

University of Windsor

Scholarship at UWindor

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Theses, Dissertations, and Major Papers

7-7-2020

A Bridge for Change: Four Award-Winning Canadian Novels and Their Engagement with National Discourses (1981-2015)

Umama Jutt
University of Windsor

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd>

Recommended Citation

Jutt, Umama, "A Bridge for Change: Four Award-Winning Canadian Novels and Their Engagement with National Discourses (1981-2015)" (2020). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 8374.
<https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/8374>

This online database contains the full-text of PhD dissertations and Masters' theses of University of Windsor students from 1954 forward. These documents are made available for personal study and research purposes only, in accordance with the Canadian Copyright Act and the Creative Commons license—CC BY-NC-ND (Attribution, Non-Commercial, No Derivative Works). Under this license, works must always be attributed to the copyright holder (original author), cannot be used for any commercial purposes, and may not be altered. Any other use would require the permission of the copyright holder. Students may inquire about withdrawing their dissertation and/or thesis from this database. For additional inquiries, please contact the repository administrator via email (scholarship@uwindsor.ca) or by telephone at 519-253-3000ext. 3208.

A Bridge for Change: Four Award-Winning Canadian Novels and Their Engagement with
National Discourses (1981-2015)

By

Umama Jutt

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Department of English and Creative Writing
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2020

© 2020 Umama Jutt

A Bridge for Change: Four Award-Winning Canadian Novels and Their Engagement with
National Discourses (1981-2015)

by

Umama Jutt

APPROVED BY:

A. Allen
Faculty of Education

S. Holbrook
Department of English and Creative Writing

R. Douglass-Chin, Advisor
Department of English and Creative Writing

April 16, 2020

Declaration of Originality

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication.

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, my thesis does not infringe upon anyone's copyright nor violate any proprietary rights and that any ideas, techniques, quotations, or any other material from the work of other people included in my thesis, published or otherwise, are fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices. Furthermore, to the extent that I have included copyrighted material that surpasses the bounds of fair dealing within the meaning of the Canada Copyright Act, I certify that I have obtained a written permission from the copyright owner(s) to include such material(s) in my thesis and have included copies of such copyright clearances to my appendix.

I declare that this is a true copy of my thesis, including any final revisions, as approved by my thesis committee and the Graduate Studies office, and that this thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

Abstract

Since the Multiculturalism Act of 1971, Canadian literature has resounded with the voices of racially and ethnically marginalized Canadians striving to contribute their own stories and experiences in a country that prides itself on its inclusivity. It is problematic then, when novels that are a part of the Canadian canon or contribute to Canadian cultural capital in some way, offer a narrative that allows integration only to white males. In Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* and Vincent Lam's *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures*, the narratives suggest that whiteness leads to success. Visible minorities in Lam's novel are forced to assimilate to find success. Ondaatje deals with immigration but explores only the issues white immigrants face. He writes an immigrant success story, troubling in its premise that the only way an immigrant can successfully integrate is through their own merit. In *Obasan*, Joy Kogawa critiques this "truth" as she explores the ways in which visible minorities are constantly othered. Kogawa writes of the reality of the Japanese internment during World War II in Canada, and so, she depicts the injustices the Canadian government inflicted on its own citizens. André Alexis's *Fifteen Dogs* is an apologue where he clearly deals with universal issues such as the perils of human consciousness, but the novel is also about race, even though Alexis never addresses this directly. Alexis is subtle in his critique of whiteness, and so, Alexis and Kogawa both critique the reality faced by non-whites in Canada. All four novels contribute to Canadian cultural capital and thus help form Canadian identity. The issues these novels either criticize or unproblematically present all point to the still-thorny dilemma of Canadian identity; is this identity based primarily on an individual's whiteness?

Dedication

To Hala and Faris

I hope none of this will be true of the Canada you grow up in

Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the direct influence of several people. I would like to thank my parents and family for their never-ending support. I would also like to thank Dr. Mark Johnston, Dr. Lorenzo Buj, and Dr. Susan Holbrook for believing in me when I needed the encouragement most.

To Dr. André Narbonne: I find that I can never thank you enough. This entire project came out of our discussions from the first class I took with you, years and years ago. I wish you all the best. And of course, Dr. Richard Douglass-Chin. Thank you for the constant support and for having faith in me. Thank you for being certain that I could do this—especially when I wasn't so sure—and for telling me that my voice needs to be heard.

And finally, Amal, Dana, Linah, and Dalia—the memes help with *everything*. Thank you.

Table of Contents

Declaration of Originality	iii
Abstract	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgments.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1 Joy Kogawa’s <i>Obasan</i>	14
Chapter 2 Michael Ondaatje’s <i>In the Skin of a Lion</i>	35
Chapter 3 Vincent Lam’s <i>Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures</i>	58
Chapter 4 André Alexis’s <i>Fifteen Dogs</i>	85
Conclusion	107
Notes	114
Works Cited	116
Vita Auctoris	121

Introduction

Currently, Canadian literature resounds with the voices of racially and ethnically marginalized Canadians striving to contribute their own stories and experiences in a country that prides itself on its inclusivity. It becomes problematic then, when canonical novels, novels that have either won prizes or in some way contribute to Canadian cultural capital, favour narratives where marginalized characters are forced unproblematically to assimilate. Novels such as Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981), Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987), and Vincent Lam's *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures* (2006) all present problematic issues involving characters who are capable of successfully becoming Canadian only if they have given up their past identities. André Alexis's *Fifteen Dogs* (2015) also follows a similar idea. The novel addresses race but under the guise of being about dogs. The allusions to slavery, though consistent, are subtle. I intend to use these novels, specifically *In the Skin of a Lion* and *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures*, as evidence of the existence of a pattern, investigating how canonical Canadian works, works that contribute to what constructs a Canadian identity, favour a narrative where it is unproblematic that assimilation is possible only for characters who are white males. *Obasan* and *Fifteen Dogs* emphasize that this is a very real issue but depict the narrative as problematic.

In *White Civility* (2006), Daniel Coleman identifies textual worlds as an important means by which "white normativity is purveyed" (3) and notes that Canadian literature's strong history of favouring whiteness exists to this very day. Many novels unproblematically present characters with marginalized identities, specifically immigrants and descendants of immigrants as capable of integrating or assimilating only if they are white males. Coleman emphasizes the continuation of this white-dominant narrative in Canadian literary history, noting that this pattern existed

alongside the presence of “the most nefarious and complex system the world has ever seen for classifying and stratifying humans into a hierarchy of racial types” (13). The fact that this still exists in Canada after what should have been the abolishment of such a system through the Multiculturalism Act of 1971 shows the ways in which important Canadian novels fail to portray and support the inclusivity Canada as a country attempts to project. By carrying Coleman’s ideas into these books that span over the course of more than forty years after 1971, I investigate the ways in which marginalized characters are represented as never Canadian enough. While *Obasan* and *Fifteen Dogs* critique this, *In the Skin of a Lion* and *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures* are both evidence that books that have won prestigious Canadian awards and managed to attach themselves to the very definition of being Canadian Literature offer narratives that give value to this whiteness. The fact that these books are so well-received while unproblematically representing such characters further emphasizes the value placed on such a narrative and illustrates how this ideology contributes to ideas of what it means to be Canadian.

In *Prizing Literature*, Gillian Roberts explores the role of literary prizes in Canada using the idea of hospitality as her framework. Immigrants to Canada begin as guests and upon integrating, become hosts with their own Canadian identity. Roberts focuses on authors with hyphenated identities and uses the four authors she studies to explore the way prizes “[construct] a national literature, and, by implication, the boundaries of the nation itself” (24). One of the authors Roberts studies is Michael Ondaatje for his award-winning novel *The English Patient*, which is a sequel to Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion* that I study here. Since Roberts’s focus is specifically on the author, analysis of the novel is irrelevant for her; instead, it is Ondaatje’s identity that is brought into question. Roberts explores the fact that despite never being a Canadian citizen, Ondaatje is now considered Canadian because of his literary success in the

country's marketplace. He has been allowed to embrace identities of "Canadianness as a personal development, rather than a legal question" (4), allowing him to convert from being a guest to becoming a host, as Roberts theorizes, so he may be considered representative of Canadian culture. This very idea of guests becoming hosts through their own literary success within the country can be used to analyze characters that are presented by authors rather than the authors themselves. In the novels studied here, marginalized characters are able to convert from guests to hosts of the culture they are a part of only if they are white males. This opportunity is never granted to the women who are non-white. The visible difference in these women holds them back, preventing them from becoming a part of Canadian culture, ensuring that they are never seen as being Canadian first, or often, at all. *Fifteen Dogs* further emphasizes this gender imbalance. Every chapter in the book focuses on the male dogs—the females are not given a real voice.

Authors that are able to win awards go on to become capable of winning even more awards. They are given both financial and "cultural" benefits, and their works contribute to Canadian cultural capital. These literary works are given prestige and honour; they may go on to become a part of the canon. If they do not initially have this influence in Canadian society, they still have an opportunity to contribute later on. *In the Skin of a Lion* won no major Canadian award at the time it was written, but in 2002, fifteen years after the book's initial publication, it won the Canada Reads award. In these fifteen years, Ondaatje brought attention to Canada on the global stage. Ondaatje's *The English Patient* won the Booker Prize, drawing attention to this prequel. Roberts notes that Canadians capitalize on novels that have already gotten attention on the international market and as such, the Canadian literary market lags behind with respect to others on the world stage (Roberts 39).

Cultural capital refers to the value given to certain things and so, something that has cultural capital is something that society deems valuable. Books that win awards gain cultural capital because by becoming award-winners, these books are deemed valuable by society. Similarly, whiteness is a form of cultural capital. The books that I study carry and contribute to Canadian cultural capital because they are given the chance to. These books act a certain way, carry on a certain narrative that is not always inclusive, and so, this problematic narrative carries cultural capital as well. The narrative portrayed shows that whiteness makes integration possible, and proves that for visible minorities, integrating is not an option.

Sadiya Ansari argues that to this day, Canada remains a “white settler society.” Despite the narrative of inclusivity the country strives to project as its predominant national discourse, Ansari questions why Canada is “still evaluating ‘minorities’ on the basis of their ability to ‘fit in’ in 2017, a half-century after Pierre Trudeau said ‘there is no such thing as a model or ideal Canadian’” (Ansari). Trudeau’s Multiculturalism Act of 1971 really emerged as more of a “biculturalism,” introduced at the same time that Canada became a bilingual country. Even today, bilingualism is one of the “only legitimate expressions of Canadian identity—despite the fact that there were non-white people here long before the British and French arrived” (Ansari). The fact that Canadianness is exclusive of people of colour is clearly depicted in the way visible minorities are denied the potential of integrating. Ondaatje and Lam depict this unproblematically, while Kogawa and Alexis both critique this troubling reality.

Canada’s multiculturalism is supposed to be integration without demanding assimilation. This is what makes the country a supposed “cultural mosaic” rather than the melting pot that is the United States.¹ Assimilating requires one to give up any previous identity, and forces one to embrace being a Canadian first. Integrating allows the merging of different identities, allowing

one to keep the best or any part of their own culture and still be a Canadian. Integration as a concept is supposed to be something available to all Canadians, an embracing of the best of all the cultural heritages a person carries. The problem is this ideal of integrating is offered only to people who are white and so, can visually assimilate. Whiteness then, is made to be the determining factor of whether or not a person can embrace a Canadian identity. Ansari argues that to white Canadians, “non-white immigrants and their descendants either accept or disturb the status quo—contributing to or shaping Canadian culture seems out to be of the question.” Because of this, non-white Canadians are considered guests, never capable of becoming hosts to the country, despite their citizenship or willingness to assimilate.

Both *Obasan* and *In the Skin of a Lion* were published before the amended 1988 Multiculturalism Act. Prior to this, there was no way to ensure visible minorities specifically were to be treated equally under the law. This time period was the beginning of a legal acceptance of minorities—it was only after this legal act that Canada became a true “multicultural” country. Both of these novels were also published well before the New York terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, which changed the political landscape of Canada as well as America. *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures* and *Fifteen Dogs* were both published post 9/11, at a time when white citizens of the country were more afraid of the “other” than they had been previously, and so, less willing to accept diversity. The period around which *Fifteen Dogs* was published (2015) demonstrated a rise of alt-right groups, hate crimes, and racial injustices, all of which exacerbated feelings of fear felt all over the country.

Marginalized groups within Canada have a tendency to form their own individual communities that are separated from the rest of society.² By choosing to marry someone outside of one’s own community, a person attempts the ultimate act of merging distinct cultures and

ideas. Oppositely, failure to marry outside of this community could be a way to hold on to one's own identity. In the novels I study, in cases where the person or character is a white man, he is able to integrate whether or not he marries within or outside of his immigrant community. On the other hand, when the characters are visible minority women, failure to marry outside their cultural community depicts the ultimate act of resistance against embracing a Canadian identity. In this case, the visible minority woman is never Canadian enough, implying that she deliberately chooses her other identity to be her most important.

In "Making Whiteness and Acting White: The Performativity of Race and Race as Performative," Charlotte Chadderton uses Judith Butler's theories on performativity to explore the ways in which race can also be performative.³ When race is performed, either consciously or unconsciously, visible minorities are further othered by the ways in which they act. Performance can also be used to mimic whiteness. "Acting white" or according to the "dominant norms shape[s] our intelligibility as subjects" (115) and being intelligible then, is accomplished by embracing the conventions of whiteness. Performing whiteness should hypothetically allow a non-white person to better assimilate into the dominant white culture. Chadderton notes that race as performative is "reproduced through various actions, practices and institutional arrangements which disadvantage minority ethnic people, and which ensure the continued privilege of white people" (111). The fact is, even by performing, visible minorities cannot escape their physically different bodies—a fact that further suggests that they cannot blend in, physically or otherwise, to being a (white) Canadian.

In Anne Nakagawa's documentary *Between: Living in the Hyphen* (2005), Fred Wah speaks about the liminal existence of Canadians who live with hyphenated identities. He refers to living in this hyphen or embracing this middle identity as a way to resist assimilation and

embrace ideals of integrating. But I would argue that the reality of this in-between state is rarely addressed, where people are often forced to take one identity or the other. Wah talks about the ideal of living with multiple identities, neglecting the fact that though seemingly perfect, this middle ground is never an option for visible non-whites who are labelled as being outsiders before possibly being considered Canadian. As a man of Chinese and white ancestry himself, Wah's virtually white looks allow him to blend into a mainstream Anglo-Canadian society. Wah's experience with living as a visible minority then, gives him a naïve and optimistic view – he assumes other minorities are able to live in this ideal place, one that does not exist for people who look different from the white norm. Female visible minorities who come as guests to Canada are often required to assimilate and rarely given the option of embracing both identities or becoming hosts to represent Canadian culture to others. The characters focused on here are not even given the option to assimilate or integrate because of their status as visible minorities. In the case of *Fifteen Dogs*, the issue is so disguised it does not even come up. For those who are not dogs, integrating or becoming hosts would allow them to hold on to other identities, but this ideal concept does not appear where it could in the Canadian novels I examine. The narrative strategies, including both form and content, employed by these novels work to reject the capacity of such characters to become Canadian.

The concept of becoming Canadian is something that is seemingly only possible for someone who is white. The implication of Canada being a country that is both “diverse” and “inclusive,” oft-touted terms favoured in current national discourse, implies that whiteness is the only acceptable norm. Diversity, then, is anything diverse from being white. Inclusion is actually the opposite of its implied meaning; it suggests a prior *exclusion* of anyone that does not conform to the dominant white Canada. The terms “multiculturalism,” “visible minority,” and even just

the term “people of colour” all enforce this white dominant narrative. Canada’s national discourse includes these terms despite them being problematic. As such, the country is trying to be “inclusive,” but even just in terms of the discourse used, anyone that is not white is othered, is “diverse.” Race is another term that is problematic. Chadderton argues that race itself, like gender, is “perceived to be, or even made to be ‘real’ in some sense” (110). As such, like gender, race is a social construct rather than a “biological, immutable” (110) fact. I use these terms, aware of the problematic issues with them, as a way to aim my writing at the national discourse I criticize.

Kogawa’s *Obasan* follows Naomi, a middle-school teacher who repeatedly corrects students unable to pronounce her name. As a third-generation Canadian, Naomi rejects the stereotypes expected of her. She does not allow others to diminish her identity but fails to form any lasting relationships. She never marries and her dating experiences portray the racism that surrounds her; on one date she notes that the man “was so full of questions that [she] half expected him to ask for an identity card” (9). Naomi is constantly othered by white Canadian society, and the novel follows her as she recalls her childhood during the Japanese-internment. She grapples with the different ways her two aunts react to the injustices around them and is unsure of how she should be feeling. She looks into and asks questions about her past at Aunt Emily’s insistence; Emily, rather than embrace ideas of traditional Japanese femininity, is outspoken and demands justice. This clashes with Obasan, Naomi’s other aunt, who faces her own struggles by remaining silent. Naomi chooses to hold on to her past unlike her brother Stephen, who attempts to assimilate by ignoring his roots, always being “uncomfortable when anything is ‘too Japanese’” (261). Naomi is unable to integrate because she is a visible minority and the white people around her never see her as anything other than different. She dates a white

man who comes from a different background, showing that she is willing to marry someone who is not a Japanese-Canadian like herself. Naomi's desire to hold on to her identity and subsequently, her refusal to assimilate prevents her from forming any sort of lasting relationship with the men she dates. She is not given the option to marry while holding true to her own identity, and so, her failure to marry is evidence of her failure to integrate or assimilate. She remains an outsider, always in the position of a guest to the culture and country rather than being offered or embracing a host position. Any integration she accomplishes is internal, and unrelated to Canadianness. Kogawa challenges the national discourse of inclusivity, forcing readers to see the cruelty that was made legal during the internment of Japanese Canadians. Kogawa's novel was cited in the House of Commons during the Japanese-Canadian redress agreement, a fact which suggests that *Obasan* was successful in challenging the national discourse, and able to influence government policy.

In the Skin of a Lion was published in 1987, during a time of high non-white immigration. Ondaatje's novel follows the story of the working class and white immigrants who were involved in the building of the Bloor Street Viaduct and the Ronald Harris waterworks in Toronto. As such, the novel is set during and around 1938. The narrative follows Patrick, an Anglo-Canadian of the working class, and his class equates him with the immigrants he goes on to befriend. The two immigrants Ondaatje does present—Temelcoff and Caravaggio—are both majestic characters, presented mythically, and their success stories are glamourized. Both of these characters are capable of integrating into Canadian culture because their whiteness permits them to blend in. Ondaatje's narrative glorifies immigration and presents the success of immigrants as individualistic, based on merit alone. While Ondaatje's novel courts a national discourse which claims to accept immigrants, his representation of only white immigrants is

problematic for a novel written when immigrants of colour were predominant. Ondaatje's novel offers integration as a success story for the immigrants he presents, ignoring the fact that non-white immigrants have different barriers to overcome and for them, integration is impossible to achieve.

In Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*, Nicholas Temelcoff is the ideal immigrant character. He pushes through the struggle of immigrating to a new country, becomes a "citizen here, in the present," and goes on to raise a family, "becom[ing] successful with his own bakery" (149). He builds a stable life and comes to own a Macedonian Bakery. His goal is to integrate, and in his attempt to do so, his priority becomes learning the English language and ignoring everything else. He is visibly white and therefore not racialized, a fact that makes his success possible. His capacity to integrate stems from the fact that he looks like what a Canadian is expected to be—that is, white. His character opposes another white character, Caravaggio, an Italian who holds on to his identity and blatantly challenges the status quo, becoming a thief and living on the edges of acceptable society. Caravaggio blends into the white upper class because his appearance and light skin permit it. Unlike Temelcoff, Caravaggio attempts to remain an outsider, but is also able to integrate. He holds on to his identity, speaks his language with the Italian woman he marries and is eventually imprisoned for stealing, but subsequently makes an escape. Caravaggio's marriage to a woman who comes from the same background as his own does not force him to give up his Canadian identity. He chooses to remain an outsider, but as a white man, his marriage does not prevent his integration. He is still accepted by Canadian society even though he refuses to sacrifice anything the way Temelcoff does. Both men are white, and despite their opposing lifestyles upon coming to Canada, both find success. As an award-winning book, *In the Skin of the Lion* is accepted and deemed a part of what mainstream Canadian cultural

identity entails. The novel shows that being white is all that is required to successfully be Canadian. Even if a white person holds on to their language or chooses to remain an outsider as is the case with Caravaggio, they can still seemingly integrate. This suggests that visible minorities are always going to be lesser than white Canadians, and not Canadian enough.

In *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures*, Lam presents Ming as a stereotypically intelligent but emotionless Chinese-Canadian who, despite loving the white character Fitz, bows to parental pressure and marries Chen. Rather than explore Ming's struggles, Lam focuses on Fitz's pain, alienating Ming from readers. Of the four doctors Lam focuses on, Ming is the only one who is cold and distant. She is clinical and efficient in her practice but fails to establish a connection or portray a caring image to her patients. As the white male, Fitz's character is better explored and his heartbreak after Ming moves on is used as the cause of the misery and depression he faces throughout the story. Ming breaks up with Fitz by cheating on him, despite promising they will be together. Lam portrays her as detached, cruel and heartless, allowing readers to blame her for Fitz's pain and self-destructiveness. Lam uses strategies that allow readers to sympathize with the white character rather than better explore the inner life of the only woman doctor. Ming fears that her parents will "threaten to disown" (57) her if she decides to marry Fitz, and her marriage to Chen is portrayed according to Fitz as her succumbing to her parents' expectations. Because her husband is also a Chinese-Canadian, her marriage to him is depicted as her failure to embrace her own Canadian identity. Her relationship with Chen is never explored the way her relationship to Fitz is, and is only ever seen through her white ex-boyfriend's eyes. Lam won the Giller Prize in 2006 amid all sorts of controversy. Winning such an award suggests that the novel must contribute to Canadian cultural capital in some way, and since the book stereotypes the

female Chinese-Canadian, the implication is that such characters, and so, people, have little depth beyond the stereotypes associated with them.

In *Fifteen Dogs*, André Alexis explores issues of race and belonging while disguising the book as being about dogs. The novel begins with two Greek gods, Hermes and Apollo, whose interaction establishes the outer frame of the narrative. When Hermes wonders what it would be like for an animal to have human intelligence, Apollo wagers a year of servitude to Hermes that any animal “would be even more unhappy than humans are if they are given human intelligence” (14). The narrative itself opens with fifteen dogs having been granted human consciousness by the gods, and the story follows each of the dogs to their deaths. With the outer frame of Greek whiteness, Alexis uses the apologue form to offer a critique on race, servitude, and social hierarchies. Alexis criticizes the hierarchal structures that the dogs live within, with some dogs trying to go back to their old dog ways and others embracing the change, perhaps using it for their own conniving means. In the novel, the dogs are concerned with issues of their own servitude and their masters, paralleling themes of African enslavement. *Fifteen Dogs* is about race without clearly dealing with the issues race explores. In terms of literary criticism, nothing has been written about Alexis’s novel with regard to race, contributing to the fact that this novel may have been successful as a novel about the way in which “universal truths about human nature [are revealed] by transferring consciousness and conscience to animals” (Jinje) precisely because issues with regard to race are not made clear.

Each of the novels studied presents characters who function as a bridge between two different worlds. Similarly, Kogawa’s *Obasan* functions as a bridge between art and art’s purpose in the real world. In the same way that Kogawa is able to influence real change, this

paper attempts to bridge the ideas of Canada's *exclusivity* to academics that still think of Canada as a multicultural nation with no flawed history and no problematic present.

Chapter 1

Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*

In 1971, ten years before Joy Kogawa published *Obasan*, Pierre Elliot Trudeau declared that Canada would adopt multiculturalism as a national policy. The Multiculturalism Act in 1988 was established based on a report issued the previous year which noted that the 1971 policy in place did not “adequately [meet] the needs of Canada’s multicultural society.” The previous policy reflected “the interest of European-born immigrants” but immigration to Canada was shifting away from Europe, “with increasing numbers of immigrants from Asia, Africa and the Middle East” (“Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988”). European immigrants did not have to deal with issues of discrimination in the same way Eastern immigrants (who were visible minorities) had to.

The Japanese Canadian Redress Agreement was established in 1988, the same year as the Multiculturalism Act. Prime Minister Brian Mulroney (Trudeau had stepped down in 1984) delivered an apology, announced a compensation package to survivors and guaranteed reinstatement of Canadian citizenship to those Japanese Canadians who had been deported. When the government at the time announced “its settlement with the Japanese Canadian redress movement on September 22, 1988 – some two months after the Crown’s assenting to the Multiculturalism Act – *Obasan* was cited in the House of Commons as evidence for the errors of previous governments” (Dobson 91). This was done only after President Reagan did something similar in the United States, and so, Canada did not take the leading step in ensuring these sorts of reparations would be made.

Both the Multiculturalism Act and the Japanese Canadian Redress Agreement were established well after *Obasan*’s publication, and so, people from non-European cultures had not

yet been given complete equality. In 1981, there was no guarantee and no method to ensure that such citizens would be treated equally as the act later stated. The emerging discourse of multiculturalism allowed these things to be spoken about, but when *Obasan* was written, there had been no apology or actions to show regret on behalf of the Canadian government, in any way.

Even by today's standards, Kogawa's unapologetic tone still challenges the "inclusivity" of the government's current national discourse. *Obasan* is written before visible minorities have really been given the right to be treated equally. *Obasan* was well received; the book was literally cited in the House of Commons, but also, won the Books in Canada First Novel Award. Kogawa's writing is not gentle or subtle; she does not leave it to readers to infer the meaning she is getting at. She is direct, her language is unapologetic and candid.

Kogawa highlights the horrid treatment of the Japanese in Canada. She notices the mistreatment that stemmed from the fact that the people of Japanese ancestry had an identity that was not solely Canadian, an identity that visibly made them different. The country itself enforced this mistreatment by enacting legal policy that caused Canadians to lose their citizenship. In *Obasan*, Aunt Emily is unable to locate Naomi's mother because by leaving Canada, Naomi's mother gave up her Canadian rights and lost any obligation the government may have felt towards her, despite her being born in Canada.

In her unsent letters to her sister, Emily questions why anti-Japanese "protestors are so much more vehement about Canadian-born Japanese than they are about German-born Germans" (98). She answers her own question at a later point, saying that it is clearly about race alone and that "obviously white Canadians feel more loyalty toward white foreigners than they do toward us Canadians" (112). Kogawa does not leave it to readers to infer that the issue boils down to

being about race. Rather than maintain the silence or leave room for meaning to be inferred, Kogawa clearly asserts the reasoning for the inconsistent mistreatment.

The book is written in first-person through Naomi's point of view, a third-generation Canadian. Naomi stands up for what she believes in, shown clearly in the way the book starts, with Naomi correcting students unable to pronounce her name. In "The Book as (Anti)National Heroine: Trauma and Witnessing in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*," Eva Karpinski describes this passage as a connection between Kogawa and Naomi. Karpinski sees the mispronunciation as a way in which Naomi's "Japanese proper name gets expropriated through her students' mangled pronunciation, signalling her non-belonging. The narrator as a teacher is also the writer's persona, dedicating herself to educating others in this mini-allegory of the text's pedagogy" (50). Kogawa does take the place of educator here, using Naomi's own occupation as a teacher to teach her own readers the proper pronunciation of all the Japanese names and terms the book presents. Naomi teaches her students, and so, Kogawa teaches readers, the proper pronunciation of Naomi's own last name, Nakane (Na Ka Neh) and her mother's maiden name, (presented as Aunt Emily's last name) Kato (as Cut-Oh) (Kogawa 7,10).

Kogawa writes in a candid tone and does so bravely, using Naomi as a bridging character. Naomi bridges the Issei and Nisei (first and second generations, respectively), noting that Obasan would be Issei, having been born in Japan, while her father and Aunt Emily "born and raised in Canada" (58) would be a part of the Nisei. Naomi, as an educator, also bridges the gap between herself and her non-Japanese students, allowing Kogawa to use her as a bridge to non-Japanese readers.

Rather than dismiss the previous generation, Naomi shows the utmost respect for the cultural silence that Obasan practises. She compares Obasan to Aunt Emily; while Emily is

always writing letters, always pushing to be heard, Obasan's "protective silence assumed 'for the sake of the children'" (Karpinski 49) allows Naomi and Stephen to be kept separate from the atrocities of the reality of their own childhood. Naomi respects the silence, but prefers and finds a middle way, in between the way of both of her aunts.

Naomi's meshing of the two languages shows an ideal of integration. Naomi's use of the name Obasan becomes a permanent fixture in the narrative. The first time Naomi refers to the titular character, she introduces her as "my aunt, Obasan" (7) and from this point forward, Naomi refuses to reiterate. Naomi's use of translation in general feels natural, integrated, and authentic. Her use of Japanese terms shows her own admiration for the language.

In *Obasan*, the translation for a term comes when it feels the most natural, not necessarily immediately after the term is presented in Japanese. Naomi notes that Okairi nasai is "the most familiar greeting [she] know[s]" before translating it to "Welcome home" (159). Here, the source language is given value; the Japanese phrase is shown to be stronger than its reductively simple translation.

At another point, Naomi presents the English first, and her analysis becomes more philosophical. She contemplates her mother's way of disciplining her for letting chicks free in a cage of murderous hens: "'It was not good, was it?' Mother says. 'Yoku nakatta ne.' Three words. Good, negation of good in the past tense, agreement with statement. It is not a language that promotes hysteria. There is no blame or pity. I am not responsible. The hen is not responsible" (72). Here, the process of translation and the underlying concepts that are lost in translation are analyzed too. Naomi's analysis of the Japanese phrase imposes layers of meaning not usually accessible in a more reductive translation. Naomi's narrative then, carries with it a philosophical contemplation about her language. She connects Japanese language with Japanese

ways of being, offering an analysis and emphasizing the different levels of meaning that are not understood through a simple translation.

Naomi's use of language shows her own reverence, and she compares herself to those around her constantly, even just through the language used. Aunt Emily is a "word warrior... a crusader" (39) and Naomi notes that Emily uses her words to try to find some justice: "like cupid, she aimed for the heart. But the heart was not there" (49). In contrast, Obasan is grateful. Obasan's priority is to care for the children. She puts them first and "[w]hen pressed, finally said that she was grateful for life. Arigatai. Gratitude only" (50). After Obasan's husband dies, even "the language of her grief is silence" (17) and ironically, her loss of hearing ties into her own willingness to live in this silence. Uncle's death serves as a catalyst for memories to surface; it is through Uncle's death and Aunt Emily's subsequent arrival that Naomi and Stephen are able to break past the silence and learn the truth about their mother. His death is the death of stoicism; the stone bursts and the stream pours forth. This catalyst allows the novel to move forward in intertwining the past and present. Obasan tells Naomi that before his death, Uncle "called [Obasan] but she couldn't hear what he had to say" (16). Uncle's last words are unheard and thus, irrelevant, literally falling onto deaf ears.

As a novel, *Obasan* becomes about language completely. The narrative is driven by a need to unveil secrets, and so, Kogawa pits choosing to speak out against remaining silent. Naomi notes the difference in terms of language spoken by her elders. Aunt Emily and her own father, having been born and raised in Canada, do not speak the same language of her mother, Obasan, and Uncle, who, raised in Japan, have the same understanding and reverence for silence. As a narrator, Naomi contemplates this difference through the way she is taught:

who is it who teaches me that in the language of eyes a stare is an invasion and a reproach? Grandma Kato? Obasan? Uncle? Mother? Each one, raised in Japan, speaks the same language; but Aunt Emily and Father, born and raised in Canada, are visually bilingual. (58)

For those raised in Japan, language becomes futile and feeling unentitled to their own rights prevents them from being able to assimilate, or more ideally, integrate. Obasan, Uncle, and Naomi's mother all feel less Canadian, only taking the role of guests to a country that has not given them fair treatment. They are grateful for things that should be expected and this feeling of gratitude prevents them from gaining access to other withheld things they deserve. This becomes a cycle then, where the country takes advantage of this non-belongingness and uses it to mistreat its own citizens further.

Naomi identifies herself as a Canadian first. In terms of identification, the language used depends on the context and audience present. When speaking to Naomi and frustrated with her niece's lack of activism, Aunt Emily urges Naomi to think and see the bigger picture, asking her, "why in a time of war with Germany and Japan would our government seize the property of and homes of Canadian-born Canadians but not the homes of German-born Germans?" (45). Here, Emily identifies herself and the Japanese Canadian internees as Canadians, born in Canada, and refuses to ascribe any other identity to them. Fundamentally, Emily is emphasizing that it is only their Canadianness that should be looked at, and any other labelling would be considering them somehow less Canadian. At a later point in the novel, Naomi is reading Emily's unsent letters to Naomi's mother, and here, Emily identifies herself and the persecuted people differently, saying "protestors are so much more vehement about Canadian-born Japanese than they are about German-born Germans" (98). In a very personal letter to her own sister (Naomi's mother), Emily

is unafraid of identifying herself as Japanese, knowing her sister may feel much the same in terms of self-identification. Emily does not need to downplay her own Japanese-ness to emphasize that she is Canadian, because the audience is more personal and her purpose of writing is not to evoke change but share the troubling circumstances with her Japanese sister. Emily understands that by calling herself a Canadian-born Canadian later, she aligns herself solely and purposefully with the country that mistreated her. She attempts to speak out with a language that challenges her white Canadian persecutors, refusing to leave any room for them to potentially misidentify her.

Kogawa's characters, even though they may label themselves as solely Canadian first, still have their Japanese background as a fundamental aspect of their own identities. Other than Stephen, Naomi's brother, all the characters identify as Japanese *and* Canadian, and this attempt to have and keep both identities is the basis of the primary conflict of the novel. Naomi respects and values the Japanese ideals instilled in her by her uncle and Obasan, but struggles to find an in-between that allows her to live comfortably. Despite her deep respect for Obasan, Naomi does separate herself, firmly rooting herself in a path between Obasan's and Aunt Emily's. The path Naomi takes leads her to a different solution: "by cutting herself off from Obasan, from the older and more 'traditional' generation, Naomi aligns herself with Canada and pushes for an integration through storytelling" (Dobson 100). The fact that the novel is successful in bringing out real political change then, is a testament to the success of this path.

Unlike Naomi, Stephen does not feel the same obligation or respect towards their uncle and Obasan, the man and woman who raised him. Naomi is uncomfortable with Stephen's internalized racism. Things are "too Japanese" (*Obasan* 261) for him; he would rather ignore the wounds, cover them up and perhaps even cover up his identity, his visible differences. He

dislikes the way Obasan tries to ignore the pain the family is going through and tries to keep himself separated from this way of living. Stephen wants to and tries to assimilate, while Aunt Emily wants justice. In contrast, Obasan just wants to be left alone. Obasan's main drive is to raise the children the best way she may be able to. Obasan says it is better to forget and is constantly just grateful that at least they have each other. Unlike Stephen, Obasan's attempt at moving on is not her ignoring her wounds. Rather, Obasan's Japanese values allow her to keep silent for the sake of the children, a protective, nourishing silence rather than a silence of ignorance, as Stephen tries to achieve.

The novel pits silence against speaking out. Aunt Emily's voice, her desire to tell the truth and be heard, outweighs Obasan's comfort within silence. Naomi chooses to live beyond Obasan's silence, choosing to speak out, but in a less drastic way than Emily does. In a way, Emily is "mocked for her efforts" (Dobson 94), with Naomi constantly trying to get away from the burden she feels over Emily's overwhelming pressure. Similarly, upon learning of her uncle's death, Naomi is "not in a great hurry to see Obasan" (12). Even growing up, Naomi is frustrated with the silence, the lack of answers: "This is the way it is whenever I ask questions. The answers are not answers at all" (160). The book looks to answer the question - how should a visible minority live in Canada? Naomi tries to grapple with this identity issue, tries to find a place where she can fit in, not being a word warrior like Aunt Emily, and not being an embodiment of silence and stone like Obasan.

Naomi struggles to find an in-between. She maintains her own position, not necessarily speaking out. When Mr. Barker tells Naomi that "it was a terrible business what we did to our Japanese" (270), Naomi as a narrator shares her frustration, describing the situation as similar to "being offered a pair of crutches while I'm striding down the street." She says that the questions

are “ice breaker questions that create an awareness of ice” (271). This shows that Naomi does see the clear double standard and issues Emily fights against but is refusing to speak out against them in the way Emily does.

Naomi chooses to remain silent despite Emily’s insistence on speaking out. Naomi finds herself unable to revisit her past completely. The novel glosses over an entire part of her life, the years that have shaped her the most. Her time in Lethbridge is a part she cannot delve into, cannot fight or talk about because of how much it hurt and how much she remembers. It is in Lethbridge that Naomi hits puberty and with that, becomes bitter about her reality. Prior to this, her childhood innocence shines through at some points, such as in Slokan when she questions when they will ever go back to their own home and whether she will get to play with the rest of her dolls (141).

In Aunt Emily’s package of letters, Naomi sees a newspaper clipping with facts about the Alberta evacuees. The clipping includes a picture of a Japanese Canadian family smiling and standing around a pile of beets and the caption below notes that “Japanese evacuees from British Columbia supplied the labour for 65% of Alberta’s sugar beet acreage” (231) the year prior. When forced to relocate to ghost towns in Alberta, these Japanese Canadians brought “life and prosperity to their new settlement[s]” (Karpinski 51).

Naomi’s narrative voice gives a story she does not want to further explore. She says “I never got used to it and I cannot, I cannot bear the memory. There are some nightmares from which there is no waking, only deeper and deeper sleep” (232). She goes on despite this. In an imagined conversation with Aunt Emily, Naomi expands on not wanting to delve into this part of her life, where the memories are horrid:

Is it so bad?

Yes.

Do I really mind?

Yes, I mind. I mind everything. Even the flies. The flies and flies and flies from the cows in the barn and the manure pile – all the black flies that curtain the windows...

It's the chicken coop "house" we live in that I mind. The uninsulated unbelievable thin-as-a-cotton-dress hovel never before inhabited in winter by human beings. In summer it's a heat trap, an incubator, a dry sauna from which there is no relief. (233)

The language used here shows her difficulty in exploring this painful time. Her description is an entire paragraph that is presented as a run-on sentence. It is poetic and full of emotion, clearly depicting the pain, frustration and hurt that echoes just through her words:

It's hard, Aunt Emily, with my hoe, the blade getting dull and mud-caked as I slash out the Canada thistle, dandelions, crabgrass, and other nameless nonbeet plants, then on my knees, pulling out the extra beets from the cluster...it will never be done thinning and weeding and wedding and weeding. (234-235)

Even the Canadian landscape has presented itself as a challenge, the labour being intensive and the work difficult. Time itself is conflated, with seasons and seasons passing over the course of just a few lines:

It's so hard and so hot that my tear glands burn out.

And then it's cold....and the fine hairs on my legs grow course there and ugly.

I mind growing ugly. (235)

Naomi faces a sort of loss of innocence. She goes through puberty and with that, loses the hope she ever had to return home.

Naomi goes on to note that her suffering would not prevent this from happening again: “What is done, Aunt Emily, is done, is it not? And no doubt it will all happen again, over and over with different faces and names, variations on the same theme” (238). At this point, Naomi makes Emily’s entire quest seem futile, and further validates her own position in choosing not to be the “crusader” Emily is. Advocating for change in the way Emily does is useless for Naomi at this point, who notes that “I can cry for Obasan, who has turned to stone. But what then? Uncle does not rise up and return to his boats. Dead bones do not take on flesh” (238).

The entire chapter is presented as Naomi imagining a response to Emily. Naomi does not want to explore her past. She does not want to remember all of the things Emily implores her not to forget. In this response, Kogawa uses ideas of female embodiment to present Emily’s mission as akin to surgery, clinical in an attempt to expose the underlying harm: “Aunt Emily, are you a surgeon cutting at my scalp with your folders and filing cards and your insistence on knowing all?” (232). Rather than show Emily’s mission as an attempt to right wrongs, Naomi presents the hurt Emily causes people like Naomi, people who cannot live through the pain again.

Emily is given the role of a midwife. Naomi notes, “It’s your hands in my abdomen, pulling, pulling the growth from the lining walls, but bring back the anesthetist turn on the ether clamp down the gas mask bring on the chloroform when will this operation be over Aunt Em?” (232). Emily’s connection with her patient, in this case Naomi, is an intimate one, but Naomi does not want to feel the pain. Naomi would rather avoid the pain, wanting to act in her own way instead. Emily is clinical – Naomi describes her as a surgeon with filing cards. Despite the intimate connection in being Naomi’s aunt, Emily does not show sympathy but just looks to yank the truth out.

Naomi is resisting Emily's attempt at influencing the national discourse. As a visible minority, Emily wants to resist being labelled as a marked body. Kogawa's novel is her own attempt at influencing the narrative around Japanese internment. In this way, Kogawa's use of female embodiment shows the emotional impact the internment camps had on the internees. Emily was able to move to Toronto before this began and so, could avoid the pain. Even as a young girl, the horror Naomi lived was all something Emily had managed to avoid.

The entire narrative looks to uncover the truth of Naomi's mother and so, the embodied relationship between Japanese-Canadian mother and daughter becomes central to the story. Much of *Obasan* is a connection between Naomi and her mother, with race being tied to the feminine through this mother-daughter relationship. When looking at a photograph of herself with her mother, Naomi's description emphasizes these themes of embodiment: "Your leg is a tree trunk and I am branch, vine, butterfly. I am joined to your limbs by right of birth, child of your flesh, leaf of your bough" (291). Birthing presents an intimate connection between her and her mother, and it is through this birthing trope that we see different mentalities emerge. Emily's representation as a midwife then, is indicative of Emily's attempt to bring about change within Naomi as well. When Naomi hears the truth of her mother through the letters Emily has saved, she is able to connect with her mother.

The connection between Naomi and her mother is first disturbed when Old Man Gower abuses Naomi. Gower abuses Naomi as a child and tells her not to tell her mother, establishing the only distance Naomi ever feels between herself and her mother. Naomi is made to feel ashamed and keeps this a secret. She describes the same photograph of herself and her mother differently here: "here in Mr. Gower's hands I become other—a parasite on her body, no longer of her mind... If I tell my mother about Mr. Gower, the alarm will send a tremor through our

bodies and I will be torn from her. But the secret has already separated us” (77). The western male gaze fetishizes these women, which contrasts to the Japanese belief that a stare, “such lack of decorum, it is clear, is as unthinkable as nudity on the street” (58). Naomi’s mother’s eyes are described as “steady and matter-of-fact—the eyes of Japanese motherhood” (71), whereas Gower’s gaze is invasive. Even as a four-year-old, Naomi “cannot play because he is watching” (75). She is afraid, worried that even if her brother finds her, he “will see my shame” (76).

Naomi says, “I am supremely safe in my *nemaki*, under the bright-colored futon in my house” (60). It is within Japanese clothing, in her own house that Naomi feels the most comfortable, the most safe. As a white male, Gower invades her safe space, both by abusing her and later on, when he enters her house and “seems more powerful than Father, larger and more at home even though this is our house” (82). Mark, Naomi’s father, entrusts his family’s belongings to Gower, but feels uncomfortable. Naomi notes that in this moment, her “[f]ather’s eyes are not at ease” (82). Gower’s white male gaze has authority over Naomi’s entire family. Gower “sounds as if he is trying to comfort [her] father, but there is a falseness in the tone. The voice is too sure—too strong” (82). Gower does not act like a guest, invading a space he feels he has a right over.

Gower’s sexual abuse makes Naomi see first-hand the ways in which women of her race are fetishized. She conflates this abuse with the mistreatment towards the Japanese during the war. In a dream she has, “three beautiful oriental women lay naked in the muddy road” surrounded by soldiers with rifles drawn. The women are fetishized, and they try to use their sexuality to save themselves but are still killed. They feel that the “only way to be saved from harm was to become seductive” (73) and yet, quite easily, the soldiers kill them in a scene that is described in a graphic way. Her dream illustrates the underlying idea of fetishization not being

about embracing or using sexuality, but about dehumanizing people. These women are naked and sheer desperation leads to their attempt at using their sexuality to save themselves, but instead, they are killed for sport, as a display of power.

Naomi does not speak to Gower, choosing to remain silent. Similarly, Naomi stays silent around Rough Lock Bill; he is the only other non-Japanese man Naomi has interactions with growing up. Naomi is quiet, does not speak to him in an attempt to protect herself from the danger she perceives from him. But Rough Lock's gaze is not invasive; rather, he is comforting and saves Naomi from drowning. Rough Lock is welcoming. He acts like a good host to the town of Slocan, sharing the story of how the name of Slocan came to be, and so, welcoming the children. He says he does not understand "all this fuss about skin" (172) and so, presents as a welcoming, safe character. By choosing to not stereotype against visible minorities, Rough Lock offers the possibility of integration. As a social outcast himself, Rough Lock having these thoughts does not influence any sort of national change in the discourse. Instead, the implication is that for non-Japanese, the only people that can be welcoming are those who are also social outcasts.

The novel keeps Gower's rape silent; Naomi never does get the chance to tell anyone of the abuse she goes through. There is no closure here – Gower is never mentioned after it is made clear that Mark has entrusted the family's belongings to him. Karpinski notes that both "racism and sexual abuse are the book's 'dirty secrets'" (57). In the same way as rape is silenced, Karpinski argues that Emily's refusal to accept that her actions cannot bring about change shows a sense of naïveté. As such, Karpinski ignores the value of Emily's activism and preservation of letters in influencing Naomi to come to terms with her own history. Emily ignores her own

failure in influencing change but still pushes forward, striving to be heard. Kogawa shows Emily's activism as being futile on a national scale, but fundamental in allowing Naomi to heal.

The novel explores the trauma that came from the violations against the Japanese Canadians

from a gendered perspective split onto three women: Naomi, Aunt Emily, and Obasan.

Collectively, they embody a racialized gendered position of difference that leads to contesting a national identity founded upon the principles of racial and ethnic homogeneity. (Karpinski 57)

Naomi's middle path, in between that of her two aunts, shows itself to be the correct path. In the same way Naomi uses story telling as a method to evoke change, the success of Kogawa's novel, illustrated in its being cited in the House of Commons, brings about the same change Naomi strives to find.

Kogawa illustrates the near impossibility of racial integration in Canada. After everything she has gone through, Naomi still tries to date, but is unable to as she does not allow herself to be boxed up as a stereotype. On a date with a widower father of one her students, Naomi notes that the man "was so full of questions that [she] half expected him to ask for an identity card" (9). He acts as border control officer, testing her Canadianness. She willingly goes on this date. Despite questioning "what chance for romance is there" (8) in such a small town, Naomi is still willing to take a step and try to get to know someone. She goes on to note that "the widower never asked [her] out again" (9) and begins to wonder why he may have found her "unsatisfactory." His refusal to ask her out again shows her to fail his identification test. To this man, Naomi is not Canadian enough. Naomi looks towards herself for faults and so, is seemingly accepting of this man's own faults. It is Emily's activism then, her dedication to revealing the truth that helps

Naomi come to terms with where she fits into society. Emily's letters allow Naomi to see the real history and realize she is not to blame for the racial injustices that surround her.

Naomi cannot marry, as it is hard for her to marry across racial and cultural lines when potential partners are so ignorant. Just like her students, the widower's need to stereotype Naomi points to flaws in Canadian education in general. The widower, as the more "Canadian," holds the power in determining her worthiness. The imbalance of knowledge and understanding, the unwillingness within white people to look beyond stereotypes, makes it impossible for Naomi to integrate, or in this case, get married to a white Canadian.

Naomi refuses to be stereotyped or silenced, refuses to be the "stone" Obasan was, emotionally. She refuses to be as outspoken as Aunt Emily, who allows her activism to hold her back from settling down by marrying. When Uncle notices Emily's passion towards her activism, he tells her that "Like that there can be no marriage" (43). Naomi notes that though Aunt Emily may be considered a spinster like herself, she is "too busy" and "never stays still long enough to hear the sound of her own voice" (10). Naomi admires Emily's dedication but is unwilling to do the same.

However, she refuses to silently sit by and allow others to label her, choosing instead to try to educate the people that surround her. On her date with the widower father, Naomi's conversation with him consists of her speaking to him the way she speaks to her students. She answers his questions about where she comes from by explaining that her mother is a Nisei. She spells out the term on a napkin and explains the pronunciation and then meaning – second generation. By doing this, she attempts to educate him, which exemplifies the importance she places on understanding and respecting her own culture. In much the same way, she also corrects

the students unable to pronounce her name, unwilling to allow them to label her however they choose.

The novel begins with Naomi noting that she will look back on this day to find significance. There is an emphasis on what she is doing precisely then – standing before her class “defending myself” (6). Even as a teacher, a position where she should have authority, Naomi must defend herself in front of students. She has to correct their mispronunciation of her name, explain her unmarried status and as such, fails to be taken seriously. She teaches students how her name should be pronounced, unwilling to accept their variations. She stands up for herself, is able to and wants to, rather than be willing to accept the sort of box they place her into. The novel follows this same idea – Naomi’s refusal to be forced into accepting injustices she went through, but also unsure of how to proceed. She grapples with the variation between how Obasan and Aunt Emily expect her to live, unsure how to be in between the word warrior that Emily is and the silence and gratitude Obasan favours. The entire novel continues to do this very same thing.

Naomi has achieved a middle way, should be able to integrate into Canadian culture, but she cannot. She is deprived of the chance, only really able to assimilate, if that. She does not try to, does not want to. She tries to establish her own position in between that of her two aunts. She notes that they are different; “one lives in sound, the other in stone” (39). Naomi is “curiously numb” beside Aunt Emily’s “highly charged energy” (41) and chooses to leave the past in the past and focus on the now. Obasan is detached from this, choosing to remain grateful and not scour around for justice. Naomi criticizes Stephen’s disapproval of anything that may be considered “too Japanese,” she attempts to strike a balance between the personalities of her two aunts and considers Stephen as someone who has lost his roots completely. In the end, Naomi

“rejects both silence and multicultural jingoism, suggesting that a more honest telling of the stories of oppression is required” (Karpinski 62).

In *Obasan*, Naomi’s explanation of the cultural elements of her Japanese-ness consist of Buddhist ideals. When Grandma Nakane, her paternal grandmother, passes away, Obasan tells Naomi and Stephen that “though she [Obasan] and Uncle are Christians, like Mother and Father and the Katos, Grandpa Nakane is Buddhist. It was Grandpa Nakane’s wish that Grandma Nakane’s body be sent for cremation” (153). Naomi’s desire to find an in between ideal of living, a middle way so to speak, also derives from Buddhist teachings. Kogawa’s use of religion only becomes relevant when it needs to. Despite Naomi’s own parents, Uncle and Obasan all being Christian, the fact that her paternal grandparents are Buddhist never seems to disconcert any other family member. The religion is mentioned only when it is relevant, and it is only after this mentioning that the other ideals in the book can be more clearly correlated to Buddhist teachings. As such, Buddhism is not fetishized or brought in to appeal to a non-Japanese audience. Instead, it feels natural, makes sense and shows Kogawa’s own inclusivity.

In contrast, Canada is emphasized as being a democracy by Aunt Emily, but also, a Christian country. The country’s failure to fairly treat its citizens is emphasized to be worse for both of these reasons. Karpinski explores the failure of Canada as a Christian country, noting the systematic racism that the internees were forced to deal with: “The clergy refusing communion to Uncle... the RCMP betraying the trust of Japanese Canadian citizens, the press spreading the yellow peril propaganda” (50). While Buddhist teachings are also reflected in the Japanese ideals Naomi is taught, Christianity is exclusive. The only church Naomi goes to as a child is one where there are only other Japanese Canadians. Prior to their leaving Slocan, the minister, Nakayama-sensei, goes into the homes of the internees to offer their own separate prayer. The

declaration of faith is “repeat[ed] in a mixture of Japanese and English” (209) but to Naomi, the prayer itself seems to have no meaning, and consist of just rote recitation. When Sensei leaves, “he bows to everyone and is gone, trotting rapidly down the path to the next waiting group” (213). The prayer is rushed and seems to be just meant to check off tasks, removing meaning from the routine.

As narrator, Naomi explains that Obasan teaches her to restrain emotion in mourning. She goes on to explain, saying,

Though we might wish Grandma and Grandpa to stay, we must watch them go. To try to meet one’s own needs in spite of the wishes of others is to be “wagamama” – selfish and inconsiderate. Obasan teaches me not to be wagamama by always heeding everyone’s needs. (151)

This acceptance and lack of selfishness is a further reflection of Japanese ideals reflecting Buddhist teachings. Naomi’s mother’s philosophy about not ascribing blame (“it was not good”) around the incident with the chicks also reflects these ideals. The philosophy of non-attachment and non-ego (i.e. no one is to blame for the chick’s death, it was simply “not good”) is also very Buddhist. The novel as a whole celebrates these beliefs, making them central to the mentality that helped the internees through their hardships.

Obasan brought about real change and influenced governmental policy. Kogawa resists the national Canadian discourse of 1981 which has no way of ensuring equal treatment of visible minorities. Her novel uses poetic descriptions that show cruelty and lack of humanity. The characters are all three dimensional and humanized rather than presented as stereotypes. The characters Kogawa presents all respond differently to the unmentionable problem in 1981 of anti-Japanese racism in Canada. Obasan ignores the national discourse completely, while Aunt

Emily tries to fight it. Stephen, then, is so affected by it that he becomes ashamed of himself and wants to assimilate, trying to lose his roots completely. Naomi is in between; as a bridging character, she resists the national discourse, acknowledges the hurt and wants to move past it but still wants to hold on to herself. She wants to find a middle way and integrate but is simply not given the option to do so. She is unable to find love or form any real relationships.

The novel begins with Naomi unhappy, unsure of where she fits in with regard to her own stance in response to the human rights violations against Japanese Canadians. By the end and upon uncovering the truth about her mother's sacrifice, Naomi is able to make peace with her initial guilt of feeling numb around Emily's energy and attempts at seeking justice. Naomi's stance is one where she will not assimilate and refuses to be stereotyped. Her strong sense of self identity makes her what Stephen himself fears most – Naomi is “too Japanese” for white Canadians. She is unable to date them, incapable of relating to a white man who would only try to label her as an outsider. Stephen seems to be able to date a non-Japanese woman, perhaps successfully too. Stephen brings his girlfriend to meet his family, but Naomi cannot have a relationship that may lead her to do the same. Stephen wants to assimilate; by dating someone of the dominant race, Stephen shows that he is willing to lose the Japanese part of himself, while Naomi is unwilling to do the same.

Resisting the national discourse can make literary works what Butler calls illegible. Despite this, the novel found a success “unprecedented for a book written by a non-white Canadian,” and went on to make an influence on a political scale, “bridging the gap between writing and political activism” (Karpinski 46). *Obasan* resisted the national discourse by creating characters who, despite being third-generation Canadians, were still treated as outsiders. Kogawa's language is strong. She challenges the predominant national discourse, and her book

went on to be canonical, being taught in high schools across the country to this day. Education specialist Jim Greenlaw argues that without a “critical filter, such as Edward Said’s or Rey Chow’s” students who read novels such as *Obasan* “will have little ability to resist stereotypical readings of the ‘Asian presence’” (9). This leads towards Eurocentric biases within their readings. Though it may be well read today, it is still likely that *Obasan* is studied with biases, perhaps through a reading that encourages passive empathy rather than one that explores the values of active empathetic transformation (Rodino-Colocino 96-97) the novel presents.

Obasan shows that visible minority women are often brushed aside, prevented from integrating or carrying a Canadian identity because it is their difference that is seen first. The novel “is built around a series of silences, about people wanting to forget the histories of violence and racism that they have faced in order to live in Canadian society” (Dobson 92). Naomi wants to move past this pain and integrate, but she is unable to, “because racism in Canada, in both its subtle and explicit forms, leads to white Canadians' failure to recognize the novel's narrator, Naomi Nakane, and her family members as Canadian” (Dobson 92).

Chapter 2

Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*

If *Obasan* problematizes the treatment of Japanese Canadians, Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* glorifies the immigrant experience by presenting white characters who come to Canada and eventually rise in their social class, ultimately able to find success. The novel is published in 1987, just a year before Canada's Multiculturalism Act was enacted, and so, immigration and identity were very relevant issues. But rather than focus on immigration of visible minorities as was current and relevant to the time, Ondaatje explores only the issues faced by white immigrants to Canada in the early twentieth century. The immigrants Ondaatje explores have to sacrifice to be able to integrate, but they do find success. While their success is attributed to their willingness to work hard, the novel ignores the fact that the whiteness of the immigrants presented is what makes it possible for them to really blend into society, capable of integrating instead of being forced to assimilate. For immigrants of colour, there is a visible barrier that makes their integration more complicated and sometimes impossible.

The novel was published at a time of high immigration of visible minorities (Troper). By making white immigrants central to his argument, Ondaatje fails to encapsulate the issues all immigrants really faced. In *Discourses of Domination: Racial Bias in the Canadian English-Language Press*, Frances and Tator explore the issues visible minorities dealt with during this time period. When visible minorities were speaking out about a lack of representation in media, the response from a "president of a major white brewery, when asked why there were no non-Whites in his company's commercials, answered: 'White sells'" (41). In much the same way, Ondaatje uses whiteness to sell his novel about immigration, ignoring the existence of and issues relevant to visible minorities.

The second epigraph of the novel emphasizes a need for stories from other perspectives. The epigraph is a quotation by John Berger: “Never again will a story be told as though it were the only one.” Ondaatje uses this to frame his novel, but also, to justify the glorifying perspective of immigration he offers. Ondaatje glorifies the struggles of immigrants and also, mythologizes them. He sets up a sort of Canadian immigrant dream as something that is achievable by any immigrant willing to work hard. By focusing only on white immigrants, Ondaatje’s mythical portrait of integration ignores the barriers visible minorities face, discounting their very different struggle to integrate. Immigrants of colour face all sorts of struggles that exist as larger barriers to overcome. These visible minorities do not have white privilege; they cannot blend in and appear to be like any other white Canadian. The book as a whole criticizes class without addressing racialization.

Ondaatje tackles issues of immigration by having Patrick be the primary focus of narration, making it easier for white readers to connect. Patrick is an Anglo-Canadian of the lower working class, “born into a region which did not appear on a map until 1910” even though the “land had been his homestead since 1816” (10). The narrator emphasizes Patrick’s outsidership, even though he and his family have ownership over the land. They were here first, but immigrants like the Finns, Macedonians, and Italians have invaded the land. These immigrants know their place in society—they live and accept their position as outsiders, further emphasizing the rights of those who own the land. But Patrick does not act out this sense of false privilege; he actually befriends these people. Patrick’s terrorist attack is against another white man and he commits that attack because of class inequity. His conversation with Commissioner Harris who oversees the building of the Bloor Street Viaduct emphasizes Patrick’s stance and attempt to fight for all of those who were overworked and given no credit.

Prior to coming to Toronto, Patrick and his father Hazen's interaction with the loggers, who are Finnish immigrants, is their only real interaction with people who are from elsewhere. Hazen and Patrick are comforted by their presence, "the companionship a silent comfort to him in the dark of five A.M." (7-8). They are referred to only as loggers, and are clearly from elsewhere, with an emphasis on them "walking twenty miles into land they did not know" (18). The narrator emphasizes their status as outsiders, noting that the men are kind and move aside as Hazen and the cows occupy most of the road. While the loggers wait, they touch the cows to gain their warmth, but "must do this gently, without any sense of attack or right. They do not own this land as the owner of the cows does" (7). Hazen's position is emphasized; he has ownership over this land and the Finnish immigrants are clearly aware of this. They touch the cows gently and know their own place too. The novel starts with the introduction of these people who offer comfort and are assumed to be kind by their actions. Hazen does not connect with them but is glad to see other humans. His introverted, solitary personality appears to have passed on to his son as well.

When Patrick is fifteen, his father switches careers and becomes a dynamiter, and the destruction Hazen's new career causes is presented with beautiful poetic imagery. The drama is emphasized, the visual aspect glorified and yet, Hazen's thoughts turn destructive. He wonders if he could kill someone with these devices and becomes afraid of the power in the things he attempts to control. Hazen is overly cautious. He does not wear metal at all, and also, is "meticulous in washing his clothes every evening in case there were remnants, little seeds of explosive on his apparel" (19). This depiction of fire counteracts the way Patrick sees fire being used for fun earlier in his life.

At eleven, Patrick follows moths to find the loggers playing a game involving cattails of fire while they skate. Patrick is in awe when he sees them, noting that:

when they collided sparks fell onto the ice and onto their dark clothes. This is what caused the howls of laughter—one of them stationary, struggling to shake off a fragment that had fallen inside his sleeve, yelling out for the others to stop. (21)

The fact that Patrick follows moths, insects that are drawn to light and fire, connects to both Patrick and the loggers as well. Moths will often immolate themselves in the fire they chase, and so the men, who are playing with fire quite literally, are evoking danger. But instead, we see these men laughing and having fun, creating art. They are “strangers of another language” (22), and Patrick wants to connect to them. Patrick wants to join the majestic way in which they seem to be free, the way they create art. Ondaatje glorifies the white immigrant experience here, portraying the loggers to be fearless even in their pursuit of fun. Fire is joyous, whereas to Hazen, fire is destructive. The loggers create art in their skating; the scenery is beautiful and majestic. Even when Hazen uses dynamite to destroy things, the fire is presented with beautiful destructive imagery. When moths chase fire, they chase the beauty and yet, often enough, the danger of the fire can consume them. This scene of the skaters is replicated and reemphasized later in the novel, when Alice tells Patrick about Cato, the father of her child Hana, allowing Patrick to finally close the loop on his early memory of the Finns. He learns from Alice that the loggers—like Cato—were Finns, and so, is able to put a name to glorified white immigrants, rather than just considering them as strange men who were outsiders.

Patrick’s arrival in Toronto is equated to an immigrant experience; he “arrived in the city of Toronto as if it were land after years at sea” (53). Despite this equation, Patrick is solitary, separate from the people he is equated to. Yet he still connects with the immigrants because he is

of lower class. Ondaatje conflates immigrant status and class here, presenting the immigrant community as a friendly one that welcomes Patrick, and showing that Patrick is welcomed because he works in conditions like them; Patrick treats them as equals unlike the upper white class who look down upon them. Patrick sticks to the people who befriend him. Although he sees himself as an outsider, he goes on to connect with Temelcoff and Caravaggio and eventually forms a fatherly relationship with Hana, Alice's and Cato's daughter.

Patrick wants to feel connected but does not until closer to the end of the book, when he has come to befriend both Temelcoff and Caravaggio. He creates a family with Alice and Hana, and becomes connected to Hana's father Cato as well. Cato's father was one of the Finnish skaters Patrick saw when he was eleven. Reading Cato's letters makes Patrick feel out of place, not belonging and questioning his position in Alice and Hana's lives: "And who is he to touch the lover of this man, to eat meals with his daughter" (156). Despite this, Patrick goes on to take a fatherly role in Hana's life, realizing that he is loved by her and loves her. He attaches himself to their lives despite having "always been the alien, the third person in the picture. He is the one born in this country who knows nothing of the place" (156-7). By having Patrick befriend the two immigrant characters presented, Ondaatje establishes a bridge between class and immigration status, thereby conflating the two. The three men all face the same struggles, which emphasizes that immigration is not really relevant to their situations; their common bond is their lower-class status. The three men contribute to building a physical bridge in the book—the Bloor Street viaduct—while Patrick functions as the bridge between them and the other characters in the novel.

Initially when he arrives in Toronto, Patrick is connected to the immigrants only because he works with them. He is described to be "as silent as the Italians and Greeks" (106) and in his

dynamiting “separates himself from the others” (106) as he walks away from his fellow miners, calmly installing the explosives. In this time alone, prior to befriending them, the dangerous job of installing explosives for dynamiting “is the only ease in this terrible place where he feels banished from the world” (107). He deliberately separates himself, wants to be kept alone but feels banished because of it. He lived with “mostly immigrants and he walked everywhere not hearing any language he knew, deliriously anonymous” (112). Patrick then connects with these people he is surrounded by. He bridges the language by learning one word in Macedonian for something he needs, and then they reach out to him, bring a translator, and immediately, he realizes that they know him, despite his knowing nothing about them. This change appears quickly in him, when he becomes full of emotion: “suddenly Patrick, surrounded by friendship, concern, was smiling, feeling the tears on his face” (113).

Patrick reconnects with Alice by joining her on stage in a show his new friends invite him to. He still feels like an outsider, and Alice ensures that he is able to clearly distinguish between himself and them. Alice emphasizes to Patrick that his Anglo ethnicity keeps him separate from the other immigrants and so, he is in a position that gives him privilege. In establishing this, the text reminds readers that Patrick is not like the immigrants he now feels connected to. The narrative of the play Alice performs in is about class warfare. She villainizes the rich and aligns herself and Patrick with the immigrants who are of a lower class and unable to fight for themselves.

Patrick recalls Alice’s take on the rich: “‘I’ll tell you about the rich,’ Alice would say. ‘The rich are always laughing’” (132). She tells him this as a warning, saying “‘You’ve got to know these things, Patrick, before you ever go near them’” (132). Later on, when Caravaggio is helping Patrick launch an attack on the waterworks, Caravaggio repeats this same idea (223). As

such, Patrick connects Caravaggio's understanding of the upper class to Alice's, and so, Patrick serves as a bridging character who connects Alice, Caravaggio, and readers with the immigrant class. During the point of Alice's plays in the waterworks, there are laws in place "against public meetings by foreigners. So if they speak this way in public, in *any* language other than English, they will be jailed" (133). The silent performance is illegal. The people are not allowed to meet in any public gathering, let alone the place they work. The laws that are being enforced emphasize the way the immigrants are forced into only assimilating, and so, Alice's role is meant to be a way for the immigrants to be allowed to integrate rather than be forced into assimilating.

Alice's political drama takes the centre stage of Patrick's inner narrative. Alice hides to perform, putting on class commentary plays at night when the waterworks is closed. Her performances as agitprop are meant to invoke feeling from the audience and lead to change. It is on this stage that Alice and Patrick meet for the second time. When Alice is coming out of her costume, Patrick watches and becomes a part of the intimate moment. When looking for Alice behind the stage, Patrick tries to decide how to enter a room where "a giant takes off its head" (119). Patrick sees the world as a stage, himself as central to the theatrical arena. When he came to the show initially, he "felt utterly alone in this laughing crowd" (115), but when he himself comes onto the stage and helps Alice off, he "look[s] down embarrassed" (119). His first bit of real intellectual conversation, the first glimpse we see of his opinion on class relation, comes about when he speaks to Alice after he meets her on stage. He tells her he is interested in a passive sense of justice and so, becomes articulate after this second meeting with Alice. She tries to convert him but suddenly he has opinions and ideas.

In his conversation with Alice, Patrick learns that she wants him to be sacrificial. She wants Patrick to fight for a cause he does not really believe in. For him, the fight is personal and

the only thing he agrees to do is for himself. He says, “I’ll protect the friends I have” (122) and he does. He tries to protect Alice, and then tries to seek vengeance for her. Alice aligns herself with the immigrant population and aligns them with him. She tells Patrick that “the people in the audience were your friends” (124) in her attempt to convince him to join her. Patrick tells Alice that the lower-class immigrants do not want what Alice is trying to achieve, saying “they don’t want your revolution” and Alice’s response is to exclude them from the process. She says “[t]hey won’t be involved. Just you” (127) and in doing so, she limits this mission to just the two of them, trying to convince him that he has to do this for them and that he should agree too.

As a bridging character, Patrick initially sees himself as an outsider, even outside the people he is most connected to. Temelcoff, Caravaggio, Alice, and Cato are a “drama without him” (156-7) and he lives “in a silence, with noise and conversation all around him.... Mutual laughter was conversation... [he] was always comfortable in someone else’s landscape...” (138). The two women he falls in love with are both actresses. At the end of “Palace of Purification,” the last line is about Patrick wanting his affair with Alice to just be a love story. It is meant to end there, after Alice dies (159); he does not want a plot. Patrick initially does not want to have to seek vengeance for Alice because by doing so, he contributes to her cause. He tries to protect Alice, fails, and then acts out of anger, not out of conversion to her cause. He embodies the individualism the novel valorises.

A factor that further emphasizes the dramatic element of the text is the way the novel is framed. The entire novel is framed as a story Patrick tells Hana, while they are on the road to Marmora to pick up Clara. The novel begins with a note about the novel being “a story a young girl gathers in a car” (3) but here, Patrick is the one in the driver’s seat. The names are not mentioned in this earlier preface to the narrative, but it is still a man and a young girl, driving the

“four hours to Marmora” (3). The frame itself is disjunct; by the end of the novel, Patrick gives Hana the keys, letting her drive and promising to tell her the entire story. In “Art over History,” theorist Frank Davey emphasizes that by passing on the keys to Hana, Patrick gives her the voice of the narrative. Davey notes, “[w]ho is speaking’ is an extremely important question in a novel that claims to call into question the large numbers of people—women, workers, immigrants—who are silenced by the ‘official histories’” (145).

Whether Hana or Patrick is given the narrative voice, the text still explores events that Patrick would have no way of knowing. The narrative focuses on different characters and so, “without the framing passage... responsibility for the narrative moves entirely to its signator; it becomes a text, not of Hana and Patrick's 1938 consciousness reconstructed in 1987, but entirely of one in 1987” (Davey 145). The novel is about how Patrick remembers his own drama, and so, the text becomes firmly placed as both written and narrated in 1987, at a time when white immigration was not an issue. Ondaatje’s frame emphasizes that the text is looking back at memory and this allows a narrative that is informed by the 1987 present as well. As such, the text should be informed by the 1987 immigration issues that were relevant in the novel’s publication time.

Sometimes Patrick’s third person voice is conflated with a first-person voice which creates moments of free indirect discourse where point of view and time are confused. The novel is primarily in the third person, but a few times Ondaatje breaks apart the form and shows Patrick’s own perspective, follows his thoughts either in the form of a letter he writes or in a direct first-person view. When Alice dies, the immediacy of Patrick’s first-person voice as he remembers her, helps to emphasize the way he felt towards her: “*I don’t think I’m big enough to put someone in a position where they will hurt another.* That’s what you said, Alice, that made

me love you most” (160). The section ends with a combination of both first and third person conflated closely: “This is only a love story. He does not wish for plot and all its consequences. Let me stay in this field with Alice Gull...” (160). It is unclear who speaks here—the narrator from 1987 or Patrick in 1938, and so, time is conflated.

By making the novel about Patrick’s individualist ideals of drama, Ondaatje makes the immigrant story individualistic as well. Ondaatje shows that the only way for an individual to find success is through their own personal merit. The systemic barriers that exist are ignored, specifically as they exist for racialized minorities. People of colour are incapable of blending in the way white immigrants can, and so, by disregarding this problem, the text excludes the struggle of racialized immigrants.

The way Harris is presented enforces this idea of individualization. Throughout the course of the novel, Harris is villainized. But by the end, when Patrick confronts him, he is presented as someone who, like Patrick, rises out of his class constraints to become successful. In this way, he is connected to the workers he abuses, the same ones who villainize him. The novel initially presents him as someone who “had not entered the tunnels himself” (110). He knew the conditions were horrid and would subject his workers to these conditions with minimal pay. He is bothered by the inconvenience of “the Depression and public outcry” (109) against the extravagance of his dream of building the bridge and waterworks. His cruelty extends even further, when Nicholas Temelcoff is able to visualize the injustice himself. Temelcoff “*knows* Harris. He *knows* Harris by... his expensive tweed coat that cost more than the combined weeks’ salary of five bridge workers” (43).

But when Patrick attacks Harris in his attempt to seek revenge for Alice, Patrick fails, falling asleep before getting to blow up the entire structure. Harris is kind to Patrick. Rather than

turn him in to the police, Harris gets the security officer to bring “a nurse with medical supplies” (242) as Patrick had injured himself in the process. By giving Harris his own sympathetic role, the text presents Harris on a more personal level; he is kind, considerate, and an “amateur in [the] midst” of those with “real power” (242). Like Patrick and like the immigrant workers, Harris has to rise out of his class constraints to become successful.

In his extravagant building of both the bridge and waterworks, Harris collected products and services from different subcontractors, brought in things that were from other countries. He uses tiles from the “Italian Mosaic and Tile company” and wants the whole entrance to be modelled like “a Byzantine city gate” (109). In much the same way, Ondaatje sprinkles eastern references throughout his novel, exoticizing the East. This is made even more problematic because aside from this exoticization, Ondaatje excludes minority immigrants and the East completely from his immigrant success story line.

In his heroic end, Harris is connected to the epic of Gilgamesh. This eastern exotic reference is also reflected in the first epigraph of the novel. This epigraph is also where the title of the novel comes from. The part of the epic used for the epigraph is: “The joyful will stoop with sorrow, and when you have gone to the earth I will let my hair grow long for your sake, I will wander through the wilderness in the skin of a lion.” The epic is a part of the eastern exotic, and the novel conflates the hero from the epic with Harris, by having a narratorial insertion of a passage from the epic placed into the text when Harris looks down on a sleeping Patrick:

He stood over Patrick. “He lay down to sleep, until he was woken from out of a dream.

He saw the lions around him glorifying in life; then he took his axe in his hand, he drew his sword from his belt, and he fell upon them like an arrow from string.”

There was a knock on the door. (242)

This insertion feels oddly out of place and is interrupted when the knock nudges Harris out of his reverie.

Ondaatje exoticizes the East by sprinkling in references without them being relevant and without connecting or explaining them. The back of the stage Patrick finds Alice on is set up like “a king’s court, silent—a custom of the East” (120). When Alice tries to convert Patrick towards her cause, she tells him of a play

in which several actresses shared the role of the heroine. After half an hour the powerful matriarch removed her large coat from which animal pelts dangled and she passed it, along with her strength, to one of the minor characters. In this way, even a silent daughter could put on the cloak and be able to break through her chrysalis into language. Each person had their moment when they assumed the skins of wild animals, when they took responsibility for the story. (157)

The reference to skin, similar to the references of flesh and themes of embodiment in *Obasan*, is relevant to the entire novel. While working in a leather factory, Patrick and the other workers “leapt in embracing the skins of recently slaughtered animals” (130). They embrace the covering of their own skin, and “had leapt into different colours as if into different countries” (130). These men are unified. What they want, standing together as “representatives from separate nations, was a cigarette. To stand during the five minute break dressed in green talking to a man in yellow, and *smoke*” (130). Patrick remembers them standing together, “only their heads white” (130).

By making Patrick the protagonist figure who goes on to be articulate, the text gives him the position of speaking out for the lower class and immigrants. Davey notes that the text presents Patrick as the one who “takes up 'the skin of a lion' and assumes responsibility for the

narration of the lives of those whom official history leaves nameless and silent” (Davey 145). Patrick finds language and forms his own opinion. He acts alone and “characteristically questions the effectiveness of collective social action” (Davey 148), further emphasizing that Ondaatje supports individualistic meritocracy.

Ondaatje uses skin here to further exoticize the East and visible minorities. The factory workers literally take on different coloured skins. They mark themselves as visible minorities, but even in this sort of costume, they are still clearly white. While these workers can eventually have “a moment of superiority” when they stand under the showers at the end of the day, when this coloured skin “fell in one piece to their ankles, and they stepped out, in the erotica of being made free” (132), people of colour are not able to escape their difference. The text plays with these allusions to race. Ondaatje writes *In the Skin of a Lion* as a glorification of white immigrants at a time when immigrants were primarily people of colour. In “Colour Disrobed Itself From the Body”: The Racialized Aesthetics of Liberation in Michael Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion*,” Jodi Lundgren’s response to this statement is critical: “If the socioeconomic mobility of ‘visible minorities’ depends on the metaphor of freedom that Ondaatje employs—that of shedding coloured skin—then the prospect is not encouraging.” As such, Ondaatje’s exoticization of stepping out of skin reads as an allegory of everything visible minorities cannot do.

The fact that the text focuses only on the stories of white immigrants emphasizes this struggle that Ondaatje avoids. The narrator notes that in 1938 in Canada, “over 10,000 foreign-born workers had been deported out of the country” (209). Having written this book in 1987 when non-white immigrants did exist in the country and there were tensions surrounding their presence, Ondaatje still makes white immigration and foreignness his main issue. This is problematic because people of colour did exist in Canada as immigrants to the country in 1987.

By referring only to white immigrants, Ondaatje seemingly equates white and non-white immigrants.

In “Representation of Race in Ondaatje” Glen Lowry argues that despite being criticized for not discussing issues of race, Ondaatje’s narrative explores issues of both class and race. Lowry notes that Patrick’s entrance into Toronto and his living among the immigrants who come to Canada creates an “overlapping [of] the trauma of immigration with the alienation of urbanization” (3). To Lowry, Patrick’s connection with the immigrants allows “his identity [to] develop in relation to a host of other, not quite ‘white’ subjects—Greek, Macedonian, Russian, and Italian” (3). Lowry’s argument, that Ondaatje does consider race, is based upon defining levels of whiteness. While Lowry is correct that in terms of a 1930s Canada, Eastern-Europeans were not quite “white”—a term he conflates with “Anglo”—Lowry fails to connect this definition to immigrants who are clearly non-white. Immigrants from Asia and the middle east, predominant countries of immigration in the time the novel was published, have a higher level of visual difference, and so, Ondaatje’s conflation of all immigrants is made problematic.

In the Skin of a Lion can be read as a guidebook on how to be a good immigrant. The novel shows that immigrants were always prejudiced against, and yet, overcoming this struggle and integrating is possible when they have white skin. The narrator does not talk about the immigrants or foreign-born workers who were deported. He mentions that this happened, which frames his novel in the historical time period he is attempting to frame it in, and yet, this is just a mere case of fact-dropping. The characters the novel does explore are not these deported workers or characters that do not find success.

Both Temelcoff and Caravaggio are beautifully constructed characters, well-written, and mythological. Temelcoff struggles in the beginning, but he, along with Caravaggio, does find

success. The characters the novel really focuses on are not the ones that were incapable of finding success. *In the Skin of Lion* does not talk about the people that were deported other than just providing a surface level statement showing that this was happening. The characters explored are majestic and surreal. They live freely, beautifully, and find immense success. Caravaggio blends in with the rich, Temelcoff becomes financially successful with a bakery that is actually depicted to be quite large.

Temelcoff's financial success is surreal. His big bakery is described as a "warm large space where winter sun pierced through the mist of flour in the air," the machines are "spotless" and "buns moved forward along rollers till they were flipped over into the small lake of sizzling shortening" (210). The shortening is literally a lake, the machines are kept immaculate, and Patrick finds Temelcoff, "in his suit covered with white dust... choreographing the movement of food" (210). The scene is a dance, and Temelcoff is literally covered in whiteness. The entire space is depicted to be largely successful, and Temelcoff's success in a bakery, a place that is so safe, is starkly different from his daredevil days. He goes from risking his life, to becoming the central "choreographer" of this entire successful operation, living his dream and capable of finding happiness. When Patrick goes to prison, Temelcoff looks after Hana. He is a kind, caring, loving character by this point and has befriended Patrick fully. At Alice's death, it is Temelcoff who helps ground Patrick, "the former bridge-builder's face held together only by the formality of two clear tears" (241).

Temelcoff moves from something so daring and dangerous to something calm, peaceful, and domestic and ends up far more successful than he is as a daredevil. The novel demonstrates how Temelcoff sacrifices so much by learning the language and working hard, risking his life, as if such dedication and hard work are all that is needed. While swinging under the bridge and

avoiding falling timber, Temelcoff remembers that “his predecessor had been killed in a similar accident, cut, the upper half of his body found an hour later, still hanging in the halter” (41). Did that predecessor not sacrifice enough? By only focusing on characters who find success, Ondaatje diminishes the struggle of the 10,000 who were deported or the thousands of others of whom “no record was kept” (236). Ondaatje leaves open the interpretation that these workers (such as the man who was sliced in half) who did struggle but did not find success, did not work hard enough or were somehow not mythical and majestic enough. The argument becomes about merit, the idea that anyone and everyone who does work hard can succeed if they try. Race is brushed aside completely, seemingly irrelevant.

Temelcoff successfully integrates. His family is not mentioned, only referred to—we are never told who he marries, because for a man, a chosen life partner is not relevant to his capacity to assimilate. Even after becoming successful, Temelcoff still carries the scars of his past. He ignores his past, does not speak to his family about how he achieved the success he now has. It is Patrick that helps him make it possible to articulate things. Patrick approaches him with the information he has discovered about Alice. By going to Temelcoff and giving him the opportunity to tell the story of the nun, Patrick gives him a gift, an “arrow into the past, [that] shows him the wealth in himself, how he has been sewn into history” (149). Temelcoff would normally try to live in the present, move on from the pain, but after Patrick asks him about Alice, he “will begin to tell stories” (149).

As a daredevil, Temelcoff is afraid of falling asleep. After saving Alice, the narrator notes that “the verge of sleep was always terrifying to Nicholas [Temelcoff] so he would drink” (49). As sleep is equated to immobilization, Temelcoff’s fear of sleep is a fear of being stuck. When working under the bridge, Temelcoff relied on his ability to move, and so, to fall asleep,

he would drink “himself into blunting out the seconds of pure fear when he could not use his arms” (49). He tries to move on and ignore the part of his life where he had to work in such extreme conditions, risking his life to be able to eventually live his dream, which is so simple and domestic in comparison to the job he does do earlier. Temelcoff clearly has the talent for far more, but just wants comfort, stability, and to do what he loves. He can achieve all of this because he is white, he is able to blend in, and not a threat the way people of color appear to be in 1987 when Ondaatje writes *In the Skin of a Lion*. Temelcoff can open a Macedonian bakery and be successful, a clear portrayal of the perfection of his integration and embracing of a hyphenated identity, something that is only possible because he is white.

Unlike Temelcoff who finds success by becoming a part of the society, Caravaggio’s chosen way of living keeps him as an outsider, but he does not mind this and this outsidership is glorified. He works as a thief and marries Giannetta, an Italian woman who is supportive, and together, they live on the edge of acceptable society. Ondaatje makes both Temelcoff and Caravaggio mythical characters, characters who are glamourized and can be admired. As a bridge-worker, Temelcoff catches Alice in mid-air, saving her life and giving her a new start. Caravaggio easily blends in with the upper class, capable of winning them over.

Caravaggio keeps his immigrant language as a part of him. Ondaatje establishes a momentary distance between his reader and Caravaggio by making the couple speak in Italian and not offering any sort of translation. But the Italian phrases are not off-putting because it is a European Romance language. Ondaatje’s failure to offer translations does not cause us to judge the text for being hostile or impenetrable for not facilitating our understanding. Instead, the text is like Caravaggio himself who uses his European foreignness to find a way into the upper class. He hides his immigrant status and feigns being cultured.

In the 18th century, wealthy men would travel to Europe, “visiting the major centres of art, culture, and learning” after their initial education, to learn the language, and become “cultured and civilized” (Beaver). Italy was one of the countries on this grand tour, and so, someone who knew Italian was depicted as being both cultured, and upper class. Travelling *outside* of these European countries today would be more of a humanitarian mission, to see poverty or exoticize elements of the East or the Americas. The immigrants that Ondaatje portrays come from European countries and so, they can more easily convert from being guests to becoming hosts than their non-white counterparts can. White immigrants come from countries that are already considered to be cultured and sophisticated, while immigrants from the East, visible minority immigrants, are seen as having come from countries that need to be “civilized.”

This framing of Italy as a country of culture allows Caravaggio to use his language to align himself with the upper class. When Caravaggio is trying to woo a woman before stealing from her, the narrator notes that “she was impressed by his Italian, which he claimed to have picked up in Tuscany the previous summer” (223). White foreignness is acceptable, a symbol of wealth. Caravaggio’s summer in Tuscany where he supposedly picked up Italian connects him to the upper class, because he knows that as solely an immigrant, he would immediately be less than. It is his whiteness that makes this blending in possible, and by equating white immigrants to immigrants of colour, Ondaatje ignores the white privilege his characters have, brushing it aside, and making the book solely about class, as opposed to being a realistic story of all types of immigration.

Caravaggio’s language is a part of him. He speaks in Italian to Patrick, wishing him good luck (229) in a language that his friend cannot understand. Caravaggio is comfortable with Patrick and so speaks to him the with the same level of comfort he speaks to his wife. As a

majestic, mythical character, Caravaggio is open about his thievery. He wants to create and leave behind a legacy, and so, willfully tells anyone who will listen that he is a thief. Caravaggio has a strong sense of himself. Rather than remain anonymous, he tells Alfred, the boy who helps him, his real name and that he is a painter who escaped. He wants people to see him, as a painter, a thief, and anything else that puts them in awe of him.

Caravaggio steals from the rich but knows he can never be like them. He wants to be known as a famous thief. He does not want to be like the rich:

He put his hands up to his face and smelled them. Oil and rust. They smelled of the chain. That was always true of thieves, they smelled of what they brushed against. Paint, mushrooms, printing machines, yet they never smelled of the rich. He liked people who smelled of their trade. (199)

By not smelling like the rich, Caravaggio does not become like them, which separates him from the rich people he mocks. He goes into the house of a rich woman, Anne, to use her landline and call his wife. When Anne catches him, he manages to feel comfortable around her. He speaks in Italian to her initially, after speaking with Giannetta over the phone, and feels “relaxed with her—as if this was a continuation of his conversation with Giannetta” (201).

There is a strong conflation of race and class here. Anne feels comfortable around him because he is able to blend in; he is white and he can pretend to be a part of this upper-class society and people. She asks him—using the fake name he gave her, “David, why am I not scared of you?” after catching him breaking into her home. He tells her he is a thief, that he has escaped prison and that he is not stealing anything from her home because “with cottages all you can steal is the space or the people” (201). As they talk, “she sits across from him laughing at the

story of his escape, not fully believing it. A fairy tale.” This further emphasizes his majestic and mythical characterization. Even Anne sees him as too unreal to be true.

Caravaggio mocks the upper class and even though he marries an Italian woman, he is able to successfully integrate. When Caravaggio is attacked in prison, Patrick—also imprisoned for terrorist attacks—saves his life and later helps him escape by painting him blue to blend in with the blue roof. The prisoners who are tasked with painting the roof “blue up to the sky” know that this is a “trick, a humiliation of the senses” (179). Caravaggio’s escape is majestic. He says “*Demarcation... That is all we need to remember*” (179) which is the opposite of assimilation. By Caravaggio’s being painted blue to blend into the roof, the text suggests that sight, the visual image of Caravaggio being blue, allows him to become a chameleon.

Visually, Caravaggio’s white skin allows him to blend into the upper class. But by never smelling like the rich, he is aware that his smell demarks, drawing a line that separates Caravaggio from the people he *appears* to blend in with. This olfactory demarcation reminds Caravaggio that he is not like the rich, he is not one of them, just as he is separate from the roof he is painted to blend into. Caravaggio *knows* he does not blend in because he *feels and smells in his body* that he is different. He is separated from the upper-class Anglo Canadians even though he looks like them—a false integration, which is further emphasized in his being a thief. It is only his white skin that allows him to blend in.

Just as Temelcoff is covered in white, Caravaggio’s escape from prison “depends on altering his skin colour” (Lundgren). This same phrase is repeated later on, when Caravaggio helps cover Patrick in grease to help him swim into the waterworks. Patrick is “invisible except by touch, grease covering all unclothed skin” (228). Caravaggio uses the same tactic of blending in, to help Patrick squeeze through the iron bars and pipes that surround the waterworks. Both

Caravaggio's escape from prison and Patrick's attack on the waterworks force the men to blend into their surroundings, a task that allows them to create art.

When Caravaggio, after escaping prison, does return to his wife who is staying in her brother in law's home, their reunion is described artistically. Giannetta is sexualized and when they have sex, the act itself depicts them as having found success. Caravaggio "breaks the necklace" Giannetta is wearing and the "pearls fall around them." As he carries his wife, the "crockery behind her crash[es] from shelf to shelf" and "blue plates bounce and come through the lower panes like water and smash on the floor" (204). They bring destruction to everything around them, and it is all displayed as artistic. They destroy these things even though the home is not theirs, but like the rich, they can live and have sex in a carefree manner, destroying all of the things of value around them. The text uses Giannetta to show Caravaggio's success. She is showered with "jewels of every colour he has stolen for her," there is "a pearl embedded in her flesh," and her "wedding ring he can pull off her finger with his teeth" (203). Giannetta is symbolic of Caravaggio's own successful integration and represents the way he has "risen up" (pun intended) in social rank.

The women Ondaatje presents are all minor supporting characters. Giannetta is sexualized right from the moment she and Caravaggio meet. Their meeting itself is mythological; in his attempt to escape after his first robbery, Caravaggio breaks his ankle and hides in the mushroom factory where Giannetta works. He hides in the closet where she changes her clothes and then he asks her for help. Alice and Clara are also sexualized. Both of them are connected to Patrick and both support his characterization. The text compares the two women: "Clara's vividness and erotic movement, even when she stretches, to Alice's paleness and suppressed

energy” (75). They are sexualized and only used to further the growth of Patrick’s character rather than have any more substance to them.

As a Canadian novel, *In the Skin of a Lion* was extremely successful. Ondaatje’s book won the first ever Canada Reads competition in 2002, fifteen years after the book was published. This win “increased the novel’s sales by eighty thousand within the following twelve-month span” (Dobson 106). *In the Skin of a Lion* saw more fame than *Obasan* did; Ondaatje’s book sold more copies and won bigger-named awards. Ondaatje’s book was “celebrated for its postmodern pastiche style of recording the narratives of Canadian immigrants” (Dobson 105-106) but it is the glorification of immigration that is problematic.

In the Skin of a Lion is artistically written; the two white male immigrant characters presented are majestic, almost mythical. The only female immigrant, Giannetta, as well as the other white females, are all highly sexualized. Kogawa’s novel does far more in terms of giving a voice to the voiceless. As Dobson notes, the critique of Ondaatje’s novel boils down to what it presents as possible for immigrants:

the alternative modes that are offered in the text have been questioned. It seems that the politics of difference ends up requiring that ethnically marked bodies give up their marks of difference in order to be integrated into Canada, a troubling position that abuts some of the difficulties in *Obasan* (and a demand that is impossible for *racialized* bodies). (106)

While Lowry praises Ondaatje’s portrayal of race struggles as an undoing of the “dominant ‘race’ codes of CanLit” (Lowry 2), Dobson’s direct comparison of *In the Skin of a Lion* to *Obasan* ensures that white and non-white are defined clearly. By writing a novel on immigration in 1987 but only exploring the struggles of Eastern European immigrants, Ondaatje ignores the very different barrier of integration visible minorities have to face. The novel attributes

successful immigration to individual meritocracy alone, ignoring the fact that this is not the only thing required for immigrants to be successful, especially for immigrants of colour. By sprinkling in Eastern references, Ondaatje uses the east as a sort of fetish in his novel, making the text even more problematic when he ignores the very real struggles of 1987 immigrants from the East for the issues of European immigration he portrays.

Chapter 3

Vincent Lam's *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures*

In *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures*, Lam presents the struggles of two Asian immigrants in medical school, Chen and Ming. Ming is an outsider to Canadian society, and Lam depicts her as a stereotypically intelligent but emotionless Chinese-Canadian, who, despite loving the white character Fitz, bows to parental pressure and marries Chen. It is problematic that a book that won the Giller Prize presents the only immigrant woman doctor as a stereotype, and yet, Lam's book is mostly praised, his own gender bias ignored.

In a book review by Judy Stoffman that first appeared in the *Toronto Star* and now, is also present on Lam's own website, Stoffman has nothing but praise for Lam's novel. She notes that *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures* follows the lives "of successful, assimilated young Chinese-Canadian professionals," but ignores that in reality, the two—success and assimilation—go hand in hand. The only reason these doctors are successful is because both Ming and Chen are assimilated. As such, neither of them is really representative of complex, hyphenated Canadian characters because Lam represents very little of their Chinese identities.

Each of Lam's stories has varying narrative perspectives and focus, but Ming is only ever shown in third person, through a narrative that mainly focuses on either Fitz or Chen. By only presenting her through the gaze of either of her romantic partners, Lam does not allow the reader a chance to get into Ming's mind, understand her struggles, feelings, or be able to connect to her thoughts. She is racialized and kept an outsider, and the depiction of her personality as detached further emphasizes this.

The book's first chapter starts off by having Fitz as the outsider. Lam appears to be sympathetic of Ming's struggles, but he still objectifies her. When having lunch with Ming, Fitz

cannot consume an Asian culture, literally choking on the hot peanut sauce, calling his own intolerance “Anglocentric” (4). Fitz tries to regain control over the conversation, but here, Ming succeeds in getting her message across, leaving Fitz to drink alone. The novel does not continue down this path. Fitz gains control over the narrative and his story becomes more important, with Lam focusing on his heartbreak and pushing Ming aside. Rather than further explore Ming’s struggles, the text focuses on Fitz’s pain, alienating Ming from readers. The way Ming moves on from her relationship with Fitz portrays her as detached, cruel and heartless, allowing readers to blame her for Fitz’s pain, eventual alcoholism, and self-destructive mindset.

When the two separate, the text focuses on Fitz as he pushes himself to do better in his classes, hoping that doing so would secure his spot in medical school and allow him to move closer to Ming. Ming cheats on Fitz and rather than guiltily confessing to him, she is cruel and refuses to accept blame, saying “I don’t do guilt” (63). She is deliberately callous and feels superior to him for being in medical school before Fitz gains entry. Ming emphasizes that “human anatomy is important—it’s for real now” (59). She blames Fitz for her own problems too, telling him “I didn’t learn the thorax well enough because you need me too much. How much do we have to talk?” (59). She stops answering his calls and the way she speaks to Fitz, treating his needs as a burden, further emphasizes her holier-than-thou attitude.

The first chapter introduces Ming as quiet, reserved and an over-thinker. She constantly rethinks her relationship with Fitz, tells herself and him that even though their feelings are mutual, she cannot get involved with him romantically. She keeps her thoughts in and has to be certain before taking action. Initially presented from a third-person perspective, Fitz is the focus of narration here and he still idolizes her, only sees the good and so, any of these potentially negative aspects of Ming’s character are brushed aside. Fitz is respectful and accepting of the

boundary that Ming places between them. He is patient with her, and still offers her comfort. Fitz is presented as calm and kind, which clashes with the way he goes on to be presented. When Fitz becomes an alcoholic and makes morally grey decisions, his characterization is in a stark contrast with his personality in the earlier stories. Fitz's character falls onto a downward trajectory right from the moment Ming breaks up with him, with Fitz blaming her as the source of his misery later on. Despite this, he is still given the authority to have more chapters where the narrative focuses on him. Lam still gives his point of view value, giving him a voice, which further emphasizes the absurdity of denying this chance to Ming.

In a 2013 Globe and Mail article, entitled "Why do we struggle with what makes Canadian Literature?" Russel Smith argues that "emotion has always been the primary driver of any attempt to define Canadianness." While Smith argues that the only way to ascertain that a piece of literature is considered Canadian should be by identifying that the author is either a citizen or permanent resident of the country, his attempt at defining a Canadian identity is not farfetched. Smith moves away from using emotion and tries to ground his definition in reality, but the fact is, emotion is still a strong defining factor. Fitz's emotion, our emotional attachment to him, and of course, his white skin, all make him more easily identifiable as a Canadian. Ming's coldness, her lack of emotion and instead, her analytical mind, paints her as a foreigner.

The novel's epigraph, "Medicine is a science of uncertainty and an art of probability" by renowned Canadian physician Sir William Osler, reinforces the different personalities of both Ming and Fitz. Ming is the rational, analytical-minded character, while Fitz is governed by emotion and sentiment. The characters are polar opposites then, and Lam attempts to connect them through their shared culture of medicine. They are connected in that they both want to be doctors, but Ming's analytical mindset frames her as uncaring. In contrast, Fitz's emotion

humanizes him, challenging gendered stereotypes of males being the cold, unemotional characters. Ming's coldness further villainizes her, and her relationship also with Sri emphasizes this aspect of her depiction.

While Sri is of Indian descent, he is also a sentimental character, and thus, depicted as a Canadian. The introduction of Sri in "Take All of Murphy" offers a perspective that challenges the way Ming is initially presented. Sri is presented through a third-person narrative that focuses on Chen. Here, Ming is no longer reserved. She is eager to learn, yet cold and cruel, being depicted as heartless. Chen, Ming, and Sri are all in the same dissection group, sharing a cadaver they are told to respect. While Sri proposes that they name the cadaver "Murphy" to enforce a respect for it, Ming refuses, making a point of focusing on "the cadaver's aorta, the cadaver's kidneys" (40). When Murphy's tattoos are revealed, Sri attempts to uncover the cadaver's story, concluding that Murphy was an air force pilot. Sri suggests they cut around the crucifix on Murphy's body, saying it is "bad luck" to cut through it, and "[y]ou should respect a man's symbols" (43). Ming's retort stereotypes Sri: "Don't your people burn the corpses anyhow?" to which Sri responds, "He's not my people" (43).

Ming's own racist remarks show her to be both cruel and uncaring. Rather than sympathize or connect with another visible minority like herself, Ming shows her own racism, constantly undermining and disrespecting Sri's beliefs. The text presents the narrative such that Sri's "emotional response... is the focus of the story" (Sugars 259), giving him a voice and further villainizing Ming. When Ming loses half of the cadaver's head, Sri feels "she has willfully violated both him and Murphy" (Sugars 260) and is horrified at learning that upon finding it, she chose to leave it in a bag with the intestines. Ming literally loses the right side of the cadaver's head, the part of the brain that is said to be more creative, governed by emotion and

sentiment. As an analytical character, Ming would be considered left-brained, and so, her uncaring attitude at losing the opposite part of the head emphasizes her cruelty, but also, enforces her lack of emotion and sentiment.

Sri wants to respect the cadaver's symbols and his personality clashes with Ming's cold-heartedness. Sri's respectful personality is represented as something that stems from his cultural and religious beliefs and this aspect goes on to make him a better, more caring doctor. As such, Sri is presented as a foil to Ming. In "Winston," the narrator presents an in-depth look at Sri's psyche from a third-person focus of narration on Sri, which contrasts with the complete lack of connection readers can make with Ming. Even after his death, Sri is remembered by the other doctors as kind-hearted. Chen and Fitz bond over their shared memories of Sri, remembering the time he personally made eggs benedict for a patient (285-286).

It is clear that "the reader is meant to empathize with Sri's inner conflict and not Ming's detachment" (Sugars 260), and this further alienates Ming from readers. Sri is depicted as a man who is respectful; he values the symbols on the cadaver, cares about the tattoo of a cross and reference to a biblical verse. His caring personality clashes with Ming's clinical one, and her inability to accept blame for her own mistakes (losing the cadaver's head) is similar to her not taking blame for cheating on Fitz. Chen tries to care for both Sri and Ming, being the peace maker and a reliable character. Like Patrick in *In the Skin of a Lion*, Chen is the bridging character. He defends Ming but later apologizes to Sri on her behalf, connecting each of the doctors to each other. Chen is kind to and observant of Sri and offers support for Fitz in "Contact Tracing" as well.

Ming's relationship with Fitz is evidently different from her relationship with Chen. While Fitz's perspective makes her seem like someone Fitz has an active and complex

relationship with, Chen only presents her as a placeholder figure. In “Before Light,” a chapter that is from Chen’s first-person perspective with himself as the focus of narration, Ming fills the role of his wife. She lives with him, but Chen does not mention anything about their relationship. We do not get to see any love or connection between the two of them. Prior to his night shift, Ming tells Chen to “try to rest. Resting is good” (307). She stays awake while her husband tries to get some sleep, staying in her own sphere separate from him. Despite showing a scenario in which she could be domestic and perhaps open and kind, Ming is still cold and abrupt, emphasizing Ming’s coldness to be evident even in her relationship with her husband Chen.

Chen is allowed to value his heritage. He is allowed to marry a woman who comes from a culture similar to his own and still be represented as a character who becomes Canadian by the very end. In “A Long Migration,” Chen initially tells his story from a distant perspective, taking the role of a native informant, unable to really connect with readers. But by the last short story, “Before Light,” Chen’s character is assimilated. His first-person focus of narration ends the novel, giving him the final voice and framing him as an all-around Canadian, capable of blending in to the society around him. He is not racialized in this chapter, and his Chinese heritage is not noted at all. Chen is allowed to go from being a guest, or native informant (as he is seen to be in “A Long Migration”) to becoming a host of Canadian culture.

On the other hand, Ming is not given this chance. Lam presents her as stereotypical in that she is submissive to her parents’ will and incapable of fighting for herself for fear of upsetting them. Even when she marries Chen, Lam neglects to show whether or not the couple is happy or close. Despite her assimilation, Ming’s status as a woman and visible minority keeps her as othered, unable to become a host and reinforcing the stereotype of visible minority Canadians in general. She remains an outsider to Canadian culture, failing to be accepted into

Canadian society. The fact that Ming may have been attached to her own culture, the fact that she may have wanted to hold on to her culture and, to do so, chose to marry a man like herself, is completely glossed over. Instead, she is continually depicted as heartless, not willing to fight for a man like Fitz, being cruel to him instead.

Through Fitz's white male gaze, Ming is only somewhat humanized. Lam explores their relationship while the narrative focuses on Fitz, the narrator noting that Ming could not "imagine loving anyone else" (57) and emphasizing her promise to Fitz that telling her parents about him "should be easier now that [she is] far away." The glimpses we get into Ming's perspective only really appear through the things she says to Fitz. When frustrated with the pressure he places on her, Ming tells Fitz, "You don't get it, do you? That it won't ever be easy" (58), emphasizing that Fitz never understands the struggle Ming faces. By refusing to explore her struggle from her own perspective, Lam alienates Ming from readers as well, making her the villain.

Ming only ever becomes the victim when exploring her sexual abuse. Ming's abused past is used within the narrative to bond her closer to Fitz; she "confesses" her sins to Fitz and the two of them take the first step in acknowledging their feelings for one another. Fitz is introduced as a character who has experienced his own sense of childhood trauma. He tells Ming that "the loneliness he felt after his mother died was like living in a house frame that would never be clad with walls or a roof" (63), and in doing so, his character evokes sympathy. In contrast, rather than allowing the reader to feel sympathy for Ming's experiences with Karl, Lam focuses on Ming's self-blame, and later on, Fitz's attempt at being her saviour.

After they have separated, Fitz breaks into Ming's house and escapes just as Chen starts coming in. Fitz imagines his own encounter with Chen, rendering the situation in filmic form, where he sees himself as the villain and Chen as a heroic kung fu master. Fitz perceives Chen as

a stereotype, in the same way that the text presents Ming as a stereotype. Fitz is “*the faithful but jilted lover*” (83) in this scenario, emphasizing him as victim to Ming’s unfaithfulness, yet villainous to Chen’s protection over Ming. There is the implication that Ming is property. Chen is given the duty to protect her as a sort of ownership over her, and by no longer being with her, Fitz is denied this role.

Prior to breaking into her apartment, Fitz has an interview at the same medical school Ming attends where he meets Karl. Fitz plays the role of the hero, defending Ming. He is the white saviour here, imagining himself “jerking his knee up into Karl’s jaw, Karl’s head snapping back” (71-71). Fitz sees himself as better than Karl but not good enough to be better than Chen, specifically because of the way Chen has managed to win Ming over. When Karl tells Fitz “I wouldn’t count on Toronto” (74), Fitz uses Ming’s trauma to blackmail Karl, saying, “Imagine the embarrassment if there was some reason you couldn’t be left alone with kids” (74-75). By using Ming’s trauma to blackmail his way into medical school, Fitz is presented as a problematic figure, with grey morals. Despite this, he is still given a prominent voice, with the narrative focusing on him.

The fact that the text depicts two Chinese men, both Karl and Chen, with vastly different morals and personalities shows that Lam is able to present male visible minority characters well, with depth and give them importance. The place where Lam fails is in his portrayal of Ming, a depiction that calls into question why a book that so poorly depicts the only female immigrant character could have won a such a prestigious award, giving it the authority to contribute to Canadian cultural capital. Canadian cultural capital as relegated through the Giller Prize does not give female visible minorities this same ability to contribute their own stories in the way men are given this right.⁴

Ming feels guilty for using her sexuality to keep Karl as her tutor, but Cynthia's occupation as a sex worker entails no guilt. Cynthia is white and uses her position to question the people who come to her rather than feel guilty for her own occupation. When a bylaw inspector and police officer catch Cynthia in the middle of an appointment, she is arrested and then forced to go to court. She is frustrated, wanting to "address the court and say what was clear to her. *Sure I was blowing him. That's what he wanted, to get off, just like you're getting off on me now*" (199). The narrator notes that "the prosecution lawyer made her angry, the way he enjoyed administering humiliation without paying for it" (200). Cynthia sees her occupation as humiliating, but is clearly doing it for the money, thus, evoking sympathy from readers. Ming cheating on Fitz is depicted as immoral, while Cynthia's entire occupation being in such a grey moral field does not incur upon her the same judgment Lam allows readers to have over Ming. Instead, Cynthia brings a new issue to light, allowing readers to feel sympathetic towards her. In court, Cynthia is cleared because the officer had no search warrant, but after the incident, "she raised her price for oral" (200) and continued working in the same field. Cynthia is allowed to be the focus of the narration for a part of this chapter, which gives her more authority than Ming is ever offered. Cynthia is a more three-dimensional character, allowing readers to sympathize with her as she feels better after returning the widow her dead husband's money.

Lam's problematic depiction of Ming is not indicative of his depiction of women in general. Cynthia, Janice and Dolores are all white, and three-dimensional, well-rounded characters. Cynthia justifies her occupation by pushing the blame onto the men that take advantage of women like herself. Dolores is a nurse and a frightened mother, so afraid of SARS that she forgets about her children's health, preoccupied with her worry of being quarantined and having to leave them alone. Dolores fears the possibility of having a fever, ducks out of the

checkpoint line outside of the hospital she works at, and drives herself home. At home, she realizes that she may have just put her children in even more danger:

What was she doing? What was she thinking? She was in the process of contaminating her children's home. Whereas all this time she been thinking only of the problem of picking up her children from the babysitter and bringing them home, now she wanted more than anything to keep them away from this place—this place that she was now transforming into a cesspool of disease. (303)

The fear in Dolores's very short narrative has far more emotion than we ever experience from Ming. Dolores's story illustrates the general fear around the infectious disease; her bone-chilling narrative evokes sympathy and presents her as a character readers can connect with.

Other than being presented through the eyes of Fitz and Chen, Ming is also presented in a narrative that focuses on one of her patients, Janice. The contrast between Janice and Ming is striking; where Ming is clinically efficient yet detached, Janice's emotional and physical strength depict her as a character to be in awe of. Janice spares her neglectful husband, Oliver, from knowing details that would only worry him, depriving herself of the emotional support system she should have had in place, showing that she is willing to be brave alone. Oliver is oblivious to the pain and fear his wife is going through, and yet, Janice is kind to him, knowing he is too far and will be too late, and so spares him from potential worry. She is strong and takes on a maternal role, both to her unborn child and Oliver.

Ming remains calm and collected, willing to go to the extreme Janice suggests. At Janice's request, Ming performs a caesarean section on Janice without waiting for an anaesthetist. Ming tells Janice, "[t]hey call it a Caesarean section... because it comes from the time of the Caesars in Rome. They used to tie the woman down" (230). Ming operates "quickly,

methodically” (231), doing whatever it takes to save both her patient and the baby. Ming is secondary, contrasting and in fact, complementing Janice’s strength. She remains detached, does not offer any emotional support or comfort. When Ming discovers that the baby is at risk, she is grateful that Janice understands the urgency of the situation. Ming tells Janice that the baby’s “head will crush the cord” and rather than explain what this would entail, Janice herself replies, saying “And my baby will suffocate.” Ming is detached still, with the narrator noting that “Dr. Ming nodded, and the corners of her mouth creased with the satisfaction of having laid out certain facts and seeing her patient come to the correct conclusion” (220). Ming is grateful that she does not have to explain herself, knowing that Janice’s condition is delicate and Ming would have to inform her kindly.

Her lack of kindness, her unwillingness to share information with her patient contrasts with Janice’s own refusal to share information with Oliver. While Ming’s reasons are inherently selfish in that speaking such facts would require a sympathetic tone, Janice’s reasons elicit even more kindness in the reader; she realizes that Oliver is unable to make it and so, telling him would only worry him further, so she chooses instead to just tell him to be safe. Janice carries the burden and stress herself; the strength to do so all comes from herself, as she has no real support. She does all of this and is white, which calls into question why a woman of colour cannot occupy a similar role. Lam writes Janice as a female character who maintains this sort of strength in a very sexist world. This chapter presents Oliver as the only male and an emotional intruder, not present and also not focused, but nevertheless disrupting the calm and peace both Ming and Janice strive to maintain. Ming’s character comes secondary to Janice’s, showing the difference in the characterization of a woman who is a visible minority versus one who is white. Janice’s

character is an impressive portrayal of a woman by Lam. The image of her contrasts with Ming's portrayal, even just in this story.

Cynthia, Janice and Dolores are all white, and in contrast to these three women, Ming is a two-dimensional archetypal character. This emphasizes Lam's own bias towards the one female visible minority present. Ming is presented only through the male gaze of Fitz, Chen, Karl and even the text itself, all of whom emphasize her cold detached personality. There is an inherent failure to capture Ming in any kind of human form. Instead, she is robotic. This contrasts strongly from the way Fitz is presented.

As the white male, Fitz is the representative "Canadian." He starts off as a likeable protagonist figure. When he and Ming break up, Fitz's character spirals. His heartbreak after Ming moves on could be seen as the cause of the misery and depression he faces throughout the story. While initially determined to become successful in his career and claiming that his wanting to be a doctor stems from good intentions rather than caring about the money, Fitz fails to find happiness in his job and blames Ming for the downward trajectory of his life. He is presented as a complicated, round character, unlike Ming who is two-dimensional.

In "Eli," Fitz is the focus of narration and the chapter, presented in first person, makes Fitz's thought process easy to follow. Fitz criticizes the police, who "stand and talk and lean on things as if they belong anywhere" (166). He notes that they exert their own authority on places where they do not belong and is frustrated at their attempt to take charge over his space. In *Obasan*, Naomi is uncomfortable with the way Old Man Gower sits in her home as though he owns it, not as a typical guest. Gower sits comfortably, in a place that does not belong to him. In much the same way, Fitz feels like the police (who have brought Eli in under arrest) are trying to assert themselves in his workplace, a realm that should be his own. Fitz deliberately tries to

extend Eli's waiting time, knowing that the officers would be frustrated. He notes "[w]e all have our quiet ways of asserting ourselves" (173), but when Eli tries to bite Fitz, Fitz's anger is redirected to Eli. Despite this, Fitz deliberately leaves a pair of scissors within reach of Eli and feels justified in potentially causing harm to the police officers when they will deal with Eli later.

As a white man, Fitz is given the authority to react to the sort of intrusion he feels. Rather than comply and let the police do their job, Fitz feels frustrated at their attempt to overstep into his realm. Fitz reacts to the invasion without being afraid of any backlash, and this is possible because he is white. For many racialized Canadians, black men specifically, a police officer's demands are met with fear and immediate compliance. While society allows "many white Canadians to think of the police as those who protect their security, Black people, quite legitimately, largely fear for their security" (Maynard 102) when it comes to any police interaction.⁵ This discomfort over an invasion of space is very similar to the invasion Naomi feels at Gower's presence in her house. Even Naomi's father, Mark, is uncomfortable even after Gower has left their house; Mark's "eyes are not at ease" (Kogawa 82).

Lam allows readers to feel sympathetic towards a defiant Fitz's struggle in this chapter. The first-person narrative makes Fitz's immoral act understandable, and his vilification of the police officers justifiable. The suggestion of hurting someone should be seen more clearly as morally wrong, but instead, the text makes the situation appear grey.

Similarly, in "Night Flight," Fitz's alcoholism and misuse of his doctor title should make him seem immoral, but Lam displays his humanity. When drinking vodka before work, Fitz notes that his uniform has some "pull with the highway cops" (235). His drinking, though inherently wrong and putting others at risk, is brushed off as something he uses to self-medicate, which evokes sympathy. Even Chen turns a blind eye towards Fitz's problem, being aware of it,

but feeling pity for the lack of meaning Fitz struggles with in his life. Rather than feel morally obligated to take some sort of action, however, Chen brushes the issue aside. The entire field of medicine is presented with all of these grey areas, where action and inaction are both justified, but for Ming, any morally wrong act villainizes her further.

Fitz becomes kind to Mrs. Amiel only when he learns that she has given up everything to fulfil her husband's last wish. Fitz lies to her to comfort her:

Without a moment's hesitation and with the greatest tenderness I have within me, I lie. I say, "I think that your husband got the crucial treatments he could have received at home...he got all the main things that could have given him a chance" (262).

By presenting this in first person, the text allows readers to connect with Fitz, and really understand him. His lie to Mrs. Amiel is presented as the right thing to do, and also, a sympathetic act.

Fitz is also concerned with making sure he notifies the Guatemalan airport workers about what he believes are forest fires, which presents him as compassionate. He rushes to leave the scene of the fire and warns the ground crew only after his plane has taken off. He wants to make a difference, pretends to be willing to sacrifice himself to save others, but warns them only after he has saved himself. When learning that the fire is a controlled burn, Fitz cannot fathom the concept. Fitz is afraid of something that can cause harm but can also be controlled, similar to his perception of his own drinking. He feels that his drinking is in control and realizes how out of hand it has gotten only when he develops a tremor, a symptom of his withdrawal. This happens only when he is put under quarantine after being diagnosed with SARS. Lam depicts Fitz as inherently good, but also inherently ineffectual. Despite his downwards trajectory, Lam still

evokes sympathy for Fitz. Fitz does things that are morally wrong, allows his patients to cause harm and acts inherently selfish.

Gradually, however, the focus of the novel shifts away from Fitz, moving instead to giving Chen the more prominent voice. Chen's overall portrayal varies greatly from Fitz's. Chen begins as detached storyteller in "A Long Migration," the first chapter that really focuses on Chen. In this chapter, Chen "wanted to pretend to be a doctor" despite only being a first year medical school student, and later, learns that unlike people with such inexperience as himself, "real physicians... try to not to be doctors" (114) in situations such as the one he finds himself in. Doctors want to put on a mask, pretend to be someone else, someone accepted rather than someone who can diagnose and cure. Chen learns early on the burden and hardship associated with being labelled as a doctor, which contrasts with Fitz's relationship with the term. Fitz holds on to his title as the only thing that defines him, while Chen is made more human by learning that his title also carries responsibilities he may not always want to have.

"A Long Migration" comes right after "Code Clock" where Fitz is the focus of narration, but the chapter is in third person. This is the point at which the text pulls away from making Fitz the focus and moving on to making Chen central. Fitz is already a doctor in "Code Clock" whereas in "A Long Migration," Chen is still only a medical student. As such, Chen's story interrupts the chronological flow of the novel. "A Long Migration" introduces Chen's character as different than the peacemaker he is presented to be. The placement of this chapter ensures that Chen is introduced as more than just the man Ming cheats on Fitz with. His character is given more substance, and he is better explored.

In "A Long Migration," Chen spends time with his dying grandfather, Yeh Yeh, and attempts to uncover what was true and what was mere "exaggerations of memory" (103) from

the stories he had heard. Chen is the focus of narration and the chapter is told in first person, allowing the reader to completely get inside Chen's head. Chen is presented as a storyteller to a non-Chinese audience, playing the role of a good native informer. His time with his grandfather is exoticized, and this role leads Chen to eventually be a guest-turned-host to Canadian culture.

When talking about his grandfather, Chen uses the term grandfather and Yeh Yeh interchangeably only after formally establishing their equivalence (102). It is clear, then, that the audience to Chen's own story would be a reader who needs such an equivalence to be established, and a constant reminder of the equivalence of the terms. There is a clear distance between the reader and Chen as opposed to the reader and Fitz, Fitz being more accessible and his chapters being clear, with no language barrier. When there is an insertion of Chinese dialogue into the text, everything is translated, clarified, and served to us in an accessible way. But the very presence of a different language distances Chen from the reader, pointing to the existence of a barrier. Chen is the native informant, and not giving translations would seem antagonistic, but giving them establishes an "exotic" air to the story, allowing the language to be fetishized.

Similar to the ways in which Chen serves as a stand-in for Lam, Kogawa uses Naomi's protagonist role as a stand-in for her own. But while Chen takes the role of a native informant and storyteller who makes his own culture accessible to a white audience, Naomi's role as narrative interpreter feels more natural, and better integrated. Unlike Chen's use of the term Yeh Yeh, the first time Naomi refers to the titular character, she introduces her as "my aunt, Obasan" (Kogawa 7) and from this point forward, refuses to reiterate. In contrast, Chen's interchanging use of the terms "Yeh Yeh" and "my grandfather" in both languages shows that he tries to clarify meaning to his readers. As such, Chen's language is made to feel more foreign.

Naomi's meshing of the two languages and her use of translation in general shows an ideal of integration. Her use of Japanese terms shows her own respect and admiration for the language. Chen's speech in comparison, feels clumsy. When his grandfather speaks to him, the narrator gives the dialogue in English: "'Come and feel it. See what you think,' he said in Cantonese" (111). The necessity of specifying the language then, further establishes a distance. More often, the Cantonese words are given directly, with the narrator offering the translation immediately after. When discussing his grandfather's tumour, the text is presented differently, "'*Mo toong*,' he said. There is no pain" (112). Here, the text is made to feel more authentic in that the actual words his grandfather speaks are presented, but even just the italicization of the phrases emphasizes their portrayal as being a foreign invasion.

Kogawa's use of translations differs from Lam's. Unlike Chen's status as a native informant, Kogawa makes Naomi a protagonist figure who is more aware of herself and unwilling to assimilate. By being the native informant, Chen is focused on being the host, rather than embracing his own cultural background. Lam's text offers translations immediately after presenting any non-English phrase. Kogawa's novel analyzes the wording in Japanese, ensuring that her translation only comes when it feels natural and in a way that the tone can also be understood. On the same note, Ondaatje's refusal to offer translations of the Italian phrases makes his writing seem like white-exotic. Instead of distancing his readers, Ondaatje includes Italian as a normal part of his dialogue. Lam and Kogawa both cannot do this, because unlike Italian, Chinese and Japanese are both othered as standing outside of Europeanness.

Lam uses Chen and Ming's Chinese identity to pair them together. Ming being Chinese is touted as the destructive factor in her relationship with Fitz. Chen's Chineseness is depicted as the reason they are together, as Lam presents their relationship only through Fitz's eyes. When

Ming first mentions Chen, Fitz only feels threatened by him because of his heritage, depicting Chinese identity to be exotic, and the basis of Fitz's breakup to be grounded in this identification he cannot have. In the final short story of *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures*, Chen sheds his position of the native informant and becomes a more assimilated character. His Chineseness is not at all mentioned. Lam displays a little bit of Chen's home life with Ming, showing the way they cohabitate as husband and wife, and here, rather than explore any element of their shared culture, this aspect is ignored completely. Chen is depicted as having assimilated, and so, has lost his previous identity completely.

Chen is the focus of narration in this the final chapter, "Before Light." In this chapter, Chen is no longer a native informant and has let go of his Chineseness completely. There is nothing that makes Chen seem distant; instead, he is a character that readers can connect with, showing he has likely assimilated. He is not kept at a distance here; his struggle and actions are comedic. In trying to keep himself awake while driving home, Chen starts screaming nonsensical words like "BOPPITY BOO!" (335) and slaps himself. When he thinks the woman in the car next to him has perhaps seen this, his reaction is comedic still: "*Did she see me slap myself? Oh well, it's no one's business.* I slap myself again. She looks ahead, rolls her window up" (335). The function of comedy here, works to make Chen a character readers can connect with.

The book ends with Chen contemplating the benefits of remaining silent. The last voice of the book, though given to Chen, offers a telling representation of his character:

Mostly, I feel that if only I do not speak, if only I refrain from uttering a single phrase, then everything will be all right. If I talk, it may allow things to spill from me. It could set in motion a vertiginous unbalance, a confusion leading to madness, or a hunger that may cause me to eat until I burst and die. If only I do not speak, I will be fine. I may go see a

matinee. Movies are mostly mime, and will not lead to a dangerous escape of words.

(337)

This passage offers a reading that is different from the mainstream one Lam presents in the rest of the novel. While Stoffman notes that all of the characters are good, successfully assimilated characters, Chen's final words show a perspective that proves he may not be truly and comfortably assimilated. By forcing himself to remain silent, Chen offers a narrative that presents him as someone who understands the need to shut a part of himself out, diminish a part of his own identity to be able to be successful. Chen's fear that speaking may cause "things to spill" or "lead to a dangerous escape of words" further alludes to the possibility of him faking his assimilation.

The climactic story in Lam's collection is "Contact Tracing." Here, Fitz is the focus of narration, but the story is presented from a third person point of view, which conveys a sense of detachment. Lam places Fitz at a bit of a distance then, and so, the shift from focusing on him to focusing on Chen is more clearly displayed. Fitz is possibly dying, having contracted SARS on a heroic mission to save an ill patient. While the novel initially presents Fitz as a kind and caring boyfriend, he falls into being obsessive after Ming cheats on him and their subsequent breakup. In this chapter, Fitz is a doctor-turned-patient, evoking even more sympathy.

The nurses call Fitz doctor and he feels ambivalent towards accepting the moniker in his current predicament. The narrator notes, "this label which felt taunting and futile when he was alone became, with someone else present, his best and last and only piece of clothing which, despite its flaws, could hardly be discarded." Even the narrator refers to him as Dr. Fitz, alluding to his uncertainty in telling others to stop referring to him as what he is, saying "what would he be if not a doctor." Fitz wants his title as it is all he has, but also, wants to be able to feel like a

human, not have to work towards maintaining the image the title of doctor should provide. He wants to be able to be small and vulnerable as he has felt since the beginning of the novel when he talked with Ming about the loss of his mother—a fact that endears him to us. But at the same time, he feels uncomfortable with the idea of losing the only thing he feels defines him. To Fitz, his title is engrained into who he is in a social sphere: “Although he longed to shed the medical shell when he was alone, it was frightening to try to remember how to be anything else in the presence of others” (271).

Lam uses a very real event and connects it to fiction. He presents real facts and statements from the World Health Organization side by side with the words of the fictional doctors, specifically, Dr. Zenkie’s reports. Reality is blurred, and the many different voices contribute to this. At the end, when Chen saves Fitz’s life, the readers are made aware of this only through a statement Chen makes to CBC Television. This allows the text to have more authority in the way the story is depicted, making the situation seemingly nonfictional.

As the bridging character, Chen connects with Fitz in this chapter. The four doctors that the novel begins with are all connected at this point. Chen and Fitz bond through their shared quarantine. They mention Ming, who has not shown any symptoms, and Sri who has died from pancreatic cancer years prior. Sri is remembered for his kindness, the way he made eggs Benedict for a sick patient. According to Fitz, Sri was a “good guy” (286). Ming, however, is never discussed in terms of her character. Fitz apologizes for passing on his infection to Chen, and Chen brushes it aside, saying “It’s an infection. It’s not you” (279). Fitz is the one to bring up Ming, asking if Chen gave it to anyone else, perhaps a spouse: “Fitzgerald knew that Ming and Chen had married a year ago, that they were now Mr. and Mrs. Chen, although she still used Dr. Ming” (279). Chen’s response, that his wife is in quarantine but has not shown symptoms, is

the end of any conversation about Ming. She is brushed aside, only serving as the placeholder figure of being Chen's wife, and as a connection between Fitz and Chen, a connection that Fitz hopes Chen knows nothing about.

Chen feels sympathy, almost pity, for Fitz, and the two bond. Fitz still believes no one knows about his alcoholism, but as we find out through Chen, people are aware. By keeping this chapter in the third person, Lam's exploration of Fitz's alcoholism is more clearly depicted for what it is, rather than the comfort Fitz himself depicts his drinking to be. The narrator notes that aside from "the rationed nips, the binges called him like old friends who were impossible to outgrow" (275). The language allows readers to sympathize with him and feel pity too. It is made to be understandable, and by so cleanly placing Fitz's anger towards Ming side-by-side with the beginning of his alcoholism, Lam causes readers to blame Ming too.

Chen is kind to Fitz. He realizes that Fitz thinks people are not aware of his alcoholism, and Chen spares him from being aware about "how much people had talked in that indelible way" (288). He can see Fitz's attempt at being self-sacrificial, can also see the way Fitz is struggling and wants to hold on to any sort of respect he might be able to maintain. By signing a DNR, Fitz is willingly sacrificing himself, and by ignoring those orders, Chen is now made to be the saviour. Fitz is willing to die, is ready to accept death, but wants Chen to live. When Chen tells Fitz that "Ming and I were talking about kids," Fitz's response is, "I'm a fuckup anyhow. Better for me to croak. You stick around" (296). Fitz tries to fill the role of the white martyr, telling Chen to live but accepting death for himself. He wants to die as a "SARS martyr" (296) so that his death could have purpose.

At this mention of Ming, Fitz becomes "angry and sick with himself, his drinking, his aloneness." The narrator explores his thoughts:

He told himself resolutely that losing her hadn't influenced the shape of his life, but when he drank he did not believe this. When the bottle sank him below the comfort zone, Ming was one of the if-only-it-had-been-another-way things that became vivid. (297)

When talking to Chen, Fitz notes that all of these feelings are "all far away, dull" (280) and yet, he still dwells on her. He remembers a trip he took with Ming to Centre Island, and instead of being bitter, he "felt good, that it was a mostly pleasant memory of a woman whom he now hardly knew, and of himself as a person remembered" (292). His sober thoughts show a different side of him; he is happy. In his thoughts he goes on to note that he feels a slight pang, but this "was mostly a pang for his present aloneness" rather than pinning Ming as the source. The only bit of comfort he has is knowing he had made memories and would be remembered by her.

By being placed in quarantine side-by-side, Chen and Fitz are mirrored. There is a literal glass between them, and "through the glass, they could see each other's monitors" (283). While Chen has Ming and his family, Fitz has no one around him. When Ming is brought up, Fitz's loneliness is emphasized, making the reader feel even more pity for Fitz. The end of "Contact Tracing" leaves the case open; it is unclear whether or not Fitz survives. Whether he lives or not does not matter because the text ends his life here, choosing to end his narrative in way that illustrates Chen's heroism. Nothing has really changed; Fitz is still the same sad and lonely person. Since Chen does attempt to (and perhaps successfully) save Fitz's life, Lam inverts the normal order that he himself initially contributed to. Fitz was initially Ming's saviour (when he defended her before Karl), but here, Chen saves the white man, becoming the new saviour, and inverting the prior order. As a kind of guest turned host, Chen is now an honorary white man.

Throughout this, Ming is still kept completely outside. She cannot have the role of a saviour and does not get a chance to redeem herself. She is never the focus of narration in any of

the chapters. We get to see directly into Fitz and Chen's minds, getting chapters that are in first person from each of their respective points of view, and with them as the focus of narration. Ming is never given anything close to that. She is always depicted as cold, distant and cruel, even when she is presented in her professional role as a doctor.

The novel uses images of skin to get at a deeper level of connection between the characters. Ming breaks through Janice's skin without giving her an epidural. The image of piercing is prevalent, with Janice able to feel the pain as Ming is "cutting muscle, the blade deep inside me now" (231). By presenting her thoughts in first person, the text makes Janice's pain real, and allows readers to sympathize with her. Even as a minor character, Janice is explored and made three-dimensional, but this chance is not given to Ming. Janice's skin is protecting her unborn baby from the outside, but by literally and figuratively getting into Janice's skin, Ming saves the baby's life. By giving Ming permission to pierce through her skin while Janice herself can feel it, Janice opens herself up completely to Ming, quite literally. She lets the protective lining of her skin be pierced into, just to save her baby.

When Fitz treats Eli, Eli bites into Fitz's skin, and Fitz bleeds. Fitz is forced to take a blood sample, blood he calls "insurance blood" (183). Fitz's blood becomes exposed, exposing him to potential disease as well. From his own perspective, Fitz blames this exposure for what follows, saying that "*the evil of blood is like a malevolent thought. Once it touches, the very suspicion of its presence causes it to grow, to distort motive and action, and to propagate its own dark, spreading reach*" (181). Rather than give Eli proper stitches for a head wound, Fitz carelessly staples the skin on Eli's forehead, closing off his wound. By leaving a pair of scissors within Eli's reach, Fitz gives Eli the opportunity to pierce one of the police officers. Fitz blames

his own cruelty on the fact that his own blood had been exposed, describing the evil that comes from blood.

We get into the skin of Fitz, Janice, Murphy, and at only one point, Chen. When Ming sleeps with Fitz, there is a “a humid adhesion of skin on skin” (54-55), but this connection is only surface level. After Ming and Karl have sex for the first time, Karl removing his condom “looked exactly like a snake shedding its skin” (28). The graphic imagery, comparing Karl to a snake, alludes to his horrid character. Piercing through Murphy’s cadaverous skin is the source of much of the conflict in between Ming and Sri in “Take all of Murphy.” In “Contact Tracing,” Fitz’s “fever clawed at his skin” (271) and he shakes as a result of his withdrawal. Later in the chapter, when Chen breaks through the glass to save Fitz, Chen cuts “his arm on broken glass” (305) and so, Chen’s skin is pierced as well.

In “A Long Migration,” Chen’s grandfather’s tumour is “growing under the skin” and his “biggest fear was that the skin would split over the growing lump” (112). Having been diagnosed with renal cell carcinoma, “Yeh Yeh refused a second operation” which would “only prolong things” (105). By refusing to have his skin pierced, Chen’s grandfather is able to keep his insides, in. He keeps his secrets, tells stories that are generally exaggerations, and remains distant and inauthentic. Readers are unable to connect with his character, needing Chen to bridge the distance.

Ming pierces through Janice’s skin, but her own skin is never pierced. Ming’s cold personality, or her clinical exterior, protects her from letting others get under her skin. The text does not really explore Ming’s struggles, and as such, her skin protects her from being known or accepted. She remains a stereotypical character, preventing readers from being able to connect with her. Skin is a protective barrier, keeping the inside in, and leaving what is meant to be

outside of the body, out. While the other characters are seen to have their skin pierced, the fact that Ming is not given this keeps her on the outside.

Vincent Lam published his Giller prize-winning collection of short stories, *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures*, in 2006, five years after 9/11 and only a few years after the SARS outbreak. Both of these historical moments resulted in a great deal of xenophobia in Canada; in 2003 SARS was seen as something that came from Asia and caused harm to (white) Canadians,⁶ while 9/11 brought with it a rising fear of the East. Lam's book came at time when the national discourse would have overtly favoured a narrative that presented Canada as a diverse, unified nation, an image the country would have (and still is) attempting to project. This notion of diversity is a false one; the reality is, after 9/11, Canada shifted to be more concerned with security. Lam's year of publication also happens to be the same year Canada elected Stephen Harper as the country's 22nd Prime Minister.

Considering the national discourse at the time, Lam should have been in a position to write a better book, that is, a book that that would be more complex and humanizing, especially of the only female visible minority he presents. Ming is only ever presented in a third-person perspective, with the focus of narration always being on another character rather than herself. Fitz is the focus of narration, and Lam focuses mostly on his feelings. Lam says that his first attempts at writing came "after reading and rereading Ernest Hemingway's Nick Adams stories" (Stoffman). Lam praises Hemingway, who is celebrated for his clear and effective prose. But Hemingway's language attacks race and is full of images of toxic masculinity, both traits evident in Lam's writing as well.⁷

Lam's close connection to Margaret Atwood, which some critics insinuated as the reason he won the Giller prize, suggests that he is a man who has embraced Canadian culture. His

ability to professionally woo a woman who represents Canada in the global literary marketplace is fundamentally what allowed him to go on and win the Giller Prize, but this also made it possible for him to assimilate into the “diversity” of the country and embrace his “Canadianness.” His name, his winning of a Canadian literary prize, and his association with Atwood all allow him to carry cultural capital of his own. As a visible minority himself, Lam has shifted his identity from that of a guest to Canadian culture to that of a host.

By becoming a host to Canadian culture, Lam becomes representative of a successfully assimilated Canadian. Rather than embrace his hyphenated identity by writing successfully integrated characters, Lam’s novel presents Chen as having assimilated, suggesting that assimilating is the only way to find success.

It should not be surprising, then, that Lam’s winning of the Giller Prize led to all sorts of controversy. Since *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures* stereotypes the female Chinese-Canadian, the implication is that such characters, and so, people, have little depth beyond the stereotypes associated with them. As the Giller Prize winner, the fact that the book stereotypes the Chinese-Canadian woman shows that Canadian literature, at least according to the Giller committee, is willing to stand by, accept, and pass on this toxic message.

Stephen Henighan criticizes Atwood and her role in ensuring the Giller prize was fixed. Henighan notes that as Atwood stood up to introduce Lam’s book, “anyone who understood power in Canadian culture knew that Lam had won.” The fact that Atwood had withdrawn her own novel from being considered only reinforces Henighan’s claim, that Lam’s winning, through Atwood, allowed “the old WASP establishment to claim parentage over the new multicultural establishment” (Henighan).

The politics of the matter is jarring, and in “Mainstreaming Multiculturalism? The Giller Prize,” Kit Dobson echoes Henighan’s argument but focuses on a different aspect. Dobson’s focus is on Lam being so easily considered multicultural, representative of what the older generation of authors find to be a difference. Dobson questions what equality really means when the “Giller Prize systematically rewards commodified versions of ethnicity” (164) and notes that Lam’s book “reinforces pre-existing ideas of Canadian diversity, those that privilege whiteness as a universal category and multicultural difference as precisely that—as difference” (159).

Lam’s win, then, is framed as a controlled narrative of race, the older, white generation attempting to exert their own influence on a newer generation that may consist of visible minorities. Lam’s identity and his own assimilation is problematic. Lam is able to win the Giller Prize because he fits the picture of a “potential teddy bear” (Henighan), having assimilated and written an entire novel about other, “successfully assimilated” characters.

Chapter 4

André Alexis's *Fifteen Dogs*

Integration or assimilation have not even been considered by critics writing about André Alexis's *Fifteen Dogs*, because the novel clandestinely explores issues of race while ostensibly being a book about dogs. Alexis's novel won the Giller Prize in 2015, allowing *Fifteen Dogs* to assume considerable Canadian cultural capital. This book had to disguise itself as being about animals, rather than clearly deal with issues of race, slavery, and belonging in Canada. On the surface, *Fifteen Dogs* appears to be about dogs and human consciousness, but Alexis pulls a sleight of hand, tricking readers into believing the issues his novel deals with are universal, when in fact an important issue in the novel is race and how race operates.

Alexis's novel focuses on dogs, making it easier to explore the concept of "masters" (19) and "servitude" (21) without seeming to be a critique of white supremacist systems of oppression in Canada. Alexis also explores the supposed need for a social hierarchy, by showing that these structures are an essential part of maintaining order, at least as it appears to be in the world of dogs. In "Making My Head Spin: Critical Intersectionality," Victoria Bromley criticizes this dependency on social hierarchies. Bromley notes that "hierarchies of privilege order society based on ensuring that advantages flow to the dominant group in society: those who make the rules and hold power over others" (51). As such, the very concept of hierarchies enables those on the top to have control over those they feel are inferior to them—a problematic concept especially with regard to issues of racial enslavement and inequity. These hierarchies, then, need to be destroyed to make for equitable societies.

The fact that Alexis writes this novel as an apologue allows him to work with themes of slavery while bringing dogs to the forefront. Ironically, the form of apologue has origins that

stem from the East. The word itself, however, comes from a Greek root, and as per Greek mythology, two slaves, Aesop and Phaedrus, are accredited for bringing the literary form to the west. By using a form that the Greek myth shows came from slaves, Alexis is able to allude to his underlying themes in a way that criticizes the supposed whiteness of everything coming from Greece and forces one to question the true origin of the apologue (Chisholm).

The novel begins with two maps that create a narrative akin to realism. The frame opens with the gods Hermes and Apollo in The Wheat Sheaf, a real tavern located in Toronto. This realism further enforces the way Alexis's use of apologue works as a critique on the very real issues of Canadian society.

The book's premise gives it the guise of being about human consciousness, exploring how one can achieve happiness, and the role of love in a world where hierarchal interactions dictate the way dogs and people behave. While Alexis does explore these fundamental issues, the book focuses on more than just this. *Fifteen Dogs* has multiple frames, the outermost frame beginning with the Greek gods Hermes and Apollo, who are enjoying their time at the Wheat Sheaf Tavern where the people are worshipping them. While discussing the nature of humanity, Apollo and Hermes disagree on the superiority of humans to other animals. Apollo suggests a wager, offering a year's servitude to Hermes if Apollo loses, that animals "would be even more unhappy than humans are, if they had human intelligence" (Alexis 14). The very idea of the gods wagering servitude reinforces the theme of slavery and hierarchy in the novel.

The reference to Greek gods, the reinforcing of their familial structure by bringing in Zeus, and the gods being presented as a squabbling family all offer a representation of the gods as superior to humanity but exhibiting human qualities. The Wheat Sheaf Tavern in Toronto is a location that makes the gods seemingly accessible to readers. When the location changes to the

mythical city of Olympus that lies atop Olympus the mountain, this offers a framing of the gods in a world that is not accessible. The variance here reinforces the existence of a social and ontological hierarchy; though the gods seem almost human in their interactions with humans on earth, the novel emphasizes their superiority.

The gods all derive a sort of entertainment from watching the lives of the dogs, with Zeus showing sympathy for their suffering, Hermes and Apollo both cheating on the rules they have set in place, and all three of them interfering in and hoping to change the outcome of the dogs' lives. There is an interesting doubling of god and dog as well. Linguistically, the word god is an anagram of the word dog, which makes the interest the gods have in the dogs multilayered. The gods carry themselves in a way that consistently depicts them as being at the top of an ontological hierarchy; they are superior to humans in that they are immortal and they have a language that is far superior to that of humans, as "no mortal could learn so many shades of silence" (169).

Greece and Christianity, both two important markers of western culture, form the backbone of western civilization and fulfil fundamental roles in the novel. The entire novel revolves around the wager by the two Greek gods, thus framing the work through a tale that assumes the supposed superiority of western civilization. Just as the gods are superior to humanity and animals, western ideals are supposedly superior to all else.

Even though the dogs themselves do not follow any set religion, the allusions to Christian myth enforce the western framework of the novel. Of the fifteen dogs who are given human consciousness, only twelve make it out of the clinic and set out on a path together, the same biblical number of Jesus's twelve apostles and the twelve tribes who fled Egypt and wandered in the desert: "The twelve who set out from Shaw were driven as much by confusion as anything

else” (19). The garden of death (76-79) Benjy leads the pack to is akin to the biblical garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus undergoes suffering prior to his crucifixion. The three days it takes Nira to accept Majnoun’s ability to speak is a biblical number as well, reflective of the three days it takes for Jesus’s resurrection. It also takes three days for Atticus’s pack to die of poisoning after visiting the garden of death three times. Through the allusions to Christian myth and his portrayal of the Greek gods, Alexis first establishes and then critiques these markers of western civilization, and in doing so, critiques the concept of social hierarchies privileging whiteness.

There are other allusions as well that further enforce this white framing. The human woman Nira and Majnoun discuss films, the opera, and Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*. Miguel teaches Benjy the first few lines of William Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, and the name Nira initially chooses for Majnoun, Lord Jim, is taken from Joseph Conrad’s novel of the same name.⁸ These references are all literary markers that emphasize the western framework the novel challenges. The works mentioned show Miguel and Nira as being literary, but also, establish the narrative of the novel within a framework that is seemingly non racialized but everywhere smacks of race.

Of the fifteen dogs that are granted human consciousness, Agatha is the first one whose story is given to readers. Agatha “had been left at the clinic to be put down” but is unaware of her impending death. She “hesitated to choose liberty” (17) and instead, glorifies her mistress, refusing to rush to freedom because in doing so, she would give up on the possibility of going back to her home. In the same way that enslaved Africans were often afraid of embracing a life beyond what they knew, Agatha is unable to live a life without her mistress. Agatha’s glamourized perception of her mistress is what causes her death:

She wanted no part of a world in which her mistress did not figure. She lay down by the clinic’s door and let the others know she would not leave. She did not know that this

decision meant her death. It did not occur to her—it *could* not—that her mistress had left her to face death on her own. (18)

In much the same way, the other dogs' stories also have parallel themes to slavery. Of the remaining dogs, "the word *master* evoked in all of them feelings that did and did not call for hiding." Upon Majnoun's question "Where will we hide if a master comes?" (21), the ambivalent feelings of the pack as a whole towards servitude becomes relevant. Of the remaining pack, Prince wants to find his master and Athena is ambivalent, having become dependent on being carried. Amongst the bigger dogs, however, the idea of submission is disliked.

Atticus appoints himself as the leader over the twelve that remain, and the pack becomes his. Atticus's feelings about what is necessary for the pack to survive causes him to lead the dogs he believes would follow his idea, that is, be willing to go back to being "true dogs," and planning an attack to rid the pack of the others. Majnoun, philosophical figure, and Prince, poet, are bundled up with Bella and Athena, and the four of them face an attempted execution. Majnoun is left for dead but survives, and Prince is given no choice but to live in exile. The two female dogs are both killed. Atticus's fear is that these four would want to embrace change and make their newly acquired language normal.

When Atticus's pack rids itself of these dogs that are "undesirable" (95), they struggle to maintain a sense of order as there is no remaining dog that is willing to be "mounted." Max, a mutt who was initially a part of the already reduced pack, refuses to "accept a diminished position" (94) and fights Rosie, the German shepherd bitch, who "he could not stand to be mounted by" as he "was convinced he could overcome" (95) her. Atticus agrees that Max is rightful in his attempt to hold on to his status. Despite this, Max's unwillingness to cooperate with the hierarchy causes Frick and Frack to wound him, forcing Atticus "to finish the dog off"

(97). Atticus agrees that Max “had every right to contest his status” (95) but also notes that with the attempted execution of the initial four, the dynamic had to change.

The struggle the pack faces forces Atticus to clearly see the need for a distinct social hierarchy—there must be a top and bottom dog. In much the same way, in terms of slavery, the white-supremacist need for a similar hierarchy was emphasized. This human hierarchy put real people who were enslaved on the bottom, at the level of property and even below pets or animals. Women were still inferior to men, which is also shown to be the case in the mentality of the dogs where feminism is nonexistent or even unnatural. Both Benjy and Majnoun consider the “top dogs” to be the human men they encounter, Miguel and Randy. Among the dogs themselves, Atticus acknowledges that Rosie should have been the obvious choice for bottom dog because being a female “was a mark against her” (94).

Atticus’s pack strives to return to their base animal instincts. These dogs are trying to be “atavist” (22), and so, want to return to animal ways. Despite this, gaining human consciousness causes Atticus to feel some sort of human feelings towards Rosie, “the smell of her something he wanted for himself alone” (94). Atticus understands that the hierarchy should dictate Rosie as female be the dog that is mounted but refuses to diminish her. In contrast, when Benjy and Majnoun declare that their mistresses are inferior to the masters, neither of the two dogs seem to have any issue undermining the women. The dogs have no concept of feminism but Atticus’s now human-like feelings for Rosie make him want to treat her better. By depicting this sort of disagreement and confusion in terms of how the hierarchy should work, Alexis is criticizing the entire dynamic.

Atticus is the Plato figure. Like Plato who banishes poets from his republic, Atticus banishes Prince and Majnoun as both of them are problematic for the hierarchy Atticus wants to

maintain. Plato's proposals for his ideal city "amount[ed] to a complete reconstruction of Greek culture as it existed in his day" (Burnyeat). Plato considered poets to be liars and deemed them a danger to his ideal city. His banishment of a form of expression through which poets can criticize the society is problematic in that it would be authoritarian, demonstrating his unwillingness to accept the flaws in his thinking or adjust with the times. As the Plato figure, Atticus's banishment of Prince and the forward-thinking Majnoun emphasizes a sort of ancient Greek authority. Atticus and the Greek gods are at the top of their own social hierarchies, and so, the very order of society ensures that both of them benefit the most from their "top dog" positions. In the same way that Plato is reflected in Atticus, Plato's banishing of poets reflects Atticus's own banishment of Prince. Atticus wants to go back to his atavistic ways, and so, the implication here is that Plato, as well as the Greek philosophy he is paired with, all seek out this very same sense of "atavism"—a return to a "better" time, where there would no room for progress.

The book has an overarching outer frame that closes near the end when the gods return to their "home," but also, the gods from the outer frame intervene within the internal story. The outer frame enforces a reading of Greek whiteness within the inner narrative. This outer frame begins with Apollo, who wagers a year's worth of servitude to Hermes if even a single dog, given human intelligence, dies happy. Details arise, specifications and rules that make their game fair, but still, the gods intervene despite the fact that they are not supposed to. In the main outer frame, the Greek gods are playing with the lives of innocent animals. They exert their superiority and power over those beneath them, specifically, the dogs.

Zeus, Apollo, and Hermes are each paired with one of the dogs. Zeus intervenes in Atticus's life, Apollo in Prince's, and Hermes in Majnoun's. After ordering his sons to not interfere in the lives of the dogs any longer, Zeus himself immediately intervenes in Atticus's

life, as Atticus is his favourite from among the pack. Zeus and Atticus parallel each other; both are leader figures. Zeus is seemingly just, but by intervening right after telling his children not to, he portrays himself as an unfair leader. Zeus, as father to the gods, which are presented as a squabbling family, is unable to keep his children in line. He is unable to maintain a strong family unit, and his children do not really respect him, ignoring his commands and attempting to avoid him by staying on earth. In much the same way, Atticus struggles to maintain a correct hierarchy and get his pack to function as a cohesive unit. Max refuses to accept his place, and this struggle within the pack causes Atticus an uncertainty deep enough to lead him to want to develop a sense of faith in something. He begins to want to worship a god, and when he meets Zeus, his faith is rewarded with Zeus's pleasure at being worshipped. Zeus shows Benjy's perception of Atticus to be flawed, instead showing that Atticus is noble. When Zeus appears to Atticus, the father of the gods:

spoke to Atticus in the new language of the pack.

– Atticus, said the god, I am the one to whom you sacrifice.

– I knew you would come, said Atticus. Tell me how I may be a better dog.

– You are no longer a dog, said Zeus. (96)

By telling Atticus he is no longer a dog, Zeus affirms that trying to be a true dog is futile. This statement and acknowledgement makes Atticus's prayers meaningless as he attempts to be what he believes his god would want him to be. Why should Atticus strive towards a goal (to be a dog) that Zeus already determined to be unreachable? Atticus wants to be a true dog, but his "god" clearly tells him he is no longer a dog at all. Atticus's religiosity is made meaningless; he is attempting to be something he cannot be, even after it his "god" tells him that his efforts are futile.

Zeus does not encourage Atticus to give up his attempts at being a true dog. Instead, Zeus revels in the prayer and worship he is getting through this dog who tries to change despite knowing the futility. The text shows Zeus's egotistical nature in the way he intervenes in the life of Atticus immediately after ordering his sons to leave the dogs alone. Rather than be presented as a just ruler, Zeus intervenes when he wants to: "Taking pity on his favourite, Atticus, the father of the gods intervened in the life of the dogs" (92). Zeus is mirrored in Atticus – both are leaders of their own "packs." Zeus's favouritism for Atticus, however, develops from the faith the dog had, willing to worship what Atticus himself perceives to be the "dog of dogs" (96). As the father of the gods, Zeus's ego depicts him to be a flawed character, unworthy of his superior title.

Apollo intervenes in Prince's life by making him suffer, in order to prevent Prince's dying happy. He is bitter towards Hermes and is afraid to lose, so he causes Prince to go blind and then deaf, hoping that this added suffering would kill the dog's spirits. Apollo's efforts are futile however, as Prince's character is what matters; "[d]espite his tendency to introspection, Prince was something of an optimist in hard times" (160). He is old and suffering, and yet, he is grateful, comfortable, satisfied and dies happy. As the god of poetry himself, Apollo is frustrated at having to make Prince (the poet) suffer but does it anyway.

Hermes is also sometimes paired with Prince but mostly, with Majnoun. Hermes comes to Prince and helps him escape being killed by Atticus's pack. As the god of translation, Hermes tells Prince, who is saddened at being forced to be alone, that at least in exile, he can maintain his new language, telling him to "consider that, if you die, your way of speaking dies with you" (37). Hermes also grants Prince a happy memory after he has died, showing Hermes to be kind, and caring. Also being known as the god of conveyance of earthly beings to the afterlife, Hermes,

under Zeus's command, comes to Majnoun's aid in assisting him to accept death and follow Nira into the afterlife. Hermes is introspective; he understands that by asking the meaning of love, Majnoun is really trying to understand what Nira meant by the word and grants this understanding to Majnoun. Hermes is kind to the dogs. As the trickster god, meant to upset hierarchies, Hermes's kindness is a depiction of the way the other gods would not find it fitting to act. Apollo as more arrogant and egotistical in his assumed superiority, also represents Greekness most popularly; his oracle at Delphi attests to his centrality and importance in the Greek pantheon (Cartwright). Yet the text valorizes Hermes for his humanity. At the end, it is Hermes who is thoughtful, trying to understand the concept of love and death.

The novel ends by setting up a striking binary – “On the one hand, power; on the other, love” (170). Hermes is the loving god. As the god of translation, he is important in a world where the dogs, now with human consciousness, struggle to understand everything going on around them. Hermes is important for communication, as well as for a complete grasping of ideas. Apollo, conversely, is paired with power. By granting Prince the final memory of his master, Hermes acts kindly, allowing Prince to remember the comfort and love he had with his master Kim. In contrast, Apollo makes Prince blind and deaf, deliberately invoking suffering. Apollo uses power and his superiority in a corrupt hierarchy to inflict pain. The novel favours Hermes, and presents Apollo as corrupt, further emphasizing problematic issues with hierarchies.

In the time of slavery, enslaved Africans, being at the bottom of the Western hierarchy, were treated as property, considered equivalent to animals and cattle. But even today, there are “deliberate associations of Blackness with criminality by social elites” (Yuya 183). There is still a clear racial stigma associated with black people in general, emphasizing that blackness is immediately associated with inferiority by many people in Western culture. Enslaved Africans

would either strive for freedom, and accept the fact that upon running away, they could never come back, potentially leaving behind masters and other people they loved. Or some would not be able to fathom a life of independence, not capable of knowing how to live if they were not “provided for” by a master. In the same way, the dogs want to escape potential masters, or, as is the case with Agatha, are unable to go on without their masters or mistresses.

The gods’ wager being a year’s worth of servitude is seemingly ironic, then, in a novel that constantly depicts dogs thinking of their masters. The naming of the dogs is also relevant, reinforcing the emphasis on slavery as a subtext. Atticus and Prince are both names that were often given by whites to enslaved Africans. By naming someone they saw as inferior to them with a powerful, superior name, the slave owners (and dog owners) are able to feel even more power, as masters of powerfully named figures. Specifically for enslaved Africans, this was “a kind of branding through which slaveholders believed they were proclaiming the eternal superiority of their own white race every time they summoned a servant” (Newton). The fact that Prince can be taken as a slave name then, further enforces the images of slavery Alexis invokes. Prince wants to be serving to Kim. After his exile, Prince dislikes being so dependent on masters and so, remains individualistic, a free black man—or dog, as the case may be.

Majnoun’s name is also an interesting case. While initially accepting his new moniker of “Jim” from Nira, Majnoun goes on to tell his owner that his name is actually Majnoun and while she seems to accept and be respectful of this, she cannot even call him by his proper name, shortening it to “Maj” (125). Majnoun is an Arabic name; Nira’s shortening is problematic in that it shows her colonizing him – she cannot even say his full name and chooses instead to shorten it to something she can pronounce more easily. Nira is unwilling or incapable of adapting to the otherness of Majnoun’s eastern name, choosing instead to shorten it to force his name, and

him, into assimilating. Through the name Majnoun the narrator, and so, Alexis, engages in a sort of “exoticism” but fails to pursue it any further. Majnoun’s name, or the significance of it, is never explored; all we get is a very superficial eastern allusion, that is never clearly referenced. In the same way, race is never clearly referenced in the book.

In Arabic, Majnoun means a person who is crazed, or on the outside of belonging, outside of reason. The name, and Majnoun’s story, is reflective of the story of Majnun and Layla, a tragic Persian love story that stems from the 7th Century. Qays, a poet, and Layla fall in love at a young age, but Layla’s father prevents them from being together. Layla goes on to get married, and Qays is given the name Majnun, due to his obsession for her. Upon learning of the marriage, Majnun flees to the desert. After Layla’s death, from illness or heartbreak (stories vary), Majnun is found dead near her grave after carving three verses of poetry on a rock nearby (Seyed-Gohrab).

Since Nira and Majnoun are “avatars of the Arabic/Persian love story of Layla and Majnoun” (Ridington), Majnoun’s relationship with Nira mirrors a racialized allegory. Majnoun leaves Nira because she sees herself as superior to him, but then he comes back, with Hermes granting him the ability to “understand all human languages” (125). Majnoun begins to understand the meaning behind the things Nira says rather than be caught up in his perception of meaning. At this point, with his ability to completely understand his mistress, Majnoun and Nira’s story becomes almost a love story. Nira is uneasy at being called his master. She does not want him to feel like she owns him – a relationship suggestive of enslaved black men who had white lovers. The white lover would not have wanted the slave to feel inferior. Nira and Majnoun reach the height of their relationship and understand each other completely. The romantic element is reflected in the eastern source text – the story of Majnun and Layla. Majnoun asks

Nira about “fucking” (129), and she tells him about how she much prefers the concept of “making love” (130) instead. Even Miguel, Nira’s husband, is not capable of understanding their relationship and when Nira dies, Majnoun leads the rest of his life in suspended anticipation, waiting for her return, afraid that she might come looking for him and would not find him. His devotion to his mistress and his suffering evokes the sympathy of Zeus who sends Hermes, god of conveyance of beings to the afterlife to help Majnoun decide to move on, past this world into the afterlife. Majnoun does not die happy; he cannot have happiness because he is named after a tragic character from the love story.

Majnoun is the philosopher, upholder of reason and rationality while Prince is the poet figure. From the beginning, Prince’s poetry draws a dividing line between the other dogs in his pack, those that want to be atavist, and those that are willing to accept and adapt to their own changes. The dogs that cannot stand Prince’s poems are the ones that go on to be a part of Atticus’s pack, spending their lives attempting to become true dogs. By giving Prince such a divisive role (one that Prince does not intend), the text alludes to the fact that Prince would go on to be different from the other dogs, and capable of winning the bet for Hermes. Prince challenges the world view of the other dogs; they are afraid of his way of thinking; “The irritant was that Prince has strange ideas. It was he who had divided the day into portions” (27). The other dogs are afraid of having their old world view disrupted; they are simple dogs disoriented by Prince’s ideas. Prince challenges their concept of time and constantly creates poems with the new language. He is the one to introduce the first ever pun (23) but “[i]t seemed to Frick and Frack as if Prince were intent on destroying their spirit” (28).

Even though Prince is forced into exile, he still finds a way to achieve happiness. Atticus affirms that “there must be change. Some may stay. Some must not” (33). Atticus’s ideal of the

pack is a divisive one, while Prince wants to stay with the pack. Atticus wants separation; he knows that to go back to their “correct” way of living, there has to be a clear group that can and will stay and try to be normal dogs. In contrast, Prince strives for inclusion and is happy being with the dogs that can understand the new language that he enjoys making poetry out of. Prince is sad to be exiled, and so, he is presented as a good character that represents the way they should be, or the goal they can strive towards. Prince wants an inclusive and equitable society, but the last image we get of Prince running happily to his master suggests that this servitude is what gives him complete happiness in the end. Hermes grants Prince this memory that reminds him he “loved and knew that he was loved in return” (171), but this memory is specifically with his old master. The one dog who dies happy gets to see his master, implying servitude being the happiest one may be able to be. Prince becomes separated from and loses Kim because of Kim’s edict. Kim’s command to Prince to come back is against Prince’s very nature and inclination to chase a squirrel. Kim trains Prince against his natural instinct, and this imposition makes it even more difficult for us as readers to respect Prince’s own love for Kim. The fact that the novel ends on a problematic memory further enforces the issues with the white frame. Hermes grants Prince this memory ignorant of any issues associated with servitude, because as a Greek god, Hermes does still function within the social hierarchy.

Apollo and Hermes grant the fifteen dogs human intelligence, but with it, the dogs become aware of so much more. They develop a need for communication and an awareness of time. Human intelligence and the complexities associated with it are what force the dogs to create a new language, a new means by which to communicate. The novel focuses primarily on three languages for the dogs, the old language, the new language, and English. The dogs all see

the world differently, and interact with language differently as well, in a way that reflects their own world views.

In both *In the Skin of a Lion* and *Fifteen Dogs*, the dialogue is sometimes presented as free indirect discourse, with no quotation marks or clear punctuation. As such, the dialogue becomes strangely distanced, with little emotion. In Ondaatje's novel, this becomes problematic because as readers, we are unable to really hear the words of the characters. Instead, all of the dialogue blends in with the words of the narrator. Patrick's voice is conflated with the narrator's, making it unclear where Patrick's real thoughts begin and where the narrator's own insertions end. In *Fifteen Dogs*, the same thing happens. We are forced to be detached from the dogs, but Alexis's use of this kind of discourse makes more sense because of the varying languages he uses. By using this kind of discourse, Alexis is more authentic in portraying his characters, choosing not to quote them as having said something in English, when in fact, the dogs would most often be speaking their own dog language.

As a poet, Prince loves the new language and regrets not having made more of an attempt to learn English because now, as "his strength faded, it became unavoidably clear that his work and his language would, with his death, disappear from the face of the earth" (165). Prince tries to teach his new host his language, and this is the only time we really see this new language clearly, instead of just being offered the translation in English. The woman repeats his words after him, "a few lines of his verse – *Grrr-ee arrr err oh uh ai*" (166). As the language of dogs, and a new language at that, this second language dies out with the death of Prince as it is a language that does not belong to and is not permitted to be a part of the normal social hierarchy. Prince's death allows Hermes to win the bet because, at the moment of death, Prince remembers that he is happy for having learned the language, even if no one could carry it on after him:

he had been given a great gift. More: it was a gift that could not be destroyed.

Somewhere, within some other being, his beautiful language existed as a possibility, perhaps as a seed. It would flower again. He was certain of it and the certainty was wonderful. (168)

Prince dies happy because he is grateful for learning this language. He is happy about his language, connecting him to the god of translation Hermes even further.

This novel possesses a subtext of blackness, enslavement and servitude. Languages of enslaved Africans would not have been seen as human by white slave owners. The dogs are not humans and the enslaved Africans also would not have been seen as human. Language then, becomes about status and serves as a connection to the social hierarchy. Majnoun, as symbolic of a slave, learns English to communicate, and then develops a relationship with his mistress and potential lover. Prince remains individualistic; he refrains from finding a new master as he is faithful to Kim and cannot imagine serving anyone else. As a solitary being, Prince does not try to learn English but instead, stays diligent in creating even more poetry with his new language. When Prince first recites his poem, the reaction by the other dogs separates him from them:

Most of the dogs sat in silence, no doubt trying to understand what Prince was on about.

But it was too much for Max. It wasn't just that Prince was twisting their clear, noble language, it was that Prince had gone beyond the canine. No true dog could have uttered such tripe. Prince was not worthy of being one of them. (29)

Prince's appreciation for this newness, this poetry within this language that they have just created, distances him from the rest of the dogs. As a poet and creator of art, Prince is immediately alienated from the others.

As the philosopher figure, Majnoun appreciates Prince's poems, but does not show the same awe for the language Prince does. Even though he learns English, Majnoun does not prefer English, because "the language of dogs was more expressive, more vivid, easier to understand and more beautiful than any human speech." He tries to teach the new dog language to Nira, but her humanness makes it impossible for her to understand. He refers to the language as "Dog," and as the narrator notes, Majnoun "tried to teach her Dog, but, to his surprise, their efforts foundered on Nira's inability to tell the difference between a bark of pleasure and a call for attention, a crucial distinction in canine speech" (136).

Aside from Majnoun, Benjy is the most interested in learning English. Benjy's intentions, however, are conniving. He believes that learning English would elevate him in the eyes of the humans and so, he would be successful (well-fed) and treated well. Benjy's expectations, however, his selfishness and need to see himself as superior, are what lead to his death. In Benjy's English, we see a dog's accent, whereas for Majnoun, this accent is glossed over, or perhaps, nonexistent. Benjy talks to the human Miguel for the first time, using his own dog language and says the word "little" as "ihdle," his name Benjy – introducing himself as "Name Benjy" (84) as opposed to perhaps a more structured, coherent, "my name is Benjy." Benjy is not yet fully literate but still uses his minor language skills to allow himself to get ahead or earn Miguel's regard.

Atticus's view of the new language is that it is an anathema; he declares that it must not be spoken. He still speaks to Rosie in their new language while away from the others, because his feelings for Rosie are also wrong, against the normal hierarchy and a deviation from their atavistic ways. Despite breaking his own rules to suit himself, Atticus tries to portray the image of being a "true dog" (33) to his pack. His pack constantly tries to achieve a way to get back to

the old language, to the way dogs are supposed to be. They end up being “an imitation of an imitation of dogs” (73), rather than what they strive towards. As pack leader, Atticus enforces that the dogs act the way they used to be, a return to their savage ways. Any deviation from this old perception of normal is considered a deviation away from being true dogs. The way the dogs end up acting, however, is representative of a performance of identity.

Benjy and Dougie decide to return to Atticus’s pack, hoping that because Atticus “is a true dog” he will “teach [them] how to be true dogs again” (67). Instead of learning how to rid themselves of what makes them different, Dougie is killed but,

in his final moments, [he] unmistakably spoke the universal language of dogs

– I submit, he yelped. I submit! I submit

as if he was being done by unknown dogs who, for some reason, could not understand him at all. (71)

By speaking this first universal language, Dougie’s methods of communication blur and he does not need to perform to speak in his initial language. At a time of such desperation, the first language, though strange, comes naturally to him. It is the hierarchy that kills Dougie, and so, when he speaks in the old language, his death becomes representative of the way of true dogs. He represents the ideal of hierarchy that the other dogs all strive to emulate. Atticus’s pack strive to go back to the first way of living but they appear to constantly be performing. They are trying to make natural what is no longer their natural instinct, attempting to ignore their human intelligence, and force themselves to go back to a time before they had deviated. The dogs in Atticus’s pack feel that performing would allow them to blend in. In the same way, black and racialized immigrants have to perform a sense of whiteness to be able to integrate, assimilate or become intelligible as Canadians.

Benjy is an intermediary character. He cannot understand why he was not exiled with the first dogs, as he has made peace with the new way of thinking. As a manipulator, Benjy is a parallel of Caravaggio in *In the Skin of a Lion*. Both are conniving characters, trying to get whatever they want by exploiting the kindness of others. Caravaggio is a mythical, likable character. He does exploit the kindness of others, but he is presented as kind to those he cares for. In contrast, Benjy is a schemer, manipulating everyone who surrounds him. When Prince finds Benjy, Prince is excited to discover another dog who speaks their common language, but Benjy is “bored” (105) contrasting Prince’s enthusiasm. Just as Benjy takes advantage of Majnoun’s kindness, he also manipulates Prince and worms his way into Randy and Clare’s lives. Like Prince who is kind to and excited upon seeing Benjy, Caravaggio is kind to his own people and the people he befriends. Benjy’s death and the suffering he goes through is depicted as something he deserves. As an unlikable character, Benjy’s conflation of self in terms of his own ego leads him to be left behind by the humans he sees himself as superior to. He is alone, starves, and then dies from poison he mistakenly eats. Thus, while Ondaatje glamourizes and mythologizes the assimilative opportunist, Alexis criticizes him.

Alexis’s characterization of all of the dogs, gods, and even humans shows that embracing difference is a good thing. Prince embraces his newfound intelligence, while Atticus and the pack try to ignore and diminish it. Atticus tries to get the pack to assimilate into the dominant dog culture; those dogs are all depicted as trying to give up their difference in order to blend in. They are unable to accurately perform true dog behaviour, and so, they are still kept as outsiders. Majnoun is the ideal of integration. By learning English, he is an intermediary character; he bridges the world of dogs to the human world. He does not know if he is considered a dog. When Nira asks him if he is a dog, the narrator notes that to Majnoun, this was “a surprisingly difficult

question to answer. He did not feel very much like a dog. He felt adrift between species” (47). This middle ground makes him become a host to the new dog culture.

Prince regrets not trying to learn English. He regrets not being one to bridge the gap because in failing to do so, he has lost his new language. Prince remains an intelligent dog, given human intelligence by the gods, and so, does not even try to assimilate, choosing instead to hold on to his own identity, and also, language.

Majnoun and Prince are alike, and by preventing them from ever meeting, Alexis denies the hopes of readers. By meeting Prince, Majnoun may have found a new friend, someone else to bond with that would not have been trying to take advantage of him (as Benjy does). Prince and Majnoun both die alone, with Prince saddened because he does not have someone else who could really completely understand or appreciate his art. Prince’s poems are just art for art’s sake, not ever given an audience and his poems, like his language, die with him. This denial of hope comments upon the relevance of hope as an important feeling in the novel. Atticus dies “with the hope that his unseen enemy would suffer” (98), and Benjy, the “unseen enemy” referred to, also dies “into hope itself” (117). Hermes, as a kind, loving god, is confused about whether or not hope equates with happiness, but Apollo is far more certain, saying “Hope has nothing to do with happiness” (118). Rather than be able to discuss this further, and potentially broaden the definition of a happy death to include hope at Hermes’s insistence, Apollo harshly exerts his own power, asking his brother, “Are we suddenly human that we need to argue about words?” (118).

It is not a stretch that this is a book about slavery, because the book itself is structured around Prince’s Oulipos. The poems Prince creates all hide names, which encourages a very careful reading of the poems, and also, of the novel. The poetry forces readers to look deeply within the text. And so, looking for clandestine references to race and blackness is not only

justifiable as a way to read this novel, but also, logical. By using these poems, “*Fifteen Dogs* gives the readers an aural sensation through OUILOPO poetry: discovering something that is there but disguised and revealed only in the hearing of it” (Ridington). To take this further, Alexis’s novel may appear to be about dogs, but just as the poems need to be heard, the novel needs to be understood through a gaze that allows a racialized reading.

This is not André Alexis’s only well received book. According to the “About the Author” at the end of *Fifteen Dogs*, at least two of Alexis’s other novels also found literary success. Despite this, the fame that Alexis got after *Fifteen Dogs* won the Giller Prize was still unprecedented for him. To the date of Quill and Quire’s publication of Alexis’s author profile, *Fifteen Dogs* had “sold 110,000 print copies and another 20,000 eBooks, twice as many in total as the publisher’s closest bestseller” (Patch).

Fifteen Dogs is the most recent of the books studied, and so, very little literary criticism has been written on the novel. Nothing has been written with regard to its comments on race and so, the fact that the novel effects a sleight of hand, that is, is about race without appearing so on the surface, makes it difficult to situate it in terms of national discourse. The national discourse around *Fifteen Dogs* is of course, post 9/11, but at the same time, 2015 should have been a year more celebrated for diversity. In 2015 and 2016, Canada accepted more than 25,000 Syrian refugees, a fact which emphasizes the acceptance of diversity the country was attempting to portray. While Lam’s novel was published the very same year Stephen Harper was elected into office, 2015 saw the end of Harper’s electoral term. In October 2015, Canadians elected Justin Trudeau as the country’s 24th Prime Minister, bringing in a political shift. South of the border, the United States of America elected Donald Trump as President in 2016, one year after Canada’s election and Alexis’s novel’s publication.

The fact that Trump was elected as President the year after *Fifteen Dogs* was published is in part symptomatic of the strong fear around otherness that had made itself a part of an underlying national discourse, both in Canada and the United States. Kogawa and Ondaatje both published around a time when the national discourse on multiculturalism was just starting to become relevant. Canada was striving for inclusivity, but 9/11 brought with it changes to people's perceptions of safety. Rather than accept the "outsiders," many Canadians and Americans started to once again see whiteness as the only way to measure a person's loyalty towards the two countries. Trump's win is indicative of the country accepting this alt-right narrative that endorses these fears of otherness. The zeitgeist then, shifted away from multiculturalism and diversity, moving to ideas more akin to security and protection.

Diana Brydon sees *Fifteen Dogs* as a way in which Alexis "claims Greco-Roman heritage for himself." She notes that "Alexis has always refused stereotyping as either an immigrant or a racialized writer" (105) and misses Alexis's underlying theme of race in the novel. Brydon focuses more on Alexis choice of using the classical apologue form, noting that the novel is "global in that it imports Greek gods to influence a local story" (105). The fact that the apologue is not inherently a Greek form and the possibility that Alexis may be criticizing Greekness and whiteness altogether is not even considered.

By being able to talk about race, slavery, and belonging without really talking about any of these themes, Alexis is able to become a host to Canadian literature. His visible difference, that is, white reactions to his black skin, still makes him othered in that a theorist such as Brydon feels it necessary to point out Alexis's refusal to be stereotyped. While Alexis is a Canadian writer, his unwillingness to write about race more clearly points to problems within the national discourse—not problems with his writing in this way.

Conclusion

Each of the four novels ends with a voice that encompasses the entire work. *Obasan* ends with a very poetic description of Naomi's mother rendered in Naomi's voice. After learning the truth of the way her mother died, Naomi walks to the same coulee the book begins with. It is here with this return to nature that Naomi connects with the sea, further enforcing the connection to her mother the book focuses on. Here, the "moon is a pure white stone" (296), reflective of the theme of stone, nourishment and silence throughout the novel. The sea then, is an amniotic sea, connecting Naomi to her mother. At the end of this narrative is a legal document, a 1946 "[e]xcerpt from the memorandum sent by the Co-operative Committee on Japanese Canadians to the House and the Senate of Canada" (297). The inclusion of this document within the text further emphasizes the stark realities behind Kogawa's novel, a reminder of the inhumane acts the government took part in.

In the Skin of a Lion ends with Patrick calling out a stage act, "Lights," while in the car with Hana, Alice's daughter. This passage functions to close the frame that the novel begins with. By the end, Patrick is able to function as a father figure. He sits in the passenger seat and lets Hana drive, emphasizing the growth of his character. The beginning of the narrative starts with Patrick as a solitary figure, always separate from those around him. By the end, Patrick is connected to the immigrant characters. Like Caravaggio and Temelcoff, Patrick is also able to "integrate" and find success, capable of living comfortably. By ending on Patrick's success, Ondaatje conflates class with race. A book that is seemingly about immigration becomes a story about Patrick's own class struggle, ending on a depiction of his success.

Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures ends with Chen's thoughts as he explores a fake assimilation. Chen thinks about remaining silent, contemplating the "dangerous escape of words"

(337). He wants to refrain from “uttering a single phrase,” knowing that his silence is the only way everything can be stable. Chen is presented as having assimilated by this last chapter. He is given the final voice in an entire chapter that focuses on him, from a first person perspective. Chen’s final thoughts are problematic. The idea of having to hide himself, having to remain silent, alludes to Chen being unable to integrate. Chen is aware that to be successful, he has to hide a part of his own identity. He needs to remain silent and keep his Chineseness hidden. The only way Chen can keep the balance is by staying silent, and so, he hides his own identity to be able to be considered successful. His assimilation then, represents something he does not want; he deliberately hides a part of himself to be able to successfully assimilate.

At the end of *Fifteen Dogs*, Hermes is contemplating humanity, specifically how mortals perceive death, something he as an immortal god can never comprehend. In his kindness, Hermes grants Prince a happy memory after Prince’s death. This last memory, one where Prince is able to be with his master Kim, is problematic in its depiction of servitude. When considering the subliminal theme of African enslavement, we see that the fact that the happiest Prince can be is in his serving Kim drives home Alexis’s critique of the social hierarchy. Hermes is oblivious to the problematic nature of servitude, showing that it is the white frame of the narrative that allows these issues to arise. This final memory Prince is granted challenges whiteness, master-slave (dog) relationships and offers a final critique on the issue of social and racial hierarchies.

When the dogs in Atticus’s pack strive to go back to the old way of living, they end up appearing to be “an imitation of an imitation of dogs.” Their attempts at trying to return to their “old way” are displayed as performance. As dogs with human consciousness, they are incapable of being “true dogs” but they attempt to assimilate back into the normal dog culture. They attempt to diminish their human instincts —the very same human instincts the gods bestowed

upon them. This is made impossible; they are not capable of losing such a fundamental aspect of themselves.

A guest to Canada is forced, in a similar way, to constantly perform to be able to hopefully fit into the requirements expected of a Canadian. Performance is a social way of interacting, enacted to gain approval and acceptance. Immigrants to Canada, in the books studied, are often in a state of performance to fit into the society around them. Ming is performing an aspect of her personality when she dates Fitz; she initially uses her relationship with him as practice for a real relationship she will have in the future. She tells him about Karl's abuse towards her, convincing herself that it would be "a trial run of telling it to a man she was in love with" (Lam 23), and in this way, their relationship is her performing a relationship she will have with a man who her parents would approve. Ming's identity is given to us through Fitz's eyes and so, all that we see of her is the performance she puts on for Fitz. She tells Fitz that her Chineseness would make it difficult for them to be together and so, uses her cultural identity as an excuse to reject Fitz. Fitz accordingly identifies her as a Chinese woman. This aspect is made more important than her Canadianness. But Lam himself does not explore any aspect of Ming's Chineseness. In this way, she is kept at a distance from us as readers; her struggles are not explored and so, she never becomes a host, always remaining as a guest to Canadian culture.

Naomi's performance, in much the same way, emphasizes her own heritage. She tells the one man she goes on a date with that she is a Canadian first, and a then a third-generation Japanese. She refuses to compromise her own identity, but also, as a visible minority like Ming, both women are unable to ignore this aspect of themselves. Ming refuses to accept the stereotypes people around her try to categorize her within. She refuses to perform a specific type

of submissive femininity white Canadians might associate with Chineseness, refusing to be silenced and so, she refuses to assimilate and is never given the option to integrate either. Both Naomi and Ming remain as guests in the culture rather than hosts. As women, they both are undermined, their performances preventing them from integrating into a Canadian identity.

Caravaggio, as an artist and thief, is also constantly performing. He acts differently with his Italian wife, Euro-immigrant friends and of course, with the rich white Anglo people he steals from. He blends in with the rich, his performance allowing him to successfully infiltrate a party of the upper class. He woos the people he needs to and manipulates them into getting what he needs. Caravaggio is able to blend in in his performance because he is white and a man. His European features make him seem more cultured and rich, rather than mark him as subservient as is the case for both Ming and Naomi. Caravaggio is able to transform from being a guest to being a host; he becomes a proper, integrated immigrant, able to carry on both of his cultures and be primarily a Canadian.

The characters who are consistently marginalized are all women and visible minorities. The men, specifically Fitz, Temelcoff, and even Caravaggio are not marginalized because they are white men. As immigrants, Temelcoff and Caravaggio are not required to assimilate; Caravaggio is accepted by society as Canadian even though he marries an Italian woman, holds on to his language, and still chooses to live as a thief. Temelcoff and Caravaggio are able to integrate because they are both white men. Ming and Naomi fail to assimilate and are not offered the chance to integrate. Both are presented as or against their respective stereotypes. Ming is a Chinese-Canadian who is intelligent but cold and emotionally distant. Naomi refuses to be seen as submissive; she stands up for herself and her identity, refusing to allow even her students to

diminish her. The status of these women as visible minorities makes them either incapable of showing emotion or of establishing romantic relationships.

Lam's *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures* won the Giller Prize amidst political controversy. Ondaatje's novel was nominated for the Governor General's Award but went on to win the Canada Reads Award in 2002, establishing itself as a book that was still widely-read even fifteen years later after its publication. *Obasan* won the Books in Canada First Novel Award and *Fifteen Dogs* also won the Giller Prize. These awards are all considered to be top-tier national prizes, and books that win these awards are deemed representative of Canadian culture. The Giller Award has faced controversy because of its perceived political favouring of minority-driven narratives (Roberts 28), but participants in the controversy do not look beyond mere thematic concern. Other than *Fifteen Dogs*, the novels all point to the idea that integration is only possible for white males. Temelcoff and Caravaggio can integrate, which is the ideal for immigrants, only because they can also visually assimilate—their white skin allows them to blend into the white society around them. Ming is presented as being a stereotype but Lam shows her and Chen both as “successfully assimilated” characters. Lam presents both Ming and Chen as characters who have lost their Chineseness and gone on to find success in their medical professions. In contrast to these books that directly address issues of belonging, *Fifteen Dogs* is written as an apologue where Alexis explores racial issues by disguising his book to be about dogs. The success of Alexis's novel and the failure of any literary theorist to address the issues Alexis subtly explores shows that *Fifteen Dogs* was almost too successful. Alexis's writing is subtle enough that theorists have not seen past the apologue narrative, and so, the themes he addresses have not even been talked about.

Ondaatje's novel establishes a bridge between class and immigration. Patrick is the bridging character here, a white Canadian who connects with the immigrant population. In Kogawa's *Obasan*, Naomi bridges the gap between herself, her history and non-Japanese readers, while also functioning as a character that bridges the two Japanese-Canadian generations. The success of Kogawa's novel allows her work to "bridge the gap between writing and political activism" (Karpinski 46). In *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures*, Chen is initially a native informant, the bridge between his Chinese culture and non-Chinese readers. Chen bridges characters within the book as well, connecting each of the four doctors to each other. He marries Ming, befriends Sri, and saves Fitz's life. In *Fifteen Dogs*, Majnoun learns English and bridges the human and dog world, offering Nira insight into the way things are different for dogs. Conversely, Prince does not learn English and regrets not being able to carry on the new dog language—in other words regrets not being a bridge.

The bridging characters function to connect other characters to one another; in this way society as a whole can be made inclusive. As a white Canadian, Patrick's connection to the immigrants shows him to be both open minded and accepting, depicting what should be the reality for all Canadians. But Patrick does not have the opportunity to connect with non-white immigrants. *In the Skin of a Lion* and *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures* both present a troubling pattern that exposes the lie of Canada's supposed inclusivity. *Fifteen Dogs* also criticizes issues of racism and exclusion, but is disguised so much that Alexis's critique of whiteness has gone unnoticed by critics so far. *Obasan* criticizes Canada's treatment of Japanese Canadians and went on to invoke political change. The fact that these problems of racism and exclusion exist in imaginative, fictional worlds demonstrates a need for us to critique and confront them in Canadian society. That *Obasan* has been so successful in influencing real

change is proof that there is hope, that these problems can be addressed, and that pointing to them can lead to their eradication.

Notes

1. The term ‘mosaic’ was first used to describe the different cultures in the Canadian Prairies by writer Victoria Hayward, who, in the 1920s, described the people as “indeed a mosaic of vast dimensions and great breadth.” In 1965, John Porter borrowed Hayward’s term in his study, *Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada*. Porter’s study went on to influence Canadian policy, being the basis on which Trudeau enacted the multiculturalism policy (Day 30). The term mosaic then, referred to white immigrants—not people of colour. When the mosaic imagery is used as an expression of the ideal of Canadian multiculturalism, this is problematic because this ideal image is based on a term that was really referring only to white immigrants.
2. See Reitz who notes that “visible minorities are less socially integrated into Canadian society than their white counterparts,” emphasizing the existence of these separate social groups.
3. Butler’s ideas of performance are specifically applied to gender, but Chadderton uses a Butlerian lens to study race as a performative. For Butler, “performativity is the process by which... identities are produced” (Chadderton 109). Performance, then, is the way an identity is acted out, or performed, and performativity is the power these performances have. Traditional gender norms, or race are enforced through performativity.
4. Since its inception in 1994, the Giller Prize was won by Esi Edugyan twice, but both of her novels are about men. *Polished Hoe* won the 2002 prize, and though the novel is about a black Barbadian woman, it is written by a man, Austin Clarke.
5. In *Policing Black Lives State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present*, Robyn Maynard explores the history of state violence against black populations. Maynard notes: “‘Hands up, don’t shoot’...continues to be a mainstay of Black fear-based responses to police

interactions.” This fear has factual evidence: “Black populations face a rate of violence by police that is more than five times that of the white population” (102-103). This happens even in Canada, despite being something Canadians attribute to being a flaw only in the United States’ Police system.

6. Even more recently, the outbreak of COVID-19 which emerged from Wuhan, China brought about similar racist and xenophobic beliefs. All over social media, “bats...have become a staple in racist attacks blaming Chinese eating habits for the coronavirus spread” (Heng).

7. Hemingway’s flaws are beyond the scope of this paper, but one example could clarify the point. In “Fathers and Sons” Nick Adams’s sexual escapades with Trudy, a Native-American woman, display both Nick’s heteronormative masculinity and a fetishization of the non-white female character. When Nick hears that Eddie, Trudy’s older brother, wants to sleep with Nick’s sister Dorothy, Nick is outraged and threatens to kill Eddie. There is a clear double standard; as the white male, Nick is given every right to defend his sister’s supposed honour. Yet hypocritically, Nick sleeps with Trudy without ever giving Eddie a chance to defend his own sister. Eddie and Trudy, both non-white characters, are dehumanized.

8. These are all Victorian novels—*Lord Jim*, *Mansfield Park* (Austen), and *Vanity Fair*—and were published between 1847 and 1900, the period just after the British abolition of slavery in 1838. The novels glamorize the romance of a Victorian England, completely ignoring slavery. The novels all have characters involved in the slave trade. *Mansfield Park* specifically includes the Bertram family who benefit from the wealth produced by their West Indian slave plantation. Edward Said and other critics argue that the novel succinctly accepts and condones slavery while others defend *Mansfield* as critiquing it (C. Hemingway).

Works Cited

- Alexis, André. *Fifteen Dogs*. Couch House Books, 2015.
- Ansari, Sadiya. "Here's how multiculturalism has failed people like me." *Chatelaine*, 29 June 2017, www.chatelaine.com/opinion/multiculturalism.
- Beaver, Alan. "Grand Tour." *A Dictionary of Travel and Tourism*, Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Between: Living in the Hyphen*. Directed by Anne Marie Nakagawa, performances by Fred Wah, Shannon Waters, Suzette Mayr, Tinu Sinha, Tina Thompson, Charlene Hellson, and Karina Vernon, National Film Board of Canada, 2005.
- Brydon, Diana. "Risk, Mortality, and Memory: The Global Imaginaries of Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*, MG Vassanji's *Nostalgia*, and André Alexis's *Fifteen Dogs*." *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, no. 28, 2019, pp. 97-112.
- Burnyeat, M. "Art and Mimesis in Plato's 'Republic'." *London Review of Books*, vol. 20, no. 10, 1998.
- "Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988." *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21*, www.pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/canadian-multiculturalism-act-1988.
- Cartwright, Mark. "Apollo." *Ancient History Encyclopædia*, 25 July 2019, www.ancient.eu/apollo/
- Chadderton, Charlotte. "Making Whiteness and Acting White: The Performativity of Race and Race as a Performative." *Judith Butler, Race and Education*, Springer International Publishing, 2018, pp. 109-130.
- Chisholm, Hugh. "Apologue." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 2, no. 11, Cambridge University Press, 1911, pp. 194.

- Clarke, George. "White Like Canada." *Transition*, no. 73, 1997, pp. 98-109.
- Coleman, Daniel. *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada*. University of Toronto Press, 2006.
- Davey, Frank. *Postnational Arguments: The Politics of the Anglophone-Canadian Novel Since 1967*. University of Toronto Press, 1993.
- Day, Richard. *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity*. University of Toronto Press, 2000.
- Dobson, Kit. *Transnational Canadas: Anglo-Canadian Literature and Globalization*. Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2009.
- Domotor, Teodora. "Ernest Hemingway's 'Father and Sons': An Evasive Confession about Paternal Roles and Masculinity." *49th Parellel*, vol. 34, 2014, pp. 113-142.
- Frances, Henry and Carol Tator. *Discourses of Domination: Racial Bias in the Canadian English Language Press*. University of Toronto Press, 2002.
- Greenlaw, Jim. "A Postcolonial Reading of the 'Asian Presence' in North American Films." *Language and Literacy*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1999, pp. 1-11.
- Hemingway, Collins. "Do Austen's Novels Reveal Her Views on Slavery?" *Austen Authors*, 26 Jan. 2017, www.austenauthors.net/do-austens-novels-reveal-her-views-on-slavery.
- Hemingway, Ernest. *The Snows of Kilimanjaro And Other Stories*. Scribner, 1995.
- Heng, Larry. "Chinese Canadians facing hate, racism for coronavirus outbreak—much like the SARS outbreak in 2003." *National Post*, 31 Jan. 2020, www.nationalpost.com/news/chinese-canadians-facing-hate-racism-for-coronavirus-outbreak-much-like-the-sars-outbreak-in-2003.
- Henighan, Stephen. "Kingmakers." *Geist*, 2006, www.geist.com/fact/columns/kingmakers.

- Jinje, Safa. "Fifteen Dogs by André Alexis: Review." *The Star*, 28 March 2015,
www.thestar.com/entertainment/books/2015/03/28/fifteen-dogs-by-andr-alexis-review.
- Karpinski, Eva. "The Book as (Anti) National Heroine: Trauma and Witnessing in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*." *Studies in Canadian Literature*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2006, pp. 46-65.
- Kogawa, Joy. *Obasan*. 1981. Anchor Books, 1994.
- Lam, Vincent. *Bloodletting & Miraculous Cures*. Anchor Canada, 2006.
- Lowry, Glen. "The Representation of Race in Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*." *Comparative Literature and Culture*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2004, pp. 1-9.
- Lundgren, Jodi. "Colour Disrobed Itself from the Body": The Racialized Aesthetics of Liberation in Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*." *Canadian Literature*, vol. 15, no. 190, 2006.
- Maynard, Robyn. *Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present*. Fernwood Publishing, Halifax, 2017.
- Moss, Laura. "'A Science of Uncertainty': Bioethics, Narrative Competence, and Turning to the 'What If' of Fiction." *Studies in Canadian Literature*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2015, pp. 5-24.
- Newton, West. "The very name Atticus conjures our slaveholding history." *The Boston Globe*, 19 July 2015.
- Ondaatje, Michael. *In the Skin of a Lion*. Vintage International, 1987.
- Patch, Nick. "Profile: André Alexis's Key to Success." *Quill and Quire*, 2016,
www.quillandquire.com/authors/profile-andré-alexiss-key-to-success.
- Reitz, Jeffrey. "Social Impact of Diversity: Potentials and Challenges in Canada." *Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1 Apr. 2010, www.ideas-idees.ca/blog/social-impact-diversity-potentials-and-challenges-canada.
- Ridington, Robin. "Reading André Alexis' *Fifteen Dogs*: An Apologue." *Canadian Literature: A*

- Quarterly of Criticism and Review*, www.canlit.ca/article/reading-andre-alexis-fifteen-dogs-an-apologue.
- Roberts, Gillian. *Prizing Literature: The Celebration and Circulation of National Culture*. University of Toronto Press, 2011.
- Rodino-Colocino, Michelle. "Me too, #MeToo: Countering Cruelty with Empathy." *Communication and Critical Cultural Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2018, pp. 96-100.
- Schwinghamer, Steve. "'There is no Exclusion Act in the Dominion of Canada': Deportation from Canada during the Great Depression." *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21*, www.pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/deportation-from-canada-during-the-great-depression.
- "ScotiaBank Giller Prize Finalists." *ScotiaBank Giller Prize*, 1994-2020.
- Seyed-Gohrad, A. "Leyli O Majnun." *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 2009, www.iranicaonline.org/articles/leyli-o-majnun-narrative-poem.
- Smith, Russel. "Why do we struggle with what makes Canadian Literature?" *The Globe and Mail*, 21 Nov. 2013.
- Stoffman, Judy. "ER Doctor a Good Fiction Writer." *Toronto Star*, 22 Jan. 2006.
- Sugars, Cynthia. "Keeping the Gothic at (Sick) Bay: Reading the Transferences in Vincent Lam's *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures*." *Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic*, Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2009, pp. 251-76.
- Troper, Harold. "Immigration in Canada." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, 22 Apr. 2013, www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/immigration.
- Van Dyk, Lindsay. "Canadian Immigration Acts and Legislation." *Canadian Museum of*

Immigration at Pier 21, www.pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/canadian-immigration-acts-and-legislation.

Yuya, Kumsa. “*Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present* Book Review.” *Studies in Social Justice*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2018, pp. 182-187.

Vita Auctoris

NAME: Umama Jutt

PLACE OF BIRTH: Edmonton, AB

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1995

EDUCATION: Holy Names High School, Windsor, ON, 2013

University of Windsor, B.Sc., Windsor, ON, 2018

University of Windsor, M.A., Windsor, ON, 2020