologically advanced Native American. He writes that: “No white person could fail to have a *general* opinion—a cultural expectation—about Indian people in cars, and no white observer could look at a single automotive Indian person without activating that opinion. As a result, Indian people behind the wheel almost always proved an estranging sight, even for those who thought it worth celebrating” (Deloria 145). In Louise Erdrich’s novel *Four Souls*, the Ojibwe protagonist, Fleur Pillager drives a white Mercedes Benz when she returns to the reservation from her time in Minneapolis. The luxury of the car seems to indicate the kind of life she led for the years she spent away; however, it is the only remnant of her marriage to the lumber baron John James Mauser aside from her child. Ultimately though the reason she leaves, and then later returns, is the possibility of reclaiming the land that was stolen from her by Mauser. In Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water* mobility presents a possibility of family being reunited and of rejection from restrictive government structures. Whereas Sal sees the road as offering infinite and imagined possibilities for himself, for Indigenous and Native American authors the road has the potential to reconnect with and reclaim their identities and occupy spaces that often exclude them. Similarly, for Black Canadians, mobility can act as a means of asserting masculinity as in George Elliot Clarke, or a way of complicating identity structures as they relate to nation and national identity as in André Alexis. The act of mobility in these novels is a rejection of the way that histories of Native American, Indigenous peoples, and Black Canadians have been neglected in national narratives.

These narratives explore those neglected histories while also questioning the constructed narratives about nation and national identity on their journeys.

Similarly, in *Volkswagen Blues*, Jack relies on the Metis Pitsémene's intellectual labour to extrapolate what has been obviously ignored or left out of the Brûlé story. As Macfarlane points out: "From a nation-building perspective, this is very telling. On the one hand, their road trip involves a search for history and national heroes, so this reliance on other texts makes sense. On the other hand, however, it is as though they are incapable of charting their own course and therefore have no choice but to follow the routes prescribed by others" (57). This observation is a counterpoint to the notion of radical possibility in mobility that Kerouac envisions. Poulin's text presents the duality of the space of the road; it is both prescriptive and unfettered. The duality of the road's space is also central to the argument being put forth in this dissertation. The narrative of mobility, I am suggesting, is a productive genre for destabilizing and deconstructing narrative myths and constructions of identity that are tied to nationhood. Jack and Pitsémene replicate the route of an early explorer and coureur de bois, whose explorations were a part of the nation-building process. Pitsémene is extremely critical of the heroic stories of Brûlé which forces Jack to confront his beliefs about history and the way that narrative myth has shaped his relationship to nation. The kind of destabilization that occurs in Poulin's novel is exemplary of the argument being put forward in this dissertation. Pitsémene illustrates the way in which cross-continental travel forces the traveller to confront the ways in which narrative shapes their understanding of national identity. The experience of the road, however, demonstrates the diversity of individual identities that exist within a nation.

In each of the texts examined in this dissertation, the traveller reflects on their identity and relationship to nation. As they move through the varied landscapes and encounter an array of

people and experiences, they are forced to reckon with prescribed narratives about national history and identity. In recognizing the failures of these narratives, the possibility of less reductive identity formations emerges. Paul Jay asserts that transnationalism stimulates renewal and “new forms and expressions of coherence” (4). Producing space for the multifaceted nature of national identity rather than relying on grand narratives and selective histories is a central feature of the narratives of mobility under study here. Ann Brigham works to understand why the road trip becomes so central to the realization of national identity. She wonders: “Is it through the embrace of the country’s vastness, or does ‘looking for an ‘authentic’ American experience’ entail an act of shrinking” (5). My argument here, is that by pairing a discussion of transnationalism with the examination of the narrative of mobility is to embrace vastness: of the nation, of identities, and of potentiality. Rather than treating nation as a category that exists in a vacuum, I insist on the construction of nation as always reliant on its transnational exchanges.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter 1 will provide the historical context of the way in which mobility, both physical and social, is so integral to the American identity. I will examine Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* as the touchstone that most contemporary texts reference. The young white man and his search for identity became too reductive for a genre that seeks to explore the multifaceted experience of alienation. The road narrative allows for the exploration of marginality and North American socio-cultural issues in an in-depth way because of the picaresque nature of the genre. Positioned as *theoros*, the traveller has various encounters in different spaces, which produces space for a variety of characters and ways of life to be depicted in a singular text. Kerouac’s *Sal Paradise* makes attempts to connect with marginalized others throughout his travels, and in doing so

attempts, through his position as *theoros*, to represent the lives of racialized and marginalized peoples. Kerouac's narrative is paired with John A. Williams' *This is My Country Too*, a memoir in which Williams details his experience, as a Black man travelling the United States shortly after the Civil Rights movement. A journalist for *Holiday* magazine, Williams accepts the assignment with the intention of shirking any preconceptions about what he will encounter. The resulting text, however, ends with a reflection on how to move America forward and produce a stronger nation. This chapter pairs these two texts in order to examine the legacy of Kerouac in American literature as well as present the potentiality of the road narrative as an exploration of possible futures for a nation in the midst of massive social and cultural changes.

Chapter 2 will shift focus to Canadian road narratives. This chapter acknowledges Canadian literature's debt to the American road narrative and highlights the ways in which Canadian authors have adapted and reinterpreted the genre. This chapter examines the history of cross-country movement in Canada and the way that mobility continues to be influenced by that history. There is no denying the very Americanness of the road narrative genre, but the lasting influence of the Canadian Pacific Railroad and the TransCanada Highway shape the trajectory of the journey as well as the types of reflections that result from them. The continued crisis to define Canadian national identity is central to academic discussions of Canadian Literature as a whole, and the nation-novel plays a significant role in works that feature cross-Canada journeys. Identity is a central question of the road narrative, and this often manifests in Canadian works as a meditation on individual identity in a self-appointed multicultural nation. The multiplicity of identities (cultural, ethnic, racial, sexual, social, etc.) that exist within Canada make it impossible to create a single definition of what it is to be Canadian. Transnationalism, then, is a useful avenue of analysis given that singular and uniform identity is uncommon in contemporary

Canadian society. Transnational readings acknowledge this as well as the permeability of borders which accounts for the frequent crossings in many Canadian narratives of mobility. An examination of Jacques Poulin's *Volkswagen Blues* demonstrates the extent to which the transnational is central to Canadian journeys. Additionally, this work will engage with and help to expand transnational literary studies. Using Poulin's novel, this chapter explores the complex relationship between America and Canada while also avoiding collapsing the two countries into one homogenous entity.

Chapter 3 examines Canadian policies of diversity and inclusion and multiculturalism through Kamboureli's frame of sedative politics. Texts regarding the mobility of people of colour often take the form of collections containing excerpts, short stories, and letters documenting the travels of African-Americans and Black Canadians. These travels often take place outside of North America whereas this dissertation seeks to refocus its scope specifically on Canada and the reasons that Black Canadians travel within the country. This chapter discusses George Elliot Clarke's *The Motorcyclist* and examines the space of the city that Carl Black traverses and the way that urban mobility serves to affirm Black masculinity in the text. His motorcycle serves as a means of escaping his job as a railcar cleaner and allows him the opportunity to meet and enter into relationships with a variety of women, including his sweetheart, various nursing students from the university, and a wealthy white American woman. The vehicle allows him freedom in his personal life and some class mobility that he may not otherwise have had. His mobility affirms his personhood in a city that still practices segregation and affords him an agency over his social life that empowers him to reject, for a time, the traditional family life that he is expected to embrace. In André Alexis' *Days by Moonlight*, Alfie Homer's mobility is also regionally limited. However, his experiences travelling through

southern Ontario reveal to him some uncomfortable truths about Canadian narratives of politeness, diversity, and inclusion. On his journey he becomes increasingly alienated from a place that he believed to be familiar and welcoming to him. His mobility distances him from his fellow Canadians, but ultimately empowers him in unique ways. Alexis destabilizes Canadian national narratives in order to insist upon the individual experience. Rather than homogenizing the Black Canadian experience, *Days by Moonlight* serves as a reminder of the inability to universalize experiences and thus affirms the need for a multifaceted Canadianness. These novels work together to remap geographies of Blackness in Canada, recount neglected histories of Black Canada, and reject notions of a singular Black experience.

The focus of Chapter 4 will be First Nations narratives of mobility and the way that these often deal with reclamations and community-building. This is exemplified in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* and "Borders," Jeanette Armstrong's *Slash*, and Louise Erdrich's *Four Souls*. These texts examine the imposition of borders, the construction of national identity that both relies on and marginalizes Indigenous peoples, and mobility as a reclamation of agency. Governments in both Canada and the United States have historically restricted movement of Indigenous peoples. Building on Philip Deloria, this chapter examines the narrative of mobility as a political act. Movement, in these texts, works to reclaim lands, agency, and Civil Rights. The mobility of Indigenous peoples also destabilizes categories of nation given, as Heather Macfarlane points out, as the notion of sovereignty and the history of Indigenous nations whose traditional lands stretch across the U.S-Canada border. While mobility is often a solitary undertaking, these texts also insist on the necessity of community as a way of collectively insisting on recognition from the nation.

The conclusion of the dissertation will tie the chapters together to stake a larger claim about the purpose of the road narrative in contemporary North American fiction and the genre's unique ability to explore issues faced by marginalized communities. This dissertation refutes the notion that the road narrative is a genre dedicated to the leisurely explorations of young white men, rather the genre offers productive insight into the construction of nation and national identity and the fluidity of these constructions. When considered in relation to the complex dialectic of nation and transnationalism, the narrative of mobility provides a productive area for considering the shortcomings of contemporary definitions of nation in a time when populations are rapidly shifting, and diversity renders static formations obsolete.

Chapter 1

Psychological Orientations: Historical Contexts of the American Road

The road narrative was a well-established and popular genre long before Jack Kerouac was writing. As far back as *The Odyssey*, there have been written accounts both fictionalized and factual about journeys of discovery. European discovery of the New World inspired a great deal of interest and accounts of the long and dangerous voyages are plentiful. There are a number of accounts written by or told by enslaved African peoples about the experience of the transatlantic slave trade and the horrors they experienced as a result of their kidnapping and ensuing captivity, such as *The Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African* (1789). There are also the journals of Christopher Columbus and the Jesuit missionaries as well as settlers, pioneers, and those who chose to move westward in search of new frontiers left behind accounts of the heretofore unknown. Slave narratives of plantation life, vicious owners, and attempts at escape are readily available. Native Americans share their stories of migration both forced and self-driven orally as well as textually. In short, narratives of movement are plentiful and diverse.

Before the twentieth century, there was an understanding that narratives of movement were investigative as well as personal. Stories of mobility would often take the form of journals or personal narratives, in which the author reported and reflected on new discoveries. These personal and investigative accounts parallel a practice described by Susan McWilliams Barndt in the introduction to her book *The American Road Trip and American Political Thought* (2018). She outlines the Greek practice of *theoros* in which an appointed figure would travel to other city-states in Greece to see how they operated and decide if there were valuable lessons or practices that could be adopted. Culturally the road narrative is thought of as an investigation into individual identity, yet as Barndt demonstrates through her discussion of the *theoros* that the

most valuable part of these journeys are encounters with the other. Ann Brigham considers the vastness of the United States in her discussion of the allure of the road. She wonders if the driving force for any individual traveller is a result of a desire to experience the nation in order to reduce the vastness to something more knowable. I would argue that this is true in the case of travellers like Kerouac's Sal. For marginalized travellers, however, mobility through and across nations is an attempt to reckon with constructions of national identity that exclude or reduce their own personal identities. She argues that the expansive nature of North America creates some very dramatic regional differences. Patriotic desires to explore the nation and wider attempts to understand the construction of national identity necessitate an exploration of the physical space that dictates identity formation. Certainly, *On the Road* spends a great deal of time reflecting on American life and culture. The experience of the nation through road travel is very different when the traveller is a person of colour. Exploring a nation that has historically marginalized or disenfranchised you based on your skin colour requires a negotiation of identity that is radically different. It also requires a more detailed examination of history and national myth. John A. Williams' *This is My Country Too* (1965) details the journalist's travels through the United States. Williams journeys south on assignment from *Holiday* magazine to investigate the ongoing effects of the Civil Rights movement. It is explicitly a reflection on American race relations in the early 1960s. While the aims of the two works are in some ways disparate, the nation that is presented by each is very similar. The America that each author encounters is one that is divided over issues of race, gender, and wealth. These encounters are exemplary of the value of the road narrative as a genre given its unique amalgamation of observation, critique, and geographical remappings.

The spectre of the frontier always lingers on the periphery of American road

narratives. The promise of success, fortunes, and the American Dream were historically responsible for westward movement. However, as Arthur Redding notes, the “safety valve” theory is evidence that the space of the frontier was, and perhaps is, crucial to the development of nation. Redding writes that: “According to the ‘safety valve’ argument, the existence of the frontier allowed the United States to cultivate a functioning democracy by avoiding full-scale violent conflicts between competing social and economic forces” (314). The frontier is not only a space of promise, but it was necessary to have an “open territory into which antagonists might expand” (Redding 314). The way that the safety valve has been framed by Frederick Jackson Turner, and articulated by Redding, renders the space of the frontier a Foucauldian heterotopia, perhaps the one defined in his first principle. In “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” Foucault attempts to lay out his definition of a heterotopia: “In the so-called primitive societies, there is a certain form of heterotopia that I would call crisis heterotopias, i.e., there are privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis” (4). These sorts of crisis spaces are quickly disappearing, Foucault points out and yet they are spaces into which antagonistic people must be able to expand. Toward the end of the lecture, Foucault examines the colony as a heterotopic space. More specifically, he discusses the manner in which Puritans that settled in New England functioned as this sort of heterotopic colony. Foucault argues that “I am thinking, for example, of the first wave of colonization in the seventeenth century, of the Puritan societies that the English had founded in America and that were absolutely perfect other places.” (8) The foundation that America is built on then, the original Puritan colonies, are already conceived of as a heterotopia. The purpose of the colonies was not only to flee religious persecution in Europe and Great Britain, but also to be able to practice their faith publicly and peacefully. The New

World was settled as a space free from the pre-existing restrictions of society. The notion that the New World was a space where freedom from oppression (albeit, almost exclusively for white Imperialists) evolved into the notion of American individualism. When considered in conjunction with Redding's explanation of the safety valve concept, an understanding of the history heterotopic spaces in American culture begins to emerge.

While the notion of the frontier as a heterotopic space is alluring, it does not provide a satisfactory theoretical framework through which to examine alterity in American road literature. There is no utopian space beyond the frontier, while perhaps alluring for settlers was a project of colonization and dispossession and therefore predicated on white supremacy and Manifest Destiny. Mobility studies offers a more complex and nuanced understanding of the way that the road narrative genre presents space as socially produced. Mobility studies is still an emerging field of scholarship that examines the culture of human mobility and the ways that it has changed throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In the Foreword to Philip Vannini's edited collection *The Cultures of Alternative Mobilities: Routes Less Travelled* (2009), Ole B. Jensen defines what he calls "critical mobilities thinking" as the study of "mobilities as *culture*, *alternative ways* of practicing mobilities, and the *plurality* of mobilities" (Vannini xv). Jensen also argues in his foreword that "sites of movement may be thought of as potentially political sites" (xviii). Drawing on Jensen, this chapter uses the framework of mobility studies and the potential of those spaces of mobility to examine the road as an infrastructure implemented by both federal and state powers, and the subversive potential of the space of the road. This discussion is further bolstered by Susan McWilliams Barndt's argument that road travel is inseparable from political theory. It was not simply that the *theoros* could relay interesting stories, but that their travels allowed them to "[amass] a special kind of political wisdom. By

seeing in practice so many of the different ways in which human societies can manage themselves, the theoros was in a unique position to be able to consider the range of political possibilities that exist in the world. He— in ancient Greece, it was always a he— bore witness to cultural variety and was able, on the basis of that witness, to speak with some authority about the relative merits of different forms of social and political organization.” (xvi). The *theoros* as bearing cultural witness to variety is an essential aspect of the road narrative, and the exchanges between the traveller and those that they encounter are the most compelling and engaging facet of road stories. Barndt demonstrates that this practice dates back much farther than Kerouac’s use of it, and therefore begs the question: what makes Kerouac such a touchstone of the genre?

The safety valve eventually adapted, and in the post-World War II era, and with the new popularity of the car, the solution seemed to be a modernization of the pioneer ethos: taking to the road. If a frontier destination no longer existed, then the road itself would serve as the heterotopic space into which the refuse of society could be filtered. The publication of *On the Road* in 1957 reinforced the notion of the road as a space where countercultural endeavours could be undertaken more freely. While *On the Road* is considered fiction, it is a fictionalization of Kerouac’s real road experiences and the characters in the novel are largely made up of his Beat friends and colleagues presented with pseudonyms to avoid legal repercussions. Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty exemplify the more hedonistic aspects of the freedom that is seen to accompany road travel. Sal and Dean travel America looking for a good time, indulging in a kind of sex, drugs, and rock and roll ethos on their travels. However, there are moments in the text that hint toward the utopian possibilities of the road. These moments often come from encounters with those who are othered. Sal romanticizes various subject positions as somehow more authentic than his own. Yet, there are moments of real connection in the novel and what is

considered to be somewhat of a bildungsroman is oftentimes a text that examines a variety of American ways of life. Leaving New Jersey on the heels of a failed marriage, Sal hopes for a better understanding of himself and his own issues, and yet find himself attempting to connect with marginalized people throughout the novel. While these attempts are sometimes shallow and Sal himself rarely understands his own subject position in relation to others, *On the Road* presents the experiences of migrant workers, Black Americans, transient people, people who have struggled in social and prison systems, and women who are working through the sexual revolution as well as attempting to break away from the constraints of traditional notions of femininity. The cultural importance of Kerouac's novel can be understood then not simply as a result of the allure of a story about American Beat culture, but also as a document of cultural otherness in mid-twentieth century America. The road narrative as a genre is perfectly suited to this sort of cultural investigation. The picaresque nature of the genre allows for brief snapshots into the lives of strangers relayed by the narrator. While stories of the road are often thought of as private or individual reflections, they often arise out of encounters with other people.

However, in a narrative of mobility oftentimes the person undertaking the road travel is someone whose otherness is pre-determined. In *This Is My Country Too*, John A. Williams leaves Harlem and drives into the Southern United States with only a very vague idea of what to expect. In fact, he decides to bring his firearms with him and is only convinced to send them home just before traveling into Kentucky. He struggles with balancing a desire to protect himself versus the advice of friends and loved ones who feel that the possession of a firearm by a Black man in the South would cause a great deal of trouble for Williams. His encounters with others are most often dictated by race despite his desire to avoid discussions about Civil Rights. When *Holiday* magazine offers Williams the assignment, he "was just to drive around the country and

see and listen to Americans. [He] was to take the pulse of the country as nearly as [he] could” (xvii). However, given the recent passage of Civil Rights legislation and the racial tension in the American south, Williams’ journey becomes a reflection on Black American identity and the difficult task of relating to nation when one is openly and often violently marginalized by the constraints of a white nationalism. Williams’ mobility does not match the uncomplicated freedom experienced by Sal, instead his journey is dictated by his race. His meetings, lodgings, and routes are often determined by his identity. For example, Williams must carry the *Travelguide* with him so he can be certain that he will be able to find safe lodgings and stops along his journey. Unlike Sal, he is not in search of an ephemeral authenticity and instead reflects on his experiences as they unfold. Where Sal must rely on his encounters with othered peoples, Williams is afforded a great deal of insight through experiencing the way that Americans act during their encounters with a Black man.

“The road is life”: Kerouac’s Constructions of Alterity

Sal, as *theoros*, tries to relay his experiences and encounters with otherness throughout his travels. His narrative presents a pastiche representation of America and American people. He is principally concerned with encountering otherness on the road, and desires encounters with existences that are radically different from his own. While Sal is a naïve observer who often fails to understand the people and experiences that he encounters, his narration of them is still valuable in producing space. In telling the stories of the people he encountered, he drew attention to the lives of Americans that were not often depicted in popular literature. One of the earliest examples of a reliance on the experience of the other in the novel is when Sal hitches a ride on the flatbed of a truck driven by two farmers from Minnesota. Among his companions on the

flatbed is a man referred to as “Mississippi Gene,” who is described as a “little dark guy.” Almost as soon as he is introduced, Sal begins to attribute Buddha-like qualities to the man (23). Shortly after this description Sal clarifies that Gene is a white man but that “there was something of the wise old Negro in him” (26). Sal projects a racialized identity onto Gene. He so desperately wants to connect with otherness because he believes that he can gain insight from perspectives radically different from his own. Sal believes he can learn something from this older vagabond, but rather than attribute his knowledge to experience he imbues Gene with a kind of mystic otherness, emphasizing his “cross-legged, patient reverie” and his distinct southern accent. Gene is traveling with a young blond boy who has left Mississippi because of some unknown trouble. The way that Gene describes their relationship is evocative of Huck Finn and his companion Jim. Mark Twain’s classic bildungsroman is a natural reference for many road narratives because it too is a journey where the protagonist learns about the construction of American identity through his travels. However, it is strange that Kerouac seems to be connecting these two men he has encountered with these fictional characters. It reinforces the way that Gene is othered through his connection to Buddhism, his thick accent, and the way he is described as “dark.” In spite of the fact that Sal learns very little about Gene and his companion, he feels strongly that they must have some knowledge of IT, Kerouac’s term for an undefinable essence, that he is seeking. This becomes a recurrence in the novel, Sal feels that there is some kind of purity of spirit attached to those who are other, and he fetishizes people that he sees as other. Regardless of the naivete of Sal, there is a real desire to connect with and learn from those with wildly different experiences.

His desire to experience cultural otherness is more apparent when Sal meets Terry on a bus to Los Angeles. She is a Mexican woman whose family are migrant labourers in Sabinal,

California. The pair abandon their plans to drive to New York together and instead decide to live in Terry's brother's garage and work for a time in order to make money. Sal begins to view himself as a Mexican migrant labourer in spite of his inability to comprehend even the most basic Spanish. Terry's brother Rickey and his friend Ponzo have a *laissez-faire* attitude towards work which is reflected in their refrain of "*mañana*²" when Sal wonders "what had been accomplished" during the workday (93). Rickey dismisses Sal's concerns by telling him that tomorrow they will find some manure to deliver. Ponzo also assures him: "Don't worry, man... Tomorrow we make a lot of money; tonight we don't worry" (93). Worried about spending the last of their five dollars, Terry wonders: "*Mañana*... everything'll be alright tomorrow, don't you think?" (94). It is not until this moment that Sal reveals that he does not know the meaning of the word, nor does he care to find out. Rather he muses on his own suppositions: "It was always *mañana*. For the next week that was all I heard... a lovely word and one that probably means heaven" (94). He begins picking cotton with Terry in order to make money and this leads to a number of naïve observations about racial identities. He romanticizes the work of an older Black couple, imagining that "They picked cotton with the same God-blessed patience their grandfathers had practiced in ante-bellum Alabama" (96). As with most of his encounters in the novel, Sal fails to recognize the complexity of being racially other in America.

Despite living and trying to work with Terry and her family for the previous week, Sal has not gained any understanding about the lives of migrant workers and the difficulties they regularly experience. Rather, he is content to have the experience without gaining real knowledge. Sal claims an identity that is not his because he feels that his proximity to these

² A word used to indicate the indefinite future and procrastination.

people is enough. When labourers from Oklahoma begin violently assaulting some of the other workers, Sal imagines he could also become a target. He arms himself with “a big stick...in case they got the idea we Mexicans were fouling up their trailer camp. They thought I was a Mexican, of course; and in a way I am” (98). Nothing comes of Sal’s fear, and he never has to confront the Oklahoma labourers. Mere pages after exposing the limitations of his understanding of Spanish, Sal declares that he is a Mexican simply by the fact of his proximity to Terry and her family. While the threat of violence from the other workers does extend to him, he fails to see that he is privileged in this situation. His whiteness and his Americanness offer him potential to resolve the issue should he encounter these workers from Oklahoma. His desire to connect to an experience of alterity results in a failure to recognize his shared identity with other American migrant workers. Sal is desperate for a certain kind of experience, one that often precludes him from other authentic connections on his journey. McWilliams Barndt reads Kerouac’s novel as an example of *theoros*. I argue though, that unlike the journeys of *theoros*, Sal often rejects moments of interaction with others in favour of maintaining a singular experience that he imagines for himself. Rather than observing and interrogating all of the people that he encounters equally, Sal constructs his experience on the road in a way that ensures that he feels he has achieved a certain kind of experience. He chooses not to befriend the labourers from Oklahoma and sees them as antagonistic to him because of his connection to Terry’s Mexican family. Rather than intervening and establishing a connection with them in a way that might end their violence against other migrant workers, Sal simply accepts their antagonism as a fact.

The desire for authenticity, however, is usually short-lived because Sal is more tourist than *theoros*. It is not long after this incident that Sal decides that he can no longer continue to work in Sabinal because colder weather is approaching. Terry wants to accompany him, but her

father resists and Sal recognizes that it is for the best that she and her young son remain in the care of her family. Sal cannot stay because he can “feel the pull of [his] own life calling [him] back” (98). His involvement with Terry, her son Johnny, her brother Rickey, and his friend Ponzio, is not enough to keep him in Southern California. Each of them promises to come to New York but Sal knows they will never make it there.

Before his departure, he convinces Terry to return to her parents’ home where Johnny can have a more comfortable life. It is very clear, upon arrival, that Sal is not welcome there and that he is an outsider in this situation. Ponzio gives Sal, Terry, and Johnny a ride to the “family’s shack...They left me off a quarter-mile away and drove to the door” (98). Not only is he not welcome in the home, but he must stay off the property while Terry negotiates her return with her parents. While Terry spends time with her family, Sal must sleep in Ponzio’s truck and the barn of a farmer down the road from her family. Not only does his misunderstanding of the language mark him as an outsider, but here it becomes clear that he is not considered worth including. Ostensibly, Sal is not allowed on the property because Terry’s family is still angry that she left her husband for Los Angeles. Sal represents this departure from her life. Aside from what he represents, the fact remains that he does not share a language with Terry’s family and his presence would only serve to complicate the conversation. Terry and Sal are both aware that they have come here hoping that Terry will be allowed live with her family while Sal returns to New York. In this situation Sal takes note of the otherness of Terry’s family, rather than recognizing that he is the minority in this situation. While listening to the arguing that follows Terry’s arrival at her family home, Sal positions himself as a distant observer: “They called her a whore because she’d left her no-good husband and gone to LA and left Johnny with them. The old man was yelling. But the sad, fat brown mother prevailed, as she always does among the great fellahin

peoples of the world, and Terry was allowed to come back home” (98). Employing the language of Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* (Holton), Sal positions himself as a kind of anthropologist, observing the familial structures of a foreign culture. In spite of his insistence that he belongs with Terry’s family, and his claim that he is one of them, he remains an outsider. He leaves alone, keenly aware that he will likely not see any of these people again. Sal does not seem to understand, however, that his departure is a result of his privilege. He has a comfortable, middle-class home in Paterson, New Jersey to which he can return. He wants to be on the road again and he is happy to return to New York but does not acknowledge that these freedoms and his whiteness mark him as an interloper and therefore not able to access the realities of Terry’s life. She is rooted in Sabinal with few other options, and once Sal leaves her, she is forced to return to her father’s home.

Sal continues to oscillate between a desire to connect with marginalized peoples in a way that he envisions as authentic while continually positioning himself as an outsider and an observer. For a period of time, he works and lives in Denver on his own. By this time, all of his friends have left the city for various reasons, but he chooses to take a rather gruelling job at a fruit market. During this period of time, he does a great deal of reflecting while walking through the city and observing. He narrates his reflections: “At lilac evening I walked with every muscle aching among the lights of 27th and Welton in the Denver colored section...feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night...I wish I were...anything but what I was so drearily, a ‘white man’ disillusioned” (Kerouac 179-80). Sal is certain that his identity precludes him from experiencing life in some significant manner. Yet mere moments later he claims a knowledge of racial otherness based solely on observation. He wishes desperately to “exchange worlds with the

happy, true-hearted Negroes of America” without reflecting on how he arrived at this conclusion (Kerouac 180). He imagines that there is some essential characteristic possessed by racialized peoples that he cannot access. He projects a sort of purity of being onto people of colour in the same way that his inability to understand the Spanish language results in his belief that the refrain of “*Mañana*” is evocative of the celestial. Sal continues to assume knowledge of others while positioning himself as distinctly different from those that he observes. This is obvious as he observes a sandlot softball game during his walk:

A great eager crowd roared at every play. The strange young heroes of all kinds, white, colored, Mexican, pure Indian, were on the field, performing with heart-breaking seriousness. Just sandlot kids in uniform. Never in my life as an athlete had I ever permitted myself to perform like this in front of families and girl friends and kids of the neighborhood...Near me sat an old Negro who apparently watched the games every night. Next to him was an old white bum; then a Mexican family, then some girls, some boys—all humanity, the lot. (180)

Kerouac positions his narrator as an observer of humanity, rather than a participant in “the whole lot,” and yet Sal relates to the scene unfolding before him, nonetheless. He remarks that these neighbourhood players are enjoying the game far more than he was ever allowed to in his youth. This is one example of the All-American identity that Sal Paradise had once aspired to before falling into the counterculture. Before leaving for his journey, Kerouac and subsequently Sal had been a university student, and a merchant marine. He had gotten into Columbia University on a football scholarship. Athletics, in Sal’s experience, does not involve a sense of play or enjoyment. Yet here he witnesses the game as an expression of joy and community that is open

to all, but he remains an outsider and observer. In this instance, Sal is othered and excluded because he is a tourist rather than a neighbour.

As he continues his walk, he laments that these marginalized peoples will never truly understand the unique difficulties that he has had to face. He believes firmly in his misunderstandings of racial difference: “There was excitement and the air was filled with the vibration of really joyous life that knows nothing of disappointment and ‘white sorrows’ and all that” (181). Sal’s observations are clouded by his own naivete, and yet they still present scenes of daily life with which many of Kerouac’s readers would not be familiar. Kerouac’s description of racial harmony during the nightly game of neighbourhood baseball not only depicts an idealized American “melting pot,” but does so through a staple of Americana: a baseball game. Not only is this presented as a harmonious assimilation, but Sal imagines it as a microcosm of humanity as a whole. This vision of humanity is a utopian America in which all races coexist happily and without conflict. Naïve though it may be, it is an optimistic view and one that, in 1957, would likely have been unusual in popular literature. Sal positioning himself as an outsider to this scene contrasts with the way that he views himself while living in Sabinal. There, he sees himself as assimilating with his Mexican friends and paramour in spite of their obvious differences. In Denver, conversely, he sees himself as an outsider but one whose own circumstances are far more oppressive than the racially othered peoples living in a low-income neighbourhood. He imagines that the people he observes are simple and thus able to enjoy life unburdened by the problems that plague Sal. Sal forgets, that in spite of his “white sorrows,” he too “gets his kicks” while spending time in the company of friends. There are moments of joy and excitement for him that are no different from this baseball game. When he is travelling with Dean, there is no shortage of enjoyment in their adventures. His self-pity obscures his ability to

recognize this moment of enjoyment as an experience that he is often afforded. Sal's "white sorrows" amount to nothing more than feeling sorry for himself because his friends have left the city and he must take a labour-intensive job for very little pay in order to live. Yet Sal is not obligated to take working-class jobs, he simply does so when he is on the road in order to make extra money. He could simply return to his middle-class existence in New Jersey; however, he chooses to stay in Denver. Mere sentences after he laments his lot in life, he describes a visit to a rich female friend who proceeds to give him \$100 and instructs him to: "take this and go and have your fun" (181). Sal is thrilled by the gift and explains that "all my problems were solved" (181). His decision to live as somewhat of a vagabond makes him believe that he is somehow disenfranchised, and yet a visit to a sexual partner changes these circumstances immediately. Sal seems to forget all of his sorrows and takes off yet again for San Francisco. His mobility alone is evidence of the kind of privilege he enjoys that the people in the racialized neighbourhoods of Denver do not. It also recalls his swift departure from Sabinal and his refusal to acknowledge that Terry, Rickey, and Ponzo could never make enough money to afford to travel to and establish a life in the city and therefore would never come to meet him in New York.

The final journey in the novel eschews Westward movement in favour of exploring "the magic *south*" (Kerouac 265). Dean and Sal finally decide to leave the confines of their America, where they "are at home; I can go anywhere in America and get what I want because it's the same in every corner, I know the people, I know what they do" (121). This affection for the sameness of America comes much earlier in the novel, but it also foreshadows the desire to turn south toward Mexico in favour of experiencing something far different than the trans-American journey the pair had already made several times. The desire to experience difference finally leads the two men across the border and away from what they know and ultimately allows Sal to

position himself yet again as a kind of anthropologist. Once again, Sal returns to Oswald Spengler's term and considers many of the Mexican peoples as "fellahin" who Spengler believes exist outside of Western understandings of history.³ Sal's descriptions of many of the people he sees echoes stereotypical depictions of the noble savage. He disparages American ideas and stereotypes about Mexican peoples and yet he replaces the images of the "Pedros and Panchos of silly civilized American lore" with his own generalizations: "they were great, grave Indians and they were the source of mankind and the fathers of it" (280). He imagines that when "destruction comes to the world of 'history'" the peoples of Mexico will carry on and once again populate the Earth (280). His reverence of the racial and cultural other is most apparent in this section of the novel. While he speaks about the people he observes in a very generalizing fashion, one that again assumes a kind of essential pureness of spirit, he does not present his readers with negativity. His naivete allows for a rather positive image of Mexico and its inhabitants even if it is rooted in misunderstandings and assumptions and replaces one stereotype with another. What stands out in the description above is that he disparages the popular American image of Mexicans as "Pedros and Panchos" and replaces it with the image of the "Indian" in a way that draws on the noble savage and thus belittles and marginalizes an entire nation.

Kerouac's text is a product of Beat counterculture, but it often is thought of as a novel that reinforces contemporary notions of race, gender, and class. These criticisms are not unfounded; Sal often takes issue with any woman he is not romantically involved with and does make racially insensitive comments throughout the novel. Bill Roger (2010) argues that

³ Michael J. Prince explains Kerouac's adoption of Spengler: "Drawing his inspiration from Oswald Spengler (in *The Decline of the West*), Kerouac takes the Arab peasant fellahin and generalizes the social 'caste' to embrace all New-World cultures that lie beyond the grasp of Western materialism" (193 in *Transculturation and Aesthetics*).

Kerouac's experience counters his ideals and that *On the Road* is "a precursor of mobile mass tourism in America" (395). James Campbell (2001) details the attempts made by Kerouac and his Beat peers to 'pass' in Black social circles and how the popularity of Beat culture "the black word *beat* turned white" (451). In a similar critique, Jennifer Forsberg (2017) suggests that Kerouac performs "working-class drag." I agree with Forsberg's critique, which is particularly reflected in Sal's time in Sabinal and Denver. Todd F. Tietchen (2010) condemns Kerouac's "predatory treatment of Latin America...where characters routinely participate in forms of ethnic/racial tourism" (9). Michael J. Prince (2014) similarly critiques the way that Kerouac deploys race in *On the Road* and often coopts identities and subjectivities because he believes the "fellahin" to be a romantic ideal. The scholarly discussion around Kerouac's work frequently engages with the problem of Kerouac's desire to coopt experiences that are not his own. Tietchen's criticism is particularly useful for my own discussion given that Kerouac often veers away from *theoros* function and becomes a predatory tourist in an effort to fulfill his desire to experience alterity. The endurance of Kerouac in popular culture must then lay in the text's prominence as a work of Beat literature, in its representation of the counterculture in the early 1950s, and its representation of marginalized peoples whose stories may not otherwise have been so wildly popular.

The publication of *On the Road* in 1957 was perfectly timed to capture the frenzied spirit of the Beat countercultural movement. The novel was an instant success and Kerouac was vaulted to fame seemingly overnight. The success of *On the Road* also cemented Kerouac's status as emblematic of the Beats and as an icon of mid-twentieth century popular culture. Kerouac remains the "gateway" to Beat literature for many young readers, and alongside Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs makes up the triumvirate fatherhood of the Beats. Joyce

Johnson's book, *Minor Characters* (1999), recounts the felicitous timing of the *New York Times* review of *On the Road* written by Gilbert Millstein. The novel was published on September 5, 1957, and the regular reviewer Orville Prescott, who Johnson notes was "conservative [and] middle-aged" (181), was away on summer holiday so the task of reviewing Kerouac's novel fell to Gilbert Millstein. Millstein had read John Clellon Holmes and had been following the Beat authors for some time. It is somewhat by happenstance, then, that *On the Road* finds such instantaneous success, in part as a result of Millstein's glowing review and genuine excitement about Beat literature. While Johnson's description of the events is a reminder that Kerouac became extremely successful because of the novel, it also serves as an example of the atmosphere into which *On the Road* was published. There was a desire for accounts of counterculture and depictions of experiences outside of traditional, conservative middle-class existence. William S. Burroughs spoke about the reception of the novel at the 1982 Jack Kerouac Conference, saying that:

Once started . . . the Beat movement had a momentum of its own and a world-wide impact. In fact, the intelligent conservatives in America saw this as a serious threat to their position long before the Beat writers saw it themselves. A much more serious threat, say, than the Communist party. The Beat literary movement came at exactly the right time and said something that millions of people of all nationalities all over the world were waiting to hear. You can't tell anybody anything he doesn't know already. The alienation, the restlessness, the dissatisfaction were already there waiting when Kerouac pointed out the road. (Davidson 28)

Burroughs' description paints an image of Kerouac as a well-timed voice in a period fraught with discontent. *On the Road* was simply a response to this desire for change and Kerouac reflected the pre-existing "alienation, the restlessness, [and] the dissatisfaction" back at his readers.

The cultural importance of the novel, then, is the fact that it captured an overwhelmingly relatable sense of disaffection. The Beats were not just a group of college-educated literati whose own writings were wildly popular, but rather a movement that evidenced a cultural shift away from contemporary notions of traditional values. As Burroughs and Johnson point out, Kerouac became something of an icon of the movement which is such a crucial aspect of his legacy and his continued popularity. The relatability is precisely what makes *On the Road* such a touchstone of the road narrative genre. Kerouac pairs the disenchantment of young Americans with the movement of road travel in a way that evokes the Greek *theoros*, even if he is unsuccessful in my assessment. He revives the tradition of cultural exploration alongside the solipsistic reflections that are characteristic of the solitary journey. Sal Paradise embodies the mounting dissatisfaction with conservative middle-class American values and escapes the pressures of suburban life through road travel that allows him to engage with people whose views, experiences, and ways of life differ from his own. As Burroughs points out in his conference address, Kerouac drew attention to the space of the road as a means of escape, but he did not establish an entirely new tradition.

Kerouac's legacy is often conflated with the wide-reaching influence of the road narrative as a genre, yet *On the Road* is far more reflective of a particular cultural moment than it is a reinvention of the genre. Truman Capote was rather famously critical of the spontaneous prose method employed by Beat authors, writing in a 1957 issue of the *Paris Review* that: "they're not writers. They're typists". This assessment is in some ways a fair representation of *On the Road*

and does not necessarily conflict with what Kerouac set out to accomplish: travel America and report what he saw. While Kerouac's own naivete and privilege often colours his assessment of his experiences, nonetheless the novel seemingly reports what he witnessed in his travels. Jack Kerouac, via his narrator Sal Paradise, functions as a *theoros* figure, albeit an unreflective and uncritical one, through his reporting of his encounters with otherness across America. Therefore, Kerouac's novel as a piece of literary history is highly valuable in the sense that it provides readers with insight into a particularly complex and frenzied period of cultural upheaval. The value of *On the Road* as a touchstone of the road narrative genre, however, may be overstated precisely because of Kerouac's lack of depth. *On the Road* relays the experience of encountering the racial and cultural other but rather than critically engage with or reflect on these conversations and experiences, Kerouac imagines not only that he understands this feeling of marginalization, but that he can experience it through proximity.

“America in its crisis”: Reports from a Country in Turmoil

The road narrative genre is most powerful and effective when it blends the observation of the *theoros* with the production and remapping of social spaces that often occurs in those journeys undertaken by marginalized peoples. Whereas Sal is a more passive observer and reporter on the things he witnesses, John A. Williams is an active *theoros*. He engages those around him on the difficult issues faced by Americans during the Civil Rights movement. He reflects on his experiences and offers suggestions on how best to move forward. His narrative actively produced space for Black Americans during a time when their demand for rights and freedoms were causing discomfort for white Americans. The Lefebvrian understanding of space as constructed and therefore malleable is taken up by and expanded upon scholars of colour such

as Katherine McKittrick and Indigenous scholars like Philip Deloria. Deloria's *Indians in Unexpected Places* examines the discomfort felt by white observers when Native Americans or Indigenous began to use commonplace technologies. Deloria points out that Native Americans were imagined as primitive and thus it was unsettling for white people to witness a car being driven by a someone often labelled as a "savage". John A. Williams notes a similar reaction, in the 1950s, to his own driving when witnessed in the southern United States. The very act of driving while Black, Native American, or Indigenous is transgressive and disrupts the idea that progress is unique to white North Americans. This disruption, while causing discomfort for some, creates space for marginalized peoples in public spaces from which they have historically been barred.

Katherine McKittrick's work emphasizes the geographical remappings that occur in the travels of people of colour. In her book *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, she "draw[s] on creative, conceptual, and material geographies from Canada, the United States, and the Caribbean" (x) and does so in order to examine "spatial histories as they constitute our present geographic organization" (x). Most importantly, McKittrick lays out the reason for her interest in the project which is rooted in the fact that "The relationship between black populations and geography— and here I am referring to geography as space, place, and location in their physical materiality and imaginative configurations— allows us to engage with a narrative that locates and draws on black histories and black subjects in order to make visible social lives which are often displaced, rendered ungeographic" (x). Through examining Black geographies, McKittrick not only draws attention to but reasserts the social space of Black life. McKittrick's text contributes to my own discussion about the way that the literature of the road maps social space as well as produces it where it may have previously been suppressed.

McKittrick echoes Deloria in her discussion of the complex relationship between technologies of travel and peoples of colour. For McKittrick, it is not simply that Black people are viewed as incompatible with technologies, as Deloria argues is the case for Native Americans, but also that technologies of movement have also been sites of oppression. McKittrick specifically discusses the ship of the transatlantic slave trade, which “move[d] diasporic subjects through space...these vessels also expose a very meaningful struggle for freedom *in place*” (x). Movement is sometimes in opposition to freedom and post-civil rights journeys undertaken by Black Americans are often, whether intentional or not, reclamations of agency.

John A. Williams did not intend to write a text that dealt overtly with racial politics in the southern United States, and yet, in *This is My Country Too*, he is often faced with the tension of the post-civil rights era during his travels. As a man of colour, he is often asked what he thinks of the situation and consistently drawn into conversations about race relations in the South. Williams makes certain decisions solely as a means of enacting his agency and as a way of separating himself from outdated conceptions of Black people. Not only is he faced with outright hostility in certain situations, but in many cases, he encounters progressives whose behaviour makes him just as uncomfortable. Williams’ text provides an insight into the experience of tokenization, racism, and an exploration of American identity as a non-white person. Whereas Kerouac’s subject position affords him a carefree experience, Williams must pay close attention to his surroundings, stops, and safety throughout his journey. In this way, Williams’ positioning as *theoros* is somewhat more compelling than Kerouac’s. Williams is actively exploring a political issue and doing so through interviews and experiences all while considering his own subject position in America.

This is My Country Too is an examination of how people of colour were treated at the time of his journey. He embarks on his journey south at the behest of his editors but was warned to avoid “overemphasizing the civil-rights issue” (xviii). Williams prepared himself to “lean over backward to be objective” but once his journey took him south of the Mason-Dixon line it became impossible for him to remain impartial about race relations in America. Williams’ editors at *Holiday* magazine intended for the articles to mimic Steinbeck’s *Travels with Charley* (1962) and thus Williams was asked merely to observe Americans as he traveled. In the introduction to the text, Williams points out the way that his journey differs from that of a white American like Kerouac. Cross-country travel for a Black Americans at the time required careful planning and consideration. Such foresights rarely factor into Sal and Dean’s various trips, particularly a number on discussions Williams must have about whether or not to carry arms with him. Williams wonders “Does a white American have to orient himself psychologically for some aimless wandering about the country” (xix)? He suspects that there is some preparation for any journey, but he knows that it is not nearly the same as the mental exercises he must undergo before leaving New York State.

This consideration parallels but also presents a very different kind of preparation than that which is described early in *On the Road* that reflects the sense of uncertainty that accompanies a road journey: “The whole mad swirl of everything that was to come began then; it would mix up all my friends and all I had left of my family in a big dust cloud over the American Night” (5). Kerouac is writing the manuscript, or the Original Scroll, of *On the Road* after all of his travels have occurred. This allows him perspective to consider the outcome of his trips and the relationships that were affected by them. It is an excellent example of what Williams imagines occurs before a white man takes to the road. As Williams assumes, Sal’s brief moment

of consideration differs significantly from the sort of psychological orientation that he experiences before journeying south. In Sal's recollections, he is pondering the ways that his own life has changed following his time on the road, whereas Williams' must prepare himself in a number of ways to travel to the American south as a Black man.

In her analysis of female road narratives and her discussion of gendered space on the road, Alexandra Ganser writes that: "Any such analysis rests upon the intersections and cross-cuttings of all kinds of spaces: textual and contextual space...the physical space of embodiment, as well as the mental space of textual characters and readers" (152). She then goes on to argue that "women's literary re-mappings of social space are potentially transformative" (152). This argument is specific to a gendered analysis of women's road narratives (such as Mona Simpson's *Anywhere but Here*, *The Bean Trees* by Barbara Kingsolver, and Joan Didion's *Play It As It Lays*) and yet I am drawing on it in order to argue that the remapping of social space can be examined in any narrative of mobility. In fact, there is a great deal of overt remapping in Williams' text from the outset. Before heading south, he packs a copy of *Travelguide* in his suitcase so that he can safely select where to stay in unfamiliar cities. Cotton Seiler discusses the importance of *Travelguide* in "'So That We as a Race Might Have Something Authentic to Travel By': African American Automobility and Cold-War Liberalism." It was a necessary publication for black Americans in spite of the imagined notions of anonymity and autonomy associated with "practices and landscapes of automobility" (Seiler 1092). He goes on to argue that this is clearly restrictive: "The driver enters the stream...as a blank figure, divested of her particularities, and thereby empowered to speak, act, and move. This self-abstraction of the citizen...disembodied political agency while at the same time making clear that only those with specific types of bodies could assume it" (1092). The very act of driving while Black, then, is

transgressive. Williams is remapping social space by defying expectations as a mobile subject that is empowered by his movement⁴. Seiler lays out a number of ways that the mobility of Black Americans has been restricted both culturally and legislatively. While some view the space of the road as “a space by definition democratic since in theory no class systems or unfair hierarchies exist there,” Seiler asserts that automobile culture “limited access to mobility through a system of discrimination and representation that positioned nonwhites outside the new motor culture” (1093). Like Deloria, Seiler points out the complex relationship between people of colour and historically marginalized peoples and mobility. Deloria writes about the way that automobility both provided agency and restricted it for certain groups:

in the explosion of mass cultural production that characterized the twentieth century, the automobile has been among our most evocative symbols. Mobility, speed, power, progress: these things matter and Americans of every race, class, gender, and origin have found ways to express them in automotive terms. Cars serve a utilitarian function, of course—and, thus, access to automobility matters critically to those outside the few urban transportation systems in the United States. As important as the moving of people from point A to point B, however, is the fact that automobiles express a driver’s sense of self and of the nature of his or her power. (138)

This is significant given the amount of thought that Williams gives to his vehicle and the way that it impacts his journey and the perception of him as a mobile subject. There are several

⁴ While there is a plethora of Kerouac scholarship that contributes to my own discussion, there is very little that has been written about Williams and almost nothing about *This is My Country Too*. Alan Nadel’s “My Country Too: Time, Place, and Afro-American Identity in the Work of John Williams,” Sarah Phillips Casteel’s “Jazz Fiction and the Holocaust: Reading History for Clues in the Novels of John A. Williams and Esi Edugyan,” Adam Meyer’s “Occupying the Middle: Italians, Jews, and Racial Positioning in Edward Lewis Wallant’s *The Pawnbroker* and John A. Williams’ *Sons of Drakness*, *Sons of Light*,” represent the bulk of Williams scholarship that can be found on the MLA Bibliography. Nadel’s article uses the title of Williams’ memoir but does not actually discuss the text in depth. This chapter seeks to reinvigorate academic discussions about the work of Williams as a cultural critic and broadens the scope of his work through his geographical remappings of Civil Rights-era America.

instances in which he outlines his concerns and the difficulties that he encounters as a result of the type of vehicle he chooses to drive.

During his journey, Williams describes his relationship to the car and the way that his feelings about it often fluctuate. As he is leaving Chicago to return to New York State he writes that:

It felt good to be on the open road once again...I let the car out and it jumped ahead, moving cleanly and easily, and the joy of having so much power at toe tip filled me completely. Here it was, the groundlevel height of Everyman's automated existence. Open the doors, press a button and lower the window, turn the key, set the gear and mash down. Beneath the hood, currents surged like flashes of lightning, and hundreds of horses snorted, kicked, and began to gallop. Two and a half tons of brightly burnished metal, resting on rubber hoofs, bucked for one second, then soared ahead. There had been times in the South when I hated to leave the car because it formed a vault of safety. But in New England and when I was emerging from the South, I did not want to get out of the car because of the sense of power it gave me; power to move rapidly, for miles, at so little cost of energy to myself. (86-87)

While in some cases, Williams disrupts expectations as a Black man driving an automobile, he feels secure in the comfort of the vehicle. In areas where he may feel uncomfortable in the presence of white supremacy, the car itself provides respite. This can be seen when, in a strange turn of events, Williams pulls himself over for a police officer who had been tailing him seemingly without cause. En route to Louisville, Kentucky, he passes a state trooper and later notices that the trooper is following him for several miles. Williams, unsure of what to do and concerned about his newly acquired tail writes that: "What to do? ... I was surprised by my own

actions. Somewhere I felt that as soon as something of this kind happened, I would panic. Instead, I flagged him down and pulled over myself” (29). He asks the trooper for advice about a bump that has developed in his tire. The officer asks him where he is staying in Louisville and gives him the name of a garage where he can take the car for service. Williams recognizes that this resolves his issue because “if I were a car thief, a murderer, a narcotics peddler, or an FBI Most Wanted, he had the [license plate] number, and the hotel, plus a good description. The trooper no longer followed me” (30). Rather than continue to worry about his tail for any longer, he simply resolves the situation by allowing the state trooper to profile him. Williams is aware that the officer is only suspicious of him because he is Black and chooses to indulge the racial bias in order to have a more comfortable journey to Louisville. Williams is aware that not only does he draw attention, but so does his vehicle. As he notices the trooper tailing him, he realizes “All at once I was conscious of the very big, very white, spanking, brand-new station wagon with its California plates winking in the sunlight” (29). This moment again pairs well with the title of Deloria’s book given that the ostentatious nature of the car renders it the unexpected place that Williams is occupying. Beyond the vehicle, though, Williams notes a number of unexpected places for people of colour and the navigation of these spaces can often be difficult. One such space is the university.

Williams considers the advancements that have been made as a result of Civil Rights and is critical of the way that space has been produced for people of colour. He spends a great deal of time at Tennessee State University and often remarks on the way that the students there seem to differ from other college students. One morning on his drive he picks up two young men hitchhiking out to the University, and he wonders what about them stands out to him. He finally understands, after a mostly silent car ride that

those kids were unlike any college kids I'd seen anywhere. Just as suddenly I knew why. College was not a lark for them as it was for the kids who went to Fisk. These were burdened with breaking the chain of evolution of their families. Whereas their fathers and their fathers before them were of the soil and were bound to spend their lives in pastoral confinements, these young men were advancing sullenly toward a new world of books filled with ideas, some good, some bad, depending upon the school and the circumstances of its existence. (40)

The university is a space that has only recently become accessible to these men, especially in the South, and it is one that these young men must take extremely seriously. He points out that the spaces do not necessarily reflect this kind of seriousness, though. While visiting Jackson State University, he remarks on the appearance of the campus: "Tennessee State, Alabama State, Jackson State, a pattern. High school-like buildings, surplus prefab buildings, some grass, some dirt. Here, you colored people, take this! ... When the state legislatures of the South created Southern Negro school, they thought they knew what they were doing. Books, and teachers, and space. Build what you will. But white schools had grass, and baroque and gothic structures, and great ideas sometimes trod those halls, unminded" (71-2). While he goes on to point out that, ultimately, these schools have greatly advanced the civil rights movement, it is still worth noting the unremarkable surroundings in which these milestones occur. Williams often toes this line on his travels: considering the kind of progress that has been made and recognizing that the progress is not equality. There is a distinct remapping of social spaces happening, but there is more to be done. Williams strikes a balance between interest in progress and a subdued skepticism and criticism of the rate at which changes are occurring. This duality is especially notable in one interaction Williams has in Georgia.

This is My Country Too is an interesting reworking of the *theoros* trope because Williams' race is consistently used to undermine his position. In Georgia, for example, Williams meets with a man named Ralph McGill. McGill, a white man, was a journalist and editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, which, during his tenure was one of the only Southern news sources examining the effects of segregation and was vocal about support for Civil Rights. For Williams, it is an exciting prospect to meet another journalist whose work he admires, and yet the meeting reveals that McGill views himself as instrumental to the progress of the movement. This is revelatory of the archetype of the white saviour embedded within the Civil Rights movement that likely was not uncommon and certainly evocative of white abolitionists of the late 19th century. McGill is certain to remind Williams that he would not have been working as a reporter for *Holiday* "Ten years ago...not even three or two" (55). Williams is acutely aware that this statement is a reminder and an unsubtle way for McGill to point out what he believes to be the result of his own efforts as a part of the Civil Rights movement. Williams recognizes that "He saw me, then, as a product of his work" (55). More significantly, however, and perhaps even more sinister is the fact that McGill casually employs the use of a racial slur during his meeting with Williams. Williams is taken aback by the use of the term and reflects that perhaps it is simply that McGill feels very comfortable speaking to him and attempts to imagine that he "is being paid a compliment in some subtle way" (53). In a continued effort to move forward from the moment, Williams considers that perhaps it is simply a moment in which McGill forgot their racial difference and assumed he was speaking to a white man. Rather than begrudge his colleague in this moment, Williams decides that McGill is an ally and in spite of the there is no ill intent and that "any bitterness...became impotent with understanding" (53). It is McGill's reminder, however, that remains with Williams when he leaves the office. The subtle but pointed

remark from McGill is intended as a reminder that, as far as he is concerned, without the support of outspoken white supporters of Civil Rights, the movement would not have made such gains. Afterward, Williams does not really reflect on the situation but his discomfort with the meeting seems obvious given that he is acutely aware of McGill's rejection of Black agency and image of himself as a sort of white saviour.

Conversely, when Williams meets with Hodding Carter Jr. of the *Delta-Democrat Times* in Greenville, Mississippi, he has a somewhat more positive experience. Williams seems to enjoy his conversation with Carter and respects the man because he does not see himself as a white saviour. Rather, Williams points out that the Carter family "were not for Negroes but for law" (79) because their position was that "a law existed, a federal law, and should be obeyed" (ibid). As a result of the stance taken by Carter and his newspaper, his safety is of concern and Williams notes that it is likely that his family remains heavily guarded when he leaves the house. His position is controversial enough to be dangerous in Greenville. Carter is motivated by a commitment to the law rather than any kind of pity or Samaritan sentiment which allows Williams to feel more comfortable around Carter than most of the other white journalists he meets on his travels. During their conversation, he realizes his own exhaustion and in spite of his attempts to conceal it, Carter takes notice of Williams' demeanour and asks, "What's the matter?" (ibid). When Williams admits that he's tired, the other reporter smiles knowingly and says, "I'll bet the hell you are" and wonders if it is his first time in the South (ibid). While Williams mentions that he was born in Mississippi, he had not been there in a very long time. Even though he has only just met Carter, he writes that he is "not at all surprised that I would admit [my tiredness] to this stranger, who, in a larger way, was not a stranger at all" (ibid). The connection between the two men is one that is, of course, rooted in race given that they are

meeting precisely because of their respective interests in the civil rights movement. They share the burden of impending violence, a threat that exists both in their personal lives but also one that they believe will be the result of the racial and political tensions produced by the advent of civil rights. They two men share a unique position in Mississippi and that alone allows for Williams to confide in someone that he has just met. This is not a situation where, like McGill, Carter believes that Williams should feel indebted to him for caring about desegregation. Rather, this is a meeting where two men from Mississippi are discussing their shared beliefs about the fact that there is no way for civil rights to succeed without violence. They are “not stranger[s] at all” because they both understand the exhaustion, fear, and dissatisfaction that accompanies a belief in racial equality and therefore intimately understand each other.

This is My Country Too offers readers a number of these moments of honesty and genuine reflection. Williams often questions his own behaviour and wonders how he could have conducted himself differently in many situations. The text provides insight into the lives of other Americans, but it does so in the context of their meetings with Williams and the experiences that he has while interacting with them. Before they part ways, Carter gives Williams “directions through a less troublesome part of the state to the border” (80). Recognizing that Williams is tired by the fact of being in the South, Carter tries to offer a route that would prove easier. However, Williams feels that he cannot choose this direction. He suddenly regrets this honest conversation and writes that: “driving away, I knew I had to take the other route, the one where trouble lay, in order to live with myself and in order to overcome the shame I suddenly felt to confess my tiredness, my tension, to this white man. Drive the cliff edge” (80). In the moment, Williams feels a kinship with Carter and allows himself to be honest, but in hindsight he feels ashamed by his candidness. Carter may be able to relate to Williams intellectually, but his

position is one that he has chosen. Williams does not project onto others in the same way that Kerouac's Sal does on his journeys. Williams ends his description of each encounter with a reflection on his own perceptions and feelings without drawing conclusions about the people he has only briefly met. This is a reminder that the experience of travelling America is a subjective one, and that each journey will be unique but especially for Williams, whose travels are consumed by discussions of race. Whereas Kerouac is often unaware of his position and often assumes that his experience reflects the way that mobility in America is experienced universally. The two authors approach their texts with differing methods but nonetheless, each presents a snapshot of the nation during a tumultuous time.

I argue that Williams, as *theoros*, experiences a great deal of discomfort in the process of exploring his nation when an entire region of the nation, the South, still struggles with recognizing Blackness as American. His mobility is in some ways a personal sacrifice for the benefit of those who will read his reporting. In his attempt to articulate the nation's progress during the tumultuous era of the Civil Rights movement, he must use his own mobility to produce space for progress in American race relations. Williams begins to feel a sense of calmness once he has safely left the South. He does not stop to rest between Tennessee and Illinois. While driving through the night, he realizes that "the night became my ally, hiding me from the police in small towns...I was not so conspicuous now. Now I knew how fugitives felt when they crossed those borders, waiting joyously for starlight" (81). While the night allows him some protection, he is also driving through a part of the country where he is not safe to stop and spend the night and "the rule among Negroes who travel in the South is: don't sleep in your car" (81). When he finally reaches Illinois, he desperately hopes that this is somewhere he can safely stop to rest for the night. The border between Illinois and Kentucky also demarcates, quite

suddenly, safety for Williams and he is able to find a room after fourteen hours of driving. The next morning, he is pleasantly surprised by the kindness of strangers on the road. After a number of oncoming cars flash their lights at him, he is pulled over by a state trooper for speeding. While he failed to recognize the warnings, he remarks that “Those drivers in the hurtling cars didn’t know me; they only knew, having passed the waiting trooper, that I was in trouble...Strangers can, sometimes, unite, if only for a moment” (81-82). Illinois is buoying his spirits and he is feeling positive about this leg of his journey. When he arrives in Chicago, he begins to feel even more relaxed and comfortable and finally “emerging from mild shock” as he settles back into the culture of the North. The comfort he feels in Chicago allows him to decompress from his travels: “The dark fears of the South were behind me. The thought of the legislated anarchy that exists down there...slid to repose in the back of my mind” (83). After a few days, he begins to “feel human again...I was able to file the South on a shelf. The white people I met in Chicago, and there were not many, I met without rancor, without any ill will” (84). While in the South, he writes, he had felt differently and in fact he had begun to imagine a “life of no contact with whites...Chicago changed that” (84). Chicago allows Williams to revert to how he felt about race relations before embarking on his journey. The stress of being in an openly racist environment subsides and Williams can enjoy his time in Chicago.

Williams is invited to be a guest on a local radio when he is “at the zenith of normality” after returning to the North and regaining his sense of identity. It is during this interview about his writing career and Civil Rights that he is reminded that the northern states are not immune to the kind of racism that he experienced in the South. Manifestations of racism in more northern parts of America often take a more covert form and it is therefore surprising for Williams when a listener calls the radio station to ask Williams if he has ever been to Africa. When Williams

responds to the caller that he has never been, the young man asks: "Then why don't you go?" (85). The caller laughs loudly and hangs up while Williams attempts to respond to his taunt in a thoughtful way. This interaction stays with him, but once again he is focused more on his response to the caller than the mean-spirited call itself. He wishes that he could have provided a better answer to the young man's question and is irritated with himself for not being able to answer the question in suitable manner. Williams views this as a teachable moment that was cut short and blames himself for not providing a snappy response. This moment is the first in a series of racist ruptures in Williams' picture of a more integrated north. Shortly after departing Chicago, Williams is driving outside of Duluth, Minnesota and he witnesses a man drive "his car filled with children" off the road because he is gawking at the Black man driving a car. Like Deloria's *Indians in Unexpected Places*, Williams' driving is so unexpected in Minnesota that it results in an extreme reaction. Shortly after this incident Williams recounts that there was only one time on his journey that he was refused a room: Lewiston, Idaho. The woman at the desk of the motel insists there are no single rooms left and when Williams asks for a double or family instead, she enters a back room to confer with a man. Williams then hears the woman raise her voice and ask: "Well, tell me. Do you want him or don't you?" (100). When she emerges, she tells Williams that there are no vacancies left. While this is occurring, a white customer enters the motel and Williams understands that this man will have no problem securing a room. While he is angry that he has been denied a room, he also knows that if he confronted the woman, she would assure him that the white customer had a pre-existing reservation. Williams is angered, sympathetic to the woman, and leaves the motel feeling frightened and alone. These emotions are channeled into the purpose of finding a room and enters the next hotel "belligerent as hell. And do you know what happened? The clerk couldn't sign me in fast enough" (101). Williams resists

his urge to lose his temper on the woman who refuses him a room because he is aware that she is operating on the wishes of the man in the back room. He recognizes that the woman is acting on behalf of someone else and is not entirely to blame for this mistreatment. More importantly, this occurs outside of the South and therefore shatters the notion of the binary.

Williams is only able to reflect on his perception of the binary after leaving the South. But his ability to be understanding of the woman in the motel recalls a moment earlier in the text when Williams asks his friend Coach “why...being raised in the North, he could live in the South, in Mississippi, which is the worst of the South” (72). His friend tells him simply that he went to Kentucky State for school, received a doctorate, built a career, and a family. Coach explains that he has security and the northern town he came from had nothing. Williams realizes that Coach is a professional and an academic: “the elite among the Negroes...were as estranged from the masses of Negroes as the whites” (73). Coach has built a comfortable life for himself and his family and therefore sees no need to move out of the South and away from what Williams views as a more racist part of America. However, Williams’ experience in Idaho calls this belief into question. Williams’ must use *Travelguide* in the South as a way of ensuring he will not be denied a room, but he does not have this kind of resource for Northern states. He expects that the North is a safe place for him to travel just as he expects that the South will be a difficult and trying place for him on his journey. The South meets his expectations, but it is the North that consistently surprises him and flouts his expectations. The decompression period that he experiences in Chicago is short-lived and he must again prepare himself for the uncomfortable encounters he will have on the rest of his journey. Yet these uncomfortable encounters are what make *This is My Country Too* an engaging work of reporting.

Williams embarks on this trip on assignment and therefore operates in a more traditional *theoros* capacity: visiting cities that are struggling with the advances won by the Civil Rights movement, interviewing politicians, journalists, and acquaintances about their experiences, and making his own observations based on his travels. Sal's value as *theoros* is often incidental and results from a desire to connect with others in search of a kind of authenticity that he feels modern America is lacking. He does not often stop to assess his own actions and decisions and how they may contribute to the interactions he has on his journey. In contrast, Williams frequently assesses his exchanges with the people he meets and the way that he may have impacted the conversation. As a result, *This is My Country Too* is a far more introspective road narrative. It pairs self-exploration with national exploration at a time when Williams' identity as a Black journalist is highly politicized, especially in the South. However, the nuance and complexity of Williams' text does not discount the value of Kerouac. Kerouac is writing with very different motivations and his goal is to produce a work of Beat literature. Barndt positions Sal as a *theoros* figure, but I argue that his position is incidental. Sal's reporting of American life and culture are reflective of the time, but he is never self-reflective or critical of his own perceptions and therefore not as successful as Williams. Kerouac's novel has maintained a readership for over 50 years and the reach of *On the Road* is incomparable. It has become ubiquitous and the exemplar of the American road narrative. The two texts present unique perspectives of America, but Williams and Kerouac nonetheless travel the same highways and visit many of the same cities.

The charting of America in both texts, then, is not so dissimilar. Each author presents a country that is divided by race, wealth, and gender. Williams does this in a more overt manner, but Kerouac presents a remarkably similar vision even if it is one that he is not entirely aware of

at times. What makes these texts valuable for scholars is way that they both produce space for discussions about America in their presentation of its successes and failures. The genre has moved beyond travelogues and frontier narratives, but it still presents readers with depictions of progress. The picaresque format of these texts does not discount the linearity of the road narrative genre. Simply put, the road narrative is a snapshot of national identity and Kerouac and Williams both demonstrate that quite clearly. The automobile is a symbol of progress and is in many ways inextricable from American constructions of identity, but it also concretely allows for individuals to dissect national narratives through travel and frequent encounters with the unfamiliar. Both Kerouac and Williams seek out this unfamiliarity and do so in ways that expose their readers to identities and subject positions that they may not otherwise discover. The two men have very different approaches: Kerouac seeks to embody otherness in such a way that modern day readers tend to find uncomfortable, whereas Williams' journalistic approach employs an interview style through which to depict the people he encounters. Kerouac is not just an author, but one very committed to the Beat aesthetic. Therefore, his spontaneous prose reflects his creative ideals as well as his experiences. Williams asks questions and engages with the people he meets, but he always includes his own thoughts and reactions as a way of narrativizing his journey. Williams is aware that the road trip is a very individual experience and therefore does not remove himself from his work. It is a very personal text that still reflects his journalistic background, but it also concludes with an afterword in which Williams makes an honest assessment of American politics.

The afterword of *This is My Country Too* is a call to action for the America that Williams experienced on his travels. He suggests that if the nation continues down the same path, then the only possible result is anarchy. Williams is writing the afterword a year after his trip, and he

speaks about the impending passage of Civil Rights Act. This legislature does not mean much as far as he is concerned: “for obviously, if the Constitution could not be enforced, then neither could the new laws” (165). After a year of reflection and time abroad, he concludes that “man, as I knew him best, in America, was not basically good, as is always suggested, but evil in the primitive, possessive, and destructive sense...stack American upon American, reach into the heap and pull one out, and the chances of getting hold of one who measured up to the ideal American we all would like to be would be practically nil” (166). Williams completes his road narrative with a sense of disappointment. As his narrative is being serially published in *Holiday*, he begins receiving letters from readers. Some are hateful, but Williams is unsurprised: “I was once again struck by the stupidity of the American bigot who often cloaks himself in Fundamentalist righteousness. His clichés, ripped bodily from the racial myths, were scrawled in illiterate passages” (167). The more engaging letters were written by readers who wondered “what to do to help America in its crisis” (167). In an attempt to respond to their letters, Williams reflects on his journey and calls for a number of reforms in response to the crisis that he witnessed not just in the South, but all over the nation.

As *theoros*, Williams uses the afterword to make recommendations that he believes will redirect America away from crisis. To return to Barndt, the *theoros* is placed in a position to offer insight into different ways of organizing social and political life because they have witnessed “many of the different ways in which human societies...manage themselves” (xvi). Williams has traveled the entire nation and has also spent several months learning about the way that the Congress of the United States is perceived abroad. These experiences solidify his position and lend him the “political wisdom” that Barndt explains is the hallmark of the *theoros*. Based on the wisdom and insight that Williams has amassed on his travels, he argues that there is

an impending “vote of no confidence in government” (167). He believes that business interests have superseded those of the American public and in order to move forward as a nation, the political system needs to be populated by “honest and concerned men” rather than the privately wealthy who continue to serve the interests of the rich and powerful (168). He argues that laws need to be enforced, but beyond that, laws cannot be created that “protect the rich and expose the poor just because the two classes live in that most primitive of conflicts between the haves and the have-nots” (168). Williams is firm that those in public offices need to understand that their job is to serve their constituents and to adhere to their duties rather than see themselves as in charge of the people that have elected them. His recommendations are relatively straightforward and not entirely unlike the ideas outlined in the United States Constitution. It is a call to separate politics and capital because the interests of business should not come before the interests of all Americans.

This is My Country Too concludes with a firm assessment of the most pressing issues facing the nation at the time, and several informed suggestions for avoiding what Williams sees as an impending “grim anarchy” (167). Having completed his duty, he makes one final personal reflection that reiterates his desire for change. Recalling the listener question he received on the radio show in Chicago, Williams writes that “I have been to Africa and know that it is not my home. America is; it is my country too, and has been for generations” (169). Williams is “forced to hope” for a better America because he does not want to live elsewhere. He wants to feel comfortable, safe, and fulfilled in his own country. He should not have to return to a continent that he has no connection to in order to make bigoted folks feel more comfortable. He ends with a statement of hope: “Yes, it is true that America has yet to sing its greatest songs, but it had better hurry up and find the key to the tunes” (169). He has to be optimistic that the future of his

nation is better than its present. The conclusion of Williams' road narrative implores Americans to reimagine political office in such a way that would benefit everyone equally not only because it would be of personal gain for him, but for all Americans regardless of race and class.

Conclusion

As argued by Primeau, culturally, the road narrative is often thought of as an investigation into individual identity, a journey of solipsistic reflection. Barndt's text connects the traveler to the ancient Greek position of *theoros* and emphasizes the fact that the road narrative is often an investigation of regional differences. At the end of the journey, *theoros* is meant to make suggestions for improved ways of life based on what they have encountered. In *American Road Narratives*, Ann Brigham suggests that road journeys are a means of grappling with the vastness of America. The sheer size of the country results in many distinct regional differences. In the road narrative genre, the individual feels that to attempt to understand nation, one must experience it. Road narratives are popularly imagined as a period of self-reflection and personal growth and while this can be true of certain texts, the two discussed in this chapter end with a reflection on the nation. This is likely a result of the fact that, fundamentally, we construct the self in relation to the other, and this is affirmed in the literature when narratives rarely end with more nuanced understanding of the self. The nation, in both texts, is fractured and often culturally diverse. Conceptions of nation are equally varied and cannot be reduced into a singular vision. Williams has suggestions for a possible path forward in his afterword, while Kerouac ends with a reflection on America and Dean, as though the two are united in an almost mystical way. Having spent a large part of his American experience with Dean, the two are so interwoven for Sal that they are hard to separate. The final paragraph of *On the Road* ends with Sal sitting on

a pier in New Jersey watching the sun set and imagining the minutiae of the lives of other Americans as the day comes to an end. He lists several images that the sunset conjures for him, but ultimately at the very end of his journey, Sal confesses that: “I think of Dean Moriarty” (307). Neither man reflects on how the journey has affected their own understandings of themselves. Rather, they both meditate on the vastness of America that, to contradict Ann Bringham, simply cannot be reduced and therefore each man focuses on a more manageable concern.

One of the most attractive aspects of the road narrative is the multiplicity of voices and perspectives that it can represent in a single text. In so doing, the road narrative almost mimics the idealized, utopian notion of the physical road. The road is imagined as an escape, one that is open to all citizens equally and indiscriminately. As Deloria, Seiler, and Williams point out, this is not the experience for people of colour and the road presents just as many barriers for marginalized peoples as the towns and cities that it connects. The road itself rarely meets expectations of travelers as it is not the space of freedom and transgression that it is expected to be, but it does provide a ways of encountering America in its many manifestations. The genre produces space for stories of under-represented populations because it is those encounters that punctuate the driving that are most revealing of the lives of citizens. The engaging aspects of the road are the encounters, and the most noteworthy encounters are with those people with whom the narrator or writer would not interact in their everyday life. The road narrative charts the nation through a series of meetings that inspire conversation and provoke thought. Building on Susan McWilliams Barndt, the reframing of the genre as one that provides socio-political insight and offers valuable suggestions for potential change is central to the argument put forth in this dissertation. The notion of *theoria* when paired with the mobility studies and the concept of

socially produced space provides the road narrative with more nuance and decouples it from the popular understanding of the genre as self-indulgent. In fact, the road narrative functions as a kind of documentary that engages with otherwise unremarkable citizens and provides readers with a multiplicity of perspectives rather than a singular narrative. The enduring popularity of the genre speaks to the appeal of representation allowed by the picaresque form and a voyeuristic desire to experience other social and cultural ways of living. The road narrative continues to be aligned with a specifically American tradition of literature, but American influence is often inescapable in Canada. Canadian road narratives also engage with the question of nation and national identity but coloured by the Canadian anxiety around defining a singular, unified national identity.

Chapter 2

Shifting Gears: Contexts of Canadian Mobility

Jacques Poulin's 1984 novel, *Volkswagen Blues*⁵, is a road narrative that examines the hybridity of identities both personal and national. It is a work that is simultaneously Québécois, Canadian, and American. The protagonist, Jack Waterman, struggles with his identity as a writer while his travelling companion Pitsémine seeks to reckon with her mixed Innu and French heritage. Together, the pair embark on a road trip that forces Jack, with the encouragement and guidance of Pitsémine, to interrogate the narrative myths of nation and national identity in Quebec, Canada, and the United States. Poulin, like Kerouac, appropriates the voice of the cultural other in ways that are problematic when viewed through a contemporary lens. However, the way that Poulin uses the novel to interrogate narratives surrounding nation in Canada was quite thought provoking at the time of publication. Poulin's appropriation of Indigenous voices results in a character that is underdeveloped, and yet her criticisms of North America narratives of colonization and settlement are valuable for examining the ties between mobility, identity, and nation. Scholarship on Canadian road narratives explicitly ties the genre to the process of nation building, narrative myths, and national identity⁶. These discussions are rooted in a tradition of Trans-Canadian travel as a nationalistic undertaking. Kevin Flynn, writing about nineteenth century travel narratives makes the assertion that the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) is perhaps the most crucial infrastructure in the production of novels attempting to depict a quintessential

⁵ I will be using Sheila Fischman's 1988 translation for my analysis, therefore compounding the transnational reading, both literally and figuratively, of the novel.

⁶ See Katherine Ann Roberts *West/Border/Road: Nation and Genre in Contemporary Canadian Narrative* and Heather Macfarlane's *Divided Highways: Road Narratives and Nationhood in Canada* for recent examples of this discussion.

Canadianness. The nation-novel⁷ in Canada, then, is tied to travel narratives as these meditations on nation and national identity play out while moving through the varied landscapes of Canada. Flynn is speaking specifically about travel narratives of the nineteenth century, but the precedent set by these early works is undeniable: “The readerly travel quest and the quest to realize the nation became one; to read was to travel was to find the country” (191). On their journey, Jack and Pitsémine often reference history books to plot the route they intend to follow, but also to learn about historical explorers, settlers, and figures of the frontier. However, Pitsémine is critical of many of the figures that they read about, which forces Jack to become more critical of narrative myths about national identity.

While Poulin’s novel is a work of Canadian literature, it is also a work of Québécois literature. Moreover, it is a journey into the United States that examines the influence and intersections of American culture and history on Québécois and Canadian life. While the travellers cross the border into the United States, the direction of movement in Poulin does not necessarily render it less Canadian or Québécois, but rather it speaks to the permeability of the border in many North American road narratives and instead lends itself to a transnationalist reading of the novel. The character of Pitsémine, I suggest, underscores the permeability of borders and the possibilities afforded by transnationalism when narratives of national identity alienate those with hybrid identities. The transnational as a category of analysis is both productive and worrisome for many scholars, and as a result there is still a desire to preserve discussions of CanLit as a distinct literary body. Where transnationalism allows literary study to flourish, however, are those spaces where ideas, texts, and discussions transgress borders and

⁷ A term I am borrowing from Mary Helen McMurrin: “a text that captures” the identity of a nation, or at least attempts to capture a nation.

where the exchange of social and cultural norms as a result of globalization renders definitions of nation and nation-state less concrete.

Motorists without Borders: Transnationalism in North America

The road narrative as a genre is tightly connected to ideas of nation and yet, border crossings are often featured in North American road narratives. Likewise, the influence of American culture is undeniable in Canada as well as Québec. Transnationalism, then, seems as though it would be an obvious framework through which to study such texts. However, it remains relatively unexplored in current discussions of Canadian narratives of mobility. Thus, while the genre is an exploration of both identity and nation, it also revels in the fluid and porous nature of each, given that neither is ever static. Personal identity is always being explored in ways that produce new meaning, while nation is consistently redefined to reflect present conditions. Transnationalism acknowledges the somewhat slippery nature of definition when it comes to nation but allows for an analysis of the ambiguous nature of borders and national identity. Yet, even while discussing the value of transnationalism within the context of Canadian literature, there is still an anxiety that Canadian Literature as a discipline is at stake and that transnationalism will erase what scholars feel was the extremely difficult task of establishing a national literature. Diana Brydon in particular voices this anxiety even while attempting to establish a discussion of transnationalism in Smaro Kamboureli and Roy Miki's collection, *Trans.Can.Lit* (2007). Brydon lays out her personal stake in maintaining Canadian Literature as a discipline, but also outlines certain concessions she would be willing to make. She writes that "From my own perspective as a postcolonial critic within the discipline who is also experimenting with work within a large interdisciplinary team, and as someone who is personally

committed to the importance of maintaining a Canadian-based perspective in research on globalization and cultural studies, I find Canadian literary studies both enabling and constricting” (7). It is important, Brydon argues, to question the construction of Canadian nation-state rather than privileging discussions of nationalism, but her writing also carries forward some of the anxieties that characterize Canadian literary study. Brydon opens her chapter with Northrop Frye’s famous question “Where is here?”⁸, which among others dominated mid-twentieth century attempts to establish a definition of Canadian literature. Margaret Atwood’s *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972) follows in Frye’s footsteps and sets out to establish certain themes that dominate and define Canadian literature. The publication of these texts launched a discussion focused on defining a Canadian Literature in order to establish a kind of canon and a national history represented through a national literature. This was a difficult process and one fraught with anxieties about representing Canada as a young nation while simultaneously working through the complexities of a nation with a number of conflicting majority identities.

Scholars such as Brydon may insist on a discussion of transnationalism that is embedded in a conversation about nation rather than viewing it as a transformative lens through which to discuss literature. As the title of Miki and Kamboureli’s edited collection suggests, transnationalism is something that can be used to augment discussions of Canadian Literature, and yet as Kit Dobson argues in *Transnational Canadas: Anglo-Canadian Literature and Globalization* (2009), there are areas of transnationalist studies that threaten to unsettle North American constructions of nation entirely. Much of Dobson’s discussion of transnationalism is rooted in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s discussions of Empire and the Multitude, which he

⁸ From *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (1971).

sees as reinforcing discussions of imperialism and thus specifically exclude Indigenous peoples. Dobson's discussion in *Transnational Canadas* is critical of the nation as a locus of study and is worth quoting at length:

Critics... have been able to continue to speak in favour of a nationalist mode as though it were always, in the final analysis, necessary and good. Jonathan Kertzer, for example, asserts that we 'are not free to reject [the nation] at will, since it has already helped to define the position from which we speak.' While this may be true, it does not quite lead to his further assertion that 'the nation will continue to be a prime forum for justice, because only a national setting can confer legitimacy on communities seeking to articulate their social distinctiveness and power.' Indigenous and transnational debates about sovereignty and nationhood suggest that, at the very least, the nation is a variable construct, and that it might be possible to do politics differently. At the same time, rejecting such a nationalism need not result in a merely celebratory postnational vision of the multitude. Where Canadian writing intersects most clearly with transnational lines of thinking, a substantial discomfort with such totalizing discourses is visible, challenging the drive toward total discourses of either the global or the national. (154)

Dobson's analysis fleshes out the value of transnationalism in discussions of Canadian Literature and in so doing, responds to the concerns raised by Diana Brydon. Dobson argues that transnationalism and nation as categories of study need not be mutually exclusive nor should either become the dominant frame of literary criticism. Some of the issues with Canadian literary criticism, Dobson suggests, stem from the drive to establish a "totalizing discourse" in order to relieve the anxiety articulated by Frye and Atwood. When the transnational debate emerges,

Dobson argues, it presents a way for discussions to move beyond the central framework of nation while still maintaining that it as an important aspect of Canadian literature.

Winfried Siemerling and Sarah Phillips Casteel expand on these discussions in their book *Canada and Its Americas: Transnational Navigations* (2010) in which they explore the hemispheric turn in North American literary criticism and subsequently, discussions of transnationalism as a productive force for expanding discussions about literature in North America. The introduction to the book displays similar anxieties to those expressed by Brydon and outlined by Dobson. They discuss the way that scholarship around national literatures is shifting away from what Dobson identifies as a “totalizing discourse.” One of the central discussions in the introduction of the text is the use of America to designate the United States and the scholarly push to “rediscover” the Americas as a whole. Siemerling and Casteel write that

The hemispheric turn is a product of the convergence of a number of trends in literary and cultural criticism. It follows remappings of the field of United States studies by African American, feminist, Asian American, and Chicano critics (Porter 1994, 468), in keeping with which hemispheric American studies in its current configuration has tended to pay particular attention to minority and marginalized discourses (Patell 1999, 169). In addition, the emergence of hemispheric American studies has also been encouraged by the quincentennial ‘rediscovery’ of the Americas and by the recent growth of Caribbean studies, both of which have called attention to alternative visions of the meaning of ‘America’...Finally, like the popularity of borderlands studies the hemispheric turn reflects a broader interrogation of the nation as a unit of cultural analysis. A particularly telling index of this paradigm shift, then, is the extent to which border zones have displaced the

frontier as the key site within United States studies, with the American West itself recast as a multi-ethnic and hybridized contact zone (6).

The closing of the frontier, they argue, simply opened new zones of contact and indeed, in many North American road narratives the border is a space that often alienates the traveller.

Confronting nationality as a process of documentation, rather than a set of relations, becomes alienating for those who are doubly marginalized by those relations and processes of documentation that coalesce into a national identity. In road narratives, then, the border zone does not necessarily replace the literature of the frontier given that the frontier was a space used to consider the creation and expansion of nation while the border calls into question the very constructedness of nation. While the two navigate similar themes, Siemerling and Casteel accurately point out that they encourage an interrogation of previously accepted narratives about Canada and Canadian identity.

The most striking aspect of their argument is the desire for transnationalism to unsettle “America” as a designation for one nation rather than the hemisphere that it was intended to represent. The introduction plainly states the concerns previously articulated by Brydon, Dobson, and many academics: “only a few decades after securing its recognized academic position, Canadian literature as an institutionalized field of study is currently facing a number of challenges to which it may be more vulnerable than other fields, including the increasing problematization of ‘nation’ as a category of literary analysis” (Siemerling and Casteel 9). They go on to discuss that the unsettling of “America” is necessary for overcoming the scholarly hesitancy to engage in transnationalism given that much of the scholarship that is “dominated by a country that, under the designation ‘American studies,’ tends to appropriate for nationally limited purposes the name of a continent” (9). While the fear of moving away from a field of

scholarship that required a great deal of labour to construct causes anxiety, the notion of succumbing to U.S imperialism through the transnational erasure of borders is equally distressing to many scholars. These discussions tend to fixate on the concerns surrounding what may be lost in the transnational shift, and yet the turn away from nationalist literary studies serves to multiply possible discussions and examine subject positions that do not traditionally fit into the Canadian canon. Canada has become an extremely diverse nation and public discussions insist on the multicultural and inclusive nature of Canada, which makes it increasingly difficult for most road stories to be categorized as specifically Canadian. Rather than reduce the multiplicity of subject positions into pre-existing discussions, there is a need to broaden the scope of the genre while engaging with previously unconsidered perspectives and insights into the meaning and construction of nation. The transnational as a category of analysis allows for the convergence of a multiplicity of narratives of mobility while acknowledging the specificities of each individual traveller.

Beyond conceptions of nation, however, the narrative of mobility reflects the active production of social space. In *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*, Thomas Faist writes that “we need to establish the reality of transnational social spaces” (196). One of the more prescient points that Faist makes about transnational social spaces is that there is no stasis: “The reality of transnational exchanges indicates that migration and return migration are not definite, irrevocable, and irreversible decisions; transnational lives in themselves may become a strategy of survival and betterment. We then speak of transmigrants. And even those migrants who have settled for a considerable time in the immigration country can entertain strong transnational links and may thus participate in transnational social spaces.” (197) This is, of course, crucial to the discussion of

transnationalism in North America but more importantly it points to the notion of social spaces that are created around transnational communities. The creation of these transnational social spaces is, in many ways, an unintentional by-product of globalization. An example of such transnational social spaces is the Francophone community in Lowell, Massachusetts where Jack Kerouac was raised. His Québécois heritage was a distinct part of his upbringing: his childhood nickname “Ti Jean,” is mentioned in several of his novels, he did not learn English until he was 6 years old, and his use of French and joul in some of his unfinished manuscripts is well-documented (Villa 89). This personal history complicates the popular understanding of a man who is often seen as a nearly mythic American figure. Kerouac’s parents immigrated to New England from Quebec and raised their family in a transnational social space. In the context of this discussion, these spaces are necessitated by the proximity of nations in North America, the shared history of colonization, and the cultures that are not only entwined but rely on one another for the exchange of goods and ideas. This is not to say that nationalist identities are precluded by transnationalism in North America, the two are not mutually exclusive, but a firm reminder that there is no clear social definition that separates Canada from the United States. This grey area is often reflected in Canadian literature as a result of the pre-existing anxieties around defining nation.

Transnationalism is inescapable when examining national literatures. Mary Helen McMurrin’s discussion of transnationalism in relation to the nation-novel further supports this point. In “Transnationalism and the Novel: A Call for Periodization” she writes that: “This is not to suggest...that the novel...exists in a ‘nexus of transnational exchange’ in the modern era as if unhinged from the nation. In its current usage, ‘transnational’ refers to crossing between nations, emphasizing the processes of transport or transfer in ways that ‘international’ has not done. The

novel was transnational in this sense of crossing between nations only when the nation-novel symbiosis fully informed exchange” (533). McMurrin uses *Pamela* as an example of the nation-novel, a text that purportedly captures Englishness through its realist style. Kevin Flynn suggests that the nation-novel is even more central to Canadian identity. In his article “Destination Nation: Nineteenth-century Travels aboard the Canadian Pacific Railway,” he recounts the way that British tourists were compelled to write about their travels. The narratives produced, Flynn argues, “fit into a master narrative of the nation's progress from infancy to maturity, with the traveller's arrival at the west coast terminus seeming to be the proper occasion on which to contemplate Canada's arrival at nationhood” (191). He makes the assertion that the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) is perhaps the most crucial infrastructure in the production of the Canadian nation-novel. The nation-novel in Canada then, is inherently tied to travel narratives as these meditations on nation and national identity play out while moving through the varied landscapes of Canada. Flynn is speaking specifically about travel narratives of the nineteenth century but the precedent set by these early works is undeniable: “The readerly travel quest and the quest to realize the nation became one; to read was to travel was to find the country” (191). The transnational is already embedded in this early Canadian nationalist literature as it is often British tourists making these railway journeys across the country. However, given that they are outsiders they are not nearly as invested in constructions of national identity, and they are not seeking to understand their own place within said nation.

In her book, *American Road Narratives*, Ann Brigham poses the question around whether or not cross-country or continental travel seeks to embrace the vastness of space or attempt to reduce it into something more manageable (5). There is no singular answer to this question as the motivation for travel can be so varied, but in the context of Canadian narratives of mobility there

is certainly a strong sense that the vastness of the country is something that is at once beautiful and awful. Many early settlers wrote about their efforts to tame the vast *terra nullius* that would become Canada. With the completion of the CPR, the answer to Brigham's question is simple and yet extremely complex: both. Travelers want to marvel at the vastness of the country, the juxtaposition of the endlessly flat prairies with the sheer magnitude of the Canadian Rocky Mountains, but they want to do so in a comfortable and convenient fashion. The railroad connects the coasts thereby encouraging the seemingly impossible task of traversing the country while also creating a spectacle of the immense landscape. Yet the very structures that enable cross-Canada travel were reliant on the labour of marginalized peoples. The CPR was built by Chinese immigrants whose lives were viewed as disposable and therefore put in extremely dangerous situations with no training in order to clear a route through the mountains using explosives.

Journey to the Centre of the Universe: Canadians Abroad

A novel that aligns with my discussion of Canadian mobility, transnationalism, and identity is Poulin's *Volkswagen Blues*. Not only does Poulin's protagonist Jack cross the American-Canadian border, but he does so with his Métis travel companion, Pitsémine. His experience of this cross-continental journey is guided by the movements of his brother, Théo, his childhood hero, Etienne Brûlé, and Pitsémine's explanations of the mistreatment and displacement of Native Americans. The Canadian writer following in the footsteps of a great French explorer into the United States with his passenger of mixed Indigenous heritage could hardly be anything but an intersection of national identities and narratives. While Pitsémine and

Jack (and the spectres of Brûlé and Théo) make something of a meagre transnational community, they are a microcosm of transnationalism.

Volkswagen Blues is a novel that employs a traditionally nationalistic genre to deconstruct the mythologization of conquest, settlement, and individualism. While there are of course several Canadian road narratives that remain north of the 49th Parallel, the genre is so distinctly American that many works tend to replicate the trajectory toward California. Poulin is no exception. His protagonist begins in Quebec City and yet completes his journey in San Francisco. Jack spends a great deal of time exploring a hub of Beat culture, City Lights Books in San Francisco and learning from a fictionalized Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Jack and Pitsémine discover evidence of his brother Théo at the famous Caffè Trieste when the owner shows them a photo of a group of famous Beat poets and an unidentified man amidst them. Jack recognizes that unidentified man as Théo. When the two travelers manage to catch up with Mr. Ferlinghetti, they discover that he only has vague memories of Théo, but he remembers his Quebecois accent and the fact that he spent a great deal of time attending poetry readings and hanging around the Caffè. Much like Kerouac and his Sal Paradise, Théo is drawn toward the epicentre of West Coast Beat culture. Théo becomes very closely aligned with Quebecois history in the novel and the fact that he was in some way attached to the distinctly American Beat movement blends French-Canadian history with American cultural production in an act of transnational revisionism. California is not only the logical direction of Westward expansion but also an epicentre of cultural production. Regardless of nationality, California is a beacon of cultural importance in the North American road narrative. The direction of movement in Poulin does not necessarily render it less Canadian, but rather it speaks to the permeability of the border in many North American road narratives and lends itself to transnationalist readings.

Following Etienne Brûlé's historical trail through North America to map the trajectory of the journey, *Volkswagen Blues* depicts the colonial project as one that relied on French exploration for expansion, which "add[s] a counterweight to the Anglo-Saxon metanarratives about the colonisation of America" (Sanz-Lazaro 271). This supports the reading of the novel as one that is invested in the francité⁹ of Quebec's history, but the influence of *On the Road* as an intertext in *Volkswagen Blues* demonstrates the hybridity of Québécois identity. The American influence, however, does not efface the novel's status as a Québécois cultural production. The novel is not limited by borders either real or imagined, but rather shows the complex way in which they interact with identity. Mike Winterburn argues that *Volkswagen Blues* is an "explicitly American" (277) novel, and Jean Morency calls *Volkswagen Blues* Poulin's attempt to write "the Great American Novel" (213). Jimmy Thibeault calls the novel a representation of "américanité québécoise" and discusses the American influence on the novel while also stressing that it is an aspect of Québécois culture, and scholars such as Anne Marie Miraglia provide close readings of the hybridity of Québécois culture. She writes that: "La question identitaire comporte toujours chez Poulin une dimension nationale" (Miraglia "L'Amérique" 36). Nation, however, is a complex construction in the novel. Poulin interrogates the hybridity of Québécois culture through the juxtaposition of French and American influence on Quebec. Similarly, Miraglia writes that: "*Volkswagen Blues* semble remettre en question une identité nationale fondée exclusivement sur le relais français. Ce roman pose que le problème de l'identité Québécoise ne saurait être résolu qu'en tenant compte simultanément de la francité et de l'américanité du Québécois" (37). She goes on to argue that Théo and Jack represent the duality of Québécois

⁹ "Frenchness," a term that Anne Marie Miraglia suggests opposes *americanité*.

culture. Théo's nomadic lifestyle, his desire for adventure, and his abandonment of Quebec are indicative of his *américanité*, while Jack is representative of the *francité* of Québécois culture.

This duality of culture, Miraglia argues, is not only represented by the brothers, but is the driving force of the novel. She further argues that the centrality of the *coureur de bois* is representative of a rupture with French heritage. It is also, however, a figure that is crucial to the establishment of the American continent. Jack follows in Théo's footsteps to resolve his writer's block and ennui but once he discovers Théo's paralysis, he realizes that the effect of abandoning his *francité* in favour of fully embracing *américanité* can be devastating. Many scholars present *américanité/francité* as a duality in the Poulinian construction of Québécois identity, with Miraglia writing that to identify as French-Canadian is to repress "*américanité et donc de son hybridité*" (41). David Leahy, however, describes *américanité* as a form of imperialism for "satellite nations" such as Canada and Quebec. Leahy describes the way that *américanité* is not simply an adoption of American culture and identity, but rather an acknowledgement that "USian" influence on the Americas is pervasive and also a reminder that "international borders and cultures are presented as being permeable and malleable" (77). Leahy's argument suggests that American culture equally influences Anglophone Canada and Quebec, therefore French-Canadian identity need not repress its *américanité*. The novel has been categorized under a variety of national and provincial designations (Canadian, Québécois, American), each of which reinforces borders and constructed ideas of nation. The very fact that it has been employed in the service of various geographic designations is a reminder that the transnational does not supersede nation, but instead offers a method of reading that troubles what Kit Dobson calls the "totalizing discourse" of nation. Read through the frame of transnationalism, however, the novel can be productively read as concurrently Québécois, American, and Canadian. Rather, the "pluralities,

differences, hybrid identities, and transnational geographies” (Jay 4) can work to unsettle rigid conceptions of nation and produce a more nuanced representation of the influence that American culture has on Canadians and the difficulty of isolating Quebec from Canada.

Paul Jay’s definition of transnationalism is particularly productive for my discussion of Poulin’s novel. In the introduction to his book, he writes that transnationalism has “productively complicated the nationalist paradigm...transformed the nature of the locations we study, and focused our attention on forms of cultural production that take place in the liminal spaces between real and imagined borders” (1). The transnational turn, for Jay, does not “fragment” literary studies, but rather offers opportunities for a wider range of voices, interests, and ideas that renews the discipline (4). It is also these liminal spaces that allow Jack and Pitsémine to interrogate their own subject positions. The road trip is itself a space of liminality in which the voyagers are not home or away but rather in transit, which allows for productive reflection on constructions of the self and home. Siemerling and Casteel, like Dobson, assert that “the hemispheric turn reflects a broader interrogation of the nation as a unit of cultural analysis” (6). Their discussion points out that the hemispheric turn in literature of the Americas encourages an interrogation of previously accepted narratives about Canada and Canadian identity through an examination of the transnational.

In *Volkswagen Blues* there is a particularly interesting border crossing in which Jack is seen as a suspicious character given both his profession as a writer and the fact that he has very little information to offer about his trip into the United States. Pitsémine, meanwhile, simply wanders about the border crossing freely while Jack is being questioned. This is an interesting inversion of roles where the white privileged man falls under suspicion rather than the woman of mixed Indigenous heritage. The state is concerned with and wishes to surveil Jack to some

degree while Pitsémine is allowed to cross the border without being questioned. When the border guard asks Jack if he is travelling for “‘Vacation or work?’...Jack hesitated. ‘I’m looking for my brother,’ he said. ‘Are you? And what do you do for a living?’ ‘I’m a writer.’ The agent jotted something at the bottom of the form” (50). Jack is told to park the Volkswagen Minibus and enter the building for follow up questioning, but Pitsémine is allowed to walk about while this takes place. When Jack enters the immigration building, he explains that he is unsure why he has been sent for further questioning since he does not intend to stay in the United States. Rather than respond to Jack directly, the agent demands to know what he writes. After some questioning about what kind of writing Jack produces, he is allowed to leave but he asks the border agent if they detained him because of his occupation, to which she responds: “‘No. Because you don’t seem to know anything’... ‘Maybe that’s why I’m a writer,’ Jack said jokingly. ‘I think you’d better go,’ she said, and the man had the distinct impression that he shouldn’t push the matter” (51). This border crossing is complicated by the fact that the border guard views Jack as inept. There is no mention of Pitsémine during Jack’s questioning and in fact she is mostly unaware of and removed from the incident. Poulin purposefully uses this moment to divert the suspicion of border agents away from the Indigenous character and onto the white man.

In *Volkswagen Blues*, Poulin uses this moment at the border to highlight the over-policing of borders in North America in spite of the permeability of culture across nations. Jack is following the same trail that Brûlé carved out while mapping trade routes, and he is searching for his estranged brother whose journey mimicked that of the *coureur de bois*, and yet Jack is thought of as suspicious simply for taking a cross-continental journey without having a purpose. If Pitsémine had been questioned, it would have erased much of the strangeness of this moment as it is expected for non-white peoples to be thoroughly questioned by police systems. Her ability

to move quite freely between nations is doubly significant: the existence of borders for Indigenous peoples is an imposition on pre-contact geography of the continent but also her absence from the border security office highlights the ridiculous nature of state apparatus like border security attempting to control movement and mobility across geographies that predate the implementation of borders. Poulin's text can be read as a work of Québécois literature or of Canadian literature. However, the novel can be read productively as reflective of the transnational nature of North America and the value of embracing the confluence of cultures. Poulin uses this moment at the border to highlight the over-policing of borders in North America in spite of the permeability of culture across nations.

Transnational Communities: Finding Social Space Beyond Nation

The confluence of cultures and the transnational character of the journey is outlined when the pair finally arrive at their own frontier: California. This particular moment in the novel speaks to the transnational, transcultural significance of Québécois américanité and the influence of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. Chapter XXIX of the novel, "The Ghosts of San Francisco" begins with a short summary of the journey that the pair have taken so far:

They had set out from Gaspé, where Jacques Cartier had discovered Canada, and they had followed the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes, then the old Mississippi, Father of Waters, to St. Louis, where they had taken the Oregon Trail and, following the trail of the nineteenth-century emigrants who had formed caravans of ox-drawn wagons to set out in search of the Lost Paradise, they had covered the vast prairies, crossed the continental divide and the Rocky Mountains, forded rivers and traversed the desert and still more mountains, and now they were pulling in to San Francisco (141).

This is the culmination of their transnational journey, as if somehow the answers for both Jack and Pitsémine are to be found here and are intrinsic to the city itself. One landmark in particular causes Pitsémine to pause and reflect. The two set out to see many of the tourist destinations that the city has to offer, and they both pause to consider Alcatraz. Jack is thinking about Burt Lancaster and *The Birdman of Alcatraz* as he considers the former penitentiary, especially because Lancaster was beloved by Théo. Yet another of his brother's heroes is named alongside a number of actors such as John Wayne, synonymous with Hollywood's idea of the cowboy. Conversely, Pitsémine states that she is thinking of "Indians. They took over the prison in 1969 and declared the island Indian territory.' She was smiling" (142). After an extremely long journey that retraced the steps of colonizing forces, she is able to see a monument to First Nations' resistance. Yet she quickly reduces the activism to a mere footnote. When asked what happened, she says simply that "the police set up a blockade around the island...and then..." (142). She seems to suggest that "the Indians always lost, that they had lost here yet again and there was nothing to be done about it" (142). The ellipsis in her speech leaves a number of incidents of Indigenous resistance unspoken.

Yet, Heather Macfarlane sees this moment as a reinforcement of the vanishing Indian trope. It is seen as accepting a defeatist attitude toward Native American claims of sovereignty in spite of the fact that "The occupation was a turning point in Native claims for human rights...the occupation forced Americans to recognize and take the claims of Native peoples seriously" (Macfarlane 12). Perhaps it is a rather dismissive moment, but of course the character of Pitsémine is nothing but practical throughout the novel. Rather than dwell on the activists' loss, she smiles at the thought of the act of occupation, and it does seem to give her a sense of pride. While Macfarlane is right and the actions are reduced to something of a historical footnote,

Pitsémine immediately follows her somewhat dismissive comment with a declaration of the beauty of the city. This is particularly interesting given that she will decide to settle, for a time, in San Francisco because she believes it to be a “good place to try to come to terms with her own twofold heritage, to become reconciled with herself” (Poulin 161). She claims to have made this decision based on the racial diversity of the city. This is of course a factor, but the sense of connection that she expresses in relation to Alcatraz, recognizing it as a symbol of First Nations’ reclamation, inspires her to embrace her heritage rather than efface it. In fact, this relocation adds yet another layer to the transnational aspect of the novel given that a woman of mixed Canadian and Innu heritage feels that an American city is a space in which she feels comfortable exploring her own complex identity.

Just as the novel reminds readers of the constructedness of nation, Pitsémine calls attention to the erasure of Indigenous peoples in the constructed history that she and Jack read so carefully. She insists that Jack think more critically about his valorization of Etienne Brûlé and reminds him that it is likely that Brûlé was slain because he disrespected his First Nations hosts. While the character of Pitsémine is meant to historicize the colonization of the Americas and provide the postcolonial analysis of the maps and Brûlé text, scholars such as Heather Macfarlane argue that her Métis identity contributes to ideas of cultural hybridity that erase specific Indigenous cultures. Compounding the aspect of the erasure of her identity is the way that her name is treated in the novel. It is only used a handful of times in the novel and Jack thinks of it as her “Innu name” but the majority of the time both Jack and the Narrator refer to her as La Grande Sauterelle, a French name that disregards her Innu heritage. Poulin, as a white man writing a woman of mixed background does fail to fully flesh out the character of Pitsémine. In fact, her character plays into a number of different stereotypes, as she “is partly

faithful Metis guide, partly the sexually attractive Indian maiden, temptress of the North American wilderness. She is also...the spiritual teacher” (Goldie 29). Jean Morency sees Pitsémine’s character as working to come to terms with her “composite” nature and her duality (223). Ultimately, he sees the novel as working to reduce the social, cultural, and ideological divide between the two characters. Pamela Sing, in her writing, pays close attention to the character of Pitsémine and examines the representation of her Métis identity in two of Poulin’s novels. She interrogates Poulin’s characterization of Pitsémine in order to determine if an Indigenous character written by a non-Indigenous person is necessarily reductive. Sing argues that Pitsémine is a more nuanced character than she is often thought to be and, using the work of Glissant, she points to the potentiality of Pitsémine’s hybridity¹⁰. I argue, however, that it is the transnationalism woven into the text and Pitsémine’s character that makes it so compelling.

While Jack spends a remarkable amount of time with this woman as they travel across North America, he rarely considers her thoughts or motivations for undertaking this trip. In moments where she confides in him, he is unable to adequately respond or even react. She begins to open up about the way that her mixed-race identity is difficult for her to navigate: “I like the lights...I think nature’s most beautiful when there’s nothing there — I mean when it’s still the way it was in the beginning. – but I like the lights, too. I’m torn between the two and I know I always will be” (Poulin 32). Jack confesses that he could “think of nothing to say” (32). While the reader knows he listened, he does not even acknowledge this very intimate moment. Moments later he wonders how she could ever feel cold: “I thought Indians were never cold...’ I told you, I’m not a real Indian,’ she cut in, and muttered something that he didn’t catch” (33).

¹⁰ See Heather Macfarlane’s essay “*Volkswagen Blues* Twenty-Five Years Later: Revisiting Poulin’s Pitsémine,” Terry Goldie’s review of the novel “*Transcontinental*” in *Books in Canada*, Marie Vautier’s article “Postmodern Myth, Post-European History, and the Figure of the Amerindian” also present a variety of discussions about the character of Pitsémine.

Even this reproach does not encourage Jack to really engage with Pitsémine, and once again he says nothing. He has mentally categorized her as an “Indian” and does not seem interested in understanding the more nuanced and complex issues of identity that she is wrestling with on this journey. Her companionship is a welcome relief for him, but her own personal journey is not of any interest to Jack. Consciously, he is recreating the trajectory of Brûlé, but he is also subconsciously treating Pitsémine as his Indigenous guide, his trusty sidekick, and as a background character in his own travel narrative.

In this way, Poulin uses the character of Jack to critique romantic notions of conquest and exploration that disenfranchises First Nations peoples. In spite of Pitsémine’s best efforts, Jack fails to recognize some of his own shortcomings as a settler-colonial. There are moments throughout the novel where he is obviously sympathetic to her struggles as a mixed-race woman and yet he never asks for elaboration when she makes mention of her difficulties. She asks that they stop on their way through Ontario so that she may pay a visit to the burial site of Chief Thayendanegea “whom the whites called Joseph Brant” (Poulin 46). Jack silently admits to himself that he knows very little about the man other than the fact that he “had been a great Mohawk warrior [and] that he had fought beside the English and had remained loyal to the British Crown during the American Revolution” (46). Aside from some mention of women’s status in Mohawk society, Jack does not seem to desire any more information from Pitsémine to understand why she would want to sleep next to this man’s grave site. He does not seem curious about why she feels connected to this particular figure or why she decides to sleep between his grave and that of E. Pauline Johnson. There is a reference to the fact that she was a Mohawk poet, but the fact that she herself dealt with identity issues as a Métis woman is not acknowledged or discussed. When Pitsémine returns in the morning, she talks about the

revelation she had while considering the nameless grave of Thayendanegea's wife. She explains that the question kept her awake for some time and it forced her to reflect on his position in the war against the Mohicans, and she eventually concluded that she had "lost confidence in him" (49). Strange though it may be that she did not turn her attention to Pauline Johnson whose grave is mere feet away from Brant's, it is stranger still that Jack does not seem interested in this experience and Pitsémine shrugs it off before carrying on with her morning. Jack asks vague questions about his travelling companion and is perfectly happy to receive vague answers. Rather than inquire about the woman's personal journey, Jack is satisfied with keeping her at a distance under the guise of affording her some privacy.

Waiting for Théo: The Quest for a Personal History

After discovering some information that indicates that Théo could be living in St. Louis, Missouri, the two travelers make their way toward the Mississippi River in the old Volkswagen bus. The description of the river itself is part and parcel with the *americanisme* of the book, but it also acknowledges the complex history of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and the impact of colonialism on the Indigenous peoples of North America. Jack and Pitsémine are aware of the river before they can see it:

...they were suddenly aware of a strange smell...It was a damp, oppressive odour, dense and sludgy, like the smell in a swampy woods, a mixture of water, earth and plants, an aroma of muddy water and old moss. As they drove up to a bridge, they saw a very broad waterway, its water heavy and yellow; both realized without having to say a word that it was the Mississippi, Father of Waters, the river that divided America in two and joined North and South, the great river of Louis Jolliet and Pere Marquette, the sacred river of the Indians, the river of the black slaves and of cotton, of Mark Twain and Faulkner, the

river of Jazz and the bayous, the mythic, legendary river that people said merged with the soul of America. (Poulin 66)

Even while conceding to some of the more heinous aspects of American history, the narration of the novel still positions American culture as worthy of the awe afforded it by not only Jack, but patriots and admirers globally. The facts of slavery and colonialism are only mentioned in the gauziest fashion and glossed over in favour of the great cultural productions of the South, a trajectory that is hardly uncommon in conversations with apologists south of the Mason-Dixon line. This apologism is unsurprising given Jack's sentimental feelings toward his childhood heroes. His unquestioned devotion to heroic narratives of North American settlement endures in spite of Pitsémine's best efforts. It is during their stay in St. Louis, however, that these sentiments start to erode, and Jack begins to understand why his companion has been trying to unsettle in the previously unquestioned idea of settlement and Manifest Destiny.

Mobility, in *Volkswagen Blues*, forces a reckoning with colonial forms of violence. It removes both physical and cognitive distance from Jack's understanding of history. He is confronted with the material reality of historical violence. His presence at sites of historical note forces him to examine his understandings of history and how these histories shape concepts of nation. A few days after their arrival in St. Louis, when Pitsémine asks what is bothering him, he replies: "It's America. You start to read the history of America and there's violence everywhere. It's as if America was built on violence" (72). Pitsémine has been trying to open his eyes to this fact since they set out on their journey together and yet it is not until he reads a history text written by Timothy Severin, detailing the Oregon Trail, that the reality of colonial violence begins to dawn on him. This stop on the journey marks a turning point for Jack, one in which his epistemological conceptions of nation begin to rupture. This stimulates a watershed for Jack,

calling into question many previously accepted narratives and causes Jack to become disillusioned in a way that he cannot quite verbalize.

Ever the figure that bears the burden of emotional labour, Pitsémine takes Jack on a steamship tour of the city in order to lighten his mood. At the end of the tour, fascinated by the tour guide's knowledge of the Oregon Trail, Jack asks what sort of people decided to leave the more settled areas of America behind in favour of the unknown West. The captain replies that it was just "'Ordinary people' ...[he] the repeated in French, '*Du monde ordinaire.*' 'Not adventurers?'" asked Jack. 'No.' 'And not bums?' 'Not at all'" (74). Jack seems disappointed by this revelation and after considering it for some time he comes to something of a conclusion telling Pitsémine that:

my brother Théo and the pioneers. The relationship between them might not be very obvious, especially because I've only remembered some trivial details about him to tell you -- a big house, a garden, a river, a snowmobile, that sort of thing. But I'm positive there's a link and it's likely this: my brother Théo, like the pioneers, was *absolutely convinced that he could do whatever he wanted*. And that's just about everything I had to say. (76-7)

After a period of reflection, Jack recognizes that he is not only disappointed by his new understanding of the adventurers, but he is also angry at the selfish and careless nature of these men. During this time in St. Louis, the mythology of the adventurer begins to unravel for Jack in a very personal way. It is not only that the violent history of nation-building is suddenly revealing itself to him; he is also beginning to reckon with the resentment he feels toward his brother for his selfishness. Jack must come to terms with the fact that he is on something of a blind chase of his brother because Théo never bothered to keep in touch with him.

By the end of the novel, all of the narratives about exploration and discovery that Jack so fiercely believed in start to unravel, and his anger begins to surface. While driving through Nebraska and reading about the Oregon Trail he begins to convey his new understanding to Pitsémine:

‘He knows the emigrants aren’t heroes. They’re ordinary people. They were farmers, artisans, teachers and missionaries...They’re not adventurers. What they’re looking for isn’t adventure, it’s...In fact they don’t know exactly. They’ve heard there are vast fertile lands out west and they’ve decided to go there, that’s all. They think they’ll find a better life out there, on the Pacific coast. What they’re looking for, basically, is happiness. (100)

Jack had to embark on his own journey in order to begin to understand the motivations of those who were historically pulled westward. While it takes Jack far longer to break away from what he has been taught to believe, this realization echoes the moment earlier in the novel when Pitsémine returns from her vigil at the grave of Chief Thayendanegea, Joseph Brant. She had believed so firmly in his influence and yet when she pauses to think about it, she begins to question her understanding of him: “there’s the business about [his] wife who...I mean, she has no name and I spent part of the night wondering why, and I asked myself all sorts of questions about the old chief” (49). She wonders why he would have chosen to fight “against the French and against the Mohicans from the Hudson River Valley” and she begins to realize that he was a complicated figure that perhaps does not deserve to be valorized (49). In these parallel moments, *Volkswagen Blues* is a novel that employs a traditionally nationalistic genre to deconstruct the mythologization of conquest, settlement, and individualism. These concepts are entangled in histories of North America, but in following the trails of exploration, the grim realities begin to emerge from the stories.

The pair engage in an ongoing process of relearning the colonial history of North America, and eventually Jack begins to understand that his mythologies are fictionalized. This is obvious in North Platte, Nebraska when the pair decide to pay a visit to the Buffalo Bill Museum. The narrator explains how William Cody received his nickname and Pitsémine's reaction speaks volume for Jack: "That must add up to five or six thousand buffalo'...Her face was hard again and her eyes shone, and Jack saw at once that Buffalo Bill, like his brother's other heroes and his brother himself, was about to come under fire. This time, anticipating her, he himself denounced the buffalo hunter's alleged heroic deeds" (94). Jack is resigned at this point to the veil being lifted on his childish fantasies and yet his resignation is not coloured by resentment or anger. Rather he wants to demonstrate to his companion that he is learning from her and beginning to understand that the narrativization of history has shaped the way that he understands the world. This moment takes a turn though as Jack's subtle, but seemingly good-natured manipulation forces Pitsémine to acknowledge some of the positive aspects of Buffalo Bill's history. He points out that Buffalo Bill "killed his first Indian at the age of twelve"; he had become a scout for the despicable General Custer...The man's tactic assuaged La Grande Sauterelle's wrath and even prompted her to say that not everything Buffalo Bill had done was bad" (94). She notes that he had a ranch in Wyoming where he raised buffalo at the end of his life. Jack takes this a step too far by suggesting that he may be the very reason that buffalo are not extinct in America, and she rebuffs him for suggesting something so extreme. Jack is in some ways amenable to the decolonizing process of learning, but it is a result of Pitsémine's patience as well as her emotional and intellectual labour. She is committed to this process of decolonizing Jack's view of the world, but this is an extremely involved process, one that requires her to

continue to reflect Jack's biases back to him. Still, this is a reciprocal process wherein Pitsémine does allow herself in some small ways to be swept up by the heroic descriptions of these men.

This allowance is fleeting, and later that night she wakes with a start and begins to explain the extermination of the buffalo by white settlers and by extension the extermination of the Plains Indians. The one moment of allowance she granted Buffalo Bill earlier causes her even more outrage. She wakes from her nightmares and begins to explain her anger to her companion:

she launched into a violent outburst against all the whites who had turned buffalo hunter for financial reasons, like Buffalo Bill or the employees of the fur-trading companies, or for sport, like the rich people who came from New York or Washington on special trains...her most unflattering epithets were reserved for the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia, son of Czar Alexander II, who had come to hunt buffalo, complete with his retinue and his cases of champagne, in 1872. (96).

Finally, she lulls herself and Jack back to sleep by reading the Sioux Prayer for the Return of the Buffalo¹¹. As a result of moments like this, her guidance fundamentally changes Jack's understanding of the version of history that he has grown up believing. The road narrative, in Jack's case where it situates the young white man as the hero of his own journey, is a product of nostalgia. There is a desire to recreate experiences of the frontier that are no longer attainable. Sal Paradise himself imbues Dean with a cowboy ethos, comparing him to a young Gene Autry upon their first meeting. Jack projects this onto his brother and desperately clings to it even when it becomes glaringly clear that Théo was not, in reality, how he imagined him to be through a haze of nostalgia.

¹¹ In spite of the full text being printed into the novel with a year dating the prayer, there is no evidence that this is prayer exists before the publication of the novel. It may be part of an oral tradition that has escaped reference in print. However, it is clearly influenced by Christian traditions and speaks to God rather than Wakan Tanka, the Great Spirit of Sioux tradition.

Jack's reaction to the slow realization that his brother was not, in fact, the person he thought he was, manifests physically in a sort of flu-like illness. After discovering a newspaper article that reports Théo's theft of an old map from a museum in Kansas City, Jack becomes bedridden in the back of the Volkswagen for three days. La Grande Sauterelle is worried at first and checks his temperature, but she remarks that "“You don't have a fever...In fact it's below normal”" (78). She spends this time in the library reading about local figures of history, including Jesse James. The novel again pairs the white men of history with Jack and his own circumstances as a way of allowing him to understand his own life. Pitsémine leaves a book about James open to a page about his relationship with his brother. In the face of this rather heavy-handed message, Jack concludes that he must accept the fact that his love for Théo cannot change the fact that he may have a criminal past. Comparing his "illness" to a deep-sea diver's complex, Jack begins to acknowledge that Théo was likely a part of the Quebec nationalist and domestic terrorist group, the FLQ (Front de libération du Québec). An extreme nationalism would explain the theft of the document as Théo would have seen this as a reclamation of Francophone heritage. While this could be seen as heroic by some, Jack does not view it as such. His realization that Théo may have been a member of the FLQ is difficult for him and it is obvious that Jack does not feel connected in any way to extreme Quebecois nationalism. He is not so strictly defined by his identity as a French-Canadian, but it is not something he outright rejects.

French is the primary language spoken by both characters and as a result, there are several moments throughout the book where Jack and Pitsémine struggle to communicate with the US citizens they encounter. When they come across someone that is able to converse with them in French, then, they are thrilled. This desire to communicate in their first language stands in contrast to the way that some scholars have described this novel as a work of post-Referendum

americanisme. In a moment I discussed earlier, the captain of the riverboat in Kansas City goes out of his way to use his small knowledge of French in conversation. Pitsémine is thrilled when she comes across the journalist who had written about Théo's theft because his French is excellent, and it is easy for him to communicate what he knows. Of course, Jack is attracted to American popular culture as it is nearly impossible to grow up in Canada and be removed from the cultural productions of our neighbours. However, this is yet another example of the transnationalist nature of the novel. Robert Sapp writes about the use of language in the novel in his article "Linguistic Vagabondage: The Driving Force in Jacques Poulin's *Volkswagen Blues*." He discusses the moments in the text when language is crucial. Sapp opens the article with the statement that "the nomad carries his home in his native language" (345). Using the original French text, Sapp examines moments when Francophone characters use English to communicate and sees them as a "violent refusal of a past that has become unrecognizable" (345). In an argument that supports my own assertion, Sapp writes about the way that parts of our identity are connected to our personal history.

However, Sapp also draws on a discussion of the postcolonial, "the gap between the self and other has diminished if not disappeared [and] questions of language and identity inevitably arise" (346). Sapp sees the use of English in the novel as evidence of colonization which is of course an obvious point of discussion when considering Quebecois literature, but it neglects the fact that the French were just as culpable of colonial violence in North America as the English. Can the colonizers become the colonized? Perhaps so, but Sapp's argument also ignores the erasure of Pitsémine's name. Therefore, Sapp's argument is somewhat reductive and does not reflect the way that the novel attempts to confront the complexities of decolonization. To imagine *Volkswagen Blues* as a novel that is principally concerned with a distinctly Quebecois

identity invalidates Poulin's use of Jack to deconstruct grand narratives of Canadianness that rely on exclusion. Nonetheless, language does play a significant role in the novel and one that reflects notions of nationalism. However, Poulin is not concerned with producing a novel that is a direct reflection of Quebec, but rather uses the road genre as a means of displaying the complex ways that North American, particularly American and Canadian, cultures rely on one another. Yet this reliance also manifests as a rejection of the other in favour of presenting a better culture.

Common narratives of Canadianness tend to espouse our polite and friendly nature in opposition to our more boisterous, patriotic southern neighbours. Poulin avoids this cliché in favour of a more realistic portrayal of three travelers from Canada (I include Théo in this as Jack and Pitsémine follow his path exactly) whose fascination with American history influences their trajectory and yet this travel is by no means a rejection of their own identities. Rather, the novel is an exploration of how national identity is a complicated amalgam of social and cultural values shared across borders and languages in North America.

Jack's discovery of Théo does not result in the happy reunion that he had hoped would occur. Even as Jack manages to catch sight of Théo, sitting on a bench watching a vaudeville performance, he projects a number of characteristics onto his brother. In spite of the clownish entertainment, "Théo was serious...He sat there motionless, his face imperturbable" (157). Jack thinks of his brother as a very dignified man observing his surroundings until the reality of the situation begins to dawn on him: "Something strange was happening...The men sitting on either side of Théo...they had got up, they had taken hold of something behind the bench. It was a wheelchair. All at once the two men placed Théo in the wheelchair. They leaned over and lifted Théo so they could climb the stairs" (158). This moment is the culmination of Jack's journey and before his very eyes yet another of his heroes is reduced to a shadow of his former self. Jack

learns that Théo has a kind of creeping paralysis that not only affects his mobility but also his cognitive function. Théo does not recognize his brother, nor can he have a conversation with him. Quickly Jack becomes frantic in his efforts to connect with Théo:

‘It’s Jack! It’s your brother!’ Théo’s eyes squinted as if he were making an effort to understand. His cheeks were hollow, and there were creases on either side of his mouth and bags under his eyes. There were tufts of grey hair in his nose and ears. He moved his lips and saliva dribbled from the corner of his mouth. Jack took a Kleenex from the pocket of his jeans and wiped the saliva. Then he grabbed Théo by the arm and shook him, crying, ‘THÉO IT’S ME! IT’S YOUR BROTHER!’ (159)

He is devastated when he realizes that his brother can no longer recognize him, and their reunion is emptied of all of the meaning that Jack had anticipated. Théo cannot apologize for his absence, he cannot discover what life had been like for his brother or reconnect with him in any substantial way. Théo is a ghost of himself, and this should be unsurprising to Jack given his experiences confronting his heroes on this journey. As though finishing his earlier sentence about disappointing heroes, this moment shatters the image that Jack had constructed of the one he admired most. Not only has his idea of his brother collapsed, but he has also had to reckon with the dissolution of his long-held notions of nation, history, and identity. He has undergone an epistemological shift, having had his image of his heroes wrested from him and the myth of the frontier along with them. This is the culmination of the rupture Jack began to experience and reckon with in St. Louis. He has had to reckon with the dissolution of his perception of history and national identity that was wrapped up in the mythologization of historical figures. His expectation of Théo is shattered and he must face the fact that the imagined narratives that he had believed in are not infallible. It causes an epistemic reorganization for Jack and marks a

transnational shift in his thinking. He breaks from the trails taken by pioneers and explorers and chooses to fly home to Québec City, leaving the Volkswagen behind.

The conclusion of the novel begins with Jack and Pitsémine discussing what they will do next. Jack is flying home to Quebec City and leaving Pitsémine with the Volkswagen bus. Having spoken to the doctor who treats Théo, Jack concludes that there is no real point in visiting with him given the extent of his memory loss and paralysis. The doctor even goes so far as to suggest that attempting to remind Théo of his past could aggravate him, therefore implying that the best course of action is to leave well enough alone. His companion asks him if he is still thinking about his brother. He responds that “‘I...the idea that it’s better not to see my brother again...I accepted it so quickly that...now I wonder if I really loved Théo. Perhaps I only loved the image I’d made up.’ He shrugged and said half seriously, ‘One of these days I’m going to have to learn something about human relations’” (162). Jack seems willing and able to part with the romanticized version of his brother as quickly as he had abandoned his heroes, and yet the existence of Théo complicates Jack’s usual acceptance of alternate narratives. Jack feels that he simply does not understand human relationships and that must be why he is so willing to leave his brother behind. Throughout the novel Jack has worked to accept that his understanding of nation, history, and identity are rooted in exclusion and perhaps when he finally arrives at Théo, he is able to accept that there is much that he does not know about who his brother came to be in the intervening years. Jack seems willing to accept that he will never know who Théo had truly been and chooses the simplest route: leaving Théo as “happy as a person could be under the circumstances” (161). This echoes Jack’s actions when he and Pitsémine visited the Buffalo Bill museum. There, he had anticipated Pitsémine’s criticism and began discussing it himself. Here, he preemptively understands that his hero will disappoint him. In this situation, and on the advice

of the doctor, Jack chooses not to agitate Théo and thus avoid disrupting his own memories. He questions his feelings for his brother but, given the extremely long period of estrangement between the two, it does not seem unreasonable for Jack to leave on the doctor's recommendation.

Jack's longing for a narrativized history and the experience of the frontier, as well as his clouded memories of Théo pair to create in him a nostalgia for a world that can be organized by borders. The transnationalism of the text forces a reckoning with the concept of the nation-novel as a fabrication, much like national identity itself. Jack's sense of adventure, which is rooted in the hero-worship of Théo, is ruptured when he sees him wheelchair-bound and he realizes that embracing the ethos of the *coureur de bois*, for both Brûlé and Théo, is to reject the past. Jack chooses instead to return home, but with a new understanding of identity both national and personal. Pitsémine however, still feels alienated by constructions of nation and while Heather Macfarlane reads this as a way of effacing her specificity in choosing to be just another ethnic minority in San Francisco, I read this as a moment of transcultural triumph. She is disappointed by her own Indigenous Canadian heroes and instead takes pride in the act of Native American resistance at Alcatraz. While she has spent the novel rejecting the valorization of historical figures, she finds comfort in an activist movement. The novel's trajectory, plotted by Brûlé, predates the establishment of the border and nation, and therefore Pitsémine is choosing to create a home within North America because strict definitions of Canada and Quebec do not offer her the sense of home that "away" does.

The transnational mobility that the novel presents works to unsettle national categories that road narratives are often a part of constructing. In Chapter 1, the road narratives discussed are aligned with the practice of *theoros* and each text relates experiences of American life. They

each pause at the end to reflect on the nation and Williams suggests some possible ways forward after the tumult of the Civil Rights movement. These texts fit comfortably into Benedict Anderson's discussion of the way that the novel can shape understandings national identities. *Volkswagen Blues*, on the other hand, unsettles easy narratives about national history that have shaped Jack Waterman's conception of national and personal identity. Pitsémine works to unravel the narrative myths that Jack believes about the heroism and bravery of the *coureur de bois* and early North American explorers. The transnational movement in the novel is crucial to untangling the myth from the historical record. This process of destabilizing simple narratives about nation and national identity produces space for identities that do not conform to strict constructions. Transnational mobility in the novel produces space for a national identity that is more inclusive and that evolves to reflect the identities of those that reside within the boundaries of nation.

Chapter 3

Driving While Black: Black Canadian Escapes, Returns, and Relocations

Canada, as a nation, is consumed by narratives of inclusion and diversity. When Justin Trudeau ran for Prime Minister in 2015, the cornerstone of his campaign was a promise to assemble a cabinet that “look[ed] like Canada”. This decision would, of course, create a cabinet in which members’ opinions did not always align with Trudeau’s policies. At the time of the election, though, Trudeau was lauded for his progressive and inclusive government. The desire for representation is not limited to government, it extends to a demand for media that “looks like Canada” as well. As a result, Canadian literature reflects the diverse population of the country. It is interesting then, that recent scholarly work on Canadian road narratives largely scants examination of works by racialized Canadians. Otherness is explored in work by scholars such as Heather Macfarlane and Katherine Ann Roberts through Indigenous literature. While this is valuable scholarship, there are many narratives of mobility written by Black, Asian, Latinx, and immigrant Canadians that have not been addressed in recent scholarship. This dissertation is interested in the way in which one’s connection to nation is explored through the narrative of mobility and how experiences of marginalization and disconnection impact a traveller’s relationship to national identity. This chapter is therefore an examination of road narratives of Black Canadians and the way that race further complicates the traveller’s relationship to nation. George Elliot Clarke’s *The Motorcyclist* (2016) and André Alexis’ *Days by Moonlight* (2019) will form the basis of my discussion of the ways that Black Canadian narratives of mobility engage with issues of masculinity, nationalism, and Canadian narratives of inclusion and diversity.

Histories of Black Canada complicate such narratives of inclusion, as Katherine McKittrick's article "'Their Blood is There and They Can't Throw it Out': Honouring Black Canadian Geographies," points out. She introduces the erasure of Black geographies in Canada through the attempt to rename a road in Holland Township, Ontario. This example, McKittrick writes,

invites certain questions about how Canada is spatially produced. Specifically, discarding and rewriting geography according to racial, white dominant hierarchies, also asks for an explanation of what is beneath and beyond existing geo-political landscapes...it also demands a reading of how identity and place are mutually constructed when geography, and the production of space, are uneven and perpetuate inequalities. (28)

McKittrick's argument recognizes that existing social spaces have developed around structures and systems of exclusion and inequality. She goes on to point out the way that Black Canadian narratives work to unsettle concepts of nation and require a reconfiguration of "the meaning of unsatisfactory, racial, geographical boundaries" (28). As I have argued throughout this dissertation, narratives of mobility are valuable because of their ability to produce space through textual explorations of identity, otherness, and nation. The narrative of mobility reckons with the agency and potential for reclamation offered by the vehicle. Reclamation, here, conveys not just a claiming of one's agency through mobility, but also a reclamation of geographical and social space that rejects hierarchies and structures of exclusion.

Set in the late 1950s, *The Motorcyclist*, is exemplary of these acts of reclamation. Carl Black's visible mobility is an affront to "whites-only segregationists" in Halifax who recognize that Carl's possession of the motorcycle signifies the loss of control over Black Canadians. Carl's mobility allows him to penetrate spaces that were, until only recently, barred to Black

Canadians. In this way, Clarke's work insists on representing and including Black spaces rather than replicating the exclusion of Black geographies in Canada. Alexis' novel, by contrast, is a satirical examination of Canadian constructions of identity. Alfie Homer embarks on a regional tour of southern Ontario with Professor Bruno, a family friend. Alfie expects to be comforted by the familiar rural landscapes; however, he encounters racist attitudes veiled behind polite exteriors and an attention to difference and otherness that ultimately alienates Alfie rather than connects him to a national identity. An examination of these two novels demonstrates that Black Canadian road narratives reimagine the genre not as a celebration of nationhood, but rather as a way for marginalized peoples to reclaim their histories through travel.

Thus, this chapter will examine the way that Black Canadian road narratives reflect these concerns in unique ways. George Elliot Clarke's *The Motorcyclist* is a representation of Africadia, Black masculinities, and an example of how mobility can still produce space on a smaller scale. Significantly, Clarke's novel subverts a stereotypical depiction of Canadian men that Katherine Ann Roberts discusses in *West/Border/Road*. She examines how men in Canadian Road narratives oftentimes fall victim to the "loser guy" stereotype. In contrast to Carl Black's hypermasculinity, Roberts charts a genealogy of "loser Canadianness" that she argues "shape[s] the debate on representations of Canadian masculinity" (281). Citing popular television characters such as Bob and Doug McKenzie, Red Green, and the *Trailer Park Boys*, she argues that "linking masculinity and Canadian identity with themes of failure remains compelling and recurrent motif despite the existence of other more positive male identity narratives" (281-82). Clarke, by contrast, uses the road narrative genre to present an extremely masculine character and his mobility is central to his sense of manhood. While André Alexis' *Days by Moonlight* does explore certain aspects of Black masculinity, it is mostly interested in examining concepts

of belonging as a second-generation immigrant and satirizing Canadian narratives of inclusivity and national identity. Alfie's journey forces him to consider the notions he held about the politeness and kindness of the people of southern Ontario. These novels then actively remap the contours of the Canadian narrative of mobility and reject stereotypical depictions of Canadian identity. Each narrative deals with otherness in a way that is representative of the way that racialized Canadians grapple with nation, identity, and belonging.

Perspectives on Black Canada

There is a robust scholarly discussion that examines the history, cultures, and socio-political position, as well as geographies of Black Canada. The field has been well-established by scholars such as George Elliot Clarke, Austin Clarke, Katherine McKittrick, Rinaldo Walcott, Dionne Brand, David Chariandy, and many others. Drawing from this scholarship, this chapter aims to establish the way that Black Canadian road narratives unsettle concepts of nation as well as constructs such as gender, mobility, geographies, and identity. George Elliot Clarke's piece "White Like Canada" (1997) is an examination of the way that Canadians imagine themselves and their character in response to Americans. Clarke suggests that "the vagueness of black identity in Canada...is emblematic of a larger crisis of Canadian identity" (98). He goes on to argue that Canadian narratives of inclusion and diversity are a reaction to American racism and most white Canadians are unaware that Canada has similar histories of oppression and marginalization. Clarke lists the ways that Canadian identity is constructed in opposition to the United States: "Canada is mildly socialist; the U.S. is unabashedly capitalist. Canadians are nice; Americans are trigger-happy. Canadians also claim to be uniquely sensitive to multiculturalism. Whereas the American paradigm for assimilation is the 'melting pot,' Canada celebrates a

gorgeous ‘mosaic’ of peoples permitted to maintain their ethnic particularisms” (100). Clarke draws on the same popular rhetoric that emerges time and again about the welcoming and inclusive nature of Canada as a nation. As I discussed in Chapter 2, this notion of a multicultural Canada is so deeply entwined with Canadian nationalism and thus has created a kind of wilful ignorance about the way that racialized peoples experience Canada. Clarke writes that: “The most significant difference between Canada and the U.S. is, finally, that America has a race problem. In Canada, the party line goes, there are no racists save those who watch too much American television” (100-01). Clarke’s piece is pointed in its discussion of Canadian politeness and the underlying facts of ignorance, exclusion, and marginalization. The insistence on a national character that is fundamentally “nice” does not permit honest discussions of histories of oppression, violence, and racism. Clarke argues that at the time of publication “There are plenty of white liberals in Canada, but little white liberal guilt: Canadians do not believe that they have committed any racial sins for which they should atone” (102). In the decades since this piece was published, Canada has engaged in some of the white liberal guilt that Clarke argues was missing from public conversations in the 1990s. However, white liberal guilt seems to have had less of an effect than Clarke imagined it would.

In a 2007 article entitled “‘The Fiction of Belonging’: On Second-Generation Black Writing in Canada,” David Chariandy discusses the social panic that arose in the years following 9/11 that multiculturalism was, in fact, a threat to the nation. He writes about the fear of visible minorities and the “threat of terrorism,” particularly in relation to the London Underground bombings of 2005. The people who orchestrated the bombings were not immigrants or outsiders, he notes, but rather, were “second-generation British citizens” (Chariandy 819). Chariandy goes on to analyze the ways that many second-generation authors attempt to reckon with a sense of

belonging in Canada. He draws on an essay written by Leslie Sanders titled “Impossible to Occupy: André Alexis’s *Childhood*” in which she argues that the Alexis novel “is a work of obsessive and recursive self-articulation, suggesting that, at this point in time, neither can the narrator articulate the nation, nor is the nation prepared to articulate him” (184). This inability to express one’s connection to nation is at the heart of many narratives of mobility produced in Canada. In *The Motorcyclist* by George Elliot Clarke, for example, Carl Black’s mobility is alarming to many white Haligonians. Based on Clarke’s father’s diary from the years 1959 and 1960, *The Motorcyclist* is reflective of a time when segregation was very much a part of Canadian life. Clarke’s novel is a reminder of just one of the ways that Canadian narratives on inclusion tend to ignore histories of racial discrimination that produce the feelings of disconnection and marginalization so evident in works by authors of colour such as Alexis. As Leslie Sanders suggests, André Alexis’ work is an excellent example of the inability to articulate a connection to nation and in *Days by Moonlight* the narrator, Alfie, struggles to identify both with Canada as a nation and southern Ontario as a region. Although Alfie spent much of his youth travelling through southern Ontario with his parents, his travels as an adult leave him feeling very alienated from a place that he once believed had shaped him. Each text presents a different perspective on relating to nation as a person of colour, an immigrant, or a second-generation Canadian. Paired together, these novels present narrativized Canadian identity and history as silencing Black histories and experiences, creating the vagueness of experience that Clarke outlines in his discussion. They critique and satirize the insistence on Canadian multiculturalism and reveal the sedative politics of Canadian national identity. Using the narrative of mobility as a vehicle for exploring and revealing these constructions, Clarke and Alexis reject a universal Black Canadian experience and instead present their works as individual

experiences that speak to the way that Canada deals with race. These works stand in opposition to narratives of Canadian inclusivity and demonstrate the ways that, while multiculturalism is a pleasant notion, it is still not a reality for many Canadians, immigrants, and diasporic subjects.

Clarke's novel, however, emerges from a very different history of Blackness in Canada. While Alexis' provides a second-generation perspective and reflects on some of the complexities of the Black Caribbean diaspora, Clarke's *Africadia* is the result of an influx of Black Loyalists to Atlantic Canada following the American Revolution. The British had promised to provide freedom and land to those who enlisted to fight against the Americans. When the Americans won the war and the British retreated into Canada, many Black Loyalists settled in the Maritime provinces to claim their land allotments. These allotments were notably smaller than those awarded to their white compatriots, some of whom brought their slaves with them when they fled to Canada. They still faced discrimination, but they were also "the founders of Canada's first free black community" (Walker x). These communities were quite small and close knit, therefore the history from which Clarke's novel emerges is very specific. The Black Loyalists settled in Canada in the 1780s, some eventually leaving for the new settlement of Freetown in Sierra Leone. James Walker writes that "In all but economic terms the black Loyalists were isolated from the rest of Nova Scotian society. They were settled, most of them, in segregated communities...Under such conditions the blacks began to feel not only different but exclusive" (86-7). Clarke's construction of *Africadia* is the product of this history of movement from America to Canada, motivated by the Revolution. It is also reflective of the kind of segregation that Walker points out and a disappointment that Canada was not nearly as progressive and welcoming as the Black Loyalists had been promised. This is reflected in the way that Clarke's protagonist relates to Canada, America, and England. While the history of Black Atlantic Canada

differs from the context in which Alexis is writing, the two novels use mobility as a means of producing space for Black Canadian narratives. They differ in history and experiences, but this difference is a reflection of the diversity of Blackness in Canada.

Rinaldo Walcott's *Black Like Who?: Writing Black Canada* (2003) tackles the issues that arise when Blackness in Canada is imagined as a singular experience. In discussing the public reaction to the work of Austin Clarke, Walcott asks: "why must Clarke's great Canadian novel be set in Canada? My question is meant to indicate the assumptions that place a limit on what being Canadian is imagined to be" (12). Walcott's point is that definitions fail to encapsulate the complexity of Canadian identities and to suggest a singular experience is to ignore the complexity of a multicultural nation. He engages with Clarke's argument in "White Like Canada" and suggests that the article is reductive in its own discussion of Blackness in Canada. Walcott suggests that Clarke's argument attaches itself to the notion that there is a singular narrative of Canadianness. Walcott believes that "blackness [is] a potential challenge to normative narratives of the nation" while Clarke positions it as "sutured into the normative narrative" (19). Walcott believes that Clarke chooses not to unsettle the "whiteness of Canada...but rather points to where blackness or other 'coloureds' show up and accords them their due, even if it is a subordinated due within the contexts of a violent institution of nation, to gloss Gayatri Spivak" (19). Blackness in Canada, Walcott argues, is not something to be subsumed into a monoculture, but a rupture that offers possibility for new narratives. Therefore, Walcott cannot offer a singular approach through which to examine Black Canadian literature. He distinguishes between "indigenous black Canadian writers," such as George Elliot Clarke, and works written by first generation immigrant writers such as Dionne Brand. The work of first-generation immigrant writers, Walcott argues, are "[refiguring]...the social, political, and

cultural landscape of Canada” (50). Here, Walcott is invoking the Lefebvrian understanding that space is produced to demonstrate the way that Black Canadian authors are “remapping the Canadian urban landscape” and examining the lives of “the people who live in the in-between, neither here nor elsewhere, [who] redraw and rechart the places/spaces that they occupy” (Walcott 50). Building on Walcott’s assertion about the recharting of place and space, this chapter will examine the narratives of mobility produced by Black Canadians and interrogate the ways that geographies can be recharted through movement as well as occupation.

Moving away from the urban can also offer opportunities to “refigure and claim, and make one’s presence felt” (Walcott 52). The sense of reclamation expressed by Walcott is not akin to the experiences of other works of road literature. It is not a reclamation of Canadian identity nor is it a reclamation of land or treaty rights. Walcott suggests that this sort of reclamation reinforces restrictive constructions of nation and national identity. This argument builds on the work of the previous chapter in which the character of Pitsémine seeks to unsettle accepted narratives of Canadian history. She, like Walcott, does not offer a model for how to reconceive of nation because to do so would be equally limiting and restrictive. Acts of reclamation in narratives of mobility are diverse and manifest differently because they are individual experiences and are not representative of collective desires. However it presents itself, reclamation is central to the narratives of mobility under study in this dissertation. The works discussed in this chapter seek to reclaim or refigure a history of Blackness in Canada, a sense of belonging, and a recognition of citizenship that is not tied to nationalism.

In order to examine the ways in which the texts discussed in this chapter seek to refigure or reclaim Black histories, I must first engage with Katherine McKittrick’s work on Black geographies. In her book, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*

(2006), she argues that “the relationship between black populations and geography—and here I am referring to geography as space, place, and location in their physical materiality and imaginative configurations—allows us to engage with a narrative that locals and draws on black histories and black subjects in order to make visible social lives which are often displaced, rendered ungeographic” (x). McKittrick’s work builds on Lefebvre’s argument that space is socially produced. She argues that examining Black narratives not only reclaims histories of Blackness, but also produces social space for Blackness by acknowledging the relationship between place and space. Examining the literary social lives of Black Canadians produces social space for narratives that have historically been invisible. The novels discussed in this chapter work to locate and make visible histories of Black Canada. Both Clarke and Alexis use the narrative of mobility to chart Black geographies in Canada.

Building on McKittrick, I suggest that the narrative of mobility uses geographic movement to reveal otherwise overlooked social lives. The narrative of mobility is uniquely apt at making visible the processes through which social space is constructed and can therefore be restructured. Each of the narratives of mobility discussed in this chapter do some of the work that McKittrick argues needs to be done. In her discussion of Black Canada, she writes that “It could be argued, for example, that given the white colonial and geographic contexts of Canada, it is a surprise that black people are geographic at all due to spatial constraints that have an interest in sustaining black subordination and exclusion” (92). Through an examination of Black Canadian road narratives, the deconstruction of nation is inevitable. As Walcott argues, to construct Black Canada within the contexts of white Canada is to reinforce structures that have historically oppressed and marginalized people of colour in Canada. Instead, these narratives of mobilities offer insight into excluded histories and potential futures for Black Canada.

These discussions around Black Canada inform the foundation of this chapter given that these conversations are rooted in an understanding of space and place. Clarke seeks to reclaim a history of Blackness that is distinctly Canadian, whereas Walcott argues that constructions of nation and national identity are restrictive. *The Motorcyclist* and *Days by Moonlight* reflect these differing views and, in my reading, suggest that the Black Canadian narrative of mobility offers the potential for both reclaiming histories of Black Canada while also rejecting restrictive identity formations. The recharting of Canada in each of the texts discussed in this chapter is twofold: each presents a picture of Canada that is distinct from grand narratives of politeness and inclusion and each one charts a unique journey that rarely follows the TransCanada Highway. Rejecting prescriptive movement, these works traverse the urban and the rural and rarely, if ever cross provincial borders. These narratives of mobility are not concerned with national myths and the exploration of Canada as a nation, yet they are deeply concerned with establishing one's (dis)connection to nation. George Elliot Clarke's *The Motorcyclist* is a somewhat fictionalized depiction of Africadian history; *Days by Moonlight* is a playful and fictionalized exploration into rural Ontario and the cultural understandings of race, sexuality, class, and religion that emerge outside of urban centres. Each novel works to imagine possibilities for restructuring notions about identity that do not rely on nation as a central component.

“Exchangin’ royal-purple satin for *Lumpen* black leather”: Carl Black’s Ramblings

Using his father's diary from 1959-1960 as a launching point, George Elliot Clarke adapts and fictionalizes William Lloyd Clarke's experiences into a narrative of mobility that follows Carl Black, a young railway worker and aspiring artist as he details his sexual conquests, his travels, and the experiences that he had as a result of growing up Black in Nova Scotia. In the

“Proviso” to the novel, Clarke writes that it is “neither biography nor history, but it does sketch the he-said, she-said, *black* comedies of coupling, and their *personal* consequences. All open to *Interpretation*. As usual...” (x). Nonetheless, the novel is rooted in real experiences and recollections. However, before these experiences are relayed, Clarke includes a meditation on the road, the car, and mobility. He writes about the danger of pavement and the vigilance required of a motorcyclist to avoid obstacles on the road that could be fatal. The car, in Clarke’s preface, is an object of bourgeois comfort, a symbol of the white middle class nuclear family. In contrast to this, the motorcycle “means purity—of one man or one-duo transpo” (5). Clarke suggests that the motorcyclist has a more authentic connection to the road because there is no interior. Clarke characterizes the car driver as disconnected from their experience: allowed to daydream where the motorcycle driver needs “a cold eye, a clear eye to avoid the random annihilation that pavement permits” (4). Clarke’s novel, in other words, rejects the safety of the vehicle that John Williams finds appealing. Carl rejects the car because they “imply—usually—family or the whole gang tuckin in” (5). Many road trips undertaken in cars are taken alone and yet Clarke argues that the size of the car welcomes the presence of the family. A family is precisely what Carl Black is attempting to avoid creating and thus the appeal of the motorcycle is both because of an associated hypermasculinity and the limited capacity. The lone driver of the motorcycle may choose to invite a paramour as a passenger but there is no room for a third.

The restrictions of the motorcycle are perfectly suited to Carl, a young Black man working a menial job in order to achieve his goals: first to purchase his motorcycle and then to be able to attend art school. He does not want to be tied down to a family and have his income and opportunities drained from him. While *The Motorcyclist* details his sexual conquests, it also explores Carl’s anxieties about fathering a child with any of his lovers. The motorcycle is

representative of this desire to be untethered, to be afforded his freedom to come and go as he pleases and to do so in a way that flouts the expectations of the middle-class white people of Halifax. It is not simply mobility that is liberating in *The Motorcyclist*, it is also the sense of masculinity associated with the motorcycle itself that provides Carl with an accentuated sense of bravado. It allows him a freedom of movement that renders him visible in public spaces in a predominantly white city. His visibility on the motorcycle announces several things to observers: financial independence, Black masculinity, and unrestricted movement. His movement is no longer restricted to home, work, and segregated spaces. Carl is producing the kind of remappings discussed by Katherine McKittrick in both geographical and social contexts. As Lefebvre argues, space is socially constructed, which suggests that Carl's mobility when paired with the visibility of the motorcycle produces space for Black Acadians (or Africadians to borrow Clarke's term) in Halifax and the surrounding areas with his presence.

While Carl's mobility is more localized than some of the other road narratives discussed in this dissertation, because he can only take trips on weekends when he is not working, it grapples with many of the issues that are central to the narrative of mobility. Further, it provides a semi-historical account of Blackness in Canada that forces a reckoning with the nation's racist past. Clarke's novel recounts the historical desire in Halifax for segregation, the emasculation of Black men, and describes the city of the mid-twentieth century as "just a frosty, salt-spray South" (48). As mentioned earlier, the novel emerges from a Black Loyalist tradition in the Maritime provinces and Carl's assessment of Halifax reflects the disappointment felt by Loyalists when they realized that Canada was not so different from the America that they fled. This statement suggests that Carl's experience of being a Black man with access to a vehicle is not so different from John A. Williams' experience while traversing the South for *Holiday*

magazine. Williams' narrative is written about the South, a region that is still thought to be more racist and conservative than other parts of America, but here Carl Black is demonstrating that Canada was not immune to the racist and segregationist attitudes of a pre-Civil Rights American South. While Canada is imagined as a polite, inclusive, and diverse nation, Carl's statement reflects the hollowness of this construction. Just as Williams' text reveals the experience of the Black American and produces space for those narratives, Carl's mobility produces space for Black Canadians in a predominantly white public. So too does the novel: it presents a single, fictionalized narrative of Black experience rather than generalizing or claiming to present a universal experience. The novel allows for individual experiences of Blackness while also presenting some of the history of racism in Canada that is so often ignored. Clarke frames the novel as a diary (loosely based on an actual diary) which reinforced the notion that Carl's experience is personal. The novel is not meant to serve as a historical document of Canadian Blackness, but rather represent one experience among many, which Clarke reminds readers of in the "Proviso". The novel thusly produces space for a narrative of mobility centered around a Black man living in Halifax and focuses largely on the post-World War II experience of racism and struggles with upward mobility during that time. Carl's mobility is a reclamation of his identity as a Black man, but the novel itself is also a reclamation of an overlooked Black geography and a reclamation Africadia through a personal recollection.

While the novel is critical of the erasure of certain Canadian histories, it does not necessarily turn to America as a salve as Jack Waterman does in *Volkswagen Blues*. Through an examination of Carl's two most significant relationships in the novel, it becomes clear that developing a relationship to America is ultimately unsatisfying for Carl. His affair with an American woman leaves him jilted. Her ability to articulate her sexual desires and pursue them

without inhibition mark her as distinctly American. When read in the context of the Black Loyalist history, his relationship with Avril is reflective of what they left behind in search of freedom and opportunity. Many of Carl's Canadian lovers are presented as demure and sexually passive and naive, and it is he who must introduce them to certain sex acts. His relationship with the American woman reveals inequalities that are not as significant in his relationships with Canadian women, even if they are white. While the novel does not outright construct a commentary about Canadian identity, an examination of Carl's contrasting relationships with Avril Beauchamps and Liz Publicover demonstrate a distinct difference between America and Canada. The transnational influence of both nations is central to the possibility of reconceiving new, more inclusive identity formations.

At the outset of the novel, Carl purchases an R69 BMW motorcycle that he christens "Liz II...out of fealty to the Queen. An act of sweet, beatnik *Irony*" (10). Carl's use of the term beatnik here is, of course, loaded. While it invokes the spirit of the movement, as I pointed out in Chapter 1, the Beats have a fraught relationship to racialized peoples. They often claim racialized identities or knowledge of otherness, but Carl's use of the term could be a rejection of this kind of coopting. Additionally, his "fealty" to the Queen reflects the Black Loyalist history. Carl's irony comes from his knowledge of how Loyalists were treated after relocating to Nova Scotia. He reverses this relationship and uses "beatnik irony" for his own satisfaction. His possession of the female-gendered motorcycle, though, renders Carl "now bluntly male. Buffed. Not to be *rebuffed*" (11). Carl is now a Black man that rides through the streets of Halifax on the back of the queen. His race, masculinity, and history become entwined with his mobility as it is rendered public and highly sexualized by the motorcycle. His ownership of the vehicle is a reclamation of his agency as well as his masculinity. Carl's mobility is also explicitly tied to the history of

Africadia. He pledges himself to the Queen in order to secure his freedom of movement. This mobilization of Black Canadian history and the visibility of Carl's act is significant. While Carl genders Liz II, the vehicle itself is phallic and thus reasserts the masculine nature of Carl's movement. Carl is aware of the many implications associated with Liz II: German engineering is not respected in the wake of World War II, his ownership "flouts *Prejudice*; his profile, astride the machine and gliding...through Halifax streets must give white-only segregationists serious heart attacks" (10-11). Carl's masculinity is often mentioned throughout the novel and the motorcycle affirms it in several ways: he is empowered through owning and riding the motorcycle, it allows him to pursue several lovers at once, and it renders his masculinity public and highly visible. It is difficult to disentangle the complexities of race, gender, and mobility in the novel given that Carl's mobility is a reclamation of both his Blackness and his masculinity. Carl's characterization in the novel risks reaffirming the hypersexualization of Black male bodies but given that the novel stylizes these as diary entries, I instead read this as Carl's reclamation of his body and agency in a society that teaches him that his sexuality and his physicality are dangerous and threatening.

His gendering, naming, and branding of Liz II sexualizes his possession of the motorcycle as well as the act of mounting it. It is a vehicle (both literally and figuratively) for wooing women, transporting them on dates, and travelling to and from rendezvous with his lovers. He also imagines the leather that he wears while riding as emblematic of his machismo. After describing the outfit that he has assembled for riding, Carl assesses himself: "Motorcycle man is slick; just sharp style—like Lee Van Cleef, only more coppery, less devious, in look...forwarding such svelte, sporty black, a blackness that radiates—he posits—both immaculate macho and charismatic charity" (9). His leather emphasizes and augments his

Blackness and likens him to a Western film star, only darker and with softer features. It is not just that the motorcycle lends him confidence and bravado, so too does his leather driving gear make him feel masculine and attractive. He attracts the attentions of white Haligonians, but he also attracts attention from young women whose interests, according to Carl, often quickly become desire. His virility is enhanced by his possession of Liz II as it affords him the opportunity to abscond an interested woman and transport her somewhere private. He can also return her home promptly and if one woman does not indulge him, he is able to make his way to the next in short order. Carl imagines that he is able “to be all man for all women in all seasons” (15). He notices a distinct difference in the way his presence is received when he is riding Liz II. After he purchases the motorcycle, he notices that: “Only now doth Carl expect women’s heads to swivel as he U-turns or pivots, one black-booted, blue-jeaned leg extended for careful balance. Finely, women seem to step with sweetened energy, dancing or bouncing their way along each sidewalk, each concrete panel suddenly flaunting a catwalk” (15). Astride Liz II, Carl turns heads and finds himself the object of many women’s desires and attentions. Carl’s appearance in relation to the motorcycle provides him with a bolstered sense of his own attractiveness, his sexuality, and his masculinity. His race is accentuated attractively when he dons his leather, and it likens him to popular male figures of desire. Even though Carl likens himself to white actors, it is his Blackness that makes him more attractive and alluring. His ownership of the motorcycle is an investment in his social capital as it not only provides him with self-confidence, but it also allows him access to areas of white social life that may otherwise be restricted to him. Carl revels in stereotypes, of masculinity, Blackness, and sexuality. His diary entries use intertextual references, stereotypes, and caricatures of identity. He employs them in humorous and satirical ways when he is imagining how he appears to others or describing how he views himself. He

reclaims many of the caricatures and stereotypes that white Haligonians could project onto him and in so doing, he negates some of the power of these racist epithets. He is not unaware of the way that he is perceived as a Black man, but he often refuses to allow the characterizations to shape his perception of himself.

Carl's knowledge that he can elicit desire is, in some ways, a product of his upbringing in a racist community. Carl recalls his gradual understanding of the white fear of Black male sexuality:

By about fifteen, in 1950, Carl discovered the violent emotions of some white men when contemplating the threat—or visceral treat—of Negro lads lying with Caucasian 'lookers.'...Carl soon realized thanks to backyard scuttlebutt plus brutal photos in *Life* magazine—and the coverage of the Italy Cross affair in *The Morning Herald*—his dark sex was—is—perilously seductive, an enchanting, life-enhancing organ that jeopardizes his life. (42-43)

As a young man, Carl begins to understand the complex interplay between the sexual desire that he can arouse and the fact that a relationship with a white woman would be a threat to his safety. He begins to develop an understanding of interracial relationships as both empowering and disempowering. His masculinity is fetishized by white women and yet, should he perform for their desires, his life would be in danger. Carl recalls the details of the (seemingly fictional) Italy Cross affair in which a married white woman engaged in affair with the Black garbage man, Peter Paris. Paris, enraged by the idea that the woman would still engage in a sexual relationship with her husband, murders the other man. He immediately turned himself in and was jailed, but the friends of the murdered husband took it upon themselves to pull Paris from his cell and lynch him. This story terrifies Carl, who thinks of his own attraction to a white classmate and learns to

relate these feelings to the danger that is associated with interracial relationships. For the most part, then, Carl avoids relationships with white women because the threat associated with them is too great.

As a result of this hesitancy to be involved with white women, most of the relationships that he engages in throughout the novel are with Black women. His mobility allows him to move easily between his dates with Laura, Muriel, and Marina. He uses Liz II to seduce several of them as well as to navigate easily between public and private, urban and rural, and from one woman to the next. His mobility affords him a freedom of movement that mirrors his desire to be untethered. He refuses to be tied down to any one woman or place and Liz II allows him to leave as soon as he feels stifled by a lover. As a young man, he is able to support himself and allow himself certain luxuries with the wages he makes, but a family would restrict his financial and individual freedom. His most fulfilling relationship, however, is not with any of the women that he is pursuing. Rather, Carl finds sexual and social satisfaction in his relationship with Liz II. The imagery used to describe Carl's feeling while riding the motorcycle is highly sexualized: "Astride the BMW, even when he's bent over the fuel tank...Carl feels erect, like a gunfighter in full gallop, streamlining with his stallion, ready for the showdown, the high-noon or midnight fray...His manhood too, even at rest, is cocked. Liz II, his 'queen of queans,' transforms Carl into a black-leather Priapus, a dark roustabout darting cupidic, or so he doth believe" (85). The motorcycle augments Carl's sexual prowess as well as his masculinity. Carl once again imagines himself as a frontiersman while he rides Liz II, just as he did when he described himself as a coppery Lee Van Cleef. Carl's relationship with the motorcycle emboldens him to traverse frontiers of his sexuality that had previously made him nervous.

In addition to and because of the fact that his possession of the motorcycle allows him access to white social spaces, particularly when he befriends white motorcyclists who invite him to dine with them, Carl is able to overcome his fear of interracial relationships. Carl's mobility, then, is valuable not only in his sexual pursuits but also in his desire to escape from the oppressive social restrictions of a still highly segregated city. He describes the feeling that he has while driving: "Aboard that machine, he imagines that he's Jesse Owens, streaking always to *Victory*, with style, with panache...*Liberation* is going, floating, flying; i.e., *feeling* actually free" (86). Carl's feeling of freedom is directly tied to his sense that he is "ready to sally forth, to seduce as many (milk-white) ladies as he may. He plans to introduce the motorcyclist Lawrence of Arabia to the plushest bedrooms of mainland Nova Scotia, wherever swagger and deft left are welcomed...Carl will...be a man of action, never *Alienation*. To lay down ladies, not lay down switchblade-rumble-in-dark-alleys *Nihilism*. *Vroom! Va-va-voom!*" (86). Clarke's prose is dense with intertextuality in moments when Carl is describing his feelings in relation to the vehicle. The heightened sense of confidence, freedom, and masculinity that he acquires from the motorcycle encourages him to plot his invasion of rich, white society. His motorcycle provides him with a sense of bravado that is potent enough to distract him from his fear of the violence that often accompanies interracial relationships. If Carl is a frontiersman, then his foray into plush bedrooms of the "milk-white" women of Halifax is the next venture that he intends to take on. In Clarke's novel, access to mobility is just as important as the act of movement. Carl uses his mobility to remap the social space of a city that insists on his inferiority. Liz II allows him to reject the narratives of Blackness that he has grown up being forced to believe.

Although he is hyper-aware of the threat of violence, he nonetheless enters into a relationship with Avril Beauchamps, a white woman from the American South. She is only one

among his many lovers, but it is their relationship that most exemplifies the freedom afforded by Carl's mobility. He often assesses his lovers in relation to one another, but Avril possesses a unique attraction for Carl. Halifax allows Avril to indulge in her own taboo desires: "As a Mississippian, studying *Nursing* at Dalhousie, Avril enjoys her present liberty to ogle Coloured guys...Hailing from the magnolia-hypnotic, if homicidal, Mississippi, her yen for Coloured gents would be a death wish in the South. She is twenty-one, flashes gold hair, green eyes, scarlet lips, and is plush enough to dispatch a thousand brothers of Emmett Till...to lynching trees, just for glancing her way" (98). In his description of Avril, Carl demonstrates the fact that the two are connected through their taboo desires. Avril understands Carl's fear of interracial relationships because she grew up in a place where she too would have been persecuted for engaging in a relationship with a Black man. Of course, her move to Halifax allows her the freedom to engage in any relationship she chooses, but Carl must still take great care in his pursuit of Avril. While the two may feel united in their pursuit of a sexual relationship that is a social taboo, it is only Avril that experiences a feeling of liberation. Their mutual desires do not necessarily denote equality in their relationship. Carl continues to be reminded of the fact that his desire for her could result in violence. However, his desire is also linked to his fear and the curiosity that emerges when something is forbidden: "One look at Avril, and Carl recalls again the fierce *frissons* that the 1950 Italy Cross incident had aroused. He now wants to ascertain, fundamentally, just how deliriously evil a Caucasianess can be—in bed—as the Nation of Islam preaches and the Ku Klux Klan fears" (99). These sentiments are compounded though, by his desire to possess her as an act of "*Vengeance*" (100). Carl details the fraught nature of his attraction to Avril when Marina introduces them to one another. His desire is mingled with his drive to reclaim and prove his masculinity to white men through a relationship with a white

woman. The novel positions sex with Avril, whose Southern identity compounds this complex desire, as symbolic vengeance against white patriarchal structures that emasculate Black men. Avril mentions her interest in the motorcycle to her classmate and Marina arranges for the two to meet to allow Avril to satisfy her curiosity. Curiosity that, as far as Marina is aware, extends only to Liz II, and not to Carl himself. The vehicle functions as the catalyst for the relationship between Avril and Carl. Yet Carl fails to acknowledge that Avril's attraction to the motorcycle is not so different from her attraction to him, she sees both as objects meant to fulfill her curiosities and desires. Avril mirrors Carl's attitudes toward sexual relationships and the two objectify and use each other more than Carl realizes for a time. Movement and mobility play a crucial role in the romance between the two, but it is the symbol of masculinity and mobility that initially brings the two together.

Avril's first tour on the motorcycle is also the first long journey that the novel describes. Carl plans a 75-mile route around the Nova Scotia mainland. The descriptions of scenery are sparse, Carl instead describes how Avril feels as his passenger, how she looks in contrast to his leather, and how her hair "suits a motorcycle mama" (102). The scenery of the Atlantic is of some interest, but it is Avril's beauty that demands Carl's attention and praise. Carl's fixation on Avril's allure continues to dominate the descriptions of their time together. Carl often mentions that Avril accompanies him on rides throughout Halifax, but much of their relationship is confined to the hotel room that Avril occupies during the summer months when student residents are closed. Following a date at the theatre, the two must concoct a reason for Carl to enter the hotel. The two cannot be seen entering the hotel together, so Avril enters the hotel alone while Carl "will hang back, then pick up Chinese food to 'deliver' to her room. They both chuckle over this ruse—though they rue its necessity...Thirty minutes later, playing the eunuch Uncle Tom,

Carl steps into the ritzy hotel...and tells the officious clerk (who is so prejudiced that he doesn't even look at Carl) that he has an order of Chinese to deliver to Miss Beauchamps" (120). In order for him to possess Avril, Carl must shed the stereotype of the hypersexualized Black male body and embracing an emasculated racist stereotype so that he does not seem to present a threat to white womanhood. In a rare moment, Carl abandons his pride as a means of securing his dalliance with Avril. His desire for Avril outweighs both his dependence on his hypermasculine façade and his fear of interracial relationships in the wake of the Italy Cross affair. While Carl briefly ignores his fears, the novel demonstrates Carl's affinity for risk-taking behaviour, and creates a close association between the danger presented by Carl and Avril's relationship and the dangers of riding the motorcycle.

The danger associated with riding a motorcycle is something that sets Clarke's novel apart from the other narratives of mobility examined in this dissertation. The relative safety of the car is taken for granted in many of the texts and travellers do not often worry for their lives when embarking on their journeys. Carl is often reminded of his mortality and the risks associated with the motorcycle. The dangers presented by the motorcycle are parallel to the dangers presented by his relationship with Avril. This is highlighted in an incident where Carl encounters another BMW on his first tour with Avril and decides to race it through the city. This encounter prompts a recollection of the death of Carl's friend Mack whose risky driving resulted in a fatal accident. Carl describes how the two men were on a tour in New Brunswick, driving side by side in both lanes over a hill "only to see one car bearing down on em in the opposite lane and a farmer and horse-and-buggy plodding head of em in their designated, legal lane. No time to react, to brake, to slow and dip behind the buggy. Worse, the oncoming car was moving like silk on wheels—dynamic, direct" (104). Mack is launched off of his motorcycle and lands

on the roof of the car, his impact killing the female passenger, while his motorcycle collides with and kills the horse. Carl is unharmed in the incident and recognizes that his luck: “Carl wept. For his dead friend. For *Joy*, too, truly, for he had staved off the cancellation of his own breathing” (106). The brief street race that Carl engages in remind me him of the incident, and yet immediately following this recollection, the novel turns once again to sexualized imagery of Avril and the excitement she feels after her tour on Liz II as well as the prospect of bedding Carl. He imagines her excitement: “She thinks, *The man is fast; his blood is hot; his muscles are hard*” (106). While this may not be a faithful representation of her thoughts, Avril is clearly excited by both the motorcycle and her sexual relationship with Carl. I read the novel as representing her thrill-seeking tendencies through her desire for Carl both because of the taboo nature of their coupling and her request for another ride on Liz II in order to experience the excitement of the motorcycle itself. Avril, having relocated from the South to Halifax, is a tourist in many aspects. While she is excited by the prospect of pursuing relationships that would have been forbidden to her in Mississippi, her relationship with Carl does not present her with much risk. She has the privilege of being away from her family while still being supported by their wealth, but the distance affords her privacy in her personal life. She is, as Carl points out, liberated by having relocated to Canada. Carl, on the other hand, must consider his decisions more carefully. If there were to be negative consequences as a result of their relationship, they would fall on him. Avril is able to comfortably fetishize danger while Carl is aware of the realities that Liz II is an extremely dangerous vehicle if he is not careful. Likewise, his coupling with Avril could be a threat to his safety if he does not take precautions to avoid public upset.

Carl understands that Avril’s interest in him is a result of her Southern upbringing and her desire for him comes from a fetishization of Black bodies. Avril’s lust for Black men is in

part a product of a childhood spent being a “prisoner of a KKK fairy tale” where the slaves owned by her family were off limits (121). Canada, for Avril is far less oppressive than the South. Yet this contrasts with Carl’s earlier statement that Halifax is simply a “salt-spray South” (48). Having relocated to Canada, she is free to indulge in her fantasies. Yet this sense of freedom is one-sided. Carl is keenly aware of what the Paris affair represents for him if his relationship with Avril was made public. While Canada is a haven for Avril to explore her taboo desires, it is far less free for Black Canadians. However, he understands that her fantasies are a result of the dehumanization and othering necessary to the slave trade. He recognizes that her sexual attraction is a result of the environment that she was raised in: “Avril suspects she ain’t the only Dixie deb to pass a chain gang and witness Negro men, half naked, sweat showering their tasks, and to wonder about the power present in those iron-coloured, bull-muscled torsos. Thus, Carlyle be her case-study Negro” (123). Nonetheless, Carl is not quite the kind of man that Avril truly desires, because he is “not the simon-pure Negro that Avril lusts to try. He’s for starters, not for keeps” (123). While Carl is a suitable option, Avril is desirous of someone who recalls the brute strength of the men that inspired her young lust. While she may imagine herself as more evolved than the Southerners that surrounded her, her attraction to Black men is steeped in racist notions of the Black male body. While Carl is vaguely aware of his role in Avril’s fantasy, it also satisfies some of his own desires. Not only does he call their sexual relationship an act of vengeance (100), but Avril’s fetishization of Carl’s Black masculinity bolsters his sense of pride and bravado. Their mutually beneficial relationship eventually comes to an end when Avril meets Carl’s friend Ery, another Black man whom Avril finds attractive for reasons beyond Carl’s comprehension. Carl, however, recovers quickly by pursuing a relationship with Liz Publicover, who conveniently bears the same name as his motorcycle, the white girl that inspired

both attraction and fear in him as a high school student. His attraction to Liz begins around the time that he learns of the Italy Cross Affair, and his recognition of his desire for her pairs with his understanding that his desire is dangerous for him.

Whereas Carl's white American lover expects him to perform a variety of racist stereotypes, Carl is able to be himself when he enters into a relationship with Liz. It is not just her Canadian identity that sets her apart from Avril, though. Carl's attraction to Liz is not solely sexual; he describes her as "a white woman, a girl who resembles the Queen, a girl with a Jayne Mansfield figure and a Katherine Mansfield vocabulary" (193). Once again, Carl is attracted to British high culture and history. While Carl comes to appreciate Avril's interest in art and culture, he knows before entering a relationship with Liz that she is both beautiful, intelligent, sexualized, and aristocratic. Carl views Liz as cultured, particularly because she has lived outside of Halifax, in a metropolitan city where races are far less segregated. While Liz is initially intrigued by Carl's motorcycle, she is not attracted to him simply because she views him as forbidden. Liz is depicted as "worldly" for having lived in Montréal, where "it was not unusual to see dark chaps with pale 'Pepsis'...In Montreal, working-class Negroes and working-girl Frenchies constitute everyday couplings" (197). Here Carl is not representative of an underlying desire to experience Black sexuality because for Liz, Carl "is singular—and he was one of the few lads who'd intrigued her at school" (197). Liz is also differentiated from Avril by class. Avril comes from a wealthy Southern family, one that certainly made their money owning slaves. Liz, however, grew up and went to school with Carl and therefore comes from the same social and economic background. Liz uses the motorcycle to initiate conversation with Carl, but she is interested in him rather than how he looks. Their relationship allows him to abandon any of the stereotypes that he must play into in order to keep Avril interested. Avril is unable to

conceive of Carl as anything other than a caricature. She treats Carl the same way that he treats women, as a conquest. He becomes expendable to her when she finds a Black man that suits her desires more completely than Carl can. While Carl's conception of Canada as a nation is constructed entirely in opposition to his understanding of America and England, Avril is set apart from his Canadian girlfriends by her frankness when it comes to disclosing her sexual fantasies. Her family's history in the American South imposes itself on their sexual coupling in a way that reinforces a fetishization of Black male bodies and objectifies Carl just as he objectifies her. The two use each other to fulfil certain sexual desires, but ultimately Avril grows bored of Carl because he does not quite satisfy her desire for a more brutish and less intelligent sexual partner. Avril moves on quickly and without warning, mirroring Carl's treatment of his own sexual conquests, and in doing so emasculates him and leaves him feeling somewhat jilted. His pursuit of an American woman leaves him feeling dejected and unsatisfied. His relationship with Liz, who is metropolitan but still Canadian, renews Carl's sense of optimism and demonstrates his ability to enter into an equal partnership with a woman.

When Carl runs into Liz, it is the first time that the two have seen each other since they were in school together, but she agrees to a ride without hesitation. Their journey around Nova Scotia is uncharacteristically descriptive. Unlike Carl's tours with Avril, which are often sexually charged and focus on Avril's appearance, the trip with Liz is accompanied by a lengthy description of the landscape. The first tour with Avril is disrupted by thoughts of violence and danger, while the trip with Liz is filled with descriptions of the riders' senses. Once they leave the city, the motorcycle allows for them to take in aspects of their surroundings that a car would not allow: "a miniature waterfall pours down with great energy and noise... Wild roses flare and flame. A mint smell near the bridge" (194). Descriptions of landscapes are not uncommon in

road narratives, but because they are riding a motorcycle, the pair are privy to smells and sounds that travelers in a car may miss. Their tour is accompanied by an unusually rich description of the Nova Scotian terrain:

The pair passes stretches of wild apple trees, wild pear trees, pines, spruce, maples, as well as farms, gardens, here and there a lake, a river, fields studded with strawberries. In the six p.m. daylight, they see guys felling timber; they hear saws screeching and axes thwacking. They roll past orchards, somehow cut from the woods, plus patches of green wheat, green corn, green beans. They see streams stoop down cliff faces. All is pastels—velvet colours. A Dominion Atlantic Railway locomotive and passenger cars, despite the clanking and the smoke, supplement the pastoral scene. (194)

Carl is aware that his budding relationship with Liz differs from the others that he has been pursuing. The accurately described pastoralism of the trip pairs with the sentiments Carl begins to associate with Liz. He recognizes that “this moment is...Edenic, and...*promising*” (194). Carl thinks of Mack briefly on this trip, and mentions his death in passing, but there is no sense of danger with Liz. Instead, there are descriptions of life, fertility, and natural beauty. Their distance from the city allows them to be forthcoming about their desire for one another, but here again, neither has a concealed motive for pursuing the other. Their drive is “Edenic” simply because the two enjoy the journey and one another’s company rather than using it as a prelude to a sexual encounter as with Avril and Carl. Unlike the other women in the novel, Carl does not see Liz as simply a conquest or a placeholder. He respects her intelligence and sees her as a potential partner. Likewise, Liz respects his intellectual and artistic pursuits. For Avril, his intelligence detracts from her ability to objectify him as simply a Black male body. Carl’s coupling with a white Canadian woman does not present the sense of danger and mutual

objectification that results from his relationship with Avril. In this way, the novel constructs a representation of Canadian identity through contrasting Carl's relationships with Avril and Liz. Liz and Carl's Canadian coupling is described as "Edenic" and promising which seems to point toward a kind of future for Carl, one that is founded on respect and admiration rather than objectification.

When Avril begins to pursue Erv instead of Carl, the latter makes a renewed effort to woo Liz and he invites her on his final trip of the season. They set out for St. Andrew's by-the-Sea, New Brunswick and once again their trip is accompanied by pastoral descriptions of the landscape. Even though New Brunswick was where Mack's fatal accident took place, Carl is not hesitant about this trip. There are not thoughts of danger or mortality on this tour, in fact, Liz II "works like a top. The bike hurtles along smoothly—like a pen nib pushing forward ink. The engine genie sounds cheerful—like a church choir abandoning gospel for doo-wop" (223). Buoyed by his company, Carl is not distracted by the memory of Mack's death. He is elated to be accompanied by Liz on his final trip of the season and therefore able to enjoy their surroundings without violent memories intruding. Likewise, he only thinks of Avril when he and Liz check into the hotel in St. Andrews. The pair can check in as a couple and Carl does not need to masquerade as a delivery boy to enter their room. His companion is herself contributing to his sense of ease, she is "loving—*not* researching, quasi-anthropologically—Negroes. Or so Carl now defines Avril, forgetting they both delighted in a mutual discovery of *Difference*" (224). While Carl was complicit in the mutual objectification, he recognizes in hindsight that he is hurt by Avril's rejection of his intelligence. Carl may be forgetful of his own motives for pursuing Avril, but he recognizes that Liz is not motivated by curiosity or rejection of social mores. She is interested in Carl for himself, not because of his motorcycle or his race. As with their short trip

around Nova Scotia, their distance from the city allows them to explore their budding relationship freely. Carl and Liz rely on mobility as a means of advancing their relationship. In Halifax, Carl must do his best to keep his lovers from knowing about one another while also attempting to conceal his interracial relationship because the city continues to be socially segregated. It is on this trip to St. Andrews that Carl begins to consider “Liz P. [as] present tense and possibly the future” (228). For much of the novel, Carl thinks of his Black girlfriend, Marina, as his future wife but for the first time he imagines a potential future with someone other than Mar. This trip solidifies their coupling as far more fulfilling and promising than his dalliance with Avril. Away from Halifax, Carl is not using his motorcycle to move from one woman to the next and he begins to consider the possibility of letting go of his bachelor lifestyle. Carl’s relationship with Liz represents a maturation and this helps him to recognize that his previous relationships were not serious because he did not feel intellectually equal to his previous paramours.

Mobility functions in several different ways in George Elliot Clarke’s *The Motorcyclist*: the narrative of mobility produces space for a personal account of Africadian history, Carl’s ownership of the motorcycle reaffirms his masculinity, and it allows him a great deal of freedom in his personal life. Clarke, using his father’s personal diary as a launching point for his novel, creates a story that depicts a young man who is dissatisfied with the possibilities laid out for him. He rejects marriage and child-rearing because his work at the railway station could not support both a family and his dream of becoming an artist. Carl’s rejection of middle-class respectability and traditional family values likens him to Kerouac’s Sal Paradise whose own road narrative is itself a response to the restraints of social expectations for young men in the 1950s. While Sal can go anywhere in America and feel at home, Carl does not experience the same freedom of

movement even though he feels the same sense that “The only thing to do was to go” (Kerouac qtd. in Clarke 129). This direct intertextuality affirms the centrality of Kerouac to the road narrative genre and demonstrates that while Carl’s mobility is restricted in some ways, it is a product of the same desires that inspired Kerouac’s novel. Carl, as an artist, sees himself as aligned with the Beat movement because his pursuit of his passions and desires do not align with traditional family values. His form of mobility explicitly rejects family aspirations, just as Sal Paradise takes to the road to avoid personal responsibilities and to deal with the dissolution of his marriage. Carl does not have the financial freedom to leave his job and wander aimlessly as Paradise did, therefore all of his tours on Liz II are localized to Maritime provinces. Carl’s movement is somewhat restricted by his attachment to Halifax, but mobility for him nonetheless provides a liberative experience. The motorcycle itself provides him with a sense of freedom that encourages him to pursue his own ambitions before settling down and starting a family. While the novel ends with Carl discovering that he has fathered a son and suggests that he may settle into the family that he inadvertently created, he believes himself to be prepared for this stage of life after a few years of being an untethered young man.

What distinguishes *The Motorcyclist* from other texts discussed in this dissertation is the relative lack of national sentiment associated with mobility. Canada and Canadian identity are not much of a concern for Carl, instead his consideration of nation is influenced by imperialist ties to England and the colonies. His relationship with Avril is a cause for him to consider Canadianness, but only in relation to Americanness. Unlike Jack in *Volkswagen Blues*, Carl does not view America as an alluring alternative for Canada and Canadian history. Additionally, unlike Pitsémine, Carl does not leave Canada to create a transnational future for himself. Carl’s memories and connection to Canadian history are personal encounters with racism and violence

or evidence that he must exercise caution in his interactions with white Canadians. While the novel is a fictionalization of a personal diary and Carl himself does not often consider his own Canadianness, the novel contrasts his relationships between Avril and Liz in ways that reflect on national identity. Avril's Southernness is brought to bear on their relationship in negative ways that leave Carl feeling somewhat inadequate. This is reflective of the Black Loyalist decisions to fight for the British in order to leave America behind. His relationship with Liz, however, does not carry the weight of their racial differences in the same way and her Canadian identity is certainly a factor, particularly her experience of living in Montreal. The history of Africadia is demonstrated through Carl's relationships with Avril and Liz. He is easily set aside by the Southern woman because he is far too intelligent for her to properly objectify. His relationship with Liz is full of promise and Nova Scotia itself is rendered pastoral and pristine in her company. Ultimately, however, they do not end up together because one of Carl's former conquests, Laura, gives birth to his child and he feels obligated to step into his role as father. The promise offered by Liz evaporates and Carl must become trapped in a family that he never wanted. Just like the Loyalists who were lured to Nova Scotia on exaggerated promises, Carl is never able to achieve the Edenic promise offered by Liz.

While this commentary on nation can be extrapolated when examining Carl's relationships, Clarke's protagonist himself is not very interested in constructions of nation because Black Canadians have historically been marginalized. In fact, many of the national associations in this novel simply work to demonstrate sketch out what Canada is not: American or British. The transnational influence of both, though, afford possibilities for new constructions of nation. Canada is, however, very picturesque and beautiful. The landscape is Edenic and promising, but only when experienced in the company of Liz. Clarke's narrative of mobility,

however, documents Black geographies of Canada and serves to produce space for Black Canadian histories. The novel calls attention to the erasure of Africville, Nova Scotia and presents images of the Black communities that emerged throughout Halifax as a result of Africville's demolition. In calling attention to, representing, and creating space for Black geographies and histories, Clarke's novel is representative of the work that Katherine McKittrick demonstrates as central to Black Canadian literature. Moreover, Clarke's novel uses mobility to critique racial stereotypes of masculinity and identity, sexuality, interracial relationships, unacknowledged histories of Canada, and constructions of nation. The novel is critical of the way that Canada presents itself as innocent when compared to the history of slavery in America and draws attention to the racist past of Nova Scotia in particular. While Clarke insists on faithfully representing Canada's own racism, it also suggests that Canada is able to move forward from this past into a productive and inclusive future. Carl's mobility offers him freedom from restrictive and largely segregated Canadian society of the mid-twentieth century. Liz II is an instrument that allows Carl access to spaces that otherwise exclude him because of his race. In addition, his relationship with Liz Publicover represents a possible future despite Carl's fear of interracial relationship. *The Motorcyclist* then, is an excellent example of the way that Canadian narratives of diversity and inclusion efface histories of oppression. However, the novel also demonstrates that the narrative of mobility is capable of producing space for alternative histories as well as reconstructing national identity as a more inclusive construction. The novel affirms that narratives of mobility, through their picaresque nature and ability to present both an individual and somewhat representative experience, provide unique and insightful critiques of nation and national identity.

“That particularly Canadian thing”: The Uncomfortable Journey in Alexis’ *Days by Moonlight*

Days by Moonlight (2019) is a more traditional road narrative in the sense that Alfred “Alfie” Homer, the novel’s Black Canadian protagonist, and his travelling companion Professor Bruno, a white University of Toronto professor, leave Toronto on a trip through small-town Southern Ontario. While their travels are localized to a small geographical region, the novel engages with some of the same issues presented in *The Motorcyclist* and *Volkswagen Blues*. Having spent a great deal of time travelling Southern Ontario as a child with his preacher father, Alfie is both familiar with the region and nostalgic for the time he spent there with his parents. He expects a pleasant journey through the familiar landscapes of his childhood, but his journey presents him with a very different experience of Southern Ontario, one that renders familiar territory strange. Alfie is often reminded on his journey that he is very much unfamiliar with some of the strange customs and histories of Southern Ontario. While they are local traditions, they often point to larger narratives of Canadian identity. In each small town, Alfie reflects on the sometimes-bizarre customs that are important to community but render local and national pride strange for an observer. As Clarke does with Nova Scotia in *The Motorcyclist*, in *Days by Moonlight*, Alexis uses the geography of Southern Ontario to dislocate Alfie’s sense of familiarity with the people and social norms that he had assumed he understood. Alexis’ satirical novel plays on the question Brigham posits in *American Road Narratives*: in seeking to reduce the vastness of nation through a regional journey, Alexis presents southern Ontario as a microcosm of Canadian identity. A construction of Canadian identity that insists on collectively presenting an image of politesse, commitment to multiculturalism, and inclusion.

The small towns in Alexis’ novel are an escape from the city, sites of interest, and crucial to Professor Bruno’s purpose. An old friend of Alfie’s recently deceased parents, Bruno asks

Alfie to accompany him on his quest to learn about what happened to John Skennen. Bruno wants to flesh out some of the details in his “literary account” of Skennen, a fictional poet who had lived and written about Southern Ontario and suddenly vanished (12). Through a series of interviews with Skennen’s friends, family members, and acquaintances Bruno and Alfie learn that Skennen is not dead but retired from writing and living as John Stephens. Alfie is to accompany the professor as a driver, a transcriptionist, and porter. Given that Professor Bruno’s interest is in finding out more about Skennen, the novel is often dominated by the experiences of others in relation to Skennen or small-town Ontario more generally. Alfie and Bruno’s interviews and encounters establish the picaresque nature of the novel. Alfie is uniquely positioned in the novel as he is both an insider with knowledge of the area and outsider who is often unable to comprehend the strangeness of the towns that he visits. The novel presents the narrative of mobility as one that disrupts preconceived understandings of social space and remaps the geographies of Southern Ontario. Alfie’s parents both grew up in Chatham and he spent most of his summers in Southern Ontario as a child. As a result, Alfie expects that he will be familiar with the places that he and Professor Bruno travel to and the kinds of people that they will meet, but what he finds instead are places and people that he cannot comprehend and make him feel uncomfortable. Alfie stands in opposition to Sal Paradise, who remarks on his journey that “I can go anywhere in America and get what I want because it’s the same in every corner, I know the people, I know what they do” (Kerouac 121). Alfie believes a similar sentiment before embarking on his travels with the professor, however, with each town that they encounter Alfie becomes less certain that he has any understanding of the social and regional customs of rural Southern Ontario.

The town of Nobleton, for example, has a yearly tradition that brings the community together to build a home for a struggling family. The family, selected by a raffle, gets to live in the home for a full year. At the end of the year, the home is set on fire. Families are allowed to use whatever means they can find to stop their homes from burning, and if they succeed, they are allowed to continue living in the home. This event is described to Alfie as “typically Canadian” because the people of Nobleton believe that the event is meant to evoke the pioneering spirit of early settler through the communal building process (54). Alfie’s host in Nobleton also believes that the event is hosted with “good intentions” and therefore any harm to families trying to protect their engulfed homes is incidental (56). His experience deconstructs his beliefs about localized Canadian history, narratives of multiculturalism and inclusion, and social customs. Alfie’s experience is similar to that of Jack Waterman in *Volkswagen Blues*, as his mobility is accompanied by a rupture in entrenched narratives of nation and national identity.

One of the factors that contributes to Alfie’s sense of otherness is his race. While his Blackness is not a central to his experience of mobility as it is for Carl Black in *The Motorcyclist*, it is something that demarcates his dual status as insider/outsider. It also lends him a unique perspective when he encounters local traditions rooted in Canadian nationalism. One of the strangest experiences that Alfie and the professor encounter happens early in their journey. Many of the towns that they visit have strange yearly traditions, but each town insists that while their event may be strange it is not nearly as bad as the Coulson’s Hill Indigenous Parade. After hearing about it a few times, Alfie asks a local to explain the parade. The parade, it seems,

As with so many things in our beautiful country...was the product of a committee. It was also the product of an era and a longing. Like most Canadians, the people of Coulson’s Hill sometimes noticed that the Indigenous populations of Canada had been mistreated in

any number of ways and for quite some time. Most felt it was not enough to simply notice this. Justice demanded restitution, even if only a symbolic one. So, when Councillor Bergen put forward the idea of an ‘amusing but serious’ form of symbolic restitution, the rest of the town council were receptive. (70)

The concept that the council finalizes is that Indigenous peoples will be invited to throw food at Canada’s “founding fathers” (70). The committee does not engage in any thoughtful planning of the parade and the result is an event where the people of Coulson’s Hill dress up as early Canadian politicians to have rotten fruit and vegetables thrown at them by other residents who don Indigenous “headdresses, ceremonial beads, moccasins, etc” (71). The event becomes an instantly successful tourist attraction, but “In other ways, of course, the parade was a disaster” (71). There is, of course, public discomfort with the use of Indigenous symbols and a desire for more representation for other groups that have been wronged by the Canadian government. The profitability of the parade encourages the town council to make changes, but the changes only result in increasingly bizarre attempts by the townspeople to represent various racial, ethnic, and linguistic groups. When Indigenous peoples elect to represent themselves, however, it causes tension with Coulson’s Hill residents because they do not “dress in any special way” (72). Alexis’ novel frequently satirizes the complicated web of Canadian nationalism, multiculturalism, politeness, and Eurocentrism.

The Indigenous Parade is emblematic of a national desire to present a Canada that is inclusive and committed to the project of reconciliation, but when participation in these efforts does not adhere to prescribed behaviour there is public outrage and reductive solutions. The residents and councillors of Coulson’s Hill repeatedly reject certain forms of participation that earnestly engage with Canada’s colonial history. The parade was originally imagined as an

opportunity to reckon with the mistreatment of Indigenous peoples, but in practice the town council is far more concerned with amusement and profitability than earnest reflection on the way that Canada has historically treated Indigenous peoples. To recognize that the nation has a history of mistreating other racialized peoples, the parade produces a number of unforeseen issues: residents in blackface, anti-Francophone sentiment, the use of bok choy as well as tomatoes to represent Asian Canadians, a righteous sense of nationalism in response to criticism, and Indigenous peoples who are insulted by the notion of throwing tomatoes as a form of reconciliation. In spite of the fact that the parade results in an annual backlash, the “Coulson’s Hill town council (largely Liberal)...were persistent. Over the years, they tweaked or changed the rules to accommodate the criticism they’d got” (73). Rather than acknowledge criticism and earnestly reflect on the competing motivations for and intentions of the parade, the council continually add new rules and regulations to justify their insistence on hosting a contentious event. The profitability of the parade is too alluring to the town council, therefore any misgivings about whether the event is appropriate are ignored. In fact, the residents of Coulson’s Hill consider themselves “morally superior to the people of Nobleton who, for entertainment, endangered women and children” (74). Alfie, having recently witnessed both annual traditions for the first time considers the two events: “I myself had a difficult time judging the relative moral densities of Nobleton and Coulson’s Hill. Was it virtuous to burn down poor people’s homes, having given them homes in the first place? Was it noble to wear blue sheets and throw tomatoes at people who also wore blue sheets? Both events — the parade and the house burning were founded in notions of justice, but both seemed perverse” (74). As an outsider, Alfie can assess the local traditions and social customs with an objective point of view. He is critical of the way that each town has used narratives of politeness and inclusion to stage events that are

“displays of power, not goodwill” (75). Alexis uses the narrative of mobility to expose the dangers of subscribing to popular narratives about Canadian identity. Alfie’s understanding of Southern Ontario, constructed mostly during his youth, is destabilized when he travels to these towns and places as an adult and is confronted with the strange realities of the places he remembers. It is only through travel and mobility that Alfie is able to come to terms with the constructedness of Canadian identity and his pastoral memories associated with Southern Ontario.

During his travels, Alfie becomes increasingly estranged from his understanding of Southern Ontario and the people that live there. Through attempts to display liberal attitudes, each small town only serves to demonstrate entrenched notions about race, identity, and nation. As with many public efforts to address the histories of violence and oppression, the intent is rarely reflected in the product. A recent example of the type of performative politics being satirized by Alexis is the first Orange Shirt Day in Canada, which was meant to be a day for Canadians to reflect on the realities of residential schools. A bill was passed in 2021 to make Orange Shirt Day a statutory holiday in recognition of the overwhelming number of unmarked graves being unearthed at the sites of former residential schools. While the government established September 30th as a national holiday, there was almost no other action taken. The first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation was largely an opportunity for performative recognition of colonial violence rather than meaningful reparations. It was a performance that played out largely online: social media posts presenting statistics, resources, organizations that accept donations, and calls for recognition of the overwhelming number of children that had died in Canadian residential schools. Politicians, corporations, and individuals signalled their observation of the day. Donations were made to funds that benefitted survivors of residential

schools, but because of fundraising and activist work rather than government intervention. While the Canadian government deemed it a national day of observation it relied heavily on individual action rather than systemic change. While the gesture itself felt somewhat hollow, there was one noticeable absence from the performance: Justin Trudeau. The Prime Minister spent the day vacationing with his family in British Columbia. This incident, much like the fictitious Indigenous Day parade, is representative of the performativity of liberalism that can be said to sustain Canadian narratives of diversity and inclusion.

Alexis is critical of these narratives and his criticism is made explicit when Alfie and Professor Bruno visit the Museum of Canadian Sexuality in New Tecumseth. The building that houses the museum is described as “brick...recently painted white, with black trim around the windows and doors. It looked elegant and compact, almost Quaker-built. Inside, it was more colourful” (121). Alfie and the professor decide to explore the museum because neither of them can “imagine what a museum devoted to ‘Canadian sexuality’ would look like” (121). The plainness of the building is evocative of sexual repression despite the fact that the museum’s contents are sexually explicit. Alfie quickly becomes very uncomfortable on their guided tour, but it is not the sexual nature of the museum that bothers him. Instead, it is the nearly clinical way in which the museum approaches sexuality. Professor Bruno and Alfie are asked for their consent before proceeding on their tour of the museum and when the former expresses slight hesitation, he is assured that “all the acts depicted are within the norms of Canadian conduct, if not approval” (122). The museum seeks to represent Canadian sexuality as best as possible but, in an attempt, to represent diversity and inclusivity, the museum causes discomfort for Alfie. The first thing that their guide, Michael, points out is a statue that is meant to represent all Canadians. However, Michael then pulls Alfie aside to recognize that while the statue is intended to

represent all Canadians, the one currently on display is the “Caucasian model” but Michael assures him that “We have a number of others, different ages and races. If you’d come yesterday, we had the older Negro out. I hope you’re not offended. I’m able to refund your entrance fee, if you are” (123). This is not the first time that a museum employee has offered to refund the entrance fee should Professor Bruno or Alfie be offended by anything that they have seen or heard even though they have not yet reached any of the exhibits. While each visitor likely understands their decision to enter a museum that presents sexuality, the employees continue to ensure that guests feel comfortable and represented in the displays. In an attempt to acknowledge that sexuality is extremely diverse and varied, the museum must recognize their limitations and rotate their statue because despite their best attempts a statue cannot represent all Canadians. The museum intends to represent the diversity of the country’s bedrooms and yet the experience feels very uncomfortable for Alfie. There are several times on the tour that Michael pauses to ask Alfie and Professor Bruno personal questions in order to ensure that they feel both comfortable and represented by the museum’s exhibits, but these questions are far more invasive than they are considerate. For example, Michael asks whether Alfie and Bruno are sexual partners and when they respond that they are not, Michael then asks about their individual sexual orientations. When they finally arrive at the first diorama, Alfie begins to understand that the insistence on representing all Canadians in each exhibit is an impossible task.

After being assured that Alfie is not offended by the Caucasian statues, Michael leads the two men to the first diorama. Alfie finds it to be “the most disturbing” but wonders if it is simply because it is the first one that he is seeing (123). He notices that: “Stencilled on the glass between the spectators and the diorama were some twenty columns of numerals and letters neatly organized and clearly legible” (123). After being handed a kind of legend detailing the meaning

of the letters and numerals, Alfie learns that the complex system gives visitors a detailed understanding of the sexual position as well as all possible variations. The exhaustiveness of the system is overwhelming:

This desire for completion—which was a desire for inclusion—accounted for the sheer number of ‘notations’ stencilled on the glass. Meanwhile, penetrations and accommodations accounted for, the theatre of the Canadian sexual imagination could be given its due with the dioramas. Knowing the meanings of the symbols did not ease my discomfort. If anything, it made things worse. From the moment Michael gave me the ‘chart of correspondences,’ I wanted out of the museum. (124)

The “desire for inclusion” makes Alfie deeply uncomfortable but it seems unrelated to the frank discussions and representations of sexuality. It is the complexity of the museum’s system of representation and inclusion that creates his discomfort. Rather than acknowledging the impossibility of a space that can represent every Canadian and their sexual preferences, the museum continues to add to their system and the result is a catalogue of every possibility. The name of the museum suggests that it can incorporate the desires of Canadians as a whole, as though sexuality could be tied to national identity. The museum endeavours to represent the individual desires of a diverse population while also insisting that the representations are specific to Canadians. While the professor seems to think Alfie is uncomfortable with the depictions of sexuality, the detailed alpha-numeric catalogue that demonstrates the “desire for completion” is what causes Alfie’s discomfort. In attempting to ensure diversity and representation, the museum flattens the experiences of desire and sexuality into a “chart of correspondences.” The discomfort is a result not only of the impulse for inclusion but also of the documentation and organization of a fundamentally human experience. It is the categorization of sexuality with such precise detail

as well as the insistence that the representations are uniquely Canadian that cause Alfie to react aversely.

As if to reaffirm the museum's distinctly Canadian content, the second diorama presents a field of fire-lions, a seemingly fictional plant that Alfie describes as "among the most beautiful plants native to our country" (124). Michael tells Alfie and the professor that this diorama depicts the field outside of Saguenay where "Jacques Cartier and a handful of his men are rumoured to have engaged in a spontaneous orgy amongst themselves, under the influence of what we now know to be the aphrodisiac contained in fire-lions" (125). The novel then claims that this event is described discreetly in Jacques Cartier's diary and claims to quote from the source: "Cartier wrote in his diary: 'Nous ne sommes pas sortis indemnes'" (125). Alfie admits to never having heard this story and does not understand why it would not be a well-known incident, especially among botanists. He notes that Professor Bruno does not question the fact of the alleged orgy, rather, he inquires about the vague nature of the diary entry. The professor is uncritical of this new information and seems willing to accept the idea that Cartier and his men engaged in an orgy with very little evidence. Michael need only mention that one of Cartier's entries could be interpreted to have described the orgy and claim that some of his men also wrote accounts of the incident and the professor accepts this information willingly. Alfie is skeptical that such an event would be relatively unknown given that Michael claims it is recorded history. Not only that, but this diorama makes explicit the sexual undertones of colonization, conquest, and exploration. While it does not depict the sex act itself and suggests that the orgy was consensual, it effectively pairs the figure of Cartier with ravenous sexual appetite, and it does so uncritically. Contrary to the "loser Canadian" stereotype fleshed out by Katherine Ann Roberts; this depiction of Cartier aligns him with the kind of hypermasculinity exhibited by Carl Black.

This moment also recalls *Volkswagen Blues* and Jack Waterman's desire to believe in the narrative that Cartier was a heroic courer de bois while Pistémine must actively question these beliefs and deconstruct Canadian historical narrative. Alfie doubts the veracity of the Cartier story, but Professor Bruno is fascinated by the anecdote and convinced of the truth by Michael's claim that it is mentioned by various sources. While the literary scholar does not insist on consulting primary or secondary sources on this subject, Alfie chooses not to accept this narrative at face value. He distances himself from the experience of the museum and rejects the way that the curation attempts to micromanage his experience. Likewise, he rejects the constructed narratives of Canadian identity and history that the museum attempts to provide to guests.

Alfie finally exits the museum and waits outside of the bookstore until Professor Bruno is done with his visit. While he is waiting, he contemplates his reaction to the exhibits he had seen and his aversion to engaging with the museum's displays and system of cataloguing. As he waits for the professor, he acknowledges that the museum's advertisements pique his interest despite the feelings of discomfort that caused him to leave. He notices a poster for an exhibit that had just ended titled "PIERRE TRUDEAU: ANGEL OF THE EROTIC". The poster does not provide any further information and it catches Alfie's attention while he waits to the professor to finish his tour with Michael. The novel offers no comment on the exhibit, but the irony is jarring. The elder Trudeau famously stated that there was "no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation" (CBC). While he made this statement to support the decriminalization of homosexuality, the entire premise of the museum seemingly flouts his claim. Not only does the museum attempt to represent the bedrooms of the nation, but it attempts to do so with a level of detail and scrutiny that stands in opposition to Trudeau's statement. The displays of the museum claim to represent

a very detailed account of sexuality and suggests that it represents sexuality as specifically tied to Canadianness. The Museum of Canadian Sexuality not only places guests in the bedrooms of the nation, but also suggests that those bedrooms are representative of a distinctly Canadian national identity. The contradictory messaging of the museum confounds Alfie and while he waits outside the bookshop, he again considers what exactly caused him to feel uncomfortable in the museum. He reflects that:

I wasn't offended by what I'd seen...I also assumed it had nothing to do with the way the information was presented. I love taxonomy and I take pleasure in small variations...And yet, the collision of sex and taxonomy was at the heart of my unease. The museum was disturbing in its institutional desire for inclusivity, a desire that had turned the sexual into a thing that could be dealt with alphanumerically. Seeing the notations on the glass of the dioramas, I'd felt the tyranny of the specific. If every instance of the sexual could be plotted, turned to symbols, catalogued, and boxed, could the emotions behind our couplings and caresses also be assigned a symbol? (129-30)

Alfie is clear that prudish feelings are not to blame for his unease, but rather the institutionalization of inclusion and the attempt to catalogue the experience of sexuality, desire, and arousal. However, Alfie's critique extends beyond his own feelings of unease. He is also critical of the narrative of Canadian history, identity, and nation that the museum attempts to portray.

When Professor Bruno finally emerges from the museum, he asks if Alfie at least managed to interact with something called the "Canadian Construction," an interactive exhibit where users can create their ideal "Canadian" lover by selecting various attributes and characteristics. While Alfie is told that all of the characteristics offered "are typically Canadian,"

the professor also assures him that “if you want a Malaysian accent, you have to ask for it, and the program might refuse based on how many Malaysian accents have been asked for that week” (133). The desire for inclusion, it seems, ends with the ideal Canadian lover. While the catalogue of desires accounts for every possibility, visitors must not expect their ideal lover to differ too much from the norm. The availability of certain characteristics is restricted to what other visitors have recently requested and therefore demands a certain uniformity of desire. As Michael assured them at the beginning of their tour, all of the museum’s offerings are within the norms of Canadian sexuality yet these suggested norms defy the diversity of the Canadian population. The mantra of inclusion only extends as far as sexual preferences. As I argued earlier, while there are stereotypes that tie sexual prowess or desire to national identities, to suggest that sexual desire can be tied to Canada in some way is comical. Nonetheless, the catalogue is exhaustive. Conversely, when a specific lover can be selected there are a number of limitations on race and ethnicity unless other visitors to this museum in small town Southern Ontario also request such specificities. This is of course aligned with the actual history of Canadian diversity and inclusion. While Michael has provided certain embellished and imagined accounts of Canadian history, the museum’s shortcomings are far more telling of Canada’s relationship to multiculturalism. Canadian narratives insist on multiculturalism as essential to national identity and yet Canadian history shows that racialized peoples are only included when the majority of Canadians decide they are acceptable and desirable. As the professor demonstrates with his discussion of the “Canadian Construction,” a Malaysian accent is only an acceptable trait when a number of visitors request such a trait and deem it desirable. Alfie’s unease is rooted in the museum’s desire to catalogue human experience, certainly, but he is also critical of the façade of inclusion that the museum presents. Not only does Michael make note of the statue that must consistently be

rotated, but Alfie recognizes that the attempt to sexualize colonization is awkward and the veracity of the story is unlikely, and the ideal Canadian lover is revealing of the constructedness of the museum's narrative of diversity, inclusion, and representation.

In Schomberg, Ontario, Alfie is confronted with his position as an outsider to Southern Ontario and the odd customs to which many of the small towns adhere. Schomberg causes a particular discomfort for Alfie given that its Black population communicates with a unique form of sign language that Alfie does not entirely understand. Having spent a good deal of time in Schomberg when he was young, Alfie is somewhat familiar with the language, but his attempts to use it are awkward and he is only understood through trial and error. Alfie is uneasy upon entering Schomberg, despite his familiarity with it, "having spent summers there as a boy, between the ages of seven and fourteen. Even so, I find it an unsettling place. My unease has nothing to do with Schomberg's Black population. Being Black, I'm comforted by the thought of a town of Black people. My problem is more practical: when I'm in Schomberg, I'm often unsure of what's being said to me" (112). Schomberg forces him to grapple with the duality of his identity as both insider and outsider. While this is true of many of the towns that he visits with the professor, Schomberg is particularly alienating because of its Black population. The novel explains that, in the 19th century, Schomberg had been home to a number of white abolitionists who had "shepherded into town numerous freed slaves who'd come to Canada by way of the Underground Railroad" (113). The abolitionists were, in theory, welcoming to and accepting of the new members of their community. In practice, however, the freed slaves made the white people of Schomberg uncomfortable because of the diversity of the languages that they used to communicate with one another. In order to mitigate the discomfort of the white Schombergians, the "lawmakers made it illegal for Black people to speak on the streets of

Schomberg during the day” (113). The Black people of Schomberg fled America only to find that Canada was not nearly as promising and free as they had hoped it would be and this fictionalized history parallels the real history of Africadia. Alexis, like Clarke, uses the narrative of mobility to reveal histories of oppression and segregation in Canada. As a result of the law, the Black people of Schomberg adapted and created a method of communicating using “hand signals and movements of the head” (113) that became known as “day speak” (114). As a child, Alfie accepted the need to be quiet in public when visiting Schomberg but was unnerved by the movements made by the residents of the town because as an outsider to their customs he is often unable to discern if there is meaning in a movement. It is assumed that because he is also Black, he is able to navigate “day speak” with ease and when he is unable to communicate, he becomes embarrassed and ashamed. Alfie feels alienated by the history and customs of Schomberg because his Blackness does not conform to expectations. Schomberg’s Black community does not acknowledge the diversity of Blackness in Canada and as a result, Alfie feels estranged from his own identity.

Alfie’s skin colour forces him to mediate between Bruno and the residents because he is an obvious outsider. The professor makes this position more uncomfortable for Alfie because he seems charmed and bemused by Schomberg as though this town in Southern Ontario were somehow foreign and exotic. The professor’s fascination is presented as well-intentioned, but Alfie is clear that the things that seem to delight him are “neither wonderful nor much cause for delight” (115). His exoticization of the town draws attention to the pair because he forgets the by-law and repeatedly speaks aloud. When a towns person insists that he keep quiet, he seems to misunderstand which prompts the woman to direct her reminder to Alfie because she expects him to understand. The residents of Schomberg direct discussion to Alfie because it is obvious

that his companion is an outsider. In this instance, Alfie knows the woman's meaning and immediately must assume the position of translator and guide for Professor Bruno. The professor's confusion leads him to accidentally misspeak in a way that "communicated his desire for sexual contact" and the woman responds by slapping him across the face (115). This moment is indicative of Alfie's position as both insider and outsider because he is completely aware of why the woman slapped Professor Bruno and sympathizes with her. On the other hand, he acknowledges that "misunderstandings of this sort between residents and strangers are common in Schomberg" (115). While he understands that the woman was likely very shocked by the sexual connotations of the professor's seemingly innocuous gesture, he also understands that the professor could not have known what he was saying. The visit to Schomberg puts Alfie in a position where he must act as a guide and translator for the professor while also struggling with a sense of alienation from a town where his racial identity outwardly marks him as an insider.

Alfie's movement through Southern Ontario continually forces him to recognize that his Blackness sets him apart, even when he is in a historically Black town. In Schomberg's pub, The Scruffy Dog, Alfie endeavours to teach the professor how to order a tea for himself. Using his knowledge of "day speak," Alfie explains how Professor Bruno should go about ordering a camomile tea, however, being unpracticed and unfamiliar with the language, he does not recognize the way that small differences in gestures can alter meaning. As a result, Professor Bruno inadvertently tells the bartender that he is going to vomit, and he would like a glass of water instead of ordering a tea. Alfie intervenes to clarify what the professor is attempting to order but is also misunderstood. He realizes that he is using an incorrect gesture and he feels "humiliated" (118). This incident causes Alfie to feel insecure about his identity and to question his perceptions of himself. While he recognizes that he is not from Schomberg and his mistake

was perfectly understandable, he wonders if the white people that live in Schomberg are “in some way, more ‘Black’ than I [am]” (118) simply because they are fluent in “day speak”. This small Southern Ontario town with a unique language causes Alfie to question whether he is “more Canadian than Black” (118). This thought forces him to consider his own assumptions about Blackness and Canadian identity and his unconscious assumption that the two are in some way mutually exclusive. When the pair are preparing to leave the pub, Alfie rejects this thought and once again reminds himself that he is a Canadian. He sees a “wide patch of silk locket” and he remarks that “I was reminded of how rich in small wonders Canada is, how rich *my* country is” (118, emphasis not my own). This phrase recalls the title of Williams’ text and works as a powerful reclamation of Canadian identity. Visiting Schomberg forces Alfie to confront his fraught sense of belonging to nation as a racialized subject. Ultimately, however, the experience does not shake his sense of identity and upon leaving Schomberg he forcefully reclaims his Canadianness and rejects the strict constructions imposed on Black Canadian identity by the town of Schomberg. His movement away from Schomberg serves as a reminder of the diversity of Canada’s beauty and the fact this small town is not the arbiter of national identity.

It is language that briefly renders Alfie uncertain of his own identity. The miscommunication in a language that he considers to be essentially Black unsettles him. “Day speak” was created as a way for freed slaves to circumvent a racist by-law created by the white people of Schomberg and therefore it is seen as a Black language, but one that is used and understood by the white people of Schomberg. This moment is reflective of a sense of alienation felt by Black Canadians when they cannot communicate in languages of the Black diaspora. In an essay titled “Haunted Diasporas: The Second Generation Stories of André Alexis,” David Chariandy writes that Alexis is part of a group of “recently emerging second generation of

writers of Caribbean descent...[that] have almost wholly been socialized within 'white' countries and often possess only indirect or second hand connections to the Caribbean" (80). Chariandy is writing about some of Alexis's short stories that explicitly deal with "his Afro-Caribbean heritage," I see this complicated relationship between heritage and nation reflected in *Days by Moonlight*. Alfie visited Schomberg frequently when he was growing up and has a familiarity with the language but nonetheless is critical of his identity because he is not fluent. Schomberg, for Alfie, seems to be representative of a Black diasporic community whose existence gives him pleasure, but whose unique language and culture mark him as an outsider. The alienation that Alfie experiences in Schomberg underscores Chariandy's point about second generation writers and the "whiteness" of their socialization. He was raised in Toronto and therefore Schomberg "day speak" was a language he would only have used during summers when he and his family visited, and yet, his lack of fluency frustrates him and causes him to question his own Blackness. The experience in Schomberg seems to be a comment on the difficulty of navigating hybrid identities that result from the Black diaspora. Alfie experiences a feeling of connection to Black communities while also feeling like an outsider when the language, customs, and social codes of the community do not come naturally to him.

Blackness in Canada, in the novel, is mostly represented as being localized to the town of Schomberg. Alfie and Professor Bruno do not encounter other Black Canadians outside of Schomberg, but the pair do encounter stories about Black people in Southern Ontario. While drinking at Coulson's Hill's local pub, the Rebarbative Moose, Mr. Henderson provides some insight into John Skennen's love life. He explains that, as a young man John had fallen in love with a woman named Carson Michaels. The novel describes her as "the most beautiful woman in Southern Ontario" and "[although she] had never been married, people thought of her as a

Penelope waiting to meet Odysseus” (84). Henderson tells Alfie and the professor that her beauty attracted an endless stream of suitors. In order to manage these men who traveled to the garage that she worked at in Coulson’s Hill, she would ask each suitor “what is the only object that makes me cry” (84)? In order to put off her suitors, like Penelope, Carson Michaels finds a way to discourage and turn away her suitors. And, like Penelope, Carson is an enigma. Carson is constructed from the stories of others. She is notoriously private and reveals very little of herself. This façade was crafted to protect herself from falling in love with someone who does not know her, and yet it also turns her into a canvas onto which men project their desires. Alfie and John drive to Lee’s Garage to meet Carson, but by the time they do she is a woman of sixty and Alfie describes her face as “variable” (111). The only description of Carson as a young woman is equally vague, she was born in Schomberg, she is beautiful, and when she moved to Coulson’s Hill she was “an already lovely twenty-one-year-old, dark-skinned, of Antiguan descent” (84). She refuses to speak to them about John and once again refuses to tell her own story. When she looks at them, Alfie remarks that “for an unnerving moment, it was as if I were looking into my mother’s eyes, the loving face I remember from when I was a child” (111). Once again, Carson functions as a blank slate onto which men project their desires. While Alfie is not imagining her as a potential lover, he is projecting his love for his deceased mother onto this woman that he has never met. After explaining that she cannot help them by providing information about John, she leaves the garage. Carson remains enigmatic and all that Alfie and Professor Bruno learn about her is her skin colour and the stories told by the men of Southern Ontario.

Carson Michaels and Schomberg are paired in the novel not simply because she was born there, but the two vignettes in the novel happen in succession. Together, the vignettes of Schomberg and Carson depict the Black experience in Canada as one that is cloaked in silence.

This recalls George Elliot Clarke's suggestion that there is a "vagueness [to] black identity in Canada" (98). However, Clarke suggests that the vagueness is reflective of a crisis in national identity. Just as Alfie wonders if he is more Canadian than he is Black, the novel explores what Leslie Sanders suggests is, in Alexis' work, an inability for the nation to articulate his identity. This is represented in the novel through Alfie's increasing sense of alienation on the journey. The people of Schomberg are silent and Alfie feels othered by his inability to connect through the use of their unique language, while Carson Michaels refuses to be known. Alfie and Bruno pick up a hitchhiker named Malky as they are leaving Schomberg and, once in the car, the novel suggests that he quite talkative. However, much of what Malky says is glossed over in the narrative and the only thing that is relayed is Malky's assessment of Carson's beauty. *Days by Moonlight* presents the experience of being Black in Canada as disorienting; it is marked by silence, estrangement, and a sense of disconnection.

Further, it is his Blackness that marks Alfie in Southern Ontario. Toward the end of the novel, Alfie has what others believe to be a religious experience that leaves him with the ability to heal. He and Professor Bruno are making their way back to Toronto and make a stop in Seaforth, Ontario. As if to solidify the Canadianness of the road trip, Alfie and the professor stop at a Tim Hortons. They do not order their coffees in "the drive-through [because] Professor Bruno wanted to drink his double-double in 'civilized fashion'" (184). The people of Seaforth quickly identify him as "the healer" because he and the professor are not locals. This prompts the patrons of the Tim Hortons to weigh in on whether there is a correlation between race and healing powers. Many of them don't believe that a Black person could be a healer and one of them tells Alfie: "I hope you're not PC...but I just don't think Black people are sensitive enough" (185). This is followed by another person amending that "it's hard to be poor and

sensitive” (185). This discussion irritates Professor Bruno, “a man with no time for racism” and, after calling the patrons of the Tim Hortons Hicks, he tells them that if they would like Alfie’s help, it will cost them one hundred dollars. Alfie heals a man with arthritic hands and, both feeling unnerved by what has occurred, he and the Professor quickly depart Seaforth. It is only on their journey back to Toronto that Alfie and the professor begin to encounter these types of comments. For most of the novel Alfie has been navigating his identity privately, but his newfound abilities make him more recognizable and make the people of Southern Ontario feel comfortable approaching him. This happens again in Barrow, Ontario where Alfie is quickly identified as a healer because people in town had already heard word of “the Black healer” and assume it must be the first Black person that they see. Beyond the fact that his skin colour makes him identifiable, it is also the strange nature of his ability that provides people with a reason to discuss him as though he were not present. He is seen as an oddity so the people around him feel that there is no need to consider his feelings when speaking about him. Alfie already stands out in most of Southern Ontario given that he is a minority. In many towns he is identifiable because of his skin colour. In Schomberg, he is assumed to be a local but is marked as an outsider because he makes a mistake when using their language. The novel presents the road trip as increasingly revealing of Alfie’s feelings of disconnection and alienation and his healing powers only serve to augment his sense of otherness.

Alfie’s sense of estrangement is underscored by the picaresque structure of the novel. Early in the journey, Alfie states that “I sometimes find my province difficult to understand...partly because my fellow Ontarians, while kind, were peculiar beyond what I’d remembered of them” (41). Alfie is struck by the peculiarity of the Ontarians that he encounters but the novel often shifts perspectives as Professor Bruno and Alfie interview some of these

peculiar Ontarians in their search for Skennen. Alfie's experiences force him to question his identity, his relationship to nation, and his sense of disconnection from his parents' history. He is still processing their recent deaths and he is often reminded of pleasant memories of them on this journey into Southern Ontario. At the outset of the journey, Alfie indulges in a pastoral idealization of the region. He feels that the trip will allow him to pursue some botanical research while also getting him out of the city and perhaps helping to shake off the feelings of grief with which he is struggling. However, it quickly becomes clear that this journey will not provide much comfort, and the idealized pastoral simplicity of Southern Ontario is a veneer. Beneath the surface, the towns of the region are unwelcoming and somewhat sinister. As the trip progresses, he realizes that Southern Ontario itself is much different than he remembers. To a lesser extent, Professor Bruno also expresses his sense that the area is not as he recalls it to be from his childhood. Having grown up near Nobleton, the professor is somewhat familiar with the region. Yet, after visiting Coulson's Hill, the professor admits to Alfie that: "in the end, the place he'd come from, this dull patch of Ontario, was more mysterious and threatening than he'd remembered" (79). Southern Ontario does not prove to be the pleasant countryside sortie that Alfie had hoped for and while it does distract Alfie from his grief, it also forces him to confront his sense of identity. Alfie's journey stands in opposition to the Kerouacian road narrative in which the traveller feels at home in every part of their country. Recalling John A. Williams' *This is My Country Too*, though, Alfie's experience is not singular. The Black North American is often excluded from a national sense of belonging when they endeavour to explore their country. This is further complicated by the fact that Alexis' writing is influenced by his identity as a second-generation Caribbean immigrant. Building on Sanders and Chariandy's discussions of Alexis' writing, I argue that it is necessary to explore the fraught connection to the Caribbean

diaspora even if the textual journey in *Days by Moonlight* does not venture beyond Canadian borders. The novel thus grapples with a sense of disconnection from nation but also a disconnection from heritage. Returning to Southern Ontario, where his parents were born and raised, does not provide Alfie with a sense of belonging. Instead, it causes him to recognize that his connection to the region is tenuous and clouded by nostalgia. When he returns to experience the area as an adult, he is marked by his unfamiliarity with local customs, his discomfort with the way that Canadian identity is conceived in the region, his Blackness, and finally his healing abilities.

Ann Brigham posits that domestic road trips “merged scales...[making] the national local, and the local national. Joining individual with country, it also sited the intrinsic qualities of the nation” (2). Alfie’s experience of the road contradicts the sentiment that to explore the nation is to become aligned with a national identity. While Brigham’s study focuses on a deeply nationalistic and patriotic time in United States history, the sense that occupying other parts of the nation produces space for marginalized or minority groups is a central point of interrogation in this dissertation. *Days by Moonlight* complicates this discussion because it is not until Alfie returns to Toronto that he feels any sense of belonging and comfort. The novel makes a clear distinction between home and away (drawing again on Macfarlane) and for Alfie, away does not stimulate growth or self-discovery. Rather, like Jack Waterman, he is disappointed by what he finds and recognizes that he allowed nostalgia to dictate his sense of away and romanticize a life outside of the city. When Alfie returns to Toronto, he is comforted: “my city, Toronto, soothing for being a faithful presence” (218). It is in Toronto, as well, that he reconnects with pleasant memories of his parents. His journey does not provide him with a renewed sense of national pride and connection to Canadian identity even if it is a return home. He remains as solitary and

disconnected from others as he was at the beginning of the novel, with only the memory of his parents to comfort him.

Conclusion

Alfie and Carl Black present two distinct experiences of Black mobilities in Canada. The two stories take place in different time periods, but the novels deal with similar issues: navigating a sense of belonging, mobility as a way of examining connection to nation (or a lack thereof), masculinity and sexuality, and Black Canadian experiences. Their experiences of Blackness in Canada are very different and emerge from distinct histories of the Black diaspora, but they work together to demonstrate the diversity of Black experiences in Canada and reject any singularity. Carl embraces the freedom that his motorcycle affords him and uses it as a way of accessing areas of Halifax social life that may otherwise exclude him. Conversely, Alfie's journey begins pleasantly, but it is ultimately revelatory of his exclusion from constructions of national identity. Both novels are demonstrative of the ways that Black Canadian narratives of mobility unsettle constructions of nation, geographies, and identity. Carl Black transgresses the boundaries between white and Black Halifax and in fact learns to move between the two with relative ease. He uses his mobility as an empowering means of reclaiming his sense of masculinity and personhood in a city where white supremacy dictates social station. I read Carl's narrative as a reflection of Black Loyalist and Africadian history that positions Carl as disappointed by America, and again by the promise offered by the British of life in Canada. I view his mobility is an allegorical retelling of this history that uses the road to explore an aspect of Black Canadian history. Alfie's experience of mobility puts him in contact with people, traditions, and ideas about Canadian identity that expose a certain kind of strangeness that he had

not before encountered. Alfie leaves Toronto expecting a sense of familiarity with the people and places that he and the professor will travel, but instead their journey leaves him feeling increasingly disillusioned with this part of Ontario and the people that live there. Both Alfie and Carl's travels are rather limited, they rarely move beyond the borders of the province that they live in and yet their journeys are very revealing of the ways in which narratives of national identity are not only inaccurate, but also deeply flawed.

The Motorcyclist presents a picture of a Canadian city in the 1950s where segregation is still a part of everyday life. Clarke's novel is based on his father's journals which lends the narrative with a sense of historical accuracy. It depicts an aspect of Canadian history that is often ignored. Contrary to narratives of Canadian inclusivity, the novel rejects the notion that unlike the United States, Canada was a land of equal opportunity. It presents a more honest picture of the way that Black Canadians have historically been marginalized. While some of the details are fictionalized and altered in the novel, the experience that it depicts is not fabricated. Carl attempts to live the (North) American Dream by working hard, saving money, and enrolling in post-secondary education. He rejects segregation and relishes his presence in traditionally white spaces. His mobility often provides him the access to these spaces and his presence in places like Avril's hotel is revealing of the entrenched racism of Canadian society at the time. André Alexis' novel is a narrative of mobility that presents a contemporary experience of being Black while travelling. The racism that Alfie experiences is more subtle and veiled by narratives of Canadian politeness. Many of the people that Alfie encounters believe themselves to be typical Canadians: polite, welcoming, and inclusive. Therefore, they cannot be racist or complicit in marginalizing certain communities. As Alfie's journey progresses, he becomes increasingly aware of the emptiness of these narratives. While *The Motorcyclist* reveals an overlooked aspect of Canada's

past and creates space for Black Canadian histories, *Days by Moonlight* demonstrates that narratives about Canadian identity are both exaggerated and alienating. Alfie is often marginalized on their trip because of his Blackness. However, when he and the professor encounter spaces that insist on inclusivity, such as the Museum of Canadian Sexuality, Alfie becomes very uncomfortable. The indexing and classification of possible identities is just as disturbing to Alfie as his experience at the Indigenous Parade in Coulson's Hill. Alexis uses the road narrative to expose the veneer of Canadian politeness, but the attempts to overcome this are equally uncomfortable. Alfie's experience presents the way that Canada tries and fails to deploy multiculturalism as a trait that is foundational to national identity. While the novels present different experiences of mobility, they share some important features. Each novel presents Black Canadian geographies, even if they are imagined as Alexis' Schomberg is, that Katherine McKittrick argues are often erased from national memory. Both Clarke and Alexis use the narrative of mobility to produce space for discussions of Black Canadian identity but do so from a first-person perspective. Neither author attempts to generalize Black Canadian experience as something that is unified and singular and presents one way of experience Blackness in Canada. The road narrative genre is very individual and therefore conducive to an exploration of one's relationship to nation without attempting to totalize the experience of reckoning with narratives of national identity. As Leslie Sanders argues in relation to the fiction of André Alexis, many of the issues explored in this chapter are reflective of the inability of the nation to articulate identities that do not fit comfortably into the category of "Canadian." Each text is revelatory of the structures that shape social and cultural life in Canada and suggest that the current notions of diversity and inclusion are failing. George Elliot Clarke sheds light on the ways that race has historically been dealt with in Canada and how the failure to recall the past contributes to the

sense of alienation that Alexis presents in his novel. Alfie ends his journey feeling alienated from his fellow Ontarians which suggests that new ways of managing racial diversity and national identity need to be considered. Rather than insisting on Canada as a welcoming and inclusive nation, there is a need to represent history faithfully in order to re-envision a nation that does not rely on precise cataloguing to reflect a diverse population. Neither novel suggests a future, but their insistence on representing the Black Canadian experience through a picaresque structure creates space for stories to be told. The texts do not seek to generalize an experience of Blackness in Canada and in some ways embrace the vagueness pointed out by Clarke. A multiplicity of stories provides space for a Black Canadians to articulate themselves in relation to nation instead of waiting for the nation to attempt to articulate them.

Chapter 4

“Whose Land Is It Anyway?”: Borders, Land Claims, and Mobility in Indigenous Narratives

The previous chapters of this dissertation have examined texts in which the mobility of a non-white traveler is revelatory of the constructedness of national identity and national myth. While this is also the case in the texts discussed in this chapter, there is another layer of context in Indigenous and Native American narratives of mobility. They often occur as a result of a desire for community as well as a desire to reclaim stolen lands. More than a century of compartmentalization and government regulated movement, in both Canada and the United States, not only disconnected communities from one another but also fostered a complicated relationship between individuals and their decisions to leave or remain on reserve land. The narratives of mobility that are discussed here are a result of this disconnection and therefore the aim of most of the journeys is a reconnection with family, community, tradition, and stolen lands.

There is a strong sense of place in the Indigenous narratives of mobility examined in this chapter. In Jeanette Armstrong's *Slash*, for example, Tommy yearns to be away from the reserve and yet is always called back to it even though his activist peers advise against his return. In *Four Souls* (2001) by Louise Erdrich, Fleur leaves home precisely because she needs to be able to reclaim it, and in *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993) by Thomas King, Lionel and his uncle Eli both hope to leave their traditional homes in order to assimilate into white culture but are, ultimately called back by familial and community ties. North American literature tends to be haunted by the spectral presence of the First Nations peoples (Boyd and Thrush viii), however in each of the texts I will be discussing in this chapter the Indigenous characters are haunted by

spectres of colonialism and those hauntings are often a catalyst for journeys not of leisure or self-discovery as those undertaken by travellers like Sal Paradise or Jack Waterman, but of necessity. There are many facets to this argument but another one that applies to the current study is the fact that despite the colonial project's best efforts, Indigenous presence persists.

The concept of *terra nullius*, which Sherene Razack defines as “empty, uninhabited lands”, allowed colonizers to treat the Americas as land to be claimed on a first come, first serve basis and rejected the fact that the Indigenous peoples were the first to inhabit the land (3). Given the fact that the European notion of property was not culturally relevant to many of the peoples of the Americas, the colonizers chose to treat the continents as vacant space that was readily available for occupation. In *Divided Highways*, Heather Macfarlane writes about the visual representation of this can still be seen on historical documents from the time:

Many early maps of what is now Canada show just an outline—the theoretical contours of a country—and explorers and settlers arriving from France and England continually described it as empty or barren: a *terra nullius*, nobody's land...Indigenous peoples had inhabited the land for millennia and had their own, very different maps. These maps, often oral, were filled not only with physical landmarks, but also centuries of personal and collective histories...as well as mythologies. (4)

The emptiness suggested both by the maps and the settler-colonials can be seen as a driving force behind the road narrative as a genre. Macfarlane writes that the reason for this is “suggested by the title of J. Edward Chamberlin's landmark 2003 book, *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories? ...belonging to the land means being a part of its history and mythology*” (4). This is largely what makes the road narrative such a fixture of North American culture: a desire to connect with the land and therefore the nation. The act of creating memories on and with the land

fosters a sense of ownership. The stories that settler-colonials do have in connection with North America are those of Western expansion and road narratives tend to replicate the movement from East to West.

Sherene Razack's "When Place Becomes Race" criticizes the depiction of nation that imagines it as uninhabited before the arrival of European settlers. She points to the mythologized ruggedness of Canada that is often relied on to characterize nation and how the "taming" of the wilderness reflects on the characters of European settlers and contemporary Canadians. Her article demonstrates the way that *terra nullius* or "empty land" is central to the narrative that Canada is a nation that was "developed by hardy and enterprising European settlers" (115). She argues that this national mythology erases the labour of racialized people that helped to construct so many of Canada's crucial infrastructures: "for example, the Chinese who built the railway or the Sikhs who worked in the lumber industry in nineteenth-century Canada" (3). The whitewashing of Canadian history thus reaffirms the concept of *terra nullius* and supports the mythologized history of Canada.

Razack's article illustrates the ways in which national myths work to "enable citizens to think of themselves as part of a community, defining who belongs and who does not belong to the nation" (114-15). She argues that the myths of North American settlement, a harsh wilderness captured and tamed by European colonists, reinforces the narrative that Indigenous and Native American peoples are always pre-modern. This construction "produces European settlers as the bearers of civilization while simultaneously trapping Aboriginal people in the pre-modern, that is, before civilization has occurred" (115). Razack's essay argues that it is crucial to acknowledge the production of space in discussions of systemic racism. Her discussion illustrates that laws, national myth, and social space work together to produce conceptions of

race and racial difference. Razack's argument builds on the Lefebvrian concept of socially constructed spaces and serves as a reminder that nation is socially constructed and therefore malleable. The construction of nation is central to many of the texts studied in this dissertation, and this chapter examines narratives of mobility that question national mythologies as well as the creation of borders. When Indigenous and Native American narratives of mobility reject the social constructions of nation, reserves and reservations, and national identity they not only question myths of belonging and place, but also the civilized/savage distinction posited by Emma LaRocque (Plains Cree Métis), and the notion that Indigenous peoples exist outside of time. LaRocque's distinction comments on the two categories into which the Indigenous peoples of North America could fall: the noble savage and the savage savage. More simply, LaRocque defines it as the "'civ/sav' distinction" (qtd in Fee 27). Novels like *Four Souls* and *Green Grass, Running Water* push back against these ideas and demonstrate the reality of Native American and Indigenous peoples existing in time while also attempting to stay connected to tradition.

In *Literary Land Claims: The "Indian Land Question" from Pontiac's War to Attawapiskat*, Margery Fee examines the issue of *terra nullius* through textual analysis. In her introduction, she builds on Chamberlin's argument by distinguishing between the fearful nature of the settler's relationship to the land and the reciprocal and symbiotic relationship that Indigenous peoples have with the land. She writes that "Indigenous peoples have not characteristically described themselves as transfixed by a deep terror in response to nature or as heroes for overcoming it: unlike incoming settlers, they have lived on and with the land for millennia" (Fee 7). This distinction is crucial and extends the argument made by the title of Chamberlin's book. Fee points out the flaw in the national mythology explained by Razack. She argues that Canada is only imagined as a rugged wilderness that needs to be tamed by the

European settlers. The Indigenous peoples of North America have a very different relationship to the land, one that is not rooted in fear and desire to tame. Aside from the lack of stories associated with the land, the invading peoples had no relationship to or understanding of the physical spaces that they were attempting to claim. Fee refers to an essay written by Jeanette Armstrong (Sylix) titled "Community: 'Sharing One Skin,'" in which she writes "[T]he flesh that is our bodies is pieces of the land come to use through the things that the land is... We are our land/place" (7). This deep connection does not always translate to legal claim, however, as is often seen in cases of government projects such as dams and oil pipelines that are planned or built on Indigenous land with either coerced consent or no consent whatsoever.

Throughout the colonial period and well into the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the dominant cultural narrative of the West was that the Indigenous peoples of the Americas lived a relatively static existence before the arrival of European colonizers. Given the oral nature of most Indigenous and Native American cultures, codified Eurocentric history dominated in popular discourse and First Nations peoples were often thought of as primitive in the cultural imaginary. Characters such as Tonto from *The Lone Ranger*, Tiger Lily from *Peter Pan*, and even the representation of Native Americans in *Pocahontas* are exemplary of the racist caricatures that were common in North American popular culture. The civilizations and communities that existed prior to European contact were not only sophisticated and advanced far beyond what Columbus believed, but they were engaged in cross-cultural relationships of trade and negotiation. Indigenous scholar Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) discusses and elaborates on this in his article "'To Look upon Thousands: Cherokee Transnationalism at Home and Abroad":

Whereas Christopher Columbus heralded a dramatic (and catastrophic) level of transnational and intercultural interaction between Indigenous American and European peoples, Native realities in the Americas are, by necessity, transnational, for vast and complex relations of diplomacy, trade, conflict, and kinship connected diverse Native peoples long before European invasion, and they would exercise a profound and direct influence on the lives and political agency of European colonizers well into the nineteenth century. (171)

Ignorant to these realities, the colonizers informally used the civ/sav distinction to define the Indigenous peoples that they encountered. As far as colonial forces were concerned, there were those that could be civilized through religion and Western education and those that were beyond redemption. These categories persisted long beyond the colonial period and continue to influence contemporary notions regarding First Nations peoples.

Attempts to control and contain entire populations are part of more than a century-long legacy of legislation and government programs in Canada that were created for the purpose of mandating the movement and activity of Indigenous peoples. The creation of policies such as the Indian Act of 1876 forced many nations into a kind of stasis. The creation of the reserve system, residential schools, and the Sixties scoop are all examples of the way that Indigenous peoples were rendered immobile or tightly controlled by colonial state power. For example, following the North-West Rebellion, Indigenous peoples in certain Western provinces needed to have a pass signed by an Indian Agent that outlined the length of time that they would be gone from the reserve and why they needed to leave (Barron 215). The pass system, as F. Laurie Barron writes, had no legal basis and was what she calls “administrative tyranny” (25). This is just one instance

that is representative of the system created by settlers as a means of controlling and containing the Indigenous populations of North America.

In the United States, the legislation controlling Native American peoples was quite different from the more bureaucratic methods in Canada. The American approach to what was deemed the “Indian problem” was thorough and “voluminous” legislation in the hopes of assimilating the previously displaced Native American peoples (Samek 5). In her book, *The Blackfoot Confederacy 1880-1920: A Comparative Study of Canadian and U.S. Indian Policy*, Hana Samek writes about the way that public perception in America viewed Canadian policy as enviable given that there was not the kind of ongoing violent conflict experienced by those on the frontier of the American West. This outsider affirmation also contributed to the self-congratulatory nature of the popular belief that legislation in Canada was “benevolent and fair-minded [in its] treatment of the Indians” (Samek 5). It seemed from distant observation that the Canadian methods of controlling the Indigenous peoples were far more successful than those used by the American government. The 2008 Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the subsequent report would of course lay bare the horrors of the Indian Act and its legacy, but in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the United States believed that the extreme regulation of First Nations peoples was the most effective way of dealing with their “Indian problem”.

During this period of course, much of what is now the southwestern United States was in fact part of Mexico. Therefore, the displacement and difficulties with many First Nations groups that now reside in the American southwest began with Spanish colonization and continued or worsened under American imperialism. As with nations that cross the U.S.-Canadian border, many were severed by the arbitrary nature of these designations. Like the reservation pass system under the Indian Act in Canada, the First Nations peoples were required to apply for U.S.

Citizenship during the 20th century in order to “legally” traverse the border of land that once belonged to them. The process of documentation and the legal process of navigating border spaces is explored in Thomas King’s short story “Borders”. What is significant about the texts discussed in this chapter though, is the way that mobility is represented in each. The narrative of mobility serves a dual purpose for these marginalized peoples whose history has been repressed and erased. Travel in these narratives is both a reclamation of agency and a rejection of erasure. In King, Erdrich, and Armstrong the characters often learn to embrace their cultural heritage and honour their ancestors because of the journeys they have taken. Whether it be the choice to move away from a traditional life and then experiencing a deep longing to return to it as in Armstrong, encountering the elder trickster figures escaped from Fort Marion as in King, or the claiming of a mother’s name and the physical presence of ancestors as in Erdrich, each of the travellers in these journeys of Indigenous mobility can come to an understanding of themselves through an understanding of their cultural past.

Narratives of mobility written by Indigenous authors are not only shaped by this history but are also in many ways a reaction against the legislative power that has previously dictated their movements and continues to do so in many ways in the present. While young white men like Sal Paradise are represented as joy riding through the vast wilderness, that conquerable *terra nullius*, Indigenous travelers are presented as making powerful statements about their agency. In this sense then, the narratives of mobility produced by and about First Nations peoples do not conform to many of the characteristics of the genre. The fact that an entire population of a continent was barred from free travel, however, does make the act of movement a reclamation in itself. Reclaiming agency that was denied for such a substantial amount of time is an act of resistance and mobility is central to the rejection of imposed regulation.

Emma LaRocque's "civ/sav" binary is brought to the forefront when a First Nations person is on the road in the same fashion as Kerouac. The cultural notion of the savage creates a perception of an existence outside of time. These "primitive" peoples were, until the late twentieth-century, thought of as outside of time and incapable of modernizing. As discussed in Chapter 3, Philip Deloria (Dakota Sioux) points out the discomfort felt by white observers of the modern or technologically advanced Native American in his book *Indians in Unexpected Places*. He writes that: "No white person could fail to have a *general* opinion—a cultural expectation—about Indian people in cars, and no white observer could look at a single automotive Indian person without activating that opinion. As a result, Indian people behind the wheel almost always proved an estranging sight, even for those who thought it worth celebrating" (Deloria 145). Deloria then goes on to discuss the way that the vehicle promoted Native American agency, and the use of an automobile functioned as a resistance to white patriarchal power:

The *auto* and *mobility* that made up the word *automobile* pointed exactly to the ways in which mobility helped Indian people preserve and reimagine their own *autonomy* in the face of the reservation system. Reservations, we know, functioned as administrative spaces, meant to contain Indian people, fixing them in place through multiple forms of supervision. Despite the assault on Native land bases, many Indian reservations, particularly in the west, remained landscapes characterized by great distances. Automotive mobility helped Indian people evade supervision and take possession of the landscape, helping make reservations into distinctly tribal spaces. (153)

Despite the fact that white observers perceived Indigenous drivers to be abnormal, the technological development of the vehicle was as important if not more freeing for Indigenous peoples. As Deloria points out, away from the eyes of white society, vehicles have been in

frequent use as transportation to traverse the space of the reservation. In the above passage, Deloria is speaking specifically about the American reservation system and the bureaucratic structures that dictate the reserve system in Canada differ. However, his description is not unlike the conditions and functions of the Canadian reserve. Off the reservation, the Indigenous person driving functioned as a defiance of societal expectations and as a tool of empowerment. As with John A. Williams driving in the South, which caused white man to drive off the highway, this defiance has historically provided the kind of shock necessary to confront racialized expectations and enfranchise marginalized peoples.

The feeling of otherness experienced by Indigenous peoples across in Canada poses a threat to Canadian nationalistic narratives of a utopian multicultural society wherein people of every race, gender, class, and belief system can feel welcomed and included. This narrative has been a pillar of Canadian national identity that dates back roughly to the time of the Centennial celebrations (Macfarlane "*Adventures in Rainbow Country*" 100). This narrative is used to this day in speeches by Liberal and New Democrat politicians to bolster support from left-wing voters. However, as Himani Bannerji writes in *Unhomely States*: "Canada as a settler-colonial state...uses "multiculturalism" not only to excuse itself from accusations of racism and discrimination, but also as a way of "establish[ing] Anglo-Canadian culture as the ethnic 'core' while 'tolerating' and hierarchically arranging others around it as 'multiculture'" (Bannerji 295). Multiculturalism becomes a shield with which settler-colonials protect themselves from their violent and hateful past. Rather than acknowledge the wrongdoings of colonization, national narratives insist on Canada as an inclusive and progressive nation. It also neglects the transnational nature of Indigenous history, culture, and identities in North America, as Daniel Heath Justice points out. The Black Canadian road narratives in Chapter Three expose the façade

of multiculturalism, and the novels discussed in this chapter build on this from the perspectives of Native Americans and Indigenous peoples. This chapter returns to Smaro Kamboureli's concept of sedative politics and extends her critique. Kamboureli is critiquing the Multiculturalism Act, but the Canadian government has handled Truth and Reconciliation in a very similar fashion. This chapter examines the works of Thomas King, Louise Erdrich, and Jeanette Armstrong as representative of the ways that Multiculturalism and Truth and Reconciliation function as self-congratulatory policies rather than progressive politics.

In Katharena Vermette and Warren Cariou's special edition of *Prairie Fire* from Fall 2018, they define the term "ndncountry." This notion plays a significant role in the concept of North American geography in this chapter. Their definition is as follows:

ndncountry is not a singular place. It is a territory of the imagination, but it is also profoundly rooted in the land and the living energy of Indigenous languages. It is not about border or real estate or extractive infrastructures; instead it is about the relationships that sustain us and connect us. It is a collective term for the nations that have existed for so many centuries on this continent and that continue to thrive here. It is non-hierarchical, gender-fluid, respectful of diversity, open to experimentation, and always, always, fascinating. And as the stories and essays and poems collected here can teach us, *ndncountry* is literally everywhere, if you know how to look. It is a way of being, a way of seeing, and perhaps especially a way of listening—to the land, to one another, and to the generations. It is a deep and active acknowledgement of Indigenous belonging in this land, all of this land (6-7).

Therefore, for the purpose of this chapter, while I am discussing notions of Canadian multiculturalism, transnationalism, and the permeability of borders, I am also discussing Louise

Erdrich's novel, *Four Souls*, which is set just over the Canadian-American border in early twentieth century Northern Minnesota. The border does not factor into the novel, but the text discusses an Ojibwe woman who sets out on a journey to reclaim her stolen land and therefore is very much an example of a powerful narrative of Indigenous mobility.

Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* and "Borders," Jeanette Armstrong's *Slash*, and Louise Erdrich's *Four Souls* deal with indigeneity, reclamation of stolen lands, and question the value of borders. Each text deals with the complex ways that nation and national identity are reflected or critiqued in North American road narratives. Many previous studies of the genre argue that the wilderness of Canada serves as the mythic frontier that needs to be explored. However, rather than parrot the American concept of Manifest Destiny, Indigenous North American road narratives do not treat the land as *terra nullius* or "no one's land."

Indigenous scholar Jace Weaver writes that

'Natives have never been great respecters of national borders,' especially when they are predicated on the dismissal of tribal rights. King's focus on the forty-ninth parallel is, indeed, timely and relevant because it speaks to the issues of tribal identity and nationality that are at the centre of recent government negotiations in both Canada and the United States. First Nations tribes, on both sides of the border, continue to pursue land claims, the opportunity for self-government, and the recognition of their status as autonomous nations. (23)

The immobilization both physically and politically of Indigenous peoples put limitations on the sort of transnationalism Heath Justice discusses and effectively isolated many individuals as well as nations. Philip Deloria details the process of overcoming immobility and lays out the history of First Nations' access to vehicular mobility which in turn allows for a rebirth of Heath Justice's

transnationalism and Macfarlane's pan-Indigenous communities. The protagonist of Jeanette Armstrong's 1985 novel *Slash* exemplifies this because his journeys allow him to understand that there are huge communities of First Nations peoples that not only exist, but actively engage in protests and attempt to make their voices heard.

“Everybody was Indian and that was good enough”: Transnational Activism in *Slash*

Slash follows Tommy from childhood, where he lives a more traditional way of life on a reserve in the Okanagan to his journey of self-discovery and empowerment following and getting involved with activist movements. He leaves behind the white Christian school that he is forced to attend and becomes involved in the Red Power and American Indian Movements (AIM). When he first leaves his home, he is fleeing the oppression and marginalization he faces at school and in town. *Slash* is an example of the solidarity that exists between Native Americans and Indigenous peoples in Canada regardless of the border that separates the two countries. Armstrong's text exemplifies the argument that I am attempting to advance in this dissertation that mobility across borders promotes valuable possibilities for change. Through a rejection of strict constructions of national identity, the potential emerges for a restructuring of the way we conceive of and construct our relationship to the nation. Throughout the novel, Tommy travels back and forth between the United States and Canada participating in various movements, protests, and activism as a result of his dissatisfaction with government policies, departments, and bodies that regulate Indigenous and Native American peoples. In addition to his involvement with AIM, Tommy also begins to work with Canadian activists. The causes are parallel, and Tommy views the occupation of Wounded Knee, South Dakota as equally important to the protests he participates in at Parliament Hill, Canada. Early in the novel, Tommy begins

travelling the United States to attend rallies, occupations, and demonstrations. He travels to Oklahoma to join other activists in retracing the Trail of Tears. He knows that in some ways, the Okanagan peoples were fortunate that they were not forced to relocate. Tommy admits that prior to this trek, he had not known the history of the trail and therefore the purpose of the caravan, to educate, was in some way successful. On their journey, he discusses the conditions of Native Americans in comparison to the Indigenous peoples of Canada. He joins a woman named Elsie and spends much of the trip talking to her about First Nations issues. He reflects that “it must have been terrifying and horrible to be put in a place where you didn’t even know what plants to eat and medicines to use with the weather making everybody sick all the time and lots dying” (95-6). He explains to Elsie that the Okanagan peoples were not forced to relocate because many died as a result of illness and disease brought by the settlers. He tells her that because of this, there were not many Indigenous peoples in Canada left to resist, and those that remained “were so weak and confused that the colonizers were almost able to do just as they pleased” (96). Tommy wants to take part in what AIM is doing in the United States because he wants to learn from the organization and bring some of that knowledge home. Tommy sees the value of transnational solidarity in pursuit of Civil Rights for First Nations peoples. He sees that solidarity across borders is valuable and his movement is necessary to add bodies and voices to demonstrations that advance the cause. *Slash* is a narrative of mobility that not only insists on the value of transnational alliances, but also demonstrates that the same social and cultural upheavals can be experienced across borders and do not reflect national identities.

I argue that a cross-cultural exchange of knowledge and network of support is central to Armstrong’s novel. Tommy’s movement between Canada and the United States is a result of his desire to be involved in advancing the rights of Native Americans and Indigenous peoples as a

group. A victory in the United States is just as important to him as a success in Canada. The value of the narrative of mobility is located in this notion that relations between populations can promote social and cultural change. The movement, for Tommy, is not affected by borders and while each country legislates the First Nations peoples that reside there differently, I read Tommy as recognizing that their resistance to colonial power structures is more powerful when there is solidarity across borders. Tommy recognizes that the histories in Canada and the United States have been very different, but nonetheless he feels that he can learn from the Native American activists from both sides of the border. He continues to be compelled to return and work with AIM because he sees the struggles on both sides of the border as parallel to one another. Tommy spends some time in Toronto getting to know “the scene” in Ontario. When Tommy suggests that they go to South Dakota to support the Sioux people, one of the other activists argues that there is no reason for them to get involved. He says that the Sioux people are warriors and the violence in South Dakota is because they “got to live up to it,” and he does not understand why Tommy would care about what they are experiencing (110). Tommy’s friend seems to embrace a kind of Canadian nationalism by differentiating what is happening with the Sioux peoples from the issues going on in Canada. He tells Tommy “You’re from B.C., it ain’t got nothing to do with up there or up here” (110). Tommy, however, recognizes the similarities: “I knew that it had a kind of parallel in what was happening then back home, except that it was on a greater scale and in greater depth” (109). Tommy, having spent time with many Native Americans already, recognizes that at that moment, the movement is more advanced in the United States, Canadian Indigenous peoples are beginning to experience similar feelings of anger and resentment and can learn from the successes of their southern neighbours.

The novel is representative of the fact that they may have different histories, identities, and government structures, but they can work together in order to advance the rights of First Nations peoples in North America. Nation was imposed on Native Americans and Indigenous peoples; therefore, the transnational character of Tommy's journey is not simply a rejection of national identity. *Slash* depicts a pan-Indigenous activist movement as an effective means of organizing, sharing resources, knowledge, and demonstrating the number of people who demand change. Armstrong's novel is a work of transnationalism because it represents the cross-border activism that followed the Civil Rights Movement and despite the sense that Native Americans were fighting a different fight, Tommy envisions a movement where Native Americans and Indigenous peoples work with one another to make change in both nations. He rejects the idea that the border somehow renders their struggles separate. While the government bodies and structures imposed on them may differ, they recognize that their shared outrage is valuable. The histories of how governments have treated Indigenous communities may not be identical, but their collective frustration results from their spaces, bodies, and identities being regulated by government in ways that harm them.

Tommy is never detained at the border even though he frequently crosses between countries in the novel, but he is pulled over and threatened by American police en route to join the protest at Wounded Knee. The police allow all white drivers through the blockade and only stop Tommy and his friends. Tommy and his companions lie and claim that they are on their way back to Canada to avoid any problems while their vehicle and personal belonging are searched. The police hurl racial epithets at the group and begrudgingly let them go when they cannot find a reason to keep them. This desire to be involved as much as possible however, means that Tommy is constantly moving and sees his mobility as central to his worth. He feels that he is not helping

advance the movement unless he is always chasing the action. After he takes part in the occupation at Wounded Knee, he travels around with some other activists looking for places to go to get involved. He mentions several conflicts taking place across Canada and these issues only fuel his need to stay busy. His anger and frustration at the violence and lack of government response is overwhelming: “All I cared about was to keep moving, to keep doing things so I wouldn’t have to stop and think” (123). In addition to the mounting situation in Canada, he is still uncertain of the whereabouts of Mardi, the woman who got him involved with the AIM and Red Power movements. If he were to stop to think, he might be overwhelmed by feelings of despair. He has left his family behind, his struggle with drugs and alcohol becomes more difficult for him to manage while he is on the road, and he has lost touch with Mardi. While the pair would meet at protests and demonstrations, Tommy assumed that eventually the two would return to the Okanagan together and have a relationship. She had gone to California and was now missing. Tommy knows it is unlike her to simply disappear and senses that he will likely never see her again. This loss is very difficult for him, as he imagined a future with Mardi, and it allowed him to have something to work toward. When he acknowledges it as a loss, he explains that this causes him to “[burn] inside with anger that was hard to handle sometimes” (119). While he continues to travel and attend meetings and rallies, he acknowledges that “I was hurting too much inside. It had a lot to do with Mardi” (121). While he knew that he and Mardi were working to improve the situation of First Nations peoples in North America, Tommy felt like he had purpose and a goal to achieve. After Mardi goes missing, he becomes angry, frustrated, and dissatisfied with the movement and some of the people involved. When he stops to think, his feelings of frustration mount. He wants change and he feels that nothing is changing. The attitudes of the activists in Toronto who scoffed at his attention to the demonstrations in South

Dakota only further disappoint him. They are unable to recognize the value of transnational solidarity and support and fail to recognize that the border should not preclude activists from recognizing a parallel struggle and choosing to learn from it in order to advance their own efforts. The novel once again demonstrates the need to disregard nation in order to stimulate change.

His desire to keep moving and stay actively involved in demonstrations sometimes conflicts with his need to return home, get sober from the drugs and alcohol that are so freely shared by his travelling companions, and surround himself with family. He often tries to maintain his sobriety while he is travelling, but he becomes discouraged by the fact that all of the organizing, activism, and meetings do not result in widespread change. When he recognizes that his substance use is unmanageable, he returns to the Okanagan to be with his family and refocus on the smaller, more local changes that he can try to encourage. Slowly, the Okanagan peoples and the Indigenous peoples of Canada become more demanding of change and Tommy is excited by the fact that they are learning from the movement in the United States. Tommy is pleased to see that the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs are taking a stand over land claim issues. They begin occupying the local offices of the Department of Indian Affairs and reject the terms of the Indian Act until the claims are settled. There is a hopeful sense of possible change resulting from these demonstrations and actions and Tommy describes the excitement: "Everywhere, on every reserve, there was a feeling of high activity and energy...A strong feeling of unity persisted among the people. Nobody questioned which Band or which Tribe a person belonged to; everybody was Indian and that was good enough" (181). Once again, Tommy feels that a pan-Indigenous network of activism is the only way to achieve real change. Rather than fixating on difference in place and culture, as the activists in Toronto had, Tommy embraces the sense of a

collective because he understands that while difference exists, the fundamental issues can only be overcome through unity.

Slash is rooted in the history of Indigenous activism in Canada and the United States. However, Tommy moves between the two nations because he recognizes that the struggles in the two countries are parallel and working together and learning from one another only serves to benefit the advancement of First Nations peoples on both sides of the border. *Slash* is an example of a narrative of mobility that demonstrates the way that transnationalism can be deployed in order to create productive relationships. Many of the novels examined in this chapter depict transnational journeys, but Armstrong's novel argues that reducing Indigenous experience to national borders is a hindrance to progress. *Slash* is an examination of the way that space is produced socially as well as structurally. It presents the imposition of borders as separating peoples who could be unified in their defense of their land claims, and yet national borders often divide them.

Whether it be a reclamation of traditional lands, or the claiming of space both geographic and social, the narratives of mobility discussed in this chapter focus on Indigenous and Native American travelers seeking to reclaim lands that they have been told do not belong to them. As Mishuana Goeman discusses in her article "(Re)Mapping Indigenous Presence on the Land in Native Women's Literature," space is a production, and it can be produced in such a way as to exclude marginalized communities. Goeman argues that "by understanding that space is produced and productive...we unbury the roots of spatial colonization and lay bare its concealed systems" (Goeman 295). While reclamation is central to these narratives, through mobility, there is also an ability for marginalized communities to create social spaces that embrace otherness and react against those forces that marginalize them.

In *West/Border/Road*, Katherine Anne Roberts aims to demonstrate what differentiates a Canadian road narrative from their American precursors. One possibility that she offers is that Canadian road stories tend to focus on the uninhabited land in Canada. *Terra nullius* is often seen as space that has not yet been colonized but has potential, and she points out that popular Canadian road narratives like the film *One Week* reaffirm this by characterizing Canada as a series of vast, unoccupied, breathtaking spaces (Roberts 293). Roberts' work paints a very clear picture of the ways in which Canadian road narratives are influenced by and respond to American counterparts. However, reading such works only in relation to American texts and contexts is to only scratch the surface of the sorts of issues being tackled by Canadian road stories. In earlier chapters, I worked through discussions of the transnational as a way of reading narratives of mobility that acknowledges nation without privileging it as the sole lens through which to examine texts about mobility. Rather than reinforcing the notion of Canada as a satellite nation to the United States, this dissertation seeks to expand the scope of what can be understood about Canadian travel stories. The texts under study here are not road narratives in the sense of the privileged subject whose identity allows them to travel safely and freely throughout his country or continent. As seen in the previous chapters, the narrative of mobility is distinct from the traditional road narrative because often people of colour and Indigenous peoples are forced to travel as a means of claiming space.

Crossing Over: Navigating Movement in Thomas King's "Borders"

Border crossings are a common occurrence in Thomas King's fiction, and his short story "Borders" depicts a young boy, the narrator of the story, and his mother taking a trip to Salt Lake City to visit the narrator's sister. The narrator and his mother leave southern Alberta and head for

the Canada-U.S. border crossing at Coutts. When the pair arrives at the border, the mother is asked to declare her citizenship and rather than responding that she is either American or Canadian, she answers that she is Blackfoot. She refuses to engage with the border guards who continue to insist that there are only two nations to which she may belong. They are finally turned away from the American border because the narrator's mother chooses not to relent. When they arrive to cross back into Canada, they are asked the same questions and are once again denied access because the mother will not declare herself to be either Canadian or American. The narrator tells border guards that they are "Blackfoot and Canadian," but they cannot accept this declaration because he is a minor (137). The pair are not allowed to enter either country unless the boy's mother chooses to declare a nationality that she does not identify with. Every border guard that they encounter comments that they are sympathetic to their situation and yet insistent that their declaration of Blackfoot citizenship is not satisfactory. The interactions at the border suggest that while the narrator and his mother may identify as Blackfoot in their everyday lives, the nation and its regulatory bodies do not accept that identity and insist on imposing their own. The narrator acknowledges that the issue could easily be solved if his mother simply told them that they were Canadian, but if she were to declare herself a Canadian, she would be losing some of the nuance and complexity of her identity.

The pair are thus rendered nationless, unable to enter either Canada or the United States unless they declare themselves as belonging to one nation. They spend several nights sleeping in their car in the parking lot of the duty-free store. Finally, the narrator explains, the television crews begin to arrive to interview the narrator and his mother. The narrator explains that "I told them we had a nice house on the reserve and that my cousins had a couple of horses we rode when we went fishing" (143). His perspective is limited, and he does not seem to fully

understand the arrival of the cameras. His description suggests that life on the reserve is comfortable and pleasant and the Blackfoot reserve that is his home is a place where he feels content. The narrator has grown up surrounded by Blackfoot friends and family on land designated for Blackfoot peoples. While he understands that their reserve exists within the borders of Canada, his identity is informed by his family, his community, and the space of the reserve. The story reflects the difficulty of navigating nation and identity when neither conforms to strict categories. The Canadian government created a reserve system that distances Indigenous peoples from other communities and yet insists that peoples that live on reserves reject their cultural specificity and identify with the nation that creates structure and systems that other them. The presence of the media is never explicitly explained nor are readers given any insight into who calls them. Some scholars have suggested that the mother's telling of the Coyote story just before the media arrive signals "a breakthrough in their border dilemma as if the Coyote trickster did his magic" (Mayer 80). In King's story, then, the border is not simply an imposition. It is a liminal space, but one that can be productively transformative. What is central to this productivity, however, is the narrator's mother insisting that her identity be recognized and accepted as valid. Her refusal to deny her identity attracts attention from outside sources and this attention forces the hand of the state powers that are keeping them from entering either nation.

Mobility is necessary to stimulate change in King's story. The stagnancy at the border draws enough attention that eventually, a man arrives to discuss the situation with the narrator's mother. The narrator describes him as a "good-looking guy in a dark blue suit and an orange tie with little duck on it" and explains that he arrived in a "fancy car" (143). While the narrator does not know what the man's purpose is, the man's presence allows for the pair to once again approach the border into the United States. With the media and the man present, the mother once

again declares her Blackfoot citizenship and is allowed to cross the border without incident. The narrator's mother is persistent and thus draws outside attention to her situation. With the power of media coverage and public perception behind her, she is able to navigate the system that had previously rejected her declaration of identity. However, gaining access to support required her persistence. Rather than acquiescing, as the narrator suggests that she could, she chooses not to identify as Canadian and insists that her Blackfoot citizenship be recognized. The narrator and his mother must exist in the in-between for several days in order to navigate a border that was imposed on the Blackfoot Confederacy. While the border guards acknowledge that there are Blackfoot peoples on both sides of the border, the system that controls and regulates movement between Canada and the United States cannot accommodate citizenship tied to Native American, Indigenous, or First Nations identity. Ultimately, the narrator and his mother become an exception to this rule. I read this acknowledgement of the narrator and his mother's Blackfoot identity as a result of the scrutiny that accompanies the presence of media.

King's short story explores the problems that arise when state regulatory bodies are confronted with identities that do not conform to strict definitions. Narratives of mobility examined in this dissertation have continually explored constructions of national identity in a more conceptual way, often as it relates to individual identity. While these issues are still explored in the present chapter, there are also legal and bureaucratic dimensions to questions of national identity in narratives of mobility about Native Americans and Indigenous peoples. As Arnold Davidson, Priscilla Walton, and Jennifer Andrews (2003) write: "In-between the traditional border of the nation-state lie other nations, races, ethnicities and cultures, such as those of First Nations peoples, which are divided by the traditional and imperialist demarcations. Native lands, in a sense, lie 'in-between' the borders of the nation-state—they are affected by

them, but they are also independent entities” (17). “Borders” uses the literal space of the in-between in order to examine the construction of national identity that does not acknowledge the “independent entities” that exist within the borders of the nation. Even though many Indigenous groups maintain a unique language, culture, and live on reserves, they must identify as belonging to a country, even if their relationship to that country is complicated and uncomfortable. The story demonstrates the unreasonable restrictions on cross-border mobility however, it also presents the border as space where potential change is possible. King’s story does not indulge in blind optimism but instead demonstrates that change comes when people refuse to relent and are supported by powerful bodies like the media. Persistence and perhaps, as Mayer argues, some trickster magic are necessary to force the hand of regulating bodies. “Borders” demonstrates the way that space can be produced through mobility for national identities that are not tied to the nation-state. “Borders” is exemplary of the way that movement is a force that can decouple nation from identity in the narrative of mobility. While this is true of all of the texts examined in this dissertation, it is an essential aspect of the texts discussed in this chapter. Much like the narrator’s mother in King’s story, most of the Indigenous and Native American characters in these texts belong to nations and have identities that are not recognized or valued by the nation-state.

“Only so many places you can build a dam”: *Terra nullius* in *Green Grass, Running Water*

Many of the main characters in Thomas King’s novel, *Green Grass, Running Water*, also belong to the Blackfoot nation, and like the young narrator of “Borders,” struggle with their relationship to the reserve and their Indigenous identities. The novel follows several different threads and characters as the plot unfolds, but most of the characters are connected to the

protagonist Lionel Red Dog. The novel also presents a few border crossings and that are never straightforward. Alberta Frank, Lionel's love interest, recalls a time from her childhood when she and her family were traveling to a town directly over the border. The young border agent, who is assumed to be a student hired for the summer, instructs Alberta's father to pull over and asks that the entire family enter the building. When it becomes obvious that there is nothing untoward about the family's travel, the border guards insist on searching the vehicle in hopes of securing their assumptions about the criminality of Indigenous peoples. They examine the family's Blackfoot dance outfits and declare them to be decorated with eagle feathers despite what Alberta's father, Amos, mentions about the use of prairie chicken feathers being a common replacement. Amos does mention that eagle feathers are used for such garments, however this is not thought of as something untoward. When he says: "Sure... That's what we use," (King 257) it is not an admission of guilt but rather a conversational affirmation of cultural practices. Nonetheless, the border guards seize the outfits and threaten Amos with jail when he protests that the family need their outfits in order to dance. After some discussion, an older guard takes control of the situation and states firmly "Jail or home. What's it going to be?" (257). They understandably choose to go home. Alberta's family, who were ostensibly on their way to a gathering are not only refused entry to their own ancestral lands, but also stripped of their sacred garments by a young man convinced of their illegality. When he cannot find Amos in possession of cigarettes or alcohol, he becomes determined to find some reason to deny the family entry to the United States. This interaction exemplifies the arbitrary nature of border security and the failure to acknowledge Indigenous land claims that expand beyond the limitations of colonial conceptions of space and nation. Similarly, it explores the same issues presented in King's short

story and the imposition of borders on peoples whose communities are now separated and regulated.

Later in the novel, Alberta recalls what happened when Amos was allowed to reclaim the outfits. They were kept in a garbage bag on the floor in the courthouse and no care had gone into storing them safely. It is clear from the way that they are returned that they were not thought of as significant belongings. The authorities treated them as they would anything else in a green bag: trash. The man who works at the courthouse cheerfully discusses his experience of powwows at the Calgary Stampede and offers to help in any further matters Amos may have without acknowledging the damage that may have been done to the outfits due to carelessness. Amos is treated first as a suspicious person, then as a criminal, and once he is released, he is treated as an oddity, one to be displayed in a kind of “cowboys and indians” setting. Following the colonial state powers’ rejection of the social and cultural space belonging to the Blackfoot peoples, Amos experiences the reduction of his cultural artefacts to a discarded garbage bag. The man at the courthouse believes himself to be a benevolent force: “‘I’ll bet you’re happy to get these back Mr. Frank.’ ‘You can’t stick outfits in a bag like this.’ ... ‘You’ll bend the feathers doing that. You bend the feathers and it’ll ruin the outfit’” (King 283). The man seems not to listen to Amos whatsoever and simply recites platitudes in response to his concerns. Without the eyes of the media, the border officials treat Amos and his family as caricatures of Indigenous identity, they are shown no decency, and their mobility is restricted without real cause. Without the media attention and scrutiny present in “Borders,” the Frank family are unable to advocate for themselves against the regulatory bodies of the state. Their identity is mocked, denied, and erased by the border guards and the courthouse employees.

The erasure of identity is paired in the text, with the erasure of Indigenous land claims. Some of the novel's many storylines deal with movement and mobility, but King's novel also explores the necessity of refusing to move when land claims are threatened. This is most overt in the narrative that follows retired University of Toronto professor Eli Stand Alone, Lionel's uncle, and his opposition to the Grand Baleen Dam. Eli left the Blackfoot community behind to attend University and had never wanted to return to his family or home. However, after the death of his mother he returns to live in her cabin on the reserve which is in the shadow of the proposed dam site. The dam has already been built, but Eli's injunctions and legal actions stop it from becoming fully operational. His resistance to the dam is not only strictly to protect the cabin he inherited from his mother, but also a stand against the notion that the dam was being built on *terra nullius*. In a conversation about the site, an employee of the company building the dam, Clifford Sifton insists to Eli that there are "only so many places you can build" dams (111). Eli brings up the fact that the provincial commission suggested three locations for the dam and none of them were on the reserve, but Sifton brushes it off by suggesting that it is a matter of "Geography" (111). Sifton insists that there are "only so many places you can build" dams. The larger implication of this exchange between Sifton and Eli points to the fact that dams are not desirable neighbours, so they tend to be built in Indigenous communities where those affected are made to feel powerless against the construction of something that changes their environment so radically. Tired of discussing the matter, Sifton tells Eli quite plainly that his job is simply to build the dam no matter the location. Clifford Sifton believes that it is entirely justifiable to build the dam near Eli Stand Alone's cabin because Eli is not empowered by the justice system in order to legally lay claim to what rightfully belongs to him. The law is skewed in favour of the colonizers and Eli begins to recognize that despite his best efforts: "[he] had to admit that after

all the years of threats and injunctions, he had won very little. The dam was there. It wasn't going to go away" (King 260). He learns to revel in the small victories but all the while knowing that eventually the dam will be the death of him. Despite his family's claim to the land and history, there is nothing Eli can do to stop the dam from destroying his mother's cabin. The state bodies have denied his legal action and therefore mobility, for Eli, would require abandoning his home with the knowledge that he could never return. His refusal to move is significant as it is a continued act of resistance and insistence on his own agency. The courts do not support his resistance, but he remains steadfast and demonstrates his resistance to the dam through his silent but persistent protest.

James H. Cox discusses land claim issues in the novel in his article "'All This Water Imagery Must Mean Something': Thomas King's Revisions of Narratives of Domination and Conquest in *Green Grass, Running Water*". Discussing previous scholarship written about the novel, Cox argues that the subversion of maps as a tool of colonial power is one of the facets of the novel that is most often studied. Discussing the work of scholar Florence Stratton, Cox writes that "[she] even suggests that maps are narratives of domination and conquest, and if we read maps as stories, especially as stories that construct 'blank spaces' that both signify the Canadian 'wilderness' and articulate a First Nations *absence*" (qtd in Cox 221). Cox develops this idea further and goes on to state that: "This specific cultural value enables the reading of North American landscapes as 'undeveloped' or 'uncivilized' and therefore as 'empty.' Rhetorical 'emptiness' erases Native American populations and facilitates the acquisition of Native lands by white entrepreneurs, governments, and corporations with little or no regard for Native concerns: flooding Cherokee or Sioux lands, for example, is much easier if the federal government believes there are no 'real' Cherokees or Sioux" (Cox 226). *Terra nullius*, Cox argues, goes hand in hand

with the denial of Indigenous identity. This is precisely why Eli's refusal to move is significant, his mobility would acquiesce to state powers that seek to erase his presence and his claims to the land. Just as mobility can function as an act of reclamation, immobility in King's novel is an act of defiance that insists on recognition. Eli insists on being recognized by the state as having a legitimate claim to the land that his family has inhabited for as long as he can remember.

Slash, Green Grass, Running Water, and Four Souls all consider the dismissive attitude that Indigenous people are often met with when confronting an apparatus of the state and the way that that shapes the uneasy relationship between the two groups. The negative attitudes toward Canada's First Nations peoples are compounded by erasure that occurs in ways that are much more concrete and perhaps, more sinister. As Cheryl Lousley points out "'empty land' not only refers to a racist erasure of Indigenous cultures and political communities but also represents a particular configuring of nature in service of national development". This statement echoes Sifton's claim that he is not to be blamed for the location of the dam and his nonchalant attitude toward the feelings of distrust and anger felt by Eli and his community. The story of the Grand Baleen Dam is in no way unique and is likely modelled on the construction of the Oldman River Dam near Lethbridge, Alberta¹². Lousley aptly describes the influence of the dam when she writes that "as a technology for colonizing freely running rivers, the hydroelectric dam is an icon of twentieth-century mastery over nature in the name of progress". Beyond that though, is the issue of Indigenous land being coopted for technological use on the premise of *terra nullius* which is what King's text pushes back against through the characters of Eli and the four old Indians. While the dam itself is a massive structure announcing the "taming" of wildness, it

¹² It also bears resemblance to the issues faced in Northern Quebec following phase one of the James Bay Project as well as the ongoing issues being faced by Indigenous communities in northern British Columbia as a result of the Site C dam.

ultimately becomes the instrument of reclamation for the people of the reserve. When the trickster characters from Fort Marion arrive, it is Coyote's singing that causes the dam to burst. Eli is presumably killed, and his cabin is destroyed. King underscores the fact that despite best efforts, attempts to tame nature are not always successful and the flood manages to destroy one of the great technological advancements of the twentieth century. After the flood has ended, Eli's sister Norma searches among the wreckage in order to rebuild and reclaim the home that has been in her family for so many years. Eli's small resistances may not have protected the cabin from the forces of nature, but he was able to ensure that a member of his family could continue to reside on that land for many years to come. With the help of her nephew Lionel and her children, Norma is able to reconstruct the cabin without the looming presence of colonizing forces represented by the dam.

Thomas King plays with history in *Green Grass, Running Water* with the character Joe Hovaugh and his attempts to capture the "four old indians". Their escape from Fort Marion is followed by a number of investigative measures taken by Dr. Hovaugh. His obsession with tracking their absences from the facility and attempts to link them to something larger seems to him to be more important than his position as the psychiatrist of the facility. When Hovaugh feels that the authorities are not doing nearly enough to return the escapees to where they "belong," he takes it upon himself to surveil their movements and determine the purpose of their flight from the institution. The implications of this plot line are clear: Fort Marion's existence is evidence of the governmental structures created to contain and eventually abolish the "Indian problem." The fact that those structures are flawed and easily overcome cause Joe Hovaugh a great amount of anxiety and a desire to regain control of their bodies and the perceived threat that they present as other. This storyline uses issues of policing and surveilling Indigenous

bodies in public space, however the meaning and history of the sites mentioned are rewritten by King to reflect the agency and trickster powers of the characters. He depicts events such as the eruption of Mount St. Helens as being enacted by the “four old indians” and the names that they assume: Coyote, The Lone Ranger, Hawkeye, and Robinson Crusoe. King uses the narrative of mobility to reimagine events of national and historical significance to destabilize historical narrative.

King’s novel examines land claims and borders in a playful but critical way. The characters travel between spaces both fluidly and with difficulty. The “four old indians”, for example, rarely face any barriers to the movement which takes them across North America and the details of their journey are sparse. Alberta, however, describes a much more realistic experience at the U.S.-Canadian border where her father and his traditional clothing are disrespected by government employees. The “four old indians” evoke tradition, oral storytelling, and Indigenous culture and therefore their transnational movement is comparable to the freedom and openness described by Daniel Heath Justice. They escape without much effort, they evade capture, and their journey is not hindered by difficult border crossings or government regulation. Alberta and Amos present a more contemporary experience of government intervention into cross-border mobility for Indigenous peoples and the way that it limits their ability to connect with and participate in cultural events and practices.

Eli Stand Alone actively works to reclaim his mother’s home and reject the use of Indigenous lands for the purpose of industrial projects. His efforts are largely unsuccessful, but he works to resist the devaluation of Indigenous agency and seeks to affirm his own land claim against the corporation building the Grand Baleen Dam. While his mobility is largely a part of his past and he is settled in his mother’s cabin just on the edge of the reserve, he chooses to fight

against the idea that Indigenous land is *terra nullius*. It is his refusal to move, in fact, that is central to his attempt to reclaim his land and demonstrate that Indigenous land should not be a convenient place for large projects that seek to tame the Canadian wilderness.

King's novel oscillates between mobility and decisions to remain immobile to explore issues of *terra nullius*, government policy, sedative politics, and land claims. Transnational journeys are an important part of the novel and offer a reminder of the imposition of borders and restrictions on Indigenous and Native American movement in North America. Set in the early 1900s, Louise Erdrich's novel, *Four Souls*, offers an account of similar issues. While the main character does not cross borders in the novel, she nonetheless embarks on a journey in order to reclaim stolen lands. King's novel, set nearly a century later, demonstrates that these issues have not been resolved and in fact advancements in technology have underscored the continuing problem of *terra nullius*.

“A trunk full of old bones”: Reclamation and Revenge in Louise Erdrich

Four Souls tells the story of a young Ojibwe woman who sets out to reclaim the land that has been stolen from her by a white logging baron. The title character, Four Souls (known to most as Fleur Pillager), endeavours to reassert her birthright by taking back the land. She departs on foot from her home on the reservation, following train tracks to the city, but toward the end of the novel returns in a beautiful white Mercedes-Benz that functions as both transport and lodging until she can take possession of her land. She leaves behind the only remaining relationships that she has, her friendships with Nanapush, a trickster figure who narrates the novel, and his wife Margaret. Erdrich's contemporary feminist re-imagining of the generic road narrative refocuses on the more cyclical nature of travel. Erdrich's novel uses what Joseph Campbell refers to as ‘the

hero's journey" to structure *Four Souls*' mobility in the novel. The structure of the hero's journey follows a pattern, typically the hero is called to adventure and must achieve victory before they can properly return home. *Four Souls* leaves her reservation and travels to Minneapolis in order to find the man who purchased her family's land without her consent. Through careful manipulation she wins over John James Mauser, the man who purchased her stolen land and eventually marries him. Once she discovers his financial ruin, she leaves the city with their child in order to reclaim that which rightfully belongs to her. Summer Harrison describes the complex relationship that exists between tradition and modernity in her article "The Politics of Metafiction in Louise Erdrich's *Four Souls*," where she writes that:

Nanapush, tribal elder and resident trickster, self-consciously reflects on the whole 'scope and drift' of the region's history, lamenting the fact that people now 'print [themselves] deeply on the earth' with roads, automobiles, and modern buildings that transform the reservation and threaten tribal sovereignty (210). He contrasts these destructive markings that 'bite deep' and cause the 'bush' to 'recede' with the printed tracks of his own words. (Harrison 38)

In contrast to the argument made by Deloria, Nanapush sees automobility as a threat to the space of the reservation rather than a tool of empowerment. While vehicles can provide more of a sense of freedom, they also threaten the natural spaces of the reservation and traditional ways of living. The juxtaposition of tradition and modernity carries throughout the novel and is exemplified most obviously in the title character herself. In a previous Erdrich novel, *Fleur* Pillager loses her land as a result of not paying taxes following a land allotment law that "divided communally held land into individually owned parcels" (Harrison 46). As a result, Fleur loses her connection to her land and therefore begins to lose touch with her own identity. After

shedding her birth name in favour of her departed mother's name for strength, Four Souls begins her journey toward modernization. Her modernization does not necessarily occur as a result of desire but rather as a way of reclaiming her traditional lands and thus her identity. Erdrich's novel is a road narrative that explores land claims, the possession of Indigenous lands and Indigenous women's bodies, the harmful effects of colonization, and the value of community.

When she finally arrives at the Mauser home, whose walls are built with trees from her land parcel, she feels the connection immediately: "When I walk through your hallways I walk through myself. When I touch the walls of your house I touch my own face" (Erdrich 45). Mauser has benefitted from a system that disenfranchised Four Souls, forced her off of her land, and profited off of the sale without allowing her any recourse or opportunity to regain her property. The imposition of private property has had a harmful effect on Four Souls and allowed Mauser to purchase and abuse the land of its natural resources. The plot may have been razed and turned into lumber, but the Mauser home functions as memorial for the Pillager land. Four Souls, upon entering the home, is able to occupy a space that is distinctly her own despite the theft and destruction of her land. While her land has been clear cut and the trees displaced, she is still able to claim ownership over the house because of her connection to what once belonged to her.

Upon arriving at and securing work in Mauser's home there is a divergence in the text from the more familiar road narrative in the style of Kerouac. She settles for a time in Minneapolis, but this is not out of satisfaction with her destination. Rather, she stays in order to enact revenge against John James Mauser. Her time here is significant not only because she inhabits the space that is constructed from her land, but also because she transgresses the borders of reservation and city as well as the binary of us and them. Her presence in the home reduces

the physical distance between Native and non-Native while also creating what Gloria Anzaldúa calls a 'borderland': "the psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands...are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" (3). In the case of Fleur and Mauser, this intimacy is not just figurative. Borderlands are often spaces of danger which is particularly true for Fleur as she falls victim to both Polly Elizabeth and John Mauser. Through caring for him in his illness she begins to feel pity for him, and their relationship becomes sexual. There are several power dynamics implicated within this relationship. John James Mauser represents many things for Fleur: thief, destroyer, employer, target, and husband.

Once John James Mauser takes up with Fleur and they marry, Polly Elizabeth and her sister Placide, Mauser's previous wife, are swiftly dispatched from the house. Slowly, through repeated visits to the Mauser home, Polly learns of Fleur's pregnancy. Mrs. Testor, the Mauser housekeeper, confides in Polly that the pregnancy is becoming quite difficult for Fleur. After some coercion Polly learns that

Fleur was having some difficulty carrying the child and there was concern she'd lose it...I was suddenly anxious to return to my preciously assembled household library and consult the sections of my eugenic hygiene books that dealt with delicate pregnancies. I quickly drained my cup, thanked Testor, and told her I was going home to research the matter and find a cure. (Erdrich 63)

The feeling of being needed and the fulfilment of a long-time desire washes away any ill will from Polly and she soon becomes devoted to caring for Fleur and the unborn child. Beyond that, however, there is the intervention of Western medicine into Fleur's pregnancy. While Polly has

good intentions, she is gathering her information from racial hygiene books because she feels that the problem with the pregnancy is the mixing of races. She is intervening without being asked because she believes that she can gather enough knowledge to solve Fleur's medical issues. The distress that the pregnancy is causing Fleur and her body is obvious. I read it is as her body is rejecting the colonization of her uterus and attempting to eject the settler offspring that would come of her union with Mauser. While this aligns in some way with Polly's attitude, it seems more reflective of the critique of *terra nullius* that drives the story. Mauser represents many things to Fleur, but there is very little affection between the two. She feels that she must produce a child in order to secure the return of her lands, but her body tries to reject the fetus. Despite the protestations of Fleur's body and the illness that accompanies her pregnancy, she gives birth to the baby and names him John James Mauser II. She produces a son that becomes a part of the colonial legacy, but her decision is also self-serving. Her son secures her marriage, even if her husband only sees their offspring as yet another way of possessing Fleur and taming her wildness.

Eventually, Fleur discovers that Mauser has lost most of his fortune and her land parcel along with it. The news prompts her to leave him and return home, taking their child with her. Following this loss, he describes to Polly exactly what it was that she represented to him:

'She's caught me somehow...It isn't just her face, either, or the figure she cuts. It isn't that I married her for notoriety, as some say, but only that I couldn't bear not to have her near. God,' his voice went ragged. 'I had to have her and I swear to you there was no other way. Only now do I understand that I had to get near something in her that I can't know, some pure space, something that I went up north to have and only ended up destroying. It is the same with her.' (Erdrich 129)

Possession is a driving force for Mauser. It couldn't be achieved through stolen lands just as it couldn't be achieved through a physical relationship with Fleur. Mauser's desire, though, is somewhat contrary to what many scholars believe to be the motivation behind settler-colonial sexual violence against Indigenous and Native women. Although Fleur consents to the relationship with Mauser, she does so out of pity and a desire to reclaim her land as well as the above-mentioned power dynamics, it is difficult to establish Fleur's desire for this relationship. In becoming his wife, she understands that she will have legal claim to the land that was stolen from her, and she believes she can manipulate Mauser into returning it. Mauser himself says that she hated him and the only reason she did not kill him is because "the whiskey got to her" (Erdrich 128). It is not just subjugation that motivates Mauser in *Four Souls* but also colonization of Fleur's body both through sexual relations and through impregnation.

While the parallels between Mauser's possession of the Pillager land and Fleur's body are obvious, it can also be thought of as an extension of patriarchal power. As Andrea Smith outlines, colonial powers saw the possession of Indigenous and Native women's bodies as a means of exerting power. The colonization of the body can also be seen through settler-colonial state policies such as the loss of status through marriage to a non-Indigenous person under the Indian Act in Canada. Smith succinctly argues that "the connection between colonization of the bodies of Native peoples, particularly those of Native women, is not simply metaphorical. Many feminist theorists have argued for a connection between patriarchy's disregard for nature, for women, and for [I]ndigenous peoples. It is the same colonial/patriarchal mind that seeks to control the sexuality of women and [I]ndigenous peoples that also seeks to control nature" (Smith 80). Mauser sees Fleur as an extension of the land that she comes from and the idea of *terra nullius* that allowed him to purchase her land is mapped onto her body. He imagines Fleur

possesses an inherent wildness that he can tame through his sexual relationship with her. While Fleur embarks on the journey to Minneapolis as an act of reclamation, Mauser imagines that their relationship provides him with an opportunity to exert control over her body as well as her land.

Mauser's desire to be near to an imagined form of wildness began when he went north but owning parcels of land did not bring him any satisfaction. He is desiring of what he calls a "pure space" that he feels is somehow connected to Indigenous peoples. When he cannot acquire it through land ownership, he tries to have it through his relationship with Fleur's body. He can never claim her as a conquest, though, because she seduces him, and her motivations for doing so are equally self-serving. He is unable to possess her because she enters into a sexual relationship with him for her own benefit, unknown to him. What Mauser fails to realize is that his notion of possession is intrinsically destructive. The Ojibwe lands and people that Mauser is so drawn to do not have the same notions of ownership as their colonizers. This is of course the same reason that colonizers used to justify their claims on the land. Smith believes this to be further evidence of her argument. The European invaders felt that their actions were justified by God "on the grounds that Native peoples did not or do not properly control or subdue nature" (80). Further Smith explains, some among the Christian Right argue that due to the failure of Indigenous peoples to "privatize land...their communities had not been 'established by God'...Europeans had a right to seize the land from them" (Smith 80). Yet Mauser is never driven by religious sentiment. Like Théo in *Volkswagen Blues*, his character is informed more by the historical *coureur de bois* or those *voyageurs* who chose to involve themselves with Indigenous communities.

Mauser's attempts are misguided and come from a deep misunderstanding of the culture. When discussing Fleur's rage with Polly, Mauser reflects on the Native American peoples that he has harmed, and his ignorance is clear. He tells her that:

I could hardly make restitution to a people who've become so depraved...The old type, the old warrior type, they are gone. Only wastrels, the dregs of humanity left, only the poor toms have survived...The reservations are ruined spots and may as well be sold off and all trace of their former owners obliterated. That's my theory. Let the Indians drift into the towns and cities or subsist where they will. Thinking their tribes will ever be restored is sheer foolishness. There's nothing left! (Erdrich 127)

Rather than following in the footsteps of the *coureur de bois* and attempting to live on the reservation, Mauser dismantles the land in order to build his home and tries to build a life for himself and Fleur in Minneapolis, away from Fleur's community. His relationship with Fleur does nothing to further his understanding of his own role in the colonial project. While he seems to praise the "old type," drawing on the notion of the noble savage, he fails to recognize the devastating impact of colonization on traditional ways of life which are essential to the "old type" of Native American that Mauser romanticizes. Each of his shallow attempts to possess a romanticized otherness leave him disappointed. Clear cutting Pillager land did not satisfy his needs nor does his colonization of Fleur's womb. The relationship between the literal colonizer and colonized then produces a child: the embodiment of Gloria Anzaldúa's *mestiza* consciousness. Anzaldúa writes that "At the confluence of two or more genetic streams, with chromosomes constantly 'crossing over,' this mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny...From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollination, an 'alien' consciousness is presently in the making—a new *mestiza* consciousness"

(99). I read Fleur's pregnancy as difficult precisely because the life inside her is 'alien' and new. Unfortunately, the difficulty results in a reliance on alcohol for both mother and child.

The illness that accompanies her pregnancy reduces her capacity to make judgements about her health and therefore Polly Elizabeth takes full control of Fleur and her body for the duration of the pregnancy. Fleur is reverted to a child-like state and becomes vulnerable to the influence of her caregiver. The primary treatment that Polly decides on in order to ensure the baby survives to term is whiskey. Once a doctor is called, he simply encourages Polly to continue the "crude, but effective" treatment and informs her that he does "not treat servants...or Indians" and therefore has no interest in guiding Polly's attempts to help (Erdrich 65). Left with knowledge gained exclusively from books about eugenics, Fleur's care leads her to a dependency on alcohol. In another instance of modelling Fleur's story after the narrative of colonization she is plied with alcohol, having never tasted it, and when she becomes reliant on it, she does not know how to handle the consequences of substance addiction. Though she is in the process of reclaiming that land, it has nonetheless been destroyed. The alcohol is both cure and comfort for Fleur, but one that she would not have selected had it not been forced upon her by Polly Elizabeth.

Fleur's return to the reservation is not triumphant or simple. She is still struggling with her reliance on alcohol and rarely leaves her white Mercedes-Benz. She maintains a distance from both the land and her community, and it is clear to Nanapush and Margaret that her time away has changed her deeply. Margaret says of Fleur's reappearance that "She came back so rich that we didn't know, at first, whether the slim woman in the white car, and the whiter suit fitted to the contours of her body, was the ghost of the girl we knew or Fleur herself" (182). She refuses to engage with those close to her and surrounds herself in white culture to keep Margaret

and Nanapush at bay. This is particularly interesting when observed in relation to the vehicle that Four Souls drives when she returns to her community after her husband disappears. Fleur makes her return to the reservation behind the wheel of a white Mercedes-Benz. While the colour is perhaps a bit on the nose, the type of car is a bit more interesting. The Mercedes-Benz signals the kind of wealth Four Souls has achieved through her marriage. While much of the wealth may have been lost by Mauser, the impact it made on Fleur remains.

Mauser's financial ruin cost him the land and Fleur must work to win it back in a game of poker from the owner of a local bar. She begins to frequent Tatro's bar every night to partake in the never-ending game of poker and allows the patrons as well as Tatro to underestimate her skill and overestimate her personal wealth. Nanapush describes her playing style as "demure...modest and even and I don't need to tell you, dangerous" (Erdrich 192). She establishes a reckless playing style to lull Tatro into a false sense of security and even boredom. Unfortunately for the bar owner "A person's boredom always worked to Fleur's advantage" (193). Tatro is also aware that the plot he purchased from Mauser once belonged to the Pillagers but given Fleur's appearance of prosperity he is not at all concerned that she may have her sights set on regaining the land. Fleur indulges settler-colonial expectations of Indigenous women and exploits them in such a way that ultimately works to her advantage. Once Tatro tires of her demure style of playing, she begins drinking heavily during the nightly games and her behaviour becomes increasingly erratic. Nanapush begins to be concerned for her well-being until she indicates with a wink to him that her behaviour is simply a show to trap Tatro. This recalls an earlier moment in the novel, where Polly Elizabeth mentions that many in Minneapolis society think of her as Mauser's "squaw," and in this game Fleur plays into settler-colonial expectations of Indigenous women but does so in a way that is advantageous. To convince Tatro to bet the land in the card

game, Fleur must “play Indian” so that he feels confident that he has the upper hand and that it would be impossible for him to lose the game. Her son, John James Mauser II who is now a young boy, is also underestimated because he is believed to be a “simple” boy. However, he has been observing the “game that never ends” for weeks and learned precisely how best to win against Tatro. Once he takes his seat, Tatro becomes incredibly confident in his ability to beat the “idiot” and agrees to bet the land on their game (197). As soon as he agrees, the boy’s demeanour changes, and it becomes clear that his simple manner was an act. His victory and the reward of the land title is secured not only through careful planning but also by fulfilling roles that white settlers have created because of their lack of understanding of First Nations peoples and their cultures.

Once she and her son win back their land in a poker game, she begins the process of re-establishing her relationships and allows others to help her through her recovery. Margaret begins to help Fleur through the process of decolonization which begins with Fleur removing the clothing of white culture and donning the medicine dress that Margaret has begun to make. Margaret, who had a close relationship with Fleur and her family before Fleur left for Minneapolis, cares deeply about Fleur and wants to help her heal. Margaret tells stories while she works: stories of her childhood, her grandmother, and all of her strong female ancestors. Through this process which she earlier refers to as “praying,” Margaret imbues the dress with the strength and wisdom of the women who precede her and Fleur. Once Fleur puts on the garment, she will be able to access all of the wisdom of the many generations whose spirits are connected to the dress. In gifting the medicine dress to Fleur, Margaret is actively taking part in the decolonization process. The act of decolonial feminism that takes place between the two women is something that Ashley Noel Mack and Tiara R. Na’puti discuss in their article ““Our Bodies

are not Terra Nullius’: Building a Decolonial Feminist Resistance to Gendered Violence.” They discuss the crucial nature of coalitions between women of colour and Indigenous women in order to create and sustain decolonial feminism. Their argument is especially applicable to Erdrich’s text when they write that: “Women of color and Indigenous communities in the U.S. settler colonial nation-state are often forced to travel in and out of ‘worlds’ as a strategy of survival” (Mack and Na’puti n.p.). In Fleur’s case, her survival depends on her reclaiming her land and she must therefore enter the world of the settler city. In Thomas King, Eli demands recognition of his land claim through the legal system. He is ultimately unsuccessful, but Fleur does not have any means of recourse given that Mauser lost his fortune and her lands, so she must take reclamation into her own hands. When she travels back to her own world though, she faces difficulty, and it is only with the support of Margaret and the choice to embrace tradition that she is able to attempt to decolonize her body and mind. Margaret’s medicine dress returns her to strength and thus Fleur can begin her rehabilitation. The gift of the medicine dress is powerful because it not only signals the coalition between Fleur and Margaret, but also between all of the women of Little No Horse who have gone before them.

While Fleur’s journey appears much different than the traditional road narrative, it is undeniably a novel about travel. Fleur moves between distinct cultures, spaces, and traverses borders of language and identity. She leaves home not simply because it is destroyed, but to reclaim what rightfully belong to her and ultimately, she succeeds in that task. Her return proves to be difficult, but she is supported by her community and therefore able to overcome those issues that developed when she was away. The beginning of the novel details the various types of roads Fleur must take in order to leave her home. The progression from natural to constructed is clear: “She took the roads that the deer took, trails that hadn’t a name yet and stopped abruptly or

petered out in useless ditch...[she] kept walking until she came to the iron road” (Erdrich 1). As soon as she embarks on her journey Fleur begins to cross boundaries and borders, she leaves behind tradition, community, and culture while heading toward modernity, isolation, and settler ways of living. Margaret must forcefully remind Fleur of her identity and the history that created her. After she puts the medicine dress of Fleur she says: ““You can’t just drive back onto your home ground with a trunk full of old bones... Yes, I know what you carried home in that whiteman’s car. Nor can you stab the earth with the high heels on your shoes or breathe your whiskey breath into home air... The strength of your ancestors should not find an ending in your weakness” (Erdrich 204). Fleur had carried her ancestor’s bones with her on her journey and buried them outside the city so that she could be near them. When she returned, she had been sure to bring them back home with her so they could return to their land as well. Whereas for many travelers to return home is to enter again into a safe and comfortable space, Fleur is unable to do so without undergoing a series of cleansing rituals. Space is not simply a personal or sentimental connection but a historical and sacred one. Unlike most road narratives, Erdrich’s does not end when Fleur arrives back where she began. Rather, her journey continues until she learns to live peacefully. In something of an afterword to the novel, Nanapush informs the reader that “the woman once called Fleur Pillager, and now named Four Souls as well as another name that nobody speaks is now understood by the spirits. Like the spirits, she lives quiet in the woods. No road leads to her place. Hardly even a path” (Erdrich 209-10). Mobility served a purpose for Fleur, and her movement was productive. Once she secured her land, however, she does not need the infrastructure necessary for movement. As mentioned earlier, Erdrich uses a more traditional and cyclical journey to structure the novel and Fleur’s return home marks an end to her travels. Once she and her son achieve victory in reclaiming their land, she can return home and no longer

requires access to mobility. Her journey is complete. Nanapush goes on to discuss the change in her demeanour since her cleansing ritual, saying that “she doesn’t drown men anymore or steal their tongues, she doesn’t gamble” (210). There is no more rage in *Four Souls* and what is left is the ability to live quietly on the land that she worked so hard to reclaim.

Conclusion

Both mobility and immobility represent acts of resistance in the texts discussed in this chapter. The Indigenous (Canada) and Native American (United States) travellers experience something akin to what John A. Williams describes in *This is My Country Too*. It is often dangerous and restrictive, and the agency of mobility is shocking to observers. Movement, in these texts, is a rejection of the structures and legislation that have historically restricted the movement of First Nations peoples. Williams must plan his stops according to where it is safe for him, as a Black man, to travel and stay. In King and Armstrong, movement between nations is necessary and can be productive, but it can also require a rejection of identity as represented in “Borders” where the narrator’s mother is asked to claim a national identity that she does not feel represents her. Ultimately, she is able to claim her identity and carry on with her journey but only as a result of public scrutiny. In *Slash*, when Tommy and his friends are stopped on their way to the occupation of Wounded Knee, they must lie and accept verbal abuse from the police in order to avoid detainment. This kind of harassment is also seen in the way Alberta and her family are treated when they try to cross the border into the United States in *Green Grass, Running Water*. In these texts, transnational travel is a crucial part of maintaining family and community relationships and yet the characters consistently face difficulty and mistreatment from border agents and law enforcement. Despite the level of suspicion and restriction, the

characters in these texts insist on their agency. The narrator's mother in "Borders" refuses to acquiesce to the demands of the U.S. and Canadian border agents and uses media attention to demand recognition of her identity as a Blackfoot. Public scrutiny in this case is a powerful force that is able to force the powers of the state to recognize their identity, even if it is seen as an exception. In contrast to a moment from *Volkswagen Blues* that is highlighted in Chapter 2, Pitsémine is not questioned or asked about her purposes when crossing into the United States. Pitsémine is ignored and not seen as a threat whereas Jack is a person of suspicion. The novels in this chapter however present a much different experience of navigating indigeneity at border crossings. Many of the Indigenous and First Nations characters in these texts face scrutiny and over policing when they cross borders into neighbouring nations. Pitsémine's experience is unique, and these texts serve as a reminder that state regulatory bodies interfere with the transnational travel that connects Indigenous and Native American communities that predate the 49th parallel.

The construction of nation in each of these texts is haunted by the spectres of colonialism through the regulation of the state. While all of the texts explored in this dissertation grapple with constructions of national identity that are restrictive and confining, the novels in this chapter must in particular navigate the foundational myths of nationhood that minimize and efface the histories of pre-colonial Indigenous peoples. Transnational travel not only rejects imposed borders and maps of North America, but it also rejects the notion of *terra nullius* through an exploration of spaces like reserves and reservations, which are not often stops in traditional road narratives. The mobility of characters like Fleur Pillager and Tommy produces space for stories to be told about the way that legal structures fail to recognize Indigenous and Native American land claims. They also represent a reclamation of agency through individual action and rejection

of the systems that marginalize them. However, immobility is equally significant in King's novel given that Eli's land claim is rejected by state bodies and his mobility would result in the loss of his family home. To borrow from Leslie Sanders once again, nation often fails to articulate the identities contained within. Defiance of state legislation, in these texts, requires different forms of action and inaction. Mobility can be a reclamation of agency, but so too can immobility.

While the narrative of mobility destabilizes static definitions of nationhood and national identity, the refusal to move equally insists on recognition and acknowledgement of identities that do not conform to strict constructions.

The pan-Indigenous sentiment expressed in Jeanette Armstrong's novel, while incredibly optimistic, is also a testament to the value of transnational solidarity and the rejection of borders. Tommy's insistence on the parallel nature of Canadian Indigenous issues and Native American issues provides a framework for reconsidering colonial maps and borders that divide communities. Establishing transnational networks of activism and resistance is central in *Slash* but read more broadly transnational movement itself is transformative in the texts discussed in this chapter. Each traveller departs their government regulated state (for Fleur, she leaves the only nation she has known on her reservation), and their departure produces space for new constructions of identity. Scholars such as Flynn, Macfarlane, and Roberts discuss that an important aspect of the Canadian road narrative or travel narrative is the desire to occupy space within the nation to create a connection and to reaffirm the histories and mythologies that foment grand narratives. These narratives affirm national identity, character, and the connection between a nation-state and its citizens. As Ann Brigham details, Americans felt a renewed desire to travel America by road following 9/11, in part, due to a reactionary patriotism. Brigham suggests that "Road travel... sited the intrinsic qualities of the nation" (2). While this is also a common trope

in Canadian road narratives such as *One Week*, it is more complicated for Indigenous and Native American travellers. In *Volkswagen Blues*, for example, engaging with historical sites is a negotiation between narrative, fact, and nuance. Pitsémine consistently rejects harmful narrative mythologies and insists on presenting a more nuanced picture of national heroes as historical figures as well as human beings. In this chapter, the journeys rarely involve sites of historical meaning.

Thomas King plays with history in *Green Grass, Running Water* with the character Joe Hovaugh and his attempts to capture the “four old indians”. Their escape from Fort Marion is followed by a number of investigative measures taken by Dr. Hovaugh. The fact that the structures meant to contain them are flawed and easily overcome cause Joe Hovaugh a great amount of anxiety and a desire to regain control of their bodies and the perceived threat that they present as other. This storyline uses issue of policing and surveilling Indigenous bodies in public space, however the meaning and history of the sites mentioned are rewritten by King to reflect the agency and trickster powers of the characters. He depicts events such as the eruption of Mount St. Helens as being enacted by Coyote, The Lone Ranger, Hawkeye, and Robinson Crusoe. King uses the narrative of mobility to reimagine events of national and historical significance to destabilize historical narrative. Similarly, King’s short story destabilizes the myth of inclusion and diversity that popularly defines Canadian national identity. The narratives of mobility discussed in this chapter deconstruct the myths that nations are built on, and in doing so cover a wide array of issues such as land claims, imposed borders, and colonial history.

Concurrently, narratives of mobility produce space for a reckoning with what Margery Fee calls the civ/sav binary. The notion, also explored by Philip Deloria, Colleen Boyd, and Coll Thrush, rejects the idea that Indigenous and Native American peoples are frozen in time, arrested

at the point of colonization. While mobility itself is a rejection of the notion that First Nations peoples have not advanced, the narratives examined use mobility and immobility as a means through which to reclaim agency and negotiate the relationship between identity and nation. In repurposing a traditionally nationalistic genre, the narrative of mobility offers a space for interrogating the nation as well as imagining potential futures that resist static categories of nation and identity.

Conclusion

This dissertation attempts to draw together the fields of mobility studies, spatial production, transnational studies, and national literatures to examine the narrative of mobility as a productive genre for considering the complex issue of identity construction. Often, the road trip is thought of as a frivolous undertaking, and the generic association with Kerouac affirms this belief in the triviality of the road narrative. However, given the association between road literature and nation-building that has been detailed throughout this dissertation, I posit that there is value in examining the genre as productively moving forward conversations about the fluidity of national identity in the contemporary period. Returning once again to Paul Jay, who argues that “the locations we study are not fixed, static, or unchanging,” this dissertation examines how the narrative of mobility functions to disrupt public perceptions of national character, presents an array of perspectives and experiences that cannot be universalized, and grapples with historical narratives and erasures that form the basis of a national identity (4). Conceiving of the traveller as *theoros*, as Susan McWilliams Barndt does, reframes the road narrative as an examination of ways of life and identity formations that exist under the umbrella of nation but reject uniformity. Whereas Kerouac boasts of his comfort in America and his ability to be anywhere in the nation and feel secure, the narrative of mobility does not often depict the nation as a whole. I have made the conceptual distinction between the Kerouacian road narrative and the narrative of mobility which depicts a marginalized or minoritarian traveller whose mobility is an act of resistance, a reclamation of agency, or a means of reckoning with a fraught relationship to nation. These narratives recognize the fragmentation of nation and the regionality that is often subsumed by and conflated with national identity. The narrative of mobility is uniquely suited to explore and unsettle constructions of nation and national identity. Mobility encourages encounters with the other, and these encounters are revealing of the plurality of identities that exist within the

boundaries of nation. Thus, the texts explored in this dissertation productively demonstrate the shortcomings of contemporary definitions of nation that do not reflect the diversity of populations.

Jack Kerouac's 1957 novel, *On the Road*, was and still is a widely read novel and touchstone of American popular culture. While the road narrative predates Kerouac, the novel's success and popularity set a precedent for those that follow. Critiques of Kerouac tend to point to the obvious misogyny and naïve conceptions of race. While these issues cannot be denied, they are also a result of the broader cultural context in which the novel was produced. Written in the 1950s in America, *On the Road* was quite subversive for the time. It featured frank discussions of sexuality, race, substance use, and counterculture. The popularity of Kerouac, then, is significant given that his readership was being exposed to experiences, identities, and ideas that were unfamiliar and likely shocking. Thus, while it is easy to criticize Kerouac's naivete and what appears to the modern reader to be his outdated language and ways of conceptualizing race, it is valuable to acknowledge the way that the novel produced space for stories that may not otherwise be told. Through the character of Sal Paradise, Kerouac recounts experiences with transients, migrant workers, runaways, gig workers, and criminals. Sal continually attempts to occupy these marginalized positions throughout the novel, always unsuccessfully, but in his pursuit of connection he witnesses and reports on the lives of the American underclass. Sal is always able to leave behind his experience and return to a comfortable middle-class existence, and the end of the novel reaffirms this identity as Sal and his girlfriend leave Dean behind to attend a Duke Ellington concert at the Metropolitan Opera.

The final scene of the novel contrasts Sal's proximity to wealth and luxury with Dean's inability to move outside of socioeconomic status. The end of the novel shows Sal embracing

many of the things that he rejects as a member of the Beat movement. However, this does not invalidate the stories represented in *On the Road* and the way that Sal's journey depicts America. While Sal is certain that he knows America and he is at home wherever he goes, his role as *theoros* often makes him an outsider and observer to the ways that people live and work in relation to nation and national identity. His time with Terry is representative of his lack of awareness of his position in relation to the people he encounters. While he imagines himself to be a migrant worker through his relationship with Terry and her family, he often misunderstands them and is never fully aware that his subject position marks him as an outsider. His time with Terry is simply one vignette in the picaresque structure of the novel which presents American life as varied and American identity as fluid and multifaceted. Sal believes himself to be capable of inhabiting each of these different identities and ways of living, but he is never able to detach himself from his middle-class subjectivity. What is valuable about *On the Road*, though, is his documentation of his encounters with a wide variety of people who, in one way or another, identify as American.

Examining *On the Road* in this way lays out a framework for examining the narrative of mobility as a way of exploring the diversity of experiences and identities that exist within the broader context of nation. To expand the scope of this reading of Kerouac, I discuss it in relation to John A. Williams *This is My Country Too*. Taken together, these texts establish not only the relationship between the road narrative genre and the function of *theoros* in these texts, but also the ability for the narrative to present a unique, individual experience of mobility as well as provide glimpses into the lives of others. Williams' text is an honest and frank account of the way that he, as a Black man, is treated in various parts of the country. He must plot his course using guidebooks that advise Black travellers about the safest cities, accommodations, and routes

to take while driving through America. He knows that he is more likely to experience discrimination in the South and he prepares himself for the kind of treatment he will likely receive when he leaves the northern states. However, he encounters racist attitudes and behaviour in the north and while he is slightly taken aback by it, he recognizes that the race problem in America is not localized and is pervasive across the nation. Williams writes about his discussions with various journalists, friends, and Civil Rights activists and he thoughtfully considers the positions of others. Williams of course presents his personal thoughts about the conversations that he has, but he also details the opinions and ideas of those he encounters. Thus, the text presents several points of view in discussions and debates about the Civil Rights movement. Williams faithfully reports on how Americans are feeling with regards to the social and political climate as the passing of the Civil Rights Act looms. Williams' text ends with a reflection on what he witnessed during his travels through America and using the wisdom he acquired as *theoros*, he makes suggestions for how to improve the increasingly difficult social, political, and economic situations unfolding in the United States in the mid-twentieth century. He points out, however, that he is writing his afterword a year after he embarked on his journey and following his road trip through the United States, he spent some time abroad in Europe reflecting on his experience. He appeals to his readers to demand an overhaul of the political system that prioritizes profits rather than working to effect change. Williams distills his experience of the road into a thoughtful meditation on reshaping the nation politically. He does not generalize about the South and despair over the racism that he encountered on his trip. He refuses to reductively paint regions and states as other. While he often feels alienated on his journey, he refuses to allow that alienation to diminish his belief in the potentiality of America. Rather he uses his outrage to outline the path toward a more effective government that would result in a

more progressive and inclusive nation. Williams is optimistic about the potential future of America, but that optimism is the result of having taken some distance from the nation. Williams and Kerouac present more nationalistic texts than others examined in this dissertation, but they do so in a way that acknowledges that there is no singular experience of Americanness. In response to Brigham's question about the vastness of nation, both texts seek to embrace the vastness of nation. They reject uniformity and celebrate the multiplicity of experiences and identity formations that America contains.

Building on the tradition of the American road narrative as well as histories of trans-Canada travel, Canadian narratives of mobility are entwined with the process of nation building. Katherine Ann Roberts and Heather Macfarlane both examine the way that the Canadian road narrative is often invested in the creation of a Canadian nationalism. National identity is perpetually articulated in relation to the neighbouring nation because of the proximity and the transnational exchanges of culture that occur between the two nations. Most of the narratives of mobility examined in this dissertation cross borders because the shared histories between the U.S and Canada pre-date the implementation of the border. It is precisely this cross-border exchange that makes these narratives valuable. Transnational movement in these texts is a powerful force for change. Exploring the constructions of nation both from within as Anderson suggests, but also from a distance provides necessary perspective for rethinking the narratives that define national identity.

In *Volkswagen Blues*, Jack is tracing the path taken by Étienne Brûlé whose exploration of the New World crossed from Québec into early America. Poulin is representative of the permeability of the border and the way that cross-cultural exchange with the U.S shapes Canadian identity. Jack and Théo's heroes, aside from Brûlé are largely figures of American

history, popular culture, and literature. This is in some way a product of Québécois *americanité*, but Québécois consumption of American culture is not necessarily unique. While the border is a space of surveillance that restricts mobility for travellers, it is also unable to divide nations from one another culturally. Where I think that the transnational narrative of mobility is unique, however, is that it employs nation as a geographical space that, through contact, is revealing of the impossibility of defining a singular national identity.

National identity in North America is indebted to narrative myth that emphasizes the wildness of the New World and characterizes settlers as intrepid explorers whose taming of the landscape is seen as shaping the Canadian spirit. Jack Waterman is very attached to the mythic figure of the *coureur de bois* and sees the ethos of the explorer reflected in his brother and hero, Théo. Pitsémine patiently untangles Jack's recollections of his brother from his conceptions of heroism and the way that each of these constructions contribute to Jack's understanding of national and personal identity. Their drive from Québec City to San Francisco follows the trail of Brûlé to St. Louis, and when they must find a new route, they carry on by following the Oregon Trail. In following tracing these historical routes, Pitsémine pushes Jack to question his understanding of history and the figures that he and Théo grew up valorizing. They read accounts of settlers and histories that provide some nuance to the stories of mythic figures like Jesse James, Buffalo Bill, and of course Brûlé. Jack begins to recognize that they were all ordinary people. Their circumstances placed them in historical and cultural memory, but they are complicated figures and Jack's hero-worship of them is childish. Jack and Pitsémine's transnational journey forces Jack to confront the narratives that dominate his relationship to family and nation. His proximity to historical sites removes cognitive distance and he must acknowledge the negative characteristics of the figures that he admires. His mobility encourages

him to reframe his understanding of national identity, and with Pitsémine's guidance he is able to reject the construction of Canada as a wilderness that needed to be tamed by brave explorers.

While Poulin is appropriating Indigenous voices in his writing of Pitsémine, I believe that her character serves an important role in underscoring the harm done by these narrative myths that Jack believes and the work that the novel does to unsettle historical narrative is significant.

For Pitsémine, the transnational journey affords her the ability to explore her hybrid identity. She feels disconnected from both a white, Québécois identity and an Innu identity. She does not feel comfortable claiming one or the other but identifying as a hybrid makes her feel like an outsider who does not belong anywhere. Their journey brings her to her own realizations about figures she had admired, like Chief Thayendanegea who, she realizes was just as flawed as Jack's heroic figures. The transnational journey, however, allows her to find a space where she can embrace her hybridity and where she feels proud of her identity. San Francisco offers her the opportunity to explore her identity without having to tether herself to the weighted construction of national identity. Alcatraz, for Pitsémine, is a symbol of resistance and reclamation and it inspires her to reclaim her sense of self rather than allowing complicated national histories and narratives to define her identity. For both Jack and Pitsémine, distance from nation allows them to explore their perceptions of themselves in relation to nation and in doing so, destabilize some of the narratives and myths that form the basis of national identity in Canada.

Conversely, *The Motorcyclist* makes visible some of the national histories of Canada that are underrepresented. Using his father's diaries from the years of 1959-1960, Clarke presents a story of Black Halifax during a time when the city was still practicing segregation. Clarke uses a narrative of mobility to remap historical geographies and represent a history of Blackness in Canada. Using *Liz II*, Carl rejects racial and gendered hierarchies and reclaims and insists on his

masculinity. The motorcycle allows him a freedom of movement that he may not otherwise have in the city, and his ability to reclaim that agency affirms his masculinity. Carl's mobility is central to affirming his agency, and while he does not consider movement in relation to national identity, his narrative adds to a history of Canadianness. *The Motorcyclist* demonstrates the pervasiveness of American and British culture in Canada. Carl Black evokes American celebrities in his assessment of himself as an example of heightened masculinity. The transnationalism of the nation that Carl articulates is shaped by England as well as America through the history of Black Loyalists. America, as represented by Avril, however, is a less favourable influence on Canada and only serves to support racial segregation. The transnational influence of England is viewed as positive and something that Carl values. The novel gestures to the multiplicity of national experiences and identities that flout categorization and reject narrative myth.

Days by Moonlight presents the attempt at precise categorization of identity as a way of managing and presenting Canadian multiculturalism. Alfie's experiences in southern Ontario all reflect a critique of Canadian politeness, multiculturalism, and sedative politics. Festivities in Nobleton and Coulson's Hill are considered by locals to have good intentions, even if, in practice the house burning is horrifying, and the Indigenous Day Parade is uncomfortable. Alfie continually points to Canadian politeness as a masquerade for fixating on race and identity. The novel presents the way that Smaro Kamboureli's sedative politics functions in practice. Being self-congratulatory and certain of the intent invalidates the feelings of alienation or discomfort that observers or spectators might feel. When Alfie feels uncomfortable at the Museum of Canadian Sexuality, Michael is certain it must be because he does not feel represented and informs him that he should not worry, they also have a Black mannequin. The precision used to

catalogue the wide range of identities that exist within Canada is alienating for Alfie and he is unnerved by the insistence on a diverse and inclusive space. The fixation on turning identity into a kind of formula that must account for every possibility. This obsession with categorization also insists that people identify as their race, gender, or sexuality. For a character like Pitsémine, who does not feel connected to any aspect of her identity, making declarations about her race would be incredibly difficult. George Elliot Clarke argues that there is vagueness to the Black Canadian identity. In the contexts of Clarke and Alexis, I see the vagueness and fluidity of identity as a potential that can be explored through the narrative of mobility. Rather than alienating individuals by insisting that they fit into a matrix of identity formation, these texts suggest that considering the individual experience is far more valuable than attempting to categorize or generalize an identity.

The final chapter of this dissertation explored the narratives of mobility of Indigenous and Native American peoples and the way that their movement functions as a reclamation of identity and lands. Some of their journeys can be examined alongside Pitsémine's experience of mobility. Not only is their mobility an act of agency that has historically been denied to them, but characters like Tommy are able to reflect on and embrace their complex identities through their experiences and encounters on the road. In "Borders" and *Green Grass, Running Water*, border crossings are necessary to visit family, connect with communities, and participate in cultural practices. The transnationalism of these texts is a rejection of imposed borders and Tommy in particular advocates for a pan-Indigenous solidarity as a way of moving forward in both Canada and the United States. Armstrong, King, and Erdrich reject notions of *terra nullius* and use the narrative of mobility to redraw maps and reshape the geographies of North America that recognize histories and communities that pre-date colonization. In these narratives, mobility

is not simply a reclamation of agency. It is also a rejection of the idea that Indigenous and Native American peoples are stuck in time. They employ mobility as a tool to achieve a variety of goals. Tommy travels to activist demonstrations, Fleur uses her car as a betting tool to regain her land, and the characters in *Thomas King* use their vehicles to flee oppressive institutions and connect with one another. These texts employ transnational movement as a way of negotiating space for Indigenous peoples in North America.

The narratives of mobility under study in this dissertation engage with issues ranging from land claims to estranged family. What draws them together, though, is the fact that they interrogate constructions of nation and national identity through mobility. The road narrative is historically entwined with the project of nation-building, and yet each of these texts works to destabilize national myth and question formations of national identity. Transnationalism is a thread that weaves these texts together and insists on examining the individual experience. While each of these experiences exist within the context of nation, they do not map easily onto one another and therefore reject the notion of a unified national identity. The characters in these texts have wildly different experiences and yet many of them trace similar routes or unfold in similar spaces. These texts suggest that there is no singular national experience, identity, or history. Nation as a construction always exists in relation to the other, therefore transnationalism is central to constructions of nation. In the narratives of mobility examined here, transnationalism allows for and encourages the notion that national identity is impossible to define.

The nation is, at the current moment, becoming an increasingly problematic cultural construction. One that is often used to justify conservatism, traditional values, xenophobia, and extremism. It is valuable then, to insist on a national imaginary that is not strictly defined, is inclusive, and welcomes diversity and transnationalism. Deconstructing national myth and the

misrepresentation of historical narrative is crucial to this project. Narratives of mobility work to unsettle national myth and narrative while using the popular road narrative genre to disentangle and interrogate the histories and narratives that are foundational to constructions of national identity. The familiarity and popularity of the road narrative allows for these texts to be read widely and therefore produces social space for discussions of nation and national identity that thoughtfully unsettle assumptions and misrepresentations of history. In addition, transnationalism provides a useful avenue for disentangling strict constructions of nation that can lead to jingoism and dangerous notions of patriotism. National literatures are valuable for creating a shared sense of identity and history but interrogating these narratives and myths will be crucial going forward. It is more important than ever to embrace a more loosely defined sense of national identity, one that does not insist on exclusion as the foundation.

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