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**REWRITING THE PAST, PLURALIZING THE PRESENT:
RENEGOTIATING CANADIANNESSE IN THE WORKS OF DIONNE
BRAND, GEORGE ELLIOTT CLARKE AND LAWRENCE HILL**

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Canadian Crisis of Identity

There is no core identity, no mainstream in Canada. There are shared values – openness, respect, compassion, willingness to work hard, to be there for each other, to search for equality and justice. These qualities are what make us the first postnational state.¹

When Justin Trudeau, then Canada's newly elected prime minister, proclaimed Canada to be the first postnational state, a state without a “core identity” in late December 2015, this declaration was not received with surprise, but nevertheless quickly became a fiercely debated claim. The response to this statement has shown that Canadian nationalism is, contrary to Trudeau's assessment, still alive and well.² Trudeau's critics were keen and eager to demonstrate that Canada definitively has a clearly defined national identity. The discourse, however, is neither new nor has it been decided yet if Trudeau's assessment describes anything but a political and social utopia, and, according to most of Trudeau's critics, a vision not shared by many.

Looking back on the development of the discourse since the late 1980s, a number of critics, artists and politicians have contributed to a reassessment of Canadian national identity. In 1988, Linda Hutcheon argued – and many pundits still consider this assertion as valid – that, unlike the United States, Canada is still on a quest for a definition of national myths and identity, and therefore its culture lacks an important feature of U.S. postmodernism - “its deconstructing of national myths and identity.”³ Even in the new millennium, a contest like Canada Reads, a series of panel discussions on CBC Radio with the aim of finding “the book all of Canada should read”, was described by reviewer Laura Moss as “a new instrument of cultural formation, [...] intent on drawing Canadians together by creating a shared cultural background.”⁴ These statements point to the strikingly different positions with regard to national identity, articulated in Canadian cultural discourse during the last three decades. However, the striving for a national literature that duly reflects the nation's cultural and societal idiosyncrasies, is not a new phenomenon in Canadian culture. As Volker Stunk points out, there have always been two key problems plaguing critics and artists alike when Canadian national identity was at issue: the

¹ http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/13/magazine/trudeaus-canada-again.html?_r=0 accessed on January 7, 2016.

² <http://www.torontosun.com/2016/09/14/trudeau-says-canada-has-no-core-identity> accessed on September 20, 2016.

³ Linda Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*. Toronto, New York & Oxford 1988, 6.

⁴ Laura Moss, “Canada Reads” In: *Canadian Literature/Littérature canadienne. A Quarterly of Criticism and Review*. No. 182 / Autumn 2004, 6-12 [7].

heterogeneity of the landscape and the proximity of the United States.⁵ In 1984, he described the endeavours of literary critics and artists as follows: “[T]he overwhelming part of contemporary literary criticism still gives the appearance of having kidnapped the country's literature, run it through the nationalist mill, and presented the world with a 'Canadian' literature in the miller's image.”⁶ Following Strunk's line of argumentation, it could be said that while some writers and critics deplored the absence of a clearly defined national identity, it has also been understood as an opportunity by others. While some writers simply celebrated Canada's lack of national identity, its cultural and political pluralism, others – often not part of the white majority and mostly involved in postcolonial debates – set out to redefine Canadianness and question hitherto dominant narratives about the past. While Strunk seemed to be ambivalent about these tendencies in the early 1980s, he was perceptive enough to judge the intent behind the bulk of literary criticism engaging with Canada produced at that time. This period of political and social change responsible for a refocusing of Canada's cultural politics – which was already at its second stage when Strunk wrote his essay – had had its first heyday in the late 1960s with the introduction of multiculturalism as social and political practice and policy. It was a period when new ideas took hold and societal changes made a reshaping of the Canadian imaginary inevitable. A number of factors contributed to this development: the decline of the former European colonial powers, the rise of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, and the emergence of new pressure groups within Canada itself.

During the last 40 years, Canadian literature has been radically transformed; this transformation, which was neither triggered by external nor internal events only, has to be discussed within the frame of reference of a number of transnational developments. Since the late 1960s, authors like Robert Kroetsch, Michael Ondaatje, Timothy Finley, Alice Munro and especially Margaret Atwood have received worldwide recognition for their engagement with Canadian culture and society. They turned towards reworking the history of their country in order to “deconstruct *British* social and literary myth.”⁷ In addition to these famous and mostly white authors, modern Canada's literary and cultural scene also mirrors the nation's multi-ethnic and multicultural population. During the last 25 years, Canadian cultural discourse changed its direction and turned away from cultural eurocentrism, finally acknowledging the different voices

⁵ Cf. Volker Strunk, “Canadian Literary Criticism and the Problem of 'National Literature.’” in: Dieter Riemenschneider (ed.), *The Historiography of Commonwealth Literature*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1984, 66-77.

⁶ Ibid, 71.

⁷ Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 6. Emphasis in the original.

and cultures of which modern Canada is composed. Accordingly, the diversity of the country's current literary production increasingly mirrors the heterogeneity of the Canadian population and its cultural and ethnic diversity. Writers belonging to "visible" as well as "invisible" minorities⁸, who finally came to claim their position in the country's cultural life, challenged the notion of a homogeneous corpus of national literature and culture through their artistic contributions. Their works provided a different perspective on myths, history and culture and often challenged the hegemonic heteronormative narratives focusing on the depiction of white majority experiences which had been regarded as an ideal in colonial Canada. In short: they turned Canada into a post-colonial nation.

1.2 African-American and African-Canadian Literature, Contemporary Canadian Discourse and Transnational Studies

George Elliott Clarke's protest against the exclusion of Canada as a site of the black diaspora from recent discourse, primarily directed at Paul Gilroy's book *The Black Atlantic*, first published in 2002, points to the crucial problem: the history of Canadian blackness was⁹ unacknowledged and, therefore, neither part of the average Canadian's collective memory nor of contemporary black diaspora studies.¹⁰ This is due to two factors; the first one is that only about one percent of the Canadian population is of African descent. The second factor is the dominant position of African-American scholars, authors and publicists, who, due to their world-wide renown and influence, either eclipsed, or simply incorporated African-Canadian literary and cultural production into their national curriculum.¹¹ Clarke describes this situation in a humorous way,

⁸ The terminology used here was borrowed from the Canadian Employment Equity Act of 1995. According to this document the definition of the term is: "persons, other than aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour." It was first used in the 1984 report of the Abella commission on equality in employment. It is used here to illustrate the ambivalent political situation of persons of colour in Canada, who are granted equal rights by law, but do not receive equal treatment by the census officials. The Canadian government and its administrative organs were reprimanded in 2007 by the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination because they single out a particular group. It has been classified as a term contrived for a particular political purpose. Cf. Audrey Kobayashi, "Representing Ethnicity: Political Statistexts." in: *Challenges of Measuring an Ethnic World: Science, Politics, and Reality*. Washington, DC: Statistics Canada and U.S. Bureau of the Census, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993, 513–525.

⁹ Rinaldo Walcott claims that since the late 1990s the cultural landscape of Canada has changed significantly, but he doubts if this change was for the better because even if black cultural productions have been accorded "a bigger place and space" by the nation's official culture, it remains to be seen if this acknowledgement will be sustainable. Cf. Rinaldo Walcott, *Black Like Who? Writing: Black: Canada*. Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2003, 13.

¹⁰ George Elliott Clarke, *Odysseys Home*. Toronto, Buffalo & London: University of Toronto Press, 2002, 9.

¹¹ This is a two-fold problem of African-Canadian studies; despite Clarke's attempts to show that there is a clearly defined African-Canadian literary tradition, many scholars and writers are still reluctant to acknowledge the existence of this tradition.

coming to the conclusion that, even though he grew up with in an environment that made him question his cultural identity, he had to accept, at a very late stage in his studies, that African-Canadian literature actually exists.¹² Blackness is therefore deemed to be part and parcel of the culture and history of the United States, but in Canada, even though the histories of both countries run along similar lines due to their proximity and their historical relationship, this issue has not been of comparable relevance in cultural discourse. However, the claim to a decidedly authentic national way of writing blackness articulated by Clarke offers a stark contrast to the current tendency to describe this experience within a transnational framework that accentuates the similarities between New World African cultures rather than their different national characters.

A look back on the beginning of modern African-Canadian literature might be helpful to explain the surprisingly conservative approach we find in Clarke's critical writings. In 1976, when Ishmael Reed was freely indulging in the deconstruction of temporal sequentiality, merging past and present, myth and collective memory in his novel *Flight to Canada*, modern African-Canadian fiction had just come into being.¹³ In African-Canadian literature – due to its belated rise – two decisive changes occurred simultaneously at that time. While “the African-American novel” had already been “raised out of its autobiographical, historicist obsession”¹⁴ by the late 1960s, the latter remained one of the prevailing issues in African-Canadian fiction until the end of the first decade of the 21st century. Consequently, African-Canadian literature gained momentum during a period of extensive endeavours to deconstruct popular myth and social structures and conventions, a development that coincided with the democratization of cultural capital.¹⁵ While African-American culture, from the antebellum years on, had been extensively and notably producing myths, stories and narratives about history which could be disseminated and deconstructed by later writers, its Canadian counterpart basically lacked audience, occasion and most importantly publicity. Furthermore, African-American writers were connected on a national, and often international level, while writing by African-Canadians was mostly treated as a regional phenomenon that was deemed to be hardly marketable. Most publishing houses refrained from publishing the works of African-Canadian writers due to an alleged lack of

¹² Cf. Clarke, “Embarkation: Discovering African-Canadian Literature.” in: *Odysseys Home*, 4-6.

¹³ Harold Head's anthology *Canada In Us Now*, first published in 1976, was the first collection that featured African-Canadian authors only; among the texts are poems and prose by Dionne Brand and Austin Clarke.

¹⁴ Timothy Brennan, *Secular Devotion. Afro-Latin Music and Imperial Jazz*. London & New York: Verso, 2008, 203.

¹⁵ For a definition of cultural capital see: Pierre Bourdieu, “Reproduction culturelle et reproduction sociale” in: *Informations en sciences sociales* X (2), 1972, 45-79 (48).

readership, or simply due to blunt racism. Additionally, the linguistic division of Canada formed another structural disadvantage and inhibited the coming into being of literary and cultural movements.¹⁶ According to Clarke that lack of a shared African-Canadian intellectual tradition forced writers “to act as historians” in order to find out about their rootedness in a certain tradition and, moreover, to be able to aptly depict African-Canadian history in their writings.¹⁷ African-Canadian literature's belated rebirth, as mentioned before influenced both by the U.S. American Civil Rights Movement and the birth of Canadian multiculturalism, consequentially led to its participation in a number of discourses at the same time. It is informed by two related cultural traditions, the post-modern and the post-colonial. Furthermore, due to the heterogeneity of the African-Canadian population, both transnational and national perspectives and problems are of relevance. The position of modern African-Canadian literature among the literatures of the Americas is therefore rather peculiar.

1.3 The Objective and Focus of this Study

Despite its apparent heterogeneity, African-Canadian literature seems to be basically focusing on two key themes; firstly, the depiction of experiencing blackness in the context of Canadian multiculturalism and, secondly, the rewriting of national and transnational history, contributing to the revisionist discourse about regional, national and transnational aspects of identity. These two key themes can be found in most fiction produced by African-Canadian authors. Clarke's *Québécoisité* is a perfect example for the textual coexistence these two key themes. On the surface level it deals with two young couples of different ethnic and racial origins who attempt to overcome social conventions and are fighting their parents' bigotry in modern multicultural Canada. However, in a subtle and implicit way, especially through the setting, readers are informed about the lingering effects of Canada's colonial history.

The objective of this study therefore is to analyse texts produced by African-Canadian authors in the light of my initially stated claim about the interrelatedness of those two key themes. It sets out to explore the literary reworking of Canadian history and contemporary

¹⁶ Cf. George Elliott Clarke, “Introduction” in George Elliott Clarke (ed.), *Eyeing the North Star: Directions in African-Canadian Literature*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1997, xvii-xix.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, xx.

identity by three African-Canadian writers and intends to contribute to the debate about the relation between identity, history, myth and the writing of fiction; a debate which is concerned with discussing the interdependence of storytelling and cultural or collective identity.¹⁸

In order to achieve this, the focus will be on works by Dionne Brand, George Elliott Clarke and Lawrence Hill.¹⁹ There is a certain rationale behind focusing on their work which lies in the difference of their perspectives, an aspect that will be discussed later on. More importantly, each of the three authors has produced at least one literary work that posed a decisive contribution to, if not a turning point, in the development of African-Canadian literature. Clarke's *Whylah Falls*, Lawrence Hill's *Book of Negroes* (2007) and Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For* (2008), represent the zenith of a cultural development that started in the late 1980s. During this period, which will here be called the African-Canadian renaissance, postmodern doubt in epistemology and the need to inscribe the history of the black presence in Canada into the collective memory correlated. From this paradoxical correlation – paradoxical because postmodernism questioned the epistemological status of language and therefore the very possibility of actual historical knowledge – originated works of fiction that are unique in density and style. Clarke, Brand and Hill are theoretically informed writers. Consequentially, their works reflect their theoretical awareness and simultaneously contribute to different areas of discourse. Their fictions are both innovative in style and contribute to an ongoing socio-political discourse. One of my basic arguments is that all three authors, at some point in their career as writers, privileged the postcolonial over the postmodern which means that they either deliberately refrained from literary experimentalism or harnessed experimentalism for their political intent.

1.4 Theoretical Approaches

Discourse studies allow for the incorporation of a large variety of concepts like memory studies, post-colonial theory, sociological categorization, and both new-historicist and post-structuralist approaches. It will be a viable tool to analyse and contextualize the development of themes,

¹⁸ This study can therefore be regarded as a complementary work to Birgit Neumann's *Erinnerung-Identität-Narration*, which analyses Canadian "fictions of memory" with a focus on the diversity of Canadian identities rather than on the politics of identity construction practised by a single ethnic group. See Neumann: Trier 2005.

¹⁹ For bibliographical information on the works analysed in this thesis see the bibliography attached to this study.

styles and strategies in the literary works of all three authors in my focus, both on a diachronic and a synchronic level. The theoretical approach forming the basis of my study will thus incorporate models originating from both literary and cultural studies. As a large part of this study will engage with the attempt to read literary works as contributions to a process of discursive revision of history, concepts about mnemonic functions of literature will receive due consideration. Identity, memory and myth-making have certainly acquired the status of buzzwords in recent discussions. However, they are vital to my approach as these phenomena are integral parts of social imaginaries. The term social imaginary describes something that has otherwise been described as world picture or world view; social imaginary is a variable term; it focuses, as Charles Taylor put it, “on the way ordinary people 'imagine' their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms, but is carried in images, stories, and legends.”²⁰ To specify my understanding of the term, I will continue with giving an example of the historical component of a social imaginary. In stories, histories and myths about North-American slavery, Canada is often regarded as the safe haven, as the last stop on the Underground Railroad. While it is a historical fact that Canada was a safe haven for runaway slaves, it was that only between 1834 and 1860. And even in this rather short period, its status resulted from being part of the British Empire and therefore forced to support British anti-slavery policy. Canada's history as a slave-holder society and the latent racism of post-confederation Canada is seldom mentioned, neither in popular histories nor tourist brochures. It might be argued that this is due to a discursive process that started in the 1840s in the U.S. and had its peak after the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852.²¹ Especially the scene in which the slave Eliza, after having received news that she was supposed to be separated from her son by sale, escapes in a dramatic flight to Canada and experiences a warm welcome and protection by the Canadians who rescue her from the calamitous situation she and her son were in had a singular influence on the Canadian collective memory. The discursive perpetuation of this entirely positive perception of Canadian history has been contested by African-Canadian writers ever since. They argue that Canada's history is more problematic and therefore contribute to a discourse that questions those prevailing ideas about the historical role of Canada in the context of black diaspora studies.

²⁰ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Durham & London: Duke UP, 2004, 22.

²¹ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. New York & London: Norton & Co., 1993 [1852]. Serially published between 1851 and 52, published in book form in 1852.

1.5 The Authors and their Status in Contemporary Canadian Cultural Production

George Elliott Clarke, Lawrence Hill and Dionne Brand were heralded as a new force in Canadian literary production in the 1990s. A number of their literary works received considerable critical acclaim.²² Clarke's position and his "prominence as a Canadian writer and cultural commentator"²³ have been attributed to his special relationship to his native country. His ancestral roots in Nova Scotia go back to the so-called Black Loyalists²⁴, a community of former slaves who fled from the U.S. during and after the American War of Independence. Clarke's ancestors settled in Canada after the war of 1812. Clarke taught literature and Canadian studies at Duke University and McGill University. Before that, he had worked as a parliamentary aide and as a social worker. Today, Clarke engages with artistic and scholarly work. In addition to his work as an author of fictional texts, which encompasses such different genres as poetry, libretti, plays and narrative fiction, he holds the prestigious E. J. Pratt professorship at the University of Toronto. Clarke's major fields of interest are the history of North America's black population, multiculturalism in modern Canada, and politics of identity, especially black cultural identity. Despite the versatility and quality of his literary work, its international reception is poor on account of being engaged with largely national or even regional topics. Additionally, Clarke's use of colloquial language makes his fiction difficult to translate. Regarding his influence and importance in Canadian cultural life, however, these aspects are of minor importance.

One of the prominent aspects of his writing, either fictional or non-fictional, is its exemplary position in the reshaping of cultural discourses that has been going on in Canada since the late 1980s. Clarke is part of the afore mentioned larger group of writers and critics who are trying to change the nation's perspective on its past. It might be argued that particularly Clarke's way of brushing history against the grain, his reviewing of past events using a different perspective, has changed the self-perception of "visible minorities" in Canada. One of Clarke's major concerns is the general lack of knowledge about the existence of the African Canadian population and their history. Especially the prevailing exclusion of Canada's past as a slave-holder economy from Canadian cultural discourse is one of the salient points of his writings. As he points out in an

²² Clarke and Brand have both won the prestigious Governor General's Award (Clarke 1990; Brand 1997) and a number of other prizes, whereas Hill has received the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for best book in 2008. In addition to that, all three writers were part of the special issue of *Canadian Literature* presenting black Canadian writers, published in autumn 2004.

²³ Moss, *Canada Reads*, 10.

²⁴ The term will be of relevance for following discussions of tendencies in recent African-Canadian cultural politics to mystify and romanticise the origins of Nova Scotia's black population.

interview with Maureen Moynagh, “I feel I am constantly writing against our erasure”²⁵, a remark made with regard to the cultural politics of the Canadian government and the exclusion of the black-Canadian minority and its history from travel companions by the Canada Tourism Commission. Therefore, Clarke’s fictional reworking of Canada’s national past cannot be treated as a one-dimensional venture. Quite the contrary is the case – it is an engagement with the current state of affairs in Canada and an attempt at reworking the national past. It is an instrument to re-shape African-Canadian cultural identity. Clarke’s approach is as problematic as it is fascinating; among the diverse strategies used to rework the history of the black population, he integrates his own family history and thus presents parts of his own history disguised as fiction. In some of his fictional works, the story of his mother’s cousins George and Rufus Hamilton, who were convicted of committing homicide ten years before Clarke’s birth, provides the context for his examination of racism and white social hegemony in Canada.²⁶ Thus, a critical engagement with Clarke’s work must follow Meuter’s reasoning that “[s]omebody who sees him/herself rooted in a certain tradition will add the history of this tradition to the narrative about his life and his personal identity in a certain way; he will say, [...]: I am to a substantial part that which I inherit [...].”²⁷ In acknowledging their presence in his past in his fictional writing, Clarke also points to Canada’s history of racial discrimination and reveals aspects which had hitherto been unknown to the public.

Rewriting the Canadian historical imaginary is the main aspect that links Clarke’s literary works with those of Dionne Brand and Lawrence Hill. However, even if some of their topics are similar, their approaches towards issues like slavery, racism, gender issues and the politics of multiculturalism are different. Whereas Clarke tries to rework the history of the Africadian population, a term of his own coinage, subsuming the three terms Acadian, African and Canadian; Hill’s writing offers a wider, more continental perspective. Hill was born into a mixed-race family. His parents had moved from the U.S. to Toronto Canada in 1953. With their relocation, they intended to avoid becoming victims of the particular form of racial segregation

²⁵ Maureen Moynagh, Mapping Africadia’s Imaginary Geography: An Interview with George Elliott Clarke. *Ariel* 27.4 October 1996, 71-94 (73).

²⁶ The lives and crimes of George and Rufus Hamilton are a recurring theme in Clarke’s fictional writing. Their story is the basis for *Execution Poems. The Black Acadian Tragedy of George and Rue*, as well as for the novel *George & Rue* and the first poems in his collection of poetry titled *Black*.

²⁷ Norbert Meuter, *Narrative Identität. Das Problem der personalen Identität im Anschluss an Ernst Tugendhat, Niklas Luhmann und Paul Ricoeur*. Düsseldorf: M&P, 1995, p. 252. (my translation) “jemand, der sich stark in einer bestimmten Tradition erwurzelt fühlt, [wird] die Geschichte dieser Tradition in gewisser Weise mit zu seinem Lebenslauf und seiner personalen Identität hinzu(er)zählen; er wird etwa mit MACINTYRE sagen: ich bin „zu wesentlichem Teil das, was ich erbe [...].”

still prevailing in the U.S. His way of depicting the past in fiction offers a different perspective and reveals a different approach to literature compared to both Clarke's and Brand's. He had his international breakthrough with the novel *The Book of Negroes*²⁸ which was a particular success in 2007, leading the best-seller list for 13 weeks. It also achieved critical and public acclaim in the U.S. and other countries such as the UK and Germany, easily topping the success of his 1997 novel *Any Known Blood*. In addition to his works of fiction, Hill's autobiography, *Black Berry, Sweet Juice: On Being Black and White in Canada*, offers an autobiographical depiction of him growing up a mixed-race child in 1960s Canada.

The fusing of fiction and (family-)history is, with regard to Clarke's and Hill's narratives, a recurring strategy. In the course of my close readings of their fictional and non-fictional writings, the possible functions of this strategy in the context of the discourse they participate in will be discussed. Their blurring of boundaries, which problematizes a strict division between fictional and non-fictional text, will be analysed by taking recourse to generic theories and postcolonial approaches. By doing so, I aim to contribute to an assessment of their role in re-writing the Canadian imaginary in a national and transnational context.

In her writings, Dionne Brand, a feminist and first-generation immigrant from the Caribbean, follows a decidedly inclusive approach that negotiates race and ethnicity as transnational issues. As Marlene Goldman points out: "Brand's insistence on tracing complex identities beyond the nation-state, reflects the limitations of what Clifford terms 'the old localizing strategies.'"²⁹ More decidedly than Hill and Clarke, Brand thematizes language as a system of power in her poetry and prose. Especially the highly acclaimed volume of poetry *No Language is Neutral* deals with the interconnectedness between personal, cultural, and collective identity, gender issues, and language as a surreptitious system and source of power. Like Clarke and Hill, Brand tries to negotiate between exile and belonging; her focus, however, is rather on the relation between gender and race and the structures and forces forming the basis of social hierarchies.

All these readings will be focusing on one aspect I consider to be of vital importance: the appropriation and revision of iconic cultural texts. While it is a commonplace that no text comes

²⁸ The *Book of Negroes* was published in 2007 in the U.S. by W.W Norton & Co. under the title *Someone Knows my Name*.

²⁹ Marlene Goldman, "Mapping the Door of No Return." in: *Canadian Literature/Littérature canadienne. A Quarterly of Criticism and Review*. No. 182 / Autumn 2004, 13-28 [26].

into being as the sole creation of a creative genius and that intertextuality is a general feature of all literature, its function within a discourse has often been ignored, or, if not ignored, at least not appropriately considered. Despite their different approaches to literature and the production of literary texts, all three authors appropriate and refunctionalize iconic cultural texts for their writings. For the writing of *The Book of Negroes*, Lawrence Hill took recourse to the genre of slave narratives in order to fashion a transnational neo-slave narrative that, due to its mixture of historical accuracy and changed perspective, brought into focus that national and transnational history are intimately linked in the experience of the black diaspora. For *Whylah Falls*, Clarke appropriates stylistic patterns used in epic poetry to portray a fictitious black community. On the surface level, both texts differ not only with regard to stylistic choices, but also to the kind of black diaspora experience they depict. These can roughly be described in terms of national versus transnational approach. Those different approaches and perspectives point to the heterogeneity of the social imaginary both authors draw their inspirations from and relate to.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

This study is divided into two major parts. In the first part, the theoretical approach outlined before is explained and discussed in detail. In this part, key terms, ideas and reading strategies used in this study are introduced. Starting with the attempt to find a working definition of the term identity, a discussion of terms such as collective, communicative and cultural memory and their implications of these concepts for literature as a medium of memory is provided in the following part. The next chapter is dedicated to a detailed discussion of the discursive function of literature with regard to the reshaping of social imaginaries. This aspect is contextualized with Hall's and Rutherford's concept of identity as a performative social construction. This concept proceeds from the assumption that all forms of identity are subject to constant rephrasing and reshaping. All these theoretical approaches are discussed in the context of the larger political issues behind the post-modern and post-colonial projects the texts analysed in the close-reading sections contribute to. Secondly, an overview of the history of Canadian multiculturalism and its repercussions on Canadian culture is provided. In order to define the positions of those who participated in the public debate about multiculturalism as an official political and social programme, a sociological model that allows for a differentiation between different forms of multiculturalism is introduced.

The second main part of this thesis consist of close readings of works by the three authors previously introduced in this chapter. All their longer fictional writings are discussed in detail; the discussion of shorter works are – if necessary in the given context – be embedded into those chapters. As the discussion of stylistic change is of special relevance for this thesis, my close readings are arranged in chronological order. In accordance with my basic argument that historical fiction is of seminal importance for modern African-Canadian cultural production, the relations between fact and fiction and between myth and history are discussed in detail.³⁰ At the heart of these readings is Roberta Pearson's idea that the representation of the past has become a contested field which is no longer a “component of the hegemonic order [but rather] a site of struggle between different voices seeking to construct versions of the past that accord with their memories.”³¹ To provide a meaningful reading of those various texts, it is inevitable to discuss them firstly with regard to the historical period they are set in and secondly to define the generic strategies and textual practices they rely on. In addition to the past they rework, they have to be contextualized with the period they originate from.³² As this is a problematic point, it must be stressed that these texts are not regarded as reflections, but as part of a multilateral cultural discourse. Therefore, an attempt at locating these texts within the socio-cultural discourse of their times inevitably needs to be part of these readings. In this context, the authors’ references to and appropriations of other sources have to be considered because they are of vital importance to the reviewing and reshaping of social imaginaries. As this constitutes an important part of the authors’ strategies and approaches towards reworking history, this issue is an essential focus point of these chapters. All three close-reading parts can be read separately, but I summarize and juxtapose my discussions in the conclusion in order to pinpoint differences and similarities in the discursive function of the texts and in the stylistic means used for them. In this chapter, it is furthermore shown whether they predominantly contribute to either regional, national, or transnational discourses, or to all of them simultaneously.

³⁰ According to Cowart all fiction “[...] in which the past figures with some prominence [can be classified as historical fiction]. Such fiction does not require historical personages or events [...] nor does it have to be set at some specific remove in time. Thus I count as historical fiction any novel in which a historical consciousness manifests itself strongly in either character or the action.” David Covart, *History and the Contemporary Novel*. Illinois, 1989, 6.

³¹ Roberta Pearson, “Custer loses Again: Contestation Memory” in: Dan Ben-Amos & Liliane Weissberg, *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999, 176-202 [180].

³² Synchronic contextualization in this case means that the texts have to be read with regard to the discursive context they originate from. In this case, the synchronic perspective encompasses the past of the discourse as well.

Part I: A Brief Introduction to the Theoretical Contexts

2.1 Contemporary Identity Studies: A Brief Overview

First of all, I would like to turn to the different forms of identity relevant for this study and to the discourses they have shaped. Identity, as mentioned before, is an umbrella term, bringing together different concepts from diverse scholarly fields such as sociology, psychology and cultural studies which draw upon each other. All concepts of personal, national, cultural, sexual, social identity more or less try to fill a gap in explaining which factors determine the self- and other-perception of individuals and communities within their respective environments. The debate about the different concepts and notions of the term identity mainly originates from its inherent lack of conceptual limitation. While some scholars regard any form of identity, be it personal, cultural, or national, as something that is basically definite, others stress its tendency to become the object of social and even personal change and reassessment. Admittedly, those who argue in favour of the first approach are mostly concerned with research on societies that differ from the western idea of progress, being organized by regular cyclic models, like ancient societies and communities that are strongly linked to their natural environment.³³ Most scholars, however, agree that identities are social constructs which can only be understood within the larger social complexes they originate from. In modern industrialized societies, identities are no longer regarded as permanent social constructs, but rather as sites of conflicting interests and ideologies.³⁴ Apart from its original lexical meaning³⁵, identity is a problematic term due to the nature of its previous uses. Paul Ricoeur differentiates between the notions of identity as sameness (*idem*) and self (*ipse*), arguing that the latter is the more appropriate use because it allows for a differentiated treatment of the notion of constancy inherent in the term identity.³⁶ This static definition of identity was largely abandoned during the latter half of the twentieth century, an epoch that witnessed the removal of “any metaphysical foundation.”³⁷ According to Ricoeur, the key problem behind this idea of the self was the notion “permanence over time”, of

³³ Cf. Jan Assmann & Klaus E. Müller (ed.), *Der Ursprung der Geschichte. Archaische Kulturen, das alte Ägypten und das frühe Griechenland*. Klett-Cotta 2005, 46.

³⁴ Dorothee Birke, *Crisis of Memory, Identity and Narrative in Contemporary British Novels*. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier 2008, 19-21.

³⁵ “The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality.” *Oxford English Dictionary*: Online Version; accessed on 07/19/09.

³⁶ Paul Ricoeur, “Narrative Identity” in: *Philosophy Today*, 35:1 (1991: Spring), 73-81.

³⁷ Hanne Bingel, “Scouring the Unsettled Self: Identity and Spiritual Quest in Marilynne Robinson's Fictional Autobiography *Gilead*.” in: Birgit Neumann, Ansgar Nünning & Bo Petterson (eds.), *Narrative and Identity: Theoretical Approaches and Critical Analyses*. Trier: WVT, 2008, 99-113 [99].

some “immutable substrate”, an essential part of human beings usually described as personality.³⁸ In recent approaches of modern philosophy and cognitive studies towards a re-assessment of the term, this traditional understanding has been challenged. The static model was problematized by a number of scholars from different fields of research. Ricoeur first differentiates between self and character in order to show that even character is not a concept entirely free from development over time. He argues that human actions have both an ethical and a temporal dimension:

This ethical justification [for an action], considered as such, develops its own temporal implications, namely a modality of permanence in time capable of standing as the polar opposite of the permanence of character. It is here, precisely, that selfhood and sameness cease to coincide. And it is here, consequently, that the equivocalness of the notion of permanence in time is dissipated.³⁹

Since the early 1970s, scholars have been developing a dynamic model of identity which consists of a number of factors which are subject to dynamic discursive adjustment. This approach is basically constructivist as it neither regards the ethical nor the temporal dimension of human self-perception as a stable given if the factor of time is properly considered. Ricoeur regards time as a threat to the notion of “uninterrupted continuity [...], a factor of dissemblance, of divergence, of difference.”⁴⁰ This re-thinking of the term had wide implications for a set of issues related to the various identities, as for example the re-presentation of the past in both memory and historiography. In the following, the idea of dynamic adjustment will be a term of key importance. With dynamic adjustment I mean to follow the constructivists' approach that every form of identity and everything that is related to these identities will not be regarded as static, but rather as a changing set of emotional attachments, predispositions, socially determined attitudes and restrictions – to name but a few aspects of identity-defining social practices and norms. The differentiation between me and not-me, them and us, might easily become subject to change as it is a discursive construction which is liable to change over time.⁴¹ Furthermore, the sense of self

³⁸ Paul Ricoeur, “Narrative Identity”, 74-76.

³⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (translated by Kathleen Blamey). Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 124.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 117.

⁴¹ My definition of discourse follows Wodak's et.al definition that “[t]hrough discourses, social actors constitute objects of knowledge, situations and social roles as well as identities and interpersonal relations between different social groups and those who interact with them. [...] [Discursive acts] can contribute to the restoration, legitimation or relativisation of a social status quo (ante). [...] Fourthly, discursive practice may be effective in transforming, dismantling or even destroying the status quo. Ruth Wodak (et. al.), *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*. Edinburgh: EUP, 2009, 8.

of an individual and the way a community describes itself is often subject to a variety of different influences which all have a temporal dimension of their own. The hegemony, or rather acceptance of discourses and discursive acts is related to the power structures within a society.⁴² Therefore, all concepts of identity which will come to bear in this thesis, are based on the notion of dynamic adjustment. I will conclude this attempt at describing my working definition of identities as provisional, re-negotiable, subject to innate, social and cultural influences with the following examples from contemporary sociological studies. Pratibha Parma's constructivist approach, which describes identity in the context of the discursive processes experienced by a migrant or the representative of a minority, is of key importance. It is of special relevance for my thesis as I will discuss literary texts as a medium in which migrant and minority writers "produce, in the act of discourse, that very reality which they purport to describe."⁴³ Being either within, without or on the periphery of a particular society is an active determinant for the individual's sense of self:

The social and psychological construction of identities is an ongoing process which defies any notion of essential or static determinants. Identities are never fixed but complex, differentiated and are constantly repositioned. For migrant and black people who have been disenfranchised and are outside the dominant modes of representation, personal identity is very often tied to the need to articulate a collective identity around race and culture even though as individuals we inhabit a range of positions within our histories and inside our diverse identities.⁴⁴

Parmar's concepts includes aspects that Wodak et. al. have summarized as social identity which means that "social characteristics [...] and assigned role expectations and memberships from outside" are ascribed to a person.⁴⁵ It is not only the self-ascription mentioned by Parmar, but also the view, or rather assessment from outside, that defines a person's identity. According to this concept, individuals are defined by those ascriptions, or assigned roles, rather than creating a coherent identity by themselves. Rutherford basically shares this view, but he points out that individuals should not be neglected as active determinants in their own story:

⁴² By resorting to Foucault's theories of social discourses of power, Eckstein has shown that those discourses have, in order to be effective, to be sanctioned by society. With regard to testimonies of members of social minorities this implies that they had been either subject to manipulation, or unwittingly fulfil the criteria to be accepted as such. See: Eckstein, *Remembering*, 22.

⁴³ Birgit Neumann & Ansgar Nünning, "Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Narrative and Identity." in: Birgit Neumann, Ansgar Nünning & Bo Petterson (eds.), *Narrative and Identity: Theoretical Approaches and Critical Analyses*. Trier: WVT, 2008, 3-22 [12].

⁴⁴ Pratibha Parmar, "Black Feminism: The Politics of Articulation." in: Jonathan Rutherford, *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd. 1990, 116.

⁴⁵ Wodak et. al. (ed.), *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 16.

Our struggles for identity and a sense of personal coherence and intelligibility are centred on this threshold between interior and exterior, between self and other. [...] But there are no ready-made identities or categories that we unproblematically slip into.⁴⁶

The idea of an active struggle for coherence, self-constancy and reliable social roles is central to Rutherford's theoretical approach. Coherence and intelligibility are key components of this concept, but Rutherford does not use them in a diachronic sense, as meaning constancy over time, but rather as temporary features of our self-perception and self-representation. A human being consists of different social identities, or virtual identities as aspects of one personal identity, but those aspects are never stagnant, they are always developing, always changing because they are perpetually redefined by the interaction between society and individual.⁴⁷ This dynamic conceptualization of the human self, nevertheless, fundamentally contradicts how human beings experience themselves in time. As Ricoeur points out, we perceive our existence to be founded on permanence of character over time and a gradual, continuous development of the self.⁴⁸ To arrive at a working definition of identity, I will make use of Stuart Hall's theoretical works in connection to Ricoeur's idea of the life story as "a series of rectifications applied to previous narratives", which actually leads us to the inclusion of memory as one of the factors determining identity. Nevertheless, the application of Ricoeur's concept leads us to a wider definition of the term, paradoxically including change and constancy as both are part of the scope it can assume, especially taking into consideration the factor of time.

Identification is one of the central ideas in any approach to discuss identity as a dynamic and developing feature of society. Positive as well as negative identification is a subconscious or indirect emotional attachment, or, on the negative scale, detachment from a community or society. In order to foster this state, a differentiation between "self" and "other", signalling the affiliation to one's family, an ethnic group, or a nation state, is necessary. There are natural and cultural affiliations. While family ties are the prime example of natural affiliations, the sense of belonging to a nation state is based on the conscious acceptance of cultural and ideological constructions that have finally created this form of identification of individuals with an artificial political unity. Even if national identities, traditions, myths or cultural constructions like

⁴⁶ Jonathan Rutherford, "A Place Called Home: Identity and the Cultural Politics of Difference." in: Rutherford, *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, 24-25.

⁴⁷ Wodak et. al., 16.

⁴⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 124.

religions and identities related to environmental aspects, like regional identities, appear to be static, this apparent stasis is not to be mistaken as permanency. Like almost every aspect of human existence and culture, they are continually adapted, reassessed and redefined. However, all those aspects of human existence mentioned before consist of simple, structures and ideas that provide us with the illusion of permanency. Due to their simple, often binary structure, these cultural constructions satisfy a basic human need as they provide coherence and serve as means of identification.⁴⁹ Anthropologists like Erik Eriksson argued that the illusion of permanence is necessary for the social interaction of human beings, enabling us to place ourselves in society and to fashion our self-narratives. On a national scale, collective representations, are, according to Émile Durkheim “[c]ultural beliefs, moral values, symbols and ideas shared by any human group.”⁵⁰ They are essential aspects of nation building processes. Those “[r]epresentations create a symbolic world of meanings within which a cultural group lives.”⁵¹ Or to use Paul Ricoeur’s words: “Individual and community are constituted in their identity by taking up narratives that become for them their actual history.”⁵² But this placement has become ever more controversial because in our world, which seems to be in a permanent identity crisis, the construction of a “self-constant community” has become problematic.⁵³

2.2 Narrative Identity

The mutability of the self-conception of human beings is not congruent with the way human beings experience their identity. This incongruence is based on subconscious self-deception. In his influential work *The Concept of Identity*, Eli Hirsch points out that the criteria of bodily identity always comprise two elements: “an element of continuity and an element of sortal coverage“, adding up to sortal-covered continuity, which leads us to perceive change at a lesser rate than it actually occurs.⁵⁴ It can be said that human beings are mentally capable of practising

⁴⁹ Ibid, 75. Ricoeur points out that what problematizes identity is that “the self intersects with the same at one exact point, precisely with regard to permanence over time.”

⁵⁰ Durkheim in Stuart Hall & Bram Gieben (eds.), *Formations of Modernity: Understanding Modern Societies*. Cambridge and Oxford: The Open University 1992, 238.

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1984, 247.

⁵³ Ibid, 19-21.

⁵⁴ Eli Hirsch, *The Concept of Identity*. New York & Oxford: OUP 1982, 181-182. Hirsch describes his method of analysis as follows: “[We] have attempted to analyse our concept of bodily identity in terms of the interrelations between the successive momentary stages of a body.“ Later he adopts the term “body history“, a term which he also discards later on as most problematic because the characterization of the relationship between object

this self deception by their ability to turn their experiences into a mental narrative, a life story. As Ricoeur put it: “Without the recourse to narration, the problem of personal identity would in fact be condemned to an antimony with no solution. [...] The difference between *idem* and *ipse* is nothing more than the difference between a substantial or formal identity and a narrative identity.”⁵⁵ In the context of personal identity it can therefore be said that the concept of narrative identity bridges the gap between sameness and selfhood. As Wodak et. al. have summarized it:

[Narrative identity] oscillates between both poles of identity [sameness and selfhood] and integrates the changeable and dynamic elements in a temporal permanence. Narrative identity is an identity seen as identity of a character; a figure is that part of a fable composition which executes the plot. The fable composition aims to synthesise heterogeneous elements by combining heterogeneous factors in linked plots and events to form a narrative.[...] The narrative configuration has to mediate between concordance and discordance in such a way that the story told can be understood as a whole by its recipients. By means of this narrative operation, a dynamic concept of identity is formed which also includes the concepts of transformation.⁵⁶

By narrative identity we describe the coherent sequential emplotment of events, having taken place at different points in time, in order to minimize the effect of historical contingency on the individual's sense of self. The telling of stories about oneself is therefore a means to negotiate the dynamic adjustment and to sequentialize experiences in order create a coherent sense of self. The concept in itself cannot only be applied to personal identities, but, as Paul Ricoeur points out, is also applicable to national narratives, or rather historiography as a medium for those narratives. The narrative identity of a people, collective group or even a nation is therefore, as Wodak et. al. have concluded, subject to a diachronic, discursive corrective that performs rectifications on earlier narratives.⁵⁷ This diachronic, discursive corrective is subject to the shifting power relations within a society. This constructivist and deterministic view of personal identity therefore necessarily includes gender, race, social institutions, immediate environment and the traditions and history of a community as guiding and regulating aspects behind the formation of a personal identity.

Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what

and time cannot be described in stages.

⁵⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*. Volume 3. (originally published as *Temps et Récit*, vol. 3) Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press 1990, 246.

⁵⁶ Wodak et. al., *Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 14.

⁵⁷ Wodak et. al, 15

differentiates you from others. At its most basic it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core to your individuality. [...] Each of us lives with a variety of potentially contradictory identities, which battle within us for allegiance: as men or women, black or white, straight or gay, able-bodied or disabled, 'British' or 'European' ... [...] Identities are not neutral. Behind the quest for identity are different and often conflicting values. By saying who we are, we are also striving to express what we are, what we believe and what we desire. The problem is that these beliefs, needs and desires are often patently in conflict, not only between different communities but within individuals themselves.⁵⁸

However, race alone cannot be a basis for a shared set of memories, imaginaries and values since racial communities are as beset with divisions over culture, gender and class as any other community. Class divisions among black communities are real in the influence they have over both the consumption and production of particular cultural objects and practices.⁵⁹ Therefore both social influences and regional idiosyncrasies shape the self-perception of individuals and communities. In an interview with Sarah Hampson, author Lawrence Hill nicely illustrates this differentiation with an anecdote from his youth:

Growing up in the situation I did probably hugely influenced me in making me a writer today. [...] An *unclear environment* makes you want to figure out who you are and, in my case, to make sense of myself in the world. I couldn't have done that if my father was living in New York and the Carolinas, where all his family was. I would have been deemed to be black unequivocally, attending segregated schools. I would not have had to think about how I was perceived. In Don Mills, it was all fuzzy. I didn't know how I was seen or how to see myself, and that ambiguity is a great crucible for a writer to flourish in.⁶⁰

According to Hill's self-analysis, the lack of a rigidly defined social identity is one of the issues that turned him into a writer. In his comparison between U.S. American and Canadian social environments he points out that in the U.S., there would have been no debate about his racial status: he would have been forced to adapt to and act according to the unwritten rules ascribed to black individuals and communities. In Canada, which he describes as “an unclear environment”; race is not less problematic, it is only less rigidly defined.

⁵⁸ Jeffrey Weeks, “The Value of Difference“. In: Rutherford, *Identity*, 88-89.

⁵⁹ Cf. Parmar, “Black Feminism“, 118.

⁶⁰ Sarah Hampson, “The search for a promised land“, Interview with Lawrence Hill in *Globe and Mail*, 9 June 2008. (My emphasis).

The wish to create a coherent cultural, social and ethnic identity through narratives or rather a comprehensible narrative identity is essential to every human being, but, at least in an abstracted, argumentative form, it is even more important in the context of the African diaspora. Due to the disruptive experience of the middle passage, slavery, segregation, and ongoing exclusion, cultural coherence and social orders were rendered insignificant to those who endured these forced translocations and were brutalized by their environment. In the course of (self)-emancipation new ideals had to be established. Narratives were then written to argue against the social and legal systems. In this context, slave narratives served as a means to make sense of personal experiences as well as to enrich and expand the cultural discourse of their time. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. stresses:

This connection among language, memory, and the self has been of signal importance to African-Americans, intent as they have had to be upon demonstrating both common humanity with whites and upon demonstrating that their 'selves' were, somehow, as whole, integral, educable, and as noble as were those of any other American ethnic group.⁶¹

Those narratives inevitably have an afterlife. While having served different functions like self-assertion, argumentative self-locations within a system and political propaganda when they were first published, they are today regarded as the backbone, or rather origin of African-American literary traditions. The scope of personal experiences they deal with, their narrative structures and the arguments they provide have been of vital influence on the self- and group-perceptions of the following generations of African-American writers. Many African-American writers attempted to deconstruct a set of paradoxical stereotypes described by Levine as follows:

[T]here has rarely been one monolithic image of black people. Blacks, for instance have been pictured as senselessly violent and dangerous even while they were also depicted as docile, passive, and obedient. Caught in the pincers of this dual image, if Negroes reacted to the American system with force they were living up to a stereotype, and if they did not they were also living up to a stereotype.⁶²

The problem of stereotypical representation by outsiders described by Levine will be of relevance for the assessment of African-Canadian identity politics as it basically extends the

⁶¹ Henry Louis Gates, "Introduction: On Bearing Witness" in: Henry Louis Gates, *Bearing Witness: Selections from African-American Autobiography in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Pantheon Books, 199, 7.

⁶² Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*. Oxford, London & New York: Oxford UP, 1977, 336

concept of double consciousness developed and introduced by W. E. B. Du Bois.⁶³ However, I will quote and relate Du Bois famous definition to George Elliott Clarke's assessment of African-Canadian identity politics later on in the text. For now, I will stick with the cultural function of autobiographical and narrative texts in the context of this thesis. As a close reading of African-American autobiographies shows, most followed more or less rigid structural and topical conventions.⁶⁴ Considering the narrowness of these structural and topical boundaries, it is astonishing that most authors managed to tell their individual stories, to make sense of their problems, and to find their individual narrative voice. However, those constraints rather enabled them to reflect on their own selfhood. By keeping to those narrowly confined generic conventions, writers were enabled to place themselves within a social group and its narrative traditions. For most African-American writers these traditions were firmly based on autobiographical structures. The individual testimonies of the writers are part of a grass roots movement, providing coherence, structure and focus for themselves and others by emplotting events and experiences in the form of reliable sequentiality, creating narrative identities for them and others. In short, they became part and parcel of African-American nation building processes, mnemonic device for communities and structural guideline for individual writers.

2.3 National Identity

As is the case with personal identity, national and collective identities draw their appeal from the illusion of permanency and longevity they create. Individuals born into a modern nation state rarely notice long lasting developments, neither of their own personality nor of the identity of the collective they feel connected to. National identity has public and private aspects. Like all other forms of identity it is construed discursively. Most European nation states and their ideologies emerged during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Belgium, Italy and Germany were among the last nations to emerge from the post-Napoleonic re-ordering of Europe. In spite of their short existence a world without them is unthinkable. From the day those political constructs emerged they were endowed – often by those who politically facilitated their emergence – with myth and legends that served to purport the idea that those young nations were actually in

⁶³ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Knopf, 1993 [1903], 9.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 4.

continuity with great powers of the past.⁶⁵ Both Italy and Germany were supposed to follow in the footsteps of former empires, respectively to be their legitimate successors. The founding myths and the narratives about its national heroes – and, at best, their adversaries – are essential to the sense of national unity and collective memory. The sense of unity, of shared narratives, ideals and traditions is even more essential to those young nations because they help fostering the nations' collective identity. In contrast to the older European empires like Austria and Turkey, the new nation states of the nineteenth century were supposed to be ethnically uniform. This implies a shared linguistic and cultural background, old and venerable political traditions and a shared adherence to Christian ideals. These characteristics had been part and parcel of British imaginaries since the Act of Union of 1707. Ever since being British has been synonymous with being white. Race became an absolute criterion of belonging in spite of the obvious contradiction this claim posed when reviewed in the context of the ethnic diversity of its metropolitan centres. As Patrick Brantlinger points out: [r]acism and nationalism have been inseparable since the formation of the modern English, then from 1707, British, nation-state.”⁶⁶ As Caryl Phillips discovered after reading Orwell's “England your England”: “[British] traditions, hobbies and pastimes – their culture, if you will – was not only deeply rooted in a continuous historical past, but was impervious to *pollution* by foreign sources.”⁶⁷ The ethnic, or even racial other, was regarded as a danger to the integrity of the nation's sense of self. Phillips goes on by stating that “[t]he nineteenth-century imagined community of Empire did much not only to legitimize British racism, it also entrenched the ideals of Britishness that Orwell explored in his essay.”⁶⁸ In the context of national identity, the need for continuity is, as Phillips makes clear, the origin of xenophobia and racism. It entrenches the nationalist idea of communities divided by origin, race and history. Despite the obvious faults of this line of argumentation, singularity and continuity, not similarity and ruptures, have remained essential to the understanding of nation states and their populations. Representatives of nations tend to describe their homeland and its culture in contrast to other countries. Often this act of juxtaposition is used to either accentuate the achievements of their own culture, or to point to its shortcomings. However, those representatives, as their representative techniques are based on cultural essentials, have no power in culturally and ethnically heterogeneous societies. This obvious discrepancy also posed a problem to Britain's dominions because, like their mother country, their

⁶⁵ For a detailed description of the process and interesting case studies see: Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*. London & New York: CUP, 1983.

⁶⁶ Patrick Brantlinger, *Fictions of State: Culture and Credit in Britain, 1694-1994*. Ithaca, New York & London: Cornell UP, 1996.

⁶⁷ Caryl Phillips, *A New World Order: Selected Essays*. London: Secker & Warburg, 2001, 266. [my emphasis]

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 267.

collective identities did not allow for ethnic otherness, especially in terms of racial differences. Both for Great Britain and for Canada, the post-World War II influx of migrants from the Caribbean challenged and eventually changed prevailing imaginaries established on the premises of an existing ethnic and racial unity. Not only the skin colour of these migrants posed a problem to the white majority, but also their different strategies of performing gender, race and culture. As Bryant Alexander makes clear: “[...] the location of culture is bodily practice and that realization is much more salient when other bodies are not performing the same practices and when the materiality of bodies is marked differently.”⁶⁹ Basic problems of all those claims to heterogeneous performances of national identity, shared ethnicity, culture and customs is that those claims contain a factor probably best described as the authenticity paradox. The idea of authenticity is intimately linked with the idea of an unfailing system of evaluation, a kind of innately correct knowledge about cultural and social practices all participants share. As Homi Bhabha points out: “What is at issue is the performative nature of differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, contingently, 'opening out', remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular autonomous sign of difference – be it class, gender, or race.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Bryant Keith Alexander, *Performing Black Masculinity: Race, Culture, and Queer Identity*. Lanham: Altamira, 2006, 8.

⁷⁰ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994, 219.

3.1. A Functional Categorization of Fictionalizations of the Past as Part of Identity-Formation Processes

He thinks that perhaps a truthful account of the past week would include the various stories he has made up for himself concerning Black. With so little to report, these excursions into the make believe would at least give some flavor of what has happened.

(Paul Auster, *The New York Trilogy/Ghosts*, 175)

As Paul Auster so poignantly illustrated in his *New York Trilogy*, narratives about the past can be randomly arranged fragments, employed to create a certain impression, or as the narrator (White) called it “to give some flavor of what has happened.” Without narratives about the past, no matter whether they are depicting events as they really were, social life would not be the same. Recent Canadian literature offers many examples of novels which try to retell the past from a different angle. As early as 1983 the literary scholar David Staines hailed this tendency as a sign of cultural and political maturity.⁷¹ Especially contemporary narratives of members of minorities, which, due to political and social repression, did not have the opportunity to create lasting mementos of their past, are essential to preserve and foster the identity of the culture they originated from. In the context of African-Canadian culture it can be said that the scarcity of such literary testimonies created the need to make existing narratives about the past accessible to the public and to fill the existing gaps in the knowledge about the past. As George Elliott Clarke points out, identity, history and storytelling are deeply intertwined. Furthermore, he stresses that “[g]iven the socio-political, economic, and geographic context in which African-Canadian literature exists, a knowledge of its history is crucial for those who would not commit misreadings, a too-popular offence.”⁷² This reminds one of George Steiner's assessment of nineteenth-century German literary and artistic movements for which “the study of one's own past played a vital part in affirming national identity.”⁷³ Proceeding from the assumption that Steiner's assessment can also be applied to modern Canadian culture, Clarke's unearthing has to be regarded as an attempt to contribute to discursive nation-building processes. However, in his introduction to the collection of recent African-Canadian fiction, *Eyeing the North Star*, Clarke identifies the main problems of African-Canadian historiography. Those problems are, firstly, the

⁷¹ David Staines, “Crouched in Dark Caves: The Post-Colonial Narcissism of Canadian Literature. In *The Yearbook of English Studies* 13 (Colonial and Imperial Themes Special Number) 1983, 259-269 [263].

⁷² George Elliot Clarke (ed.), *Eyeing the North Star. Directions in African-Canadian Literature*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart 1997, xx.

⁷³ George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature and the Inhuman*. New York: Athenum, 1970, 57.

disputed sovereignty of interpretation and, secondly, revoking the exclusion of African-Canadians from cultural discourse. Especially from a feminist perspective, like Dionne Brand's, many issues were to be addressed in a different way.⁷⁴

Therefore, this part of my thesis is concerned with the relation between history, or rather, as I would like to call it, "narratives about the past" and identity constructions in African-Canadian cultural discourse and production. In this context it should be said that the definition of discourse this thesis rests on is a very broad one. Mills emphasizes that "a discourse is not a disembodied collection of statements, but groupings of utterances or sentences, sentences which are enacted in a social context, which are determined by that social context and which contribute to the way that social context continues its existence."⁷⁵ With Mills, it can be said that literature, regarded as an "utterance enacted in a social context" has to be seen simultaneously as product and producer; it is produced in a certain socio-economic and socio-cultural context, and, by being taken up by others, potentially influences how members of this cultural and social group experience and represent themselves and others.

First I would like to provide a general introduction to the present-day discourses concerned with the link between identity, history, myth and memory before engaging with the relationship between constructions of ethnic and national identities (as a part of counter-hegemonic nation building)⁷⁶ and imaginative re-writings of the past.⁷⁷ As a starting point for this part Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson are mentioned who point out that myth and memory are "not only [serve] as special clues to the past, but equally as windows on the making and remaking of individual and collective consciousness, in which both fact and fantasy, past and present, each has its part."⁷⁸ This theoretical approach will be highly relevant in the context of my discussion of the writings of Dionne Brand, George Elliott Clarke and Lawrence Hill. In

⁷⁴ One of the pioneering studies of African Canadian Women's History in which Brand participated is: Peggy Bristow and Dionne Brand (eds.), *We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History*. Toronto, Buffalo & London: University of Toronto Press 1994.

⁷⁵ Sara Mills, *Discourse*. London & New York: Routledge, 1997, 13.

⁷⁶ It should be considered that Canada is an especially interesting case for the analysis of nation-building processes as "[p]luralism and tolerance have a key place, and an institutionalised place, in the cultural politics of national identity in Canada, while "the 'white backlash' grows louder, and marginalised populations have fewer and fewer choices." See: Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*. Toronto, Buffalo & London: University of Toronto Press 1999, 5.

⁷⁷ Counter-cultural and counter-hegemonic is used in accordance with Patterson and Kelley: "One reason that New World black cultures appear 'counter' to European narratives of history is that Europe exorcised blackness in order to create its own invented traditions, empires, and fictions of superiority and racial purity. See: Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley, "Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World." In: *African Studies Review*, Vol. 43/1, 2000 (Special Issue on the Diaspora), 11-45 [13].

⁷⁸ Raphael Samuel & Paul Thompson (eds.), *The Myths We Live By*. London & New York: Routledge 1990, 21.

order to discuss the different forms these amalgamations take on in their writings, focussing especially on their techniques and their treatment of literary and cultural conventions.

During the last thirty years identity, memory and (re-)constructions of the past have become key-terms of cultural discourse. Generally spoken, their reliability and consequently their susceptibility to be manipulated and henceforth used as instruments of power came into focus through the shift of cultural and literary studies to acknowledge postmodern and postcolonial ideas. Even though it is still to be resolved to which extent individuals, ethnic groups and whole nations can be manipulated by cultural productions, the history of this century has shown that mass media have a strong influence on how people perceive their environment and how they relate themselves to it. This includes the formation and distribution of narratives about the past of one's people or culture which are not necessarily exclusively based on verified items of information, but more often are amalgamations of myth, stereotypes and other narratives used to reconcile the present with the past. As this thesis is primarily concerned with works of literature, it makes sense to point to the possible functions of literature within our social cosmos. Michel Riffaterre for example, draws attention to the “*dialectic* implementation of narrative models” in literary writing trying to show that

[In literature] [t]he combination of [...] multiple references to the given, of the verifiability of each against the accepted idea of reality, of the very bulk of detailed translations of each into actual descriptions, and of convergence on one initial lexical or phrasal given convey the impression of truth.⁷⁹

Even if Riffaterre's notion of truth, or rather verisimilitude as he calls it, is problematic and surely debatable, especially with regard to his assumption that “[in a work of fiction] there must be [...] signs of plausibility that makes readers react to a story as if it were true”⁸⁰, he paved the way for other scholars who have shown that literature influences our way to look at the world. Hubert Zapf for example, regards literature, due to its “aestheticising transgression of immediate referentiality”, as an “ecological force-field within culture, a subversive yet regenerative semiotic energy [...]”⁸¹

⁷⁹ Michel Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth*, Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990, xiv.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸¹ Hubert Zapf, “Literature as Cultural Ecology. Notes Towards a Functional Theory of Imaginative Texts with Examples from American Literature” in: *Literary History / Cultural History: Force fields and Tensions*. Herbert Grabes (ed.) *REAL 17. Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature*. Tübingen: Narr Verlag, 2002, 85-99 [88].

Inevitably, the three issues identity, memory and narratives are linked with each other, although this linkage is often ignored, or, due to the scope of critical analyses, presented as side-effects of the respective issue discussed. As a formal taxonomic system for this chapter, identity, as defined in the previous chapter, will be regarded as the top of an imaginary pyramid with memory and narratives concerned with the past. Memory and identity are closely related to identity; nevertheless, they are dependent on the respective processes of identity construction because they function as limited determinants in social discourses. According to Karl Kroeber, works of art in this context must be regarded as “dynamic participants in a constantly self-transforming historical environment.”⁸² Or, as Neumann puts it:

Especially in literature, the relation between remembering and identity is depicted in an aesthetically condensed manner, thereby gaining the narrative contours rarely exhibited by regular pre-narrative memory-work. (my translation)⁸³

The idea that literature functions like a condenser that intensifies the relation between memory and identity is central to Neumann's research. In the context of my study I deem it to be highly relevant, too. Therefore, I will concentrate on the possible effects cultural products might have on the construction of identities by focusing on the potential effects of certain generic decisions; narratives about the past will be considered as functional devices which shape personal and cultural memory and as a result also the identity of ethnic groups. Furthermore, narratives about the past as well as cultural memory will not be regarded as static and settled, but, like identity, as social constructions that are subject to constant change. This approach will be explained in the following part.

In accordance with Ricoeur's idea of rectifications applied to former narratives, Hall regards cultural identity as a temporary construction which can never be regarded as stable, but must rather be described with the spatial metaphor of a diachronically changing site:

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think,

⁸² Karl Kroeber, *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of the Mind*. New York: Columbia UP 1994, 25. As cited in: Zapf, “Literature as Cultural Ecology”, 91.

⁸³ Birgit Neumann, *Erinnerung, Identität, Narration. Gattungstypologie und Funktionen kanadischer Fictions of Memory*. Berlin & New York: De Gruyter 2005, 119. “Gerade im Medium der Literatur wird der Zusammenhang zwischen Erinnern und Identität ästhetisch verdichtet dargestellt und gewinnt hier jene narrative Konturierung, die oftmals prä-narrative alltägliche Erinnerungsarbeit selten aufweist.”

instead, of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in progress, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematizes the very authority to which the term, 'cultural identity' lays claim.⁸⁴

Following Hall, identity does not simply consist of a large number of social and private factors, like gender, ethnicity, faith and political conviction, but is under diachronic development, which is accompanied by a constant shift of emphasis in the critical discourse about the past. This implies the necessity to critically re-address and re-negotiate the past, or rather the narratives our ideas of the past consist of. As Roberta Pearson puts it, this development challenges the idea that history is a stable construct that supports a certain world view: "Rather as a component of the hegemonic order, historical representation becomes a site of struggle between different voices seeking to construct versions of the past that accord with their memories."⁸⁵ Even seemingly unified complexes like national and cultural identities are subject to diachronic change. Those changes are the results of incessant discourses about the evaluation and re-evaluation of the place and significance of the contestants within these concoctions. As William Boelhower points out, national and cultural identities have been destabilized by the declining influence of governments caused by globalization and market deregulation, which have substituted governmental institutions for industry or business conglomerates.⁸⁶ Within these destabilized nation states, contesting social and ethnic groups hold ideas and narratives about the past which are significantly different.⁸⁷ Accordingly, in our age, which lacks the grand defining narratives,⁸⁸ societies do not tend to see and describe themselves as a whole, but rather as a conglomeration of different ethnic, religious and social groups.⁸⁹ On the national level this

⁸⁴ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in: Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), *Community, Culture, Difference*. London 1990: Lawrence & Wishart, 222-223.

⁸⁵ Roberta Pearson, "Custer loses Again: Contestation Memory" in: Dan Ben-Amos & Liliane Weissberg, *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*. Wayne State University Press: Detroit 1999, 176-202 [180].

⁸⁶ William Boelhower, "Identity, Memory, and the Archaeological Turn in Humanistic Studies." In: Rüdiger Kunow (ed.), *Cultural Memory and Multiple Identities*. Berlin, Hamburg & Münster: Lit verlag 2008, 18-30. and "Mnemohistory: the Archaeological Turn in the Humanities From Winckelmann to Calvino," *Symbiosis*, Vol.9, No.2, October 2005, 99-116.

⁸⁷ Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*. Toronto, Buffalo & London: University of Toronto Press 1999, 1-22 [2].

⁸⁸ See: Wolfgang Kloß, "Forms of Identity Construction in English-Canadian Historical (Meta-)Fiction" in: Klaus-Dieter Ertler & Martin Löschnigg (eds.), *Canada 2000: Identity and Transformation / Identité et Transformation, Central European Perspectives on Canada / Le Canada Vu à Partir de l'Europe Central*. Frankfurt a. O. :Peter Lang 2000, 91. And: Gordon Bölling, *History in the Making. Metafiktion im neueren anglokanadischen historischen Roman*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter 2006, 14-15.

⁸⁹ Bölling, *History in the Making*, 14-15. Bölling's bold assessment that Canadian historiography is basically limited to a monolithic version of national history is certainly debatable. The examples he cites show that they are arbitrarily chosen and limited to mainstream historiography. He neglects publications which treat the history of ethnic minorities, rather concentrating on mainstream national history. While he considers fiction to be the genre concerned with the reworking of history, it has to be said that the same tendencies occurring in modern historical

problematic situation implies that there are a number of competing narratives about the past that constitute parts of a cultural discourse. The same incoherent picture Pearson has diagnosed with regard to cultural productions exists on the more abstract level of collective memory. As Neumann emphasizes: “The collective memories of different groups do not co-exist harmoniously; they rather come into being through and remain in competition for interpretational sovereignty and mnemonic dominance.”⁹⁰ With regard to ethnic minorities this is of special relevance because, from the historical perspective, it can be said that since the late 1950s, representatives of ethnic minorities started to participate in the western cultural discourse on a comparatively large scale. Nevertheless, the existing gap between today’s cultural production by representatives of ethnic minorities and the lack of surviving older examples of the creativity of representatives of their ethnic community is a statistical testimony of enforced absence from public life and discourse.⁹¹ From the perspective of cultural materialism, it has to be said that members of ethnic groups which were forced to live on the margins of societies, due to slavery, governmental racism and other forms of discrimination, did not only have to cope with the instant material conditions of their lives, but were largely excluded from participating in shaping the culture of those societies marginalising them.⁹² Accordingly, enslaved minorities were often excluded from the creation of written histories; instead they memorized and made sense of their past and present orally, handing their memories down from generation to generation through songs or stories which were told in the context of private or public festivities. As this is no longer practicable and necessary due to the significant social and technical shifts that have radically changed the means of human communication during the last 150 years, the stories that can be told about the past must be adapted to these different circumstances. Zapf points out that the form of art that results from this development recovers imaginatively the “pre-modern forms of culture and modes of writing/storytelling.”⁹³

Consequentially, individuals intent on retracing the pasts of minorities that had previously been excluded from western-dominated historical discourses, have to fill gaps in order to

fiction are also to be found in historiography, for instance, the focus on ethnic groups a.s.o.

⁹⁰ Neumann, *Erinnerung, Identität, Narration*, 110-113. Die Kollektivgedächtnisse verschiedener Gruppen stehen nicht in harmonischer Konsonanz; vielmehr (ent)stehen sie im Streit um Deutungshoheit und Erinnerungskonkurrenz.

⁹¹ There is a number of narratives written by former slaves which has to be mentioned at this point, but these narratives are limited in scope as in quantity in comparison to the literary production of the often cited male, white & Christian-writers.

⁹² Cf. Hartmut Giese, Bruno Nikles & Christoph Rülcker, *Zur Vermittlung von Individuum und Gesellschaft*. Opladen: Leske und Budrich 1977, 50-55.

⁹³ Zapf, “Literature as Cultural Ecology“, 94.

inscribe these pasts into our present-day discourses, using the items of information available to them and the stylistic conventions and technical means of their culture. By this act the historical presence of “alien otherness” within western societies is brought into focus as a neglected part of western narratives about the past. Nevertheless, it is significant that if this presence had not been duly acknowledged before, its neglect gives a certain account about the self-conception of a society. The narratives that originate from these reconstructions are therefore not based on continuities, but rather concerned with disruptions caused by violent and abrupt shifts of space and time, an aspect that will be considered in detail in the analysis part.⁹⁴ As Zapf points out, contemporary multicultural and postcolonial narratives at once make use of the three main procedures of the cultural ecological function of literature he describes. They simultaneously function as culture-critical metadiscourses, imaginative counter-discourse and reintegrative inter-discourse.⁹⁵

While those narratives might be primarily concerned with coming to terms with former dislocation and alienation, they might also serve as means in processes of nation building.⁹⁶ This happens on different levels, less on the normative historiographic, but rather on the fictional or mythopoetical level. This is of relevance with regard to the construction of personal and cultural identities of ethnic groups within a larger society. Nevertheless, one basic prerequisite of cultural identities is that certain narratives, ideas and cultural practices are shared within an ethnic community. Clarke emphasizes the necessity to turn to the past, in order to make sense of the present, already providing a certain historical taxonomy.

One must treat the objective realities of the African settlement of Canada, via slavery, resistance to slavery, pioneering, homesteading, and the twentieth-century experiences of labour and professional life, as well as fluxes of refugees escaping civil wars, invasions, famines, and other species of disaster. To refuse to inquire into the history of the formation of the African-Canadian people is to opt for bewilderment and confusion [...].⁹⁷

Even if he provides a perfect example of keyword historiography, this short passage informs the reader about aspects that have been crucial for the history of African-Canadians. But for Clarke’s argumentation, historical veracity is not a key aspect. He is far more concerned with

⁹⁴ Patterson & Kelley, “Unfinished Migrations, 11-45.

⁹⁵ Zapf, “Literature as Cultural Ecology”, 93-94.

⁹⁶ Patterson & Kelley 13.

⁹⁷ George Elliott Clarke, *Odysseys Home. Mapping African-Canadian Literature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2002, 198.

contemporary politics than with historical accuracy. In order to make sense of the here and now he confronts his readers with neglected aspects of Canadian history, trying to show that African Canadians had been suppressed in an institutionalized form, thereby establishing a sense of historical continuity. Clarke's argumentation certainly has revisionist intentions with regard to official Canadian historiography, because he argues for a Canadian pan-Africanism, meaning the cultural re-orientation towards "definable, Africanist oral/linguistic strategies, as well as a special relationship to song, rhythm, and a specific history."⁹⁸

Clarke also points out that African Canadians are not a unified ethnic group with a shared identity, but at best "an assembly of miniature nations" which, however, should be able to agree on common traditions.⁹⁹ This ideological approach is in the tradition of other black writers around the globe, who "defined themselves as a part of a larger international black community."¹⁰⁰ Even if there is a certain resemblance to the idea of pan-Africanism as a counter-cultural movement, opposing colonialism and imperialism in Clarke's vision, it must be stressed that he rather advocates an intra-national, but still counter-hegemonic unification of Canadians with African origin. But the ideas Clarke presents aim to further a more integrated understanding of the Black Diaspora; he proposes a combination of intellectual cosmopolitanism and regionally oriented research projects, concentrating on "historiographic and sociological analyses of specific national and regional cultures."¹⁰¹ With intellectual cosmopolitanism I describe an approach that – following Vertovec and Cohen – simultaneously: (a) transcends the exhausted nation-state model; (b) is able to mediate actions and ideals oriented both to the universal and the particular, the global and the local; (c) is culturally anti-essentialist; and (d) is capable of representing variously complex repertoires of allegiance, identity and interest.¹⁰² Clarke envisions a network of (black) scholars that operates on a national, if not world-wide level, while keeping track of regional historical research and specific cultural developments. In his argumentation, Africa remains the unifying origin, the place which unites people living in different forms of diaspora. Nevertheless, this Africa is only a mythical construction to establish historically validated categories, guaranteeing cultural continuity in basic aspects of social and cultural life, as mentioned by Clarke in e.g.: "definable, Africanist oral/linguistic strategies, as well as a special relationship to song, rhythm, and a specific history." With this he tries to

⁹⁸ Clarke, *Odysseys Home*, 203.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 203-5.

¹⁰⁰ Patterson & Kelley, "Unfinished Migrations", 13-14.

¹⁰¹ Clarke, *Odysseys Home*, 202.

¹⁰² Steven Vertovec & Robin Cohen, *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice*. Oxford & New York: OUP, 2002, 4.

counter a problem of double identity which he describes as follows:

[Concerning the relationship between blackness and Canadianness] It is far too easy to emphasize one identity to the near-exclusion of the other, so that Alexis stumps for 'Canadianness,' while Walcott plumps for 'blackness.' Paradoxically though, this disjuncture is where African Canadians live out their lives. Our history is nothing less than the problem of the definition of our identity.¹⁰³

Clarke's assessment echoes W. E. B. Du Bois double consciousness theory by which he described the problem of African-American identity at the beginning of the twentieth century. Du Bois defines the problem as follows:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels this two-ness, – an America, a Negro; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.¹⁰⁴

Similar to Du Bois, who regards what he describes as double-consciousness as one of the key problems of African-American cultural and social self-realization, Clarke regards the feeling of being caught between two binary oppositions, e.g. African/Canadian as the basis of African-Canadian cultural life, self-perception and discourse. Therefore, double identification is one of the most problematic aspects of African-Canadian identity constructions. There are two main reasons for its problematic status: African Canadians have been excluded from the historical discourse for a long time. In addition, Canada's white majority was more concerned with the schism between French and English-speaking communities, therefore representatives of other minorities – who were often regarded as unable to master the discursive codes – had only restricted access to this identity discourse. In conclusion, it makes sense to treat this condition as one of the paradigms of African-Canadian cultural discourse and to treat it separately from Diaspora studies as a distinct feature of modern Canadian identity.

¹⁰³ Clarke, *Odysseys Home*, 188-189.

¹⁰⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Knopf, 1993 [1903], 9.

3.2. Conclusion: Functions of Fictional Narratives concerned with the Past

Fictions of history, or narratives concerned with the telling of stories about the past, are ubiquitous in today's literary production. These narratives often fulfil cultural functions that exceed pure entertainment and they de facto determine how members of a culture locate themselves within this complex framework of discontinuities and relate themselves to the multiplicity of depictions of events of the past.

The main issue that concerns us is to which extent identities can be influenced by means of literature and if those works establish a new and perhaps more positive view on the position of a minority within a society. One of the results of cultural productions can be to create awareness about the relationship of different individuals within a society, thus fostering a cultural and ethnic consciousness and, perhaps, changing the self-perception of these people within the larger society. The functional status of fictional narratives within this complex process depends on certain factors. To shape a discourse, literature must engage critically with contemporary and historical issues, trying to rectify dated views of the past and reflect and shape the discourse about current problems, without losing its appeal to the reading community. In order to have an effect on the cultural discourse, works of literature must be sharp-edged criticisms, still being easily approachable – a combination bordering on the impossible. In addition, another aspect of cultural identity – the illusion of permanency inherent to the social constructions of identities – is a hindrance to rapid changes in the perception of cultural and national identities.

The scholarly research regarding the structures and forms used in narratives and the functional aspects inherent to narratives follows a number of different approaches. Among these different ways to classify fictions of history, realistic and deconstructivist approaches are relevant for my thesis. Traditionally, the historical novel was regarded as a combination of facts and fiction, feigning historical authenticity and offering a comprehensible and mostly entertaining and instructive picture of the past. This traditional variety relies on language as a mediator of self-evident truths, as a means to fathom the world and produce reliable narratives about an incontestable past. The medium of literature was in the case of the traditional historical novel quite obviously used as an *Anschlusswelt*¹⁰⁵, stressing the continuity of relationship between the present it was written in and the past in which it is situated. Apparently, those novels were

¹⁰⁵ Karlheinz Stierle, "Die Fiktion als Vorstellung und als Schema", in: Dieter Henrich & Wolfgang Iser (ed.), *Funktionen des Fiktiven*. München 1983, 173-182 [176].

actually rather situated in the present of their production than in the past they tried to recapture.¹⁰⁶

In addition to this classical form there are novels that are rather concerned with the technicalities of describing the past, engaging with the problems of language, perspective and taxonomic systems as underlying but dominant social structures determining our way to deal with the past. As a result of the iconoclasm of scholars like Hayden White, who analysed the narrative structures and positions used by nineteenth-century historiographers and showed that their ways of writing about history is functionally the same as the one used in fictional writing, the alleged scientific exactness of historiography became doubtful. As a response to this development Linda Hutcheon, who conceptualized *historiographic metafiction*, highlighted the artificiality of human endeavours to write about the past. Her research has shown that “the rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past” in late twentieth-century literature and historiography was one of the effect of White's theories.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, it is questionable if White's approach is only relevant in the context of obviously critical historiographic metafiction. Especially with regard to memory studies it has become clear that the re-evaluation and reconfiguration of past events is an integral part of human existence. While Hutcheon and other scholars are generally concerned with an academic approach towards analysing cultural changes, those changes can also be initiated by cultural productions that are not self-reflexively questioning their validity. Considering the cases described by Harald Welzer in his book *Das kommunikative Gedächtnis*, it can be said that ideas about the past are a conglomeration of influences from different sources, being rearranged in our memory.¹⁰⁸ Those influences are drawn from personal experience, but also from medial representations of similar events as remembered by a person, borrowed and reused as parts of “a social, cultural and historical intertextual fabric of a dispersed memory (verteilten Gedächtnisses).”¹⁰⁹ It is significant that Welzer does not primarily concentrate on works of literature, but stresses that mostly popular stories with an appeal to a larger audience are to be considered as adaptable tales. This is due to the permanent presence of those stories within a culture and their easily comprehensible structures. Those narratives are so very influential within a culture, because they are accessible and “lend themselves to being understood as historical situations, which might be simulated, but

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Stierle, *Fiktion als Vorstellung und Schema*, 178.

¹⁰⁷ Linda Hutcheon, “Beginning to Theorize Postmodernism“, in: *Textual Practice* 1 (1987): 10-31 [12].

¹⁰⁸ Harald Welzer, *Das kommunikative Gedächtnis*. München: C.H. Beck 2002, 202. [my translation]

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

nevertheless seem to be in accordance with the past as it was experienced”¹¹⁰, which makes the role models and fictional experiences they create appear even more vivid.

Especially this functional feature of literature, to be culturally endowed with a mnemonic function, is of importance with regard to the discussion of Brand’s, Hill’s and Clarke’s work as writers. The subject of this part of my thesis turns out to be quite paradoxically shifting between two positions; the one that stresses the need for permanency, while pointing to the continuous change abstract concepts like cultural and national identities are undergoing. This is perfectly illustrated by again turning to Stuart Hall who argues that there is no such thing as a stable identity, while on the other hand stressing that especially marginalised people effectively regard this kind of identity as important:

The first position defines ‘cultural identity’ in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’[...], which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people’, with *stable, unchanging* and *continuous* frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. [...] It continues to be a very powerful and creative force in emergent forms of representation amongst hitherto marginalised people. (my emphasis)¹¹¹

Modern fictions of history therefore do not only reflect on the changed notions of history, they actively contribute to our re-evaluation of the past. While the world develops with accelerated speed, the look back into the past often remains the only chance to come to terms with the present. Fictions of history can therefore be bi-polar: they are a part of the re-evaluation process as well as they produce continuous “frames of reference” and serve as role models in the process of identification. This is especially relevant with regard to the literary works of Brand, Clarke and Hill, chosen as representatives of modern African–Canadian fiction, for whom narratives about the past are an essential element of forming, or rather re-forming, a cultural identity. Their fictionalisation of history must firstly be classified and divided by structural and generic elements and contextualized with the above described discourse. Especially Hill’s work must be considered due to its accessibility to a large readership and the vivid fictionalization of history it provides. Regarding generic elements the focus must foremost be on the creation of models of positive identification, the description of communities and the contextualization of these issues.

¹¹⁰ Harald Welzer, *Das kommunikative Gedächtnis*, 202.

¹¹¹ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora“, 223.

In addition it will be resolved if these fictions succeed in bridging “[t]he contradiction between disavowal of racialist nationalism and the assertion of cultural ‘authenticity’” which Clarke stresses is “the matrix of – national – art, including African-Canadian literature.”¹¹² The other question to be resolved is if those narratives follow the “definable African oral/linguistic strategies” Clarke mentioned as a tool to create an authentic and independent African-Canadian literature. Linguistic idiosyncrasies have therefore to be analysed in the context of creating a distinguishable narrative idiom.

¹¹² Clarke, *Odysseys*, 191.

4. Memory: Personal, Cultural and Communicative Forms of Memory

'I told you the truth,' I say yet again, 'Memory's truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own.'¹¹³

[...] I must speak of myself and of my time in the city of Oxford, even though the person speaking is not the same person who was there. He seems to be, but he is not. If I call myself 'I', or use a name which has accompanied me since my birth and by which some will remember me [...] it is simply because I prefer to speak in the first person and not because I believe that the faculty of memory alone is my guarantee that a person remains the same in different times and places.¹¹⁴

The awareness of the changing nature of personal identities, as the above cited passage from Javier Marías' novel *All Souls* illustrates, has been a frequent topic in contemporary fiction. However, this tendency to stress the unreliability of all forms of identity is not limited to narrative fiction; in the context of the academic study of different forms of identity it has become a commonplace that both individuals and communities are participating in a continuous discursive renegotiation of the relationship between their pasts, presents, and futures. An essential part of these interrelated processes is the re-deployment and re-assessment of both personal and collective memories. The selective nature of these processes has been frequently discussed by scholars; however, the overall question if we are the sum of our experiences, or if we adjust the memories of our experiences to fit with the present context of our existence, has not yet been answered. Moreover, as scholars like Harald Welzer have shown with regard to individuals remembering certain episodes of their past, the discursive renegotiation of the past is heavily influenced by imagery borrowed from other sources such as films and novels. Identities are therefore not only created selectively, they might also contain building blocks borrowed from cultural fabrications, or – depending on the perspective – are cultural fabrications themselves. However, a key issue with all forms of identity is the synthesising agent. With regard to our personal sense of self, this agent is easily identified in the continuous form of its employment: the first-person autobiographical narrative. With regard to more complex and contested forms of identities the number of agents multiplies. As my thesis deals with the discursive re-negotiation

¹¹³ Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*. London: Picador, 1981, 211.

¹¹⁴ Javier Marías, *All Souls*. London & New York: Vintage, 1999 [1989], 6.

of identities in contemporary African-Canadian fiction, I will use the following pages to describe the theoretical background to my working definitions of personal, collective and cultural memory in order to pinpoint these determining agents. Furthermore, I will discuss the theoretical approaches towards narrative identity in the context memory studies. In order to arrive at a working definition of this concept that is as closely adapted to my particular field of study as possible, I will translate the existing conceptualizations into the particular historical and discursive context around which my study is centred.

Even a seemingly monolithic concept like personal memory is not clearly definable. In his study *Memory, History, Forgetting* Paul Ricoeur, while describing the philosophical tradition that attributes memory to the realm of the imagination, highlights its central focus, which, even if it sounds simplistic, is: “All memory is of the past.”¹¹⁵ In recent years, there have been two, mostly interdisciplinary, approaches that either focus on the philosophical or physiologic aspects of personal memory. Paul Ricoeur, in tracing the development of the concept of personal memory, starts out by dividing concepts of memory into two categories: internally or externally defined. Concepts focussing on the internal constitution of personal memory can be traced back to Aristotelian philosophy, the exemplary thinkers Ricoeur in this passage analyses are Augustinus, Locke and Husserl. They regard personal memory as not transferable, “fundamentally private”, as a “model of mineness”, and as a means to “ensure the temporal continuity of the person” and, therefore, their identity.¹¹⁶ In laying down this particular philosophical tradition, Ricoeur structured personal memory according to three criteria: its private character, as a tie of the consciousness to the past, and, finally, as orientation in the passage of time. As Ricoeur points out, the concepts that aim to prove that memory is constituted by the human being alone, stress that there exists a fundamentally important relationship between identity and a mental record of one's past. Time, as Ricoeur points out is of crucial importance to concepts of memory as for example in his interpretation of Augustine's *Confessions* in which he discovered a relation between “the present of the past or memory, the present of the future or expectation, and the present of the present or attention.”¹¹⁷

Another factor he stresses is that “[i]t is primarily in narrative that memories in the plural

¹¹⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*. (translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer). Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 96-97.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 101.

and memory in the singular are articulated, and differentiation joined to continuity.” (96-97)¹¹⁸ His synthesis of different approaches towards a working definition of memory also includes Locke's division into consciousness, self and identity, which - as he points out – laid the groundwork for many later theories of consciousness.¹¹⁹ According to Ricoeur, Locke's approach is in so far indispensable as it has shown that consciousness “constitutes the difference between the idea of the same man and that of a self, also termed person.” This line of argumentation is highly relevant as it stresses Ricoeur's own differentiation between self and identity, the *ipsem* and *idem* discussed in chapter two of this thesis. Reason, or rather the ability to think, according to Locke is not necessarily innate – he actually disassociated himself from Descartes' theory of innate human faculties – but it nevertheless has to be a constituting element of all sensible beings. A person therefore has to be “a thinking, intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places.”¹²⁰ This is highly relevant as, according to Ricoeur, the idea of consciousness extends back and forth in time, memory is therefore a part of it which he describes as follows: “Personal identity is a temporal identity”, concluding that “in the matter of personal identity, sameness equals memory.” The last representative of the “tradition of inwardness” Ricoeur discusses is Husserl. The two phenomenological discoveries we owe to Husserl are, according to Ricoeur: “the difference between 'retention' of the phase of flow that has just elapsed, and that 'still' adheres to the present, and the 'remembering' of temporal phases that have ceased to adhere to the living present, and on the other hand, the difference between the positional character of memories and the non-positional character of images.”¹²¹

The second theoretical position Ricoeur describes is the external approach as described by Maurice Halbwachs. Ricoeur positions himself by pointing out that “[Halbwachs' main achievement] consists, therefore, in denouncing the illusory attribution of memories to ourselves, when we claim to be their original owners.”¹²² Nevertheless, he does not completely side with Halbwachs, he rather attempts to unite both aspects, the self-generative and the socially transmitted, by pointing to the similarities in the phenomenological and the sociological approaches towards memory. His principal critique of Halbwachs' concept is that it implies that memories are never personal, but only social. According to Ricoeur, Halbwachs underestimates

¹¹⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 96-97

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 102.

¹²⁰ Ibid. Locke as quoted by Ricoeur.

¹²¹ Ibid, 111.

¹²² Ibid, 122.

the function of the individual in the collective processes of remembering and forgetting. Ricoeur's counter-thesis is that "the very act of 'placing oneself' in a group and of 'displacing' oneself or shifting from group to group presuppose[s] a spontaneity capable of establishing a continuation with itself. In other words the collective and the personal memory are interdependent." This argument is actually drawn from Halbwachs' own theoretical work which acknowledges changes with regard to the position, or rather viewpoint of the individual on the collective memory.¹²³ To put it plain and simple, one might conclude that a collective memory can only come into existence when people come together, form a group and – for whatever reason – share their memories. The memories of the individual are not obliterated by the collective memory; in discursive interactions they take part in shaping the group's memory while simultaneously being shaped by it. To cite Ricoeur: "It is Halbwachs's very use of the notions of place and change of place that defeat a quasi-Kantian use of the idea of framework, unilaterally imposed on every consciousness."¹²⁴ Moreover, it has been shown by Maurice Halbwachs and Frederic Bartlett that processes of personal remembering always follow preformed social patterns, frames of reference that have been shaped by social interaction and consequently by the "permeation of cultural knowledge and patterns of thinking."¹²⁵

Ricoeur regards memory as a mental facility that operates by temporal stratification, but, due to its flexibility, is able to disregard this structure and bring the past back into the present as either a confirmation, or as a challenge to personal identity. For Ricoeur memory is never passive, "remembering [...] is doing something: it is declaring that one has seen, done, acquired this or that. And this act of memory is inscribed within a network of practical exploration of the world [...]."¹²⁶ Of special importance to Ricoeur is the stage when memory is being articulated, when the Husserlian trinity of "picture, fantasy and memory" is translated into language. Language, in this line of thinking, is the link to the external world, to the social influences the thinker is exposed to. By using language, which has to be regarded as an epistemological means, taught to the individual human being by the outside world, by society, the being in question involuntarily uses the patterns of thinking that are functionally included. In addition to that, Ricoeur amalgamates the two different approaches, the internal and the external, pointing to "an intermediate level of reference between the poles of individual memory and collective memory, where concrete exchanges operate between the living memory of individual persons and the

¹²³ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 124.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 122.

¹²⁵ Birke, *Crisis of Memory*, 37.

¹²⁶ Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 123.

public memory of the communities to which they belong.”¹²⁷ As both approaches appear to be mutually exclusive, Ricoeur introduces a mediator as a link between the phenomenological and the sociological concepts of memory. This mediator, or rather mediators are called close relations. They are catalysts in the “interplay of disassociation and closeness that makes proximity a dynamic relationship ceaselessly in motion.”¹²⁸

Two aspects make personal memory susceptible to manipulation: temporally induced reorganization and traumatic experiences.¹²⁹ So forgetting and repression are both part of subconscious mnemonic strategies. In some cases, forgetting can not only be connected to the individuals' existence in time and their subordination to the workings of time, but it can also be linked to the experience of traumatic events. These aspects are not only important with regard to the memory of any individual but must also be translated to the collective memory. There are various possible reasons for a individuals, communities and societies to forget or suppress aspects of a shared past: collective shame, guilt and self-preservation are among the most important incentives to forget.

Another aspect that has to be considered is is the relocation of memories. We are talking about the relocation of individual and collective memory with regard to individuals or groups that migrated and therefore have to re-negotiate their memories in a new environment. While the memories of a group or an individual are perfectly consistent in one environment, they might be questionable and problematic when these people are translocated to a new environment. As Halbwachs phrased it: “I would readily acknowledge that each memory is a viewpoint on the Collective Memory, that this viewpoint changes as my position changes, that this position itself changes as my relationships to other milieus change.”¹³⁰ This change of position can imply a number of necessary alterations to what is being remembered by a community and how this process is being enacted. The relocation of memories is even further problematized when this relocation was enforced. Communities and individuals that have been forced into such a diaspora tend to see their past existence as an existence close to an ideal state, an antediluvian, paradisaical past. This perspective does not allow a constructive dialogue with the past to come into existence. Diaspora communities, or even individuals tend to idealize their past and,

¹²⁷ Ibid, 131.

¹²⁸ Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 131.

¹²⁹ As Eckstein summarized, traumatic experiences are “re-structuring factors” with regard to personal and collective memories. “[...] A once-established subjective, emotive relationship with a specific event equally possesses the potential for massive distortion.” See: Eckstein, *Remembering the Black Atlantic*, 19-23 [20].

¹³⁰ Halbwachs as quoted by Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 124.

consequently falsify past experiences. It is a form of “popular memory” as described by Raphael Samuel:

Popular memory is on the face of it the very antithesis of written history. It eschews notions of determination and seizes instead on omens, portents and signs. It measures change genealogically, in terms of generations rather than centuries, epochs or decades. It has no developmental sense of time, but assigns events to the mythicized 'good old days' (or 'bad old days') [...]. So far as historical particulars are concerned, it prefers the eccentric to the typical; the sensational to the routine.¹³¹

With regard to individuals and communities that willingly migrated, the re-negotiation of memories is caused by the pressure of the host society to cooperate, or even to integrate into a new social environment. The shift of perspective can result in the alteration of collective memory or popular memory and a hypostatization of the past leading to collective nostalgia. As Samuel put it, events are either grouped as having happened during the “good old days, or bad old days”, respective of the current social and economic position of the individual or collective assessing their pasts in juxtaposition to their present. Re-negotiation of memories is often accompanied by a collision of national narratives. This is an issue in societies that consist of a large number of migrant-splinter groups, as is the case with Canada's African-Canadian population; a racially homogeneous group that consists of individuals originating from often starkly different cultural environments. As collective and cultural memories always carry information about traditions, and, consequently, help to maintain those traditions and keep them alive, it could be contagious for a community if their narratives are in competition with those of other communities as that might result in an obliteration of collective memories and, therefore, in loss of traditions and cultural identity.

Another approach to personal memory highlights its susceptibility to external influences. Orhan Pamuk for example introduces his book about childhood memories with statement that:

We get used to assessing the value of everything we experience – even the most pleasurable things in life – in accordance to the views of others. Just like our first “memories” from the time when we were babies, which had been told to us by others until they became our own, so that we finally think we actually remember them and naively retell them to others as our own, that which

¹³¹ Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 6.

others think about our actions and omissions will also later in life often not only become part of our mindset, but also part of our memories which are often more dear to us than the experienced past itself. (My translation).¹³²

It can therefore be concluded that memory, contrary to Ricoeur's description of the "school of inwardness", is not generated by the individual, but rather a conglomeration of certain external and internal factors, so even personal memory is partly a social construct. Harald Welzer confirms this approach. He points out that: "We may summarize that both individual and collective past are constantly re-made by social communication. Surprisingly, this process corresponds to a description of the mnemonic process on the neuronal level: the memory of an experience is triggered by the activation of temporal and spatial patterns which cover many neuronal groups."¹³³

Furthermore, it can be contested that the collective memory offers the backdrop and the stage on which the personal memory performs its role. But personal memory can only be activated in a dialogue with other individuals identified by Ricoeur as "our close relations", those people who are "situated along a range of varying distances in the relation between self and others."¹³⁴ Without those close relations there is no positioning of the self, no contrasting between self and others and no participation in establishing a collective memory.

Raphael Samuel diagnosed in his seminal study *Theatres of Memory*, published in 1994, that England has "witnessed an extraordinary and, it seems, ever growing enthusiasm for the recovery of the national past" during the last thirty years.¹³⁵ The same could be said about its former colonies – only with different preconditions and intentions. While the search for some, if not glorious, then glorifiable English past became a paradigmatic sign for a nostalgia for the Empire, the former Dominions used the archives of their national past to find out about their

¹³² Orhan Pamuk, *Istanbul*. Hanser, 2005, 15. "Wir gewöhnen uns nämlich daran, alles erlebte – und selbst die höchsten Genüsse – danach zu bewerten, wie andere es sehen. Genau wie unsere ersten 'Erinnerungen' aus der Babyzeit, die wir von anderen so oft erzählt bekommen, bis sie ganz zu unseren eigenen geworden sind, so daß wir schließlich meinen, uns wirklich daran erinnern zu können, und sie gutgläubig weitererzählen, so wird auch im späteren Leben oft das, was andere über unser Tun und Lassen denken, uns nicht nur zumeigenen Gedankengut, sondern auch zu unserer Erinnerung, die uns wichtiger als das Erlebte selbst ist."

¹³³ Welzer, 44. "Individuelle wie kollektive Vergangenheit, so kann man zusammenfassen, werden in sozialer Kommunikation beständig neu gebildet. Eine verblüffende Entsprechung zu diesem Prozeß findet sich in einer Beschreibung des Erinnerungsprozesses auf neuronaler Ebene: die Erinnerung einer Erfahrung geht auf die Aktivierung temporaler und räumlicher Muster zurück, die sich über viele Gruppen von Neuronen erstrecken."

¹³⁴ Ricoeur, 131.

¹³⁵ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory. Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*. London & New York: Verso, 1994, 139.

national, cultural and political identities. With regard to the development of the Canadian national narratives it is decidedly not the “nostalgia for the present” as Frederic Jameson called it¹³⁶, it is, especially with regard to the narratives introduced in recent historical fiction, a craving to change, or rather add to the grand national narratives.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Frederik Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London, 1992.

¹³⁷ Many contemporary novels like for example Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*; most novels by Guy Vanderheaghe, especially *The Englishman's Boy* and *Last Crossing*; Timothy Findley's *The Wars* and Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*, are engaging with the revision of Canadian national narratives.

5. Canadian Multiculturalism and its Politics of Identity

5.1 Canadian Multiculturalism in its Historical and Geopolitical Context

The emergence of multicultural approaches in politics is an effect of a number of coinciding historical, social and cultural developments. During the second half of the twentieth century western powers devised political programmes in order to cope with the social and cultural effects of geopolitical shifts. For most western states, except the United States, the range, impact and social effect of those shifts were of unprecedented scope. Especially the Second World War and the breakdown of the former European colonial empires had ushered in an age of increased spatial mobility. Due to the influx of migrants, states, which had formerly based their shared identities and cultural and practical politics on the idea of a shared ethnic background, were forced to adapt their politics and practices to the changed social and ethnic structures within their borders. The effects of increasing spatial mobility were first noticeable in the metropolitan areas of the former colonial empires. As the inhabitants of the periphery, especially the former colonies, gravitated towards those centres, new ethnic communities took hold of environments that initially resisted their influx. Despite the demographic changes those urban regions had undergone, they paradoxically housed the very institutions that “preserved the cultural hegemony” of the ethnic majority.¹³⁸ The different political responses to these changes have since then not only shaped the political reality of the respective nations; they have also shaped their citizens' understanding of nationhood and belonging. In short: they have become important aspects of modern social imaginaries. bell hooks for example regards the idea of multiculturalism as an escape route from “systems of domination – racism, sexism, class exploitation and imperialism.”¹³⁹ While some western nations effectively rejected shared ethnicity as a prerequisite of belonging and citizenship, others still regard it as an important factor. At this point it must be stressed that the emergence of new nationalisms coincided with the implementation of multicultural policies. As Timothy Brennan diagnosed in 1990, “the 'nation' is precisely what Foucault has called a 'discursive formation' – not simply an allegory or imaginative vision, but a gestative political structure which the Third World artist is consciously building or suffering the lack of.”¹⁴⁰ Accordingly, the implementation of multicultural policies

¹³⁸ Urs Altermatt, “Multiculturalism, Nation State and Ethnicity.” in: Hans Peter Kriesi (et al, eds.), *Nation and National Identity: The European Experience in Perspective*. Zürich: Verlag Rütger, 1999, 73-85 [77]

¹³⁹ bell hooks, “A Revolution of Values: The Promise of Multicultural Change.” in Simon During (ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader*. London & New York: Routledge, 2000, 233-240.

¹⁴⁰ Timothy Brennan, “The National Longing for Form.” in: Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. London & New York: Routledge, 2003 [1995], 170-175 [170].

did not mark the decline of nationalism in general, it marked the birth of new nationalisms that were no longer indebted to the ideal of shared ethnicity. In the following, I will firstly provide a brief outline of the historical forces that contributed to the development of multicultural approaches in politics. Secondly, I will summarize the discourse about multicultural policies in Canada and outline the different positions. The long-lasting nature of this discourse, as I will argue, has become a precondition of the emergence of modern Canadian society and has to be discussed as a social and cultural determiner, part of an imaginary, which is repeatedly thematized in the literary works my thesis engages with.

Historically, the ethnic shifts that resulted in the implementation of multicultural policies began earlier than the public became aware of them. During the last 200 years, spatial mobility – caused by the world-wide demand for an effective work force – has undermined an essential, if imagined criterion of the nation state: common ethnicity.¹⁴¹ As Leo Drieger puts it: “[...] between 1750 and 1920, especially in Western Europe, the triumph of nationalism introduced the contrasting [with regard to previous developments] ideal of ethnic homogeneity within a geographic or sovereign boundary.”¹⁴² While the rural populations of nineteenth-century European nation states thought that they could take a common ethnicity¹⁴³ with all their fellow countrymen for granted, perceptive inhabitants of the metropolitan areas had long before begun to register the enormous influence of other cultures on those commercial and cultural centres. Especially with regard to Great Britain and its vast colonial territory any claims to an ethnic and cultural continuity were increasingly questioned in the decades following the end of the Second World War. Right from its infancy, English culture and society had been a hybrid culture. During the period of reconstruction after the end of the Second World War the discrepancy between ideal and social reality was acutely felt by British people. European countries like France and Britain experienced, for similar reasons – their colonial histories – an influx of people who, as inhabitants of their former colonies, had a rightful claim to British and French citizenship. This process was perceived by the cultural commentators at the time as an effect of the decline of colonial power; in 1978 Gordon Lewis described it as “colonialism in reverse.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ In his influential book Benedict Anderson diagnoses that the basis for the imagined social and cultural cohesion of a nation lies in the idea of the state as a fraternal relationship. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

¹⁴² Leo Drieger, *Race and Ethnicity. Finding Identities and Equalities*. Oxford & New York: OUP, 2003, 2.

¹⁴³ According to Kallen, Gilroy called this phenomenon “ethnic absolutism”; it describes nations as “culturally homogeneous 'communities of sentiment'.” Evelyn Kallen, *Ethnicity and Human Rights in Canada*. Oxford & New York: OUP, 1995, 31. See also: Joane Nagel, “Ethnic Troubles: Gender, Sexuality and the Construction of National Identity.” in: Klaus Armingeon (et.al.eds.), *Nation and National Identity. The European Experience in Perspective*. Zürich: Rügger, 1999, 85-108.

¹⁴⁴ Gordon Lewis, *Slavery, Imperialism, and Freedom: Studies in English Radical Thought*. New York and London:

Therefore, multiculturalism is often associated with post-colonialism, or, to be more precise, with the political re-conceptualization of societies that have, in one way or another, experienced and overcome colonialism. Without doubt, multiculturalism, or rather the ideal of different cultures living together in harmony and mutual respect under the banner of a liberal democratic nation, is an important aspect of modern social imaginaries. Moreover, while being part of social imaginaries, multiculturalism (as part of a de-colonization processes) is a political tool which might be used to facilitate a reconstruction of national imaginaries from within in order to make them “less exclusionary and monolithic.”¹⁴⁵ Accordingly, multicultural policies – in accordance with the political requirements of post-colonial societies – helped to uncouple the terms ethnicity and nation, adapting the latter concept to the changed political reality. In the context of international migration, multiculturalism is only one of two dominant regulative responses devised by governments to cope with the social effects caused by the influx of different ethnic groups. The other is assimilation.¹⁴⁶ While multiculturalism is the more liberal approach, enabling “new citizens to maintain their distinct cultural identities”, “assimilation [...] is a one-sided process whereby migrants are expected to give up their linguistic, cultural, and social characteristics and become indistinguishable from the majority population.”¹⁴⁷ Before the historical caesura of 1945, the middle European powers regarded themselves as the centre of economic and political progress; however, with the experience of the Second World War, especially the ensuing political and economic dependence on the USA France and Great Britain experienced, entirely changed their place in world politics and their self-perception. However, especially France and the UK, despite their similar colonial histories, took different political paths to cope with the effects of international migration. While France opted for assimilation, the UK followed a more liberal approach that allowed its new citizens to maintain their former identities.¹⁴⁸ Generally, the period following WW II might be characterized by the decline of colonial notions about centre and periphery, which once had determined a predominantly Eurocentric world-picture.¹⁴⁹ Up to today, these imaginaries have often been inverted and

Monthly Review Press, 1978, 304.

¹⁴⁵ Amaryll Chanady, “From Difference to Exclusion: Multiculturalism and Postcolonialism.” in: *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* Vol.8.3 (1995), 419-437 [433].

¹⁴⁶ Altermatt mentions a third approach, the “differentialist strategy” which aims at a separation of ethnic groups through “parallel institutions [which] meet the cultural and social needs of ethnic minorities.” Altermatt, “Multiculturalism, Nation State and Ethnicity”, 79.

¹⁴⁷ Khalid Koser, *International Migration: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: OUP, 2007, 39.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 40-42.

¹⁴⁹ Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a number of critics have tried to unhinge this predominance of the west in cultural, social and political discourses. For a comprehensive assessment of their various writings see: Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt Against the West and the Remaking of Asia*. London: Penguin, 2012.

replaced by narratives that do not privilege the colonizer, but rather focus on the periphery and its coming to terms with history.

The decline of the former European superpowers brought about a significant shift of political and cultural influence with regard to their former colonies. Especially Britain's former settler colonies Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa – in their self-perception all predominantly white Dominions of Great Britain – demanded an increase in political and economic autonomy, which, due to Britain's precarious financial and political situation, was granted to all of them in order to quell separatist tendencies. While Britain had to face the decline of its empire, which – especially with regard to its African colonies involved severe bloodshed – their dominions had to redefine their places and allegiances among the world powers. With regard to their demographic situation, a general tendency can be observed. While all of Britain's dominions initially stressed their European heritage, ethnic diversity and multiculturalism have since the 1970s become key concepts behind their social imaginaries. Due to the formation of non-European pressure groups in all former settler colonies, exclusive political structures were questioned, revised and mostly completely abandoned. Social practices like the segregation and exclusion of members of ethnic minorities and the laws that sanctioned those practices became subject to increasing scrutiny. A first step in that development was the revision of immigration laws. While even after 1945 the immigration laws of all settler colonies privileged immigration from European countries and often made it virtually impossible for people from non-European countries to immigrate, those laws were revised in the two decades after the Second World War and now grant equal rights to immigrants of all ethnicities and nationalities, however, privileging refugees who left their country of origin for political or religious reasons and those who are perceived as being beneficent for Canada for reasons of education or qualification.

This development resulted in a gradual demographic shift in the populations of both Australia and Canada. This demographic shift was accompanied by a coming into being of political pressure groups; not only the First Nations, respectively the Aborigines, gained political and social influence, most of the formerly excluded minorities began to articulate distinct ideas about social life and political participation. As those nations had in fact never been ethnic nations, but had established the idea of the prevalence of a certain ethnicity basically through suppression and exclusion of all other ethnic groups, the transition of power and the shift of social influence was inevitable if the social equilibrium was to be kept intact.

Within the discourse about Canadian multiculturalism, language has been recognized as one of the most potent forces. Critics of Canadian multiculturalism argued that due to the socio-economical and socio-cultural importance of the two official languages English and French, multiculturalism can never be fully realized. According to Arnold Itwaru, members of cultures with different native languages are inevitably forced into assimilating to Canadian mainstream culture, because “in anglophone Canada [...] English is the cultural medium of power [...]”¹⁵⁰

Not only the mastery of the official languages but also their function in the designation and differentiation of cultural and ethnic groups is an issue in the multiculturalism debate. Hyphenation and coinage are outstanding features of the discourse engaged with Canadian identity. On the one hand terms like African Canadian, Caribbean Canadian or George Elliott Clarke's neologism Africadian symbolize membership of the larger Canadian nation. Nevertheless, it has been argued that those hyphenations and neologisms in asserting individual identities “have weakened the national identity.”¹⁵¹ Roy's main argument is that encouraging the preservation of individual ethnic and cultural identities entails abandoning the consensus about a Canadian core identity.

5.2 Canada's Demographic and Political Development since 1945: The Multicultural Approach

Taking a look at the history of Canadian politics it can be said that multiculturalism belongs to the more recent political and social developments. Before the late 1960s a large percentage of Canadian people saw their country as a “white dominion” of Great Britain, their political representatives still followed the vision of establishing “a homogeneous British nation-state.”¹⁵² Political representatives neither considered the francophone community's interests nor did they pay any attention to the emergence of minority pressure groups. That changed abruptly during the 1960s, especially under Pierre Elliott Trudeau's government. Trudeau, a francophone Canadian, is often described as the father of modern Canada. His politics were at the time highly

¹⁵⁰ Itwaru, *The Invention of Canada*, 15.

¹⁵¹ Patricia E. Roy, “The Fifth Force: Multiculturalism and the English Canadian Identity.” in: *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. 538 (March 1995), 199-209 [201].

¹⁵² Brook Thomas, “Civic Multiculturalism and the Myth of Liberal Consent.” In: *The New Centennial Review*. No. 3 (Winter 2001), 1-35 [21].

controversial. Due to his move to officially acknowledge the linguistic and cultural division of Canada he was regarded as a traitor of Canadian unity by many of his peers. However, Trudeau's policies were only overdue responses to the political and social rifts that had developed in Canada since the end of World War II. For scholars like Brook Thomas, the implementation of multicultural policies during Trudeau's first term as prime minister was not a visionary act but simply a political manoeuvre to quell “separatist calls from Quebec by proclaiming Canada a nation tolerant of cultural difference.”¹⁵³ Actually, Québécois separatism worked as an incentive for a political development that began with the Official Languages Act in 1969 and was confirmed in the Multicultural Act of 1988. Under the auspices of Pierre Elliot Trudeau Canada developed from “white dominion” into a sovereign state, a nation that takes heed of the ethnic diversity of its population by having made multicultural policies the basis for its political and legal framework. Therefore, it can be said that, as a political concept, multiculturalism answered the claims of the francophone community and those of other ethnic minorities at the same time. Nevertheless, concept and social reality are not always congruent; this is especially true of Canada’s indigenous population, whose rights and claims remain problematic issues.¹⁵⁴

Historically, the development of Canadian multiculturalism can be divided into three phases; the first phase, beginning in the late 1940s lasted until 1971. As mentioned before this phase consisted of gradual reforms of those laws that limited the political participation of members of formerly excluded minorities. Those reforms were encouraged from the inside as well as the outside. While some non-governmental organizations like human-rights movements gathered momentum, Canada – as a member of the British Commonwealth – was, and still is, part of an extensive and complicated political network. Due to Great Britain's attempts to limit the influx of Caribbean immigrants, “Caribbean governments successfully pressured the Canadian government to retract its 'climate unsuitability' clause and other regulations that restricted immigration [from non-European countries].”¹⁵⁵ As a result of these new policies “thousands of Caribbean nationals settled in Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa, and other Canadian

¹⁵³ Thomas, “Civic Multiculturalism and the Myth of Liberal Consent”, 21.

¹⁵⁴ As the recent debate about the Canadian Museum for Human Rights shows, the rights of Canada's indigenous population, and the treatment of these people during colonial times are still issues that remain unresolved. According to Dan Levin, the author of the *New York Times* article from October 5, 2016, the museum “has become a symbol of the contradictions between the nation's modern multicultural identity and what critics say is an unreconciled legacy of human rights violations against indigenous peoples that continue to this day.” See: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/06/world/americas/winnipeg-canadian-museum-for-human-rights.html?_r=0 accessed on October 31, 2016.

¹⁵⁵ David Austin, “All Roads led to Montreal: Black Power, the Caribbean, and the Black Radical Tradition in Canada.” in: *The Journal of African American History* Vol. 92.4 (2007), 516-539 [517].

cities.”¹⁵⁶ Even if most of these immigrants initially did not become Canadian citizens and had no right to political representation, their increase in numbers during the 1960s, especially in Canada's urban areas, contributed to the emergence of movements that called for political responses to the rapidly changing ethnic and demographic situation. Another factor that contributed to the remarkable change in Canada's political landscape between the 1950s and the 1970s was the increasing political and economic influence of the United States. The increasing economic interdependence, in alliance with political endeavours from both political fractions of both nations to strengthen a common North-American market, resulted in further intertwining cultural and economic relationships. The intensifying political and economic interdependence of both nations was accompanied by a vivid exchange of political theories and practices. The Civil Rights Movement emerging in the United States in the 1950s provided the blueprints for Canadian minorities in terms of organization and motivation. By using existing political and social structures, these non-European minority groups began to form political and semi-political organizations that were soon striving to participate in the political decision-making processes of their time. This development came to bearing in the late 1970s, in a political climate shaped by Pierre Trudeau's move to steer Canadian policy in a more inclusive direction. However, as mentioned before, at the time, Pierre Trudeau's political move to steer Canada towards the implementation of a legal framework based on multicultural ideas, was mostly regarded as an attempt to quell Quebecois nationalism and separatism and not as a response to larger forces and developments within the British Commonwealth. Studying Trudeau's early political writings, it becomes clear that his politics were motivated by his conviction that Canada's existence as a nation state was in acute peril due to being ideologically based on the non-existing racial and ethnic unity of its population. His political thinking followed the tradition of of the French-Jewish philosopher Julien Benda, who, in his 1927 book *La Trahison des clercs*, condemned contemporary European idealizations of nationalisms and their proponents as they propagate inhumane systems which ideologically strive on the denial of political participation to persons who do not share the majority's racial and ethnic backgrounds.¹⁵⁷ Trudeau actually used Benda's book as a blueprint for his 1968 essay “Nouvel Trahison des clercs” in which he applied Benda's intellectual framework, his blatant criticism of ethnic, racial and linguistic nation states, to analyse Canada's political and social situation. In this essay Trudeau develops the idea of a new cosmopolitan vision of Canada in which “English Canadians, with their own nationalism, will have to retire gracefully to their proper place, consenting to modify their own precious image of

¹⁵⁶ David Austin, “All Roads led to Montreal”, 517.

¹⁵⁷ George Elliott Clarke, “Treason of the Black Intellectuals?”, 184-85.

what Canada ought to be.”¹⁵⁸ Trudeau's problematization of the Anglo-Canadians' claim to cultural and linguistic pre-eminence was in keeping with a general unease about Canada's future. As Donald Wright points out in his introduction to the re-print of Donald Creighton's *Canada's First Century*: “English Canada's identity as a British country could no longer contain its inherent contradictions. The most obvious contradiction was Canada's abiding duality, its French and English facts.”¹⁵⁹ So it happened that while non-European Canadians' pressure groups were still caught up in the process of self-consolidation and were yet unable to participate in the drafting of this political program, the Trudeau government laid the groundwork for Canada's exceptional response to the demographic, social and political changes the country was about to experience. This is at least partly due to the intervention of the so-called Third Force, a coalition of non-English and non-French immigrants spearheaded by Ukrainian representatives like Paul Yuzyk.¹⁶⁰ Despite the prevailing misconception that the Third Force and its Multicultural Movement mainly represented the political ideas and demands of Ukrainian Canadians¹⁶¹, it was supported by almost all non-English and non-French pressure groups, including the “other long resident immigrant ethnic collective, the Jews.”¹⁶² Canada's historical vanguard role in the implementation of multicultural policies therefore cannot be regarded as entirely accidental. Both representatives of visible and ethnocultural minorities used the Multicultural Movement as a means to create an awareness of the issues they found most pressing. Since the earliest days of the Multicultural Movement, the eradication of racism had been the most pressing issue for representatives of visible minorities. Ethnocultural minorities on the other hand focused on the issue of collective rights, which include linguistic, religious and social aspects of culture. According to Kallen these different concerns “have resulted in a deepening rift between racial and cultural minorities within the multicultural movement.”¹⁶³ For the decade between 1960 and 1970, multiculturalism can be regarded as an attempt “to deconstruct symbolically the dominant Canadian notions of Anglo-conformity and biculturalism.” The *Official Language Act* of 1969 intended to counteract the rise of French-Canadian nationalism by strengthening the status of

¹⁵⁸ Pierre Trudeau, “New Treason of the Intellectuals”, in: Pierre Trudeau, *Against the Current: Selected Writings, 1939-1996*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1996, 178.

¹⁵⁹ Donald Wright, “Introduction.” in: Donald Creighton, *Canada's First Century*. Don Mills/Ontario: OUP, 2010 [1970], ix.

¹⁶⁰ Evelyn Kallen, *Ethnicity and Human Rights in Canada*. Oxford & New York: OUP, 1995, 211.

¹⁶¹ Patricia E. Roy, “The Fifth Force: Multiculturalism and the English Canadian Identity.” in: *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. 538 (March 1995), 199-209 [200]. Roy reduces the achievements of the multicultural movement to its most influential advocate, senator Paul Yuzyk. She does not consider that his stance on that topic originated from a general consent among the representatives of those different groups.

¹⁶² Kallen, *Ethnicity and Human Rights in Canada*, 211.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, 214.

French within the framework of the Canadian nation state. The resulting focus on biculturalism and bilingualism, the “inclusive policy of 'multiculturalism' within a bilingual framework”, was later challenged by minority groups who felt excluded by this restrictive policy because they regarded it as a mere reaffirmation of existing cultural and political practices.¹⁶⁴ However, the conciliatory politics of the federal government did not keep the Quebec nationalists, especially the Parti Québécois, from “pursuing their policies of economic and linguistic nationalism.” A hotly debated example of those politics was Bill 101, introduced by the Quebec government under the Parti Québécois in 1970, which for a time, virtually banned the English language from the public sphere. Disregarding Quebec nationalism, the federal government's decision to introduce a policy of multiculturalism was embraced by all minority groups. While the tensions between French- and English-Canadians continued to exist, the implementation of multiculturalism laid the groundwork for the development of today's multi-ethnic Canada. Even if this policy had not been implemented with the integration of ethnic and racial minorities in mind, it was used by the political organizations of those minority groups, after they had consolidated themselves, to pursue this very end. As Karl Peter stated in 1981: “True multiculturalism therefore is the mobilization of intellectual resources and political powers on the part of all ethnic groups put into the service of revitalizing and reconstructing a Canada for the twenty-first century – a Canada that is built for the benefit of all.”¹⁶⁵ His appeal did not remain unheeded; in the following decades intellectuals, artists and politicians have involved themselves in an ongoing process of remaking Canadian politics and practices. Nevertheless, in the late seventies, there were still a number of amendments to be pushed through in order to correct the flaws of this policy. The result of those claims was the *Multiculturalism Act* of 1987 which explicitly engaged with the issue of language and tries to correct the flaws of the preceding political programs.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Karim H. Karim, “Reconstructing the Multicultural Community in Canada: Discursive Strategies of Inclusion and Exclusion.” *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* Vol. 7.2 (1993), 189-207 [189].

¹⁶⁵ Karl Peter, “The Myth of Multiculturalism.” in: Jorgen Dahlie & Tissa Fernando (eds.), *Ethnicity, Power and Politics in Canada*. London & New York: Methuen, 1981, 56-67 [66].

¹⁶⁶ http://focus-migration.hwwi.de/uploads/tx_wilpubdb/CP_08_Canada.pdf

5.3 Excursus 1: Taylor's Idea of the Politics of Equal Recognition and Dignity discussed in the Context of Canadian Multiculturalism

According to Charles Taylor, one of Canada's pre-eminent political theorists, multiculturalism is a political construction that translates observations of social conditions into a practical agenda, a set of political tools to support ethnic diversity under the canopy of a unifying framework. This implies that people originating from various different cultures, live together in a nation, preserving the values of their original culture, but being willing come to an agreement (on a democratic basis) about the basic form and institutions of the society they are living in. It presupposes that people who live in a society following this ideal have to arrange with the dominant cultural identity, or if they belong to the representatives of the dominant social group, they have to arrange with and acknowledge other cultural identities and leave them room to express their particular identity. Taylor describes it as a by-product of historical nation-building processes and democratization: "Democracy has ushered in a politics of equal recognition, which has taken various forms over the years, and now returned in the form of demands for the equal status of cultures and genders."¹⁶⁷

Regarding ethnic identities, Taylor's concept of "the politics of equal recognition" is of importance. What is most crucial is the emphasis Taylor puts on the historical dimension of misrecognition, which can be in his terms "a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false [...] reduced mode of being."¹⁶⁸ To avoid, or if necessary overcome this state of "imprisonment", the multicultural state has to endow members of ethnic minorities with the power to participate in the existing cultural and legislative framework and if necessary extend this framework.

Essential to multiculturalism as a political concept is that the state first has to create and then to protect a legal system that safeguards the equal status of different cultures and genders within a state that does not emphasize its heterogeneity, but stresses its plurality. In terms of political theory Taylor has introduced two contesting, but in multiculturalism necessarily related models:

With the **politics of equal dignity**, what is established is meant to be universally the same, an identical basket of rights and immunities; with the **politics of difference**, what we are asked to

¹⁶⁷ Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition." In Amy Gutmann & Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1992, 27.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 25.

recognize is the *unique identity of this individual or group*, their distinctness from everyone else.¹⁶⁹

Taylor therefore basically advocates the intervention of the state to guarantee equal rights to all citizens, while propagating the recognition of different individual or group identities. This model therefore equally values ethnic and national identity, while the individual is encouraged to practice his/her ethnic identity and advocates a propagates a construct which has become famous as the Canadian multicultural mosaic.

5.4 Excursus 2: Hybridity and the Loss of Identity

To talk about multiculturalism as a political ideal without considering potentially problematic issues like hybridity and the “loss of culture” experienced by minorities whose presence in Canada is a result of an enforced diaspora is unbalanced.¹⁷⁰ Hybridity is a concept inevitably linked to ethnic identity, because, according to Philip, persons of colour have to retain their links to Africa and to African culture; everything else would be to treason their cultural identity:

To become unambivalently British or Canadian is to forget the history of empire that defined England, produced a Canada, and honed the beliefs and practices of white supremacy; it is to forget that our people and Europeans first met as equals – the latter being made welcome in Africa as they were here in Canada – and that the latter would use their superior technology to attempt an obliteration of African peoples and their cultures. Not to remember those things; to forget that what we now *appear* to share – education, religion, dress, legal institutions – are really tombstones erected on the graves of African customs, culture and language, is simply to collude in our own erasure, our own obliteration.¹⁷¹

Contrary to bell hooks' celebration of multiculturalism as a political means to overcome the legacy of colonialism, Philip regards multiculturalism as a political means to eradicate ethnic differences and create a culture of forgetfulness in which the heritage of British colonialism will be gradually forgotten. Philip stresses the ambivalent political and social status of persons of African ancestry within modern multicultural Canada. For this and other reasons Canadian

¹⁶⁹ Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition”, 38 (italics by the author, emphasis by me),

¹⁷⁰ Marlene Nourbese Philip, *Frontiers: Essays and Writing on Racism and Culture*. Toronto: Mercury Press 1992, 14-19.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 19.

politics of multiculturalism are frequently discussed issues. Not just in Canada, but also from an external point of view, ethnic diversity and national identity can be regarded as important political issues during the last 30 years. While mostly serving as a positive example for multi-ethnic politics for commentators from abroad, they are very much criticised from the inside.¹⁷² From the internal perspective those politics have been either classified as going into the wrong direction, as an unfortunately named construct, or as simply propagating the wrong idea of the Canadian society.¹⁷³

5.5 The Discourse on Canadian Multiculturalism: Positions and Issues

Critics of Canadian multiculturalism can not be clearly divided into groups because opponents and supporters often criticize the same issues with different objectives in mind. In general one can differentiate between advocates of a majority-multiculturalism and plurality-multiculturalism. While the advocates of the latter propagate a theory of multiculturalism based on unlimited linguistic, institutional and cultural diversity, the former propagate conformity with the ethnic majority, like the Anglo-conformity model which is based on the predominance of British institutions and economic practices.¹⁷⁴ In the USA, the situation is similar. Douglas Hartmann and Joseph Gerteis have diagnosed that: “[...] a fuller conception of multiculturalism must begin by breaking down the false opposition between unity and difference, between solidarity and diversity, or, as it is most frequently formulated in social and political theory, between universalism and particularism.”¹⁷⁵ To avoid rigid categorization Howard-Hassman borrowed Kwame A. Appiah's division into liberal and illiberal multiculturalism.¹⁷⁶ According to this differentiation ethnicity is either regarded as a matter of choice for the individual or as an obligatory social categorization the individual is subject to. This differentiation into liberal and

¹⁷² Cf. Rinaldo Walcott: “By Way of a Brief Introduction: A demand for a Different Canada.” In: Rinaldo Walcott (ed.), *Rude. Contemporary Black Canadian Cultural Criticism*. Oronto: Insomniac Press 2000, 7-10. Walcott directly questions the way in which Canadian cultural politics propose to re-imagine the nation, a process which turns ethnic minorities into so called “not-quite-citizens. Walcott especially criticises that “the narratives of [the Canadian] nation [...] seek to subordinate Blackness as merely adjunct to the ‘real’ and more sustaining national story.

¹⁷³ Cf. George Elliott Clark, “White like Canada.” in: *Transition* No 73 (1997), pp 98-109. In this polemical text Clarke argues that “It is difficult enough to figure out what it means to be Canadian, let alone African Canadian. The positive content of Canadian identity is unclear [...]”

¹⁷⁴ Leo Driedger, *Race and Ethnicity*, 25-31.

¹⁷⁵ Douglas Hartmann & Joseph Gerteis, “Dealing with Diversity: Mapping Multiculturalism in Sociological Terms.” In: *Sociological Theory* Vol. 23.2, 2005, 218-240 [221].

¹⁷⁶ Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann, “‘Canadian’ as an Ethnic Category for Multiculturalism and National Unity“. In: *Canadian Public Policy / Analyse de Politiques*, Vol. 25, No 4 (Dec. 1999), 523-537 [526].

illiberal multiculturalism is not uncontested as the obligatory categorization can be either understood as an infringement on or as a measure to preserve personal rights.

One of the earliest and fiercest critics of Canadian multicultural policies was Howard Brotz. He contested that the idea of culture, with regard to the compound multiculturalism, is a major conceptual problem and inevitably leads to significant differences in interpretation and explanation of the concept. Brotz argues that the term culture is hardly definable and therefore “no one really knows what culture [in the context of multiculturalism] precisely means.”¹⁷⁷ Even if Brotz’s arguments are refutable and basically signal his polemical intention, his essay has been an important step in defining the general ambiguities that characterize Canadian cultural and social politics. Brotz’s main argument is that Canadian society is basically uniform in the intention every member of it shares, which is to “improve [...] his standard of living for himself and his family by working in an economy which satisfies these wants.”¹⁷⁸ In the course of his argumentation he tries to show that the “bourgeois way of life”, an idea borrowed from Alexis de Tocqueville in which religious and political freedom and a so-called “freedom of tastes” form central liberties of a democratic state, is the backbone of Canadian national identity. Brotz continues his argument with the claim that this model is closer to the American idea of the melting pot than to the popular formula “pluralism in equality.” The state’s only functions in this model is to maintain material security and provide the basis for economic prosperity, it is not supposed to interfere with private matters. Accordingly, cultural identity is a private issue that each person has to negotiate individually.¹⁷⁹

In 1982 Lance W. Roberts and Rodney A. Clifton extended Brotz’s critical viewpoint by adding the idea of “symbolic ethnicity.” Contrary to Brotz they defined culture as “[referring] to the shared meanings by which a people give order, expression, and value to common experiences.”¹⁸⁰ However, their argumentation followed Brotz in pointing out that Canadian multiculturalism was haphazard. In their essay they try to show that multiculturalism encourages the formation of ethnic masks, also called “symbolic ethnicities” which “allows an individual to ‘feel ethnic’ without traditional inhibitions and sanctions.”¹⁸¹ Their concept of “symbolic

¹⁷⁷ Howard Brotz, “Multiculturalism in Canada: A Muddle.” In: *Canadian Public Policy / Analyse de Politiques*, Vol. 6, (Winter 1980), 41-46 [42].

¹⁷⁸ Howard Brotz, “Multiculturalism in Canada: A Muddle”, 42.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 44-45.

¹⁸⁰ Lance W. Roberts and Rodney Clifton, “Exploring the Ideology of Canadian Multiculturalism” in: *Canadian Public Policy / Analyse de Politiques*, Vol. 8, No 1 (Winter 1982), 88-94 [88].

¹⁸¹ Lance W. Roberts and Rodney Clifton, “Exploring the Ideology of Canadian Multiculturalism, 90.

ethnicity” is based on the idea that state-sponsored ethnic activities like festivals and ethnic conferences encourages the individuals to maintain a “nostalgic allegiance” to the cultural heritage of their ancestors without “having to “incorporate [specific traditions] into their everyday behaviour.”¹⁸² In addition they refuse the idea of a Canadian mosaic because they doubt that ethnic groups might be able to “perpetuate coherent cultural traditions because they lack the social structures.”¹⁸³ Roberts and Clifton point out that migrants and minorities are reassured by the state in participating in a modern society while maintaining a non-compulsory link to their former identity, respectively the ethnic identity of their parents. They also follow Brotz by criticising the intervention of the state regarding the creation of “symbolic identities” because, according to their view, this is simply unnecessary, or even utterly wrong in a liberal society, and should remain to the individual, respectively groups to organize and finance such activities.

Despite Howard-Hassmann's seemingly objective theoretical engagement with multiculturalism, her categorization shows a certain tendency to advocate a more conservative point of view. This categorization allows her to describe her own approach as liberal, because she is content with the Canadian policy as it is. According to her line of argumentation, all further political intervention by the state – be it in matters of language or culture – would be an infringement on personal liberty and social coherence. Among those whose approach Howard-Hassmann most decidedly rejects, Evelyn Kallen is one the most extreme and critical voices with regard to the realization of multiculturalism in Canada. In 1995 Kallen was still convinced that Canada's “[i]nstitutionalized forms of ethnic discrimination, [...] have served to maintain a vertical ethnic mosaic in which, despite some mobility in the middle ranks, the superordinate status of those at the top (founding partners and immigrants most like them) and the marginalized status of those at the bottom (aboriginal peoples) has remained relatively stable over time.”¹⁸⁴ Especially the language politics of the Canadian government poses a problem to both opponents and advocates of multiculturalism. For Arnold Itwaru and Evelyn Kallen, the policy's most capital flaw is its reluctance to encourage linguistic diversity.¹⁸⁵ According to their understanding the lack of institutionally guaranteed linguistic diversity problematizes the individuality of cultural practices, respectively the individual practising a culture that does not conform to the mainstream. Especially Kallen argues that members of ethnic and linguistic

¹⁸² Ibid, 90.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 91.

¹⁸⁴ Kallen, *Ethnicity and Human Rights in Canada*, 150.

¹⁸⁵ Evelyn Kallen, “Multiculturalism: The Not-So-Impossible Dream.” in: R.I. Cholewinski (ed.), *Human Rights in Canada: Into the 1990s and Beyond*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 1990, 178-80.

minorities should be instructed in their native language and not in English. Howard-Hassmann on the other hand contests that in order to grant social and cultural coherence, citizens of a nation state must agree on a number of shared standards of which language must be one.¹⁸⁶ She defends the Canadian policy of encouraging and subsidizing language learning programs, but she stresses that in the public sphere people should not be inhibited by linguistic barriers that originate from their cultural background. Howard-Hassmann advocates a rigid differentiation between private and public spheres, pointing out that in order to facilitate the individual's participation in the economy, the practice of non-official languages and religion must be a private matter. Nevertheless, two alleged fallacies have been singled out by the critics of Canadian multiculturalism during the past two decades. Like in a trench war, those alleged fallacies have either been used by its advocates or its opponents by attributing different social significances to the respective aspects. The one aspect that has been criticized is its alleged lack of political consistency, which has been interpreted – either positive or negative – as symbolizing the unwillingness or inability of the Canadian nation state to shed its former colonial allegiance and identity. More recently, a number of critics stated that Canada's policy of multiculturalism is directly responsible for the decline of social cohesion because it invites immigrants unwilling to integrate into society to self-segregate themselves from the mainstream population. According to this position, immigrants and policy are equally responsible for the decline of social cohesion because, “[self-segregation] is exercised in the context of multicultural policy which, rather than promoting social cohesion, is actually promoting separateness through social segregation.”¹⁸⁷

The other aspect that has been criticized is the translation of political theory into social practice. The institutions that were created to implement the concept of multiculturalism and turn it into a social experience, are either regarded as too extreme or as too reluctant to push their agendas through.¹⁸⁸ For the opponents of multiculturalism the demands for cultural integrity and political participation of the various minority groups pose a threat to Canada's national unity and

¹⁸⁶ Howard-Hassmann, 527.

¹⁸⁷ Daniel Hiebert, Nadine Schuurman & Heather Smith, *Multiculturalism “On the Ground”: The Social Geography of Immigration and Visible Minority Populations in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver; Projected to 2017*. Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Diversity: Working Paper Series No. 7 – 12, 2007, 8.

¹⁸⁸ In 1995 David A. Hollinger summarized all those aforementioned aspects with regard to the situation in the United States, concluding with the thesis “[t]hat multiculturalism is not more helpful in interpreting these boundary disputes derives, in part, from its prodigious character.” In order to overcome the limitations of the political concept of multiculturalism he advocates a “postethnic perspective” which resists “the grounding of knowledge and moral values in blood and history, but works within the last generation's recognition that many of the ideas and values once taken to be universal are specific to certain cultures.” See: David A. Hollinger, *Beyond Multiculturalism: Postethnic America*. New York: Basic Books 2000 [1995], 3.

identity.¹⁸⁹ Evelyn Kallen controversially discusses this fear as a feature of the “new racism”, coming to the conclusion that not all critics of affirmative action programs and equality policy draw their motivation from the so-called “new racism.” For Arnold Itwaru - one of the most outspoken critics of Canadian politics - Canadian multiculturalism is only a veil which covers up the nation's exclusiveness, a rhetorical means to turn the Canada's social situation into an object of desire for immigrants willing to contribute to Canada's economic development.¹⁹⁰ Kallen furthermore claims that “in Canada the constitutional protection for equality rights, [...] is impugned by the systemic inequality of visible minorities. In order to maintain the *status quo* of racial/ethnic inequality in face of an anti-racist/egalitarian national ideology, majority authorities have shifted their ideological stance from a focus on inherent (biological) racial inferiority to a focus on 'natural' cultural difference.”¹⁹¹

In recent public discourse, the focus switched from discussing the preservation of aboriginal ethnic identities to the issue of the emergence of a coherent and integrative Canadian identity.¹⁹² In 1996 Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann describes the paradoxical outcome of the politics of multiculturalism, which, in her own words, “far from promoting divisions among Canadians, seems to promote their integration.”¹⁹³ To summarize her argument there are two key issues she highlights: the unacknowledged forces behind assimilation and the artificiality of ethnic identities. Regarding the first point, it can be said that Howard-Hassmann’s emphasis is on language as a force supporting the assimilation of non-aboriginal Canadians. By using recent statistics she comes to the conclusion that with regard to language, Canadian policy has failed because a mere 1.7 percent of all Canadians speak neither French nor English, the rest has therefore voluntarily integrated into the French and English-dominated public life. The other issue she stresses is the fact that ethnicity is a social creation and not a fixed entity which implies that it is also subject to change. Even if multicultural policy encourages the preservation of ancestral heritage, cultural contact creates multiple identities. According to her argument Canadianness is characterized by blurred, but still recognizable ancestral origins, and the general acceptance of diversity, respectively multiculturalism as a key value of Canadian society. Instead of preserving ethnic identities multiculturalism “[...] paradoxically universalizes specificity; all Canadians are expected to have and to enjoy a specific ethno-cultural ancestral identity as well as

¹⁸⁹ Kallen, *Ethnicity and Human Rights in Canada*, 32.

¹⁹⁰ Arnold Harrchaud Itwaru, *The Invention of Canada. Literary Text and the Immigrant Imaginary*. Toronto: TSAR, 1990, 17.

¹⁹¹ Kallen, *Ethnicity and Human Rights in Canada*, 30.

¹⁹² Howard-Hassmann, “‘Canadian’ as an Ethnic Category for Multiculturalism and National Unity“, 526.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, 523.

their universal Canadian identity.”¹⁹⁴

Summarizing all three theoretical positions from a diachronic perspective, it becomes clear that they all correspond in the assumption that ethnic identity is not a fixed entity. In the Canadian context assimilation to the dominant social forces in society seems to be inevitable in order to be “allowed” to be part of the “modern society”. This leads to the emergence of “symbolic ethnicities”, or multiple identities, which are either private aspects of individual identities, or displayed in public life. All three positions proceed from the assumption that non-aboriginal Canadians combine an ethnic and a national identity which are not in direct relation to each other. To be more specific each (recent) immigrant to Canada therefore has, or should have a “modern bourgeois Canadian-“, and one “ancestral identity”, whereas the last exists only in a blurred, or symbolic form in order to be able to participate in a society which is regulated by different mechanisms in keeping with the ideas and regulations of the majority of the population. With regard to all three theoretical positions it is remarkable that conflicts between the state and ethnic groups or among ethnic groups themselves are hardly mentioned. Only Howard-Hassmann mentions social problems like racism and discrimination, pointing out that at least “racism has declined substantially in Canada [...]”, an effect she traces back to governmental efforts.¹⁹⁵ For her racism and discrimination are negative aspects which have been successfully fought back, but remain “memories of past discrimination [which] fester and demand recognition.”¹⁹⁶

The origins of these different and sometimes even competing claims to multiculturalism, as Hartmann and Gerteis have shown, lies in the critics' different understandings of required cultural bases for the policy of multiculturalism. Their model consists of two different dimensions: a differentiation of cultural bases and social or relational bases. There are “thick” and the “thin” visions of cultural bases. While the “thick vision” relies on the existence of shared practices, lifestyles and values etc., the “thin vision” regards a shared legal norm as sufficient to maintain social order and cohesion.¹⁹⁷ Their social interaction division focuses on the different roles attributed to the individual and the group in the critics' arguments. While some focus on the individual and their interactions with the state, others concentrate on groups and their relation to

¹⁹⁴ Howard-Hassmann, “‘Canadian’ as an Ethnic Category for Multiculturalism and National Unity“, 533.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 527.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 527-28.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Hartmann & Gerteis, “Multiculturalism in Sociological Terms”, 222-223.

the system.¹⁹⁸ Connecting these dimensions of diversity, they came to the conclusion that there are three different forms of multiculturalism: cosmopolitanism, interactive pluralism, and fragmented pluralism. In addition to those three forms they also mention assimilationalism, which is not a form of multiculturalism, but closely related to the criteria Hartmann and Gerteis mention, as it “represents a real response to difference and as such should be considered in tandem with other kinds of visions.”¹⁹⁹ Cosmopolitanism is the most liberal vision of the three because it allows for permeable micro- and macro-social boundaries, which easily allows for individuals and groups to be integrated into the existing social system. Interactive pluralism requires set boundaries in both the micro and the macro order; nevertheless, it requires intense communication and interaction between the groups on the basis of equal recognition. Fragmented pluralism consists of permeable macro-social boundaries and non-permeable micro-social boundaries with strong and exclusive centres. In this vision, the groups recognize their mutual differences, but do not interact with each other. The state is reduced to its function to maintain the integrity of the groups' boundaries.²⁰⁰

5.6 Literature and Social Policies

A number of scholars have commented on the function of literature as an active determinant in various discourses. The way literature engages with the depiction of social environments is part and parcel of how social imaginaries are constructed. As Anderson points out: “these forms [the novel and the newspaper] provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation.”²⁰¹ Literature is torn between its political and its aesthetic functions; in this context it can not be purely aesthetic, but is inevitably politically charged to a certain extent. But it is not only the literary product that is ideologically charged, the whole discourse about and around its production and reception is subject to political interactions. Social reality, its depiction in literature and social imaginaries that show an awareness of the latter two, do not always coexist. Sometimes societies see themselves confronted with literary depictions of their social reality that do not fit to the set of characteristics they regard as essential to their social order. If they enter public discourse, those re-evaluating depictions can have two effects on

¹⁹⁸ Hartmann & Gerteis, “Multiculturalism in Sociological Terms”, 223.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 224.

²⁰⁰ Hartmann & Gerteis, “Multiculturalism in Sociological Terms”, 228-231.

²⁰¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. London & New York: Verso, 1983, 25.

the social imaginary of a group; it will either become more inclusive or more exclusive. As Roy points out: “If Canadians can listen to new creative voices and distil their experiences of Canada through a variety of rich cultural heritages, *they may yet devise a distinct, diverse, and vibrant culture that will be their common identity.*”²⁰² The promotion of multicultural literature thereby does not only confirm and foster existent ethnic identities; by giving insights into the social reality of immigrants and members of ethnic minorities it contributes to the acceptance of multiculturalism as an essential feature of Canadian society.

5.7.1 From Theory to Practice: Canadian Multiculturalism and its Practices from the African-Canadian Perspective

The demographical shift caused by increased immigration of African and Caribbean people whose immigration was facilitated by the “removal of racial barriers from immigration laws in the 1960s”, brought a “fifth force” in Canadian politics into being.²⁰³ Due to their political intervention there has been a shift of focus. While, as Roy points out, “[multiculturalism] once seemed primarily concerned with promoting good feelings among peoples of different cultures[...]”, it has come to respond more seriously to existing social problems like racism and social inequality. Throughout the last two decades African-Canadian cultural critics have engaged in the discourse about how to translate this essentially positive political policy into lived social practice. During the 1990s, most African-Canadian criticism focused on the problem that, from a historical perspective, blackness, never was part of the Canadian imaginary, therefore, as Sooknanan argues, “issues of racism and marginalia have never been sufficiently been dealt with in Canada.”²⁰⁴ According to Sooknanan, this neglect of coming to terms with the past counteracted the official policy of multiculturalism: “Blackness in Canada is a kind of ongoing erasure, an invisible visibility repressed in the psyche of a nation flogging a failed multicultural.”²⁰⁵ The thesis that Canada still suffers from its racist heritage for which “multiculturalism is still largely an unsuccessful corrective” is one of the key issues African-Canadian cultural production and criticism engage with.²⁰⁶ Nevertheless, Sooknanan’s

²⁰² Roy, “The Fifth Force: Multiculturalism and the English Canadian Identity”, 209.

²⁰³ Ibid, 200 (emphasis mine).

²⁰⁴ Renuka Sooknanan, “The Politics of Essentialism: Rethinking ‘Black Community.’” In Walcott, *Rude*, 137-58 [139].

²⁰⁵ Sooknanan, “The Politics of Essentialism”, 139.

²⁰⁶ H. Nigel Thomas, “*Sleep on, Beloved: A Depiction of the Consequences of Racism in Canadian Immigration*

assessment offers a very good starting point because she adds a diachronic perspective to her criticism. By pointing out that she sees Canadian multiculturalism as an “ongoing” failure she stresses the longevity of this, in her eyes, problematic concept. But her assessment contains more than that; by drawing on the contradictory construction of blackness as an “invisible visibility”, she underlines the existing ambiguities in the self-perception of the Canadian nation. This is indeed remarkable because Sookanan renders the voices of those, who are generally described as “the others”, of people who do not belong to the mainstream, but to ethnic minorities, more or less invisible. With regard to the African-Canadian minority it is certainly wrong to talk of an invisible visibility, at least concerning their literary production.

5.7.2 Multiculturalism and Racism: Ideal and Reality of Canadian Social Life

African-Canadian cultural critics like George Elliot Clarke or Marlene Nourbese Philip do not agree with the theoretical positions like those by Brotz or Howard-Hassmann. In his article “White like Canada” Clarke argues that “multiculturalism and the idea of the Canadian mosaic are just inside projections – ideal visions of (white-)Canadians to describe themselves and their nation in opposition to the U.S.”²⁰⁷ In this article, he problematizes the “incoherence of color-based identity in Canada [which] permits Canadian Whiteness to exist, then, as an ethereal force.”²⁰⁸ According to Clarke the origins of this “ideal whiteness, ready for export” can be traced back to the lack of unity, or as he calls it “racial solidarity” among persons of colour. Following his line of argumentation, the lack of unity has two origins: “the scarcity of nonwhites in Canada” and the problematic self-perception of those persons. Basically, Arnold Itwaru occupies the same theoretical position. According to Itwaru, Canadian multiculturalism is only a speech façade, a set of “ego-ideal statements” that “are designed for the enhancement of the state's profile through the presentation of ideas which would intensify it as an object of desire for its large numbers of multi-ethnic inhabitants, and thereby lessen the danger of dissent in this areas.”²⁰⁹ This position is similar to that presented by Renuka Sookananan,²¹⁰ who describes the black community in Canada as a shifting and constantly self-reshaping entity. According to her “(h)ow Black community is imagined is dependent on the chaotic brilliance of performative acts

Policy.” in: *Journal of Black Studies* Vol. 38.3 (Jan. 2008), 484-501 [484].

²⁰⁷ George Elliott Clarke, “White like Canada.” in: *Transition* No. 73 (1997), pp 98-109 [100].

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Arnold Harrechaud Itwaru, *The Invention of Canada. Literary Text and the Immigrant Imaginary*. Toronto: TSAR, 1990, 17.

²¹⁰ Cf. Sookananan, “The Politics of Essentialism”, 148-53.

that shape at the limits of representation.”²¹¹ While she focuses on the aspect of performativity in the context of identity construction, Clarke’s view is simpler and not as positive. He argues that this unawareness about ethnic identity has to be set into relation to the problem of Canadian identity as it is emblematic of a larger crisis of Canadian identity.”²¹² What Clarke highlights in order to get to a rough outline of what Canadian national identity consists of is a polemic construction containing an enumeration of binary oppositions: welfare against warfare; socialist against capitalist and melting pot against multiculturalism. The point he arrives at is that this opposition is imaginary; especially with regard to the social utopia it creates, which relegates ethnic conflicts and historical facts into the realm of myth. But even in denying the binary oppositions Clarke paradoxically uses the imaginary historical opposition to the U.S. and the negative aspects it seems to contain as an ideological state of mind to read and understand identity in terms of a regional imaginary. By highlighting the similarities between both nations with regard to the treatment of ethnic minorities, especially black people, Clarke uncovers the differences with respect to the construction of racial discourses in both countries. David Sealy even goes one step further. In his deconstruction of images of Canadian identity he argues that “Canada is constructed as a synonym for pluralist rationality, while Jamaican is constructed as a synonym for Black criminality.”²¹³ This constructed antithesis of Canadian rationality against Jamaican criminality is not restricted to spatial antagonisms; it rather positions Black individuals outside Canada and outside a normative code of civilized behaviour.

Many Canadian writers with a non-European background criticize Canadian ethnic and cultural politics. They claim that, contrary to prevailing notions of a well researched and properly documented past, many aspects of Canada's involvement in human trafficking and enforced relocation still need to be addressed in Canada. What Howard-Hassmann mentioned as festering “memories of past discrimination”²¹⁴ and Rinaldo Walcott called “the absented presence of slavery in official national discourses”²¹⁵ is Clarke’s main topic. By pointing to Canada’s “ethereal whiteness” and “[w]hite Canada’s faith in its innocence”, images mostly incompatible with the apparent results of an unbiased diachronic description of ethnic injustices committed by the white majority, he indirectly problematizes the very foundation of Canadian multiculturalism. In opposition to the critical but nevertheless optimistic voices discussed in the beginning of this

²¹¹ Sookananan, “The Politics of Essentialism”, 149.

²¹² Clarke, “White like Canada,” 98.

²¹³ David Sealy, “‘Canadianizing’ Blackness: Resisting the Political.” In: Rinaldo Walcott (ed.), *Rude. Contemporary Black Canadian Cultural Criticism*. Toronto: Insomniac Press 2000, 87-108 [101].

²¹⁴ Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann, 527.

²¹⁵ Rinaldo Walcott, *Black like Who? Writing-Black-Canada*. Toronto: Insomniac Press 2003 [1997], 35.

chapter, Clarke – at least in his non-fictional writings – describes a Canada in which racism, inequality and state brutality are rather common phenomena.²¹⁶ In his brief description of previous governmental actions and tacit consents granted, the historical presence of the Ku Klux Klan, the expropriation of the native population and the rejection of Jews fleeing from Nazi terror in the 1930s are to be mentioned. By the choice of these examples he highlights the similarities between the U.S. and Canada and further deconstructs the idea of Canadian moral superiority to its southern neighbour as imaginary. With reference to Jean Baudrillard he states that “[t]he ghostly, cool, glimmering whiteness of the cinema is precisely that of white Canada.”²¹⁷ In Dionne Brand’s fiction we find an approach to these problems which follows the same line, adding a gender perspective to Clarke’s more general critique. Especially in the short story “Train to Montreal”, published in 1988 in the collection of short stories *Sans Souci and other Stories* and in her 1997 collection of poetry *Land to Light on* she confronts the readers with depictions of Canada which have nothing in common with egalitarian versions of multicultural Canada. I will now provide a brief reading of excerpts from these texts.

5.7.3 Excursus: Engagements with Gender, Language and History in Dionne Brand's Poetry and Short Fiction

The poem “Blues Spirituals for Mammy Prater” from Dionne Brand's collection *No Language is Neutral*²¹⁸ is symptomatic for her engagement²¹⁸ with the history of the African Diaspora, respectively the afterlife of world-wide slave trade. Furthermore, it perfectly illustrates Dionne Brand's refusal to let her poetic writing be restricted by adopting the perspective of a Canadian writer. Brand is more concerned with a transnational approach towards diaspora studies than with a mere national perspective on the African-Canadian experience. By means of a deliberately open poetic technique and an inclusive approach to the experience of the African diaspora, readers are confronted with a depiction that knows neither regional nor temporal boundaries.

The title of the poem hints that it is situated within African-American literary and cultural traditions. This impression is corroborated by the text because it does not follow European poetic

²¹⁶ Rinaldo Walcott’s position with regard to this assumption is similar to Clarke’s. According to Walcott’s policy as an editor “racism [can be taken] as a given in the Canadian social and cultural landscape.” In: Walcott, “Insubordination: a Demand for a different Canada”, 8.

²¹⁷ Clarke, “White like Canada“, 109.

²¹⁸ Dionne Brand, *No Language is Neutral*. Toronto: Coach House Press 1990, 17-19. All further references are to this edition, The page number will be indicated parenthetically in the text, the title will be abbreviated as NLIN.

conventions; the style is plain, in some passages even mimicking oral conventions and pointing to the repetition patterns of traditional African storytelling. As we learn from the title and the structure of the poem, Brand's poetic technique is situated within African-American literary and cultural traditions. The direct reference to the blues spirituals which is implied in the title points to certain regulated proceedings which are taken up as poetic techniques within the poem. It uses the repetitive structure of the "call and response technique" of African-American gospel music, focussing on and repeating the important issues the poem deals with in order to strengthen their presence in the minds of the addressees'. It should nevertheless be mentioned that the combination of blues and spirituals with regard to generic definitions is rather problematic because blues lyrics are "decidedly secular" and Brand's poem simply does not contain any religious references that mark it as a spiritual. So the title can be either described a deliberately misleading combination, or as a contradictory construction to problematize its categorization.²¹⁹ Despite this adherence to non-European structures and repetitive poetic techniques the poem provides a discernible three-part structure. Its 51 lines have originally been printed on three pages; at the end of each page the speaker re-focuses on the eyes of the women on the photography.²²⁰ Therefore it can be inferred that its three-part presentation is supposed to be associated with a religious triptych, or the structural regulations of classical dramatical works. The dramatic organization of the poem confirms this inference drawn from its structure; the middle part of the poem to be found on its second page contains a short but vivid description of the hardships the eponymous Mammy Prater had to endure as imagined by the speaker.

The speaker's ruminations about the person Mammy Prater are started by an old photograph showing her. This photo serves both as memento and catalyser, giving testimony to her existence, starting the speaker's train of thoughts. By way of this poem, the narratees are informed about the speaker's thoughts about the historical personality of the eponymous person and the history behind this particular photo. The speaker assumes that the old woman in the photography deliberately waited for the perfection of the medium to have her picture taken. The technical development is accurately described, as part of the process to create material proof of her existence. This deliberateness is stressed by the speaker's allegation that the pose on the photo was carefully considered and planned. It was to serve as a testimony to Mammy Prater's

²¹⁹ Henry Louis Gates & Nellie McKay (eds.), *The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature*, London & New York: W. W. Norton 1997 (1st Edition), 22.

²²⁰ This obsession with eyes of a deceased person alludes to the imagery in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*: "I stood beneath [my grandfather's] photograph with my brief case in hand and smiled triumphantly into his stolid black peasant's face. It was a face that fascinated me. The eyes seemed to follow everywhere I went." (31)

life and of the achievement of having survived slavery. The speaker assumes the position of an ancillary executor to do so, a position due to him only because we are told that:

40 she knew that it would be me who would find
her will her meticulous account, her eyes,
...
she planned it down to the day,
...
this moment of
50 my turning the leaves of a book,
noticing, her eyes. (NLIN, 15).

Even if art “requires a suspension of disbelief”, the speaker seems to be a bit too eager to justify her approach to the interpretation of this picture; by that the speaker re-directs the narratees' focus on the achievement of the person who had been photographed, the claim of authenticity and deliberateness is only a symbolic rendering of the life-long persistence of Mammy Prater. Her extraordinary life story has to be handed on – even if that requires gap filling by those who tell it:

37 she took care not to lose the signs
to write in those eyes what her fingers could not script
a pact of blood across a century, a decade and more [...] (NLIN, 16)

In the poem the historical person is instrumentalized. It is apparent that her story cannot be told in its completeness without filling gaps and imagining pieces. Throughout this whole imaginative process the photograph serves as an inspiration for the speaker. Mammy Prater is stylized into an icon of endurance whose most important characteristic is quiet patience, a patience that is bordering on despair, but still keeping her alive to have her photograph taken. Mammy Prater's photograph is a reminder that contains the ghost of slavery, oppression and hardship like the ghosts in Brand's novel *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, which “may appear to 'carry historical burdens of tradition and collective memory' and to act 'as links to lost families and communities'” as Maureen Moynagh put it.²²¹

²²¹ Maureen Moynagh, “The Melancholic Structure of Memory in Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*. In: *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. 43/1, 2008, 57-75 (62).

The following discussion of a scene from Dionne Brand's short story "Train to Montreal" is a brief attempt to describe Brand's early critique of Canadian social problems. In this story, Dionne Brand depicts an instance of racism in public life. While getting off the train in Montreal, Brand's protagonist, a young, black woman who had planned to meet her lover there, is intimidated by a group of middle aged white men:

The man's voice still coughed, "Whore! Niggerwhore!" She looked to say something, but only said it in looking. Apologising to her past for not striking him or cursing back, for not hurting, wounding all of them standing on the escalator. [...] She looked for her lover. [...] Nothing had just happened to him as it had to her. [...] They had all melted into the general crowd at the station. She scanned the crowd, wondering if they remembered now, greeting their friends. They looked safe, as clothed in their friendships as the man who got off at Kingston. He had forgotten their conversation and gone back to his life. They had forgotten her humiliation [...].²²²

In accordance with her later literary work, Brand focuses on the isolation persons of colour experience in a dominantly "white environment", depicting racism as both a personal and a social experience. What is remarkable about Brand's this particular passage is that she depicts racism in urban environments as something that erupts from the confrontation of persons of colour with unexpected outbursts of racism. While the perpetrator is able to become one with the crowd, the victim stands isolated, feeling branded with the shame of having suffered humiliation instead of instantly retaliating. She is both helpless and lost in a crowd of strangers who apparently sympathize with the perpetrator's actions. The character is misrecognized by the crowd as an outsider, as non-Canadian, a person who can legitimately be ousted. This misrecognition is due to indirect racism, according to Tess Chakkalal a "feature of everyday Canadian life" that is "so deeply ingrained in [Canada's] national psyche that locating its operative features in certain situations is deemed superfluous."²²³

We find a similar situation in *Land to Light on*²²⁴ where a white male person, respectively the threat he poses to her physical integrity, constantly haunts the persona. This again corroborates the idea that "[r]acism is a feature of everyday Canadian life"²²⁵, an idea that is

²²² Dionne Brand, *Sans Souci and other Stories*. Toronto, Firebrand Books, 1989, 27-28.

²²³ Tess Chakkalal, "Reckless Eyeballing: Being Reena in Canada." In: Rinaldo Walcott (ed.), *Rude. Contemporary Black Canadian Cultural Criticism*. Toronto: Insomniac Press 2000, 159-167 [167]

²²⁴ Dionne Brand, *Land to Light on*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1997, 14. All further references will be to this edition, page and abbreviated title (LL) will be indicated parenthetically.

²²⁵ Ibid. Chakkalal's essay mainly reports on the beating and subsequent death of fifteen year old Reena Virk. Analysing the media coverage she comes to the conclusion that despite the official statements, Virk's death was

unbearably intimidating for the speaker:

I ii

[...]

If the trees don't flower and colour refuse to limn / when a white man in a red truck on a rural road / jumps at you, screaming his exact hatred /of the world, his faith extravagant and earnest and he threatens, something about your cunt, / you do not recover, you think of Malcolm / on this snow drifted road, you think, / "Is really so evil they is then / that one of them in a red truck can split your heart / open, crush a day in fog?" (LL, 14)

The experience of being threatened with physical violence makes the speaker reassess her position within the social network, coming to the conclusion that she is not safe. This awareness of physical danger and the frailty of personal safety are linked to the thought about a person named Malcolm. Even if it is not explicitly mentioned, the addressees might feel invited to link this association to the person of Malcolm X, which thereby serves as an indirect reference to white racism and Malcolm X's statement that "all white men are devils."²²⁶ The last three lines of the poem diverge from the rest with regard to the language used. Although the rest is in plain, but perfectly idiomatic English, the three final lines show an attempt to recreate the language of someone whose English of limited scope. Those lines, set in inverted commas, differ from those articulated by the speaker, signalling that the speaker either reflects on a situation she witnessed, imagining the train of thoughts in the mind of the victim, or a means of disassociation of the victim from what has happened. The poem also transports a feeling of isolation and loneliness which is connected to the threat of violence, an aspect that is taken up again in these lines:

II iv

no wonder I could get lost here, no wonder
in this set of trees I lose my way, counting
on living long and not noticing a closing,
no wonder a red truck could surprise me
and every night shape me into a crouch
with the telephone close by and the doors
checked and checked, all night. [...]

an act of racial violence that was kept away from the public.

²²⁶ Malcolm X (with the assistance of Alex Haley), *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Harmondsworth: Penguin
³1968.

The persona in the poem is constantly afraid of two things: Firstly, the Canadian landscape which appears dangerous, intimidating and illusionary to her. Secondly, the threat lurking in a “red truck” which hints at possible violent intentions of its driver. The truck and its driver, who feature in the previously cited passage, represent white male Canada as a *pars pro toto*. The speaker is helpless against both the environment and those whose dominance she experiences in everyday life. This feeling of helplessness manifests itself in her decision not to leave the house at night and to barricade her private space against any intrusion. The telephone is her only ally and the only connection to the external world protecting her sanity. All of these passages have two things in common, firstly, the speakers and characters experience verbal abuse or even threats of physical violence by white male persons that were uttered because of their skin colour or sexuality, or both. Secondly, the potential victim does not openly discuss her emotional reaction to these situation, but is driven into social isolation by them. In the following chapters both issues briefly introduced on the previous pages, the long term effects of enslavement and suppression, and the systematic exclusion of individuals and groups in Canadian society will be discussed in the context of Brand's longer narrative fiction.

Part II: Close-Readings of Selected Works by Dionne Brand, George Elliott Clarke and Lawrence Hill

6. Close Readings of Selected Works of Narrative Fiction by Dionne Brand

6.1. Dionne Brand's Narrative Fiction: A Short Introduction

Brand possesses the manifestly un-Canadian desire to make the personal political. It is a stance that continually shapes her art.²²⁷

The accents of Empire that return in the voices of post-colonial subjects – both travelling from the 'periphery' and erupting at the centre – find expression in a cross-cultural cosmopolitanism that reworks and rewrites the once hidden histories of black Atlanticism and imperial diaspora in the grammar of modern nomadic identities.²²⁸

In 1994, when Iain Chambers made the above quoted assessment, postcolonial literature had already been well on its way to reshape the literary and cultural landscape, not only of the west, but also of the former periphery. Chambers' idea of “cross-cultural cosmopolitanism” articulating its concerns “in the grammar of modern nomadic identities” has become a truism with regard to authors from all around the globe who have found their home in the diaspora. The publication of Chambers' book coincides with Dionne Brand's most productive period as a poet and novelist, and one might easily be tempted to read her work within the frame he proposes. This does make sense to a certain extent, but in my reading I will show that while this frame perfectly fits her work in the 1990s, it no longer fits her more recent work. Rather late in her career, Brand turned to writing novels. Before the publication of *In Another Place, Not Here* in 1996, Brand had already produced autobiographical writings, several volumes of poetry and a collection of short stories. The turn came late, but it was unsurprising because the novel is a genre that, due to its inherent amalgamation of fact and fiction, redirects focus from the autobiographical perspective of persona or autobiographical narrator onto the events depicted. Readers thereby relive emotional experiences or situations in a narrative by proxy instead of just being told about them. As Scholes and Kellog point out: “The novel's combination of factual and fictional elements is not naïve and instinctive but sophisticated and deliberate, made possible by the development of a concept called realism, which provides a rationale for a marriage that rationalism had seemed to

²²⁷ Donna Bailey Nurse, *What's a Black Critic to Do? Interviews and Reviews of Black Writers*. Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2003, 71.

²²⁸ Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*. London & New York: Routledge, 1994, 68.

forbid.”²²⁹ The form of the novel therefore enables writers to stage complex emotional and social situations, involving a set of characters of varying complexity before a canvas of different social and spatial environments. It can be multi-layered and complex, as well as simple and one-dimensional. The following chapters basically engage with the longer narrative fiction Brand produced in the 1990s and early 2000s. The last novel I will analyse in detail is *What We All Long For*. My analyses have three main objectives: Firstly, I will discuss the novels' renderings of their characters' pasts, considering especially the alternation between diachronic and synchronic perspective in her first two novels. Secondly, and with reference to the first point, I will discuss and contextualize the novels' problematization of national narratives, especially with regard to the Americas. Thirdly, through the diachronic structure of my readings I will show how the focus of her writing shifted from Latin America and the Caribbean region to Canada. While for some regard this as a natural development, I will argue that this change of focus is actually a signal for a large-scale paradigm shift in the notion of belonging thematized in Brand's fiction, a shift from national to post-national ideas. An articulation of this change of focus can already be detected in her semi-autobiographic book *A Map to the Door of No Return*. Additionally, Brand's reluctant experimentalism will be discussed. The term “reluctant experimentalism” aims to describe Brand's tendency to mask the politics of her texts with a thin layer of stylistic innovation, disguising the still obvious elements of literary realism in her texts. I will show that the apparent polyphony of her novels is orchestrated and arranged by a single authorial voice which occupies a certain political, ideological and intellectual point of view, which connects all three texts.

The texts Brand produced during the 1990s are essentially engagements with power shifts within post-colonial societies. Belonging and race are important issues in these texts. As Charlotte Sturges points out: “The double movement of a 'writing out of' and 'a writing in' is [...] particularly crucial to the understanding of the way a historical consciousness informs the cultural imaginary of Black Canadian writing.”²³⁰ In her various writings Brand is trying to establish a counterpoint to what she perceives as the prevailing prerogative of “whiteness”, at least with regard to Canada and other predominantly white settler colonies, which decides the individual's position within the discourse about nationality and nationhood. Especially her 1994 collection of essays *Bread out of Stone* shows a preoccupation with Canada's alleged whiteness,

²²⁹ Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*. London, Oxford & New York: OUP, 1979 (1966), 58.

²³⁰ Charlotte Sturges, *Redefining the Subject; Sites of Play in Canadian Women's Writing*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2003, 53.

not unlike George Elliott Clarke's claim that Canada has a deeply rooted racist tradition and basically defines itself as "a white man's country."²³¹ Additionally, the texts' engagement with sexuality and gender constructions, especially their depictions of black female homosexuality will be considered. In comparison to Clarke's and Hill's fiction, Brand's engagement with sexuality is the least normative. In order to do justice to those two, it has to be clarified that Brand's texts thematize non-heterosexual relationships while Clarke and Hill do not. So far, all her novels are have engaged with gender as a social construction that determines individual and collective social reality. Race and gender, especially the power structures those social constructs define, are main concerns of her writing. As Brand writes in her autobiographic collection of essays *Bread Out of Stone*: "[...] Black men stare me down in the street, informing me silently that they can and want to control the terms under which I appear on the street [...] I stare the brothers back. They see my sex. My race is only a deed to their ownership. [...] *If this finds its way into some piece of fiction, a line of poetry, an image on a screen, no wonder.*"²³² *Bread Out of Stone*, read in its entirety, outlines most of the issues her fictional writing is preoccupied with. In an interview with Beverley Daurio, Brand reiterates this view and points out that her writing can never be seen as "pure aesthetics" because it is fuelled by political motivation.²³³ Charlotte Sturgess stressed that "for Brand [...] the in-between space of cultural hybridity is not easily negotiated. Her status as Canadian-Trinidadian is a conflictual one as she refuses both multiculturalist pedagogies and the cultural erasure of an 'assimilation'."²³⁴ Sturgess further on argues, basically in accordance with Brand's claims, that "her writing rejects a didactic stance [...] which would place the writer at a distance."²³⁵ Therefore, one might be tempted to read Brand's fiction as an autobiographic means of coming to terms with her own race and sexuality in the context of societies which tend to ostracise and marginalize homosexual persons of colour. One of my basic assessments is that Brand's texts reveal a peculiar position between postmodern and postcolonial perspectives and approaches. Let me first specify my notion of both approaches: being reductive, one might say that postcolonial positions accentuate the political while postmodern positions stress the aesthetic dimension of literature.²³⁶ To put it in a nutshell, the postcolonial focuses on language as an instrument of

²³¹ George Elliott Clarke, "White Like Canada." in: *Transition*, No. 73 (1997), 98-109 [106].

²³² Dionne Brand, *Bread Out of Stone*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1994, 13 (emphasis mine).

²³³ Dionne Brand (Interview by Beverley Daurio), "Writing It." In: Beverley Daurio (ed.), *The Power to Bend Spoons: Interview with Canadian Novelists*. Toronto: The Mercury Press, 1998, 21-41 [33].

²³⁴ Sturgess, *Redefining the Subject*, 52.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ I am aware of the reductive nature of my statement, but it had to be reduced for the sake of the argument. For a more detailed analysis of the problem see: Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge, 1998. Especially the first part of Loomba's book, "Situating Colonial and Postcolonial Studies" provides a very

political and social change, the postmodern, on the other hand, focuses on the study of the rules commonly associated with its mastery.²³⁷ Advocates of postmodernism and postcolonialism are therefore both equally interested in language as a social factor, but for different reasons.²³⁸ This clear division of functions is, like most artificial categories in literary studies, quite a problem when it has to be applied to a real book. Nevertheless, an awareness about these categories is important in order to appropriately appreciate the tightrope act of Brand's narrative works because they are both instruments of political change and innovative works of art. I will argue that while employing techniques associated with postmodernism like magic realism and fragmentation, they claim an autobiographically asserted authority to substantiate their political subtext: the author is never absent from the texts. This claim can be bolstered by reading *At the Full and Change of the Moon* alongside the first chapter of Brand's collection of autobiographical essays *A Map to the Door of No Return*. Both the physical environment she describes and the emotional response to the historical situation it deals with echo some of the novel's basic concerns. I will illustrate this with a longer passage in which Brand describes her desire for origins:

[Concerning Brand's attempt to find out about her own origins] Having no name to call on was having no past; having no past pointed to the fissure between the past and the present. That fissure is represented in the Door of No Return: that place where our ancestors departed one world for another; the Old World for the New. The places where all names were forgotten and all beginnings recast. [...] I am interested in exploring this creation place – the Door of No Return, a place emptied of beginnings – as a site of belonging or unbelonging.²³⁹

Up to her most recent work, meaning the fiction she produced after 2005, the differentiation between fictionalized autobiography and autobiographical fiction is hardly possible: her preoccupation – in fictional and autobiographic writing – lies in the engagement with the African Diaspora, and its lasting influence on the lives of human beings. Being aware of Brand's personal involvement does not imply that an autobiographical reading will be attempted, it only

illuminating summary of the problems concerned with the interrelation between poststructuralism/postmodernism and postcolonialism.

²³⁷ Loomba points out that “[M]any critics of postcolonial theory have in fact blamed it for too much dependence upon post-structuralist or post-modern perspectives (which are often read as identical). They claim that the insistence on multiple histories and fragmentation within these perspectives has been detrimental to thinking about the global operation of capitalism today.” Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 13.

²³⁸ See: Jeanette Winterson, *Art Objects: Essays on Art and Effrontery*. New York: Vintage International, 1997, p. 160-61. Winterson, a representative of “postmodern” writing, focuses on the aesthetic dimension of her work, while being aware of its sociocultural implications.

²³⁹ Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return. Note to Belonging*. Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2001, 5-6.

means that my readings will focus on the didactic function of her novels, especially in the context of Canadian national discourses – they are not only delightful reads, but they make readers aware of the problems of living together in multicultural societies. Furthermore, I will continue to read her novels for their redefinition, or rather re-construction of history, focusing on the interrelatedness of individual, national and global developments her novels illustrate. These issues will be of considerable importance for my readings of *At the Full and Change of the Moon* and *What We All Long For*. As outlined in the theoretical part of this thesis, the different dimensions of mnemonic work and its contribution to the construction of individual, collective and national identities will be given a privileged position in these readings.²⁴⁰

The readings are in chronological order, starting with Brand's first novel *In Another Place, Not Here* which will be discussed in the context of the emergence of the second generation of Caribbean-Canadian authors in the 1990s. Due to the fact that her novels roughly cover a decade, it makes sense to read them under diachronic as well as synchronic perspectives. The novels therefore enable us to discuss the development of Brand as an artist and the changes in the discourse they participate in. While Charlotte Sturgess could rightly claim that Brand's first attempts at narrative fiction, the collection of short stories *Sans Souci* and the novel *In Another Place, Not Here* [and to a certain extent also *At the Full and Change of the Moon*] offer an exclusive migrant perspective, “a poetics of migrancy” that focuses on the experience of the African diaspora²⁴¹, this has changed with *What We All Long For*. According to Sturgess, “[t]he subject is very much at stake in such writing [with reference to Brand's early fiction] as it investigates the very possibilities of Black, female self-representation in Canadian cultural space, just as it inflects the contours of such a space.”²⁴² Sturgess' concept of the subject is vague; it applies to author, narrator and characters; however, this vagueness seems deliberate because all those different agents compete for narrative agency. Nevertheless, read diachronically, Brand's narrative fiction shows a gradual shift from postmodern narrative techniques that privilege character construction through direct speech, often in the form of interior monologues, to more traditional approaches. This might be a coincidence, nevertheless, it is apparent that the characters in Brand's fiction, once apparently their own agents, have openly been disempowered by narratorial interference. The narrator's perspective, and often her stance on social and political issues, has become an integral part of the narrative. I will discuss this privileging of the narrator

²⁴⁰ Welzer, 44.

²⁴¹ Sturgess, *Redefining the Subject*, 52-53.

²⁴² *Ibid*, 53.

in different contexts that all have their origins in the shift in Canadian cultural discourse. Due to the fact that *In Another Place, Not Here* and *At the Full and Change of the Moon* were published within three years and that they share some basic concerns, the close reading chapters on those novels offer an analysis of their politics of place, gender and history. In the last step Brand's most recent novel *What We All Long For*, which, thematically and stylistically, differs significantly from her first two novels, will be discussed against the background of Eva Mackay's²⁴³ and Jeanette Winterson's thesis that experimental and politically subversive fiction is either trivialized or familiarized by mainstream culture.²⁴⁴ Despite discussing Brand's work in a Canadian context I am aware, and partly follow Carole Boyce Davies' argument (even if I do find its prescriptive character problematic) that "Black woman's writing should be read as a series of boundary crossings and not as a fixed, geographical, ethnically or nationally bound category of writing."²⁴⁵ But doing exactly this – reading this kind of writing within those categories – might actually lay bare the structures governing the discursive re-negotiation of Canadian cultural identities.

²⁴³ Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*. Toronto, Buffalo & London: University of Toronto Press, 1999, 4.

²⁴⁴ Jeanette Winterson made the same observation but discussed it in a different cultural context. "Art has deep and difficult eyes and for any the gaze is too insistent. Better to pretend that art is dumb, or at least has nothing to say that makes sense to us. If art, all art, is concerned with truth, then a society in denial will not find much use for it. In the West, we avoid painful encounters with art by trivializing it, or by familiarising it." See Winterson, *Art Objects*, p. 13.

²⁴⁵ Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*. London & New York, 1994, 4.

6.1 Troubled Homes – Troubled Identities: Transnational Blackness in Dionne Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here*

[T]here were fights between the West Indians and the Nova Scotians. Bitterness and hostility turned inside out. Two sets of Black people fighting each other over turf as if any turf could be theirs without the white man's say so.²⁴⁶

By the time Brand's first novel *In Another Place, Not Here* was published she was already an accomplished and celebrated writer, cultural critic and film-maker. The novel was first published in Canada in 1996 by Alfred A. Knopf and later in the same year by Grove Press in the United States. It received favourable reviews from both Canadian and US-American critics. The tenor was that it does credit to Brand's artistry and confirmed Brand's status as “a significant voice for the African-Canadian experience.”²⁴⁷ It sold very well and brought an enormous boost to Brand's popularity as an artist, making her accessible to a readership that found it hard to engage with her poetic works.

Central to the narrative is the relationship between Elizete and Verlia. With those two contemporary Caribbean women in the centre, the novel engages with issues as diverse as gender, sexuality, race, belonging, the legacies of colonialism, memory and marginality. Symbolically, their relationship echoes the margin/centre discourse important to postcolonial studies. In the novel, Verlia, who spent her adolescence and early professional life in Canada, returns to her birth place, an island in the Caribbean, in order to help facilitate political change there. Elizete, on the other hand, is a manual labourer on the island who, before meeting Verlia, suffers from sexual and economic exploitation. Like *At the Full and Change of the Moon* the novel is partly set in the Caribbean, on an unnamed island, but, according to the places and geographical landmarks mentioned in the novel it can be identified as Brand's native island Trinidad.²⁴⁸ Other parts of the novel are set in Canada, Verlia's adolescence in Sudbury, Ontario and Toronto, Elizete's search for Verlia's past in Toronto. The settings juxtapose urban and rural

²⁴⁶ Dionne Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*. Toronto: Grove Press, 1996, 189. All further references will be to this edition, page number indicated parenthetically. The title will be abbreviated as IAPNH.

²⁴⁷ Donna Bailey Nurse, “In Another Place, Not Here”, [Review originally published in *Maclean's*] in Donna Bailey Nurse, *What's a Black Critic to Do? Interviews, Profiles and Reviews of Black Writers*. Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2003, 159.

²⁴⁸ Greg A. Mullins, “Dionne Brand's Poetics of Recognition: Reframing Sexual Rights” in: *Callaloo* Vol. 30, No. 4 (Fall 2007) 1100-1109. Mullins contests that the island the novel is set on might be identified as a thinly fictionalized version of Grenada. The places mentioned in the novel actually contradict the assumption. He might have been led to this conclusion because Brand was politically involved in the revolution of Grenada in 1983.

areas, centre and periphery, as do the two protagonists. These binary oppositions are highly important for the construction of the novel's imagery. Both the Caribbean and the North American settings - periphery and centre – are linked by the characters' diasporic experiences. Nevertheless, not the places themselves, but the politics and social mechanisms practised there are of primary importance.

Belonging, memory, history and identity are central themes of the novel. Its characters are constantly struggling to relocate themselves within different environments and to adapt their language to their changed circumstances. Language defines them to the same extent that they have to define it. They use it to describe, renegotiate and make their environments their own. In the following I will discuss the characters's strategies to make sense of their lives and histories. The focus will be on the discursive function of the characters' perspectives which privilege two female points of view allowing for a wide variety of insights into the mechanisms governing social systems. Elizete's insights into Canadian life and institutions will be read in the context of an emerging awareness that multiculturalism has developed from political slogan to social reality. I will attempt a reading of the novel that highlights the different discourses which converge in it. Furthermore, a conclusive discussion of its politics via its poetics will be attempted. My main argument is that despite the apparently experimental use of narrative techniques and generic conventions, it contains an amount of reader guidance that makes it hard to misread its politics.

The narrative techniques Brand employs have led critics to compare her style with Faulkner and Woolf, stylistically placing the novel in the context of experimental modernism. Another critic – for advertisement reasons quoted on the back cover of the Grove Press paperback edition – judged the novel to be “a work of artistic boldness in both form and content. [Because Brand's] narrative elegantly shifts between points of view and intertwines deft, simple language with dense poetic prose.”²⁴⁹ *In Another Place, Not Here* features both a heterodiegetic and two homodiegetic narrators. The two homo- and intradiegetic narrators can be identified as Verlia and Elizete. With regard to Elizete, the passages which make use of this narrative perspective are, unlike the interior-monologue technique, descriptions of moments in time deliberately recollected by the narrator. Accordingly, the act of remembering and telling becomes a means of making sense of the past in order to come to terms with it. Verlia's narrative

²⁴⁹ The review apparently appeared in the Canadian women's magazine *Ms.* but it was not possible to locate it, therefore its authenticity cannot be confirmed.

voice contributes to the novel in a similar way; parts of the novel consist of entries from her diary. The diary is, unlike the rest of the narrative, in chronological order. The entries reflect her emotional situation and allow the narratees a glimpse into Verlia's conscious mind, her reflections and motives. Nevertheless, the use of those two similar but significantly different techniques stresses the different social and intellectual positions of the novel's two main characters. Elizete and Verlia use different regional dialects. Elizete uses Caribbean vernacular English; for Verlia's diary entries standard English is used. Additionally, her diary entries reveal her ability to position herself in a political and social system, to think abstractedly and reflect about her own motivation. While Elizete's storytelling is unmediated, the narratees only get an edited version of Verlia's thoughts and emotions. Verlia is an absent presence in the novel; absent as an unmediated narrative voice, made present as a character through Verlia's attempts to research her past. This is due to the fact that Elizete is the novel's main character. The novel is actually a Bildungsroman in disguise as her experiences are central to its politics. In the course of this chapter Elizete's experiences in Canada will be compared to her life in the Caribbean in order to show that the differences between first and second world are merely imaginary. The forms of abuse Elizete endures are extraordinary; focusing on these scene might therefore lay bare the novel's politics of gender and race. The third narrator is heterodiegetic and exists outside the characters' world. The heterodiegetic narrator provides insights into the characters' emotional world and lays bare their unconscious motivation. In keeping with the novel's two successors, this narrator functions as both structurally guiding and ethically questioning instance. It provides coherence through ethical and moral evaluation. Nevertheless, in *Another Place* it is more descriptive than openly political. The frequent shifts of point of view and the contrast between Caribbean English and North-American English stylistically contribute to the presentation of the novel's main theme, the "exploration of the political and psychological transit between the Caribbean and North America."²⁵⁰

The novel's approach is partly historical as it depicts the struggle for post-colonial nationhood on an island in the Caribbean by way of revolution. On the other hand it cannot be placed in a historical context as neither place nor time are specified. As mentioned before, this has already lead to unjustifiable speculations with regard to the historical context. As the novel deliberately evades specification, I would argue that those attempts are pointless. The novel is

²⁵⁰ Catherine Bush, "Anywhere but Here. A first novel examines the dissatisfaction of two women." in: *New York Times*, January 4, 1998. <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/01/04/reviews/980104.04busht.html> (accessed October 8, 2013)

not concerned with a particular historical context, it rather depicts the effects of decolonialization on individuals. The intricacies of nation-building processes are depicted on a very personal level as the conflict actually branches out on Elizete's and Verlia's relationship. The struggle against colonialism and its various aftermaths affects their lives differently. Elizete spent most of her life on an island whose economy is still governed by colonial principles. The plantation economy with its hierarchies is still the cornerstone of rural life. While Verlia – having grown up in Canada – only knows about the social mechanisms of colonialism in theory, Elizete has acquired an intimate knowledge of its realities. The ideology of violent anti-colonial resistance, originating with Fanon and Che Guevara, which has shaped Verlia's political consciousness, therefore has no effect on Elizete: “Revolution my ass. Let foolish old people believe she.” (IAPNH, 12). Both women are sometimes at odds with the other's position, but their love transcends those ideological differences. Both *In Another Place, Not Here* and *At the Full and Change of the Moon* mournfully depict the long-time repercussions of colonialism on post-colonial individuals and societies. While the latter has a linear, episodic structure, *In Another Place, Not Here* follows a non-linear narrative approach. It consists of different time levels which are often intertwined with each other by way of personal recollection. Time levels which lie beyond the characters' personal experiences are included by way of collective memory. This handing down of collective memory is practised as storytelling. These story-telling sessions are described like ritualistic practices, stressing the effacement of the narratee. Especially the founding myths, like Adela's story – which is of considerable importance for the narrative – is introduced in a depersonalized way: “She [Elizete] always stood facing the wall in the evening when the woman wanted to talk but did not want to acknowledge her presence as if acknowledging would be like loving [...]” (IAPNH, 32). In these passages Mirelda Josepha, Elizete's step-mother is not granted a name, she becomes a nameless woman. She can only provide fragments of the stories she intends to tell; the absences and gaps in the stories are painful for her. Stories of the past are handed down as stories of defeat. In the context of these founding myths, isolation, speechlessness and separation are the most important images. The story of Adela's abduction and relocation from Africa, due to its elusiveness, wields a captivating power on both her descendant, Mirelda Josepha, and Elizete. Despite Adela's reluctance to make herself familiar with her environment (including to name her children) her memory has not been completely obliterated by time, it has been preserved by her descendants. While the nameless woman has resigned to her fate: “She gone, yes, she leave we here to suffer.” (IAPNH, 33), Elizete develops a strategy to make the island her own, by creating names for the items and creatures she finds in her physical environment. In doing so, she attempts to finally overcome the

historical trauma of the middle passage. Nevertheless, in *Another Place*, the middle passage is not only a memory which has to be overcome, its political and socio-economic effects are still tangible in the environment the novel is set in. It made its characters homeless and, according to European concepts, nationless. Reclaiming their right to a nation by way of revolution is the obvious way out of this dilemma. In this case, violence is used as a corrective for the wrongs of history. In the following passages I will first discuss the novel's approach to history and its own place in the African-Canadian literary canon. Later on I will define the novel's politics and its contribution to the discourse on belonging in the context of the African diaspora and Brand's very own literary contributions to this discourse.

The novel starts in medias res with Elizete's description of an epiphany. Elizete remembers the moment when she fell in love with Verlia. In this emotionally charged recollection, Elizete mentally revisits the scene that made her change her life and question everything she ever took for granted. This epiphany is born out of a moment of despair; Elizete, after hours of hard manual work, is revisited by the feeling of being trapped in a life that is not worth living, a life that is not life but mere physical existence. This epiphany leads to a symbolic rebirth; Elizete in the moment of recognition, realizing what Verlia really means to her, severely injures herself with a cutlass, her "blood blooming in the stalks of cane [...]." Pain and liberation are close associates in this symbolical rebirth; the pain of abandoning and the liberation which lies in having abandoned everything. *In Another Place* is a story about liberation in two respects: it depicts the process of liberation from colonial power structures and Elizete's personal liberation from the patriarchal system which has been oppressing her all her life. In addition to the vagaries of economic exploitation she flees from the restrictions imposed on her by a man called Isaiah. Elizete was not only working for him, but has also been sexually exploited by him. As Catherine Bush wrote in her review of the novel: "For Elizete, Verlia becomes the catalyst who compels her out of her circumscribed existence."²⁵¹ By focusing on the homoerotic relationship between Verlia and Elizete, the novel thematizes sexual oppression in both patriarchal and heteronormative contexts. While escaping from an environment which has been perceived as normative and oppressive by Elizete constitutes an act of liberation for her, it shatters the gender expectations of her oppressor Isahia and drives him to social isolation and ultimately insanity. The "crisis in ontology experienced both at the level of society and

²⁵¹ Catherine Bush, "Anywhere but Here. A first novel examines the dissatisfaction of two women." in: *New York Times*, January 4, 1998.

language”²⁵², Judith Butler associated with the process of accepting one's queerness, does not bear on Elizete, but, perhaps in an attempt at poetic justice, on Josiah. The novel therefore reveals the pervasive social power of gender constructions and their contribution to social and personal identities. Josiah's sense of self is shattered by by Elizete's mono-lateral redefinition of their relationship:

Isahia gone mad catching me lying underneath Verlia, and even the sure killing in him couldn't sweep me away from the sweetness of her. [...] I never see him after that. They say he sit under a fishing net in Las Cuevas and he talk to himself, they say he don't remember me but call out the name of the Venezuelan woman first was his wife [...]. (IAPNH, 5)

Josiah is apparently suffering from amnesia and loss of orientation, all resulting from the experience of his loss of power. Josiah's breakdown here symbolizes the decline of patriarchal power and the re-definition of social structures. Obviously the name was a deliberate choice as the biblical and historical Josiah was responsible for the codification of laws and the enforcement of monotheistic principles. Nevertheless, while Elizete leaves Josiah for Verlia thereby abandoning her entire previous social existence, she does not accept her expertise and authority in political questions. Paradoxically, she rejects Verlia's talk about the revolution for the same sexist principles and misogynist and racist ideas which had formerly formed the basis of her social marginalization: “It don't matter what women say in this world, take it from me. [...] I hear something about cooperative. Black people could ever cooperate?” (IAPNH, 13). Like many of Brand's characters, Elizete's own attitudes and thoughts are rooted in the persisting ideology of colonialism. Her thinking is based on the colonial stock phrase that black people are not ready for economic and political independence. As becomes clear later, Elizete recapitulates these sexist and racist stock phrases because she is convinced that this system cannot be changed because it is controlled by powers that lie beyond human control. She deems Verlia's political ideas to be utterly utopian; a contradiction to common sense because the powers that be cannot be overthrown. Elizete and the plantation economy she is part of represent what Frantz Fanon perceived as the “organized petrification of the peasantry. [...] rural masses [that] still live in a feudal state whose overbearingly medieval structure is nurtured by the colonial administrators and the army.”²⁵³ Despite having accomplished political independence, Elizete and the other workers on the plantation are not free. They are still bound by the same conventions and

²⁵² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*. London & New York: Routledge, 1999, ix.

²⁵³ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 2004 [1961], 65.

economic restrictions their ancestors, as slaves, had suffered from. In the case of Elizete and the other women on the plantation slavery has been replaced by a network of traditional obligations that binds them to their male life-partners. This patriarchal system is not only condoned by the estate owners, but they actively support it.

Additionally, the novel retraces the development of Verlia's political activism and depicts her motivation and her political position through Elizete's eyes. After Elizete witnessed Verlia being shot at while jumping off a cliff, she decides to travel to Toronto to find out about Verlia's past. In Toronto she does not only discover Verlia's past, but comes to experience and learn about North-American social life. Elizete therefore overcomes the topographic division upon which the construction of binary oppositions in narratives is founded.²⁵⁴ Both Elizete and Verlia constantly transgress the boundaries between first and second world, disrupting the notion that those environments exist in opposition to each other. This division “into sinful and just countries” that according to Juri Lotman lies at the heart of these antithetical constructions, is broken up in *In Another Place, Not Here*.²⁵⁵ As I will show later on this deconstruction of oppositions is part of the novel's politics. Sometimes these insights are rather dire. Both Elizete's and Verlia's experiences lay bare the intrinsically racist nature of Canadian society and its institutions. Verlia is an in-/outsider due to her race, Elizete on the other hand remains outside Canadian society, even outside her own ethnic group. While Elizete is able to abandon her life of physical and economic dependence in the Caribbean, she is not able to free herself from sexual and mental exploitation in Canada:

A man you don't know bends you against a wall, a wall in a room, your room. He says this is the procedure, he says you have no rights here, he says I can make it easier for you if I want you could get sent back. His dick searches your womb. He says you girls are all the same, whores, sluts, you'll do anything. His dick is a machete, a knife all the sharp things found on a kitchen table, all the killing things found in a tool shed. He says don't think about moving, I can find you. He shakes the blood off his knife and leaves. This time they searched her skin, this time they found nothing and took it, too. Elizete flat against the immense white wall, the continent. (IAPNH, 89)

²⁵⁴ Erhard Reckwitz, “The Forbidden Fruit: sex across the color bar as a transgressive act in South African fiction.” in: Rüdiger Ahrens, María Herrera-Sobek, Karin Ikas and Francisco A. Lomelí (eds.), *Violence and Transgression in World Minority Literatures*. Heidelberg: Winter, 2005, 263-83 [264].

²⁵⁵ Jurij M. Lotman, *Die Struktur literarischer Texte* (translated from the Russian original by Rolf-Dietrich Keil). München: Fink, 1972, 338.

In the Caribbean she was confined by ossified patriarchal structures, assigning a gendered position in the social hierarchy to her; in Canada she becomes the object of institutionalized racism and misogyny. The difference between both countries is that in Canada she feels even more helpless. In both countries Elizete experiences racialized and gendered violence. She is forced to the margins of society, unable to claim their right of physical and mental integrity. In these passages the narrator shifts the focus from Elizete to the narratees, including them in this depiction of sexual violence, stressing the arbitrary nature of this assault. By including the narratees, speaking to them and including them into the scene by using the pronoun 'you', the narrator blurs the boundary between fiction and experienced reality. The depiction of Elizete's experiences almost transcends the representational, seeking "a generalized connection with the real world."²⁵⁶ Compared to the introductory chapters of the novel, which are narrated by Elizete, in this passage we have a narrative voice which alternates in focus and tone. Its ambiguity originates from the personal form of address. The narrator speaks both to Elizete and to her narratees, including the latter into the scene previously described. In contrast to Kellogg and Scholes' thesis that the "illustrative connection between fiction and reality" is established by means of "generalizing [the] subject", the fictional character is endowed with an individual personality. Elizete is not a "generalized type", but she is depicted as a human being who reacts to depersonalizing sexual and racial harassment. Nevertheless, instead of granting agency to Elizete, the narrator politicises the passage by contextualizing it with larger social issues. The individualization of Elizete and the depiction of her traumatic experiences as an illegal immigrant are only means to an end. Clichés and stereotypes are exploited for their effect. The aggressor in this passage does not have a face, he is simply a representative of Canadian/North American societies, symbolically depicted as an "immense white wall", and the institutionalized forms of oppression keeping it intact. In defiance of narrative conventions, the antagonism of victim and perpetrator is not based on a binary opposition between both parties, but a blank has been left where usually one would have expected to find whatever items of information are needed to coherently construe this opposition. Despite being granted agency, the perpetrator does not say anything that goes beyond attempting to intimidate Elizete. By not giving details about the perpetrator's racial and ethnic background, not making him ostensibly white, the passage cannot be read as merely another of those stories where postcolonial race relationships turn out to be neo-colonial in nature. The only emotional response of the perpetrator is the stereotypical shifting of guilt from him to his victim.²⁵⁷ Therefore he takes recourse to the stereotypical

²⁵⁶ Kellogg & Scholes, 87.

²⁵⁷ Maud Ellmann finds examples for this shift of blame from perpetrator to victim in both Richard Wright's *Native*

equation of blackness with uninhibited sexuality.²⁵⁸ The narrative is both symbolical and highly personalized. This passage is one among many which emotionally manipulate the narratees. The symbolism used in this passage is striking, a recurring image is the white wall Elizete is pushed against, representing both a physical wall and Canadian society. Another striking image is the analogy used to portray the rape scene, which entirely relies on the metaphorical substitution of the perpetrator's penis with various knives, among them a machete, stressing the physical aspect of this act of violence. In her Caribbean environment Elizete's self-injury with a machete proceeded the epiphany which made her challenge the institutions which infringed on her personal liberty. In Canada she cannot do the same, she is entirely subjected. The highly subjective nature of Elizete's experiences finds reflection in the narrator's description of her thoughts and impressions. Nevertheless, in this passage she is not granted agency of her own. Additionally, the novel portrays a divided society where those in power abuse and debase those they regard as beneath them:

The immigration consultants were another story again. Money. And the immigration officers, well they dealt in flesh strictly. So suspicion had a lodging place for good in all the houses on Palmerston²⁵⁹ and the mazes of roads ending in wood. (IAPNH, 59)

The personification of suspicion, as used in this passage, stresses the commodification of the immigrant through the representatives of state authority. It describes a society in which human beings are exploited by the hand of those who should protect them. In contrast to the island Elizete exchanged for Canada, social order is not based only on the simple division between plantation owner and worker, but is infinitely more complex and unregulated. Nevertheless, the key incentives for all action are unmistakably money and social power. Also the immigrant imaginaries described in the novel are at first primarily based on the promise of a more rewarding life in terms of money and commodities, the experience of the real apparently has a curative effect:

And if anyone thought the glinty glamour of away, away sent back home in barrels and reeking of some place unscuffled, unmuddy, unrainy; if any of them thought this was why they came, diving

Son and E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. See: Maud Ellmann, "Rape, Race and Writing in Afro-American Women's Fiction." in: Rod Mengham (ed.), *An Introduction to Contemporary Fiction. International Writing Since 1970*. Cambridge: Polity Press/Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999, 32-52 [42].

²⁵⁸ Reckwitz, "The Forbidden Fruit", 265.

²⁵⁹ Most likely Palmerston Avenue in Toronto, located in the municipality of Trinity Bellwoods.

into the gluttony of Honest Ed's²⁶⁰ would set them straight after a while but maybe not, because for some it was better than the places they had been, more money. (IAPNH, 59)

The ambiguities of consumer culture are projected on Toronto's most famous department store, Honest Ed's. While for some it symbolizes the fulfilment of their wishes, some perceive the lack of substance, the fleetingness that goes along with this form of culture. Honest Ed's provides almost everything, but it cannot provide a home. This passage antedates further engagements by Brand with the idea that corporate capital and its symbols are shaping modern imaginaries, which will be discussed in the context of her 2005 novel *What We All Long For*.²⁶¹ The following passages will deal with the different ideas of identification and belonging thematized in *In Another Place, Not Here*.

6.1.1 Belonging and Identity in *In Another Place, Not Here*

In comparison to Clarke's version of home and belonging thematized in *Whylah Falls*, Dionne Brand's writing offers contrasting insights and attitudes towards identity-defining aspects like belonging, identification and ideas of home. In Brand's first two novels, the (post)memory of slavery is a vital aspect of the character's lives as it still defines their personal identity and their attitude towards belonging. Instead of localizing the experiences of black people within regional and national imaginaries – an idea central to George Elliott Clarke's fiction – Brand avoids positioning her work within those discourses. In her autobiography *A Map to the Door of No Return* she introduces the concept of “the door of no return” as a term that designates both a topographical and a historical site which separates new-world-African people from their history. In the context of Paul Gilroy's concept of the “black Atlantic”, Dionne Brand's term stresses the loss of history and culture inflicted on African people through their enforced re-location. *In Another Place, Not Here* predates this concept by almost a decade; nevertheless, it engages with the same set of problems Brand describes in her later writings. Structurally, *In Another Place, Not Here*, in contrast to its two successors, is based on fragmentation in both temporal and spatial dimensions of the narrative. Nevertheless, fragmentation is not only a key element of its

²⁶⁰ Honest Ed's is a discount store located on the corner of Bloor and Bathurst Streets in Toronto. It was founded in 1948 by Ed Mirvish. It has become famous for its colourfully lit exterior and its advertising campaigns. It has served as a setting for a number of TV and film productions, including the 1996 action movie, *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, starring Geena Davis and Samuel L Jackson.

²⁶¹ Donna Bailey Nurse, *What's a Black Critic to Do?*, 71.

structure, but also the memories and histories of its characters exist only in fragments. This fragmentary nature of memories exacerbates the discursive construction of a usable and coherent past and therefore problematizes the characters' sense of belonging. These motifs are of vital importance for the novel's politics. The lack of coherence of the characters' past and present and their sense of belonging, especially with regard to Elizete, has its roots in the experience of the middle passage. Slavery and its history therefore serves as a hidden, but still present historical backdrop upon which contemporary characters have to act and which still shapes their sense of self:

They had been taken. Plain. Hard. Rough. Swept up from thinking of the corn to be shucked, the rains coming or no rain coming at all for the season that patch of high grass to clear. The mist gathering at their feet. The steam of baking. Poised over a well, the bag lowered, they had been plucked, or caught in the misfortune of a wedding or a war, sold. (IAPNH, 41)

This passage contains an essentialized description of a prelapsarian rural African past; its fragmentized presentation creates the notion that the “status quo ante” is no longer important as there has been no return. The juxtaposition of everyday thoughts with extraordinary disruptive events stresses the disruptive nature of the experience: the anonymous characters were ripped out of their living. The abrupt ending of this paragraph, a combination of an oxymoron and an asyndetic structure, stresses the immediacy of change people who were abducted to be enslaved experienced. It puts special emphasis on the commodification of human beings by ending on the word “sold.” The choice of words in this passage needs further consideration. “Sweeping”, “plucking”, “catching” and “selling” are terms usually associated with agriculture, hunting and economy. They convey the idea that the abduction of people was regarded as legitimate by those who practised it. The narrative voice's choice of words in conjunction with the structure of the narrative unites both the experiences of the victims as the justification of their victimizers, it is impartial and polyphonic. Brand's investigation of the “rebellious slave” as a black subject transcends the time frame of the novel. The novel does not only investigate the individual black subject's experience of slavery; it also engages with slavery as part of a collective identity.²⁶² More important for the narrative are the psychological effects of enslavement. The above quoted passage is only the prelude to the descriptions of diasporic existences the novel features. In the following I will focus on the effects of enforced exile on the individual described in the novel.

²⁶² Arleen R. Keizer, *Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2004, 9.

One problem of deracination Brand deals with is the refusal of individuals to identify with their new environment. Because, to quote Nilufer Bharucha, “Living in diaspora means living in forced or voluntary exile [which] usually leads to severe identity confusion and problems of identification with an alienation from the old and new cultures and homelands.”²⁶³ Naming, more explicitly the unwillingness to denominate aspects of this new and unknown environment, is the response to captivity of Adela, the great-great grandmother of Elizete’s adoptive mother, Mirelda Josepfena. Nevertheless, Adela's story in the novel allows for a distinction between two functions: in the collective memory of her community, she lives on as a person who commanded supernatural powers, yet her story also bears memory to the traumatizing effects of enslavement. Adela’s story, especially the parts concerned with her supposedly magical skills, stresses the importance of myth-making and -perpetuation for the collective memory of a community:

Every evening when she come home from the cocoa fields, as was cocoa they mind then, she make sure and pass the big house and she draw a circle in the ground and sprinkle one stone in it that was her eye and spit the man name, with blood from biting she mouth, into the centre. Rain or sun she do it for three years. And finally one day he drop dead on that very spot. They say she could work obeah, but she say it is not obeah what kill him... (IAPNH, 18)

While the community is keen to adopt this story as a confirmation of their collective power, Adela refrains from being instrumentalized. Nevertheless, the story is handed on until it forms part of their collective identity. This identity is founded on bitterness. The community's founding myth is tied up with Adela's rejection of life:

Yet after all she did not learn the grace of drying up her womb even after eight children. She spill and spill and she mothered not a one. She only see their face as bad luck and grudge them the milk from her breast. She eat paw seed to make them sick in her womb. The charm she tried to use each one was left half done in them so, till all of she generations have a way so that is right with them neither. [...] That was she inheritance. (IAPNH, 19)

The brutal abduction and subsequent enslavement Adela experienced lead to her refusal to become familiar with and identify with her new environment: Enslavement, sexual harassment and rape have been regular aspects of Adela’s life. Notwithstanding the enormous importance of

²⁶³ Nilufer Bharucha, “Real and Imagined Worlds: Salman Rushdie as a Writer of the Indian Diaspora.” In: Liselotte Glage, Rüdiger Kunow (eds.), *“The Decolonizing Pen”: Cultural Diversity and the Transnational Imaginary in Rushdie’s Fiction*. Trier 2001, 69-87 [70].

Adela's story, which perpetuates the experience of slavery, for the development of the novel's characters, the novel does not contain a coherent study of her character and motivation. To paraphrase Joseph Conrad: the rites of enslavement she experienced remain unspeakable. Only fragments of her life story have made it into the collective memory of her descendants, respectively the community they belong to. Brand's narrative is certainly not concerned with accurate historical facts; the only measure of time the readers are provided with is the three-generation gap between Adela's abduction and enslavement and Elizete's recollection of being told the story by her adoptive mother. Contrary to Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes*, the novel is neither an attempt to create a the coherent subjectivity of an enslaved person nor does it feature a character who acts as an agent between western concepts of history and personal experience. History, in the western sense of a description of "things as the really were", is a concept absent from the novel. It does not provide a coherent story assembled from the fragmented stories of the victims of the New World economy. This is in keeping with Edouard Glissant's critique of official (New World) historiography:

One of the most disturbing consequences of colonialization could well be this notion of a single history, and therefore of power, which has been imposed on others by the West. [...] The struggle against a single History for the cross-fertilization of histories means repossessing both a true sense of one's time and identity [...].²⁶⁴

By avoiding narrative chronology and coherence, the discourse of power inherent to Western historiography is implicitly problematized through the novel's emplotment strategy. Furthermore, fragmented stories about the past are handed down orally. Following Jan Assmann, the collective memories of groups and communities consist to a large extent of oral history.²⁶⁵ This form of social remembrance is essentially more selective than formal historiography. Additionally, it needs sites of memory which foster the preservation and cultivation of community's sense of identity:

The memory needs sites, it tends to spatialization. Community and space are entering a symbolic unity, to which the community adheres even when it is detached or separated from its area by symbolically reproducing its holy places.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1992, 93.

²⁶⁵ Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*. München 1993, 50-51.

²⁶⁶ Assmann, 39: "Das Gedächtnis braucht Orte, tendiert zur Verräumlichung. [...] Gruppe und Raum gehen eine symbolische Wesensgemeinschaft ein, an der die Gruppe auch festhält, wenn sie von ihrem Raum getrennt ist,

Applying Assmann's ideas to the historical experience of the middle passage, the dilemma becomes obvious: The first point is that individuals and not groups of people, as Assmann assumed, were detached from their homeland, and, secondly, that the detachment did not happen at will, but was enforced. The refusal to come to terms with the new environment which Brand describes with regard to Adela's experience of the middle passage is her only one possible response to enforced detachment, but this response leaves the burden of coming to terms with the past to the following generations. Consequentially, Elizete has to start from scratch and create a taxonomic system by making up names for plants, trees and animals with which she can classify and describe her environment: "I wonder what Adela would call this if it wasn't nowhere, pull and throw bush, make haste weed, jump up and kiss me flowers, waste of time plant [...]" (20). At first this has been a tentative attempt, but later Elizete determines that she cannot live like Adela and ignore her environment. She finds out that the only way to overcome the fear of living life according to her own terms is to overcome the historically determined reluctance to familiarize herself with her environment. Only after having accomplished this, the diaspora she never really experienced, which was handed down to her through time and history, can become memory:

Nothing barren here, Adela, in my eyes everything full of fullness, everything yielding, the milk of yams, dasheen and blue flesh. [...] Where you see nowhere I must see everything. Where you leave all that emptiness I must fill it up. [...] since then I make myself determine to love this and never to leave. (IAPNH, 24-25)

In this passage Elizete justifies her attempt to "develop [...] an effective identifying relationship between self and place."²⁶⁷ According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, the disruption of this relationship and its re-establishment is one of the primary concerns of postcolonial writing, symbolically attempted here by one of the novel's protagonists. Elizete's decision is not only an attempt to come to terms with the past and finally overcome the trauma of slavery, she also restores historical agency to herself and the generations to come. She is breaking out of the time loop the traumatizing experience of enslavement created generations ago. This process of restoration of agency contains three vital aspects: the emergence of a cultural and collective memory, the familiarization through naming with her immediate environment and the emergence of a sense of belonging. But Elizete can only reclaim her right to remember and to ground her

indem sie die heiligen Stätten symbolisch reproduziert."

²⁶⁷ Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 9.

memories to her immediate environment through Verlia's mediation:

That was Verlia's love, the people buried in the field. [...] Verlia would cry watching fields of cane or the stony remains of the sugar mills or the old *tamarind tree* which someone said was there since then. She understand their witness to this days and when she was standing in front of them she was standing in that same time. I see the body curve in pain at these moments, the spirits rush up to hold she in their ache. Under the tamarind tree where they say many get hang, I see she turn transparent and blue in the rain-damp dirt. She had sadness enough for all their sorrows She remembers them in she body. Vein does remember blood. The spirits call she and make display in she. You don't ever live for yourself there. (IAPNH, 84)

The tamarind tree, as in Brand's second novel *At the Full and Change of the Moon* serves as a site of memory, a repository where a history of cruelty, dehumanization and loss is infinitely stored. It is therefore not simply a site of memory, but a site that perpetuates the memory of fragmentation, disruption and deracination.²⁶⁸ The memories this site preserves and the visual images they evoke in Elizete are so very bleak that they impede her positive identification with the environment. Elizete is shown a site of memory, but the memories and the insight into history they provide will further complicate her life instead of relieving her of the burden of memory. She has to flee from the site in order to be free again. The dominance of the past, which has manifested itself in Verlia's obsession with political change, forces Elizete, who had tried to build “an effective identifying relationship between self and place”²⁶⁹, off the island. The novel's characters cannot come to terms with the history of slavery because it is still too present in the collective memory of their generation. Verlia will die while attempting to change the neo-colonial system. Elizete flees from the island in order to seek refuge from history in Canada. In the context of her research on the holocaust, Marianne Hirsch calls this part of the collective identity of a community in the process of coming to terms with traumatizing experiences “postmemory.” She defines postmemory as follows: “Postmemory characterizes the experiences of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that they can neither understand nor re-create.”²⁷⁰ The idea that New World African people are still

²⁶⁸ Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*. München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1999, 309.

²⁶⁹ Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 9

²⁷⁰ Marianne Hirsch, “Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy.” in: Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe and Leo Spitzer (eds.), *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1999, 3-23 [8].

exorcising the ghosts of slavery and colonialism was to be developed and brought to perfection in *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Elizete will leave the island and travel to Canada in order to retrace Verlia's life. Her status there is ambiguous; she certainly is an illegal immigrant, but her motivation to stay remains unclear. Having failed to come to terms with the past, she exchanges a site of identity that is tainted by the postmemory of slavery for her for uncertainty in a new diaspora. Elizete's relocation to Canada and the juxtaposition of Canadian and Caribbean environments it facilitates is a means to make the emotional and economical situation of migrants tangible. Especially, Elizete's emotional response to the denigration, exploitation and abuse she experiences in Canada, become, due to the drastic form of depiction, lessons in the failures of Canadian institutions. Instead of becoming a refugee from history, Elizete experiences a new form of physical and psychological victimization. For both Elizete and Verlia, Canada remains a no-man's-land that defies familiarization and positive identification:

If you live here long enough you notice that nothing ties people together because you notice people don't talk to perfect strangers on a bus going up Jane Street. It's not an old city. Nothing happened here. You can't look at the buildings and say ah! that's where... Things are made up.
(IAPNH, 65)

While Elizete felt oppressed by the sites of memory on her native island, which infringed on her development of both sense of self and a positive relationship with her physical environment, she deplores the absence of the past from Canada's physical environment. To her, Toronto has neither past nor present. The people and the city are shrouded in silence; its inhabitants are unable to establish personal relationships spontaneously, its physical environment holding neither myth nor story. To Elizete, positive identification with this environment is impossible:

[T]his place resisted knowing. When she tried calling it something the words would not come. [...] She would not come to know this place no matter how much she walked it, no matter if she set herself to knowing, she could not size it up. It resisted knowing, the words would not come.
(IAPNH, 69)

The lack of positive identification, not having access to Toronto's past and its present, its culture and people, problematizes the development of Elizete's sense of self. As Stuart Hall points out: "Identity is formed at the unstable point where the 'unspeakable' stories of subjectivity meet the

narratives of history, of a culture."²⁷¹ By not being granted access to those narratives of history, Elizete's subjectivity remains in stasis. She cannot form a hybrid space in which to negotiate her new diasporic identity; where Canada should provide her with narratives of its past and present she encounters only a blank. For Elizete, it is both the place itself and its institutionalized racism which denies her both positive identification with the physical environment and acceptance of their common humanity by the fellow human beings she encounters while for Verlia it is society's problematization of blackness. She feels both at the centre of, and marginalized by, social mechanisms:

In Sudbury²⁷² all of the people are white except for her aunt and her uncle. She feels aglare, a standing off, a glow around their bodies, her face burns in the grey light. [...] She feels out there, in the centre. (IAPNH, 137)

In Sudbury, if they [black people] conform to some part of the puzzle, they are convinced that they will be rewarded with acceptance. Ordinariness. Man, woman, husband, wife, couple, parents, Black. They are counting on the first six words. (IAPNH, 141)

Blackness is visible, but, by blending in, black people paradoxically seek to obliterate all traces of their blackness in order not to be perceived as black, to be accepted as Canadians. Neither their Caribbean home place nor Canada can set either Verlia's or Elizete's mind at rest. While the first continually confronts them with the past, a past which infringes on their present through the omnipresence of sites of memory and the postmemory that dominates their collective memory, the latter is a blank from whose present and past they feel continually excluded. In the next chapter I will describe how Brand develops those ideas in her second novel, *At the Full and Change of the Moon*.

²⁷¹ Stuart Hall, "Minimal Selves" in: L. Appignanesi (ed.), *Identity. The Real Me. Post-Modernism and the Question of Identity*, ICA Documents 6. London: ICA, 1987, 44.

²⁷² Sudbury is a city of 150,000 inhabitants in Ontario.

6.2 The Legacies of Empire: Anti-Modernisms in Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*

So far, Dionne Brand's 1999 novel *At the Full and Change of the Moon*²⁷³ has had a rather peculiar critical afterlife. It has been claimed by scholars in Caribbean, Canadian and inter-American studies as an exemplary text for the various critical approaches they advocate. In her recent essay on the tidal poetics of Brand's novel, Lucy Evans' main argument is founded on two assumptions: first, that Dionne Brand can be monopolized as an African-Caribbean writer and secondly, that her writing is basically concerned with Caribbean issues, especially with the “reformulation of existing conceptions of Caribbean communal identity.”²⁷⁴ Other scholars, such as Gabriele Pisarz-Ramirez, despite claiming that Brand's novel should be read “within an inter-American framework, an approach that questions existing hierarchies [...]” discuss it as an instance of Canadian national literature. Especially Pisarz-Ramirez leaves no doubt that she claims Brand as an African-Canadian writer whose work, especially *Moon*, confirms her thesis that “Blackness has possessed a specifically Canadian dimension since the 18th century.”²⁷⁵

In addition to their important contribution to a critical discussion of Brand's novel, these scholars have especially shown that while the categories of nation and nationality are still part and parcel of most critical approaches, they are almost irrelevant for Brand's fiction.²⁷⁶ None of these approaches take into consideration that most of Brand's work is not affirmatively concerned with abstract concepts such as nationality or national identity or that her texts often show a certain disdain towards frontiers, barriers and divisions.²⁷⁷ As mentioned before, I would

²⁷³ Dionne Brand, *At the Full and Change of the Moon*. New York: Grove Press, 1999. All further references will be to this edition, the page number will be indicated parenthetically and the title will be abbreviated as AFCM.

²⁷⁴ Lucy Evans, “Tidal Poetics in Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*.” in: *Caribbean Quarterly* Vol. 55, No. 3 (2009), 1-19 [1]. See also: Alexis Pauline Gumbs, “Dionne Brand: A Poetics of Diasporic Domestic Radicalism.” in: Michael Bucknor & Alison Donnell, *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*. London & New York, 2011, 3-10. Gumbs, while acknowledging that “Brand's work is transnational” and that her it has been analysed “across discourses of Caribbean, feminist, Marxist, diasporic, and queer theory”, nevertheless discusses her work within the framework of Caribbean studies.

²⁷⁵ Gabriele Pisarz-Ramirez, “African-Canadian Literature and the Americas.” in: Michael Steppat, *Americanisms: Discourses of Exception, Exclusion, Exchange*. Heidelberg: Winter, 2009, 286.

²⁷⁶ Timothy Brennan's assessment that “[t]he resilience of national-literature forms of organizing knowledge in terms of their own sub-specialities (again, in the daily press as much as in academia) has been stronger than is usually thought [...]” apparently is still appropriate. See: Timothy Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now*. Cambridge, Ma & London: Harvard UP, 1997, 313.

²⁷⁷ In this context I might have labelled the novel “postcolonial”, but I feel that the term, charged as it is, impedes my discussion of the novel rather than furthering it. As Elleke Boehmer remarks: “Another problem is that definitions of the postcolonial tend to assume that this category of writing is diametrically opposed to colonial literature. We are said to have on the one hand postcolonial subversion and plenitude, on the other, the single voiced authority of colonial writing. The main difficulty with a warring dichotomy such as this is the limitations it imposes, creating definitions which, no matter how focused on plurality, produce their own orthodoxy.” In:

rather suggest reading Brand's first two novels as fictional complementaries to Paul Gilroy's concept of the "black Atlantic", focusing on the global instead of the local.²⁷⁸ Accordingly, if need for a labelling of Brand's fiction arose, "cosmopolitan" would be most suitable as it challenges "conventional notions of belonging, identity and citizenship."²⁷⁹ With regard to this issue, Diana Brydon and Martha Dvořák point to the essential problem: "Certainly the creative sphere may both challenge and sustain national imaginaries, but to which extent is it tied to the national and to which extent does it form an autonomous global system?"²⁸⁰ Accordingly, does a text that in itself transgresses the boundaries of nations and continents contribute to the re-formulation of national imaginaries? By reading the novel as a response to the lasting effects of colonization, I will argue that it does. Contrary to colonial literature, which monopolized discourse, *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, by appropriating familiar western literary models like the family saga, creates a counter-narrative in which the frightening 'other' is the white colonizer's limited and limiting perspective.²⁸¹ Especially the novel's diachronic perspective and its different settings problematize the restrictions imposed on human beings in the name of abstract ideas and concepts which are depicted as arbitrary, futile and reversible. Passages of the novel problematize the ideals and objectives of western scientific rationalism. The novel especially focuses on the codification of space in mapping as a tool to dominate and control people and their movements in space. Contrary to Hill's *The Book of Negroes*, which highlights the function of illustrations on maps in colonialist' discourse as part of the discursive construction of the myth of terra nullius, the allegedly unclaimed, unpopulated and unoccupied space, the critique in *At the Full and Change of the Moon* is primarily concerned with their practical function to provide reliable information about the geography of an area. This becomes obvious in those passages of the novel which engage with a juxtaposition of the practice of mapping and the descriptive oral practice of the maroons (runaway slaves) depicted in the novel:

Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*. Oxford & New York: OUP, 1995,5.

²⁷⁸ Paul Gilroy, "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity." in: Kwesi Owusu (ed.), *Black British Culture and Society: A Text Reader*. London & New York: Routledge, 2000, 439-452 (441).

²⁷⁹ Stuart Hall enumerates this feature among the different approaches to the term he mentions. See: Stuart Hall, "Political Belonging in a world of Multiple Identities." Steven Vertovec & Robin Cohen, *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice*. Oxford & New York: OUP, 2002, 25.

²⁸⁰ Diana Brydon & Martha Dvořák, "Introduction: Negotiating Meaning in Changing Times." in: *Crosstalks: Canadian and Global Imaginaries in Dialogue*. Ed. Diana Brydon & Martha Dvořák. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfried Laurier University Press, 2012, 2.

²⁸¹ Boehmer makes clear that the globalization of the creative sphere had already been a feature of nineteenth-century colonial literature which, due to its monopolization of discourse, created a set of images and metaphors that were in use around the globe to describe different phenomena with the same terms. She points out that "the expanse of the Empire, because vast, heterogeneous, and confusing, encouraged the exchange of the dependable stock images between widely separate cultural and geographic spaces, blurring their differences." Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literatures*, 55.

Maps are such subjective things, borders move all the time. [...] A map, like the one on Hill's²⁸² desk, can only describe the will of estate owners and governors. Or perhaps their hopes. This map cannot note the great fluidity of maps, which is like the fluidity of air. Paper rarely contains – even its latitudinal and longitudinal lines gesture continuations. Paper does not halt land any more than it can halt thoughts. [...] A map does not contain the dispositions and reflections that collect at a harbour, or what those people will do on arrival, which is to work out the way to Maroonages, the way to rebellion, or for that matter, the ways to docility. [...] This is what Kamena told her and this is what she marked down in her head. Bola imagines the reaches of an island, gathered from this fisherman and that runaway [...] (AFCM, 52)

This passage implicitly engages with the failure of colonialism. What Edward Said described as “imaginative geography” was part of othering processes, stressing “the distance between what is close [...] and what is far away.”²⁸³ Dividing the world into sectors and parts – colonialism's great project – is described as futile. The location of sites, the retracing of travel routes and unguided meandering through uncharted landscapes are topics related to the act of mapping taken up in the novel. The power this practice apparently grants to those who bring it to perfection is an illusion, because even land is not a reliable constant that can be kept in check. This notion counters the idea that those who have the means to grasp a territory's geographical peculiarities are actually entitled to rule and exploit it. Mapping as a codification of spatiality is a practice closely associated with colonialism, and, consequently, western modernity.²⁸⁴ This critique of the practices of Western modernity finds its literary equivalent in the novel's use of magic realism²⁸⁵, a “fictional technique that allows disassociation of the authors from their socioeconomic and ethnic background.”²⁸⁶ It therefore facilitates the novel's most important

²⁸² Sir George Fitzgerald Hill was governor of Trinidad and Tobago from 1833 until his death in 1839. See: <http://www.nalis.gov.tt/Research/SubjectGuide/GovernorsofTrinidadandTobago/GovernorsofTrinidadandTobago/18041839/tabid/279/Default.aspx?PageContentID=456>, accessed 11/20/2013.

²⁸³ Edward Said, *Orientalism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995 [1978], 55. Neumann introduces Said's concept of “imaginative geography” without considering its function within Said's conceptualization of colonialism as a stage in establishing racial and cultural oppositions. See: Birgit Neumann, “Migration, Space and Identity in Contemporary Anglo-Canadian Novels.” in: Maria Löschnigg & Martin Löschnigg (eds.), *Migration and Fiction: Narratives of Migration in Contemporary Canadian Literature*. Heidelberg: Winter, 2009, 91-110 [94].

²⁸⁴ Cf. Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*. London: Allen Lane/Penguin, 171. “As early as the 1770s, the East India Company had grasped the importance of cartography [...] the army with the more accurate maps had a crucial advantage.”

²⁸⁵ Diana Brydon argued that postcolonial gothic would be a more appropriate term to address “the problematics of slavery and its legacy” as it does not convey the notion of exoticism she claims is commonly associated with magic realism. Nevertheless, I would argue that both terms are ideologically and emotionally charged, therefore I will use the latter in this chapter. See: Diana Brydon, “Postcolonial Gothic: Ghosts, Iron and Salt in Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*.” in: Zbigniew Bialas & Krzysztof Kowalczyk-Tawarowski (eds.), *Ebony, Ivory & Tea*. Katowice: Silesia University Press, 2004, 211-227 [222].

²⁸⁶ Theo L. D'haen, “Magic Realism and Postmodernism.” in: Zamora & Faris (eds.), *Magical Realism: Theory History Community*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1995, 191-209. D'haen points out that magic realism can either be a “ruse to invade and take over dominant discourse(s)” or “a means for writers

project: providing a counter-discourse to western modernity and its advocates, the “homines economici.”²⁸⁷, confirming Chambers' claim “that there is a growing hesitancy in pretending to offer a rationalist synthesis of the voices and forces released in the post-colonial world [...]”²⁸⁸ Additionally, the novel carefully re-negotiates the stories of origin and arrival, two intrinsic features of diasporic writing.²⁸⁹

In this chapter I will discuss these features of the novel in the context of the coming of age of the second generation of Caribbean-Canadian writers during the late 1990s and its contribution to the discursive renegotiation of Canadian identity.²⁹⁰ Most of the novel does not directly engage with Canada, but it engages with an entity that was of crucial importance to the Caribbean region as well as to Canada: the British Empire. Accordingly, I will show how Brand's fiction explores and depicts globalization processes and the coming to terms with the history of the British Empire. In spite of its spatial and temporal scope, the novel can be classified as a neo-slave narrative because it engages with the long-time repercussions of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Like Hill's *Book of Negroes*, the novel transgresses national boundaries, redefines gender roles and historical perspectives.

Divided into eleven chapters, *At the Full and Change of the Moon* covers 180 years, or six generations, beginning with Marie Ursule, abducted from Africa, enslaved and becoming founder of the dynasty the novel depicts. It a dynasty of outcasts, violently enslaved and uprooted from their native land who, during these six generations, spread throughout the Americas and Europe. Symbolically, the characters of the novel, by coming to live in Europe, form a counter-movement to the imperial sense of mission that disseminated English culture and

coming from the privileged centers of literature to disassociate themselves from their own discourses of power, and to speak on behalf of the ex-centric and un-privileged.” (195, italics in the original)

²⁸⁷ Characters that illustrate the idea of the homo economicus, especially his reliance on science and progress and his craving for material riches, abound in western fiction. Ian Watt was the first to introduce this term to literary studies. See: Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel. Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. London: Hogarth Press, 1957. Especially his chapter on Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (60-93) deals with the emergence of this particular type in English fiction.

²⁸⁸ Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*. London & Newyork: Routledge, 1994, 69.

²⁸⁹ Michelle Gadpaille, “In Exchange for a String of Islands': A Meditation on Diasporic Caribbean Writing in Canada.” in: Maria Löschnigg & Martin Löschnigg (eds.), *Migration and Fiction: Narratives of Migration in Contemporary Canadian Literature*. Heidelberg: Winter, 2009, 161-170 [162].

²⁹⁰ Cyril Dabydeen, “Places We come From: Voices of Caribbean Canadian Writers (in English) and Multicultural Contexts. In: *World Literature Today*, Vol. 73.2 (1999), 231-237. In 1999 Dabydeen argued that Canadian literature had finally come of age especially “in terms of the latter's flexibility and capacity to be all-embracing , without undermining Canada's identity [...]” She regards this flexibility as rooted in the nation's history, especially in its “triangular foundation' of First Nations Peoples and English and French Canadian heritages.” (231)

language across the world: they are the empire talking back, using the broken English that was forced upon them.²⁹¹ The novel resonates with Gilroy's idea of “the black Atlantic”, and enacts its theoretical concepts and approaches in a narrative focusing on the problems the extended diasporic family it depicts has to face. While some of the characters gravitate towards the (former) centres of imperial power like Amsterdam and London, others flee from them. Nevertheless, they form a global network of beings whose diasporic existences have been linked and shaped through European capitalism and its reliance on human trafficking and forced labour.²⁹²

The novel simultaneously follows four organizing principles: the interrelated time-line structure of the extended family of Marie Ursule's descendants, the genealogical chart that links each character, the tidal metaphors that symbolize the rhythmical but nevertheless arbitrary flux of diasporic existences, and the often related circular imagery of decline and decomposition. Those organizing principles, especially the contradictory nature of the first two, stress the cultural ambivalence the novel engages with. The idea of the interrelated time-line structure applies best to a synchronic, a chapter-focused reading of the novel highlighting the interrelatedness of each central character with his antecedents and their actions. Nevertheless, the novel follows a chronology that rests on the genealogical chart which can be found prefixed to the narrative. This results in a certain arbitrariness; each of the chapters could be read separately, but for some of them the events described in the first chapter are of crucial importance, the echo of those events permeates the rest of the narrative. In this chapter Marie Ursule and her daughter Bola are introduced. Told by a heterodiegetic narrator, focalizing at first through Marie Ursule, then shifting to Bola and Kamena, Marie Ursule's life partner. In this chapter the readers are provided with Marie Ursule's life story in retrospect. The novel starts in *medias res*; Marie Ursule – a slave on a Trinidadian plantation tellingly called “Mon Chagrin”, my sorrow – is introduced on the morning that the slaves have agreed on for their collective suicide.

²⁹¹ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literatures*, 7. Boehmer argues that the dissemination of European influences through imperialism brought “vastly different cultures into close proximity”, resulting in a continuous mixing and mingling of cultures that “permanently transformed the English literary canon.”

²⁹² Maria and Martin Löschnigg have reiterated the argument that migration and mobility in any form are paradigms of modernity which are “most tangible form in modern cities, where everybody becomes a nomad in a world which is multiple in itself, and where the diversity of spaces needs to be integrated into a meaningful whole.” Additionally, they point out that “plurality [through migration] [...] can be most readily perceived in contemporary Canadian literature, and it is underlined by the importance of migration narratives in that literature.” in: “Introduction.” Löschnigg & Löschnigg, *Migration and Fiction: Narratives of Migration in Contemporary Canadian Literature*. Heidelberg: Winter, 2009, 10-11.

The first chapter is basically organized as a series of flashbacks. These flashbacks not only serve to tell Marie Ursule's life story; the readers are also introduced to the intricacies of colonial Trinidad and the racialization of society exemplified by the self-denial of the plantation owner's wife, who refuses to go outside as "one good sitting in the sun and the African in her would come out." (AFCM, 13). Like in its predecessor, *In Another Place, Not Here*, issues such as home and belonging are important. Apparently, the whole population of Trinidad is more or less displaced and uprooted; except for the declining indigenous population the island is a home place to none:

[N]o one truly belongs here except the Arawak close to extinction and the Carib retreating into denser interiors down the South American main. The rest are cargoes of human beings without a recognizable landscape, whether they are slave or masters. (AFCM, 36)

In this passage, dislocation and estrangement are described as side-effects of colonization. Neither the white colonizers nor their black slaves can call the island their own. This echoes Derek Walcott's assessment, answering St.-John Perse's call "Et c'est l'heure, O Poète, de décliner ton nom, ta naissance, et ta race..." that "We were all strangers here [the Caribbean]." ²⁹³ Similar assessments are to be found in a number of different post-colonial regions. In the context of this study Margaret Atwood's statement, "we [Canadians] are all immigrants to this place even if we were born here" seems to be most poignant. ²⁹⁴ As in Walcott's engagement with belonging, the novel problematizes the localization of origins and individual and communal histories. Not only has the indigenous population been uprooted and estranged, but also those who took their land and forced them to leave are simply "human cargo", a term that can be grouped among the nautical and aquatic metaphors which are frequently used stylistic devices in novel. In general, the natural flux of the sea is the novel's key metaphor. The sea is a symbol of the natural and social forces that determine the protagonists' lives. Nevertheless, as Evans points out, the "[a]quatic imagery which pervades Brand's work is always a site of ambivalence. [...] In Brand's writing the figurative function of the sea, like the ocean itself, is unstable and shifting; it appears to offer now a source of, now a threat to, collective identity." ²⁹⁵ In addition to being a repository for memories, a source of collective identity, the sea, contrary to most other neo-slave novels ²⁹⁶,

²⁹³ Derek Walcott, *What the Twilight Says: Essays*. London: Faber & Faber, 1998, 10.

²⁹⁴ Margaret Atwood, "Afterword" to *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*. Toronto: OUP, 1970, 62.

²⁹⁵ Lucy Evans, "Tidal Poetics in Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*." in: *Caribbean Quarterly* Vol. 55, No. 3, (September 2009), 1-19 [2].

²⁹⁶ Lars Eckstein, appropriating Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic, read it as "a unique metaphor evoking the formative experience of the Atlantic slave trade, a metaphor charged with the fate of millions who suffered and

holds the promise of freedom from the oppressive memories of slavery for Marie Ursule's daughter Bola. Bola's return to nature, her close communion with the sea, is basically new-found lust for life. She is the exact counterpart to her mother, whose memories of past injuries developed into an obsession with revenge that finally led to her execution by the white authorities. Bola, on the other hand, is self-centred and forgetful. Her existence is circular, determined by nature, especially the tides, her whims and mere contingency. In her character vital aspects of the *négritude* movement, “which claimed that the very incapacity for rationalism and abstract thought endowed the African with a naturalness and emotional purity that constituted superiority of a sort”²⁹⁷ are personified. Nevertheless, Bola is not a celebration of those traits; her close communion with nature problematizes all forms of social interaction, be it with her children, their fathers, or the community of former slaves that forms around her. It is not “emotional purity” that we find in her, but a human being in the state of *angstblüte*: “and the loneliness of life with Kamena ended, she craved everything. Like some endangered tree she bloomed, devoured, fell into all her senses.” (AFCM, 295)

While the narratees are introduced to Marie Ursule's story and Marie Ursule's and Bola's characters are being developed, the scheduled mass suicide is drawing nearer. Right from the start it is clear that Marie Ursule is not only a tag-along, but that she has been planning this last act of defiance for more than two years and is determined to see it through. Nevertheless, Marie Ursule's character is not fully developed; vital information about her background is not given and her history is indeterminate for the readers. She echoes Brand's concept of the diaspora described as the “Door to No Return” as “the creation place of Blacks in the New world diaspora at the same time that it signified the end of traceable beginnings.”²⁹⁸ While no information about Marie Ursule's origin is given, we know that she had at least three different masters and it is implied that she previously fought against her commodification. The bits and pieces revealed about her past are basically concerned with her motivation to plan, facilitate and execute the mass suicide of the slaves who belonged to the “Sans Peur Regiment” (literally translated: the regiment of the fearless) during a fictitious failed slave rebellion that rattled the island some years before the setting of this part of the novel. By and by, the readers are informed that Marie Ursule and the

lost their lives before, on and after the countless crossings between the continents.” Lars Eckstein, *Remembering the Black Atlantic*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2006, x.

²⁹⁷ Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Afrocentrism: The Roots of African American Popular History*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998, 19-22. According to Moses, the *négritude* movement basically consisted of a positive re-valorization of western stereotypes and mythologies. In the western hemisphere, the “essentially racialist characterization of the Negro” had been forming since the Renaissance.

²⁹⁸ Brand, *The Map to the Door of No Return*, 5.

others had been severely punished for taking part in this failed slave insurrection. Marie Ursule, in particular, had been punished with 39 lashes and a chain and ten-pound ball which she had to carry for two years. Despite the fact that those had already been removed, the “the memory of that ring of iron hung on, even if it was removed. A ghost of pain around her ankle.” (AFCM, 4).

Mass suicides are not unusual in the history of American slavery. Nevertheless, those final acts of defiance can only be properly understood in relation to late eighteenth and early-nineteenth century discourse. The novel starts on Trinidad, where on Christmas Day 1823 the final morning of the Sans Peur Regiment is dawning. The historical background to this fictitious movement is the first and only successful slave insurrection on Haiti in the wake of the French Revolution. After 1790, the revolutionary movement, inspired by the Haitian Revolution and its key advocate Touissant L'Ouverture, took hold on many Caribbean islands. In 1805 about 500 Trinidadian slaves attempted to (re-)claim their freedom. Brand's blueprint for the novel's first protagonist, Marie Ursule, was borrowed from Naipaul's *The Loss of Eldorado: A History*, which contains the story of a certain “Thisbe who in 1802 was hanged, mutilated and burned, her head spiked on a pole, for the mass deaths by poisoning on an estate.” (AFCM, 301). In the novel Marie Ursule was among the instigators of a failed slave rebellion: “Marie Ursule, queen of the Convoi Sans Peur; queen of rebels; queen of evenings, queen of malingerings and sabotages, queen of ruin, who had lost an ear and been shackled to a ten-pound iron for two years after the rebellion of 1819 had been betrayed [...]” (AFCM, 5). The novel shifts between historical accuracy and deliberate lack of authenticity. Like Hill's *Book of Negroes* it uses historical characters, setting and atmosphere as a foil to re-enact the past, focusing not on the past as it has been, but on its moral message. As Mark Carnes points out: “Novelists [in contrast to historians] explore the subjective realm of the self that, though moulded by the social and cultural pressures of their own place and time, acquires suppleness through immersion in a deep literary tradition.”²⁹⁹ Novelists make the past tangible for their contemporaries, using the merger of literature and history as a means to focus on its emotional dimension.

Marie Ursule is a character who, despite her victim status, is morally ambiguous. Western culture has a tendency to regard “victims of oppression [as] morally superior to those who oppress them.”³⁰⁰ This idealization has most effectively been employed by Harriet Beecher

²⁹⁹ Mark C. Carnes, “Introduction” in: Carnes, *Novel History: Historians and Novelists Confront America's Past and Each Other*. New York et.al.: Simon & Schuster, 2001, 13-25 [24].

³⁰⁰ Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Afrocentrism*, 27. Moses argues that this view originates with the Greek tradition of “*pathemathos*”, in which suffering was regarded as “a source of knowledge.”

Stowe in her epochal novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.³⁰¹ In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* the final crisis is brought about through the juxtaposition of evil victimizer and noble victim. Tom, the novel's protagonist, is the epitome of Christian ideals who accepts his fate as God-given, not considering rebellion as an option. His antagonist Simon Legree is a demonic slave-holder, mercilessly exploiting and degrading his slaves. This binary opposition does not feature in *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, victim and victimizer are both human beings confined by a social system. While Beecher Stowe's novel was regarded as progressive during the nineteenth century, it became a negative foil in twentieth-century African American culture due to its essentialist and sentimental representation of African Americans. Since the heyday of the Harlem Renaissance, the novel's eponymous character has become a well deconstructed stereotype in African American and New World African literature. Moreover, Brand's Marie Ursule is an anti-Uncle Tom; non-religious, unforgiving and focused on revenge. It is Marie Ursule's "singleness of intention" to take revenge on the system by turning it upside down, which lays bare the insight into the psychology of slavery the novel is based on. The reversal of roles, or a change of perspective, is a common literary means³⁰² to unhinge cultural stereotypes and lay bare the structures and codes that govern social systems like slavery. By embracing violence she changes her status from morally superior victim, to that of a morally questionable agent of revenge, acting on behalf of a community which chooses death before slavery. There are two aspects of her behaviour which are morally questionable: the mass suicide she facilitates signals an acceptance of their commodification – they punish the slaveholder by taking away the only thing he values about them: their working power. The second aspect that problematizes this character is her almost pathological focus on revenge, making her discard any sense of natural self-preservation. Accordingly, her descendants, in their attitude towards her character and her deed, oscillate between admiration and fear as we will see in the course of this chapter.

Brand's engagement with slavery is similar to Morrison's approach in *Beloved* in so far as the novel focuses on family structures and a strong mother-daughter relationship. Nevertheless, *Moon* is more like a complement to Morrison's story because instead of freeing her daughter Bola from the shackles of slavery by poisoning her like the rest of the Sans Peur Regiment, she

³⁰¹ See: Wendy Wagner, "Harriet Beecher Stowe." in: Andrews, Smith, Foster & Harris (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*. New York & Oxford: OUP, 1997, 304-5.

³⁰² These inversions are part of the project of the postcolonial "interrogation of European traditions." This project often allows a decided shift of focus, either foregrounding the actions of characters who had no agency of their own like in Jean Rhys' *Wide Saragossa Sea*, or J.M. Cotzee' *Foe* or the various adaptations of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in which the focus has been shifted from the protagonist, often the colonizer, to a previously silenced colonized. See: Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, 173.

has her taken away by Kamena. The act of freeing Bola and having her taken “beyond the reach of Lambert and his like, [...] was her one conceit now, her one little ambition.” (AFCM, 6). Having her taken away, “[S]he'd sent whatever wasn't spoiled, with no hope of gratitude or remembrance. If her descendants might emerge, sore and disturbed, in another century - well, it reflected only a moment in her mind, a little passion which she indulged herself in, and Bola would add the rest, all beginnings, all catastrophes, like lust.” (AFCM, 22). In the novel, Marie Ursule's story functions as a myth of origin tainted by a history of violence. While Marie Ursule is one of the martyr figures so important to African-Canadian literature, Bola is a messianic figure, a symbol of a new beginning. Bola – the uncorrupted child of nature – living in close communion with nature, and, especially the sea, will be the origin of the dynasty of displaced persons the novel depicts, being, unwittingly, a living memento to the history of slavery. The name Bola – of Yoruban origin – implies a continuity with African traditions. Nevertheless, she can neither revisit her place of origin nor the past of her people in storytelling because she, and temporarily Kamena, live in absolute isolation. The ocean becomes her link to the world, her refuge, her new home. “Bola retreated into the sea the way one retreats into the bush. Fled the way one flees terrors, craving joys. The sea's billowing mountains and crinkling ridges became as well known to her as any territory is known by its travelers.” (AFCM, 62). In the final chapter of the novel when she admonishes her children, she says: “‘Quiet!’ she sang above the sea noise ‘Or I'll go back in the sea.’” (AFCM, 299).

When Marie Ursule realizes that she has been commodified, she opts to oppose it by birth control, so that her offspring do not have to live as slaves and to act against the financial interest of her owner: “[S]he had vowed never to bring a child into the world, and so to impoverish de Lambert with barrenness as well as disobedience.” (AFCM, 8). Her hatred of white men is programmatic: “*Pain c'est viande beque, vin c'est sang beque, nous va mange pain beque nous va boir sang beque*” (AFCM,11). This is what she tells the Ursulines after they have bought her; not quite literally translated as “[b]read is the flesh of white man, wine is the blood of white man, we will eat the white man's flesh, we will drink the white man's blood.” (AFCM, 11). This actually was part of one of the battle cries of the 1805 slave revolt on Trinidad; in its original form it continues with a reference to the revolution on Haiti: “San Domingo!” Historically, the repeated utterance of this battle cry brought about the violent suppression of revolutionary tendencies on Trinidad and led to “an inquiry [...] that resulted in both executions and severe

punishments for the accused rebel leaders.”³⁰³

In addition to these historical references, the novel features historical documents that, in this new context, reveal the unwillingness of the Trinidadian planters to comply with the jurisdiction of the imperial centre. The document that Brand includes in her novel, an official declaration to the slave population of Trinidad from the island's governor Sir George Fitzgerald Hill³⁰⁴, shows that the planters, represented by Hill, use every given opportunity to keep up the status quo:

[...] The King's orders [...] shall be immediately obeyed [...]. To prevent you however from forming hasty and wrong opinions upon the subject and then meeting with disappointment, I think it right to inform you, that no change whatever will take place in your condition, until after next Crop time, and that when your slavery shall cease, you will still be required to work for a certain time, for your former masters, but under regulations different from those to which you have been hither to been accustomed. (AFCM, 50).

This historical document – which serves as an extended epigraph to the novel's second chapter – highlights the cynicism of British imperial and colonial politics. This official statement is utterly condescending in tone. It reveals an attitude towards human beings similar to Rudyard Kipling's, who describes the colonized in his infamous “The White Man's Burden” as “new caught sullen people,/ half devil and half child.”³⁰⁵ To ease the economic difficulties for the plantation owners, the implementation of the anti-slavery laws of 1833 took place during a period of transition in which the former slaves were of indefinite legal status, neither slaves nor free people.³⁰⁶ Instead of complying with the new legislation right away, Hill uses his executive freedom and prolongs the period of transition to serve the needs of the landowning class. Hill also implicitly, or rather by inversion, suggests that the historical debt is not to be settled by the landowners, but by the slaves who are forced to remain in their former master's service for an indefinite time span. By

³⁰³ William D. Piersen, *Black Legacy: America's Hidden Heritage*. Amherst: UP of Massachusetts, 1993, 63. Piersen discusses this battle cry in the context of New World African strategies of subversion, irony and satire which he regards as sophisticated means of coming to terms with the social conditions imposed by slavery. While Piersen points out that “most African political systems did not recognize the right to violent revolution” (62), New World African people considered the viability of this option. Both Brand and Piersen have used V.S. Naipaul's *Loss of Eldorado* as a source.

³⁰⁴ This letter to the slave population has been taken from Eric Williams', *Documents on British West Indian History, 1807-1833*. Trinidad: Trinidad Publishing, 1952.

³⁰⁵ Rudyard Kipling, “The White Man's Burden” in: Elleke Boehmer, *Empire Writing: An Anthology of Colonial Literature 1870-1918*. Oxford & New York: OUP, 1998, 273.

³⁰⁶ On the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire see: Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*. London: Abacus, 1995, 185-88.

juxtaposing this historical document with a narrative which explicitly engages with a depiction of those who have to cope with the consequences of those political decisions, the equilibrium of agency is restored. The voiceless objects of the declaration become acting, thinking and feeling individuals for whom this declaration is either “a slap in the face”, or, with regard to Marie Ursule and Bola, due to the former's violent resistance, a confirmation and justification of their actions. The binary opposition between historical document and imaginative literature becomes necessarily blurry; otherwise agency and historical justice would not be recuperated through the narrative. In the passages concerned with the aftermath of Hill's declaration, the irony in the narrative voice is almost tangible. The narrator neatly deconstructs the formerly established oppositions, claiming that “one of those nuns, the one who loved counting and multiplying, in this passion had a son by a slave.” (AFCM, 53). Colonialism and its hypocritical attempt to bring structure and order via commerce, religion and culture to the dark places of the world is condemned to fail, like Hill's map “to succumb to anarchy.” (AFCM, 53) The unresolved tensions of this period, as other novels by Trinidadian writers have shown, are still part of historical imaginaries. Not only in Brand's novel, but also in the works of V.S. Naipaul, C.L.R James and Earl Lovelace, a deep concern with this particular period is noticeable. In Earl Lovelace's *Salt* we have a passages that alludes to this period:

It is that curse on him, that *light* that pass down to him from his great-great-grandfather JoJo, who as one of thirty persons they arrest and flog when on Emancipation Day he stand up in Brunswick Square and curse the governor for granting him a half-way freedom instead of giving him the liberation that was his due, and who out of his own and pride refuse the opportunity that others take to run away to squat a piece of land in Arouca [...] ³⁰⁷

In tone and outlook this passage is remarkably similar to the passages in *At the Full and Change of the Moon* which engage with the historical impact of this political fraud. The experience that emancipation, a decisive moment in history was postponed to the economic advantage of the privileged few, has shaped the social imaginary of a people. The collective memory that perpetuates this fraudulent act is part of the social imaginary as it perpetuates the artificial the division between the races. Experiences like that define “how we stand to each other, how we got to where we are, how we relate to other groups, and so on.” ³⁰⁸ The perseverance of different authors to engage with this historical period – almost in the same style and mood – shows that

³⁰⁷ Earl Lovelace, *Salt*. London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1996, 45.

³⁰⁸ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginary*, 25.

the process of coming to terms with the past has not yet come to an end.

As I have already remarked with regard to the mass suicides of slaves, history – not only in the form of historical documents – is a powerful subtext in the novel. Nevertheless, this subtext is restricted to the first three chapters. While the first three chapters contain historical data and numerous references which guide the readers through the colonial history of Trinidad, the following chapters completely lack such items of information. The historical information in the early chapters facilitates a reading that not only focuses on the characters' actions, but additionally allows a contextualization within historical events. In addition to the depiction of the New World African diasporic experience, the narrative alludes to the colonial pre-history of the region, thematizing the extinction of the Caribs:

She had listened to whispers from the Caribs and had made dealings with those of them alive on the island after their own great and long devastation by the Europeans; their six-thousand-year-old trek over the Andes was close to ending here in Trinidad after four hundred years of war with the invaders. [...] The Caribs were becoming ancient and extinct even as she looked into their faces, the last of their language vanishing. (2)

The shift to interiority that occurs in chapter four coincides with the beginning of the end of colonialism. The chapter is set in the year 1953, the year which marked the decline of colonial rule in many territories.³⁰⁹ As described by a now anonymous journalist in *The Spectator* on December 13, 1953: “Dependencies of Britain that were quiet a year ago are now loud with discontent. [...] Demands for independence are heard from people without the means to support it [...]”³¹⁰ The fourth chapter of *Moon*, titled “A Sudden and Big Lust” is an allegory on the decline of colonial rule throughout the British Empire.

Not only British dependencies are loud with discontent, but also the chapter's protagonist, Cordelia Rochas. Cordelia, after having been married for almost three decades of which the last has been lived in celibacy, rediscovers her sexuality. Her desire to live her sexuality corresponds to her willingness to separate from her husband, whom she had married because she was sure

³⁰⁹ WM. Roger Louis, “The European Colonial Empires.” in M. Howard & WM.R. Louis (ed.), *The Oxford History of the Twentieth Century*. Oxford & New York, 1998, 91- 103. According to Louis, the decline of the British Empire after Indian independence was accelerated by the Suez Crisis and by various nationalist movements in the African and Middle Eastern colonies which opposed the continuation of British rule. Those events finally sealed “the liquidation of the British Empire.”

³¹⁰ <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/11th-december-1953/6/britains-colonial-policies>.

that he would provide for her and grant her the security she craved. This “sudden and big lust”, turns her life inside-out. She takes a number of lovers, both men and women, and follows her inner voice. In the end, Cordelia renounces all family ties. Her husband leaves her to live with their children in England, and she puts her children, who wanted to talk her into renouncing her new way of life, into their place. Independence and the freedom to follow her urges are more important to her than maintaining social appearances and her cherished prestigious position in society. All these factors symbolically mirror contemporary British arguments against the independence of the colonies. In 1953, despite the fact that decolonization had by then been under way for half a decade, most officials and experts were surprised about the sudden explosion of anti-colonial feelings within the British colonies. While the protagonists of the preceding chapters were depicted as integral part of historical systems and constellations, and acted within these confining realities, Cordelia lives within an environment she herself has formed. She does not interact with other people socially, she does not obviously suffer from restrictions imposed on her by any political system; the decision to break with her former life and act against any understanding of rationality comes from within herself. The actions of the characters in the first three chapters are determined by their environment, by being confined to a certain period. In the environmental influences are less pressing, also the extent of reader guidance through historical dates, references and documents is limited. The characters gain in complexity, are less driven by circumstances and environment and are less determined in their decisions and allegiances by exterior forces.

At the Full and Change of the Moon features – like most texts discussed in this thesis – female characters of extraordinary determination. Be it Aminata Diallo in Lawrence Hill's *Book of Negroes*, George Elliott Clarke's Beatrice Chancy or Dionne Brand's Marie Ursule – all those female characters, by transgressing socially confining boundaries – counteract and deconstruct existing literary stereotypes. Kamena, Marie Ursule's partner, does not equal her in resolve. While she is orchestrating the mass suicide of the Sans Peur Regiment, he longs for a mythical refuge for maroons called Terre Bouillante which he eventually finds, but has to leave again in order to take Bola away from the plantation before Marie Ursule poisons the other slaves. “He loved her fatal resolve but he himself could only think of escaping.” (AFCM, 32). Marie Ursule's act of defiance and Kamena's flight from the plantation are both responses to slavery, but while she is meticulously planning her actions, his fate seems to be entirely at the hands of coincidence and contingency: “He had escaped, promising to return for the child, not listening to Marie Ursule. Because Bola was his child too and his mind did not linger on hurt like Marie Ursule's.

He wanted lightness, he wanted peace.” (AFCM, 7). Marie Ursule, like Elliott's Beatrice, willingly chooses martyrdom over a life in enslavement and agony. For her, the experience of slavery is worse than the torture she was subjected to as part of her punishment for orchestrating the mass suicide. All that maiming and torturing is “but a drink of water to what I have already suffered.” (AFCM, 21) Like other female characters in African-Canadian fiction Marie Ursule does not only defy white hegemony, she also challenges gender stereotypes. Especially her knowledge about herbs, plants and natural medicine – very much like Hill's character Aminata Diallo - puts her in a position of power. These powerful female characters in recent postcolonial fiction redefine a stereotypical colonial stock character: the witch.³¹¹ In most postcolonial novels the witch is neither involved in obscure religious practices nor does she use supernatural forces against the colonizers. Instead we find a kind of naturopath, using the means provided by her environment, like herbs, plants and other natural resources, to produce medicines. But unlike Aminata Diallo, Marie Ursule uses her expert knowledge to bring death upon the slave community and ruin the plantation's owner financially as she had been doing to a lesser extent by “impoverishing de Lambert with barrenness as well as disobedience” (AFCM, 8) through rigid birth control. Those strong female characters echo Judith Butler's claim for a revision of identity politics through a proliferation of cultural configurations of sex and gender “within the discourses that establish intelligible cultural life, confounding the very binarism of sex and exposing its fundamental unnaturalness.”³¹² The female characters in most of the literary works discussed in this thesis do not stop at that; their blackness, their juxtaposition with weak and compliant male characters and their interaction with slave-holder societies dominated by white males are antithetical to racist and nationalist discourses. Following Linda Hutcheon, one could say that these novels as cultural productions are part of the “contesting of the voyeuristic masculine gaze of patriarchal society that idealizes and fetishizes women.”³¹³ Butler's definition of gender as “an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts* [...]”³¹⁴, inevitably reminds one of the fact that the same goes for any concept of race. While Marie Ursule's story formally seems to be a variation on the “eighteenth-

³¹¹ In many colonial novels we find characters who have a social monopoly on healing practices. Those practices are often denounced as witchcraft, superstition or worse. Actually, during the colonial period, authorities acquired an intimate knowledge about indigenous customs and often used this knowledge against the colonized. See: Karen E. Fields, “Political Contingencies in Colonial Central Africa.” in: *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 16.3 (1982), 567-93.

³¹² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York & London: Routledge, 2000 (1990), 191.

³¹³ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. London & New York: Routledge, 1989, 165.

³¹⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 179.

century stereotype [classifying] the African slave as a “dangerous, cunning savage bent on revenge against his captors [...]”³¹⁵, it becomes apparent that, by means of the narrative technique used, a change of perspective is introduced. The distant heterodiegetic narrator who focalizes through the main characters of the narrative apparently provides a matter-of-fact rendering of the story that does not show signs of emotional involvement.

6.2.2 Tottering Giant vs. Northern Clean Coolness – Experiencing the US in Canada in *At the Full and Change of the Moon*

The novel's lack of concern with one particular nation or region is a wilful transgression of the boundaries of national narratives. While Cyril Dabydeen advocated an “elastic and simultaneously dynamic” understanding of the “rubric Canadian literature”, this claim is of importance when it comes to a discussion of the texts' relation to Canadian culture and identity.³¹⁶ Most (first generation) Caribbean-Canadian writers effectively started their careers with novels that depicted the experience of Canada from the perspective of the immigrant, laying bare the “hostility and indifference of White Canada to the West Indian immigrants, who initially embraced their adopted country as the ultimate Eldorado.”³¹⁷ Their motivations for using this perspective might be diverse, but it is not too far fetched to assume that they did so to assert their position within the discourses about nation and national identity. Austin Clarke, who actually belongs to this first generation of Caribbean-Canadian authors shifted his focus from depicting the sensibilities of immigrants in Canada to his country of origin, Barbados, an act that problematized his status for a number of Canadian scholars who argued that his novels – due to the fact that they no longer deal with Canada – are not Canadian.³¹⁸ Despite the short life span of this spatial definition of Canadian literature in academic circles, it still occupies the minds of many mainstream readers and critics. For those people, the issue is whether a novel not set in Canada and written by a first generation immigrant writer can be regarded a contribution to

³¹⁵ Lively, *Masks*, 34.

³¹⁶ Dabydeen, “Places We come From”, 231.

³¹⁷ Georgiana Banita, “Canons of Diversity in English-Canadian Literature.” in: Reingard M Nischik, *History of Literature in Canada. English-Canadian and French-Canadian*. Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2008, p. 402. Banita's assessment refers to Austin Clarke's Toronto trilogy, but it also describes the general focus of many immigrant writers in the late 70s.

³¹⁸ The “identity wars of the 1980s and 1990s” shaped Canadian politics of representation and also the idea of who is part of the Canadian cultural canon and who is not. See: Kamboureli, xii. See also: Caroline Rosenthal, “English-Canadian Literary Theory and Literary Criticism.” In Reingard M. Nischik (ed.), *History of Literature in Canada*, 291-309.

Canadian literature.

Unarguably, the fictional (but often autobiographically influenced) journey back to the author's place of origin is a recurring feature of Caribbean-Canadian writers.³¹⁹ Novels like Austin Clarke's *The Polished Hoe* and Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon* use the respective Caribbean islands they are set on as places of departure. In Clarke's novel it is the experience of a journey from the fictitious Caribbean island Bimshire to the southern states of the USA, undertaken by the novel's black protagonist Mary, who accompanies her employer and lover, the plantation owner Bellfeels, which lays bare the similarities between those two different settings and their shared histories of violence and oppression. In Brand's novel it is the history of a fictitious family that, throughout the novel, will spread over both parts of the Americas, which reveals those hidden histories of violence and oppression.

In Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, Canada is largely absent. The novel is set on Trinidad, in Venezuela, the USA, the Netherlands, but Canada, despite being the country of residence of Bola, a descendent of Marie Ursule and one of the novel's protagonists, only features as a site of longing and as a counterpoint to the U.S. Regarding the parts of the novel actually set in Canada, the depiction of the interaction between immigrant and hegemonic society is of secondary importance compared to depictions of Bola's individual experiences, her inner life. The US, however, are depicted as counterpoint to Canada's clean coolness, as a tottering giant in rapid decline. When Eula travels through the U.S. to rescue her brother Carlyle from a detention camp and passes the cities of the rust belt, the juxtaposition of imagined ideal and physical reality comes to her as a shock:

Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Washington, a huddle to the east – sprawled in grime and smog. She had not thought that they would look so old, so worn down. She had expected some lure, some sweet smell. [...] She passed them with a nervous fear at their largeness, their spillage. She was afraid of them. [...] These cities were like mounds of refuse, scourings and dregs. (AFCM, 134-35)

To her mind, Toronto and its alleged “clean coolness” and “slow reserve” is a positive reverse image to those dilapidated sites of deindustrialization she encounters on her way through the rust

³¹⁹ Jacqueline Petropoulos, “Performing African Canadian Identity: Diasporic Reinvention in “Afrika Solo.” in: *Feminist Review*, No. 84, Postcolonial Theatres (2006), 104-123.

belt. Her passage through the USA has various functions within the narrative and the final confrontation with her brother Carlyle, aka Priest, is more than a conflict-laden brother/sister relationship. Bola (the younger)'s journey through the U.S. is both a rite of passage and a coming to terms with the past she shares with her brother. They are opposites who find themselves in their counterpart. Two minor characters feature in this chapter as well: Adrian who is, as Carlyle rightly guessed, a distant relative and Gita, Carlyle's girlfriend. Adrian is Carlyle's doppelgänger; due to their unknown kinship he looks like Carlyle's younger self. The image of the doppelgänger is a vital hint to the symbolism behind the character constellation: Both Adrian and Carlyle and Eula and Gita complement each other. The narrative technique used in this chapter is revealing; using a heterodiegetic narrator again, the focalization constantly alternates between the four characters, mostly using Eula and Carlyle as focalizers. Adrian is not only younger than Carlyle, but also rather a victim of circumstances. While Carlyle has shown disdain for society and its rules from his youth on, Adrian is only a tool to be used by other people at will. Gita is the daughter of Indian immigrants who was seduced and impregnated by Carlyle back on Trinidad, but willingly followed him to the U.S. Eula, like Carlyle, takes her life into her own hands, but not with the intention of parasitically living off others', but rather to flee from a home that was corrupted by Carlyle. The image of corruption that is symbolically present in the decay of the rust belt appears in another version when Adrian talks about his involvement in Carlyle's criminal activities in the U.S.:

The sore grooved in him. He smelled things he didn't want to smell, saw things he did not want to see, mostly people, poor-faced and dragged out. He soon lost the old thought in him that America was where you lived well. Maybe they lived better than where he'd come from on the whole but not in the small ways, not in the raw-boned pain and anguish.

He carried the shit, as Priest called it, strapped to his body again, he carried it up his ass, he carried it in his bowels. He crawled through the body of America as small bags crawled through his own body. (AFCM, 172)

The corrupting aspects of their drug trafficking are depicted in terms of bodily functions. Drugs are the harbingers of death; they possibly contaminate Adrian; if they do not, Adrian will deliver the drugs where they will contaminate the U.S. Metaphorically, Adrian and, implicitly his doppelgänger Carlyle, are vermin, potentially spreading disease “as they crawl through the body of America.” Rhetorically, the anaphoric structure of the passage is striking as the reiteration of the phrase “he carried”, reveals his subaltern position as a mere object of transport within the

larger scheme of things. The image of corruption is taken up again in the following chapters which engage with the aftermath of this involuntary family get-together. Adrian, now living with his sister Maya in the Netherlands, has become a drug addict who is recurrently plagued by a dream. In this dream “sea cockroaches were floating out of him, fat, white sea cockroaches.” While he had metaphorically become the vermin that poisons the body of the United States in the previously quoted passage, the roles are now reversed; the drugs, metaphorically represented by the cockroaches are devouring him from the inside. Eula, on the other hand, has lost her positive attitude towards Canada. It no longer exists as a safe haven, as a refuge from her corrupting family; in her imagination it has also started to decompose and disintegrate:

The streets here are full of decay. People hunched up in their filthy coats and shirts and blouses, their moulting shoes and pants. Mama, everyone here is decaying. When I first came they were all new, at least they seemed brand new all the time. Now they are all decaying on the streets and the streets themselves seem old and crumbling, the concrete is chipped and old garbage decays in the gutters. (AFCM, 240)

Eula's changed perception of Toronto is a projection. She projects her inner turmoil, the accumulated guilt about having sent her daughter back to Trinidad and the horrible moments she experienced in her brother Carlyle's presence on her environment. Toronto has not changed, but she has; all her naiveté has dropped like a veil, enabling her to see more clearly. Thus, Canada acquires the status of an empty screen on which she initially projects her hopes and dreams and, in the end, her disappointment and frustration. Eula's story illustrates Canada's peculiar position in Brand's earlier fiction as a site that is being defined from the margins, from the perspective of an immigrant who brings her own history and her own stories with which the blank canvas white Canada provides is being filled. Bola's Toronto is, following Neumann's re-appropriation of Soja's terminology, an ethni-city, a site “of and for cultural differences, which are constantly produced and reproduced anew by the ongoing process of global migration.”³²⁰ In addition, the novel plays with the images of corruption and decline which have been intrinsic to New World African popular history since the middle of the nineteenth century.³²¹ In contrast to the original concept that associates the middle passage with decline, marking an abrupt break with a glorious African past, the novel depicts decline as a circular, generation-spanning phenomenon.

³²⁰ Birgit Neumann, “Migration, Space and Identity in Contemporary Anglo-Canadian Novels”, 97.

³²¹ Wilson Moses, *Afrotopia*, 4-5.

6.2.3 Magic Realism in *At the Full and Change of the Moon*

Brand's disregard for boundaries, limits and frontiers is not restricted to the geographical; it also manifests itself in her depictions of human experiences which problematize the ontological world view of literary realism and, instead, focus on the supernatural and transcendental aspects of these experiences. Since Hamlet's father's ghost, the co-existence of natural and supernatural presences has a set place in literature. Nevertheless, during the last five decades this fictional technique has increased in popularity. This is due to the emergence of post-colonialism and post-modernism. As post-colonial literature almost inevitably follows a political agenda³²², employing the literary techniques popularized by post-modernism, it is hard to separate both movements. The rigid political agenda behind neo-slave narratives is linked to the genre's recourse to post-modern techniques such as parody and inversion. Brand's fiction is quintessentially postmodern and post-colonial as it turns away from the factual to the spiritual and supernatural.³²³ Especially *Moon* and its recourse to magic realism is comparable to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Gabriel García Márquez' *Cien Años de Soledad* and Cesar Aira's *Los Phantasmas* because it shares two preoccupations of those authors: the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous, overcoming traumatic experiences, and the related aspect of coming to terms with histories of violence and oppression.³²⁴ The function of this technique is highly contested. Joan Mellen argues that “only through the conjunction of the fantastic and the factual can truth fully emerge in literature. [...] Reality seems to be deformed, but the reader perceives essential truths as a result of this distortion”³²⁵ Prevalent in Mellen's argument is the claim that magic realism is a literary technique employed “in the service of a quest for meaning.”³²⁶ D'haen even proposes that it might be used to “create an alternative world *correcting* so-called existing reality, and thus to right the wrongs this 'reality' depends upon.”³²⁷ With regard to *Moon*, the co-existence of

³²² See: John Thieme, “Introduction.” in: J. Thieme (ed.), *The Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*. London & New York: Arnold, 1996, pp 1-9. Thieme views “the term post-colonial as describing a continuum of experience, in which colonialism is perceived as an agency of disturbance unsettling both the pre-existing 'Aboriginal' or 'Native' discourses it penetrates and the English (or European) discourses it brings with it.” (2 italics in the original). David Lodge points out that most writers who employ magic realism “[...] have lived through great historical convulsions and wrenching personal upheavals, which they feel cannot be represented in a discourse of undisturbed realism.” See: David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992, 114.

³²³ Lois Parkinson Zamora, “Magical Romance/Magical Realism: Ghosts in U.S. And Latin American Fiction.” in: Zamora & Faris, *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Durham & London, 1995, 497-531 [497-98]. Zamora points out that magic realism [or rather the spectral presences it features] “presents an assault on the scientific and materialist assumptions of Western modernity: that reality is knowable, predictable, controllable.”

³²⁴ Joan Mellen, *Magic Realism*. Detroit (et.al.): Gale Group, 2000, 20.

³²⁵ Mellen, *Magic Realism*, 1.

³²⁶ Mellen, *Magic Realism*, 6.

³²⁷ D'haen, “Magic Realism and Postmodernism”, 195.

documentary realism – in the form of authentic documents, historical sources and contextualization – and the characters' subjective experience of their environment is most striking. In the following I will discuss the function of magical realism in *Moon*.

Moon features two kinds of spectral presences: ancestral ghosts and ghosts of the oppressors. The ghosts of the oppressors, the Ursuline nuns who bought and exploited Marie Ursule haunt their former estate where Bola and Kamena seek shelter after having left Mon Chagrin. With regard to the spectral presences of the nuns, magic realism is a narrative ruse to join two temporally disparate story lines. Through the ghosts of the nuns the novel negotiates the joint histories of colonization, slavery and Christian missionary work. The continuing spectral presences of the nuns illustrate that the legacies of those histories are not easily shed. They are spectres that will continue to haunt the archipelago because: “Nothing disappears with finality along the archipelago. Time is a collection of forfeits and damages. Colonies of life's acts inhabit time here.” (AFCM, 37). Paradoxically, those nuns – representatives of the Catholic church – are also representatives and advocates of modernity.

These years were the years of counting, they were the age of expertise, it was modernity, the New World, little additions and subtractions, increments of stock marked the time, and Soeur de Clémy, and Soeur de Clèmy always needed exactness. [...] modernity was the will of the Lord. And now she translated prayers into numbers and short phrases, sums for easier understanding. (AFCM, 44)

The spectral presences of the nuns are part of the novel's participation in an anti-modern counter-discourse. These spectral presences are inextricably linked to a very real issue: They represent the “homines oeconomici” who were responsible for the commodification of human beings and the colonization of the western hemisphere. Furthermore, their continuing presence stresses the persistence of capitalism, colonialism and imperialism.³²⁸ Accounting and religion, two seemingly exclusive domains, are intimately linked in these characters. Economic interest has rendered religion, or rather the propagation of their faith, a secondary issue, allowing for the instrumentalization of its rites and practices for the sake of profit. The nuns are depicted as displaced exploiters; similarly in the grip of the hierarchical structure of their church and acting

³²⁸ As Ania Loomba points out, a neat distinction between colonial and post-colonial periods is almost impossible as the characteristics of colonial regimes, meaning its governmental structures often survive decolonization, she also points out that imperialism exists in two forms: the economic and the political, whereby she argues that the former might very well exist without the help of the latter. Cf. Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. 7.

as the oppressors of their slaves and wards, they are victims as well as as victimizers. The geographical position of their cloister/plantation on the periphery of Trinidad is symbolical: on the very rim of the island, crumbling into the sea, it represents their own liminality.³²⁹ The spectral presences of the Ursulines – silently hovering and voiceless - who appear before Bola and Kamena are convenient vehicles to introduce a neglected aspect of colonial history into the novel:

So, like the man-o'-war, there and not there, the Ursulines had entreated to be sent, to make passage to the new world, since 1691. Begging the souls for board and lodging, on October twenty-eighth, 1691, they had embarked from La Rochelle [...] on the ship *Tranquille* [reaching] Martinique on October twenty-ninth, 1692. (AFCM, 37 italics in the original)

Chronicle-like, this passage provides background information on the history of Christianization in the New World. This sub-plot provides the readers with a geography of displacement: “[t]hey had moved, skittering down the archipelago [...], Guadeloupe, Deasade, St. Vincent [...] (AFCM, 37). It also identifies their adversaries in the colonial project: “their jurisdiction was contested by the Jesuits who had laid claim to their holdings” (AFCM, 38), implying that the dynamics of capitalism had first converted a religious into a secular project and subsequently brought dissent into its institutions. Nevertheless, while the spectral presence of the nuns, the displaced victimizers, makes clear that the aftermath of this history is still a decisive aspect of Caribbean and New World cultures, the ghosts of the victims make normal life impossible for their descendants. Just as Bola cannot flee from the nun's ghosts, her descendants cannot escape from the spectre of slavery that will continue to haunt them. Especially Eula's daughter Bola, named after her ancestor, is haunted by the coexistence of past and present, of real and supernatural. Young Bola, sent back to Trinidad by Eula and, in turn, shattered by her grandmother's death, is no longer able to distinguish between the real and the supernatural. The spectral appearances of her grandmother and also Marie Ursule make a regular life impossible for Bola the younger. Being constantly confronted with the presence of the past, she loses touch with her environment, regarding her physical environment and her living relatives as unusual and out of place.

³²⁹ In Brand's *No Language is Neutral* this promontory features as a site of memory, a site where the history of slavery might sometimes manifest itself materially: “From here envied tails of water swing out/and back playing sometimeish historian/covering hieroglyphs and naming fearsome artefacts,/ That is not footsteps, girl, is duenne!/is not shell, is shackle! (ll. 16-20) See also: Gumbs, “Dionne Brand: A Poetics of Diasporic Domestic Radicalism”, 5.

While the last chapter is an epilogue to the novel, the chapter preceding it deals with young Bola's social and mental decline. Using her character as the only focalizer, the chapter illustrates the psychological intricacies of diasporic existence. Here the presence of the past, the spectres of colonialism and slavery block the character's future. The chapter is a social allegory. Young Bola, shattered by her grandmother's death, is actually indulging in her return as a ghost. Nevertheless, in the end her grandmother's ghost does not remain alone but is joined by Marie Ursule's ghost: "One of my mother's visitors, a lady, came limping to our house as if one foot was sore. [...] She had a heavy ring around her ankle and a rope around her throat. I loosened the rope, I fanned her as I had fanned our mother when the sun was too hot." (AFCM, 285). Bola the younger acts like a good Samaritan, symbolically freeing her ancestor from the pains of slavery. The ghosts, on the other hand – as personifications of history and memory – problematize, and, in the end, disrupt Bola's sense of reality. Accordingly, a coming to terms with the past is impossible because Bola's vision is blocked by her great-grandmother's spectral presence; it is too dominant to negotiate and cope with. Roughly at the same time Bola's mother, sitting behind the wheel of a borrowed car, has a day dream that nearly makes her lose control of the car: "I remembered what you said about Marie Ursule with her iron ring, limping through forests. I saw her caught in vines and tangle, hurrying back before daylight. I thought that I heard the thudding of her ring on wood and stone [...] I was awake but not really awake." (AFCM, 236) The characters in the novel can never free themselves of the shackles of the past. Similar to Elizete and Verlia in *In Another Place, Not Here*, they cannot cope with the oppressive postmemory of slavery. While some of them try to settled down and establish some kind of regular life, some of them remain, to quote Said again, in a "discontinuous state of being", a condition paradigmatic for modern culture and its emphasis on the impermanence of identities.³³⁰

6.2.4 Sites and Metaphors of Memory and their Functions in *At the Full and Change of the Moon*

The tamarind tree has acquired a symbolic status in contemporary diasporic writing. Especially with regard to narratives concerned with the African diaspora it has become a key metaphor for the physically evident mnemonic link to Africa. Both people of African descent and this

³³⁰ Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile." in: Russell Ferguson (ed.), *Marginalization and Contemporary Culture*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990, 357.

particular kind of tree bear witness to the transatlantic slave trade. While in *In Another Place, Not Here* the tree functions as a site of memory that perpetuates the traumatic experience of slavery, its counterpart in *At the Full and Change of the Moon* is used by Bola's descendant Gordon Some to imaginatively fill the blank spaces in his own genealogy:

Tamarindus indica. [...] A tree perhaps brought here by his great-great-grandmother, as a seed in the pocket of her coarse dress. Probably held in her mouth as a comfort. Perhaps then germinating in her bowels. [...] And if it had been his great-great-grandmother, she would have brought a silk cotton tree, its high wing-like buttresses webbing out in embraces. His great grandmother, however, had not passed down into memory but he had heard that silk cotton flew all the way here from Africa and that is how he thought of any ancestry before Marie Ursule [...] (AFCM, 73)

Again, the anaphoric structure of this passage is remarkable. Some's attempts at retracing his genealogy is problematized by the lack of reliable items of information. In the following passages it becomes obvious that Some can not decide whether this tree represents the link to his maternal or his paternal roots. As a memento the tree is unreliable because its natural habitat is both India and Africa, covering both paternal and maternal regions of origin. In addition to its symbolic function as a mnemonic link to his ancestral homelands, the symbiotic relationship between human beings and tree is a metaphor for the novel's leitmotif: the involuntary spread of people of African descent in the Americas. The tree is a physical manifestation of Gordon Some's link to the place of origin of his ancestors, but this memento of his ancestral past fills a void in his existence, it rather confines him to the position of the outsider. In this chapter, the tree is a site of historical uncertainty and also a site where Gordon Some goes to do penance for his betrayal of his great-grandmother's ideals. "It was a fitting tree to hear his confession and take his penance since such a tree must have come in his grandfather's cheek or in his broken toes." (AFCM, 74). The chapter engages with Some's experience of the Great War as a volunteer member of the Second West Indian Regiment.³³¹ He went to war for the British Empire as one of "these men wanting to be a credit and to prove the British Empire wrong." (AFCM, 88). Moreover, Some, like the adolescent characters in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* and

³³¹ By the beginning of the nineteenth century, at least one quarter of the British Empire's soldiers were recruited from the indigenous population of the colonies. With regard to India, the recruitment of soldiers from the indigenous population had a long tradition. Even in the aftermath of the first Indian Revolution more than 125.000 Indian soldiers served in the British-Indian troops. See: Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*. London: Allan Lane, 2003, 170-72. Conscription for the Great War, nevertheless, was basically restricted to white colonists as the British initially did not want to involve coloured soldiers in a "white man's war."

Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, would like to trade in his ethnic and racial identity and become more English than the English. He returned disillusioned and traumatized, disappointed by his white childhood friend Michael De Freitas, who made him feel the racial hierarchy of the British Expeditionary Force. After having seen action for the first time, De Freitas orders Some to serve the white officers before getting something for himself. Some, traumatized by having killed a Turkish soldier, attacks De Freitas and knocks him down. As a result he is sent to prison and, after having served his time, is discharged for misconduct. Ironically, Some had been deprived of his initial enthusiasm for going to war for the British Empire by Bola the elder. When he informs her about his decision to enlist, she just laughs at him and reiterates her mother's battle cry, her solemn promise to take revenge for the wrongs of slavery: "Pain c'est viande becque, vin c'est sang becque..." (AFCM, 82). Bola hereby ridicules Gordon's aspirations to escape the confines of colonialism and racism, reminding him that her mother – his grandmother – had died fighting against slavery and exploitation. In order to assert his place in the colonial hierarchy, Gordon becomes a willing accessory to the British Empire. Corruption and decline are also key images used to portray Some's psychological deterioration. Throughout the years he spends under the tamarind tree, his formerly pristine clothing – suit, shirt and tie – deteriorates into rags. This set of clothing is a symbol of the decline of the British Empire. In addition, Some represents the self-loathing and self-denial of the colonized, often thematized in diasporic literature³³²:

He was filled with so much self-loathing every time he remembered the Second West India Regiment, he tried to root out that small place inside him that led him to it. [...] And he understood that it was his fault. All of it. He deserved it for pushing himself up and thinking that he was more than he was. (AFCM, 95)

While his environment is involved in constant renewal and redefinition, Some continues to define himself through his personal failure to revise the old order from within, to "prove the British Empire wrong." Whereas the old order is crumbling, having deprived him of all prospects, having shown him that he will always remain on the periphery, he still dreams of returning to the motherland:

He recalled nothing. Nothing but the hope of going to Great Britain, going home to the mother country. He recalled nothing but the plans he made right away when he touched De Freitas's

³³² According to Banita, this is one of the important themes in post-colonial and multicultural literatures. See: Banita, "Canons of Diversity in English-Canadian Literature", 402.

reading book, when he kept it and thumped the pages smudgy. That was his departure, and the laugh of his senseless grandmother [Bola]. (AFCM, 97).

Somes' longing for his imagined motherland echoes Derek Walcott's memories of his youth: "In those balmy days [...] I was not English, but I considered myself to be. I was a colonial, but did not consider myself to be so. England belonged to me, her heritage, her war."³³³ Somes, like Walcott, was doubly colonized, ruled by a white elite, who were themselves governed from the imperial centre, and fed with the ideologically tainted representations of empire through De Freitas' reading book. Nevertheless, Some's misled patriotism, his longing for the imperial centre, wears away like his suit, which deteriorates from pristine perfection to a dirty patchwork of worn cloth, another symbol of the decline of the British Empire.

6.2.5 Conclusion

Most of Evans' claims about Brand's use of tidal metaphors in *Moon* are to the point, especially her assessment that the characters experience the "gravitational pull of the past" and are "thus out of control of their own movement" and that the novel engages with "temporarily and spatially fractured diasporic experiences."³³⁴ With regard to Somes' fate, this assessment is entirely adequate as his daily walk to the tamarind tree imitates the tidal movement of the sea. To remain in the allegorical mode: he is the driftwood of history. On the other hand, her assessment that Brand's use of tidal, aquatic and nautical metaphors allows for a categorization of her writing as quintessentially Caribbean is rather questionable. Almost all New World African writing employs aquatic metaphors. Due to the historical experience of transatlantic slavery and, especially, of the middle passage, the ocean is not only a "repository of ancestral memories" in the Caribbean culture, but has the same status in all New World African literatures. Fluidity is not only a "means of exploring [...] the cultural specificity of the Caribbean", but has a special function with regard to black-diaspora discourses. Fluidity is the novel's leitmotif, but the ocean and related aquatic and tidal metaphors either function as an allegory of slavery-related dislocation or the failure of Western modernity. By the end of the 20th century, Marie Ursule's descendants will have spread out over the Americas (AFCM, 20), but the great project of western

³³³ Derek Walcott, *Remembrance and Pantomime*. 1980, as quoted by Elleke Bohmer in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, 98.

³³⁴ Lucy Evans, "Tidal poetics in Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*", 15.

modernity, the rationalization and description of the world is doomed to fail because “[p]aper rarely contains – even its latitudinal and longitudinal lines gesture continuations. Paper does not halt land any more that it can halt thoughts. Or rain showers for that matter.” (AFCM, 52).

The novel's power lies in its harnessing of myth and oral memory to depict the transnational aftermath of the Atlantic slave trade, the black Atlantic. Myth and memory here are part and parcel of nation-building processes. They should, as Samuel and Thompson point out, “not only be considered as special clues to the past, but equally as windows on the making and remaking of individual and collective consciousness, in which both fact and fantasy, past and present, each has its part.”³³⁵ In doing so, they implicitly reflect on the problem of representation and authority. As Valerie Smith has remarked in her seminal essay on Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, there has been an exchange between post-structuralist critics and novelists which intensified the awareness that we only know about “the institution of slavery through the mediation of socially constructed signifying systems.”³³⁶ Accordingly, in postmodernism, literary representations of the past are rather concerned with “the relation of both history to reality and reality to language.”³³⁷ The polyphonic structure of Brand's *At the Full* is a response to the postmodern problematization of the depiction of historical reality. The novel explores the sensory and intellectual experiences of its characters, rather than attempting to reconstruct historical reality, an act that would be futile and, according to Hutcheon, even presumptuous, considering the notion that the past's “accessibility to us now is entirely conditioned by textuality.”³³⁸ The limited perspectives the narrator assumes by focalizing through the characters of the novel necessarily emerge through the diachronic character of the narrative; they are also a statement against totalizing and homogenizing narratives. Nevertheless, the novel also features excerpts from historical documents which are integrated into the narrative and juxtaposed with the characters' experiences.

As I have argued, *At the Full and Change of the Moon* is not only pertinent with regard to its immense contribution to the field of diasporic and migrant narratives, but it also contributes to the discursive construction of Canadian imaginaries by showing that the diasporic experience is a transnational phenomenon that has a “particularly Canadian dimension.” Eula perceives Canada

³³⁵ Raphael Samuel & Paul Thompson, *The Myths We Live By*. London & New York: Routledge, 1990, 21.

³³⁶ Valerie Smith, “Circling the Subject': History and Narrative in *Beloved*.” in: Henry Louis Gates, Jr. & K.A. Appiah, *Toni Morrison. Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. New York: Amistad, 1993, 342-355 [344].

³³⁷ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 15.

³³⁸ Hutcheon, *Poetics*, 16.

as a foil on which she can project her anxieties and longings, remaking the country every single day. The novel shows that Canada is neither periphery nor centre, but part of a new cosmopolitan world which, shaped by historical forces like the British empire, is subject to constant redefinition, from both without and within. Brand's novel, despite its transnational or even cosmopolitan outlook, is not uncritical about the loss of a sense of community. Especially Eula is indulging in open nostalgia, longing for the things history has denied her like “one single line of ancestry” and “a village where I might remain” (AFCM, 246-47). The characters in the novel experience uprootedness, not cosmopolitanism. They are not able to develop a healthy sense of belonging, which results in the disruption of their social behaviour. Eula's unwillingness to admit the father of her child into her life and Bola junior's inability to cope psychologically with the breaking-up of her immediate social environment are the most striking examples of this disorder. As Maria Moss diagnosed with regard to the narrator in Brand's short story “At the Lisbon Plate”, those characters have “not only succumbed to the pressures of Western hegemony but [have] turned the destructive impulse towards [themselves].”³³⁹

6.2.6 Epilogue

Historical and spatial connectedness, especially in the form of the Black Atlantic, is the major theme of *At the Full and Change of the Moon*. This idea resurfaces in Brand's autobiographical book *A Map to the Door of No Return*. Describing her arrival at London's Heathrow Airport she notices and appreciates the convergence of different ethnicities in this hybrid space:

[...] All my apprehension subsided as I joined an oddly familiar queue of South Asians, Africans, Spanish, French, Arab, and Middle Eastern people struggling with papers, forgotten bags, crying children, lost purses, well-filed papers, swollen feet, and red-eyed sleeplessness. All nervousness subsided when I saw the same apprehension loosen in their faces as they saw me, too, like them part of an unnameable familiarity among us. Empire.³⁴⁰

The “unnameable familiarity among us” that Brand feels towards the fellow human beings she encounters at the airport is part and parcel of the legacy of empire. While noticing the different

³³⁹ Maria Moss, “(Reluctant) Postcolonial Storytellers: Dionne Brand, Thomas King, and Rohinton Mistry.” in: Jutta Ernst & Brigitte Glaser (eds.), *The Canadian Mosaic in the Age of Transnationalism*. Heidelberg, Universitätsverlag Winter, 2010, 107-19 (117).

³⁴⁰ Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 75.

ethnicities coming together in this third space, it is not their differences she highlights, but the common humanity of the people converging in this space that is not only a site of convergence, but also marks a point of entry to the nation state that facilitated their coming together. Contrary to Eva Marie Kröller's claim that *A Map to the Door of No Return* is an attempt "to interrogate and revive terms like 'migration' and 'diaspora' that have become something of a cliché in postcolonial studies, losing much of their experiential poignancy in the process"³⁴¹, I would argue that this book was Brand's final venture into this field, not to revive discourses, but to file them for good.

Nowadays, Dionne Brand's work is celebrated as part of the canon of Canadian multicultural literature.³⁴² Nevertheless, it remains questionable if the inclusion of Brand's work into the Canadian canon can be regarded as a sign of less restrictive concepts of nation and national identity. The 'mainstreaming' of indigenous and diasporic literature in Canada, which has been one result of its "unprecedented visibility" in the decade following 1995, has been preoccupying writers and scholars alike. Nevertheless, according to Smaro Kamboureli, the increased marketability of minority literature is "a symptom of CanLit's belatedness" driven by an impetus "that comes from the need to recognize those Canada had forgotten and responds to the demands of global economies."³⁴³ Assuming that Eva Mackay's thesis that "[t]he powers of 'Western modernity' [...] work not only through the erasure of difference and the construction of homogeneity, but are endlessly recuperative and mobile, flexible and ambiguous, 'hybrid' as well as totalizing [...]" is correct, the inclusion of writers like Brand into the Canadian canon is not without ambiguity.³⁴⁴ According to Mackey, in the age of mass media, Western modernity responds to 'threatening' and 'dangerous' differences by containing, controlling, normalizing, stereotyping, idealizing, marginalizing and reifying them.³⁴⁵ Accordingly, it is debatable if Brand's gradual inclusion into the Canadian canon and her response to that inclusion by focusing on Canadian settings and issues can be related. Are writers like Brand, through their inclusion in the literary and cultural canon, then co-opted and their texts deprived of their potential threat?

³⁴¹ Eva-Marie Kröller "Exploration and Travel" in: Eva-Marie Kröller (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 2004, 70-93 [89].

³⁴² As Rebecca L Walkowitz points out: "[T]he location of literature depends not only on the places where books are written but also on the places where they are classified and given social purpose." Rebecca Walkowitz, "The Location of Literature: The Transnational Book and the Migrant Writer." in: *Contemporary Literature*, 47.4 (2006), 527-545 [527].

³⁴³ Smaro Kamboureli, *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literatures in English*. Oxford & New York: OUP, 2007, xiv.

³⁴⁴ Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*. Toronto, Buffalo & London: University of Toronto Press, 4.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

Unarguably, while her first two novels explore “the political and psychological transit between the Caribbean and North America”, her last novel, *What We All Long For*, marks her arrival in Canada. These issues will be discussed in the following chapter.

6.3 *What We All Long For*: Cosmopolitanism and its Discontents

“[S]he thumped *A Bend in the River*, uphill task – ”

“Superb writer,” said Noni. “First class. One of the best books I have ever read.”

“Oh, I don't know,” Lola said, “I think he's strange. Stuck in the past.... He has not progressed. Colonial neurosis, he's never freed himself from it. [...] “After all, why isn't he writing of where he lives now? Why isn't he taking up, say, race riots in Manchester?”³⁴⁶

In the passage quoted above Kiran Desai playfully articulates a cultural diagnosis through the characters of her novel *The Inheritance of Loss*. Similar to Lola and Noni, many readers of diasporic writers like Naipaul, Rushdie, Coetzee and also Brand felt concern about the incongruity between those writers' privileged perspectives – most of them had been residing in the west for some time – and their subjects and settings. Noni basically deplores V. S. Naipaul's reluctance to situate his fiction within the cultural environment that he inhabits, doubting his integrity as a writer. This doubt about their integrity and the authenticity of their concerns, some postcolonial diasporic writers saw themselves confronted with, made many of them turn their attention to their more immediate cultural environments. In the following I will retrace how this concern also affected Dionne Brand's writing in the new millennium.

Brand's 2008 novel *What We All Long For*³⁴⁷ differs in outlook and focus from her previous longer narrative works. Apparently, the critique of western modernity and its effects which was one of the key elements of its immediate predecessor *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, has been all but abandoned. While her first two novels focused on the pervasive anxiety of their character's diasporic existences in a transcontinental and transcultural setting, *What We All Long For* portrays – and, to a certain extent, celebrates – the ethnic polyphony of contemporary multicultural Toronto, while at the same time critically examining the institutional structures that problematize post-colonial Canadian society. It marks a return to exclusively Canadian settings and issues first explored by Brand in her collection of short stories *Sans Souci*, especially in the story “No Rinsed Blue Sky, No Red Flower Fences”, which also depicts the daily life of migrants in urban Toronto. The link between *What We All Long For* and her previous novels is the portrayal of diasporic identities. As David Chariandy points out: “Dionne Brand's

³⁴⁶ Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2006, 46.

³⁴⁷ All further references to the novel will be to this edition: Dionne Brand, *What We All Long For*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2008 [2005]. The page number will be given in parenthesis, the title will be abbreviated if necessary for the context as WWALF.

What We All Long For [...] suggests that the cultural and historical legacies of the diaspora 'haunt' Canadian-raised characters in ways that are both figurative and literal, seductive and threatening.³⁴⁸ The novel depicts individuals in the context of multiple communities and the interactions of those communities that form modern Canadian society. In contrast to the multiple settings of her previous novels, *What We All Long For* focuses entirely on Toronto. With regard to narrative fiction it marks Brand's turning to urban space and reveals her singular poetics of urban environments. Her previous efforts in poetry, *No Language is Neutral Land to Light on*, and, especially *thirsty*, which primarily deals with the poetic depiction of life in urban Toronto, have already foreshadowed this development. Brand's focus has shifted from the depiction of experiencing blackness in a transnational or Caribbean towards an exclusively Canadian context. Canada, which, in Brand's former novels, formed the periphery of these narratives, has become the centre. *Bread Out of Stone*, a collection of Brand's essays published in 1996, and her political and artistic manifesto provides as blueprint to some of the issues the novel engages with. In this collection Brand began to write about Canada not as an outsider, but as someone intimately aware of and, perhaps more importantly, intimately involved with the intricacies of Canadian cultural and social identities. My reading hypothesis is that with *thirsty* and especially with *What We All Long For*, Brand has finally unlocked her full potential in terms of the depiction of modern multicultural Canada. Disregarding Brand's peculiar history as a writer and critic, the novel is additionally outstanding in so far as it marks her first serious engagement with the depiction of contemporary Toronto.³⁴⁹

What We All Long For was first published in Canada in early 2005. So far it has been her most successful novel both in terms of critical acclaim and sales figures. Accomplished cultural critic Rinaldo Walcott, writing for the *Toronto Globe and Mail* enthusiastically claimed: "Brand's talent for putting [Toronto's] uniqueness into language and art comes through with profound intelligence, humour and realism. [...] We can now say with certainty that we no longer have to wait for a novel that speaks the city's uniqueness, Dionne Brand has given us exactly that."³⁵⁰ In

³⁴⁸ David Chariandy, "Migration and Diaspora in Contemporary Caribbean Literature." In: Michael A. Bucknor & Alison Donnell, *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*. London & New York, 2009, 245-254 [252].

³⁴⁹ Toronto was the obvious choice for the setting of the novel. It has the reputation to be "Canada's most multiethnic and multiracial city." With regard to demographic data it can be said that about one third of the city's inhabitants are non-white Canadians. About half of Canada's entire black population - approximately 300.000 people - is "located in Ontario, mostly in Toronto", being nevertheless outnumbered by the Asian-Canadian group, which amounts to about 800.000 people - one fourth of Toronto's urban population. See: Leo Driedger, *Race and Ethnicity: Finding Identities and Equalities*. Oxford, New York et.al.: OUP, 2003, 223.

³⁵⁰ Rinaldo Walcott, "Toronto: a many textured thing." <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/toronto-a-many-textured-thing/article734054/>

academia too, it was well received for its focus on the depiction of the interrelation between urban landscapes and human experience. According to Astrid Fellner, “this story of four young Torontonians is a powerful metaphorical text because Brand manages to translate the energy of urban Toronto into a transcultural poetics of the city. Glimpses of the city provide detailed insight into urban life [...]. All of these images come together in dialectical Benjaminian fashion, creating a transcultural space that is characterized by fragmentation, dislocation and the various contradictions of urban experience.”³⁵¹ But is Brand's fictional Toronto, in the positive sense, “a nucle[us] for the negotiation and hybridization of identities, [an imaginary] laborator[y] [...] for the formation, reformation and transgression of individuals and communities [in which] the sharp demarcation line between 'First World' and 'Third World' that characterizes the continent”³⁵² is unrecognisably blurred? I will argue that this is not the case with the novel's version of Toronto, because what Fellner describes as “detailed insight into urban life” is basically a discursive re-evaluation of the failure of Canadian multiculturalism in a cosmopolitan context, presenting Toronto as a site of cultural segregation. This is especially the case with regard to the novel's depiction of harassment, ostracization and institutional racism as components of everyday life. Accordingly, I will discuss to which extent the novel depicts this failure as a consequence of Canada's cultural politics and its identity being “predicated on whiteness”, as Brand phrased it in *Bread Out of Stone*.³⁵³ Moreover, I will discuss its depiction of urban spaces in the context of Homi Bhabha's theories of social spaces, especially contemplating the absence of what he termed the third space from the environments described in the novel.³⁵⁴ I will furthermore discuss the novel's tightrope act between innovative art and political message, especially considering that Brand's fiction might have been born out of Canada's political situation, connecting with Back's thesis “that complex and exhilarating forms of transcultural production exist simultaneously with the most extreme forms of violence and racism.”³⁵⁵ In this context the novel's status as a work of art, as well as its characters' perception, production and

³⁵¹ Astrid Fellner, “Translating Toronto on a Bicycle.” in *REAL* No. 26, Tübingen: Narr Verlag, 2010, 231-244.

³⁵² Martin Butler, Jens Martin Gurr, and Olaf Kaltmeier, “Introduction: On the Intersection between Urban Environments and Ethnic Identities in the Americas.” in Butler, Gurr & Kaltmeier, *EthniCities. Metropolitan Cultures and Ethnic Identities in the Americas*. Trier: WVT, 2011, 1.

³⁵³ Dionne Brand, *Bread Out of Stone*, 161. “Canadian national identity itself for many reasons is necessarily predicated on whiteness. One key reason is the need to bolster an inferiority complex occasioned by Britain as its great intellectual mother and the United States as its rich bully cousin. [...] Canadian culture doesn't deal with the cultural work of all peoples of colour living here the same way, of course, and hence the different approaches to its imperialising effect”

³⁵⁴ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. London & New York: Routledge, 1993, 219. “What is at issue is the performative nature of differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, *contingently*, 'opening out', remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference – be it class, gender, or race.”

³⁵⁵ Les Back, *New Ethnicities and Urban Culture: Racism and Multiculture in Young Lives*. London: Routledge, 1996, 7. Quoted by: Butler, Gurr & Kaltmeier, “Urban Environments and Ethnic Identities”, 4.

attitudes towards art will be considered.

Comparable to George Elliott Clarke's *Québécois*, Brand's novel depicts the friendship of four young adults, Carla, Tuyen, Jackie and Oku with different ethnic and racial backgrounds. But both works have nothing but the character constellation in common, both generically and in outlook they are entirely different. In contrast to *Québécois*, it is not interracial relationships that are at issue, but the characters themselves and their friendships to each other are troubled by a number of factors such as Carla's and Oku's unrequited love for Tuyen, respectively Jackie, the criminal tendencies of Carla's brother Jamal and the re-appearance of Quy, Tuyen's brother, who got lost fifteen years before when their family fled from post-war Vietnam. Furthermore, their lives are complicated by their families' stories and the unresolved conflicts and traumata they contain. None of the major characters of the novel lives entirely in the present. While Oku and Jackie try to escape their past in order to re-define themselves, Tuyen and Carla cannot escape theirs. Additionally, gender constructions and sexuality are depicted in a less normative way. While in *Québécois* the heterosexual couples' relationships are merely problematized by their different cultural backgrounds, in *What We All Long For*, the range of possible combinations and complications is wider. Unrequited homosexual love is only one of the issues additionally tackled. Despite the relatively short time span the novel covers, approximately three months, the coming-of-age of its characters is portrayed. In contrast to *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, which stressed the characters' alienation and fragmentation by using different settings and covering a longer time span, *What We All Long For* is of almost classical simplicity: a limited set of characters, a short time span and Toronto as single setting.

As in *Québécois*, the city and its landscape is more than a setting, it functions as an additional character that contributes to the tone and mood of the novel. Toronto features as, the “city [that] hovers above the forty-third parallel”, an absent presence, contradictory and elusive. The novel begins with a scene in the train of one of Toronto's most frequently used commuter lines, introducing some of the – yet nameless – characters. They remain nameless because they are introduced with reference to their anonymous environment; they are and, till the end of the ride, remain strangers on a train. Nevertheless, this apparent anonymity is a mere illusion: “Now that conversation has entered everyone's heads, and will follow them to work; they'll be trying to figure out the story all day” (WWALF, 3). The novel depicts the city as a net of affinities, a rhizomatic structure in which the animated talk of its protagonists affects and inspires the imagination of the people who share their immediate environment, engendering feelings as

diverse as envy, curiosity and happiness. This depiction of the city as a network in which all actions have consequences, in which no act remains private echoes popular theories like the “butterfly-effect theory.” Toronto, as a metropolitan centre, is depicted as a crossroads in which human lives intersect. This set of ideas introduced in the first chapter can be understood as a structural and thematic guideline in which city and narrative function according to the same principles. But while the element of chance determines most social encounters in the city, the narrative is carefully crafted to create the surprising ending of the novel which makes excessive use of the previously introduced factors chance and interrelatedness.

Brand's employment of different narrative techniques and voices is more consistent and intense than before. The first part of the novel is crucial to understand its underlying theoretical and political agenda; therefore I will discuss it in detail. The novel begins in a rather conventional way; a heterodiegetic narrator, who, by using a *mis-en-scene* technique, creates a frame narrative for the novel by describing the protagonists – from the perspective of the outsider – in their natural environment. Nevertheless, this heterodiegetic and extradiegetic narrator does not show a lack of sympathy for the characters' personal dilemmas and tragedies. The narrative voice is partial if not downright intrusive, it sets the scene by deliberately focusing on the multiplicity of ethnicities and the multilayeredness of contemporary North-American urban life. According to the narrator the city is an agglomeration of “crossroads”, spaces, not unlike Homi Bhabha's “third space”, where cultural hybridity comes into being: “But as at any crossroad there are permutations of existence. People turn into other people imperceptibly, unconsciously, right there in the grumbling train” (WWALF, 5). In the short frame narrative, the narrator implicitly confronts the readers with theoretical positions and theories on the internal workings of societies and communities. This mock-version of free indirect discourse sets the tone for the rest of the narrative. Its playful re-appropriation of literary conventions and theoretical analysis of twenty-first century society are discursive markers, laying bare the text's political agenda and its ideological contexts. In addition to its theoretical and political context, the narrative voice reveals a deep knowledge of Toronto's history, ranging from the 2005 political turmoil after heavy snowfalls to a reference to the indigenous population which, before colonization, inhabited the area.

Apparently, the narrative techniques employed in the novel are rather conventional in the sense that they adhere to a traditional understanding of storytelling. Throughout the novel a heterodiegetic narrator depicts the experiences of the four protagonists by using them as

focalizers. Only with regard to the fifth protagonist, Quy, Tuyen's long lost brother, a homodiegetic narrative voice is used. This choice is very telling as it highlights Quy's outsider status and foreshadows his fate to remain outside the social sphere of the four Canadian protagonists. The heterodiegetic narrator has two functions: she describes the protagonists' daily lives by using one of them as a focalizer for a certain episode. Additionally, she highlights or comments on certain aspects in the style of free-indirect discourse. The alternation between the novel's characters intertwined with narratorial comments gives the novel an episodic character. This has the side effect that the origins of the characters' traumata and conflicts are only gradually disclosed. While the characters are at first presented from the perspective of an outsider, the novel creates the illusion of an intensifying emotional relationship with its characters. Unlike earlier uses of this narrative technique the free-indirect style here is used to pose questions to the narratees and society in general and to challenge existing social conventions. The narrator here functions not only as an impartial commentator, but contributes to the discursive function of the text on her own terms. Thereby, the text becomes consciously political. Fortunately, the tightrope act between literary political activism and intense character study renders the political intentionality of the text less obtrusive. Another important device used in the text is the lack of closure. It starts in medias res, providing glimpses into the characters lives, providing the narratees with an emotional status quo, avoiding foreshadowings, providing flashbacks only through the eyes of the characters as either deliberate remembering or subconscious memories. The lack of closure naturally leaves unresolved most of the issues the novel is concerned with. The novel ends with Carla arriving home, apparently having put her family life in order by convincing her father to bail out her brother Jamal. She feels satisfied and emotionally stable. This moment of tranquillity is a tragic illusion because while she is reminiscing about the last couple of days, rejoicing in her newly won freedom, Jamal robs and assaults Quy on the streets. The intertwining of story-lines, juxtaposing the trivial with the tragic highlights the inevitability of catastrophe: all of their lives will be shattered by this act of violence. Unlike Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, which provides a happy-ending by symbolically eliminating race as the primary determiner of Englishness in Irie's daughter, whose race and ethnicity defy classification, *What We All Long For* stresses never ending fluidity of identities.

Throughout the novel Quy is the embodiment of John Donne's famous line that "no man is an island."³⁵⁶ While the narrative voice allotted to him suggests the exact opposite, his fate

³⁵⁶ John Donne, "Devotions upon Emergent Occasions: Meditation 17." Stephen Greenblatt (gen. ed.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* Vol.1. New York & London: W.W. Norton, 2006, 1305.

indirectly determined his family's entire life. His siblings and his parents, despite having been able to exchange the dire poverty of their early days in Canada for a world of affluence, are emotionally determined through his absence. For Quy, the separation from his parents was a shock that forced him to re-define his sense of self, building up a wall of indifference to protect himself from the hostile environment he was accidentally abandoned to. He “lives a survivor's life in Thailand, repeatedly reinventing himself to fit the shifting local landscape.”³⁵⁷ The idea of survival is essential to his sense of self, adapting to the situation, becoming whatever was required because “Pulau Bidon [...] was a place where identity was watery, up for grabs” (WWALF, 9). Quy is almost obsessed with his photos in the press, especially with the sense of anonymity they propagate: “I've seen the pictures. We look like one face – no particular personal aspect, no individual ambition. [...] Was it us or was it the photographer who could not make distinctions [...]” (WWALF, 9). This passage highlights the often problematic perception of political refugees by western society created by the media. The artificially staged photographs used in the press in order to illustrate and highlight the deprivation experienced by fugitives often anonymize the individuals on those pictures.

6.3.1 Race, Gender, Ethnicity and Toronto's Urban Environment

What We All Long For, too, engages with the complex and problematic fields of race and ethnicity in contemporary Canadian culture. All black characters in the novel experience a racialized society, but they all experience it differently. While Oku and Carla sense a latent racism with the executive institutions of the state, especially the police, Carla's brother Jamal even stylizes himself as a victim of a hostile state power. For Oku, being sent to prison is a “Rite of passage in this culture, girl. Rite of passage for a young black man” (WWALF, 46). Jamal describes the legal situation of black people as follows: “‘Carla’, he'd say, ‘you know resisting is a false charge, any body can tell you when you see a black person charged with resisting, it's the motherfucking cops who started it, right, right, Carla?’” (WWALF, 34). It remains questionable if Jamal is really guilty of committing the crimes he is being accused of, or if he is impersonating the stereotypes society projects on him. In the novel racism is not tangible, no manifestations of racism through the depiction of violent scenes are part of the plot; however, all three black

³⁵⁷ Jaqueline Turner, “*What We All Long For* by Dionne Brand.” Retrieved September 7, 2010. <http://www.straight.com/life/what-we-all-long-dionne-brand>.

characters basically agree that they are systematically disadvantaged. When Jamal is being arrested for stealing a car and Carla is being confronted with a lawyer who tries to patronize her, she retorts: “What if he isn't guilty? Should he just plead being black?” (WWALF, 36). While Jamal has fully accepted the socially imposed role of the petty criminal, acting the part to impress his fellow inmates in prison by using the required register, Carla and Oku evade this world of stereotypes. The identity Oku performatively confirms is racialized and gendered. Young black men have to go through rites of passage in order to be accepted by their peers. When describing Jamal's performance of his social role, Carla highlights its artificiality which has its physical manifestation in a supposedly self-inflicted “ugly branded G on his breast under his left shoulder blade.” (WWALF, 30). This artificiality confirms that these performances are actually directed at an audience. This audience is not Carla, but he is “trying to impress the fellow prisoners in the booth beside him.” (WWALF, 31). Jamal inhabits a “dreamworld”, “trying to be someone she [Carla] could not recognize.” According to Judith Butler, all these acts of impersonations are signals for a struggle for coherence through repetition.³⁵⁸ Jamal is a symbol of the gendering and racialization of contemporary Canadian society. Through his performative acts Jamal discursively confirms the racialized gender identity projected on him by society; he embraces those stereotypes because they provide him with a sense of coherence. Jamal impersonates what society projects on him. Nevertheless, he acts as a distorting mirror, reflecting society's subtle racism, confirming and even taking the stereotypes ad absurdum by overacting the role attributed to him by society. His overdoing of both racial and gender stereotypes in his performance highlights the fact that both are social constructions that have a set of discursive functions.³⁵⁹ While Jamal confirms racist stereotypes by acting according to them, Oku has developed an insight about the artificial nature of these social mechanisms:

Yes, he could become the bad public hard-ass kind of black man everyone appreciated. Everybody knew it was bullshit. The leather coats, the dark glasses, the don't-give-a-shit attitude. Life was all about getting the car, the bling-bling, the honey. All the television talk had made it to the street, or was it the other way round? (WWALF, 164).

In this passage the narrator lays bare Oku's awareness of the reciprocal relationship between society and the media, especially the invention of traditions and perpetuation of stereotypes

³⁵⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 173.

³⁵⁹ Butler attests the same function to cross dressing and drag culture through which “[i]n the place of the law of heterosexual coherence we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity.” *Gender Trouble*, 175.

through public discourse. Despite being aware of the artificiality of these social roles, they appear as a viable alternative to other, perhaps less stable, social roles. Being the bad guy would win Oku respect, everyone's respect, because he would act in accordance with people's expectations, he would be appreciated for confirming the stereotypes. Oku's basic problem is that he does not do that. Nevertheless, Canadian society, especially its authoritarian institutions, regularly invite him to confirm these stereotypes as they continually harass him because of his skin colour:

He had come to expect this passion play [referring to the practice of detaining people without charges] acted out on his body any time he encountered authority, and it was played out at its most ecstatic with the cops. Whenever he encountered them, he simply lifted his arms in a crucifix, gave up his will and surrendered to the stigmata (WWALF, 165).

The religious imagery used in this passage stresses the novel's political position. By using Christian symbolism, this analogy highlights the peculiar opposition between state authorities, in this case the police, and an adolescent person of colour who is depicted as an innocent victim of social forces. In this passion play, Oku acts the martyr while the police represent the executives of state power. The symbolic crucifixion Oku endures becomes a metaphor for socially sanctified state violence. Oku is constantly about to embrace the social role allotted to him due to his phenotype and performed by some of his role models: "That is why he cultivated the persona of the cool poet – so that he wouldn't have to get involved in the ordinary and brutal shit waiting for men like him in the city" (WWALF, 166). The novel leaves no doubt that even 30 years after the implementation of multiculturalism as an official policy, the black male body in Canadian culture and society is still constructed as an other, a site of difference, of non-belonging. Applying Charles Taylor's terminology, black people are not equally recognized as Canadians by the state authorities. Furthermore, the tradition of racism has become part of their sense of self. This is illustrated by Oku's relationship to Jackie's boyfriend Reiner, a white musician with a bourgeois background. While Reiner shows no signs of antipathy towards Oku, Oku constructs Reiner as a white supremacist, a representative of latent eurocentrism: "Reiner was safe. Reiner was white. [...] Reiner did not, could not possibly see the city as a prison. More, Reiner must see it as his place – look at how he took possession of it, how he took possession of Jackie's back [...]" (WWALF, 176). Oku's construction proceeds according to the classic psychological scheme of black/white gender relationships. He claims that Jackie rejects him because she finds Reiner's ethnic and racial position and implicitly the power associated with this position more appealing.

Accordingly, the relationship with Reiner ameliorates her own blackness and facilitates her social aspirations. Considering statistical data, long term black/white relationships are extraordinarily rare. Often those relationships are undermined in the long run by social pressure on the coloured partner who is reproached for his lack of racial solidarity.³⁶⁰ With regard to these points, Oku's ideas seem to echo these social conventions. Due to the fact that his sense of self is contested by his peers and his role models who would rather like him to conform with prevailing notions and stereotypes, he projects his insecurities on Jackie. Nevertheless, the whole issue is even more complicated because Oku's judgement is biased due to his love for Jackie. Jackie, who, in comparison to her friends, defies social conventions most effectively, is drawn back into the trajectory of their racialized thinking by Oku's demanding love.

Carla's judgemental attitude towards her brother's performance of racial stereotypes only covers up that her own racial identity is basically a performance. Carla is not “phenotypically black” but she has chosen to adopt this social role in order to commemorate her mother who thwarted the expectations of her family in dating and finally marrying a black man, Carla's father. Therefore, it can be said that both Carla and Jamal – for different reasons – have chosen to perform a social role that problematizes their social position. Carla's deliberate decision not to blend in with white mainstream society, to “disappear into this white world” (106), is an act of resistance, an affirmation of her otherness. Nevertheless, while she openly embraces her blackness, she hides her true sexuality, unwilling to confront her homosexuality because she is afraid of openly articulating her desires. Her basic problem is that she is in love with her friend Tuyen, who is apparently not homosexual and does not reciprocate her feelings.

The identities of all black characters in the novel are shaped by social conventions and expectations. Those conventions and expectation are rooted both in the black community and in white mainstream society. Even those characters living in defiance of those conventions, like Carla and Jackie, are inevitably brought back into their trajectory by their social environment. The strategies of dealing with racial stereotypes depicted in the novel are most diverse both in intention and result. While asserting her blackness is both an epitome of her social disobedience and a commemorative act for Carla, crossing the colour bar in the choice of her life partner is not politically motivated with Jackie. Oku sees the racial stereotypes and the institutionalized racism

³⁶⁰ See: Erica Chito Childs, “Looking Behind the Stereotypes of the 'Angry Black Women': An Exploration of Black Women's Responses to Interracial Relationships.” in *Gender & Society* 19, 2005, 544-63. <http://www.ericachitochilds.com/articles/lookingg%26s.pdf>.

he is constantly confronted with as a challenge to his masculinity. He feels imprisoned in a social role that inevitably renders him an outsider. Despite clearly identifying the social chains that bind him, he cannot properly assess Jackie's motivation in transgressing the colour line and questions her motivation. He unwittingly judges her behaviour according to racialized standards. Race and its conventions remain inescapable forces in human relationships. Oku's behaviour nicely illustrates that paradoxically even people who are themselves negatively affected by essentialisms still act and think in accordance with them.³⁶¹ Both Jackie and Oku cannot escape normative essentialism, apparently it is too deeply ingrained in social structures. Similar to the ghosts who haunted the characters in *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, the novel's characters show that colonial concepts and ways of thinking are still part and parcel of modern post-colonial societies. Under the thin cover of multicultural polyphony, Canadian society still functions according to colonial concepts and ideas, but indoctrination has become more subtle. Despite the latent racial stereotyping experienced and unwittingly practised by some of the characters, the novel leaves no doubt that essentialist concepts are on the wane. When Carla compares her way of life to her mother's, she comes to the conclusion that what was denied to Angie has finally been accomplished by her generation:

'Okay, Angie was a border crosser, a wetback, a worker in the immigrant sweatshop they call this city. [...] She tried to step across the border of who she was and who she might be. They would not let her. [...]' A stream of identities flowed past the bar's window: Sikhs in FUBU, Portuguese girls in DKNY, veiled Somali girls in Puma sneakers, Colombian teenagers in tattoos. Carla had said it all, not just about her mother but about all of them. Trying to step across the borders of who they were. But they were not merely trying. They were, in fact, borderless. (WWALF, 213).

The image of cultural diversity invoked in this passage, of various ethnicities united by the emblems of consumer society, illustrates the new permeability of Canadian society. Postmodern societies in their acceptance of diversity have substituted the emblems of consumerism for a shared ethnicity as a sign of belonging. The act of visibly participating in late market economy consumerism, expressed through the brand names of their clothing makes them western and, accordingly Canadian. This cultural diagnosis does not imply that Canada has finally become 'happy multicultural land' – quite the contrary: the characters are still subject to subtle forms of

³⁶¹ Cf. Heidi Safia Mirza, "Race, Gender and IQ" in: Kwesi Owusu (ed.), *Black British Culture & Society: A Text Reader*. London & New York: Routledge, 2000, 295-311. Mirza argues that "[...] despite the apparent 'writing out' of essentialism in the new postmodern academic discourse on identity and difference as a fiction, I would argue good old-fashioned racism is alive and well and living in a place near you." (297).

racism, still have to cope with social expectations, both of their parents and majority culture, that they cannot possibly meet. This self-fashioning with the emblemata of modern consumer culture, which, in the long run, will allow people of non-Anglo origin access to mainstream social life is actually a thinly disguised form of Anglo-conformity. Anglo-conformity, as described in chapter two of this thesis, is one of the more conservative models of multiculturalism which favours the predominance of the English language and traditional English institutions as a framework for the realization of Canadian multiculturalism. The image of Canadian multiculturalism the novel construes is therefore a paradox. While defined and treated as the ethnic and racial “other”, non-Anglo Canadians can only be accepted if they show their conformity with the very system that subjects them. In the following I will discuss the different strategies to overcome this paradoxical situation the characters in the novel develop.

When the plot of the novel finally thickens, it is revealed that Carla still suffers from a severe childhood trauma involving the death of her mother, Angie. This trauma has its roots in her witnessing Angie's suicide, an act supposedly triggered by their difficult economic and social position. After this family tragedy her mother became Carla's primary role model, the day of her suicide and the environment in which it happened perpetuated “in a loop running over and over in her brain” (WWALF, 110). Contrary to Carla's mnemonic perpetuation of her earliest childhood, the intensity of the emotional experiences her frequent visits to the apartment house they formerly inhabited has lessened. Apparently, the house cannot function as a site of memory because the new tenants' presences overshadow and complicate Carla's longing for continuity:

But 782 Wellesley had become less and less cooperative in that love. Today it stood there indifferent and inhabited by other lives, other worries, other dramas. The building would not register these any more that it has Angie's. 782 Wellesley was built especially for disavowal – it was incapable of nuance or change of attitude. It was innocent (WWALF, 110-111).

The government-financed physical environment does not serve as a site of memory because it was not designed to do so, it denies positive identification. Throughout the novel similar environments serve as physical manifestations of the institutional failure of Canadian multiculturalism: instead of building a society they condemn people to anonymity, making positive identification with a place impossible, thereby nipping in the bud the emergence of communities. The depictions of those environments stress the notion that the difference between political vision and social reality is insurmountable. The novel also participates in a discourse

that has been accelerated by the publication of Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* in 1961. In that book Jacobs claims that most low-income housing projects are a waste of money because they create what they were supposed to prevent: “[...] look what we have built with the first several billions: low-income projects that become worse centres of delinquency, vandalism, and *general social hopelessness* than the slums they were supposed to replace; [...]”³⁶² The same urban environment that Jacobs already deplored in the 1960s ago defined Jackie's and, to a lesser extent, Oku's sense of self. These issues are illustrated in the novel by using the housing project Alexandra Park in Toronto as a foil for the depiction of those political failures. The novel therefore explicitly politicizes specific urban spaces and environments, reminding us that town planning facilitates successful integration and social contentment:

Yes, it may have cost a little more in the first place to make the ceilings a little higher, the hallways a little less narrow, but in the last place think of the perspective: the general outlook might have been worth it. The sense of space might have triggered lighter emotions, less depressing thoughts, a sense of well-being” (WWALF, 261).

These passages stress that the “general social hopelessness” that Jacobs described has not been eliminated by efficient and humane city planning. Especially the use of free indirect discourse stresses the discursive functions of the text. This technique, by assuming a point of view that allows for generalizations, stresses the centrality of the problem and its universal position in current discourse. The narrator also establishes a binary opposition between them and us, the authorities responsible for city planning and those who live in this very city:

Why couldn't they have planted a good tree anywhere here, why couldn't they have laid out beds of plants and flowers, a forsythia bush or two [...], why had it been so hard for the city to come up with a bit of beauty? [...] Perhaps they didn't think that poor people deserved beauty. [...] Would it have killed them to splash a little colour on the buildings?” (WWALF, 260-261).

Social inequality is expressed by bareness, by the absence of beauty from public spaces. The following passages of the novel highlight the interdependence of environment and society. While the anonymous environment of Alexandra Park gives almost nothing to those who populate it, those people, in return, have nothing to give back, the result is a downward spiral of

³⁶² Jane Jacobs, *The Life and Death of Great American Cities*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994 [1961], 13-14. Emphasis mine.

delinquency and decline. Additionally, the anonymity of urban spaces the novel thematizes forms the core problem of Carla's memory work. Due to its anonymity Wellesley Park 782 denies her access to her past. Therefore, she cannot come to terms with this past; the cinematic image of remembering as a loop is telling because it implies that any form of development is impossible; she is trapped in a vicious circle, any emotional development is suspended; since Angie's death Carla's emotional life has been on hold: "She had a cool surface. But the battle to sort out what she could and couldn't love was furious in her. The loop of experiences with Angie needed more and more space in her brain and the invention that maintaining an image of her mother required took all her will and focus." Carla is almost monomaniacally concerned with the preservation, or rather adaptation, of those memories, this practice has become a feature of her identity. Her sense of self, her performance of race and gender is rooted in the fear of losing, corrupting or profaning those memories. Her allegiances are neatly divided: while she idolizes her mother, she demonizes her father Derek. This binary opposition continues when it comes to those people who were, or are close to them. Therefore she tries to help Jamal; she detests her father's partner Nadine, despite Nadine's attempts to build an emotional relationship between the two. Paradoxically, Carla is well aware that memories are constructed: "She knew she had probably made up some of the incidents along the way until they were indistinguishable from the real ones – extensions of them" (WWALF, 110). In order to preserve her sense of self she has to adapt those memories to her personal circumstances, subconsciously re-arranging them in order to provide a coherent background for her present actions and decisions.³⁶³ Carla's present sense of self is the product of various social forces. Her affirmative performance of blackness is a celebration of her mother's civil disobedience; through not-passing she becomes what her mother sacrificed her inheritance and social status for: black.

Nevertheless, as we will find out later on in the narrative, the simple binary opposition that forms the basis of Carla's identity does not hold. As the nature of this family tragedy is anatomized, its triangular character comes to light: Derek already had a family before meeting Angie. Initially this fact does not deter either him or her, but after Jamal's birth, when Derek chooses to live with his family, Angie takes it badly. She does not accept Derek's decision and begins to stalk his family. Other acts of social transgression preceded Angie's suicide; which finally make Derek threaten Angie because her determination frightens him: "He hadn't thought

³⁶³ In this context, Welzer described autobiographical memory as a "synthesizing functional unit" (my translation) that enables human beings to create a coherent sense of self through the authority of the narrator, the autobiographer. See: Welzer, 217.

she would run him down like this. He'd promised her, no doubt, and at the time he had intended to fulfil that promise. [...] He had not looked at her clearly beyond those things and beyond the fact that a little something on the side was not unheard of him.” Derek clearly underestimated Angie's determination and, in the end, was confronted with an individual who could not be emotionally controlled. Angie's suicide forms the climax to this conflict.

In addition to Alexandra Park which, due to misguided city planning makes positive identification with their environment impossible for its inhabitants, the novel describes other sites which fulfil exactly this function. The Paramount (WWALF, 94-97), a dance club visited by Jackie's parents in the early 1980s, is a site where identities were negotiated, a third space where identities were challenged and redefined: “They knew about the Paramount from Cape Breton to Vancouver, *they* being a select group. [...] They were the places people went to feel in their own skin, in their own life. [...] the Paramount was a place of grace – like church. Where else could you enjoy the only thing you were sure god gave you, your body [...]?” (WWALF, 94). However, this site of identity is a thing of the past, an anachronism, a site that only exists in the collective memory of this generation. Self-display in the context of more or less public events apparently is not an option for Tuyen and her friends. Their identities are not negotiated in public, but in private. They are portrayed as members of ethnic and racial minorities confronted with an exclusively white mainstream society who cannot accept their deviation from its norms.

6.3.2 Art and Representation as thematized in *What We All Long For*

The relationship between art and identity is a minor theme of the novel. Among its characters we find representatives of both subversive street art and institutionally educated artistry. Tuyen, one of its protagonists, represents the institutionally educated branch of cultural production, while the graffiti crew represents her subversive opposite. In the following I will discuss their different approaches to art as a means to challenge prevailing identities. So far, critics have discussed the issues of art and representation as minor themes of the novel, often in the context of Brand's urban poetics, focusing on Tuyen and her work as “a representative of Brand's construction of queer constellations.”³⁶⁴ Nevertheless, Tuyen's project, her “lubaio”, a wooden statue that

³⁶⁴ Fellner, “Translating Toronto on a Bicycle”, 237.

reminds observers of and is supposed to function like a signpost on which people “like long ago [...] would pin messages against the government and shit like that” (WWALF, 16), ties in nicely with the issues of agency, representation and memory. Tuyen's “*lubiao*” is a means to reclaim agency and work against the growing alienation of individuals from their urban environment. It is an artificial site of memory that facilitates the positive identification of individuals with their environment. Tuyen is inspired by her immediate environment. Her art is intimately connected to her experience of Toronto. It mirrors, shatters and rearranges the images Tuyen is constantly confronted with.

Yes, that was the beauty of this city, it's polyphonic, murmuring. This is what she thought her art was about – the representation of that gathering of voices and longings that summed themselves up into a kind of language, yet indescribable” (WWALF, 149).

Tuyen's art does not render the experience of the city more transparent, more understandable, but due to its highly subjective approach translates the city's “polyphonic murmuring” into an equally complex medium. Nevertheless, both Tuyen and the graffiti crew do not create art for purely aesthetic reasons. In the novel art is synonymous with social protest. It is part of the political project to reclaim Toronto for its people and to transcend white-majority focused politics. The graffiti artists who feature in the novel symbolically articulate this stance:

They were critical presences, unnoticed until they felt like being noticed. They saw their work – writing tags and signatures – as painting radical images against the dying poetics of the anglicized city. The graffiti crew had filled in the details of the city's outlines (WWALF, 134).

Formally transcending institutional notions and definitions of art, the members of the graffiti crew advocate an inclusive understanding of art. Their art incorporates both activism and social performance and does not primarily satisfy aesthetic demands. As Marsch points out: “[...] street art in general should rather be considered a means of social and individual self-expression and communication among members of various subcultures.”³⁶⁵ It is a gesture that stresses their masculinity, a daring act that challenges both the white establishment and their own peers:

[Oko in conversation with Kumaran from the graffiti crew] what you guys do lately?' 'The

³⁶⁵ Eva Marsch, “The Construction of Ethnic Identities in Street Art.” in: Martin Butler, Jens Martin Gurr & Olaf Kaltmeier, *EthniCities; Metropolitan Culture and Ethnic Identities in the Americas*. Trier: WVT, 2011, 55-67 [57].

subway, end of the line at Sheppard. You can see the pig there when the train slows.' Kumaran licked his fingers. 'and see that bank at the slow corner of Dundas and Spadina? Right at the top? We did that.' 'You guys are nuts man, [...] out of your mind frigging crazy!' 'It's art man. You should come with us one night. Tuyen does' (WWALF, 134).

Fame is the primary objective of graffiti artist; they are intent on proving their own audacity and productivity to those they regard as belonging to their peer group.³⁶⁶ Kumara actually used the group's latest works as references: he is boasting. Especially the inaccessibility and the visibility of the sites they chose incite wonder and admiration in Oku. Their depiction as “shadowy presences” in the novel highlights their peculiar position within the city; while acting from the shadows they clandestinely challenge and re-define their environment. Nevertheless, they exist on the margins of society, unable, and, due to the conventions of street art, unwilling³⁶⁷ to make their authorship public. Due to the illegality of their practice, their cultural production is perceived by the majority of the population as disfiguring the urban landscape. They are seen as mementos of a youth run berserk. Only members of the graffiti artist' peer-group are able to identify the graffiti artists through their tags. They also evaluate them differently because they belong to the in-group that knows about the criteria of street-art production. Street art, especially graffiti, therefore approaches two different public spheres; one – we might call it in-group – appreciates this particular form of cultural production because they are also involved in it, the other – the wider public – does not. Therefore, graffiti artists are, paradoxically, both intent on remaining anonymous and participating in a form of social competition in order to “get fame.” In Brand's novel Tuyen experiences a similar problem: She is fascinated by the work of the graffiti crew, but her art follows more conventional criteria, despite being created in an urban context. Most strikingly neither the graffiti crew's work described in the novel nor Tuyen's installation engage with or reveal their ethnic identity. Accordingly, strategic essentialism, one of the strategies used in street art, or art in general, to create the sense of an ethnic identity, does not play a role in their works. By evading the representation of real subjects – either persons, or environments – in their art, they avoid making them “bit players in the nationalist imaginary [...] [and] helpmates in the project of making a Canadian identity that defines itself as victimized by

³⁶⁶ Julia Reinecke, *Street-Art: Eine Subkultur zwischen Kunst und Kommerz*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2007, 24-26. Reinecke mentions three formal criteria to “get fame” in the community: number of tags (getting up), style and site/embeddedness.

³⁶⁷ Even those celebrated graffiti artists - whose work is acknowledged as cultural production - carefully maintain their pseudonym status; some of them do not even share their true identity with a peer group but remain anonymous.

outsiders and tolerant of insiders.”³⁶⁸ Due to their objectification of individual emotions, or their abstracted protest, both Tuyen's and the graffiti crew's works are meant to be inclusive, not racialized or gendered and they therefore symbolically contradict Canadian social and cultural policies as depicted in the novel.

In theory, Tuyen's installation serves the same function as the crew's works; primarily it is an attempt to overcome the city's anonymity by creating a material manifestation of the feelings of an individual and inviting other persons to symbolically inscribe themselves by contributing personal messages to the installation. Both the graffiti crew and Tuyen use their art as a means to become visible in an environment which so far has denied their presence. Nevertheless, throughout the novel, Tuyen's *lubiao* never leaves her apartment, she is unable to confront people with her installation, unable to re-define Toronto's urban environment through her art. At first Tuyen works obsessively on her installation; Carla even begins to dream of it, seeing it as an intruder that will intrude on her privacy: “Last night she had dreamed Tuyen asking, 'What about the wall?' Meaning the one near Carla's head. Meaning could she take it down too, could she extend her sculpture to Carla's place?” (WWALF, 40). Throughout the novel Tuyen's obsession with the installation diminishes and her focus shifts to other projects. (WWALF, 158/231). Instead of becoming a site of memory and identity, her installation blends in with the furniture of her apartment and becomes part of the inventory: “[...] for the moment her clothing hung from the arms, along with a bag of onions and another of her beloved potatoes” (WWALF, 223). Accordingly it can be contested that at least Tuyen's art has no power because she fails in making it accessible to the public. Additionally, it should be mentioned that her new project engages with people's longings, not their memories. Throughout the novel it does not become entirely clear why she abandoned the project, but due to the fact that the formation of personal and collective memories is among the pressing topics of the novel, the thought comes to mind that Tuyen's failure in creating an artificial site of memory actually supports the idea that neither memories nor their sites can be consciously created. Instead of continuing to dedicate her power to the *lubiao*, Tuyen creates an installation that is supposed to visualize and voice people's longings by writing them on pieces of paper which are pinned to a “drape of cloth”, creating the illusion that those longings are racing down on it. This project is born out of the *lubiao*. The messages she attaches to the cloth are the longings she wanted to use for it.

³⁶⁸ Eva Mackey, *The House of Differences*, 49.

In contrast to Tuyen's self-imposed seclusion, the graffiti crew produce their art in public, in situ, but secretly and, at best, unobserved, simply due to the fact that it is against the law. Sharing their authorship with the public is therefore impossible for both parties, but with regard to the graffiti crew, it is a social practice. While they at least succeed in making their presence felt in the public sphere, Tuyen's installation, as a means of social protest, as a challenge to the city's anonymity, fails because it never leaves the private sphere of her apartment. Nevertheless, it remains questionable if Tuyen's installation does not primarily fail because it originates from a more academic context than the radical art of the graffiti crew. Tuyen's failure brings to mind Cornel West's claim that academia “quiets and domesticates radical and subversive works of art [...]”³⁶⁹ Tuyen locates her work, and also her education as an artist, in the tradition of Remedios Varo, one of the female surrealists who had to fight for acceptance by the wider public. There are obvious correspondences between her idol and Tuyen. Both produce art in competition with male artists who are, at least for the time being, more successful. While Varo's paintings were appreciated by her contemporaries, she was not commercially successful. Tuyen is neither commercially nor artistically successful because she fails to make her work accessible.

Due to the language barrier, Tuyen's and Quy's parents, belonging to the highly qualified specialists in their native country, were excluded from their former occupations. Instead her father, formerly a civil engineer, worked as a driver and her mother, formerly “being in practice in Saigon as a family doctor” (WWALF, 65) became a manicurist. After having saved enough money to establish their own business, “[t]he restaurant became their life. They were being defined by the city. They had come to think that they would be who they were, or at least who they had managed to remain” (WWALF, 66). Nevertheless, Tuyen's parents share a profound sense of belonging with all first generation parents depicted in the novel. In a way their lives ended with leaving Vietnam and losing Quy, their oldest son, who got lost when they fled from the war. Their life “was cut in half one night on a boat to Hong Kong. Lam and Ai [Tuyen's older sisters] had become shadows; two little girls forgotten in the wrecked love of their parents” (WWALF, 59). From that day on, Cam, Tuyen's mother was obsessed with preserving the status quo of her family. This drive to preserve manifests itself in the family home: “Cam had laminated everything in sight when she discovered a shop, Vickram's, that did laminating. If she could wrap everything in plastic or laminate it, Tuyen felt, she would. [...] Cam's main

³⁶⁹ Cornel West, “The New Cultural Politics of Difference.” in: Simon During (ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader*. London & New York: Routledge, 2000, 256-70 [259]. Cornel West's notion focuses on the academic discussion of art and literature as cultural artefacts. He is not concerned with the academization of the production of art which, due to its rigid focus on theoretical concepts, might as well lead to cultural sterility.

preoccupation, though, was birth certificates [...]” (WWALF, 63). Despite their later monetary affluence they never really take part in Canadian life. They were accepted as immigrants because they met the requirements to be regarded as political fugitives: “[the authorities] needed terror, and indeed Tuan and Cam had had that; they needed loss, and Tuan and Cam had had that too” (WWALF, 225). Their two daughters Binh and Tuyen are supposed to work as links between their world and Canadian life, as translators, interpreters and mediators: “They were required to disentangle puzzlement; any idiom or gesture or word, they were counted on to translate” (WWALF, 67). Making money, being able to afford bigger houses in better parts of the town is only a small compensation for the original loss, the tragedy the family never recovered from. Nevertheless, for the authorities these personal stories do not count, instead substitutes are offered that do not focus on individual experiences but on large-scale historical developments: “[with] this coaxing of their story into a coherent wholeness, they were at least officially comforted that the true horror was not losing their boy but the forces of communism” (WWALF, 225).

Throughout their adolescence, all characters distance themselves from their parents and their social expectations. While their parents are still longing for the home they have lost, their children have come to terms with the marginal existence their social and geographical environment grants them. The gulf between first and second generation immigrants, parents and their children shows most painfully when parents and children engage with their perceptions of the past:

Tuyen, Carla, Oku, and Jackie, felt as if they inhabited two countries – their parents' and their own – when they sat dutifully at their kitchen tables being regaled with how life used to be 'back home,' and when they listened to inspired descriptions of other houses, other landscapes, other skies, other trees, they were bored. [...] They were born in the city from people born elsewhere (WWALF, 20).

While the past – and usually the memory of a different country – is a site of longing for their parents, it is no longer tangible or even imaginable for the children. They developed a double-consciousness, a mode of being that allowed them to distance themselves from their parents' narratives re-evoking pasts that were never theirs:

None of them took each other home in those teenage years. [...] In fact they took nothing home, no

joy and no trouble. [They were] dreaming their own dreams of what they would be if only they could get out of school and leave home. No more stories of what might happen back home, down east, down the islands, over the South Chinese Sea, not another sentence that began in the past that never had been their past (WWALF, 47).

Tuyen and her friends' troubled relationships with their parents is based on their rejection of their parents' nostalgic longing to recuperate their pasts. Especially Tuyen's parents have developed an ambivalent attitude towards their life in Canada. While they cherish their economic success, their flight from Vietnam brought about the loss of their first-born. Their unsuccessful and expensive search for him made them restless and engendered a spiritual emptiness in them which could not be compensated with material gain. Dwelling on the past offers comfort to their parents, a sort of comfort denied to Tuyen and her friends. They share neither their parents' nostalgic longing for an idealized past, nor do they feel at home in their Canadian present because they feel systematically excluded. Without actually having experienced their parents' past lives, all Brand's adolescent characters are involuntarily and inescapably caught in their web of memories. This is a transcultural phenomenon in the fiction concerned with the experiences of immigrant families. With regard to the characters of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* Schaff points out that: “They [Irie and Millat] are neither able to compensate for their shortcomings by a shared collective memory of a better past nor are they able to experience the status of hyphenated identities as culturally enriching. Rather, they all try to escape from the obsession of their parents' generation with the past [...]”³⁷⁰ Compared to Brand's previous novels this is a major paradigm shift. The characters of *What We All Long For* are not caught in the postmemory of colonialism, but rather in the neo-colonial patterns of behaviour expected of them. Canada, as presented in the novel, is not a nation of immigrants granting access and equal opportunities to other immigrants, but rather a monolithic wall that excludes the protagonists: “They'd never been able to join in what their parents called 'regular Canadian life.' The crucial piece, of course, was that they weren't the required race” (WWALF, 47). On the other hand, Tuyen's parents cannot accept that she is not able to accommodate with mainstream society; they regard her inability to fit in as a serious disappointment: “They hate the self that keeps drawing attention, the one that can't fit in because of colour or language, or both, and they think that moving to a suburb will somehow eradicate that person once and for all” (WWALF, 55). Other characters in the novel, as for example the girlfriend of Tuyen's brother Binh try to comply with exclusive notions of Canadianness by

³⁷⁰ Barbara Schaff, “Trying to Escape, Longing to Belong: Roots, Genes and Performativity in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* and Hari Kunzru's *The Impressionist*.” in: Frank Schulze Engler and Sissy Helff (eds.), *Transcultural English Studies: Theories, Fictions, Realities*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009, 281-292 [285].

neglecting, or denying aspects of their identity. In public, Binh's girlfriend, whose name actually is Hue, adopts the name Ashley. Instead of asserting her ethnic identity by using her original name, Hue tries to blend in by using a socially accepted alias. Hue's blending in illustrates that the strategy to amalgamate with the largest group still persists with non-British immigrants. Anglo-conformity has not been eradicated by inclusive multicultural policies, but apparently it is still practised by those desperate to be accepted by the dominant ethnic group.³⁷¹ Hue is, as Driedger put it, “losing herself in the industrial arena”; in order to be successful in business she uses an alias, denying her ethnic identity.³⁷² Tuyen and her friends on the other hand have chosen not to fit in. Instead of attempting to amalgamate with the masses, they assert their difference and thereby open up pathways to reshape society and its institutions.

As I argued at the beginning of this chapter the novel's engagement with urbanity is only one of its themes. More pressing is its assessment of the state of the nation with regard to its ideas about race, gender and nationality. The Canada Brand evokes in her novel still defines itself through race, it excludes minorities and discursively perpetuates the essentialist ideas it created to classify them with. Race still is an imperative that goes along with stereotypical social expectations and model identities. The characters in the novel are torn between old allegiances and a new way of life, their parents' past and their own future. While they are celebrating their cultural hybridity they are at the same time unconsciously driven by notions that originate with the ideologies of the old orders such as racial essentialism and ethnic nationalism. Nevertheless, the historical panorama the novel offers unambiguously shows that, despite having to cope with the sins of the past – both in terms of city-planning and social policies – a new generation of multi-ethnic Canadians has emerged. The various longings of the characters often circle around the wish to belong somewhere. The one issue the novel carefully avoids to engage with is whether this desire to belong is utopian or if it can be satisfied by Toronto. Actually, some passages of the novel suggest that the leap from post-colonialism to post-nationalism has already been accomplished by this new generation: “They were, in fact, borderless” (WWALF, 213). The text does not remain on the level of discursive reiteration, it is highly political as it poses questions to its narratees. Especially the episode which depicts Carla visiting Jamal in prison shows that the text is theoretically informed. The gender and race relationships depicted in the texts show an awareness of sociological concepts. By way of her novels Brand enacts those

³⁷¹ Leo Driedger, *Race and Ethnicity: Finding Identities and Equalities*. Oxford & New York: OUP, 1999, 25-26. According to Driedger, Anglo-conformity is still an influential force in Canadian cultural politics that undermines all attempts at establishing a truly multicultural society.

³⁷² Driedger, *Race and Ethnicity*, 25-26.

theoretical concepts and makes them tangible. Additionally, the theoretical concepts the novel enacts facilitate its placement within the political discourse. In contrast to her first two novels, *What We All Long For*, despite ending on a tragic note, reveals glimpses of hope for the emergence of a post-national and post-ethnic Canada, a society as Chambers put it “in which differences are permitted a hearing, in which both speakers and the syntax of conversation run the risk of modification.”³⁷³ While Brand's first two novels in their characters perpetuated the idea that racial and ethnic minorities are inevitably caught in their history, that they cannot escape from the position of the victimized, *What We All Long For* shows that the path to a liberal society lies in the future, not in the past.

³⁷³ Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, 40.

7. Close Readings of Selected Works by George Elliott Clarke

7.1 The Politics and Poetics of Memory and Community in George Elliott Clarke's *Whylah Falls*

Five years later, Shelley, I can't forget.

We are our pasts. Nothing is forgotten.³⁷⁴

In this chapter, *Whylah Falls*, George Elliott Clarke's second book of poetry, will be analysed. As Heather Sanderson claims, “*Whylah Falls* [...] tells in fiction the true story of the 1985 death in Weymouth Falls in 1985 (sic) of Graham Jarvis, whose killer was acquitted by an all-white jury, an acquittal that led to charges of racism.”³⁷⁵ My working hypothesis concerning this text is that it is both an instance of nation building, of memory work engaging with the re-presentification of a past, the 1940s, which Clarke himself had not witnessed and a poetological re-assessment of the boundaries of literature. At first my working hypothesis for this chapter might remind readers of previous engagements with the text by other scholars. In fact scholars seem to be unambiguous about the text's discursive position. As I find this fixedness of interpretation and therefore textual meaning rather striking, I will attempt to uncover the particular textual strategies employed by Clarke to situate readers and link the text to a particular discourse and thereby reduce the “gap between intention and reading.”³⁷⁶ These strategies have not yet been properly described as most scholars have so far been discussing the text within the particular discursive framework the text – and themselves – are situated in. Additionally, I will discuss Clarke's strategy to dehistoricize the past he represents in order to create an imaginary environment that is free from the constraints of historical accuracy. The ambiguous temporal setting of the story illustrates this strategy perfectly. While the text never explicitly refers to historical contexts, a number of passages invite us to situate it in the 1930s. The concept of dehistoricization used for this analysis differs considerably from the similarly named concept familiar from philosophy. Dehistoricization, as used in this chapter, is not to be understood as the basis of logical thinking, as a precondition to the development of an unbiased argument, but rather as a flaunting of the addressees' cultural expectations concerning the narrative

³⁷⁴ George Elliott Clarke, *Whylah Falls* (Tenth-Anniversary Edition). Vancouver, BC: Polestar Book Publishers, 2000 (1990), 9. All further references will be to this edition, abbreviated title (WF) and page number will be provided in parentheses following the quote.

³⁷⁵ Heather Sanderson, “George Elliott Clarke”, in: William H. New, *Encyclopaedia of Literature in Canada*. Toronto, Buffalo & London: University of Toronto Press: 2002, 208-209.

³⁷⁶ Anthony Easthope, *Poetry as Discourse*. London: Routledge, ²1990 [1983], 15. Easthope's concept of reader positioning will be explained in more detail later on in this chapter.

reconstruction of a certain historical situation.³⁷⁷ In short: the text's artificiality is stressed and, due to the latter, prevailing discursive strategies to represent the past are problematized. Criticising this approach and the terminology used to describe it, one might claim that what I describe is the main idea behind all fictitious texts: to create an imaginary counter-world that allows the narratees to re-assess their reality. My point, however, is that *Whylah Falls* and its paratexts, while seemingly not facilitating the narratees' production of historical knowledge, are attempts at monopolizing the discursive re-imagination of the past, which, in turn, is an essential part of nation-building processes often described as myth making. *Whylah Falls* apparently invites its readers to feel into the historical situation of a community instead of claiming to transfer historically verifiable items of information about it. But this denial of background information inevitably creates a strong focus on its characters, their various motivations, and the community structures at the back of the particular social and historical environment recreated in the book. My point can be illustrated with the temporal discrepancy between the original of the story that is told and the setting it was transferred to. As Heather Sanderson claims, “*Whylah Falls* [...] tells in fiction the true story of the 1985 death in Weymouth Falls in 1985 (sic) of Graham Jarvis, whose killer was acquitted by an all-white jury, an acquittal that led to charges of racism.”³⁷⁸ So while the text offers hints allowing readers to locate its temporal setting during the 1930s, its story was, according to Sanderson, modelled on an incident which happened in 1985. This discrepancy and its effects will be analysed later in this chapter. However, I claim that the rhetoric of love which permeates the collection of poems in all its possible varieties and the traditions attached to it is the key to a discussion of this particular dehistoricizing effect. My argument is that Clarke uses these particular rhetorical devices in order to articulate a vision of the past that is neither time-bound nor indebted to one particular culture and its traditions of representation or discursive approaches: it transcends the idea of a claim to truthfulness, marginalizing the historical background information. I will first discuss the generic ambiguity of the sequence of poems assembled in *Whylah Falls*, especially focussing on the adaptation of stylistic devices from popular African-American music as poetic devices. Secondly, Clarke's poetological concept will be analysed in order to show how he intertwines politics with poetics. Subsequently, I will discuss *Whylah Falls* in its generic and cultural context, comparing Clarke's approach to depicting communities to other previous and contemporary attempts.

³⁷⁷ For a proper discussion of the dehistoricization in the context of western philosophy see: Robert M. Frozier, *Foucault, Subjectivity and Identity: Historical Constructions of Subject and Self*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2002, 252-260.

³⁷⁸ Heather Sanderson, “George Elliott Clarke”, in: William H. New, *Encyclopaedia of Literature in Canada*. Toronto, Buffalo & London: University of Toronto Press: 2002, 208-209.

7.1.1 The Musical Text: George Elliott Clarke's *Whylah Falls*

Whylah Falls was – in rudimentary form – first published in 1990, however, apparently being a work in progress, the tenth-anniversary edition, on which this chapter is based, published in 2000 by Polestar Books, contains a new introduction by Clarke and a number of poems that were written in the context of *Whylah Falls* but initially remained unpublished. In the new version these additional poems are separated from the original text as “The Apocrypha”, a section following the original text. Both the introduction and the additional poems are of interest for a revised close reading of the text as they provide a further insight into Clarke's poetics and politics. Seen from a business-oriented perspective, the marketing politics behind this tenth-anniversary edition show similarities to the re-issuing practices in popular music, similarities that seem to be intentional with regard to the text's structure and form. In this context, it is noteworthy that the author himself attempts to position his text in close proximity to musical forms of expression. The use of marketing strategies commonly used in popular music, however, is both an ironic comment on genre expectations – poems are usually not reissued, repacked and re-edited – and an implicit claim to be a marketable item, work of art and commodity. In addition to these similarities in marketing, the text, as mentioned before, is highlighting the historical proximity of music and words.³⁷⁹ Music is both an important subject in the text and a means to illustrate the internal workings of the text used by Clarke in the paratextual part of the book. In the introduction Clarke describes the structure and concept of *Whylah Falls* in musical terminology:

Consider the book as a symphony in which each poem is a passage, sometimes harmonious, sometimes cacophonous. Hence, the narrative emerges from the lyrical – sometimes in counterpoint, at other times in harmony, now merging, now diverging, but always enjoying the liberty of concord and discord. (WF, xi).

The analogy between words and music Clarke creates infringes the common notion of an interaction between the two separate entities, here words become sounds, are themselves tonal building blocks in a non-musical symphony. Improvisation is a key idea behind *Whylah Falls*, not only in the sense of the free interplay of images and sounds, but also as recourse to different

³⁷⁹ As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. remarked in a review of Toni Morrison's novel *Jazz*: “[...] the boundary between music and literature has proven a dynamic site of interplay [...]” Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Jazz.” in: Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. New York: Amistad Press, 1993, 52-55 (52).

approaches to poetry. However, in this context improvisation does not imply the dissolution of structures and established conventions often associated with the term, but a playful rearrangement of ideas and poetological approaches from different epochs. As I will later show, this improvisational strategy is juxtaposed to rigid structures borrowed from classic English poetry. Concerning the apparent disregard for a unified approach to poetic conventions behind *Whylah Falls*, I will argue that Clarke's flaunting of historical and cultural expectations is geared to achieve a certain effect.

However, as Clarke points out in his introduction, *Whylah Falls* was devised as a sequence of lyrical poems. The term lyrical is, for vast passages of the cycle, to be taken literally as those poems would sometimes also work as words to be sung, lyrics for songs. Some of the poems' titles explicitly stress their adaptability to music, as for example "King Bee Blues"³⁸⁰ (51), "Blues for X" (63) or "Jordantown Blues" (71). Those poems – as is obvious from their titles, which echo iconic traditional blues songs – are predominantly meant to be set to blues music. In terms of style, the first two poems mentioned before correspond to the three part structure predominant in classic Mississippi blues, featuring various repetitions of the key idea, or variations on key phrases. However, in terms of structure, "Jordantown Blues" has nothing in common with traditional blues lyrics. But title and subject – domestic violence and alcohol abuse – conform with generic requirements. Other poems in the collection such as "Death Song" (113) or "The Ballad of Othello Clemens" (123) would lend themselves to be performed with musical accompaniment, but, in terms of textual structure and subject, are apparently rooted in different traditions. However, especially the later poem is generically ambiguous as it contains features of blues lyrics – both in terms of structure and content – and, through the title, claims generic proximity to the English ballad-tradition. Especially the repetitions of key-phrases and the call-and-response effect going along with it, which dominate the first and third stanzas of the poem, allude to blues or even gospel traditions. The general function, the lament of Othello's death, can, however, be also related to the ballad-tradition. The ambiguous connection of title, structure and effect stress the intentionally hybrid nature of the poem. Concluding from these examples it can be said that some of the poems do not adhere to the musical traditions and structures they refer to in their titles. However, generally speaking, *Whylah Falls*, not unlike Toni Morrison's *Jazz*, explores the possibilities of modelling literary texts on musical structures, imagery and

³⁸⁰ The title of the poem reminds one of Slim Harpo's (James Moore's) classic blues song "I'm a King Bee" originally recorded 1957. Gerard Herzhaft, "I'm a King Bee". *Encyclopedia of the Blues*. University of Arkansas Press, 1992, p. 453.

traditions.

7.1.2 Biblical Language and Christian Imagery in *Whylah Falls*

Discussing the publishing politics of *Whylah Falls*, the additional poems published in the anniversary edition can be understood as further documents of the poetic process, serving a function similar to “bonus tracks” in music re-issuing. The title of this section is an ironic reference to the similarly titled books of the *Old Testament*. The section title “apocrypha”, a term which is predominantly associated with theological contexts, has been appropriated and secularized. However, this term is misleading as the additional poems are neither “hidden” nor “unauthentic” as apocryphal literally translates³⁸¹, but they complete the circle (of poems) and provide further insights into its key characters.

Throughout the whole collection Biblical phrases, imagery and style are used as literary devices. Sometimes whole passages echo the translations of the Old Testament in the King James Bible: “Shelley rouges her lips 'til they gleam glad like God sayin' she is His wife in whom He is well-pleased.” (WF, 19). In the context of Clarke's reliance on literary strategies borrowed from blues lyrics this seems to be a contradiction in terms. As Samuel Charters reminds us, “[t]he preoccupations of the blues; love, sexuality, personal disappointment and unhappiness are felt to be an insistent reminder of the worldly life that the [African-American] Christian should forget.”³⁸² By using biblical phrases, titles and terminology in a predominantly secular context like blues lyrics, discursive practices are challenged. The passage cited above illustrates this problematization of monopolized representational strategies. However, as I will show later, the references to Christian imagery and terminology in *Whylah Falls* should be discussed in the context of Africadian discursive practices described by Clarke as follows: “Faith and politics join in Africadian culture. The fact is likely a legacy of the Black Loyalists.”³⁸³ So at least with regard to Clarke's scholarly claim, the combination of Christian rhetoric and blues traditions is justifiable. Text and paratext both reiterate and stage Clarke's historical understanding of Africadian discursive strategies. The secular and the religious are intimately interwoven.

³⁸¹ Walter W. Skeat, *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*. Oxford: OUP, 1968, 25.

³⁸² Samuel Charters, *The Poetry of the Blues* (with photographs by Ann Charters). New York: Oak Publications, 1963, 35. Charters' book is also one of the key references mentioned by Clarke in the section “Apocrypha” of *Whylah Falls*.

³⁸³ George Elliott Clarke, “Introduction.” in George Elliott Clarke (ed.) *Fire on the Water: A First Portrait of Africadian Literature*. Lawrencetown Beach, Nova Scotia: Pottersfield Press, 1991, 13.

Therefore, a number of examples from the text which rely on Christian imagery are not analysed in this part of the chapter but will be dealt with in other contexts.

This re-contextualization of Biblical phrases and vocabulary could, however, also be discussed in the context of post-colonial cultural politics. The extension of the boundaries of language by appropriating terms and phrases and endowing them with new meaning used by Clarke in *Whylah Falls* is in keeping with the programmatic vision of a “new English”, adapted to express the experiences of the colonized individual, formulated in Chinua Achebe's epochal essay “The African Writer and the English Language”, first published in 1975.³⁸⁴ Using the terminology of music once again, Clarke describes this practice as follows: “You see, you have to understand improvisation, how a standard reference can become something else.” (WF, xi). However, this does not make *Whylah Falls* a text focussing on the redefinition of the cultural positions of colonizer and colonized, but, by challenging a wide range of discursive practices and vocabularies, it becomes more ambivalent in its politics. Furthermore, Clarke's creative appropriation of English transcends Achebe's in so far as he takes heed of the more fundamental challenges to language articulated by postmodern theorists.

7.1.3 Clarke's Poetics and Politics as Outlined in the Introduction to *Whylah Falls*

Clarke, both as scholar and author, is – despite the number of articles he has already published on his own work – reluctant about positioning his approach to literature. Judging on the basis of the amount of paratextual information provided in Clarke's fictional texts, it seems as if he values an approach that privileges author-centred readings of his texts. This assumption is confirmed by his introduction to the tenth anniversary edition of *Whylah Falls*. On the following pages, I will examine the poetological and political considerations contained in this introduction in order to distil a poetics from his elusive meanderings.

The second section of Clarke's introduction to the second edition of *Whylah Falls*, which familiarizes readers with Clarke's understanding of poetry is, rather teasingly, titled “The

³⁸⁴ Chinua Achebe, “The African Writer and the English Language” in: Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. New York & London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994, 328-34.

Intentional Fallacy.” The title of this section, borrowed from W.K. Wimsatt's and Monroe Beardsley's 1946 essay is hinting at the issue Clarke is negotiating. In their article, Wimsatt and Beardsley challenged literary criticism as practised by their contemporaries and established the foundation for a text-centred approach to literature.³⁸⁵ Instead of searching for possible clues to better understand the author's intention, they advocated a form of close-reading that privileges the analysis of the internal workings of texts themselves. They intended to challenge a school of literary criticism that – in focusing on the discovery of authorial intentions and motivations behind texts – spent little time on their social and historical position and their discursive function. In this section, Clarke explains the autobiographical roots of his sequence of poems and gives an insight into the experiences that finally motivated him to write *Whylah Falls*. By giving additional information on the text and the circumstances of its production – in a sense revealing his intentions behind writing this sequence of poems – Clarke deliberately problematizes readings that entirely reject authorial positions. He personalizes his poetry and points out that his writing was fuelled both by his feeling of nostalgia for the past and motivated by the urgent need to preserve the last traces of a vanishing culture. He “wanted to resurrect that lost time [apparently the 30s and 40s] when poetry was lightning and rich rain, falling like steel guitar.” (xi). But *Whylah Falls*, unlike later works like *Execution Poems* and *George & Rue*, is not openly blurring the boundaries between literature and historiography. Those boundaries, however, are also challenged, but in an entirely different way. In terms of discursive function, Clarke explicitly describes his poetry as a form of memory work: “Richard Lemm and Eli Mandel³⁸⁶ helped me to retrieve a scarecrow and a crooked kitchen that I had hidden in memory.” (xii). The material aspect of memory, the Proustian Madeleine, which evokes a train of association and triggers the imaginative re-figuration central to Clarke's *Whylah Falls*, is alluded to in this passage. The “crooked kitchen” and the “scarecrow” are not only images in Clarke's mind, reminding him of his youth, but also symbols of memory work. Actually these symbols invite a Freudian reading. The kitchen, where ingredients are concocted and turned into meals, in a way processed, represents the internal workings of memory itself, or according to Freud's terminology – the subconscious. In this context, “crooked” might hint at the imprecision of the mind when engaged in memory work or, it describes the individuality of these processes.³⁸⁷ The scarecrow represents consciousness itself, guarding the psyche of the individual from the random actions of the id, misplacing, replacing and hiding memories. The cook in the crooked kitchen

³⁸⁵ W.K. Wimsatt (& Monroe Beardsley), “The Intentional Fallacy” (excerpts) in: Raman Selden (ed), *The Theory of Criticism. From Plato to the Present*. London & New York: Longman, 1988, 314-16.

³⁸⁶ Eli Mandel was one of the key figures in Canadian literary criticism in the latter part of the twentieth century.

³⁸⁷ Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Historical Slang*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972 [1937], 225.

can therefore only do his processing, his transformation work when everything is in place. Clarke thereby, in double coding, describes his memory work. As I will later show in my discussion of the function of stylistic devices employed in *Whylah Falls*, materialization and transformation are key conceptual elements. In a Wordsworthian sense he transfigures the images those personal memories, myth and stories evoke in him and couples them with the discursive framework stereotypically associated with this epoch and the ethnicity of the people he depicts, creating a representation of the past that is decidedly subjective. Despite the subjective character of this representation both the allusions to fundamentally common discursive frameworks and the detailed and varied insights into the different characters make this piece of writing an instance of memory work.

As style and structure of his introduction show, Clarke is firmly rooted in the western tradition. Some of Clarke's paratextual passages follow the literary tradition of the poetological poem. This tradition dates back to classic Roman literature, revived and adapted by Alexander Pope and his contemporaries during the eighteenth century. Especially Pope's "Essay on Criticism", a long poetological poem first published in 1711, should be seen as a historical predecessor to Clarke's approach used in his "Introduction" to the tenth-anniversary edition of *Whylah Falls*. The first proper literary tradition he alludes to is the concept of the muses originating from classical Greek and Roman literature. Clarke's muses are "Eros, Death, Intellect and Spirit" (xi) which he attempts to rediscover. The rediscovery of these muses is part of "finding the emotion of song." (xi) By mentioning his personal muses – which do neither in number nor in function correspond with the Greek and Roman set of deities – Clarke makes clear that his appropriation of the western poetic tradition is fuelled by political calculus. The "invocation of the muses" is traditionally associated with epic poetry. It is both an affirmative and authoritative gesture of the writer, a claim to be guided and favoured by the muse Calliope. Yet, in his introduction's sub-chapter titled "The Death of the Epic", Clarke points out that while seeing himself in the epic tradition, *Whylah Falls* should rather be considered akin to the extended lyrical sequences of Emily Dickinson's *Poems*, Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and Jean Toomer's *Cane*. The epic tradition, according to Clarke has its roots in the perpetuation of ethnic and national identities. This is a commonplace confirmed by most standard works on literary terms. J.A. Cudden, for instance, attributes "national significance in the sense that they embody the history and aspirations of a nation in a lofty and grandiose manner" to the genre.³⁸⁸ It

³⁸⁸ J.A. Cudden, *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*. London: Penguin, 1999, p. 264.

is therefore a tradition that, in the context of increasingly post-national and post-modern identity concepts, has outlived itself. As Easthope points out: “Discourses and their means of representation live and die within history.”³⁸⁹ However, Clarke regards the form of the lyrical sequence, he used in *Whydah Falls* as the natural successor to the epic tradition. This tradition, or rather poetry in general, is, according to Clarke, already in danger of becoming irrelevant, a process that can only be stopped if poetry is produced to occupy a discursive position similar to the novel: “The poem survives now by gathering onto itself all of the powers of the novel.” This, which Clarke, in a self-conscious gesture, claims to have achieved: “And although the machinery³⁹⁰ of the epic – the decasyllabic line and iambic metre – had rusted from lack of use, once repaired, it began to find new expression in my verse.” (WF, xvii). Clarke's choice of genre is political. The text itself is an attempt to revive, or rather invigorate a genre that has lost both its former grandeur and its discursive relevance. Considering his position as part of the African-Canadian minority, it is a gesture pending between self-conscious appropriation and cultural conservatism. As Easthope claims, “English poetic discourse since the Renaissance is the product of history, ideologically determined. [...] it is an epochal form co-terminous with the capitalist mode of production and the hegemony of the bourgeoisie as the ruling class. It is therefore a *bourgeois* poetic discourse.”³⁹¹ By resorting to poetry as a form of expression, Clarke stresses the marginality of both text and the subject position he occupies – both as cultural critic and artist. However, as pointed out before, he situates his writing within generic and cultural boundaries which he continually strives to challenge and extend. His conservatism is therefore not uncritical and his approach could also be seen as a break with prevailing strategies in New World African writing. As Loomba claims: “Discursive practices make it difficult for individuals to think outside them – hence they are also exercises in power and control.”³⁹² Clarke's appropriation of those outlived discursive practices therefore signals an intentional break with prevailing forms of representation. What is often described as an “appropriation of the colonizer's voice” is an ironic gesture in Clarke's writing. It appears conservative as it is rooted in western traditions, but on the other hand its discursive practices are appropriated to give expression to those lying beyond the boundaries of this tradition. The first two passages of his poetological introduction perfectly capture the essence of Clarke's literary work. His approach is based on a merging of western poetic structures with New World African elements, especially his

³⁸⁹ Easthope, *Poetry as Discourse*, 23.

³⁹⁰ Clarke ironically echoes Derrida's understanding of language as “a sort of machine.” Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (translated from the French by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak). Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1976, 181-182.

³⁹¹ Easthope, *Poetry as Discourse*, 24. The italics are Easthope's.

³⁹² Loomba, 39.

appropriation of the epic tradition – in the guise of the lyrical sequence. In “Antiphony” from *Blue*, a later collection of poems, Clarke describes the idea behind this strategy: “So I craved to hear Milton hollered out, / Yelled with handclaps and tin spoons played on thighs, / [...] Spellers, wrecking letters, / Bashing grammar into gravel. Why not? / Our British literature was just dust – / A Mob of beetles chewing torn up books, / Royally churning Chaucer into dung.”³⁹³ This idea of reviving old forms through hybridization is central to the concept behind *Whylah Falls*. Embedded into structures borrowed from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English classicism, Clarke realizes his idea of lyrical improvisation. The staging of dialogues, monologues, love letters and press clippings, of which *Whylah Falls* consists is an attempt to capture an imaginary rural community through its own representatives, the scrap-book style of this collection stresses the interplay of individual voice with overall structure. The idea to represent this fictitious place Whylah Falls through its inhabitants is rooted in Clarke's own assessment that Africadian culture defines itself through its particular focus on community: “Africans also seem to believe that identity is found not primarily in the self, but in the group.”³⁹⁴ The text itself – due to its hybrid structures – functions as medium that artificially stages a third space, a sphere where traditions are experimentally juxtaposed and collided with each other, where rigid conventions are broken up and reassembled in the manner of blues improvisation. As mentioned before, *Whylah Falls* does not feature a single unifying speaker. Instead the sequence of poems is divided among different speakers, such as the poet Xavier (x), his beloved Shelley and an anonymous speaker. Furthermore, in addition to the poetic sequences, it also features fictional press articles and dramatic dialogues. Yet, despite its fragmented structure the poems in their original sequence do produce coherent stories about Whylah Falls' inhabitants. Especially the section dedicated to the depiction of Othello Clemens' assassination through Scratch Seville, “The Martyrdom of Othello Clemens”, provides a multi-perspective insight into the internal workings of the community. By diversifying the perspectives, the problem of the privileged authoritative voice has been circumvented. The individuals living in Whylah Falls either present themselves as individuals or they are presented in a form that does not plainly show the interference of a narrator. This multiplicity of perspectives problematizes an autobiographical reading. Only the poet Xavier can be seen as Clarke's spokesman, however, detached from his position in time by a couple of decades.

The traditional invocation of the muses, a central feature and key strategy in epic poetry

³⁹³ George Elliott Clarke, *Blue*. Vancouver: Polestar Books, 2001, 21.

³⁹⁴ Clarke, “Introduction” to *Fire on the Water*, 13.

does not occur in the text of *Whylah Falls*, despite being discussed in the introduction. As there is no bard, no authoritative speaker, there is no need to verify and stress his authority and truthfulness. The different individuals present themselves, they have their own agency, their own subject positions. Furthermore, Clarke situates *Whylah Falls* in the tradition of the blues, claiming that the blues and epic poetry are both performative acts that basically share the same set of functions. This claim has a number of implications for the text itself and for its poetological background. By foregrounding the performative function poetry and (blues) music share, he highlights their non literary features, creating the impression that the material status of the text – the writing – is of secondary importance. Additionally, by providing a number of implied fictional addressees and addressers, creating a fictional miniature discourse, he re-centres his writing, giving the impression that its “original context” is an inherent part of it.³⁹⁵ As I will later on discuss in more detail, the implied refusal of the claims of post-structuralism is programmatic, its positioning of real and implied addressees strategic.

According to Clarke, both the blues singer and the bard provided narrative sequences which contained myths and stories about origins, community and values, which is as Clarke deplures, not possible in contemporary Canada due to the lack of “a womb of commonly held beliefs” (WH, xv). In addition to that, Clarke makes clear that he equally acknowledges the different cultures that have influenced his writing and that he is well informed about the different tendencies and the development in literary criticism during the 20th century. The headlines to the subdivision of his introduction, which are all titles of major works of twentieth-century literary criticism, show that Clarke is an informed reader and writer, well versed in the literary traditions and literary criticism of both western traditions and New World African schools of thought. The cultural tradition into which Clarke inscribes himself and literary strategies that are inherently part of these traditions are therefore subject of a meta-poetical discourse within *Whylah Falls*. In order to properly discuss the this meta-poetical discourse I will later discuss the function of the rhetorical devices most frequently employed by Clarke.

³⁹⁵ Easthope, *Poetry as Discourse*, 14-15.

7.1.4 The Rhetoric of Community: Stylistic Devices employed in *Whylah Falls*

A recurring motif in *Whylah Falls* is transformation, its key stylistic devices are paradox and oxymoron. In contrast to classic mythology this leitmotif does not occur on the story level, persons do not change into things and vice versa, but is rather a stylistic feature. The text contains different kinds of imagery based on the idea of transformation, the transformation of immaterial into material object is perhaps the most frequently used image. In many cases, language metaphorically materializes and its materialization is in turn transformed into another material. The poem “Rose Vinegar” is exemplary for this technique:

[...] Xaviar wires rugose rose blossoms to Shelley. [...] though she admires the blossoms for their truthfulness to themselves, she does not hesitate to distill a delicate and immortal vinegar from what she considers the ephemeral petals of X's desire. [...] Rose vinegar. It's especially good on salads. (WF, 10)

These passages contain a combination of paradox and transformation. The first part is a paradox: rugose rose blossoms are wired, an act that is in itself impossible. Subsequently, the message of love, almost certainly poetry, having been wired to the speaker's beloved Shelley, is paradoxically treated like the material manifestation wired to the beloved. The poem is literally transformed into blossoms again. These blossoms are then furthermore transformed through a chemical process – unsuitably described as distillation – by its recipient. This second transformation symbolizes the rejection of the speaker's love through his beloved; blossoms, by distilling become vinegar, thereby losing their essential qualities, their smell and softness, they become a sour liquid. While rose blossoms appeal positively to both our sense of smell and sight, the vinegar, due to its sourness, is sensually perceived less positive than the blossoms. The whole poem is a variation on the saying “love turns sour.” The effect of the poem is basically due to a discontinuous employment of figurative language, thwarting conventional expectations in order to return, by means the afore mentioned proverbial phrase, back to its general idea: the speaker's unrequited love for Shelley. While this example was rather unconventional, *Whylah Falls* also features the transformation motif in more conventional forms:

All my poems have sprouted into this gold daisy, this
memory, of how, at the slightest touch, Whylah Falls sunlight
turns to rain, how the Sixhiboux River, rusted by stones and sewage,

pours brown into the blue bay [...] (WF, 19)

Language, in the form of poetry, is both metaphorically transformed into a living organism and becomes an articulation of the speaker's memory work, it is both substantial and fleeting. This image is used again in slightly different form on the following page: "My poems, thrown to the creek, gleam, wriggle, leap." (WF, 20) In this case the motif of transformation is used to stress the resilience of both language and the emotional state it describes. In the following example the materialization of language describes the development of the speaker's insight into his own use of language:

But my lies lie. My colleged speech ripens before you,
Becomes Negro-natural, those green, soiled words
Whose roots mingle with turnip, carrot, and squash,
Keeping philology fresh and tasty. (WF, 57).

In these passages the idea of estrangement of educated middle-class writers from the folk tradition they want to represent is taken up. The folk tradition is metaphorically stylized as the ideal the poet aspires to. The vegetable-metaphor in this passage translates the Renaissance idea of figuratively linking vegetative qualities with emotional states to the realm of language, stressing thereby the vitality and capacity of almost unlimited growth inherent to language. The idea that language has a life of its own, is mobile and active, permeates Clarke's cycle of poems. As a stylistic device, Clarke makes use of the idea of metamorphosis in order to symbolically highlight the unbroken vitality and the power of rejuvenation of language. The idea of transformation which Clarke explores as a stylistic device in *Whylah Falls* is one of the central concepts in (western) literary tradition: "[M]etamorphosis is the principle of organic vitality as well as the pulse in the body of art. This concept lies at the heart of classical and other myth, and governs the practice and scope of magic; it also, not coincidentally, runs counter to notions of unique, individual integrity of identity in the Judaeo-Christian tradition."³⁹⁶ However, there are numerous examples of transformation rhetoric more in keeping with Christian symbolism as in the introductory poem "Look Homewards Exile" where the speaker presents himself by using literary devices closely associated with omnipotent saviour figures: "I knead earth into bread, spell water into wine." (WF, xxxi). In the poetic universe of *Whylah Falls*, the Greek/Roman idea of transformation as more or less arbitrary and uncontrolled change and its Christianized

³⁹⁶ Marina Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds*. Oxford & New York: OUP, 2002, p. 2.

counterpart, locating transformative powers in omnipotent saviour/creator figures, peacefully coexist. In a form of playful exaggeration, central to the African-American tradition of boasting, the speaker stylizes himself as a self-appointed saviour, concluding that even his rhetorical powers cannot cure him of his homesickness: “Still nothing warms my wintry exile – neither / Prayers nor fine love, neither votes nor hard drink: (WF, xxxi). Neither in rhetoric nor in social situation are the worldly and the religious clearly separated. Sensual and religious feelings and practices are both thematized as aspects of human experience, closely related to each other. Furthermore, the combination of paradox and anthropomorphism is used to express cultural anxiety:

Another player, a poet, bears a
satchel full of letters and seven books of the elegant verse
that perished in the slaughter of The Great War.” (WF, 3).

This combination of stylistic devices is an intratextual re-iteration of Clarke's claim, phrased in *Whylah Fall's* paratext, that certain genres have outlived their original function.

Xaviar regards language as a magic tool, a deus-ex-machina, enabling him to transform his beloved's indifference into love. But in order to make language function as a magic potion that transforms indifference into love, it has to reach its addressee. Shelley however indulges in her indifference and does not even read his poetry. This story is a vehicle to thematize the problematic discursive status of literature.³⁹⁷ As Cuddon reminds us, [d]iscourse has an object and is directed at an object.”³⁹⁸ Poetry, like any other form of discourse, is pointless if it remains unread and unappreciated. As Xaviar postulates:

Lovely Shelley,
I have no use for measured, cadenced verse
If you won't read. Icarus-like, I'll fall
Against this page of snow, tumble blackly
Across vision to drown in the white sea
That closes every poem – the white reverse
That cancels the blackness of each image.” (WF, 23).

³⁹⁷ In this context, discourse is used to describe an interconnected series of acts of communication. I am well aware that different fields of discourse exist, i.e. the relationship between texts as described by T. S. Eliot; however, in the following passages I will use the term to describe both the specific phenomenon and the larger cultural contexts in which it occurs. Easthope, 7-10.

³⁹⁸ J.A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Penguin: London, 1999, 228.

While the poem apparently focuses on the speaker and his very personal problems, revealing a sensitivist rather than intellectualist concept of discourse to follow Genette's differentiation³⁹⁹, its imagery suggests a wider meaning. Being centred around the writing-inherent black/white contrast the poem implicitly hints at the problematic position of African-Canadian cultural production within a white-majority culture. The speaker, stylizing himself as a modern-day Icarus, is afraid of not being perceived. His wings – poetry – can only make him fly if public perception – especially Shelley – give him the strength to avoid falling into the “white sea.” In these lines the whiteness of the paper – the waves of the white sea – paradoxically obliterates the blackness of the ink. Through this imagery the speaker articulates both his own helplessness and a deep-seated fear of losing his identity. Language, as Clarke points out in his dedicatory epigraph is a “traitor”, unworthy to be trusted as Shelley makes clear:

You come down, after
five winters, X,
[...]
litterin' the table
with poems –
as if we could trust them! (WF, 24).

Shelley, speaking in the plural form, articulates both her own suspicion and foresees Xaviar's scepticism. According to Hugh Hodges this passage thematizes “the distrust that develops on both sides when the educated writer attempts to engage with the oral culture.”⁴⁰⁰ According to Hodges' reading, Shelley refuses Xaviar's poetry because it does not fit in with her set of requirements, it remains unsatisfying. Xaviar, on the other hand, feels frustrated by Shelley ignoring his poetry and thereby rendering it useless in the sense of becoming a means of communication. Both images are taken up again towards the end of the cycle. In the last poem Xaviar addresses to Shelley he complains:

You salt away my green, tender letters
To cure – or decay – in forgetfulness.
There, foxed by tears, the dark sheen of words
Will fade slowly to blurs, my Negro blush

³⁹⁹ Gérard Genette, *Mimologics* (translated from the French by Thaïs E. Morgan). Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995, 174-76.

⁴⁰⁰ Hugh Hodges, “New Maps for Old: George Elliott Clarke's *Odysseys Home*”, 151.

Of eloquence corrode to white silence.” (WF, 202).

The black/white opposition, however, is not reserved for the articulation of cultural anxiety, it is also used to describe complementary features of the setting:

[...] Simultaneously, a
dark blue engine steams into Whylah station – a white
marble phantasm.” (WF, 3).

In different contexts the symbolic use of colour-coding varies, however, the frequently used black/white opposition mostly illustrates the cultural conflict between white and black Canadians, the attempts of the latter often silenced by the former.

Structurally, the lyrical sequence is divided into parts of which each is concerned with the character of one or two individuals and their (self-assigned) role within the community of Whylah Falls. The content of each of these parts is briefly introduced in a short summary always titled similarly as “The Argument”, a strategy Clarke borrowed from seventeenth and early eighteenth-century poets like Milton and Pope. Each of those sections is introduced with an epigraph. Those epigraphs primarily originate from the *Old Testament*, amongst them, two from “The Song of Solomon.” Those summaries feature the anonymous speaker who, similar to an omniscient narrator, who has an insight into the inner life of the other characters. Despite keeping an ironic distance from the characters, the anonymous speaker describes the community from within. As Janice Fiamenco claims this speaker functions as a “narrator [who] attempts to capture the many voices necessary to a full epic portrait of Nova Scotia.⁴⁰¹ Xaviar, most probably Clarke's fictional extension, is the central character of the lyrical sequence as he features both as suitor to Shelley and lover of Selah, Shelley's sister. Love, in its various forms, is a central theme in *Whylah Falls*.

⁴⁰¹ Janice Fiamenco, “Regionalism and Urbanism.” in Eva-Marie Kröller (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*. Cambridge: CUP, 2004, 241-62 [260].

7.1.5 Literature for My Village? Clarke and US-American Representations of Community and History

Whylah Falls similar to both William Faulkner's "Yoknapatowa Novels" and most of Toni Morrison's narrative fiction focuses on the representation of an imagined community. People and sites or landscapes portrayed by its various speakers, be it through memory or on-site description, are both abstract – due to the speakers' reliance on the rhetoric of love – and concrete in their corporeality and spatiality. Clarke's sequence of poems, especially considering its focus on the representation of a community of people of colour, follows the tradition of African-American literature produced after the success of the civil rights movement. As Maria Diedrich points out, writers like Toni Morrison began to "free themselves of the fixation on a primarily Euro-American readership" and instead targeted a readership from their own "cultural matrix."⁴⁰² Those writers often reject traditional western narrative models and conventions and, through their rejection of canonized narrative strategies, question "Euro-American perceptions of reality, time and space."⁴⁰³ Clarke's strategy, as I have shown in my discussion of his poetological approach, is entirely different. Instead of rejecting western narrative conventions and models, he appropriates and parodies traditional western styles, challenges conventional practices of signifying and appropriates registers and vocabulary from different and often problematic fields. He challenges the discursive forms of the majority not through rejection, but by appropriating their conventions to articulate experiences and world-views differing from those of the majority. Instead of artificially creating a new Anglo-African form of narrating, Clarke makes use of the vast heterogeneous repertoire of cultural influences, consisting both of European, Euro-American and New World African narrative models, world-views and concepts. Nevertheless, even this approach, despite the topicality of its aesthetic and political revisionist practices, is neither new nor innovative. It has a long tradition in Anglo-African literary history, dating back to Phillis Wheatley's poems which, while using European register and style, implicitly thematize African – in Wheatley's case west-African – concerns and ideas. Furthermore, Clarke's lyrical sequence shows strong similarities, both in style, structure and focus to Jean Toomer's *Cane*. In *Whylah Falls*, generic parody is a device that signalizes an acceptance of this heterogeneous cultural heritage and a means to synthesize it. This approach to structures and conventions also includes the reworking of New World African forms of art like blues lyrics, which, as I have

⁴⁰² Maria Diedrich, "Literature For My Village. Die afro-amerikanische Gegenwartsliteratur." in: Hubert Zapf (ed.), *Amerikanische Literaturgeschichte*. Stuttgart & Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 1996, 420-26 [420]. My translation.

⁴⁰³ Ibid, 421.

pointed out before, have been hybridized with genres from other cultures such as the European ballad-tradition.

Clarke's approach to literature, and, therefore, his chosen medium of poetry, are according to his own point of view, decidedly anti-modern. According to Clarke, poetry, due to its denial of the modern, "insists on recalling Arcadian pastures" (WF, xiii). Anti-modern, seen in conjunction to Clarke's references to the blues – which has been identified by Timothy Brennan as quintessentially anti-modern⁴⁰⁴ – is an apt self-description of his poetics. However, anti-modernism is also the key philosophical and stylistic principle behind *Whylah Falls*. Brennan states that the blues and the poetry it produces is inevitably political, in the sense of rejecting what Brennan summarizes as modernity. However, it does openly criticize politics but, according to Brennan, forms an imaginary counter-world to this modernity. As Shuker quoting Garon points out: "the blues conveys pleasure 'through its use of images, convulsive images, images of the fantastic and of the marvellous, images of desire.'"⁴⁰⁵ Following this argument *Whylah Falls*, seen as a merger of blues and (epic) poetry, incorporates two similarly anti-modern art forms which, in their flexibility elude systematization⁴⁰⁶ and, by incorporating mirrored and distorted references to other works of art, extend their scope. What Brennan contests with regard to neo-African music can be appropriated to pin-point the idea behind Clarke's approach to poetry, because it is "modern by giving voice to anti-modern sentiments."⁴⁰⁷ In addition to that, blues is one of the few varieties of New World African Music that is entirely North American and in its stress of honest lyricism and the depiction of rural life styles an antithesis to jazz which has completed the development from popular to intellectual variety.⁴⁰⁸ On the textual level, this anti-modern effect concerns especially the attitude towards an intimate relationship between place, community and the individual. While the characters of Lawrence Hill's and Dionne Brand's novels can be characterized through their – voluntary and involuntary – movements across the globe, the characters in *Whylah Falls* are reluctant to leave their homeplace, and, if they do, like Xaviar, they are more than willing to return home.

⁴⁰⁴ Timothy Brennan, *Secular Devotion. Afro-Latin Music and Imperial Jazz*. London & New York: Verso, 2008, 2. "African New World music is political not because it is always, or even usually, a carrier of political messages (it isn't) but because the saturation of New World sensibilities by African religion and philosophy is, by its nature, political [...]"

⁴⁰⁵ Roy Shuker, *Understanding Popular Music*, London: Routledge 2001, 148.

⁴⁰⁶ See: Marshal Stearns, *The Story of Jazz*. Oxford: OUP, 1956. Stearns points out that recorded blues and blues improvised on stage are two different entities. While recorded blues relies on a relatively (if already less than classical music) fixed rhythmic and melodic structure, in performances this structure is further opened up and interspersed with unexpected breaks, changes and repetitions of the rhythmic patterns.

⁴⁰⁷ Brennan, *Secular Devotion*, 34.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 238-40.

Derascination, one of the central issues in Dionne Brand's narrative fiction is not an experience shared by the speakers of Clarke's cycle of poems. Instead of celebrating the contemporary ideal of cosmopolitanism, Clarke depicts an intimate relationship between a particular environment and the physical living conditions it offers and its inhabitants. This is both due to the temporal setting, the 1940s, and to the family and community structures that characterize the setting. The closed community of Whylah Falls – in structure similar to that which we find in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*, but not openly motivated by racial issues – functions both as social web and net: permeable from the inside, but impenetrable to intruders. This vision of a stable, if not stagnant social microcosm is certainly at odds with the motif of transformation which resurfaces in different variations throughout the text. So while the text in its entirety, describes a stable social entity, its imagery suggests permeability and change. This ambiguity is part of the strategic employment of contradictory strategies. Language and textual message, which are often expected to correspond, develop into separate entities, each occupying its own semantic space. Returning to a discussion of the home vs. exile idea, the obvious starting point is Xavier as he is the speaker introducing this issue. In the following I will discuss Xavier's absence and the figure of the intellectual he represents in the context of rural vs. metropolitan concerns.

The tension between popular and intellectual approaches towards literature is one of the central themes of *Whylah Falls*. Especially Clarke's alter ego, the poet Xavier, is torn between his longing to be part of the community of Whylah Falls and his aloofness from its social practices. However, seen in the context of recent approaches to Clarke's writing as an instance of world-making and nation-building it is obvious that the hybridity of Clarke's text implies a continuity with a tradition that many of his contemporaries reject due to its inherent elitism.⁴⁰⁹ Hugh Hodges actually senses an anxiety about cultural estrangement in Clarke's writing that implicitly foregrounds the “ambivalent relationship between the educated, middle-class writers of the Africadian Renaissance and the folk culture from which they often find themselves distanced.”⁴¹⁰ This estrangement between object, speaker and addressee is furthermore thematized in the double diaspora – in an intellectual and spatial sense – these educated middle-class speakers place themselves in. This double diaspora is thematized in Clarke's “expatriate poems”, as for instance “Look Homeward Exile” in *Whylah Falls* or “Watercolours for Negro Expatriates in France” in *Lush Dreams, Blue Exile*, in which those speakers articulate feelings of

⁴⁰⁹ Hugh Hodges, “New Maps for Old: George Elliott Clarke's *Odysseys Home*.” In: *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 34.4 (Winter 2003), 150-54 [151].

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

cultural disorientation, estrangement and loss. While “Look Homeward Exile” introduces both the main characters and the main themes of *Whylah Falls* in the context of the speaker's nostalgic articulation of his longing for home, “Watercolours for Negro Expatriates in France” explicitly problematizes the experience of the black diaspora:

After all, how can you be an expatriate
of a country that was
never yours?”⁴¹¹

The contrast is sharp: while *Whylah Falls* creates the vision of an Africadian community, a home-place its expatriate speaker Xaviar longs for, the Negro expatriates addressed in “Watercolours” have no such thing, they are involuntary cosmopolitans. In contrast, *Whylah Falls* is a closed community which consists of a racial and ethnic homogeneous set of people. The attitude of the world outside towards *Whylah Falls* and its inhabitants, especially their rites and practices is not among the issues the cycle of poems deals with. Considering the paratextual information given, the text remains remarkably free of political comments. However, the denial of civil rights during the era the poems are set in is implicitly thematized. In “Look Homeward Exile”, Xaviar speaks about his longing for home, explaining why the advantages of exile, including the right to vote, cannot make him forget about his home-place.

Both his poetological introduction and the introductory epigraph point to the primacy of language and its systemic and ideological ambiguity. These passages reiterate the idea that, as Ania Loomba puts it, “no human utterance [can] be seen as innocent.”⁴¹² The dedicatory epigram of *Whylah Falls* shows a similar attitude towards language as a means of representation:

I know that this traitor language can turn
One truth into another or even
Against itself. Yet, it is all we have. (WF, vii)

While showing a keen awareness of post-modern tendencies to question the epistemological status of language the speaker, obviously Clarke himself, as this epigram belongs to *Whylah Falls'* paratext, points out that – despite its shortcomings – human beings cannot exist without it. The epigram echoes Easthope's analysis of Saussure's theoretical work: “If signifiers have an

⁴¹¹ George Elliott Clarke, *Lush Dreams, Blue Exile*. Lawrencetown Beach: Pottersfield Press, 1994, 24.

⁴¹² Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London & New York: Routledge, 1998, 37.

autonomy and determining action of their own, the signifier is not transparent in respect of the signified, not merely a passive means of communication.”⁴¹³ The paratext, in which Clarke states his poetical and political principles, also suggests that, despite all its abstraction, *Whylah Falls* was modelled on an incident that had really happened. This is explicitly stressed in the following quote from the introduction: “These poems are fact presented as fiction. There was no other way to tell the truth save to disguise it as a story.” (WF, xxviii). Despite Clarke's focus on the content level, the “disguising” draws most of its effect from the choice of genre. As Easthope points out: [t]hrough repetition of the signifier, poetry signals that it is read as a fictional discourse.”⁴¹⁴ Judging from these ambiguous statements, I claim that Clarke strategically problematizes postmodern and postcolonial doubts in language as a discursive tool in order to be able to fully exploit its nation-building power. Additionally, due to the enormous amount of paratextual information, Clarke's fiction can, if read consciously, hardly be read as a self-referential entity. According to Easthope, a poem does become referential if “reader[s are] positioned so as to read the discourse as transparent and treat it as referential.”⁴¹⁵ In *Whylah Falls* this positioning is achieved by way of the paratext. These paratextual elements – if read – inevitably guide potential readers through their readings of the fictional text, furthermore highlighting its ideological position. Contrary to Easthope's claim that “signifieds are not fixed and cannot be so fixed”, the paratextual elements of *Whylah Falls*, by positioning the addressees, inextricably bind the fiction to a particular discourse.⁴¹⁶ While Clarke had not yet been explicit about his didactic intent when *Whylah Falls* was first published in 1990, it became evident in his introduction to its tenth anniversary edition and, even earlier, in his introduction to the collection of African-Canadian writing he edited in 1997 titled *Eyeing the North Star*. There he postulates that:

Generally, African-Canadian writers are called to bear witness against Canadian racism: the shooting-downs in cold blood, of unarmed black men by white cops; the pitiless exploitations and denials of black women; the persistent erasure of our presence; the channelling of black youth into dead-end classes and brain-dead jobs; the soft-spoken white supremacist assumptions that result in our impoverishment, our invisibility, our suffering, our death.⁴¹⁷

Reading these lines, it becomes clear that his fiction is politically and emotionally charged. There is not much room for interpretation in his fiction; following the post-structuralist claim that the

⁴¹³ Anthony Easthope, *Poetry as Discourse*. London: Routledge, ²1990 [1983], 12.

⁴¹⁴ Easthope, *Poetry as Discourse*, 16.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid 17.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid, 7.

⁴¹⁷ Clarke, *Eyeing the North Star*, xx.

reader produces meaning, not the author, would obliterate and invalidate the paratextual reader guidance and, therefore, the text's didactic message. According to Clarke's understanding literature and politics are intimately linked. The writer, as a participant in a cultural discourse, contributes to the project of making African-Canadians visible. This idea has been with him since the beginning of his career in the introduction to *Fire on the Water*, the first anthology he compiled, he briefly discusses the reasons for the rise in literary productivity within the "Africadian community."⁴¹⁸ The primary criteria for his selection of texts was their "artistic exploration of the Africadian soul." In his introduction he aimed to "reveal the common themes and techniques of Africadian literature."⁴¹⁹ In this introduction, Clarke thematizes his materialist approach to describe the Africadian literary tradition. He explicitly links the increase in number of African-Canadian, especially Africadian authors during the 1970s and 1980s to a number of social and political developments.⁴²⁰ The materialist approach is also relevant with regard to *Whylah Falls*, not in the paratextual part, but in the text proper. Especially in the context of the historical epoch it is set in, the description of material living conditions – in the form of recipes and embedded setting descriptions – is of importance.

Considering the historical epoch it is set in, the text gives explicit clues in the form of references to historical events and developments. The strategies of memory work employed in *Whylah Falls*, can be best illustrated using the example of the poem "Quilt." In "Quilt" the female speaker, most certainly Amarantha, articulates her fear of recent political developments:

The newspaper scares me with its gossip of Mussolini and
the dead of Ethiopia.
The radio mutters of Spain and bullets.
Only the devil ain't tired of history." (WF, 92).

In the textual body of *Whylah Falls*, news from this outside world often have the status of footnotes interspersed into the text, articulated by one of the various speakers in the context of events, impressions and thoughts which preoccupy them. However, in "Quilt" the level of interconnectedness between centre and periphery, Europe and Canada, here the fictitious Whylah Falls, is foregrounded. While the poem stresses the distance between those two spheres by

⁴¹⁸ George Elliott Clarke, *Fire on the Water: A First Portrait of Africadian Literature*. Lawrencetown Beach, Nova Scotia: Pottersfield Press, 1991, 11.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

referring to the mediating function of the media, the events are essentially part of daily life. Throughout the poem fragments that mention historical events are interspersed with descriptions of things the speaker has observed in her immediate environment or references to her continuous working on her quilt:

The white moon ripples in the darkness of fallen rain.
The sunflowers continue in the living room.
The latest reports from Germany are all bad.” (WF, 92).

European turmoil and bloodshed is far away from the people populating Whydah Falls, however it is always looming in the background as an abstract fear. The quilt symbolizes this coming together of different spheres, of centre and periphery, the personal and the public, the proximity of life and death. This is stressed by the descriptions of various memento mori motifs the hints at historical circumstances are embedded in. The most effective description contains the poetic rendering of the speaker's impression at finding a horse's bones:

Yesterday, I saw – puzzled beside railroad tracks – a horse's
bleached bones.
Roses garlanded the ribs and a garter snake rippled greenly
through the skull.” (WF, 92).

The imagery these passages contains – especially the garter snake situated in the horse's skull – symbolizes the permeating ideological divisions shaking the very foundations of western self-definition during this period. Europe – as the various hints at Italian and German fascism and the Spanish Civil War show – is, similar to the horse's bones, only a shattered remnant of its former power and grandeur that houses the very seed of corruption in the form of the snake. The site of the horse's last resting place “beside the rail-road tracks” further stresses the idea of historical connectedness. Against this looming danger emanating from the old world, the speaker knows only one remedy:

I quilt, planting sunflower patches in a pleasure of thick
cotton.
I weave a blanket against this world's freezing cruelty.” (WF, 92).

The process described seems to be a form of escapism, stressing the speaker's feeling of

powerlessness. Similar to its symbolic function in Adam Johnson's *The Orphan Master's Son*, the quilt is a metaphor for storytelling, articulating the experiences of an individual or a community as an encoded abstraction. It is noteworthy that cotton, for more than a century the main product of the southern states of the US and one of the key incentives to import slaves as labourers, is used by the speaker as the raw material for her quilt. The quilt – in its very materiality incorporating the incentive to enslave fellow human beings – acquires the status of a memento against cruelty and injustice, a statement of solidarity with the victims of history. Moreover, a number of recent publications have discussed the probability of quilts having been used as maps to freedom or means of communication by supporters of the Underground Railroad in pre-civil war North America.⁴²¹ Like “Quilt” itself, *Whylah Falls*, in its episodic structure and generic ambiguity, reminds one of the practice of quilting. However, it should be stressed that “Quilt” is the only poem which explicitly refers to political history, or rather history outside the fictitious Whylah Falls. It therefore has an exceptional status within the whole cycle.

Another strategy we encounter is the merging of references to historically verifiable and mythological characters. In “Love Letter to an African Woman” the names of historical personalities and mythological and biblical characters are combined in a faux-genealogical list, celebrating the deeds of African women:

Are you not Sheba, 'black but comely,' who enlightened Solomon; Nefertiti, who brought glory to Egypt; Harriet Tubman, who brandished a pistol and pledged to shoot any slave who tried to abandon her freedom train; Lydia Jackson who fled Nova Scotian chains to found Sierra Leone; Portia White, who enthralled the world with song [...] (WF, 60).

In passing, this passage puts Canada and its iconic women on the map of the African diaspora. In joining old-world mythological queens with new-world freedom fighters, singers and nation-builders, this faux-genealogy suggests an idea of continuity that transcends the limits of nationality, time and reliability. The continuous list covering up the obvious gap between real-life personalities and mythological characters leaves no doubt that not their verifiable existence, but their iconic status is at stake here. A similar strategy with an entirely different effect is pursued in the following passage:

⁴²¹ See: Barbara Brackman, *Facts and Fabrications: Unravelling the History of Quilts and Slavery*. Lafayette: CT Publishing, 2006; Jacqueline L. Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard, *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad*. New York: Doubleday, 1999.

The music of Pablo and Am segues from the Moorish mood of Duke Ellington's "Dusk on the Desert," with its Arabic saxophone, sobbing through oases for want of love, to the soul cry of Bessie Smith, wailing in the Churrigueresque temples of ecstasy. (WF, 75)

In these passages the allusion pieces of African-American popular music is used to describe the courtship of Pablo and Amarantha. The reference to iconic sound patterns functionally replaces more conventional metaphors. The references to the different artists and their respective songs illustrate the stages of their courtship. It ranges from a slow sequence of exotic big-band music, here Ellington's "Dusk on the Desert" to the ecstatic and soulful blues of Bessie Smith. This passage illustrates that the cultural contribution of those iconic artists has shaped our perception. The respective worlds of music and literature become one again.

Central to the experiences of the speakers is their perception of their immediate environment. A recurring landmark is the Sixhiboux river. The Sixhiboux, or Sissiboo, is both a symbol of change and continuity. As I have shown on the previous pages, in *Whylah Falls* the relationship between subject and the stylistic and structural devices used for its representation is ambiguous as both constantly contradict each other. While the stylistic devices used in the text often evoke the idea of transformation and change, the community depicted in the text seems to be suspended in time, untouched by historical developments, stable in its essential structures. The various symbolic functions of the river in the text echo the opposition between subject and stylistic devices. It is in constant flux and nevertheless deeply embedded into the landscape. The river is both the centre of the community's public life and a site of personal and collective memory reminding speakers of religious initiation ceremonies: "Let us go down by the bright Sixhiboux / and sit where thingabob uncorked his voice / and elders baptized him in snow-white robes." (WF, 21). The range of descriptive adjectives and phrases used to evoke images of the river ranges from "bright" to "rusted by stones and sewage", all used during the space of a few lines by the very same speaker. So the river itself is another site on which the particular expectations and memories of speakers are being projected. These ambivalent associations show that the reading of sites of memory is a subjective and highly emotional action and, therefore, likely to produce contradicting images. The image of the river – a traditional symbol of time – is of special significance in the context of my reading of *Whylah Falls*. Having outlined the implications behind the hybrid nature of the text, its engagement with the past and its own situation in time has to be reconsidered. The text – due to its dehistoricization – of the past is an attempt to capture the very nature, the timeless essence of a community, its myths and stories.

However, in doing so the text also stresses its contemporaneity. As the German historian Ulrich Schlie diagnosed: “nowadays, many people live in a permanent present.”⁴²² In assembling fragments from different epochs, cultures and discursive contexts, the text contradicts this idea of a permanent present and, instead, stresses the connectedness of all forms of culture and – as cause and effect – of past with present. In its hybridity, it becomes a cultural encyclopedia that transcends spatial, generic and cultural boundaries, like the Sixhiboux: in flow but permanent.

⁴²² Ulrich Schlie, *Die Nation erinnert sich. Die Denkmäler der Deutschen*. München: C.H. Beck, 2002, 10; my translation.

7.2 George Elliott Clarke's *Beatrice Chancy*: The Reconfiguration of Cultural Memory through the Translocation of Stories, Myth and History

The legend around Beatrice Cenci is, as one can see, not an invention of later times; it came into existence on the day of her execution. One report written on this day states “Beatrice died like a saint”[...].⁴²³

Now, damn it, we have a history full of trials, triumphs and struggles, [...] and there is just no legitimate way that we can be excluded from the history of this place.⁴²⁴

George Elliott Clarke's verse play *Beatrice Chancy*⁴²⁵ is an ambitious and multi-layered work of art. The printed text has received almost unambiguously positive reviews in most Canadian publications and the opera version, with music by John Rolfe, has also met a positive reception when it was staged, and subsequently shown on CBC.⁴²⁶ In this chapter I will show how and why Clarke's verse play, which is basically an amalgamation of stories from different cultures and historical periods, re-enacts a period in Canadian history that did not originally become part of the collective memory, but that has recently been reintroduced into the cultural discourse by African-Canadian authors. For this discussion the printed version of the play, not one of its filmed performances, will be used. This is due to the fact that the stage versions differ considerably from the printed text, an issue that will be discussed later on. Secondly, I will describe the dramatic techniques Clarke used, show how myth and stereotypical sceneries are translocated and translated into a different cultural context to outline the resulting de-familiarization of myth and familiar stories that was caused by the transfer. This follows the previously described theoretical approach; the focus will be on the function of a text as a form of retrospective sense making and as a means to establish a sense of identity based on identification that is “constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group.”⁴²⁷ Furthermore, I will show how stereotypical postmodern devices

⁴²³ Kurt Pfister, *Beatrice Cenci*. München: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1946, 14; my translation.

⁴²⁴ Maureen Moynagh, “Mapping Africadia's Imaginary Geography: And Interview with George Elliott Clarke.” In: *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*. Vol. 27, No. 4. 1996, 71-97 [73].

⁴²⁵ George Elliott Clarke, *Beatrice Chancy*. Toronto: Polestar Books, 1999. All further references will be to this edition, page number and abbreviated title (BC) will be indicated parenthetically.

⁴²⁶ See the online-reviews in *CBC books*, and *University of Toronto Magazine*; www.cbc.ca/booksandauthors/2010/10/beatrice-chancey.html; www.magazine.utoronto.cd/feature/george-elliott-clarke-canadian-poetry-africadia.html On CBC books online, the play has been described as “a singular creative work that should be shelved under tour de force or must be read.”

⁴²⁷ Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs Identity”. In: Stuart Hall & Paul Du Gay (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London, Thousand Oaks & New Delhi: Sage Publications 2007, 2.

like meta- and paratextual comments and doppelgänger-characters are employed in the texts in order to subvert the narratees' generic and theoretical expectations elicits the use of these techniques. As I have argued in my theoretical introduction, the appropriation of those literary devices runs counter to postmodern problematizations of coherent social and narrative identities. Instead, the re-appropriation of these devices, especially the inscription of the author – and especially the particular discursive position he occupies – into the text, are both in keeping with new world African, especially African-American traditions, and the personalization of post-postmodern avant-garde art and literature as described by Donald Kuspit in his book *Idiosyncratic Identities*.⁴²⁸

On the story level, the text, which is set in eighteenth-century Nova Scotia, deals with a fictitious incestuous race-crime, which leads the eponymous victim, a mixed-race slave, to murder her owner and father, Francis Chancy, a deed that finally causes a slave revolt. Title, structure and the basic elements of the story unambiguously show that Clarke used the tragic (life-)story of Beatrice Cenci, the daughter of Roman noble man, who was beheaded for parricide in Rome on September 11, 1599, as a structuring source. Clarke freely admits to this, so, as reader, one is initially tempted to ask if Clarke's text should be regarded as an inspired, original act of artistic creativity, or rather as a well researched adaptation, used as a means to drive his political message home. But even if one decides for the latter, Clarke's technical skills as a writer are considerable, and his subversive reenactment of history is worth considering. Clarke – as usual – meticulously describes the techniques and practices of his writing, even his motivation for choosing them is deliberately disclosed. By referring to some of the authors who had engaged with this topic before, he disassociates himself from their “dallying” with the story and stresses the fact that he used the combination of sources and techniques to drive home a slightly but significantly different message; he “committed indiscretions” (BC 152). The term indiscretions in this context is deliberately ambiguous; it encompasses his open description of sexual and racial violence and also hints at the liberties he took with regard to the original story. In his article “Racing Shelley”, published in 2002, Clarke points out that according to his reading, Percy Bysshe Shelley's adaptation of the theme actually contains elements that allow for an identification of Count Francesco Cenci as a slave master.⁴²⁹ His basic claim is that Count Cenci, impersonating cultured tyranny “is a prototype for the white South African *baas* (or

⁴²⁸ Donald Kuspit, *Idiosyncratic Identities. Artists at the End of the Avant-garde*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.

⁴²⁹ George Elliott Clarke, “Racing Shelley, or Reading *The Cenci* as a Gothic Slave Narrative.” in: *European Romantic Review*, Vol. 11.2, 2000, pp. 168-85.

master), but also the Renaissance-Italian version of a classic, nineteenth-century, Anglo-American slave master.”⁴³⁰ He introduces three different lines of argumentation to advocate his point of view. The most persuasive argument is that both Shelley's *The Cenci* and most slave narrative focus on the symbolic value of the human body which – due to abuse and degradation through an oppressor – has lost its agency. He bolsters this argument by pointing to the similar socio-political and socio-economic status of women and slaves during the nineteenth-century. Accordingly, Clarke argues that the theme of “victimization and drastic retribution”, as developed in Shelley's drama is universal and not restricted to the historical period of the Italian Renaissance. The second line of argumentation is that Shelley's drama showcases elements that are similar to Gothic novels and slave narratives, intending to “effect sociopolitical change through the personal voice.”⁴³¹ The third line of argumentation is rather biographical and focuses on Shelley's proto-socialist ideals and ambitions, which Clarke regards as having been related to the contemporary abolitionist movement.⁴³² To summarize his reading, it can be said that Clarke argues that the theme – as dramatized by Shelley – already engages with institutionalized racial and sexual inequality. For him “*The Cenci* is projected not just to the past, but to a future of continued liberationist struggle.”⁴³³ In an informal lecture he clarifies the idea behind his version of the theme by pointing out that he found “Shelley's drama quite suitable for [his] *didactic* intent”; adding that he wanted “to make [the incident / its ensuing literary renderings] new again, that is to say, relevant to an evidently anti-racist and feminist perspective, not to mention a post-colonial and postmodern one.”⁴³⁴

Regarding previous critical engagements with Clarke's verse play, it has to be said that there has been comparatively little response from academia. Only Maureen Moynagh⁴³⁵, Ann

⁴³⁰ Clarke, “Racing Shelley”, 174.

⁴³¹ Ibid, 175.

⁴³² Ibid, 173.

⁴³³ Ibid, 181.

⁴³⁴ George Elliott Clarke, “Embracing *Beatrice Chancy*” in Michelle MacArthur, Lydia Wilkinson & Karen Zaiontz, *Performing Adaptations: Essays and Conversations on the Theory and Practice of Adaptation*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2009, 224.

⁴³⁵ Maureen Moynagh, “‘This History's Only Good For Anger’: Gender and Cultural Memory in *Beatrice Chancy*.” in: *Signs*. Vol. 28, No. 1, *Gender and Cultural Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2002, 97-124. And: Maureen Moynagh, “Eyeing the north star? Figuring Canada in postslavery fiction and drama.” *Comparative American Studies* Vol 3.1. London, Thousand Oaks (CA) & New Delhi: Sage Publications 2005, 15-27.

Wilson⁴³⁶, Katherine Larson⁴³⁷ and most recently Gabriele Pisarz-Ramirez⁴³⁸ have published critical essays concerned with *Beatrice Chancy*. While Wilson convincingly discusses the religious aspects of the drama and their function as structural elements, Larson's post-structuralist reading uncovers the communicative features of the text by reading it against Gerard Genette's theoretical work on text structures and intertextuality, explaining their function with regard to reader-response theories. Moynagh on the other hand tries to analyse and contextualise *Beatrice Chancy* from two different perspectives; in her first approach (2002) she concentrates on the relation between literature and cultural memory and in the second she tries a comparative analysis of three contemporary African-Canadian texts in order to show that a hemispheric approach towards African-Canadian literature might be applicable.⁴³⁹ While the latter offers a convincing line of argumentation, her first approach is quite problematic because the terminology and the line of argument she follows are sometimes unconvincing and inconsistent. While I share the general assessment of her 2002 article that *Beatrice Chancy* is “[a]nother instalment in Clarke's mythopoetic elaboration of 'Africadia’” and that it is a form of memory-making, her approach is too superficial with regard to structural and poetical aspects. Based on Clarke's self-assessment that he belongs to those “scribe[s] of a marginal and colonized community [who] sack and plunder all those larger literatures [...] to domesticate their authors and their most noted lines”, Moynagh also describes *Beatrice Chancy* as a collage of texts that “holds copy and 'original' up together.”⁴⁴⁰ But, contrary to Linda Hutcheon's theory that “the pleasure of [...] adaptations lies in recognition and remembrance”, it is the re-appropriation of myth and literary models through cultural translocation and transposition that is remarkable.⁴⁴¹ In contrast to Moynagh's reading I will stress that Clarke's meticulous adherence to structural models is not “performative in the sense of 'draw[ing] on and cover[ing] the constitutive

⁴³⁶ Ann Wilson, “*Beatrice Chancy: Slavery, Martyrdom and the Female Body*” in: Marc Maufort & Franca Bellarsi (eds.), *Sitting the Other: Re-visions of Marginality in Australian and English-Canadian Drama*. Berlin, New York & Others: Verlag Peter Lang 2001, 267-279 [280].

⁴³⁷ Katherine Larson, “Resistance from the Margins in George Elliott Clarke's *Beatrice Chancy*” in *Canadian Literature* 189, 2006, 103-118.

⁴³⁸ Gabriele Pisarz-Ramirez, “African-Canadian Literature and the Americas” in: Michael Steppat (ed.), *Americanisms: Discourses of Exception, Exclusion, Exchange*. Heidelberg: Winter 2009.

⁴³⁹ Moynagh, “Eyeing the north star.” Most tellingly Moynagh chose Lawrence Hill's *Any Known Blood* and Dionne Brand's *Full and Change of the Moon*, which are parts of this study as well, in addition to Clarke's *Beatrice Chancy*. Gabriele Pisarz-Ramirez uses the same approach as Moynagh and also nearly the same texts, only excluding Hill's *Any Known Blood*.

⁴⁴⁰ Moynagh, “This History is Only Good For Anger”, 102.

⁴⁴¹ Linda Hutcheon, “On the Art of Adaptation.” in: *Daedalus* Vol. 133, No. 2 (2004), 108-111 [111]. Hutcheon's understanding of the term adaptation concentrates on the visualization of literary texts through movies and plays. With regard to *Beatrice Chancy* a more versatile definition of adaptation is required. As the Cenci story is not only visualized, but also culturally and temporally translocated, we extend the narrow definition in order to be able to focus on the effects of those additional changes.

conventions by which it is mobilized”⁴⁴², but that its awareness of form, its stress on dramatic conventions, places the play in a tradition rather than breaking with it. Part of this strategy, as Larson has already pointed out is that “Clarke deliberately constructs paratextual elements as framing devices to guide readers' interpretations of his verse drama.”⁴⁴³

What is most problematic about Moynagh's essay, however, is that her definition of performativity is unclear as it does not differentiate between structure and sujet-related aspects. This is largely due to the fact that she rather took the performances of the play than its printed version into consideration, yet arguing that both could be regarded as performative.⁴⁴⁴ Concentrating on the printed version of the text, it can be said that there is no covering up or of conventions which she regards as an essential part of performative strategies, quite the contrary is the case. It must be emphasized that the literary renderings of the Cènci story are legion, but Moynagh seems to assume that all former versions of the story follow the same scheme, which is not the case. Moreover, the conventions that are supposed to be covered up are a vital part of the text's communicative strategy, but the drama's remarkable adherence to classical strategies and techniques has been explained away by Moynagh as a re-signification of narrative conventions. This is too vague and does not do justice to the drama's structural concept. Moynagh calls the intertextual transformation of texts and their adaptation to different cultural contexts “indigenization” and claims that “historical archives” are re-signified. While she concentrates on the cultural and historical origin of the texts that she regards as relevant sources for Clarke's verse drama, it should be emphasized that it is not the process of translation or “indigenization”, but their translatability that is remarkable. This translatability is due to the character of the story which has to be regarded as mystified incident rather than as a literary source or as history. Both forms of narratives she mentions with regard to Clarke's adaptation, the Cènci story and slave narratives are structurally simple, and both, due to their historical background, leave out aspects that – in performative acts – are added to those stories. In order to enable the addressees to grasp the whole complexity of African-Canadian history, those stories are re-performed not as historical artefacts, but as part of a revision process cultural memory is subject to. The character of the intertextual fragments used in the text is significant: they are European as well as U.S. American, which stresses the historical situation of Canadian literature and culture.⁴⁴⁵ The

⁴⁴² Moynagh, “This History is Only Good For Anger“, 102.

⁴⁴³ Larson, “Resistance from the Margins,“ 105.

⁴⁴⁴ Moynagh, “This History is Only Good For Anger“, 101.

⁴⁴⁵ In the early 1980s David Staines stated that Canadian literature and culture are under a post-colonial strain because Canadian history till the 1960s “is the record of a colony paying allegiance to several mother countries; to follow Canada's historical development is to trace its time as a colony of France and England and, finally and

resignification of structural and poetical aspects as well as narratives originating from those two cultures therefore does two things: Canadian history is linked to the history of the African diaspora, and sites of memory that dominated African-American narratives (like the plantation) are translocated to Canada and its environment.⁴⁴⁶

With regard to Clarke's text, Homi Bhabha's concept of performativity is far more relevant than the one applied by Moynagh. Bhabha claims that migrant or minority literature is of relevance in re-phrasing a nation's *self-perception* and that it “intervenes in the sovereignty of the nation's *self-generation*”⁴⁴⁷, which more or less describes Clarke's own idea of the function of his writing. But Hubert Zapf's definition of migrants and minority writers as parts of a larger national discourse is even more convincing, because their texts are fictional re-performances of identities and serve as critical re-evaluations of national histories and narratives:

[...] literature activates and semiotically empowers the culturally repressed as a source of its own creativity, reflecting it up from the amorphous depths of the collective unconscious to the surface of cultural consciousness and communication.⁴⁴⁸

Even if Bhabha's and Zapf's conceptual approaches towards the place and function of the minority/migrant writer are a little too optimistic, they provide a good starting point for a close reading of Clarke's texts. The metaphor Zapf uses appropriately characterizes an important part of Clarke's literary agenda: the reclaiming of a forgotten and suppressed African-Canadian past. In the following, I will provide a reading of *Beatrice Chancy* that focusses on the textual and dramatic strategies Clarke uses to construct his literary assemblage before contextualizing the play within the cultural situation of contemporary Canada.

most exclusively, as an economic colony of the United States. In an informal lecture Clarke reiterated this view and confirmed that he also regards Canada as post-colonial. David Staines, “Crouched in Dark Caves: The Post-Colonial Narcissism of Canadian Literature. In: *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 13, Colonial and Imperial Themes Special Number (1983), 259-269 [259]

⁴⁴⁶ Neumann, “Literatur als Medium kollektiver Erinnerungen und Identitäten“ in: Astrid Erll, Marion Gymnich & Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *Literatur Erinnerung und Identität. Theoriekonzeptionen und Fallstudien*. Trier: Winter 2003, 54-61.

⁴⁴⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. London & New York: Routledge 1994, 145-147. With regard to the status of immigrants and minorities within a nation, Bhabha's assertion that [t]he barred Nation *It/Self*, alienated from its eternal self-generation, becomes a liminal signifying space that is *internally* marked by the discourses of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending people, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference“ is equally important. [148]

⁴⁴⁸ Hubert Zapf, “Literature as Cultural Ecology: Notes Towards a Functional Theory of Imaginative Texts with Examples from American Literature. In: Winfried Fluck (a. o. /eds.), *Real. Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag 2001, 93.

Normally, the extent of narrative mediation in texts written to be performed can be considered lower than in texts that are self-containing entities like narrative fiction. As Larson shows, this assessment is questionable with regard to the printed version of Clarke's *Beatrice Chancy*. Authorial mediation, even if it contradicts most post-structuralist theories, is an important part of the printed version of the play. Structurally, the printed version of the *Beatrice Chancy* text can be considered a five-act play, following the dramatic unities of place and action, while disregarding time. The stage directions and the intertextual references used as reader guidance in the printed version of the text dissolve the structural impression the text conveys. Due to the authorial interference in the paratext the text is no longer a text that can be readily performed, but rather a work of art that is primarily concerned with its own textual character. The titles of the five acts, *Ambivalences*, *Violators*, *Victims*, *Revolt* and *Responsibility* are in keeping with the classical dramatic structure of introduction, climax and denouement. In terms of plot it follows the different stages of development as identified by Christopher Booker with regard to the group of texts summarily labelled as tragedies: anticipation, dream, frustration, nightmare and destruction stages.⁴⁴⁹ The primary conflict that leads to the play's tragic outcome develops during the anticipation and dream stages when both father's and daughter's plans for the future develop and their totally contradictory nature becomes obvious. However, as *Beatrice Chancy* primarily deals with the effects of moral degradation on individuals it can be more precisely classified as a revenge tragedy.⁴⁵⁰ This is due to the following reasons: Firstly it has to be mentioned that morality, or its counterpart hypocrisy are among the most important issues negotiated in the play. This abstract concept – morality – is of immense importance for the story as re-staged by Clarke. The changing perception of this concept is implicitly thematized by juxtaposing contemporary ideas with concepts prevailing in the late eighteenth century. The characters and their actions show that slavery, incest, rape and parricide are all immoral for the contemporary reader, but, while the latter three can be considered as social and moral taboos, the first one is still practised in different forms. The freedom of the individual is limited by their position – rather their value for – within the prevailing economic system, as illustrated in the play by the eponymous character's fate.

⁴⁴⁹ Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories*. London: Continuum Books, 2004, 156.

⁴⁵⁰ Ronald Broude defined the term revenge in the context of Tudor and Stuart plays as follows: "Revenge was used to indicate retribution effected directly by an individual [...], that is, retribution effected without the intervention of any civil authority." In addition it has to be mentioned that this deed of retribution can be regarded as an act that – despite its lack of institutional legitimacy – was nevertheless in keeping with moral standards because it was not opposing the order of the "socio-legal system." See: Ronald Broude, "Revenge and Revenge Tragedy in Renaissance England." in: *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Spring 1975), 38-58 [42-44]

Even if the classic revenge tragedies are not so severely limited by a strict structural organization, the breach of moral values is one of the criteria that have to be fulfilled. The other criterion that *Beatrice Chancy* certainly meets is the symbolical bloodshed at the end of the play. In most cases a revenge tragedy starts with the murder of a potentate which is subsequently discovered and avenged by one of his/her relatives. In *Beatrice Chancy*, the actions that generate the culminating cathartic rush of violence originate from a series of crimes of passion which can all – for different reasons – be regarded as a violations of moral values. Chancy, feigning to preserve the hierarchies which govern patriarchal slave-holder societies, is intent on satisfying his incestuous desires. His daughter Beatrice, in response to her fathers brutal behaviour, avenges those intrusions on her moral and sexual integrity by killing Chancy. These crimes of passion that make the play gather momentum are the result of the institutionally legitimized crime of slavery. However, it is Chancy whose obsession with his own power first draws him into defying all social codes and conventions. According to Christopher Booker, this act of hubris is an essential aspect of tragedies but normally brought about by the tragic hero who, due to his morally flawed character, regards himself to be above all other human beings.⁴⁵¹ Chancy in turn corrupts his daughter and thereby hands on and perpetuates his morally perverted state of being. It is therefore significant that this institutionally legitimized crime is brought into direct relation with the violation of a social taboo – the incestuous rape of Beatrice by her father/owner. It results in a blurring of differences; as a martyr-figure Beatrice does not only take revenge for the pain and humiliation inflicted on her, she takes revenge on the system and its representatives by symbolically murdering her father/owner. Accordingly, the moral legitimacy of this deed – which a contemporary reader would acknowledge – is denied to her in the age the play has been set in. While stressing the historical situatedness of the action, the play – by using this intertextual framework – criticises the socio-legal system of slavery in general. Thus, it can be concluded that the play, while presenting and referring to socio-historical facts, eschews an impartial presentation, and, by juxtaposing historically and culturally opposing notions of morality, stresses the corrupting and amoral tendencies of the depicted society and its institutions.⁴⁵²

The adaptability of the intertexts Clarke uses is due to the fact that those texts follow

⁴⁵¹ Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots*, 174.

⁴⁵² In the response to Louis Mink's and Marilyn Waldman's criticism of his article "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality", Hayden White argues that "[s]tory forms not only permit us to judge the moral significance of human projects, they also provide the means by which to judge them, [...]" Even if White's observation referred to historiography, the conclusion lies at hand that the form of representation chosen becomes a determinant in the addressees' perception of the "moral significance of human projects" described. See: Hayden White, "The Narrativization of Real Events" in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Summer 1981), 793-798 [797].

certain traditions. These traditions, as I will argue, especially with regard to the Cenci story, focus on the representation of human vices. This basic story is transferred to a pre-abolitionist slave-holding Canada, a translocation and re-contextualization for which information drawn from (African-American) slave narratives and historiographical work on the history of Canadian slavery is added. One of my basic assumptions is that Clarke's text consciously subverts and exploits narrative models and fictional characters of abolitionist' texts which, according to Adam Liveley, followed these patterns:

[The slave] has, of course, no independent culture or history. Before slavery there is only the state of nature, a *tabula rasa*. And in slavery, too, there is no culture, no economics, no shades of collaboration, no daily covert acts of resistance. There is only the individual master confronting the individual slave. And hovering about them, *moral absolutes*. *On the one side there are the opposites of benevolence and cruelty, and on the other of gratitude and vengeance.*⁴⁵³

Clarke blurs those “moral absolutes”, which determine the character of persons of colour in those older texts, reversing psychological simplification. The motivation behind the actions of the slaves in Clarke's play are not reduced to atavistic human drives, but depicted as complex concoctions of highly elaborated spiritual, religious and humanistic motifs and beliefs; in short they are represented as human beings, not as alien outsiders. The character construction of the slave holders and the officials on the other hand reveal crudely simplistic motivations: monetary gain, (political) dominance and the satisfaction of their sex drives are the premier motivations for their actions.

Beatrice: Am I merchandise, so **cheap to discount**?

Chancy: Your plushest value is as **merchandise**.

[...]

Chancy: Quilt her till reds texture the floor.

This April 3rd, this Good Friday,

Let her feel my authority. (BC, 70, my emphasis)

This passage, filled to the brim with contesting images, allusions and references reveals Chancy's premier motivation: the preservation of racial and patriarchal power, challenged by the

⁴⁵³ Adam Liveley, *Masks: Blackness, Race & the Imagination*. Oxford: OUP 2000, 83 (emphasis mine).

disobedience of his daughter. Beatrice's racial, sexual and social status are ambiguous: she has the choice between being either a black slave or an obedient white daughter; her reluctance to be the latter is the starting point for her conversion into "a martyr-liberator." The term combines two mythologized stereotypes: the "Uncle Tom martyr figure" and the revolutionary leader for which Toussaint L'Ouverture might have been the prototype.⁴⁵⁴ Francis Chancy and the social microcosm he has created resemble the Roman "pater familias" and his household: he is above the law; decisions about life and death are within his (social) power.⁴⁵⁵ It is striking that the character Clarke has created is entirely anachronistic. Even in the early 19th century, economic, legal and social power were no longer in the hands of just one person, at least not to such a large extent. Overdrawn as this character might appear to be, one should be aware that post-revolutionary war Canada was home to a number of slaveholders who had sided with the British during the Revolutionary War and were subsequently relocated or had fled – together with their slaves – to British Canada.⁴⁵⁶ Chancy's power originates from a combination of social status and the capitalistic striving for control of the resources he owns. As a conclusion, the society that endowed him with this (nearly) all encompassing power must be downright monolithic and strictly hierarchical. The form of patriarchy he represents does not tolerate disobedience; all those who operate within his circle of power must function according to his will, must act in keeping with his political, social or financial interests. The clash with his daughter Beatrice, who, paradoxically, is also his legal property, enacts that "historical processes, such as imperialism or colonization [do not] produce the same kinds of gender relations for women and men from subaltern groups as they do for women and men of the imperial power."⁴⁵⁷ Under the veil of binary opposition, both characters, Chancy and his daughter Beatrice, respectively combine contesting social roles; social power is not de-centred as in a regular social constellation, but equally polarized in both characters. Both inflict violence on their environment; Chancy to preserve a hierarchical, patriarchal and capitalistic social order; Beatrice to take revenge for the violence inflicted upon her and finally to trigger an act of liberation. The killing of the tyrant

⁴⁵⁴ Regarding the cultural importance of both the fictional character and the historical personality see: Joan D Hedrick, "Commerce in Souls: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the State of the Nation" and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "Bodies and Souls: The Haitian Revolution and Madison Smartt Bell's *All Souls' Rising*." in: Mark C. Carnes, *Novel History: Historians and Novelists Confront America's Past (and Each Other)*. New York & London: Simon & Schuster 2001.

⁴⁵⁵ For the definition of family see: E. J. Graff, *What is Marriage for?*. Boston: Beacon Press 1999, 92. Graff defines the social power of the patriarch as follows: "he could educate, beat, sell, give, indenture, marry off, endow, or kill any one of them [the larger family, including slaves and servants], almost at will."

⁴⁵⁶ Douglas R. Egerton, *Death or Liberty. African Americans and Revolutionary America*. Oxford & New York: OUP, 2010, p. 207-8. Egerton reminds us that those Loyalists who re-settled in other parts of the British Empire importet the practices of slavery with their slaves.

⁴⁵⁷ Kathryn McPherson, Cecilia Morgan and Nancy M. Forestell, *Gendered Pasts: Historical Essays in Femininity and Masculinity in Canada*. Oxford & New York 1999, 5.

Chancy is therefore not only a formal requirement of a revenge tragedy, but from the sociological perspective it restores the equilibrium of power, by, at least in fiction, erasing the monopolizer of power.⁴⁵⁸

The intertextual elements Clarke uses are not hidden within the text for the informed reader to find, but are pointed at by the author by means of the peritext. The list Clarke produces in his ambiguously titled postscript “Conviction” mentions many different versions of the Cenci story, coming from different fields like visual art, literature and film and introduces those influences to the reader. This peritextual hint to paratextual relations makes the reader aware of two factors, namely that the story has predecessors in many different fields and, secondly, that its author relates his re-working, but also dissociates himself with the version he has created from the prior ones. Clarke's peritextual reader guidance offers an insight into his personal relationship to the textual material, into the historical context and into the process of creativity which finally resulted in the printed version of the text. On this level the text of *Beatrice Chancy* self-reflexively deals with its own history, respectively the history of its performance. As the readers are informed in an appendix to the text of the play, this final printed manifestation of the story – at least in the form of a verse play – has been pre-dated by public performances as dramatic readings and as a libretto for opera performances of various length and with casts of various sizes between November 1995 and June 1998. This is quite significant because the final printed version features characters which are important with regard to issues the play deals with which were omitted previous public performances. Each production, except the dramatic reading in July 1997, omitted the character of Reverend Peacock who can be regarded as the negative – and white – counterpart to Father Moses, one of the slaves who represents a moral instance in the printed version of the play. It is an interesting question how this omission has been compensated, but it is not relevant for this present discussion of *Beatrice Chancy* because, as mentioned before, this chapter is entirely based on the printed version of the play, due to the lack of visual documents of its public performances.

According to Larson, the printed version of *Beatrice Chancy* contains more than 60 peripheral elements, including the introduction, headlines, postscript and epigraphs.⁴⁵⁹ Larson

⁴⁵⁸ As McPherson, Morgan and Forestall point out: “Historians influenced by theorists such as Michel Foucault have conceptualized power as de-centred, a fundamental aspect of all human relationships, and embedded in multiple locations and sites. Power is therefore neither monolithic nor a discrete entity, but rather the result of human relations.

⁴⁵⁹ Larson, “Resistance from the Margins“, 107.

argues that these peripheral elements of the text are Clarke's main instrument to guide the readers' interpretation of the main text. Supporting this reading, I will show in the following how these peri- and paratextual elements create a trans-historical frame of reference for the text and thus bridge the gap between a number of social and cultural discourses. Especially the epigraphs used in *Beatrice Chancy* are decisive textual instruments. Even if the readers are not familiar with the authors, their particular biography and the work those quotations originate from, they nevertheless serve as devices that foreshadow dramatic developments in the play, or as an indirect commentary of the author. Many of those epigraphs have been taken from texts written, or quotations attributed to historically influential women, as for example Olympe de Gouges' claim to political equality: "La femme a le droit de monter sur l'échafaud; elle doit avoir également celui de monter à la tribune" (BC, 9), introducing the main section of the text.⁴⁶⁰ Often those epigraphs, like de Gouges' famous proto-feminist demand for equality of the sexes, have been taken from French texts, left untranslated. This is both a challenge to a mono-lingual readership and a symbolic celebration of Canada's bilingualism. This diversification of linguistic codes goes hand in hand with an optional proliferation of historical knowledge on the narratees' side. In order to grasp the epigraph and its relationship to the text in its entirety, historical information has to be either acquired, or at least reactivated and recontextualized, and the different linguistic code has to be mastered. The epigraphs contribute to the intellectual challenge the text poses and help Clarke by disassociating himself as author from the implied commentary. Paradoxically, if the linguistic and historical barriers are overcome by the narratees, the epigraphs function as peritextual reader guidance, providing both political commentary and serving to place the text in a certain discourse. As fragments, the epigraphs contain a universalized transhistorical authority, simultaneously stressing discursive continuity and historical singularity. All those different voices those textual fragments contain, be it de Gouges, Maryse Condé, or the late Canadian prime minister Elliott Trudeau, in spite of originating from different epochs and cultures, all have been uttered in various discourses concerned with political change. While the quote attributed to Condé, "Ceux d'entre nous qui ne sont venus au monde, armés d'ergots et de crocs, partent perdants dans tous les combats," is more concerned with the nature of human beings, respectively the natural inclinations of the individual to fight for what

⁴⁶⁰ Olympe de Gouge was one of the early advocates of gender equality encouraged by the events of the French Revolution to go public with her ideas. She was executed for counter-revolutionary activities in the final stages of the revolution, the reign of terror under Robespierre. The quote above originates from her 1791 pamphlet *The Rights of Women and the Female Citizen*, article X. Naish translated it as follows: "Women have the right to mount the scaffold, they must also have the right to mount the speaker's rostrum." For further information see: Camille Naish, *Death Comes to the Maiden: Sex and Execution, 1431-1933*. London: Routledge, 1991, especially pages 130-141.

they desire, the epigraph attributed to Trudeau is concerned with the legitimacy of revolutionary acts in general: “Faut-il assassiner le tyran?” (BC, 123).⁴⁶¹ The epigraphs deal both with individual capacities and general moral issues. The epigraph attributed to Trudeau is in so far remarkable as it questions the legitimacy and moral basis of political decision making; in the context of *Beatrice Chancy* it serves to foreground the problem of moral legitimacy which is a recurring issue in the text. Contrasted to the epigraph introducing the preceding act, “[s]he learns her lesson at once; to escape slavery she must embrace tyranny” (BC, 89), it becomes apparent that the epigraphs run counter to the strategies employed in the text itself. While in the text Beatrice's mental and physical suffering is foregrounded in order to turn her into a martyr-like character, the epigraphs evoke the idea of moral degradation. In *Beatrice Chancy*, as in most of his longer texts, Clarke attempts a literary tight-rope act, making them intellectually challenging while on the other hand sacrificing their multi-dimensionality to a political ends. The “jolt[ing of] readers into memory, awareness, and action” which Larson regards as the key effect of the text, is intensified by its para- and peritextual guidance.

Paradoxically, in terms of theatrical adaptation, the most interesting point about the Cenci story is that it is based on simple binary oppositions, the ultimate battle between good and evil. The simple opposition of a greedy, lustful and faithless old man and his beautiful, religious daughter who is perverted by her father's breach of social and religious rules has inspired numberless reiterations. Most of those are concerned with the problem of a person of authority whose actions deviate from moral and religious expectations. The two questions the story poses are centred around the integrity and legitimacy of social structures. However, the problem of the outcome of the whole event and its subsequent dramatizations – both from an orthodox Christian and moral-philosophical point of view – is that it does not end with the triumph of good over evil. A problem Clarke interestingly circumnavigated in the text by a number of artistic decisions I will discuss later on. General alterations are the temporal and spatial and social re-contextualization of the basic story, staging this conflict between virtue and vice against a different, more complex, socio-political background. Basically, the depiction of human virtues and vices is a marker of social conditions within the respective communities the story is transferred/adapted to. The changes of time and place Clarke inflicts upon the original story are therefore relevant with regard to the social system the adaptation is transferred to. The merit of Clarke's text lies in its driving the essential conflict to an extreme by adding slavery to incest,

⁴⁶¹ The quote attributed to Pierre Elliott Trudeau is the title of one of his essays on political theory, first published in 1961, the quote attributed to Maryse Conde could not be found.

thus creating a situation that is doubly – morally and socially – problematic. As Ann Wilson described it:

[t]his connection between slavery and family generates a fundamental contradiction, as the violent inscription of relations of power characteristic of the institution of slavery clashes with the nurturing usually associated with that of the family.⁴⁶²

This confusion of social roles and relationships, or rather the fictional hybridization – which does not lack historical counterparts – of economic interest and father-daughter relationship turns out to be effective, but also problematic with regard to the achievement of the denouement. It is Clarke's artifice to rely on and emphasize the problematic position his heroine occupies; shifting between social affiliations and cultural identities. On the one hand Beatrice was infused with religious sentiment and norms. She has been sent “[t]o a Halifax convent to copy/ White ladies' ways, [...]” This way of describing Beatrice's education stresses that what she has learned can never be entirely her way of life because she is not regarded to be in the position to internalize these conventions. The ambiguous character of those social conventions – which are a part of Beatrice's hybrid existence – is stressed through positioning herself into the community of black slaves by publicly declaring her intention to marry one of them. Beatrice rejects her hybrid position; she is one of the outsiders striving for identification and belonging that people Clarke's fiction. As MacLeod phrases it:

In his work, absence and belonging are intimately intertwined, and often Clarke is more interested in capturing the disorienting and dislocating experience of the exile or outsider than he is in accurately recording the rooted perspective that we normally associate with the insider's point of view.⁴⁶³

However, the absence from her father's plantation has not made Beatrice more complacent, her time at the convent made her question the rules of the white elite, so she decides to complete her vow and marry Lead. When Francis Chancy, who is characterized as representing “civilization in wolf's shape” (BC 33), is confronted with this decision, he first has her incarcerated and

⁴⁶² Ann Wilson, “Beatrice Chancy: Slavery, Martyrdom and the Female Body” in: Marc Maufort & Franca Bellarsi (eds.), *Sitting the Other: Re-visions of Marginality in Australian and English-Canadian Drama*. Berlin, New York & Others: Verlag Peter Lang 2001, 267-279 [280].

⁴⁶³ Alexander MacLeod, “The Little State of Africadia Is a Community of Believers”: Replacing the Regional and Remaking the Real in the Work of George Elliott Clarke” in: *Studies in Canadian Literature*. 33.2 (2008), 96-114 [98].

whipped, then rapes her, “renounces his role as father”⁴⁶⁴ and in a dramatic monologue vows to reduce her to property:

Chancy: Imagine a costly, well-kept diamond -
 Jumped, wriggling, cracked by a jeweller's chisel -
 A soft, ebony jewel, split tenderly,
 Then vomiting priceless ruby facets.
 My hands will speak horror to her body.
 She'll learn what it means to be property. (BC 82)

By way of metaphor the readers are informed that Chancy intends to rape his daughter and by impregnating her hopes to maximize his profit. The ensuing confrontation with violent carnality inflicted on Beatrice by her own father stresses the hypocrisy of the social rules she was supposed to copy. The revelation that those rules and values are at best hypocritical triggers a decision in the play's eponymous heroine; she renounces those artifices and turns her back on (white) society. Consequentially, Clarke's heroine decides that those rules no longer apply to her because she had inherited two factors that disqualify her from being part of this society: race and gender. Moynagh describes Beatrice's hybrid status as both slave and daughter as “an allegory about the nation's intimacy with racial and sexual violence.”⁴⁶⁵ But in the play (sexual) violence is not especially reserved for the black characters; it is Lustra, Chancy's wife who, in a dialogue with Beatrice, points to the legitimized social suppression of women:

Beatrice: I never asked you to adopt my chains.
Lustra: My chains are invisible, silent
 But they weigh me, they press me down. (BC 74)

The violence Lustra, as a white women and wife of a slave holder, suffers from is more subtle, more indirect; this dialogue points to the psychological strain Victorian virtue and purity inflicted on women. According to Pizarz-Ramirez this passage relates “Nova Scotian beliefs about gender hierarchies to the U.S. Southern views about the position of white wives and black female slaves in the plantation economy, as they have been presented in abolitionist texts by Lydia Maria Child, Harriet Jacobs, Frederick Douglas, and others.”⁴⁶⁶ But *Beatrice Chancy* does not only

⁴⁶⁴ Ann Wilson, “Slavery, Martyrdom and the Female Body”, 282.

⁴⁶⁵ Moynagh, “Eyeing the north star?”, 18.

⁴⁶⁶ Pizarz-Ramirez, “African-Canadian Literature and the Americas”, 7.

echo those texts and their observations; the language used to present those issues like slavery, racism and gender differences is more direct, more violent and in these respects follows modern rather than traditional forms of presentation⁴⁶⁷

Beatrice Chancy operates on different meta-levels: the printed version of the play comments on its own textual and performative history. Additionally, a comment on the history of its intertextual references, the transferring, or rather translocation of a mythologized European story to early nineteenth-century Canada, and the structural combination of literary sources lay bare its own artificiality. Despite this obvious artificiality and the rigid structural concept the text does much more than to remind/inform its readers/audience about a forgotten Canadian past: it depicts the failures of institutions in an environment that knows no moral inhibitions. The Cenci story provides the perfect backdrop for the presentation of human virtues and vices. In addition to this factor, the use of this narrative model and the general problems it is concerned with, such as violent abuse, unfulfilled love, racism and social discrimination enable Clarke to point to the topicality of some of these aspects, especially with regard to the social situation of African Canadians. The story Clarke tells via the performances of his text and through the text itself is still a universal story of greed, violence, abuse, shame and revenge, but his version of it is in so far extraordinary as he adds, or rather changes two aspects to the story; he turns race into one of its main issues and therefore changes the basic conflict the story is originally concerned with. While other authors like Percy Bysshe Shelley rather engaged with depictions of the binary oppositions of pious and chaste daughter and greedy and sinful father, Clarke extends their relationship by adding the factor of slavery to their family relations. Guilt and revenge are thus depicted as very much more complex issues because the father-daughter relationship which morally forbids sexual intimacy has been extended by adding the slave-owner relationship which basically justifies any possible physical intervention because slaves were “placed outside a gendered moral code.”⁴⁶⁸

Like in Shelley's version of the story, religion plays a major role with regard to the construction of the main characters and their moral justification and motivation.⁴⁶⁹ Additionally,

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid, 8. Pizarz-Ramirez points to this difference of presentation and stresses that “[abolitionist narratives] were clad into a language of decorum in order to appeal to a female middle-class readership [...]”

⁴⁶⁸ Moynagh, “This History is Only Good For Anger“, 108.

⁴⁶⁹ Religion and faith have always been important aspects of George Elliott Clarke's writing from the very beginning of his career on. In his first collection of poetry, *Saltwater Spirituals and Deeper Blues* he dedicates most of the first part “Soul Songs“ to the poetic description of the churches built by African-Canadians. Those churches he describes are sites of memory and identity; in addition to a gathering place for the black communities they were important landmarks for the achievements of African-Canadians, because those churches were virtually built

Clarke uses it to portray the community of slaves living on Francis Chancy's estate in opposition to their master's way of life. Especially the binary opposition between the appointed church official Ezra Love Peacock, who, in keeping with his telling-name, regards religion as a form of *staffage*, and the “enslaved believer” (BC, 10), Ezra Moses, who practices religion under the yoke of slavery, highlights the precariousness of faith in a world that knows neither equality nor justice. His name and character description are telling: “Father Ezra Moses, 30, a summoned minister, refuses a debased faith [...] that yields not a jot of light to lead the lost onwards to revelation. [...]” (BC, 13). It is noteworthy that Peacock and Moses share the same first name.⁴⁷⁰ This stresses that they are, after all, both representatives of institutionalized religion; however, while Moses' faith is uncorrupted, Peacock has been lead astray by his own ambition, playing the devil's advocate for Chancy and the system of slavery:

Lustra: I wish he'd quit this slavery business:
We're just ripening cannibals.
Our white lives give sunlight no more.
Peacock: Slavery satisfies our ordained world
Where wolves and blossoms co-exist. (BC, 46)

But Peacock's position is even more ambiguous. While talking to *Lustra* he defends slavery, but in a conversation with Chancy he tries to convince him that slavery is unchristian, unnatural and – most importantly – uneconomical:

Peacock: I look upon slavery as I do upon venom.
I don't want to trample on Christ's body.
[...]
Chancy, the Bishop seeks
But the look of freedom. Free
your slaves, then work them
At cheaper cost. Appearances
Are made to deceive.
[...]
Slavery disputes and disgusts *Nature*. (BC, 46-47; italics by the author)

up from nothing. Despite their lack of refinement they are symbols for the absolute will of the Africadian communities to create permanent places of worship.

⁴⁷⁰ The name can be roughly translated from the Hebrew as “for God helps you.”

Additionally, he explains away Chancy's (conjugal) infidelity by describing his notorious infidelity as part of local customs and rather natural in their environment:

Peacock: He loves you, but here, in Nova Scotia,
Wives sleep with Bible, husbands with whores.

Only the community of slaves is concerned with the orthodoxy of religious practices and beliefs, the white characters either act blasphemously by abusing religious symbols, using religion as a hypocritical masquerade, or simply neglect the whole Christian value system. However, it is telling the text begins with a scene in which the slaves are about to commence a religious ceremony, but this ceremony is interrupted by some dissenting slaves who have come to the conclusion that the religious ideas they are indoctrinated with have been manipulated and diluted in order to preserve the existing social order. Talking about religious orthodoxy, the ceremony in itself should rather be described as syncretic as it is a mixture of Christian and non-Christian practices. Wilson points out that, contrary to the example of other narratives, the slave community in Clarke's text is not content with its allotted place in the world.⁴⁷¹ This discontent manifests itself in dialogues in which Moses, in discussions with other characters of the text, attempts a theological explanation of slavery. The discussion between Moses and Lead at the beginning of the play reveals the basic opposition between materialist and idealist perspectives.

Lead: Deal, what's we got to joy about?

Moses: Almighty God who rents us breath.

Lead: Mose, He can take mine back right now:

This life here ain't no life-
We smile as they whip us,
Grin as our weak flesh breaks.

Moses: Boy, you jaw like you know somethin God don't. (BC, 13)

Lead, the quintessential rebel, openly questions Chancy's position within society and his power over his own life; his anger is directed against the white people and the power they wield. Moses on the other hand, tries to make sense of the discrepancy between religious ideals and doctrines

⁴⁷¹ Wilson, *Beatrice Chancy: Slavery, Martyrdom and the Female Body*, 269 Wilson's comparison to Harriet Beecher Stowe's much discussed novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* seems to be rather odd, but it nicely illustrates the discrepancies between this well meant, but problematically executed work of literature and its modern counterparts. While Beecher Stowe tended to create stock-characters that incorporated contemporary stereotypes, modern texts mostly subvert and parody such stereotypes.

and the oppressive social system that justifies their exploitation established on these very ideals. He also wants to take action against their white oppressors but points out that “[v]engeance be God's luxury” (BC 80). The basic problem the slaves are confronted with is the ambiguous position of the church with regard to slavery. A benevolent ideal of God is certainly not in keeping with the institution of slavery. And if slavery has to be regarded as a divine punishment, the question arises why are only black people are subject to this punishment. In the text it is Moses who takes up the burden “to justify the ways of God to men”, as John Milton summarized the issue in *Paradise Lost*. However, Moses, in his idealist position – seeing the reward for earthly toils and punishments in divine justice and ultimate transcendence of those trials – cannot convince the materialists, especially Deal, who doubts the very existence of God, with his arguments. Clarifying Ann Wilson's assumption that “[f]or some of the slaves the promise of Christianity entails the redemption from evil and, therefore, their liberation [...]”⁴⁷², it should be said that the text's engagement with theological questions is based on the clash between idealists and materialists mentioned before. When Deal rejects Moses' idealist perspective and the promise of redemption through Christianity that it entails, he does it on the grounds of his personal suffering and debasement. Also for Lead, redemption in the afterlife is secondary; it is the present that counts but in contrast to Deal, he still does not feel alienated from religious practices: “[i]f prayer could bust iron, we'd be free.” (BC, 13). However, he is acutely aware that these practices are futile as they do not improve their current situation. In the end, Moses cannot contain the slaves who, triggered by Francis Chancy's transgressive acts, no longer seek their liberty in endurance and instead revolt against their oppression.⁴⁷³ By resorting to violence, the majority of the slaves rejects Moses' idealist perspective as part of the social system which oppressed them.

One of the factors Wilson describes in great detail, namely the position and role of Francis Chancy within their social microcosm, is the key to understand the problematic and multidimensional relationship of the slaves towards religion. As “pater familias” – applying the ancient Roman term for this social construct – Francis Chancy is in command of each member of the household, therefore nobody except him is unrestrictedly free. By relying on this model Clarke emphasizes the hypostatization of race and gender, respectively white and male, that has

⁴⁷² Wilson, *Beatrice Chancy: Slavery, Martyrdom and the Female Body*, 269.

⁴⁷³ Pizarz-Ramirez remarks that the “play evokes both the violent reality of plantation life as well as the discourses about slave revolts in the Americas [...].” But the character of “the enslaved believer” Moses and the whole religious backdrop of the play stress the idea of a systematic criticism of the position of the church and the its corrupted and corrupting representatives.

dominated social hierarchy, and in some parts of the world still does. Therefore, Chancy occupies a position that for some of the slaves seems to be equivalent with God, as Dice, Chancy's unacknowledged mixed-race son says: “Look you's white – the colour of God himself” (BC 23). The assumption that God must be white and male points to the problematic position of the slaves, especially the women. In Clarke's play this scene is rather contradictory and problematic because Beatrice, in her function as “martyr-liberator”, is described Jesus-like as taking on the suffering of her fellow slaves. So Dice's act of relating Chancy to God can only be understood as a sycophantic act. The hierarchical order Clarke depicts centres around this social construct, as Wilson points out: God symbolizes the Father, but Chancy also embodies a father who perverts all that God supposedly stands for within Christian theology.”⁴⁷⁴ The black-and-white dichotomy is once again applied by Chancy to justify his position:

Chancy: What is whiteness without blackness?

How can we be beautiful, free,

Virtuous, holy, pure, *chosen*

If slaves be not our opposites? (BC, 26, original italics)

The author's highlighting of the adjective *chosen* again points the readers to a historical reference. Establishing a relationship with the biblical story of “God's chosen people” was a common rhetorical means for a community to describe themselves in opposition to their others. This rhetorical device has been used by both black and white communities who tried to establish a relationship between the biblical story and their own history, thereby distinguishing themselves from other ethnic groups.⁴⁷⁵

In the play, institutionalized religion, which is represented by Reverend Peacock, can be easily manipulated. This manipulability is visualized through description of the bible purging by the nuns of the convent Beatrice attended:

Nuns tore exodus from our books; they feared

Moses speaks satanic as Robespierre.

Slavery chains and bedevils our Christ. (BC 32)

⁴⁷⁴ Wilson, 269.

⁴⁷⁵ South African Boers labelled themselves variously as “God's chosen people” or “the white tribe of Africa”, either stressing their difference from coloured people or stressing their natural relationship to the African continent. With regard to Nova Scotia, the self-labelling as *chosen* was common for the *Black Loyalists* who later re-crossed the Atlantic to found Sierra Leone.

This passage contains a doubled reference. The two figures Moses and Robespierre are inserted as metonymies, representing the biblical story of the exodus from Egypt and the French Revolution; they stand for the questioning of a social system, upheaval, purge and reorganization. The biblical story of the Flight from Egypt on the other hand is a metaphor for the memory of the African diaspora, a reminder of the common tradition of (post-)slavery cultures. By claiming that the purging of scripture is executed by representatives of the church, Clarke points to the manipulative power of an institution and furthermore stresses the importance of narratives and historiography. Through this commentary on institutionalized censorship the significance of literary models is stressed and the play also criticizes the self-perversion of religious values and the historical problems that resulted from a lack of clear positioning of the Christian churches with regard to slavery.

In addition to the slaves' ambiguous relationship towards institutionalized religion, Clarke uses Christian symbolism as metaphorical dramatic device. Clarke arranges the action of his drama around Easter time to establish a metaphorical relationship between Christ and his eponymous heroine, thereby linking the mistreatment, torture and death of his “martyr-liberator” to the death of Jesus Christ. As Wilson presents it: “Given that the rape occurs at Easter Beatrice's sacrifice appears analogous to that of Christ's death on the cross.”⁴⁷⁶ Further on, Wilson argues that the analogy Clarke constructs is “rhetorically powerful” but that it “detracts from the issues of gender and slavery by rendering Beatrice more masculine than feminine.”⁴⁷⁷ While arguing against gender stereotypes, Wilson's own writing seems to be informed by them. What Clarke depicts is not a “masculinization” of his main character, but rather a renunciation of cultural conventions and moral inhibitions caused by the violent assault on her sexual purity, “which forms the core of her sense of identity.”⁴⁷⁸ The loss of her status as “white” and her being turned into a commodity by her own father – who has renounced his role and the accompanying conventions and moral obligations as well – set Beatrice free from any socially indoctrinated rule. So, it is not only a “recasting of gender”, as Wilson described it, but the painful awareness that the purity of her body has been contaminated – which leads Beatrice to rethink her position in a society that marginalizes and disenfranchises people on the base of race and gender – that makes Beatrice reconsider her identity. The question “Beatrice? What is she?” does not signal a renunciation of her female identity, but the larger ontological problem Beatrice is confronted

⁴⁷⁶ Wilson, “*Beatrice Chancy: Slavery, Martyrdom and the Female Body*”, 268.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid, 273.

with: the breaking down of her own sense of identity expressed with the words: “Oh, Beatrice is dead.” (BC 94). Beatrice is no longer Beatrice because the powers that be, especially her father, do not let her be. Beatrice does not become more masculine, but renounces gender conventions in general. This scene echoes Lady Macbeth's wish “unsex me here, [...] you murd'ring ministers” (1.5.30-35), with which she did not only intend to renounce her female identity, but her humanity in general, an act that enables her to commit the deeds she clandestinely plans. By renouncing all social conventions in order to be able to take revenge on her father, Beatrice symbolically takes revenge on society in general. A society that legitimizes such outrageous cruelty must inevitably be deemed inhumane. The act of revenge constitutes an act of reclaiming her own humanity, her own autonomy.

Regarding the status of Clarke's, text Larson observed that, against his usual strategy of reader guidance, this issue has been clarified by the author. Both references to the status of the text, which can be found in the peritext of *Beatrice Chancy*, are either left ambiguous, or use a language, in this case Italian, that is not in keeping with the language of the text, which poses a hindrance in the flow of the text as it requires additional decoding.

Every line is true, or it is a lie:

Honey poured – honest – over lye.

Ogni riferimento a fatti e persone è del tutto casuale e le vicende,

Personaggi ed I loro nomi sons immaginari. (BC 2, italics by the author)

The motivation for this obfuscation of the literary status becomes clearer by turning to Clarke's dedication. *Beatrice Chancy* is explicitly dedicated to Marie Joséphe Angélique and Lydia Jackson⁴⁷⁹, two women of colour who suffered from racism in early Nova-Scotian settler society.⁴⁸⁰ Both women might be regarded as historically verifiable predecessors of Clark's eponymous heroine because the hardships they endured under slavery, respectively racism by far

⁴⁷⁹ Both women can be regarded as African-Canadian cultural icons. Within the larger context of Canadian identity discourses they pre-eminently serve as reminders of Canada's not so innocent past as a slaveholder society. Their life stories have acquired a political dimension as they are stylized as martyrs of the struggle of black emancipation. See especially Clarke's essay “Canadian Biraciality and its 'Zebra' Politics“ in which he explicitly thematizes the fate of black women in the pre-Canadian slaveholder society and the afterlife of this historical situation. A short account of the story of Lydia Jackson can also be found in Sylvia Hamilton, “Naming Names, Naming Ourselves: A Survey of Early Black Women in Nova Scotia“ in Peggy Bristow (ed.), *We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us UP: Essays in African Canadian Women's History*. Toronto, Buffalo & London: University of Toronto Press 1994, 13-41 [27-29].

⁴⁸⁰ Neumann, *Erinnerung, Identität, Narration*, 67. Neumann stresses that in literary texts depicting collective memories and identities elements from “the whole cultural inventory like events, persons and places“ can be selectively re-appropriated.

exceeded the general condition.⁴⁸¹ Those historical victims of slavery are present throughout the text; for example the 19-year-old slave Deal is described as “a new Lydia Jackson, she yearns to tend sunflowers in a free state” (BC 12). By evoking the memory of those (enslaved) women, Clarke's reworking of the Cenci story therefore shows the awareness that, as Dionne Brand phrased, it: “[...] Black history is both de-feminized as well as, to a lesser extent, de-masculinized, but the outcome nevertheless subordinates the experiences of Black women in Canadian history to those of Black men.”⁴⁸² However, it should be mentioned that Clarke also inscribes himself into the text by way of a literary doppelgänger whose fictitious “wanted” poster directly follows upon the text of the tragedy. This poster: “runaway [...] negro boy George [...] who fancies himself a poet, but is handier with a razor” (BC, 151), and the person it describes systematically mock all attempts at historical veracity and, perhaps more pointedly, postmodern playfulness itself. By inscribing historical characters and himself into his text, he playfully transgresses the limits of fiction, teasingly making readers aware that his play might be fiction, but nevertheless is indirectly referring to a past that is still part of the communicative memory of the African-Canadian community. Therefore, it can be said that the relation between reality and fiction in *Beatrice Chancy* has been carefully blurred. The world the text depicts is in keeping with Karl-Heinz Stierle's concept of the literary text as an “Anschlußwelt”⁴⁸³, its obvious references to existing historical personalities relate it to an experienced social reality of the past. This is especially true for the trait of an “Anschlußwelt” to “continue our world [...] into the imaginary, in such a way that the transgression remains visible.”⁴⁸⁴ This is fulfilled by the text's intertextual references and its meta-textual self reflexivity. Its engagement with a social reality of the past stresses the (possible) fictitiousness of all such attempts of reconstructing a bygone reality. Accordingly, the social reality depicted in *Beatrice Chancy* is highly fictionalized and presented through the intertextual reworking of (another) fictionalized real-life story. This fictional engagement with the past can therefore be labelled as a simulacrum which, in the sense of Roland Barthes means that the text creates a “world that is similar to the first, without copying it, but tries to make it transparent.”⁴⁸⁵ Combining the concepts of “Anschlußwelt” and “simulacrum”, the problem of generic categorization and differentiation between fact and fiction becomes clearer. Its twist lies in its evasion of categorization: it avoids the dialectic of memory

⁴⁸¹ Dionne Brand, “No Burden to Carry: Introduction“ in: Dionne Brand & Louis De Shield (eds.), *No Burden to Carry; Narratives of Black Working Women in Ontario 1920s – 1950s*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1991, 12.

⁴⁸² Dionne Brand, “No Burden to Carry: Introduction“, 13.

⁴⁸³ Karl-Heinz Stierle, “Die Fiktion als Vorstellung, als Werk und als Schema“ in Dieter Henrich und Wolfgang Iser (ed.), *Funktionen des Fiktiven*. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag 1983, 173-183 [176].

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid, 176 (my translation). “Sie ist gleichsam eine Anschlußwelt, die unsere Welt in je spezifischer Weise ins Imaginäre fortführt, doch so, daß die Übergänglichkeit selbst erkennbar ist.”

⁴⁸⁵ Roland Barthes, “Die strukturalistische Tätigkeit in: *Kursbuch 1966*, 190-196, my translation.

and history, the problem of subjectivity and interpretation inherent to all approaches dealing with the past by not allowing systematic categorization. It echoes a lost past, without claiming to produce truth or even coherence because it is impossible to do so, but offering an insight into how it could have been. This ambiguity forces the readers to fill in textual gaps by imaginative actions and to decide about status and plausibility of the text/play they are confronted with. Stierle describes this procedure as follows: “Wherever our knowledge of the is fragmentary and unstable, the imaginary can, as imagination that closes these gaps, transcend into our knowledge.”⁴⁸⁶ Further on Stierle points out that this way of transcending the horizons of our knowledge becomes necessary to turn the unimaginable that is part of our world into an entity that does not resist imagining, especially with regard to our knowledge of the past. Considering the systematic reader guidance through the paratextual elements in connection to the concept of an “Anschlußwelt” produced by a fictional text, Clarke's text is dramatically realistic, while paradoxically being drastically exaggerated and intentionally artificial, which is stressed by the choice of epigram for the text's conclusion.

This conclusion, titled “Colophon”, is introduced with an epigram taken from David Bradley's 1981 novel *The Chaneyville Incident*. While this part of the text is mainly concerned with its technicalities, the epigram is paradoxically of considerable peritextual significance.

And if the African belief is true, then somewhere here with us, in the very air we breathe, all that whipping and chaining and raping and starving and branding and maiming and castrating and lynching and murdering – all of it – is still going on.⁴⁸⁷

This literary quotation can be read in various ways; on a content level – not considering the original literary work it has been taken from – the reference to African beliefs stresses the temporal trajectory of slavery. Slavery is not depicted as history, as something of the past, but as something that is still relevant for the world we live in. Turning people into commodities did not stop with the end of the worldwide slave trade. According to Clarke, people around the world still suffer from other forms of slavery. By considering its original context, a hint to the text's underlying motive is provided because Bradley's novel is also concerned with the process of uncovering a past that is at best ambiguous. The main difference between Bradley's work and Clarke's *Beatrice Chancy* is that its generic categorization is comparatively clear. Bradley

⁴⁸⁶ Stierle, “Die Fiktion als Vorstellung“, 177.

⁴⁸⁷ David Bradley, *The Chaneyville Incident*, 213.

classifies his novel as “a work of historical reconstruction” nevertheless admitting that “[a]ll other characters are products of the author's imagination.”⁴⁸⁸

To summarize this chapter, it can be concluded that *Beatrice Chancy*, by way of intertextual adaptation, strict reader guidance and decided obfuscation of its textual status, provides a revisionary view on Canadian history. The language describing violence is provocatively aesthetic and colourful. This is part of the performative strategy to adapt plots and structures of texts originating from a different cultural environment and to translocate those features into a different setting. The hybrid character of this text stresses the historical problems it presents and reworks. Isolation, exclusion, violence and rebellion are aspects of this neglected history. These aspects are depicted in a religious context and the monstrosity and perversion of the socio-legal system of slavery is stressed by the use of religious symbols and metaphors. Exaggerated binary oppositions are a means to drive home Clarke's “didactic intent”, which the play successfully does: it confronts its readers/audience with history, not presented as such, but recreated as “a historical possibility [creating] plausible scenarios omitted from historical documentation”⁴⁸⁹, dedicated to its historically verifiable predecessors: Lydia Jackson and Marie Josèphe Angélique. Clarke thereby questions Canadian national identity and the myth of a slavery-free Canada that was only a place of refuge for slaves and shows that slavery is a part of the nation's history.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid, iii.

⁴⁸⁹ Pisarz-Ramirez, 11.

7.2 George Elliott Clarke's *Execution Poems* & *George & Rue* – Amalgamating Family History, Cultural History and Communicative Memory

White man goes to college,
Nigger to the field;
White man learns to read and write;
Poor Nigger learns to steal, Honey Babe,
Poor Nigger learns to steal.⁴⁹⁰

For isn't it odd that the only language I have in which to speak of this crime is the language of the criminal who committed the crime? And what can that really mean? For the language of the criminal can contain only the goodness of the criminal's deed...⁴⁹¹

Both George Elliott Clarke's cycle of poems, *Execution Poems*, first published in 2001, and his novel *George & Rue*, first published in 2005, are instances of discursive renegotiation of personal and collective pasts and histories in African-Canadian literature. As the texts grew out of Clarke's investigation of his family history, they add momentum to the theory that writing and telling about one's history, or, in this case, the history of one's family, is among the basic human needs.⁴⁹² In this chapter of my thesis, I will analyse the techniques Clarke uses to depict the results of his investigations in poetic, respectively narrative form. The decision to use a fictional instead of a non-fictional approach to present the results of his research to a wider audience shows that Clarke avoided structural frameworks which are based on rigidly regulated textual and cultural practices. Instead, he opted for frameworks and strategies which are not linked to ideas like verifiability and truth. However, in the following I will argue that both texts and their reconstruction of past events have to be considered as memory work and therefore as an essential part of the ongoing discursive re-evaluation of Canada's past. Both texts will initially be

⁴⁹⁰ Widely known blues lyrics, predominantly circulating in the southern states of the U.S. at the time of the Great Depression. Quoted after: Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 250.

⁴⁹¹ Jamaica Kincaid, "A Small Place", in: Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. London & New York: Routledge, 2003 [1995], 92-94 [94].

⁴⁹² As mentioned in chapter two of this thesis the theoretical approach towards my analysis of Brand's, Clarke's and Hill's work is indebted to the work of Hayden White, Paul Ricoeur and Jan Assmann. Their approach to the study of memory as a cultural phenomenon has been remarkably fruitful for both cultural and literary studies. Despite the enthusiastic reception of this approach there are only very few large-scale applications. This is due to the problematized relationship between individual and collective memories, which have been, due to the development in 20th century philosophy, "placed in positions of rivalry." Paul Ricoeur on the other hand has shown that there is a "distinct, yet reciprocal and interconnected, constitution of individual memory and of collective memory. See: Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer). Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004, 95.

discussed separately, these separate strands, however, will be connected in the course of the text in order to analyse and compare the different generic approaches.

On the synchronic level *Execution Poems* and *George & Rue* describe a minor incident in Canadian history, a crime motivated by poverty and executed by two brothers, George and Rufus Hamilton, who existed on the margins of society. These brothers, who were cousins of Clarke's, twice removed, as he often stresses in interviews, had three major problems: they were black, poor and uneducated, which, in 1940s Canada, according to Clarke, meant social marginalization. Their existence was a well-kept secret in Clarke's family; he learned about it by coincidence.⁴⁹³ Before the mid-1990s Clarke's family refrained from engaging in a constructive dialogue with the past. This part of family history had been considered too embarrassing to be a part of their shared memories, so the brothers were consigned to be forgotten. Clarke's re-working indicates a change of paradigms; while stories about those cousins and their deeds had hitherto been suppressed, they have by now become part of the collective, or even cultural memory through Clarke's fictionalization.

On the following pages I will first deal with *Execution Poems* as it preceded *George & Rue* by five years. As the publishing history of *Execution Poems* shows, Clarke was initially not entirely convinced that his family would be enthusiastic about the project. Andrew Steeves, editor for Clarke's publisher Gaspereau Press, points out in his foreword to the trade edition of the book that the first edition, published in 2000, was limited to a symbolic 66 copies which were sold out within a month. Initially, there was no plan to publish a second edition, but, due to ever increasing demand, Clarke and his publishing company decided to issue a second edition.⁴⁹⁴ The rest is history; after having been awarded with the Governor General's Award in 2001, the book has never been out of print.

In contrast to the novel, the poems assembled in *Execution Poems* re-work the lives of the Hamilton brothers in an entirely different way. Instead of the strictly chronological organization, which is the structural basis of the novel, the poems are separate entities shedding light, basically through the eyes of three speakers – George, Rue and an unidentified speaker – on the events that

⁴⁹³ Herb Wylie, *Speaking in the Past Tense. Canadian Novelists on Writing Historical Fiction*. Waterloo/Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press 2007, 134-64 [140].

⁴⁹⁴ George Elliott Clarke, *Execution Poems: The Black Acadian Tragedy of "George and Rue."* Toronto: Gaspereau Press, 2001, 7. All further references will be to this edition, page number and abbreviated title will be indicated parenthetically. The title will be abbreviated as EP.

lead up to the crime for which the brothers were sentenced to death. Tellingly, the cycle of poems is introduced by a poem, “Negation” in which Clarke reveals his personal involvement as their cousin and thematizes his function as an author. In the following, I will discuss the poem in the context of the sequence as a whole and briefly comment on the other version of the poem which is considerably longer. Both versions of “Negation” juxtaposed read as following:

Negation

Ne nègre negated, meagre, *c'est moi*:
 A whiskey-coloured provincial, uncouth
 Mouth spitting lies, vomit-lyrics, musty
 Masticated scripture. Her Majesty's
 Nasty, Nofaskoshan Negro, I mean
 To go out shining instead of tarnished,
 To take apart poetry like a heart.
 My black face must preface murder for you.
 (EP, 11, italics in the original)

Negation

Le nègre negated, meagre, *c'est moi*:
 Denigrated, negative, a local
 Caliban, unlikable and disliked
 (Slick black bastard – cannibal – sucking back
 Licorice-lusty, fifty-proof whiskey),
 A rusty-pallor provincial, uncouth
 Mouth spitting lies, vomit-lyrics, musty,
 Masticated scripture. Her Majesty's
 Nasty, Nafaskoshan Negro, I mean
 To go out shining instead of tarnished
 To take apart *Poetry* like a heart.
 So my black face must preface your finish
 Deface your *religion* – unerringly,
 Niggardly, like some *film noir* blackguard's.⁴⁹⁵

In addition to the short version of “Negation” used as an introduction to *Execution Poems*, the longer and more complex version reproduced above – on the right – was published in 2001 in Clarke's collection of poems titled *Blue*. Both poems serve different purposes; the shorter version creates a coherent persona, a speaker whose authority and commitment will guide the implied readers through the cycle of poems it is prefaced to. Additionally, the speaker's objectives are different; while the shorter version foregrounds its function as a preface, especially the pun on the speaker's “black face”, which might either be taken literally, or as a reference to printing, the longer is devised to be more general and unified. In the shorter version the speaker is driven by the need to write in order “to go out shining, instead of tarnished” (EP, 11). In this case writing about the past is described as an act of liberation, a coming to terms with the past in order to be able to confront the future. Both versions basically consist of three sense units: introduction, characterization and motif/objective, a turning point occurs after the characterization, when it becomes obvious that the speaker's self-representation is suffused with irony. The use of asyndetic lines, internal rhymes and colloquialisms stress the poem's performative, almost improvised character. Concerning the rhetorical devices used in the poems, it should be emphasized that they contain almost no figurative language. Their poetic force lies

⁴⁹⁵ George Elliott Clarke, *Blue*. Vancouver: Polestar Books, 2001, 16 (italics and capitalization in the original).

in the use of alliterations, puns, ambiguities and allusions. The speaker – creating a coherent and consistent persona – apparently describes himself in utterly negative terms. Due to the fact that one of the poem's main objectives is the construction of a coherent identity for the speaker, I will further on differentiate between speaker and persona, using the latter with regard to self-stylization. His subject position – as the title of the poems already implies – has been problematized by his social invisibility. The idea of the socially invisible man echoes Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* whose protagonist is continually denied acceptance by society and, in turn, does not offer any form of formal identification to his addressees. Despite the speaker's negative, almost satirical engagement with his self-characterization, the tone is, paradoxically, always self-affirmative. Nevertheless, especially the rapid enumeration of negative character traits deliberately invites the readers to take offence with the speaker. In his self-presentation he re-appropriates a number of racist stereotypes, inverts them, and actually uses them as a source of power for his poetry. In both versions we are first familiarized with the speaker's skin colour, a social determiner he consistently problematizes. Race and its social implications are furthermore thematized in various forms; alternating between French and English, both official languages of Canada, the speaker introduces himself as “*Le nègre negated, meagre, c'est moi:*” (EP, 11), harmonizing irreconcilable linguistic oppositions and thereby stressing the speaker's cultural hybridity. Ironically, parts of the phrase echo the famous claim, wrongly attributed to Louis XVI, “*L'état, c'est moi*”, which draws attention to the speaker's political impotency. In both versions he ironically engages with his peculiar subject position as an African-Canadian person, especially the alliterative phrase “Her majesty's Nasty, Nofaskoshan Negro” (EP, 11) accentuates the historical peculiarities of his existence. In the longer version the speaker, by claiming proximity to Shakespeare's iconic character Caliban, alludes to colonial and postcolonial discourses which seek to examine the power structures and hierarchies that were created by colonialism and sometimes continue to exist in post-colonial times. Through this allusion the speaker's alleged attempts to corrupt and misrepresent the truth through his misuse of language is historically contextualized. Like his predecessor Caliban, his “mouth [is] spitting lies, vomit-lyrics, musty/Masticated scripture” (EP, 11). In the tradition of Caliban, the speaker uses the language, the culture and the stereotypes of the oppressors against themselves, making familiar what was once foreign to him. This localization within a critical discourse is the main difference between both versions of the poem. The longer version, being more complex in terms of referentiality, suggests that the cultural contribution of the speaker will inevitably alter the face of the cultural landscape. Especially the ambiguous phrase “[s]o my black face must preface your finish/Deface

your *religion* – unerringly”⁴⁹⁶ suggests that the speaker's words will challenge and perhaps alter the addressees' world view. This longer version is addressing those persons whom the speaker identifies as antagonists, those who share the stereotypes he re-appropriated and, accordingly, culturally and socially marginalize him. Both versions deliberately problematize the differentiation between speaker and author, tempting the addressees into equating the one with the other. This blurring of boundaries stresses the social dimension of literature, especially its discursive re-evaluation of stereotypes and identities.

In *Execution Poems* this persona, most obviously Clarke himself, provides an additional summary of his cousin's crimes in the poem following up on “Negation.” In this poem, “George & Rue: Pure and Virtuous Killers”, almost all sentences start with the pronoun “they.” This repetition enables him to distance himself from them and it allows and leaves each sentence as a separate entity. However, it is a combination of characterization through an outsider and a detached description of their callous criminal actions, a combination of fact and imagination. For the speaker his cousins have multiple dimensions and identities, too complex to be fathomed through descriptions of their actions, they are his “bastard phantasms, [his] dastard fictions.” (EP, 12). The introduction to the cycle of poems alludes in form and function to the prologues frequently used in English Renaissance drama to introduce the stories of tragedies about to be performed to the audience. While in the novel *George & Rue* a minute description of the crime serves as an introduction to the story, this introduction is threefold in *Execution Poems*, both speaker and story are introduced in separate poems. The events leading up to the key event, the murder of the taxi driver Silver, however, are summarized by both the speaker and George, one of the murderers. This second description is not marked as the beginning of the fictitious part of the book and follows directly on the speaker's prologue. However, the two summaries offer different perspectives on the particular situation and create a distance between speaker and characters, underlining the speaker's attempt to stress the historical and emotional distance between the two entities. So while there is no marker signalling the beginning of the fictionalization of events, this distancing between the various speakers and their historical positions basically serves the same function. In keeping with the strategy to introduce the cycle of poems with a prologue, the dialogic nature of most poems follows an approach generally associated with drama. Through the appropriation of these strategies, the text transcends the limitations of poetry and acquires the performative qualities of a stage play, while preserving the

⁴⁹⁶ Clarke, *Blue*, 16.

intimate nature of a poetic dialogue. Comparing both renderings of the story, the narrativization does not follow this dialogic approach but features a third-person narrator. In my reading of *George & Rue*, focusing on this traditional approach will be of central importance as I will argue that in the novel, in contrast to the poetic rendering of the story, which distances between speaker and characters, Clarke attempts to accomplish the tightrope act of breaking up this distance between characters, narrator and narratees, despite the dire nature of the characters' crimes. In terms of poetic approaches, *Execution Poems* is similar to *Whylah Falls*. Having discussed these approaches to great extent in the previous chapter, I will in the following focus on the narrative techniques and strategies Clarke employed in *George & Rue*.

In *George & Rue*, the story of the Hamilton brothers is told chronologically, but Clarke, “conscious of literary traditions”, as Lawrence Hill remarked in his review of the novel,⁴⁹⁷ actually starts the narrative in medias res. This is an authorial act to redirect the readers' attention away from the crime, that, due to its utter brutality, forms a centre piece of the narrative, to the reconstructive description of the protagonists' social environment. Due to this authorial act the creation of tension, a key characteristic of crime fiction, is avoided. Right from the beginning, the addressees are informed about the crime, the victim and the culprits; only the motive is omitted because that is what the novel is essentially about: the reconstruction of the psychological, economic and social motivation for this deed. *George & Rue* depicts the brothers' childhood in the early 1920s, their relationship towards their parents, their environment and to each other. Their parents Asa and Cynthy are depicted as brutal and neglecting, respectively. Both boys drop out of school at an early age and have to fend for themselves. During their adolescence the boys learn to strife for their own advantage. Most of the novel is set in the Canada after World War II. It deals with the social situation and the consequences of the post-war depression for the African-Canadian population. While George, after having settled with his wife Blondola, seems to have integrated into society, his younger brother Rufus, after a disappointed love affair and a longer stint in gaol, has completely dropped out. This process comes to its sad climax with the murder of a taxi driver; Rufus kills this man and George, having planned the deed and provided the weapon, becomes his accessory. While Rufus is entirely callous, George can not stand the pressure and, after committing a number of blunders with the victim's car, confesses his complicity to the police. The depiction of the following trial shows

⁴⁹⁷ <http://<<.cbc.ca/arts/books/georgeandrue.html>. (accessed 5/25/2011) Hill relates Clarke's technique to recent novels like Garcia Marquez' *Crónica de un muerte anunciada* (*Cronical of a Death Foretold*) and Austin Clarke's *Polished Hoe*.

that both George and Rufus try to use the other as a scapegoat. The outcome of these manoeuvres is nevertheless devastating as both are sentenced to death. In a postscript Clarke mentions that a similar crime, committed by two white adolescents, had not been considered that serious by the authorities, their death sentence had been commuted to a sentence of life in prison.

This real-life story is – in a number of meta-commentaries – contextualized with the historical background. Historical documents, transcriptions of oral narratives and recorded testimonies are integral parts of the text. The marginalization the Hamilton brothers experience is connected to the social structures of 1940s Canada and translated from its seeming insularity into a greater scheme of things. Due to these points it can be said that, in addition to the personal aspect of the novel, its participation in a larger cultural discourse is significant. From that perspective I will attempt a reading of the novel that contextualizes it within contemporary discourses, focussing on the issues outlined in the second chapter of my thesis, especially considering the different levels of memory the novel makes use of, or rather recreates. Up till now, there have been comparatively few attempts at a critical engagement with *George & Rue* and it hasn't been contextualized with his other works within a longer study.⁴⁹⁸

The subject of poverty-induced criminality is not new; the text's basic structure and character constellation reminds readers of classical narratives such as A. E. Johnson's *Clarence and Corinne; or God's Way*.⁴⁹⁹ But unlike *Clarence and Corinne*, *George & Rue* is free from idealization and sentimentality. Another essential issue that has to be mentioned with regard to *George & Rue* is its stylistic difference from other works of historical fiction. While the novel is largely a collage of historical documents, oral narrative and re-imagined incidents, the language used to combine the different sources is artificial and condensed, appropriating poetic techniques for narrative purposes. Right from the beginning of the novel the metaphorical density of the language and its idiosyncratic use of idiomatic phrases introduces the reader to a world that is cold and unforgiving. Considering the functional potential of metaphors, especially their potential “influence on the collective perception”, as Hanne Birk points out, Clarke's use of metaphors can be described as a veiled reiteration of the issues the novel deals with.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁸ See: Gugu D. Hlongwane, “Whips, Hammers, and Ropes: The Burden of Race and Desire in Clarke's *George & Rue*.” in: *Studies in Canadian Literature: Etudes en littérature canadienne*, No. 33 (2) 2008, 291-306; Jens Martin Gurr, “Zweierlei Entdeckungen: Verdrängte kanadische Geschichte als Familiengeschichte im Werk von George Elliott Clarke.” in: *Flandziu – Halbjahresblätter für Literatur der Moderne*, Vol. 5, 2006, 131-143;

⁴⁹⁹ A. E. Johnson, *Clarence and Corinne; or God's Way*. Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1890. Reprinted in the series: *The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers*; Henry Louis Gates (gen. ed.). New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 21990 [1988].

⁵⁰⁰ Hanne Birk, “Das Problem des Gedächtnisses [...] drängt in die Bilder.” in: Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning &

The moon's whiteness was cold – some pure hydrochloric acid blackening pines and spruce. Bad nerves, a jittering hand got that hammer smashing down. It's wielder couldn't see straight; it was like his head was under water. (G & R, xi)

The symbolism of this passage cryptically points to the basic issues the novel deals with; the moon in its artificial whiteness and the light it provides is responsible for the sense perception that the whole environment, which is normally much more colourful, appears to be entirely black. The moon therefore represents racial categories, its cold whiteness symbolized a scientific approach and points to the fact that the origin for those categories is a result of certain European intellectual traditions. Apparently this moon has the power, by means of chemical reactions, to change things, a process that indirectly poisons those affected. The last sentence quoted here is potentially problematic as it can be interpreted as an attempt at exculpation, making use of imagery that support the idea that the perpetrator is not entirely responsible for his crime. This imagery is ubiquitous in the novel, the use of colour contrasts and binary oppositions symbolizes the racialization of Canadian society; those categories are, at least symbolically, revealed to be artificial, nevertheless, as we will see in the course of the chapter, they are important with regard to the way the characters of the protagonists are construed.

Structurally, the novel is strikingly symmetrical; it consists of three main parts: “Whip”, “Hammer” and “Rope.” In addition to the three parts engaged with the fictional reconstruction of the crime, two separate parts titled “Crypt” and “Notes” are added. “Crypt” is basically a epilogue to the first three parts, contrasting the Hamilton's verdict with the much laxer treatment a similar crime committed by two white boys received. The last part, “Notes” – as it is a characteristic of Clarke's writing - provides background information on the writing process, his motivation and the sources consulted. All parts are accompanied by short epigrams that comment on the part they introduce. Especially the epigram introducing the final part “Rope”, which has been taken from Jean Genet's *Les Nègres*, foreshadows the outcome of the part it precedes:

Listen: we don't care if it was the one or the other who committed the crime,
we don't differentiate between this and that man, because a man is a man, a Negro is a Negro;
we are content if we have got two arms, two legs, to break and

Marion Gymnich, *Literatur; Erinnerung, Identität. Theoriekonzeptionen und Fallstudien*. Trier: WVT, 2003, 79-101 [79-81].

a neck to put into a noose and our jurisdiction is satisfied.⁵⁰¹

The epigram already provides a comment on the reconstruction of the legal situation Clarke depicts in *George & Rue*; especially the reduction of the human body to functional parts that add up to a human being, but nevertheless has no other function than to “satisfy our legal system”, evokes the idea of a corrupt and arbitrary state. Genet's drama is not a mere intertextual hint, its position in literary history is also relevant. Norman Mailer, as Adam Lively points out, thought that Genet's lack of realism, which he pinpoints on the fact that the whole cast, which, in its early performances, consisted of persons of colour only, who had to wear black masks, distracts the attention from the real issue.⁵⁰² However, following Lively's argumentation, it has to be pointed out that the masks are not a mere stage prop, but must be regarded as a symbol for racial categories.⁵⁰³ In addition to that, Genet belonged to a generation of writers who, not unlike contemporary writers like Clarke, introduced open and sometimes aestheticized violence as a stylistic means into their texts. This development, beginning in European and American Realism, intensifying in the Naturalism of the fin de siècle, had become an important means in the works of the writers of the Harlem Renaissance.⁵⁰⁴ Especially Richard Wright's novel *Native Son* started a controversy which was mainly due its explicit descriptions of violence. So while the reference to Genet's thinly disguised symbolism points to the importance of racism as a general subject, Clarke's explicit depictions of violence can be related to a certain literary tradition. Moreover, Clarke's protagonists unite different literary traditions; the reaction of the white society to their arrest points to common imagery of the stereotypical black marauder, who, due to his innate lack of social competence, cannot adapt to society.⁵⁰⁵ In addition to this stereotypical categorization through society, psychological depth is added to the characters through the depiction of their childhood.

Additionally, the novel's three-part structure is reminiscent of classical dramatic structures, pointing to the inevitable end of the novel's protagonists. The first part titled “Whip” describes the birth, adolescence and the coming of age of the novel's protagonists. This part

⁵⁰¹ Jean Genet, *Les Nègres*. Paris: Gallimard 1979 [1958], 59-60 (my translation). The original passages is: Écoutez: il nous est indifférent que ce soit l' un ou, l' autre qui ait commis le crime ..., si un homme est, un homme, un nègre est un nègre, et il nous suffit de deux bras, deux jambes à casser, d'un cou à passer; dans le noeud coulant, et notre justice est heureuse.

⁵⁰² Adam Lively, *Masks*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 247-250 [247].

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid, 278. Lively points out that literary depictions of violence are “essential to slave literature.[...] From the abolitionists onwards violence and the threat of it have been intrinsic to how black and white liberals have depicted what used to be called 'race relations.'”

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

focusses on the social environment they grew up in, especially on the disrupted relationship of their parents and on the historical origins of the community they lived in. In the second part, the forestalled climax, the readers are confronted with the crime, a more or less unplanned and blunt act of violence, avoidable and executed solely for the sake of monetary gain. Its victim, Nacra Pearly 'Silver' Burgundy⁵⁰⁶, a war veteran and taxi driver, had first been severely injured with a hammer and then subsequently disposed of into the woods in order to be dug out and put into the boot of his own car. This illustrates the haphazard character of the crime, which, despite it being premeditated, was executed with utmost brutality and only superficially covered up. The third part, the text's denouement, reworks the Hamilton's prosecution and trial. It depicts the workings of a legal system that is not entirely free of racial prejudice and shows that there was no equality before the law for minority groups in 1940s Canada.

As I have already explored in the previous chapters of this thesis, Clarke's writing has political implications, which have so far been neutrally described as 'reworking', a term that does not properly take heed of the political agenda it follows. I did not chose that term in order to deny the function of literature to challenge, perpetuate, or alter social memory⁵⁰⁷, a process that is certainly important with regard to Clarke's novel, but rather as a reminder that the depiction of this process is problematized by the contemporaneity of the text. As it is not possible to analyse this process from a historically detached perspective, the only thing to be done is to describe the text's structure and analyse its use of mnemonic techniques. Keeping a detached and objective perspective is further complicated by Clarke's involvement into the reception of his writing. His critical engagements with his own work – within his fictional writing and in the form of interviews and essays – might easily lead to an author-centred reading that is to be avoided, but should those insights be completely ignored? I would argue that this would be neither fruitful nor possible because meta-commentaries or additional information provided by the author, are already part and parcel of the textual strategies he employs. This is especially important with regard to *George & Rue*, which contains intra and extra textual commentaries. One example of the text-internal critical commentary in *George & Rue* is chapter II, which starts with a short summary of the social history of the African-Canadian population of Nova Scotia. In this part the historical agenda becomes obvious:

⁵⁰⁶ The victim's real name was Norman Phillip Burgoyne. Clarke changed the name in order to preserve the privacy of the victim's descendants. See: Wyile, *Speaking in the Past Tense*, 147.

⁵⁰⁷ Lars Eckstein, *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi 2006, ix. Eckstein does not only attribute the mentioned mnemonic functions to literature, he goes even further and points out that literature can be seen as an individual site of memory, not only as a referential sign system.

African Nova Scotia and, specifically, Three Mile Plains were the results of slave trade and slave escape. [...] They arrived just like two thousand black others who came with nothing to nowhere, were [...] plunked on rocky land (soon laced with infants' skeletons.) They [the black Nova Scotians] were so poor, they supposedly didn't even have history. And could they afford self-respect? Well, they paid for it with their backs, their legs and feet, their hands and arms. (G & R 14)

Clarke depicts the landscape and its relation to the history of the black presence on Nova-Scotian soil. The presence of black people in this region can be traced back to colonial times and originates from the conflicts between the USA and Great Britain in the course of the USA's strife for independence. In addition to this short summary of African Canadian, respectively Acadian history, the US edition of *George & Rue* contains an author's note that functions as a reminder of the fact that slavery was a practice that united the Americas, at least in the first colonial period. In addition to that, it also points to the consequences historical developments might have for individuals; a factor that will be dealt with later on in this chapter. This short attempt to describe a transnational history of slavery is, as the text already shows, more than a mere reminder. Its addressees are supposed, or even expected to be surprised by the facts provided, because "their [African-Canadian] history is a mystery to all."⁵⁰⁸ Significantly, this comment is not included in all other editions of the novel, its readership is therefore, at least theoretically, limited to US American readers; its function is to connect the historical developments of the Americas and point out that Canada's history has to be contextualized with the transnational history of slavery and racism. Clarke's apparent inclination to engage with history basically echoes Arthur A. Schomburg's statement that:

The American Negro must remake his past in order to make his future. Though it is orthodox to think of America as the one country where it is unnecessary to have a past, what is a luxury for the nation as a whole becomes a prime social necessity for the Negro. [...] History must restore what slavery took away, for it is the social damage of slavery that the present generations must repair and offset.⁵⁰⁹

It can therefore be said that Clarke's programmatic agenda follows a well established

⁵⁰⁸ George Elliott Clarke, *George & Rue*, New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006, v. All further references will be to this edition, indicated parenthetically in the text, the title will be abbreviated as G & R.

⁵⁰⁹ Arthur A. Schomburg, "The Negro Digs Up His Past" (1925) in: Henry Louis Gates Jr. (gen. ed.), *The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature*. London & New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997, 937.

philosophical tradition.⁵¹⁰ In Schomburg's essay, a key text of the Harlem Renaissance, history is allocated functions that might as well be attributed to the collective memory. Memory and history are described as essential tools to “repair [...] the social damage of slavery” with; in this context, his idea of a “group tradition” that “must supply compensation for persecution, and pride of race the antidote for prejudice”, could, in more recent terminology, be described as collective memory.⁵¹¹ Research about the past accordingly becomes a necessity; black people are, “apt out of the very pressure of the present to become the most enthusiastic antiquarian[s] of them all.”⁵¹² Even if Schomburg's argumentation, influenced by the thinking of his era, is sometimes too essentialist, it becomes clear that his essay provided a blueprint for endeavours that have not yet been completed. It laid the groundwork for a discourse that spread from the U.S. to the rest of the Americas. Robin Winks was the first Canadian historian who followed Schomburg; he points out that “[t]here is no accurate historical memory in Canada of British North America's own experience with the Negro and even a clouded awareness of an earlier Negro presence is slight.”⁵¹³ While Schomburg's programmatic text stresses the power-political aspects of history, modern approaches to history acknowledge that it cannot be limited to binary oppositions, but must rather be regarded as a circular discourse. This discourse, as described in the theoretical part of this thesis, is functional, but also emotionally charged, it forms our ideas of individual and collective memory, ideas that are due to the circular structure of this discourse subject to constant change. Private memory work, as practised by Clarke for *George & Rue*, is one aspect that defines Schomburg's “enthusiastic antiquarian”; the aim is to render past structures visible and to change the very idea we hold of this past. This changed outlook does not neglect or even deny the Hamiltons' guilt, even if they are not solely depicted as victims; it rather reveals the manifold aspects that lead the brothers to commit the crime.

As I will show, the generic categorization is a crucial element for the analysis of the functional level of the novel. As a very superficial starting point *George & Rue* can be characterized as a historical novel. However, the novel also contains elements more prominent in crime fiction and with regard to the highlighting of issues like discrimination and racism it is influenced by the tradition of African-American protest novels. It is noteworthy that Clarke actually reworked the history of his own family, because the protagonists of the novel were his

⁵¹⁰ Actually Schomburg's essay only summarized the programmatic agenda of African-American endeavours to trace back their history. An earlier landmark had been the launch of the *Journal of Negro History*, which is today known as *The Journal of African-American History*, of which the first issue had been published in January 1916.

⁵¹¹ Ibid, 938.

⁵¹² Schomburg, “The Negro Digs Up His Past”, 937.

⁵¹³ Robin Winks, “The Canadian Negro”, *Journal of Negro History*, 53, No.4 (Oct. 1968), 290.

cousins. This adds another problematic factor to the already problematic genre of historical fiction: emotional involvement. The problematic hybridity of the historical novel⁵¹⁴, its mixture of reconstructible past and fiction, is complicated by the position of the author who, despite not being part of the narrative, is personally affected by the history he reconstructs.⁵¹⁵ Clarke explicitly mentions this problematic position in the author's note to the US edition of the novel cited above.

My characters (and real-life cousins) George and Rufus Hamilton, descend, like me, from the 1812-1815 landing of African-Americans in Nova Scotia. Although our ancestors had physical freedom, they were forced to work like slaves, basically, for that was their function in the Nova Scotian economy and society, and it remained our reality, until well into the 1960s. (Nova Scotia is a displaced Mississippi.) (G & R, vi)

This peculiar position resulted in a controversy between Clarke and the victim's family because Clarke initially informed them about his intention to write about this incident and asked for their understanding. While the victim's family did not react to the publication of *Execution Poems* they protested against *George & Rue*.⁵¹⁶ This shows that the novel is widely regarded as a more powerful medium. While the victim's family did not consider the possibility that *Execution Poems* would be widely read and therefore an efficient means to rework this incident and might perhaps be a financial success, they readily alleged that Clarke's "aim was to profit from a tragedy that had wrecked their family."⁵¹⁷ The fears of the victim's family might result from the unbroken popularity of Truman Capote's novel *In Cold Blood*, first published in 1965, which also centres on the description and reconstruction of a real-life crime.⁵¹⁸ Despite the similarities between the two novels, *George & Rue*, in opposition to *In Cold Blood*, is not an attempt to faithfully reconstruct the past, the poetic and highly metaphoric language used in the novel is a sign of its fictitiousness. While Capote stated that *In Cold Blood* is supposed to be an accurate description of the crime and the persecution of the culprits, *George & Rue* is, perhaps due to the worries of the victim's descendants, generically much more evasive.

⁵¹⁴ Cf. Herb Wyile, *Speculative Fictions. Contemporary Canadian Novelists and the Writing of History*. Montreal, London & Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press 2002, 16. "One of the challenging aspects in theorizing about the historical novel is that from the start it has been seen as a hybrid genre, combining the real and the historical with the fictional and the literary in often problematic ways."

⁵¹⁵ Cf. Herb Wyile, *Speaking in the Past Tense*, 140. In the interview with Herb Wyile Clarke points out that, "George & Rue would be [his] way, rightly or wrongly, of talking, *without sentimentality*, about race relations in the Maritimes in the 1930s and 1940s [...]" (my emphasis)

⁵¹⁶ Ibid, 145-47.

⁵¹⁷ Whyile & Clarke, "We Have to Recover their Bodies", 147-49.

⁵¹⁸ Capote's novel was the predecessor for a number of similar novels, this movement was called New Journalism.

This peculiar situation of the author also supports the idea that *George & Rue* can not be regarded as a work of fiction that merely requires of its readers to believe in the probability of the events depicted.⁵¹⁹ It is far more complex; the contesting forces of historical authenticity and fictional distortion are embedded characteristics of the text. Due to their interaction within the text the boundary between fact and fiction is blurred; the text is neither historically accurate nor is it mere fiction, it is somewhere in between, it is a form of cultural memory or rather remembering that necessarily avoids classification. While the classification of *George & Rue* as a historical novel, narrated by a heterodiegetic narrator, is not invalidated by the afore mentioned criteria, its adherence to historical documentation and the authorial decision to use two real-life characters as protagonists are factors that are not in keeping with the classical genre definitions.⁵²⁰ Therefore, it requires, as many other recent historical fictions do, a more flexible, less generalizing classification.⁵²¹ By taking Nünning's five-point categorization of historical fictions into consideration, it becomes clear that the tension between fact and fiction in *George & Rue* results from a dominant position of fact-based information forming the core structure of the narrative, which includes the character construction drawn from various sources. By integrating court documents – he actually used the trial transcripts to reconstruct the actual trial – newspaper articles (G & R, 189-191), a poem by Rufus Hamilton (199-200) and George Hamilton's letter to the Governor General (G & R, 192-94) and extracts from his journal (G & R, 195) the narrative gains authenticity. The narrative presentation of these items of information on the other hand accentuates the fictitiousness of the re-constructive attempt.

Not only generically, but also regarding its position within a larger cultural context, *George & Rue* is a hybrid of (literary) invention and authentic historical documents amalgamated to form a coherent narrative. All the historical documents stress the public disdain for the culprits and the deed they had committed, but through authorial intervention, meaning the emplotment of the extant information, a wider historical and social context is established in the novel, which therefore offers several perspectives at once. Despite, or even because of Canada's official policy of multiculturalism, existing since the late 1970s, debates about race, racism, inequality and

⁵¹⁹ Cf. Kendall L. Walton, "Fearing Fictions" in: *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 75(1), January 1978, 5-27 [5], Walton states that despite these limitations of the medium the "barrier [between real worlds and fictional worlds] appears to be psychologically transparent." This again evokes Stierle's concept of an "Anschlusswelt", a world that is different from the real world, but still provides characteristics that are easily identified and associated with by the narratee.

⁵²⁰ George Lukács, *The Historical Novel*. (translated by Barbara and Stanley Mitchell). Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1969. Lukács' definition of historical novels certainly does not apply to recent historical fiction any more. Especially his rather rigid structural and narratological claims have been outdated by recent historical fictions.

⁵²¹ Nünning, *Von historischer Fiktion zu historischer Metafiktion*. Trier: WVT, 1995, 206-207.

injustice against ethnic minorities were not part of the Canadian national narratives. As Clarke and others stated, the Canadian population tended to ignore such problems and concerns and, as an act of exculpation, used the United States as a historical counter image on which to project those issues. As Clarke describes it in his article “White like Canada”: “Canadian identity, such as it is defines itself primarily in opposition to the United States. Canada is pristine unpolluted wilderness; the U.S. is decaying urban centres.”⁵²² On the Canadian side this resulted in a lack of literary narratives concerned with those topics. In the United States on the other hand we find a large number of texts concerned with the experience of cultural othering, racism, slavery and violence. Even when Clarke points to the long tradition of African-Canadian literature it becomes clear that certain kinds of narratives are only extant in African-American literature. This is especially true of the representation of slavery⁵²³, because till the 1960s, there are only a few examples of African-Canadian authors engaging with this topic, a fact that has been taken up by a number of contemporary African-Canadian authors.⁵²⁴ Maureen Moynagh summarizes the problematic situation of Canadian minority literatures as follows: “[writers are confronted] with a particular kind of that New World myth, and that is the myth that Canada is free of the history of slavery by virtue of being the 'north star', the land of freedom for fugitive slaves.”⁵²⁵ In *George & Rue*, an intricate and perverse form of racism is depicted, not the openly practised KKK racism despite the fact that “[in York Country] the Klu Klux Klan clucked and conclaveed occasionally” (G & R, 86), but the Hamilton bothers get to know about racial categories through their father. Asa was indoctrinated with racist ideology and now, polemically described in the text, wants to teach his boys the essence of this thinking:

They had to learn *they were worth zilch*. He was a patriarch who felt commissioned to destroy his own family. [...] The boys had to be abused like *beasts*, just whipped and slapped and kicked and punched and beaten, so they'd knuckle under and be quiet *niggers*. (G & R, 28 my emphasis)

Hlongwane related this depiction of internalized racism to Frantz Fanon's thesis that “[the colonial man] will first manifest this aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones

⁵²² George Elliott Clarke, “White like Canada.” in: *Transition*, No. 73 (1997), 98-109 [100].

⁵²³ Tim A. Ryan, *Calls and Responses. The American Novel of Slavery since Gone with the Wind*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press 2008. “American novel” in Ryan's book means written in the United States, or by U.S. American authors. This exclusive approach stresses that slavery is not only in the Canadian self-perception, but also from the US perspective, regarded as an exclusively U.S. American national narrative, “a national shame, an ugly gaping crack in the mythology of the United States, a troubling subject that it is safer to avoid or, at least, to politely sanitize.” (1)

⁵²⁴ See chapters 2, 3 and 5 in this book.

⁵²⁵ Maureen Moynagh, “Eyeing the north star? Figuring Canada in postslavery fiction and drama.” *Comparative American Studies* Vol 3.1. London, Thousand Oaks (CA) & New Delhi: Sage Publications 2005, 15-27 [15-16].

against his own people.”⁵²⁶ Hlongwane's line of argument puts *George & Rue*, alongside Fanon's thesis, in a post-colonial context⁵²⁷ and thereby provides a suitable description of the psychological workings of institutionalized racism depicted in the novel. One should consider that western categories of race were influenced by second-hand information, received through observations on the behaviour of black people in the Americas.⁵²⁸ Through those observations connections between black people and the animal world were established, to denigrate their place in the chain of beings, a concept that was valid in pre-Darwinian times. Clarke also makes use of this strategy, but in a symbolic way that parodies it and renders its absurdity obvious:

Rue dreamt of how nice it'd be to smash flies' soft bodies against Purity's hard, sober whiteness, to make it darker, softer. He wondered if Purity, plastered with hundreds of corpses of smeared flies, might seem delectably darker. [...]In Purity's eyes, Rue's a kind of crow, raven, vulture, vampire, as black as rat's fur. (68)

Purity's racist imagery is juxtaposed to Rufus' bizarre (sexual) fantasies. While she imagines him as a predatory animal, he craves to cover her in corruption, this, besides being a deconstruction of racist imagery, is an allusion to miscegenation. The thought to have intercourse with a white woman, even with a prostitute, is a violation of the racial categories Rufus has internalized. Even covered in corruption she would be “delectably darker” for him.

In comparison to Ellison's classic *Invisible Man*, Clarke's protagonists were doubly discriminated, they were “visible minorities”; but invisible on every other level of social existence. While Ellison's nameless protagonist had a higher education, George and Rufus Hamilton had neither ambitions nor patrons to take care of them; the unsentimental description of their dire youth pinpoints the origins of their moral corruption. While the predominantly white society in *George & Rue* acknowledges their physical existence, they are deprived of education as well as of economic and political participation in social life. Comparing Clarke's depiction of

⁵²⁶ Citation according to Hlongwane, “Whips, Hammers and Ropes”, 293.

⁵²⁷ See: George Elliott Clarke, “Canada: The Invisible Empire“. In: Jutta Ernst & Brigitte Glaser (eds.), *The Canadian Mosaic in the Age of Transnationalism*. Heidelberg: Winter 2010, 19-37. Especially Clarke's evasive attitude towards the use of the term in the Canadian context is to be considered: “[...] Canada is post-colonial in terms of its origin in the power struggles between discrete empires (first British and French, then British versus the uppity American colossus, and *always* the conflict between settlers/colonists [and descendants] and First Nations peoples). Understood in this way, 'post-.colonial' does describe an ongoing process of complex interchanges between ex-empires and the territories they annexed, exploited, conquered, settled, and then were expelled from, or permitted to exit quietly. But Canada is also quasi-imperial in terms of its relationship to its own 'territories' [...].” (34)

⁵²⁸ David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage. The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 74-78.

the Hamilton brothers' place in history and society to the questions asked by the nameless narrator in Ellison's *Invisible Man*:

Why had he chosen to plunge into nothingness, into the void of faceless faces, of soundless voices, lying outside history? [...] For history records the patterns of men's lives, they say: Who slept with whom and with what results; who fought and won and who lived to lie about it afterwards.⁵²⁹

it becomes clear that in *George & Rue* there are no choices to be made. As Lawrence Hill states in his review: “[Rufus] resents the world that has made him poor, black and undesirable, and he mostly refuses to play the role of the Uncle Tom who would do any work for any pay – no matter how little.”⁵³⁰ George and Rufus were born without a choice, lived on the margins of society and were certainly not able to place themselves in the historical consciousness, except, as an indirect confirmation of their marginal status, through their crimes. But the Hamiltons are not the only victims in the novel:

Purity was one more victim, a woman from the impoverished, French-speaking countryside that couldn't speak French and prosper. Like many Acadians, she'd been Englished in merciless schools and Anglicized by predatorial bosses. (G & R, 33)

More or less in passing, the novel depicts the history of another marginalized community; the Acadiens, French-speaking Nova Scotians, who experienced persecution, dislocation and later forceful assimilation.⁵³¹ Purity, who represents this minority group in the novel, has been doubly discriminated; like other women belonging to minorities, she was sexually exploited, and, due to economic and social pressure, worked in a brothel. Happiness is also denied to Blondola,

⁵²⁹ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*. London: Penguin, 1965 [1952], 353. While *Invisible Man* and *George & Rue* share the same larger topic: the discrimination and social alienation of minority groups by a white majority; their outlook is different. Ellison's novel depicts a social situation from a contemporary perspective, Clarke's novel is a retrospective that engages with history and reworks an unacknowledged part of the Canadian past. Despite these temporal and spatial dissimilarities both novels are part of the larger discourse of black emancipation. Both novels depict men who were made invisible, who were forced to live a marginal existence due to their skin colour.

⁵³⁰ Lawrence Hill, “Rueing the Consequences” <http://www.cbc.ca/arts/books/georgeandrue.html>.

⁵³¹ In addition to the neglected history of African Canadians, the Acadiens are another minority group whose history had basically been obliterated. Especially the attempted expulsion of Acadiens from Nova Scotia, and their persecution and forceful assimilation through the British settlers is a historical process that has come into focus during the last years. Many descendants of the original French-speaking Nova Scotians started to question official narratives and, as a consequence, presented their own versions of these incidents. See: Antoine Maillet, “The Great Disturbance According to Bélonie.” in: *The Story of A Nation: Defining Moments in Our History*. Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2001, 25-45.

George's wife. Her simple claim, “[w]hy shouldn't we be happy? Who don't have molasses, matches, moose meat, and milk?” (G& R, 88), cannot be fulfilled. Even if she is not obviously exploited like Purity, she has got no place in the social order. In the novel she is depicted as a woman with simple needs and simple wishes; her happiness would be consolidated by material security, which is denied to George and therefore also to her.

Another important aspect of *George & Rue* is its over-abundance of representations of sites and landscapes that are part of the depiction of a hostile environment. Ever since Margaret Atwood's influential collection of essays *Survival* was first published, representations of nature have been acknowledged as a feature of Canadian literature. Atwood argued that in early Canadian literature the experience of the Canadian landscape created a “double minded attitude towards Canada” because British settlers, who were basically influenced by Wordsworth's and Burke's idealized depictions of nature, were disappointed by their real-life encounters with their new environment. Those settlers who experienced the unbridled fierceness of nature had to integrate these experiences into their world-view, which as Atwood emphasizes, was shaped by romantic notions of nature, metaphorically depicting it as a benevolent mother, or a caring nurturing goddess.⁵³² Even if Atwood's book and the approaches it suggested have been questioned during the last 30 years, this “double minded attitude towards Canada” she described, can still be detected in Canadian fiction. In more recent novels the antithetical presentation of man against nature notable shifted from “a sense of imprisonment” created by nature to the depiction of man-made infringements of nature.⁵³³ Still, in *George & Rue*, the forces of nature, due to the poor housing conditions the Hamiltons are living in, make life miserable for the protagonists:

Winter was the stench of oil lugged home. Or was it lugging snow into the kitchen to make tea. Or was it trying to battle oppressive rain, that forceful misery soaking up the newspapered floor. Or was it a crop of rats. The sloughs were laced with ice, a crust of crystal formed in the water pail. And no bite of even bad meat anywhere.[...] (G & R, 5)

In this passage, a causal relation is described; the dire poverty had not been caused by nature, but the harsh climate intensifies the situation, due to this influence the poor housing becomes unbearable. In keeping with the early migrant writings cited by Atwood, there is no “Nature the

⁵³² Margaret Atwood, *Survival. A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press Limited, 1972, 49-52.

⁵³³ *Ibid*, 51.

Sublime” to be found in *George & Rue*. Both the urban and rural environments described show hostility towards their inhabitants. When George envisions his future life, he dreams about nature as a source of nourishment; in his imagination nature fulfils the position Atwood described as that of a “caring benevolent goddess:”

He dreamt of one hundred and sixty apple trees, fifty-two fat cows and pigs, to heap up capital in pre-biblical, antediluvian ways. [...] George could enjoy the abundant, soft brains of raspberries. He planned a crop of blueberries and blackberries, also onion, garlic, cucumber, tomatoes, and anything else that could bring the best of Three Mile Plains and Benzanson's Farm back to his nostalgic stomach. (87)

This dream is a counter image to George's real life existence. While living in a dilapidated hut with a partly collapsed roof, subsisting on the produce of a small garden, day-jobs and petty theft, he envisions an existence that is free of the constraints of the market economy. But this antediluvian existence is denied to the Hamiltons; they are expected to perform their part in the Canadian market economy. Nature, or rather the access to nature as a means of production is denied to them because they lack the monetary means to purchase farmland as their part in the market economy is restricted to, at best, menial labour.

In addition to the symbolic re-appropriation of natural phenomena, like in the aforementioned metaphoric re-functioning of images, literary representations of environments contribute to the atmosphere of the narrative and, as a third function, re-negotiate sites of local history and collective memory.⁵³⁴ Accordingly, the integration of depictions of social and natural environments has a symbolic meaning as “prevailing cultural norms, hierarchies of [social] values, circulating collective ideas of centrality and marginality, of 'own' and 'others' as well as the location of the individual between those oppositions are manifested in [these depictions].”⁵³⁵

The description of Fredericton is a suitable example:

⁵³⁴ As explained in the theoretical part of this study, the term “sites of identity” is not used in the same sense as Pierre Nora's “lieux de memoir.” I will restrict my re-appropriation of the term to real sites, or rather descriptions of natural and man-made environments. It is rather the archaeological approach that is relevant for the novel because the sites depicted do not serve as “lieux de memoir” as the African-Canadian minority, for various reasons, did not use sites as mementoes.

⁵³⁵ Wolfgang Hallet & Birgit Neumann, “Raum und Bewegung in der Literatur: Zur Einführung“ in Wolfgang Hallet & Birgit Neumann (eds.), *Raum und Bewegung in der Literatur: Die Literaturwissenschaft und der Spatial Turn*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag 2009, 11-33 [11; my translation]. “Raum ist in literarischen Texten nicht nur Ort der Handlung, sondern stets auch kultureller Bedeutungsträger. Kulturell vorherrschende Normen, Werthierarchien, kursierende Kollektivvorstellungen von Zentralität und Marginalität, von Eigenem und Fremden sowie Verortung des Individuums zwischen Vertrautem und Fremdem erfahren im Raum eine konkrete anschauliche Manifestation.”

[...] Fredericton, The Celestial City, was ivory drunkenness and false British accents perfected in lumbercamps. It had tried to simulate Boston, Mass., but had ended up emulating Bangor, Maine, a distinct let down. *Rive sud* was mansions, government, elmed and lilac'd streets. But Eatman Avenue, on the north side of the Saint John River, in Barker's Point, was where most Coloured lived: a place of huts, cops-and-robbers, lumber mills, and railway yards. Here the Klu Klux Klan clucked and conclaved occasionally. The area was named for Lieutenant Thomas Barker, an ex-Yankee and ex-con who landed in 1783 and built a house with iron rings on the walls to hold slaves. (G & R, 86)

The imaginary city tour through Fredericton does not create a positive impression for the narratees. The “Celestial City” is nothing more than a parody of its inhabitants' high hopes. Furthermore, it is a divided city, the Saint John River serves as an invisible colour-bar that divides the city into north and south. Barker's Point, where most of the black population lives, had paradoxically been named after a Loyalist who erected his house and slave quarters there. It is therefore a site of identity that is only made visible through historical research. The Hamilton brothers' problems are symptomatic for this whole situation; slavery and racism are part of their life, part of their history, but they are hidden and have to be laid bare by turning to the history of the places. This is in keeping with Rinaldo Walcott's thesis that:

[N]ational narratives render these racial geographies [the originary struggle over space, constituted through a particularized Canadian discourse] invisible, and many people continue to believe that any black presence in Canada is a recent and urban one spawned by black Caribbean, and now continental African, migration.⁵³⁶

It can be therefore be concluded that there are few or no official sites of memory for the African-Canadian population, no mementos that serve as reminders of a glorious past.⁵³⁷ Especially this lack of sites of identity problematizes the identity formation of a culture, in this case an African-Canadian culture. Due to this situation, racial envy and the protest against social inequality is inevitable in this environment:

⁵³⁶ Rinaldo Walcott, *Black Like Who?*, 43. Walcott also accuses the Canadian authorities of a conscious obliteration of sites of identity, like the razing of Africville, an exclusively African-Canadian community on the outskirts of Halifax, in 1967; and the re-naming of settlements and roads.

⁵³⁷ The search for African-Canadian sites of memory has already been taken up by a number of institutions like for example the Harriet Tubman Institute, which hosted a conference that, at least partly, dealt with that topic. See: <http://research.news.yorku.ca/2011/05/03/conference-on-africa-will-include-latest-uprisings-in-north-africa/>

[...] [I]t was common for black boys to stroll with brown girls down to the river to glance at the Gothic and Georgian mansions of the burghers on Waterloo row and to slingshot stones at the silver-roofed legislature.

The open displays of wealth and power strengthen the depiction of racial and social inequality the text provides. The “mansions of the burghers” are a symbol of social and economic exclusion; those houses, exclusively built for white people, offer a stark contrast to the housing conditions the Hamilton brothers experienced and also to the huts that dominate Barker's Point. The law, represented by the “silver roofed legislature”, and the dwellings of the moneyed whites are places that can only be watched from afar by coloured people; the symbolic act of throwing stones at an inanimate object like the parliament building points to the lack of power, the silent protest against existing social and political structures. The pomposity of those buildings intensifies that feeling of marginality which, in the Nova-Scotian context, denotes “a lack of influence in societal decision making and a low degree of participation in the mainstream political or economic life.”⁵³⁸

In order to come to a conclusion of this chapter, the relation between the mnemonic function of the text and its participation in the larger cultural discourse must be established. As I have shown, the novel follows a programmatic agenda that can be traced back to the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance, but its adherence to this agenda is not rigid. While following this approach, the novel provides – despite the contextualization with the larger American perspective in the U.S. edition – an exclusively Canadian perspective on the problematic situation of retracing the history of marginal groups. It playfully but seriously re-works the history of reviously unspeakable events in the author's family history. By contextualizing the abominable crime committed by the Hamilton brothers within the historical situation, Clarke uncovers the social structures that finally led to the brothers' moral devolution. However, Clarke's position, especially due to being personally affected by the story he tells, is problematic. Therefore he avoids being apologetic. Contrary to Levine, who stated in his ground-breaking work *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* that “[i]t is hardly surprising that the deeply ingrained prejudices of American society should have affected some of its victims to the point where they turned the hatred upon themselves and their peers”, Clarke, for the reasons outlined above, cannot pass this judgement.⁵³⁹ In the novel he therefore attempts the tightrope act to give

⁵³⁸ Clairmont & Magill, *Africville*, 39.

⁵³⁹ Levine, 285.

voice to the Hamilton brothers without denying, or even playing down their guilt. However, the depiction of the environment clearly shows that the marginal social and economic position the brothers lived in contributed to their moral degradation. Family history is not equalized with social history, but the depiction of latent violence, intrinsic to the family structures depicted in the novel, is related to the overall racialization of Canadian society. By integrating historical documents, a feeling of textual authenticity is created. This feeling is undermined by the highly metaphorical language used in the novel. This sense of ambiguity is also highlighted by the impossibility of the text's generic categorization; through its ambiguity prevailing narratives and their structures are questioned, by being neither purely truth nor fiction, the text reveals its status as a part of African-Canadian memory work. It can therefore be concluded that Clarke translates his family history from the realm of communicative into cultural memory. By using the formal structures of literary predecessors, he rescues past incidents from being forgotten, turning items of information that would have been transmitted orally – as part of his family's history – into an accessible literary form that is no longer subject to suppression and neglect.

7.3 Music, Multiculturalism and the New Canada in George Elliott Clarke's *Québécois*

George Elliott Clarke's libretto for the jazz-opera *Québécois* was first published in printed form in 2003. By that time, the opera, for which the Canadian composer D.D. Jackson had composed the music, was premiered at the Guelph Jazz Festival on 5 September 2003. The performance was filmed, recorded and later partly broadcast by the CBC. On D.D. Jackson's homepage the opera is described as “a jazzy, contemporary 'Romeo and Juliet' with a happy ending.”⁵⁴⁰ The opera is set in the historic district of Quebec City at the end of the twentieth century. Despite the title, the libretto is not only concerned with particular images of a local community culture, but it deals with national issues that are negotiated against the backdrop of Quebec City. It deals with the problems two mixed-raced couples, or rather would-be couples, face in modern Canada. According to Ajay Heble, who wrote the “Postlude” for the printed version of the libretto, “Clarke’s emphasis on ‘*le Québec de couleur*’ represents a bold attempt to counter the demonization of the ‘other’ in attempts to fashion homogeneous national communities.”⁵⁴¹ In following Clarke’s assessment that “[t]he primacy assigned to the Canada-Québec schism marginalizes all other ethnic-racial-linguistic questions [...]”, Heble also points to the importance “[of working] towards a more inclusive vision of valued social practices”, which includes the visualization of “a more expansive, fluid, ‘cosmo-politan’ definition of blackness.”⁵⁴²

As is often the case with Clarke's works, the libretto for *Québécois* shows a clear-three part structure. The three acts, called cantos in Clarke's text, divide the text into exposition, climax and denouement. Each of the three cantos is introduced with a motto taken from Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, inviting a comparative reading of both texts by firstly using the same genre term, and secondly introducing his writing with quotes from Pound's. The first epigram, “Sacrum, sacrum, inluminatio coitu”⁵⁴³ has been taken from canto xxxvi; which is, at least in the first part, concerned with a description “of an affect, wild often / That is so proud he hath Love for a name.”⁵⁴⁴ The epigram to the second canto is the first sentence from Pound's canto xcv: “Love gone as lightning... (Q, 49).” Clarke's third canto is introduced with “The production IS

⁵⁴⁰ <http://ddjackson.com/press.aspx?ID=1009>, accessed on January 10, 2012.

⁵⁴¹ Ajay Heble, “You know you break no laws by dreaming” George Elliott Clarke’s *Québécois*. A Postlude. in: *Québécois: A Jazz Fantasia in Three Cantos*. Toronto: Gaspereau Press 2003, 97-101.

⁵⁴² Heble, 100.

⁵⁴³ George Elliott Clarke, *Québécois: A Jazz Fantasia in three Cantos*. Kentville/Canada: Gaspereau Press, 2003, 17. All further references will be to this edition. References will be indicated parenthetically in the text. The title will be abbreviated as Q.

⁵⁴⁴ Ezra Pound, *The Cantos*. London: Faber & Faber, 1968, 182-86.

the beloved” (Q, 73), taken from Pound's canto civ. In addition to their engagement with love, Clarke's and Pound's work share a number of stylistic similarities. Like Pound's, the language Clarke uses contains some archaisms, neologisms and – to a very large extent – makes use of techniques that give the text a certain musicality. Especially his use of couplets and alternating rhymes, connected to the varying meter – some of the lines are in dactylic hendecasyllable and dactylic pentameter – reminds one of Pound. The dactylic hendecasyllable gives the meter a certain off-beat quality that can be compared syncopated jazz rhythms. In addition to that, Clarke's use of the black vernacular is striking because he formally and structurally follows Western conventions, while his use of language, on the other hand, is not in keeping with those conventions.⁵⁴⁵ Furthermore, he uses images and discourses borrowed from other writers and integrates those intertextual references – mostly estranged and re-contextualized – into his text. As Cuder-Dominguez points out: “[t]he play's aesthetic, like its plot and character, is rooted in hybridity and diversity, and aspires to bring together high and low, music, words and images.”⁵⁴⁶ This playing with conventions and expectation is in itself a form of cultural hybridity prevalent in African-American literature, as Gates points out:

[B]lack texts are 'mulattoes' [...] with a two-toned heritage: these texts speak in standard Romance or Germanic languages and literary structures, but almost always speak with a distinct and resonant accent, an accent that Signifies (upon) the various black vernacular literary traditions.⁵⁴⁷

Clarke, however, gives it another twist by taking hybridity one step further as he combines dramatic structures common in the European operatic tradition with the musical structures of North-American Jazz. As Clarke points out in a conversation with Linda Hutcheon, he tries to break open the tendency “to see [opera] as an elitist art form”, pointing out that “[a]ccessibility with regard to language and music is [...] really important in terms of trying to build a larger audience.”⁵⁴⁸ Conceptually, music and text seem to be equally important. As MacLeod describes it: “Through Clarke's libretto and Jackson's score, these characters negotiate cultural

⁵⁴⁵ Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey*. Oxford & New York: OUP, 1988, xxii. Gates points out that “[...] black writers, both explicitly and implicitly, turn to the vernacular in various formal ways to inform their creation of written fictions. To do so, it seems to me, is to ground one's literary practice outside the Western tradition.”

⁵⁴⁶ Pilar Cuder-Dominguez, “Sharing Quebec” in: Stella Borg Barthet (ed.), *Shared Waters. Soundings in Postcolonial Literature*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2009, 352-361 [357]

⁵⁴⁷ Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey*, xxii.

⁵⁴⁸ Linda Hutcheon & George Elliott Clarke, “Opera in Canada: A Conversation.” in *Journal of Canadian Studies* Vol. 353, 184-201 [186/89].

identifications within visual and acoustic spaces that simultaneously reify and unfix differences.”⁵⁴⁹ Catherine Obert occupies the same critical position stating that: “Clarke’s ‘Québécois(e) acoustic’ exceeds the bilingual, and approximates the multicultural.”⁵⁵⁰

Canada's constitutionally enshrined commitment to multiculturalism has often been described with the popular slogan “unity from diversity” and the visualizing term “mosaic concept.” But the slogan contains a paradox; the process of unification and the preservation of existing cultural patterns seem to be mutually exclusive. Unification implies that a certain consensus has to be formed; this consensus can lead to the exclusion of contending cultural and social concepts that are at odds with either the unifying political concept – multiculturalism in Canada – or with the cultures competing for prevalence. Since the ratification of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act on July 21, 1988, a vivid public debate about its political viability has come into existence. Mostly, it is concerned with the problems of translating a political program into social practice. Multiculturalism is a response to existing social conditions, but it also shows an “awareness of the historical primacy of theory.”⁵⁵¹ This, as Charles Taylor writes, “is central to the European idea of a revolution, whereby we set out to remake our political life according to agreed principles.”⁵⁵² As I will show, *Québécois* is part of this discourse as it deals, in a light-hearted way, with the problems of a society that by law grants equal rights to all citizens while some of the citizens have not yet realized that this is a mutual responsibility.

The Canada depicted in Clarke's *Québécois* is not “happy-multicultural land”, as Ajay Heble stressed in his “postlude” to the print version.⁵⁵³ The protagonists of this Jazz opera – two young couples with different ethnic backgrounds – are either inhibited in their social freedom by the pre-modern world view of their parents and relatives, or they are afraid of the frailty of multiculturalism as it depends on social consent. My main thesis is that *Québécois* and its playful re-negotiations of cultural hybridity, multiculturalism and social change, depicts – in the love stories – the birth of a new Canadian consciousness, or rather thematizes the cultural changes and social conditions that supported the acceptance of multiculturalism. This thesis is fuelled by the idea, purported by Charles Taylor, that political concepts and theories – as responses to

⁵⁴⁹ Katherine McLeod, “‘Oui, let's scat': Listening to Multi-Vocality in George Elliott Clarke's Jazz Opera *Québécois*.” in: *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature and Ideas*. (42.1) 2009, 133-50.

⁵⁵⁰ Julia Catherine Obert, “The Cultural Capital of Sound: *Québécois*'s Acoustic Hybridity”. *Postcolonial Text* 2.4 (2006), 2.

⁵⁵¹ Charles Taylor, *Social Imaginaries* Durham & London: Duke UP, 2004, 29.

⁵⁵² Ibid.

⁵⁵³ Ajay Heble, “You know you break no laws by dreaming“, 99.

existing social and material conditions – might “perpetrate[...] and transform [a] social imaginary[...].”⁵⁵⁴ Social imaginaries are therefore highly dependent on the way a society translates its social reality into theories, less abstract on social discourse . The practices that evolve from the implementation of those theoretical musings, in a circular motion, “can be the basis for modifications of theory, which in turn can inflect practice.”⁵⁵⁵ As described in the context of the theoretical approach of my thesis, multiculturalism should theoretically fulfil two functions: it has to grant what Charles Taylor calls “equal recognition of all ethnic groups.”⁵⁵⁶ Further on, it paradoxically has to foster and encourage cultural diversity while creating a unifying political system.⁵⁵⁷ So while the cultural integrity of the individual is maintained, these individuals nevertheless have to agree and compromise on a basic political system. The introduction of multiculturalism was problematized by a number of obstacles. One important aspect that impedes its implementation is that it unavoidably has to bridge the gap between different concepts of society and its various institutions. Multiculturalism aims at integrating people – and thus in principle at equal recognition of all cultures. Nevertheless, some cultures and outlooks are rather exclusive and fuelled by nationalistic concepts of society that rely on a shared ethnicity. This shared ethnicity on the other hand, as Itwaru argues, in its “maintenance of that group's cultural distinctiveness which may find, if it is to continue its traditions, irresolvable conflicts with some of [white Canada's] institutions.”⁵⁵⁸ It can therefore be said that one of the basic problems of multiculturalism is its strong link to concepts like race and nationality. While trying to blur the boundaries of those concepts in order to overcome the inhibitions they present to twenty-first century global culture, multiculturalism frequently evokes those concepts as its own counter-models. Therefore, I would argue that, while Clarke's libretto is concerned with the paradoxes created by Canadian multiculturalism, the protagonists of Clarke's libretto and their first thwarted and then resumed loves are – despite his claim that the libretto is not political –

⁵⁵⁴ Taylor, *Social Imaginaries*, 29. Taylor's idea of social imaginaries is most fruitful as a tool in literary studies if used in combination with Itwaru's notion that “[l]iterary production as the imaginary of a consciousness at work is informed by, as well as it transcends [discursively constructed identities]. See: Arnold Harrichand Itwaru, *The Invention of Canada*. Toronto: TSAR, 1990, 10.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid, 30.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁷ The political project of multiculturalism was equally criticized by both left-wing and right-wing activists. Scholars on the far left of the political spectrum like Itwaru contested that Canada's policy of multiculturalism is only a facade that only redirects “attention away from the reality of cultural erosion and transition. [...] The process of assimilation which is actively, though not readily conspicuous, at work, and especially in the guise of language-use and its accompanying sensibilities. The domination of the anglophone view is [...] a force in the development of homogeneity.” Itwaru, *The Invention of Canada*, 17-19. Basically, the right-wing antagonists of multiculturalism follow Itwaru's line of argumentation that multiculturalism requires consent, which might require representatives of minority groups to abandon certain traditions, whereby they focus on the alleged unwillingness of those people to do so.

⁵⁵⁸ Itwaru, *Inventing Canada*, 16.

allegories describing a social re-ordering.

In the year the opera was performed and the libretto first published, Rinaldo Walcott provocatively claimed in the introduction to the second edition of his influential book *Black Like Who? Writing-Black-Canada* that “blackness and black people remain a 'problem' in Canada. [The media responses to Austin Clarke's *The Polished Hoe*] point to an inability to recognize what a truly multicultural place might sound like. Clearly, in a multicultural society we all don't sound alike.”⁵⁵⁹ Accordingly, he doubts that Canada is the multicultural nation it purports to be. Additionally, Walcott claims that George Elliott Clarke, especially with *Québécoisité*, does not confront “the discursive strategies of the nation that render black Canadian continuity absent, but rather [turns] his gaze to what he terms 'the recent' as the problem for thought.”⁵⁶⁰ According to Walcott, by focusing on recent urban ethnic diversification, Clarke neglects to engage with the historical continuity of black communities in Canada. Furthermore, Clarke's “regressive localism” as Walcott terms it, allegedly “fails to account for diaspora connectedness [...]” Both Walcott and Clarke accuse each other of propagating some form of nationalism; according to Walcott, Clarke's literary engagement with Canadian multicultural politics does not take heed of phenomena like diaspora communities and transnational identities, occupying a position that was devised to defend the idea of Canadian blackness. In Clarke's critique of Walcott's position, this focus on the transnational in the latter's writings is problematized as a levelling of existing differences in experiencing blackness in various national contexts. In the following, I will read Clarke's libretto within this discursive framework as it both engages with Canadian multiculturalism and with urban blackness. The focus will be on the depiction of multiculturalism and its impact on social structures. Walcott's claim that Clarke does not take heed of “diaspora connectedness” will be discussed in the context of my reading of the text's “happy ending.”

In this chapter I will mostly focus on Clarke's libretto. The performance and the music will be taken into consideration, but not to a large extent. This is due to the following reasons:

⁵⁵⁹ Rinaldo Walcott, *Black Like Who? Writing · Black · Canada* (Revised second edition). Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2003, 12.

⁵⁶⁰ Walcott, 19-20. Clarke and Walcott have been involved in a debate about their respective positions and allegiances since the first publication of *Black Like Who?* In 1997. On November 4, 1998 Clarke presented a paper titled “Treason of the Black Intellectuals?” at the McGill Institute, Toronto, defining Walcott's position as follows: “Perversely, by stooping to an unexamined, facile black nationalism and Pan-Africanism, to support his reading of certain African-Canadian writers *in or out of* an African (or black) aesthetic, which is, treacherously (perhaps just lazily), never defined, Walcott is a capital candidate for the charge of treason.” The paper was published in: George Elliott Clarke, *Odysseys Home*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002, 182-210 [188].

the first and most important reason is that there is no complete recording of the performance available. Therefore, I have to restrict myself to the available excerpts and use them as illustrating examples, not as representative choices. Secondly, it must be said that the libretto of *Québécois* is a work of art that can stand for itself. Especially the paratextual elements of Clarke's writing are interesting and should be regarded as part of the textual unity which can not be reproduced on stage. Regrettably, it is also impossible to analyse how those elements are integrated into the performance. Despite the fact that I will not be able to duly consider D.D. Jackson's music, it must be emphasized that, in a theoretical sense, music is part of the text as one of its protagonists is a musician and part of the opera is set in a jazz club owned by Colette's parents. Mc Neilly and Cuder-Dominguez share the impression that music and text jointly enhance the issue at stake. Mc Neilly points out that “*Québécois*'s songs [...] persistently bear traces of an unassimilable otherness: tones, textures, and words that refuse to blend.”⁵⁶¹

Québécois marked a change of direction in George Elliott Clarke's writing. While his previous literary work shows an intensive engagement with the history of the African-Canadian population, especially those who could trace back their origins to Canadian and U.S. American slavery, his 2003 work is a contemporary inter-racial love story. In the “Prelude” which is part of the paratext, Clarke offers a characterization of his work and some instructions to the readers:

Thus *Québécois* is an Absinth-Amarula-Brandy-Champagne-Chartreuse-Chicoutai-Cognac-Grappa-Palm-Port-Pastis-Rum-Saki-Sangria-Scotch-Tequila-Vodka Opera, one coloured spicily with notes of ebony, dark cherry, India indigo ink, and bronze-beige the shade of papyrus or bamboo. If possible your eyes must savour lilies here – lilies laced in licorice; your ears must accept African strings, Asian brass, European percussion, aboriginal vocals. (Q, 12)

What Clarke offers as an introduction to his text is a not-so-well hidden idealization of multiculturalism. The strange concoction of alcoholic beverages of various origins quite obviously symbolizes modern Canada's ethnic diversity. The different approaches to music and the styles that have been used are mentioned in order to stress the idea of diversity, of an artistic approach that tries to combine European genres like, in this case, opera, and African-American forms of expression like Jazz. But this hybrid of genres, as Clarke suggests, is not entirely unusual and rather a viable means to depict a shared social reality in an ever more complex and

⁵⁶¹ Kevin McNeilly, “This Ain't No time For Innocence: *Québécois*, a Jazz Opera by George Elliott Clarke and D.D. Jackson.” *Canadian Theatre Review* 118 (2004), 121-123 [122].

heterogeneous world.⁵⁶² In the opera Quebec City becomes the setting in which Canadian multiculturalism is negotiated in literary form. This is a highly provocative gesture as Quebec is still very much concerned with its own nationalism.⁵⁶³ However, according to Clarke – for him as a politically motivated artist – this choice makes sense because African-Canadian scholars have to consider the different forms of nationalism at play in Canada in order to assess their own position within the nation:

To begin, African-Canadian intellectuals and cultural nationalists must interrogate the complication that Canada's only legitimized nationalisms emanate from the cultural institutions of the federal state; the cultural, economic, and political state apparatus of Quench [a state-funded cultural agency]; and – though with less effective power – the cultural, economic, and political organs of The First Nations.⁵⁶⁴

Considering Clarke's assessment that contemporary Québécois literature still relies on “tropes that betray a 'pugnacious and repugnant ethnocentrism'”⁵⁶⁵, his depiction of Québec City as a site of cultural and ethnic diversity, where racial stereotypes and clichés are finally overcome is a provocative confirmation of the presence of people of colour in Quebec. Actually, whiteness and white people form an absence; their exclusion from the plot is a reversal of the usual majority/minority constellation. The couples' parents form the other absence; their reactionary and exclusive points of view are iterated and finally rejected by their children. So it can be said that the libretto does not give the restrictive social factors a voice of their own. Despite these absences, the characters in *Québécois* feel excluded and ostracized by a majority whose self-image is based on their alleged social liminality, as Laxmi sings: [A]ll Québécois must be white / Or could not be Québécois, at least not quite.” (Q, 67). This feeling of exclusion is later thematized by Malcolm: “Québécois claim they're 'white niggers of America', / *Peut-être*, but I'm the Negro *nègre* of Québec!” (Q, 69).

⁵⁶² *Québécois* is Clarke's second opera libretto. Before he had collaborated with composer James Rolfe on the production of *Beatrice Chancy* which had premiered in 1998. For an analysis of the libretto for *Beatrice Chancy* see Chapter 4.2 of this thesis.

⁵⁶³ In his essay “Reading Black and White in Contemporary Québécois Texts”, Clarke maintains that “Québécois writers, like *all* post-colonial writers, will continue to oscillate between nationalism and liberalism, producing, perhaps frequently, disturbing *louche* racial constructions.” (italics in the original) in: Clarke, *Odysseys Home*, [162-183] 178.

⁵⁶⁴ Clarke, “Treason”, 184.

⁵⁶⁵ Clarke, “Liberalism”, 177. As quoted in Obert, “The Cultural Capital of Sound”, 6. Obert also refers to Walcott's assessment that Clarke's writing is “tainted by nativism”, concluding that “*Québécois*'s hybrid aesthetics offers a more redemptive constructivist reading of Clarke's critical work.” She does not consider that *Québécois* differs considerably from Clarke's former work, while it is in keeping with his critical position.

Central to the libretto is the depiction of the courtship of two couples, Laxmi Bharati and Ovide Rimbaud as well as Colette Chan and Malcolm States. All central characters belong to different ethnicities; Laxmi is of Indian origin; Ovide is a Haitian with a mixed-race background; Colette is Chinese; her parents political refugees from China; and Malcolm States – Clarke's alter ego – is of “African-American and Mi'kmaq Nova Scotian heritage” (15). Additionally it should be noted that Malcolm States, a jazz musician whose performances mark important turning points in the plot, reflects Clarke's interest in the iconic status of jazz in African-American culture, respectively the representation of masculinity in contemporary African-American pop culture.⁵⁶⁶ The couples in *Québécois* have to overcome racial and social inhibitions. Those inhibitions do not come from without; it is the respective families and their ethnic prejudices that cause grief. Especially Colette is at first reluctant to introduce her boyfriend Malcolm to her parents.

C: Everything about our pairing is despairing.
 Despair is everything about our pairing.

All our Reality is shades of wars
First, yellow sunlight blacks out the stars,
Then the sun crashes into crimson seas
And bursts into stars – black, burning stars. (Q, 65)

Clarke's playful literary use of colours is highly symbolic. While integrating the different skin colours of his protagonists into the lyrics, he uses those colours to describe the daily cycle of the sun as “shades of war.” This antithetical construction, juxtaposing love and war in terms of a “daily natural catastrophe” – the cycle of the sun – illustrates the cultural and gender divisions that problematize their love affair. This affair “across racial boundaries”, is emotionally problematic for Clarke's protagonists as the stylistic devices employed by Clarke stress, because it is a union of entities not supposed to unite. By using these literary strategies, Clarke takes recourse to images that have a long tradition in European literature. The violation of the natural order, in this case originating from the interracial love-relationship Clarke depicts, effectively poses a threat to the natural order of things. By contextualising imagery from starkly opposing fields such as war, nature, and love the imagery is re-configured which in turn subverts and the

⁵⁶⁶ See especially: George Elliott Clarke, “Cool Politics: Styles of Honour in Malcolm X and Miles Davis.” in: *Jouvert: A Journal of Post-Colonial Studies* 2.1; <http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v2i1/CLARKE.HTM>; accessed 01/04/2012.

readers' cultural and logical expectations in the form of a literary conceit. However, the ambivalence contained in this imagery does not necessarily imply that these couples are violating the natural order; it rather refers to their parents' and social environments' ethnocentric ideologies. The daily struggle for recognition is equalled with the cycle of the sun. The “shades of war” Clarke invokes are the antithesis to the normality implied in the depiction of the cycle of the sun and, by implication, of their love affair.

In the following dialogue between the lovers Ovide and Laxmi, Clarke is even more political. Laxmi, whose parents belong to the social elite and emigrated from India to “foster fortunes and a future for me” (Q, 66), describes the lack of recognition she has to cope with. Her outward appearance, respectively her skin colour, is one factor that disqualifies her Canadianness: “Everybody asks me if I’m Indienne, / If I answer “Canadian”, they ask, “since when?” (Q, 67). Laxmi constantly has to re-assert her nationality, her status as a citizen, her Canadianness. Her entire social environment, however, misrecognizes her. This runs counter to the concept of multiculturalism and invalidates the social consensus, reiterating again Chakkalakal's claim that “[racism is] so deeply ingrained in [Canada’s] national psyche that locating its operative features in certain situations is deemed superfluous.”⁵⁶⁷ Significantly, all characters in the text are either first- or second-generation immigrants; their perspective on Canada is therefore an in/outsider perspective that is apt to depict Canada's social transformation. There are quite a number of aspects that invite a biographical reading of *Québecité*. As Kevin McNeilly remarked: “[t]he couples mimic, to some degree, the lived multiracial identities of Clarke himself and of D.D. Jackson's parents, whose unpublished joint autobiography *Love Song and Sorrow*, provided source material for portions of the libretto.”⁵⁶⁸ Conceptually, the characters stress their different ethnicities by the use of clearly distinguishable musical styles. As Obert points out this stylistic diversity could only be realized to a certain extent as “*Québecité* was penned with a certain cast in mind.”⁵⁶⁹ Nevertheless, Obert's description of the performance shows the potential of *Québecité*'s music to highlight diversity: “Laxmi's solos resonate with the tonal shifts, arpeggios, and trills of ghazals and Punjabi folk songs, and Malcolm's melodies incorporate African-American acoustics, fusing twelve-bar blues with elements of jazz, soul, and gospel.”⁵⁷⁰ The protagonists' names are obviously symbolic. Colette Chan's name hints both at

⁵⁶⁷ Tess Chakkalakal, “Reckless Eyeballing: Being Reena in Canada.” In: Rinaldo Walcott (ed.), *Rude. Contemporary Black Canadian Cultural Criticism*. Toronto: Insomniac Press 2000, 159-167 [167]

⁵⁶⁸ McNeilly, “This Ain't No time For Innocence”, 121.

⁵⁶⁹ Obert, “The Cultural Capital of Sound”, 9.

⁵⁷⁰ Obert, 8.

her parent's country of origin and their chosen québécois; it therefore stresses Colette's cultural hybridity, symbolically pointing to her parents' retention of Chinese cultural and social values, while also showing their intention to facilitate their daughter's integration into Quebec's mainstream society. The name Ovide Rimbaud is symbolical on two levels; by combining the last names of two eminently influential poets – divided by a good 1900 years, the heterogeneity of poetical techniques and traditions used by him – and for the text – are stressed. Additionally, Ovid will be primarily associated with his *Metamorphoses*, which, as a collection of poetical renderings of Greek and Roman tales concerned with transformations, is symbolic as the opera is concerned with the transformation of a society. The fifth protagonist of the text is – as the title already implies - Ville de Quebec/ Quebec City. This aspect of the opera is actually more prominent in the text than it has been in the performances. As Pilar Cuder-Dominguez remarked, “[p]laces seem to shape people in this play, with the city, its buildings, and its people establishing intimate and intricate relationships.”⁵⁷¹ Quebec’s colonial history, respectively the struggle of the French settlers against the rule of the English is part of an implied historical narrative, an imaginary shared by *Québécois*'s protagonists. Heritage cities like Quebec City will remind readers of the Americas' history as the “site of emergence of a capitalist world system that from the very beginning has been based on the racial divide between colonizers and colonized.”⁵⁷² Despite its symbolic importance, the scenery Clarke described in his paratext has not become part of the performances; the performances in 2003 both used a bare stage without any backdrops. This is regrettable because the city's historical sites, its flair and versatility and its seemingly hybrid character are important aspects of the text, features which Clarke describes in the preface:

Their story is set in Ville de Québec because its architecture is Gothic, its vices baroque. Too, Québec is a cinema of words, a cathedral of jazz, a catwalk of politics, a theatre of art a *fête* of nostalgia, a gallery of passion and a theme park of dreams. [...] (Q, 12)

Considering Clarke's description, it becomes clear that the settings were carefully chosen. In 1998 Clarke identified competing forms of nationalism at work in Quebec:

This fact reveals a devilish norm: the necessary attractiveness of nationalism for any minority that

⁵⁷¹ Pilar Cuder-Dominguez, “Sharing Quebec”, 360.

⁵⁷² Olaf Kaltmeier, “Historic City Centers in Globalization Processes: Cultural Heritage, Urban Renewal, and Postcolonial Memories in the Americas.” in: Martin Butler, Jens Martin Gurr & Olaf Kaltmeier (eds.), *EthniCities: Metropolitan Cultures and Ethnic Identities in the Americas*. Trier: WVT, 2011, 41-54 [45].

feels itself downtrodden and disrespected. [...] Impressive examples of this defensive thinking are vigorously visible in Québec, where both the francophone majority and the anglophone minority define themselves as embattled communities.⁵⁷³

While the protagonists, as representatives of Canada's ethnic minorities, seem to be closely connected to their environment, their environment on the other hand, as a “site of memory and identity”, once was the domain of their historical counterpart, the colonizers. The idea of nationhood this domain represents is at odds with the notion of ethnic and racial diversity; it symbolizes the power of the colonizer. Nevertheless, in *Québécoité* this environment becomes the setting for the life-stories of the formerly excluded who recolonize this rather exclusive environment. These sites and their commemorative function are re-appropriated to the discourse about multiculturalism and ethnic diversity. *Québécoité* thus counteracts the persistence of colonial memories as sites of colonialism as conquered by the formerly colonized.⁵⁷⁴ In the city, very much like Pratt's contact zone, residual colonial memories and the immigrant imaginary meet and create a “third space” in the sense of Bhabha, where these two modes of commemoration create a new sense of the past. While the city was a bulwark and stronghold of the French settlers against British invasion in colonial times, in *Québécoité* it is presented as a site of cultural and ethnic diversity. But this “Quebec de couleur”, as Ajay Heble argues, is often problematized by French-Canadian nationalists who regard it as a hindrance to “fashioning homogeneous national communities.”⁵⁷⁵ As Cuder-Dominguez points out, Quebec nationalism “implicitly denied the very presence of black people in Quebec while only voicing the subject position of 'pure-laine' Quebeckers.”⁵⁷⁶ Against this canvas of a nationalism which literally excludes diversity, the two couples re-negotiate multiculturalism. The setting consists of places that exist in reality like the Chateau de Frontenac, Quebec's cathedral, Le Pont de Quebec and the city's courthouse and also of imaginary places like the tellingly named nightclub “La Révolution Tranquille”⁵⁷⁷, which is owned by Colette's parents. Nevertheless, Clarke uses historical sites of (anti-)colonial struggle as backdrops for the inter-cultural and inter-racial love stories. In addition to that, the protagonists – mostly recent immigrants to Canada – and the setting, Quebec City,

⁵⁷³ George Elliott Clarke, “Treason of the Black Intellectuals?”, 183.

⁵⁷⁴ Especially Kaltenmeier argued that “[Regarding the reconstruction of colonial urban landscapes] Obviously, we do not deal with colonialism as a specific historical period of European expansion, but with coloniality and its enduring principles of vision and division of the social world. See: Kaltenmeier, 49.

⁵⁷⁵ Heble, “You know you break no laws by dreaming“, 98.

⁵⁷⁶ Cuder-Dominguez, “Sharing Quebec”, 353.

⁵⁷⁷ The term “la révolution tranquille” is usually used to describe a political movement that changed Quebec in the 1950s and 1960s. Pierre Trudeau, who later became prime minister of Canada, was one of the most important political leaders of that movement. The main objectives of this movement were the secularization of the public sphere and the welfare system, economic and political autonomy, and emancipation from colonial dominance.

could be understood as Clarke's answer to Walcott's claim that his engagement with blackness basically stresses the rural tradition of blackness and ignores urban blackness. But for the protagonists the city evokes contesting images; while Ovide regards it as an essentially beautiful architectural hybrid, Laxmi views the city as backward, corrupted and dirty:

- O: Laxmi, you'll always be beautiful.
You're going to always be capitally beautiful-
Like Québec Cité, Québec Cité,
This rococo, Art Deco, disco city.
- L: This medieval, bonfire-lit, Gothic, sleazy,
Tear-gas tainted, politics-poisoned city,
Stained by bikers, strippers, drug violence.... (Q, 20-21)

For Laxmi the city represents both a disappointment as well as a potential threat. Both the centre of Quebec nationalism and a liberal multi-ethnic urban area, she regards it as contaminated. Ovide in contrast idealizes its hybridity. Nevertheless, further on in the text, the formerly euphoric multiculturalist Ovide reflects on imperialism, and, in a double allegory uses his metaphorical reflection on European imperialism to describe his emotional state:

- O: The moon expands its white domain, intakes
Territory upon territory,
Increases its white hold on seas, shadows, stars,
And drives night into silvery exile.
My heart is like an imperialist-
Annexing states outside itself.... (Q, 59)

The moon fills two different positions in this metaphorical construction: in a *pars pro toto* relation it represents the night that slowly drives out the day, while in a political and historical sense the “white moon” stands for Western imperialism which set out to gain power over formerly independent nations and cultures. In a third sense this metaphorical construction points to Ovide's emotional state as he tries to “conquer” Laxmi and to talk her into forming an emotional attachment to him.

In addition to the intratextual discourse about the city, Clarke's preoccupation with African-Canadian history is still present as a subtext:

L: Marie-Josèphe Angélique
is my Québécoise idol:
that abused slave, proud, *tragique*,
incinerated Montréal.... (Q, 60)

As mentioned with regard to *Beatrice Chancey*, Marie-Josèphe Angélique is one of the iconic victims of Canadian racism, frequently mentioned and indirectly thematized in Clarke's texts.⁵⁷⁸ In the dialogue between the two characters Ovide and Laxmi, two central issues of Clarke's fiction are playfully thematized: multiculturalism and history. The historical figure of Marie-Josèphe Angélique is neither referred to as a martyr nor as an insurrectionist, but as the role model. But Laxmi does not only identify with Marie-Josèphe Angélique, she is also aware of the literature of social resistance – like Lorena Gale's *Angélique* - that engages with and celebrates her. In the following dialogue between Ovide and Laxmi, their different positions become clear. While Ovide is living in the here and now and, despite his own blackness, seems to disregard Canada's history of racially motivated injustices, Laxmi is painfully aware of it. Ovide's euphoric vision of a multicultural Montreal, which triggers Laxmi's evocation of the black cultural icon Marie-Josèphe Angélique, is a polemical rendering of current over-enthusiastic responses to Canada's policy of multiculturalism:

O: Laxmi, I'm 100 per cent, humanist Aquarian!
I know who I am: son of Montreal -
Metropolis *noir*, a black capital -
With Nelson Symonds on guitar, Oliver Jones on piano:
Where being bilingual is being biracial and bisexual too. (Q, 60)

Here Ovide takes the notion of hybridity to extremes. Multiculturalism and its promises point to a future without racial and gender boundaries. The formerly negative implications of being a member of a non-white minority do not exist anymore. This utopian vision is founded upon the notion that this former minority is not a minority any more as racial and cultural divisions are a thing of the past. Laxmi on the other hand is sceptical about this development:

⁵⁷⁸ Two years after *Québecité* had been published Clarke wrote a scholarly article that analyses the different literary texts engaging with the historical figure of Marie-Josèphe Angélique. Clarke shows that – at least in the representation he focuses on – Angélique is either depicted as martyr or insurrectionist. See:” George Elliott Clarke, “Raising Raced and Erased Executions in African-Canadian Literature: Or, Unearthing Angélique.” in: *Essays on Canadian Writing* 75, 2002, pp 30-61.

L: *Je me souviens*, Québec's motto, says it all:
We are the heirs of History's crushing pall.

Apply a plain philosophy of light:
History looms in the future, darkly. (Q, 60)

In Laxmi's reply to Ovide's attempt to render historiography as redundant scepticism, she refers to the historical motto of the Quebecois. This motto originated in the aftermath of the Seven-Year's War when the settlers in the former French North-American colonies refused allegiance to the British crown, and, due to historical circumstances, were granted a number of rights such as keeping French as an official language and religious freedom, respectively the toleration of Catholicism. The French-speaking population of Quebec as an ethnic group consciously remembers its past and the suffering they endured under the British. Laxmi is basically in keeping with this act of remembering, she implies that the teachings of history should not be forgotten. The choice of words in Laxmi's assessment points to the philosophical and theological concept of "the philosophy of light." In eastern mysticism, "the philosophy of light" is a school of thought that privileges intuitive knowledge before discursive knowledge. In this school of thought, the light, or rather intuitive knowledge, represents God-given wisdom originating from intensive self- contemplation; its counterpart, discursive knowledge, originates from deductive actions, consciously practised by human beings in order to provide answers to complex problems.⁵⁷⁹ In contrast, the last sentence echoes the syntax of the translation of 1 Corinthians 13:12 that can be found in the *King James Bible*. Despite all of these allusions, the message is rather simple: history might repeat itself. This notion of being caught in a web of historical affinities defines Laxmi's world view. For her, history moves in circles; the past offers a foreboding of what will be in the future, the divisions that are part of Canada's history are also part of the country's future. It reiterates Clarke's statement from the introduction that "this production accepts that History is a slaughterhouse, Poetry an opera house: only Love allows us to distinguish Beauty from its extinguishing." (Q, xviii). The enigmatic, slightly polemical character of Clarke's assessment is only a thin veil for the latent scepticism dominating the world

⁵⁷⁹ Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy* (translated from the French *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*). London: Keagan Paul, 1993, 206-10. In contrast to *representative* knowledge, which is knowledge of the abstract or logical universal (*'ilm sun*), what is in question is *presential*, unitive, intuitive knowledge, of an essence which is absolutely real in its ontological singularity (*'ilm hudun, ittisalf, shuhudi*)— a presential illumination (*ishraq huduri*) which the soul, as a being of light, causes to shine upon its object. By making herself present to herself, the soul also makes the object present to her. [...] The truth of all objective knowledge is thus nothing more nor less than the awareness that the knowing subject has of itself.

views of some of the opera's characters. As Colette's reference to the similarities between African slavery and Chinese indentureship implies:

C: [...] Africa is far from China, yes,
But their histories harmonize:
On its “yellow niggers,”
Canada a head tax incised,
but bid my slaving ancestors
lay down its rail ties;
their blood scoured the iron road
flashing Gold Mountain's skies. (Q, 77)

Colette, who is a student of law, points to the legal history of economic and social inequality non-European immigrants were systematically subjected to in Canada. The head tax she mentions was part of the *Chinese Immigration Act* of 1885, which, in order to limit Chinese immigration, contained a paragraph that set down a payment of 50\$ for Chinese immigrants. The legal situation became even more problematic after the *Chinese Exclusion Act* of 1923, which literally prohibited the immigration of Chinese people. This law was finally repealed in 1947. As Bumstead points out:

With the CPR⁵⁸⁰ finished, the Canadian government moved swiftly to limit Chinese immigration. [...] The west was to be an anglophone colony of Canada. Not only were First Nations, Métis, and Chinese cast aside as quickly as possible, but French Canadians were not expected to settle there in any substantial numbers.⁵⁸¹

History does not carry positive implications for any of the characters in *Québécoisité*. Their shared social imaginary⁵⁸² is informed by the historical experiences of racism, racial violence, dislocation and ostracization, which, as they intuitively know, “still looms in the future [perhaps also present], darkly.” As members of the “Québec de couleur” their shared idea of society considerably differs from the social imaginary shared by the mainstream and identifies them as members of diasporic communities, while they still identify themselves as Canadians, as they

⁵⁸⁰ Canadian Pacific Railroad.

⁵⁸¹ J.M. Bumsted, *A History of the Canadian Peoples*. Oxford & New York: OUP, 2003, 245.

⁵⁸² Cf. Charles Taylor, *Social Imaginaries*. Duke & London: Durham University Press, 2004. In this context Charles Taylor's concept of social imaginaries is more appropriate than collective memory as it both simultaneously makes use of a synchronic and a diachronic perspective to depict social realities.

“carry out the collective practices that make up [...] social life.”⁵⁸³ Therefore, it should rather be said that their Canadianness, or rather Québécoité, is informed by two competing social imaginaries that draw on different versions of history and a different iconography. With each other, they share the liminal position of members of visible minorities, being aware that their social imaginary does not correspond with that of the white majority. In reflecting about his love affair with Colette, Malcolm States – whose family name points to his African-American origin – concludes that his experiences correlate with his father's experiences in the United States:

M: Loving you is like, like, Heaven and a lynching!
Pops abandoned Tennessee to flee such flinching!
For lavish Love, motorcycled to Nova Scotia,
Affianced, married, an Afro-Mi'kmaq madonna. (Q, 78)

Malcolm here reiterates the motif of history moving in circles as he compares his predicament to the one his father successfully escaped from. He basically relives his father's past. Colette's parents, however, do not accept their relationship because he is not Chinese; their general ideal apparently being racial purity. While Colette's parents are not in a position to do him any harm, he nevertheless experiences the same racialized argumentation that drove his father from the United States. Colette's parents – despite their own status as political refugees and open-minded democrats – are stuck in pre-modern concepts of racial purity. By Colette's siding with her parents, Malcolm becomes aware of his blackness and he verbally others himself from them and their racialized ideology and lays it bare by ridiculing the stereotypical concepts it contains:

M: Are Chinese *pure laine* like some Québécois?
Am I a black sheep, a devil, dizzyingly *noir*?
[...] Do you think our kids'd be striped like zebras?
Or look like Neapolitan ice cream? Or amoebas? (Q, 78)

This conflict echoes Charles Taylor's concept of equal recognition: “identity can be formed or malformed through the course of our contact with significant others. [...] On the intimate level, we can see how much an original identity needs and is vulnerable to the recognition given or withheld by significant others.”⁵⁸⁴ The “dialogue and struggle with significant others” [in this

⁵⁸³ Ibid, 28.

⁵⁸⁴ Taylor, *Social Imaginaries*, 36.

case Colette's parents] poses a significant threat to Malcolm's personal freedom and his self-conception. While he initially described himself as a musician, identifying with his instrument and his music, he later reduces himself to racial concepts and stereotypes others associated with him. In the end he realizes that these concepts effectively renders acceptance by Colette's parents impossible due to his racial identity. This conflict foregrounds one of the basic problems multiculturalism has to overcome. While it institutionally grants equal rights and dignity to all citizens, concepts of racial supremacy continue to exist in the private sphere. So while the state turned to "a politics of universalism, emphasizing the equal dignity of all citizens, [and] the equalization of rights and entitlements", Colette's family in private rejects and counteracts this policy.⁵⁸⁵

Clarke's open depiction of sexuality is not without precedents. According to Levine, "Black song depicted sex freely as a natural and expected part of life."⁵⁸⁶ So it could be inferred that *Québécois* in more than one way follows the traditions established by the African-American blues singers of the early twentieth century in that it proudly uses sexually explicit lyrics and imagery. The depiction of black sexuality has always been ideologically charged. While in white storytelling, the sexually active black man was often stereotyped as a dangerous creature, driven by his animal instincts, the black woman often occupied the position of the temptress who was intent on seducing white men and thus leading them to their ruin.⁵⁸⁷ Black storytelling actually used those stereotypes and inverted them. In most black stories the sexual prowess attributed to black people was a sign of power, while the sexually phlegmatic white characters were turned into objects of ridicule.⁵⁸⁸ Clarke does use the image of the sexually powerful black male, but he does not use it in a humorous or ironic way. Both Ovide and Malcolm share the same attitude towards sex: they regard it as a basic human need and try to talk their respective girlfriends into having sex with them. Nevertheless, both female protagonists are reluctant about taking their relationship to a sexual level. The gender relations can be described as a contest between eros and agape. While the men conceptualize love as eros, stressing the importance of erotic stimulation, of carnal love, the women go beyond craving sex in order to satisfy a distinctly physical need; they want men to embody a set of ideal character traits. Especially Laxmi initially

⁵⁸⁵ Taylor, *Social Imaginaries*, 37.

⁵⁸⁶ Levine, *Black Culture*, 279.

⁵⁸⁷ Cf. Lively, *Masks*, 77-78/ 147. Lively points out that the depictions of black male sexuality usually show the male individual as either subservient or aggressive.

⁵⁸⁸ This happened even more often in jokes than in music. As Levine shows, jokes popular in the black communities often inverted the stereotypes that were established by whites and used them to make fun of those attempting to ridicule them. Cf. Levine, *Black Consciousness*, 334-336.

does not trust Ovide and his advances. As Kelly Murphy wrote in her review of *Québécois*: “[Laxmi] is a proud virgin who expects men to deceive and ruin her.”⁵⁸⁹

- O: The bed decides
 Who is competent to wed.
 The bed decides
 What grooms wed which brides
- L: Men crave messy messianic, extra-satanic sex
 That turns psycho, sycophantic, or pedantic next.
- O: Our Virtue's verified by our tenderness.
- L: Seduction is no promise of happiness:
 Seduction's a satisfaction sated with pain. (Q, 22)

While the problem behind Malcolm and Colette's relationship lies in the culturally and racially motivated reluctance of Colette's family to accept Malcolm as a possible suitor to their daughter, Ovide and Laxmi's relationship is a modern version of Shakespearean gender-relation problems. As Cuder-Dominguez remarked: “*Québécois*'s multiple mixed-race love plots with their twists and turns, all sorted out in the final happy double wedding, owes a profound debt to Shakespearean drama [...].”⁵⁹⁰ Again, the re-appropriation of Shakespearean models supports Gates' assessment that literature produced by people of African descent has a strong tendency to parody and subvert narrative or dramatic structures that govern western literature. Certainly, this is no novelty, because even Shakespeare's art, as Garber argues, “is not only modern but postmodern: a simulacrum, a replicant, a montage, a bricolage. A collection of found objects, repurposed as art.”⁵⁹¹ However, Laxmi is not precisely a shrew that has to be tamed, but her reluctance to be wooed by Ovide, and her idealized vision of a mutually responsible relationship certainly does not include premarital sex. Her ideals therefore are at odds with Ovide's sexual ambitions. The text gives a clue as to the cultural motivation of Laxmi's reluctance:

- L: To breathe Occidental oxygen,
 Say my parents, is go rotten.
 So I hex all wrecks and vexations of men.

⁵⁸⁹ <http://www.aelaq.org/mrb/article.php?issue=11&article=272&cat=2>; accessed January 12, 2012.

⁵⁹⁰ Cuder-Dominguez, “Sharing Quebec”, 357-58.

⁵⁹¹ Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare and Modern Culture*. New York: Anchor Books, 2008, xvii.

Oh, what is wrong with women is men! (Q, 20)

It becomes clear that Laxmi's indecisiveness with regard to Ovide results from the social environment she was socialized in and she basically echoes her parents' cultural position. Nevertheless, later on it becomes clear that her reluctance to engage in a sexual relationship with Ovide is only partly due to her mother's instructions and anti-western word plays; the other aspect that contributed to her negative image of men can be found in the past as she watched her father kiss another woman:

L: I keep the Wisdom of my Mama:
Trust the faithful God of Death, Yama,
Next the God of Chastity, Rama,
But, dead last, the god of Love, Kama.

M: Is that any reason, Laxmi, for this drama?

L: When I was twelve, I accidentally saw
Father kissing some shocking Québécois:
She was viscous, a creamy *vichyssoise*.
He didn't know I saw, clear viciousness saw. (Q, 78)

Laxmi's revelation is part of the climax that leads to the lover's reunion and their double marriage. Both women never renounce their ideals, but they overcome their self- and socially-imposed restrictions in order to start a new life. Irritatingly, only the female characters are restricted by their families, and – in the end – have to risk breaking up with them. They celebrate their joint marriage on May 1, as the stage directions indicate “[u]nder a banner proclaiming, '1 Mai, Fête des travailleurs, Fête du printemps,' [...]” (Q, 90). This final scene is symbolically-charged. As their union coincides with the spring festival, it symbolically represents a rebirth, a rejuvenation of society. Theoretically, this ending is in keeping with the structural requirements traditionally associated with the conventional comedies in which all entanglements are resolved and the marriage of the couple, or in this case the couples, symbolizes a new beginning, a new stage in the cycle of life. It therefore appears as if Clarke ends his libretto on a hopeful note; not only have the lovers overcome social conventions and the expectations of their parents and environment; they imagine the future to be free from the inhibitions they had to overcome:

All: Our children will be
every colour eyes can know,
and free:
and states, parents, gods,
must have no say:
Love is a tyrannical democracy. (Q, 91)

Still there will be ethnic diversity, but a concept like race will no longer dominate social imaginaries because, in their imagined future, a differentiation by skin colour will be futile. The phenotypical characteristics that allowed people to determine racial origins will have been blurred, the concept therefore rendered redundant. In the context of theoretical approaches towards multiculturalism, this passage is highly ambiguous. Apparently celebrating diversity and its socially-transformative power, the couples' breaking with their parents' expectations also symbolizes a waning of ethnic allegiances. Neither of the couples' parents is present when they celebrate their double marriage, nor is the audience informed whether they finally consented to their marriages. Even if Malcolm asked Colette's parents for their consent – as he had announced – their response is never mentioned, their respective world views and opinions are reproduced by their daughters; as persons they are entirely absent. Again, it is Clarke's use of antithetical terms and concepts like “tyrannical democracy” that points to the tension between concept and realization. The music supports the idea that hybridity is often discordant. As Obert states: “[...] the sonic hybridity *Québécoisité* foregrounds is not unadulteratedly positive; harmony, here, is often offset by acoustic clash.”⁵⁹² It also remains questionable if this notion of love is entirely positive, as it levels cultural differences without considering consequences. The question whether the end justifies the means, a point that has been taken up by Colette's question “do I have to break my parents hearts?”, remains unanswered. In addition to that, the end of the libretto grants poetical justice to the characters; nevertheless, in the final scene the characters only articulate their intentions; the readers never get to know if they will make them come true.

It can therefore be concluded that, despite the apparently happy ending, *Québécoisité* does not provide an entirely positive insight into the state of Canadian society and the nation's official policy of multiculturalism. Focusing on the emotions, attitudes and world views of its four protagonists, the world around them becomes tangible through their point of view because in the opera's songs they include and negotiate the positions of those who are absent. The various

⁵⁹² Obert, “The Cultural Capital of Sound”, 10.

points of view depicted through the eyes of the four lovers, the girls parents' and that of the white majority, are culturally and racially exclusive. While the protagonists feel excluded and rendered invisible by the white majority, their parents oppose their love affairs in order to safeguard the ethnic purity of their respective diaspora communities. Multiculturalism and the “Québec de couleur”, as performed in *Québecité*, are infringed by opposing pre-modern essentialist ideologies. Those two competing ideologies, which both apply racial and nationalist criteria to advocate the preservation of a certain status quo, are in the end challenged by the two couples as they inaugurate a “social revolution” in order to assert the common humanity of all Canadians and thus do away with all socially inhibiting factors:

All: We are not only
Philosophies and religions,
Languages and 'races',
but also skin and breath,
thought and blood,
and on that basis,
that axis,
yes, *qui*, may amalgamate
and mate and propagate
just as we wish. (Q, 95)

The ending, which Cuder-Dominguez describes as “happy”, is actually not entirely satisfying as there are too many gaps and absences. The parents of the couples are not present and the couples are more concerned with their visions of the future than with their momentary happy state. The ending reveals the politically problematic nature of the text. Implicitly, it suggests that in order to start a new life the couples have to renounce the racially and ethnically exclusive cultural identities and allegiances their parents feel indebted to and fully embrace liberal Canadian cultural norms. These liberal norms, however, as the text repeatedly stresses, merely camouflage a racially and culturally exclusive society. The consequence is that their union will not only further the waning of race as a social determiner, it will also have the same effect on the traditions inherent to the various cultural backgrounds the couples originate from; they will, in due time, be forgotten. Indirectly, the ending therefore suggests that, rather than peaceful coexistence of cultures and races, it is the emergence of a single culturally and ethnically unified population that will be the effect of the interplay between Canadian multiculturalism and the cultures it was designed to accommodate. This development might positively be described as

amalgamation; however, one might also describe this process as assimilation, as both couples reject the traditions and norms inherent to their cultures of origin in order to “mate and propagate.” To “maintain their distinct cultural identities”, which, according to Koser, is the key objective of multicultural policies, seems to be impossible for the couples.⁵⁹³ But this is not only due to Canada's politics of multiculturalism, but also due to the restrictive social concepts dominating their cultures of origin. These restrictive concepts are rejected by the couples because they do not consider them as binding cultural norms. Both parents and children consider themselves to occupy a different national and ethnic position. While the parents consider themselves to be part of a diaspora community, the children primarily regard themselves as Canadians. In order to be together, they have to decide against their parents' restrictive understandings and sever the ties to their cultural origins. The text therefore problematizes Canadian multiculturalism and its objectives from both angles, implicitly showing that the concerns of diaspora communities – to maintain their cultural and religious integrity – are likely to become less important for second-generation migrants who will increasingly perceive the cultural gap between their communities and the world around them.

⁵⁹³ Koser, *International Migration*, 39.

8. Close Readings of Selected Works of Narrative Fiction by Laurence Hill

8.1 Laurence Hill's *Some Great Thing* (1992): On the Way to Post-Ethnic Canada?

Lawrence Hill's first novel *Some Great Thing* was first published in 1992. It has been re-issued in the wake of *The Book of Negroes*' success in 2009 and marketed as a satire on Canadian media. The blurb on the inner flap of the 2009 re-issue praises it as "the comic and insightful debut novel about life in the journalism trenches, by the Commonwealth Writers' Prize-winning author of *The Book of Negroes*."⁵⁹⁴ The re-issue and the advertising methods which have been used to market it are revealing with respect to two issues: despite the novel's obvious problematization of Canadian multiculturalism, advertisers found it preferable to foreground its satirical approach to the shortcomings of the press. Secondly, the novel would have been forgotten for good without its author's comet-like rise in public and critical esteem. Even if its marketing as a press satire was done for the sake of diversifying Hill's readership and building a following beyond those interested in race and ethnicity issues, it seems incongruous with the review excerpts, especially that from *The Globe and Mail* on its back cover: "He [Hill] lures the reader with the sheer naturalness of the hilarious script, while sneaking in telling stories about the sad state of race relations in this country." Having *Some Great Thing* back in Canadian public discourse through the enormous popularity of its successor is a windfall for African-Canadian literary and cultural studies because the novel is far more lasting than the neglect which it initially met with might have hinted at.

In the following chapter I will argue that despite being marketed as a satire on the press by HarperCollins, the novel ties in with other works on Canadian race relations discussed in this thesis. In the context of this thesis, *Some Great Thing* is the only novel which might be classified as a comic novel. Debates about Canadian literature have shown that the status of comic fiction in cultural discourse is, to say the least, contested. Apparently, seriousness is considered one of the genuine criteria for the attribution of this contested classification. Rudy Wiebe, by many Canadians regarded as one of their pre-eminent novelists, answered Lawrence Hill's question if he had ever considered writing a funny novel with the following words: "It seems to me that laughter is too easy a way to face the 'wilderness of this world;' you can too easily laugh yourself past the difficulties. Laughter is not a way to understand; it is, basically, a method of

⁵⁹⁴ Lawrence Hill, *Some Great Thing*. Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2009 [1992]. All further references, will be to this edition, the page number will be indicated parenthetically. The title will be abbreviated as SGT.

elusion.”⁵⁹⁵ This statement, even if it was an impromptu reply to a spontaneous question, is a telling insight into the intricacies of Canadian cultural politics. Instead of being greeted with a bout of laughter from various literary critics and writers, the statement created a minor debate about the status of parody in Canadian culture. This lays bare the unease with parody as a cultural practice and the formidably restrictive attitude of one of Canada's pre-eminent writers. Deploring the lack of funny and innovative fiction, American comic novelist and Giller-Prize judge Gary Shteyngart claims that Canadian “fiction is dull” and encouraged in its dullness by a grant system that favours “serious” works.⁵⁹⁶ Canadian novelist Stephen Guppy, replying to Steyngart’s claim that “there is a lack of funny, it seems like, when it comes to literature”, which was published in the wake of his work as Giller-Price judge⁵⁹⁷, claims that “it is difficult to lampoon anything in a culture that has been marinated in the inanities of pop psychology and political correctness.”⁵⁹⁸ There are two different lines of argumentation to this debate: the first is a critique of the state funded arts-patronage system in Canada. Shteyngart implies that this system favours a certain kind of fiction and subsidizes only authors whose works fulfil certain criteria. This idea is radical because it implies that authors, in order to receive public funding, might feel inclined to meet these criteria which, in turn, would result in a lack of diversity. The second line of argumentation, represented here by Rudy Wiebe, stands for a rejection of comic fiction for culture-political reasons. In his comment, Wiebe reveals his limiting essentialist point of view on literature. By disqualifying the claim of humorous fiction to be labelled as a valid cultural product, he monopolizes a term whose lack of definition and restriction is its greatest advantage, namely “literature.” Wiebe’s argumentation is reactionary in favouring the national over the cosmopolitan. His concern that no one will take Canadian literature seriously if some of its representatives should feel inclined to produce comic instead of serious fiction reveals an ineradicable inferiority complex. Seen in isolation from other participants in this debate, Shteyngart’s and Wiebe’s comments might easily be construed in terms of an out/insider dichotomy; what the outsider finds deplorable, the insider hails as a politically sensible and artistically positive development. These views represent two extremely different positions, but these two extremes, even if they represent the contested opinions of individuals, offer a telling insight into the different perspectives on Canadian cultural politics.

⁵⁹⁵ <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/can-canlit-be-funny-rudy-wiebe-thinks-not/article20895329/> accessed on 11/18/2014

⁵⁹⁶ <http://news.nationalpost.com/2014/01/09/u-s-comic-writer-gary-shteyngart-sets-off-predictable-repudiation-when-he-says-canadian-literature-doesnt-take-chances/>

⁵⁹⁷ <http://arts.nationalpost.com/2012/10/30/will-ferguson-wins-2012-giller-prize-for-419/>

⁵⁹⁸ <http://arts.nationalpost.com/2013/02/22/stephen-guppy-canadians-arent-funny/>

Nevertheless, as my reading of Hill's debut novel will be basically concerned with the emergence of black-Canadian history and memory as major themes in his narrative fiction, this debate will only be of minor importance for my analysis. My approach to Lawrence Hill's fiction, however, is markedly different from that used by Christian Krampe in his book-length study on Hill's novels *The Past is Present – The African-Canadian Experience in Lawrence Hill's Fiction*.⁵⁹⁹ As the title of Krampe's book implies, the book relies on two problematic assumptions: Firstly, that Lawrence Hill's fictionalization of the past can unproblematically be taken at face value, and, secondly, that "Hill[']s fiction] is in fact emblematic of the vast majority of African-Canadian literature."⁶⁰⁰ As I will continue to show, all three authors whose work I am discussing in this thesis reveal marked differences in terms of the philosophical approach that lies at the basis of their reworkings of the past. Contrary to Krampe, my focus will not be entirely on historical verisimilitude and probability of the events described in the novels, but I will rather focus on the possible implications of generic choices and narrative strategies. Furthermore, I will show that, contrary to Dionne Brand's bleak vision of the past as a continuous shadow hanging over her protagonists, the unearthing and subsequent telling about the past in Hill's novels must generally be regarded as a redemptive act, liberating his characters from the uncertainty of origins.

However, before doing that, I will give due consideration to the juxtaposition of serious and comic elements in *Some Great Thing* as a literary device rarely used in African-Canadian fiction. Actually, it seems rather odd that humour and satire are not used more often in African-Canadian fiction. In African-American culture, humour was, and to a certain extent still is, an essential tool to cope with and simultaneously question systemic oppression, disenfranchisement and discrimination of black people. As Lawrence Levine has shown in his seminal study *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*:

[B]lack humour as a whole did not tend to reaffirm the outside world's opinion of blacks. On the contrary, no other mechanism in Afro-American expressive culture was more effective than humour in exposing the absurdity of the American racial system and in releasing pent-up black aggression towards it. [...] Consciously or unconsciously, blacks inverted the majority's stereotypes in their humour in order to rob them of their power to hurt and humiliate them.⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁹ Christian J. Krampe, *The Past is Present – The African-Canadian Experience in Lawrence Hill's Fiction*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid, 11.

⁶⁰¹ Lawrence W. Levine, *Black culture and Black Consciousness*, 335-36.

The cultural function of humour in the Canadian context is not entirely different from Levine's assessment of its traditional African-American uses. As Jennifer Andrews points out in her contribution on humour to the *Encyclopaedia of Literature in Canada*:

Humour and satire are ideal strategies for examining different racial and ethnic identities within a Canadian context. Both literary modes involve the juxtaposition of incongruous perspectives and thus enable writers [...] to challenge readers' stereotypical assumptions about a particular minority population while reinforcing the existence of otherwise neglected discursive communities.⁶⁰²

While Andrews later on thematizes the function of humour in the works of first-generation migrant writers like Rohinton Mistry, Sky Lee and also Dionne Brand as “an accessible and entertaining” way of depicting “the immigrant experience and the difficulties posed by living in an unfamiliar culture”, her article does not mention the work of indigenous African-Canadian authors. The article, while offering an illuminating insight into the politics and tradition of humour in Canadian literary production, does not consider its function in the fiction produced by representatives of indigenous minority groups other than First-Nation and Jewish-Canadian writers. So either indigenous African-Canadian authors do not use humour – which can be easily repudiated by quoting from *One Great Thing* – or those works simply do not receive as much attention as those of first-generation migrants, or their existence does not corroborate Canadian imaginaries and is therefore problematic. Furthermore, in the same *Encyclopedia*, A. C. Morrell introduces the part of his essay concerned with the representation of Africa in African-Canadian fiction as follows: “Neither strangers nor citizens, some Canadian writers of African descent have made an attempt to return to the land of their ancestors.”⁶⁰³ This formulation explicitly problematizes the citizen status of African-Canadian writers. It leaves its readers with the notion that those writers do not qualify for Canadian status because they are of African descent, they are “neither strangers nor citizens.” However, the articles leave one with the notion that the black-Canadian experience is indeed a new phenomenon and must inevitably be linked with the experience of culture clashes and hybridization. The protagonist of *Some Great Thing* experiences the same mindset as he constantly has to justify his claim to Canadianness. The clash between African-Canadian attempts at self-assertion and prevailing imaginaries of white

⁶⁰² Jennifer Andrews, “Humour and Satire” in: William H. New (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*. Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2002, 514-21 [520-21].

⁶⁰³ A. Carol Morrell, “Africa in Candian Writing” in: William H. New (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*. Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2002, 9-12 [11].

Canadians will be discussed later on in this chapter. Furthermore, Mahatma Grafton's trip to Cameroon in *Some Great Thing* will be discussed for its comic juxtaposition of western expectations with African realities and as a journey to his origins.

The novel is set in early 1980s Manitoba, depicting the development of its protagonist, Mahatma Grafton, from clueless would-be journalist to sophisticated press activist. The novel has been labelled as a "comedy about modern Canada." As pointed out before, this label is misleading because it renders the novel's engagement with serious issues secondary. Nevertheless, this assessment is not entirely unjustified because the novel depicts serious issues like racism, racial exclusion and the problematic relationship between French- and English-Canadian people in a light-hearted way. At first, Mahatma has no real ambitions in journalism, he is giving the job a try because he has "nothing better to do" and is "over his head in student loans" (SGT, 7). Before starting with *The Winnipeg Herald*, a right-wing outfit with racist tendencies – at least in the eyes of Ben Grafton, Mahatma's father – Mahatma had been studying in Toronto for his M.A. in economics. In spite of not being enthusiastic about the job at first, Mahatma quickly finds his own routine and develops a positive attitude towards some aspects of his work. The setting facilitates an engagement with different cultural issues at once: the historical dimension of blackness in Canada, racial segregation, the problems of French- and English-Canadian relationships and bilingualism (before the 1988 amendment of the Official Language Act came into force). The novel features a heterodiegetic narrator who is not part of the story world and entirely covert. This narrative technique has the advantage of offering deep insights into the different characters and their various motivations. While the novel focuses on Mahatma Grafton's development as a reporter and his growing insight into Canadian cultural and ethnic divisions, it sometimes provides outsider perspectives through minor characters such as the Cameroonian journalist Hassane Mustafa Ali, in the novel generally called Yoyo, and Mahatma's French-Canadian colleague Helen Savoie which are equally illuminating. By using these different perspectives, the novel lays bare the social divisions and hierarchies that defined Canadian society at the time of its publication. The novel is deeply situated in the period it is set in.

8.1.1 White Canada: Racialization and Racism in Canadian Society as Depicted in *Some Great Thing*

As pointed out before, the novel's protagonist Mahatma Grafton is constantly marginalized due to his skin colour. Unlike the protagonist of its follow-up *Any Known Blood*, Mahatma cannot pass for white: "During his twenty-minute stroll, Mahatma reviewed all the kinds of people he had been mistaken for, in his life. Moroccans had spoken to him in Arabic, Jamaicans had assumed he was Syrian, Peruvians thought he was Andalusian and Spaniards had taken him for a Mexican, but nobody, not even in Winnipeg, believed he was Canadian." (SGT, 126). The novel starts with Mahatma's new colleagues discussing his ethnicity/race. Chuck, Don and Helen neither consider that he might be black nor that he might be black and Canadian. Mahatma himself is treated like a criminal upon first entering the building that holds the Herald's offices by the security guard. His new colleagues are rather surprised about him being black, because his name made them assume he might be Indian. However, one of the questions he is asked is: "Are you black? To which he replies: "My heels are pink" one other: "Where are you from, anyway?" Unlike other works in this thesis, the novel is set in a historical, cultural and political context that allows for a juxtaposition of conservative Anglo-Canadian and cosmopolitan-Canadian concepts of citizenship and nationhood. Through the following dialogue I will illustrate how the novel uses this juxtaposition of old and new order to further the idea of a cosmopolitan-Canadian nationhood :

"So," Betts said, "where are you from, anyway?" Mahatma tried not to stiffen. He kept his legs crossed, casually, at the ankles. "Winnipeg. The Wolseley area." Batts frowned. "Ye, but your nationality?" "Canadian." [...] "Mahatma fought back a lump of anger in his throat. He met Betts' stare blankly. "You know, your origins." "Origins," Mahatma repeated, aware of the tension in his voice. "I originated in Winnipeg. Misericordia Hospital." He said that a touch too smartly. His father had been much more skilful in dealing with fools (SGT, 12-13).

In this dialogue, Betts serves as a representative of Anglo-Canadian conservatism, as he still regards Canada as a white anglophone country. According to his world view, one has to be white in order to fully qualify as Canadian. In spite of not outright denying Mahatma's claim to Canadian citizenship, he cannot accept the implication that Mahatma's claim is based on a historical continuity. Following this racially and ethnically exclusive concept of citizenship Betts inevitably fails to recognize Mahatma's Canadianness. Mahatma Grafton has to cope with a

society that does not grant him equal recognition; according to the logic of the people he meets, he cannot be of Canadian origin, his family cannot have a Canadian history. The form of discrimination Mahatma experiences is very subtle as it denies him historical continuity by generally repudiating the historical presence of people of colour in Canada. In contrast to other works discussed in this thesis, Mahatma's existence in Canada is not problematized by dislocation and estrangement, but by his claim to continuity and familiarity. This can be illustrated with a dialogue between Mahatma and the chief of police, Mac Grearicque:

“You're telling me your goddamn grandfather was Canadian?”

“Naturalized, yes. So you'd better get used to it, Patrick Mac Grearicque. My people have been here as long as yours.” (SGT, 62)

The understanding of citizenship the novel promotes is rooted in the ideas of an egalitarian, post-ethnic and post-racial state. Its representative Mahatma embodies all the facets of this new model: he is of mixed-race-ancestry, polyglot and well versed in the idiosyncrasies of other cultures. In contrast to his colleagues and friends he is not subject to the indoctrinations of a narrow-minded nationalism, but stands above those concepts. However, those individuals who problematize Mahatma's Canadian history originate from a certain very conservative group. In contrast to Dionne Brand's first two novels, Canadian society is not portrayed as a “white wall” the protagonist cannot penetrate; it does not impede his social participation on both professional and non-professional levels. This might either be due to the people he encounters, or due to his profession. Actually it is one of the novel's minor characters who occupies a position of authority in society, judge Melvin Hill, who maintains that Canadian society is intrinsically racist. One of the scenes in the novel describes judge Melvyn Hill's encounter with an adolescent of Indian descent. When the judge refrains from giving the young man the money he asks for, the latter says: “You're not a judge. You're just a cheap old nigger.” Melvyn felt as if he'd been slugged in the solar plexus. His midriff caved in; his shoulders sagged.” (SGT, 39). However, Judge Hill, too, is far from being impartial. His own understanding of justice is tainted by the belief that people of colour must be treated differently than white offenders; otherwise they might backslide. When Hill sends a black man to prison for 30 days for causing a public disturbance, his justification is: “[...] I lean harder on Negro offenders than on non-Negroes. [...] I will have no one, and I say *no* one, accuse me of favouring people of my race (SGT, 33). Hill's fear of being accused of partiality due to his own racial identity has given his own jurisdiction a racist edge; the anxiety about being accused of racially motivated partiality has eroded the impartiality

of his social function. Paradoxically, Judge Hill casts himself as a victim of institutional racism, claiming that he has not been promoted due to his race “My record to date is spotless, but I still haven’t been promoted” (SGT, 33).

In the novel none of the black characters – with the exception of Yoyo – experience, what Charles Taylor terms “equal recognition.” Ben Grafton thinks that persons of colour are living under general suspicion: “If two of these Block Parents saw a black stranger talking to their kid in the street, they’d panic. But if it were some white stranger, they’d think he was some fellow needing directions. There is a kernel of racism in that Block Parents business.” (SGT, 146). Even more telling than Ben’s assessment is Mahatma’s reaction: “You’re crazy!” Mahatma’s initial rejection of Ben’s assessment is in keeping with a general tendency in Canadian society to reject any allegations of racism as pure fantasy. Dionne Brand caustically described this reassertion that “racism is not a problem here” as the “wonder and deliberateness of liberal dissembling!”.⁶⁰⁴ Ben’s cultural diagnosis strikes Mahatma as exaggerated because the kind of racism Ben detects does not correspond with the subtle racism he encounters on an almost daily basis. By denying it, Mahatma is set up as a devil’s advocate, paradoxically defending a society that forces him to assert his citizen status in almost every private and professional encounter.

In the next passage, I will discuss the representation of Africa in the novel in the context of neo-colonial forms of myth making. Furthermore, I will show how it negotiates the tightrope act between comic and serious fiction. When some of the novel’s characters travel to Cameroon to accompany Winnipeg’s fictitious mayor on a trip to promote friendship between the two countries, Mahatma is among the representatives of the press who cover the events of the trip. While Mahatma attempts to write unbiased and informative stories about this visit, his colleague Edward Slade, writing for a tabloid, comes up with a bogus story about ritual murders and abductions of foreigners fed to him by an impostor miming a police official. In Canada, the public, including Mahatma’s editor Don Betts, regards this story as a major scoop. Betts who already clandestinely re-wrote and manipulated the stories Mahatma had filed, encourages Mahatma to come up with similar stories. Neither Betts nor Slade question the legitimacy of their work. Nevertheless, Mahatma does not comply with Betts’ wishes, but sets out to lay bare the fraudulent nature of Slade’s story. But actually this overdone demonization is very much in keeping with both the public’s expectations. As the real police official interviewed by Mahatma

⁶⁰⁴ Dionne Brand, *Bread out of Stone*, 155.

diagnoses: “Someone has made a fool of that journalist. We have no such crimes on record. They must have been conjured up by somebody who knew your friend would like such a story.” (SGT, 278). In Slade's articles, Cameroon, as a pars pro toto for Africa, is constructed as the demonic other, a site where western standards are unhinged, a place that cannot be understood within the framework of a liberal democratic model. Slade's articles takes recourse to colonial imaginaries which depicted Africa as a “heart of darkness” and its inhabitants as practitioners of “unspeakable rites” and confirms the validity of those stereotypes to his avid readers.⁶⁰⁵ Especially the nature of the crimes described in his article remind one of stereotypes about the inhumane nature of African civilizations and the essentially hostile behaviour towards strangers attributed to Africans by advocates of colonialism. While ridiculing those who took recourse to these imaginaries – Slade will be fired after his return and Betts will be suspended – the novel nevertheless creates an awareness of the persistent influence of those stereotypes on western imaginaries. Slade did not ask his source to verify his credibility because he expected to hear such stories and to have his stereotypes confirmed. Mahatma on the other hand flaunts the expectations of his editor by providing reports which describe Cameroon, especially its inhabitants and their social mores, as overly positive and generous. Slade's and Betts' work ethics as representatives of the Canadian press are juxtaposed with Yoyo's neutral and informative coverage on Canadian issues in the fictitious daily paper *La Voix de Yaoundé*. Yoyo, originally from Cameroon, has received a grant from the government of his country to visit Canada. Throughout the novel his insights into Canadian culture and society offer a different point of view on topical issues. He often naively celebrates Canada and its institutions, trusting in the power of “civic authorities”, but is equally often troubled by Canadian customs. In his character the novel offers a counter-model to the corrupt and biased representatives of the Canadian press satirized in the novel. Yoyo in his naivety seems to be capable of unlimited goodness. His ideas for articles show that Canadian and Cameroonian concerns are very much alike: “Education was of utmost importance to his countrymen in Cameroon, he focussed on that subject (SGT,148).” Often it is Yoyo who, in his naïve bewilderment, lays bare the idiocy behind certain customs and institutions. Nevertheless, Yoyo is not only the outsider whose different approach to both work and social life highlight Canadian idiosyncrasies, he also functions as a catalyst for Mahatma's development as a cultural critic and amateur historian. Through Yoyo's unlimited goodness and his striving for truth and justice, Mahatma is made aware of his own

⁶⁰⁵ On the development and nature of Victorian stereotypes on Africa and the representation of Africa in Victorian fiction see: Patrick Brantlinger, “Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent.” in: *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 12 (Autumn 1985), 166-203.

faults, both in terms of professional and personal involvement.

Both in the context of the representation of Africa through Slade and Betts and in the depiction of Canadian race relations, humour is an important stylistic device. The report on the hideous but invented crimes that Slade files is a farce both in terms of the exaggerated report itself and also in the context of his career. Nevertheless, his readers nor his superiors discover the farcical nature of the report. This, in turn, enhances the comic effect as the farce enters a second level on which the editor's and the general reading public's craving for more sensational items of information appear even more ridiculous. Also the recurring questioning of Mahatma's citizen status borders on the comic. Nevertheless, in this context one has to differentiate between persistent and less persistent advocates of white Canada. While Mahatma acts leniently towards those who inhabit a non-ideological imaginary of white Canada, he is infuriated by the persistent denial of those who should know better. Nevertheless, in the afore discussed scene where Betts denies his Canadianness, Mahatma, despite his obvious infuriation, acts as the voice of reason who unflinchingly counters Betts ethnically and racially exclusive concept of citizenship by reiterating his initial position.

8.1.2 *Some Great Thing* in the Context of the Official Languages Act and the Development of Canadian Pluralism

In addition to the contested status of the people of colour the novel depicts, another change in Canadian identity politics is thematized: Canada's policy of bilingualism and its implementation into Manitoban legislation and jurisdiction. As Raymond M. Hébert describes this period in his standard work *Manitoba's French-Language Crisis: A Cautionary Tale*: "From May 1983 to the end of February 1984 Manitoba was racked by one of the most intense, divisive debates in its history, a debate that left no segment of the population untouched and that in its final stages virtually paralysed the government of the province."⁶⁰⁶ As the novel shows, the crisis was of such a peculiar nature due to "the intermingling of passion and rational debate over a prolonged period [...]."⁶⁰⁷ The novel does not use real historical figures as foils against which a fictitious

⁶⁰⁶ Raymond M. Hébert, *Manitoba's French Language Crisis: A Cautionary Tale*. Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 2004, xi.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 209.

rendering of the past is enacted, but resorts to entirely fictitious characters. One of the main figures in this domestic tragicomedy is Wilbur Lawson, a primary school teacher and self-appointed defender of Anglo-Manitoban culture and founder of the *League Against French Takeover of Manitoba (LAFTOM)*. Nevertheless, his main argument echoes the historical debate:

[T]hroughout this century, English has been the increasingly dominant language of Manitoba. Ukrainians, Poles, Germans, Icelanders and others have accepted English as the language of our legislature, our courts, our government, our businesses. Speaking it didn't *diminish our ethnic roots; it just meant you were Manitoban*. (SGT, 194; my emphasis)

Lawson clearly advocates the preservation of an English Canadian cultural and linguistic supremacy. For Lawson, the English language is the lowest common denominator, a lingua franca that enables different ethnicities and cultures to co-exist within a system relying on linguistic unity. The passionate and often very personal character of this debate emerged, as Hébert argues, from the infringement of the Languages Act on the institutionalized certainties of the Anglophone majority. Accordingly, the debate is not about language but rather about cultural and linguistic supremacy. Lawson's argumentation by focusing on the linguistic dimension of cultural supremacy, occludes the influence of English institutions on Canadian culture. Not only is "English the language of our legislature, our courts, our government"; these institutions were actually created in accordance with their British equivalents. This anxiety about linguistic and cultural supremacy is, according to Hébert, due to Manitoba's history of nation building. He applies the model of the melting pot to describe Manitoba's post-confederation history, pointing out that English institutions, values and traditions were adopted and subsequently defended by European and non-European immigrants in the guise of a shared Canadianness. In the early 1980s, a number of conservative politicians began to regard the policies advocated by the federal government as an infringement of their Anglo-Canadian identity. Therefore they began to lobby against the introduction of bilingualism and the adaptation of the existing institutions to the requirements of the federal policies. According to Hébert, the French-language crisis in Manitoba can therefore be regarded as an artificially fuelled debate in which political hard-liners exploited public sentiment to push their own agenda.⁶⁰⁸ Additionally, it was a debate that was fuelled by an anxiety about the preservation of national and cultural unity perhaps best articulated by Donald Creighton, one of Canada's leading conservative historians in the twentieth

⁶⁰⁸ Hébert, 211-12. Hébert describes the crisis as a surfacing of "right-wing authoritarianism", in which a few leaders "manufactured" the debate for its "dramatic effect on the public opinion in Manitoba."

century:

It was only through a great collective effort, in which both English Canadians and French Canadians fully participated, that the nation could have escaped from its mental vassalage [to the United States] and recovered its independent powers of creation and self-determination. But the new dominance of ethnic values in Canadian domestic politics and the resulting outbreak of cultural conflict had destroyed national unity at the moment when it was desperately needed.⁶⁰⁹

The novel captures the spirit of this debate in the excerpts of the articles written by Mahatma, Edward Slade and Yoyo. While the former attempts to write an unbiased report about the debate, Slade's attempt to reproduce the facts of the language deal invariably ends in a polarization of the issue, manipulating his readers into voting against the introduction of French as Manitoba's second official language: "it paves the way for the French to dominate Manitoba." (SGT, 225) This echoes Hébert's caustic remark that the public was informed by persons whose testimonies document a "level of prejudice and sheer ignorance [which] is truly appalling."⁶¹⁰ Yoyo, in his role as outsider observer, does not grant the Languages Act an importance of itself, but rather focuses on those involved in the debate and their personal concerns. His report on a protest rally describes the motivation of the anti-government protesters as "a wave of anti-French bigotry" (SGT, 223), using the rally as a background to report about the plight of Jake Corbett who is at odds with the Canadian welfare system.

The description of the rally itself is one of the novel's most comic scenes. While Lawson tries to agitate against the implementation of the Languages Act, Jake Corbett enters the stage to give a public speech against the violation of his constitutional rights through the welfare system. In this episode, Corbett appropriates the public sphere artificially created by Lawson's *League* to lobby for his own concerns. Even if Corbett's intrusion on their self-created public sphere might be interpreted as a rather selfish act, it is actually described in a humorous way as an act that unwittingly defused the situation. In addition to this comic episode, the novel offers a very personal and polarizing insight into Lawson's attitudes. Helen Savoie, one of Mahatma's colleagues, has experienced Lawson's extremism as a pupil. Lawson humiliated her in front of the other pupils because she used French swear words. As she tells Mahatma: "He was my grade one teacher at the John Bell Elementary School. He made me ashamed of my language. I hated

⁶⁰⁹ Donald Creighton, *Canada's First Century*. Don Mills: OUP, 2012 [1970], 356.

⁶¹⁰ Hébert, 213.

[my parents] because they were French. I wanted to be like the English kids.” (SGT, 203). Due to this humiliation Helen began to reject her Franco-Canadian identity, trying to adapt to the Anglo-Canadian majority: “She thought back to public school, to her sudden refusal to speak French as a child, to all the years she had detested all that was French in her.” (SGT, 201). While Lawson is depicted as a hard-liner who abuses his position as a primary-school teacher to represent his political views and social theories, who abuses the emotional susceptibility of his pupils to drive home his political message, the movement in general is portrayed as ultra-conservative and, in some respects, even retrogressive.

Both the rally-incident and the personal experiences of Helen Savoie give evidence to the negative portrayal of those persons and groups arguing against the amendment of the Manitoban state regulations to meet the demands of federal bilingualism policies. In line with the vindication of cosmopolitan Canadianness the novel contains, the representatives of conservative positions, here with regard to Canadian bilingualism, are exposed as being inhuman and self-centred both in outlook and approach. It might therefore be argued that the novel establishes a binary opposition between progressive cosmopolitan Canadians and conservative defenders of English Canadian hegemony. In this discourse the validation of minority histories is of special relevance as they serve as a counterpoint and often invalidate claims to cultural and ethnic prevalence of the dominant group. I will develop this idea in the next sub-chapter, in which the characters’ different strategies of turning memory into history will be discussed.

8.1.3 The Discursive Re-Negotiation of Canadian Imaginaries: Individual and Collective Histories in *Some Great Thing*

Some Great Thing already contains most of the features that later came to define Lawrence Hill’s fiction. Especially Mahatma Grafton’s father Ben and his obsession with history and social justice are themes that have become prominent in the two following novels, *Any Known Blood* and *The Book of Negroes*. In contrast to the latter two, *Some Great Thing* is not primarily a historical novel, yet it nevertheless offers a perspective on the history of black people in Canada, especially in the context of one line of work formerly associated with black people: the railway porters. Ben Grafton represents the collector/researcher type, avidly trying to preserve African-Canadian history and create an awareness of his people. His motivation for compiling his “Negro

History Appreciation” binder originates from the problematization of his Canadianness by white Canadians. The introduction to his binder contains the following comment:

“Nobody shall think that We have no Reasons for documenting this history [...]. Many times have we been subject to Questions about our History, the Tendency being for citizens of Winnipeg to express Wonder about the presence of Negroes in the city, and to display Incomprehension of a certain Fact, namely, our presence.” (SGT, 75)

Considering the depiction of Mahatma’s experiences, it becomes clear that Ben and Mahatma experienced the same form of misrecognition. Both do not qualify as Canadians according to the narrow racial definition established and maintained by representatives of the white majority. Nevertheless, the archive Ben has created at first means nothing to his son, who – despite being confronted with the public denial of his Canadianness on a more or less daily basis – regards it as an old man’s folly: “The same old boxes stuffed with documents. Documents Ben had collected. [...] Mahatma wondered if the old man had touched the boxes in years. Did he still log details about the family, lecture about race consciousness and think Mahatma had forsaken his people” (SGT, 6). As we later find out: “The bulk of Ben’s entries pertained to Canadian blacks such as Osborne Anderson, who in 1859 had participated in John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry and escaped back to Canada, and Anderson Ruffin Abbott, the first Canadian-born black doctor” (SGT, 59). During Mahatma’s adolescence, Ben tried to hand on all these facts to his son, but his persistence in lecturing his son about their past became a major reason for their estrangement: “By the age of fifteen, he wouldn’t read a newspaper. He didn’t watch TV news, didn’t care about [...] civil rights” (SGT, 139).

Later on in the novel, Mahatma realizes that his father’s archive and the past it documents are of great importance to his life. It is Mahatma’s father who gives him the necessary background information about the historical intricacies of Winnipeg life, illuminating for him the connection between the city’s fictitious mayor John Novak, judge Melvyn Hill and himself. Ben’s archive serves as the missing link between past and present, re-establishing coherence for Mahatma and offering an insight into the past of his people. Through his archive Ben transcends the limited horizon of the communicative memory and makes knowledge of the past available to the following generations: he collects memories. By following this agenda, Ben is creating a counter-history to official history. He thus unwittingly becomes a representative of a new school of historiographers who, as William Boelhower describes it, advocate “a paradigm shift from

history scripted as the march of Western progress to history conceived as digging up the fragments of a largely unfathomable past.”⁶¹¹ The fragments collected in Ben’s archive document local black history and also offer a transnational outlook as he unselectively collected all items of information about black trials and triumphs that he could get hold of. Ben’s archive nevertheless is highly selective as only items commemorating the actions of members of his ethnic and racial group are stored in it. Additionally, while preserving items of information, it lacks structure and a mediating agency; only Ben himself can reconstruct the past through the fragments in his collection; his archive becomes meaningful only through him. Ben’s self-chosen dedication to the past resembles the office of the story-teller (griot) in some west-African communities. It is striking that most central characters in Lawrence Hill’s fiction fill a position similar to Ben’s. Emplotting and preserving the past for posterity – in a non institutionalized form – is a central element of their sense of self. All those central characters take recourse to the strategies and resources of historiography, but all of them appropriate the practices and strategies commonly associated with this discipline for their own ends. Returning to *Some Great Thing*, one should be aware of the cross-generational nature of Ben’s project. While Ben attempted to raise Mahatma to follow his footsteps and finally transform his collected memories into a coherent narrative, Mahatma himself at first does not comply with his father’s plans. Only later does he realize the importance of this mission. This is actually a turning point in the development of Mahatma Grafton’s character:

Mahatma hadn’t done anything for anybody. He hadn’t even tried. He had gotten a Master’s degree and learned two languages and returned to Winnipeg to chase the families of murder victims. [...] If he [Ben] were to die tomorrow, how could Mahatma tell his future children who their grandfather had been? [...] Mahatma would go to his own grave ignorant about the life of his father. (177-80)

At first, Mahatma’s motivation is intrinsic; he wants to make up for his own ignorance, learning about his father’s past in order to create a coherent self-image. This self-image is to be obtained through decoding and objectifying Ben’s archive. This “objectification or crystallization of communicated meaning and collectively shared knowledge” would be one of the “prerequisites of its transmission in the culturally institutionalized heritage of a society.”⁶¹² In this subplot, the

⁶¹¹ William Boelhower “Identity, Memory, and the Archaeological Turn in Humanistic Studies.” in: Rüdiger Kunow and Wilfried Raussert (eds.), *Cultural Memory and Multiple Identities*. Berlin, Hamburg and Münster: Lit Verlag, 2008, 19-30 [20].

⁶¹² Jan Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity”, 130.

novel thematizes a coming into being of a counter-history that seeks to inscribe itself into an imaginary that, in order to preserve its coherence, cannot allow its existence. As the novel shows through the problematization of Mahatma's Canadianness, the stories about the past he wants to introduce into public discourse diverge from the all-white imaginary shared by most of the minor characters. The narrator describes Ben's reaction to Mahatma's decision not to act in confirmation of the all-white myth and attempt to unearth his people's history with the following words: "He had escaped the curse of his generation." (SGT, 259). This is actually an oblique comment on the state of African-Canadian studies which were already gaining momentum in the 1970s and 80s.⁶¹³ The novel ends on an optimistic note; Mahatma – after having left *The Herald* – works for the *Toronto Times*, where he will be given a forum to write about the railway-porter incident, unearthing it, and giving it due coverage. He has become the agent of his father's archive, re-introducing the items of information he had collected in an edited form into cultural discourse, thereby freeing African-Canadian history from oblivion. The preservation of the past, the establishment of a continuous history, as thematized in the novel, provides its protagonist Mahatma Grafton with a sense of self and a sense of mission. Through Mahatma's agency the press serves as a medium that challenges prevalent imaginaries. Due to his position he can use it to contest white-Canadian complacency and to confront it with a different version of the past. As Patrick Brantlinger points out: "[N]ovel, newspapers and other forms of mass communication are factors in the development of the 'imagined communities' of modern nation states and their empires."⁶¹⁴ In the context of this novel, the imagined community at stake is the African-Canadian minority Ben and Mahatma belong to. Instead of using those media to create unity out of difference, in the novel they become agents of diversity. In retracing the emergence of Mahatma Grafton's sense of mission the novel engages in a meta-discourse about the function of history and memory in contemporary fiction. The channels through which imaginaries are challenged are implicitly and explicitly thematized. The novel's ending also features a mock-postmodern turn when Mahatma tells his father Ben that he is writing a novel whose title has "something to do with one of Ben's most favourite lines" (SGT, 309), which is, obviously, "do some great thing." Readers are reminded, or rather informed, by this blurring of fact and fiction that Mahatma's coming of age, respectively the process of finding his own voice, closely resemble Laurence Hill's own development as a writer. In the paratext of the 2009, reprint he goes even further by drawing an analogy between his father and his fictitious character Ben

⁶¹³ See: George Elliott Clarke, "Discovering African-Canadian Literature", 7.

⁶¹⁴ Patrick Brantlinger, *Fictions of State. Culture and Credit in Great Britain 1694-1994*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1996, 4.

Grafton: “Don’t discard family history, my father would say. Preserve it for future generations. Like my ancestors, I can’t get rid of personal papers. They represent my own life and the lives of my loved ones” (SGT, 7).

Ben’s archive provides the novel with a sub-plot that gives an insight into Canadian race politics of the 1930s and 1940s, laying bare the social divisions at the heart of Canadian society. The story Ben tells his son (SGT, 147-54) is about a scandal involving the Canadian Transcontinental Railway. He describes how his friend Alvin James, a railway porter like Ben, lost his life in a fire because the doors of the boardinghouse he slept in were locked. This boardinghouse belonged to the CTR and they had it locked every night because they were afraid of damage to the building. James’ death brought one of the first anti-segregation movements into being and gave momentum to both Ben Grafton’s activism and John Novak’s political career. In spite of the fictitious nature of the incident described, this episode in the novel sheds light on a period in Canadian history in which working options for people of colour were highly restricted. Furthermore, it shows how, during this period, people of colour fought for their right to political participation.

But this engagement with the diverse histories of Canadian people is only one among the many issues the novel raises. Its characters, with the exception of Ben Grafton, exist in the present of the 1980s and their preoccupation lies entirely with this present and thus the fact that history is part of this present at first eludes them.

8.1.4 Visions of Post-Ethnic Canada in *Some Great Thing*

The novel, similar to Brand’s *What We All Long For* and George Elliott Clarke’s *Québécoisité*, participates in the discourse about the declining importance of race as a social marker. Similar to US-American cultural productions, racial and ethnic amalgamation is thematized. The mixed-race couples described in *Some Great Thing* serve as examples of a social utopia in which all racial inequalities will have vanished. As David A. Hollinger points out with regard to the US: “The extraordinary increase in marriage and reproduction across the ethno-racial pentagon presents a fundamental challenge to the authority of descent-defined categories. A critical mass of acknowledged mixed-race people heightens the credibility of an ideal according to which

individuals decide how tightly or loosely they wish to affiliate with one or more communities of descent. These Americans help move the society in a postethnic direction.”⁶¹⁵ For some of the characters, racial amalgamation is a utopia that fires their imagination: “Harry would bet his ass they’d been humping half an hour ago. Good on ’em! It gave him hope for the human race. The more white women and black men and black women and white men mixed up, the harder it was gonna be to keep coloured people down.” (SGT, 235). As Hollinger reminds us, the multiplication of histories is an essential step in the development of a post-racial and post-ethnic society. The archive begun by Ben, and later to be popularized by Mahatma, is therefore an important act against the monopolization of historical narratives through the white majority. Nevertheless, Hollinger points out that he does not regard those challenges to particularizing perspectives in historiography as a danger to the coherence of national narratives if they are articulated as productive, not disruptive contributions. These new histories “can be part of the story the nation tells itself and the world. This story can be told without precluding the telling of other empirically warranted stories about subnational and transnational solidarities, including communities of descent.”⁶¹⁶ Both Hill’s novel and Hollinger’s study followed the same political agenda. They share a common optimism in the power of liberal discourses in the form of cultural criticism, historiography and fiction to reshape prevailing imaginaries. While Hill’s novel propagates a liberal and inclusive understanding of Canadianness, Hollinger, focusing on the United States, describes this particular attitude towards nationality as a precondition of postethnic nationhood. Nevertheless, for the people of colour portrayed in *Some Great Thing*, ideas similar to Hollinger’s thesis about the imminent emergence of a post-racial society remain in the realm of utopian fabulation. The diagnosis on race issues the novel offers, especially with regard to the lack of recognition as equals people of colour experience, is, at best, ambiguous. Essentialization and othering are depicted as practices that still have an enormous appeal to the white majority and its cultural practices. Nevertheless, by Mahatma’s emergence as a spokesman for and a perpetuator of African-Canadian history, the novel ends on an optimistic note.

⁶¹⁵ David A. Hollinger, *Postethnic America*. 2000 [1995], 165.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid*, 116.

8.2 *Any Known Blood*: Transnational Black History and (African-)Canadian Identities

*Any Known Blood*⁶¹⁷, the 1997 follow-up to *Some Great Thing*, was met with with critical acclaim. The blurbs on the back cover of the first hardback edition, taken from reviews by novelists John Barth and Joyce Carol Oates, suggest that the novel was neither marketed primarily as African-Canadian, respectively African-American fiction nor that a certain group of people was targeted. The flap shows black and white photographs of people of colour and hand-written letters arranged in a collage laid on top of a map of which only the place names Harpers Ferry and Charlestown are entirely legible. In the centre of the collage, a young couple is engaged in a lively conversation; they are sitting side-by-side, balancing hats on their knees, smiling at each other. They are framed by a larger profile photo of a black man in uniform on the right and the close-up of the face of an older black woman on the left. On the back-cover, various letters are displayed; embedded between these letters is the portrait photography of a black women in a white dress. The dates on the letters have not been covered by the photos: the letter used for the front flap is dated August 8, 1918, the letter on the back May 9, 1919. The cover collage, as part of the novel's paratext, prepares the narratees for its historical approach and its socio-cultural setting. It gives away that its characters are black, that Harper's Ferry will be a relevant setting and that letters are of importance to the narrative. In combination with the blurbs, it ambiguously shows that the novel has an extended historical and spatial scope, ranging from the pre-civil war era US to modern Canada. Family history, as Moynagh, in accordance with Hendley, points out, is a central issue of postslavery narratives.⁶¹⁸ The politics behind these literary unearthings, which are so central to the works of all three writers I examine in this thesis, have been described by Moynagh as follows: "The texts challenge the complacent multiculturalism of the past thirty years with a history of racism and intolerance that the dominant narratives of nation abjure."⁶¹⁹ Interestingly, the photos and letters which have been used for this collage are part of the Daniel G. Hill collection of the Archives of Ontario, situated in Toronto. Daniel G. Hill was Lawrence Hill's father and the persons in those photographs all belong to the paternal line of Hill's ancestry.⁶²⁰ As letters will be of central importance to the

⁶¹⁷ Lawrence Hill, *Any Known Blood*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1997, 3. All further references will be to this edition, page number indicated parenthetically in the text. The title will be abbreviated as AKB.

⁶¹⁸ Moreen Moynagh, "Eyeing the North Star? Figuring Canada in Postslavery Fiction and Drama." in: Winfried Siemerling and Sarah Phillips Casteel, *Canada and Its Americas: Transnational Navigations*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 2010, 135-147 [136].

⁶¹⁹ Moynagh, "Eyeing the North Star?", 137.

⁶²⁰ Both the origins of the photos and the letters is listed in detail in the section following on the title page of the first American edition of the novel used for this study.

novel's plot and its protagonist and his family resembles Lawrence Hill's own descriptions of his family, it suggests that the novel is at least partly a fictionalized family history. Seemingly contradicting ideas of textual integrity and the irrelevance of the author for the production of meaning are playfully renegotiated through the discursive functionalization of text and paratext. Actually, the text itself undermines any autobiographical reading by providing cameo appearances of Mahatma Grafton, allegedly Hill's alter ego in its predecessor *Some Great Thing*. This doubling of alter egos can be both regarded as a problematization of a consistent autobiographical reading and as an implicit thematization of the multidimensionality of identity. Nevertheless, the analogies between the novel and the short autobiographical introduction Hill provided for the 2009 re-print of *Some Great Thing* are striking. Due to these problematizations of postmodern ideas I will read the novel within the framework of Linda Hutcheon's idea of historiographic metafiction. The blending of fiction with autobiography, its “textual incorporation of [...] intertextual past(s)” and its “overtly metafictional assertions of both history and literature as human constructs”, according to Hutcheon all strategies of this genre, are to be found in the novel.⁶²¹

The first story the novel's narrator Langston Cane the Fifth tells about his parents first attempts at finding an apartment in 1950s Toronto is, in slightly altered form, part of Lawrence Hill's short autobiography mentioned above. While in the novel Langston Cane the Fourth and his wife Dorothy do not succeed in making their potential landlord sign the contract, Hill's parents duped the apartment's owner by his mother taking “on a surrogate husband for a day.”⁶²² Furthermore, the novel shows numerous analogies between Lawrence Hill's autobiography and its central character Langston Cane, ranging from their shared social background, i.e. mixed-race parents, A.M.E. family, to their profession as writers. The merging of autobiography with fiction is, as a mentioned before, a recurring issue. Hill's real life daughter's name is Geneviève Aminata; the central character's name in *The Book of Negroes* is Aminata, and when the fictitious Langston Cane the Fifth hears this name on his research sabbatical in Mali, he considers it a possible name for his unborn child: “If it had been a girl, I would have tendered the name Aminata[.]” (AKB 210). Actually, Hill began to fancy this name during one of his repeated stays in Mali where he “worked as a volunteer for Crossroads International.”⁶²³ Nevertheless,

⁶²¹ Hutcheon, “Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History”, 4.

⁶²² Lawrence Hill, *Some Great Thing*. Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2009 [1992], 2 (autobiographical paratext)

⁶²³ Donna Bailey Nurse, “Lawrence Hill's big spring: Two new books keep the author in the spotlight.” Review in *Quill and Quire*. (Winter 1997), 47-50.

Langston Cane, in spite of the obvious correspondences between author and character, is a product of the imagination, a character in a novel.

Yet, these obvious resemblances have some implications for the text's position in today's identity discourse. The function of its playful proliferation of authorial doppelgängers should therefore be given due consideration. First, considering this inscription of the author into the text in the context of various schools of writing, it allows for the placement of the text in opposition to certain poetological and theoretical approaches. Making the text authorial implies a rejection of theories privileging the aesthetic function of literature, like Oscar Wilde's poetological approach as well as T. S. Eliot's theoretical historicism. Furthermore, texts consisting of such an abundance of textual and paratextual interference defy the readerly approach propagated by Roland Barthes in his seminal essay "The Death of the Author."⁶²⁴ By using Langston Cane as a spokesperson closely modelled on his own autobiography, Lawrence Hill places his narrative outside those scholarly and poetic conceptualizations.

The conceptual understanding of identity, which forms the basis of these texts, is, as the playing with the concept of the authorial doppelgänger shows, neither indebted to a static nor a mono-dimensional approach. The text stresses the developmental aspect of human identity as it depicts human beings as consisting of many social selves which are sometimes competing with each other, sometimes obliterated or problematized by social environments. Coherence and continuity, both essential to personal identities, are only achieved through narrative emplotment of past with present, memory with experience. Emplotment, or rather sequencing, is done on the basis of condensing and elaborating certain features, both in texts and in our personal memory. We incorporate into our history what best fits with our continuous sense of self, what contributes to the coherence of our identity. We are, so to say, narratively constructed products of our experiences with these experiences having been evaluated in a selective process. In the context of the study of identities, it is a commonplace to argue that the ontological differentiation between fact and fiction is hardly possible.⁶²⁵ The mixing of fact and fiction, of history with story then gives these ideas a narrative dimension. These narrative strategies invite the narratees to "suspend their disbelief" in the fictitiousness of the narrative. It symbolically problematizes the idea of an ontological truth and thematizes the fictitiousness of any form of identity.⁶²⁶ This does

⁶²⁴ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author." in Raman Selden (ed.), *The Theory of Criticism*. London, New York et.al.: Longman, 1988.

⁶²⁵ Harald Welzer, *Das kommunikative Gedächtnis*, 44.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid*, 44, 213.

not mean that the texts play with postmodern imagery for the sake of deconstructing the idea of coherent social identities. Neither do the doppelgängers serve the same function as in, say, Paul Auster's fiction, namely to contest the notion that literature can be purely mimetic. Adapting a conceptualization from Neumann and Nünning, it can be claimed that the novel, as Hill understands it, is “a medium of cultural narration, contributing to the formation and dissemination of new concepts of identity.”⁶²⁷ The counterworld these texts depict and the characters which populate it are closely bordering on the real world. Their intermingling of fictitious characters and real historical personalities serve to blur the boundaries between both worlds and turn the texts into a contact zone where the past can be experienced and re-lived through the mediation of the characters.

Nevertheless, the pervasive border between fact and fiction in these texts exceeds Moynagh's notion of serving as a bridge between different geographical and historical settings.⁶²⁸ While perpetuating a transnational imaginary that takes heed of diasporic displacement and denied histories, this fictional contact zone is based on a particular philosophy of history. In Hill's first two novels, coherence and continuity are thematized as essentials of human existence. As this short excursus has shown, the blurring of fact and fiction is an essential strategy of Hill's fiction. In the paratextual apparatus of the reprint of *Some Great Thing*, Hill actually plays down the influence of his families history on the novel, claiming that he “used the stories of [his] ancestors as emotional fuel to write *Any Known Blood*.”⁶²⁹ On the following pages I will argue that this blurring between historical fact and fiction emerges as one of Hill's primary literary strategies that he will bring to perfection in *The Book of Negroes* by doing away with the autobiographical background. Furthermore, in the same context, I will discuss how the novel thematizes historical research and its functions for individuals, communities and societies. Contrary to Moynagh's focus on the politics behind the narrative, I will discuss the literary strategies employed in the text in the context of philosophical approaches towards the writing of history and their contributions to the remaking of historical imaginaries.

The novel is set in Toronto, Canada and Baltimore and Harper's Ferry in the United States. Its protagonist Langston Cane V is a failed writer who lost his job as a minister's speech

⁶²⁷ Birgit Neumann and Ansgar Nünning, “Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Narrative and Identity.” in Birgit Neumann, Ansgar Nünning and Bo Petterson (eds.), *Narrative and Identity. Theoretical Approaches and Critical Analyses*. Trier: WVT, 2008, 3-23 [15].

⁶²⁸ Moynagh, “Eyeing the North Star?”, 137.

⁶²⁹ Hill, *Some Great Thing*, 2 (autobiographical paratext).

writer for deliberately disclosing confidential information via a speech he wrote for his employer. After losing his job, Langston is using his newly won freedom to take up the research on his family history again. Cane shares some of the preoccupations with Mahatma Grafton of *Some Great Thing*, namely to unearth black-Canadian history and thereby restore a sense of historical continuity and coherence to his community and make society in general aware of this past. The name Langston Cane, which, of course is meant to remind the readers both of Langston Hughes and Jean Toomer's epic poem *Cane*, signalizes an acute awareness of African-American literary culture and traditions. Tone and style of the chapters in which Langston recreates his family history differ from the passages in which he describes the progress of his research. The different narrative voices employed in the text and their respective functions will be described in more detail later. Considering literary traditions, the novel's bordering on the autobiographical and its mixing of fact and fiction, is in keeping with its Anglo-African predecessors. For Langston Cane, the process of unearthing is not uncomplicated: "Years have past since I've had the courage to write – or, more properly, to recreate – my family history." (AKB, 3). Langston does neither consider himself a historian nor does he differentiate between fact and fiction, evidence and imagination. The use of the phrase "to recreate" implicitly shows that his interpretative work is not restricted to the unbiased interpretation of sources, but produced by his own imagination. Unlike other novels of the same genre, as for example David Bradley's *The Chaneyville Incident*, which in terms of language features both historiographical and fictional registers, *Any Known Blood* solely relies on narrative techniques and emplotment strategies primarily used in fiction. While Langston Cane V is trying to find as many items of information as possible, especially physical evidence in the form of letters and journals, he ranks oral narratives before those physical items of information. His journey to meet his aunt Mill in the United States serves both as an act of liberation from his domineering father and as search for the stories which he hopes to hear from her. But she is not entirely sympathetic to his endeavours and, not unlike his father, is reluctant about telling him about her past. The items of information he hopes to obtain and, consequently, the book he wants to write are of a very personal nature. While they are based on oral narrative and physical evidence, Langston leaves no doubt that the final product will be both, based on fact and a product of his imagination. Like Hill himself, who stresses in his "acknowledgements" that "this novel is a novel. Family stories have been altered or exaggerated, and *almost* all of this book is an invention" (AKB, 507, my emphasis), Langston Cane feels the need to construct what can not be reclaimed. When Mill interrogates Langston about his intentions to recreate his family's history, asking: "How are you going to do that? I don't have enough stuff to fill a whole book", he replies: "I'll use my imagination to fill in the

holes” (AKB, 132). The decision to turn his family's history into a novel is due both to the limited availability of information and to the emotional dimension of the past as remembered by his sources. As form, function and substance of memories are the result of a personal emotional response to given situations, the items of information he might obtain from the oral testimonies of the witnesses to the past available to him are highly subjective.⁶³⁰ Langston's generic choice can be understood as a cultural diagnosis. Narratives about the Anglo-African past, due to both its complex emotional heritage and problematic state of evidence, can only become culturally meaningful when they are not self-limiting. Langston therefore chooses to resort to his imagination to recreate his family's history instead of condemning it to oblivion. In other words: conventional historiography can often not grasp and articulate the emotional depth of the New World African experience. This is in keeping with Boelhower's assessment that the writing of history, in order to create meaningful stories, should not be limited by a rigidly formalized approach.⁶³¹

The narrative consists of four story lines. The first is set in the late 1990s and retraces Langston Cane V's journey into the past via a journey to his aunt in Baltimore to research the stories of his parents and grandparents and the story about Langston Cane the First's involvement in John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry. Langston's research proceeds systematically back in time, while covering only “peak episodes” in his family's history. The narrative he creates is selective, condenses and focuses on the spectacular. In the following, I will discuss the different symbolical meanings of Langston Cane's journey.

My central argument is that by using the development of its central character Langston Cane as an illustration, the novel stages history, or, to be precise, a coherent narrative of the past, as a central element of identity-formation processes. Langston's journey to the US is not only an attempt to reclaim the past; it is also a self-therapeutic journey into his self to re-establish a coherent and continuous personal identity. Initially, Langston presents himself as a man of multiple social identities: “A woman at a party said Moroccans were sexist pigs, so *I became* a Moroccan. Then I started *claiming* I was part Jewish, part Cree, part Zulu, part anything people were running down. My *game of multiple identities* continued until eighteen month ago, when my wife left me.” (AKB, 2, my emphasis). What starts as a game becomes over time a feature of his personality. He exploits his ambiguous racial features in order to secure a promising job; he

⁶³⁰ Welzer, *Das kommunikative Gedächtnis*, 137-41.

⁶³¹ William Boelhower “Identity, Memory, and the Archaeological Turn in Humanistic Studies”, 23.

denies his family, especially his influential and sometimes boisterous father and tries to avoid contact with his family in general. According to his father, his heritage determines his identity. Langston himself is aware of his historical debt and confronts it with irony, stylizing himself as the black sheep of the family:

“[C]onviction ruled the lives of my ancestors. They all became doctors, or church ministers. By my age – thirty-eight – they already had their accomplishments noted in the *Afro-American*, the *Oakville Standard*, the *Toronto Times*, or the *Baltimore Sun*. I will admit that it takes a certain amount of discipline and boldness to throw oneself into high-minded professions. But it also takes something to fall from the treadmill of great accomplishments [...]” (AKB, 3).

In this passage, Langston stylizes his refusal of family obligations as an accomplishment. The choice of words shows that, at this point in time, he regards his contesting of family traditions as part of his personal identity. By not making his accomplishments public through the proper social channels, he remains an undefined entity within a society that seeks to define him as an Other. Nevertheless, he takes up and plays with identities as he sees fit in order to either challenge racial and ethnic stereotypes or improve the range of his options on the job market. Initially, racial identity is only a matter of performance for Langston; being neither black nor white, he occupies a hybrid space for himself that defies absolutes, but does not provide him with cultural, racial and ethnic allegiances. The lack of a visibly defined racial identity then contributes to the development of the identity crisis he experiences. His brother Sean's unmistakable blackness and social and economic success contribute to Langston's imminent crisis: “Sean smiled. My brother's face was acorn brown. Unmistakably brown, which means that he was indisputably black, and didn't have to worry about it, or think about it, at all.” (AKB, 50). The signal words in this passage, “unmistakably” and “indisputably”, show that Langston, in contrast to his bother, regards himself as undefined because he can inhabit an indefinite number of racial and ethnic identities. But he craves a clearly defined individuality. He sees himself as a man without qualities, without future and past. In terms of post-Freudian psychology one might conclude that Langston's social performance of various distinct racial and ethnic identities are either the symptom of, or the cause of the loss of a coherent personal identity.⁶³²

⁶³² David J. de Levita, *The Concept of Identity*. Paris and the Hague: Mouton & Co, 1965, 141-43. De Levita attempted a conceptualization of the term identity in the context of Freudian psychoanalysis and sociology after Erikson. While some of his approaches are now dated, the narrative and cultural devices he relies upon, as they follow the tradition established by Freud, are appropriate to the discussion of literary texts as those strategies of representation are still dominant in cultural production.

Furthermore, one might argue that the relationship between Langston and his father, who is described as self-assertive and boisterous, is at the heart of Langston's performances of social, ethnic and racial metamorphoses.⁶³³ These performances are acts of protest against both society's bigotries, "I started claiming to be [...] anything people were running down" (AKB, 2), and the racially rooted world view of his peers. Both his father and Aberdeen Williams, a close friend of the family, are outraged at Langston's transgressive and opportunistic attitude towards racial and ethnic allegiances: "Aberdeen's grin dropped into sadness. 'If I hadn't come into Toronto, how would I have discovered that Langston Cane the Fifth had become an Algerian.'" They regard their racial heritage as a historical obligation, not something to be jeopardized for a job. Langston's father is convinced of his family's historical mission, his concept of identity is rooted in biological determinism: "the Canes come from a special mold" (AKB, 27). Meant as a formula of encouragement because his son has just lost his job, this statement also makes clear that his father expects Langston to finally position himself within the framework of expectations and obligations that go along with their family's tradition. Establishing a historical continuum, an unbroken line of ancestry, a tradition founded on both social obligation and biological relatedness is central to the philosophy of the Cane family. The practice of naming the first-born son Langston creates a continuous family tradition, the name being both an act of commemoration and a self-assertive social act that answers to the historical naming practices under slavery. As pointed out in the theoretical part of this thesis, this deterministic approach is central to human conceptions of identity. As Paul Ricoeur points out: "The demonstration of this continuity functions as a supplementary or a substitute criterion to similitude."⁶³⁴ Similitude in the sense of biological determinism is meant to evoke the image of an unbroken line, a family tradition. In the course of the plot, not only is the story developed, the narratees also witness the development of the protagonist's sense of self in terms of defining himself through his heritage. This depiction of this development ranges from an initially fragmented character, who, through establishing a close connection to the past by way of his research, gradually mends his fragmented sense of self by re-establishing continuity with the past. The text follows traditional African-American, respectively Anglo-African forms of emplotment and use of narrative voice: It is double voiced in its "tropological revision" of literary traditions.⁶³⁵ Those traditions are both evoked and challenged at the same time, a process Gates calls "signifyin(g) as repetition and

⁶³³ Ibid, 142. De Levita points out that human beings whose identity contains social roles which are not entirely stable, which have to be constantly renegotiated with other people, are more likely to develop pathological identity disorders.

⁶³⁴ Ricoeur, *Myself as Another*, 117.

⁶³⁵ Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey*, xxv.

difference.”⁶³⁶ In the text, two distinct narrative voices are employed to stress the development of the central character's identity in time. This identity development the text depicts does not retrace the protagonist's spiritual and cultural conversion central to the traditional forms of the autobiographical narrative, but instead retraces the mending of his sense of self by way of memory work. This particular doubling of voices highlights the paradox of human experience; while we regard our selves as static, this sense of permanence is only created through narrative emplotment.

In terms of emplotment the text does not only rely on the conventions of Anglo-African slave narratives and autobiographies, it also takes recourse to the romance, or rather quest-narrative. Langston Cane's journey to Baltimore is both a symbolic journey to the beginnings of his family, a journey back in time and a quest for truth and historical continuity. In this context, narrative functions as a means to reduce historical contingency: As Neumann and Nünning point out: “Our experience and knowledge are not simply given or naturally meaningful; rather they must be ordered, articulated and interpreted – i.e. narrated – to become meaningful.”⁶³⁷ In this context, narrative and identity are deeply intertwined as the experience can only become meaningful through the act of telling, making the gap between self and same diminish through creating a narrative identity. In addition to the depiction of Langston's personal development through an interplay of naïve and experienced voice, the text also features a third voice, an extra- and heterodiegetic narrator. This narrative voice is used to emplot the results of the research and to articulate stories handed down as family legends.

Obviously, these stories not only contain Langston's historical research, they also illustrate his idea of recreating the past in terms of blending the historical with the imaginative. The recourse to traditional African-American narrative strategies for the protagonist's narrative identity has certain cultural implication that will be discussed in the following. In this context, the re-establishment of the formerly fractured notion of historical continuity of North-American blackness serves as a re-integrative interdiscourse.⁶³⁸ Memory work is depicted as essential to the future of African-Canadian presence and their contribution to the new Canada as it contributes a different strand to the national narrative. Being able to retrace the past of one's ethnic community

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

⁶³⁷ Birgit Neumann & Ansgar Nünning, “Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Narrative and Identity”, 5.

⁶³⁸ Hubert Zapf, “Literature as Cultural Ecology: Notes Towards a Functional Theory of Imaginative Texts with Examples from American Literature.” in: *REAL: Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature* 17. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2001, 85-100 [91].

becomes a form of empowerment. It provides continuity on a personal and a larger scale and serves as a counter history to the prevailing national narratives.

As mentioned before, two central characters from *Some Great Thing*, Mahatma Grafton and Yoyo, also appear in *Any Known Blood*, whereby Mahatma's appearance is not of central importance. Yoyo has a similar function in *Any Known Blood* as in its predecessor. He becomes Langston's friend and contributes to his process of coming to terms with himself and his family. Nevertheless, Yoyo has changed during the ten years that lie between his time in Manitoba and Baltimore. Yoyo is no longer a Cameroonian journalist on a grant to visit and study a western country, but has become a fugitive from political upheavals in his native country, an illegal immigrant. Moreover, he has entirely accepted liberal market economy as his creed:

“I'm a good cleaner,” Yoyo said. “But I have to make my living. This is America. I got you this apartment, and I don't ask for any gratuity. But here is what you can do for me, my friend. Pay me forty-five dollars cash – special rate for friends – and I will clean this apartment for you. [...]” (AKB, 106)

Yoyo has internalized Adam Smith's idea of the interplay between self-interest and public benefit. Having ridiculed North-American self-centredness and self-interest in *Some Great Thing*, he has developed into an avid propagator of a liberal market economy. The “American-Canadian dream of monetary success” that Arnold Itwaru has described as an overarching issue in North-American immigrant narratives, is – for Yoyo – bound to a certain code of conduct, a work ethics that transcends the mere act of money making.⁶³⁹ The “failure of that ideological promise”, which, according to Itwaru, is an overarching criteria of most of the texts that he discusses, cannot be detected in *Some Great Thing*.⁶⁴⁰ In terms of monetary success, Yoyo does not progress from “rags to riches,” but through his sense of business and his unrelenting striving to understand and use the principles of the free market to his own advantage, he makes a decent living. Yoyo's has acquired his knowledge about the internal workings of the US market economy through the study of self-help books like “*How to Succeed in America*” (AKB, 227). For Yoyo, succeeding in America is life-preserving. He lives in constant fear of being discovered and subsequently deported as an illegal immigrant. Deportation, as Yoyo is sure, would endanger his life. When a friend of Langston's aunt Mill asks him critically why he “contributed to the

⁶³⁹ Arnold Itwaru, *The Invention of Canada*, 27.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 28.

brain drain from Africa” he answers ironically “[m]y brain would probably have been draining, thanks to a blow from a shovel or a bullet, had I returned to Cameroon” (AKB, 249). Through Yoyo, the necessity for a reassessment of the laws granting an immigrant political asylum is thematized. Yoyo felt the need to “go underground”, to become “an illegal” because one of his colleagues who had applied for political asylum “was jailed and deported to Cameroon after three month of court arguments” (AKB, 101). The novel depicts the legal situation of political refugees as unjust. As an illegal immigrant, Yoyo lives both in the heart and on the very margins of society. After having had to flee from the police twice, he even becomes reluctant to appear in public places. Like Langston, he chooses his identities at will. While proudly presenting the TV-set which “helped [him] improve his English” (AKB, 102) to Langston, moments later he plays “up the poor-Cameroonian-refuge role” (AKB, 109), to bargain for a good price with a credulous student. Nevertheless, it is not his willingness to diversify and adapt to the market situation which, towards the end of the novel, makes him a striving entrepreneur, but his return to his previous profession as a journalist. His former Canadian acquaintances H el ene Savoie and Mahatma Grafton convince one of their editors to publish Yoyo's articles. These articles turn out to be a great hit with a readership that perceives them as satires on North-American practices and institutions, a reception that surprises Yoyo because he had no satirical agenda in writing them. Yoyo is a comic character because he is most amusing when he tries to be serious. This apparent misreading of his articles again foregrounds the public's problem to take the perspectives of outsiders seriously; the mirror that Yoyo provides to society distorts the shared imaginaries and certainties and creates confusion and uncertainty which culminates in merriment and laughter that might be understood as a way of coping with this confusion. Yoyo's unintended satires are satirical in the purest sense of the word as they “censure and ridicule the follies and vices of society and thus bring contempt and derision upon the aberrations from a desirable and civilized norm.”⁶⁴¹ Yoyo's power as a satirist originates from his down-to-earth perspective of the illegal alien. But in the context of the novel, these articles have an additional function: they reiterate central themes from Yoyo's point of view, a process that sheds a different light on these themes. Yoyo's articles function as a meta-commentary on issues negotiated in the novel, either satirizing society's obsession with political correctness and the centrality of race in public discourse, or pointing to the transnational aspects of the family history Langston is unearthing.

The episodes of Langston's family's history he attempts to recreate coincide with phases

⁶⁴¹ J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. (Revised by C.E. Preston) London: Penguin Group, 1999, 780.

of radical change in African-American and African-Canadian history. They are set in the 1950s, the 1920s, and the late 1850s. By focusing on these phases, Langston shows how individuals, during a certain period in history, confronted the challenges imposed on them by their environment. In this fictionalization of history, Langston's ancestors are the harbingers of change. Both his father and grandfather are depicted as leaders who, despite their shortcomings, are able to change society for the better. They are illustrative of the fact that the novel's protagonists act within the boundaries of an ethical philosophy based on the idea of moral responsibility. They follow the categorical imperative to do what is morally most appropriate. In one episode of the novel, set in the 1920s, Langston Cane III, having been asked to attend a supposedly dying youth to pray for him, finds out that the boy is far from dying and just needs medical help. Consequentially, he brings the young boy to a hospital and asks for admittance. In spite of the hospital's racist policies not to admit black patients, he makes them treat the boy. Langston IV eventually overcomes the boy's mother's reluctance to have her boy taken to the hospital and defies the hospital's racist practices. His behaviour is both unconventional within the historical context and appropriate to the situation. Through the apparent unorthodoxy of his actions he sets new social standards and becomes a role model who challenges and redefines social practices. Langston Cane III's adherence to the categorical imperative to do what is morally right sets him apart from his fellow human beings whose capacity to act morally right has been occluded by ethically problematic social practices. Against this unorthodoxy, the mother's reluctance to have her son transferred to a hospital seems unnatural.⁶⁴² The situation appears therefore constructed, but it stresses how Langston III is stylized as a moral authority. Social change, as the novel shows is based on morally appropriate actions: “[...] there are times for praying, and there are times for doing. This is a doing time” (AKB, 274-75). Langston Cane III's moral realism is grounded on a practical understanding of morality. He is both aware of the long-term repercussions of an action, about the need to differentiate between conventional and unconventional actions, and the need to chose the latter when the end achieved might be classified as morally desirable.

However, in Lawrence Hill's narrative fiction, racism is rarely depicted as an institutionalized practice. Violence against minorities is usually perpetrated by people who exist on the margin of society themselves, not as a mass phenomenon. Both the Ku Klux Klan episode

⁶⁴² Cf. Russ Shafer-Landau, “A Defence of Ethical Nonnaturalism.” in Russ Shafer-Landau (ed.), *Ethical Theory: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, 62-72 [69]. Shafer-Landau points out that “moral principles and facts aren't meant to explain behaviour, or anticipate our actions, but rather to *prescribe* how we ought to behave, or *evaluate* states or events. (italics in the original).

in this novel and the race riots described in *The Book of Negroes* illustrate this conciliatory depiction of racial violence. In *Any Known Blood*, Canadian institutions unfailingly protect the rights and interests of the black community. After having arrested the Ku Klux Klan activists in front of the Cane family domicile in Oakville, the police chief assures Langston III of his solidarity: “[...] You're good folks Reverend Cane. This should not have happened to you. And I happen to know that ninety-nine out of a hundred in Oakville would agree with me.” (AKB, 323). Hill unearths these histories of violence in his novels, but unlike his peers Clarke and Brand, he does not deal with them as symptomatic of Canadian society. Representatives of Canadian institutions in Hill's fiction, like the chief of police in *Any Known Blood*, do not transgress and violate ethical codes of conduct; they do not abuse those under their protection as it frequently happens to Brand's characters, and do not clandestinely perpetuate a system of racial inequality, they simply do their duty. In this respect, Hill's fiction diverges from an established pattern and provides a moderating counterpoint to those more decided problematizations.

The repeated switching between different settings, between Canada and the United States, reiterates the idea that New World African history can only be meaningfully articulated when its transnational character is duly considered. When the plot thickens, the number of narrative voices and sub-plots proliferate. At the outset of Langston's research, the novel features his self-reflexive narrative voice and a third person narrator – his assumed narrative voice – who turns the extant items of information into coherent linear narratives. But with the proliferation of information through his research, the narrative voices and storylines, too, become more numerous. Langston's research is emplotted into three interrelated story lines; the first two epochs are covered by the third person narrator. Some of the sub-plots are linked to his research, while others, especially the sub-plot dealing with Yoyo, can stand on their own. The novel ends with Langston Cane I's autobiography, which Langston V obtains from an archive. The integration of this autobiographical text – structurally modelled on nineteenth-century slave narratives – restores historical agency to Langston's great-great-grandfather; however, it also breaks down the structural unity of his fictionalized family history. It is a text within a text, which, despite using a similar register, introduces a different narrative voice. This proliferation of voices at the end of the novel is symbolic. By breaking down the established emplotment strategies, the novel is liberated from its own confines. A side effect is that the boundary between fact and fiction, between Langston's narratives and his ancestor's autobiography, becomes even more blurry. This narrative provides closure to the research story lines and grants an insight into the origins of the moral dilemma Langston I's descendants saw themselves confronted with, an

insight from the perspective of the alleged perpetrator himself. These insights allows for a re-evaluation of Langston I's problematized heritage which will be discussed in the following.

The novel can be labelled as historiographic metafiction because it explicitly thematizes the narrator's research process and progress.⁶⁴³ By juxtaposing past with present the dynamics of Langston's research and his personal involvement become part of the past he attempts to recreate. Contrary to Hutcheon's diagnosis, which argues that this foregrounding of narrative processes is primarily a problematization of positivist historiography's truth-claim, this narrative focuses on the protagonist's moral redemption through recreating his family's past. Furthermore, through the integration of letters and documents into the novel, agency is returned to those formerly silenced by history. This proliferation of voices is a symbolic refusal of master narratives. The novel perpetuates the idea that history can only be meaningful when it incorporates more than one position and more than one point of view. Nevertheless, contrary to prevailing claims that New World African narratives, especially African-Canadian narratives, unearth a past that was denied to this minority, the novel shows that the Canes' themselves were most interested in keeping some family secrets from being unearthed.

Both Langston Cane IV and his sister Mill are not too eager to have their past thematized in a novel. While the first had committed minor misdemeanours, the latter was working as a prostitute in her youth. Langston Cane I was, apart from his involvement in John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, a person not without slight moral weaknesses. When Langston Cane III receives a document about his grandfather's alleged moral transgressions he asks Aberdeen Williams to hide them for him. He feels morally responsible for the deeds of his grandfather and regards the documents he obtains as a threat to his personal integrity and to the social position of his family. Nevertheless, he does not destroy the documents which Aberdeen would have regarded as "destroying history" (AKB, 302). Langston Cane III acts as a moral realist. He is both aware that his "reasons are determined entirely by his circumstances" and that his decisions, if they prove to be irreversible, might have negative implications for the future as he cannot determine whether his moral judgement is clouded by his current situation.⁶⁴⁴ Even if the novel is not implicitly thematizing Langston Cane III's reaction, his actions were motivated by a sense of moral responsibility for the actions of his ancestor, and, at the same time, his responsibility for his family. Judged from a contemporary position, Langston I's transgressions might not be deemed

⁶⁴³ Cf. Linda Hutcheon, *Historiographic Metafiction*, 3.

⁶⁴⁴ Michael Smith, "Realism" in: Shafer-Landau, *Ethical Theory*, 72-76 [75].

too serious. For Langston V's grandfather, a Baptist minister, however, his ancestor's diary, if it had become known to the public, would inevitably have resulted in a loss of credibility. By way of these different assessments, the novel shows that ethic judgements are often bound to time and circumstances. As Galen Strawson points out, the notion of moral responsibility is often tightly linked to either guilt or shame.⁶⁴⁵

Having uncovered the weaknesses of his ancestors, seeing that his idealized forebears are also human beings, Langston can finally come to term with his own moral imperfections. Langston's research shows that the idea of his ancestors as a continuous line of socially and morally impeccable human beings is nothing but a myth. By uncovering the dark spots in the family history and thereby demystifying the past, Langston V presentifies the past in terms of moral evaluation and sense of continuity. By finding out about Langston Cane I's ambiguous historical and moral position, he can establish a different idea of continuity, one that is not based on mystifying idealization but on common humanity:

I told Mill that I felt strangely connected to Langston the First. "I love the fact that he didn't fit in. I love him for his mixture of weakness and dignity."

"Don't make a hero out of him", Mill said. "He lived in hard times, but was a regular man. But you're right about him not fitting in. If you ask me, the man had a chromosome that skipped a few generations and turned up in you." She had a point. (497)

The disenchantment of Langston Cane I frees his descendant Langston V of the historical obligation to live up to the ethical standard set by some of his ancestors. By revealing the faults of his forebears, Langston V uncovers the fragile fabric of his family's attempts at self-fashioning, perpetuated by covering up their inadequacies.

The motif of the healing power of historical knowledge runs through Lawrence Hill's first two novels. Both protagonists define themselves through their immersion in their families' past. While *Some Great Thing* stresses the importance of a continuous history and a coherent idea of the past for the protagonist's development, this idea is taken one step further in *Any Known Blood* as the protagonist's research on the past serves as a healing tonic that restores both his disrupted sense of self and reunites him with his family. Paradoxically, Langston Cane has to break down established continuities and dismantle the myth of belonging to a family of super-

⁶⁴⁵ Galen Strawson, "The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility." in: Shafer-Landau, *Ethical Theory*, 345.

archivers. By demystifying his ancestors, by making them human again, Langston can finally attempt to realize his own potential. Both novels play with the conventional distinction between fiction and fact, imaginative narratives and historiography, showing that both forms traditionally depend on each other. Accordingly, writing about the past, if it is supposed to be effective, must be like storytelling about the past. Fiction, on the other hand, is most effective – in terms of discursive power – when it bears close resemblance to the reality this discursive community shares. While Hill claims both novels to be largely fictitious, he undermines this statement in the paratextual commentaries and also, especially with regard to *Any Known Blood*, through the artwork. Hill's doubling of the motif of the literary doppelgänger, both hints at a highly playful attitude towards postmodern literary stereotypes and a problematization of autobiographical narratives. Those characters have to be regarded as authorial spokespersons, articulating and problematizing both cultural issues and literary concepts.

8.3 The Revisionist Politics of Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes*

[I]n autobiography, as in all literature, what actually happened is less important than what the author can manage to persuade his audience to believe.⁶⁴⁶

Fiction is where individual memory and experience and collective memory and experience come together, in greater or lesser proportions. The closer the fiction is to us, the more we recognize and claim it as individual rather than collective.⁶⁴⁷

Lawrence Hill's 2007 novel *The Book of Negroes*⁶⁴⁸, published under the title *Someone Knows My Name*⁶⁴⁹ in the United States, has won great critical acclaim throughout the Anglophone world. It received the *Commonwealth Writers' Prize* as best overall book of 2008, was recommended by book clubs such as *Book Essence*, was awarded the top position on Oprah Winfrey's summer 2010 reading list and received positive reviews from diverse publications such as the *Canadian Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. The consensus of the reviews was that the novel was well researched and accurately depicts the historical situation of African-American slaves in the eighteenth century; only minor flaws in the plot structure and the novel's "skat[ing of] the perimeter of melodrama" have been criticized.⁶⁵⁰ With regard to the critical reception, Hill's novel has been as enthusiastically embraced as those of other African-Canadian authors, but in contrast to George Elliott Clarke's and Dionne Brand's works, there is one significant difference: *The Book of Negroes* is also a major commercial success, and not only in Canada, but in many other Anglophone countries.⁶⁵¹ Even if it is not clear if this large commercial success will have any impact on the Canadian cultural discourse,

⁶⁴⁶ Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*. London: Pan Books Ltd., 1982 [1981], 270-71.

⁶⁴⁷ Margaret Atwood, "In Search of *Alias Grace*: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction" in: Margaret Atwood, *Writing with Intent; Essays, Reviews, Personal Prose: 1983-2005*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2005, 158-177 [158].

⁶⁴⁸ All further references to this novel will be to the first U.S. edition published under the title *Someone Knows My Name*. London & New York: W.W. Norton, 2008 [2007]. Due to the fact that nothing but the title was changed, I will refer to the novel, for the sake of coherence, as *The Book of Negroes*. The page number will be given in parentheses in the text, the title will be abbreviated as BN.

⁶⁴⁹ The American title shows a similarity to James Baldwin's autobiography *Nobody Knows My Name*, first published in the U.S. in 1961.

⁶⁵⁰ See Jennifer Berman's review, "Lost Scribe." www.bookforum.com/inprint/014_04/1379; accessed on 02/12/2010. Berman also reads the book in comparison with Alex Haley's *Roots* and Tony Morrison's *Beloved*, coming to the conclusion that "Hill's volume stands as a thoughtful counterpart to other works [like the above mentioned] that quarry the brutalities of slavery in fictional form."

⁶⁵¹ According to the *Canadian Globe and Mail*, *The Book of Negroes* still was the best-selling novel written by a Canadian author nearly four years after its publication (01/24/2011). Due to the enormous popularity of *The Book of Negroes*, Lawrence Hill's second novel *Any Known Blood* also re-entered the best-selling list. See: <http://v1.theglobeandmail.com/v5/content/readerschoice/bestsellers/#bestsellers>.

the topics it covers, which are already quite well known, have never before been presented to such a large number of readers. In addition to Hill's frequent public readings and discussions, there has been a rise in critical engagement with his work.⁶⁵² Due to the enormous interest in the novel, Hill's publishing company W. W. Norton & Co has also issued an illustrated edition, adding photos, historical documents, contemporary pictures, printings and engravings and other pieces of information. One factor that will certainly add to its popularity is the TV mini-series broadcast by CBC in February 2015, starring illustrious actors such as Louis Gosset Jr., Cuba Gooding Jr. and Aunjanue Ellis.

Similar to the aesthetic cover concept deployed for the marketing of its predecessor, *Any Known Blood*, the cover artwork of the first US. edition of *The Book of Negroes* foreshadows central themes of the narrative. The front cover features a collage which interweaves a historical drawing of slaves at work with a photography showing an adolescent female person in front of an undulating agricultural landscape. This person is not a central element of the photography, she is situated slightly to the left, shown in semi-profile, slightly bowed back, her hands supporting her back. Her posture and the dusky light suggest that the person has just ended, or is about to end another day of hard labour. Due to the effects of the light and her posture, her face remains in the dark, her facial features are blurry. The endpaper artwork features an excerpt from the eponymous historical ledger, the original *Book of Negroes*, in which the British collected the names of those persons of colour who had served the British during the American Revolutionary War and therefore had qualified to be evacuated alongside other Loyalists. Obviously, the cover-artwork of the first edition of Hill's *Book of Negroes* does not consist of documents from Hill's personal archive as was the case with its immediate literary predecessor. The aestheticization of historical documents, however, is strategically similar to *Any Known Blood's* artwork as it contributes to the novel's narrative re-imagining of the past.

⁶⁵² In addition to being subject to countless reviews and interviews, Lawrence Hill toured Canada and most of the United States in order to present the novel to selected audiences and to engage in public discussions. So far, no large-scale study that deals with the novel has been published. Nevertheless, there are some noteworthy scholarly engagements with the text. The most comprehensive and complete essay, written by Christian J. Krampe, uses the novel as a general example for current tendencies in African-Canadian literature. In this essay Krampe describes the novel as paradigmatic for contemporary African-Canadian literature because it serves as a means for “the empowered Black subject who, through autonomous narrative identification and the will to change current heteronomous and hegemonic definitions, aims to insert his/her/their story into the larger collective memory.” This is certainly uncontested, but regrettably Krampe does not describe the narrative strategies that enable an insertion of that kind. See: Christian J. Krampe, “Visualizing Invisibility, Reversing Anonymity: A Case Study in African-Canadian Literature.” in: Birgit Haehnel & Melanie Ulz (ed.), *Slavery in Art and Literature; Approaches to Trauma, Memory and Visuality*. Leipzig: Frank & Timme, 2010, 301-340 [334].

In the following passages I will provide an unusually long plot summary. I deem this plot summary necessary in order to show which narrative conventions the novel echoes and in which historical and geographic context it has to be discussed. The novel covers the years between 1756 and 1804; it describes the various journeys of Aminata Diallo, the novel's protagonist, born in 1745, who was abducted from her home town Bajo in Western Africa and shipped on the middle passage to America to be sold into slavery there. For the sake of authenticity – due to limitations in printing technique, most eighteenth-century novels were published in rather short instalments, and for structural reasons, the novel is divided into four books. Each book starts with a short introduction in which Aminata informs her readers about the writing process, her state of health and the success of her endeavours as a member of the abolitionist movement in London. These introductions cover the years between 1802 and 1804.

The first book begins in 1756; it depicts Aminata's African environment, the social structures in her village, and her relationship with her parents. This rather harmonious constellation is disrupted by the violent assault of the slave traders on Bajo, which results in the murder of Aminata's parents and her abduction. She and two other people, Fanta, the fourth wife of the chief, and Fomba, a “woloso”, which means captive of the village, are captured and subsequently led, in a three-month trip, to the coast of West Africa. From there they embark on the middle passage. During the journey, Aminata is drawn into an unsuccessful mutiny on the slave ship. The second book covers her first years as a slave in the British North-American colonies. It describes the inhumane treatment of Aminata on her arrival on Sullivan Island and her dehumanization on the slave market. It also depicts the workings and routines of the plantation economy, the social life and the communication structures of the black slaves and presents two forms of slavery to the readers: domestic and agricultural. After Aminata, who had secretly married Chekura, a boy who was first part of the gang that abducted her and later was sold himself, gives birth to a boy, she and her son are sold to separate households. She is sold to Solomon Lindo who is one of a business associate of her former owner Robin Appleby. Her child is sold into a different family; his whereabouts are unknown to Aminata. After several years with Lindo, who encourages her endeavours to improve her intellectual abilities – she was taught to read and write by a fellow slave on Appleby's plantation – in order to cash in on them, Aminata flees while being on a trip to Manhattan. The third book covers the years between 1775 and 1783. In this book Aminata describes her flight from Lindo, who, as she found out, was responsible for selling her son, and her ensuing life as a refugee. On the eve of the American Revolution she associates with the British troops, as she is able to help a young officer whose

black and under-aged mistress is expecting a child. During the following years in Manhattan, respectively Holy Ground, she teaches African-American refugees who live there, works for the British as midwife and writer and is finally hired to co-write the eponymous *Book of Negroes*, a system of files in which all persons of colour who have acquired a certificate signed by General Birch are registered. Those people have rendered services to the British troops for at least one year and, as per Lord Dunmore's proclamation of 1775, are therefore guaranteed liberty. In Manhattan Aminata also meets her husband Chekura, again who had also served the British and is therefore a free man and they conceive another child. Under dramatic circumstances, Aminata reaches one of the last British ships leaving for Nova Scotia. Through Aminata's eyes the readers experience the dire situation of the settlement in Birchtown, Nova Scotia, the initial lack of provisions, the shocking housing conditions, and the failure, or rather unwillingness, of the British to fulfil their promises. After giving birth to her daughter May, Aminata works for the local newspaper and as a midwife again. In the course of race riots, May is kidnapped by the Witherspoons, a couple Aminata had worked for. After several unsuccessful attempts to find out where they took May and on hearing that her husband Chekura drowned on the way to Nova Scotia, Aminata finally decides to join the Back-to-Africa Movement inaugurated and led by Thomas Peters and John Clarkson. The fourth book describes the beginnings of the settlement of black Loyalists in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Having arrived in Africa, the black Loyalists realize that the company never intended to grant them self-government and economic freedom and that the indigenous people do not accept them as Africans. Despite this problematic situation Aminata tries to make her dream come true and, due to the help of the company's surgeon Alexander Falconbridge, manages to reach the interior of Africa. On this trip she realizes that she cannot make up for the years she has lost and that her former home town would no longer be familiar. Due to this insight she decides to travel to England and follow Clarkson's invitation to join the Abolitionists. In London she starts to write down her life story and finally meets her daughter May again.

The novel apparently represents historical fiction in its classic sense. There is no hint, no aspect in the novel that foregrounds its fictitiousness; the protagonist, her narrative voice and the genre it meticulously adheres to, stress this apparent lack of meta-level. Its realism is based on the narrator's subjectivity whose development the narratees are invited to share in retrospection. Her subjectivity, is hybrid, both in cultural perspective and moral outlook. She critically reflects on western institutions, customs and cultural practices, facilitating an insight into this particular epoch. The novel is strikingly less experimental than the longer historical fictions by George

Elliott Clarke and Dionne Brand discussed in the first two close reading parts of this study. Even in contrast to Hill's previous novel *Any Known Blood*, which, in terms of emplotment strategy, is far more challenging, *The Book of Negroes* marks a return to more traditional narrative structure. As the novel engages with the history of transatlantic slavery, it can be classified as a neo-slave narrative.⁶⁵³ As neo-slave narratives originate from a certain social and intellectual environment, their coming-into-existence implies a change of paradigms with regard to the prevailing power structures of a society. Therefore, the first aspect that has to be mentioned is that this literary form can be read within the boundaries of its historical context.

This implies that their coming into existence has been encouraged by a certain intellectual climate in which the hegemonic discursive formation shows signs of erosion that are due to a recently changed power structure.⁶⁵⁴ Following Rushdy, it can be argued that, with regard to the literary tradition of the U.S., there were basically two historical schisms that influenced this particular form of literary production; the Civil War and the ensuing liberation of the African-American population, and the Civil-Rights Movement of the 1960s.⁶⁵⁵ If we transfer Rushdy's assessment from the U.S. to Canada, it can be inferred that a comparable process was triggered by Canada's multiculturalism policy, which caused a renaissance of African-Canadian writing beginning in the 1980s, including neo-slave narratives such as Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (1999) and Austin Clarke's *The Polished Hoe* (2002). In contrast to the above-mentioned works, Hill's novel and the narrative structures it follows constantly refer and relate to its earliest generic predecessors. There are two possible reasons for the novel's recourse to the genre's beginnings namely simulating authenticity and continuity. Slave narratives, as they are autobiographies, traditionally lay claim to historical veracity. As slave narratives mark a cornerstone of Anglo-African literary traditions, following these generic conventions also implies an implicit claim of continuity with these traditions. These aspects will be examined and their function in the cultural discourse will be described in the course of this chapter. As in the other close-reading chapters of this study, I will focus on the functional aspects of literature,

⁶⁵³ For a short but concise definition and summary of the genre see: Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, "Neo-Slave Narratives." in: William L. Andrews (ed. et al.), *The Oxford Companion to African-American Literature*. New York & Oxford: OUP, 1997, 533-35. Rushdy has also published a full-length study on this topic: *Neo-Slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form*. Oxford & New York: OUP, 1999.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid, 13. According to Rushdy's theoretical approach, discursive formations are of a cyclical nature. A change in power/social structures therefore implies the emergence of a new discursive formation that challenges the hegemonic discourse and its effects on critical thinking.

⁶⁵⁵ In his large scale study of neo-slave narratives Rushdy shows that the two-period structure he established in his earlier essays was too narrow-minded because one of the most defining periods for this literary form, the years of the Reagan administration, which is still remembered because of its "rising right-wing attacks on affirmative action", had not been considered. Rushdy, *Neo-Slave Narratives*, 10-14.

following Fluck's approach that “concentrates on literature as a domain in which the existing world is given form through negotiations with [the author's] personal interests and desires.”⁶⁵⁶ An approach that was later transferred to the field of black-Atlantic writing by Eckstein.

Structure, narrative voice and outlook of the novel are direct references to its most important intertext. As Stephanie Yorke points out in her article on *The Book of Negroes*, Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself* (1789), is the structural and generic foil on which it was modelled.⁶⁵⁷ Scholarly interest in Equiano's autobiographical narrative has recently intensified. Its authenticity has become the focus point of scholarly debates, and, despite these debates, the book has repeatedly been used by historians as a blueprint for all later descriptions of the transatlantic slave trade.⁶⁵⁸ Yorke states that there is a complicated relationship between Hill's novel and its intertexts, especially to Equiano's narrative, to which it “adheres while it simultaneously undermines the generic conventions it established.”⁶⁵⁹ Yorke stresses that the temporal setting of Aminata's autobiography, which would have been among the books defining the genre of the slave narrative if it had really been published in 1804, is of crucial importance for the subversive treatment of its intertext. Equiano and his narrative feature in the *Book of Negroes*, both – to use Eckstein's terminology – as a thematization and as a dramatization. In the fictional story of Aminata Diallo, Equiano' and his autobiography are mentioned and brought into the focus of the readers as one of the sources of 'inspiration' for the fictitious author. However, *The Book of Negroes* is not attempt at literary parody that re-stages the events described in its intertext in meticulous detail. It appropriates the time and narrative frameworks frame provided by the intertext while deviating in perspective and trajectory.

According to Yorke, most pre-abolition slave narratives confirmed, or even established racial prejudices, rather than challenging them, a line of argumentation that I find rather questionable as those narratives should be discussed in their historical context.⁶⁶⁰ By reducing

⁶⁵⁶ Lars Eckstein, *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic. On the Poetics and Politics of Literary Memory*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2006, 56-57.

⁶⁵⁷ Stephanie Yorke, “The Slave Narrative Tradition in Lawrence Hill’s *The Book of Negroes*.” *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne*, No. 35, 2010.

⁶⁵⁸ Douglas R Egerton, *Death or Liberty: African Americans and Revolutionary America*. Oxford & New York: OUP, 2009. Egerton tries to fill in the blanks in Equiano's narrative and thereby create a coherent portrait of the transatlantic world before the Revolutionary War.

⁶⁵⁹ Yorke, “The Slave Narrative Tradition”, 129.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid. Yorke's argument that later slave narratives are “geared toward a white Christian audience” and are therefore using “a set of market tested tropes” and follow “a set of standardized Eurocentric criteria” does not in the least explain their alleged function of establishing and intensifying racial essentialism. It is more appropriate

slave narratives, or other pre-abolition writing, to their rigid reliance on generic conventions, one tends to forget that those narratives have “been of signal importance to African-Americans, intent as they have had to be upon demonstrating both common humanity with whites and upon demonstrating that their 'selves' were, somehow, as whole, integral, educable, and as noble as were those of any other American ethnic group.”⁶⁶¹ What is most problematic about Yorke's line of argumentation is that, while focussing on the re-appropriation of the genre in Hill's novel, it disregards the genre's original discursive function and over-emphasizes the genre's tendency to operate on the juxtaposition of dichotomies. To develop her line of argumentation, Yorke actually sets Olaudah Equiano's narrative as the genre-defining original text. Considering the latest research, this point of view has actually been invalidated. As Ogude and most recently Carretta have shown, Equiano frequently used and re-appropriated information and narrative structures from different sources into his own text.⁶⁶² The authenticity and generic positioning of Equiano's narrative is therefore highly questionable. Equiano, apparently a man of letters himself, infused his narrative with references to John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, whose imagery he used to describe the vile practices of slavery. Especially for his descriptions of the infliction of corporeal punishment on slaves by their white masters, he resorted to Milton's description of hell. In terms of philosophical background, too, Equiano's narrative is firmly rooted in eighteenth-century enlightenment philosophy. Furthermore, Equiano's narrative was generically rooted in the tradition of the spiritual autobiography as he describes his personal transformations and conversions from non-Christian to Christian, from enslaved to free, from proslavery to abolitionist.⁶⁶³ In contrast to Yorke's reductive claim that *The Book of Negroes* primarily challenges those structures established through, or in the wake of, Equiano's autobiography, I would rather argue that it is primarily the historical situation of the individual in time the novel is interested in. The genre-defining works which were published in this period and the narrative conventions they follow are not undermined, or parodied, but have been thrice translocated, not

to state that all pro-abolition publications – necessarily – dealt in absolutes; otherwise they would not have fulfilled their literary function. Without resorting to the simple means of binary oppositions of good and evil, a novel like Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would never have been that widely read and historically important. As Elizabeth Ammons wrote: “Perhaps the continuing, most important characteristic of the novel is its ability to make readers argue about important issues.” Elizabeth Ammons, “Preface” in: Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. New York & London: Norton & Co., 1993 [1852], ix.

⁶⁶¹ Henry Louis Gates, “Introduction: On Bearing Witness” in: Henry Louis Gates, *Bearing Witness: Selections from African-American Autobiography in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Pantheon Books, 199, 7.

⁶⁶² Eckstein, *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic*, 28-31. See also Carretta's recently published biography of Equiano, in which he points out that “[b]y 1789 the horrors of the coerced Atlantic crossing had already been widely reported, as Equiano knew [...]. His [Equiano's] description of the preparation for departure from Africa, however, is the most frequently quoted record of the Middle Passage because he gives voice to the inarticulate millions who suffered it.”

⁶⁶³ Carretta, xvii.

as a challenge, but as an homage.⁶⁶⁴ These translocations occur on the temporal, spatial and gender level, whereby the last is both the counterpoint to, as well as a consequence of, the first two. This level seems to engage with the notion, prevalent in pre-deconstructive feminism, which centres on the “pervasive cultural condition in which women's lives were either misrepresented or not represented at all.”⁶⁶⁵ Indeed, this is the case with regard to most slave narratives as they were predominantly written by male authors and show considerable signs of external editing. To counteract and lay bare this obvious under-representation, the novel feigns a certain kind of authorship and, by pointing to the mechanisms and generic conventions, stresses its own claim to authenticity, as the laying bare of those conventions does not serve as a meta-commentary on the creation of the text, but rather as a commentary on the social forces at work at that time.⁶⁶⁶ The feigned authenticity itself has to be regarded as a twofold problem because neither the genre it relates to nor the novel as its fictional re-functionalization fulfil the generically implied truth claim. Furthermore, it may be argued to which extent a mixed-race male author of the twenty-first century might adopt the perspective of an eighteenth-century African-American women in a narrative that does not thematize its fictitiousness on a meta level. Nevertheless, as this thesis primarily deals with the representation of the past in longer African-Canadian narratives and poems, this issue will not be explored further. For the sake of the argument I will side with Yorke, who claims that “Aminata gains authority as the representative of a social group” by sharing her experiences and thus “maintaining memory within a collective context.”⁶⁶⁷

The first aspect of this triple translocation is the translocation of traditional African-American narratives into a different national, or even transnational context. The term tradition, as Hobsbawm points out, describes “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.”⁶⁶⁸ The

⁶⁶⁴ The term translocation follows Judith Still's & Michael Worton's [gender studies influenced] theory of intertextuality in so far as it includes the notion that “each imitation is also necessarily determined by the literary and socio-linguistic codes in force at the time of its writing (and, analogously, of its reading). Consequently, an imitative text both presents and *is* a tension between two ideolects and two or more sociolects.” See: Still & Worton, “Introduction” in: Judith Still & Michael Worton (eds.), *Intertextuality; Theories and Practices*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990, 7 (italicization by the authors).

⁶⁶⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York & London: Routledge, 1990, 2.

⁶⁶⁶ The concept of social forces, as it is used in this study, follows Foucault's concept of power as a regulative, but also constructive force. This presupposition, as Eckstein's study has shown, allows for a fruitful analysis of discursive structures because it takes the circular aspect of power structures into consideration. See: Eckstein, *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic*, 23, but also: Michel Foucault, *Power: Essential Works of Foucault*. Vol. III (ed. James D Faubion). New York: The New Press, 2000, 120.

⁶⁶⁷ Yorke, 139-140.

⁶⁶⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions.” in: Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger (eds.), *The*

origin of African-Canadian literary traditions are quite similar to those of African-American literature, but, as Clarke points out, “it originated as a rebuke to the American Revolution and its pure, internal contradiction, namely, chattel slavery.”⁶⁶⁹ By including Canada as a station on Aminata's odyssey home, a place she actually never reaches, the novel shows that Canada is part of the African diaspora. Applying Gerke's terminology, it can be said that Hill's fictitious remembering of African-Canadian history, using the structures and forms from which originated the African-Canadian literary tradition, creates a national narrative that functions as a founding myth in so far as it depicts the origins of a community.⁶⁷⁰ It can therefore be said that Hill, as “a personal agent” – a term borrowed from Eckstein – responds to “certain social discourses of memory and commemoration” with his “own fictional mnemonic design.”⁶⁷¹ Taking part in a mnemonic discourse includes the positioning of a text within a framework of cultural and textual references; intertextuality must therefore be regarded as a functional aspect of memory work. The re-working and re-membering of narrative strategies through the authors, and the actual effect, respectively the creation of meaning through the readers, are both part of social discourses of memory.⁶⁷² Accordingly, Hill's conceptual use of the slave narrative genre does tell us something about Canadian mnemonic culture. As Still and Worton point out: “Every literary imitation is a *supplement* which seeks to complete and supplant the original and which functions at times for later readers as the pre-text of the 'original'.”⁶⁷³

By resorting to the structural means and the autobiographical techniques used in Equiano's life story, *The Book of Negroes* potentially activates the cultural memory of its readers and additionally re-negotiates the status of the narrative in contemporary culture.⁶⁷⁴ In order to achieve that, a dialogic relationship between both texts exists which sheds light on the socio-cultural function of Equiano's autobiography. The palimpsestic form of *The Book of Negroes* additionally lends itself to incorporating other narratives, images and perspectives. A female

Invention of Tradition. London & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983, 1-11 [1].

⁶⁶⁹ Clarke, *Odysseys Home*, 107.

⁶⁷⁰ Hans-Joachim Gehrke, “Geschichtsbilder und Gründungsmythen – Vorwort” in H.-J. Gehrke (ed.), *Geschichtsbilder und Gründungsmythen*. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2001, 9.

⁶⁷¹ Eckstein, *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic*, 11.

⁶⁷² As Still and Worton point out, “both axes of intertextuality [...] are emotionally and politically charged; the object of an act of *influence*, whether by a powerful figure (say, a father) or by a social structure (say, the Church), does not receive or perceive that pressure as neutral.” See: Still & Worton, “Introduction,” 2.

⁶⁷³ Still & Worton, “Introduction”, 7 (italics by the authors).

⁶⁷⁴ Aleida Assmann divides literature into two categories, canon and archive. Equiano's autobiography has actually been canonized as U.S. American literature, being a predecessor for many African-American writers. It therefore belongs to the active cultural memory because it is among the “works of art which are, destined to be repeatedly re-read, appreciated, staged, performed, and commented.” Aleida Assmann, “The Dynamics of Cultural Memory between Remembering and Forgetting.” in: Astrid Erll & Ansgar Nünning, *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*. Berlin & New York: De Gruyter, 2010, 99.

perspective and a changed historical outlook are inscribed into a textual tradition that had been functionally regarded as argumentative work against slavery and the slave trade, and was later identified as a cornerstone of African-American and African-Canadian literary traditions. Equiano, who, as Vincent Carretta suggests was “a self-made-man”, did not only free himself from the shackles of slavery, he also re-invented himself in his autobiography.⁶⁷⁵ This highlights the ambiguous position of autobiographical writing in African-American and African-Canadian culture. While it is valued as highly important for the establishment of a literary tradition⁶⁷⁶, this genre, and its inherent truth claim, can evidently be problematized.⁶⁷⁷ The genre on the one hand invites its readers, due to the seeming factuality and the eye-witness perspective of the narrator to “willingly suspend their disbelief”, and the common reader might find him/herself very much inclined to do so. This view is confirmed by Ann Jefferson in her essay on the autobiographical works of Barthes, Sarraute and Robbe-Grillet, contending that “the conjunction of autobiography and fiction in actual writing practice is still apt to be felt of as something of a scandal.”⁶⁷⁸ On the other hand, as Eckstein has summarized: “Rather, one must always take into account the possibility that the individual interpretation has enhanced quite a number of distortions. This second dilemma supplements the issue of 'true' representations with the issue of 'truthful' representations.”⁶⁷⁹ But it is not truthfulness of an autobiographical narrative that is at stake here, it is its probability, plausibility and coherence of the relations established by those texts. In this respect Equiano's status is outstanding; he is generally regarded as a cultural icon, as the creator of the slave-narrative genre, and as one of the most influential abolitionists of his time. Equiano's status as a cultural icon is explicitly thematized in *The Book of Negroes*:

⁶⁷⁵ Carretta contests that: “Recent biographical discoveries have cast doubt on Equiano's story of his birth and early years. The available evidence suggests that the author of *The Interesting Narrative* may have invented rather than reclaimed an African identity. If so, Equiano's literary achievements have been vastly underestimated. [...] Equiano may have forged a part of his personal identity and created an Igbo national identity *avant la lettre* in order to enable himself to become an effective spokesman for his fellow diasporan Africans” Carretta, *Equiano the African*, xiv.

⁶⁷⁶ As William L. Andrews points out: Autobiography holds a position of priority, if not pre-eminence, among the narrative traditions of black America. [...] Perhaps more than any other form of literary discourse, autobiography has been chosen by African Americans to articulate ideals of selfhood integral to an African American sense of identity, both individual and communal. Andrews, “Autobiography” in: William L. Andrews (ed. et. al.) *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*. Oxford & New York: Oxford UP, 1997, 34-39 [34]

⁶⁷⁷ Gates, “Introduction: On Bearing Witness”, 4-5. Gates does not problematize the genre, but he points out that “[...] curiously enough, the structural similarities among [African-American] autobiographies suggest that black writers turn to autobiographical texts written by other black writers to pattern their own narratives.” He suggests further on that, at least structurally, many autobiographies written by African-Americans are strongly influenced by the work of their predecessors.

⁶⁷⁸ Ann Jefferson, “Autobiography as intertext: Barthes, Sarraute, Robbe-Grillet” in: Michael Worton (ed.), *Intertextuality*. Manchester & New York, 1990.

⁶⁷⁹ Eckstein, following Foucault, contests that “[t]estimonies, like all texts, are inevitably subject to the ambivalent force of social discourses of power” because they have to be in keeping with the prevailing language, “social conventions and accepted forms of expression of a social realm.” *Remembering the Black Atlantic*, 23.

Dante smiled. “We all know Equiano, “ he said. “Any one of us who succeeds among the Englishmen lives on the lips of every black in London.”

“Do you think I could meet him?”

“He died a few years ago.”

I felt deflated. Equiano was one man I would have liked to meet. I felt I already knew him after reading his story, and had hoped to ask how he had gone about writing the account of his life. (BN, 454)

This reference has two functions: it thematizes Equiano's status as a cultural icon, both then and now, and points to the generic practices of early slave narratives. Aminata's close reading of Equiano's narrative is, as Gates has shown, not without historical precedents, as most African-American authors turned to earlier works, analysed their narrative structures and then adapted those structures in their own autobiographies. Accordingly, a reading of *The Book of Negroes* as an instance of memory work should first consider how traditional Anglo-African autobiographical writing is re-functionalized, and secondly, how intertexts, historical evidence and cultural icons are combined in order to make history more tangible. A discussion of the generic problems and perspectives entailed by a historical novel in the guise of a slave narrative is inevitable in order to reveal where the novel transcends the boundary between fiction and history. In addition to the re-functionalization of the structures of pre-abolition slave narratives, the novel thematizes a number of other texts, among which the eponymous *Book of Negroes*, Alexander Falconbridge's *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa* (BN, 407) and extracts from Jonathan Swift's poetry and *Gulliver's Travels* are the most important. Equiano's autobiography and Falconbridge's book engage with the same topic; they are highly argumentative depictions of the inhumanity of the slave trade and were written in support of the abolitionist movement. In addition to that, they are closely related to each other as Equiano's depictions of the middle passage echo Falconbridge's book in many passages.⁶⁸⁰ In the *Book of Negroes* the circle finally closes; both narratives are thematized and dramatized. While Equiano, as shown before, is explicitly mentioned in the novel as a cultural icon, Falconbridge and his wife Anna Maria are both characters in the novel. In the chapter in which Aminata remembers and describes the first encounter with Anna Maria Falconbridge, passages from Falconbridge's tract are quoted. By openly relating the novel to its intertext, “a mnemonic dialogue with

⁶⁸⁰ Carretta, *Equiano the African*, 36.

manifest resources” is established.⁶⁸¹ The experiences of the protagonist are set into relation with Falconbridge's description of the Middle Passage: Aminata points out that the observations in the book are not in keeping with her experiences. Thereby the accuracy and authority of the intertext is challenged:

I put down the book and told them that in my experience the men went mad more readily than the women. The men, who felt an obligation to change their situation, could go mad in the face of their own powerlessness. But the women's obligation was to help people. And there were always little ways to help, even if the situation could not be altered. (BN, 408)

The novel thus undermines the narratees' confidence in the veracity of historical documents. By way of Aminata's fictitious perspective, the novel challenges contemporary eye-witness accounts and lays bare their lack of accuracy with regard to deep psychological insights. It replaces earlier representations with more modern and – perhaps – less partial historiographical research. It has been statistically proven that the reactions to the capture and transportation on the Middle Passage were gender-specific. As most African societies were rigidly hierarchical and organized according to the social and economic power of their members, which were also related to their respective gender, the men found the experience of captivity and powerlessness especially disconcerting.⁶⁸² The “anomalous intimacy” that was created on board of the slave ships “constituted the antithesis of community.”⁶⁸³ Through Aminata's critical reading of Falconbridge's narrative thematizes the historical problem of mono-lateral representation. Research on the trans-Atlantic slave trade is mostly based on scarce statistical information and the biased descriptions of European observers. Even texts like Equiano's autobiography have to be read critically as they are not free of dramatizations and often feature fictitious episodes, added to render them more effective in contemporary (abolitionist) discourses. Therefore, historical reconstructions can only be of limited reliability, because we often lack the “captives' own representations of self and community.”⁶⁸⁴ In this context, the novel illustrates the discursive functions of literature as outlined by Zapf.⁶⁸⁵ In terms of Zapf's triadic model,

⁶⁸¹ Eckstein, *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic*, 24.

⁶⁸² David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*. Oxford & New York: OUP, 2006, 115.

⁶⁸³ Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*. Cambridge & London: Harvard UP, 2007, 101.

⁶⁸⁴ Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*, 102.

⁶⁸⁵ Hubert Zapf, “Literature as Cultural Ecology: Notes Towards a Functional Theory of Imaginative Texts with Examples from American Literature.” in: *REAL: Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature* 17. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2001, 85-100.

Aminata's critical reading of Falconbridge's narrative forms a cultural-critical metadiscourse. Aminata's critique of his conclusions forms the imaginative counterdiscourse, which finds its resolution in the reintegrative interdiscourse which, in a dialectic re-evaluation juxtaposes the different approaches and, in the case of *The Book of Negroes*, popularizes recent scholarly insights through a fictitious eye-witness character.

The recourse to the genre of slave narratives marks, as Yorke points out, the return to a genre that has “outlived its apparent political function”, but it also marks the return to the origin of African-American and African-Canadian literary traditions. But contrary to Yorke's assumption that the novel counteracts the genre it uses, that it parodies and inverts the existing conventions, it must be regarded as a fictionalized addition to the existing narratives. Due to its above-mentioned lack of generic referentiality. The act of writing and the social conventions that accompany it are self-reflexively thematized, but the illusion about the novel's historical position as an authentic slave-narrative is maintained by the lack of a genre-reflexive meta-level. The novel's feigned authenticity blurs the dividing line between fiction and history. Accordingly, *The Book of Negroes* can be regarded as an attempt to provide an epic narrative, depicting Canada as a site of the African diaspora filling “the vacant space of the Canadian slave narrative”, a desideratum George Elliott Clarke had deplored 2002.⁶⁸⁶ From a reader-reception perspective it can be said that the genre use by Hill has certain advantages over other narrative strategies. Due to its long tradition, the narrative strategies are already familiar to its readers. Additionally, the personal perspective facilitates the emotional identification with the protagonist. The version of history presented through a single focalizer draws attention to the social aspects of the Atlantic slave trade, the political instrumentalization of African-American slaves and the British attempts at colonization. In its historical scope it can be compared to works like Alex Haley's *Roots*; it fills a position in African-Canadian culture that had been vacant up until its publication; it is an epic about origins, about history, but also about remembering and forgiving. Nevertheless, *The Book of Negroes* does not follow in the epic tradition established by Haley without problematizing the very essence of this tradition: nation and community. The novel does not depict people on the brink of nationhood; its characters are deracinated, destitute and permanently in exile. Yorke claims that the novel “correct[s] the widely circulated and wildly inaccurate, historical 'fact' that has constructed Canada as a protective homeland for

⁶⁸⁶ George Elliott Clarke, “Raising Raced and Erased Executions in African-Canadian Literature: Or, Unearthing Angélique.” *Essays on Canadian Writing* 75, 2002, 30-61 [46].

escaped slaves.”⁶⁸⁷ This is certainly right with regard to the period of time the novel covers, but it should be duly considered that in Hill's 1996 novel *Any Known Blood*, Canada was portrayed in the same stereotypical fashion – as a safe haven for escaped slaves. In *The Book of Negroes*, Hill depicts a society on the brink of dissolution, confronted with the legacy of nearly a decade of war. Moreover, it brings into focus that thousands of African-American slaves had gained their freedom by serving the British during the American Revolution and were subsequently transported to Canada to safeguard their liberty were, as Egerton confirms, regarded as a liability, rather than an asset by the British.⁶⁸⁸ While historiography during the last decade has come to acknowledge the contribution of minorities, women and slaves to the success of the American Revolution – a good example would be the evolution of Robert Middlekauff's *The Glorious Cause* – there has been no collective consensus about the ideological motivation of those black Loyalists. The book by Middlekauff perfectly illustrates a change of focus. While the first edition, published in 1982 barely acknowledges the existence of regiments exclusively consisting of African-Americans and largely ignores the fate of those people of colour who served the British as a workforce, the new edition, published in 2005, shows slight amendments. Nevertheless, it still does not take up the debate about the black Loyalist.⁶⁸⁹ In addition to that, the number of black soldiers and workers Middlekauff mentions – between 300 and 1000 – is not in keeping with the approximately 3000 African-American refugees documented by the British Navy.⁶⁹⁰ Hill popularizes this shift in historical perception and renegotiates the “Abolition-era Canaan-myth.”⁶⁹¹ When he points out that the inspiration to write the novel originated from coming “across two startling discoveries in a scholarly work” (BN, iii), it becomes clear that his writing was very much influenced by current discourse. While historians like Barry Cahill are

⁶⁸⁷ Yorke, 142.

⁶⁸⁸ Egerton, *Death or Liberty*, 204-207.

⁶⁸⁹ The term black Loyalist has been advocated and propagated by James W. St. G Walker, as mentioned before, his book *The Black Loyalists. The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870*. Toronto, Buffalo & London: University of Toronto Press, 2nd 1992 [1976] is the seminal work on that topic. The status of the black Loyalist has been the focus of an ongoing debate since the early 1990s. The term, brought up by James Walker, has not been mentioned in Middlekauff's seminal work on the American Revolution. This might be due to the fact that till today there is an ongoing debate if the African Americans who fought for the British did this for the sake of personal liberty or loyalty to the British king. While Walker stresses that the Black Loyalist's military achievements and the risks taken equalled, or even surpassed those of the other Loyalists, and that they were therefore originally regarded by the British as Loyalists, Barry Cahill argues that it is a mistaken assumption to say that there was a consensus about their status. For the debate see: Barry Cahill, “The Black Loyalist Myth in Atlantic Canada” in *Acadiensis*, XXIX, 1 (Autumn 1999), 76-87. James W St. G. Walker, “Myth, History and Revisionism: The Black Loyalists Revisited.” in *Acadiensis*, XXIX, 1 (Autumn 1999), 88-105.

⁶⁹⁰ Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution 1763-1789*. New York: OUP, 1982, 570-71, 322, 338. Middlekauff does not regard African-Americans as self-responsible agents during the American Revolution. According to Middlekauff, they were largely used as pawns by those in power, be it the British or the Revolutionary Forces.

⁶⁹¹ Yorke, 141.

contesting the practice of describing people of colour who were brought as free refugees to Nova Scotia as black Loyalists because there were, according to Cahill, social and ideological differences between white and black refugees, the term loyalists is used in the novel to depict both white and black people who served the British crown:

“Entirely, You will be free as *any Loyalist*. But be forewarned. It will be hard work. You will be given land and expected to farm it. You will need seeds and implements and provisions, and all of those things you shall have. There will be plenty for everyone in the vastness of Nova Scotia.”
(BN, 286, my emphasis)

The novel therefore not only popularizes, it actively confirms the position of those who advocate the use of the term as an inclusive one that can be used irrespective of ideological background of the refugees. Nevertheless, due to its deliberately limited narrative perspective, it does not allow for an unbiased and multi-perspective re-evaluation of contemporary political, philosophical and practical considerations. Aminata and her friends are all loyal to the British because they are agents of their own cause: personal liberty. As recent scholarship has shown, there were diverse ways to pursue and attain personal liberty. Especially Douglas Egerton's 2009 book *Death of Liberty* has shown that African-American slaves and freemen actively participated in the revolutionary discourse in order to further the cause of attaining political and social equality.⁶⁹² Anglo-African people often used the discursive elements and inherent contradictions of Patriot rhetoric to propagate their own interests. Instead of putting their lives entirely in British or Patriot hands, they asserted their common humanity through law suits, notes of protest and other legal means.⁶⁹³ *The Book of Negroes* stops short by handing on the notion that the black Loyalist acquired their basic civil rights, or at least their liberty, by being loyal to the British Crown and therefore qualified as responsible subjects. Liberty and loyalty are almost synonymously used in the novel. It is noteworthy that the term loyalists in the novel is applied to the black community by a British officer and is, therefore, clearly not an instance of self-fashioning. The black community portrayed in the novel does not properly define their allegiance; in this context, they are not their own agents, but they are defined by others. *The Book of Negroes* with its inclusive, coherence-propagating use of history contributes, in a very traditional sense, to the self-fashioning of a community.⁶⁹⁴ It uses a historical background against which contemporary issues

⁶⁹² Douglas R. Egerton, *Death or Liberty: African Americans and Revolutionary America*. Oxford & New York, 2009.

⁶⁹³ Ibid, 93-121. Egerton points out that, especially with regard to emancipation in the North, the legal actions taken by slaves and anti-slavery activists were often of pivotal importance for the further legislature of northern states.

⁶⁹⁴ Cf. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. London & New York: Verso, 1983, 25. As mentioned in chapter

are negotiated. By condensing and simplifying circumstances and consequences of events and discourses, it creates a credible, but highly partial narrative about the past. Historical personalities, narrowed focus and emotional involvement through the personal narrative perspective contribute to the formation of a coherent and appealing imaginary. In this narrative counter-world a number of set ideological and ethic issues are staged. The black Loyalists depicted in the novel regard personal liberty and its various discourses as a central aspect of human existence. Nevertheless, for those persons of colour, personal liberty is not depicted as an unalienable right, as the prevailing liberty discourse of revolutionary American might suggest, but as something that has to be bargained for, and, eventually worked and fought for. Chekura, Aminata's husband, for instance could only acquire his freedom by rendering services to the British:

“[...] When the British took Charles Town, they made me a river guide. So I could take them up and down the low-country streams without getting shot up. Don't know how much good it did. A few of them died of musket fire, but a lot more were taken by fever and the pox.”

“Are you planning to stay for more than one night?” I asked. “Your husband is a free man, Aminata Diallo. Free tonight, free tomorrow, free to stay right here with you.” (BN, 289)

Chekura's story stresses that his status has been achieved by pragmatically using his chances. His allegiance to the British was not completely voluntary, yet for his knowledge of the area, he was in a position to offer something as a recompense for being set at liberty. Rendering services to the British was only a means to an end only means– liberty – not ideological commitment. The historical problem whether or not the people of colour who were evacuated by the British at the end of the war were ideologically committed to their cause is of no consequence to the characters in the novel. The novel suggests an easy solution to the problem of ideology: personal liberty was recompense for services rendered. By reiterating Walker's point of view the novel presents a view of history that has already “become a potent force in the cultural heritage of the Black [Canadian] community.”⁶⁹⁵ All services rendered to the British are equally valued, disregarding the (probable lack of) ideological conviction of those who served. According to this

2.1 of this thesis, Anderson is very explicit about the function of novels in the identity-fashioning processes of communities and societies as “these forms [the novel and the newspaper] provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation.” (italics original).

⁶⁹⁵ Cahill, “The Black Loyalist Myth”, 77. Cahill argues that the term was born from the historical situation of the Canadian civil rights movement of the 60s and 70s and that due to its enormous appeal “it extended well beyond the realm of public history”, facilitating “social levelling, retrospectively breaking down class barriers among black people.”

understanding of the term, fugitive slaves did become, by virtue of their actions, equally valued members of the loyalist community. If that had been the theoretical idea, it was not translated into practice, because, as Walker has shown, people of colour were strategically ostracised in the post-war period. This is also depicted in *The Book of Negroes*. By way of that description, Hill effectively deconstructs the myth of Canada as a place of refuge for runaway slaves by portraying the strategies of ostracization the black Loyalist were subjected to by the white settlers.

Many Negroes had indentured themselves to the Shelburne Loyalists for three-year periods. It was better than starving or freezing to death, but not much. A white loyalist had every motivation to push an indentured Negro to the point of collapse by the end of the period. And some indentured Negroes who had become injured or ill were thrown out when they were no longer useful – with their salaries withheld. (BN, 334)

For *The Book of Negroes*, Atwood's thesis that “[t]o challenge an accepted version of history – what we've decided it's proper to remember – by dredging up things that society has decided are better forgotten, can cause cries of anguish and outrage [...]”⁶⁹⁶, does not come true. Considering the novel's general popularity, the diagnosis lies at hand that, in the context of Canadian identity discourse, the stage where accepted history had to be challenged and questioned was a thing of the past when the novel appeared.⁶⁹⁷ On the other hand, the problem of the depiction of collective or rather social guilt has been elegantly solved in so far as the violence against the African-Canadian population is shown to have its origin not in blunt racism, but rather in a conglomeration of social and economic aspects which fuelled the racism latent in some parts of the population.

The discursive function of maps in the context of the perpetuation of colonial power structures is one of the novel's sub-themes. This theme is developed in the context of Aminata's longing for home. Despite apparently being content living with the Lindo family, her longing for home has not abated. After her having been of great help to them, Ms Lindo grants her a favour. Aminata readily asks to be taken to the library of Charles Town in order to have a look at their maps. During this visit she realizes that these maps are of no use to her because they do not show

⁶⁹⁶ Atwood, “In Search of Alias Grace”, 160.

⁶⁹⁷ It could be said that a collectivity only opposes or denies memories that threaten the social cohesion as shown in chapter 4.6 of this study; the social cohesion of Canadian multiculturalism is no longer at risk of being disturbed by versions of history that are presented from the viewpoint of minorities because the Canadian collectivity has acknowledged that it is composed of minorities.

her homeland, but an abstract and biased version of it:

On the map I paused over some squiggles in the form of baseless triangles. Lindo said they were meant to indicate mountains. I saw a lion and an elephant sketched in the middle of the land called Africa. I saw that it was mostly surrounded by seas. But the map told me nothing of where I came from. [...] This 'Mapp of Africa' was not my homeland. It was a white man's fantasy. (212).

The strategies of colonial maps to describe spaces and environments on paper reveal the system's denial of African civilizations: Africa is depicted as an unpopulated space. Aminata's master Salomon Lindo attributes the absence of villages on those maps to the ignorance of cartographers "They are unknown to the people who made this map" (BN, 211); nevertheless, these absences were often deliberate and had a discursive function as they were meant to justify the incursion of western powers into Africa and the subsequent colonialization of this territory. As Hartley points out:

Maps are never value-free images; except in the narrowest Euclidean sense they are not in themselves either true or false. Both in the selectivity of their content and in the signs and styles of representation maps are a way of conceiving, articulating, and structuring the human world which is biased towards, promoted by, and exerts influence upon particular sets of social relations.⁶⁹⁸

In contrast to the of the authorial narrator's blunt criticism of mapping as a tool to exert colonial power in Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, the passage from *The Book of Negroes* quoted further above more subtly deconstructs the alleged impartiality and the supposedly scientific nature of these practices from the point-of-view of one of the victims of colonialism. Crowning achievements of European science and progress for others, for Aminata, however, those maps are the silent witnesses to their ignorance.

The race riots Hill describes in the novel mark the high point of his revision of Canadian history. While the black Loyalists were an important workforce in the early days of the Shellburne settlement, they were later – during the economic crisis that followed after the

⁶⁹⁸ J. B. Hartley, "Maps, Knowledge, and Power." in: Denis Cosgrove & Stephen Daniels (eds.), *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 277-312 [278].

American War of Independence – regarded as potential rivals by former British soldiers who had remained in Canada.⁶⁹⁹

[...] the white men were still rampaging. Roaming bands of unemployed workers had killed at least four Negroes and beaten many others. There was talk of rape. When the whites descended on Birchtown, they had been beaten back, but they had only returned in larger numbers to tear down some houses and set fire to others, attacking anyone who resisted. (BN, 340)

Similar to the Ku-Klux-Klan episode in *Any Known Blood*, the depiction of race riots in post-revolutionary Canada serves to counteract the myth of liberal and egalitarian Canada by juxtaposing it with the depiction of events, thus retracing a history of violence. It takes part in a discursive act that Doreski describes as “excentric renarrativization of [...] history.”⁷⁰⁰ The form of racial hatred the inhabitants of Birchtown experience originates with the difficult economic and social environment of the post-revolution period. The acts of violence described in the passages preceding the one quoted above portray a society that is falling apart at the seams, a place where the law is no longer valid and the institutionalized authority highly dysfunctional. While describing the acts of violence inflicted on the inhabitants of Birchtown in great detail, the novel is careful not to depict racism as a mass phenomenon. As is the case with *Any Known Blood*, the perpetrators are depicted as socially marginalized individuals looking for scapegoats for their own precarious economic positions. As a discursive act, this dramatization of the past is both shocking and reassuring. It is shocking in so far as it shows that racism and violence against minorities are part and parcel of British North America's, respectively Canada's past, yet, it is reassuring with regard to the social status, number and individual motivation of its perpetrators.

In addition to chapters of the novel portraying life in post-revolutionary British North America, the fictional life-story of Aminata Diallo shows that what is now Canada belongs to those historical territories of the African diaspora, the “Black Atlantic” as Paul Gilroy⁷⁰¹ has called it, where, as Marina Warner points out, the “confluence of heterogeneous peoples,

⁶⁹⁹ James W. St. G. Walker, *The History of the Black Loyalists*, 75. Walker mentions the riot depicted by Hill only in the context of his chapter about the beginnings of a Black-Loyalist society in Nova Scotia. Walker does not give any details regarding the victims and the total damage caused by rioting white workers/former soldiers.

⁷⁰⁰ C.K. Doreski, *Writing America Black: Race Rhetoric in the Public Sphere*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998, 209.

⁷⁰¹ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 2. In his book Gilroy did not include Canada as part of this zone. Especially George Elliott Clarke found this problematic because, historically, it has to be added. See: Clarke, *Eyeing the North Star*, xiii.

histories, and languages” created a “cross-cultural space.”⁷⁰² The townships in which Aminata lives are liminal spaces. Birchtown and Freetown are both colonial settlements that were side-effects of British colonial politics. Both towns were initially conceived as temporal residences for the black refugees, respectively settlers. The black Loyalists who settled in the area of Birchtown initially expected to be relocated because the British promised them land of their own and the devices and provisions to establish themselves in Nova Scotia. These promises, however, were not kept. The land grants were denied to the black Loyalists, and instead they were either forced into dependence again or they served as hired hands. This is depicted in the novel as follows:

Along the way, he explained that slaves and indentured servants stayed in town with the white Loyalists who owned them. But if you were coloured and on your own bottom, he said, Birchtown was where you belonged. Nova Scotia had more land than God could sneeze at, Daddy Moses said, but hardly any of it was being parcelled out to black folks. (BN, 316)

Due to this experience of racial segregation and economic ostracization the black Loyalists developed a “separate identity”; Walker maintains that “under such conditions the blacks began to feel not only different but exclusive.”⁷⁰³ The description of the inter-racial relationships in the novel is in keeping with this diagnosis as the interaction between the different ethnicities is shown to be restricted to business transactions. With regard to the organization of community matters, the black settlements were basically independent. One essential historical characteristic of the African-Canadian settlements founded by black Loyalist is their strong relation to the Christian faith, especially Methodism and Baptism. As Walker points out:

Their religion gave them much of their vocabulary and determined many of their daily activities but it also, because of circumstances in Loyalist Nova Scotia conditioned their attitudes towards themselves and towards other people.⁷⁰⁴

The centrality of Christian motifs and rhetoric is thematized in the novel. One feature of these rhetorics is the self-stylization of Anglo-Africans as the chosen people, closely following the story of the Israelites' flight from Egypt. In *The Book of Negroes*, (Daddy) Moses Wilkinson is

⁷⁰² Marina Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, 21.

⁷⁰³ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 87.

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 86.

the character who appropriates Christian promises of salvation, rhetoric and motifs to the social and historical situation of the Anglo-Africa refugees settling in Canada. This character was modelled on the historical personality bearing the same name. Moses Wilkinson was one of the key figures in the early days of the Black Loyalist community. Wilkinson represents the quintessentially benevolent Christian. While Aminata rejects all religious sentiments, Wilkinson provides a counterpart to her agnosticism.⁷⁰⁵ In order to overcome the problem of positioning his agnostic protagonist Aminata within an environment with strong religious convictions, Hill stages a confrontation between both characters. The outcome of this confrontation is that Wilkinson tolerates Aminata's point of view, and states that he regards her soul as a “work-in-progress” (319). In the novel Wilkinson shows both moderating tendencies and a strong intention to reach personal liberty and, finally, self-government. After relocating to Freetown in Sierra Leone, the protagonist comes to the conclusion that neither in Nova Scotia nor in Sierra Leone did the British keep their promises.

The British had given false promises to the Loyalists who fought in the Revolutionary War and travelled to Nova Scotia, and they had lied once again about what we would receive in Sierra Leone. They did not attempt to enslave us, but nor did they set us free. They did not give us the promised tracts of land or any other means of becoming self-sufficient in Freetown. We depended on them for our work, our sustenance and even the materials and tools to build our homes. And they set the rules by which we lived. (BN, 387)

For the officials of the Sierra Leone Company, the black Loyalist are mere pawns in the game of colonization. Both settlements and their initial liminality were born out of attempts to colonize environments.

Another aspect that needs to be discussed with regard to the historical discourse the text takes part in is its engagement with mnemonic techniques and strategies. As a fictional autobiography it makes use of flashbacks that suggest a process of conscious remembering. In contrast to Olaudah Equiano's autobiography, the novel explicitly thematizes the protagonist's life-long longing for her African home place. Seen from a psychological perspective, Aminata is

⁷⁰⁵ Yorke, 143. Yorke argues that Aminata basically represents an antitype to the “ethnic stereotypes that have infected the slave narrative legacy” in the aftermath of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This is again a problematic argument because it completely disregards the fact that there are a number of characters like Moses Wilkinson who are depicted as very religious people, yet, nevertheless, show no tendencies to act like 'Uncle Toms.'

a severely traumatized person.⁷⁰⁶ The enforced relocation from Africa to North America, the severing of all family ties and the ensuing relocation from one milieu into another led to an idealization of her childhood memories of Africa. This initial disruption of her social environment and the violent death of all her “close relations” nearly resulted in Aminata's emotional and physical breakdown. This breakdown had been averted by Georgia, one of the slaves on the plantation who took Aminata in and came to be a surrogate mother for her. With her help Aminata manages to renegotiate her memories and to connect to her new social environment. Throughout her life, Africa is a place of longing, an ideal, prelapsarian state of being. Despite the fact that her integration into the African-American community of slaves has been successful, the memories of her past are overwhelmingly present. Especially the memories of the village she spent her youth in and the dream of returning to this place are cherished treasures that enable her to keep her sanity. Aminata's Bayo is not a site of memory, it is the memory of a site. With regard to this imaginary place time is of no consequence. Only until very late in her life does Aminata realize that Bayo is only an illusion: “I had spent more than forty years thinking about Bayo, but not about what I would do when I got there. [...] I realized that I wasn't concerned with the things I wanted to do, but rather with the place I wanted to be.” (BN, 436). But unlike other neo-slave narratives such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Hill's novel is remarkably reluctant to engage with the psychological aftermath of these traumatizing and dehumanizing experiences. Emotional involvement and responses are rarely thematized in the book; even more than Olaudah Equiano, Aminata Diallo describes her experiences as matter-of-fact retrospection.

Aminata's failure to achieve Olaudah Equiano's fame, fortune and social status despite being endowed with the same talents, highlights gender differences. Aminata might, as Eckstein has shown for other neo-slave narratives, have acquired “an understanding of the mechanisms of the English (mercantile) world”⁷⁰⁷, but she is not in the position to use that system to her advantage. The self-hire system, as portrayed in the novel, does not allow her to transgress the boundaries. Again she is acting within the system while not being allowed to fully participate:

⁷⁰⁶ Christian J. Krampe, “Inserting Trauma into the Canadian Collective Memory: Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* and Selected African-Canadian Poetry.” in: *Zeitschrift für Kanada-Studien* (29.1) 2009, 62-83. In this article Krampe basically argues that the novel serves as memory work in so far as it stresses the traumatizing effects of slavery as an integral part of Canadian history. Krampe does not engage with the problem of reliability that is relevant with regard to the presentation of those life-stories. According to his approach, the presentation, respectively publication of those life-stories is problematic on the individual and the communal level as they renegotiate suppressed memories. He does not engage with the reliability of those narrative constructions and the problem of their authenticity, aspects which are highly relevant in the context of discursive revisions of history.

⁷⁰⁷ Eckstein, *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic*, 26.

I had to give Solomon Lindo ten shillings a week, so I began to charge slave owners twelve shillings for catching a baby. I always tried to have several weeks of payment stored up and hidden under a loose plank in the room where I slept with Dolly. Sometimes I earned nothing in an entire week. At other times, I was hired out a few times the same week and brought home one or two pounds. Masters sometimes refused to pay me in coins, but the only other payments I would accept were Madeira, rum, tobacco and high-quality cotton fabric. I knew how much of each were needed to make up twelve shillings, and I could trade them easily for the things I needed. (BN, 206)

Despite her accurate knowledge of the monetary system, Aminata never has the opportunity to free herself from the shackles of slavery. When her former owner Robinson Appleby claims her as his property, and therefore has her arrested in Manhattan, it is Solomon Lindo's sense of justice that finally prevails. It is he who takes control of the situation, invalidates Appleby's claim and finally sets her free to assuage his latent feeling of guilt. Before the court Aminata remains the subject of a business transaction; she is not able to reclaim her status as an independent human being without help. Aminata's life-story, despite her literary achievement in turning it into a narrative, echoes Atwood's hypothesis about the basic issues covered by Canadian literature that "[t]he survivor has no triumph or victory but the fact of his survival; he has little after his ordeal that he did not have before, except gratitude for having escaped with his life."⁷⁰⁸ As Aminata remarks in the novel, in a passage where the abolitionists try to convince her to write down her life story: "Survival has nothing to do with virtue" (100). Aminata survives the trauma of cultural severance, torture, violence and sexual abuse, but the price she had to pay, even considering the somewhat optimistic ending, the reunion with her daughter May, cannot be compensated by her achievements. Aminata's life story, especially in this passage, echoes the discourse about female authors and their position within a patriarchal social system. As Graham Allen summarized:

Women's lives within society, like the lives of colonial subjects, are inevitably fractured or divided. Seen as 'other', as mute, objectified and outside of discourse, the dominant male and dominant white culture, women subjects, along with colonial subjects, write within and yet against such an othering process.⁷⁰⁹

⁷⁰⁸ Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press Limited, 1972, 33.

⁷⁰⁹ Graham Allan, *Intertextuality*. London & New York: Routledge, 2000, 160.

Aminata incorporates all these characteristics. Her story is embedded into traditional narrative structures of a genre that was historically dominated by male authors. The textual structures and functions of the novel's intertexts are thereby questioned and re-appropriated by a different narrative voice that switches the focus and offers a new perspective. By appropriating textual structures, like Equiano's narrative, that are itself double-voiced and infusing them with those other perspectives, the text becomes a many-voiced entity that adds up to the genre it imitates. Despite the successful re-appropriation of the genre, one could argue that the novel's protagonist is flawed because she is rather too self-assured. Contrary to being stuck within her social role as a doubly subjected individual, excluded from political and intellectual life, Aminata uses the social stereotypes to her advantage. She uncovers the petty hypocrisies of the abolitionists who mainly patronize her and affirm her authority and intellectual supremacy:

“I have decided to write the story of my life.”

“Certainly,” Hastings said, “but you will require our guidance to ensure-”

“Without guidance, thank you very much,” I said. “My life. My words. My pen. I am capable of writing”

A slender, well-dressed man stood and introduced himself as William Wilberforce, Member of Parliament. He asked if he might clarify the matter.

“Please do,” I said.

“This is not a question of your literacy,” Wilberforce said. “It is rather an act of ensuring its authenticity.”

“This is precisely why nobody will tell my story but me.” (BN, 455)

Within this dialogue Aminata not only asserts her intellectual authority, she implicitly reveals the generic limitations and editorial interventions imposed on other slave narratives. Additionally, the functional, or rather instructive character of slave narratives and the power of storytelling is thematized in the novel: “If I will live long enough to finish this story, it will outlive me. Long after I have returned to the spirits of my ancestors, perhaps it will wait in the London library.” (BN, 103). In the novel, Aminata manages to undermine and turn the power structures against themselves; by undercutting the authorities and partly rejecting the genre conventions, the narrative is placed within and without discursive boundaries. While she remains the sole author of her narrative, its authority originates from the collectivity she depicts. This assessment echoes Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s definition of the function of Anglo-African autobiographical writing:

If the individual black self could not exist before the law, it could, and would, be forged in language, as a testimony at once to the supposed integrity of the black self and against the social and political evils that delimited individual and group equality for all African-Americans. (Gates, *Bearing Witness*, 4)

Aminata's narrative perpetuates the idea of a collective identity that is firmly rooted in the active striving for liberty and equality. The depiction of the black Loyalists presentifies their historical achievements in the face of either re-enslavement or death. Most strikingly, the novel's engagement with African-Canadian history follows exactly George Elliott Clarke's definition of memory work in so far as it includes the depiction of folk traditions and more elaborate concepts:

I do not mean here to romanticize 'the folk.' Like Levine I know they 'are not historians' (389). Yet, they are surely 'the products and creators of a culture, and that culture includes a collective memory' (Levine 389). This 'collective memory' is manifested, I would add, in literary works that recall slavery, segregation, decolonization struggles, and the search for viable, independent economies.⁷¹⁰

The Book of Negroes meets all these criteria. It is a discursive attempt at preserving a particular perception of historical origins. Furthermore, it engages with and positions itself within a cultural discourse and therefore takes up certain discursive functions. Therefore, traditional narrative structures are re-appropriated and transferred into a different discourse. Its obvious recourse to those narrative models and structures and to those who introduced them is both a form of critical memory work and an activation of cultural memory. Authorship and authenticity are not at issue with regard to the re-appropriation of narrative structures, but their historical veracity is implicitly thematized and questioned. This is especially the case with regard to Falconbridge's depiction of the Middle Passage, which is critically evaluated and eventually partly invalidated by the protagonist. Olaudah Equiano, the prominent real-life predecessor for Aminata's narrative, features as a cultural icon, as self-made man and literary innovator. The authenticity of his, as well as Aminata's, fictitious autobiography remain unscrutinized. Accordingly, the reliability of

⁷¹⁰ Clarke, *Odysseys Home*, 11. The references in this passage are to Lawrence Levine's book *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*. Oxford, London & New York: Oxford UP, 1977. In this important study Levine engages on a very large scale with the growth of African-American identities and the development of a collective memory through slave tales, songs and myth. One might add that Levine was already aware that a collective memory is constantly infused by narrative fiction: "Historians have much to learn from those prolific reminiscences not merely because they are so often accurate but also because they are so often legendary; because they blend and interweave myth with fact" (389).

autobiographies and the generically implied claim to truth are not problematized. In contrast to the central characters of its two predecessors who also acted as preservers and emplotters of the past, only Aminata Diallo, due to the generic position of the novel, might claim a form of veracity similar to that primarily claimed by historians for their narratives. While both Mahatma Grafton in *Some Great Thing* and Langston Cane V in *Any Known Blood* use the practices and strategies of historiography for their own particular ends – journalism, respectively the writing of fiction – those practice are irrelevant for Aminata as she is both subject and eye-witness to her own history. Due to the novel's lack of a critical meta-level, the illusion of authenticity and reliability is fostered. Aminata Diallo is both a female counterpoint to the male-dominated power structures depicted in the novel and an agent and mediator who facilitates positive identification. The historical and spatial scope of the novel points to the fact that slavery was a transnational phenomenon, but it also includes Canada into the sphere recently subsumed under the term 'Black Atlantic.' It therefore fulfils some of the claims recently voiced by African-Canadian scholars like Clarke. The Black Loyalists are, as shown in the novel, not only a historical minority relevant in the context of North American history; their story is of transnational scope and relevance. The novel thereby participates in the discourse about Canadian history and identity – supporting a contested historiographical approach – and, by adding a transnational perspective, places this discourse within the realm of the Black Atlantic.

9. Conclusion

The works discussed in this thesis do not only illustrate the highly disparate socio-cultural backgrounds of their respective authors, they are also representative of the heterogeneity of African-Canadian literary production. While I initially proceeded using a theoretical approach that is predominantly text centred, I later came to the conclusion that most of the texts I had chosen contain passages that must be regarded as (semi-)autobiographical. This might be true for most fictional texts; however, it is striking that all three authors whose works I have discussed in this thesis link their fictional texts to experiences they have made themselves, or to stories about their families they were told by others. This is either made explicitly clear in the texts themselves or in paratextual passages like interviews and articles about their works. Therefore these texts could not be satisfactorily analysed using a limiting, text-centred approach and I adapted my perspective accordingly. It is a strategy common to all three authors – even if realised by using different means and to different extents and ends – to foreground certain cultural, social and historical discourses. The authors' anxiety about the reception of their texts and their various attempts of channelling and controlling their interpretation is a shared paradigmatic pattern.

All texts analysed – even those apparently negotiating contemporary issues – thematize the historical lack of representation of the various pasts of New World African people living in Canada. However, some of the texts discussed in this thesis do not stop at unearthing and re-writing history through fictionalization; they furthermore question the very nature of narratives about the past and, through their protagonists, show the effects – both on individuals and groups – of not having these narratives available. The meta-fictional questioning that takes place in these texts often goes hand in hand with a renegotiation of discursive strategies and generic constraints. In Lawrence Hill's first two novels, *Some Great Thing* and *Any Known Blood*, the protagonists' research of their families' histories contributes to their personal development and facilitates their coming to terms with their pasts and presents. In these novels, acquiring knowledge about the past is depicted as a redemptive process. Even if the truths behind the various family stories and legends initially seem to burden the protagonists with their ancestors' dark secrets, they help them to define and consolidate their identities. The autobiographical connections are – at least with regard to Hill's first two novels – barely hidden. Their protagonists reenact episodes of his family's history made available to the narratees in the paratexts and thereby interconnect history with story. However, by creating stories and protagonists that are based on Hill's family stories and bringing both central characters together

in *Any Known Blood*, Hill plays with conventional expectations and develops a doppelgänger strategy that foregrounds the very hybridity inherent to all forms of identity. In these two novels, race and history are shown to be ambivalent cornerstones of personal and national identity. It is striking that both protagonists Hill's first novels can only come to terms with their existence and form a stable sense of self after having opted for a racial identity and having filled in the blanks in their families' histories. By embracing their blackness and accepting their families' legacies they become functioning and responsible citizens. Hill's novels all end on a hopeful and conciliatory note. While histories of slavery, abuse, racism, domination and historical and political inequality are unearthed in these novels, they still portray modern Canada as a liberal, democratic country that allows for social change and political reinvention. For the protagonists of Hill's first two novels, Canada is a safe haven; there, they find a social environment where they are at liberty to negotiate their identities. Characters who openly question the protagonists' Canadianess and problematize their striving for a revision of common misconceptions about the past are either depicted as obstinate racists or as old reactionaries, having missed the transition from British-dominated to multicultural Canada. Furthermore, they are presented as comic caricatures, representing a world view that is out of touch with socio-political realities.

In contrast to the protagonists of Hill's novels, the characters in Brand's fiction are mostly unable to make the past usable in order to re-evaluate their social position and come to terms with their lives. While for Hill's characters history means redemption, for Brand's characters it is eternal damnation, a burden they cannot free themselves from. Especially the characters in *In Any Place, Not Here* and *At the Full and Change of the Moon* are constantly haunted by the past. Figuratively speaking it has replaced the shackles their ancestors wore around their wrists and ankles, tying them down, apparently leaving them no other choice than to continue as their ancestors did. As I have shown in the close reading of *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, young Bola, one of the protagonists, actually chooses the ghost of one of her forebears over her regular social environment. This choice, however, leads to her losing both her sense of reality and hold on life. She remains trapped with the spectres of the past: slavery and colonialism, figuratively represented in the novel by the ghost of Bola's great-great-grandmother. Surprisingly, this is also true for *What We All Long For*. Especially Tuyen, who immigrated with her family from Vietnam in the 1980s, is still trapped within a microcosm of memories which are not her own. Since having lost their son while fleeing from Vietnam, her parents live in self-inflicted stasis. This is symbolically illustrated by descriptions of Tuyen's parents' home, where

everything is either covered with polythene sheets or, if possible, even laminated. With regard to Tuyen's parents, the experience of translocation and loss made them idealize their past, a decision which rendered it impossible for them to positively identify with their new environment. They are always prepared to leave and take everything of personal value with them. On the one hand, Tuyen understands their concerns and problems; on the other hand, she would like to live a life of her own and finally come to terms with her Canadianness. Apart from how the characters are affected by their families' histories, the other striking difference lies in the various reasons why they are confronted with it. For most of Brand's characters, the past is still present in their lives. It is like a genetic disease waiting to break out in order to consume them. In contrast, the characters in Hill's first two novels have to actively unearth the past, differentiate between truth and lie, legend and myth, before they can eventually come to terms with it and find their own place in it. They need material evidence and personal corroboration to reconstruct a past they had previously been alienated from. Historical research is a vital issue in Hill's novels. However, it should be stressed that neither of the characters engaging with a reconstruction of the past does so on a professional basis, using institutionalized structures, procedures and strategies. For these characters, the past only becomes meaningful when they read it in the context of their own present. However, Hill's novels do not problematize professional historiography – Hill himself contributed to this field with a child-oriented book on the history of black people in Canada – they rather aim at using fiction as a discursive tool, spreading and perpetuating hitherto unknown narratives about the past. In this sense, Hill's third novel *The Book of Negroes* – published as *Someone Knows My Name* in most English-speaking countries – might be regarded as his most important accomplishment as it brings Canada back on the map of the triangular trade. Due to its enormous national and international success, the novel and its recent adaptation as a TV-series are already perceived as Canada's version of *Roots*. As shown in my close reading, it does not only create an awareness of Canada's history as a slave-owning country by emulating traditional slave narratives, it also contributes to the Black-Atlantic debate precipitated by the publication of Paul Gilroy's seminal book *The Black Atlantic*. Gilroy, despite offering a powerful thesis on the connection between the emergence of western modernity and the exploitation of Africa through the transatlantic slave trade, describing the Atlantic regions as a culturally connected hemisphere, fell short of including Canada into his considerations. Many African-Canadian authors, critics and scholars such as George Elliott Clarke, Austin Clarke and Dionne Brand regarded this as a gross affront which effectively contributed to the widespread denial of African-Canadian history. *The Book of Negroes* is a powerful statement for the inclusion of Canada into the Black-Atlantic debate. Through its protagonist Amainata Diallo, the

novel fictionally restages the historical experience of deracination and enforced relocation, showing that Canada was an important site of the black diaspora. Additionally, its publication coincides with a continent-spanning wave of historical research aimed at shedding light on the role of African-Americans in the American Revolution. The representation of the past in Hill's fiction is not unbiased. As I have shown, the telling about the past and the unearthing of historical events and connections, have a redemptive function for Hill's characters. Especially Aminata Diallo in *The Book of Negroes* emotionally profits from writing down her story. But also Mahatma Grafton in *One Great Thing* and Langston Cane V in *Any Known Blood* need to engage with their families' pasts in order to learn to cope with the present. At this point, it should be stressed that some of the features, strategies and arguments in Hill's fiction enable a positioning of his works in the discourse. Especially the continuous use of the term Black Loyalists as the collective term for those New World African people who worked for the British during the American Revolutionary War in his fiction is revealing. Using the term loyalists in this context is historically inaccurate because the people of African origin who served the British did not do so due to political conviction, but because they hoped to gain their freedom as individuals by contributing to the British war effort. As I have show in the chapter dedicated to this novel, the term "black loyalist" actually is subject of an ongoing scholarly controversy. The impact of Hill's book on this discourse is therefore hardly assessable.

In order to show how race and identity are negotiated by the three authors, I will once again use Hill's first two novels as a starting point. In these novels, most Anglo-Canadian characters are unaware of the historical presence of black people in Canada. This lack of awareness is a symptom of one of the key issues thematized in these novels, namely the transition from colonial to post-colonial Canadian imaginary. This period of transition in which Canada was either seen as founded on European traditions and institutions or in terms of a nation historically consisting of a multitude of ethnicities and races, a multicultural state accommodating a vast number of different peoples, is the temporal setting of *One Great Thing* and *Any Known Blood*. In the context of this setting, the protagonists' research into their families' pasts actually provides both closure for the characters as they can come to terms with their families' histories and contributes to the discursive reevaluation of Canadian history. Juxtaposing the problematic relationships of the characters in Brand's novels with their families' histories to Hill's strategy to attribute redemptive qualities to his characters' attempts to find out more about their families' pasts has far-reaching philosophical implications. In terms of social development, Hill's narratives depict the belated inclusion of racial and ethnic minorities into North-American

history as the closing chapter of a long success story. Especially *Some Great Thing* even goes one step further as some of the characters dream of a future in which race and ethnicity no longer matter. These characters dream of a blending of races, a hybridization of society for the sake of social peace and equality. They uncritically envision a future society in which all differences will have been eradicated, in which people with different pasts strive for a shared future. It might therefore be claimed that Hill's first two novels do not problematize the homogenizing tendencies of contemporary Canadian multicultural policies discussed in the theoretical part of this thesis. In contrast, in Brand's novels, especially in *What We All Long For*, Canada is depicted as racially divided, a nation which, in terms of social order, is more neo- than post-colonial. However, both Brand's and Hill's narratives problematize the unbroken mass-appeal of socio-political concepts, ideas and imagery which came into being during colonialism's hey-day. Most of the characters in Hill's and Brand's fiction feel excluded and marginalized due to their skin colour. They experience that not being white is the same as not being Canadian and continually have to prove the validity of their claim to Canadianness. Comparing the predicament Hill's characters are in with the depiction of racism in Dionne Brand's novels, especially her last novel *What We All Long For*, it becomes obvious that her novels offer a different take on the problem. In this novel, the characters are trapped in a tight net of social expectations. Especially Jamal, one of its black characters, performatively reasserts stereotypical black racial and gender identities in order to be accepted by his peers and to meet the expectations of his social environment. He conforms to these expectations by leading a life of crime. Jamal's case is extremely dramatized, the depictions of other characters and their actions and experiences in the novel, however, reiterate the assessment that individuals are marginalized due to their ethnicity or race. This suggests that Canadian society is still rigidly hierarchical in terms of race and class, requiring conformity to an unwritten set of rules which infringe the individual's rights and liberties.

History and the representation of the past are also key issues in George Elliott Clarke's fiction. In contrast to the sometimes drastic, but ultimately redemptive envisionings of African-Canadian history which dominate Lawrence Hill's novels, Clarke's texts are far more radical both in their politics and poetics. The merits of Hill's first two novels do not lie in revolutionizing established narrative concepts; in terms of narrative strategy they are rather traditional. Even *The Book of Negroes* – despite its scope and the highly political genre it occupies – never challenges established discursive and narrative conventions as radically as Clarke's *Whylah Falls* and *Execution Poems* do. Nevertheless, in terms of discursive positioning, Hill's fiction is far more direct and less complex than Clarke's. Especially *Some Great Thing* openly negotiates problems

of Canadian multicultural politics and its characters freely comment on what they consider a social utopia, a Canada without racial, ethnic and linguistic boundaries. However, it should be stressed at this point that this naïve celebration of the “de pluribus unum” idea does not occur in Hill's later works. Nevertheless, Clarke's fiction is, not only in terms of political commentary, less direct and apparently rooted in different political traditions. Returning to my assessment that Hill's fiction is rather conservative in terms of style and approach I do not want to imply that Clarke's is not traditional. His works and the paratextual comments show that he is perhaps even more rooted in the narrative and discursive tradition that is the basis of Hill's novels; however, his approach is far more challenging as he reworks and hybridizes existing poetical traditions. *Whylah Falls* and *Execution Poems* are perfect examples of Clarke's hybridization of European and African-American traditions and techniques, works in which predominantly European approaches to poetry are appropriated to express contemporary ethnic and social concerns. In the chapters dedicated to Clarke's works, I therefore argued that style and medium are itself important discursive determinants in Clarke's texts. Especially in *Whylah Falls* and *Beatrice Chancy*, both generic restrictions and boundaries as well as discursive traditions are constantly challenged. By amalgamating features of modernist poetry with poetic structures derived from blues lyrics in a structural context appropriated from seventeenth-century poetry, Clarke foregrounds the artificiality of his texts. This highlighted artificiality, however, is only a means to an end as it stresses the artificiality and subjectivity of all forms of discourse. In *Beatrice Chancy*, Clarke effectively recreates the societal ambiguities of early nineteenth-century Canadian slavery, by taking recourse to cultural stereotypes and established literary traditions. The text closely follows the plot of an incest story derived from a sixteenth-century real-life family tragedy. While in previous adaptations of the text artists and authors foregrounded the social inequalities of early capitalism, focusing on paternalism and misconstrued religious hierarchies, Clarke adds race as another determinant to this seemingly simple, but in itself highly complex social microcosm. The eponymous character of this verse play, Beatrice Chancy, is torn between racial, social and ethnic commitments and allegiances; she is both slave and daughter to her father, believer and object of adoration, black servant and white upper-class boarding-school girl. In the course of the text she develops from obedient daughter – convinced of the innate goodness of human beings – to a broken heroine, craving revenge for the violence inflicted on her. In the end, having taken revenge on her father, Beatrice is stylized as a black martyr; she is eliminated by a society that, due to its essential divisions, has to regard her as an immanent danger to its inner order. *Beatrice Chancy* is a text that draws its effect from the juxtaposition of different forms of essentialism, binary oppositions and hierarchies, creating a patriarchal counter-

world ruled by a ruthless tyrant. However, the text – despite its obvious artificiality and its tendency to spectacularize events – systematically analyses Canada's past as a slave-holder society and pinpoints the problematic legacies this history holds. Clarke treats the past as a perpetually present entity. In his fiction, stressed by his generic amalgamations and the timeless character of his texts, the lines between present and past are blurred. Contrary to the characters in Hill's and Brand's fiction, who are either redeemed or shackled by the memories and stories of past events, the aftermath and effect of past experiences on the characters is depicted in a far more subtle way in Clarke's works. Particularly his characters George and Rufus Hamilton are depicted as victims of social forces which were produced by a history of violence and neglect. They are both margin and centre of political and social upheavals, unwitting playthings of forces they can neither understand nor manipulate, cold-blooded murderers; fools.

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