Straddling the 49th Parallel

Moira Kirstin Boyd

Fred Taylor, PhD
George Elliott Clarke, PhD

May 14, 2003
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts, Vermont College of Norwich University

For Freda
For Jim

CONTENTS

CHAPTER

OVERVIEW……………………………………………………..8

1. Bildungsroman……………………….........................12

New York City
Prince Edward Island
An Academic Awakening
My Cultural Confusion
Silent Voices

2. Two Theories………………………………………………27

Overview
Literary Theory as Elitism
Ideology versus Identity

3. Who We Are………………………………………………39

Overview
Race Relations As Subject Matter
White Fear
Otherness
Merging With Literature
What Canada Claims It Writes About

4. Migration…………………………………………………..59

Overview
From The United States to Canada

5. Literary Analysis…………………………………………..69

Overview of Special Note
James Baldwin versus Charles R. Saunders
Richard Wright versus Austin Clarke
George Elliott Clarke

CHAPTER

6. Silencing the Subaltern……………………………….105

Overview
Racism in Literature
Stilled Tongues Surviving
Disregard
Hushed Tongues Healing
Conclusion

7. Works Cited……………………………………………..140

Overview

This paper will attempt to explore the literary differences between Afro-American and Afro-Canadian literature. These differences will be explored through personal experience, literary theory, historical differences between Canada and the United States, literary analysis, concepts of race, and finally, the impact upon the silencing of the 'other.'

I became interested in this particular and specific exploration less for academic reasons than for personal ones. Having lived in both the United States and Canada, I became keenly interested in finding the answers to some questions nagging me about these two countries. Why did I have such vastly different experiences in each country? Would these differences show up in each country's literature? Had my perceptions of African Americans been accurate when, as a group, I began to feel that they were far angrier, and more in revolt than Afro-Canadians? Why did I feel more 'at home' in Canada than I did in the United States?

While doing my undergraduate work in the United States, I read for the first time a small selection of important American literature written by both White Americans and Black Americans. Over the years the various subsequent discussions of these literatures created in me an emotional schism of sorts. I began to realize, that in America, very few White students, scholars, or individuals had read literature written by African Americans, but that African Americans, if so exposed, had read both White literary classics and

African American literature. I began to ponder what impact that dynamic might have on the racial perceptions that each of us holds about the other. I began to think of literature, not only as a historical documentation of how we have lived and thought, but also as a great wealth of information about the feelings and viewpoints of a peoples and predicament that, under normal everyday circumstances, we readily avoid. Simply put: it may be far easier to read a book than find the courage to move to Harlem; but the reading of a book is by no means any less important and still much can be learned. Finally, I began to contemplate the reasons why certain literature gets taught, while other literature get shelved as idiosyncratic, or worse, placed as 'special interest'.

In **chapter one,** my reader will be taken on a very personal journey that includes an overview of my life spent living in the Unites States and Canada. It also centres on my academic journey that has directly led me to this particular thesis.

Chapter two, looks at two theories. One pertains to literary theory; specifically to notions concerning 'structuralism' as theorised by Louis Althusser. In this way, I hope to construct a hypothetical framework which will enable the reader to glean a possible explanation for why we are taught what we are taught. I hope, also, to clarify the motivation behind such a theory and apply it specifically to literature, and notions, concepts and perceptions of 'classic' (valuable) literature.

Secondly, I look at the societal differences between Canada and the United States. Seymour Lipset's thesis Continental Divide will be used for illustration. I do this to show the historical divergence of two countries that resulted in two identities which subsequently shaped their respective literatures.

This historical overview is, in some ways, a preface to **chapter three** which examines various notions that are held about Canada, the United States and the literature of each country. I will examine 'white fear' as a multi-media concept and apply it to the 'silencing' of the 'other' in literature. Where "White fear' is specific to the United States, "What Canada Claims it Writes About' is an attempt to explore Canada's blurred image of its own literary identity.

Chapter four is an abbreviated history of Blacks in Canada, with a specific focus on Black immigration from The United States to the Canadian Maritimes, with a focus on Nova Scotia.

Chapter five is a straightforward comparative literary analysis of Afro-American and Afro-Canadian literature. In this chapter I will explore authors: James Baldwin, Charles R. Saunders, Richard Wright, Austin Clarke, and finally George Elliott Clarke.

Chapter six will explore the various ways in which voices of colour are silenced in literature. I have coined the terms used in this chapter as, 'Stilled Tongues Surviving,' which examines the impact of silence upon survival. It also explores the notion that characters that are silent are voiceless. 'Disregard,' examines how voices are silenced by the erasures exercised by racism. This is an important look at how cruelty, inflicted upon the coloured in literature, is often not done for predictable writing/writer's devices.

'Hushed Tongues Healing,' addresses the silence that comes about from introspection and meditation. Authors that will be explored in this chapter include Toni Morrison, Mark Twain, Truman Capote, and Maya Angelou, amongst others.

BILDUNGSROMAN

New York City

As I begin this paper, I am compelled to think back as far as I can as to what might have influenced me early in life, to determine what 'seed' planted long ago has contributed to my undertaking this academic study. What instantly comes to mind, and which I had not considered, until now, involves my early childhood years growing up in New York.

I was born in New York City, in the Inwood Spytyn Dyvil section of Northernmost Manhattan, and attended the prestigious New Lincoln School at 110th Street. In between these two neighbourhoods lies Harlem. Each day I was driven from my home in Inwood, through Harlem, and dropped off at New Lincoln, and, at day's end, a reverse route was taken.

I have absolutely no recollection of having ever stopped in Harlem. What I do recollect, and can only now articulate, was that my 'intended life' was metaphorically and literally meant to bypass the life I viewed in Harlem from the safety of our family Volkswagen. Harlem was seen through the window of our VW, as though from a tour bus. As a child I always had a distinct feeling that Harlem was different from the rest of New York. We drove through it, but never stopped. Things happened in Harlem that didn't happen outside of Harlem. For example, on the morning after Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, we drove slowly through its streets and witnessed the aftermath of a night of rioting. We drove slowly as we gawked at the burning buildings, the splintered, shard-

ridden storefronts. It was beyond my comprehension, as a child, to understand what was happening there, or what Harlem meant to those that lived there or to those who never walked its streets.

By bypassing Harlem, in many respects, I avoided racism. But I also missed discovering early the anger felt by many African Americans, a rage that I was not introduced to until I went to college well into adulthood. I had no childhood understanding of what life for African Americans meant. I was not able to make the connection between a constant confrontation with racism and the subsequent manifestation of fury. This did not happen until I opened a book and began to look at the history of the United States in relation to African Americans. (I must shamefully admit here, to my reader, that prior to this understanding I held bourgeois attitudes regarding African Americans. I watched television and always made mental comments to myself like, "Why are they so angry?" Or, "Anyone can go to New Lincoln…"

New Lincoln, a private school, was considered a progressive, avant-garde school, practically fully integrated, Its students came from all walks of life: from the poor, to foreign exchange students, to the famous, to the abundantly wealthy. Yet despite all of its progressiveness, what sticks out in my mind is the memory of Mr. Gibbs, a Black man in his sixties, who wore a step-and-fetch-it suit complete with a white butler collar and white gloves, and whose sole purpose, at New Lincoln, was to open the door to the school plus the doors of the arriving cars or limousines from which various students alighted. It was impossible to grasp, at my young age, the role of Mr. Gibbs who, while waiting for my mother to pick me up, would tell me that I was lucky and that I should,

“do him proud.” It was Cecil, the Black elevator man, who gave me elevator rides despite the school rules of ‘faculty only,’ who winked and teased and gave me potato chips as we rode up and down. I suspect that these two men held these positions only because their skin colour prevented them from having more. They were aware, I am sure, that I was experiencing a life that they had been deprived of. I was the future in their eyes. I was part of what kept them going. I made them proud despite my having no relation to them. But I was not able to understand this social-racial psychology then.

It is only after reading African American literature that I am able now to surmise what it was about Harlem that my mother felt a need to bypass. By avoiding Harlem, I temporarily evaded any serious understanding of the Black world around me. I had no understanding of what life for many African Americans meant. (I have a White mother and a Black father. I have been asked if my mother’s Whiteness might have had something to do with her feeling a need to drive through Harlem without stopping. I would have to say “no” because when my mother arrived in New York City in the late 40’s, from Michigan, Harlem is where she chose to live as a human rights/civil rights activist.)

Prince Edward Island

While I may have circumvented racist attitudes as a child, I also learned early that something about those who lived in Harlem or something about Harlem itself was to be avoided, stepped around, and not stopped for. My life became even further removed from racism and Harlem, both literally and figuratively, when my family and I moved to Prince Edward Island, Canada.

After we moved to P.E.I., it was only during a monthly trip to Halifax, a day trip away, that I encountered other people whose skin had various shades of my own skin colour. The Halifax/Dartmouth area has one of the oldest Afro-Canadian populations in Canada. In Halifax, when there was a chance to interact with Blacks, we stopped. We lingered awhile and chatted. I can remember when the musician Jimi Hendrix died, my mother and I had taken a day trip into Halifax, and there we came upon a young Black man in white jeans with a huge afro who was selling belts that he had hand-tooled. I remember we stopped and made a purchase from him: it was a white leather belt linked together with round rings, meant to be worn around the hips with the then-popular, hip-hugging bell bottoms.

Black Haligonians looked just like Harlemites, but something about them allowed us to get out of the Microbus, and mingle. There, we didn't bypass. There was a way of being in the Canadian Maritimes that allowed me to feel differently than I had in New York City. I am unsure exactly what it was, but I can suggest a few of the differences.

While living in New York City and attending New Lincoln, I felt a definite sense of division. There were the rich and the poor, the east side and the west side, those who took public transportation versus those who arrived by car and those, like myself, who went home by way of uptown (from 110th street) versus those that left school to go downtown. All of these divisions meant something. Uptown meant working-class poor, east side meant old money, west side meant Jewish or nouveau riche, and arriving in a limousine (versus by public transportation) meant one had extremely famous parents.

In Canada, many of our neighbours did not have indoor plumbing. Some did not have cars. Many walked for a mile or two each day for daily staples such as milk or eggs. Others harvested the ocean to supplement the food on their tables. Most were farmers and, as my mother said, most were poor. But this is not what I remember. I remember us all being equal. I remember that there were so many kids in each family that my older siblings could have friends in the same families where I had friends.

On Prince Edward Island we seemed to be all made equal when we arrived for church on Sunday. In Rustico, where I lived, when you went calling, no mandatory Black servant answered the door. Here when we arrived for a 'cuppa', squares were brought out, and one sat down to an afternoon of serious gossip.

I am bi-racial and bi-cultural too, and it has only been in Canada that I have felt free to be the truth of my makeup. In the States, I am simply Black; I am not allowed a pluralist dimension.

An Academic Awakening

As an undergraduate, I did an independent study with Jim Case, the former dean of the Hartsdale campus of Empire State College in New York State. Together we read a selection of African American literature, about nine books, which I picked arbitrarily, based upon a tuning into Oprah, or my catching the title of a book that I noticed someone reading on the subway, or my receiving a book as a gift. There was no premeditated reason, on my part, for choosing any of the titles.

During the study, I became acutely aware that what I was reading was very alien to me. It never occurred to me that literature written by a Black author would have a different story to tell than the one I knew. I did not 'relate' to this literature nor can I say that I understood it. In some ways, what I was reading could very well have been science fiction for all the sense it made to me.

Even though I did not empathize with the literature, it affected me deeply. I found myself unable to sleep. It created in me a sense of dread-- as though I were witnessing something unholy and morally wrong. I had a similar feeling when, as a child, my family and I visited the German Pavilion at Montreal's 1967 Expo. There, for the first time, I watched Nazi film footage of Jewish extermination. I was witnessing man being his worst towards man. In African American literature, I was reading the responses of those who had been wounded by man being his worst to man.

I read Morrison's Song of Solomon and Paradise, James Baldwin's Giovanni's Room ,and Go Tell It On the Mountain, and, Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man (which I might add I began reading thinking it was the horror movie by a similar title: The Invisible Man). I read Jamaica Kincaid's Lucy, Dorothy West's The Wedding, Richard Wright's Native Son, and finally, Gloria Naylor's Bailey's Café.

A couple of years later, while attending SUNY-Buffalo, I encountered something called 'literary theory' which induced in me, really a kind of anaphylactic shock. I barely lasted fifteen weeks. I shuffled myself right out of Buffalo, taking with me the various books I purchased for the four classes that I failed to finish.

Recently, I had the occasion to unpack some of those rejected books, opened one for a laugh, and discovered that one in particular, titled: What Is Cultural Studies? (Storey) was actually very relevant to my current work. The book is a compilation of essays which offers a historical overview of the recent essayistic debate on the subject of cultural studies. Cultural studies are shrouded in the language of literary theorists.

Literary theory and cultural studies are intertwined in the sense that many of the pioneers for one were integral to the foundation of the other. It is an incestuous field, often with schools of thought being the regurgitated thoughts of someone's former teacher such as Michel Foucault, the former student of Louis Althusser.

I began to believe that there was, and is, a connection between literary theory, cultural studies, and the syllabi of higher education. If the debate surrounding literary theory and cultural studies was partially around the issues of the exclusion of 'the other,' then it occurred to me that some of the literature I was reading had to be rethought. What I mean is that, if readers, say, reading Huckleberry Finn, fail to see the significance of 'Nigger Jim,' that failure might be, in part, for a number of reasons. We might decide that to focus on 'Nigger Jim' would be a shift of power to a character who is not White. We might further have some difficulties with a White male author attempting to narrate a Black man's perspective. But I think there is more to this, and I think it gets complicated. If we are not taught in higher education that the literary perspective of the 'other' is as valuable as that of Western White Euro-centric literature, then it makes sense that 'Nigger Jim' would go unnoticed. We learn by omission just as well as by way of direct tutelage. I will demonstrate, when I introduce Louis Althusser's analysis on the necessity of

reproduction that within the academic environment, in order to graduate into the work force, there are necessary participants required to keep some of us 'better off' than others. There is also Richard Dyer's thesis that the position of being White is the position of speaking for all races (the human 'raceless' race).

My position is that all of the literary and cultural studies debates, and what is taught in higher education, is mirrored precisely in our literature. That who or what is noticed or spoken to or ignored in literature, in a particular society, is what takes place in that society. Literary theory is an intellectual attempt, primarily by White males, to maintain elitism within the walls of academia. If that elitism also purports to speak for all of those who are not a part of the elite group, then the elite maintain a position of great power.

Literary theory is an academic attempt to apply a 'science' to literature in order to show predictable patterns. That anyone even had the time or the will to attempt such a revolution is beyond this writer's grasp. But there are those amongst us who linger and savour everything uttered by Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault - two respected pioneers within the literary theory debate, whom I will make no attempt at claiming to understand.

To want to apply a science to literature at all is a frightening concept to this writer. Literature is all about the emotional and subconscious interpretation of the world around us. Writers mirror their respective societies. Literature, like art, is practically the only thing left in this world that still maintains, and supports, the humanity in us all. To want to apply a science, free of emotion, to literature is akin to fascism. Further, to apply

that science to the emotions and thoughts of an artist who is writing a reflection of the world around himself or herself is an evident attempt to control consciousness, but also, thus, to alter history. If we add to this ‘stew,’ a muddling of the language, then control is placed also on what is read and who has access to what is read. Literary theory, for me, is an academic attempt at control. It is an attempt to reserve ‘serious’ literature for elite readers.

My Cultural Confusion

Having grown up for a time on Prince Edward Island, I was quite removed from the experiences depicted in Afro-American books. My experience living in Canada did not match what I was reading. This revelation caused in me a profound awakening and an almost obsessive desire to find out what the tone was of African Canadian literature, and to uncover the possible reasons for this difference. I needed to discover whether my feelings of comfort and freedom in Canada were real or whether I had lived a fantasy. I wanted to know if Canada was free(r) of this claustrophobic racism I was reading about, or whether I had imagined a Canada that did not really exist. If there were differences I needed to know why.

I found that Afro-Canadian literature was indeed different, and portrayed a closer match to my memories and feelings. I felt that unearthing that difference would be crucial to a partial understanding of racism, and a source of contrast for much pan-African literature.

Silent Voices

The final part of my thesis addresses the 'silencing' of African American voices in literature. This extended thesis stemmed from an additional study, taken with Jim Case, who required me to read Huckleberry Finn.

I had never read this book before, unlike most of my fellow classmates. It was introduced, alongside the other texts to be read, as having no American rivals within the time frame that Jim Case had selected: that of the 20th century. When he introduced Huck Finn to my class, with some basic reading direction, he referred to a character we would come upon, as the 'Nigger Jim'. Not having read the book I was mortified – I thought Jim was using the word 'Nigger' out of context, simply to refer to a Black man. Also, when he uttered this word, many a head in the class furtively turned towards me creating a marginal feeling within myself.

Anecdotally, I have related this story over the years to many people who thought Jim Case was very, very wrong for having used this word in a classroom setting. Some have said the White-to-Black student ratio should have prevented him from using the word; others just simply said, "He shouldn't have."

I will defend him outright. It took courage to use that word in a world preoccupied with 'political correctness.'

Too often being politically correct is a parroting of what is right and wrong based upon a populist point of view – it follows an ideology, and as I shall point out later,

ideologies have no sense of history. In short, being politically correct often excises the history supporting an often fleeting form of self censorship.

A few weeks later, when we returned to the class to discuss Huck Finn, I was sure, after hearing the various comments form my classmates, that I had somehow gotten hold of an edition different from my peers. I even went so far as to look at the book of the students to my left and then to my right. It was like I was in a room with people who had suddenly begun speaking a foreign language without telling me, and insisting that they were still speaking my language. It was so profoundly disorientating it was as though my inner ear were faltering and rendering me off balance. My naïveté was such that I assumed Jim had not read the book either. This last experience, coupled with the intellectual exchange I had with him, catalyzed my pursuit of my current studies. It also changed forever my social perceptions. I understood, from that moment on, that despite living in the same world, Blacks and Whites do not share a common reality.

Perhaps most importantly, reading took on a new meaning for me. I no longer believed in only one way to read a book. I also immediately wondered how many other ‘Nigger Jims’ had gone unnoticed in literature and been rendered to the ‘side lines’ while White characters remained front and centre. I began to rethink literature from the perspective of being its student. What were White students being taught if they were not made aware of ‘Nigger Jim’? What did it mean for African Americans to be required (in order to graduate with a four-year degree) to read White ‘classics’ while Whites could skip Black ones?

I began to believe that how literature is introduced, and taught, has a profound influence upon how we perceive one another. Hence, it is disgraceful and alarming to me, that, in America, pan-African literature classes are too often simply filled with African Americans. In Canada, however, that pan-African classes are attended by individuals from a host of ethnic backgrounds says something very profound to me. It has been the search for the answers to how and why there are these differences between the two countries and their literatures that I undertook this study.

TWO THEORIES

Overview

In this chapter I will look closely at an essay written by Louis Althusser which examines the mechanisms needed to ensure the reproduction of a hierarchy of ruling class ideals, along with their bourgeois supports. Also, I will examine two distinct, fundamental differences between Canada and the United States via the work of Seymour Lipset. Understanding these two theories is crucial to appreciating the divergent interests of each country's literature.

Inherent in Lipset's' theory is a concept of 'Americanization.' I will be exploring this notion from the perspective of how it might influence what we read, and how we might perceive what we read.

Literary Theory as Elitism

There is a debate which emanates form the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Studies in Birmingham, England. It involves literary theory, cultural studies, and it throws around words such as 'structuralism,' and 'post-modernism'.

The debate, until relatively recently, did not attract major participation from American academia. Despite this absence the debate has not prevented speculation on what American academics would add to the debate, or more precisely, how it would 'Americanise' American academics and American society in light of, and along side of, Marxist theory.

The debate plays a very unusual game. Almost entirely, it demands that a participant use the language of the dominant. The language of the dominant is an academic 'conundrum' of words which no sane person discourses in naturally. As we shall later see with Louis Althusser, an early pioneer of literary theory, there is a pragmatic reason for this chosen language in which to discourse: it keeps the elitism intact.

As tedious as the vocabulary can be, one can truly get a glimpse at what pure academic thought, and thinking might, and should be: an often difficult struggle to see 'the whole picture;' to be open to and combine the ideas outside our respective disciplines, if, for no other reason, than to enrich those disciplines which we love the most.

With literary theory it is practically impossible to prove any of the concepts it bandies about because there is no real science in the discipline, unlike say, mathematics. Literary theory also insists upon dialoguing in a jargon that is alien to even the most eloquently educated amongst us.

One of the primary focuses of the cultural studies debate centres on the historical ramifications of the exclusion of the 'other', by which I mean, what is not readily taught in academics. The 'other' is female, Aboriginal, African, Asian, Latino, gay, and lesbian.

A major structural foundation of the aforementioned debate is Marxist theory. Marxism is based upon the theory that the dominant class is dominant only through the exploitation of the non-dominant majority, and that the dominance of the majority only supports a select few. Inherent in this theory, according to Marx, is the notion that the very infrastructure is doomed to fail because revolution is inevitable to its construct. It is inevitable because, simply put: no one wishes to fall into, or stay within the underclass.

With enough time spent 'being without,' revolution is inherent in human living in capitalistic societies.

Admittedly, this is a very simplistic definition of Marxist Theory, but it will serve this paper none the less. I must argue that what is taught in academia is meant to serve a very select few (the dominant) at the expense of the non-dominant majority.

Cultural studies is also interesting to me because, as a student, I have sat in classes where instructors have declared that there is no literature of note written by anyone other than White authors. The effect of this proclomation is that 'I' become marginal. It presupposes the notion of supremacy; that one culture/race is more 'cultured', 'sophisticated' or simply, 'elite'. It gives the impression that all other literature is not worth reading. It is this literary 'death' which I wish to address in this paper as well, for as long as we do not read the voices (*and experiences*) of many other peoples, different from ourselves, we are really left knowing nothing; we are left with no perspective on our own identities. Northrop Frye posits that reading allows us an unique opportunity for learning. To paraphrase his position, he believes that, through literature, we can encounter the evils of human behaviour at its worst, and to do so via materials presented to us as entertainment. Frye's premise is that the more exposed we are to evils, through literature, the less likely we will tolerate it in reality (Frye 42).

In <u>Survival,</u> Margaret Atwood asserts that, if we read only one literature, even if it is our own, and especially if it is only our own, we will fail to have contrast; for with contrast we find patterns; that, to know ourselves well, we must know our literature in relationship to the whole picture (Atwood 17).

Exploring literature in this manner is particularly important to me because too many supposedly well-educated individuals have shown surprise when told that Canada has a literature of its own. These same people are further confounded when I tell them that my particular focus is on Afro-Canadian literature. The extent to which I encountered Americans who found my study surprising got me thinking about what it means to 'Americanise'; specifically, what sort of thinking process is involved? It also made me wonder why it was that so many Americans perceive Canada's vast landscape as being free of Black faces.

Ideology versus Identity

Sociologist Seymour M. Lipset asserts that America's foundation is embedded in an ideology and that Canada's foundation stems from an identity. American ideology sets the individual above the group. In Canada, the group comes before the individual. Literary themes of community abound in Canadian literature. I am not, however, suggesting that these communities love their neighbours, but they do know their neighbours, and often, if begrudgingly, they care for its members.

'Aloneness' as a literary theme abounds in American literature. This 'aloneness' seems to justify all individualistic behaviour. Given the lack of community in American life, its literature fosters characters whose various behaviours attract little critique -- no matter how anti-social they may be. Conversely, Canadian literature is chock-to-the-gills-of-a-mackerel with people offering opinions about another's behaviour.

Metaphorically, a community is a type of collaboration: it recognises the various quirks of its individuals but accepts them as part of the whole. Lipset writes:

> …Nationality is related to community; one cannot become un-English, or un-Swedish. Being an American however is an ideological commitment. It is not a matter of birth. Those that reject American values are un-American (Lipset 19).

If we take the concept of an ideology, and apply it to literature, or literary themes, then perhaps to 'Americanise' is to render intellectual thought as individual, not collective. However, community, however dysfunctional, is intact in Canadian literature.

One of the pioneers of literary theory and cultural studies was Louis Althusser. I chose the following excerpts from an essay he wrote because it helped me see in my 'mind's eye' how a people/culture might come to think the way it does. I had this nagging sense that the questions I was specifically asked about my present study, and the perceptions I encountered about literature, countries (or the racial make-ups of countries) quite possibly had a historical background that I did not know. It seemed to me that there was something more complicated, than simple naïveté, or ignorance, behind why I was being asked the sort of questions I was regarding my study.

Louis Althusser was a theorist of 'Structuralism'. Structuralists hold that, deep within us all, exist structures that inhibit human initiative or historical change.

The following is a rather lengthy and wordy paraphrasing of an even longer, and far-wordier essay by Althusser. I ask that my reader muddle through, for, on the other side is an understanding crucial to my own thesis.

The essay is titled, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)" (Althusser 1). In this essay, Althusser makes a strong case for the theory of structuralism through his thesis, *'On the reproduction of the condition of reproduction'*.

Here Althusser identifies the environment needed to cause societies to enact behaviours so engrained that it cannot untangle itself from its own enmeshments. His theory is that, this being so, we as humans, are forever inclined and subject to being the very instruments which keep us repeating the very histories we wish to avoid.

According to Althusser, "…No production is possible which does not allow for the reproduction of the material conditions of production: the production of the means of production" (2).

Althusser applies this concept to entire societies. His picture is a dim one to say the least; dim but fascinating. He discusses how the labour force, in order to produce a product, has to be reproduced with diversely skilled labourers who can reproduce a reproduction of what went before. Althusser then illustrates for his reader how one can entice a labourer into one type of job over another, by not only requiring a reproduction of skills, but a reproduction of submission to the rules of the recognised order of things established by the ruling ideology. He asserts that the ruling ideology maintains the worker reproduction by handing out certain obtainable 'prizes' if the reproduction of production is carried out.

These 'prizes' consist of promotions, jobs, related perks, and the ultimate goal of a labourer of production, which is to learn to handle workers like oneself, and eventually manage some of one's own (30). How does one fall into the 'daze of reproduction' to such an extent that we don't even notice, or notice perhaps our incorporation in oppressive structures, but complacently accept?

Althusser defines two ideologies which keep reproduction reproducing. First there is the 'Repressive State Apparatus', which includes the government, the military, the police, the courts, and prisons. The second class, called 'Ideological State Apparatuses', includes churches, schools (private and public), the family unit, the law, political

systems, trade unions, communications, and popular culture such as the arts, literature, and sports (16).

Althusser views the 'Repressive State Apparatuses' as being a part of the public domain, while the 'Ideological State Apparatuses' fall into the private domain. He suggests "That the distinction between the public and private is a distinction internal to bourgeois law, and valid in the (subordinate) domains in which bourgeois law exercises its 'authority' (18).

Althusser also asserts that the 'Repressive State Apparatuses' function through violence and that the 'Ideological State Apparatuses' function through ideology (19).

I will now focus on one sub-institution: The Education Apparatus.

Althusser theorises that, from a very early age, most of us are placed in schools (an Ideological State Apparatus) where we are inundated with accepted ideologies of the ruling class which we refer to as 'subjects': math, science, French, and literature, and so on. The majority of us simply graduate from high school and enter the work world as the labourers reproducing reproduction. It is also this group, the majority, which never questions what it was drilled to know. We sort of graduate with a 'that's-the-end-of-the-story' mentality. This group becomes the non-dominant majority whose sole purpose, unbeknownst to them, is to be exploited by the dominant few. (I will also suggest that one can only be exploited when one is without knowledge, and that true knowledge lies in understanding history.)

A select few are able to extend their education and eventually emerge into the workforce as white-collar workers who have jobs usually managing (handling) the non-

dominant majority. Althusser presents the last level of school graduates, an even smaller select few as the dominant few who enter the workforce as the "…Agents of repression" (29). Each group is provided with the ideology that suits the role it is required to fulfill. The non-dominant majority is filled with the highest sense of allegiance to their very exploitation. The exploiters and the agents of repression have allegiance to obedience without apparent discussion (6).

While this argument may seem like a tangle of language, I use Althusser's ideas to show how a particular literature becomes dominant, and also, how a non-dominant literature might be inclined towards 'revolt.'

Lipset theorises that America is a country based on an ideology (Lipset 19), and that Canada asserts itself as an identity (42). Althusser, I might add, suggests that inherent in ideologies is a repression of history. He writes, "Ideology is conceived as a pure illusion, a pure dream, i.e. as nothingness. All its reality is external to it" (Althusser 33). Further, he argues that, "Ideology has no history, which emphatically does not mean that there is no history in it (on the contrary, for it is merely the pale, empty and inverted reflection of real history) but that it has no history *of its own*…Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real condition of existence" (36). What Althusser suggests is that ideologies are mere wishful thinking or, more specifically, a form of propaganda. It supports ideas one wishes to project, rather than the way one really might be. This being so, inherent in ideologies is their constant need to reinvent truth, thus evacuating any fixed history.

On the other hand, identity, remains the same, despite the changing conditions in which it exists. Identity demands ritual, and an acceptance and an inclusion principle which allows an individual to remain a part of the whole (the identity), even if the individual expresses thoughts that contest the agreed-upon identity.

Lipset illustrates this point by declaring that only Americans declare one another un-American, (Lipset 19), that is, when an individual strays from the ideology of America. One can never be, nor does one hear phrases such as, un-Canadian, say, for one is always accepted as a Canadian, even if one disagrees with Canadian policies. One can disagree with an identity for there is room for difference whereas disagreement with an ideology threatens the ideology itself, and ideologies are dependant upon believers.

WHO WE ARE

Overview

My course with Jim Case was titled, "What Is American Literature?" As a class we identified many U.S. themes such as freedom, conquering the frontier, and making a fresh start. Margaret Atwood, in Survival, elaborates on American literary themes by including the gap between the promise and the actuality, the search for Utopia… (Atwood 31). Lipset, culling various Canadian opinions about American literature, adds the expression of optimism, and outgoingness. He associates these perceptions with the U.S.'s great power and economic success (Lipset 59).

Whenever I read or hear what it is that others define as being uniquely American about our literature, I always wonder what I am missing. What are the books they are referring to that can be defined in this way? I have to constantly remind myself that they are not speaking of any literature other than the literature written by and about White concerns, except

> The literature of the white south, a defeated region, that of American Blacks, a people suffering from the effects of slavery and racism, and that stemming from the declining old New England upper class, all can match Canadian writing in pessimism. (59)

These are not the themes or concerns of African America's literature. How can we claim equality when every time there is a discussion about a general field of information we separate it into categories of race with 'White' themes always being the ideal and all others merely a 'special interest'?

Richard Dyer, in his brilliant thesis, White, posits that, for the most part, “White people speak about nothing but White people, [but that they] couch it in terms of people in general” (Dyer 3). He goes on to suggest that they (Whites) do not present themselves to themselves as Whites but rather as just the human race with various differences such as gender, class, or ability. His thesis is that Whites and Whiteness are never looked at in terms of what it means, and what impact Whiteness has on the rest of us who have our races attached to our characters. Everyone else has a race but White people. Everyone else is referred to by their race except White people. If Whites are, as Dyer suggests, the ‘universal’ or just the ‘human race’ (3), what does that make the rest of us? And if Whiteness is the ‘norm’, then it would follow, and make sense, that all the rest of us would want to become ‘normal’ too. But this is an ideology that demands believers who believe that they are inferior to the dominant ideology. How might the dominant ideology manage to find believers who believe they are inferior? How does one recruit for such a pernicious construct?

Althusser suggests that the ‘lowest man on the totem pole’ is also, more often than not, the most vehemently attached to the ideologies that suppress him (Althusser 29). It is not generally the most educated amongst us who join the Klan or who volunteer for war or who wish to become a policeperson. But the ‘Repressive State Apparatus’ requires the steadfast adherence of repressors to its built-in ideology. Once you believe in those ideologies, hook-line-and-sinker, you have inadvertently participated in the production of reproduction, and bought into the notion that, by adhering to the ideology, you will gain admission into the dominant class.

The more educated we become, and by educated, I am referring to the enlightenment which comes through rigorous research; that one eventually understands that all disciplines are historically connected. And that there is a direct correlation between this knowledge and our potential impact upon the future, and how likely we are, or are not, to cause harm.

It bothers me profoundly that at the graduate level of education my White peers, at the school I currently attend, do not think it odd that they have never heard of the term, 'Slave Narrative.' I worry that they might believe that their ignorance holds no significance for the world they share with a multitude of others.

Race Relations as Subject Matter

The more I began to read, the more I felt that these were themes America 'wished' it wrote about, but in fact did not.[1]

It seemed that no matter what American book I picked up, and no matter what its subject, it could not end without some comment, whether directly or indirectly, about the struggle to come to terms with slavery and its aftermath in this country.

It is my premise that practically the only thing that is written about in American literature (novels) is the psychic struggle created when this republic sunk its foundations in slavery. Further, it is my belief that, because America is a construct of ideologies, we are practically emotionally incapable of confronting this scar-torn psychic legacy and,

[1] Let me be specific: I am excluding all genres except novels.

secondly, that because African Americans have been historically, and still are, oppressed, it is their literature that speaks the most truth about the meaning of life in America.

Almost exclusively, in African American literature, is Marxist theory at play; the notion that inherent in capitalism is eventual collapse, one wrought by revolution. Domination inspires revolt, and revolt African Americans do, but ignoring their anger by not reading cross-culturally, will not make it go away. (For this thesis 'ignoring it' simply means denying the dominated their voice.

White Fear

Michael Moore's important documentary film, Bowling For Columbine (2002), features a short cartoon which looks at the history of White fear, and the link between the Klan and the National Rifle Association (NRA). This particular segment of the film depicts the arrival of the Pilgrims to the New World and their immediate fear of the Aboriginal (savages). Moore then moves to our importation of Africans as slaves (animals) and the subsequent White fear that necessitated the construction of an atmosphere of terror to prevent revolt. This segment then moves to Emancipation and we see Whites fearing the idea of Blacks as equals and this fear inventing the Klan to reassert an 'invisible' slavery reinforced by midnight terror. From there, Moore moves to the Civil Rights Movement, the slow disappearance of the Klan and the sudden emergence of the NRA, which Moore points out is headed and funded by many former Klan members. The basis of the NRA's motto is White flight – which always simply

means running away (in fear) from Blacks. What made it all funny, to me, was Moore's citation of statistics regarding Black on White crime, and who in fact is dying from handguns, and revelation of the truth that Blacks are killing Blacks, and that Whites are killing themselves by accident with their own guns purchased to keep themselves safe from Blacks. Moore simply points out that White fear is solely based upon paranoia, and not supported by any statistical reality.

I saw this film in Brattleboro, Vermont, a predominantly White town which perceives itself as liberal. I was the only obvious person of colour present to view the film. I have never laughed so hard viewing a film as I did while watching this animated segment. I found it hysterically funny, and I made the assumption that it would be funny for everyone else. The film, in a nutshell, looks at the phenomena of Whiteness in America. Moore, with deadpan seriousness, presented White people to themselves as raced in the same way Whites apply race to all of those who are not White. He illustrates this specific theory in the context of being American. He takes his cameras to Canada and tries to apply the same ideologies and attempts to elicit the same responses from Canadians, both Black and White. He is met with laughter and blank stares. (This is important because part of Canadian identity is defining itself by what it is not, and chief on its list is that it is NOT American.)

Still, I was the only one in that theatre who was laughing. What is even more interesting is that, when the lights went up at the movie's end, the twenty or so other people in the audience, all White, collectively turned around in their seats to glare at me. I could sense something in that theatre, but I cannot put my finger on it. I can only assume

the audience was mad that I had found White behaviour, as depicted in the film, funny. Or, maybe, they were feeling found out. I think the animated section of that film made fun of the long history of White anxiety. Moore was simply making a critique further down the historical line of that never-ending White psychological angst still being gnashed about. Moore has the medium of film, more money, and vast audiences which Hawthorne and Melville did not, but the fear disclosed is, none-the-less, the same. Moore's point was that White angst is not based upon any truth. It is based upon a psychological fear that years and years of oppression of other peoples will surely lead to a revolt. Sadly, not all revolt can be repressed with guns.

There was a definite feeling of discomfort that I felt in the theatre, as though I had made a politically incorrect *faux pas*. I mention this because I came across a quote attributed to, bell hooks, in Richard Dyer's book, White that I failed to understand until I viewed this film, and experienced the hostility of other theatre patrons. bell hooks observes that those who consider themselves the most liberal and the least racist are the very ones who become the most upset when their Whiteness has attention drawn to it by non-Whites. She asserts the following:

> Often their rage erupts because they believe that all ways of looking that highlight difference subvert the liberal belief in a universal subjectivity (we are all just people) that they think will make racism disappear. They have a deep emotional investment in the myth of 'sameness', even as their actions reflect the primacy of Whiteness as a sign informing who they are and how they think. (hooks 1992, 3)

Michael Moore is a White pointing out Whiteness to Whites. What impact might that have and how might it differ from bell hooks's scenario? It might provoke a flurry of anger, or I might be dismissive of the non-White person's point-of-view as the view. Simply put, it might also be the beginning of some hard truths being examined. (It is only human, that we begin to study ourselves when prompted by someone we respect, or who shares the same class or background.)

It is my heartfelt belief that the healing of any hurt comes about only through understanding. If we are attempting to heal the wounds inflicted upon another and which has inadvertently wounded us, then it is my belief that the healing must take place through a mutual understanding of the pain and rage inspired by each transgression. Since I am examining literature which, for the most part, is primarily read by those who already know the story, then I think a first step towards racial healing is for Whites to read the literature of those who have been transgressed, to glean a better understanding of our anger and our suffering during centuries of domination. We, as Black students of literature, are aware of the themes of White literature for we are required to read it in academic environments.

As a person who is deeply committed to my own therapy and understanding, not only of self, but also of the world, and those around me, I am very interested in what the manifestation of White fear was all about on a human psychological level. During one of my therapy sessions, my therapist and I began to discuss this notion of 'fear' and its sources. I want to look at this concept of 'fear' from a less aggressive perspective. I am including, in excerpt, a discussion I had with my therapist about fear. I do this to help

illustrate the emotional psychology behind denial that I posit is the impetus behind White-written, American literature. I also convey this conversation in an attempt for Black readers to understand what might possibly be feared, and why it is so difficult for many to surrender power. I do this in a humanistic manner. I do this with gestalts in mind.

My therapist and I talked about the concept of fear as a universal human construct. I approached the subject because I wanted to understand more fully how fear works. He said that fear is usually connected to a loss of some kind, and that in order to still the fear, as humans, we devise ways in which to control the experience of loss. Some of the devices used are real, while others are simply illusory and, in reality, prevent no loss, but give the psychological illusion of control.

He illustrated it with this proverb:

Loss of love
Loss of control over something
Loss of life being the ultimate loss

During another session he explained that the odds are that when someone tells another human being - who is trying to express anger or upset- that s/he is being too sensitive, it is most likely done so to silence the individual who is upset.[2]

Simplistically, if my anger stems from you being late all the time, then you might have to look at what being late means to you. Possibly you get something from the behaviour (perhaps it gives you some sense of control to keep others waiting), and perhaps that control gives you comfort.

[2] The act of saying: “You are too sensitive,” is a controlling device – however subtle.

We are all, by now, familiar with the terms: obsessive/compulsive or ‘control freak’, and while such terms may simply cover annoying, superficial traits, what such a person is trying to accomplish is the maintenance of complete control over his or her surroundings, and, ultimately of death itself. Death is a metaphor for loss.

My therapist illustrated it with this saying:

Death as the loss of life
Death as the loss of control
Death as the loss of power
Death as the loss of dominance

Expressed anger suggests that something is wrong. Anger is a complaint out-loud. It begs to be heard. It implores. When out of control, it can lead to murder or war, to loss of life. If we are intent upon controlling anger in the belief that addressing it is dangerous, even fatal, this is what our desire might look like:

Control through censorship
Control through dominance.

Applying this train of thought to literature and what is taught in academia, one begins to see how books like The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, or Maya Angelou’s I know Why the Caged Bird Sings consistently get placed on censorship lists. We also might reconsider the notion that what we are taught in higher education has less to do with ‘classics’ or ‘better’ literature and perhaps more to do with ‘silencing’ and dominance.

Otherness

Seeing one's self in the classroom, in the canon, in the neighbourhood, in the eyes of one's lover, is to see the love of self and others reflected back. When it is missing, when there is no reflection, the point is clear: we have been given no consideration. Eyes are averted in our presence; the gesture establishes that we do not exist and we should not wish to be noticed. We are rendered invisible in the minds behind those averted eyes.

Recently, I participated in a local Brattleboro reading group, which had chosen to study Jamaica Kincaid's The Autobiography of My Mother. I was the only person, amongst fifteen others, who was of colour. As the discussion progressed, the group became quite adamant about why the main character bothered to speak at all. For this group it became an issue of, 'If you have nothing nice to say, don't say it'.

The book tells the story of a young woman in Dominica, under colonialism. She is a nasty piece of work. She detests everyone, and everything, and never hesitates to speak her mind. The White readers of this group were thoroughly annoyed that our main character complained so much. They wanted her to say only nice things; they wanted her to be appreciative of her surroundings, and to stop getting on everyone's nerves including their own.

What I find interesting about the reaction of the group is that to desire that a fictional character be silenced is to really desire the silencing of the writer. Let's look at the phrase: 'If you have nothing nice to say, don't say anything'. Let us apply that phrase to the oppressed, of the non-dominant majority.

The group also expressed wonderment as to why the story was important on any level. When I interject to suggest that it is because the oppressor cannot tell the story of the oppressed, I am greeted by bewildered faces.

If one is taught, and learns to believe, that there is no other valuable literature than Europe and White America, and if that literature is also the literature of the oppressor, then any comment from the oppressed shatters the ideology of colonisation. The myth of the oppressor is the myth that all those non-dominant majorities have had a favour bestowed upon them. The oppressor defines the bestowal as 'civilizing the uncivilized' and he (or she) believes in his (or her) heart that the dominated are thankful.

In closing, I would like to anecdotally present a story that illustrates some of the themes I wish to address in my next chapter.

In February of 2002, I went to Toronto to meet with my field faculty advisor who teaches at the University of Toronto. I attended two classes taught by him. One was a graduate class, and the other an undergraduate one. Both classes offered a pan-African curriculum. In the undergraduate class, there where perhaps thirty students, mostly white, but pretty much the same assortment of young, restless individuals as one might find in an American undergraduate classroom (except for the racial makeup). When I attended his graduate class of pan-African studies, there was not one person of African descent present. This class was populated solely by Asians and Whites.

When I relate this story to American ears I get guffaws, and looks of complete disbelief. The looks are usually followed with exclamations of, "Why?" or, "You've got to be kidding."

Merging with Literature

In the opening preface to The Western Canon, Harold Bloom declares that anyone who wishes to overthrow the canon in order to advance social change comes from the 'School of Resentment' (Bloom 4), a term which he admits to having coined. Later on he implies that including lesser (read coloured) works, in the hopes that doing so remedies historical injustices, in reality, is jeopardising higher education.

A few pages later, Bloom states,

> Expansion of the canon has meant the destruction of the canon, since what is being taught includes by no means the best writers, who happen to be women, African, Hispanic, or Asian, but writers who offer little but the resentment they have developed as part of their sense of identity (Bloom 7)

While he vaguely acknowledges 'historical injustices' (as though they (and we) are all the same), in a sweeping dismissal and with a tone of 'tough luck', it seems Mr. Bloom has some investment in silencing the putative members of his 'School of Resentment'. Yet, if 'historical injustices' are the reason for disgruntlement, how can one remove history from the canon? I think, for Mr. Bloom, the inclusion of the disgruntled weakens the illusion of white upper-class superiority. If we apply Harold Bloom's opinion to Kincaid's Autobiography of My Mother, Bloom might say that the character, as drawn by Kincaid, was simply an extension of Kincaid's disgruntlement at having grown up in Antigua under British oppression, and that, by creating a grumpy character, she added

nothing helpful to the canon, because its publication, and subsequent readings, have no impact on repairing historical injustices. If the reaction of my fellow readers in the reading group was any indication, Bloom may possibly be correct in his surmising.

Of interest to me are the on-line reviews of The Western Canon by lay readers. One reader makes the comment that, "Great works of literature are not political or social documents; they are fine aesthetic edifices. Great literature will not make us better persons necessarily, but it can humanize and broaden us" (Kolman 1). As Bloom upholds this special value of literature, he refers bitterly to the band of enemies and traitors whom we must beware. These culprits from the 'School of Resentment,' which do the Western Canon little if any good." I agree with the notion that great literature can humanize and broaden us, but I wonder how the reading of only one sort of great literature can do this. Vegetables are good for us, but don't we also need protein, and carbohydrates? What I mean to say is that by Bloom's definition of 'great,' we would be reading only the works of white male authors. How can one claim a sense of humanity or broadening when one doesn't include all? I don't think it can be done. The reader continues on by quoting Bloom's premise that 'One ancient test for the canonical remains fiercely valid: unless it demands rereading, the work does not qualify' (1). Who demands that it be read? One can not demand that it be read until it is read, and subsequently shared. The implication that a book can be so great, it leaps into the lap of the reader is ridiculous. Great literature becomes great because it is read over and over again; because it represents antiquity. If a qualification for great literature is also its ability to 'humanize and broaden,' then doesn't it follow that the reading of literature that depicts the experiences of those we differ from

is a crucial element? Those ‘others’[3] do not live elsewhere. They live with us, side by side, so to label their writings as being ‘special interest’ is to sit on the pinnacle of elitism. Another reader suggests that “Harold Bloom is an aristocratic reader in an age of democratic reading;” that Harold Bloom is part of some days-gone-by ‘aristocracy’ (Bardamu). The reader closes by saying, “i don't always agree with Harold, but like Proust, I'm fascinated by old aristocrats. Let's enjoy the old fellow while we have him”(1). I take this last line to mean that we should respect our elders, but when our elders confront us with strange, out-of-touch notions, we should simply smile and humor them. In short, the canon is valid but Bloom’s notion of exclusion is antiquated. He has failed to notice that the peasants long ago revolted.

Let’s examine this point further. Harold Bloom is a respected, published, oft-quoted person. This book, The Western Canon is not antiquated. His rhetoric is still being touted, supposedly at a time that has surpassed the ‘Age of Reason’ and entered the age of even more reasonableness. Why is it acceptable to be exclusionary in an academic atmosphere and nowhere else?

Jim Case, when defending the absence of writers of colour on his syllabus stated, there wasn’t anything of literary importance written by a person of colour during the 19th century. I said not a word, for I was incapable of arguing with him because I did not know enough to do so. I can say, however, that when he said this out loud to the class a number of heads turned towards me, looking for a reaction or a response, or a revolt, or maybe a gnashing of teeth. I don’t know why I was looked at so collectively, but I do remember

[3] African American, Gay, Lesbian, Aboriginal, non-English speakers, etc.

that I felt instantly *en garde*. Something about those words made me instinctually aware that anything not found on the reading list, anything written by the 'other' was marginal. Whether we like it or not, these experiences get internalised, and are often translated into: the blues of marginality. My teacher not only said this to me but the same words fell into the ears of my all White peers as well. What sort of dynamic had he inadvertently created? Louis Althusser might say my educational time was up and I should hit the streets and look for a menial job (Althusser 29), and let my fellow peers continue on to higher grounds, so that they can graduate, become my employer, and keep things as they should be.

What Canada Claims It Writes About

If the United States is made of a composite of ideologies, while Canada has an identity, how does the latter play out in Canadian literature?

Lipset asserts that part of what the Canadian identity is, is to define itself by what it is not, and chief on its list is that it is not American (Lipset 53).

Atwood's umbrella premise is that Canadian literature's central theme is one of 'survival'. She further defines this to mean surviving, 'nature', 'victimization' and alludes to the fact that Canadians show a marked preference for the negative (Atwood 32)

I agree with Margaret Atwood's literary themes but I do not think she is applying this definition to Afro-Canadian literature. No where in her text does she even mention the presence of brown skin in Canada except for the 'First Nations'. However, we can use her term, 'survival' to define the immigrant experience to Canada, struggling to assimilate

in a new country and culture. While ‘survival’ may cover the experiences of the immigrant struggling to survive and assimilate, these themes do not seem to be adaptable to the writings of pan-African Canadian writers. The themes of Canada defining itself by what it is not (American, specifically Afro-American), however, is found in Afro-Canadian writing, as is an attentiveness to nature.

To be of African descent anywhere in North America is to have survived. That does not mean that we are all surviving in the same way, nor does it mean that the journey of survival has taken us to the same places.

It is the story of the ‘wandering Jew’; those of us who find ourselves in North America, descendants of Africans, have journeyed far. It is this experience which can broaden and humanise us all, but first it must be considered ‘great’ enough to be read and shared.

MIGRATION

Overview

In this chapter, I make no attempts to cover the entire pan-African Diaspora to North America. This chapter will simply provide a basic overview of a very select time in history which led to some Blacks to Canada, particularly to Nova Scotia.

It is my assertion that how we come to imagine Canada is a combination of a thought process (Americanising) and notions associated with mountains.

I have heard it said that Blacks do not live in Canada because of the cold. As I will explore, this reason seems ludicrous to me. Given the alternatives to cold (a return to slavery), it makes no sense, and it fails to give reason for the thousands of Blacks who have lived in Canada for generations.

From the United States to Canada

In James W. St. G. Walkers exhaustive chronicle, The Black Loyalists: The Search for the promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone 1783-1870, he recounts that, in the War for Independence, there were those who did not wish to separate from the Crown of England, and they became known as 'Loyalists'. In order to gain momentum, and to swell their ranks, a declaration was made, in 1775, by then governor of Virginia, Lord Dunsmore that,

> All indentured servants, negroes, or others (appertaining to Rebels) free, that [sic] are able and willing to bear arms, they joining his majesty's troupes, as soon as may be, for the more speedily reducing this Colony to a proper sense of their duty, to his majesty's crown and dignity

(Walker 1)

Four years later, the British Commander-in-Chief, Sir Henry Clinton issued the following statement: “To every Negro who shall desert the Rebel Standard, full security to follow within these Lines, any Occupation which he shall think proper” (Walker 2). The effect that these two proclamations had upon the enslaved African American is profound. It is estimated, according to Walker, that approximately one-fifth (100,000) of the American Black population, took up arms, and joined forces with the Loyalist regiment and that, of that number, 3,500 left for Canada (3). After the Fugitive Slave Act was passed in 1850 (an act written with Canada’s runaway slaves in mind), thousands more made every attempt to cross over the 49th parallel.

When I think of American history, it seems odd to me that once it encounters a border, it ceases being ‘American’ history. This process, I feel, is part of ‘Americanizing’. It is not really a matter of changing a reality to make it American but rather how one perceives or views a subject. It is an intellectual interpretation (or perhaps a lack of intellectualization) that takes place that makes its mind up about the ‘other’ based upon poor reasoning. We know about the Underground Railroad, but no thought is given to what happened to all of those men, women and children once they arrived in Canada. We know about British colonialism, yet we don’t think beyond it in terms of people immigrating to other Crown-ruled countries such as Canada. This, I think, is a contributing factor for why Americans (and perhaps Canadians) fail to think of Canada as a nation of colour.

In 1796, an additional 600 Maroons were deported (or voluntarily immigrated, depending on how you look at it) to Nova Scotia from Jamaica. They were guerrilla fighters in Jamaica, rebels who held forth in the mountains and were then tricked into a truce and transported to Nova Scotia.

In some ways, it seems as if the Canadian Maritimes were a sort of 'dumping ground' for Blacks who had nowhere else to go, but I also see it as farther away than say, Niagara Falls, Ontario. I think this fact is important in light of The Fugitive Slave Act, for, if one looks at a map, one would get the impression that Nova Scotia is easy to cover. It is not, and in some ways I wonder if Blacks were safer there than in other areas, if only because it would be easier to retrieve runaways that were closer to the U.S. border. Retrieving runaways at this time would have had to have been done on horseback or by boat. One would also have to ask how far back Canadian identity goes. How much did Canada support the Fugitive Slave Act? They accepted the Act to the extent that, for decades African Americans fled the United States, under slavery, sure in their knowledge that Canada offered them solace. How large a sense of 'community' was already intact in The Canadian Maritimes, that despite feelings one might have about Blacks, one still felt a responsibility towards one's neighbour?

Racism of all sorts abounds practically everywhere, it seems. I am not suggesting that it was non-existent in the Maritimes. I am however suggesting that, unlike American perceptions of African Americans as inferior animals, in the Maritimes, people regarded the new coming African as more of an oddity and curiosity, but not with a preconceived, deep-seated hatred for brown skin.

I think this Canadian identity, this sense of community, and acceptance of members in that community, were well in place at this time. While her diary has only survived for the brief period covering August 1815 – January 1816, Louisa Collins give us a clue to this sense of acceptance and community when, in her diary

> She makes reference to an unpleasant boat trip "crowded with Blacks". At the same time she tells us (in a later diary entry…) that "this morning I have bin[sic] out to see an old Black man, our old nabour [sic] Colly. He is very sick. I administered sum [sic] mint tea, and a warm broth (Conrad 62).

Many of the donations and contributions that ensured the survival of these Black Loyalists came from the charity of Whites and from British supporters (Walker 53).

Then again, Canada's then-cohesion between church and state might have made community members construe it as 'un-Christian,' to not be charitable to this influx of bedraggled Blacks.

Canada did have slavery, and despite the fact that many of the promises made to the Black Loyalist were broken, it is evident to me that slavery in Canada was far different and less severe than its counterpart to the south. It began later than American slavery, when, in 1628, Olivier Le Jeunne (Winks 1) became the first documented slave in New France. Slavery was not given its legal force though until somewhere between 1689 and 1709 (3). Less than ninety years later, in 1790, efforts were already underway for abolition, when then Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe, a Loyalist, was outspoken in his attacks against slavery (96). Canadian slavery ends earlier as well. Of note is that while slavery was legal until 1834, it was in 1821, in Quebec, that the last known advertisement for the selling of humans was recorded (110). It doesn't appear that

it was as institutionalized in the same way as it was in the United States. One must remember that Nova Scotia is Latin for New Scotland and these arriving Scots and Irish, fleeing religious and political persecution, or just poverty, often arrived as indentured servants. Walker writes

> Indenture was an established system in Nova Scotia long before the arrival of free Blacks, and conditions among white indentured servants differed little from that of outright black slaves. They were liable to the same harsh punishments, the same pervasive authority of a master, as were blacks, but usually for a limited and specified term (Walker 49).

Furthermore, Walker attests to Blacks being perceived, by Whites, as an economic commodity rather than having, "any identifiable belief in racial inferiority" (42).

I want to return to, and address the notion that Blacks could not exist in Canada because of its cold winters. I have heard this assertion more than once and it bothers me each time I hear it. It was presented to me on a tour of the Whitney Pier Museum in Sydney, Nova Scotia, and it is also Walker's suggestion that the Black Loyalists were ill-prepared for the cold winters. He, Walker, makes note that many Blacks would have died of exposure had they not received charitable donations from their White neighbours in the surrounding communities (53). Over and over, sprinkled throughout Walker's text, are examples of White Nova Scotian's donating and sharing what they could with these ill-equipped new-comers.

Given the oft broken promises made to Black Loyalists that where not kept by the Crown, it is worth noting that many White Loyalists received the same short-end–of-the-stick, as well, when it came to promised provisions. "Clearly, the Blacks had no

monopoly on poverty and unfulfilled promises," when in 1784 a petition claimed that even whites had not received any rations for the entire year (45).

Lack of adequate clothing and shelter is a reasonable answer for why many Blacks might have moved on. Being Black, and thus not being able to withstand cold is not, in and of itself, a reason for leaving, unless, of course, you believe in the racist notions behind such a statement.

I still ask myself why it is so prevalent in the minds of many that Blacks are not situated above the 49th parallel. Is it an out-of-sight, out-of-mind sort of thing? Or does it have something to do with what mountains and snow subconsciously represent to us in our imaginations? Dyer suggests that the ideology associated with the Aryan and Caucasian finds its origins in mountains.

> Such places had a number of virtues: the clarity and cleanliness of the air, the vigour demanded by the cold, the enterprise required by the harshness of the terrain and climate…All these virtues could be seen to have formed the white character. [These notions] can still be found in…Canadian identity, where the experience of the cold North is claimed to have moulded in the white settler people a distinct White national character (Dyer 21)

Dyer goes on to discuss the German Bergfilme, which includes the controversial work of Leni Riefenstahl. These films helped link (forever) images (and concepts) of the robust, athletic, outdoor vigour of the *Uber* race with mountains and 'Whiteness'; Whiteness as in snow and Whiteness as a preferred race. The 'White' ability to survive and conquer this cold is seen metaphorically as reaching the ultimate summit – to surmount the insurmountable: nature as placed before man by God. Failing to survive in this climate (within this imagery) is to fall short of being chosen by God. This construct

is often the basis of racism (one race feeling superior to another), colonialism (one culture obliterating another culture believing it is bringing civilisation), and suppression (a dominant entity benefiting in some way from the suppression of another entity).

During a recent visit to the Whitney Pier Museum in Sydney, Nova Scotia, I was informed by a tour guide, (though I have heard this reasoning elsewhere) that those of African descent left Nova Scotia because of the cold. The implications of this statement are indicative of this myth of mountains and vigour. It repeats the myth that those of African descent are absent from Canada because they are not robust enough to survive the harsh climate. They are rendered frail and unable to keep up with their White counterparts. As anyone who has survived the New England winters should know, southern Canada can be no colder than the East Coast, where a multitude of ethnic Americans survive the cold handily.

Atwood similarly concurs with the notion of Canada being a land of cold:

> …Images of nature are almost everywhere. Added up, they depict a nature that is often dead or un-answering or actively hostile to man…There is a sense in Canadian literature that the true and only season here is winter… (Atwood 49)

These images, and stereotyping, help translate in the imagination the notion that the 'true and only' inhabitants of Canada are White.

Atwood writes that it is the inadvertent job of a writer not to tell a society how to live but rather to describe how it does live (42). I would like to add that art, as practiced by writers, is used for social interpretation and criticism of the society one lives in. While

I agree with Atwood, I think the art of writing is done, for the most part, as an unconscious analysis of a society.

Atwood notes that, in Canadian literature, it is the Indian, who takes the place of the Afro-American, as ultimate victim of social oppression and deprivation. She further writes and acknowledges that though Canada has Black ghettoes of its own, Canadians do not write about them. She is certainly speaking of White Canadian writers, for Black Canadian writers do indeed write about the Black communities in Canada. (While I have certainly not read all there is to read, I want to note here that I could not find, in the selection of books that I have read for this study, or just for leisure, any mention of a Black presence in White Canadian literature. Though scholarship is now being undertaken which examines Blackness in the Canadian imagination perhaps, for now, it may be a contributing factor as to why 'Blackness', when imagining Canada, is not conceived of).

Could it be that there is no 'Blackness' in the (White Canadian) literary imagination? I will leave this question to the scholarship, already undertaken, of others.

LITERARY ANALYSIS

An Overview with Special Note

My literary analysis of African American literature and Afro Canadian literature proceeds comparatively. I will be looking at the literary differences in terms of culture, as well as what might preoccupy the American and the Canadian writer thematically. I will address a few themes here in the prelude, for they are really just intellectual meanderings. I will present them as pure anecdote and will offer no supportive materials. They are however important to me, and are worth further consideration. They are not detailed enough at this juncture for me to offer any rigorous analysis.

Through the course of this study, I have discovered a number of themes that can only have manifested in the United States and others that, conversely, could only transpire in Canada. They are completely subjective on my part, but I nonetheless feel they are important enough to mention.

In Canada, (again let me stress that these are suspicions rather than anything that I can prove (at the moment)), I have wondered if there is a frequency, not found in the United States, which places, more often, individuals into mental institutions for behaviour deemed threatening to the community as a whole. In Alias Grace, Atwood's semi-historical tale of a woman accused of murder at the turn of the century, we are unsure if she is truly guilty or if indeed she did murder, or, if it was an act of self-defence. The story is based upon a true incident and the story is told through a series of interviews between Grace and a psychiatrist, from her cell in a mental institution.

In Diary of a Runaway, Evelyn Lau chronicles her almost three-year ordeal as a runaway youth on the streets of Vancouver. She is a second-generation Asian and is in violent revolt against the restrictions that come from that particular cultural environment. None of those reasons though are what eventually have her sitting in a psychiatric ward. Her massive drug taking and casual prostitution seem to be the causes, though we are given no specific indication even from her harrowing diary entries. The seemingly self-destructive, though 'un-crazy' behaviour of Ms. Lau became an issue and a source of interest to me for one reason, and one reason only: every single Canadian women that I know, including myself, has spent time in a psychiatric institution in Canada at one time or another. The reasons have ranged from teenage pregnancy, second thoughts about marriage once married, prostitution, or simply to have a holding ground while parents fought a divorce, homosexuality, alcoholism. If I remember correctly, a friend was threatened with institutionalisation when she demanded to breast-feed rather than go along with the baby formula being pushed on to new mother's at the time of her daughter's birth. It seems any form of anti-social behaviour, no matter how slight, can get one sent to an institution whose sole purpose is to make one acceptable to society. Psychiatric institutions are meant to be places where one learns to behave in such a fashion that allows one to be returned to one's community successfully. That metaphor is not lost on my understanding of the Canadian identity that supports the community over the individual. With the exception of one person, I know not one American, personally, who has spent time in such an asylum.

I read Asha Bandele's memoir, The Prisoner's Wife with horror. This is the account of an educated woman from Brooklyn, New York[4], who on a school assignment in higher education, is asked by a professor to read some of her poetry in a prison in recognition of Black History month. She agrees, goes, and falls in love with a prisoner named Rashid. They eventually marry. For the next 219 pages she defends her choice of a love object. She tells us of the crime for which he is incarcerated (murder), and shamelessly speculates that American prisons are filled with good Black men caught up in a White system of racism. Almost comical, considering her beloved is incarcerated and on the other side of Plexiglas, is her description of Rashid's tender courting which she describes as "…tender, and without aggression…unhurried…ready for whatever I offer, whenever I offer it" (Bandele 31). Equally appalling, and sad, is her low self esteem when she writes "…I see a new pimple on my face…every book I have not had the discipline to write…the sugar I am addicted to…(114). She makes no connection between this low esteem and her involvement with Rashid. She makes no connection with this thinking and her submission to Rashid, from behind the walls of prison, dictating what she should wear now that he is "her woman" (119).

What I found most upsetting about this memoir is its implication that in American society Black women are alone because all the Black men are in prison[5]. She makes the assumption that they are all innocents: Black men are in prison because they live in a

[4] Anecdotally, having lived in New York City for twenty plus years, Brooklyn, New York is by far the borough considered the most 'nationalistic.' This concept applies to Black nationalists as well as to Jewish nationalists. There are more Jews in Brooklyn than Israel. Brooklyn is known for its 'Middle East' atmosphere. Christian, Jews, Muslims living side-by-side, with tension always in the air.
[5] A premise of Black Nationalism.

society that does not allow them the same privileges as others, so often resort to crime to survive. If Black men where in prison mainly as innocents then I might say, look to prisons for husbands, but that is not the case. I find her memoir to be an aberration of American culture and a sad, pathetic (and embarrassing) commentary on the relationships between Black men and women in American society. I do not think this memoir could have been written in Canada because prisons are not being built in Canada at the same alarming rate as here in the United States. Also, it is my belief that modern-day U.S. prisons are just a reworking of slavery. Canada's pan-African population is not so large that it poses a 'threat' to the rest of its inhabitants, and its incarcerated population (mainly First Nation status are often the Canadian equivalent to African Americans) is not so 'Black' that its unincarcerated Black population views its prison system as a potential dating pool.

The final theme that I wish to address is the one of consensual sex. Sensual and erotic sex is hard to find in African-American literature. Some have suggested that I read the works of Iceberg Slim, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker, under the contention that these writers write about African Americans as sensual beings. In Iceberg Slim's horrifying tale, Pimp, one is introduced to the novelistic autobiographical account of life as a hostile, violent pimp. In Alice Walker's The Third Life of Grange Copeland, a man murders his wife. In The Colour Purple, Walker's one successful attempt at tenderness occurs between her characters, Shug and Celie. When we arrive at this passage in the book, we are so relieved to witness it because Celie's husband is so cruel. She hints at this tenderness early in the story when Walker describes Celie as having, "turned into a

man" at the sight of Shug's, "long black body with it black plum nipples" (Walker 45). In Morrison's Song of Solomon there is a disturbing passage in which Pilate is asked to pull her underwear down in order for another woman to inspect her stomach. Pilate has no navel. Morrison describes Pilate's experiences as

> …The woman pulled up her own dress and slipped the elastic of her own bloomers down over her fat stomach. Pilate saw the little corkscrew thing right in the middle…It was just like the thing her brother had on his stomach. He had one. She did not. He peed standing up. She squatting down. He had a penis like a horse did. She had a vagina like the mare. He had a flat chest with two nipples. She had teats like a cow (Morrison 158)

These various passages are devoid of tenderness, and when they are tender it is a tenderness that exists in exile. The affair between Celie and Shug exists only in light of Celie's dastardly husband.

In contrast is M. Nourbese Philip's short story, Commitment to Hardness. As I read it, I found myself almost dumb struck. This is a three-page story about a woman who wakes up in the middle of the night feeling randy, and in order to satisfy herself sexually, she masturbates her lover to erection, climbs on top of his erect penis and together they reach climax. I am not a prude but what surprised me about this tale was that I have never once read such blatant sexuality in Afro-American literature. It occurred to me that the reason being was that the long drawn out history of African-American women includes hundreds of years of rape, stereotypes of us not being able to get enough, more stereotypes that depict us as savage, exotic creatures, who will have sex with anything, and, on top of it all, we have to raise the children by ourselves. (Are we no longer in the mood for luxurious sex or are we just exhausted?)

I think, in a literary sense, we have written ourselves out of sexual participation for fear that any allusion to sex will be picked up, and carried off right back to the land of stereotypes. African-American women are not allowed to be horny or to actively seek sex in our literature. If we do, it hurts because our clitorises have been removed (Alice Walker's favourite way), we are lesbians (another Alice Walker way), or coitus is depicted as a function rather than pleasurable (Toni Morrison's way). All that burdensome history that African American women have had to endure has taken our sexuality from us. Thus, it was startling to read, through Philip, all of the pleasure that we have been missing.

It is my contention that notions of sensuality in African-American literature are tightly entangled with echoes of slavery, fear, and repetition of the abuse inflicted upon us by masters in slave quarters. Philip's story is a peek into the bedroom of Blacks who are devoid of psychic trauma. The air within these walls is refreshing, and a little bit disconcerting.

James Baldwin versus Charles R. Saunders

Africville, Nova Scotia was a historical Black community in Nova Scotia which was founded in 1815 and eventually bulldozed to the ground in the late 1960's. From the few photographs that I have seen of it, and various descriptions, it was a community, to which the city failed to provide running water, and to add insult to injury, eventually placed the city dump on its doorsteps. Many of the former residents felt that the city did this in an attempt to discourage the inhabitants and force them subsequently to disperse. I am guessing, but I think it might be aptly described as partly a shanty-town. Despite that possible status, by all accounts, its inhabitants felt extremely proud of its existence; as with most of the Maritimes, a strong oral history prevailed among its inhabitants, and prevails still, among its exiles.

In his essay, A Visit to Africville, Summer 1959, Charles R. Saunders takes his readers on a tour of Africville, Nova Scotia circa 1959. At about the same time, 1961, James Baldwin takes his readers on a tour of Harlem in his short essay, Fifth Avenue, Uptown: A letter from Harlem. Both of these essays are written in a style that asks the reader to come along with the writers as though on a tour. Thematically, they are almost identical except for the tone. Each of the writers introduces us to pretty much the same sites except that, in each piece, these sites take on different meanings. Saunders begins

> We start at the end of Barrington Street. See where the pavement cuts off and the dirt road begins? That's the "Welcome to Africville" sign. We're still on Barrington Street, you understand. But it's also the old Campbell Road, and it got a history that goes way, way back in time.

> Just call it "The Road." Everybody around here'll know what you're talkin' about (Saunders 53)

Conversely Baldwin writes

> The avenue is elsewhere the renowned and elegant Fifth. The area I am describing, which, in today's gang parlance, would be called "the turf," is bounded by Lenox Avenue on the west, the Harlem River on the east, 135th Street on the north, and 130th Street on the south. We never lived beyond these boundaries; this is where we grew up. Walking along 145th Street – for example – familiar as it is, and similar, does not have the same impact because I do not know any of the people on the block (Baldwin 57)

Saunders, in his description, is able to point to a sign that welcomes its visitors. This distinction gives the reader a small clue that we might be in a friendly place. We are sure of this when he tells us that, "Everyone around here'll know what you're talkin' about." This line tells us, the reader, that the speaker knows the people in this community well (he can speak for them) and it is a code for safety – if one becomes lost or in need of help one can ask 'anyone' for help.

Baldwin lets his readers know immediately that the area of Fifth Avenue that he is referring to is not the wealthier Fifth Avenue farther to the south. "Turf," in the way in which Baldwin writes, is indicative of gangs, or a 'theirs' and 'our' space. The defining of Fifth as being not the prestigious Fifth and as a 'turf,' Baldwin has set the tone for the rest of the essay. We, as readers, must stay close to our guide because we are now in unchartered territory. Like Saunders, Baldwin has defined the parameters of the space we are to be shown. Both writers are showing us their neighbourhoods; one with pride and nostalgia, the other with grimness and anger. Neither narrator would choose to live where

they live if given a choice, but one has resigned himself and makes do; the other simply survives while those around him die a slow death.

Both of these communities have churches. For Saunders, “It’s like a heartbeat…the heartbeat of Africville. This church is the living, breathing soul of our community. Long as this church is here, *we’ll* be here” (Saunders 57). For Baldwin the church in his community is a place to go fanatically to harden one’s spirit against the alternative. Others still find solace in being “…”Moslems,” by affiliation or sympathy, that is to say that they are united by nothing more – and nothing less—than a hatred of the white world and all its works” (Baldwin 58).

Saunders knows the names of everyone in Africville. He points to a house belonging to so-and-so and rambles on about its history. He knows who is related to whom, and like a true Maritimer proudly recites local oral histories in the tradition of Homer[6]. There is something to be said about oral histories. The reciter provides placement and connection of the all-inclusive surroundings to the listener; the listener receives immediate tactile history. When I go home to the Maritimes, no matter who I am speaking to, Freda always tells me how I know this person even if I have never laid eyes on him or her before. Freda is a master historian, and can find the relationship in the most unlikely of places. Once, while searching out my relatives in Pokemouche, New Brunswick, from Prince Edward Island, she got a nun on the phone by the name of Doiron, after two minutes she covered the receiver and said: “You know this woman, Moira. Her father used to sell corn and rode everywhere on his horse-drawn buggy. I had

[6] It is believed that Homer, a famous bard, traveled near and far reciting the Iliad by heart.

never met Sister Doiron but Freda was right, Old Man Doiron…well now who could forget him? I have corresponded for close to ten years now with Sister Georgina Doiron who considers me a friend because I bought corn from her dad and, having lived on Cymbria Point[7], am considered a part of the family. What oral histories do is connect people and meld them into communities. It places people in the minds of others, so that all individuals appear as though they have always belonged. Oral histories require a person to pay attention to his neighbours and other members of the community. In this sense oral historians are keen observers, a quality which Saunders displays in all its Maritime glory:

> You want to know who lives there? The Byers family, the Carters, the Flints, and the Browns. Pay attention to those names, now. You'll be hearing them again as we go along. Some of our names have a history goin' back to before there ever was an Africville (Saunders 54)

Further on he writes:

> Out behind Joe's house you can see Tibby's Pond…It's called Tibby's Pond, because it's on Aunt Tibby Alcock's property. Who's aunt is she? Well, everybody's. All the older folks here are Aunt or Uncle, Ma or Pa, whether they're related to you by blood or not. It's really like a big family out here. And you know what families are like – lovin' and fightin' all at the same time (55)

Baldwin knows his community in a different light, a sadder light. He does not know the community members by name, but rather by what eats away their spirits:

> All along the block, for anyone who knows it, are immense human

[7] Cymbria Point is an area in South Rustico, Prince Edward Island where this author spent her childhood. Old Man Doiron, was about 70 years of age when I was a child. He had never owned a car and instead traveled to and fro in a horse-drawn buggy which he switched to a horse-drawn sled during winter months. At church, on Sundays, he tied his horse and buggy to the church fence and would often give the children rides home if they lived on Grand Per Road, the road we lived on. We children regarded him with pure awe. Like Mr. Gibbs, at New Lincoln, he truly bridged history right before our eyes.

> gaps, like craters. These gaps are not created merely by those that have moved away, inevitably into some other ghetto; or by those that have risen, almost always into a greater capacity for self-loathing and self-delusion; or yet by those who, by whatever means –War ll, the Korean war, a policeman's gun or billy, a gang war, a brawl, madness, and overdose of heroin, or, simply, unnatural exhaustion (58)

The members of Baldwin's community are disintegrating before his and our eyes; he ends his tour by telling his reader that the plight of the Negro is not entirely the fault of the Negro. He tells us that it diminishes us all to let another be diminished, whereas Saunders is more hopeful. We see at the end of the story that in fact the essay was written in 1989, some twenty years after the demolition of Africville and the relocation of its inhabitants. As he concludes, Saunders writes:

> And when you get back home, if anybody asks you about Africville, you just tell 'em we been through good times and hard times, but we're still here. Yeah, there's been talk about getting' us out of here. "Relocation," they call it. But we've heard that kind of talk before. Long as it's just talk, we got nothing to worry about, right? (Saunders 65)

The impact of this last passage is profound. These residents did have something to worry about, and as the writing of this essay recalls, Africville is nothing but a memory and an exhibit in a museum. Many of its residents now live in North Preston, perhaps 20 minutes away by car. While North Preston has a historically Black history that dates back to 1783, it is nonetheless an odd juxtaposition of poor, layered texturally over the more well-to-do. While some may see it as a historical landmark village, Freda, who grew up on a farm, was quick to observe that the land allotted this community was land that was barren. North Preston, despite its longevity, does not have the soil necessary to allow for self-supporting farming. This small point can perhaps be included in what

might define or determine a 'ghetto.' Baldwin suggests that really the only place people get to move to when they leave a ghetto is to another ghetto. Unfortunately, despite North Preston's longevity, it fits the *definition* of ghetto.

Harlem is intact, though slowly being eaten away by gentrification, thus displacing more and more of the poor and Black. Africville is now a small waterfront park meant solely for strolling and gazing out onto the water. With the passage of enough time, even oral histories will not remember.

Richard Wright versus Austin Clarke

It is not an artistic oversight for Richard Wright to have used the word 'White' at least one hundred and eleven times in Book One of Native Son. Outside of Bigger's home, 'Whiteness' is everywhere, and it consumes him. When he lights up a cigarette the cigarette is, "slanting white across their blacks chins" (Wright 15). In the sky above "big white clouds" drift (15). Most telling is Wright's narration of the musings of Bigger's inward contemplation of robbing a white owned store. Bigger ruminates:

> They had always robbed Negroes. They felt it was much easier and safer to rob their own people, for they knew that white policemen never really searched diligently for Negroes who committed crimes against other Negroes…They had the feeling that the robbing of Blaum's would be a violation of ultimate taboo; it would be a trespassing into territory where the full wrath of an alien white world would be turned loose upon them; in short, it would be a symbolic challenge of the white world's rule over them; a challenge which they yearned to make, but were afraid to (14)

Only when Bigger is inside, in the pool hall with friends, or at home with his family, is his Blackness (and his family's) described with exhaustive detail. His mother and sister are described as, "the black mother and the brown daughter" (2) His very

fingers are suspect when Wright describes them as, "strong black fingers [which] gripped the edge of the table (11). Finally, Wright describes Bigger's face as, "metallically black in the strong sunlight" (18); as though he is so black, he is no longer human.

At the end of 'Book One,' it begins to snow--and for the rest of the narrative, Bigger is literally and metaphorically inundated with 'Whiteness.' He is done in by the snow. The police track him, and with each step he takes, the snow holds Bigger's foot in relief, like a fingerprint. Bigger is being 'tracked'; it is a modern day hunt, but bloodhounds sent to 'sic the nigger' is still the metaphor Wright wishes us to visualise.

When Bigger leaves his apartment, he encounters a billboard --directly across the street. It depicts a character that seems to Bigger to be watching him no matter which way he turns. At the top of the billboard are written the words: "You Can't Win." We are not told in the narrative what the billboard is advertising, but one realizes that it suggests the beginning of the end for Bigger.

Wright, in effect, has placed doom directly at Bigger's doorstep. In metaphor we see his defeat as having been pre-ordained from his birth.

It is Wright's contention that Bigger is Bigger because of a Jim Crow system instituted by White society. Bigger is Bigger, and will perhaps get Bigger if Whites continue to fail to take responsibility for how it is that Bigger came to be. Bigger cannot be Bigger by himself.

I have read this novel a number of times now, and I am never able to fully grasp all of its many meanings. It is a novel that one could spend a lifetime examining. I have always instinctually wanted Wright to be more responsible for Bigger and have felt, at

times, that he was wrong for having created this character. That is, until I read an essay by Abdul R. JanMohamed titled Negating the Negation. The essay is an examination of Wright's autobiography Black Boy. JanMohamed examines Black Boy (a classic Bildungsroman) from the standpoint of how Wright's personal experiences, growing up in the South, shaped him psychologically. The essay is fascinating in all respects, but I will focus on only one.

It is JanMohamed's assertion that Richard Wright's personality, living under Jim Crow, caused him to develop an outlook on life that seemed almost Nietzschean: "If anybody tried to kill me, then I would try to kill them first" (253). This premise, in some ways, explains Bigger's actions in Native Son. Bigger has already been killed within by a racist society. For Bigger, his own death can only be compensated through the deaths of others.

Quickly: the title, 'Native Son' reminds us that the African American (Bigger), is a pure creation of America – just like all Americans, but that African Americans do not share the same equalities with White American society. Wright's premise and title refer to the idea that a White racist society produces characters such as Bigger Thomas.

Bigger is a young man who is hired by a White liberal family and, because of fears engendered by U.S. 'apartheid', accidentally kills a young White woman, the daughter of his employer. He then goes on to murder his Black girlfriend, and is eventually caught and put into jail. No one is concerned that he killed his Black girlfriend because the contention is that Black death is inconsequential.

Unlike the character George, in a short story by Austin Clarke (which I will explore next), Bigger acts out aggression. But, Clarke's George inflicts self-hatred on himself. Instead of striking out at the racist society he lives in, he commits suicide.

Margaret Atwood, as I mentioned earlier, defines Canadians as having a marked preference for the negative. I kept this in mind while reading Austin Clarke's short story "Canadian Experience[8]." This story is almost a negative relief of "Native Son." In Clarke's story we meet an immigrant from Barbados named George. He is about to attempt his first "job interview in five years." George ponders his 'job search' outfit in the mirror in the hallway of the boarding-house in which he resides, Clarke describes his reflection as being, "cut off at the neck" (Clarke 75). In contrast, note that Wright cuts off Bigger's neck with Whiteness: "They leaned their backs against the red-brick wall of a building smoking, their cigarettes slanting White across their Black chins" (Wright 15). In his story, Clarke writes

> The knot of his tie was shiny with grease. He did not like himself. He was not dressed the way he had hoped to appear, and his image was incorrect. This made him stop laughing (75)

Wright writes of Bigger:

> Bigger's face was metallically Black in the strong sunlight. There was in his eyes a pensive, brooding amusement, as of a man who had been long confronted and tantalized by a riddle whose answer seemed always just on the verge of escaping him, but prodding him irresistibly on to seek its solution (18)

Both Clarke and Wright have left us with visions of depleted men. Both Bigger and George feel 'wrong' and out of place; not only to themselves but to the reader as well.

[8] I learn that the term "Canadian Experience" is a white euphemism used in employment ads in Canada. It was a way to weed out foreigners/immigrants from applying for certain jobs.

At the beginning of Native Son, Bigger leaves his apartment, goes down a flight of stairs and encounters a billboard. At the end of Clarke's story, our job searcher encounters two billboards. Bigger's billboard at the beginning of Native Son defines for us the end of the story. Wright writes:

> They were pasting a huge colored poster to a signboard. The poster showed a White face…The poster showed one of those faces that looked straight at you when you looked at it and all the while you were walking and turning your head to look at it it kept looking unblinkingly back at you until you got so far from it you had to take your eyes away…At the top of the poster were tall red letters: YOU CAN'T WIN! (12)

Clarke's billboards differ but are just as telling. The passage reads, "…Two large billboards. One advocates "pigging-out," and the other tells women about "Light Days, Tampax" (Clarke 87). These are the last two images our character sees before he steps off the subway platform in front of an approaching train.

Both of these men have had to search for a job in White society. Each man feels uncomfortable doing so. Clarke describes it as the institutions of money (what the poor don't have). Clarke's character is frightened in this territory:

> He was going to a job interview. It was on Bay Street in the business district of banks, brokerages and corporations. For all the time he had lived in Toronto, this district had frightened him. (75)

Wright describes Bigger's reaction to entering a White neighbourhood he is to work in much the same way

> This was a cold and distant world; a world of White secrets carefully guarded. He could feel a pride, a certainty, and a confidence in theses streets and houses. He came to Drexel Boulevard and began to look for 4605. When he came to it, he stopped and stood before a high, Black iron picket fence, feeling constricted inside. All he had felt in the movie

was gone; only fear and emptiness filled him now (Wright 49)

In both these stories our main characters come upon White women and react to their presence in odd ways. It is not in a natural manner. Both of them view the women in a claustrophobic manner. Clarke writes of George's accidental entry into a shared rooming house bathroom where he witnesses a white woman renter

> With one leg on the cover of the bowl, which she had painted black, bending down, wiping the smell of the soap from between her legs and then the red, rough dots of bruises on the bottom of her spine, which she insisted were cold sores. (Clarke 80)

Later this woman tells George he is "…too black to wear brown" (81) It is interesting to me is that Clarke wants us to notice that the toilet seat has been painted Black by a White woman who is a resident in a rooming house just like our main character. Where does she get this right? It is not her property. I see this metaphorically: It is White privilege to do as one pleases. I think Clarke also wants us to make the connection to Black skin and shit: Black skin as shit and Black skin being so Black that it makes brown look like 'shit'.

Just as 'Bigger' is easy to interpret as 'Nigger,' so are Clarke's final billboard images. 'Pigging-out' is slang for over eating but placed next to an ad for 'Tampax' it becomes a gross interpretation: 'Eat Shit' (and die) (87).

Wright, placing Bigger at the entrance to his new 'work' door, writes a similar description when he describes how Bigger feels trying to make his entrance into the home of his new employer

> He saw a white face. It was a woman…He edged through the door slowly, then stopped halfway. The woman was so close to him that he could see a tiny mole at the corner of her mouth. He held his breath. It

seemed that there was not room enough for him to pass without
actually touching her (Wright 50).

So why was Bigger born in America and not Canada? Does Canada have a Bigger of its own? Clark has his character kill himself rather than strike out. This, it seems, supports Margaret Atwood's assertion that Canadians, in literature, not only have a penchant for the negative, but also perhaps feel most comfortable being victims as well (Atwood 39). George has killed himself because of his Blackness and because of his sense of failure.

George Elliott Clarke

Poet and author George Elliott Clarke is, for me, an author, who rolls into one, everything that I personally feel is the epitome of being Black and Canadian. I am able to find and see my own dimensions in his works. He allows me these dimensions, but too, I see his work as fertile ground. For me there is something holy in his juxtaposition of "Saltwater Spirituals," which is the title of a published work of his. I know what it means instantly. I can feel it in my gut, and smell it in my nostrils. His writings re-marry my parents all over again; and it is Clarke who gets it right this time.

I root for his words because they are the words of many of my own experiences of having lived in the Canadian Maritimes. His use of words and language scent the air for me, and make my Maritime memories real. It is through his works that I know my recollections are not imaginary. He takes me home and makes me feel I am no longer 'from away;' he places me; and in this placement I long to linger.

I did not understand Clarke's work when I first read it. I am not comfortable in the presence of poetry. Here, in the States, it is presented and taught like Shakespeare; as though one needs to know a merlot from a cabernet; mostly, as a student struggling, one feels 'in a twist' from the start. I had, however, the privilege of hearing him read from Whylah Falls, while visiting Toronto. When I was able to hear his/the cadences applied to his written word, I understood immediately what I had failed to grasp before. Clarke has built much of his work upon the foundation of the church, specifically the Canadian

African Baptist church. This is not a specific church name but rather my harmonizing of four entities: that one can be Canadian, African, Baptist, and a Nova Scotian all at the same time.

His work exemplifies the multitudes of Black experience: the 'call and response' of the field worker spiritual, speaking in tongues, the history of Nova Scotia, and the blending of Blackness with the tartan. Nova Scotia is so keenly thought of in the imagination as a Celtic entity so his thrust, and blending of Blackness and the tartan rightly refocuses the Maritimes as it is, rather than as a collective fantasy. He has taken the American 'jazz,' and 'blues,' and mixed it with Malpeque and mackerel; with a reel and Miles.

He loves Nova Scotia as much as I love Prince Edward Island.

Clarke places my life. My real life, of French lessons and cow manure squishing between my toes like acupuncture for the shoeless of summer; of forts built from hay, and piss clams being dug for a night at a bonfire. It is the creeping thyme gracing the ground while I look to heaven and see the stars, so far north, cradling the sky like a yarmulke.

Clarke places Negroes back on the land. He forces us to grow roots again. He lets us let go of the burden of Blackness; he lets us live. He lets us (me) have the dimension we (I) crave.

Dimension is not afforded to Black skins. It is Whiteness that engulfs us with a sense or notion of universality that presumes itself spokesperson for all. Clarke snatches this notion back and creates a place for Blackness that does not depend on Whiteness. In

his award winning work, Execution Poems he tells of a time that perhaps is more indicative of his notions of a “Snowy Mississippi;” a phrase Clarke uses in the opening preface to his classic work Whylah Falls, and which refers to Canada’s own history of slavery and racism. But I reject his insinuation that Canada was as cruel and relentless as America’s version of slavery. It is just not reflected in Canadian literature in the same way.

Bigger Thomas does not live in Canada. If he does, he can parle un petit francais. I then come across LeRoi Jones’s poetic essay: Words, and I find him struggling, from Harlem, with all of the things it might take to unburden his Black soul. He asks why does everyone live in a closet, and hope no one will understand how badly they need to grow (Jones 90). He realizes the importance of nature and the relative lack of it. He is in search of a place to grow and he sees the potential for growth in nature. He also understands the need for quiet, an inner quiet that produces meditation, and reflection.

He ends:

> We turn white when we are afraid. We are going to try and be happy. We do not need to be fucked with. We can be quiet and think and love the silence. We need to look at trees more closely. We need to listen (91).

This absence of nature in African American literature seems to me to give it much of its tone. This ‘tone’ is tuned to the frequency of desperation with what feels like no end in sight. (I feel psychically beat up by this study. I can’t get this African trauma out of my head. I feel like a haunting is taking place inside me; it is one big three-hundred-year ‘accident’).

It is either the asphalt jungle or the southern sharecropper's life; poverty on beautiful farms owned by someone else, usually White. Even when we are introduced to a wealthy Black family in literature, like the Coles of Martha's Vineyard in Dorothy West's, The Wedding, they have managed to escape its beauty by bringing internalised racism into their lives by talking about nothing but skin colour.

Clarke, on the other hand, has the time to stop and smell the roses. It is this closeness to nature that I think profoundly separates Afro-America literature from Afro-Canadian. There is lyricism in nature; beauty is allowed. Blackness juxtaposed next to this lyricism and beauty creates Black beauty. Clarke has mastered this even when he writes of murder.

In his chapbook titled Africadian History, he blends perfectly Black experience in the hands of the Maritimes and never fails to forget that French is present at all times. He is responsible for having coined the phrase and concept 'Africadian:' this blend of African-ness and Acadian-ness which is always, in my mind, French. In part he writes,

"Illegitimate mackerel, Cigarette harlots, North Preston cotillions" (Clarke 5)

These lines make me laugh. They are perfect. Fresh mackerel is lost on Americans. It is rare to be found at the monger, and when I ask for it, I am usually told: "That fish does not sell well here." That Clarke has defined it as 'illegitimate' is interesting to me for two reasons. 'Illegitimacy' is to be defined as a bastard child, and under slavery, all Blacks are illegitimate. That I cannot find this fish in the States makes it seems at though it is illegitimate. 'Cigarette harlots'… well two weeks spent back on Prince Edwards Island, I'm ready to take the habit up again. Here in the States I know no smokers personally; in

contrast I know no one on P.E.I. that does not smoke. My Canadian friends sarcastically tell me it is America that is ruining things for smokers. I know of a woman in Charlottetown, who, when out of cigarettes, goes out into the streets to solicit cigarettes off of strangers. 'North Preston cotillions' here Clarke allows debutantes, beautiful Black women, to emerge from the black villages of Dartmouth.

"Repossessed bagpipes, renaissance banjos, Players Navy Cut tequila oxygen, Liverpudlian mulattoes, Red Rose cocaine, Cuban voyageurs" (6)

'Repossessed bagpipes:' the poor are always en garde against the repo-man – we usually think of cars but Clarke has taken one of the essences of Nova Scotia, its Celtic culture, and applied inner city worries to bagpipes.

"Renaissance banjos:' I instantly think of The Black Renaissance of literature. I also understand his allusion to the banjo being of African origin. 'Players Navy Cut tequila Oxygen:' Well if you are going to smoke: smoke right, enjoy yourself, forget the filter and don't worry about the oxygen until you need it: at the end. 'Liverpudlian mulattoes:' Here Clarke re-merges an already merged concept (the mulatto) with Britain (those that took over Acadia). 'Red Rose cocaine:' Red Rose is a tea brand and tea is consumed by Canadians and the British like an addict consumes cocaine. 'Cuban voyageurs:' Americans have to go to Canada to get to Cuba. Canadians can go to Cuba when they wish.

Briny Chaucer, Saltwater Spirituals (8). Here Clarke has coupled the saltwater brininess (or maybe he is thinking of the brine needed to jar vegetables from his garden), with the British poets, and the Negro Spiritual and baptises it in the salty waters of the Maritimes.

Bingo hall bordellos, Nouvelle-Ecosse Tartan nylons, Mi'kmaq Romeos (10)

Even I go play Bingo when I go home; it is un-Canadian to not like Bingo. When I say I don't want to go, I am looked at as though I have said something foul. Clarke has made the connection between 'Bordellos' and 'nylons,' as in, the nylons of a whore, and has made French the phrase: 'Nova Scotia.' He adds to this French whorehouse of gambling Mi'kmaq Romeos. He has almost managed to include the wonderful ethnic diversity and history of Nova Scotia all in one line. Clarke plays with and nudges language. He sees Nova Scotia for what it is. It is the Mi'kmaq Indians, and the Scottish, and the Black, the French and the British all those cultures rolled up into one glorious place: Africadia.

On a visit home to his mother in 1994, Clarke discovered, by accident, that, in his not-so-distant past, were two cousins who had been tried and convicted for the murder of a White taxi driver in New Brunswick. This was back in 1949, eleven years before Clarke's birth. He conceptualised their predicament in his work, Execution Poems, which won Canada's prestigious Governor General's Literary Award in 2001.

In this series of poems Clarke has placed a veil of beauty over the images of horror. He is sympathetic to the murder of this White man, but he understands that it was his cousin's poverty--the poverty of Blackness-- that caused them to commit this foolish act. He does not blame the Whiteness of the victim, Silver, or his more gainful employment as a reason for homicide. He does suggest though that Geo and Rue were forced into the crime because of the lopsidedness of anti-Black racism.

In these poems, he places the acts of a Bigger Thomas in the Maritimes and the effect is unique and purely Canadian. It is Clarke's insistence upon retaining nature,

community, and Canadian sensibilities that allows for ‘Rue’ and ‘Geo’ to remain men with dignity even where no dignity can be found. It is this dignity that I find in Afro-Canadian texts that I feel is absent from Afro-American literature. This dignity is influenced by the Queen, Europe (specifically France and England), the concept of calling oneself a ‘Loyalist’ (there is dignity and pride in that word), and to be able to speak more than one language, and to be a part of more than one culture is to embrace the other.

Such behaviour is condemned in America. Here is the difference between ideologies and an identity. Ideologies feel threatened when English is not the only language spoken. It screams for the death penalty without questioning its underlying racism. Ideologies have no loyalty to anyone in particular. No one is able to be compassionate to Bigger Thomas because he was born in America. Communities do not exist here like they do in the Maritimes. Bigger becomes an animal in America. Geo and Rue, under Clarke’s pen, are hanged for just punishment. They are not lynched.

NEGATION

Le negre negated, meagre, c’est moi:
A whiskey – coloured provincial, uncouth
Mouth spitting lies, vomit-lyrics, musty,
Masticated scripture. Her majesty’s
Nasty, Nofaskoshan Negro, I mean
To go out shining instead of tarnished,
To take apart poetry like a heart.
My Black face must preface murder for you (11)

This opening stanza is beautiful. I can not stress enough how strongly I feel connected to Clarke’s work. I am not connected to murder, or poverty, but rather to a heritage that, Stateside, I am not allowed to have. His words give me back dimension. I am

allowed to be coloured and know French. I am allowed to be Black and talk for hours about the Queen. There is also some truth that French softens the hardness of Black life: The Negated Negro, meagre, this is me.

Clarke had asked me to read Frantz Fanon's work: Black Skin, White Masks. I do not know if he was thinking of the opening lines to that book, but I am reminded of it when I read the latter opening lines to Execution Poems. Fanon writes

> The explosion will not happen today. It is too soon…or too late. I do not come with timeless truths. My consciousness is not illuminated with ultimate radiances. Nevertheless, in complete composure, I think it would be good if certain things were said (Fanon 7)

The original would have been written in French. There is something vulnerable about these two passages; Clarke's and Fanon's. They are not antagonistic or accusatory; they are just allowed to be and, more importantly, the race of the writer is not the focus. One can forget about race in Clarke's work even though he talks about it all the time. I don't know how he does it, but I see the man, not the race, in Clarke's work, or for that matter, much of Afro-Canadian writing. In Afro-American literature, you can't find the man under the clutter of race. I have no clue who Bigger Thomas is: He is just a Black mass that kills.

In 'A whiskey- coloured Provincial,' Clarke uses the word 'provincial' in its dual meaning that those in the Maritimes often feel they are looked at by Americans: One is from a province but one can also be perceived as backwards, 'provincial,' and uncouth. He has placed Geo and Rue as poor and not too bright, he has taken away their religion, their community when he chews-up their scriptures, but he gives them back an identity

when he places them under the Crown of Majesty, allows us to see their illiteracy (Nofaskoshan is an actual phonetic spelling of Nova Scotia that appears in Sierra Leonean settlers' letters, circa 1792.)

In another stanza, Clarke creates an atmosphere of sorrow and self hatred:

IDENTITY I

Rue: My colour is guttural
I was born in lachrymose air.

My face makes a mess of light:
It's like a Black splinter lancing snow.

I'm negative, but positive with a knife.
My instinct? Is to damage someone.

My words collide with walls of fists,
Collapse, my teeth clacking like typewriters.

The encyclopaedias encourage rape;
Murder lunges – sable genie – out the radio.

So what? So what? So what? So?
Am I the only nigger in this province with a pistol?

What I am
Cannot be dreamt

By anyone
Imperfect as you (19)

'My face makes a mess of light: It's like a Black splinter lancing snow,': as I shall address in my next chapter, it is Dyer's speculation that images of snow in the imaginary mind deletes the presence of Blackness in the imagination. Here Clarke uses this imagery to illustrate Rue's sense of internalised racism. Rue feels that his Blackness is impure and wrong in the presence of such purity and grace. He is a splinter in the body of Whites.

He is negative; his sad birth and Blackness make him good, for nothing, but death. His only instinct, left from this sad start, is to damage anything in his way. In the final four lines, Clarke tells us that Rue's world, and sense of self, is so far gone that it cannot be imagined; his devastation has gone far beyond imagination. He is speaking these lines to the person or person's in the last two lines. This listener is accusatory. This listener stands upon the ground where is perpetuated the racism with which Rue is forced to live.

In the first stanza of the following poem, Clarke sees to it that Silver is not perceived as disposable. He tells us that he has friends, and that he was remembered as friendly. He is missed, and a hole has been left, not only in his skull, but in his community. Clarke uses images of nature when it is at its most violent (storms, lightening, volcanoes and frozen things) and geography which locates the reader in religion (a Red Sea, a Dead Sea). All of these images at once place George and Rue's act of murder in the hands of God, and in his disapproval he causes the earth and sky to revolt.

THE KILLING

Rue: I ingratiated the grinning hammer
with Silver's not friendless, not unfriendly skull.
Behind him like a piece of storm, I unleashed a frozen glinting –
a lethal gash of lightning.
His soul leaked from him in a Red Sea, a Dead Sea,
churning his clothes to lava.

Geo: No, it didn't look like real blood,
but something more like coal, that inched from his mouth.

Rue: It was a cold hit in the head. A hurt unmassageable.
Car seat left stinking of gas and metal and blood.
And reddening violently.
A rhymeless poetry scrawled his obituary.

Geo: It was comin on us for awhile, this here misery.
We'd all split a beer before iron split Silver's skull.
Silver's muscles still soft and tender. That liquor killed him.
The blood like shadow on his face, his caved-in face.
Smell of his blood over everything.

Rue: Iron smell of the hammer mingled with iron smell of blood
and chrome smell of snow and moonlight.

Geo: He had two hundred dollars on him; bootleg in him.
We had a hammer on us, a spoonful of cold beer in us.

The taxi-driver lies red in the alabaster snow.
His skeleton has taken sick and must be placed in the ground.

This murder is 100 per cent dirt of our hands.

Rue: Twitchy, my hand was twitchy, inside my jacket.
The hammer was gravity: everything else was jumpy.
I wondered if Silver could hear his own blood thundering,
vermilion, in his temples, quickened, twitchy, because of beer;
jumpy molecules, infecting his corpuscles, already nervous.

The hammer went in so far that there was no sound –
just the slight mushy squeak of bone.

Silver swooned like the leaden Titanic.
Blood screamed down his *petit-bourgeois* clothes.

Geo: Can we cover up a murder with snow?
With white, frosty roses?

Rue: Here's how I justify my error:
The blow that slew Silver came from two centuries back.
It took that much time and agony to turn a White man's whip
Into a black man's hammer.

Geo: No, we needed money,
So you hit the So-and-So,
Only much too hard,
Now what?

Rue: So what? (34)

When I first read stanzas 2, 3, 4, and 5, I thought Clarke had over-used blood images. Then I have to remind myself that he is trying to recreate this madness committed by his cousins. Death is messy. Murder is messier. And no one about to hammer a person in the head can conceive of the horror they are about to unleash. Clarke, in fact, succeeds in making us witnesses to the gruesomeness of murder, and he makes us witness the apparent horror immediately felt by Geo and Rue when they realize that their 'bright, simple idea' suddenly overflows and becomes unmanageable. They cannot stave off the flow of blood nor can they return to that moment before when staving was not necessary. In metaphor, all three men are instantly seen as haemorrhaging life. All three men will die, but it is Geo and Rue who must die twice. They died when they chose to commit murder, and they are finally hung for the commission of the act itself.

In the thirteenth stanza Clarke tells us directly what it took to commit murder. He makes clear to us the true motivation behind Rue and Geo's act: two centuries of a White man's whip is what it takes to turn this whip into a Black man's hammer.

This metamorphosis, of one thing creating another, is Wright's premise of how Bigger was born. Wright created Bigger so that Wright could finally strike back at the very men against whom [he] was powerless, men who could violate [his] life at will (JanMohamed 253)

JanMohamed asserts, through Wright's' psychology, that Blacks, living in racist atmospheres, (racial hegemony) have their psyches distorted. That in order to survive in

climates of cultural terror they have to redefine what it means to live 'normally;' that if that cultural terror ceased to exist all hell would break loose; Blacks would retaliate (252).

Bigger is just an animal. His parents were this cultural terror. He responds to it purely on instinct. Geo and Rue 'break' under its pressures. Cornel West defines Bigger's behaviour as a response to pain, fear, silence and hatred for White supremacy which results in psychic terror and physical violence against a Black (Bigger's girlfriend Bessie) and a White (his employer's daughter Mary)(West 96)

According to West,

> The two major choices in Black culture (or any culture) facing those who succumb to the temptation of hate are a self-hatred that leads to self-destruction or a hatred of others – degraded others – that leads to vengeance of some sort. These options often represent two sides of the same coin (95)

All of this criticism, all of this insight, all of these *beautiful talented tenths,* has the responsibility to guide and to lead, but without the inclusion or 'all' (both Black and Whites) participating, I fear we are doomed to continue on, perpetrating senseless haemorrhagings.

SILENCING THE SUBALTERN[9]

[9] The title of this chapter was suggested in theory, after reading Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Her premise, within the context of literary theory, is to question whether or not the voice of the 'other', 'colonized', 'subaltern' really has a voice if it is only listened to within the confines of Western (white/male) literary canonical standards.

Overview

In this final chapter I will explore two concepts: the silencing of the coloured voice in literature and the racist racial imagery that abounds in American culture. As previously stated, in addition, it is my hope that further research will be undertaken to examine why this imagery still exists. Secondly, to re-examine, and change, the manner in which literature is taught, how it gets chosen, one book over another, and to re-read, with a critical eye, what might have been missed that could have, and most likely always did, include the voice of the other.

I am at the end of my work and weary. This exhaustion is included here.

Racism in Literature

I cannot speak of my work; I can no longer understand the books I read. I place them ‘over there’ and watch them tumble from piles. I step over them for weeks. I look around and see the literary debris of a reader ‘done in’; everything seems to tower over me.

This study has made me understand, not fully, but much too much more than I feel my spirit can handle, these far reaching tentacles of racism. Althusser promised, mentors have encouraged, statistics implied. I am of the minority. I went on -- and it didn’t mean a damned thing. While I looked at racism, I endured it. While I read books, I was called names. While I attend school, I endure anxiety attacks unleashed upon me from a very old past. I wrestle with my own psychic trauma and read books that disclose and

reveal an even more ancient psychic trauma. I feel emotionally opressed. While I read slave narratives telling me of women beaten savagely for weeping for children lost forever, I am sent emails by an individual; delusional, liberal, who thinks jokes about Blacks as animals, Indians as happy alcoholics, and the Irish as just generically drunk, will somehow amuse me. When I speak up and tell her to cease, I am told I am too sensitive. Later, I am called a bitch. When I complain, I am told that I should go look for another job. I am told I can't get along. I am the help. I am the non-dominant. I am 'at the mercy of'. I am a nigger who can be kicked and shoved. I'm a nigger starting to feel like Bigger. If I complain, the roof over my head, the foods to my mouth… all these things become jeopardised. So I become silent for survival. But like 'Pirate Jenny,' I am biding my time; and it will come. I cannot look at this person who abuses me. My eyes avert. It is not shame or guilt that causes me to do so but rather survival, and a part of me that knows that, if I look at her straight, she will disintegrate; my irises hold an arsenal of daggers; I'd stab but I'd be sorry for the knife. She is the dominant, and for the moment I am a domestic.

I feel tangled up with my study, with the literature of rage and hurt; I feel unseen and uncared for. I thought I had something to say, I thought someone would want to listen, I thought my subject was interesting, I thought what I uncovered would cause change. I thought, I thought, I thought. I'm a million years away from where I thought I'd be.

Freda, my best friend living on P.E.I., calls, and she asks me about my paper, and I say: I don't want to talk about it. And she says: How come you never want to talk

about that paper? I begin to weep. I say: nobody cares. I have developed distaste for White people. I cannot separate my life from my study. I am terrified of my words; my best friend is White. I am scared that my last human resource will stomp away too. I pray hard that her being a Canadian will make her understand that I am not referring to her. God answers my prayers. She says: Yeah, you guys have it hard down there. I muster a laugh. I love my friend.

I'm afraid to hand in my thesis to my advisor; he's White as well. What will he think of me?

Freda says to me: Write it for me. I cry. It is like a thousand pounds of salt water lifted from my heart. I don't know why I need this thing; this muse; this person I must keep in mind in order to write, but I do. I am weak this way. But mostly, I suspect, I am weak this way because it is so hard to be in reality. Reality is startling, but Black reality, it seems, is even more startling. It is, O, so hard to go it alone, with nothing but foes at your side, and friends too far to hold near quickly.

I began thinking that this chapter needed to be an analysis of the silence in literature minus my presence. I don't think this now.

Often when we do analysis of literature (fiction) we inadvertently distance it from any context of the here and now. We somehow think that non-fiction is reality and fiction is fantasy. Non-fiction is statistical in nature, but fiction is human: it is the internalization of life reinterpreted through imagination in as humane a way as possible by mankind. Without my participation the literature falls prey to death on the page. It is precariously and possibly rendered to the past. It is this rereading of the literature, rendering it new

again and again, that demands my presence. For, without me, it is doomed to those places we define as idiosyncratic, or acquired, or at its worst placement, ethnic.

Northrop Frye promises me that

> Literature keeps presenting the most vicious things to us as entertainment, but what it appeals to is not any pleasure in these things, but the exhilaration of standing apart from them and being able to see them for what they are because they aren't really happening. The more exposed we are to this, the less likely we are to find an unthinking pleasure in cruel or evil things (Frye 42).

I know him to be right. But if this literature goes unread, how is the lesson to be learned?

In her essay titled, Black studies, cultural studies: performative acts, Manthia Diawara writes that, "We must read their work[s] in such a way that they do not recognise themselves" (Diawara 303). I take this to mean that as readers, who are not part of the dominant class, we often read established works of literature and uncover things that may not have been noticed before, and that, by doing so, the literature becomes more inclusive. Here she is suggesting the need for the subaltern, (those of us that are meant to assume the role of lesser intent) to reread these great White classics from the perspective of the subaltern. That in doing so, we renegotiate and redefine terms such as, 'classic', 'race', or 'importance.' What her essays also suggests, and which Morrison also articulates in Playing in the Dark, is the need in academics to examine, "what makes intellectual domination possible; how knowledge is transformed from invasion and conquest to revelation and choice; what ignites and informs the literary imagination, and what forces help establish the parameters of criticism" (Morrison 8). It is exciting to ponder what the impact upon the perpetrators of racism in literature might be. And what

does it do to the subaltern to take notice, and what does that noticing potentially offer the perpetrator? I believe that this re-reading, as articulated by Diawara, is an avenue that is important, for if literature is truly a reflection of the societies where it is written, then further exploration of literature has the potential to heal the very rifts found in these same societies.

As a reader, I detect patterns and recurrent themes in the various texts. I also pay attention to the plot, for good ones offer good emotional wrangling. As a reader and a writer, I am also aware of the narrative voice versus the first-person narrative voice, but I have noticed, at times, that some narration appears to be adding nothing to the plot and seems to serve no purpose other than to interject self-indulgently snide, sadistic statements. The closest thing I can come to this narrative voice is 'Third Person Objective:'

> In third person objective, we have no entry to anyone's thoughts or feelings. The author simply describes, without emotion or editorialising, what the characters say or do. The author's persona here is almost non-existent. Readers may be unsure whose fate they should care about, but it can be very powerful precisely because it invites the reader to supply emotion that the persona does not. This is the persona of the Icelandic sagas, which inspired not only Ernest Hemingway but a whole generation of "hard-boiled" writers (Killian 97)

My only problem with this definition is that I seem to only see it used when White literary characters are abusing the 'coloured' literary subaltern. If its ploy is to allow the reader to place his or her own feelings onto the behaviour enacted, then why is it not a device used conversely in texts written by African American writers? What I have discovered is that in White-authored texts, when White characters encounter Blackness,

hysteria results. These Black characters, in White-authored texts, are rarely given dialogue of response, protest, or indignation; they are completely silent. In texts written by African Americans, the narrative voice/first person persona is clear and present. While White characters still encounter Blackness in hysteria, but the silence of the Black character is always set in relief.

For my purposes, the non-dominant is the voice of the coloured, though this personage is not always Black. The themes I have found I have chosen to define as 'Stilled Tongues Surviving,' 'Disregard' and 'Hushed Tongues Healing'. These phrases are inventions to illustrate the unheard silence of the coloured.

The imagery of 'Stilled Tongues Surviving' is that of survival. Here silence is imposed upon a character who, out of necessity, needs to remain mute to survive. These characters are not dull of brain, but behave so in order to persist. Oddly, I find this behaviour, for the most part, primarily produced by male characters. I find it curious for many reasons. The imaginary White-induced fear of the Black male is that he is out of control. He is raping, killing, and pilfering during all of his spare time. He is not found, in literature, doing so. In literature he is devising ways to stay alive in harsh and unfriendly climates. (Averted eyes are a theme as well; eyes averted, insisted upon by the dominant). When you don't have to look someone in the eye, one has time to plan. If one is forbidden to look, one has time to devise and plot. I can have my inner thoughts all to myself. I can hate with all my heart. You'll never know my rage, if you can't see my eyes. It's a cliché, but eyes don't lie. Averted eyes do not seem to be restricted to a particular gender.

In the imagery of 'Disregard', Whites are abusive towards the character of colour. This violence is presented as though it were simply natural and too often is not questioned by either the author or any particular character the author might have created. But since the abused are allowed no sign of protest we must assume that they comply. Characters silenced via 'Disregard' are an extension of Harold Bloom's theory which I discussed in chapter two. The insistence upon the silence of the subaltern is in some ways the manifestation of fear again, for such a practice prevents the loss by the dominant of the illusion of superiority.

Finally, there is the imagery of healing. In the earlier texts, such as the slave narrative, it was God who was turned to in prayer as a means of solace. Later, I began to notice the turning inward to the self; that the solution is no longer in the hands of God, but, rather, in the hands of the grieving. I refer to this type of silence as, 'Hushed Tongues Healing'. This last theme is one of hope. It is the silence that results from understanding, reflection, and the release of anger. It is a silence that sees a future. The future is not one that envies the past, but rather has adapted, accepts, and creates new images and opportunities out of the tools one learns from the experience of sorrow. It is a future that forms its diamonds of hope out of the ashes of a holocaust. It is not silenced in its own voice; but it is silenced, if it is not read, or understood.

Stilled Tongues Surviving

In Huckleberry Finn, Huck finds himself at the Grangerford estate. The 'Nigger Jim' has been missing for a few days and Huck cannot locate him. Another slave, who has been assigned to Huck, approaches Huck and asks him if he wants to come down into the swamp and look at some water-moccasins. Huck finds this peculiar but is unsure why, but still follows the slave. When they arrive at the swamp he realizes that the slave has actually taken him to where 'Nigger Jim' has been hiding. Jim explains to Huck that he had, "Swum along behind me that night, and heard me yell every time, but dasn't answer, because he didn't want nobody to pick him up and take him into slavery again" (Twain 106). Here we can see that spending a few days in a swamp, surely not a fun time, is a better time than life spent in slavery. Here we see how his silence kept him alive. After some thinking, Huck makes the comment that his slave Jack is, "…A good nigger, en pooty smart" (107). Why is Huck declaring this 'Nigger Jack' smart? Because, as he tells 'Nigger Jim', "He ain't ever told me you was here, told me to come, and he showed me a lot of water-moccasins. If anything happens he ain't mixed up in it. He can say he never seen us together, and it'll be the truth" (108). In this scene the slave, Jack, is protecting himself, through omission, for, to help a runaway slave, and to be caught doing so, would have jeopardised his own life. During times of slavery, communication had to be encoded, and construed in such a way so as to prevent harm, but to also secretly advance oneself or another. Too, the most profound act of silencing was to separate the voices of Africans

from fellow villagers who might have spoken the same language, thus preventing, by passing laws, the slave from learning, to make it a crime to be caught understanding. So how does one communicate, and find comprehension, in an environment that forbids one to do so?

Towards the end of our story, Tom Sawyer arrives, and 'Nigger Jim', for his protection, is locked up in a shed of sorts. There is a slave on the estate who Twain has chosen to describe and present as crazy. Twain, describes his hair as, "tied up in little bunches with thread". "He said the witches was pestering him awful these nights, and making him see all kinds of strange things, and to hear all kinds of strange words and noises…" (224) Then suddenly, after we have assumed his place as readers, that of being a crazy man who hears voices, Twain lets a smile cross over the slave's mouth and he describes it as, "like when you leave a brickbat in a mud-puddle"(225). Now the mud-puddle description is a description of the slave's skin tone but a brickbat is a piece of a brick used as a missile. Twain is showing us that, under slavery, ways are devised which keep people alive, and perhaps left alone; if we are believed to be crazy then we are, more often than not, dismissed. Further in the scene we learn that this slave is not so crazy that he cannot survive. When Tom and Huck approach the shed where Jim is being held they speak to one another and the slave is surprised that Huck and Tom know Jim. He exclaims, "Why gracious sakes! do he know you gentlemen?" Tom looks at the slave in such a way – Twain describes it as, "Steady and kind of wondering", but it must have been threatening in some manner for the slave immediately retracts his words and tells Tom and Huck that, in fact, he never saw or heard anything at all. When he is asked why,

he supposes that he said he had heard things, but he declares that it was the voices and that he wishes he were dead (225). Why would someone wish they were dead over something so petty and small? All throughout Huck Finn, Twain never, in detail, shows us the true brutality of slavery. It is presented as just a fact of life in this book. But, intentionally or not, Twain shows Whites living under slavery, as delirious with the headiness associated with the power they have over other human beings. All throughout the story, I feel nothing but fear for Jim. What must it be like to place your survival in the hands of a child? What is it like to know that, try as you might, that, if caught, the life you were fleeing suddenly becomes worse than it was before? What is it like to know that anything you say could be used against you and that at the whim of another person, you could instantly be dashed somewhere else? What is it like to never make plans; to not be able to contemplate your future?

As described in her autobiography, Behind the Scenes or Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in The White House, Elizabeth Keckley has plans, and, eventually, they come true. But long before this success she had to endure punishment after punishment for simply having notions of a future. Elizabeth Keckley eventually gets to The White House and is made seamstress to Mary Lincoln and many other society women of the time. In the opening lines to her autobiography, a slave narrative, she describes herself as having come into the word as, "Free in God-like thought, but fettered in action" (Keckley 17). What goes on in the imagination has no limits, but what one does in society (during times of enslavement) must not reflect those imaginings. As a child she writes of another woman under bondage whose son has been taken from her and sold before she can say

goodbye or even make an attempt to prevent the sale. Keckley describes what happens next: "One day she was whipped for grieving for her lost boy. Colonel Burwell never liked to see one of his slaves wear a sorrowful face, and, those who offended in this particular way, were always punished. Alas! The sunny face of the slave is not always an indication of sunshine in the heart" (29). Once again, silence is covered with a smiling mask. Here pain must be endured, not expressed, and a mask of joy must be created in order to survive. I can't imagine how deep the psychological sufferings must be to cause the human spirit to manifest this tactic of survival. To be beaten for the expression of sorrow; to be forced to wander about with a sunny disposition… Someone else will have to write about the effects of that trauma upon the African American. To suffer in silence: I have known this feeling and it is a feeling of sanity slipping away like sand through one's fingers. This agony can't even be screamed; it has neither words nor sound. It is beyond imagination; it is beyond pain; at this stage one is rendered numb.

When Keckley is in her late teens, she is beaten severely. Her hands are tied together and the rope is hoisted over a rafter thus causing her to be on tiptoe with arms over her head. She has been stripped to the waist. She is being beaten because her master's wife resents the fact that he is kind to Keckley and the wife feels threatened, and fearful. The beating is to ensure that Keckley knows her place well and never forgets it. While she is being whipped, her thoughts are centered on: "O God! I can feel the torture now – the terrible, excruciating agony of those moments" (35). What follows is what the fettering of action under slavery cause her to do for survival (and, I would bet, to ensure that the humiliation does not get confused with her dreams), she writes:

> I did not scream; I was too proud to let my tormentor know that I was suffering. I closed my lips firmly, that not even a groan might escape from them, and I stood like a statue while the keen lash cut deep into my flesh (34).

Later in the narrative, Keckley is raped by her master, a deed resulting in the birth of her only child. I was a little startled to read that when the child was born, she expresses hate for the baby. I am unsure why I felt this way but I think it has something to do with Keckley's glaring honesty in the face of so much silence. The baby, though innocent, was not conceived in love, and Keckley understands fully that the father sees the child as a profit. She further notes that conceiving such children often makes it harder on the mother because the master's wife sees evidence of her husbands' infidelity running around. What does it do to a person to view their offspring as profit? What is sex like when it is only taken through rape? How, in the face of so much abuse, do people not become murderous? But, or course, sometimes they do.

In Morrison's Beloved, the character Sethe cuts the throats of her children rather than see her children live a life under slavery. Why not cut the throat of the master? Ahhh! There is always another master, but children are not replaceable. In the climactic chapter which explains the psychic haunting of Sethe, Morrison depicts a slave 'still life' of sorts. All of the slaves, as in Huckleberry Finn, are rendered speechless, but unlike Twain, Morrison gives us every nook and horrible cranny of what life is like under slavery. Sethe has escaped slavery and is reunited with three of her children and has just given birth to a fourth. The slave catchers have arrived on horseback to her hiding place. She describes all of the slaves, upon seeing the arrival of the slave catchers, as having a

look of being caught red-handed. I think this is an interesting description for it implies guilt, but what are they (the slaves) doing? They are simply 'acting' free. But they have been caught and the very first slave that we encounter, through Morrison, realises the futility of outrunning a gun, but, none-the-less smiles at the slave catcher. But the slave catcher is not misled by this smile. He knows that,"The very nigger with his head hanging and a jelly-jar smile on his face could all of a sudden roar, like a bull or some such, and commence to do disbelievable things" (Morrison 148).

This character Morrison has given a 'hanging head' and a 'jelly-jar' smile. The hanging head allows eyes to be averted and the jelly-jar smile is a contradiction to what is written in his eyes. We know this to be true because the slave catcher doesn't trust the smile for one moment. We also know by instinct that when the eyes don't match the expression on the face something is wrong.

Standing in the yard with this 'nigger' are two other slaves, both of whom Morrison describes as crazy. The first one is crazy because he is holding an axe, and making low animal grunt-like noises, the other one *must* be crazy because she is standing "stock-still" (149). If one were living under normal conditions, then one could say that all of this behaviour was 'crazy'. If a man came to my house with a gun and told me I had to be his slave, today I could call the police, and have him carted away. He would be the crazy one. But, during times of bondage, any show of Black resistance brought on an avalanche of headaches. In an attempt to warn the runaway Sethe, an old man makes noises, another one has ice run through her veins and becomes too scared to move, another

one smiles ever so slyly and is thinking of ways to escape. Another, feeling absolutely trapped, and at the end of reason, slices the throats of her children. In this scene, Morrison, illustrates perfectly the effects of the dominant over the non-dominant, and the silencing of the non-dominant through brutality.

For writer, Maya Angelou averted eyes are a sign of respect. When she writes in her autobiography, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Angelou philosophises:

> At least they never looked in her face, or I never caught them doing so. Nobody with a smidgeon of training, not even the worst roustabout, would look right in a grown person's face. It meant the person was trying to take the words out before they were formed. The dirty little children didn't do that, but they threw their orders around the Store like lashes from a cat-o'-nine-tails. (Angelou 29)

This paragraph is laden with meaning. It is in the present and in the past at the same time. As slaves, Africans were forbidden to look into the faces of their captors. To do so was a sign of insolence. It was finite in meaning and symbolism. It is also a statement of: I am too worthy for you to gaze upon: it is a command of the dominant. "Nobody with a smidgeon of training"… this line has implications of the enslaved learning the behaviours of the enslaver; it is internalised racism. If you are taught to avert eyes, and then require it of another (in this case children: the less-dominant to adults) you have accepted and incorporated (Althusser) the very ideologies necessary to advance into the role of the dominant. I am not a parent but surely we do not 'train' our children. I hope we guide and nurture them. Slaves, on the other hand, are trained. Animals are trained. Black Africans, rounded up for slavery, were considered animals.

“It meant the person was trying to take the words out before they were formed”… “All’ can be expressed with a look and nothing can be a ‘look’ without the participation of the eyes. Here Angelou perceives a direct gaze as a form of rape; as an invasion of privacy; as stealing…”before they were formed.” And, finally, reaching far back into slavery, she equates this rape with the whipping one receives from the master’s application of the cat-o’-nine-tails. These are the reverberations, the echoes of slavery: these are the allusions to past silences.

Disregard

In I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Angelou describes a man on horseback coming to her grandmother’s store, to warn her that men would most likely be coming around looking for trouble because rumour has it that a Black man was heard to have messed with a White woman. The character, Mr. Steward, is described by Angelou as “The quiet bitter man that owned a riding horse… [He] used to be sheriff [and] sat rakishly [dissolutely] astraddle his horse. His nonchalance was meant to convey his authority and power over even dumb animals. How much more capable he would be with Negroes. It went without saying (Angelou 17). To ‘go without saying’ is a wonderful figure of speech that leads me directly to my next premise: that there are passages in literature that beg for a voice but instead are written as though the abused are complicit with the abuser.

In my 'unread' mind, I always imagined Truman Capote as having come north as a means of exorcizing the south from the scent of his breath. I imagined he needed a different air to breathe.

My favourite story of all times by Capote is, Children on Their Birthdays. I have read it aloud to lovers and laughed uproariously at the very parts that I now take to task. Upon rereading his work I found myself surprised by his insensitivity. Why should I be? I don't know; because he is gay? Those are my issues…I have the ungrounded notion that suppressed groups instinctually form alliances with other suppressed groups: gay, coloured, the underdog…All of us that are not a part of the dominant few.

In Capote's story, we are given a tale of innocence set on the cusp of young adulthood. All the children are acting out adulthood, but being children, they can only do so immaturely.

A newcomer, Miss Bobbit, has arrived in a small southern town. She arrives with airs that are unbeknownst to a child this age. She has ideas of chivalry, equality, and fair justice. Her various notions aggravate and perturb, but she is accepted because of her White status. She is tolerated. Something about Miss Bobbit makes her 'the cat's pyjamas.' Truman doesn't tell us explicitly what, but we can surmise that it is her embodiment of Whiteness; everyone is enthralled. Everyone in this small town stumbles over 'it' and her in hopes of getting closer to this thing she exudes. The only one that manages to succeed in doing so is a Black child that goes by the name of Rosalba Cat. No one in this short story, except for Miss Bobbit, treats Rosalba well. When we are first introduced to her she is defined as "no one":

"There was no one passing in the street, except a coloured girl…" (125). Then Capote gives even odder dialogue to children that are most likely no older than ten. He writes

> …The boys, teasing her like gnats, joined hands and wouldn't let her go by, not until she paid a tariff. I ain't studyin' no tariff, she said what kinda tariff you talkin' about, mister? A party in the barn, said Preacher, between clenched teeth, mighty nice party in the barn…Preacher, who can be as mean as the devil, gave her behind a kick which sent her sprawling jellylike among the Blackberries and the dust (125)

A party in the barn? What he is suggesting sounds like a gang rape, and when Preacher doesn't get his way, he kicks her. Capote describes Preacher as being mean for having kicked Rosalba, but no mention is made of her potential molestation. "I ain't studying no tariff" is as close that a Black child can get to saying "No" to a White person, who happens to be a child himself, but one whom she none-the-less feels it necessary to address as "Mister". Capote doesn't allow Rosalba to express to her feelings, but as is true of Twain's 'Nigger Jim,' we can sense her fear. Rosalba is not stupid. She knows that to step into that barn is to step into trouble. What is also interesting is that the story takes place in the 50's or 60's and still, like Elizabeth Keckley, Black women (here children) are still thematically threatened with sexual violation from White men (here children).

In the following passage, Capote disregards Rosalba in one sweep. He refers to her as an animal, as though giving her the last name of an animal is not enough, and then he simply comes out and allows a character to sum her up, nice and simple, by referring to her as a nigger:

> …Miss Bobbit and this baby elephant, whose name was Rosalba Cat. At first, Mrs. Sawyer raised a fuss about Rosalba being so much at her

> home. She told Aunt El that it went against the grain to have a nigger lolling smack there in plain sight on her front porch. (25)

All throughout this story, Rosalba is used as the outlet for every White person's disgruntlement. What has she done? She has done nothing; her only crime is to have been born Black. Capote writes:

> The article ended with a question: Can she get away with it? She did; and so did Sister Rosalba. Only she was coloured, so no one cared. (130)

Capote comes right out and says it: No one cares about coloured people. The coloured are to be disregarded. You can kick them, rape them, humiliate them, anything your imagination can think up you can inflict onto Black lives, and they will remain silent while you do it, (or remembering Keckley's observation, must keep a sunny disposition intact lest wrath be unleashed); never protesting, never weeping.

I don't know what White readers feel when they read these same passages nor do I know how these lines are interpreted. I hope, however the behaviour of the White characters leaps off the pages to White readers; I hope they can feel how shocking the behaviour is. Or do White readers only see racial injustice when it is clarified that this is what the plot is about -- when it is spelled out? I ask this because I wonder: is it my race that allows me to notice 'Nigger Jim' and Rosalba? I don't have the answer for this, but I have spoken to too many White people who have read Huck Finn and too many of them have no recollection of Black people in the book, except as peripheral 'items' or as decor.

In, I know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Maya Angelou describes some White children, behaving outlandishly, in attempts to insult and get a response out of an adult

Black women (Maya's Grandmother). The entire time that the children are carrying on, Maya's grandmother is humming a spiritual. Maya describes the incident in this passage:

> Her dirty bare feet and long legs went straight for the sky. Her dress fell down around her shoulders, and she had on no drawers. The slick pubic hair made a brown triangle where her legs came together. She hung in the vacuum of that lifeless morning for only a few seconds, then wavered and tumbled. The other girls clapped her on the back and slapped their hands. (Angelou 32)

I don't know how anyone can read that passage and not feel embarrassed by the behaviour of the young girls. How deeply committed to insult and racism must one be to insist upon it to such a degree that any thought given to your own sense of decency is over-ridden?

Richard Dyer talks about the colour White and how it is perceived and used in art. We are taught that the colour White is made up of all colours and, at the same time, we are told it is colourless. He notes as well that White is never included in colour charts and he quotes a painter, Roland Rood, as describing White as the colour of light and because we see light all the time we fail to see its colour (Dyer 46). Dyer then makes the connection that because we fail to think of White as a colour we have formed

> … a habit of perception that informs how we think and feel about its other aspects. The slippage between white as a colour and white as colourlessness forms part of a system of thought and affect whereby white people are both particular and nothing in particular, are both something and non-existent. (47)

What is White behaviour in literature? Is there such a thing? Yes! If Blacks are silent In literature, what are Whites doing? Whiteness, in literature, discovers chaos in itself, when near Blackness. There is an incredible power to be had in a silence that causes

those in its presence to go hysterical. Maybe 'White fear' is the fear that whiteness cannot control its power or its desire in the presence of darkness. Over and over again I encounter White people in literature behaving without reason when in contact with Black skin. When Whites have proximity to Blackness in literature Whites become the very people they have projected onto the darkness. Whites become their own worst fears.

At the end of Huckleberry Finn, Tom Sawyer comes up with the 'fun' idea of keeping 'Nigger Jim' in the shed a while longer so that he and Huck can pretend they are 'freeing-the-slave.' This aspect of Tom Sawyer's character has always bothered me. Tom is symbolic to me of the seed of racism and all things bad. Twain creates a child that is already full of the rhetoric of his times. Unlike Huck, he has not one inner struggle with his conscience in the entire book. That character trait is indicative of a sociopath and sociopaths in positions of power wreak terrible, horrible wrongs.

Toni Morrison writes in, Playing in the Dark that it is especially Tom who we should scrutinise in this story for he has, it seems, a particular interest and need for Jim to be humiliated and demoralized. Her theory is that Tom especially, is symbolic of the "parasitical nature of White freedom" (Morrison 57). Those suffering this malady can only entertain thoughts of freedom and ponder it when someone is not free.

Jim Case wrote to me, upon my completion of reading Huck Finn, in part, with the following insights:

> The prejudices we are least aware of, and therefore the hardest to deal with, are not based on what we do see but on what we don't…city dwellers who don't see beggars anymore – really don't see them, and readers who don't see Jim. Liberal, educated readers (like me, for instance) who think it is sufficient that Huck learn from Jim, that it is sufficient that Huck be nice to Jim, but who don't see *Jim* on the raft, but simply a symbolic Black shape; readers (and writer's too; Twain himself) who could not see things from Jim's point of view because they could not see Jim-as-Jim, and Jim-as-symbol doesn't have a point of view. Symbols don't: they are to be looked at, they don't have eyes to look through.

I will make the suggestion that Althusser's theories pertaining to the dominant few are in fact populated with Tom Sawyer's. In order to be in the class of the dominant few you have to have no real thought about those that are in the non-dominant majority. The moment one insists upon change is the very moment one loses privilege. Tom and Huck are not in the throes of the terrible twos. They are well into the age of having empathy (if only instinctually): Huck has it and Tom doesn't, which is why Tom can conceive of a plan to keep a grown man at his mercy for a few hours longer, locked in a shed (shitting and pissing in his own space most likely) while he entertains himself with games. It is Huck who talks him out of the more outlandish aspects of his 'game,' such as sawing off a leg for a touch of realness.

Tom Sawyer is the epitome of 'disregard.' 'Disregard' requires no inner conflict; otherwise one goes home riddled with guilt. Guilt does not appear in this literature. No one feels any remorse for their sadistic behaviour. The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is a great American novel for a host of reasons, many, I am sure, not even understood yet. That is consistently winds up on a books banned list is very interesting to me in relationship to how America sees itself and how it really is. Huckleberry Finn is

brilliantly rendered in a parable sort of way. Twain points no fingers in the book, but still it has spurned more outrage and unrest that one could imagine. Most of the outrage, it seems to me, is most concerned with how we are versus how we wish to be seen or how we wish to see ourselves. This book stands as a monument to everything America refuses to acknowledge about itself. America's perpetual insistence, over the years since it was first written, of placing it on a 'books banned' list, confirms for me America's devotion, in part, to denial. Part of 'Americanising' something is denying its existence. Slavery, it seems to me, is all too often being swept under the carpet. Embedded in this book are illiteracy, and ignorance, violence, and racism, broken families both White and Black, and the suggestion that the severance from England created outlaws rather than a new start. These are not themes that America wishes to trumpet. As Morrison states quite clearly, "Deep within the word "American" is its association with race…American means white (Morrison 47). Anecdotally, as a person of colour, I can assure my reader that entering a town that proudly wraps the American flag from rafters and homes, is to enter a town that has simply swapped symbolism: the gesture still means and is acutely felt as "Whites Only".

Carol Shields won the Pulitzer for The Stone Diaries. She had me in her grips and I was following smartly along until I hit page 255. When I got to page two fifty five I said to myself: This is not a Canadian. No Canadian would write this. A little rummaging and I discover she's an American living in Canada. She's an impostor. The following passage is what she wrote:

> Coming from Canada like he did, he wasn't used to coloreds, and he

> talked to me straight out about this and that and everything else too. "Cora-Mae," he said, "my girl needs a woman in the house. She needs to learn things, she'll be wanting a bit of company when I'm not here. First her mamma died, you see, and then an old auntie who took care of her up in Canada, and now she's got no one in the world, only me (Shields 255)

The background of this paragraph is such: Cora-Mae is a former maid being interviewed, in retrospect, during the time of the Civil Rights Movement, as to her thoughts on why her charge might have turned out the way she did some thirty odd years later.

In this one paragraph, I get to witness an avalanche of stereotypes. First I get to see an author 'disregard' a person of colour in an unusual way. Shields decides that Cora-Mae thinks her boss is weird for treating her with respect. This implies that Cora-Mae thinks that coloreds should be disregarded. Shields excuse of his being Canadian (not American) is her reason for his faux pas. What is interesting to me is that Shields plays both sides of the 49th parallel: She uses the Canadian identity of defining itself by what it is not: American, but she also uses the American ideology of race: she makes a nigger a nigger. She makes Cora-Mae know her place. Shields Americanises Cora-Mae – she puts denial onto her tongue—Cora-Mae denies, through these utterances, that she has any recollection of what it means to be treated with dignity. No woman (person) of colour in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement would have said such a thing. No person of colour, outside of an insane asylum, thinks that their subaltern status is the norm or to be accepted. I don't believe any person of colour could read that paragraph and let it slide.

No one that is, except Tom Sawyer; he could let it slide.

Hushed Tongues Healing

There is rage in healing. The rage is an integral necessity to the healing process. Rage comes when one finally sees and can feel emotionally all that has been lost. Hushed tongues healing are tongues unleashed; they are speaking and they have much to say about all the years of forced silence. It also incorporates a sorrow that makes one go to a window and stare far into the distance.

It is interesting to me, now that I can see and read of the silence of Black voices in literature. But to see White readers wanting to impose that same silence in my reading group is prospectively startling. But, in some ways, it is proof positive that who we are, as a society, shows up in our literature. Silencing the subaltern is simply a part of the status quo.

The Afro-Canadian writer Kuwee Kumsaa, in her short story, "Lamentations: A Letter to My Mother," describes this silence as a complete obliteration of culture by the dominant culture:

> They claimed and they owned it and they owned us. All our values vanished. They renamed our country, they named and renamed our towns…They renamed our…rivers…our beautiful mountains…and…they named and renamed us, all after themselves. Suddenly we vanished from the pages of history… (Kumsaa 27)

For her it seems to stem back far and deep, back to Africa: Who might I have been had I remained in my home? What might my name be? What is this impulse to re-name things?

I witnessed name-changing twice in my life. Near to where I lived in Westchester, I one day drove up The Taconic Highway and, suddenly, a park that, only a day before

had an Indian name, was now named after a dead president. When I grew up on Prince Edward Island, our little road was named Grand-per Road. When I returned years later, they had renamed it back to its original name: Cymbria; a name given it by the First Nation's people. Something about name-changing distorts history. But it is also about erasure, and removal, and indeed it is a form of silencing. It is also about the dominant few having the choice of who is remembered and who is forgotten.

Jamaica Kincaid returned to her homeland of Antigua and wrote an eloquently angry book that I like to think of as a New Age tour book: A Small Place. It is an account of her visceral reaction to the colonialism by the British of Antigua and her anger towards Antiguans for their participation.

Kincaid, it seems, was removed from school around seventeen and sent to America to be an 'au pair.' It was her brothers who were destined for better lives. She insists that the fancy phrase 'au pair' really means servant, and often demands this word be used rather than the more glamorous 'au pair.' She describes the women she worked for as having little blond children.[10]

[10] Kincaid is right…this is the job of the servant. It is an extension of the wet nurse, and we all know what that job is about. It's about White women who want children but only want to see them when they are scrubbed, smell good, and can be presented as charms when the need arises. Someone else even gets to breastfeed them, usually women (Black) whose own children have recently been sold into slavery (or in the case of the 'au pair' her children are baby-sat by others when she truly wishes to care for her own children, but does not have the White luxury of not having to work). It is these woman --milk still dripping from nipples, who have had their own children recently wrestled from their breasts. These are certainly servants of the worse kind: those who provide bodily functions. If you have ever walked on the East side of Manhattan on a sunny day, you will see hordes of Black women pushing navy blue prams all filled with little White children. And the looks upon those Black faces seem as though they are committed to their anger. It seems as though these women hate every last one of their charges. For the age-old question of Black women has been, "who is watching my children?" It is White privilege to flounce about and have others take care of things. Too, one never sees tourism commercials beckoning Black people to the Bahamas, or say, Jamaica. The only Black people in these commercials are there servicing Whites, who merely drink tropical drinks, or lay on the beach. Whites get to do all this while Black people, with huge smiles, service them. (Somewhere in my work I have read how very important the image of the smiling

Kincaid writes this short, powerful tale from the point of view of her watching tourists arrive in Antigua, on holiday. She describes, in agonising detail, what is required of a tourist to 'enjoy' themselves at the expense of others who are 'dirt' poor with a history of being colonised under British rule:

> But you should not think of the confusion that must lie in all that and you must not think of the damaged library. You have brought your own books with you, and among them is one of those new books about economic history, one of those books explaining how the West (meaning Europe and North America after its conquest and settlement by Europeans) got rich: the West got rich not from the free (free—in this case meaning got-for-nothing) and then undervalued labour, for generations, of the people like me you see walking around you in Antigua…for not only did we have to suffer the unspeakableness of slavery, but the satisfaction to be had from "We made you bastards rich" is taken away, too, and so you needn't let that slightly funny feeling you have from time to time about exploitation, oppression, domination develop into full-fledged unease, discomfort; you could ruin your holiday (Kincaid 9)

There is such scathing sarcasm throughout this book that it is almost funny, funny in much the same way as is most of Bowling For Columbine, a refreshing look at what is almost always unspoken. There is a freedom in this sarcasm (this satire-charged anger), for it has no more fear. It can speak and say all the things it has wanted to say for so long, but has been unable to, for fear of being in harm's way.

That self-freed slave, Frederick Douglas uses sarcasm (though when safely ensconced in England), despite warrants being issued for his arrest and return to his

---

Black mouth is to Whites. [See Keckley] This smile is on Aunt Jemimah and Uncle Ben (the concept sells), and it is seen when we deliriously dance through fast food restaurants apparently begging to eat more chicken and grease in hopes of a collective heart attack. It is the premise of practically every Black-centred, American-generated sit-com on television at present. A smile that is demanded is usually an exaggerated smile. It shows too many teeth and is therefore a caricature. Interestingly, a smile showing too many teeth (in a stationary image), is often a smile attached to notions of insanity, or a creature about to strike out (an unpredictable animal).

master. He is outspoken in his anger as well, and as eloquent as Kincaid. Unlike Kincaid, however, Douglas speaks to his former Master as one man to another. The violation Douglas speaks of is the robbing of his right to be a human being. He makes it clear that by having run away to begin his own life he has not left his master in any sort of quandary which deprives him of his own ability to make a living. He cannot share leg or lung, (and perhaps the rage of a woman is more, or different, because to share ones breast or vagina with the oppressor, against one's will, is despicable in a different manner. There are more bodily ways to violate a woman.) His sarcasm is most apparent, and deliciously unleashed when he declares that he would gladly have made known his plans for escape had he known his master would not have attempted to thwart his plans. And he blames him too boot! I think this position very brave, considering he was writing in 1846.

> What you are, I am. You are a man, and so am I…I am not by nature bond to you, or you to me. Nature does not make your existence depend upon me, or mine to depend upon yours. I can not walk upon your legs, or you upon mine. I cannot breathe for you, or you for me; I must breathe for myself, and you for yourself. We are distinct persons, and are each equally provided with faculties necessary for our individual existence. In leaving you, I took nothing but what belonged to me, and in no way lessened your means for obtaining an *honest* living. Your faculties remained yours, and mine became useful to their rightful owner. I therefore see no wrong in any part of the transaction. It is true, I went off secretly; but that was more your fault than mine. Had I let you into the secret, you would have defeated the enterprise entirely; but for this, I should have been really glad to have made you acquainted with my intentions to leave (Douglas 423)

I am going to end this chapter with a quotation from James Baldwin, from his 1967 collection of essays, Nobody Knows My Name. I choose to end with this because part of my thesis is the premise that if people do not ravenously read pan-African (or

any literature of the 'other') texts they will never develop a deep understanding of what it feels like to be oppressed and that by ignoring those feelings they become fully responsible for creating further hurt and anger.

If my reader cannot trust me, then ask yourself why so much of the literature written by pan-Africans have titles like Invisible Man, Native Son, Nobody Knows My Name, Eyeing the North Star, La Pacotille, Dining With the Dictator, All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave, or I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. These are the brands of the oppressed who have now learned to speak. These are the voices of the subaltern.

I believe that literature is one of the ultimate teachers (and chroniclers) of history, humanity, and understanding humanity within society. It can be our parent when we have none; it is our company when we are lonely. It gives us wings to fly; it can take us to places we will never see, and that flight can, in turn, take us to the very places inside ourselves that are prone to expansion and exploration. I cannot think of any other medium that provides hope through the simple act of placing, onto paper, for another to read, the very essence of man, which is surely, at its core, saturated in grace and decency. It is this very place that is pure, and that purity in each work of fiction, is a gesture of nobility which can only be shared, spread, and understood through the act of reading.

Baldwin writes:

> The country will not change until it re-examines itself and discovers what it really means by freedom. In the meantime, generations keep being born, bitterness is increased by incompetence, pride, and folly, and the world shrinks around us. It is a terrible, an inexorable, law that one cannot deny the humanity of another without diminishing one's own: in the face of one's victim, one sees oneself. Walk through the streets of Harlem and see what we, this nation, have become. (Baldwin 71)

Conclusion

When I look back over the contents of this paper I can see what I have struggled with. There was my struggle within myself as a student to pay attention to what was said to me in a classroom setting and apply it to my individual life. I instinctively felt that what I was hearing and learning was not always correct or well-meaning. I often have the feeling, in America, that there is an abundance of politically correct rhetoric that declares that we are all equal and that we celebrate diversity, but these sentiments seem hollow to me. At the same time, however, it is the same hollowness that is written about in many of the works by Afro-Americans.

Whites need to see themselves through the eyes of the subaltern. The subaltern knows how he is perceived in the eyes of the White. He has been silenced. Flatly, as long as American Whites, in higher education are not required to read the classics of African literature, there will be no full understanding of who African-Americans are or what the ramifications of racial silencing may be.

In contrast, Afro-Canadian literature, though defined by a border, is in many ways part of America's legacy of literature. It is also a chance to read literature that has a far different, and perhaps more approachable tone than Afro-American literature.

Lastly, I think it is crucial to examine the link between ideologies and what is taught, and to examine more closely what their underlying motivations might be.

I have enjoyed my study. I have learned an enormous amount, but I am all too aware that still, I am confronted with disbelief when I speak of my study, as though another's work must be far more important or interesting. This is my thesis in action. I witness my dismissal and watch as the conversation turns away from me and focuses on more important things; things that make more money and things that are already well known. It seems to me the easier path is always taken.

WORKS CITED

Althusser, Louis. Essays On Ideology. London: Verson, 1984.

Angelou, Maya. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. New York: Bantam, 1993.

Atwood, Margaret. Alias Grace. Toronto: Seal, 1996.

__________________. Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature. Toronto: M&S, 1996.

Baldwin, James. Nobody Knows My Name. New York: Dial, 1961.

Bandele, Asha. The Prisoner's Wife: A Memoir. New York: WSP, 1999.

Bloom, Harold. The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages. New York: Riverhead, 1995.

Burdamu, J. http://search.barnesandnoble.com/booksearch.isbninquiry.asp?userid=2UHLLCGVML&isbn=1573225142&itm=1

Capote, Truman. The Grass Harp: Including A Tree of Night and Other Stories. New York: Vintage, 1993.

Case, Jim. Letter to Moira Boyd dated 4 June 1997. In hand of Moira Boyd.

Clarke, Austin. The Austin Clarke Reader. Edited by Barry Callaghan. Toronto: Exile, 1996.

Clarke, George Elliott. Africadian History: An Exhibition Catalogue. Wolfville: Gaspereau, 2001.

____________________. Execution Poems. Wolfville, Gaspereau, 2001.

____________________. Whylah Falls. Vancouver: Polestar, 2000.

Collins, Louisa. No Place Like Home: Diaries and Letters of Nova Scotia Women 1771-1938. Edited by Conrad, Margaret, Laidlaw, Toni, Smyth, Donna. Halifax: Formas, 1988.

Diawara, Manthia. What Is Cultural Studies: A Reader. Edited by John Storey. London: Arnold, 1999.

Douglas, Frederick. My Bondage and My Freedom. New York: Dover, 1969.

Dyer, Richard. White. London: Routledge, 1997.

Fanon, Frantz. Black Skins, White Masks. New York: Grove, 1967.

Frye, Northrop. The Educated Imagination. Toronto: Anansi, 1993.

Gates, Jr., Henry Louis, West, Cornel. The Future of the Race. New York: Vintage, 1996.

JanMohamed, Abdul, Lloyd, David, eds., The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Jones, LeRoi. Tales. New York: Grove, 1967.

Keckley, Elizabeth. Behind the Scenes or Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Killian, Crawford. Writing Science Fiction and Fantasy. Vancouver: Self- Counsel Press, 1998.

Kincaid, Jamaica. Autobiography of My Mother. New York:

__________________. A Small Place. New York: Plume, 1988.

Kolman, Frederic. http://search.barnesandnoble.com/booksearch.isbninquiry.asp?userid=2UHLLCGVML&isbn=1573225142&itm=1

Kunsaa, Kuwee. Fiery Spirits & Voices: Canadian Writers of African Descent. Edited by Ayanna Black. Toronto: Harper, 2000.

Lau, Evelyn. Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid. Toronto: Harper, 1989.

Lipset, Seymour Martin. Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Morrison, Toni. Beloved. New York: Plume, 1987.

_____________.Playing In the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination. New York: Vintage, 1993.

_____________. Song of Solomon. New York: Knopf, 1995.

Pfister, Joel. What Is Cultural Studies: A Reader. London: Arnold, 1998.

Philip, M. Nourbese. Eyeing The North Star: Directions in African-Canadian Literature. Edited by George Elliott Clarke. Toronto: M&S, 1997.

Saunders, Charles R. Fire On the Water: An Anthology of Black Nova Scotian Writers of the Renaissance: Vol. 2, Edited by George Elliott Clarke. Porter's Lake, Pottersfield Press, 1991.

Shields, Carol. The Stone Diaries. New York: Penguin, 1993.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture. Edited by Gary Nelson and Lawrence Grussberg. Urbana & Chicago: U of Illinois,

Twain, Mark. The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1996.

Walker, Alice. The Color Purple. New York: Harcourt, 1982.

_____________. The Third Life of Grange Copeland. New York: WSP, 2000.

Walker, James W. St. G. The Black Loyalists: The Search for the Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone 1783-1870. Toronto: U of T, 1992.

West, Dorothy. The Wedding. New York: Doubleday, 1995.

Winks, Robin. The Blacks in Canada: A History. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997.

Wright, Richard. Native Son. New York: Harper, 1993.