

Writing(s) *Against* 'The Promised Land':

(An Autobiocritical Exploration of Identity, Hybridity and Racism)

by

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ABSTRACT

Canada's continued forgetfulness concerning slavery here, and the nation-state's attempts to record only Canada's role as a place of sanctuary for escaping African-Americans, is part of the story of absencing blackness from its history.

Rinaldo Walcott

The fact that people of African descent have had a presence in Canada for over four hundred years is not well known within the Canadian mainstream. The fact that slavery existed as an institution in Canada is another fact that is not well known. Within the Canadian mainstream writing of African-Canadian history, Blacks most often *appear* in historical narratives around the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, as American fugitives or refugees—either as escaping slaves or British Loyalists. Through the representative writing of the “the Black refugee,” Canada is often constructed as a “Promised Land,” a sanctuary or *safe haven* for Blacks, a place of refuge and redemption that does not speak to the complex history of slavery that existed well before the American exodus.

Many Black Canadian writers and scholars argue that there is a price to be paid for this kind of representation. First, the absence of people of African descent in Canadian historical narratives, prior to the coming of the American refugees, ignores the long presence of Blacks in Canada and the contributions that Blacks have made in the development of Canada. Second, in focusing on the American Loyalists and refugee slaves, Canadian writers and historians often construct Black Canadians as a homogenous, genderless group, ignoring the diversity within Canada's Black population and, in particular, the concerns of Black women. Finally, the mainstream representation of Canada as a ‘safe haven’ proves problematic for any critical discussion of racism in contemporary Canadian society, for notions of “Canada the good” and “America the evil” that arose from those crossings North still penetrate the Canadian mainstream today.

This autobiocritical exploration examines the representation of the haven and offers alternative readings to contemporary mainstream writings of African-Canadian history. In part one, I track the appearance of Black Canadians, over the past fifty years,

from 1949 to 2001, in a survey of mainstream and scholarly texts. Using the results of this survey, which does not see the appearance of Blacks in Canada until 1977, I examine how mainstream texts might *use* the works of Black writers to offer more critical and complex histories of Black Canadians and, in particular, Black women. In part two, I take up an analysis of George Elliott Clarke's *Beatrice Chancy*. Seen as a *counter-narrative* to mainstream writings of African-Canadian history, Clarke's work, which takes up the subject of slavery in early-nineteenth century Nova Scotia, presents an/Other kind of Loyalist story, one with a Black woman at its centre. In this discussion I examine how Clarke's poetic work subverts the national narrative, as he speaks to the diversity within blackness and the complexities in defining racial identities.

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This work is dedicated to my mother *Lorraine Gibson* (1950-1986) who watches over me and inspires me from another place called *Heaven*.

Havens are high-priced.

*The price exacted of the haven-dweller is
that he contrive to delude himself into believing that he has found*

*It would seem,
unless one looks*

*a more
deeply
at the
haven.*

*phenomenon,
that most people
are able to
delude themselves
and get through
their lives
quite happily.
But*

I

*still believe that
the unexamined life
is not worth living:*

*and I
know
that
self-delusion,*

*in the service
of no matter what
small or lofty cause,*

*is a price
no writer can afford.*

*His subject is himself and the world and it requires every ounce of
stamina he can summon to attempt to look on himself and the world
as they are.*

--James Baldwin, from Nobody Knows My Name

Introduction: A Haven-Dweller's Story

The Black man *is* my grandfather (Fig. 1). Can you *see* him, the man in the back row, wearing the bow tie? His name is Merle Lucas.



Figure 1: *The Bowling Photo*

Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1967

It seems I've always known this photograph, which was taken in Halifax, in 1967, the year of my birth. I don't remember the first time I saw it. It didn't hold a special place on a wall or mantel in any of our family homes, surrounded by other photos of children and grandchildren organized into some kind of genealogical narrative, nor did it have a—*frame*. Neither wood nor words surrounded the image that always seemed to slide out from the bulky pile of loose, uncontextualized photographs every time we packed to move. When I was a kid, my mother told me that this is a photo of my grandfather's bowling league. Since then, I've known it as "*The Bowling Photo*."

She said, "You know there's two things your grandfather loved, bowling—and looking sharp! And *you know* your grandfather always looked some good, girl! So clean and well-dressed. *Only* colored man on the team."

I didn't *know* my grandfather. I met him once when I was six, two years before the White girl called me "darkie." It was the year my mother remarried. He came to Oshawa for her wedding, fed me my first pomegranate, returned home and died a few months later in Halifax. Heart attack. He was about forty-five years old. That's what I'm told. I never asked him about "the bowling photo," because it came into our possession after he died.

For years "the bowling photo" continued to fall in and out of my consciousness. History has a way of finding you, whether you are ready for it or not. For me, the image was still about my grandfather loving bowling and looking sharp, *only coloured man on the team*, and I'd wonder little-girl-like *who has the bow tie now?* But when I was thirteen, when we moved *out west* to British Columbia, I re-discovered my grandfather, Merle Lucas, and I noticed, as if for the first time, that he was the *only* "coloured" man on the team. And the story changed. Yes, it was still about my grandfather Merle Lucas loving bowling and looking sharp, but I attributed his presence on the all-White team to some kind of superior bowling ability. I believed my grandfather *must* have been such a good bowler that he had to play in the White league, the best league of course. The White men wanted him to play in their league, because he was just *so* good. Somehow, I turned my grandfather into the Jackie Robinson of recreational bowling. In my mind, this

black and white photograph of my grandfather and twenty-five White men told a story about a colour line crossed, a racial barrier broken, and, in my own early adolescent needing-to-make-it-right way, I *made* Merle Lucas, my one-time-pomegranate-peeling grandfather, a pioneer—a hero.

I don't remember how "the bowling photo" left my parents' home and came into my possession, stuffed for years in a brown folder labeled "extras," waiting to be re-discovered and catalogued somewhere within the waxy-backed, plastic paged, photo albums that tell the story of my life. Now "the bowling photo" sits on my desk, next to my computer, in an expensive, masculine, wooden frame. Only now my grandfather's team consists of twenty-three White men, instead of twenty-five. (*Did you notice? Go on--count them.*) I had to *cut* two men off the team to make the image *fit* the frame. And the story has changed—again. Perhaps it took six years in lecture halls and graduate seminars for me to decode the partially hidden sign centered behind the men in the back row:

66 C.P.R. 67
MIXED
NG

Now the story goes something like this...

66 C.P.R. 67 "C.P.R." stands for Canadian Pacific Railroad, Canada's transcontinental railway system linking the Atlantic to the Pacific Coast. Long before its completion in 1884, the legendary railway foreshadowed its ability to move people across the country, yet keep them in *their* place. Consider the seventeen thousand Chinese men who were brought to Canada in the 1880's to help build the C.P.R. As the Chinese traversed and transformed the country, building a railroad and a nation—working *hard* to open the lines of communication between East and West—Canada held out its white-gloved hands to the Asian labourers: one up and open, *filled* with meagre, substandard wages, the other down and clenched, hiding a head tax for later. Then consider Blacks and Whites traveling across the country together in the 1950s, within the integrated spaces of moving box cars—Black porters in white coats, smiling, nodding, bent at the waist, singing "yes

mam” and “thank-you *suh*” to the White passengers they are *so* privileged to serve. Right from its inception, the C.P.R. drove home its philosophy: No matter *what* you are or where you're from, the C.P.R. has its *own way* of uniting the country and bringing people together.

1 **mix** \ 'miks \ vb 1: to combine into one mass 2 : ASSOCIATE 3 : to form by mingling components 4 : CROSSBREED
5 : CONFUSE (~es up the facts) 6 : to become involved **syn** blend merge, coalesce, amalgamate, fuse – **mix-able**
adj – **mix-er** n

MIXED “Mixed” means that an act of *combining* has already taken place. In the case of “the bowling photo,” “mixed” means that White men and non-White men *can* play in the same league. In this instance, “can” has nothing to do with the physical *capabilities* of these athletes, instead, it has everything to do with the fact that their *ability* to form a mixed league is dependent on their being granted the *permission*, *freedom*, *liberty* to do so. Here “mixed” means that Whites and non-Whites are *allowed* to play on the same team, which also means that at one time Whites and non-Whites were *not* allowed to play on the same team. Here “mixed” means that non-Whites and Whites are permitted to 2 : ASSOCIATE in a shared space, which also means that they were *not* always permitted to do so.

The Black man is my grandfather. His name is Merle Lucas. He loves bowling and looking sharp. He works for the C.P.R., but he's *not* a porter. My aunt told me he drives a truck. Apparently, his people were Loyalists, West Indians by way of Virginia. My Aunt told me that too. He's probably a pretty good bowler. It appears he is the only non-White man on the team (unless others are “passing”) but he is not a pioneer, nor is he a hero. He is permitted to be here, authorized into existence, sharing this space with his all White teammates. He's not breaking barriers; he's not crossing color lines. In fact—he *is* the color line. He is the only Black man in an all-White league, therefore *he* makes the league *mixed*. The sign above his head justifies his presence; his presence justifies the sign. In his absence, the word “mixed” *naturally* disappears into the always already

silence of “whiteness.” Although this *is* a mixed bowling league the league is *not* mixed, for if it were, the word “mixed”—1: to combine into one mass—would inevitably disappear under the weight of its own definition. “Mixed” signifies White authority’s awareness of the presence of the non-White “Other.” In this case, it is a backslapping, *nice-to-have-you*, socially acceptable word for—*nigger*. While my grandfather celebrates with his bowling buddies, he is being “called-out” as different, as Other. Perhaps he doesn’t know it, but *I* do.

I’ve heard a lot of “calling-out stories,” those stories told by non-White people about the times that White people called them names and made them feel different. I’ve heard “Paki stories,” “Hindu stories,” “Chink stories,” “Jew stories,” “Jap stories,” and “Nigger stories.” I’ve even told a few of my own. But the “first-time calling-out stories” are the best ones, the ones where the victim gets *hit* with a name she or he has never heard before. There is this moment in the story when the assailed, stunned, tries to decode the word and make sense of it, but it never makes sense, until someone who *knows* explains it. The following is my favorite ‘first-time story,’ remembered so eloquently by George Elliott Clarke:

As a child, I became an African American. My soul instinct. At four, lodged near Halifax with my parents and two brothers, I lived heart-pure. One April day, three young white boys, passing our home, pitched rocks and yelled “niggers” at I and I. Unstung by the word, I hurled it back—with choice stones—at their surprised eyes. Alerted by the commotion, my father shooed the white children away, ushered us sons indoors. Before a stunned mirror he sat us, uncupboarded two bowls of sugar—one white, the other brown—and preached, gently, that “some white-sugar folk don’t like brown-sugar folk.” I can still see that history-long mirror, still taste that bitter sugar. From that moment, I was, irredeemably, African American, sipping a testament of slavery, struggle, and a flight that was “mine”—a bouquet for my mouth. I tippled tales of “General Moses”—Harriet Tubman—who sheparded hundreds of fugitive slaves to freedom in “Canaan” (Canada), by eyeing the North Star. I felt only semi-Canadian. (*Eyeing the North Star*, xi)

What I find most ironic about calling-out stories, the ones I’ve read, the ones I’ve heard, and the ones I’ve told, is how very *un-Canadian* they are. For it seems to me that

the purpose of the hostile act of calling-out an/Other is to exclude, to alienate, to subjugate the victim. But in a country that prides itself on its multi-culturalness, its mosaicism, its benevolence, its humanity, its acceptance of difference, and its tolerance of "Others," calling-out stories just don't *fit*. Especially when it comes to Black folks. Canada is supposed to be "the Promised Land."

One day, early on in the writing of this work, I took "the bowling photo" to the photo department at a local drug store. I only had one copy, so I requested to have two more made. When I came back an hour later, to pick up my prints, the clerk, a friendly, thirty-something, White woman, commented on how interesting the photo was, then she asked, "But where are the women?" When I explained to her what *mixed* meant in 1967 Nova Scotia, Canada, she quietly said "Oh."

When White Canadians call-out non-White Canadians, they send one message loud and clear: "You don't belong *here*." As a result of this kind of name-calling, even native-born African-Canadians, like George Elliott Clarke (who prides himself on seven generations in this country), feel less than or semi-welcome in their own home. So, when we, non-Whites, share our calling-out stories, our personal narratives of our struggles for acceptance in our own country (native or adopted), we disrupt a kind-of Canadian meta-narrative that goes something like this:

Canada...is a human place, a sanctuary of sanity in an increasingly troubled world. We need not search further for our identity. These traits of tolerance and courtesy and respect for our environment and one another provide it.¹

Reading calling-out stories against a tale like this proves problematic. Not only do they not *fit* within the nicely bound Canadian narrative—our stories *undo* it. It is for this reason, as African-Canadian scholar Rinaldo Walcott suggests, Clarke and other indigenous Black Canadian writers "have not garnered as much attention nationally as they should because their presence—the places and spaces they occupy—makes a lie of too many national myths (or raises too many questions) concerning the nation-state" (39).

When Black Canadian writers put pen to paper, they write against a (hi)story that was written just *for* them, the popular myth that Canada has long been a sanctuary for

Blacks, a 'safe haven' for the refugee. While many of our Canadian (hi)story books inform us that Canada was a safe haven for refugee slaves fleeing bondage in the American South, they tell us little about the lives of the refugees after they crossed the border, and they do not tell us about the lives of Black men and women who lived in Canada long before the Americans.

In his book *Black Like Who?* Rinaldo Walcott writes:

If definitions of black Canadian are centred around political practices/act(ion)s that signal a transgression of instituted forms and practices of domination, then black Canadian might be anyone who resists in concerted ways, with a vision of emancipation, all forms of domination. Black Canadian is a counter-narrative or utterance that calls into question the very conditions of nation-bound identity at the same time as national discourses attempt to render blackness outside the nation. (120)

Keeping Walcott's statement in mind, it appears to me that to be Black in the White Canadian landscape is to be political, to be perceived as a threat. And to be Black in Canada, with a pen in hand, is to be a transgressor—one who crosses boundaries and trespasses loudly on national narratives. To be a Black writer in Canada is to be always telling counter-narratives and always writing *against* "the Promised Land"—whether you want to or not.

The purpose of this autobiocritical work is to examine the representation of Canada as a haven for Blacks, and to offer alternative readings to mainstream writings of African-Canadian history, writings that are often cursory, that construct Blacks as static, homogenous, genderless groups. In part one I track the appearance of Black Canadians, over the past fifty years, in a survey of mainstream and scholarly historical texts. Using the results of that survey, I explore one text in detail, Barbara Hehner's *The Spirit of Canada*, and offer suggestions on how mainstream texts might *use* the works of Black Canadian writers to offer more complex histories of Black Canadians and in particular Black women, that speak to a four hundred year Black presence in Canada. The second part of this exploration takes up an analysis of George Elliott Clarke's *Beatrice Chancy*, a poetic opera libretto that explores the subject of slavery in early nineteenth-century Nova Scotia. Seen as a counter-narrative to mainstream writings of African-Canadian history, Clarke's poetics re-work 'the Canadian haven' narrative and present a different kind of

Loyalist story, one with a young Black slave woman at its center. As Clarke “blackens” the national narrative, through his discussion of the diversity within blackness and his use of performative language and African-American signifyin(g) practices, his re-working of *Paradise* reveals the complexities in defining racial identities and the danger in “loving” blackness.

As for “the bowling photo,” it tells my grandfather’s calling-out story, though probably not his first one. I’ll never know his first. As for his Loyalist people, I am still waiting for a piece of paper from Virginia to tell me who I am and where I come from. But I am short on patience. The following is a journey of exploration into my own identity, a kind of coming to terms with who I say *I* am. While it is autobiographical in parts, it also seeks to engage in a critical discussion of Black Canadian writing that speaks to the power of loving Blackness. Here, at this moment, I realize that while I write from within a *kind-of* Canadian haven, I also speak from an academic one. I speak from the position in which my lives, inside and outside the academy, inform each other in such a way that I find it difficult to separate the autobiographical from the critical, the everyday from the academic. Here, in this space, I am “I-ing” the North Star and the Promised Land—placing myself at the centre of this discourse, as I re-search Black Canadian history, the Loyalist story, and write an/Other kind of calling-out story.

Canada's continued forgetfulness concerning slavery here, and the nation-state's attempts to record only Canada's role as a place of sanctuary for escaping African-Americans, is part of *the story of absenting blackness* from its history.

Rinaldo Walcott— *Black Like Who?*

***Part I: The Price of Heaven: Resisting the 'North Star Myth' in
Mainstream Writings of Black Canadian History***

How has African-Canadian history been written in Canadian mainstream and scholarly texts? What are the concerns of Black Canadian writers and scholars?

The fact that people of African descent have had a presence in Canada for over four hundred years is not well known. The first known person of African descent to set foot on Canadian soil was Mathieu de Costa. Around 1604, de Costa “travelled with the expedition on which Champlain came to the Atlantic region” (*Black Studies*, 6). According to some accounts, de Costa is described as a free man, but others suggest that he was the servant of the governor of Port Royal, Pierre du Gua, sieur de Monts. He served as an interpreter between the Micmac and the French (6). The first recorded slave purchase in New France identified a six-year-old boy from Madagascar, Africa. He

arrived in 1628 in the property of David Kirke, an English privateer conducting raids on the French colony of the St. Lawrence. The boy was baptized “Oliver Le Jeune” in 1632 (Alexander 37). He was set free at sixteen, and he died in 1654 (37). It is from “this simple beginning,” according to historians Ken Alexander and Avis Glaze, writers of *Towards Freedom: the African-Canadian Experience*, that “black slavery in the French and English regimes of Canada-to-be grew into a vital social and economic institution” (37).

The fact that slavery existed as an institution in Canada is another fact that is not well known within the Canadian mainstream. While the history of American slavery exists as a historical fact in American and Canadian history books, Canadian slavery as a historical fact often goes unwritten. In terms of their presence in Canadian historical narratives, Blacks usually enter the scene, that is cross the Canadian border, around the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, as American fugitives or refugees—either as escaping slaves or British Loyalists. These common representations of “the border crossing Black refugee,” in academic and mainstream writings of Canadian history, are criticized and challenged by Black Canadian writers and scholars, because they acknowledge neither the long presence of Blacks in Canada nor the existence of slavery as an institution in Canada. In his book *Black Like Who?* Rinaldo Walcott states:

Crossings to Canada represent an ambivalence for any Canadian who must simultaneously grapple with the absented presence of slavery in official national discourses and the instances in nation-state narratives which argue that Canada’s only relation to slavery was as a sanctuary for escaping African-Americans—via the Underground Railroad. This dilemma is important because the crossing has been appropriated by the nation as the source of its denial of an almost five-hundred-year black presence. (22)

As Walcott points out through the representative writing of the Black refugee Canada is often constructed as a sanctuary or ‘safe haven’ for Blacks, a place of refuge and redemption that does not speak to a complex history of slavery that existed well before the exodus of the Loyalists and refugee slaves. In fact, one could argue that this notion of the Canadian safe haven is written directly into the lyrics of the Canadian national anthem, that blackness is inscribed in the line “the True North strong and free.”

African-Canadian women writers have also expressed their concerns about the mainstream writing of Black Canadian history, especially in regards to the representation of Black women. At the beginning of her introduction to *'We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up': Essays in African Canadian Women's History*, Peggy Bristow openly acknowledges the concerns she shares with her five contributors (Dionne Brand, Linda Carty, Afua P. Cooper, Sylvia Hamilton and Adrienne Shadd):

We are six Black women who share a collective concern that the history of Black people in Canada and of Black women in particular is missing from the pages of mainstream Canadian history. Black people have a past that has been hidden or eradicated, just as racism has been deliberately denied as an organizing element in how Canada is constituted.

...Through our discussions we recognize that we share a common experience around racism within Canadian society. Specifically, the educational system has maintained and perpetuated that Black people were either non-existent in the development of Canada, or only arrived in Canada through recent migration from the Caribbean and Africa.

This misconception continues to the present and means that Black children entering the schools have no sense of Blacks being here for generations and, hence, that there is a 400 year presence and contribution of African Canadians in the country. (3)

In her introduction to *No Burden to Carry: Narratives of Black Women in Ontario 1920s to 1950s*, Dionne Brand states:

The history of Black people in Canada, let alone the history of Black women in Canada, has not been taken up by many Canadian scholars. Where information exists on Black history, it is usually general. Analyses, though well-intended, have been sweeping in their approach, as if a single work could uncover the complexity of the existence of any people, or have taken the point of view of Canada as simply a *haven* from United States slavery. (11, my italics)

For Brand and other Black writers, the mainstream representation of Canada as a 'safe haven' for Black refugees proves problematic for any critical discussion of racism in contemporary Canadian society. For how can Canadians, specifically some White Canadians, understand the *everyday* racism faced by Black and other non-White Canadians, when the mainstream Canadian narrative clearly states that Canada is and always has been a sanctuary for Blacks? How do Black and other non-White writers write against a national narrative that goes like this?

Canada...is a human place, a sanctuary of sanity in an increasingly troubled world. We need not search further for our identity. These traits of tolerance and courtesy and respect for our environment and one another provide it.¹

According to Alexander and Glaze, writers of a Canadian historical text that “weaves through the multi-layered black Canadian narrative” and “answers the call made across Canada, by blacks and non-blacks alike, for an enlightened analysis on African-Canadian history and culture” (editor’s cover note), “Canada began to develop a reputation as a safe haven for blacks during the American War of Independence (1778)” (41) and that reputation grew during and after the War of 1812 (55). During both wars, slaves and free Blacks were promised freedom, equality and land in Canada, if they fought in the service of the British against the American army. While the War of Independence saw some 3,500 Black Loyalists arrive in Canada, as well as 1,500 slaves in the company of White Loyalists (41-42), the War of 1812 saw thousands more cross the border North to “freedom.” While most Blacks settled in the Maritimes, specifically Nova Scotia, others moved into scattered communities in Ontario and Quebec.

But perhaps Canada’s reputation as a haven for Blacks really started to solidify around 1793, the year the US federal government passed the first Fugitive Slave Law, which, according to Alexander and Glaze,

placated agitated southern plantation owners who had witnessed the death of slavery in the North. In essence, it allowed owners and slave-takers to hunt down fugitive slaves and return them to the plantations. Many free blacks, with little recourse before the law, were sold back into slavery by unsympathetic northerners. (Alexander, 57)

From the enactment of the first Fugitive Slave Law, Black Americans, free and fugitive, looked to the North Star and started heading up to Canada, and abolitionists on both sides of the border began to establish “an informal network of ‘safe houses’ and secret routes north to protect fugitive slaves” (Alexander 58). By 1830, three years prior to the passing of the Emancipation Act, which saw slavery abolished throughout the British Empire, this network developed into an organized system called the Underground Railroad (UGR). Thus, while sympathy for Blacks fleeing the US slave holding territories increased in British North America, “Canada, free of fugitive slave laws and refusing to repatriate

runaways, seemed an oasis of tolerance” (58). It is reported that, between 1815 and 1860, approximately 50,000 slaves escaped to Canada via the Underground Railroad (58). America’s second Fugitive Slave Law (1850) saw the Black population in Upper Canada balloon to nearly 40,000—as three thousand Blacks arrived in the first month after the law was passed (60).

The Black and White ‘conductors’ of the UGR, who harboured escaping slaves and guided them to safety, risked death or severe reprisal. The pages of Canadian historical literature are filled with stories of the efforts and sacrifices of the abolitionist ‘conductors.’ Their stories are epitomized by two in particular, those of Alexander Ross and Harriet Tubman (Alexander 60). Ross was a White doctor from Belleville, Upper Canada, who made trips to southern plantations, disguised as an ornithologist. While he was supposedly studying birds, he secretly provided slaves with provisions and information on the escape routes of the UGR. While Ross’s efforts are well documented, it is Harriet Tubman, based in St. Catharines, Ontario, who became known as “the Moses of her people.” A fugitive slave herself, Harriet Tubman is said to have made nineteen journeys south. Responsible for freeing some three hundred Blacks via the UGR, Tubman is recognized in Canadian and American history, literature, and in children’s books, for her bravery, for compelling and sometimes forcing American Blacks to “seek freedom in Canada” (60).

It appears that this notion of a Canadian haven has been and continues to be an integral part of the representation of Black Canadians in mainstream Canadian literature, from (hi)story books (*The Story of Canada*, 1992, *The Spirit of Canada*, 1999) to children’s literature. Historical fiction writers like Barbara Smucker (*Underground to Freedom*, 1977) and Barbara Greenwood (*The Last Safe House: A Story of the Underground Railroad*, 1998) attempt to educate young Canadian audiences on the history of Blacks in Canada by informing them about the existence of the UGR and the role Canada played in the fight against American slavery. While stories of the UGR and Harriet Tubman do serve as valuable teaching tools in the education of Blacks and non-Blacks in African-Canadian history, there is also a *price* to be paid for this kind of representation. According to African-Canadian historian James Walker, author of *Racial Discrimination in Canada: The Black Experience*,

[t]he North Star provided a guiding beacon for fugitive slaves fleeing from bondage to freedom, from Egypt to the Promised Land, from the United States to Canada. Generations of Canadians thrilled to stories of the hopeful runaways, eluding pursuit while they followed the North Star, stories which ended at the border where the grateful slaves fell to their knees on Canadian soil, free at last. The Underground Railroad era was a positive moment in Canada's past, for Canada did indeed offer a haven to American slaves for more than seventy-five years. The Underground Railroad also fostered a myth: that the North Star led not just to freedom, equality, and full participation in Canadian life, that the Promised Land was fulfilled in Canada. (6)

While Canada did serve as a (kind-of) haven or 'Promised Land' for escaping Black Americans seeking refuge from the slave master's whip or the revolutionary's gun, the kind of freedom Blacks were searching for was not to be found in the North. According to Alexander and Glaze, "Canada mostly failed in its promises to help the black immigrants re-define themselves north of the border. Segregated, jobless, or given the lowest forms of employment, they were unable to cast off their slave status" (56).

Has 'progress' been made in the mainstream writing of African-Canadian history?

While many of the texts in this study recognize the existence of an early Black presence in Canada and the icy social and economic conditions that greeted their arrival, Canada continues to appear as a (kind of) haven or 'Promised Land' and Black Canadians are still defined as freedom-seeking refugees. While the dissatisfaction of early Black settlers with the chilly social climate of the North *is* (slowly) being written into the mainstream history of Canada, the acknowledgment of a four hundred year Black presence and the history of slavery as an institution in Canada are still, for the most part, being left out of the mainstream writing of African-Canadian history. At this point, the term "mainstream" should be clarified: it defines the dominant White Canadian readership, "the only audience," according to Black Canadian writer Marlene Nourbese Philip, "that matters in Canada" in terms of the Canadian publishing market (163).

The fact that Canada did serve as a (kind of) haven for American Blacks is not being disputed here. Under examination are some of the 'side effects' of the haven story, the ideas, notions, myths and misconceptions that undermine an accurate representation of Black history in Canada, that fuel Black Canadian fears of historical erasure. For in its effort to liberate Blacks, the Canadian 'safe haven' or 'Promised Land' *erases* earlier chapters of the African-Canadian story, as it constructs a homogenous Black population.

This critical exploration focuses mainly on the writing of Black history in two recent publications, *Canada: A People's History* (2000), written by Don Gillmor and Pierre Turgeon and *The Spirit of Canada: Canada's Story in Legends, Fiction, Poems and Songs* (1999), edited by Barbara Hehner, but it also offers an analysis of the "development" of the writing of the African-Canadian historical presence, in particular "the Black Loyalist story," as it has been interpreted over the past five decades in nineteen academic and non-academic Canadian history texts. This survey is not an exhaustive one, but it does argue that the appearance of 'the Black refugee,' in particular 'the Black Loyalist,' is a fairly recent addition to the cast of Canadian historical characters. An examination of the surveyed texts reveals that before 1977 "Loyalist," in Canadian historical terms, meant White Loyalist, because the presence of Blacks, free and slave, was not yet written into the history of Canada.

During the winter of 2000-01, a Canadian documentary series entitled *Canada: A People's History* was televised nationally by the Canadian Broadcast Corporation. Acclaimed by executive producer Mark Starowicz to be "the first history of Canada for the television age" (ix), *Canada: A People's History* was a three-year-long project that resulted in a book of the same name, which was written while the series was in production. *Canada: A People's History*, published by McClelland & Stewart in 2000, can be considered the latest in a long line of Canadian history books. In his forward, Mark Starowicz informs his audience that "no television series, no book, no library of books, could ever encompass the history of Canada," and he clarifies that *Canada: A People's History* is "a narrative work, not an academic work" (x). He states:

We have bleached the dramatic narrative out of Canadian history and reduced it to social studies unit in our schools. If you want to get a sense of what it felt like to be an eleven-year-old girl in a Loyalist exodus, a

nineteen-year-old Hudson's Bay Company clerk seeing the Rocky Mountains for the first time, or a terrified eighteen-year-old Acadian refugee at the Plains of Abraham, then this is the right book. Not only does it describe the great and famous, apparently in control of their destinies, it gives voice to the people who bobbed like corks in the great seas of history, in control of very little. (x)

In this most recent addition to the history of Canadian history books, the Black presence in Canada begins not with Mathieu de Costa or Oliver Le Jeune but with the first Loyalist exodus from the US. More specifically, the book concerns itself with the story of Black Loyalist preacher David George who "made it to Nova Scotia with 1,500 other black Loyalists, joining 15,000 white Loyalists (some of whom brought their own slaves" (158). Through the story of David George, writers Gillmor and Turgeon attempt to "give voice" to the Black Loyalist experience, by putting a human face on Black history. While we learn of the abuse George and his family suffered at the hands of their Virginia slave master, we also learn of the hardships the preacher faced in Canada. Readers are informed that the British recruitment slogan, "Freedom and a Farm," was "not entirely accurate" (158) and that "[t]he land grant system had quickly become corrupt and overburdened, and some black Loyalists had to wait six years for land" (159). Apparently George considered himself fortunate to be granted a quarter acre near a stream, where he could conveniently perform baptisms, but he was beaten with sticks and driven into a swamp by Whites who resented his preaching, and his house in Shelburne was destroyed (159).

Gillmor and Turgeon also inform us about the appalling conditions Blacks suffered in Nova Scotia: they note that in July 26, 1784 Blacks were driven out of Shelburne, a town they built (159); that some "black Loyalists sold themselves to merchants for two or three years service" to avoid destitution (159); and that, while famine was rampant, a Black woman in Shelburne was given 200 lashes for stealing less than a shilling (159).

In light of what he saw going on around him, we are told, "George felt that he was no better off than he had been in Virginia," so, along with 1,200 other Black Loyalists, George left Nova Scotia to help establish the colony of Freetown in Sierra Leone, on the west coast of Africa (159).

When reading Gillmor and Turgeon's writing of the Black Loyalist experience of David George next to or *against* Loyalist histories written over the past five decades, one can see that progress has indeed been made in the mainstream writing of Black Canadian history. For this examination of the Black Loyalist presence in Canada, the following nineteen Canadian mainstream and academic history books were surveyed: *Our Canada*, 1949, *The Story of Canada* 1959, *Canada: A Modern History*, 1960, *Dominion of the North: A History of Canada*, 1962, *Canada Unity in Diversity*, 1967, *Living in Canada*, 1968, *Canada's Five Centuries: From Discovery to Present Day*, 1971, *A New History of Canada: Volume 4, Crisis of Adjustment 1761-1800*, 1972, *Canada: Discovering our Heritage*, 1977, *Canada: Growth of a Nation*, 1980, *Towards Tomorrow: Canada in a Changing World*, 1988, *Origins: A History of Canada*, 1991, *Canada Revisited: A Social and Political History of Canada to 1911*, 1992, *Community Canada*, 1993, *Canada: A Nation Unfolding*, 1994, *Flashback Canada*, 1994, *The Spirit of Canada: Canada's Story in Legends, Fictions, Poems, and Songs*, 1999, *The Story of Canada*, 2000, *Canada: A People's History*, 2000. The results of this survey reveal that all of the books written between 1949 and 1972 take up the subject of Loyalists without mentioning Blacks or slaves. It is not until 1977 that Blacks come into view.

In *Our Canada* (1949), Dr. Arthur G. Dorland of the University of Western Ontario informs us that "about 50,000 Loyalists in all came to Canada. Of this number, about 37,000 settled in the Maritime Provinces" (125) or what was nick-named "Nova-Scarcity...by the critical and disgruntled" (129). He notes that "a considerable number of Loyalists were disbanded soldiers, but the vast majority were civilians. These included farmers, artisans, merchants and clerks...[and] professional men, such as judges, lawyers, doctors, or men prominent in education or commerce" (126). While we are told that "[o]ther refugees who came to the western part of [Upper Canada] were Indian Loyalists, mostly belonging to the Mohawk tribe under the gifted chief, Joseph Brant" (129), there is no mention of any Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia.

In 1959, Donald Creighton published *The Story of Canada* and explained that the "Loyalists, as a whole, were a fair sample of English-speaking provincial society in North America, a cross-section of rich and poor, literate and uneducated, town and country, seaboard and frontier" (96). From the "Harvard College graduates" down to the

“penniless but gay gentlefolk, ‘the dancing beggars’, who made merry in the odd, artificial little city of Shelburne,” Creighton argues that all were “in their very different ways representative of the Loyalist migration” (96). Ironically, Creighton does not include Blacks in his discussion of the ‘gentlefolk’ of Shelburne, the same Shelburne that held the highest concentration of the 3,500 Black Loyalists that settled in Nova Scotia (Alexander 42).

In *Canada: A Modern History*, published in 1960 by the University of Michigan, historian J Bartlet Brebner informs readers that the United Empire Loyalists “were a very mixed lot, characteristic victims of the first American civil war. The *most conspicuous* among them were former members of colonial oligarchies and senior officers of the military forces” (105, my italics). In 1967, Canada's centennial year, *Canada Unity in Diversity* was published. Historians P. Cornell, J. Hamelin, F. Ouellet and M. Trudel write: “After the [American] Revolution, many of the Loyalists who had come from similar positions of leadership in their colonies, now reinforced the aristocratic element in Nova Scotia's society. A rough division between a wealthy socially prominent class and the less wealthy remainder of the population had always been present in Nova Scotia, but it became more apparent after 1782” (126). And, in *Living in Canada* (1968), writers A. Cameron, M. Innis, and J. Richards state that “all of the Loyalists had lost their homes and much of their property when they left the Thirteen Colonies. Some were pioneers and farmers from the frontier and were already used to a rough life, but many were educated people from the towns who were not prepared for hardship and danger” (199).

In 1971 scholar W. Kaye Lamb published *Canada's Five Centuries: From Discovery to Present Day*. On the subject of Loyalist land claims, Lamb writes: “The acreage to which military claimants were entitled varied with their rank: a ‘common soldier’ received 200 acres, a corporal 400, a captain 3,000, and field officers 5,000 acres. Loyalists received 200 with supplementary grants for sons and daughters” (88). And on the city of Shelburne, Lamb comments:

Perhaps the most extraordinary story of Loyalist settlement relates to Shelburne, Nova Scotia. Many of the people who arrived there from New York were city folk, and somehow the hope and conviction grew up that Shelburne could be a new metropolis. The first town lots were located in May of 1783; by February 1784 no fewer than 1,130 houses and stores had been built, and by the autumn over 3,000 were completed. Population

soared to about 12,000, and there was even talk of moving the capital from Halifax. But neither the town itself nor the surrounding country had the resources needed to support a community of this size, and as soon as the aid given to Loyalists by the government ran out, Shelburne began to decline rapidly. By 1818 there were only 300 people left in the town. (88-9)

Like those in the aforementioned texts, Lamb's reading of the Loyalist experience, does not acknowledge the existence of Black Loyalists. It neither addresses their land claim issues, nor mentions that Blacks were driven out of Shelburne in 1784, the *same* year the town began to develop and prosper.

The *first* Canadian history text, within the surveyed group, to comment (literally) on the existence of Black Loyalists is *Canada: Discovering Our Heritage* (1977). Writer David Smith offers Canadian readers a diverse view (perhaps a reflection of Trudeau multiculturalism) of those who made the migration to Canada. He states:

People of many nationalities came to Canada from 1776 to 1812. Quakers and Mennonites, driven out of the American colonies because of their anti-war views, settled in Upper Canada. They were joined by Mohawks migrating north after the shattering of the Six Nations Confederacy. *Two thousand black Loyalists came to Nova Scotia.* Some German, Swiss and Dutch, who had served in the British army, took up grants in Lower Canada. Many American settlers, attracted by the offer of free land, crossed the border into Upper Canada. English-speaking settlers dominated the migration. (216, my italics)

Smith's reading of the Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia is cursory, but in *Canada: Growth of a Nation* (1980), Stan Garrod presents a more detailed analysis of the Black settlers who came to the Maritimes:

Among the Loyalists who came to the Maritimes were a number of blacks. Some of the black settlers were free men, soldiers who had fought on the British side in the war. Others were slaves, brought along by their masters as they left the United States. By 1788, there were more than 4000 blacks in the Shelburne area.

In the 1750s and 1760s, some slaves were sold in the British colonies of New England and Nova Scotia. Slavery was not legal in these colonies. But Loyalists who owned slaves continued to buy and sell them after they came to Nova Scotia. By the early 1800s, slavery began to die out in the Maritimes. In 1833, it was abolished throughout the British Empire. (131)

Garrod's reading of the Black presence in Nova Scotia informs readers that "life was not easy for blacks" (131), who were granted poor land but not the power to vote, and, while "[o]thers came from the United States as freemen and slaves," some Blacks, by 1791 decided to move to the African country of Sierra Leone (131). What is significant about Garrod's reading is the acknowledgment that slaves were bought and sold in Nova Scotia in the mid-eighteenth century, even though slavery was illegal. Also, Garrod notes that Blacks actually chose to leave Canada, their original site of refuge.

This multicultural approach to the interpretation of the Loyalist story, as seen in Smith's reading, is evident in Fred McFadden's *Origins: A History of Canada* (1991), first published in 1989. Readers are told that "the American Loyalists were characterized by great ethnic and social diversity" (258). On the subject of the Black presence in Nova Scotia, *Origins* informs us that "large numbers of black slaves were brought to this country by some of the *white* Loyalists. A great number of free blacks and escaped slaves who had fought with the Loyalists came along too" (259, my italics). At this point it is important to note how the emergence of "Black Loyalists" in the Canadian historical discourse brings about the emergence of "White Loyalists."

As blackness is named within the context of the Loyalist story, the whiteness of "Loyalists," formerly unwritten and invisible, is made *visible* as it is identified and displaced from its unmarked or unnamed status. In "Constructions of Whiteness in European and American Racism," Alastair Bonnett argues that "[w]ithin the vast majority of texts that draw on the notion of 'racial' difference, Whiteness is positioned as existing outside the political and economic forces that seem to shape other racialized identities" (173). While the aforementioned texts from 1949 to 1972 discuss the Loyalist population in terms of economic and class differences, the White Loyalists are not identified as a racial or ethnic group. In *Canada: Discovering Our Heritage* and *Origins: A History of Canada*, White becomes a racial category, one according to Bonnett that is neither eternal nor immutable (177). While *Origins* acknowledges the ethnic diversity of the Loyalist population, *Discovering* goes further, representing the diversity within whiteness, as White Loyalists become Quakers, Mennonites, Germans, Swiss and Dutch.

Notions of ethnic diversity are also addressed in the mainstream text *Community Canada* (1993). As Blacks and Natives are recognized, the diversity within the category

White is recognized also. Writers Cruxton and Walker inform us that “[n]ot all Loyalists were British. They came from a variety of backgrounds. There were Germans, Dutch, Scandinavians, Natives and Blacks” (259). This focus on ethnic diversity continues in *Canada Revisited: A Social and Political History of Canada to 1911*. Originally published in 1992 and now in its eighth printing, this Canadian history book was the recipient of the Book Publishers Association of Alberta's award for “Educational Book of the Year.” Writers Penny Clarke and Roberta McKay introduce us to an even more diverse Loyalist population:

A commonly held opinion has been that the Loyalists were mainly of British descent. It is now known that their nationalities varied. As well as the English and the Irish, and the Scots, there were Loyalists of German, Dutch, French, Iroquois, and African ancestry. These people hoped that Britain would protect their special customs and traditions
 ...Some blacks came to British North America because they had no choice in the matter. They were slaves and went where their masters went. Many blacks came as free people, like the other Loyalists. (103)

In the section of *Canada Revisited* on “Cultural Groups in Canada,” which includes Germans, Ukrainians, Blacks and Chinese, Clarke and McKay inform their readers that “by 1850 there were close to 40,000 blacks in Upper Canada” and “roughly 1000 had been taken to Quebec as slaves under French rule. They mostly worked as household servants” (203). Though the writers briefly mention the existence of slavery in Canada, they go on to explain that some Blacks came as slaves to Canada, when slavery was abolished in the British Empire, because “Canada became a place of safety for slaves escaping from the United States.” They state that while close to 30,000 came to Canada via the route to freedom called the Underground Railway, many slaves returned to their former homeland when slavery was abolished in the US (203).

In *The Story of Canada* (2000), a mainstream text written for young Canadians, originally published in 1992, writers Janet Lunn and Christopher Moore inform their readers that “three thousand Black Loyalists came to Nova Scotia in 1784”: “Few of them got the land that was promised to every Loyalist” and “[m]any white Loyalists wanted the Black Loyalists to be servants and labourers” (82). They also mention that slaves were brought to Canada by their Loyalist masters, and while many of the them demanded freedom and took their cases to the courts, “it took over twenty years to end the practice

of buying and selling slaves in Nova Scotia” (82). In addition, they also introduce their readers to Josiah and Charlotte Henson who fled slavery in Kentucky in 1830. Included in their analysis is a brief explanation of the drinking gourd and the Underground Railroad. Lunn and Moore state:

The Henson family hid from slave-catchers by day and walked through woods and swamps at night. They were following the ‘drinking gourd,’ the Big Dipper. It pointed the way north to Canada, which had abolished slavery. The Hensons sang:

So long, old master
Don’t come after me
I’m heading north to Canada
Where everyone is free.

Soon the Hensons got aboard the underground railroad. This wasn’t really a railroad, just a network of people who hated slavery so much that they sheltered escaped slaves and helped them to reach Canada—often at great risk to themselves. When he crossed the Niagara River, Josiah Henson fell on his knees and kissed the earth.

The drinking gourd and the underground railroad led thousands of escaped slaves to Canada. Near Dresden, Upper Canada, Josiah and Charlotte Henson founded a Black community named Dawn.” (164)

Though this text is flawed by inconsistencies (for example, noting slavery in the British Empire was abolished in 1834 rather than 1833, and noting slavery was abolished in Canada when the Hensons left Kentucky in 1830, when in fact it was still legal), Lunn and Moore do attempt to put human faces on early Black Canadians. By discussing historical figures like the Hensons, Loyalist Thomas Peters, who initiated the exodus to Sierra Leone in 1792, and Mary Ann Shadd², who “ran a newspaper and fought against the discrimination the Blacks suffered” (164), these writers introduce Canadian audiences to historical characters, human beings, rather than categorized types of Black people.

The results of my survey suggest that progress has been made in the mainstream representation of Black Canadians in historical readings of Canadian history. Over the past fifty years Blacks have emerged from absence into human presence. While their very existence was not acknowledged until 1977, the realities of their struggles for freedom in Canada are taken up in present day Canadian historical texts, as writers, like Lunn and Moore and Gillmor and Turgeon, attempt to humanize blackness.

As was mentioned earlier *Canada: A People's History* attempts to give voice to peoples who have gone unheard in the writing of Canadian history. In *Canada: A Nation Unfolding*, published in 1994, writers Diane Eaton and Garfield Newman attempt to give Black Canadians a voice through a work by Nova Scotia writer David Woods. Stating that "[a]mongst the earliest black Canadians were those who arrived in Nova Scotia following the American Revolution" (400), Eaton and Newman use Woods' "Nova Scotia Reality Song" to speak to a history of racism against Blacks in Nova Scotia. Woods' work informs readers of the organization of the African Baptist Church in 1832, stating "A black church was needed because/ the white church closed its doors" (400). It takes up the subject of Viola Desmond, a Black woman who was arrested for sitting in the downstairs section of the *Roseland Theatre* in New Glasgow, informing readers that "the downstairs section/...was reserved for whites only," while the upstairs section, called "Nigger Heaven," was reserved for Blacks (400). And in the following segment Woods addresses the destruction of Africville, "a black community on the rim of the Bedford Basin,/ ...founded in the 1800s and ignored by/ the city" (401) of Halifax:

*There was no sewage,
—no lights
—no sidewalks
—no water
In Africville,
The people did the best they could—
Building from their dreams and industry
They built a church—houses for their families.
Starting in 1960 they listened as their homes
were called "shacks,"
Their community, "Canada's worst slum,"
By 1969 houses, church, people were all gone. (401)*

In their introduction to "Nova Scotia Reality Song," Eaton and Newman ask their readers to "consider how racism has scarred the past and what can be done to ensure a better future for Canadians of all races" (400).

Another text that attempts to humanize blackness is Desmond Morton's *Towards Tomorrow: Canada in a Changing World*, published in 1988. Beginning "at midnight on June 30, 1867" and moving through to "the present," Desmond's text appears to give Black Canadians a voice, through a contemporary narrative by respected journalist and

broadcaster Fil Fraser, “a black Canadian born in Montreal whose parents immigrated to Canada from the Caribbean, [who] grew up in the 1930’s and 1940’s in a ‘white man’s country’” (220). Included in the “close-up” segment of the “Multicultural Nation” section of the text are four short excerpts from an article that Fraser wrote for *Saturday Night* magazine in 1987.

In the edited selections from his article, Fraser discusses discrimination against Jews, Germans and Ukrainians, and his praise for Canadian multiculturalism. Fraser states:

Multiculturalism is enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, is reflected in our institutions, and seeping, far more rapidly than we realize into our collective psyche. Canada has become a country that says its citizens are equal, regardless of race, or religion, or origin, or age, or physical or mental status, or sex. The courts back up that idea, almost weekly...” (221).

Framing Fraser’s discussion in *Towards Tomorrow* is the following introduction borrowed from the *Saturday Night* article: “Black Like Me: In one man’s lifetime Canada has evolved from a deeply (though subtly) racist society into a country that’s multiracial, multicultural and so astonishingly diverse it ought to be the envy of the world” (221). Oddly, while the “close-up” section and the title “Black Like Me” suggest that Fraser’s narrative will take up a discussion of his life in ‘a white man’s world,’ there is no mention of Fraser’s experience growing up Black in Canada. In fact, the word *Black* is not mentioned at all within the edited portions of the article. In the original, published in the *Saturday Night* one hundredth anniversary issue, Fraser remembers being “a careful boy growing up in Montreal,” “where ‘discriminating’ restaurants gave off a palpable hostility that seeped into your system as you sat at table, ignored” (Fraser, 180). While “No niggers” billboards were still seen “across the border,” Fraser says, in Canada “no one asked you to leave or told you to stay out, you were just not served” (180). Fraser states: “Those of us who belonged to minorities, visible or otherwise, knew what we were up against, put our heads down, and did the best we could” (180).

While *Towards Tomorrow* does attempt to put a human face on blackness, to give a voice to Black Canadians, Black writers and scholars concerned with the issues around the representation of Black Canadians might argue that it is unsuccessful in its efforts.

Since the text focuses on late nineteenth and twentieth century historical and social issues, one can see why an analysis of early Black history is not included in the text, but the exclusion of any critical discussion of Black Canadians and their experiences in Canadian society is problematic. The index of Desmond's text lists "Asians," "Chinese immigrants," "French-Canadians," "Indians," "Japanese Canadians in WWII," and "Native people," but there are no listings for "Africans," "African-Canadians," "Blacks," or "Caribbean immigrants." The Black critic's concern that the absence of Blacks in mainstream writings of Canadian history denies Black children a sense of the long Black presence in this country is realized in Benston's text. Though published in 1988, *Towards Tomorrow* is still widely read in Canadian grade eleven classrooms³.

How are Blacks currently represented in mainstream (hi)story texts? What is the price of this kind of representation? And how might mainstream writings of Black Canadian history be better informed by the works of Black writers?

While the progress from Black absence to presence is acknowledged here, Black writers and scholars argue that much more work must be done by Black and non-Black writers on thoughtful historical representations of Black Canadians. While contemporary readings of Black history may be historically accurate and well-intentioned, they may ultimately work to undermine the writers' objectives to educate and entertain their audiences and subvert their good intentions, because they unknowingly represent and misrepresent Black Canadians. Mainstream writers can no longer rely on 'the haven' to stage refugee stories. Not only do these cursory analyses run the risk of alienating Blacks (and other non-White audiences), but they also run the risk of mis-educating White and non-White audiences, especially, according to Peggy Bristow, Black children.

A case in point is the representation of Black Canadians in Barbara Hehner's *The Spirit of Canada: Canada's Story in Legend, Fiction, Poems, and Songs*. While Hehner's section on Black Canadians is historically accurate and acknowledges the existence of slavery in Canada (which the majority of the surveyed texts don't do), Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad, its reliance on 'the haven' and 'the North

Star myth' perpetuates notions that all Black Canadians have the same origins, that all White Canadians are good, and that racism did not and does not exist as a problem for Blacks in Canada

Published in 1999, Hehner's text is directed towards a young Canadian audience. It attempts to tell the colourful (hi)stories of many of Canada's diverse and colourful people, including First Nations, English-, French-, Japanese-, and Black Canadians. While the inclusion of a children's book of poetry, fiction and song, within this list of mainstream and scholarly texts aimed at more sophisticated readers, may seem inappropriate for this discussion, the success of Hehner's book in the Canadian literary market speaks to its significance. According to publisher Malcolm Lester, fourteen thousand copies of Hehner's book were sold in its first year. It has currently been picked up by Stoddart Kids publishing and will be issued in paperback form as a companion to Lunn and Moore's *The Story of Canada* (Lester, email). Viewed next to Alexander and Glaze's extensive African-Canadian history text, of which, according to Ken Pearson of Toronto's Umbrella Press, only four thousand copies have been sold since its release in 1996 (Pearson, email), Hehner's history book is reaching a broad Canadian audience of young people and adults.

Case study: effects of the haven myth

A brief summary of the Black Canadian section of *The Spirit of Canada*

In *The Spirit of Canada*, the section on Black Canadians, entitled "Freedom Seekers," begins with the following introduction:

There were black slaves in New France from its earliest days. By 1760, the year of the British conquest, there were about eleven hundred of them, mostly working as house servants or in the dockyards. There were slaveholders in the Maritimes, too, and as settlers moved into Upper Canada, they also had the right to own slaves. By the end of century, though, there was a growing belief in Britain and its colonies that slavery was morally wrong. In 1793, Lt.-Gov. John Graves Simcoe passed a law declaring that slaves coming into Upper Canada would be made free on the spot. The Maritimes and Lower Canada soon followed with their own anti-slavery legal decisions. Although most areas of the northern United States also passed anti-slavery laws, the economy of the American South was built on slave labour. Even in the northern states, it was against the law for anyone to help a fleeing slave. After the strict Fugitive Slave Law

was passed by the Americans in 1850, slave catchers could even seize blacks in the northern states and take them back to slavery in the South. Escaping slaves realized that had to go farther to find freedom—all the way to Canada. (66)

Following this introduction, is a “Traditional” song entitled “Follow the Drinkin’ Gourd,” a song, the editor informs her readers, that gave illiterate slaves directions north to Canada. Explaining how “the stars in the bowl of the Big Dipper make a line that points to the North Star” (67), the editor decodes the subversive lyrics, explaining how “[s]ongs such as “Follow the Drinkin’ Gourd” were one way for directions to be given and remembered” (67). Hehner also adds that “[o]ther words in the song carry messages as well—how to find a safe route along a riverbank, for example, following charcoal marks left on dead trees by a man named Peg Leg Joe, who guided many slaves to freedom” (67).

“Follow the Drinkin’ Gourd” is followed by another “Traditional” song—“The Underground Railroad”—which, the editor notes, was “probably by a white abolitionist (a person that wanted slavery ended),” though it “was first printed in a black newspaper, *The Voice of the Fugitive*, published in Sandwich, Ontario, 1851” (69). Hehner clarifies that the UGR was not a railroad but a “secret network of people who were willing to help escaping slaves get to Canada,” and she states that “one of the most famous conductors was Harriet Tubman...an escaped slave...[who] never lost a passenger,” and that “[m]any white people who were against slavery were involved in the Underground Railroad too” (69).

The final contribution to the “Freedom Seeker” section is a fictional work by Barbara Greenwood entitled “A Visit from the Slave Catcher.” This story is about a young, runaway slave named Melanie, who is separated from her mother as they make the journey north. While she waits for her mother in St. Catherine’s, Melanie is sheltered in the home of a White girl Joanna Reid and her family, who protect the young fugitive from “a threatening stranger [who] arrives at the door” (71). In her effort to give some historical background to the fictional tale, Hehner informs her readers that “[e]ven in Canada, escaped slaves were not entirely safe. *American* slave catchers, bounty hunters

seeking rewards from southern American slave owners, sometimes crossed the border into Canada and kidnapped blacks" (71, my italics).

'The North Star Myth': cursory readings of Canadian slavery and the problems with interpretation

Compared to the other texts in the surveyed group, Hehner's reading attempts to give thoughtful attention to slavery as a once legal institution in Canada. While it is factual and informative, the brevity of the analysis causes concern for Black writers who argue for more developed analyses of Canadian slavery in the mainstream. According to Rinaldo Walcott, "[t]he almost five-hundred-year presence of black people in Canada should not merely be an item in the catalogue of blackness: it should be actively used to inform the ways in which we analyze the nation and our citizenship" (Walcott, 140).

The concern of Walcott and other Black Canadian writers is that brief analyses of Black Canadian slavery become "second thoughts" or mere endnotes in the back pages of Canadian history when they are left undeveloped. The danger behind cursory readings is that they construct a particular kind of Canadian slavery that appears *better* than its American counterpart, a notion that further perpetuates the myth of White Canadian benevolence. Compared to the evils of American chattel slavery, Hehner's interpretation of Canadian domestic slavery doesn't sound so *bad*. The absence of detail relating to the lives and experiences of slaves suggests that Canadian slavery was somehow more *humane* or civilized than the American institution.

Robin Winks (a non-Black scholar), in his extensive work *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, argues that "[o]n the whole, slaves [in Canada] appear to have been well treated, even though many were not domestics" (Winks, 50). Winks bases his argument on the fact that the smaller number of Canadian slaves "eliminated the need for overseers, the brutalizing effects of slave breeding, and controls arising from fears of armed Negro rebellion" (50). A comparison of the numbers of slaves in Canada to those in the US proves that Canadian domestic slavery was *not* as brutal an institution as American plantation slavery. It is clear that the experiences of the domestic slaves who "washed clothes, cooked meals, ironed linen, and took care of children," in the "well-to-do homes of Montreal and Quebec City" (Alexander, 37) do not equal the experiences of field

slaves who worked the sugar and cotton plantations of the South. But there is a danger in assuming that slaves were well treated in Canada. First, this argument suggests that Canadian slaves did not suffer the de-humanization felt by slaves in the South; and second, it suggests that White Canadian slaveholders were more benevolent than their American counterparts.

On the subject of the dehumanizing effects of domestic slavery, Alexander and Glaze state that “[o]n the surface their work seemed easier than picking cotton or working cane. However [slaves] worked in isolation, without recourse to any community. They were alone, the lowest caste in an extremely hierarchical society. Loneliness drove some to madness, abuse drove others to flee” (37-8). One famous Canadian domestic slave was Marie Joseph Angelique. In 1734, Angelique allegedly set fire to her master’s house, after hearing she was about to be sold. The fire raged out of control and destroyed nearly fifty houses in Montreal. According to Daniel G. Hill, writer of *The Freedom Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada*,

Angelique was arrested, convicted of arson and sentenced to hang. A rope was tied around her neck, signs bearing the word “Incendiary” were fastened on her back and chest, and she was driven through the streets in a scavenger’s cart. Worse was to come: she was tortured until she confessed her crime before a priest; then her hand was cut off and she was hanged in public. (91).

Acknowledged and celebrated in African-Canadian historical and literary works, Marie Joseph Angelique does not often appear in mainstream writings of Black Canadian history. While Hill argues that “there is little evidence that white dependents in like situations could have hoped for more humane treatment from the courts” (91), Alexander and Glaze argue that the case against Angelique was never proven and that “her torture and hanging was intended as an object lesson. Blacks had to be taught their place.” They state, “[o]nly a person not accorded the status of human being could be so treated” (39).

This argument put forth by Alexander and Glaze is supported by the research of Nova Scotia writer Sylvia Hamilton. In her paper entitled “Naming Names, Naming Ourselves: A Survey of Early Black Women in Nova Scotia,” Hamilton states that “Black slaves were imported into Nova Scotia from various places including the colonies, as

early as 1686” and that “slave-sellers clearly saw the property value of young women” (14-15). She states:

Slaves had value and were property, along with clothing, furniture, horses, wine, and other household possessions. Unlike other property, with the exception of animals, slave women offered owners distinct advantages over furniture and even male slaves: They could increase the master’s wealth by ‘breeding’ other ‘slaves.’ John Wentworth, a former governor of New Hampshire who became governor of Nova Scotia in 1792, commented on this capacity in a letter accompanying nineteen slaves he sent to his cousin in Dutch Guiana: ‘The women are stout and able and promise well to increase their numbers’...The treatment of slaves as property is demonstrated by their frequent sale at public auction with other possessions and their inclusion in wills and other estate records. (15-16)

While Black women may have been considered more valuable than Black men, because of their abilities to reproduce more slaves, Hamilton states that “[t]he age and gender of the slaves did not appear to have any bearing on how they were acquired or disposed of” (16). Hamilton argues that when Black men, women and children were sold at auction they were not differentiated from other forms of property.

Since Black slaves were commonly viewed as property by the slave trading system, one could argue, as Alexander and Glaze do, that the heinous torture, dismemberment and execution of Marie Joseph Angelique reflects the fact that she was not seen as a human being. In effect, one could argue that she was treated as a useless object to be broken down, destroyed and disposed of. But on the other hand, a strong argument can be made that Angelique’s humanity, the fact that she was a living, breathing, thinking human being, had *everything* to do with the very graphic nature her public execution, especially when viewed in relation to her race, gender, and class position.

In his work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault explores the public execution as spectacle. On the subject of the “ceremony of punishment” he states the following:

The public execution...has a juridico-political function. It is a ceremonial by which a momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted. It restores that sovereignty by manifesting it at its most spectacular...Its aim is not so much to re-establish a balance as to bring into play, as its extreme point, the dissymmetry between the subject who has dared to violate the law and the all-powerful sovereign who displays his strength. Although redress of the private injury occasioned by the offence must be proportionate, although the sentence must be equitable, the punishment is carried out in such a way as to give a spectacle not of measure, but of imbalance and excess; in this liturgy of punishment, there must be an emphatic affirmation of power and of its intrinsic superiority. And this superiority is not simply that of right, but that of the physical strength of the sovereign beating down upon the body of his adversary and mastering it: by breaking the law, the offender has touched the very person of the prince; and it is the prince—or at least those to whom he has delegated his force—who seizes upon the body of the condemned man and displays it marked, beaten, broken. The ceremony of punishment, then, is an exercise of 'terror.' (48-49)

While Foucault's work focuses on the development of penal institutions of the West, his analysis is useful in this examination of the public execution of Angelique, for one can see that the severity of her punishment reflects the severity of her crime, not against her master's property but against the state. As a Black slave woman, she who has historically been *placed* in the lowest position within the prescribed Western social order, beneath, in particular, White men, White women, and Black men, Angelique is *supposed* to be powerless, but the fact that she acts against her master, commits a willful act of transgression, and breaks the laws of White authority proves she is not. Not only does her alleged assault against private property and the body politic evidence the power of the Black woman, but it also calls into question the stability, strength, and certainty of White patriarchal authority, in particular, the laws that serve to uphold the power of the state. Taking issues of race, gender and class into consideration, one can see the vast social space that separates the Black slave woman from the White master. It is this slave woman's *ability* to traverse the distance from the bottom of the social scale to top that is reflected in the extremity of the violence that is perpetrated against the body of Angelique. Ultimately, as Hill suggests, one cannot clearly determine how a White man, or a White woman, or a Black man would have been punished for the same crime, but it is clear that Angelique's ability to leave her *place* and to rise against her master suggests

a dangerous crossing that poses a threat to the prescribed social order. In effect, Angelique's execution suggests that she was accorded the status of human being—only for the purpose of punishment.

As Foucault suggests in his discussion of the public execution as spectacle, “although the sentence must be equitable, the punishment is carried out in such a way as to give a spectacle not of measure, but of imbalance and excess” (49). Bearing the word “Incendiary” on her body, as she is driven through the streets, Angelique is not only defined as a fire-starter, an arsonist, but she is also defined as an agitator, one who willfully stirs up civil unrest by acting out against the political establishment. Ultimately, her human status is implied in the fact that she is seen as a threat to social order. Property does not willfully transgress—human beings do; property is not punished—human beings are. Her public torture, dismemberment, and hanging evidence authority's need to re-affirm its power and to reinforce Black subjectivity.

Foucault suggests that “the ceremony of punishment...is an exercise of ‘terror’ (49), one that “make[s] everyone aware, through the body of the criminal, of the unrestrained presence of the sovereign” (49). Ultimately, Angelique's ceremonial execution brings forth *her* human status, only so that status can be publicly revoked by the state. The dual purpose of the public execution, the spectacle of beating and breaking down a human being into a lifeless object, is to empower state authority and disempower the public audience. While this particular “ceremony of punishment” may have served as “an object lesson” for Blacks, as Alexander and Glaze argue, to reinforce their status as property, the torture and dismemberment of the human body of Angelique, blood, skin and bones, also served to inscribe terror in the hearts and minds of *all* viewers who might attempt to challenge White authority.

Other cases of the mistreatment and torture of slaves are noted by Winks: one in Upper Canada was “trussed up in store house for a day,” another in Upper Canada was tied to a tree and beaten, one in Annapolis, Nova Scotia was whipped to death, another in Windsor, Nova Scotia was killed with a hammer, and a recaptured slave in Truro, Nova Scotia was killed by his master who cut a whole in the slave's ear, passed a knotted whiplash through the whole, and dragged the slave to death (51). While Winks suggests “there is far more positive evidence of humane treatment” (51) of slaves in Canada, the

preceding list of atrocities against the bodies of Blacks in Canada, along with the story of Marie Joseph Angelique, undermines Winks' idea that "[p]unishments were tempered by the law and by good sense" (50). While Black Canadian writers recognize Winks' comprehensive study of Blacks in Canada as "a valuable resource for researchers given its extensive reference to primary sources," Winks is also criticized for taking "tremendous liberties in his interpretations of Black aspirations and expectations. His constant editorializing on Black intention and organization, and his presumptions and conclusions about what is good for Black people mar the value of the work" (Bristow, 6).

While this examination of Hehner's "Freedom Seekers" opens up a space for a critical discussion of the de-humanizing effects of Canadian slavery, it also asks for a critical reading of the UGR and its relationship to the construction of the Canadian 'safe haven' and long-standing notions of White Canadian benevolence.

According to Alexander and Glaze, what is under-appreciated in discussions of the Underground Railroad is that "the activity surrounding the UGR years changed Canada's relationship with the US. The notion of 'Canada the good' and 'America the evil' began to take root during these years" (61). As the African-Canadian story unfolded through the heroic image of Harriet Tubman, the abolitionists, and the drama of the Underground Railroad, a *mythical* moral boundary began to take form between slave-holding America and *free* Canada. According to African-Canadian historian George Walker, this moral binary construction or the "North Star myth," as he calls it, had an effect on the Canadian belief system long after the last train came north:

The North Star myth entered the Canadian identity and became a major feature distinguishing Canadians from Americans: only south of the border were blacks subjected to violence, denied their citizenship rights, forced into residential ghettos. The moral superiority of the True North depended as much upon *contrasting racial attitudes* as on any other single factor...During the highly publicized black American freedom struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, most Canadians genuinely sympathized with the blacks and admired the leadership of Martin Luther King, while at the same time congratulating themselves that no such problems existed here. (Walker 6, my italics)

Like Walker, Winks argues that the UGR was the cause of a legend, one that "would make it possible for Canadians to reinforce their self-congratulatory attitudes toward their

position on the Negro, and to strengthen those self-congratulatory assumptions into the twentieth century" (233).

The arguments of the aforementioned writers prove helpful in this critical discussion of Hehner's 'Freedom Seekers,' where the Canadian 'safe haven' is constructed through the North/South, Canadian/American moral binary. Returning to the introduction to "Freedom Seekers," Hehner explains that "slave catchers could even seize blacks in the northern states and take them back to slavery in the South. Escaping slaves realized that they had to go farther to find freedom—all the way to Canada" (66). And, in the introduction to "The Underground Railroad," Hehner explains that "the Underground Railroad was not a railroad at all—it was a secret network of people who were willing to help escaped slaves *get to Canada*" (69 my italics). Hehner's analysis suggests that Canada was the only place where escaping slaves could find freedom. As Walker argues, Canada was a (kind of) haven for many refugee slaves, but evidence reveals that many slaves chose *not* to come to Canada.

According to Alexander and Glaze, between 1815 and 1860 approximately 80,000 slaves escaped via the UGR, and roughly 50,000 came to Canada (Alexander, 58). That means that approximately 30,000 slaves escaped slavery via the UGR, even though they did not come to Canada. In fact many fugitive slaves remained in the US, settling in the free Northern States, even under the threat of slave catchers. Winks argues that no accurate figure can be given for the number of fugitive slaves that came to Canada. He suggests that because "the Canadas were far away and little known to the fugitives," and because "many were told that the colonies were uninhabitable for black men" (most fugitives being male), "the majority of the total number of fugitive slaves did not reach the Canadian provinces and remained in the northern states" (235). Support for Winks' position can be found in Benjamin Drew's collection *The Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada* (1856). In one narrative, refugee slave, writer John A. Hunter of Toronto, informs his readers that "[a] great many slaves know nothing of Canada—they don't know that there is such a country" (115).

The danger in reading Canada as the last and *only* stop on the UGR is the creation of a mainstream moral complacency, described by Walker and Winks, and the acceptance of the notion that Blacks have always been well-treated in Canada. The irony that

underlies this belief is the little-known fact that slavery was abolished in the northern American territories (1787) *before* it was abolished in Canada (1833). It is for this reason that many slaves in 18th century New France fled south to find freedom—in Vermont (Alexander 51). Ultimately, it was the harsh treatment by Whites in Nova Scotia that caused 1,200 Blacks to set sail for Sierra Leone, on January 15, 1792 (49).

In his collection of fugitive slave narratives, abolitionist editor Benjamin Drew offers readers “an account of the history and condition of the colored population of Upper Canada” (front cover). While Drew’s narratives focus primarily on the horrors of slave life in the South and dramatic flights to Canada, some offer a glimpse at the social tensions between Blacks and Whites. Refugee slave Edward Patterson of Hamilton states in his narrative,

[t]he prejudice in Canada is amongst the whites to the colored, and amongst the colored to the whites. The colored fancy that the whites are a little against them, and so they do not treat the whites as they would otherwise,—this brings back a prejudice from the whites. When the colored people here are insulted it is by the *ruffians* in Canada (121).

Patterson is not the only refugee narrator to speak of prejudice in Canada in relation to the Blacks’ distrust of White Canadians. In another narrative, Henry Williamson, also of Hamilton, states that some Blacks “are jealous of the white people,” and even suspicious of those who have “the best intentions” (134). Williamson says, “[t]his is because they have been so much deceived and kept down by the white people [in the US],” especially those Whites who invite escaping slaves into their homes, “in a friendly way,” only to turn them in to an officer or their owner (134). While Patterson and Williamson seem to suggest that racial tensions in Upper Canada emanate from Blacks’ distrust of Whites, Benjamin Drew, himself, in his introduction to the “London” section of his collection, recognizes that many White Canadians held prejudices of their very own. Commenting on the discrimination suffered by Black school children, Drew states:

The principle reason for this neglect of common school advantages by the colored people, is the prejudice of whites. Many of the whites object to having their children sit in the same forms with the colored pupils; and some of the lower classes will not send their children to schools where the blacks are admitted. Under these circumstances, it is unpleasant to the

colored children to attend the public schools—especially if any of the teachers happen to be victims of the very prejudice which they should induce others to overcome (147).

While Drew appears to criticize the lower classes of London, implying that their prejudice is a symptom of their ignorance, it seems that segregationists occupied all rungs of the Canadian social ladder. For example, Edwin Larwill of Chatham, a powerful politician and school superintendent, argued in 1849 against a community of Blacks settling near his home. He espoused the idea that “blacks were inferior, that their presence would drive down property values and drive away white settlers, and that whites, especially white children, would be endangered by having free blacks roam the streets” (Alexander 66).

While only a small percentage of Drew’s narrators mentions the prejudice of White Canadians, most of the narratives are filled with praise for Canada “as healthy a place as a man can find” (134), where “colored people have become wealthy by industry” (87), whose laws “leave a man as much freedom as a man can have” (279). According to Robin Winks, Drew was among few abolitionists editors who “remarked upon the incidence of prejudice in the Canadas,” for

the great mass of fugitive narratives were unstinting in their praise of the Canadian haven and found no occasion to mention the quasi-segregated pattern of life developing there, the numerous demeaning incidents that the fugitives encountered, or the morass of conflicting claims made upon the confused fugitive by missionary groups, communal settlements, and school societies (241).

Perhaps this point is most evident in the following excerpt from a narrative by Henry Gowens of Galt. Following the slave narrative “structure,” Gowens’ narrative begins with his “wide experience of the evils of slavery,” moves through the drama of his escape, and then ends, without criticism, in praiseworthy Canada:

The colored people can do as well in Canada as they could in the United States under any circumstances. Even in the free States they are accounted as nothing, or next to nothing. But in Canada, all are really free and equal. *Color is not recognized in the laws of the land.* During all the time I have lived in Canada, no white person has suffered any inconvenience, or had cause to complain, because I was placed on an

equality with him. They come here destitute of any advantages—but they are getting along in a respectable, upright way, and there is plenty of work for them. If the colored people had come into Canada with a knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic, there would now be no difference between them and white people, in respect to property or business. They would have been just as skilful, just as far advanced in art and science as the whites. But they have to contend with the ignorance which slavery has brought upon them. Still they are doing well, [sic]—no one could expect them to do any better. (Drew, 143, my italics)

Gowens' narrative, along with most of the others in Drew's collection, tells us little about the everyday lives of fugitive slaves living in Canada. Winks argues that "little space was given to the post escape life of the fugitive, in part because...[slave] narratives often were written soon after the fugitive had arrived in the North or in Canada, and in larger part because the latter aspects of the story held less intrinsic value" (242).

At this point it is important to remember that it was the abolitionist writer/editor's job to *sell* Canada, as it is Hehner's. While Hehner is correct in defining abolitionists as "[people] who wanted slavery ended" (69), the brevity of her definition invites criticism, for it ignores the fact that abolitionists were largely responsible for constructing Canada in words as a 'safe haven' for fugitives slaves. Since the illiteracy rate among fugitive slaves was high, as Gowens points out in his narrative, it was the job of the abolitionist editor to translate the spoken word into the written word, to translate the oral story of the fugitive slave into a romantic literature befitting the tastes of a wide Victorian readership. On the representation of Canada in narrative slave literature, Winks writes: "In the thirty most widely known fugitive slave accounts published between 1836 and 1859, British North America is mentioned in all but four; of these twenty-six accounts, few can be said to provide anything like a realistic picture of conditions in Canada West" (241).

'Moses' was a woman: writing Black women into the Canadian mainstream

In her introduction to *No Burden to Carry*, Dionne Brand writes:

Inquiry into the history of Blacks in Canada has, on the whole, assumed that it is possible to know all there is to know about the subject at a glance. If Black life in Canada as a whole has been absent from the works of Canadian scholars, or inadequately served by them, Black women's lives have been doubly hidden. Within existing accounts, Black peoples are taken as a genderless group. The occasional woman in history is highlighted, such as Mary Ann Shadd, the nineteenth-century teacher, publisher and editor, or Harriet Tubman, the freedom fighter, abolitionist and general of the Underground Railroad. But these highlights are exceptions, and their heroic behaviour is attributed to their race rather than to their gender, despite the fact that they were extraordinary women who broke the norms of female behaviour of the day. (12)

In the preceding analysis, the nineteen surveyed Canadian historical texts have been read in terms of race and class, in an effort to chart the emergence of blackness in the Canadian historical discourse. Dionne Brand's comments, on the absence of Black women in the works of Canadian scholars, open up a space for a critical re-reading of the surveyed texts in relation to issues of gender. As was documented earlier, Blacks are not mentioned in any of the texts from 1949 to 1972: in particular, the Loyalists' history is White and gendered male. In Smith's *Canada: Discovering Our Heritage* (1977), Garrod's *Canada: Growth of Nation* (1980), McFadden's *Origins: A History of Canada* (1989) and Cruxton and Walker's *Community Canada* (1993) blackness emerges in the form of genderless groups—"Blacks" or "Black Loyalists." Dionne Brand argues that "[t]aking Black peoples in Canada as a genderless group conflates all of Black history into the history of men doing things" (12). In terms of the representation of Black women, it is only in the last decade that blackness has emerged within the surveyed texts, as women 'doing things.'

Clark and McKay's *Canada Revisited* (1992) identifies Blacks as a group, but it includes a small image of John and Mildred Ware, former slaves who settled in Alberta in 1882. In Cruxton and Wilson's *Flashback Canada* (1994), Mary Ann Shadd is introduced as "a freeborn woman of colour and a teacher...and the first woman newspaper publisher in North America" (65). Lunn and Moore's *The Story of Canada* (2000) includes the

story of Josiah and Charlotte Henson and briefly mentions Mary Ann Shadd. Hehner's *Spirit of Canada* (1999) offers a brief description of Harriet Tubman. And Gillmor and Turgeon's *Canada: A People's History* includes a brief yet informative discussion of Mary Ann Shadd.

While Black women are identified in the texts from 1992 to 2000, their lives as Black women in Canada meet with superficial readings, lending further support to Brand's arguments. Mildred Ware is included as the wife of John Ware, and Charlotte Henson is included as the wife of Josiah Henson. Mary Ann Shadd is described in one sentence in *The Story of Canada*; her life as a teacher, editor and publisher is taken up in more detail in *Canada: A People's History*. As for Harriet Tubman, Hehner describes her as "one of the most famous conductors" of the Underground Railroad, "an escaped slave who had settled near St. Catharines, Ontario. She made at least nineteen dangerous journeys back into the American South to help others find freedom, but she was never captured and she never lost a passenger" (69).

Hehner's reading of Tubman, like the readings of many other White and non-White writers, is historically accurate, but it conflates her heroism with her race rather than her gender. Tubman's actions are often seen as extraordinary because she is—"an escaped slave"—not because she is a woman. As a result of this kind of representation, Harriet Tubman appears a static, unchanging historical figure in Canadian history, whose life is known and no longer requires further examination. Her stock representation in Canadian historical and literary texts does not speak to the complexities of being a woman, specifically a Black woman, in mid-nineteenth century America.

In her article entitled "'The Lord seemed to say 'Go': Women and the Underground Railroad Movement," writer Adrienne Shadd, a descendant of Mary Ann Shadd, examines "the impact of gender on the fugitive phenomenon" (42). She states that "we tend to lionize Harriet Tubman, one of the few women invariably associated with the secret movement north. Harriet Tubman is viewed as an exception, a woman of uncommon valour whose actions went beyond the bounds of the ordinary or the usual" (62). Shadd's analysis examines Tubman's life in context and reveals that she was one of many extraordinary Black women who suffered hardships and risked their lives in "the fight for freedom and justice for themselves and their people" (62).

Harriet Tubman is frequently heralded for making at least nineteen trips down South to escort slaves back to Canada, but given that around eighty percent of fugitive slaves were men between the ages of sixteen and thirty-five (Shadd, 42), the fact that she made *one* successful trip to Canada is extraordinary. According to Shadd, there are numerous reasons why women made up a small portion of the fugitive slave population. She states, “the age profile of the average fugitive—between 16 and 35 years—covered precisely a woman’s peak childbearing years. Women were more likely to be pregnant, nursing an infant, or having at least one small child to care for at this stage in their lives” (43). Born a slave in Bucktown, Maryland, in 1820, Harriet Tubman was twenty-nine years old when she escaped north. While it appears that she did not have any children, she did have a husband, John Tubman, a free Black whom she married around 1844 (54). They lived together until Tubman’s escape in 1849. That Tubman was a married woman who chose to leave her husband for freedom is a fact not mentioned in mainstream Canadian historical readings, nor is it mentioned in the Black historical works by Alexander and Glaze, Daniel G. Hill, or Robin Winks, who all describe her as “the Moses of her people.”

Contemporary readings of Tubman’s life often focus on her effective escape strategies and her strong abilities as a leader. Daniel G. Hill writes, “Tubman could neither read nor write, but she was considered a military genius, a master of logistics and strategy. She was a rigid disciplinarian on the march North and would not allow any of her ‘passengers’ to drop out of the group or turn back” (38). Hill’s reading, along with most readings of Tubman’s life, suggest that she devoted all of her time to rescuing slaves. But, according to Shadd, journeying into the American South was not always Tubman’s day job, for during her time in St. Catherines, “Tubman earned money to finance her activities by cooking and cleaning for people in the town” (55). The fact that this “Black Moses” was a ‘cleaning lady’ is not written into Canadian history books. While an understanding of the realities of her everyday life serves to reinforce her heroism and her extraordinariness, the knowledge that Tubman was a ‘domestic’ in ‘the Promised Land’ does not serve the needs of the mainstream image of Tubman as a Canadian hero. Such knowledge opens a space for questions around the treatment of

Blacks, in particular Black women, in Canada and the division of labour in relation to issues of race, class, and gender.

Shadd states that “the life of Harriet Tubman has come to symbolize in many ways the struggle of African people for freedom and justice,” but she argues that Tubman’s “courage and tenacity in the face of all odds were certainly not unique in the history of African-Canadian women” (55). While a “strict code of nineteenth century ethics dictated that, even for slaves, a mother’s place was to remain with her children” (43), slave women did “brave the odds and attempt escape with one or more children when they could” (44), while others “had no choice but to leave their children behind” (48). One phenomenal case of escape is the story of Ann Maria Jackson who fled from Maryland on foot with *seven* offspring who ranged in age from 3 or 4 up to sixteen years (44). After two of their children were sold, Jackson’s husband went insane and died in the poorhouse in the fall 1857. After hearing that four more of her children were about to be sold, Jackson fled to Canada, with the aid of UGR workers, and arrived in St. Catharines in November 1858 (45). Slave women fleeing with their children had a much greater chance of getting caught by slave catchers, because they could not walk as far nor as quickly as “the score of single men” who were constantly fleeing north (47). In light of this, Jackson’s story is quite extraordinary.

In another case noted by well-known ‘stationmaster’ Levi Coffin in 1844, a Black woman identified as Mrs. Armstrong fled to Canada in 1842 with her husband and youngest child, leaving the rest of her seven children behind. “Against her husband’s better judgment,” Armstrong “dressed up in men’s clothing and travelled through Ohio and Kentucky” to her old master’s farm. She returned to Canada with five of her children and, at the time of her meeting with Coffin, she was making plans to go back and retrieve her two remaining children (55).

Shadd notes some slave women, like Armstrong, disguised themselves in men’s attire, in their efforts to escape capture. In another case, fifteen-year old Maria Weems disguised herself “as a young male coachman to her ‘master’” who was actually a UGR conductor (48). Shadd’s work illustrates another factor that restricted flight for Black women: the gendered division of labour on the slave farm (48). Due to the training they received, Black men had a greater chance of being hired out as artisans or craftsmen, and

they were also more likely to be chosen to assist in the transport of crops and other materials, away from the plantation (48). As a result, they had a greater understanding of the world outside the plantation than women who were trained to work 'close to home.' Shadd writes: "potential fugitive women were forced to consider their lack of familiarity with the surrounding country-side, and the fact that they would be more conspicuous as women travelling alone or in groups" (48).

As the research of Adrienne Shadd reveals, reading gender into discussions of fugitive slaves, who escaped to Canada, offers insights into the complexities surrounding the image of the fugitive woman. Though *all* women in nineteenth century America were subjected by the gendered distribution of labour and defined by notions of domesticity, this work attempts to show how Black women had to overcome many obstacles in order to make the journey North. While all women were trained to work close to home, White women, especially those of the upper classes who travelled with their spouses and escorts, had greater knowledge of the outside world than slave women did. Thus the fugitive slave woman had to overcome her ignorance of the world beyond the plantation, in her quest for freedom. Also, fugitive slave women had to overcome the dangers of travelling alone. Even though Black women disguised themselves as Black men, they still ran a high risk of being caught. While Black men had more mobility beyond the boundaries of the plantation, unaccompanied by a White master, a Black man travelling alone still invited suspicion. Thus the fugitive slave woman in disguise ran the risk of being doubly caught, as an escaped slave and as a woman. For those women who chose to travel with their children, rather than leave them behind, the risks were even higher.

Shadd's work offers new ways of reading and writing Harriet Tubman—the wife who left her husband for freedom, the fugitive who successfully made the journey North, the domestic who earned money to finance her trips, and the hero who led three hundred slaves to freedom—and other Black women, equally brave, equally extraordinary, into mainstream Canadian history. By reading gender into the already racialized representation of Harriet Tubman and making readers aware of the conditions under which her flights took place, writers, Black and non-Black, can offer Canadians more complex and critical readings of this Canadian hero.

Constructing "Tradition": the homogenizing effects of the haven

Bold typed and centered above the song titles in Hehner's text, "Follow the Drinkin' Gourd" and "The Underground Railroad," is the word "**Traditional**."

"Tradition," according to Merriam-Webster, means "the handing down of beliefs and customs by word of mouth or by example without written instruction" or "an inherited pattern of thought or action" (723). From Hehner's readings, it is understood that American slaves sang both songs, but it is not clear who exactly they have been handed down to. To which traditions do these songs belong? Canadian or American?

In a 1967 speech extolling the virtues of the "singular historical relationship between American Negroes and Canadians," American civil rights leader Martin Luther King pointed out the significance of the 'Negro spiritual' "Follow the Drinking Gourd":

Canada is not merely a neighbour to Negroes. Deep in our history of struggle for freedom, Canada was the North Star. The Negro slave denied education, de-humanized, imprisoned on cruel plantations, knew that far to the north a land existed where a fugitive slave, if he survived the horrors of the journey, could find freedom. The legendary Underground Railroad started in the South and ended in Canada. The freedom road links us together. *Our* spirituals, now so widely admired around the world, were often codes. We sang of 'Heaven' that awaited us, and the slave masters listened in innocence, not realizing that we were not speaking of the hereafter. Heaven was the word for Canada and the Negro sang of the hope that his escape on the Underground Railroad would carry him there. One of *our* spirituals, 'Follow the Drinking Gourd,' in its disguised lyrics contained directions for escape. The gourd was the big dipper, and the North Star to which its handle pointed gave the celestial map that directed the flight to the Canadian border. (Foster, 48, *my italics*)

In his speech Dr. King makes it clear that "our spirituals" are African-American, handed down through an oral tradition. Those slaves who followed the North Star and crossed the border into 'Canaan' brought their customs, beliefs and songs with them. Through his invocation of the 'North Star Myth,' Dr. King collapses African-American history and African-Canadian history together, thus blurring the boundaries between what is Canadian and what is American. The implication here is that the American part came *first*.

Hehner's use of "Follow the Drinkin' Gourd," suggests, in her *Canadian* history book, not only that the "African-American" came before the "African-Canadian," but that the "African-American" *is* the "African-Canadian." In a sense, the latter emerged from the former. All the parts of the "Freedom Seekers" section, except for the early acknowledgement of slavery in Canada, work together to suggest that Black Canadians are the descendants of African-American refugees. (While it has not been discussed in this analysis, it is important to note that Barbara Greenwood's story "A Visit from the Slave Catcher" does not mention the presence of Blacks in Canada before the coming of fugitive slaves.) Because 'the Black refugee' motif runs through the entire section, Hehner's work inadvertently constructs a homogeneous Black Canadian population.

According to Alexander and Glaze, Canada's earliest Black Canadians were a diverse group:

Though early Canadian slavery had no official colour, most slaves were black. Some were directly imported from Africa, but the vast majority came, after 'seasoning,' from the southern colonies or the Caribbean. In these regions, slavery had long been an almost exclusively black condition. With the British conquest of New France in 1760 came a rapid increase in black slave importation to Canada and the gradual elimination of real distinctions between the rights of Canadian, American, or Caribbean slaves. In all three regions blacks were preferred to indentured European servants, who could fade into the general population. Black skin was a badge of slavery. (41)

The fact that slaves were sent to Canada from Africa, the US and the Caribbean is not well known within the Canadian mainstream. This polygenesis story that speaks to a *diverse* Black population in early Canada is often written over with "*the* American exodus into Canaan."

At this point, there can be little doubt that African-American history and African-Canadian history *are* close relatives, if not siblings then first cousins, but "there is a popular belief that black history on this continent is *really an American thing*" (Alexander, 33, my italics) and it is this kind of thinking, reflected in the Canadian mainstream, which silences multiple Black histories—so only one can be heard. Suddenly, the American Black experience becomes *the* (North) American Black experience. On this subject Alexander and Glaze state:

The black fact in the US is a fundamental part of America's historical record, and sensitive contemporary critics describe current issues, problems, and accomplishments within the context of *the total black experience in America*. Analyses of the rise of the black middle class, black intellectualism, the black urban underclass, or black success in business, law, science, arts, sports, and entertainment, invariably takes readers back to slavery and/or the colour line of segregation. The history of these two phenomena reverberates in the American consciousness. (Alexander 33, my italics)

Much to the surprise of many White and non-White Canadians today, there has long been a "Black fact" in Canada. One that has gone unnoticed by White Canadians, because it has long been obscured by the dramatic history of Black/White race relations in the United States. It is the mainstream's ignorance about Canada's 'Black fact' that results, as George Walker argues, in the Canadian tenet regarding racism: it's *their* problem. Many White Canadians hold the position that Blacks in Canada are just like Blacks in the United States. Cecil Foster states, in *A Place Called Heaven: The Meaning of Being Black in Canada*, that "[u]nderstanding the black reality in Canada must start with the recognition that Canada's Black population is unique and that it certainly isn't a carbon copy of the African-American population south of the border" (13). "Too often," Foster says, "the rest of Canada tries to treat Canadian Blacks as if they were an offshoot from what they see on television in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago and Detroit" (13), but Foster states that there is a difference between American Blacks and Canadian Blacks, a difference that was illustrated in 1993 when the American musical *Showboat* came to Toronto.

When *Showboat* made its debut in Toronto, many Black Canadians protested the American "classic," describing the musical as racist and demeaning to Blacks. In an effort to erase the anxieties of the protesters, the show's producer called on the scholarship of African-American, Harvard academic Henry Louis Gates, who was allegedly hired by the show's production company to produce educational materials on how the show might be read *historically*. What the *Showboat* producers and Henry Louis Gates presumed was that everyone would be reading from the same American history book. On this subject, Rinaldo Walcott states that Black Canadians' "concerns and claims were dismissed by appeals to an African-American authenticity," and "the particular and

specific local concerns of black Canadians were rendered suspect by a 'public' lecture in which Gates entirely evacuated the notion of historical difference, collapsing the two nations" (26). Keeping in mind the large Caribbean and African immigrant populations in Toronto and the rest of Canada, Foster argues that there *is* a difference between American Blacks and Canadian Blacks—who have a "different sensitivity and a well developed sense of pride because of where they come from before arriving in Canada" (13).

While Foster, Caribbean born, argues quite strongly that "Canadian Blacks are not African-Americans" (13), seventh generation African-Canadian George Elliott Clarke begins his introduction to *Eyeing the North Star* with the following: "As a child, I became an African American" (xi). Raised on bagpipes and fiddles, Ti-Jean and John Henry, Malcolm X and Margaret Laurence, Clarke argues that "Canada is an assembly point for all African peoples, both Old World (Africa) and New (North and South America)" (xii). Unlike Cecil Foster, Clarke defines being African American as being part of a long history of struggle by Blacks (people of African descent) from one end of the American continent to the other, from Canada to Argentina.

Foster argues that Black Canadians are not just different from African Americans (Black residents in the US)—Black Canadians are different from each other. He asks: "Is there really such a thing as a black—or some call it, an African—community in Canada?" (21) Foster states that there are three main groups of Blacks in Canada, including Caribbean immigrants, African immigrants and indigenous Blacks, like George Elliott Clarke, whose families have lived in North America for generations. But he admits that he is over-generalizing, stating that *not* all Caribbean people are alike, "for even within the Caribbean community, there are inter-island rivalries" (21). Foster says that Canadian Blacks "are so culturally different and dispersed that there is no real bond or common denominator among [them]" and that the only thing "members of these groups have in common is the challenge of realizing that *the mainstream does not differentiate among [them]*" (21 my italics).

And it is this belief of the Canadian mainstream, that all Black Canadians are the same, that is reflected and reinforced by Hehner in her representation of Black Canadian

history, which neither speaks to a heterogeneous Black population in early Canada, nor to the contemporary, diverse Black population within her multicultural audience.

Conclusion: producing inclusive Canadian histories

In her article *Published + Be Damned*, Marlene Nourbese Philip argues against Canadian publishers who subscribe to the idea that “minority--read Asian, African and Native--writers have difficulty getting their books published because there is too small an audience and market for such writers” (160). She states that “the underlying factors in this argument...have less to do with audience and market forces and more to do with racism” (160). Philip goes further saying, “the argument also assumes that if you are a Canadian writer of Native, Asian or African background, the only possible audience for your work is one comprised of individuals of the same ethnic background; this is erroneous, narrow-minded, and even racist” (161). It suggests that books by Asian, Native and African writers become good books only if the white mainstream audience reads them.

Continuing her interrogation of the Canadian publishing system, Philip responds to a piece by Governor General's Award winner Erin Moure, which appeared in *Books in Canada*:

Erin Moure writes that the belief that the only possible audience for a Black writer is a Black audience, 'covers up and renders silent the influence (when they're allowed to be heard) minority writers have within our culture(s) on the experience and perceptions of all (including white) writers.' What appears indisputable, however, is that the only audience that matters in Canada is the white audience, and how members of the 'ideological superstructure'--reviewers, critics, and publishers alike--interpret the interests and needs of that audience. Clearly, this superstructure sees the Canadian audience as narrow-minded, provincial and unable to read and enjoy anything but work written by white writers, with the odd dash of ethnic literary spice proffered by one or two carefully chosen writers. (163)

This analysis is written in the belief that Black writers, as well as other minority writers, can influence the experience and perceptions of all (including White) writers. This work has heard the call made by Black Canadian writers and scholars for more detailed, informative, and inclusive readings of Black Canadian history, readings that

move beyond the stock representations of blackness. By weaving the works of mainstream writers with the works of Black Canadian writers, this work attempts to engage a critical dialogue for all writers committed to writing thoughtful and empowering Black histories. The purpose of the analysis of Barbara Hehner's text is not to merely criticize what it does 'wrong,' but to recognize what it is trying to do 'right,' and to offer alternative readings of a work that may potentially influence a wide number of young Canadians.

Hehner's collection is a site that markets and sells a colourful image of Canada. Within its multicultural milieu, the book's section on Black Canadians is founded on notions of a Canadian safe haven that did and did not exist for Blacks in Canada. This paradox poses problems for any writer attempting to write a critical history of Blacks in Canada, for the construction of 'the haven' undermines its own critical interrogation: to talk about the haven as a construction is to expose it as 'false,' as a myth.

Discussions of the haven that *was* run the risk of misrepresenting a history of racism against Blacks in Canada and perpetuating the idea that Canada is not a racist country; discussions of the haven that *wasn't* run the risk of absenting the efforts of White Canadians who fought against the enslavement of Blacks and alienating White Canadians who actively take up the cause of anti-racism in this country today. Ultimately, in light of the arguments made by Philip, this work recognizes that the Canadian publishing system must learn to see the *value* in blackness—to love it. By weaving the words of Black Canadian writers with those of mainstream writers, this work has attempted to open up a space for a critical discussion into how *all* writers, Black and non-Black, might work together to write effective, informative and inclusive Canadian histories.

... consider the possibility that to love blackness is dangerous in a white supremacist culture— so threatening, so serious a breach in the fabric of the social order, that death is the punishment.

bell hooks--“Loving Blackness as Political Resistance”

Part II: Making the Haven ‘Work’: Beatrice Chancy, Staging Race, and Loving Blackness as Political Resistance

Introduction to Beatrice Chancy: blackening the national narrative

In the first part of this exploration, I attempted to track and record the ways Black men and women have been written into Canadian mainstream and scholarly historical texts by paying close attention to the Loyalist story as it has been written over the past five decades. My research indicates that Black Canadian history is often defined within cursory readings that construct Canada as a sanctuary or safe haven for Black American refugees. Little attention has been given to lives of Blacks who lived in Canada prior to the late eighteenth century American exodus, specifically to the subject of Canadian slavery. In regards to the diverse population of Loyalists who came to Canada, specifically Nova Scotia, their representation has primarily been viewed through a White, male lens that has systematically filtered out blackness. It is only in the last thirty years that Blacks have appeared in the Loyalist story, either as Black Loyalist or as White

Loyalists' slaves. Current readings, for the most part, are still cursory, as Blacks appear as homogenous, genderless groups. My research concurs with the findings of other Black Canadian writers who argue that "inquiry into the history of Blacks in Canada has, on the whole, assumed that it is possible to know all there is to know about the subject at a glance" (Brand, 12). "Black life is treated as static and finite, against which 'Canadian' life, read 'white,' is ongoing and changing, the recording of the latter taking precedence and importance, the former footnoted" (Brand, 11).

At this point I will shift my attention to yet another Loyalist story, one written by a Black Nova Scotian, one that differs greatly from its predecessors--George Elliott Clarke's opera libretto *Beatrice Chancy*. Clarke's text was chosen for this discussion, because it answers the call of Black Canadian writers for more in-depth readings into African-Canadian history. While it is a work of fiction, it is written with Clarke's knowledge that "a mass ignorance exists about the conduct of slavery in the British North American colonies" (Clarke, 7), as well as his understanding of Black history in Nova Scotia. Written in 1998, Clarke's drama has been acknowledged by critics as "a powerful treatment of the generally unacknowledged history of the 'Africans'" (Sugars, 3). Within the context of this work, *Beatrice Chancy* is viewed as a counter narrative that reads *against* the mainstream writing of African-Canadian history as it re-writes the popular Canadian haven narrative.

Beatrice Chancy takes up the subject of slavery in early nineteenth-century Nova Scotia; it is the story of a 16 year-old slave girl, Beatrice, the daughter of an African slave woman who was raped by her master, who returns home to *Paradise*, a plantation in the lush Annapolis Valley, after spending three years at a finishing school in Halifax, studying and learning the ways of White women. Upon her return, American Loyalist Francis Chancy, Beatrice's master/father who both loves and lusts after his "honey tinted" daughter, expects her to *behave* like a White girl and affords her the privileges of *being* White. But when she returns to *Paradise*, Bible in hand, wearing lace, a crucifix, innocence and faith, Beatrice reestablishes ties to "her folk," the other slaves on the plantation, and she resumes a love relationship with a 21 year-old slave named Lead. When the young lovers request to be married, Chancy rails against Beatrice, like a lover deceived. Chancy sees Beatrice's desire to choose blackness, to love blackness, as a

rejection of whiteness and his patriarchal authority. To affirm his power over the young girl, Chancy beats and rapes Beatrice, his hands “speak horror to her body,” and she quickly “learn[s] what it means to be property” (82). Discounting her from “darling daughter” to a marketable commodity, Chancy threatens to sell Beatrice or keep her as his concubine. In the end, Clarke's tragedy sees an enraged, tortured and vengeful Beatrice violently murder her father, and she is later hanged, five months pregnant, for her crime.

From this short description of Clarke's tragic drama, one can see how Clarke's story contains some of the themes found in mainstream writings of African-Canadian history—the Loyalist story, an abused Black protagonist, and a haven-like setting—but, it is in his treatment of these themes that Clarke offers us a highly complex re-writing of national narratives. I argue that Clarke uses the image of “the Promised Land,” *plays* with it, in his effort to resist and re-write the words of White patriarchal authority: *Paradise*, the ‘heavenly’ setting of the drama, becomes a performance stage, a sight of conflict, where canonized notions of whiteness and blackness are undermined as they are played out, where prescribed boundaries of identity are blurred, as the knowability of race and gender is called into question.

While this discussion focuses primarily on *Beatrice Chancy*, I will supplement my reading of Clarke's work with a poem by Carol Tremaine, another native born African-Canadian writer, who tests the boundaries of “the Promised Land.” In her poem, “What's in a name?” Tremaine, like Clarke, *uses* the language of “the master” to talk back or “back talk” to White patriarchal authority. Her work subverts prescribed notions of gender and race, which are seen less in terms of biological facts and exposed more as cultural fictions. For both writers, language *is* subversion: it is always in play. They are mediators, ‘signifiers’ in the African-American sense, who don't always say what they mean, who don't always mean what they say. Language is used by both writers in the service of exposing the imperfections (the lies, illusions and myths) foregrounded in *good* Canadian story telling.

At this point, I must acknowledge that my reading of *Beatrice Chancy* and Clarke's use of “Paradise” may appear simplistic when read against the complex tapestry that weaves the 16th century Italian legend of Beatrice Cenci⁴ with African-Canadian

history, the world of Dante's *Inferno* with that of the Middle Passage, and the languages of romance with the subversive language(s) of slaves. Much like its complex main character, *Beatrice Chancy* is a hybrid text, a 1 2 3 4 5 & 6 : MIX(ING) of diverse cultures, languages, genres, and practices. Inspired by Dante, Shelley, Browning and Shakespeare (among a prestigious and eclectic group of artists and writers), Clarke's opera reflects the depth of his knowledge and understanding of the Western literary canon, while, at the same time, it reflects his historical and literary understanding of African-American slave literature. In his own way, Clarke has brought two seemingly diverse worlds together in *Beatrice Chancy*, one Black, one White. On the subject of the Western canon, Clarke states:

...it is our canon too. Even though it was imposed on us, it still belongs to us. I am told that I have to accept these writers as great writers, and that, in terms of English poetry, these are the models I have to use, but perhaps we can take these models and *blacken* them. We can make them speak Black English. We can adapt them. In everyday life I see people adapting the English language all of the time to suit their own needs. We can adapt the forms. (Compton 3, my italics)

Though Clarke's poetic opera libretto or verse play opens up a space for a critical study of the multiple literary influences that have shaped *Beatrice Chancy*, this analysis does not attempt to explore how Clarke "blackens" Western canonical models. Instead, this analysis attempts to explore how Clarke's work "blackens" White mainstream narratives around African-Canadian history. This work shifts with multiple readings of the word **BLACKEN**: In the first section, I illustrate how Clarke blackens or DEFAMES and SULLIES national narratives by examining *Paradise*⁵ as a metaphor for Canada; in the second section, I examine how the this White Loyalist story is blackened or MADE BLACK through a discussion of the diversity within blackness; and in the third section, I examine how this story is blackened through Clarke's use of performative language and African-American signifyin(g) practices.

Blackening the narrative: subverting the haven myth

Working with *Paradise* as a metaphor for the Canadian haven or "the Promised Land," we must begin this exploration by asking the obvious question, what does this "Canadian haven" look like? Early in the drama, *Paradise* is described as "Loyalist America's

strange, oriental peninsula,” where “apple trees blaze blossoms,” and a “coral-and-ivory mansion glimmers, its Grecian columns confronting the succulent, disobedient wilderness...” (12). While this plantation in Nova Scotia's lush Annapolis Valley may appear Eden-like at first, as a site of beauty and abundance, filled with apple trees and wild foliage, Clarke's *Paradise* proves to be unlike the biblical one. It is also a site of exclusive ownership and moral scarcity. Commenting on the dualistic nature of *Paradise*, Dumas, a twenty-five year old slave described as “a seer” (10), states, “[f]ools christened this place Paradise; I call it Hell” (22). It is clear that Clarke pulls no punches in his drama. The fact that *Paradise* exists as a slave plantation in Nova Scotia is an irony in and of itself but, with *Paradise* working double time as a Canadian safe haven and kind-of biblical “Heaven,” all notions of White Canadian benevolence and Christian morality are clearly undermined.

To gain a deeper understanding of Clarke's metaphor, we can attempt to historicize this scene by returning to Alexander and Glaze, who inform us, that at this time in Nova Scotia (1801), at least 1500 slaves had arrived in Canada in the company of White Loyalists, most of whom settled in the Maritimes on arable lands and “established farms capable of providing crops within one or two years” (42).

The actual granting of lands was done according to privilege, power and race. Not all of the White Loyalists were fortunate enough to receive substantial land grants, for those of the lower classes received smaller plots than the upper classes. And while enslaved Blacks continued to live with their Loyalist masters, only a small percentage of the free Black Loyalist population actually received grants from the Crown. Those who were granted land found themselves working small plots of rocky, marginal farmland. According to Bridglal Pachai, writer of *Blacks: People of the Maritimes*, “...by 1786, almost all white Loyalists in Shelburne County had received their grants. The first Blacks had to wait till 1787, when grants were made to 184 of 649 black men in Birchtown. The average allocation for whites was 74 acres; for the Blacks is was 34” (43). As for the majority of the Black Loyalist settlers, many remained landless and found themselves dependent on low-paying manual labour jobs offered by White employers. Thus, while Nova Scotia appeared to be a (kind of) ‘paradise’ for some

privileged White Loyalist settlers, it was no Eden for Blacks who were left, for the most part, landless.

The fact that Francis Chancy owns a thriving plantation in Nova Scotia's lush Annapolis Valley attests to his power and privileged social position. While *Paradise* appears to be a haven for Chancy, his wife Lustra, and his confidant the Rev. Peacock, the Black slaves who also live in *Paradise*, see the haven from an "Other" perspective. Early in the play, Moses a thirty year-old slave described as "an enslaved believer" (10) asks young Lead, "Do you imagine drunkards laugh in Heaven?" and Lead responds "There ain't no Heaven" (14). Though Lead's remark connotes a loss of faith in a benevolent Christian God, his statement proves ironic when viewed within the discourse on the Canadian haven narrative. For a Black slave located in Canada, 'the True North strong and free,' to deny the very existence of 'a place called Heaven'—to say there is no place of refuge—undermines the White benevolence at the center of the mainstream writing of African-Canadian history. In saying, "there ain't no Heaven," Lead renders the goodness of White Canadian's suspect. According to Lead, *Paradise* is a place where "[i]t's smarter to hide hatred neath kindness" (15).

Lead's feelings of bitterness and resentment are echoed throughout the play in the words of the other slaves. Chancy's dark-skinned concubine, Deal, describes Heaven as "[a] world without white folk" (79). What makes Deal's comment even more provocative is her preceding remark, which gives rise to her definition of Heaven. In relation to "white folk," in particular White men, Deal says, "They take communion in the mornin;/ They take us to bed in the evenin'" (79). While Deal's comment exposes the hypocrisy of good Christian "white folk," it also points to Clarke's use of "Heaven" as a sexual metaphor. For example, as Chancy attempts to seduce his daughter, he is overwhelmed by his own lust. Burying his face in Beatrice's hair, Heaven, according to Chancy, becomes the smell of "crème-neige or opoponax" (85). And as he violently pulls Beatrice close to him, by her hair, Heaven is redefined and re-located inside the physical body of his sixteen-year-old daughter. In a frenzy of lust, he moans:

Your hair's dark perfume, pungent like sex
That Jerusalem of orgasm, frames luscious
Sixteen-year-old munificence.

I'll not wound that skin moister than felt,
That panics me with a sweetness like stars
Your lips'll open up Heaven for me (85).

While Chancy eventually forces his way into Heaven, *into* Beatrice, it appears that his daughter is not his only salvation. When Deal asks Dumas "Why is it always the hated who must love?" Dumas replies, "In white churches, they soil the bread,/ Turn wine to piss, and shit on us/ As we toss in beds of torn gospels" (99). To Dumas' statement, Chancy's sex slave responds quick and hard: "The gospel be the view between our legs" (99).

The subject of rape is a theme that permeates Clarke's play. While the violence perpetrated against the bodies of Black women may seem gratuitous, the following comments reveal that Clarke's work speaks to the everyday realities of life on the slave plantation:

Rape was a fact of life on the plantations. At any time and in any place, female slaves were subject to the drunken or abusive sexual advances of a master, an overseer, a neighbor, or a master's son. Few Black women reached the age of *sixteen* without having been molested by a White male. The African women's dark skin seemed to have a profound effect on the White man's psyche, and many White men longed to escape the suffocating effects of a Christian ethic that equated sex with sin.

In some parts of the South mulattoes were actually bred and sold for huge profit on the female slave market. Pretty quadroons (one-quarter Black) and exotic octoroons (one-eighth Black) were in particularly high demand. Light-skinned beauties, called "fancy girls," were auctioned at "quadroon balls"...[where] a respectable White gentleman might buy a concubine, and when he tired of her, six months or so later, he might get himself another one. If he found one he liked, he might keep her for life. (Russell 18 *my italics*)

Throughout the drama, we are reminded of the value of Beatrice. Before Beatrice returns to *Paradise* from the convent, Peacock suggests that Chancy sell his sixteen-year-old daughter, but Chancy refuses saying, "She's too expensive to waste. I'll graft her/ On some slavery-endorsing Tory/ To fat my interests in the Assembly" (28). Then, when Chancy learns of Beatrice's love for Lead, he flies into a rage shouting, "My daughter

can't love some bull-thighed nigger!" (55) It is at this point that one of Chancy's guests, the Hangman, also described as "a poet," jumps at the chance to buy Beatrice: he says, "Peace, Chancy. She's yours to sell at market./ That's stock I'll trade for. Where's my wallet?" (55)

Another man who sees value in Beatrice, perhaps the most glaring hypocrite in *Paradise*, is the Rev. Ezra Love Peacock, Chancy's friend and confidant who is provocatively described by Clarke as "an undertaker" (10). Early on in the play, Peacock appears to be the moral voice in *Paradise*, the voice of Christian values, a good man who believes that "Negroes are still God's loved children" (26). But during a private dinner with Chancy, a decadent meal of dove filet and Marsala wine, it becomes apparent that the Rev. Peacock preaches from both sides of his mouth, and it is Chancy who continually calls-out Peacock as a hypocrite. For example, when Deal serves both men dove filet, Peacock quickly snaps, "I shan't eat the chopped-up doves stuffed in that pastry." But just before the good reverend "takes a quick bite, then another," Chancy replies, "Your faith is just piecrust. It wants filling" (25).

When Peacock asks, "Aren't we just leeches swollen by slaves' blood?" Chancy implores the Reverend to "[i]gnore these agricultural niggers...[and]/ [d]rink up slavery's luxuries" (25). Peacock replies, "Chancy, I shouldn't toast their oppression" (25). While it seems, from his response, that Peacock is struggling with the moral issues around slavery, the exploitation of human beings for economic wealth, we learn in the following exchange that Peacock is not the moral man he *appears* to be:

Peacock: I look upon slavery as I do upon venom.
I don't want to trample on Christ's body.

Chancy: Free nigras crimp in sick'ning caves
And grub off salt and greens and muck.
Survey my servants, plump as monks.
Yes, they break tools, steal, lie, and flee,
But they're dumb-faced, childish cattle
That needs unflinching mastery.

Peacock: Chancy, the Bishop seeks
But the look of freedom. Free
Your slaves, then work them
At a cheaper cost. Appearances
Are made to deceive. (25-26)

Peacock represents the moral, ethical voice of the Christian Church, a church that historically legitimized the African slave trade, but it becomes evident throughout the play that for Peacock, who enjoys the fruits of slavery as he loathes them, morality is a performance. And, ironically, it is Chancy, the personification of all that is immoral and evil, who exposes the Rev. Peacock's facade and the hypocrisy of the Church, for when Peacock argues "[s]lavery shackles whites to blackest crimes," Chancy replies, "[s]o does rum. So does love. So does the church" (26). Throughout the play we watch Chancy *fall* and give in to his alcoholic desire for his innocent daughter. But we learn early on that Peacock also harbours a secret lust for the body of Beatrice, and once again it is Chancy who exposes Peacock, this time his passion for the flesh. When Peacock offers to buy Beatrice, Chancy replies, "*Oui, mon hypocrite lecher, mon Salammbo, mon friar!* You are chaste, I think, Peacock, as a whore" (28).

Paradise for the master is a site that bears fleshy fruit and ripe offerings of sexual gratification. But, for Beatrice and Deal, *Paradise* is anything but a safe haven. It is a site of predatory violence, where White Christian hypocrisy plays itself out in the form of latent desire for and sexual transgression against the bodies of Black women.

While Clarke's fictional *Paradise* works to affirm the institution of Canadian slavery as a fact and *not* a fiction, we can see, at this point in the discussion, how it calls into question the treatment of slaves in Canada. While Dumas' refusal to be "commoditized to Mississippi,/ where whippings get doled out like candy" (16) suggests that life for a slave in Canada was preferred over life in the American South, the abusive treatment of the slaves, especially the slave women, in *Paradise* suggests that life on the Canadian plantation was anything but pastoral.

In this story of slave life in Canada, Black men and women are sexually violated, beaten, whipped and tortured. For example, Chancy has a crucifix branded into Lead's chest, while Beatrice is whipped to the point where her "back's as raw as beef" (78). Though Chancy does not directly administer whippings to his slaves, it is his son/slave and overseer, Dice, who "whip writes--fiery ink--across [their] backs" (78). Not only does Chancy torture his slaves, in a rage, he punches his wife Lustra in the mouth, leaving a "wet rose" (58) on her face. While Chancy is often referred to as "the Father,"

the keeper of *Paradise*, the creator of Beatrice, “[his] daughter, in whom [he is] well pleased” (52), it seems that many of his God-like qualities are non-existent. He may be all-powerful, but he is neither loving nor forgiving. It is for this reason that he is described as “a warren of Sade, Machiavelli and deceit” (23).

Now, at this point, someone informed by mainstream readings of the African-Canadian experience might argue that Chancy's behaviour befits the fact that he is American, a Loyalist living in Canada, that he has merely brought his evil ways North. This kind of thinking leads one to believe that slave holders from the US were the only White people in Canada perpetrating violence against the bodies of slaves, and it is this kind of thinking that historically lets White Canadians, morally and ethically, ‘off the hook.’ But the enslavement of Blacks in Canada did not begin with the Loyalist exodus from the American South. According to several Black and non-Black historians (Walker, Pachai, Alexander, Glaze and Winks) Black slavery in Canada begins in 1628 with the arrival of the boy who would be baptized “Oliver Le Jeune.” But within this discussion of slavery in Canada, it is important to note that First Nations’ slavery pre-dates the European point of contact. Blacks were *not* the first slaves in Canada, nor were they the first group in Canada to be enslaved by Europeans. In *Beneath the Clouds of the Promised Land*, Bridglal Pachai writes:

The Portuguese explorers who touched the shores of the Atlantic maritime regions enslaved the Amerindians who were unlucky enough to be captured. One such explorer enslaved fifty such men and women in 1501. The French who occupied the Acadia and Quebec settlements about a hundred years later followed this practice. Thus the practice of taking persons in slavery in parts of Canada goes back to as early as the sixteenth century. (30)

On the subject of Black slavery, Pachai states that “Canada lacked the economic base upon which slavery could flourish,” “[s]lavery in Canada had all the traits associated with the de-humanizing treatment meted out to human beings in bondage” (33). In agreement with Pachai, Clarke recognizes that “slavery in Eastern Canada (including Ontario) was a miniscule economic activity in comparison with the far more lucrative enterprise in the southern states,” but he argues that “slavery is slavery, and the black

slaves in what is now Canada felt every bit as oppressed as their cousins in the United States, the Caribbean and South America" (8).

It is this, the oppressive, dehumanizing treatment of human beings, which Clarke demands his audience, men, women, Black and non-Black, bear witness to. While *Beatrice Chancy* is a "work of imagination" (8), its real world audience is forced to watch Francis Chancy, the symbol of White patriarchal authority, assert his power over the bodies and minds of everyone—Black and White—around him. While he manipulates Peacock and placates the Church with the material luxuries of slavery, he exploits and abuses the Black men (from Dice to Dumas) who work his land and earn his money; and while he rapes, violates, and impregnates Black women, he rejects his barren wife, reconsidering a return to their matrimonial bed only after he has laid a wet rose on her mouth.

Through the characters of Francis Chancy and Rev. Peacock, both completely absent of redemptive qualities, White authority is defined as a tyrannical and destructive force. Ultimately, Clarke offers no easy outs for his audience(s). White Canadians are *forced* to examine and question their understanding of Black history and Colonial power, to re-visit their history books, and contemplate their place within Canada's racist political structures. As for Blacks and other non-White Canadians, Clarke's work does not allow for a complacent reading of Whites-only racism. As we will see, Blacks are forced to examine issues around skin-colour and social privilege and the possibilities of their own intra-racial discriminatory practices.

Blackening the narrative: a discussion of slavery and Black diversity

"What is a Negro?"

I saw plenty of men and women who were unquestionably Negroes, Negroes in physical characteristic, black of countenance with thick lips and kinky hair, but I also met men and women as white as I am, whose assertion that they were really Negroes I accepted in defiance of the evidence of my own senses. I have seen blue-eyed Negroes and golden-haired Negroes; one Negro girl I met had an abundance of soft straight red hair. I have seen Negroes I could not easily distinguish from the Jewish or French types; I once talked with a man I took at first to be a Chinaman but who told me he was a Negro. And I have met several people, passing everywhere for white, who, I knew, had Negro blood. Nothing, indeed, is more difficult to define than this curious physical colour line in the individual human being.⁶

While Clarke's *Paradise* works to subvert the mainstream notion of White Canadian benevolence, it also subverts the mainstream myth that *all* Blacks in Canada, slave and free, were discontented Americans. In effect, Clarke's *Paradise* undermines the contemporary Canadian mainstream notion that all Blacks in Canada are the same. Clarke's *Paradise* resists homogeneity: it is a site of Black diversity, which speaks to the differences *within* blackness. For example, while most of the slaves in *Paradise* are described as "African-American" (which for Clarke means Blacks from anywhere in the Americas), we are told by Deal that Beatrice's mother was from Africa. In the following excerpt, Deal remembers "Bee's ma":

Her name was Mafa. Thefted from Guinea,
She washed ashore when that slaver, Fortune,
Splintered off Peggy's crushing Cove, sinking
Three hundred Africans. Bought as bruised goods
By Massa, next seven years his forced wife,
She died when I was seven, Bee was four,
And she was herself just twenty-one years. (17)

Though Beatrice's mother is not present in the drama, her presence, her history, is integral to our understanding of the real world fact that Canada was a destination at the "Other" end of the Middle Passage. Slave ships did land on Canadian shores, even though most Black slaves arrived in Canada from the US or the Caribbean "after seasoning."

While Clarke's *Paradise* informs us that Blacks came to Canada from sites other than the US, it also addresses the issue of difference within the "African-American" community. In fact, Clarke's *Paradise* is a site where race and identity formation are called into question; while *Beatrice Chancy* asks loudly "what does it means to be Black?" it challenges its audiences to examine prescribed definitions of race.

In her book, *Dislocating the Color Line: Identity, Hybridity, and Singularity in African-American Literature* (1997), Samira Kawash examines the history of the colour line in America, through the narrative writings of African-Americans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Her work argues "that throughout this history, the color line has not functioned simply to name biological or cultural differences, but more important, it

has served as a principle of division, classification, and order. In this way, the color line marks the inseparability of knowledge and power in a racially demarcated society" (cover, editor's note).

Using Sawash's arguments as point of departure, I would like to shift this discussion to an examination of how race works within the context of the Canadian mainstream in relation to the representation of Black Canadians, and then extend that discussion into an analysis of color lines and racial divisions as they relate to power relationships within the context of *Beatrice Chancy*.

To begin, Kawash states: "...the authority of scientific knowledge to uphold the certainty of racial difference is both powerful and fragile; the power of this knowledge will remain invisible and unquestioned only so long as body, law and perception all fit neatly together" (Sawash, 129). Grounded in Michel Foucault's idea that "power is not simply the force wielded by some over others...[but is] deployed through and in terms of the production of the order of the world as knowledge" (Sawash, 129), Sawash's argument opens up a space for a discussion of the way representations of Black people within the mainstream reflect social/power divisions in Canadian society. As was mentioned earlier, within the Canadian mainstream, blackness most often appears homogenized and static. As a form of racial knowledge, this kind of representation, when continually reproduced, often goes unquestioned by the mainstream and therefore unchallenged because nothing new or different in terms of racial knowledge is being produced. Blackness, therefore, appears fixed, unchanging, knowable and, thus, *controllable*. Ultimately, these stock representations of blackness, as a visibly known scientific/biological fact, reflect the power that is exercised by White society over the representation of Black Canadians. In effect, one could argue that the White Canadian publishing institution constructs and produces the kind of Black people it *wants* to see, or as Marlene Nourbese Philip suggests, the kinds of Black people Canadian publishing thinks White audiences will pay to see. This power relationship, characterized by social division, is defined by a color line, one that is dependent on the knowability of blackness and whiteness.

If we who live in a White supremacist culture produce "new" kinds of racial knowledge that ultimately define blackness as varied, diverse and unknowable, *race*

quickly becomes a cultural fiction. In a hierarchical society where social order is based on fixed racial categories and the indisputable evidence of racial difference, this kind of racial knowledge is *seen* as a threat to existing social structures and White authority. For a Canadian mainstream audience, this kind of racial knowledge—the *unknowability* of race—may prove quite unsettling, for if one cannot *know* blackness, how can one be so sure of one's own whiteness? For *whiteness* is

(white \ 'hwit \ *adj* whit-er; whit-est

1: free from color **2**: of the color of new snow or milk; *esp*: of the color white **3**: light or pallid in color <lips ~with fear> **4**: SILVERY; *also*: made of silver **5**: of, relating to, or being a member of a group or race characterized by light-colored skin **6**: free from spot or blemish: PURE, INNOCENT **7**: BLANK <~space in printed matter> **8**: not intended to harm <a ~ lie> **9**: wearing white <~ friars > **10**: SNOWY <~Christmas> **11**: ARDENT, PASSIONATE <~ fury> **12**: conservative or reactionary in politics
white *n* **1**: the color of maximal lightness that characterizes objects which both reflect and transmit light: the opposite of BLACK **2**: a white or light-colored part or thing <the ~ of an egg>; *also, pl*: white garments **3**: the light-colored pieces in a 2-handed board game; *also*; the person by whom these are played **4**: one that is or approaches the color white **5**: a member of a light skinned race **6**: a member of a conservative or a reactionary political group)⁷ not always so sure of

itself.

Samira Kawash argues that “[t]he modern epistemology of race hinges on the relation between visibility and truth.” She states:

Common sense decrees that the phenotypical differences we associate with different races are a physical fact; and while we may disagree about the significance of this fact (for example, whether it has cultural, medical, or psychological circumstances), the fact itself, the visible and therefore, it would seem, undeniable differences between black and white, continues to function invariably as the basis of any claim to racial knowledge. But can we take that visibility so much for granted? (129)

Can we take that visibility so much for granted? I believe this is a fitting question to bring to this analysis of *Beatrice Chancy*, especially when it is viewed in light of the following comment: "What is whiteness without blackness?/ How can we be beautiful, free/ Virtuous, holy, pure, *chosen*,/ If slaves be not our opposites?" (Clarke, 26) If we take a closer look at Chancy's definition of race, we can see that he is a man slightly ahead of his time. While this drama takes place in 1801, Chancy's thoughts reflect the West's nineteenth century view on race that espoused human difference and "engendered a theory and practice of human inequality" (Young, 92). According to Robert Young in *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (1995), the historian can detect a "gradual shift" from the eighteenth century Enlightenment ideas of universalism to nineteenth century notions of human inequality. He says this shift in ideology "was doubtless in part the product of economic self interest: no one bothered too much about the differences between races until it was to the West's economic advantage to profit from slavery or defend it against the Abolitionists" (92). Ultimately, Chancy's binary definitions of race, all culturally, politically, scientifically and socially constructed, imply that racial signs can be seen, but Clarke's work challenges that idea. For *Paradise* not only asks the question, *Can we take that visibility so much for granted?*—it begs it.

Unlike the mainstream representation of the 'Canadian haven,' which is primarily defined through fixed dualities (black/white, North/South, good/evil), Clarke's *Paradise* is a complex site that challenges prescribed racial categories and the knowability of race. In *Paradise* race can be viewed in multiple ways from multiple perspectives. While race, in terms of Black and White, is seen as biological, as behavioral, as performance, *and* as choice, it is above all exposed as artificial, a construction that is always undermined by its own instability.

To begin, there are White people and Black people in *Paradise*. While Chancy, his wife Lustra, and Rev. Peacock represent White folk, Moses, Lead, Deal, and Dumas represent Black folk. Keeping Sawash's argument about the knowability of race in relation to phenotypical difference in mind, we can *see* that the White folks are White, because they share similar characteristics in terms of their skin colour and physical features, and the Black folks are Black, because they share similar characteristics in terms of their skin colour and physical features. Lustra, Chancy's thirty-year-old wife, fair,

delicate and barren, is positioned in opposition to Deal, Chancy's nineteen-year-old concubine, dark, corn-rowed and big-boned; and, Chancy, forty-five and over-dressed, "[v]aunted in a sable hunter's outfit, slashed black hose, a wine-black silk vest, iridescent chamois boots, a broad, shadowing hat, and a gilt-edged, grape-black cloak" (23), is positioned in opposition to Lead's twenty-one-year-old muscled nakedness. If race could be known through phenotypical differences and the signs of social difference, Black and White in *Beatrice Chancy* might simply work as knowable binary opposites—as Francis Chancy would have us believe. But the simplicity stops there, for in this drama, Black and White are never what they appear to be.

Throughout *Beatrice Chancy*, George Elliott Clarke continually turns the master's binary logic *against* him. It is Beatrice, Chancy's mulatto daughter who continually contests all boundaries of racial knowledge. In her chapter entitled "The Epistemology of Race," Sawash takes up a discussion of the "passing body" in African-American literature. On the relationship between the "passing body" and the "mulatto body" Sawash writes:

While the mulatto body challenges the myth of racial purity, the figure of the passing body goes a step further, challenging the stability of racial knowledge and therefore implicitly the stability of the order that has been constructed on that knowledge. The mulatto body transgresses the boundedness of whiteness and blackness, illustrating the arbitrariness of the boundary. But the passing body is even more threatening, putting whiteness, blackness, and boundary--in short, the entire basis of social order--into question. In the figure of the passing body, the signifiers of race are unloosed from their signifieds; the seemingly stable relation between representation and the real collapses, and representation is suddenly dangerous and untrustworthy. (132-3)

Sawash's analysis of the relationship between the mulatto body and the passing body proves useful in this exploration of the body of Beatrice Chancy. To begin, while Beatrice, the child of a Black mother and a White father, is a mulatto figure, she is not a passing figure. She is a light-skinned Black woman, and though her body "illustrat[es] the arbitrariness of the boundary" between Black and White, her body does not completely "unloose" the signifiers of race from their signifieds. It is for this reason that

so much attention is paid to the colour of her "honey-tint," "dusky plum," "gold tint," "coloured," "brown" skin. While much attention is focused on the lightness of Beatrice's skin, we are reminded that "black trumps white always and forever, for a mulatto is a kind of Black person, not a kind of White person" (Gish 265). For example, in a discussion between Peacock and Lustra, the reverend notes that Chancy "loves Beatrice, his daughter, though she's black" (47), and when Lead woos Beatrice he calls her "[his] black woman" (42), and serenades her with the following song:

Black pearl.
You're a dark
Black pearl.
Black strawberry,
Succulent t' th' eye. (43)

While the blackness of Beatrice is well recognized (no one mistakes her for a White girl) her light skin is not always described in eulogistic terms. For example, before Beatrice returns home to *Paradise* from the convent, several of the slaves are concerned that Beatrice may have "forgotten that she's a slave" (18). They fear her heart might be "frostbit" (18). Lead states that "gold-tint Beatrice worr[ies] [his] soul," because "she is half that chalk that dirtied her ma" (19), but Dumas informs us that "[a] white coloured slave can backstab easy,/ But Beatrice be dusky plum--true damson--/ Down to her soul. She be our own daughter" (18).

Ironically, it is Dice, Chancy's son, and Beatrice's half-brother, another mulatto figure, who hurls some of the most damning insults at Beatrice. Enraged by Beatrice's betrayal, her love for Lead and her rejection of his authority, Chancy has his daughter tied up, and he orders Dice to "[q]uilt her until red textures the floor" (71). When Dice complies saying, "I'll handcraft lush, handsome lashings:/ Set blood and tears flying like rain," Beatrice simply responds, "[y]our bone is my bone, your flesh is my flesh" (70). While it appears that her comment is directed at her father, who warns he'll lop off her "cat's tongue," her comment can also be interpreted as being directed at her half-brother, who rails "[w]ho you think you are, actin all mulish?/ You mangy, stubborn, *dust-coloured* bitch!" (70, my italics)

Looking at the differences between Chancy's children, we can see how notions of whiteness and blackness are disrupted and challenged. If whiteness is supposed to be a "good thing," according to Chancy, which can be *seen* in Beatrice's purity and benevolence, then why is Dice so cruel, so evil? Why does he reject blackness and refer to the other slaves as "nigguhs"? Deal calls him "messed-up white trash with a muddy face" (20), and Dumas refers to him as "that lick-spittle Judas" (21). Unlike the love he shows for Beatrice, Chancy shows no love for Dice. He does not acknowledge that Dice is his son, because his heir "must be white and *known* to be white" (28 *my italics*). Ironically, Dice says, "[t]he good that pinks [his] skin wells from the sap/ A White saint pumped into [his] ma's black thighs" (22), but it appears that Dice's cruel behavior, which mirrors Chancy's, is not enough evidence for his whiteness.

So, what are Beatrice and Dice, two mulatto figures, *doing* in Paradise? At this point we can see that these figures speak to the diversity within blackness. Their "mixed" bodies argue that Black people neither look nor act the same, and they disrupt and challenge Chancy's nineteenth century ideas. Not only do they expose the artificiality of "the colour-line" between Black and White--they make it *disappear*. But there is yet another role these mulatto figures *play* in *Paradise*. Both Beatrice and Dice, light-skinned and privileged, open up a space to discuss the "colour lines" that exist between Black folks.

What is the difference between niggers and blacks?

There is no difference, but to the white man there is.

To the white man, the difference is that a 'nigger' is some one who is uneducated, who is inferior, who is dogmatic, who has very, very dark skin, has very kinky or nappy hair... 'Black' is a more sophisticated person, more sophisticated than a 'nigger.' You have more flash because you're light-skinned and you have straight hair and to them you are more beautiful. All they look at is the physical attributes. They don't look at what's inside the mind or the heart.

I've had some people even think that I was white, when I know I don't look white. I know I'm very fair skinned, but you can put a white person next to me and you know that I'm not white. I know that I have gotten jobs because of my physical attributes, which makes me angry sometimes. Because I can go to a job and because I look close to white,

they might give me the job before they would give it to someone like my friend, whose skin is dark and whose hair is a different texture than mine. And if you ask that question to any black person, especially someone who is dark complexioned, she would tell you the same thing⁸

As we watch the eloquent Beatrice arrive home from the convent, elegantly dressed liked a White lady, and as we watch the arrogant Dice abuse and humiliate the other slaves, we can see that Clarke's work speaks to the realities of life on a slave plantation. Everyday, since the early days of Black slavery in America, Black men and women, their bodies burning from a hard day's labour or the overseer's whip were constantly reminded that their bodies were not their own. In her discussion of slavery Sawash states:

Once slavery was firmly entrenched as the basis of economic production in the British colonies (around 1660), the color line became a central feature of its functioning. And in relation to slavery, this color line was always also a property line, the boundary between a whiteness that could own but would never become property and a blackness that was defined in terms of its status as (potential or actual) human property. (viii)

As the colour line distinguished property from its owner, the numbers of light-skinned slaves increased—mulattos, quadroons, octoroons—and another kind of color-line began to form: not one that separated Black and White, but one that separated Black and Black. As light-skinned slaves realized the comforts of the masters' home, dark-skinned slaves remained *outside*. Both dark- and light-skinned slaves learned that whiteness was indeed *desirable*, especially in Black folks:

Coveted indoor assignments, including artisan, driver, valet, seamstress, cook, and housekeeper, were nearly always reserved for mulattoes, while the physically grueling work was typically left to slaves who were dark skinned. Masters considered mulattoes more intelligent and capable than pure Africans, who in turn were thought to be stronger and better able to tolerate the hot sun. As color increasingly divided the slave community, frictions developed in the cabins. Light-skinned slaves returning home from their days in the "big house" imitated the genteel ways of upper class families, and the mulatto offspring of the master often flaunted their education. Many field hands both envied *and* resented the house servants. (Russell 18, my italics)

Though she is sent away to school to learn White ladies' ways, Beatrice does not flaunt her education, nor does she see herself as superior to the other, darker slaves. But Dice, who is given the job as overseer, believes he is superior to the other slaves in *Paradise*, because he is Chancy's son, because he is half White. Though not all slaves consciously subscribed to what's known as the "mulatto hypothesis"—the 19th century idea "that people of mixed White and Black ancestry were more capable or intelligent than those who were pure Black" (Russell 126)—it was common for lighter skinned slaves to place themselves above their darker brothers and sisters. In fact, many dark-skinned slaves simply learned to accept their alleged inferiority as fact and resigned themselves to *their place* at the bottom of the colour scale. While this kind of self-loathing and internalized racism is not evident in any of Chancy's slaves (none of them concedes that they are in fact inferior to Chancy or Dice) the effects of the privileging of whiteness are evident in the hatred that Dice, who has bought into the "mulatto hypothesis," and the other slaves have for each other.

While George Elliott Clarke's *Paradise* can be defined as a site of inter-racial conflict between Blacks and Whites, it can also be defined as a site of intra-racial conflict. At this point, it is important to note that intra-racial colour discrimination was a serious issue on the slave plantation, because it worked to divide Blacks rather than unite them. As long as the slaves were fighting amongst themselves, the master did not have to worry about an uprising. But intra-racial colour discrimination didn't end when slavery was abolished in Canada and the US. As a matter of fact, it continues to separate African-Americans (in Clarke's use of the term)--today.

It is widely understood within the African-American community in the US that light-skinned Blacks are afforded better opportunities for employment or promotion than darker-skinned Blacks. According to Russell, Wilson and Hall, writers of *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans*, the idea behind the current privileging of "whiteness" is that White employers hire light-skinned blacks because they *fit in* better than those with dark skin, because they aren't *so* different (Russell 128). As a result of this discrimination, White employers who favour light-

skinned Blacks breath new life into the "mulatto hypothesis" and re-fuel the anger, pain, and resentment felt by dark-skinned blacks.

"Intraracial color discrimination is an embarrassing and controversial subject for African Americans" (1)—this is the telling first line of *The Color Complex*, an extensive study that examines the myriad issues surrounding colour prejudice within America's Black community. Writers of *The Color Complex* state that many African Americans prefer not to discuss the matter of skin colour bias, especially in "mixed" company, while others contend that—it's history—it no longer exists (1).

Yet beneath a surface appearance of Black solidarity lies a matrix of attitudes about skin color and features in which color, not character, establishes friendships; degree of lightness, not expertise, influences hiring; and complexion, not talent, dictates casting for television and film. In the world of entertainment, a Black superstar has surgically altered his features to the point where he no longer looks Black. Delve a little deeper, and you will find a reservoir of guilt and anger that threatens to overflow, exposing to African Americans the truth—that skin color still matters. (1)

While many Black Americans admit to the reality of the colour complex, they are wary of "airing dirty laundry" publicly, especially in the presence of Whites. After centuries of misrepresentation in the West, Black people who open-up about their own personal, colour issues run the continued risk of being misunderstood by those outside "the Black community." But Russell, Wilson and Hall argue that "ignorance of another's culture only breeds racism," and so they hold that

Whites ought not to be isolated from the concerns of Blacks, especially since they so often have the power to hire, promote, appoint, and elect them. In a multicultural society...justifications for hiding the color complex no longer hold weight. Blacks and Whites regularly attend school together, work in the same offices, and share the same neighbourhoods (3).

Though Canada's Black population is considerably smaller than that of the United States, the colour complex is a real condition that separates Canada's diverse Black communit(ies). While Black Canadian writers discuss racism as a Black/White conflict within Canadian society, they seldom discuss the discrimination that exists among Black peoples. We do not talk about our own self-hatred. While I have argued for more

detailed and complex readings of African-Canadians within the mainstream, it must be noted that there is a cost to this kind of representation, for one of the benefits of the homogenous representation of Black Canadians is that we don't have to see ourselves and talk about ourselves in terms of our differences, in terms of our prejudices towards one another. On the one hand we may argue for more accurate representation in the Canadian mainstream, but do we really want to *go there*? For, it seems that once we start *seeing* accurate representations of Black folks in our (hi)story books—all Hell might break loose. What will happen when White children bring home their historically accurate Canadian history books and ask their moms and dads why some “Freedom Seekers” are dark and others *look* White? Is this a kind of history White Canadians want to read? And, if accurate or truthful representation in the White mainstream is what Black Canadians are calling for, will we be willing to *look* at our selves, our multi-coloured, native born, Caribbean and African selves? Will we celebrate our diversity or criticize our differences? We won't be able to passively read redemptive, happy-to-be-here-fugitives histories that construct a kind of solidarity among Black folks in Canada that, as Cecil Foster points out, does not exist

The problem of intra-racial color discrimination is *not* overtly addressed or *named* on a wide scale, as an effect of White racism. Black people often talk about White racism, why they hate us, and why we hate them—but Black folks don't talk about why they often hate themselves and each other. As a result of our silence, the majority of Whites in Canada remain ignorant of the long lasting effects of colonialism's colour hierarchy, which positions White at the top and Black at the bottom. At the same time, many Black Canadians (and other non-Whites), from one end of the colour spectrum to the other, continuously attempt to affirm their identities, to position and empower themselves within our racially stratified society, by naming and claiming space within the rankings of the vertical colour scale.

While the colour complex is not overtly discussed by George Elliott Clarke, his opera *Beatrice Chancy* shows us, through the mulatto figures of Beatrice and Dice, that Black self-hatred is learned and exercised by those who buy into the notion of White superiority. While Beatrice has learned White ladies' ways, she continues to love blackness and the Black folks around her. Dice, on the other hand, has learned the ways

of his father and subscribed to notions of White supremacy, for he shows nothing but contempt for the Black folks around him. When Moses tries to reason with Dice saying "Black like us, Dice, can't you back us?" Dice snaps, "I'd hatchet your skulls, sick your blood on weeds," and he punctuates his feelings with the point "[Black slaves] ain't good and [they'll] never be good" (22). Clearly, racial hatred is taught and learned in *Paradise*.

Blackening the narrative: language in the service of resistance

Resistance is clearly evident in the ways that black folks make language perform. Black language not only works to convey and communicate ideas, it also works against the structures of domination by subverting overt meaning in performance. Black folks, then, do not only perform language, but their language is made to perform, to work in the service of revising and altering the wor(l)d. (Walcott, 104)

At this point, I would like to explore the ideas presented by Rinaldo Walcott to see how his words may perform in the service of furthering this discussion of *Beatrice Chancy*. It is clear that Walcott sees language as a "path to agency." It is through language that the Black people can resist oppression and reinvent the world. For George Elliott Clarke, language is also a key to empowerment. Clarke acknowledges that, while Western canonical models may be imposed on him, they belong to him, and he can "make them speak Black English" (Compton, 3). Borrowing from Walcott's scholarship and the works of other Black writers, I will explore some of the ways that Clarke uses language, specifically Black English and White English, in the service of resistance.

Many languages are spoken in *Paradise*. Latin, French, White English and Black English, each language is a reflection of the speaker's knowledge and social position. While language can be inclusive it can be equally exclusive; while it can be liberating, it can be equally oppressive. Walcott states that "language is a key to understanding black 'conditions of servitude and oppression' and black responses to those conditions" (104). With this statement, Walcott opens up a space for a critical discussion of the language of those most oppressed in *Paradise*. The language spoken by Chancy's slaves can be seen as a direct reflection of their social conditions. According to Marlene Nourbese Philip, "[t]he havoc that the African wreaked upon English language is, in fact, the metaphorical

equivalent of the havoc that coming to the New World represented for the African" (18). Broken, fractured and fragmented, the slaves' English mirrors their history of rupture and relocation. This point is evident in the song that opens Clarke's opera:

Slaves: Massa Winter
 Be dyin now—
 Our icy chains
 Will be no mo
 O Sweet Jesus,
 Won't we be free?
 O King Jesus,
 Slay Slavery! (12)

But while the language of slaves *appears* undeveloped and perhaps childlike, it is actually a complex language of signs of codes that can be used to subvert the authority of those who merely read it as simple. Throughout Clarke's drama, we see Chancy's slaves use their language to gain empowerment and to undermine the authority of their master, who sees them as nothing more than "dumb-faced, childish cattle/ That need unflinching mastery" (26). For example, after telling Dumas to "warble," Chancy watches his slave "jig clownishly" and attributes Dumas' behavior to his childish nature. Chancy informs Peacock that he won Dumas while "jousting at chess" in New Orleans, stating "He'd learned his English in a whorehouse—/ Like some King George parrot" (27). The fact that Dumas performs for Chancy on demand is met with resistance by Lead. But in the following scene, we can see that Dumas is actually the wise fool in this tragedy.

Lead: Dumas, why you always bray like pentecostals?

Deal: Too much thinkin, not enough—ah—lovin.

Moses: No, he be supplely subtle and sly.
 He grins at Massa, jigs when he fiddles.

Dumas: That's so Chancy won't wallop this bookish
 Negro. I'd sooner be comedic than
 Commoditized to Mississippi,
 Where whipping get doled out just like candy.

Moses: That's right: Play foolhardy, happy, banjo
 Negroes, then pick up knives, and cut and stab. (16)

Young Lead reads Dumas' playful performances as a sign of Dumas' willingness to submit to Chancy's authority. It is Moses who informs Lead that he has misread Dumas' behavior. In decoding Dumas' performance, Moses informs Lead that Dumas' performance *is* actually a performance, that his foolish jiggling is actually a sign of resistance. In giving Chancy what he wants, Dumas ultimately gets what he wants: he avoids being whipped or sold down South.

In "The Blackness of Blackness: a critique of the sign and the Signifying Monkey," Henry Louis Gates, Jr. examines the concept of signification, a "neologism in the Western tradition [which] is a homonym of a term in the black vernacular tradition that is approximately two centuries old" (Gates 285).

In his well-known work, Gates introduces his readers to black mythology's archetypal signifier, the Signifying Monkey, the trickster figure "who dwells at the margins of discourse, ever punning, ever troping, ever embodying the ambiguities of language" (286). Though the word signifying shares some connotations with the standard English-language word, Gates makes it clear that the word has its own meanings within Black discourse:

...it certainly refers to the trickster's ability to talk with great innuendo, to carp, cajole, needle, and lie. It can mean in other instances the propensity to talk around a subject, never quite coming to the point. It can mean making fun of a person or situation. Also it can denote speaking with the hands and eyes, and in this respect encompasses a whole complex of expressions and gestures. (Abrahams in Gates 288)

or

The Black concept of *signifying* incorporates essentially a folk notion that dictionary entries for words are not always sufficient for interpreting meanings or messages, or that meaning goes beyond such interpretations. Complimentary remarks may be delivered in a left-handed fashion. A particular utterance may be an insult in one context and not another. What intends to be informative may intend to be persuasive. The hearer is thus constrained to attend to all potential meaning carrying symbolic systems in speech events—the total universe of discourse. (Mitchell-Kernan in Gates 289)

All of these definitions reveal an important point about signifyin(g): one does not signify something; rather, one signifies in *some way* (288). From this discussion we can see that Dumas, who is at once the seer and the clown, is the trickster figure who fools Chancy by

playing the fool. "Supplely subtle and sly," Dumas grins at Chancy and "jigs when he fiddles" for the sole purpose of survival (16).

Dumas' signifyin(g) practices are evident throughout Clarke's play. Gates notes that "trickster figures...are primarily *mediators*: as tricksters they are mediators and their mediations are tricks" (286). It is clear that Dumas serves as the mediator in *Beatrice Chancy*, as he occupies the space between the slave quarters and the 'big house,' and much like a Shakespearean fool, he bridges the space between stage and audience. Perhaps this role is made visible through the lyrics of his songs. When Dumas performs for Chancy he sings the following:

Grasshopper settin on a sweet p'tato vine
Sweet p'tato vine, sweet p'tato vine
Turkey gobbler snuck up right behin,
Snapped im off a sweet p'tato vine. (27)

But later on we, the audience, hear him singing the following off-stage:

Beatrice is pure song,
So elegantly spoken,
A philosophy shaken
Into a new language,
Demanding new lips
And a new heart,
To speak her for who she is. (30)

Ultimately, Dumas must sing this song off-stage, away from Chancy for he will not appear to be who he is supposed to be. While the first song reveals Dumas the parrot, the second reveals Dumas the poet. While Dumas mediates the space between Black English and White English, he informs Clarke's audience of the complexity of a Black language that only appears to be simplistic.

It can be argued that language in *Beatrice Chancy* is in one way or another used in the service of destabilizing race. For example, Dumas performs Black English for Chancy, because he must. Who he appears to be for Chancy is more important in many ways than who he is. His race is performed in accordance with the master's expectations. So while he plays "dumb-faced" (26) for Chancy, performs the role of a Black man, his subversive behavior suggests he has the intelligence that Chancy would attribute to a White man. So, in effect, Dumas is a Black man, acting like a Black man, *acting* like a

White man. Ultimately, as it is implied in the line that foreshadows Chancy's brutal murder, "That's right: Play foolhardy, happy, banjo/ Negroes, then pick up knives, and cut and stab" (16), Black language works in the service of resisting the master.

Through an analysis of Beatrice and her use of White English, we can see that her language, the language of her master, is also used to subvert White authority. Beatrice's mixed body is a site of controversy: it is at once both Black and White, privileged and discounted, repulsed and desired. In the end, there is no doubt that she *looks* Black. But while Clarke takes up the argument that racial knowledge is located in physical features and bodily signs, he also argues that racial knowledge is located in identifiable behavioural qualities or traits. Race is not just what you look like, it's what you *do*.

Through the character of Beatrice, Clarke argues that one can, at once, look Black and *act* White. Though Beatrice wears brown skin, she is sent away to a convent to learn *how* to act like a White woman. When Beatrice returns to *Paradise*, she is dressed elegantly, with Bible in hand, like a lady, "a lucent crucifix bless[ing] her silk lace gown of pleached gold and silver" (31). And when she speaks, we see that her eloquent language reflects her education and her White stepmother's influence. Upon her return, Lustra welcomes her daughter saying, "Your Bible and blossoms will perfume our bedroom./ And your speech is perfumed like a lady's" (31). The fact that Beatrice looks Black yet *acts* White, further adds to the complexity of the site that is the body of Beatrice.

To add yet another layer to the *mix*, we must look closer at Beatrice, the lady, whose "pride is steel, unflinching, a material hostile to slavery" (31). In the following excerpt from a discussion between Lustra and Beatrice, we can see how Beatrice's language embodies whiteness and blackness at once:

Lustra: Honor thy name, Beatrice, and live happy.

Beatrice: And forget my folk sweat day-long in fields?

Lustra: Why should you worry about slavery?

Beatrice: Nuns tore Exodus from our books; they feared
Moses speaks satanic as Robespierre.
Slavery bedevils and chains our Christ. (32)

From this exchange it is evident that the language of Beatrice reflects her hybridity. It is, in a sense, performing two roles: whiteness is inscribed in her language; blackness is inscribe in its meaning. Her education gives rise to her rebellion. Keeping Walcott's statement in mind, we can see how George Elliott Clarke makes language perform. In the case of Beatrice, her language is always *doing* two things at once, serving the master and the slave. Juxtaposed with the language of the other slaves, Beatrice's English clearly reflects her privilege. But when Beatrice is betrayed by Chancy, the line between daughter and slave becomes clearly demarcated, and it is evidenced in Beatrice's language. At the pivotal moment when she chooses to *act* and murder her master, Beatrice cries "Slave days is over!" (126)

Another Black woman whose language is always doing two things at once is Canadian poet Carol Tremain. At this point, I would like to shift this discussion to an analysis of Tremain's work entitled "What's in a Name?" and to further explore the subject of performative language and its relation to race, gender and class issues. Like Clarke, Carol Tremain is a Native born Black Canadian, and, like Clarke, Tremain finds herself writing *against* White patriarchal authority, within the first anthology of Black Canadian poetry entitled *Canada in Us Now*.

Canada in Us Now was published in 1976, on the heels of "civil rights," in the midst of Black Power, and is said, by editor Harold Head, to be "representative of the collective consciousness of people in the act of liberating themselves (and us) from a legacy which denied their humanity and heaped scorn on the culture of colonial peoples" (Head 7). A venue for early works by now well respected writers Dionne Brand and Austin Clarke, *Canada in Us Now* hosts a group of Black poets "from diverse national backgrounds...confronted with an artistic sensibility that assumes the artist is responsible not only for documenting and interpreting cultural experience, but also projecting and expanding the soul of his [or her] people" (8). In the book's introduction, Head explains the workings of the "Black artist as liberator," one who "does not merely reproduce reality" but goes through a structuring process, "arranges, orders, selects" information that gains him or her "a certain insight" into the work; a poet himself, he states, "we give

expression to the plight of our peoples, yet we are objective enough, in the true sense, not to fall prey to the 'empty patterns of intellectual gentility and individualism'" (9).

Keeping Head's analysis in mind, "Let me introduce you to the intricate ramifications of pigmentation/ As it specifically applies to the defining principles of social status" (Appendix 1, Tremaine, 2-3). In her poem entitled "What's in a Name?" Carol Tremaine presents us with a narrator who directs our attention to "the serious students of the semantics of social structuring" (6) and discusses "the nomenclature of racial classification according to the colour scheme of the physiognomy" (5):

The pigmentation bureaucracy conceived through miscegenation,
illegitimacy and illegality
Has been efficiently departmentalized into definite categories
By racist misanthropes, whitewashed Blacks, ignoramuses, and the
cultural confusion of liberation.

Negro, yellow, mulatto, Black
High, clear, coloured or fair:
Which has the most status in fact? (7-12)

"What's in a Name" exposes the illusory nature of the colour scale, reminding *all* of us that our disparate skin tones, "Negro, yellow, mulatto, Black/ High, clear, coloured or fair," do not *really* determine our social positions in White society. In fact, the poem's narrator dispels the "mulatto hypothesis," which exists in "the metaphysical realms of sophistry," asserting the idea that in the eyes of white racism, we are all "Niggers"—a position that "has no status at all" (13).

While Tremaine's conscious use of highbrow *English* invokes notions of White, male authority and Western academic learning, it also signifies the warm and sticky irony that runs thick throughout the poem. Instantly, Tremaine, as a writer "schooled in Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Blake, Byron, Shelly, Keats and Browning," (Head 7) asserts her position as an educated, Black woman, while her "philandering" narrator uses the language of *the master* to educate her/his "learned friends" (19) about an intimate issue relating to the construction of Black identities.

The poet's blatant over/use of "big words" begs her readers to examine the politics of her language. Right from the start, the words "fellow philanderers" become

problematic in terms of discerning--*who's talking?* “Fellow” has a variety of meanings: 1 : COMRAD, ASSOCIATE 2 : EQUAL, PEER 3 : one of a pair : MATE 4 : a member of an incorporated literary or scientific society 5 : MAN, BOY 6 : BEAU 7 : a person granted a stipend for advanced study (Merriam-Webster 265). And while “philanderer” defines “a flirt,” which both men and women *can* be, the word is most often associated with men who are “womanizers” or “playboys.” Reading the poem through the gender of the narrator, in relation to the multiple definitions that can be derived from 2 : MIX(ING) the first two words of the poem, immediately leads the reader to some very provocative interpretations of the text.

If the narrator is a woman *flirting* in the “metaphysical realms of sophistry,” Tremaine has *placed* a Black woman within a White male dominated discourse, and—she has armed her with a voice. This subversive act of line-crossing becomes meaningful in different ways. First, the study of metaphysics is most often associated with elitist, White male thinking. Historically, White women and non-White peoples really haven’t had the *time* to ponder the nature of hypotheses that are unable to be empirically tested, *especially* in relation to “sophistry” or fallacious reasoning; as a result, they’ve been left out of the conversation.

By placing a Black woman—she who has historically occupied the *lowest* position on the colour scale of social status—alongside her 1 & 2 : FELLOWS, inside the boundaries of a White 5 : FELLOW dominated discourse, Tremaine *herself* commits a willful act of transgression. She has given us a Black, woman narrator, who is philandering, flirting, acting (*passing*) like an educated White 4 & 7 : FELLOW.

Secondly, by placing a Black woman *inside* the “metaphysical realms of sophistry,” Tremaine *re-replaces* the Black woman within a discourse that has historically focused around her. Remember the “mulatto hypothesis”? While nineteenth century, White male thinkers “concluded” that Blacks infused with White blood were more intelligent and capable than pure Africans, Clarke’s *Beatrice Chancy* shows us that White men thinking with other parts of their anatomies concluded that Black women infused with White blood were indeed more desirable than *pure* White women.

In light of this, we must return to Tremaine’s poem with the opinion that it doesn’t matter if her narrator, the Black woman in the poem, is light-skinned or dark-

skinned, for *all* Black women have suffered violent indignities at the hands of White male metaphysics. By *re*-placing the Black woman at the center of this White male-dominated discourse, Tremaine gives her narrator (and ultimately herself) the opportunity, the space, to talk-back and *back-talk* to her 3 & 6 : FELLOW/oppressor.

Now, there is a distinct possibility that Tremaine's narrator is a man. As I mentioned earlier, the word philanderer is most often used in accordance with playboys or "womanizing" men, it's meaning draped with a veil of doubt and dishonesty. If we *see* the narrator as a man, suddenly, we are reading a *different* poem, one written by a learned Black woman appropriating the voice of a learned Black man appropriating the language of White elitism and placing himself within a White male discourse. If her narrator *is* a man, Carol Tremaine the poet and her narrator are trespassing over multiple colour lines *and* gender lines outside and inside the text: as Tremaine assumes a Black male voice in a White male discourse, she in effect woman-izes a man into being, constructs—a *lady's* man. Tremaine is in effect philandering at the same time as she creates her philanderer narrator—she "philanders" him into being.

While keeping the gender of the narrator in mind, we must address the obvious: there is something *too-much* about the narrator's language. While few may speak in this overly academic language—most people, White people, don't. Here, Tremaine's language is the language of parody, of satire—the language of signification. If "What's in a Name" was a television program, the narrator of this poem would instantly become a comedian, a "sit-com" star. Viewers from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds would interpret the blackness of the speaker in light of the whiteness of his/her language and agree that s/he is *acting* White—and indeed s/he is. Ambivalent in its tone (*funny*, yet not) Tremaine's poem is a performance that exposes the superficiality, hypocrisy and absurdity that underlies the White male dominated discourse on race, and the artificiality and instability of prescribed racial categories. The *actor* in the poem is a Black narrator whose ironic tone oozes from the appropriated language of the White intellectual, which is used here to enlighten, to talk *back* and *down* to, those educated, White liberals, who "understand" the plight of Blacks and other marginalized peoples and, at the same time—*just don't get it*.

Alluding *back* to slavery, Tremaine's narrator at once addresses the violent origins of the colour scale, holding White racism (the Francis Chancys and the Reverend Peacocks) responsible for "The pigmentation bureaucracy *conceived* through miscegenation, illegitimacy and illegality" (7) and asserts its present day effects on *all* of the descendants of slavery, the disparately, shaded human beings "efficiently departmentalized into definite categories" (8) located within the sterilized files of our government offices down to the colourful language of our private homes.

While the finger of judgment is pointed first at "racist misanthropes," the White voiced narrator also criticizes those "whitewashed Blacks" (like Dice) who *buy* into the doctrine of White superiority, who try to *act* White, *look* White, *talk* White, who use the discriminating language of the slave-master to situate themselves above other Blacks. Finally, the finger points to those "ignoramuses," who *just don't know any better, because they weren't taught any different*, and the culturally confused, who sustain the language of discrimination, talking about their "Black friends," their "mulatto boyfriends," their "you don't look *that* Black" girlfriends, with the best of intentions. Ultimately, while Tremaine's narrator is performing a lecture to White authority, s/he is in fact lecturing to all of us, holding us *all* accountable for our language, our daily use of discriminating words, our name-calling—and our calling-out.

Keeping in mind that "What's in Name?" was written in the 1970s, we must notice the change in the narrator's voice, as s/he pontificates on the word "Black." Earlier, in the poem, "Black" is placed at the *center* of the words "Negro," "yellow," "mulatto," "High," "clear," "coloured" and "fair." Since these words are being defined as "definite categories" in the colour scale—we must assume that "Black" carries a negative value, that it is derogatory. But just a few lines later, the narrator asks us to "Look at Black...the latest call" (15). We are asked to re-evaluate the meaning of the word—*Black*.

If we attempt to locate this poem historically and geographically, we find it somewhere near Toronto, in the 1970s, a time when the word "Black" was a contested term in relation to issues of African-American identity. In the early part of the 1960s, African-Canadians did not identify themselves as "Black." They preferred to be called "Negroes" or in some cases "coloured" (Winks xv). But the turbulent 60s in America

had a profound effect on the way Black Canadians began to re-define themselves. After Martin Luther King Jr., and the Civil Rights marches on Montgomery and Washington, after the Nation of Islam and Malcolm X, after Vietnam (American's race/class war), and the Black Panther Party—the political climate in the US in the early 70s smacked with assertions of “Black Power” and Black nationalism and Black pride.

Suddenly, in the language of Black activism Black *became* something beautiful and Black skin was no longer seen as a badge of shame. During this revolutionary time in the US, “Black Canadians were not passive observers of...American race relations dramas. Many supported the civil rights movement by becoming directly involved or by sending money in support” (Alexander 209-210). In Canada, groups, such as Nova Scotia's Black United Front (1960), were formed to promote Black pride and help Black Canadians achieve economic, political and social power, but

[t]he success of the black civil rights movement in Canada had much to do with black activists' ability to form alliances with other persecuted populations and an understanding of Canada's immigration needs. They formed “rainbow coalitions,” to use Jesse Jackson's terminology, long before Jackson and the American civil rights movement understood the power of such unions. Without the numbers to effect change themselves, blacks extended the invitation to others. (Alexander 210)

As a result of Black American *and* Black Canadian activism, a new language around Black identity began to permeate Canada's Black communities.

It is a feeling of pride that underlines the voice of Tremaine's narrator who, like Beatrice, *sheds* the highbrow language of the White intelligentsia for the revolutionary language of Black power. Suddenly, Black is *pulled out* from the bottom of the colour scale, from the discriminating language of White racism, and claimed by the narrator; suddenly, Black

(1)black \ 'blak \ *adj* 1 : of the color Black; also : very dark 2 : SWARTHY 3 : of or relating to a group of dark-haired dark-skinned people 4 : NEGRO; also : AFRO-AMERICAN 5 : SOILED, DIRTY 6 : lacking light <~ night> 7 : WICKED, EVIL <~ deeds><~magic> 8 : DISMAL, GLOOMY <a ~ outlook>

9 : SULLEN <a~mood> --**black-ish**
adj –**black-ly** *adv* –**black-ness** *n*
 2**black** *n* 1 : a black pigment or dye;
also : something (as clothing) that is
 black 2 : the color of least lightness
 that characterizes objects which neither
 reflect nor transmit light : the opposite
 of white 3 : a person of a dark-
 skinned race; esp : NEGRO⁹ is what it is *not*:

Black transcends the colour of the skin and status in the social trend
 Black defines a unique experience for the possessors of Soul*
 Black is Beautiful: a proud badge in an awesome power play
 (Tremaine16-18)

Once considered as derogatory as the word “nigger,” *this* Black is different. It is *not* about skin colour or social status, so it rejects the ideology behind all colour lines. It is about the “unique experience” of those who have “Soul”—what Clarence Major, in the *Dictionary of Black Slang*, defines as “‘the heritage that is black’—black authenticity, feeling for one’s roots as demonstrated in black music and literature” (Major in Gates 56). While this is a thin definition of the word, one gets the point that those who do not love blackness do not have Soul. Finally *this* Black is Beautiful.

In *Black Autobiography*, Stephen Butler states,

The main burden of the black writer, regardless of his [or her] class origins, has been to repair the damage inflicted on him by white racism, rend the veil of white definitions that misrepresent him to himself and the world, create a new identity, and turn the light of knowledge on the system that holds him down.(v)

After affirming Black power, Tremaine’s narrator resumes the pose of a White intellectual, and once again the narrator’s identity *shifts* and the performance changes. After the assertions of Black pride, the irony slowly oozing from “my learned friends” is so thick, it can no longer ooze past those “who have so patiently persevered through this philosophical meandering” (19). It is apparent from the narrator’s tone that s/he is signifyin(g) on the “fellow philanderers.”

In “What’s in a Name?” the narrator signifies in several ways. Right from the beginning, the dictionary entries for the first two words of the poem are *not sufficient* for discerning the gender of the narrator, so we are forced to engage with multiple readings

of the text. The parodic overuse of highbrow English becomes absurd, as Tremaine's narrator delivers a lecture full of *left-handed* remarks, talking down, talking back and *back-talking* to White authority—putting those fellows in their place. Also, the constant crossing of gender, racial and class boundaries, proves this narrator an actor, one who performs language, or, as Walcott says, makes language perform “to work in the service of revising and altering the wor(l)d” (Walcott, 104). S/he will not be placed, pinned down and identified within the performance that is this poem; s/he is a revolutionary, one who will activate a *beautiful* Black discourse in the middle of a White racist one. Yes, indeed s/he *is* a trickster.

In challenging White authority, Tremaine asks her readers to look at ourselves and how we choose to construct our identities. She asks us to look at how we position ourselves in society—do we name ourselves or do we allow others to call-out and name us? Finally Tremaine reminds us that gender and racialized identities, like words, are performative, multiple, unstable, ever changing, always becoming and open to negotiation. While they may often be perceived in terms of looks and behavior, they are *always* about choice.

Perhaps this too is the point of *Beatrice Chancy*. As a light-skinned, Black girl, Beatrice has a choice in how she wants to define herself, and right from the beginning of the drama she chooses “[her] folk,” she chooses to *be* Black. Perhaps the question that underlies Clarke's opera is *what does it mean to choose blackness? What does it mean to love blackness?*

Black American scholar bell hooks argues that our fascination with Black self-hatred often silences any constructive discussion about loving blackness. In *Black Looks: race and representation*, she writes:

Most folks in this society do not want to openly admit that “blackness” as sign primarily evokes in the public imagination of whites (and all the other groups who learn that one of the quickest ways to demonstrate one's kinship within a white supremacist order is by sharing racist assumptions) hatred and fear. In a white supremacist context “loving blackness” is rarely a political stance that is reflected in everyday life. When present it is deemed suspect, dangerous and threatening. (10)

In Clarke's play, loving blackness *is* Beatrice's threatening political stance. It seems, in the case of Beatrice, that her decision to choose blackness immediately places her at odds with her father and his authority. Chancy, who *knows* that White is all that is good and right, cannot comprehend why Beatrice would choose to *be* Black and love Lead, especially when she has all the privileges of being White at her disposal. Chancy, his mind caught in a binary trap, cannot understand why beautiful Beatrice would choose to be all that is wrong. In light of his own inability to *see* any value in blackness, Chancy can only view Beatrice's choice as a rejection of whiteness, as an act of political resistance against his authority. Chancy, and the White supremacist order he represents, cannot see loving blackness as anything other than threatening.

So, what is the price of loving blackness? bell hooks asks us to "consider the possibility that to love blackness is dangerous in a white supremacist culture—so threatening, so serious a breach in the fabric of the social order, that death is the punishment" (9). In the following excerpt from *Beatrice Chancy*, the prophetic words of Dumas foreshadow the play's ending:

Loving black smoke and black currants
 Loving blackbirds and black-eyed Susans,
 Loving black sheep and black whiskey,
 Loving black rum and black pepper,
 Loving blackest night and black women
 Loving black black and blackish black,
 Loving...Death grows clearer and clearer. (101)

At the end of this tragedy, we witness the beautiful Beatrice, five months pregnant—hanging by the neck. Ultimately Clarke's work asks us, why did *she* have to die? The most obvious answer to this question is that Beatrice committed an act of murder, the act of patricide. At the climax of his drama, Clarke, with his pen, hands his heroine the knife, and in his own way takes an angry stab at White authority. The brutal nature of the metaphorical rape of Francis Chancy is encapsulated in Lead's language: "Encunted, the dagger fucked his left eye" (129).

Commenting on the fate of Beatrice, Clarke states:

She does take action; it's good action, positive action. At the same time, it results in her own destruction. But sometimes that is necessary if you're going to strike that blow for liberty, independence and freedom. Sometimes you suffer and lose. She's in a situation where she doesn't have any other choice but to act. (Compton, 10).

However, Clarke's reading of Beatrice's death prove problematic for me. While her revenge is justified, it is difficult to see her action as "good." If anything, *Beatrice Chancy* exposes the ambivalence of violence. It is too easy to read the story of Beatrice as a story of oppression and liberation and leave it at that. In the end, Beatrice dies and the slaves are freed, but what about those ex-slaves? And what about the White folks who live with them? History tells us that racism didn't end after emancipation, and that many Blacks, light- and dark-skinned, continued to fight amongst themselves and to hate each other.

It seems to me that Beatrice must die to expose the truth that "Paradise" is a lie. For how can Beatrice describe her Black experience—"To ask for love and be given lye,/ To ask for freedom and be given wounds:/ That is poison; that is treachery" (125)—and live? George Elliott Clark describes Beatrice as "a martyr" (10), so who or what is she dying for? I'd like to think that Beatrice's death kills the illusion of "the Promised Land" and with it the delusion of the haven dweller, the kind of thinking that leads many Canadians to believe that racism is not a problem in Canada today.

Near the end of the play Lustra cries, "What is worse than drama is clarity" (134). "Our Paradise has gone to hell" (142). In my opinion, if Paradise is a violent site of myths, lies and delusions, a place defined by its own boundaries, which includes some and excludes "Others," and if Hell is the place where those myths, lies and delusions are exposed, a boundless site of inclusion, a safe place for a critical discussion of race and racism, then I hope we *all* go to Hell.

Each sentence
 realised or dreamed
 jumps like a pulse with history
 and takes
 a side.

Dionne Brand--*No Language is Neutral*

Conclusion(?): A Haven Dweller's "First-Time" Story

And why did I come to this place?

As the child of a Black mother and a White father, I have always known in one way or another, the difficulties of speaking from the volatile space that lies in between Black and White. When I was eight and growing up in Oshawa, Ontario, a White girl, about my age, with stringy, blonde hair and blue-gray eyes (of course) called me "darkie," and I remember standing there, eyes shocked wide, on the deck of a public swimming pool, immobilized, for a moment, under an August 1975 sun, staring at the black cavity forming in the middle of her front teeth. I remembered what my mom told me to do when mean White kids called me names, so I ignored the girl, *paid her no mind*, and started walking away, my feet slapping heavy on the wet cement. But when the girl stomped up behind me, grabbed tight my arm and growled, "Hey darkie, I'm talking to you," I turned and snapped, "I'm not a darkie!" By this time some other kids, White kids, had gathered around us. They were her friends, and I could see them all staring—at me.

"Well what are you then?" she asked, standing there all sassy-like, hand on hip and foot tapping, and I instinctively said—"I'm White." With that, the girl and all the kids burst out laughing, and, feeling the pressure of being the outsider at the center of

attention, I shouted, "I'm just *tanned* that's all!" And, just for a moment, the laughing stopped...

...Later that night, my mother and I talked about the White girl and what happened at the pool, and when I told her what I'd said about being White and tanned and all, she grew visibly upset, *cut* her eyes hard, sucked her teeth and snapped, "You don't like your Black self to do you, *girl*? Well no matter what you say, you're Black. Don't nobody see a White girl when they see you." And from that day on, I've been *Black*.

There is no possible way that I could have begun to understand the politics behind my eight-year-old words. All I knew then was that I was both Black and White, and, although I didn't articulate it as such, I felt that I had the right to identify myself whichever way I wanted to: I could be Black and White *or* Black or White. I knew that it was *wrong* for the White girl to call me "darkie," but when I was called upon to name my *self*, it never occurred to me to answer *Black*. In my moment of self-defense, somehow I *knew* that blackness couldn't trump dark(ie)ness. I mean, if I'd said I was Black, and acted all proud about it, that sassy girl and her friends might have killed me. I *needed* whiteness. But when I look back, twenty five years later, my mother gone fifteen years now, and remember my mother's reaction, I realize she was not angry at me for using the word "tanned" to defend my White side; she was injured by the way I used it to defend my self *against* my Black side. But I was only eight, and I just didn't know what else to say.

..."Well, if you're so tanned, why's your ass so black?" This is what the girl snapped at me as she swiped her wet hair back off her face, with the back of her hand, and smeared snot across her cheek in the process. I stared at her, her dull yellow bikini, faded and stained with dirt on the ass, and I *knew* I was dealing with trash. I quickly scanned the deck and looked for my mother, who was resting, book in hand, on the other side of the pool. *Just keep your mouth shut, and they'll go away.*

"I said, if you're so tanned, why's your ass so black!" This time she screamed. For some reason, I didn't turn and run to my dark-skinned mother. Instead, I twisted my torso and looked down at my *ass* to find out what all the fuss was about. To my dismay, I

found my brand new pink one-piece crawling up the crack of my behind, revealing a line that clearly separated my dark tan and my *brown* ass.

I felt caught, in a lie. I stood there helpless, staring at my rear end, waiting...waiting for it to turn white. It didn't happen. And they just kept laughing—at me.

The first tears fell hard, no matter how much I tried to hold them back. I instinctively licked them away as they ran down my cheeks, and as the tastes of salt and chlorine mixed acid on my tongue, the words came to me. The words. Those special words parents use during late night fights, when you're supposed to be asleep, and you're not; the words mothers cry when they've had enough and just can't take it anymore. They're the words that get bad kids spanked and sent home from school. The words that get mouths washed out with soap and the backs of legs *cracked!* with wooden spoons.

"FUCK YOU!" I screamed into the dirty girl's face, and, like *that!* eyes and mouths froze wide open, and the laughing stopped. Everyone stared at the girl who stood shocked and silent. As I turned and walked away, she was still, silent. They *worked*. The words always do.

Then out came an ugly scream that started me running, and, before I knew it, the girl and her friends chased me into the pool. Holding my breath somewhere in the back of my throat, I kicked and kicked my beginners legs, until my limbs and my lungs burned, as frantic, outstretched hands fumbled and grabbed at my feet, pulling me back and tugging me down. I lifted my head and opened my mouth to scream, but my mouth and lungs filled up with water...

I was coughing-crying-choking when the lifeguard pulled me out. The only thing that made sense at that moment was the piercing screams of "JESUS! SWEET JESUS!" My mother was coming. Though she seldom went to church, she often called on Jesus when she was really upset.

The guard hauled the rest of the kids out, gagging and spitting. As I tried to catch my breath, I buried my face in my mom's warm, brown belly. The tears came and the snot flowed, and I made a mess all over my mom's tank top. I watched the lifeguard and some concerned adults pat the other kids on their backs. When the lifeguard kneeled down and asked me what happened, all I could do was point at the girl.

"Where's your mother!" my mother screamed into the girl's face which quickly hardened with fear. "Where is she you little *bitch!*"

I remember jello-y thighs thundering down the deck, squashing a pair of dirty yellow thongs that clicked hard against calloused heels. The girl looked terrified. The blonde woman stopped directly in front of her daughter, and, with hand on hip, knee bent and foot tapping, bent over and screamed into the girl's face, "What the FUCK have you done now?" She forgot to ask, what happened?

By this time a crowd of soggy bathing suits had gathered around us. Kids and parents jockeyed for a clear view of the action. It was apparent by her sideways glances that the girl's mother did not appreciate the attention.

"Nevermind," she growled, "just say you're sorry to *them* for Christ's sake."

The girl looked at me and did just that, with a soft tiny voice that in no way resembled the one that assaulted me only minutes earlier. "Now move it, and I'm not kidding!" the mother yelled at her child, while she pointed towards the pool exit. The girl quickly followed her mother's instructions and started to cry as she made her way past the crowd.

We all watched the girl and her mom walk away--the kids, the life guard, my mom and me--and we all watched as the mother brought her fist down hard on the back of her daughter's head. She fell flat, smack onto the concrete. "Sweet Jesus," my mother whispered.

Then we watched the mother drag her screaming child by her skinny arm all the way across the parking lot to their car. It took a few more smacks to encourage the girl into the backseat. And as they drove away, the blonde girl in the dirty, yellow bikini looked out the back window—at me. Her face was red and snotty, like mine.

Notes:

¹ Bibby, Reginald W. *Mosaic Madness: The Poverty and Potential of Life in Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1990), 7. This is an excerpt from a speech by Pierre Elliott Trudeau, whom Bibby refers to as "our premiere spokesman for a multinational Canada."

² According to Peggy Bristow, in the introduction to *We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History*, Mary Ann Shadd was the "first woman publisher and editor of a newspaper in Canada in the 1850s" (4). In *Canada: A People's History*, Gillmor and Turgeon state that Shadd was "the first black woman in North America to found and edit a newspaper, *The Provincial Freeman*, whose motto was 'Self Reliance is the True Road to Freedom'" (264).

³ *Towards Tomorrow: Canada in a Changing World, History*, by Desmond Morton, is listed at the University of British Columbia Education Library, as a text currently studied in grade eleven classrooms.

⁴ Burns, Kevin. *Quill & Quire*. (May 1999, vol 65, no 5), 35. In his article for *Quill & Quire*, Burns states, "Beatrice Chancy defies categorization. On the surface, it's an adaptation of a well-known murder story from 16th-century Rome. In 1598, a young woman named Beatrice Cenci killed her father after he raped her. Subsequently, her story inspired many writers, including Shelley, who in 1819 turned it into a verse drama. In 1837, Stendhal turned the story into fiction, and in 1971, Argentinian composer Alberto Ginastera made it into an opera."

⁵ While my examination of *Beatrice Chancy* primarily reads *Paradise* as a metaphor for the Canadian haven, it is important to note that Clarke's work is informed by the works of many writers who have taken up the subject of "Paradise," including Dante, Milton, Shakespeare, and, most likely, Toni Morrison.

⁶ Baker, Ray Stannard. *Following the Color Line: American Negro Citizenship in the Progressive Era*. (New York: Harper, 1964), 151. Baker's book was originally published in 1908. The preceding quote was taken from a chapter entitled "The Mulatto: The Problem of Race Mixture."

⁷ *Miriam-Webster Dictionary* (New York: Pocket Books, 1974), 796. My first dictionary, a bible of meaning. I still use it. It's coverless and in three pieces, but, compared to recent dictionaries, the words haven't changed much and neither have their meanings.

⁸ Essed, Philomena. *Everyday Racism: Reports from Women of Two Cultures* (Claremont: Hunter, 1990), 185. This quote is taken from the writer's interview with an African-American woman. Essed defines "everyday racism" as "the various types and expressions of racism experienced by ethnic groups in everyday contact with members of the more powerful (white) group. Everyday racism is, thus, racism from the point of view of people of color, defined by those who experience it" (31).

⁹ *Miriam-Webster Dictionary*: 85

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APPENDIX I

What's in a name?

Fellow philanderers in the metaphysical realms of sophistry,
 Let me introduce you to the intricate ramifications of pigmentation
 As it specifically applies to the defining principles of social
 status.

The distinguished significance of this seemingly trivial drivel
 On the nomenclature of racial classification according to the
 color scheme of the physiognomy
 Has somehow escaped the attention of the serious students of
 the semantics of social structuring.

The pigmentation bureaucracy conceived through miscegenation,
 illegitimacy and illegality
 Has been efficiently departmentalized into definite categories
 By racist misanthropes, whitewashed Blacks, ignoramuses, and the
 cultural confusion of liberation.

Negro, yellow, mulatto, Black,
 High. clear, coloured or fair:
 Which has the most status in fact?

Nigger has no status at all;
 Many others are prejudiced and dull;
 Look at Black: it's the latest call.

Black transcends the colour of the skin and status in the social
 trend;
 Black defines a unique experience for the possessors of Soul*
 Black is Beautiful: a proud badge in an awesome power play.

My learned friends, who have so patiently perservered through
 this philosophical meandering,
 Can you *now* perceive the grave importance of epidermical hues
 and
 racial defining,
 Especially as applied to the complicated matter of status in
 social structure.

*I've got a secret,
 It's simply called Soul;
 It's the best weapon yet
 Against the White bigot dole.

Carol Tremaine