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CONSTRUCTING CANONS, CREATING CANADIANS;
AN EXAMINATION OF CANADIAN FICTION ON HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULA

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Canada

For my family for knowing when to laugh at me, and my margarita muses for taking me seriously.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of the Canadian fiction on the current Canadian high school canon. Working under the premise that most high school literature is taught using what may be referred to as the reflection theory, I attempt to show what portrait of Canada is reflected through the texts authorized for use in the classroom. Each chapter focuses on the reflection of the Canadian experience through a certain cultural lens: Chapter one analyzes the prominence of the Scottish Canadian experience in the canon through the most recommended novel, Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel; chapter two investigates the problems inherent in the position of Joy Kogawa's Obasan as the most popular "ethnic" text in the canon; and chapter three deals with the problems of the canon's selection of a non-Native writer, Margaret Craven, and her novel, I Heard the Owl Call my Name, as the authorized representation of the Native Canadian experience (I analyze her novel alongside another popular non-Native text, Peter Such's Riverrun, and two Native texts which have received recent authorization but have yet to gain full nation-wide support: Thomas King's Medicine River, and Ruby Slipperjack's Honour the Sun). Overall, the fiction in the canon reflects white Canada as the dominant culture which is, nevertheless, willing to recognize its racism; a careful analysis of this image, however, reveals that it is only the racism of its past that white Canada is ready to acknowledge. The conclusion I come to is that the canon, although it appears multicultural in form, by containing narratives of different Canadian cultures, actually continues to serve and reflect the interests of dominant white society.

Introduction

Canadian Literature: Defining a Canon, a Country, and its Citizens

"Canadian literature is especially powerful, for it embraces both traditional and contemporary English literature, the rich mythology of our Native peoples, and the emotive literature that arises from pioneer and immigrant experiences, with the additional enrichment of translations from the many cultures that make up the Canadian mosaic. The creation and dissemination of Canadian literature can lead to increased understanding among our many peoples by establishing a deeper appreciation of one another's experiences." (Ontario Ministry of Education 2)

Canadians should study Canadian literature to learn about their country and each other. This is the argument underlying the above excerpt from the Ontario Ministry of Education's 1987 curriculum guide for grades seven to twelve. It is the premise behind the push in provinces across the country to include Canadian literature in the high school curriculum. As Simon During asserts, "[i]t is becoming a commonplace that the institution of literature works to national ends" (138). Not only is this nationalist impetus behind the creation of a country's literature a commonplace, but the connection between nation and literature appears as each province's English Language Arts

curriculum's common goal.

To gain an understanding of things Canadian is a goal that has plagued Canadians for decades. It is often quipped by humorists and critics alike that this search for an identity is, in fact, the defining characteristic of Canadians. This quest for definition usually results in a study of Canadian culture – and Canadian literature particularly – for answers to such stumpers as Linda Hutcheon's fill in the blank challenge: "As Canadian as ______" (9). In his first conclusion to Literary History of Canada, Northrop Frye argues that Canadian literature "is an indispensable aid to the knowledge of Canada" (64). To read Canadian literature is to move one step closer to understanding just what may fill in the blank of our identity. I believe, however, that this implicit mimetic approach to understanding Canadian literature needs some complication. To echo Sarah Corse, I would like to suggest that national literatures "are not reflections of the national character, but manifestations of the 'invention' of the nation, of the strategies used to create national identities" (74). One can invent a nation and its character by establishing its literature.

As Corse suggests, then, it is in no way coincidental that the rise of nationalism in this country is linked

heavily to the rise of Canadian literature. In the immediate post World War Two era, the federal government began to invent and disseminate an idea of Canada primarily through the financial support of its culture and literature. In 1951 the Massey report encouraged the study of Canadian culture, and recommended a commission to examine and promote such study. That same year also saw the creation of the National Library (Corse 51). The federal government's nation building activities through the next decade focused on the sponsorship of Canadian culture and literature and the creation of certain Canadian symbols; the government needed to invent something specifically Canadian with which its citizens could identify. By 1965, the government and, through consultation, a great many citizens agreed upon a unifying Canadian symbol, one which had first been used unofficially to identify Canada in World War I – our red and white maple leaf flag.[1] Tom Henighan's assertion that Expo '67 displayed "exceptional national pride" demonstrates the government's success by this point in inventing and establishing recognizable concepts of nation and nationality of which its citizens could be proud (12).

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[1] In the tunnels underneath Vimy Ridge is a small maple leaf etched into the limestone wall. It is thought to have been carved out by one of the Canadian soldiers who fought there and to be the first example of the use of the maple leaf to symbolize Canada.

Substantial federal sponsorship of literature during the 1960s prompted Northrop Frye to comment on the bounty that the proudly Canadian writer may enjoy:

> Scholarships, prizes, university posts await the dedicated writer: there are so many medals offered for literary achievement that a modern Canadian Dryden might well be moved to write a satire on medals, except that if he did he would promptly be awarded the medal for satire and humour. (65)

Through its funding of small presses, grants to individual writers, writers-in-residence programs at universities, and control of the Governor General's awards, the Canadian government enabled the establishment of a veritable body of national literature. Having contributed to the well-being of this body of literature, the government proceeded to provide the means to acquaint citizens with the country's literature. The Canada Council, founded in 1957, ensured adequate distribution of literary texts across the country by sending free kits of Canadian literature to "libraries in rural communities, prisons, senior citizens' clubs, cultural centres, hospitals, [and] primary schools in remote areas" (Ross Sum 180). Clearly, the government recognized that literature played an important role in the invention of the nation and was anxious to make it available to all sectors

of society.

Concurrent with the rise of a national literature is the rise of national literary criticism. Leon Surette suggests that "Canadian literary criticism has always been an enterprise in which the central purpose was the discovery of the Canadian-ness of the literature written in this country" (17). Now that there existed a body of literature in Canada, the need arose to identify just what was "Canadian" about it. Thanks to critical works by Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood, "garrison mentality" and "survival instinct" themes have been declared (and, by some, derided) as particularly Canadian. This type of thematic criticism lost popularity in the academic community by the late-1970s due to the critique that certain texts were being taught only on the basis of how well they fit into critical molds and not on their own merits as works of literature (Davey "Wonderful" 51). This battle between aesthetics and nationalist ethics continues, arguably to this day, along with at least one other argument about Canadian literature: what is the Canadian canon and whose values does it represent?

While the Canadian government was instrumental in sponsoring the creation of Canadian literature, there were other forces which helped to determine the national canon.

By "canon," I am referring to the group of texts that are understood as the "classics" of Canadian literature.[2] It is this process of selection of "the best" texts which leads critics to question who has the power to identify certain texts as "classic" and to query their selection criteria. Frank Davey and Robert Lecker are two of the major combatants in this fight over our country's canon, whose own published disagreements, interestingly, first appeared in the pages of an American philosophy journal, Critical Inquiry (cf. volume 16, 1990). Robert Lecker argues that the creation of the Canadian canon is predominantly the work of the Canadian academy as the process of selection at the university level effects which texts get published and read more often (661). Frank Davey takes issue with Lecker over his omission of the economic and political factors of canon creation and further takes Lecker to task for being critical of the canon of which he, as co-owner of ECW Press, is an active creator (672, 679). Davey's argument that there exists more than one identifiable Canadian canon is tempting for critics eager to locate resistance within the academy (675); Lecker's point appears stronger, however, in his

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[2] The definition of the term "classic" is a point of contention in any discussion about canons. I am using it in quotation marks here to denote its non-critical usage to refer to books commonly thought to be "the best" literary representatives of any genre, age, nation.

response that the sheer amount of effort Davey expends trying to displace the dominant canon certainly points to its existence (684). As Lecker and Davey are primarily concerned about who and/or what has the power to create the canon, what their argument over Canadian canon(s) exemplifies is an anxiety over identifying power relationships in Canada (as well as within the academy). Who is defining our literary canon and, thus, defining us?

I should clarify here that "Canada" and "Canadian" are not stable terms in my understanding of them; they are constantly being redefined and recreated. The geographical boundaries which constitute the country "Canada" are fairly static (all separatist issues aside for the moment) but as we inhabit Canada with our minds as well as our bodies (Atwood 18), all other non-geographical referents of the signifier fluctuate. For example, a few years back I was wandering the streets of downtown Toronto with an acquaintance of mine who comes from the Anglo-American, middle-aged, middle class sector of Canadian society. We passed someone on the street who did not appear to stem from the same racial roots as said acquaintance, "Johnny." Johnny sighed and commented, "Sometimes I wonder what country I'm living in." I sighed and wondered at the blatant ignorance of Johnny's comment. How was it that only

people who resembled himself signified "Canadian" and "Canada" to him? I tried to pass off the incident as evidence of generational differences but was unsuccessful; there was something more. It was the first time I realized that my Canada was not necessarily the same as any other citizen's understanding of his/her country, that there were possibly as many Canadas as there were Canadians.

What further struck me about this incident was the danger of the power of definition. As Johnny's racial and financial background place him as a representative of the ruling class of society, his notions of "Canada" potentially reflect those of others in this category — others who have the power to enforce this definition of "Canada" through immigration laws, for example. An understanding of Canada as the Great White North takes on new meaning in this context to signify the country's citizens as well as its climate. The blank of Canadian identity to which I refer earlier appears menacingly white (blanc?) on paper. Those who do not reflect this preferred image of "Canadian" are likely to receive resistance when they attempt to gain and/or claim citizenship, as our Johnny Canuck officials are not willing to recognize anything other than whiteness as Canadian. It should be remembered here that our immigration system worked according to a White Canada Policy which,

based on a "national preference system" until 1968, encouraged only European immigrants; it was not until 1976 that the Canadian Immigration Act actually included a clause that explicitly prohibited the discrimination of immigration candidates on the basis of their racial and ethnic backgrounds (Jakubowski 10; 19).

The attempt to gain citizenship in this country is similar to the process of gaining entrance into its canon. One must reflect the proper image of Canada or Canadian to be selected. Canadian literature participates in a national identification process – it constructs a Canada to which its readers feel they do (or do not) belong. Those who control the canon, then, are more than likely to ensure the representation of themselves in this reflection of their country. In her comparative study of American and Canadian canons, Sarah Corse finds that a members-only type of nation building is integral to each country's literary canon:

> National literatures work by demonstrating what is important and special about "us," by distinguishing between "us" and "them" through the specification of boundaries marking both who and what are within the nation and who and what are outside the nation. (158)

By establishing "us" and "them" boundaries, Canadian fiction

plays a large role in the imagining of Canada (imagiNation?) and the citizen identification process. Readers may experience feelings of exclusion when they confront representations of other countries and inclusion when they read about their own land as Corse suggests. It is also possible, however, that a national canon can be exclusionary to some of its own citizens who identify with the "them" instead of the "us" of the text.

Who is the "us" represented in Canadian fiction? How does Canadian literature identify Canadians? In his second conclusion to the Literary History of Canada, Frye muses on the identification process:

> Perhaps identity only is identity when it becomes, not militant, but a way of defining oneself against something else. (101)

Canadian literature contains this need to define the country and its people against others. Frank Birbalsingh argues that by the mid-twentieth century the Canadian identity lost its consistency because of the alteration of the political and military situation which once linked us as a colony and later as a colonial nation (5). Our literature of that period reveals the tendency to define Canada against the United States and Britain, as the following excerpt from Hugh MacLennan's Barometer Rising demonstrates:

> . . . this bead-like string of crude towns and cities tied by nothing but railway tracks, this nation undiscovered by the rest of the world and unknown to itself, these people neither American nor English, nor even sure what they wanted to be, this unborn mightiness, this question mark . . . .(79)

Published in 1941, MacLennan's Barometer Rising attempts to respond with acceptable answers to the question mark that is the Canadian identity.

Set in Halifax during World War I, the novel depicts the lives of several Haligonians as they reflect upon the events of the war in Europe and deal with its effects on their lives in Canada.[3] The Canadians in MacLennan's novel view themselves as hybrids of British and American (read the United States) culture struggling for their own uniqueness. Entangled in the optimism which closes the novel is the protagonist's belief that the two Anglo and American "halves" of Canadian society will unite to form the "new order" once there are "enough Canadians like himself" (325). Apparently, and rather fortunately I might add, there were

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[3] The explosion of the munitions ship, Mont Blanc, in Halifax harbor and its devastating effects on the surrounding population and geography is, of course, the central homefront effect of the War around which the novel's plot revolves.

not enough Canadians like Neil MacRae; today Canada is anything but a country of united Anglo-American citizens. To note only one of the most glaring problems with this depiction of Canada, it effectively erases the heritage of many millions of people who lived in Canada at the end of the First World War and called themselves "Canadian" (not to mention those who have come to Canada since).

The connection between Johnny and MacLennan's anglo-centered constructions of Canada and its discrepancy with my own understanding of the current character of the nation caused me to wonder just what literature was currently being studied as a reflection of Canada. What began as a point of idle curiosity soon appeared to me to be ideal material for a thesis-length investigation of the invention and perpetuation of the Canadian identity. I have chosen to focus my study on the senior high school curriculum because it represents the education available to all Canadians and it is an under-theorized area.[4] As well, because high school curricula are under the control of provincial governments, through their Boards of Education, an

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[4] Until now, canonical study of Canadian literature has remained within the university structure and spectrum as the Davey/Lecker battle attests.

examination of the Canadian fiction[5] authorized and/or recommended for study in high schools across the country provides me with some understanding of which reflection(s) of the Canadian identity are authorized by provincial governments to be handed down to the next generation of Canadians. As there are national trends within provincial curricula, I would like to suggest that there is such a beast as a Canadian high school canon of fiction written in English. Assuming that Charles Altieri is correct in his assertion that a canon is an "institutional means of exposing people to a range of idealized attitudes" (27), it stands to reason that an investigation of canonical Canadian novels should result in an understanding of an idealized Canada - of what our home and native land has been, and considerably remains, to those who have had and continue to have the power to construct it.

Homi K. Bhabha suggests that the agency of a people lies in the oscillation between their positions as objects and subjects of national discourse (297). I am primarily

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[5]There are many possible sites of contestation in the definition of what constitutes "Canadian literature," as the battle over Rohinton Mistry's 1991 Governor-General's award for Such a Long Journey, a novel about life in India, exemplifies. The focus of my thesis requires that I study as Canadian literature the texts the provincial curricula consider to be Canadian which are generally books written by Canadians, with the exception of Margaret Craven, and about Canada.

interested in examining the pedagogical aspects of the curriculum which teaches students what it means to be Canadian (the "people as one," as singular object). Nevertheless, I do plan to complement my analyses with a consideration of the performative aspect of claiming identity as Canadian*s* (the "people as many," as multiple subjects) which occurs on the individual level of reading a novel (and where the possibility for resistance lies). The canonical trends within high school curricula reflect provincial governments' ideas of what "Canada" is. Whilst students are taught to recognize a certain "reflection" of their country, they are participating with their teacher, school board, and provincial government in the process of creating it.

My decision to look only at novels, and those written in English at that, has more to do with feasibility than any other consideration. While many provinces recommend the same short-story and poetry anthologies, not every province specifies which stories and/or poems are recommended. This lack of specificity makes it difficult to identify canonical trends within these genres. As more exactitude is possible in an examination of the patterns of novel selection in the curriculum, I have chosen to examine this aspect of the canon. I have limited myself to novels written in English

because my French speaking and reading abilities are bereft of the subtlety required to examine the Quebecois aspect of the Canadian identity. Acknowledging this short-coming is, I believe, less of a disservice to this segment of the Canadian population than would be any attempt on my behalf to fill in this gap in the present study. Accordingly, every reference I make to the "Canadian Identity" within this paper should be understood as "the Canadian identity as constructed in the English language." Canada's official multiculturalism statement assures its citizens that the nation has two official languages, but no official culture. It is interesting, however, that once I exclude one of the official languages from consideration in this thesis the texts in the remaining language seem to reflect a common dominant, if not official, white Anglo-Canadian experience as the Canadian experience.

My exclusion of the French-speaking Canadian voice is indicative of the difficulty inherent in attempting to mobilize any singular notion of national identity: it is always exclusionary and always provisional. Canada's lands are as vast as its people are diverse and as a result, Malcolm Ross argues, "the prospect of a simple monolithic 'national' or 'nationalist' culture does not exist" (178). The prospect may not exist, but the idea of it perpetuates.

Understanding Canadian identity as something singular is necessarily a myth, but a myth that exists, nevertheless, in the English-language canon. The notion of _the_ Canadian identity may be given up by citizens as illusory (and, perhaps, ill-advised), but provincial governments continue to sponsor the image through their support of certain Canadian texts on their curricula.

The analysis of provincial governmental agency and agendas in the making of the high school canon is possible because provincial and municipal governments regard Canadian content as an important selection criteria for materials in their curriculum. Alberta boasts in its novels and nonfiction bibliography that "[o]f the 127 titles on this 1994 list, 31 per cent are Canadian" (ix). British Columbia also reveals its nationalist colours in its explanation that its curriculum provides a framework to help students "explore Canadian and world literature as a way of knowing, developing personal values, understanding _our_ multicultural heritage, and broadening experience" (emphasis mine 5). Such glimpses at these governments' justifications of their curriculum reveal their underlying tenet that to read Canadian is to understand Canada.

While I predominantly refer to the high school canon as a result of provincial governmental sanction, there are

other factors at work in the selection process such as text availability, student and teacher interest, and communal demographics. It is possible for a parent to recommend a text s/he has read to a school board which may then submit a proposal. But this proposal must, ultimately, be accepted by the provincial government before it receives recommendation. While communities may not have power to authorize texts themselves, they certainly have sway over what gets taught in their schools and sometimes are successful in removing texts from the canon as the 1976 and 1985 controversies over the sexual content of The Diviners demonstrate. Every English Language Arts Co-ordinator with whom I spoke reminded me, rather emphatically, that text selection is often a matter of contentious cooperation between school boards and communities. The 1991 bibliography from the Saskatchewan Board of Education provides a good example of such a disclaimer (in bold face type):

> Teachers are advised that, although materials in the bibliography have been identified as suitable for the secondary level, materials selection remains a local responsibility. (V)

Worries about the reaction of communities to certain novels prompt the creators of the Albertan bibliography to include

a section on "challenges to book selection" in its appendix (143). While there may be an identifiable Canadian high school canon, it does lack complete communal consensus. Unfortunately, a consideration of the discrepancies between what is recommended/authorized by the government and what is taught in the schools is not within the scope of this paper. I have confined myself to an examination of the provincially authorized texts in order to focus on how various provincial governments prefer to present Canada to their people (rather than how "the people" choose to return such a gaze — although this is a worthwhile undertaking).

What follows is an attempt to clarify the research procedures which underlie my claims of an identifiable Canadian high school canon. To gather my information I contacted the English Language Arts Co-ordinator in each province's Ministry of Education and requested a copy of their most recent bibliographies of recommended material for study for grades ten through twelve. I received official curriculum documents from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland/Labrador, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia. From Manitoba and New Brunswick I received copies of their ordering catalogues. There are no entries from the Yukon or the Northwest Territories in my bibliography as they share curriculum and materials with

British Columbia and Alberta respectively. Ontario proved the most difficult province from which to obtain information as their municipal Boards of Education are responsible for the selection of English literature (the province recommends text books for every other subject but leaves the more controversial selection of English Language Arts literature to its municipal Boards of Education). I contacted Ken Draayer, the chair of Ontario's English Language Arts Network, and asked him for assistance but was informed that although the provincial government was "making more explicit statements to encourage [the study of] Canadian literature," there was no public bibliography of such materials to be found. My only option was to do a random sampling of the curricula from Ontario school boards: my statements about this province's syllabi rely on information provided by school boards in Scarborough, Renfrew, and Ottawa/Carleton, and the book offerings in the School Book Fairs ordering catalogue used by the Toronto District School Board.[6]

A quick glance at the bibliographies I collected

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[6] As of January 1st 1998, the five municipal school boards within Metropolitan Toronto amalgamated into the Toronto District School Board. As such, it was difficult to get any information about authorized book lists. It was only through a personal contact with a principal working in this newly formed district that I was able to receive a copy of an ordering catalogue. It would seem that Toronto is reluctant to make public its title selection.

reveals that the high school curriculum has undergone some change since the findings of the infamous 1978 Calgary conference which, Malcolm Ross explains, produced lists of Canadian literature intended to represent "the range of books now in general [classroom] use" ("Ballot" 137). That conference, as Hallvard Dahlie rightly predicts, "will forever be known as the one that produced the controversial list of a hundred novels" (2), because many of the participants viewed the list as an attempt to "impose a fixed and definitive canon of one hundred novels on an innocent public" (Ross "Ballot" 137). In hindsight, Dahlie wishes the lists were named the "most frequently taught novels" and not the "most important" Canadian novels. Twenty years later, the list of the top ten "most important" novels may no longer aptly be re-titled the most frequently taught novels (see Appendix A). While Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel has retained its #1 ranking on the list (it is recommended by every province but PEI), Watson's The Double Hook, which once held the sixth position on the list, is only recommended in Nova Scotia as a component of a Canadian literature course. As problematic as the Calgary conference's declaration of a Canadian canon may be, the lists are useful for measuring changes in representations of our national canon.

A comparison of Calgary's 1978 canon with the current (1997/98) high school canon reveals that the ethnic background of the canonical writers has not changed drastically in twenty years (see Appendices A and C). White writers still predominate as the authorized definers of this country. What has altered is the focus of some of the novels on different aspects of the Canadian experience; the books by Margaret Craven and Joy Kogawa add the experiences of Native and Japanese Canadians respectively to this canon. It is this alteration in the canon's content to include other voices and, thus, its altered representation of Canada, which is the primary focus of this study. As it is the most popular novel in both canons, however, I have chosen to begin my study with the representation of Canada presented in The Stone Angel as a point of comparison for the other novels.

The inclusion of these two novels about Native and Japanese Canadians suggests an alteration in the understanding of the Canadian experience – new voices are being authorized as Canadian. However, the national popularity of The Stone Angel suggests that the narrative of the Anglo-Canadian pioneer is central to the Canadian identity – and represents, perhaps, the dominant aspect of Canadian identity. As this pioneer narrative is a story

that Canadians continue to pass down to each other, an investigation of its representation of Canada seems necessary. Why is it this story about Canada that we choose to re-tell by re-reading? It is a story about a particular kind of pioneer life on the prairies, about the fight to retain Scottish heritage through successive generations in Canada, and about the struggles of old age. As a representative story about the white Canadian experience, it depicts the dominant understanding of the referent "Canadian" against which the other texts react.

Next to The Stone Angel in terms of cross-national popularity in the current high school canon is Joy Kogawa's Obasan. As the first novel to deal with the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II, Obasan became a tool for the redressment movement in the 1980s. When the Canadian government read its formal apology and redress to the Japanese Canadians in 1988, parts of the novel were read to the House of Commons (Kanefsky 15). The links between narration and nation could hardly be clearer; the federal government acknowledged the narration as it authorized the facts it presents. Obasan's overwhelming presence in the high school canon suggests the importance this novel has in

the (re)construction of Canadian history and identity.[7] Obasan demonstrates the difficulties inherent in identifying oneself as Canadian in a society which restricts that term to apply only to those of Anglo, not Japanese, descent; it narrates the story of one of Canada's Others.

A significant point of interest for me in the high school canon is the representation of different cultural identities and voices. Obasan carries an incredible weight as the only Asian Canadian novel within this canon and the only novel by a writer of colour recommended across the country (not including Native peoples). There are sections of Canadian society which receive scarcely any representation in the recommended fiction titles (for example, African Americans). The growth of interest in cross-cultural short-story anthologies promises to bring more colour to the literary mosaic of the Great White North. Representation in the novel canon is still uneven and, as more and more novels by writers of colour are being published, one can only assume that this oversight is due

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[7] Interestingly, British Columbia is the only province which does not recommend Obasan. It recommends instead a video, The Pool, which depicts the same experience using excerpts from the novel and interviews with Joy Kogawa and her father. As the personal involvement of watching a fifty-five minute film is much less than the study of a novel, one can only assume that B.C. is willing to acknowledge its history of racism but is not yet ready to examine it too closely.

primarily to the cultural blinders of those who authorize the books for study.

Of particular interest in the bibliographies is the identifiable effort to bring writings from First Nations peoples to the attention of high school students. The bibliography from Saskatchewan demonstrates a real concern with representing the Native voice; it specifically indicates with "I/M" (Indian, Inuit, Métis) entries which contain Native material and reminds teachers that it is a curricular policy to include such works (iii). Alberta touts that its revised bibliography contains "several books on this new list written by or about Natives or containing Native characters" (6). One of the Appendixes in the British Columbia document states that "there is a need to validate and substantiate First Nations identity" and encourages teachers to help their students "analyze portrayals and images of First Nations peoples in various works of literature" (C-7-8). The effort to include Native material is laudable, but the image of Natives within this new canon differs drastically with each region.

The most popular novel about Natives in Canada, I Heard the Owl Call my Name, is written by a white American woman, Margaret Craven. In fact, the second most recommended novel about Native Canadians, Riverrun, is also penned by a non-

Native, Peter Such. Both novels, in their comparisons between Native and non-Native life, appear to be as much about white Canada as the Native Canadian experience. This cultural narcissism is made most clear when Craven and Such's novels are compared to Thomas King's Medicine River and Ruby Slipperjack's Honour the Sun — novels by and about Native Canadians. While there is an identifiable move to authorize the Native experience as part of the Canadian identity, acknowledged by its representation on the canon, there exists some resistance to allow Native Canadians to speak for themselves (King's and Slipperjack's novels are only recommended by two provinces — see Appendix D).

Marlene Nourbese Philip, in her collection of essays on racism in Canada, wonders how many identities can dance on a maple leaf (17). If we understand the maple leaf to be the image of Canada projected by English Canadian fiction taught in high school curricula, I would like to frame this thesis as an examination of what identities are permitted to dance on the maple leaf. So, let the dance begin.

Chapter 1

Haggis and Hagar: Representing Canada's Culture(s) in Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel

M. Laurence: You know, I read Kipling, and what the hell did Kipling have to do with where I was living? And that isn't to say we shouldn't read widely, but it is a good thing to be able to read, as a child, something that belongs to you, belongs to your people. And you and I might have sort of subconsciously had a compulsion to set down our own background.

R. Kroetsch: I've suspected that often. We want to hear our own story. (Kroetsch 54)

In the above excerpt from an 1970 interview, Margaret Laurence and Robert Kroetsch concur that it is important for a people to read about their own background; they want to hear the story that belongs to them and tells of where they live. Kroetsch and Laurence, as writers, feel somewhat compelled to tell this story and the result of their storytelling is termed Canadian literature.[1] As Canadian writers, they create the story of our country, of our nation; however, it should be understood that a nation is

[1] While the definition of Canadian literature can be fairly contentious (is it defined by the author's citizenship, place of residence, or the setting of the novel?), for the purpose of this study I will define Canadian literature as texts by Canadians and about Canada.

itself an invention – it is an imaginary community to which all nationals feel they belong (Tully 68). The link between nation and narration is reciprocal; by writing stories about the nation, Laurence and Kroetsch are disseminating an idea of this imagined community and, thus, helping to create notions of nationhood.

The sentiment behind this fairly casual conversation between two Canadian writers is deceptively simple in its identification of the desire to read and write about Canada. Suspicions arise quickly at the wording of Kroetsch's last sentence: to which group does "we" refer and why is "story" singular? Does "we" signify Kroetsch and Laurence, Canadian writers, or Canadians in general? Similarly, to which of the preceding possible referents of "we" does the "story" belong? The ease with which Kroetsch's sentence may be complicated demonstrates the complexity of storytelling on a national level when a story (singular) is understood as representative of a people's backgrounds (plural): who has the power to imagine the national community and narrate the story of Canada to all Canadians? To consider this issue from a different angle, I have looked at high school syllabi to determine, first of all, which stories about Canada have been and are being told to all Canadians. I have discovered that one of the few stories which has a nation-wide audience

is Margaret Laurence's own The Stone Angel (see Appendix C).

The popularity of Laurence's first novel set in Canada is not simply restricted to the high school sphere.[2] In Sarah M. Corse's examination of Canadian university syllabi for 1988-89, she records The Stone Angel and Laurence's final novel about Manawaka, The Diviners, as two of the "top ten" most studied Canadian novels (70-71). In addition, the representation of The Stone Angel on all three of the lists generated by the 1978 Calgary conference should not go unnoticed: it holds first place in List A (100 most important works of fiction) and List B (top ten novels) and places eighth in List C (top ten works in any genre) (Steele 151-54). The Diviners also does well on Calgary's lists ranking eleventh on List A and tenth on List B. W. J. Keith dismisses the lists by suggesting they are the result of what a "possibly random cross section of teachers, critics, commentators, etc." considers to be significant (Steele 146). It is precisely this "cross section" which is important to my present study; it demonstrates that at this point in time, 1978, a cross section of Canadians from different vocational backgrounds felt that Laurence's two

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[2]Laurence's previous publications (fiction, non-fiction, and translation) focus on her experiences in Africa.

novels were important *Canadian* novels.

Laurence's remarks at the Calgary conference are humorous in hindsight: "I have a feeling that being on a list like that is the surest way to getting on a fast train to oblivion" (Steele 149). Twenty years after that conference and thirty years since McClelland and Stewart began to offer it as selection fifty-nine of their "New Canadian Library" series, The Stone Angel remains one of the most widely read Canadian novels. "Oblivion" does not seem to be the destination for Laurence or Hagar, the protagonist of The Stone Angel, as this novel continues to be read widely across Canada. In her memoirs, Laurence expresses surprise at how "the old lady [Hagar] is still helping me":

> I'm told that it [The Stone Angel] has in fact sold more copies in the New Canadian Library edition than any other of their titles. It is in print in paperback editions in Canada, the States, and England. . . .It has been used in geriatrics courses in Canadian hospitals to teach young nurses about the reality of old people. . . . (Dance 166)

As well as its use as a case study of old age, The Stone Angel is recommended by the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, an "allied organization of the

Modern Language Association," as an example of "Great Plains Literature" (Hoyer). In their own Canadian Encyclopedia, McClelland and Stewart include in their entry on The Stone Angel a description of Hagar's life as "a rich fictional composite of actual women's lives in small towns on the Prairies" (Besner). As its representation and use in medical, literary, and publishing/advertising circles demonstrates, The Stone Angel's realistic portrayals of Hagar, an aged protagonist, and Manawaka, the small Prairie town which forms its setting, are central to the reception of this novel as an important Canadian text.

What is it about The Stone Angel that has caused provincial governments to recommend its study in Canadian classrooms virtually since its publication? As I have noted, The Diviners, another of Laurence's Manawaka novels, also fared well on the "canons" identified by the Calgary conference and Corse's research.[3] What can account for the preference of The Stone Angel over The Diviners in most provincial high school curricula, keeping in mind the continuing popularity of The Diviners at the university level? The problem appears to be political angst over the

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[3] I use quotation marks here to make clear my view that the Calgary conference's lists and Corse's research reveal a popular canon of Canadian texts but that these canons are not necessarily *the* Canadian canon.

reaction of certain segments of the Canadian population. Interestingly, it is the novel which appeals more to notions of cultural nationalism, The Diviners, whose use in the classroom is contested; however, the point of contention is the novel's depiction of sexuality, not nationality.

In 1976, The Diviners was pulled off high school curricula in Lakefield and Orangeville, Ontario and unsuccessfully challenged in Kings County, Nova Scotia (McMaster). Two years later, Huron County, Ontario banned the same novel. In the words of the author, the complaints against her novel were that it was "obscene, pornographic, immoral, and blasphemous" (Laurence Dance 265).[4] Although Lakefield made an unsuccessful attempt to ban it in 1984, The Stone Angel's place on any curriculum has been less contested and, thus, a safer choice than The Diviners for any Ministry of Education seeking support from those it serves. Apparently, the representation of the lack of unity within the populace is less disturbing than the representation of a woman's active sexuality which represents attempts at unity between two Canadian cultures (or is this Scots-Métis miscegenation part of the text's

[4] One wonders to what extent the depiction of contemporary Canada is more apt to incite controversy than a more historically distanced one, as The Diviners is the only one of Laurence's Manawaka novels written in the present.

"immorality"?). As both books deal with female protagonists recounting their lives in the same fictional town, Manawaka, but only one of the novels is consistently recommended for study, it becomes apparent that there is a third component of The Stone Angel, alongside the aforementioned aspects of realism of person and place, which makes it an acceptable example of Canadian fiction, and by implication, an acceptable presentation of Canada — the story it tells and the view of Canada it presents. Before I examine the content of the novel in terms of its seeming political neutrality in its representation of Canada, however, I would like to sketch out the place of The Stone Angel in Canadian literary history.

In virtually every interview, Margaret Laurence is asked to name which Canadian writers and novels she perceives to be her greatest influences. Her usual response is to mention Sinclair Ross's As For Me and My House and W.O. Mitchell's Who Has Seen the Wind and to explain that their importance lies in their demonstration of the possibility of writing out of a prairie background (Gibson 198). In a characteristically pointed remark, Margaret Atwood clarifies further the importance of such prairie prose progenitors: they showed Laurence that the "stories she wanted to tell didn't have to be about Walter Scott

knights or New York sophisticates" ("Face" 22). The effect of the dominance of British and American literature on Canadians' conceptions of fiction could hardly be more succinctly, or perhaps more ironically, referenced. The situation is, in fact, paradoxical: one needed to read about Canada to realize that Canada was worth writing about. Laurence foregrounds this fear of presenting Canada's prairies to the American gaze in the final two stanzas of her poem "Via Rail and Via Memory":

> the train   moves west
> the American Lady says
> "Are you native-born Canadian?"
> Yes, I say, I'm surely that.
> Well, she says, can I tell her
> and her friend, Vancouver-bound,
> when we'll reach
> the more interesting country?
>
> I smile   gently I hope
> because she couldn't have known
> and say
> "I was born and grew up
> hereabouts
> and for me this is
> the more interesting country." (Dance 277)

The speaker of the poem, closely allied with the voice of Laurence, proudly declares her nationality and, like Ross and Mitchell, presents the prairies as "interesting country" to hostile American eyes. As comparable as the situation of the speaker and these mid-century Canadian writers may be, Ross and Mitchell faced one more hostile audience — the Canadian public.

For Margaret Laurence, writers play an important role in generating their readers' interest in their own country; she believes writers create national awareness and appreciation. She credits the "1st generation of Canadian writers," Morley Callaghan, Gabrielle Roy, and Ernest Buckler (as well as Ross and Mitchell), with "developing the consciousness of their own people and culture" (Sullivan 79); they taught their readers to view Canada as a country and setting worthy of interest. As a member of what she might refer to as the 2nd generation of Canadian writers, Margaret Laurence moved a step beyond such a creation of national awareness through literature to invent a national mythology. As George Woodcock notes, The Stone Angel was published during a formative time for Canadian fiction and Canadian nationalism:

> Laurence came at a time when MacLennan's didacticism had served its purpose: what we needed now were not so much arguments to convince us, as myths to sustain our convictions. In creating and peopling her fictional town of Manawaka, Margaret Laurence offered a powerful myth of our country as it could exist, not in the statistics of the scientific historians, but in the imaginations of artists and their responsive audiences. (16)

Laurence's myth of the Canadian nation continues to sustain certain convictions about Canada three decades after its publication.[5]

What is it about The Stone Angel that is identifiably Canadian, or more correctly, what is the Canada which The Stone Angel makes identifiable? Writing The Stone Angel was a conscious "spiritual" return to her roots which Laurence felt she needed after living in and writing about Africa (Kroetsch 47); she desired to write about her own people and her own background. Laurence explains that she relies on her people, Canadians, to validate the truthfulness of her depiction of her own Canadian background:

> [T]here is another dimension of writing — the ancestral thing, the family background, the trueness of the idiom. This is something where only your own people can say yes, you've done it or you haven't done it. The feel of place, the tone of speech, how people say things, the concepts your grow up with, the things that have been handed to you by your parents and your

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[5] For instance, a recent issue of Elm Street, a magazine "for Canadian women," jokingly refers to the scene in The Stone Angel where Hagar decorates her hair with June bugs as a possible genesis of Canadian women's concern with fashion. Laurence's "old lady" is firmly rooted in our imaginations, as the article writer's reliance on a recognizable figure, Hagar, demonstrates.

> grandparents and so on – I have to measure the truthfulness of what I'm saying in these areas against my own people's response. (Gibson 194)

The elements of her realist fiction which Laurence desires to be most accurate concern heritage (of stories, objects, mannerisms, and ideas) and place. The continual placement of the novel on high school curricula seems to be a form of verification of this truth and idiom which Laurence seeks.

Alberta's annotated listing for The Stone Angel boasts that "[t]he background [of the novel] provides a view of western Canadian life from the 1920s through to the 1960s" (112). As there are precious few other titles listed on Alberta's curriculum which deal with the same geographical space and historical time[6], it is not a stretch to suggest that The Stone Angel presents students with the view of western Canadian life. B. C. and Saskatchewan, the only other provinces which include annotations for each text

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[6] W. O. Mitchell's Who Has Seen the Wind is the only other novel recommended by Alberta which encapsulates some of the same time period and place (Saskatchewan 1930s); it focuses on a Scots-Irish Canadian family struggling with the effects of the Depression and small town prairie politics. The setting and cultural backgrounds of the texts are similar although the age and sex of the protagonists vary: Who Has Seen the Wind is a coming of age story about Brian O'Connal; The Stone Angel records the final days and memories of Hagar Shipley. The town politics in the two novels differ only in the racial background of the social outcasts who are Chinese Canadians and Métis in Wind and Angel respectively.

listing, specify the novel as Canadian literature and indicate Hagar's old age and her proud personality as points of interest. These three annotations identify the protagonist's personality and the story's setting as the most noteworthy aspects of the novel. Robert Lecker asserts that "most students and general readers persist in reading representationally; they want to find in literature a reflection of their world" (99). Assuming that Lecker is correct and that the major trend in the teaching of realistic literature is dominated by notions of reflection, it is safe to presume that the specification of The Stone Angel as Canadian literature encourages students to find a reflection of their country in this text.[7] An analysis of the social and cultural attitudes of Manawaka and Hagar reveals that The Stone Angel "reflects" Canada as a predominantly Scottish-based society in which there is little tolerance for racial and economic difference.

As Laurence wrote five novels based around events in the same town, Manawaka has attained the semi-mythological status as a literary region comparable to Robertson Davies' Deptford and William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha (see Coger and

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[7] As the fairly rapid loss of interest in Sheila Watson's The Double Hook may demonstrate, it is also possible to consider that the exclusion of certain novels from the canon has to do with the impossibility of reading these texts representationally.

Lennox). John Lennox argues that the mythologization of small town experiences is a recognizable trait of North American literature but that the "social mythology of small town Scots – mercantile, practical, aggressive and proud – is distinctively Canadian" (194). Using Lennox's formula, it can be said that Hagar Currie, growing up in Manawaka under the stern tutelage of her Scottish immigrant father, Jason, has a distinctively Canadian upbringing. Margaret Laurence would agree with that statement; she believes that <u>The Stone Angel</u> is "in certain ways" a "typical rendering of the Canadian experience" (Fabre 196). The pervasiveness of the Scottish-Canadian experience in Canadian literature can be traced from the works of Sarah Jeannette Duncan through to Hugh MacLennan (Thomas "Planted" 8). By the time Laurence writes about such an experience, it has become "typical" and remains central to her literature and to the Canadian high school canon. Indeed, it is Hagar's recognition of the trappings of her Scottish upbringing which provides the final climactic moment of recognition towards which the narrative moves.

This epiphany, or moment of recognition, is studied extensively in most essays on <u>The Stone Angel</u>, so I will not belabor the point here. What concerns me is simply the cultural baggage which weighs upon Hagar and is the focus of

this self-revelation:

> Pride was my wilderness and the demon that led me there was fear. I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched. Oh, my two, my dead. Dead by your own hands or by mine? (292).

Although it provides the English language with yet another cliché, the concept of "Scottish pride" provides Hagar with her Achilles' Heel. Hagar's sin is also spiritual pride – it is the chain forged strongly within her by her father who led by example (that is, Hagar feels the stone angel marking her mother's grave is more a monument to her father's proud dynasty than to the woman who lies beneath it). The "two" she refers to are her husband, Bram, and her son, John, both of whom suffer from her need to keep up appearances.

Hagar's notions of propriety are all handed down by her father. Hagar grows up listening to stories of how Jason Currie pulled himself up from his bootstraps in his progression from a seventeen year old Scottish immigrant who came to Canada "without a bean" to the owner of the first store in Manawaka and of the second brick house (6-14). Jason Currie ingrains the importance of "having backbone" in Hagar so deeply that she cannot even "play" at being her

mother to comfort her dying brother:

> ...all I could think of was that meek woman I'd never seen, the woman Dan was said to resemble so much and from whom he'd inherited a frailty I could not help but detest, however much a part of me wanted to sympathize. To play at being her – it was beyond me. (25)

Even the semblance of weakness is unthinkable to Hagar. This ever-present need to appear strong keeps her from crying when she is whipped by her father and later prevents her from weeping when her son dies: "I wouldn't cry in front of strangers, whatever it cost me" (9-10;242). Pride prevents Hagar all her life from communicating emotion to those around her[3] and effectually distances her family from her. When Marvin, her eldest son who lives and cares for her during the last seventeen years of her life, remarks to a nurse that Hagar is "a holy terror," Hagar reflects that this comment is "more than I could now reasonably have expected out of life" (304-05). And the reader, torn like Marvin between tenderness and anger towards the protagonist,

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[3]A perfect example of Hagar's rather selfish nature (which contributes to her stoic appearance) is her unwillingness to show Bram that she enjoys intercourse with him – a tidbit of information he would have appreciated as his guilt-ridden pre-coital apologies make clear. Hagar is incapable of demonstrating physical, as well as emotional, intimacy.

can do nothing but agree.

Along with pride in emotional stoicism, Hagar also inherits her father's pride in social standing. Although he was once without an income, Jason Currie is careful that his children make friends within the upper echelons of society. Such social selection is demonstrated in his emendations to the guest list for his children's parties:

> [Father] went over the list of intended guests and crossed off those he thought unsuitable. Among those of my age, Charlotte Tappen [doctor's daughter] was always asked – that went without saying. Telford Simmons [funeral parlor owner's son] was allowed, but only just. Henry Pearl was an awkward one – his people were decent, but being farmers they wouldn't have the proper clothes, Father decided, so it would only embarrass them for us to send an invitation. Lottie Drieser [daughter of a single, unmarried, woman] was never invited to our parties. . . . (22)

Hagar learns from her father the importance of befriending those of prominent social standing and instills this tenet in her own parenting practices. After they move to Vancouver, John knows just how to please his mother -- by making the right kind of friends. Unable to do so in real

life, or perhaps not interested doing so, John creates stories about his friends David Connor (the son of a doctor) and James Reilly (son of an undertaker) (157). What was acceptable to Jason is acceptable to Hagar. As long as the Currie and Shipley children are spending time with the offspring of doctors and undertakers, they are in the right crowd. Hagar is certain the friends are "nice" because the knowledge of their fathers' names and professions indicates to her that they are from acceptable social and racial backgrounds. For Hagar and her father the right crowd is the rich white crowd.

Hagar's fierce pride in social standing, even though it becomes more a memory of things past (when she was a Currie) than a reflection of the present (as a Shipley, or "Shitley" (131) as Bram is known in town), distances her from her "two men." When Bram and Hagar are first married, they go into town each Saturday but Hagar, embarrassed by what her town-dwelling friends might think or say about Bram's language and manners, eventually foregoes the outing. Their marriage begins to weaken due to Hagar's worry over and Bram's disdain of appearances and, ultimately, it is Hagar's fear of public disgrace which acts as the catalyst for her separation from Bram. Mistaken by Lottie's child as the "egg woman" (132), Hagar is mortified and, after discovering

Bram looking for handouts at her father's old store, resolves to leave him and move to Vancouver with John (136). Hagar's desire for the appearance of respectability overrides her desire for a happy marriage and, thus, inhibits it.

Hagar's notions of class also inhibit her son's chances at happiness. Although Hagar becomes a housekeeper, a role she once frowned upon because of its low social standing, she can't bear the thought that her son is dating Lottie's daughter (204). Lottie has risen in social standing by marrying Telford Simmons, who has become the bank manager and is the town mayor by the end of the book, but this alteration in her status does not alter Hagar's bias. Hagar still views the woman as "No Name Lottie" from her childhood and feels justified in "flying her roots" at Lottie by reminding her of her social status as a child (204; 210). Hagar's concern that John and Arlene, Lottie's daughter, will be poor and have children "clustered like fish spawn. . . with running noses and drooping handed-down pants four sizes too large" is an image which outweighs her concern for her son's happiness (212). She'd rather he stay single and poor than be married to a descendent of the Dreiser family (and possibly content) and poor. The anticipated separation of the lovers causes John to resume drinking — an act which

ultimately kills him and an event for which Hagar feels responsible.

It is not until Hagar goes to Shadow Point that she finally casts off, if only temporarily, her prideful worries over appearances. Sitting in the fish cannery, Hagar decorates her hair with dead June bugs and crowns herself "queen of moth millers, empress of earwigs" (216). Her bemusement with such self-deprecating titles demonstrates that although she has loosened her grip on social propriety, she has not entirely lost grip on reality either (although her lapses into her memory do lengthen at this point in the narrative). When another person discovers her, Hagar remembers her appearance and feels she could "die with mortification" but, importantly, does not remove the bugs from her hair. She asks Murray F. Lees to excuse her appearance but makes no effort to alter it (220).

Hagar spends this evening getting drunk and swapping stories with a reformed Redeemer's Advocate. But it is her acceptance of this stranger, more than her acceptance of his cheap wine, which points towards the loosening of her chains of pride.[9] She realizes that he is not her "type" of

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[9] Helen Buss, looking at Lees' wine and Hagar's soda crackers as images for communion, argues that Murray Lees in fact frees Hagar's conscience from the past and enables her to seek a second birth. (26)

person: "I'd heard vaguely of the Redeemer's Advocates, but never at firsthand before. I'd never had dreamed of having anything to do with such people" (230). Not only does she tolerate and encourage "such a person's" disclosure about his son's death but she reciprocates in kind and finally voices her emotions about John's death. At this point, the woman who "turned to stone" the night her son died finally melts this restrictive mold with tears of mourning. She doesn't intend to reveal this part of her history but realizes she's "not sorry [she's] talked to him. Not sorry at all, and that's remarkable" (245). For Hagar, with her inherited Scottish stoicism and refusal to be emotional in public, this event is indeed remarkable.

Most literary critics regard this scene at Shadow Point as the climax of the novel. Both the past and present narratives unite here once Murray releases Hagar from her guilt by "playing" John and accepting an apology which came too late for John, but is fairly timely for the terminally ill Hagar. She falls back asleep "content" — an adjective that could not apply to Hagar in any previous point of her narration (248). Resolution about John's death is not her only release, however. Hagar, in a complete reversal of behaviour, temporarily puts off worries about her appearance and other people's backgrounds in order to satisfy her

emotional needs. She gains release from her restrictive notions of decorum and reflects that her meeting with Lees is "a kind of mercy" (253). It is significant that only through letting down her guard about social stigmas is Hagar able to receive such absolution.

In her final moments of consciousness, Hagar remains as proud as ever and cannot ask for religious absolution. "Bless me or not, Lord, just as You please, for I'll not beg" is what suffices for an attempt at religious appeal in Hagar's mind (307). Hagar is more interested in thinking over details of her funeral than asking for pardon:

> If I could, I'd like to have a piper play a pibroch over my grave. *Flowers of the Forest* – is that a pibroch? How would I know? I've never even set foot in the Highlands. My heart's not there. And yet – I'd wish it, as I'm gathered to my fathers. How could anyone explain such an absurdity? (306)

Readers only need to refer to Hagar's upbringing to understand this "absurdity." Jason Currie was proud of his Scottish roots and passed the lore of the Highlanders on to his children who could, once prompted, recite the particulars of the Currie clan's sept, "Clanranald MacDonalds," pipe music, "Clanranald's March," and war cry,

"Gainsay who dare" (15). The young Hagar, so enthralled with the Highlander mythology espoused by her father, wishes she were born in Scotland where she believes every man was a gentleman who lived in a castle and spent his days flailing about with claymores and his nights dancing in eightsome reels (15). As she is brought up to appreciate her Scots-Highlander heritage, it makes sense that Hagar would think of having a pibroch played at her funeral. That Hagar feels her thoughts are "absurd" signals to the reader that her once steadfast belief in the mythology of the Currie clan has altered somewhat.

Hagar attempts to raise her children with the stories of their Highlander ancestors. Believing John is more of a Currie than a Shipley, Hagar chooses to focus on him, instead of Marvin, as a receptor of the stories and of the Currie plaid-pin. Unfortunately for Hagar, John is less than grateful for this generational gift: "John only put the pin in his pocket. Perhaps I should have given it to him when he was older" (125). This third generation Canadian cares neither for the stories nor for the traditions of his ancestors from a distant country; he later trades the pin for a jack-knife. Although John later asks Bram to tell the story of the Shipley name, no such a mythology is forth-coming; Bram jokes that he was born in a barn and compares

himself to Jesus (125). The only ancestral myths which receive attention within The Stone Angel are those which Hagar attempts to pass on to her son and, indirectly, to us — those of the Scots-Highlanders.

Margaret Laurence, through her selection and presentation of material, presents readers with a story of Scottish settlement in Canada that spans three generations. Hagar, by retelling stories about her father and his fierce pride in his Scots-Highlander roots and her attempts to pass this knowledge to her own children, presents the tale of the Scottish Canadian's struggle to pass his/her heritage on to future generations of Canadians. The continual recommendation of The Stone Angel on Canadian high school curricula ensures that the story of the Scottish Canadian experience in the first half of this century is passed on to successive generations of Canadians. Clara Thomas argues that the story of Scottish settlers in Canada is one of the most pervasive mythologies in Canadian literature ("Planted" 8); by retaining this novel on the high school canon, provincial governments maintain the perpetuation of this mythology. The pervasiveness of The Stone Angel on high school canons undoubtedly has to do with its representation of this aspect of Canadian history; it tells the story of white settlement in the west through the point of view of a

woman representative of "a whole generation of English-speaking Canadians" (Woodcock qtd. Morely 88). What is important to keep in mind is the racial background of this generation. To some extent, Laurence's novel narrates the early history of the Great White North and its popularity is due to this reflection of Canada; however, there are other ancestral stories within this novel which are pointed to, although not told, through Hagar's tale.

We catch a glimpse of other Canadian histories in the first three pages of the novel. Hagar's description of the Manawaka cemetery points directly to the history of Native peoples, a history which exists in the margins of the novel as the wild flowers grow to form the perimeter of the graveyard:

> . . . although they were held back at the cemetery's edge, torn out by loving relatives to keep the plots clear and clearly civilized, for a second or two a person walking there could catch the faint, musky, dust-tinged smell of things, before the portly peonies and the angels with rigid wings, when the prairie bluffs were walked through only by Cree with enigmatic faces and greasy hair. (5)

The Cree, like wild flowers, were uprooted by immigrants

intent on making room for their own roots. Hagar's comments on their appearance aside (but not ignored), the Cree make their way into this Canadian's retelling of her own history. Their descendants, the Métis, however, are by no means treated with the same reverence Hagar affords to the descendants of the Scots-Highlanders. Historically alike as these two groups are, having both suffered through deracination policies and governmentally enforced relocation plans (Nicholson 166), there was little acknowledgement of such a kinship stemming from the Scottish immigrants who, Patricia Morely explains, viewed the Métis as "not merely uneducated but *improvident*" (144). Hagar, as a fictional descendant of these settlers, perpetuates this belief in the inferiority of the Métis.

The Métis are outcasts in the intricate workings of the Manawakan social hierarchy. Their low social standing is indicative in Lottie's attempt to slander Bram in front of Hagar by suggesting that not only is he "common as dirt" but he's also "been seen with half-breed girls" (47). To keep company with a Métis woman, the insult implies, is worse than to be thought "common." Although Hagar ignores this comment and proceeds to date Bram, she is uncomfortable when she sees John out with the Tonnerre boys whom she describes as "French half-breeds, the sons of Jules, who'd once been

Matt's [her brother's] friend, and I wouldn't have trusted any of them as far as I could spit" (127). As Hagar's distrust stems from a knowledge only of the boys' race, it is clear that she has inherited the racial prejudice of her father who "wasn't having any son of his gallivanting around the country with a half-breed" (20).

Hagar is unsuccessful in keeping John from associating with the Tonnerres. He actually trades the Currie pin to Lazarus Tonnerre for his knife. This interchange could possibly symbolize the intertwining of the Scots-Canadian and Métis heritage and their acceptance of one another. However, John does not fully appreciate the object he receives in the exchange and, rather carelessly, sells it for a package of cigarettes (177). It is possible that Laurence has left an opening here through which readers can critique the callous manner with which Canadians, like John, have watched Métis history and artefacts go "up in smoke." This message is more obvious in The Diviners, a novel Laurence admits is the most political and historical of her Manawaka cycle (Fabre 196), in which the pin and the knife are recovered and bequeathed to Piquette, a character of Scots-Canadian and Métis heritage who appreciates all of her cultural mythologies. Laurence adamantly asserts that the Métis "*are* our ancestors [and] we have to understand them a

hell of a lot better than we do right now" (Lever 30). Unfortunately, the Canadian student given The Stone Angel rather than The Diviners must read fairly closely to discover this tenet.[10] What appears on the surface of the text is simply their stance as outcasts in Manawakan, and by extension Canadian, society.

The other racial history contained within the pages of The Stone Angel is that of Asian Canadians, or those to whom Hagar refers as "celestials" (156). When Hagar moves to Vancouver to start her life without Bram, she works as a housekeeper for a man who made his money in shipping goods as well as people. The attitude Hagar assumes in recounting what must have been a horrible experience for those involved once again demonstrates the callousness with which the lives of Asian-Canadians were treated by other Canadians:

> He's been in shipping and said they used to bring Oriental wives here, when the celestials were forbidden to bring their women, and charge huge sums for passage, and pack the females like tinned

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[10] Another troubling aspect of the representation of the Métis in The Stone Angel is the treatment of alcoholism: Bram buys lemon extract to sell it at a higher price to the "Indians"; Hagar is initially attracted to Bram because of his "Indian looks" (45) and he dies of alcoholism; as the only member of his generation to forge a connection with the Métis, John dies because of a drunken bet with Lazarus Tonnerre that he can drive across the bridge (177).

> shrimp in the lower hold, and if the Immigration men scented the hoax, the false bottom was levered open, and the women plummeted. They knew the chance when they began, he assured me. The husbands were always angry, both women and passage money lost, but who could help it? And Mr. Oatley would shrug and smile, begging my laughter and my approbation. And I'd oblige, for who could help it? (156)

The repetition of the question "who could help it?" may lead the reader to attempt to discover just *who* could have "helped" the situation rather than oblige those who profited from the loss of life. Hagar, however, does not encourage such an investigation. Like the stone angel in the cemetery, and like thousands of Canadians, Hagar prefers to turn a blind eye to the horrendous treatment of Asian-Canadians. As point of view naturally coincides with the sympathies and interests of the narrator, what we read is a story of gain for white Canadians, and not the more appropriate story of loss suffered by Asian-Canadians.

When Hagar shares her semi-private hospital room with Sandra Wong, she recalls Mr. Oatley's stories and how she in turn profited from his wealth: "Maybe I owe my house to her grandmother's passage money. There's a thought" (287). The

thought remains unvoiced, however. There is the possibility of sharing a story, but Hagar denies it and the moment is lost. Nevertheless, Hagar is able to form a reciprocal relationship with Sandra. Sandra gets water for Hagar and closes her curtains when she wants to sleep (302): Hagar, in what she recalls as one of the two free acts of her life, fetches the "grail-like" bed pan for Sandra who is rendered immobile by her operation (301). Hagar perceives the bed-pan incident as a joke "yet a joke only as all victories are, the paraphernalia being unequal to the event's reach" (307). For Hagar, the reach of the event could be its standing as one of the only free acts in her life. For the reader who chooses to be acutely aware of the cultural dynamics of the incident (a Scots-Canadian woman bringing an Asian-Canadian the "grail" – cup of life (and release), the event reaches even farther than the scope of Hagar's life to suggest the possibility of beneficial cultural exchange amongst Canadians. It should be remembered, however, that Hagar remains unaware of these cross-cultural possibilities.

I should clarify what I mean here by cultural exchange. My concept of beneficial cultural exchange is based on James Tully's notion of "intercultural interaction" which he defines as the negotiation, reimagining, and overlapping of cultural relations (54). The hospital scenes offer very

interesting points of view of the possibility of intercultural exchange. Placed in a ward with thirty other women of differing ages, religions, classes and racial backgrounds, Hagar protests at first, but later experiences disappointment when she learns she is to be moved to a semi-private room: "I feel a quick sense of loss, as though I'd been cast out" (280). She doesn't want to leave because she's grown accustomed to her new environment. She has found a degree of comfort in the sounds of the women around her, specifically Elva Jardine (1), Mrs. Reilly (2), and Mrs. Dobereiner (3), and eventually adds her voice to their night whisperings (4):

> *Tom, don't you worry none —* [1]
> *Mother of God, pray for us now and at the hour of —* [2]
> *Mein Gott, erlöse mich* [11] [3]
> *You mind that time, Tom? I mind it so well —* [1]
> *I am sorry for having offended Thee, because I love —* [2]
> *Erlöse mich von meinen Schmerzen —* [3]
> *Bram!* [4] (275)

The second time she hears this chorus of voices, Hagar joins

[11] The translations of Mrs. Dobereiner's lines are: "My God, deliver me" and "Deliver me from my pain."

it to voice part of her pain and her past. What prevents this moment from being a true exchange is the fact that all the women are asleep and, thus, unconscious of their interaction. However, the reader is able to see the possibility of such interaction and may consider that it is the potential of an interactive, and supportive, community which Hagar can sense and which causes her to regret her initial decision to ask for a semi-private room. Nevertheless, it is once Hagar meets Sandra in the new room that the only positive intercultural interaction in the book, flawed as it may be,[12] takes place.

Such an exchange is possible between Hagar and Sandra, but is truncated between John and Lazarus. Hagar eventually learns that she needs to release herself from her chains of pride, but the realization comes too late in life. The reader can see how content Hagar is when she works past her racist and classist assumptions (I am thinking of the exchanges with Murray and Sandra); she is able to aid the other person and herself in the process. What troubles me is the fact that Hagar never works through her prejudice

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[12] Both women renegotiate their initial opinions of one another to form a friendship based on a grandmother/ granddaughter relationship (Sandra actually reminds Hagar of Tina – is this Hagar realizing a shared heritage?). But this relationship is more of a crutch than a reimagining of possible interactions.

against the Métis. If, as Laurence avows, hundreds of readers feel that Hagar is a fair portrayal of their grandmothers (Kroetsch 48), how does The Stone Angel enable these readers to deal with the inheritance of racism? More at issue is the question how do high school teachers encourage students to deal with a novel that tells the story of Canada from an unapologetic Scots-Canadian point of view?

The answer is, perhaps, that there is nothing wrong with this point of view as Hagar's eyes in many ways represent the gaze that dominates the telling of Canadian history; neither focuses on the stories of non-white Canadians. The Stone Angel presents a tale and a teller to which the Canadian public is accustomed to attending – the voice and (hi)story of white Canada – it is up to the careful reader to locate the lacunae Laurence has left and it is up to our teachers to encourage this endeavor in an effort to recover (uncover?) other Canadian histories. Before multiculturalism was implemented in Canadian curricula, The Stone Angel could be taught unproblematically as the narration of the settler mythology of the dominant Canadian society; Hagar could be situated as our grandmother telling us our history as the assumption of the homogenous white "we" of Canadian society, to which this "our" belongs, was relatively unchallenged. The novel may continue to be

studied under current multicultural educational policies if it is presented under the guise of the narration of one of Canada's cultures (although it is still the dominant, if not "official" culture) and attention is drawn to the glimpses of other Canadian cultures through Hagar's narrative.

Looking at her role as a Canadian writer, Laurence reflects on the many stories that have to be told in order to get a truer view of Canada:

> I think that one thing that Canadian writing is doing is to define our roots, our ancestors, our myths, where we came from and it's only out of this that we can understand who we are. This, of course, has to be done in a very specific way and has to include all our ancestors which are a varied lot of ancestors. (Lever 30)

The Stone Angel tells the story of Scottish roots, ancestors, and myths. It points to other ancestors and their stories but does not attempt to fill in these gaps (and rightfully so). However, gaps in curricula across the country make it possible that Hagar's story is the only settler story Canadian students are taught — and we already know the biases which come with her story. It is important that students learn about Scottish Canadian heritage, but it is also important that these stories get told along with

others and that Manawaka does not become understood as *the* microcosm of Canadian society. Margaret Laurence agrees that Hagar does not "get away [from] her particular sort of cultural heritage" (Gibson 203). Readers can see how it inhibits her, and how free she is when she looks beyond it, but Hagar "rampant with memory" would not encourage us to critique it – "Gainsay who dare!" would no doubt be her reply. Hopefully, Canadians do dare to contradict Hagar's view of Canada – we have everything to gain.

Chapter Two

Beneath the Iceberg: Attending the Floe of Consciousness in Joy Kogawa's Obasan

> Joy Kogawa: How does a person get to the place where they can speak? My experience of being able to speak, the community's ability to speak, grew out of two engines on the train – one in front and one behind. The one in front was love, it pulled you along, and the one behind was anger, it pushes you along. And I think if you do not have enough of either, you will not speak. (Pool)

In her explanation of the movement towards speech, Joy Kogawa credits the emotions of love and anger as catalysts. In any explanation of the movement of the Japanese-Canadian community towards public speeches on the topic of redress, critics often credit Joy Kogawa as a catalyst. Indeed, Kogawa's Obasan was so integral to the redress movement, as the first novel to deal with the experience of the internment of Japanese-Canadians during World War II, that excerpts were read from it in the House of Commons the day the Canadian government issued its formal apology to the Japanese-Canadian community (Kanefsky 15). There are other books that could have been read from that day which deal with the internment of Japanese-Canadians, such as Ken Adachi's The Enemy that Never Was, Ann Sunahara's Politics of Racism, and Barry Broadfoot's Years of Sorrow, Years of

Shame. Interestingly, Kogawa's work of historical fiction is chosen to represent this particular experience over the other authors' non-fiction. Although primarily a fictional account of a young woman confronting the gaps the internment and dispersal policies created in her personal and family life (symbolized primarily by unanswered questions about her mother's absence), Obasan quickly became the accepted history of the experience of the whole Japanese-Canadian community during that time. Support of Kogawa's "fictionalized" version of these events is demonstrated by the awards the novel has won (Books in Canada's "First Novel Award" and the Canadian Authors' Association's "Book of the Year" award), its reading in the house of Commons, and its appearance on high school syllabi across the country.

Obasan is recommended for high school study in every province excepting Prince Edward Island and British Columbia (See Appendix C). It is somewhat disheartening that the one province that should be studying Obasan, British Columbia, does not approach the subject of the internment through a novel-length study. Instead, the B.C. Ministry of Education has approved The Pool: Reflections of the Japanese Canadian Internment to cover this event in Canadian history – it is a fifty-five minute film about the internment based on Kogawa's poems, selections from Obasan, and interviews with

the author and her father (a comparative analysis of both "texts" appears towards the end of this chapter). What is important to note here is that coverage of the internment does occur in literature classes across the country and Joy Kogawa's position as writer, poet, and/or eye-witness is central to the re-telling of this time in Canadian history. Her status as narrator of the internment is recognized across the country.[1]

As well as being an accepted narration of the experience of Japanese-Canadians in Canada, Obasan is one of the few ethnic texts recommended for study in any province and the only ethnic text studied consistently across the country. I should clarify here that I am employing the term "ethnic" to indicate a text originating from a non-dominant society (in the case of Canada a non-white society) following Franc Loriggio, who explains that "an ethnic work is written by someone who, in a particular society, is perceived to be an ethnic" (55). Loriggio locates the power of definition within dominant society; the centre has the ability to *perceive* the ethnicity of the margin. Ethnic texts, however, often return dominant society's gaze and wield the power of definition for themselves to create new

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[1] Again, there is an exception to this recognition - P.E.I. does not have either The Pool or Obasan on its list of recommended titles.

perceptions of their community and of the centre – Obasan is one such a text.

The overwhelming acceptance of this novel within dominant society does cause certain suspicions to arise. What can account for the popularity of Obasan within this country's fairly conservative high school canon? Whose interests does the study of Obasan in Canadian high schools serve? Why this text and not others? Although he is speaking about curricula in the United States, David Palumbo-Lui's comments about the canonization of ethnic texts provides a warning equally applicable across the border:

> The formation of an ethnic literary canon has begun as a central part of the institutionalisation of multiculturalism that parallels the modes of inserting ethnicity into the general curriculum – certain 'texts' deemed worthy of representing the 'ethnic group' are set forth, yet the critical and pedagogical discourses that convey these texts into the classroom . . . may very well mimic and reproduce the ideological underpinnings of the dominant canon. (2)

There is a genuine worry that the ethnicity of any text is neutralized once it is canonized and that the text will be

used to serve the interests of dominant society rather than challenge them.

It is possible, however, to consider that a dominant society and its canon will allow itself to be challenged and that it selects certain texts to perform this function. Arnold Davidson suggests that Obasan is a socially significant text because it "tells us something about ourselves as a society that we long preferred not to hear" (13). I would argue that Obasan presents a challenge that dominant society confronts precisely because of how it tells the "us" of dominant society something "we" have ignored; it allows "us" to issue a politically expedient[2] acknowledgment of injustices of the past (while evading injustices of the present). More importantly, the novel tells its story in a non-threatening manner – in the manner "we" prefer to listen to. As the back flap of the paperback edition promises, Obasan is a "*calm recitation* of events which destroyed families, a culture and a way of life" (emphasis mine).[3]

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[2] If a constitution works on a platform of mutual recognition and recognizes and satisfies the demands of its populace, it will appear just to its people (Tully 7-8). It is politically expedient for the Canadian government to employ a policy of mutual recognition for events in the past because this enables the government to appear just in the present without having to address contemporary concerns.

[3] This rhetoric is suspiciously resonant of the disappearing Indian refrain – it's much easier to acknowledge the damage you've done to a people if you

This lack of confrontational anger within its pages makes Obasan a palatable ethnic text for a white readership.

The focus in Obasan rests mainly on the narrator/protagonist, Naomi Nakane, who reconstructs the narrative of her childhood through promptings from both of her aunts: Emily and Obasan. Obasan, with her photos of the family before they were split up, urges Naomi to remember the "best times" and the "best memories" (20,46). Emily, with her highly political conversations, conference papers, and newspaper clippings wants to deal with all of the memories, including the worst ones, so that the community's anger is not passed down through the genes (36). Emily is represented as a woman of speech and action while Obasan is portrayed as a woman of silence and thought. Naomi's aunts present her with two different styles of coming to terms with her past and she chooses to remain in the safer, reclusive silence of Obasan. Naomi is a silent child and a fairly reclusive adult more comfortable with silence than speech. Although she ultimately recognizes by the end of the novel that her "wordlessness was [her and her mother's] mutual destruction" (242), she does not move much towards the wordy political world of Aunt Emily. The selection of a

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pretend they're no longer there and, thus, there exists no reason to change your present behaviour.

predominantly silent narrator renders a potentially subversive narrative impotent. As King-Kok Cheung notes, "the reader must attend to the unarticulated linkages and piece together the broken parts [of the narrative]; meaning permeates the spaces between what is said" (122). The onus is on the reader to attend Naomi's silences – readers are in control of how far they interrogate the material presented through metaphors and dreams. While the moral of the story may be to attend the silences of others, as Naomi learns to do with her mother, this stance relies on the compliance of a dominant society to question its own positions. Such compliance is not always forthcoming and, as such, Obasan remains a fairly non-threatening text.

It may seem surprising to suggest that a text credited with enabling and encouraging the redress movement which ultimately exacted an apology from the government is non-threatening for those in power. This label is perhaps not as shocking once we consider the role of the narrator in the presentation of her past. The use of Obasan in the 1980s to fight for redress for governmental actions which occurred four decades earlier actually contradicts the political views held by Naomi: "Crimes of history," she muses to herself, "can stay in history" (41). Naomi's status as a narrator and her political sentiments, however, are called

into question by the structure of the novel. Her tendency to narrate her childhood experiences in the present tense reveals how historical injustice *will not* remain in the past. As Naomi's need to answer questions about the past is what drives the narrative (Gottlieb 34), the reader may surmise that crimes of history not only will not, but rather *should not*, remain in history despite Naomi's statement to the contrary and refusal to recognize this tenet. Although Obasan has been used effectively in a political manner, its protagonist is strikingly non-, if not anti-, political.

Remembering history is a personal act: re-telling and writing it are inherently political acts. The only literary interpretation which allows for an understanding of Naomi as a politically-minded person is the acceptance of her status as the writer of the novel, which is problematic reading of the text. As I view the novel, there are two different narratives within it: there is the narration we receive from Naomi which opens and closes with scenes in the coulee and there is the narrative which opens with the quote from Revelations and ends with the Memorandum from the Cooperative Committee on Japanese Canadians. What disrupts an easy division of these two narratives in the novel is the presence of the "proem" before the first coulee scene. The voice of the "proem" is closely aligned with Naomi in its

reticence towards questions and its introduction of much of the imagery which pervades the text: stony silences, underground streams of speech, and objects bursting and/or flowering with telling. To argue that Naomi is the writer of the tale we read, as numerous critics do (cf. Potter, Cheung, Rose, Willis), one would have to prove Naomi's authorship of the proem and argue that its placement outside the time line of the coulee-framed narrative (beginning 9:05 p.m. August 9, 1972 and ending September 15/16, 1972 sometime after 5:30 a.m.) is evidence of Naomi's writing self separate from her narrating self. As the narrative framed by the coulee scenes does not contain any mention of Naomi's act of writing, it is only the placement of the proem in a time other than that of the narrating present and the resolution of its imagery in the final coulee scene (Rose 222-23) which allows for the argument that Naomi heeds Aunt Emily's call to "write the vision and make it plain" (31).

The placement of the Memorandum at the end of the book further calls Naomi's authorship into question. Although she does refer to it once (188-89), she does not seem conscious of its presence in the book. Whether or not we agree that Naomi writes the proem and, thus, is the writer/narrator of the coulee-framed narrative, there is

still a break in the narrative flow which is unaccounted for between the final coulee scene and the insertion of the Memorandum without an introductory explanation. If anything, the Memorandum matches Kogawa's frame of the novel as an historical fiction narrative; the writers of the Memorandum are examples of the "real" people to whom Kogawa refers in her preface which appears the page before the proem. The preface and Memorandum function as bookends to add an overtly political dimension to the narration of a personal history. I would argue that the political nature of the bookends implicates Kogawa's rather than Naomi's hands in the final shaping of this story. The complication of authorship here is suggestive of the impossibility of extracting one strand from the tangled webs of history. As Naomi discovers in Obasan's attic full of mementos and memories, there is always more than one spider weaving webs over the stories of the past. "That is one telling" Naomi remarks of the newspaper article on "happy beet farmers" in Alberta as she proceeds to give her own narration about the horrors she and her family endured as beet farm workers(197); Naomi is aware that stories, and histories, change with the teller. The structure of Obasan suggests in its own doubled narrative that the telling of history always involves more than one story and, necessarily, more than one

story teller.

With its doubled narrative and pastiche of newspaper clippings, journals, letters, and photographs, Obasan encompasses many different story-telling styles as well as different story-tellers. The story each character tells (or avoids telling) about the internment is dependent to a certain degree upon his/her generation's attitudes towards Canada. Through the characterization of Obasan, her husband Sam, and the Anglican minister Nakayama-Sensei, the Issei, first generation Japanese-Canadians, appear as a group who express only their gratitude for life when they are pushed to remember the internment and even when they were living through it (42, 122). The reluctance of the Issei to discuss any of the government's wrong-doings stems from this notion of gratitude towards Canada and is best demonstrated in Uncle Sam's reaction to Aunt Emily's agitations:

> "In the world, there is no better place. . . This country is the best. There is food. There is medicine. There is pension money. Gratitude. Gratitude." (42)

The Issei construct Canada as a beneficent country worthy of appreciation. This gratefulness towards the nation prevents the Issei from telling the story of their internment; the internment stories are not the "best" memories and in them

Canada does not appear as the "best" country. Although Obasan has not thrown anything away since the family was relocated from the B.C. coast, she prefers to keep the items relating to the internment hidden in the attic. The only "tiny specks of memory" which Obasan allows on display in the house of "her ordering" are photos of the entire family before the dispersal (15); the memories and stories Obasan prefers are those of family unity (Harris 54). In her self-declared "carefully drawn portrait of the oppressed" (Davidson 18), Kogawa creates a character who refuses to recall and/or re-tell stories which would figure Canada as a victimizer and herself as a victim; Obasan's (and the Issei's) silence in the face of injustice is a political weakness but a significant personal strength.

As a second generation Canadian, a Nisei, Aunt Emily constantly discusses the injustices suffered by the Japanese-Canadian community and strives to get them to start "gluing [their] tongues back on" (36). A sense of betrayal compounded with a desire to be recognized as belonging to the country is what characterizes the Nisei attitude towards their homeland. Aunt Emily believes that "[w]hat this country did to us, it did to itself" (33) and her unending quest seems to be the education of those who do not know what the country did to the Japanese-Canadians and those who

do not recognize their status as Canadian. Naomi views this claim of nationality on the part of the Nisei as "desperation" (32), but she is someone whom Emily strives throughout the novel to educate.

Emily's education of Naomi and, presumably, the reader involves the re-telling of the internment through newspaper clippings and her own diary entries. Emily's diary narrates her reactions to the events in Vancouver from Christmas of 1941 to May 21, 1942. Her first entry exemplifies her faith in Canada and her hope that the war will not effect her "thoroughly Canadian" niece and nephew despite the fact that she realizes Japanese-Canadians have been designated as "the enemy"(80-84). Through Emily we learn of the loss of fishing licenses, the curfew, the closure of businesses, the internment of Japanese men, the confiscation of property, and the confusing process of removal of the Japanese Canadians from the West Coast. Along with the anger and disgust Emily registers in her descriptions of Hastings Park Pool (complete with maggots and malnutrition) and her mounting distrust of Canadian authorities (epitomized in her description of a rather belligerent RCMP officer as representative of the "glory of the redcoats"), there surfaces an outright critique of Canada's racism in Emily's diary:

> Strange how these protesters are so much more vehement about Canadian-born Japanese than they are about German-born Germans. I guess it's because we look different. What it boils down to is an undemocratic racial antagonism — which is exactly what our democratic country is supposed to be fighting against. (82)

Aunt Emily views Canada's participation in the Second World War as involvement in an attempt to fight against governmentally sanctioned racism; her diary draws attention to the hypocrisy of such a stance. Canadians are fighting Nazis abroad, but some Canadians are forced to fight a similar type of racially motivated injustice at home. "I hate to admit it," Emily explains to Naomi, "but for all we hear about the States, Canada's capacity for racism seems even worse" (33). Emily is the only character who speaks Canada's shame. On behalf of the Nisei, Emily strives to educate anyone who will listen about this country's ability to fulfil the epithet "Canada the bad" alongside its popular reputation as "Canada the good."

Emily is able to condemn Canada because she presents in her re-telling an analysis as well as a description of the events (as in the above quote from her diary). Naomi's narrative of these events contains no such critical

commentary as it records her reaction to the events at the time they were occurring – it is a child's consciousness which narrates the experience of the 1940s. Faced with a child's reckoning of historical events, the reader must work harder to make connections his/herself. The return to the present of the 1970s (with the adult Naomi's reflections) or of Aunt Emily's diary often helps to answer the young Naomi's questions but the reader must wait for these explanations. For example, there are gaps between young Naomi's query why Grandpa Nakane's journey to Sick Bay is a "cause for distress?" (74) and older Naomi's answer that he's been imprisoned (77), and her need to know why no friends come to the house to visit (73) and the answer from Emily's diary that "We are all being forced to leave (85)." Interpretations are no longer immediate – the reader must make them his/herself. The history that Naomi presents is predominantly in the silences of her confusion as a child and of the stories she cannot tell because the suffering is still too fresh (196). The reader must embrace this silence to hear the story; the gaps in the narrative encourage readers to become tellers and interpreters of history. If we do not make these steps, however, Naomi's story may get lost considerably in her silence.

Emily's narrative produces a clear picture of Canada

and its history primarily due to her ability to analyze the events. To her, Canada is a country which refuses to acknowledge the citizenship of some of its people and, thus, justifies its behaviour towards them. Emily's Canada is racist and reactionary but it is also a country from which she yearns for recognition. Naomi's narrative produces a less definitive image of Canada because of its silent gaps of meaning whether they appear in the stories she does not analyze or in the metaphors she does not explain. If the reader attempts to make sense of these silences, s/he is implicated in the process of creating Naomi's view of Canada and her definition of Canadian. To a certain extent, Naomi's notion of Canada is one readers provide for her through their own interpretations. It is through metaphor that Naomi represents the country and exchanges between Japanese Canadians and non-Japanese Canadians. As they share a common signifier, "Canadian," these two groups are, and are not, the same — this is the paradox which underlies the confusion surrounding Naomi's depiction of Canada. As her brother Stephen explains to her, their identity is a riddle: "We are both the enemy and not the enemy" (70).

The first metaphor Naomi uses to describe Canada involves the relationship of a white mother hen to yellow chicks. As a young child, Naomi puts yellow chicks in a

white hen's cage and watches with horror as the hen methodically kills each one as it approaches her (57-58). The colour scheme here points to the white Canadian fear of the Yellow peril (Japanese Canadians). The incident shocks Naomi because she expects the hen to treat the chicks as her own – after all, they are all fowl. The chicks have no difficulty trusting the hen, but she, sensing some sort of difference (of scent perhaps?[4]), enacts their destruction. Memories of the seemingly unnatural chicken scene continue to surface and disgust Naomi throughout the narrative; it is an unresolved problem in her mind. The perceptive reader who understands this image as a metaphor of white Canada's treatment of Japanese Canadians similarly confronts this riddle and experiences feelings of disgust and disbelief at how a country could be so cruel to its own citizens.

I have stated that readers must puzzle out Naomi's metaphors themselves; however, the narrative does provide some clues even if they are presented through the less analytical mind of the young Naomi. During her stay in the

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[4] People, as well as livestock, perceive difference in this novel through the sense of smell. When Mrs. Barker is at Obasan's house, Naomi constantly wonders what is causing her guest's discomfort: "What is it she smells? What foreign odour sends its message down into her body alerting her limbs? If only I could banish all that offends her delicate sensibilities" (224). Kogawa demonstrates how finely tuned people are towards sensing what is foreign.

hospital, Naomi's thoughts begin to rush together as she tries to make sense of what it means to be yellow. This narrative seems odd in its juxtaposition of different facts from Naomi's mind: she brings together images of the yellow pawns in The Yellow Peril board game (in which three large blue "kings" can defeat all of Japan), an understanding that yellow chicks eventually turn white when they age, and a notion from a story about Chicken Little. What she ends up describing is actually the situation of Japanese and Canadian people in World War II:

> Chicken Little is a Yellow Peril puff. One time Uncle stepped on a baby chick. One time, I remember, a white hen pecked yellow chicks to death, to death in our backyard.
>
> There it is. Death again. Death means stop. All the chickens in the chicken coop, dim-witted pea brains though they are, know about it. Every day, the plump white lumps are in the chicken yard, scratching with their stick legs and clucking and barkling together. If anything goes overhead. . . .[t]hey stop for a moment, then carry on as death passes by. (152-53).

Chicken Little worried that the sky was falling; the chicks that Naomi observes worry about the same thing. Although

the white chickens living in the chicken coop located in Canada are ever on the alert, death passes them by in Naomi's narrative and in history[5]; the Japanese do not bomb any place closer to Canada than Pearl Harbour. Death does not pass the yellow chicks living in the Japanese chicken coop by, however; this section of the narrative foreshadows the Nagasaki bombing which kills members of Naomi's family. Where does the Japanese-Canadian fit into these two categories of chickens? An odd question to ask, but it remains to perplex the reader and Naomi who is positioned between "two competing cultures which disallow her identification with either" (Turner 93). She is both Japanese and Canadian and, as such, should be the yellow chick and the white hen at the same time. However, denied the pecking order status of the white chicken (a status for which Aunt Emily fights), Naomi remains cooped up in the chicken yard and fears the swoop of the hawk-like Orders-in-Council which cause the yellow chicks to lunge for safety (188-89).

This duality of imagery recurs in Naomi's attempt to understand herself in relation to the fairy tale of Goldilocks and the three bears:

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[5] This is not to imply, however, that white Canadians were not killed elsewhere during the Pacific war.

> Clearly we are that bear family in this strange house in the middle of the woods. I am Baby Bear, whose chair Goldilocks breaks, whose porridge Goldilocks eats, whose bed Goldilocks sleeps in. Or perhaps this is not true and I am really Goldilocks after all. (126)

Arun Mukherjee understands this presentation of the fairy tale as telling a "myth about the last five centuries of the history of imperialism"(165). Goldilocks behaves as some imperialist settlers before her; she feeds off the hard work of beings "foreign" to her. Much like Baby Bear, Japanese-Canadians had their homes, food, and belongings stolen by people of European descent (white Canadians, aka Goldilocks). However, Naomi also sees herself as Goldilocks in that she is forever wandering in the woods looking for a safe place to rest while she is far from home. Again, Naomi is trapped between both sides of her Japanese/Canadian dichotomous descriptions and the reader struggles alongside her to make sense of her identity.

Naomi's attempts to define her relationship to Canada are also attempts to define "Canadian." Aunt Emily is not much help in clarifying this issue. Naomi tries to understand the "clash" of her upbringing on milk (a traditionally Canadian drink) and Momotaro (a traditional

Japanese tale). Emily asserts that there is no clash in this mixture of experience – it is Canadian because someone in Canada experiences both. In her efforts to claim Canadian status, Emily refuses to accept any complications of her thesis that "everything a Canadian does is Canadian" (57). Her stance is similar to that of Naomi's father, also a Nisei, who informs Naomi that she is not Japanese but Canadian (70). Naomi is not offered the identity of "Japanese-Canadian" – her father and Aunt claim for her the latter term while schoolmates define her by the first term. She is not encouraged to negotiate between the two but simply to pick the latter part of the hyphen; I see her confused chicken and fairy tale imagery, however, as an attempt to find the middle ground between both identities – to find the hyphen.

Arnold Davidson suggests that part of a Canadian writer's "inherited task is the continuous writing and unwriting of that conjoining and diving hyphen" of identities such as Japanese-Canadian (84). The politics of constructing identity are foregrounded by Naomi's narrative; her confusion over her status as chicken or hen, Goldilocks or Baby Bear, can be read as attempts to write and unwrite that hyphen. Aunt Emily's strategy of defining herself is politically effective: her editing of 1940s governmental

documents by inserting "Canadian citizens" wherever the phrase "Japanese race" occurs displays the political nature of self-definition (33). Governmental authorities would not have been able to intern Japanese Canadians if they had defined them as Canadian citizens. Readers of Emily's diary may choose to wonder at the government's reticence to recognize its own citizens and treat them fairly. On the other hand, Naomi's struggle simply to understand her relationship to Canada and, thus, to define herself can involve the reader on a similar journey of self-definition which leads to implication of ourselves, and not just our government, in the treatment of Japanese Canadians. Naomi's narrative can be politically effective *if* its readers negotiate, ultimately, their own relationship to the telling of the history of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War: are we chicks or hens, bears or Goldilocks? If readers do not analyze Naomi's thoughts to understand her identity as a Japanese-Canadian, they will not be faced with this task of re-evaluation of their understanding of themselves as Canadian.

As I am a non-Japanese Canadian reader, I view my participation in the act of interpretation as necessarily intercultural (a concept I introduce in Chapter One); I am constantly aware of how my experience and definition as a

Canadian differs from and compares to Naomi's experience. I take this term from James Tully who defines intercultural interaction as the negotiation, reimagining, and overlapping of cultural relations (54). Through Emily's papers, Obasan reveals the dangers that occur when a government refuses to recognize cultural overlap. Through Naomi's narrative, readers cannot help but recognize cultural overlap, although we may experience discomfort when the familiar appears in an unfamiliar context. Andrew Garrod, in an interview with Joy Kogawa, admits his surprise at some of the intercultural moments in Obasan:

> "It was something of a jolt to read. . .about the recitation of the 'Apostle's Creed' or of Japanese-Canadian children reciting 'Oh Canada' [sic] – and the father singing 'Waltzing Matilda.' The culture seems very Anglo-American." (143).

Perhaps because of its implicit racism, Kogawa does not respond directly to this comment. Why should it seem odd that Japanese *Canadians* are singing the Canadian national anthem? In his defense, I should state that Garrod does not get the chance to explain his reaction further. I feel his comment is an excellent example, however, of how Kogawa is successful in spurring readers to reimagine their definition of "Canadian" through an analysis of Naomi's experience.

What Garrod seems on the verge of recognizing is that what he understands as "Anglo-American" culture is *part*[6] of the signified of "Canadian" – *even* when it appears after the signifier "Japanese." What worries me is that students, like Garrod, may not push themselves enough to reach this level of recognition.

Naomi's descriptions of herself and her family can be viewed as her further attempts to grapple with the "riddle" of her heritage as a Japanese-Canadian. As Erika Gottlieb remarks, Naomi avoids physical descriptions of the characters so that they exist in the text more as presences than faces (38). Naomi's descriptions of these characters reveal that an overlap of cultures is present in each one of these presences: her uncle is referred to as "Uncle Sam" and likened to Chief Sitting Bull (18, 2); Aunt Emily reminds Naomi of Winston Churchill (33); Obasan appears as "every old woman in every hamlet in the world" (15-16); Stephen acts as Momotaro and as an Israelite child/character from the Bible (214, 205); and young Naomi sees herself at times as Goldilocks and/or one of the bears, Snow White, and

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[6]What may be understood by "Anglo-American" culture by no means constitutes the entire signifier of "Canadian" in my mind. The debate over how to define "Canadian" and who has the power to define it is a necessarily on-going struggle as Aunt Emily's definitions and Naomi's metaphors illustrate.

Momotaro (126, 64, 170). To understand these metaphors/ similes, readers must negotiate the connections between the tenors (the characters' identities) and their vehicles (the multi-cultural references). In the gaps of meaning between the tenors and the vehicles of Naomi's character descriptions, the text invites the reader to participate in the heavily political task of identity creation and recognition which, due to the nature of the vehicles, will be an inherently intercultural act.

Naomi's relationships with people of other races can also be understood as metaphors for intercultural relations between Canadian citizens. The relationships Naomi has with Old Man Gower, Rough Lock Bill, and the Barkers are marked by an uncomfortable speechlessness on Naomi's part. Old man Gower, Naomi's next door neighbour who sexually assaults her, takes advantage of her speechlessness and encourages it: "Don't tell your mother" (64). Naomi's response is to pull away from her mother and to blame herself for her treatment by her neighbour – she feels it is she who seeks Gower out (65). Marilyn Russell Rose, along with many other critics, views Old Man Gower's abuse of Naomi as representative of the treatment of Japanese-Canadians by white Canadians: "What Kogawa suggests here is that the abuse of Japanese-Canadians by white Canada is a kind of

sociopathic rape in response to which victims can only reel in silent shame" (222). Part of this shame involves the victim's belief that s/he in some way encouraged the victimization and is primarily to blame for it; Naomi incorrectly believes that she climbs "unbidden" into Old Man Gower's lap (64-65). Interestingly, in their efforts to serve their own interests, both Gower and the politicians referred to in the novel argue that their actions are to the benefit of the recipient (Davidson 43): Gower pretends to fix a scratch on Naomi's leg just as T. B. Pickersgill makes a pretense of protecting Japanese Canadians "from unnecessary anxiety" by sending them "back" to Japan (63; 184).

Rough Lock Bill is an interesting figure both in his relationship with Naomi and with Native Canadians. The novel never makes Rough Lock's ancestry quite clear; he is a recluse living in the hills of Slocan who has dark brown "leathery" skin and tells stories of a Native tribe that used to live where he now resides (145). The "fuss about skin" doesn't make sense to Rough Lock, and Naomi does not provide the reader with enough information to decide to which category of these skins he belongs: "red skin, yellow skin, white skin, [or] any skin" (145). He seems to be of the "any skin" variety, but he appears as a character in

direct contrast to the white-skinned Gower. Unlike Gower, Rough Lock attends to Naomi's silence. When he realizes that she is uncomfortable speaking, he adapts in order to communicate with her by encouraging her to write her name in the sand (144). Rough Lock also saves Naomi from drowning and carries her the long way to the hospital (149-50) – he acts in Naomi's, not his own, best interest. The final act by Rough Lock Bill that demonstrates successful interaction is his telling of the story of the founding and naming of Slocan by Native Canadians. Naomi retains this piece of folklore: as she mounts the steps to the attic in Obasan's house decades later, she repeats the story's punch line, "Slow can go" (23). Naomi's relationship with Rough Lock demonstrates that interaction between Japanese Canadians and White/Native(?) Canadians can be successful for both peoples involved if they attend one another's silences.

Rough Lock Bill's ethnicity aside, Obasan does demonstrate fairly close connections between its history of Japanese-Canadians and that of Native Canadians. In The Stone Angel, Hagar, as the descendent of Scots-highlanders, refuses to see the connections between her family's history of displacement in Scotland and that of the Métis in Canada, but Margaret Laurence places the information in the novel for the discerning reader to discover. The same blindness-

revelation could be said to operate in Obasan: Naomi does not make the connections herself, but some of her narrative encourages the reader to make a link between Canada's treatment of its Native and Japanese populations. The two groups are likened in the narrative through their appearances and their silences:

> Some of the [Native] children I've had in my classes over the years could almost pass for Japanese, and vice versa. There's something in the animal-like shyness I recognize in the dark eyes. A quickness to look away. (2)

The tendency of Native and Japanese Canadian children to avoid confrontation, as described by Naomi above, is presumably due to each group's similar experiences of racism. Along with the recognition of similarity between these two groups appears an expectation of empathy; it is towards Naomi that Annie Black Bear smiles when her teacher refers to her as "Annie Black" (202). Both children know the relief of erasing markers of ethnicity; Naomi's implicit understanding of Annie's smile suggests the sympathetic relationship which exists amongst members of visible minority groups.[7] Hagar positions herself against the Métis

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[7] It is also interesting to note that Naomi belongs to the "Tillicum club" whose slogan "Kla-How-Ya" ("we're all friends together") and totem pole pin betray its grounding

"Other" to define herself as Canadian: Naomi's identification <u>with</u> this Canadian Other defines her as Canadian. The protagonist's relationship to Native Canadians appears in both novels as an indication of Canadian-ness (a topic I cover in chapter three).

In an attempt at sympathetic interaction with "their" Japanese-Canadians, the Barkers pay a condolence visit to Obasan. This interaction is riddled with a discomfort to which both Naomi and Mrs. Barker seem finely attuned. Naomi compares their interaction to that of dogs "sniffing for clues, our throats quivering with subliminal growls" (224). Mrs. Barker's only attempt at conversation is a proposition that Obasan be sent to a nursing home – yet another proposal for relocation, but this time issued by a woman representing the "tiny but confident" Barker country (224). Mrs. Barker eyes the house, its inhabitants, and the proffered refreshments with suspicion, and her questioning gaze is matched by Naomi's distrust of this couple that enters the house unbidden (222). The Barkers are discomforted by Naomi's silence just as Obasan is continually startled by Mr. Barker's shouting (224-25). Neither group makes concessions to communicate effectively

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in Native Canadian culture – a culture within which Naomi seems to find solidarity and some sense of belonging.

with the other pair and, as a result, the intercultural interaction here is unsuccessful.

The Barkers' visit with their "icebreaker questions which create an awareness of ice" incites one of Naomi's few embittered passages about her current life in Canada:

> Oh Canada, whether it is admitted or not, we come from you we come from you. From the same soil, the slugs and slime and bogs and twigs and roots. We come from the country that plucks its people out like weeds and flings them into the roadside. (226)

The narrative continues in a similar vein with Naomi's repeated claims of belonging to this "land that is like every land, filled with the wise, the fearful, the compassionate, the corrupt." Here, towards the end of the novel, Naomi seems to be echoing Emily's continual cry to be recognized as Canadian and her tendency to define Canada as a place worthy of love and loathing. Obasan, Naomi notes, does not display such a need to claim belonging to this "clamourous climate": "She does not dance to the multi-cultural piper's tune or respond to the racist's slur" (226). As such, Obasan does not fulfil others' expectations of her and yet remains unaffected by this as her "blindness" in her interaction with the Barkers displays — she only

fills their tea cups halfway. It is Obasan's gaze (or lack of it) which directs this interaction leaving the Barkers unsatisfied and Obasan "inviolate" (225).

The power of the gaze is linked to the power of definition. Naomi reflects that "we were defined and identified by the way we were seen" (118). Her brother, Stephen, quickly understands how such power of definition can then be wielded as justification. By claiming that butterflies swarming his backyard are "moths," he justifies his crusade to get rid of them (123): the parallel here with the Canadian government's justification of the internment through the definition of Japanese-Canadians as people of Japanese race is obvious. Obasan, as a text by and about Japanese Canadians, alters the gaze and the definition of that community and, thus, questions the government's justifications. Kogawa explains in The Pool that she learned the power of writing from her father who once scared away a group of white boys simply by holding up a piece of paper and a pen:

> "He didn't do anything except he looked at them and held his pen. And I think I got it into my head that the pen was very very powerful and you had to use it that way — either to intimidate or to try to intimidate. . . .And I think there is

> power in defining. There is power in being able to tell what is real and to impose that on other people."

Kogawa wields the power of definition through the pages of Obasan and presents the reader with Japanese Canadians' own definitions of themselves as Canadian, and of Canada (although they differ depending on the generation of the gazer). Kogawa offers for interrogation a view of the internment to her readers through her fiction which differs from the official version of the events presented in history books and film reels at the time.

The Pool, a film about the internment studied in B.C. in place of Obasan, juxtaposes news reels with excerpts from Kogawa's writings (poetry and the novel) and from interviews with her and her father. "It should be made clear," the confident voice of the news reel asserts, "that Japanese residents in these towns are not living in internment camps." At a later point in the film, Gordon Nakayama specifically refers to Slocan as "the internment camp" and as the camera pans across old photos and watercolour paintings of Slocan with its "tidy" rows of housing, the viewer is encouraged to question the viewpoint presented in the news reel. The film operates on a similar premise to Obasan: official and personal accounts of the internment are

provided for the audience to make sense of and are arranged in such a manner to encourage the audience to question the government's actions. The government does not appear in the film in the guise of Goldilocks, Old Man Gower, or the white hen; the destructive pillage and rape-like actions of the government are presented through a matter-of-fact recollection by Kogawa and her father. Canada's capacity for racism is discussed by Kogawa, but it is presented as a thing of the past and, as such, no longer an issue of concern. Kogawa actually urges Japanese Canadians to "move on" from their recognition of themselves as victims:

> "It needs to seep in not just to the country as a whole but into the Japanese-Canadian imagination for us to realize now that we have been empowered. And we have a responsibility to see ourselves not as victims anymore, but to identify with those who are victims and to stand with them and that's what's required."

The film was produced in 1992, four years after the successful conclusion of the redress movement -- a success which the film emphasizes as the goal of Kogawa's movement towards speech (Kogawa is presented as an Aunt Emily figure who eventually speaks out for change and recognition). There is a sense of completion to this film which

discomforts me. Obasan ends with the words of the Memorandum. Even to the reader who approaches the novel post-redress, the placement of this document reminds readers of the capacity of the government to threaten "the rights and liberties of Canadian citizens." Kogawa's concluding remarks in The Pool urge Japanese-Canadians to alter their politics but do not present a reason for white Canadians to be wary of their own. The B.C. student who spends merely fifty-five minutes watching a story of how a community was successful in gaining voice and speaking out against the government's injustice receives little sense or appreciation of the struggle of coming to voice (which Aunt Emily's tireless speaking and writing activities embody) or of how racism continues to plague the lives of Japanese and other hyphenated Canadians (the internment is an event of the past, but the racism which caused it is not).

As much as The Pool may allow the audience to sit comfortably as they view a rather painful period of Canadian history, Obasan does not force its readers to move out of their comfort zones. The choice to attend and make sense of Naomi's silences is ours. The text is not Aunt Emily's confrontational manuscript about the Nisei "Struggle for Liberty" which purports to "discuss some of the accusations brought against us" (39). The fact that Emily has

underlined phrases heavily enough to tear the paper suggests to the reader the amount of passion involved in that text's "discussion." There is passion guiding Naomi's narrative, but it is less declarative and, thus, more comfortable for the reader who may find, like Naomi, that "[p]eople who talk a lot about their victimization make me uncomfortable. It's as if they use their suffering as weapons or badges of some kind" (34). Naomi wields few "weapons" and, thus, Obasan is a fairly non-threatening text for readers worried that they may be grouped with the victimizers. Whether we understand Naomi's tale of Old Man Gower, for example, as a metaphor for the relationship between Japanese-Canadians and the Canadian government is up to our discretion. As Naomi's view of Canada is dependent to some extent upon the reader's analysis of her narrative, what we regard as Naomi's Canada is also a matter of what we are comfortable finding (are we rapists too?).

Obasan was published at a time when the federal government's official position on multiculturalism was being implemented in the classroom to ensure that no ethnic group was given precedence over another. The inclusion of Obasan on a syllabus enables educators to state that their curriculum is multicultural as at least one text represents the experience of Canadians other than those of Anglo or

Franco-Canadian background. If we understand multiculturalism to be a celebration of many cultures and voices within Canada, however, Obasan does not present it as a positive or realistic notion for Japanese-Canadians; white culture dominates and effectively destroys difference in its own backyard as the chicken-coop imagery suggests, the title character disdains the very idea of multiculturalism, and Aunt Emily's uncritical penchant to label things Canadian verges on a desire for a monoculture. A careful reading of Obasan results in an understanding of Canada as a country in which cultural inequality perpetuates. While it queries the dominant power of white culture, Kogawa's novel also provides a challenge to the dominant version of Canadian history. Although some of its acceptance no doubt has to do with its calm and non-political style of narrative, Obasan's inclusion in a Canadian canon demonstrates a willingness to allow ethnic voices to tell their own stories which is a trait of any "real multiculturalism" (Davidson 16). This effort should be applauded alongside an awareness of the ethnic voices excluded from this canon which, with Obasan, has the token ethnic tale required by multicultural educational policies.

The danger of Obasan's position as the only ethnic novel studied across the country is that its issues may

become generalized to represent the concern of all minority peoples, let alone the expression of all Japanese-Canadians. The ability to draw generalizations from the text, however, is also what many people praise in Obasan. Lisa Lowe argues that the binary demand with which Naomi struggles (to identify as Japanese and/or Canadian) is similar to the situation of many minority peoples who are encouraged to "abandon their particular cultures to assimilate as citizens of a common culture" (Lowe 57). Understood this way, Obasan's placement in the high school canon is more palatable because of the possibility of generalizing Naomi's struggle to represent that of any member of a minority (a "universal" minority theme?). Obasan may also be studied as a lesson about the dangers of remaining silent for any community, as B. A. St. Andrews understands it:

> [Obasan shows that] to remain silent in the face of elaborate social injustice is to will some other people — at some inevitable future time. . . to suffer a similar fate: dispersal, denigration, and dehumanization. (31)

St. Andrews backs up his argument by examining the connections the text encourages between Chief Sitting Bull and Uncle Sam (both "silent" sufferers of similar fates). Although St. Andrew's understanding of Sitting Bull's fate

is faulty (Sitting Bull actively resisted the American government during the 1870s), his analysis does have merit in its assertion that Obasan warns of the dangers of silence for Canadian minorities.

Kogawa compares the silence in her novel and the silence of the Japanese Canadian community to the substance below the tip of an iceberg:

> "The difference between silence and speech, I think, is the difference between the tip of the iceberg (which is what is conscious, which is what we see, what we can measure) and what is below the tip. And I think that what the dominant society needs to do in relation to the quieter sections within the populace is to listen to the silence which is there. Because what is below the iceberg is what directs the iceberg's flow. It's an incredibly important arena to listen to." (The Pool)

Kogawa renders the silence comprehensible through her novel, and educators have made this accessible by recommending this book for study for high school students. What is required on the level of study is that students themselves go below the tip of the iceberg in their analysis of Naomi's silences in order to see the Canada they reflect. Kogawa has written

the vision, Naomi has narrated it — it is up to the reader to make it plain.

Chapter Three

The Guise of the Indian Gaze: The Role of the Native in Canadian Literature.

> Thomas King: Part of the question that was asked was why wasn't I saying the things that Canadian readers and Canadian intellectuals knew intimately to be true about Indians? Now that's an attempt to centre literature around a certain set of expectations. And much of it, I think, has to do with nationalism, which always creates superior/inferior relationships. Canadians may not feel superior to the British, but they damn well feel superior to Indians. (Rooke 72)

The semiotic field of the sign "Native" and/or "Indian," against which Thomas King reacts here, is dominated by non-Native constructions of the signified created by early European travel narratives and perpetuated by many cultural anthropology writings and popular white entertainment institutions such as Hollywood films. The images of the Native which exist in white culture are more properly understood by Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulation;[1] what is "Native" or "Indian" is signified through a sign which *simulates* reference to something in the realm of the Real while actually relying on other signs to

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[1] My understanding of simulation rests on the notion that signification "simulates reference to a real state because no real states correspond to the sign" (Genosko 40).

construct its meaning.[2] As Terry Goldie argues, these signs have been constructed by white culture: the indigene is a semiotic pawn on a chessboard under the control of the white signmaker ("Fear" 70). The Native is a pawn in a game of definition; it circulates as an image of the inferior "Other" against which white Canada defines and critiques itself (Walton 78). Instead of providing a window through which non-Natives can understand another culture, the discourse of things "Native," like any discourse of an "Other"[3], works as a mirror to reflect back on dominant

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[2] I should clarify here that within Baudrillard's theory of simulation, Native self-representation should be considered as much a construction of reality as non-Native representations of Natives; everything, ultimately, is simulacra. Given the political ramifications of Baudrillard's theory for Natives, however, it would be irresponsible for me to end my discussion of the circulation of the sign "Native" with his conclusion that the declaration of what is Real is impossible. At some point, it must be conceded that a lived reality does exist beyond the fields of signification and theories of simulation and that this lived reality is ultimately more accessible to those who exist within it and are Native than those who observe it (non-Natives). To deny this fact of lived experience is to render Native representations of their lives politically impotent and, thus, to allow white society to maintain power over the signification of things "Native."

[3] I am working with a postcolonial concept of the identification process in which the colonizers construct the colonized as "others" in opposition to themselves. As Homi K. Bhabha argues, the "construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse demands an articulation of forms of difference" ("Other" 72). The relationship between white self-

society. As nationalism is thought to be the "major ideological drive" behind this circulation of the image of the Native in Canadian literature (Fee 17), it is possible to consider that white Canadians construct the Native Other in order to define themselves more clearly.

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the movement to include more Canadian works of literature in the high school canon also incorporates an effort to include Native literature on the curriculum.[4] Alberta's curriculum guideline defines Native literature as texts "by or about Natives or containing Native characters" which is a definition loose enough to allow the study of Native life through texts penned by non-Native writers such as Margaret Craven and Peter Such. Craven's inclusion in this thesis may appear somewhat odd as she was born in Montana and lived most of her life in San Francisco save her short trip to Kingcome B.C. in the 1960s (Flint 416). Her novel, I Heard

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definition and the articulation of the Native other's difference is best represented by the following equation: White: Native = A: not-A. By defining what Natives are not (by defining their differences to white society), white people are defining what they are themselves.

[4] For example, Saskatchewan's 1997 curriculum guideline indicates with "I/M" any text selection which contains Indian/Métis and reminds teachers to include such material in their "units of study" (iii). Alberta explains that in its revision of its 1983 list texts were considered for "Native or other content validation" (6).

the Owl Call my Name, about a Native Canadian community she visited, however, is the most recommended Native content novel in Canada's high school canon (See Appendix D). Although Peter Such is Canadian, his inclusion in this high school canon of Native literature is similar to Craven's position in that he is a non-Native writing about a Native community in a novel, Riverrun, studied for its Native content. The danger in studying these books as Native literature exists in their presentation of Native views of their community and of Canada; the novels present a non-Native gaze of Canada through the guise of Native eyes and end up serving the interest of white, not Native, Canadians.

The proliferation of the non-Native construction of the Native in the Canadian high school canon (demonstrated by the fact that the two most recommended novels are those written by non-Natives) is tempered by the inclusion of a few Native authors, most specifically, Thomas King and Ruby Slipperjack. King, in his novel Medicine River, demonstrates the constructed nature of the image of the Native by presenting the dilemma Natives encounter when they attempt to define themselves as Indian (as the fight between John and Eddie reveals); should they invest in the popular white stereotype of a traditional Indian or attempt to forge a new signified in their endeavour to authorize their

identity as real Natives? Concern about reflecting white Canadian society exists only on the peripheries of King's fiction which focuses predominantly on Native life and concerns. As a result, Medicine River is more challenging for the non-Native reader used to being the focus of a text. Although Slipperjack's novel Honour the Sun does not address Native stereotypes as directly as King's fiction, its presentation of the life of a particularly large Ojibway family in the 1960s provides a challenge to the white notion of the disappearing Indian community and culture and encourages readers to deal with what are contemporary Native concerns. The content of Honour the Sun is also challenging in its suggestion that very few Indians die of natural causes (209); the novel presents the continuing rammifications of the introduction of unnatural elements into Native society by white society (alcohol and the railway, for example). Perhaps because of their challenges to white notions of Native-ness and Native life, Medicine River and Honour the Sun are currently only recommended for study in two provinces (See Appendix D).

As it is arguable that even works by Native people are "shaped by the semiotic field [of "Native"] constructed by contemporary Western culture" (Goldie "Right" 80), I think it would be profitable to look at how the image of the

Native operates in Canadian literature. I have argued in earlier chapters that Native becomes the "Other" against which Hagar defines herself and with whom Naomi aligns herself; in both cases "Native" represents a visible minority, and socially outcast, section of Canadian society. There are many other signifieds for "Native" within this discourse. I am thinking particularly of the images King refers to as the "servants of a white imagination" (Introduction 7): the sexy Indian maid, the evil shaman, the noble savage, the barbarian, the stoic elder and so on. For the purposes of brevity, I shall end the list here and simply refer the reader to the Cowboys & Indians genre for more examples of these representations.[5] Along with the entertainment value of such caricature, images of the Native appear in early Canadian literature for their location value: inclusion of Native characters "add[s] local colour to the [Canadian discovery/settler] narrative" (Atherton 23). As the Canadian exploration narratives which focus on the encounter between Europeans and Native Americans are gaining a more prominent place in the Canadian canon as examples of early Canadian literature (Monkman 80), it is

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[5] See Goldie's "Getting it Right," Godard's "The Politics of Representation," and King's introduction to The Native in Literature for further examples of the signifieds of "Indian" in white Canadian discourse).

tempting to suggest that the roots of Canadian literature are thus entwined with the use of the image of the Native to symbolize aspects of Canada.[6] Like capturing the smell of the pines and the describing the sight of the beaver, recording the image of the Native could lend realism to an early narrative about Canada.

While representations of the Native in 19th century literature can be understood as projections of a European consciousness (Wiget 261), the non-Native literature of the 20th century employs the image of the Native to critique a white North American consciousness. As Eli Mandel explains, many non-Native texts in the 1960s begin to "take a position sympathetic to that of the Native, critical of white culture and its history of exploitation and cruelty or indifference" (44). The "natural" Native way of life appears in these texts as an appealing alternative to the technologically dominated lifestyle of white society. This non-Native construction and understanding of Native life becomes mistaken as commonplace knowledge and receives authorization as authentic. These (mis)understandings of Native life are so entrenched in the canon by mid-century that even texts

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[6] For example, two such early Canadian narratives which involve the presence of the Native as backdrop and/or identifier of place are Oliver Goldsmith's long poem _The Rising Village_ (1825) and Catharine Parr Traill's settler narrative _Backwoods in Canada_ (1836).

penned by Natives are scrutinized against this non-Native standard of authenticity. Andrew Wiget wonders if it is at all possible to "write as an Indian apart from the anglo-authored discourse of Indian-ness (261). Support of Wiget's scepticism exists in Emma LaRocque's observation that texts written by Natives have actually been rejected by publishers on the basis that they were "not Indian enough" (xix).

The literary expression of the non-Native's experience with Native society is predictable enough that Margery Fee's generalization of this genre is a good encapsulation of the plot of Craven's novel I Heard the Owl Call my Name:

> The [protagonist's] confusion is resolved through a relationship with an object, image, plant, animal, or person associated with Native people. Occasionally, the relationship is with a real Native person. The resolution is often a quasi-mystical vision of, or identification with, Natives, although occasionally it takes the form of a psychic or creative breakthrough. . . .The movement from observer to participant, outsider to insider, immigrant to "Native," historian to mythmaker, is often commented on specifically. (16)

Mark Brian, the white protagonist of Craven's novel, is a

young ordinand sent to the hardest parish, the Native Kingcome village, for what are, initially, unbeknownst to him the final two years of his life. Although the task of integration into this community is daunting, Mark is eventually accepted by the tribe as an "insider" and learns to accept and anticipate his impending death as the due course of nature (his "psychic breakthrough"). Once he hears the owl call his name, Mark knows it is time for him to behave like "the swimmer"/salmon people to which he belongs and to confront "the end for which he has been made" (138). Terry Goldie argues that white Canadian literature uses the figure of the indigene to enable white characters to gain souls and become rooted to the land ("Fear" 76). Hence, Craven's depiction of Mark's personal growth, which stems from an awareness and acceptance of what is presented in the novel as a Native world view, is a standard example of white manipulation of the figure of the Native for white ends (Natives are a function, not focus, of the plot).

Although the Native view of life presented in Craven's novel is dynamic, the Native characters in the text are fairly static. The first Native Mark meets is figured as an object representative of a foreign category. After meeting this nameless young Native who helps him travel up the river, Mark reflects that Caleb, the ordinand before him,

had "prepared him for this *one*, the *first* he was to know" (4, emphasis mine). Interestingly, the second Native Mark encounters, Jim Wallace, is also referenced as "the first one" (6). These "ones" are Indians, and that is what Mark notices first of all in his interactions with them; they are representatives of a category which promises to be homogeneous. Mark is not disappointed in his expectation of similarity. He remarks that the individuals in the first group of Natives he encounters look "strangely alike, with the same watchful, waiting eyes" (14). These eyes which project a depth of sadness are eventually referred to as "the Indian's eyes" and, indeed, all the Natives in this novel have this look. It isn't until Mark's eyes also project this well of sadness that he is ultimately accepted as part of the tribe (67). The homogenizing factor in this text's representation of Native-ness is this look of sadness.

What causes this all-encompassing sadness is the current mode of life for the Natives thwarted by exploitation by white people and the fear of a loss of a more traditional way of life (also due to the intrusion of white society). The exploitation of Natives by white people is represented by one particular event that causes Mark's

eyes to imitate the "Indian look."[7] A young white entrepreneur feigns romantic interest in a Native woman in an attempt to purchase a sacred mask (which is effected by getting its owner drunk). When the woman's family learns of the transaction, they leave the village in shame but let Mark know that part of the blame is his: "What have you done to us," Mrs. Hudson asks of Mark, "What has the white man done to our young?" (62). The reader and Mark learn together what white man has done to the lives of young Natives through the ending of the young woman's story: she is abandoned in the city, turns to a life of prostitution and alcohol and dies three months later (67). The white man brings dislocation, destruction, and death to Natives.

The city, as microcosm of white society in the text, is inhospitable for Natives unless they assimilate. The first step of assimilation is enrolment in "the white man's school" which is an action the older members of the tribe understand as "another bit of the slow dying of all they held dear in their own race" (91). When Gordon, one of the students, returns to the tribe, the narrative describes him as wearing the clothing of a white person and behaving like

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[7] Kingcome is represented as a Christian village; however, the colonizing aspects of religion are not offered up for critique within the narrative. While the novel critiques white society, white religion is never explicitly invoked as a negative instance of white domination.

one in his criticism of Native customs (104). Gordon reflects that his education has changed him "too much" and that he can "never come home again" so he makes plans to live in the city (106). There is no successful negotiation of the mentality of either society: Gordon must dismiss the ways of his people in order to live in the white city.

Mark's experience and education in the village directly mirror Gordon's life in Vancouver; once he is initiated into this other culture, he prefers it to his own. Mark's comparison of life in the city and in the village sets up clearly the dichotomy between the two societies:

> How would he live again in the old world he had almost forgotten, where men throw up smoke screens between themselves and the fundamentals whose existence they fear but seldom admit? Here, where death waited behind each tree, he had made friends with loneliness, with death and deprivation, and, solidly against his back had stood the wall of his faith. (125)

As Mark chooses to live out the rest of his days in the village, the reader surmises that Native life, as long as it includes Christian "faith," is preferable to life in white society. That a white man would choose an existence surrounded by death, deprivation, and loneliness instead of

life in the city suggests the degree to which Mark finds white society lacking. It is through the experiences of Natives in the city (who assimilate or die) and the non-Native's protagonist's avowal that life in Kingcome is better than that in Vancouver that Craven manages to critique white society. Smattered with Native stories and customs as it is, the narrative of I Heard the Owl Call my Name serves primarily to educate the non-Native reader not of culture of the Tsawataineuk Tribe in Kingcome but of the defective nature of dominant white society.

The narrative of Riverrun, like I Heard the Owl Call my Name, depicts white society in a negative light, but in this text the narrative focalizes on its Native characters' points of view instead of a white protagonist's thoughts on Native culture. It is from these Native observations about white society and the recording of their own way of life that lead the reader to view whites as morally wanting (Davidson 200). By focalizing the narrative on a Beothuk woman, Demasduit, once she is captured by whites intent on civilizing her, Such is able to re-present aspects of white society as incomprehensible and to emphasize Demasduit's otherness:

> Instead of dividing their food and their tools one man has it all in a shop. And the man in the shop

> gives it out to the people in exchange for some bright metal MONEY. (100)

Material exchange is defamiliarized by Demasduit who understands the sharing, not trading, of objects as the norm. Faced with this alteration of norms where Beothuk notions are normal and white systems are foreign, the reader is encouraged to view monetary exchange as the less attractive option of the two systems. The use of capitalization to emphasize the word "money" further helps the reader to understand how distanced Demasduit is from understanding such economics. Ironically, money exchange is at the root of Desmasduit's doom; her people's food supplies are depleted to enable the white fur trade and she herself is captured because of a £100 offering by the Governor for any English subject who establishes a profitable intercourse with the Beothuk (1). Such makes his critique of white society through the gaze of a Native who cannot make sense of white mentality. The narrative leads its readers to believe that if only whites had valued sharing objects for a society's gain over exchange of them for money and personal gain, the destruction of the Beothuk might have been avoided.

As it retells the story of the annihilation of Newfoundland's Beothuk Indians by white settlers, Riverrun

is a text about the ethics of white Canada underlying this event in Canadian history. In the recurring parallel images of the remnants of a seal slaughter on an icy shore and the remnants of a massacre of three to four hundred Beothuk people in the same location (50), the narrative reminds white readers of their ancestors' and their own capacity for cruelty and for willful forgetfulness. As Peter Such informs readers in his preface, the place where the massacre happened is called "Bloody Point" by local people but does not appear as such on any map or in any history book (vii). Similar in intent in many ways to Obasan, Riverrun records a story of suffering in Canada that whites have tried to forget. Where the texts differ is in the author's relation to the events told; Kogawa speaks as and for the victimized: Such speaks for the victimized but as a member of the victimizing society.

It is difficult to deal with the issue of appropriation in this instance as the Beothuk People were completely decimated – it is not possible to have this story told unless it is taken up by someone of another race.[3] Such's

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[3] I am simply stating the impossibility of having a Beothuk write this story. While it may be more acceptable for a Native Canadian, rather than Anglo-Canadian, to have told the story, any narrative of the Beothuk history necessarily involves voicing another culture's tale (the issue, it seems, is the amount of cultural translation involved in this act of narration).

efforts to tell this aspect of Canadian history should be lauded as well as his attempts to avoid stereotypical presentations of the Beothuk People as savage or noble Indians (Davidson 198). However, the constraints of history force Such into a third popular image of the Native – the disappearing Indian. As his subject matter necessitates this choice, I do not take issue with Such. What does concern me here is that the two most popular texts about Native life in Canada's high school canon are historical and focus on the destruction of Native Peoples by white society.

Why, then, do school boards include these non-Native texts on the curricula? Terry Goldie explains that there are two manners in which white society can cope with the image of the Native as its other: it can either incorporate the other into its own society or reject it ("Fear" 73). The option to reject Native society is, Goldie rightly notes, no longer an openly popular alternative. Hence, the most popular book about Native life on the high school curricula, I Heard the Owl Call my Name, focuses on a successful attempt to incorporate the Native Other; Mark "goes Native" while retaining aspects of his white culture. While she uses the figure of the Native to critique white society, Craven also demonstrates through her narrative that what she believes to be the best of white culture,

Christianity, may be combined with elements of Native culture to result in ultimate inner content. Craven represents cultural harmony as something possible and beneficial for Canadian society if white Canadians take the time, like Mark does, to appreciate Native culture and peoples. When one considers that this novel presents, through Mark's actions, a way to achieve multiculturalism[9] which is non-threatening for white society, the reasoning for its placement on a canon which receives pressure to be multicultural becomes obvious.

The inclusion of Peter Such's Riverrun is also connected to the pressures on the Canadian high school canon to be multicultural. I regard its placement as similar to the position of Obasan because both tell a story about shameful aspects of white Canada's treatment of other cultures in a non-confrontational manner. Furthermore, because it depicts the plight of a Native culture no longer in existence, Riverrun allows for an admission by white society of their guilt in events of the past but does not

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[9] I want to clarify that the use of "Multiculturalism" is meant to refer to the federal government's policy which attests that Canada has two official languages but no official culture and that no one ethnic group should have precedence over any other. In light of this definition, a true multiculturalism would be somewhat threatening to white society as it would require that it lose its present (unofficial) status as the dominant culture in Canada.

call for a renegotiation for its relationships with other Native peoples in the present. The study of historical injustice is much easier to approve than that of present day problems. As Goldie explains, "[the Beothuk's] genocidal resonances make them attractive to white guilt without causing the confusion which their present-day counterparts raise for the white liberal" ("Fear" 74). By offering Craven and Such's novels as Native content, educators are able to satisfy the multicultural component (the texts are, on the surface, about other cultures) and to avoid discussions of present day Native issues in the classroom. It is up to the Native writer, apparently, to depict contemporary Native societies and their concerns apart from white society.

In what started out as a cycle of stories and developed into his first novel (Rooke 63), Thomas King writes stories about a contemporary Native community living in Medicine River, Alberta. The stories are narrated by a prosperous, and rather humorous Native photographer, Will, who chooses to live in the town near his late mother's reserve after he loses his job in Toronto; he cannot live on the reserve because his mother married a white man and, thus, she and her children lost their Indian status. These governmentally imposed rules about status do not appear to bother Will and

his narrative remains uncluttered by ruminations on similar repercussions of white governmental intervention in his community. Stories of the depressed and/or dying Indian are exposed by this narrative as unfounded rumours as in the following speculation on the fate of Pete Johnson:

> "So, he killed himself. Couldn't rodeo, wasn't much of a stock-car driver. One night he just drove his truck off Snake Coulee."
>
> "Floyd, I saw Pete last week."
>
> "What?... Oh, yeah . . .I remember now, it wasn't Pete, it was Jimmy Bruised Head."
>
> "Jimmy's in law school."
>
> "Well, you get the picture." (19)

Readers familiar with the image of the dying Indian are familiar with the "picture" Floyd is trying to paint. Will exposes it as an unrealistic image and provides a new one of surviving and successful Natives. Although this conversation is an example of the game of one-upmanship in which Floyd and Will constantly participate, the support of Will's claims that Pete is still alive and Jimmy goes to law school are substantiated elsewhere in the narrative. Hence, Will's point of view in this particular exchange is fairly reliable.

This alteration of the discourse of "Indian" by Natives

is further exemplified by the fight between Eddie Weaselhead and Big John Yellow Rabbit. While the fight is physical, it is also semiotic – they are fighting each other over the true representation/definition of Indian. Each character thinks the other one is not a real Native; Big John calls Eddie a "pretend Indian" and Eddie views Big John as an "apple"[10] (56-57). Eddie is a half-blood Indian who does not speak Blackfoot, was raised off a reserve, and sports a ribbon shirt, a beaded buckle, and an elaborate bone choker everyday to work (55). It is difficult to understand Eddie's place in the non-Native constructed discourse of Indian; his dress lends authenticity to a status that is questionable. What confuses the stereotype even more is that other Natives mock his dress code; Bertha tries to insult him by informing him that he looks like "a walking powwow poster" (55). Big John, although brought up on the reserve and speaker of Blackfoot that he is, questions norms of signification through his dress as well. He wears three piece suits, short hair, and a club tie (53, 56). Bertha does not approve of this code either; she informs Big John

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[10] The implication here is that Big John, like an apple, is red on the outside but white on the inside. This insult is similar to the "Banana" and "Oreo" insults referring to people of Asian and African descent respectively.

that he resembles an agent from the Department of Indian Affairs (53). The fight is never resolved; the true meaning of "Indian" is never fixed for the characters and, thus, remains fluid for the reader as well. What further problematizes any attempt to group Natives under one signified are the many references in the text to different Native groups (Cree, Blackfoot, Ojibway).

Non-Native understandings of what constitutes Native life, as well as the signifier "Native," are also questioned through the narrative. Because of the responsibility he feels as a Native writer to deal with Native issues such as child abuse and alcoholism (Canton 4), King does bring these aspects of Native life into his fiction; however, he also feels it is his responsibility to show that these problems also exist in white society. White characters and concerns exist only on the periphery of Medicine River; their stories are only told if they parallel an event which occurs in the Native community. A good example of this parallel structure is in chapter four in which Will discusses the community's reaction to the death of Jake whose abusive behaviour towards his wife was displayed both publically and privately. Intermingled in this narrative are Will's memories of his white neighbour, Mrs. Oswald, who ran away from her abusive husband but was eventually found by him.

With this emphasis on similarity between the cultures, white readers are forced to recognize that issues thought to permeate the Native community are also problems within white society; alcoholism, violence, and child/spouse abuse do not recognize racial lines in this text. As well, this technique of emphasizing the similarities between dissimilar communities effects the displacement of the Native character as "Other" without invoking white culture as a new other (Walton 79); the constructed opposition is broken down and the Native stereotypes are thus dismantled.

Ruby Slipperjack's novel, Honour the Sun, also contains references to domestic abuse and alcoholism in the Native community, but their connection to white society is rendered less visible than King's parallels. Recorded in diary entries, the novel is essentially a coming of age text which documents the life of Owl, the narrator, from her tenth to sixteenth birthday. Like Naomi's narrative about the internment, Owl's presentation of the more disturbing aspects of her childhood are bereft of analysis. For example, Owl has been taught from an early age to run and/or hide from drunken men trying to break into her home, but has never been informed of the reasons for this flight. One evening, Owl's mother is trapped by a drunken intruder and when the children return from their hiding place, Owl

notices that her mother's hair is "tangled" and her shoulders are "heaving" (100). Owl does not attempt to find reasons for her mother's visibly shaken condition or for her other curious actions that night (most noticeably her inexplicable need to wash herself). It is only the reader willing to piece the clues together who may conclude that Owl's mother was sexually assaulted. While this reading is substantiated by the violent reception this man receives from the mother and her eldest daughters when he returns (120), Owl does not know enough to draw this conclusion herself. Slipperjack's use of naive narration presents simple descriptions to which the reader may have complex reactions. For a reader to recognize the clues about sexual assault in Owl's narrative, s/he must have some prior knowledge about its effects on the victim and, presumably, this knowledge stems from narratives of sexual assault in his/her own society. As readers are not forced to interrogate their own though processes, however, this recognition of the similarities between cultures may not occur. What the reader cannot escape, however, is recognition of the stresses alcoholism and abuse create for the young Owl who must be prepared to escape her house at midnight and who experiences relief on the days she finds her mother sober (182).

Through Medicine River, Thomas King constructs an alternative view of Native life in Canada by deconstructing previously held notions of Native Canadians. In Medicine River as well as Honour the Sun, the reader is faced with a representation of contemporary Native life with its own inner troubles and tribulations apart from concerns about white society. There is positive intercultural interaction within Medicine River represented by strong Native/white friendship such as that of Rose and Erleen (54), but such negotiation between cultures does not appear to be the text's central focus. Nevertheless, by examining the importance given to the listening and telling of stories, a basic form of human interaction, a model for intercultural interaction can be drawn from the text's pages. The majority of the stories told in each chapter tend to misrepresent reality for the benefit of the teller: Erleen narrates stories about her life with her husband in the present tense to keep his memory alive; David carries around a picture of himself in order to narrate his experience at Wounded Knee and, thus, convince others of his contributions to and importance within Native society; Will creates histories for the father he never knew in order to fill that gap in his life; and January writes a suicide note for Jake which includes the apology she never received from him.

These interactions, whether intercultural or not, are successful because the listeners can allow for the voicing of an alternate representation of reality.

The story interactions which are unsuccessful are those in which the listeners impose their expectations (and understandings of reality) on the tellers. Lionel James, an elder from the reserve who tells stories abroad, returns from a world tour frustrated with the demands of his audiences:

> "But those people in Germany and Japan and France and Ottawa don't want to hear those stories. They want to hear stories about how Indians used to be. I got some real good stories, funny ones, about how things are now, but those people say, no, tell us about the olden days. So I do." (173)

The interaction here is unsuccessful because the teller is constrained by what others want to hear.[11] Nothing can be learned because the listeners will only hear what they always already knew; Lionel himself finds it odd that the audience behaves "like they never heard that story before" (175). While the listeners may enjoy themselves, this

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[11] It is rather interesting to note that our capital city is implicated in Lionel's story as a poor listener and, thus, a poor location for successful interaction — intercultural and otherwise.

repetitious interaction can lead nowhere; no new understanding is being forged, but rather a preconception is being reinforced. The story-telling model presented in Medicine River provides a method for successful intercultural interaction; one must simply allow other persons to tell the stories they want in a manner of their choosing and listen to them. This teller/listener relationship is precisely what allows for the intercultural friendship between Rose and Erleen.

Storytelling as a mode of intercultural interaction breaks down in Riverrun due to the language barrier. In a darkly ironic moment, white missionaries kill the Beothuk leader, Nonosabasut, just after he finishes a speech on the necessity of making peace between the two cultures (80-81). By presenting both the point of view of Nonosabasut and one of the white men, Such illustrates for the reader the difficulty inherent in negotiating between cultures (Johnston 61). Nonosabusut greets the men with a fresh spruce bough as a token of his intent to "share our lands with them in peace" (80). This is how his actions are interpreted by one of the white spectators:

> [He] advanced with a branch of a fir tree (spruce) in his hand. When about ten yards off he stopped and made a long oration. He spoke at least ten

minutes. . . . (81)

Neither the spruce branch nor the oration make sense to this man. As neither he nor anyone else in his party pause to speculate on the possible meanings of Nonosabut's actions or to encourage him to clarify his words, the possibility for mutual understanding is lost and Nonosabut is killed for trying to take his wife away from her captors after he believed he had negotiated her release. Once Demasduit is captured, some white characters do attempt to communicate with her but the focus is on her learning of English customs (their language and religion) – they make no effort to learn about her people's customs in order to understand her. Thus, intercultural interaction is unsuccessful in Riverrun because within the fiction there is no attempt at mutual understanding; however, Such's act of writing this novel could be understood as an attempt at intercultural understanding in a situation where interaction is impossible.

Like Such, Craven presents a view of Canada in which intercultural interaction has not been successful for Native people. It is the interaction with white people which causes the depth of sadness to reflect in the eyes of all of the Indian characters. Mark is able to effect a somewhat positive intercultural interaction by attempting to learn

the language and the customs of Kingcome society (32). Nevertheless, this interaction is represented as of benefit to Mark (in altering his understanding of death and the "fundamentals" of life) rather than to the community which, although it respects him, remains unaltered since his arrival. While in a position of religious servitude to his flock, Mark actually serves himself.

Religion is a point of ambivalent intercultural interaction in Honour the Sun. Every night before bed, Owl's mother reads from a red Cree Bible "which no one understands but it's read anyway" and then the lights go out and the family retells "Old Indian legends with some hilarious mistakes"(15). As Owl specifies that her first language is Ojibway, is it difficult to determine what language the Bible is in that makes it difficult to understand (English or Cree?). The mixing of cultures which produces a Cree Bible which then becomes part of an Ojibway family's nightly story-telling routine represents the potential of intercultural interaction on the level of story the drawback being, of course, that Owl does not understand these stories; nevertheless, as an effort is made every night to listen to stories from several cultures, the possibility for effective intercultural interaction remains plausible for this community.

When it comes to examining literature on any canon an important question to consider is whose interests the study of a particular text serves. Although the study of I Heard the Owl Call my Name and of Riverrun allows for a critique of white society, it also leaves the power of definition of Natives in the pens of non-Natives and keeps white society as a central focus of the text. While the study of these novels may have been acceptable up until the early 1980s before which few novels written by Native Canadians were published (Petrone 11), it makes little sense now when there is a growing selection of Native novels in paperback. The recommendation of Thomas King's Medicine River and Ruby Slipperjack's Honour the Sun is a good sign that some provinces are willing to alter text selections to allow for the creation of a true multiculturalist canon in which voices of different cultures speak for themselves. The danger of continuing to represent a community after it achieves the means of representation itself is explained by Richard Hill, a Native Canadian artist:

> As I've become aware of more and more texts and images created by others about Native peoples, I've found my voice rising almost inevitably – not simply because they are racist or misrepresentative individually, but rather because

> they seem to dominate discourse and become the central notions about us. (13)

The domination of non-Native texts about Natives on the Canadian high school canon suggests that the dominant segment of society is not yet ready to relinquish its powers of definition where Native people are involved. As the study of Obasan exemplifies, white Canada is willing to deal with its shame as long as it remains historical. The unwillingness to study texts about contemporary Native Canadian life written from a Native point of view is yet another example of white Canada's reticence to hear a new story, like King's, that might challenge non-Native representations of reality and notions of white superiority or, like Slipperjack's, might encourage readers to deal with white Canada's role in contemporary Native issues.

Conclusion

Looking Towards the Next Measure

"Oh, I've read about Indians. Beautiful people they are. But you're not exactly Indians are you? What is the proper word for people like you?" one asked.
"Women," Cheryl replied instantly.
"No, no, I mean nationality?"
"Oh, I'm sorry. We're Canadians," Cheryl smiled sweetly.
(In Search of April Raintree 116)

Asked by a white Canadian to define herself, Cheryl, a Métis, replies by placing herself in fairly encompassing categories which frustrate the woman attempting to classify people "like" Cheryl. The white woman searching for a definitive difference between herself and Cheryl is forced to confront her similarity with what she perceives as a recognizable other; the labels Cheryl provides are equally applicable to both women. Cheryl's claim of Canadian nationality ends the conversation and leaves unsatisfied the woman's desire to label Cheryl's difference. In this excerpt from her novel, Beatrice Culleton demonstrates that self-definition can be a successful mode of resistance to dominant society as Cheryl gains the power of definition in this exchange.

What is at work in the above exchange is the recreation of us/them boundaries. By refusing to assume membership

with "them," Cheryl presents the woman with the possibility of redefining "us." As the conversation ends here, the woman presumably does not take the time to redefine her relationship with Cheryl. The white woman does not desire to include Cheryl within her understanding of "us" as Canadian. The moment for successful intercultural interaction is lost and so, as James Tully argues, is the possibility for a post-imperial dialogue which would contribute to cultural and constitutional equality (57). Because the woman refuses to acknowledge the possible permeability of cultural borders, she retains a homogeneous understanding of Canadian culture as white (an understanding which perpetuates white cultural dominance).

The white Canadian who understands Canada only as the Great White North is a common figure in this country's literature; Hagar Shipley is a perfect example of this Canadian character who is more concerned with protecting the white Canadian image from taint than initiating successful intercultural interaction. What is uncommon, however, is a consideration of this Canadian as racist. White Canada's blindness to its own racism is outlined explicitly by Marlene Nourbese Philip:

> The currents of racism in Canadian society run deep, they run smooth, lulling white Canadians

> into a complacency that will see racism anywhere else but in Canada. (12)

Canadians are usually quick to point out the racism of the United States. We characterize ourselves as the good neighbours in the belief that Canada's multicultural mosaic is necessarily bereft of the type of racism and cultural dominance that a melting pot culture would entail. However, Canada's official multicultural stance does little to combat the country's problems of racism and, as Philip adds, white supremacy (185). My examination of the alterations in the Canadian high school canon attempts to reveal the inadequacy of multicultural policies and their inability to instill true cultural equality in the resulting literary reflection of Canada.

The inclusion of Obasan, Riverrun, and I Heard the Owl Call my Name in the high school canon is no doubt an attempt on the provincial level to implement the federal policy of multiculturalism which states that no one culture or ethnic group in Canada should achieve precedence over others. As the canon was previously dominated by narratives about the white Canadian experience, the inclusion of Asian and Native Canadian content novels in the current curricula can be understood as an attempt to recognize other (read non-white) cultural aspects of the Canadian experience; the texts which

are authorized to tell these experiences, however, do little to alter a reader's understanding of contemporary Canadian society as they address the cultural strife of Canada's past. The temporal restrictions of the ethnic voices in this canon suggest that the closest white Canadians will come to acknowledging their own racism is to recognize their racist actions in the past. Ethnic texts depicting the problems in contemporary Canadian societies do not easily receive authorization (as the limited support of Medicine River and Honour the Sun implies). Hence, the current Canadian canon continues to serve the interest of a dominant white society and does so under the guise of a multicultural canon.

This study is only the beginning of an investigation of the current high school canon. As most provincial English Language Arts Co-ordinators are eager to remind me, the curricula are constantly under revision. If we as readers, and as Canadian citizens, do not like the image of Canada with which the next generation of Canadians are being provided, the task is ours to encourage school boards to change their text selections. Robert Lecker argues that Canada "is worth talking about. The more we talk, the more we form the subject of our speech" (Real 106). I believe that Canadian literature also participates in this nation-

forming process because every text provides its reader with a certain idea of Canada. The ethnic background of the writers included in the curriculum suggests who is invited to participate in this national discussion. The inclusion of a Japanese Canadian voice is a good first step towards the recognition of other Canadian voices; to borrow, and somewhat alter, a phrase from Robert Frost, however, we have many miles to go before we sleep and many more voices to include in our literary discussion about Canada before we may realize the dream of interculturalism in which all voices speak for themselves and are attended to and understood by others.

The growing popularity of Canadian short story anthologies in high school curricula has the potential to address my concerns about white culture's dominance of the literary representations of the Canadian experience. The titles of three of these anthologies make their intent to represent many Canadian voices fairly clear: Coast to Coast, New Canadian Voices, and Canadians All. The short story anthology which includes Canadian writers of various ethnic backgrounds is an ideal text for studying the different cultural societies that make up Canada as many voices are included in this literary construction of the country. Much more balance is possible to achieve, in terms of cultural

representation, in the study of short stories rather than of a single novel. As most provinces do not state which stories within the anthologies are recommended for study, an investigation of their representation of Canada was not within the scope of this thesis; such an investigation would be, I believe, a worthwhile endeavour.

In my introduction, I framed this study as an examination of the identities permitted to dance on the maple leaves of Canadian fiction. The results indicate, not surprisingly, that those are permitted who will dance to the provincial government's piper's tune. This Canadian dance is not unlike the one Hagar remembers from her adolescence; it is a Scottish reel danced under Japanese lanterns and upon Native soil (22). Yeats' question comes to mind here: How can we know the dancer from the dance? I have no answer, but I can tell the piper's tune by the dance – it is played by and for white Canadians. And those who are already moving on the maple leaf need to realize that there are new partners to meet with new steps to teach. It is time for those who have the power to host this celebration of Canadian identity to relinquish their position as lords of the dance.

Appendix A: The Calgary Canon Today

The following table shows which provinces currently recommend for study ("R") the novels from the 1978 Calgary Conference's top ten list. Titles are listed in descending order of popularity according to the Conference's "List B" (cf Steele 153-54).

	BC/ YUK	ALT/ NWT	SASK	MAN	ONT	NB	NS	PEI	NFLD
Stone	R	R	R	R	R	R	R		R
Fifth		R		R	R	R	R		
House				R					
Valle			R			R	R	R	
Tin						R	R		
Duddy		R	R	R	R	R			
Hook							R		
Watch	R						R		
Wind	R	R	R	R	R	R		R	
Div.					R	R			

Full Title Names and Authors:

1. The Stone Angel – Margaret Laurence
2. Fifth Business – Robertson Davies
3. As for me and my House – Sinclair Ross
4. The Mountain and the Valley – Ernest Buckler
5. The Tin Flute – Gabrielle Roy
6. The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz – Mordecai Richler
7. The Double Hook – Sheila Watson
8. The Watch the Ends the Night – Hugh MacLennan
9. Who has seen the Wind – W. O. Mitchell
10. The Diviners – Margaret Laurence

Appendix B: Corse's 1988 Canon

Although I am examining the current high school canon, I thought it might be interesting to include the results of Sarah Corse's "top ten" list from her analysis of the Canadian university canon (cf Corse 70-71). Her information was obtained from several 1988/89 syllabi for literature classes at Canadian universities. Titles are listed in descending order of popularity.

1. The Imperialist – Sara Jeannette Duncan
2. Fruits of the Earth – Frederick Philip Grove
3. As for me and my House – Sinclair Ross
4. Two Solitudes – Hugh MacLennan
5. The Mountain and the Valley – Ernest Buckler
6. The Stone Angel – Margaret Laurence
7. Fifth Business – Robertson Davies
8. Lives of Girls and Women – Alice Munro
9. The Diviners – Margaret Laurence
10. Lady Oracle – Margaret Atwood

Appendix C: Top Nine Novels of 1997/98

The following table records the current nine* most recommended ("R") novels for study in Canadian high schools as listed by each province's most recent authorized bibliography (see introduction for explanation of research process). Titles are listed in descending order of popularity.

	BC/ YUK	ALT/ NWT	SASK	MAN	ON	NB	NS	PEI	NFLD
Stone	R	R	R	R	R	R	R		R
Wind	R	R	R	R	R	R		R	
Obasan		R	R	R	R	R	R		R
Fifth		R		R	R	R	R		
Duddy		R	R	R	R	R			
Owl	R		R	R				R	R
Joy			R	R		R		R	
Valley			R			R	R	R	
Wolf	R	R		R			R		

* I have chosen to include the top nine because there exists a tie between seven titles in the 10th position.

Full Titles of Novels:

1. The Stone Angel – Margaret Laurence
2. Who Has Seen the Wind – W. O. Mitchell
3. Obasan – Joy Kogawa
4. Fifth Business – Robertson Davies
5. The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz – Mordecai Richler
6. I Heard the Owl Call my Name – Margaret Craven
7. More Joy in Heaven – Morley Callaghan
8. The Mountain and the Valley – Ernest Buckler
9. Never Cry Wolf – Farley Mowat

Appendix D: Novels by/about Natives

The following table demonstrates the popularity of Native content novels recommended for study ("R") in each of the provinces. For the purposes of this study, "Native content" denotes texts by and/or predominantly about Native people and communities. I have included in this chart only the texts recommended by more than one province and listed them in descending order of popularity.

	BC/ YUK	ALT/ NWT	SASK	MAN	ON	NB	NS	PEI	NFLD
Owl	R		R	R				R	R
River		R	R				R		
Med.		R					R		
White.		R							R
Honour			R						R

Full Title Names and Authors:

1. I Heard the Owl Call my Name – Margaret Craven
2. Riverrun – Peter Such
3. Medicine River – Thomas King
4. Whiteout – James Houston
5. Honour the Sun – Ruby Slipperjack

Appendix E: Titles in Thesis

This table shows which provinces recommend for study ("R") the novels examined in this thesis.

	BC/ YUK	ALT/ NWT	SASK	MAN	ON	NB	NS	PEI	NFLD
Stone	R	R	R	R	R	R	R		R
Obasan		R	R	R	R	R	R		R
Owl	R		R	R				R	R
River.		R	R				R		
Honour			R						R
Med.		R					R		

Full Title Names and Authors:

1. The Stone Angel — Margaret Laurence
2. Obasan — Joy Kogawa
3. I Heard the Owl Call my Name — Margaret Craven
4. Riverrun — Peter Such
5. Honour the Sun — Ruby Slipperjack
6. Medicine River — Thomas King

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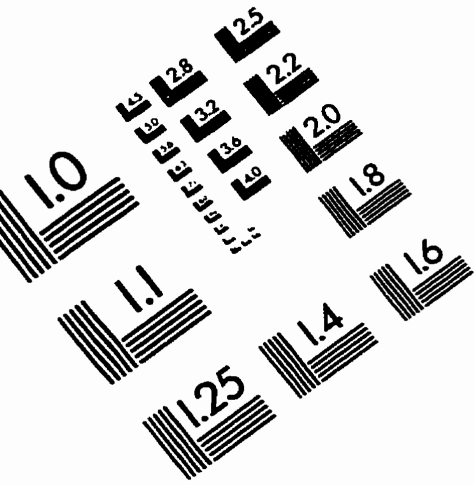
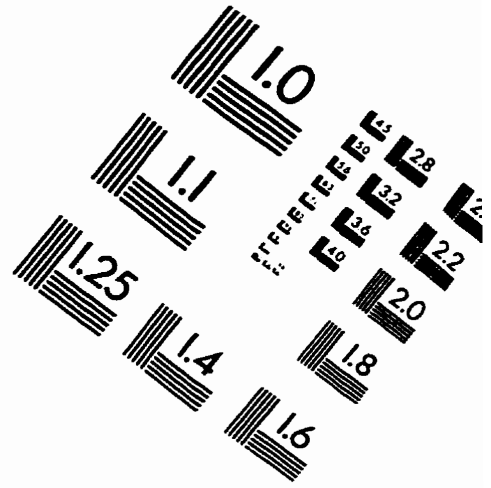
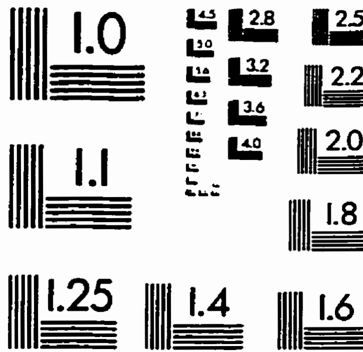
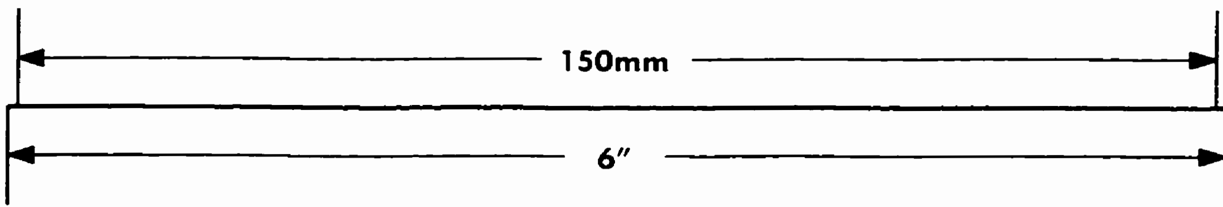

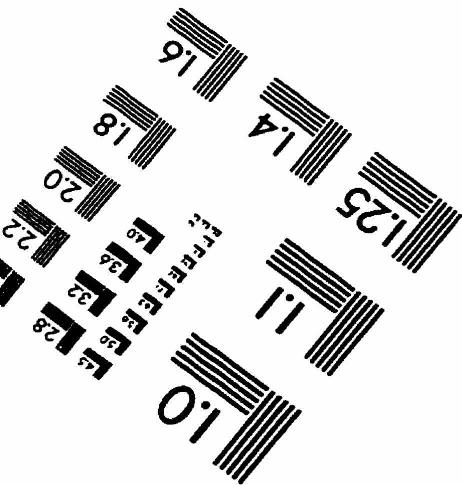
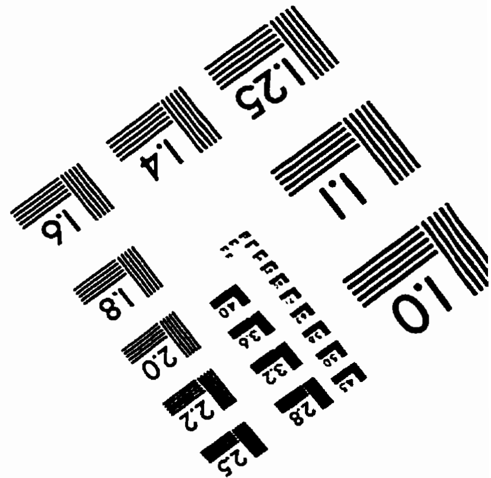

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