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Métis Representations in English and French-Canadian Literature

by

Katherine Joanne Durnin

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ABSTRACT

In this comparative study of the theme of racial hybridity in four West-Canadian novels (English and French), I examine thematic patterns related to métis hybridity using theoretical concepts that I locate within the complexity of the Canadian social context.

In each novel the métis protagonist is propelled by desire for a white mate and consequently enters into conflict with white society. That narrative pattern is intertwined with themes of absent parents, of métis people as originary figures, and of geographical moves as indicative of social displacement and reintegration.

By comparing how the authors develop these patterns and resolve their métis characters' social conflicts, I conclude that these representations of métis hybridity are illustrative of the unfixity of identity and reflect the literary and ideological purposes of the authors. The fixity of thematic patterns is countered by a narrative diversity that produces a multiplicity of representations.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my family: my parents, Joyce and Walter, my sister Margaret, my brother Guy, and my son Francis, and to the memory of my brother Robert.

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INTRODUCTION

This study examines métis hybridity in literary representations of métis characters in four Canadian novels written in the twentieth century. Using a comparative approach to juxtapose novels from the early and the late twentieth century written in French and in English by three non-métis and one métis author, I identify areas of thematic and narrative parallel that show how the métis characters in these novels negotiate their position "in-between" races and cultures. These parallels and their variations reveal the manifold and often conflicted nature of the meanings attributed to métis hybridity in Canada.

A comparative approach is an attempt at doing justice to the complex history that gave rise to the existence of métis people in Canada through the conjunction of what John Ralston Saul calls Canada's "original triangle" of English, French, and Native (12). Studies such as Leslie Monkman's *A Native Heritage*, Terry Goldie's *Fear and Temptation* and the anthology *The Native in Literature*, among others, have given students of Canadian literature the beginnings of detailed scholarship on aboriginal themes and characters. The aim of this study is to build on that work by concentrating on the particular themes and elements found in representations of métis characters in Canadian literature, and more specifically in the Canadian novel. From their position within a triangle of ethnic groups and political interests, the métis in Canada have been

witnesses to and conflicted participants in the power struggles between those groups. The goal of this study is to examine the peculiar position of the métis within that triangle, but more specifically to pinpoint some of the major elements that representations of métis have in common and to speculate on their particular resonance in the Canadian imagination as filtered through the writing of authors who are themselves positioned within Canada's complex ethnic makeup. This approach is intended to produce readings that offer the structure of "common denominators" necessary for a coherent comparison of literary texts, but also to allow for a differentiation of literary texts attributable to an author's social perspective and individual creativity. The outcome is, I hope, a study that reflects the complexity and specificity of the meanings given to "métis" (rather than to "native," "aboriginal" or "Indian") in the last century.

The two earlier novels, which I compare in Chapter II, are both based on the authors' personal experiences of living and working in Alberta. Georges Bugnet published *Nipsya*, his second novel, in 1924. He had immigrated as a homesteader to the Lac Sainte-Anne region of Alberta in 1905 after leaving the seminary in France. Bugnet himself gives a summary of the novel as "l'étude d'une âme de jeune Métisse krise, d'abord à demi-sauvage et qui, peu à peu, arrive à l'essence du catholicisme" (Duciaume and Lecomte 22).[1] *Tay John*, Howard O'Hagan's novel (his first) about a yellow-haired

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[1] [A] study of the soul of a young Cree Métis girl, at first half-savage, who little by little reaches the essence of Catholicism. (Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.) The French "sauvage" is not a cognate of the English "savage," and is often translated as "Indian." See Smith (2) and Gagnon. In Bugnet's sentence, he is referring to the girl's lack of "civilization."

mixed-blood man, appeared in 1939. According to Margery Fee, "[O'Hagan's] choice of a Métis hero was based not so much on a romantic concept of the exotic other as on his own personal experience of discrimination, which came [...] in part from watching the Métis and Native people with whom he worked suffer at the hands of a bigoted society" (Introduction 11).

The two later novels, again one in French and one in English, are compared in Chapter III. These novels have vastly different historical settings, but that distance itself provides an excellent site for comparison. In addition, these novels have significant similarities that serve as a further basis for comparative study. *In Search of April Raintree* was first published in 1983.[2] The author, Beatrice Culleton Mosionier, is a métis writer from Manitoba. Kateri Damm characterizes this text as "a fictionalized 'autobiographical' novel, based on Culleton's own life and experiences, [that] follows a woman's search for her true, hidden, identity. It follows her search for acceptance of who she is as a woman of mixed Native/European ancestry" (20). As I hope to show in this study, the parallel with Bugnet's description of Nipsya – as well as the stark contrast – is not coincidental.

Alongside *April Raintree*, I look at Ronald Lavallée's novel *Tchipayuk ou le Chemin du Loup*, published in 1987. At once historical novel, sociological study, and Bildungsroman, this novel was the result, according to the author, of a concern about

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[2] To make my thesis read more smoothly, I shorten this title to *April Raintree*.

patterns of discrimination that he had observed in his native Manitoba:

> On vivait sur des terres ayant appartenu aux métis, on glorifiait leur passé, leur culture, leurs traditions; mais rien ne nous faisait plus honte que d'être confondus avec les métis par les anglophones. [...] Alors, tout naturellement, j'en suis venu à écrire ce livre sur les origines des rapports ambigus entre les Canadiens français, les Canadiens anglais et les métis. (qtd. in Dubé 275)[3]

The juxtaposition of *Tchipayuk* and *April Raintree* raises unavoidable questions about whether such a historical treatment of the problem of discrimination in Canadian society can satisfactorily shed light on the disastrous conditions that the latter novel reveals.

In Chapter I, to lay the groundwork for discussion of the novels, I examine crucial notions around hybridity (*métissage* in French). The term "hybridity" has become so common in literary theory that it often appears to be an unproblematic concept. The apparent straightforwardness of "hybridity" appeared increasingly suspect to me, given my growing awareness that many Canadians, myself included, have little understanding of what (racial) hybridity means to Canadians. My early reading on images of métis in Canadian literature led most often to studies in which métis characters were discussed alongside Indian characters, with reference to their hybridity but no sustained discussion of that hybridity as a complex factor that distinguishes representations of métis characters from those of Indian characters. The situation that Emma LaRoque described in 1975 has

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[3] We were living on land that had belonged to the Métis, we glorified their past, their culture, their traditions; but nothing made us as ashamed as being confused with Métis people by English-Canadians. [...] So I came quite naturally to write this book about the origins of the ambiguous relations between French-Canadians, English-Canadians, and Métis.

changed little in the intervening years:

> [The Métis or Halfbreed people] are perhaps the most neglected, and the least understood people in Canadian history. Although the Métis and the Indians are lumped together in most Native Studies curriculums, their histories and their cultures, and even their current concerns are different, even if their social problems are often quite similar. (*Defeathering* 17)

While an intense interest in Louis Riel and the Métis Rebellions of the nineteenth century may have brought métis history into better focus for Canadians since the 1970s, the representations of métis in the four novels under study here show that the complexity of relations between English-Canadians, French-Canadians and métis merits examination outside of the strictly historical or historiographical approach, which relies heavily on the métis experience in Canada's North West in the nineteenth century. The texts used in this study reflect, I believe, a multiplicity of representations that demonstrate at once the long and diverse history of métis people in Canada, but also the complexity of how Canadians see and represent métis people and how métis people see and represent themselves. From that perspective, all of these texts are what Emma LaRoque calls *April Raintree* and Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*: "powerful mirrors to Canadian society" (Preface xviii).[4] They are part of the discursive structures that have the power to form the individual and ultimately to transform society as well.

It is my contention that the métis characters in these novels move in directions marked by certain openings and possibilities and that these possibilities are subsequently

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[4] The extensive critical response to *April Raintree* is indicative of its importance as a mirror being held up at a new angle by a métis writer.

closed off. What appeared to be a certain social mobility attributable to the person's hybridity turns out to be illusory. Each of these four narratives depicts a métis character engaged in an attempt to produce a social reality that appears realistic, only to find that they are blocked by forces of racial discrimination that were earlier hidden. The result is never, however, purely negative. Each métis character, through the experience of social crisis, strengthens the sense of his or her own hybridity and discovers a determination to make that hybrid identity a basis on which to build a new position in society. This study examines the social trajectories followed by the métis characters, and more specifically the moments of greatest crisis. It delineates how those trajectories are frustrated and redirected and examines the ultimate positions of these characters, that is, the manner in which they perceive their hybridity and how they envisage a métis future.

CHAPTER I

APPROACHES TO MÉTIS HYBRIDITY

Hybridity and its meanings

The concept of hybridity, which began in the realm of biology, has now moved firmly into social and literary theory. Originally designating the mixing of species, it came to signify any racial mixing. While it now maintains the latter meaning, its signification has broadened to encompass all manner of mixing, be it social, cultural, or literary. Hybridity has become an important concept in postcolonial theory and in theories of postmodernity in general, to such an extent that Roger Toumson, in *Mythologie du métissage*, sets out to understand "comment et pourquoi la combinatoire du métissage a pu apparaître comme la structure la mieux adaptée aux systèmes du monde postmoderne" (14).[5] Ironically, a concept that is apposite in helping explain the current state of human interaction and cultures now exists alongside the older notion of hybridity with its echoes of transgression and miscegenation, and the aftertaste of oppression resulting from racial prejudice. Toumson describes this doubling of the idea of hybridity in terms of concurrent, contradictory discourses: "l'apparition de ce nouveau

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[5] [H]ow and why the combinatory structure of *métissage* came to appear as the structure best suited to the systems of the postmodern world.

discours du métissage n'est pas consécutive à la disparition de l'ancien discours du préjugé raciste. Le thème de l'altérité complémentaire est une contrepartie de la montée des courants xénophobes dans la plupart des pays" (14-15).[6] As Jean Benoist points out, the meaning of hybridity in society is not a matter of the recognition of the biological fact that an individual's genes result from a "mixture of races"; instead, that meaning derives from the social interpretation of the biological fact (539). It is society that decides what constitutes hybridity and thus determines what its real effects will be for the hybrid individual living in that society. Generally speaking, notes Benoist, "le fardeau du métissage [...] est celui de la discrimination raciale" (542).[7] Yet, as I note below in my discussion of theories of social and psychological formation, it is not "society" alone that determines the contours of the individual self. It is necessary to recognize the agency of the métis individual as a participant in the social dialogue. As this study shows, the meanings of hybridity are much more complex in Canada than one might suspect. Through the examination and comparison of representations of racial hybridity in four Canadian novels from the twentieth century, this study aims to trace and explore some of the ways in which Canadians – French, English, and métis – have represented the "burden" of métissage, or conversely, its special attributes and challenges. There is no

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[6] [T]he appearance of the new discourse of hybridity does not follow on the disappearance of the old discourse of racial prejudice. The theme of complementary otherness is the counterpart of the rise of a tide of xenophobia in most countries.

[7] [T]he burden of *métissage* [...] is that of racial discrimination.

denying the resonance of métis hybridity as a theme in Canadian literature, and the purpose of this study is to detect and compare some of the recurring patterns involving métis characters in a series of texts. If racial discrimination is part of the picture that emerges from these representations, there is also a questioning and challenging of that discrimination and its racist premise. The aim is not reductive, in that the experience of métis people in Canada does not fit into one overarching pattern. Yet a common problem that emerges from this research is the question of how métis people can come together in their individual diversity to form a community whose cohesiveness will stand against powerful forces for atomization in Canadian society.

Certainly the protagonists in the four novels under study attest to the sort of diversity I am speaking of: they are the children of native mothers (Cree and Shuswap) and Irish fathers, or of parents who are themselves métis.[8] I have decided in favour of adding yet another layer of diversity by studying representations of métis characters in novels by French and English authors, one of them métis. In this way I undertake in a literary context the work that Jean Benoist advocates for social anthropology, that is, an approach "qui nous aide à comprendre que ces réalités biologiques sont perçues, vécues,

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[8] Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer Brown examine the terminology for mixed-race people in their Introduction to *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America*. To indicate the diversity of backgrounds of the métis characters under study here, I use the word "métis" spelled with a lower-case "m."

et transformées en significations sociales" (540).[9] Studies such as Sylvia Van Kirk's *Many Tender Ties* and Jennifer Brown's *Strangers in Blood* tackle these matters in historical terms, but literary studies in Canada still tend to consider representations of métis characters as a sub-group of indigenous characters, so that at times métis hybridity appears almost as a sort of "damaged" indigenousness. The representations of métis characters in the literary texts examined here are linked by one common thread that can serve as a point of entry into a comparative study: in each novel, the métis individual follows – with acceptance or with resistance – a social trajectory influenced or even dictated by his or her hybridity.

The individual and the social

The trajectories followed by the métis characters in these four novels stand out because these characters are forced to negotiate their positions in society in ways that they cannot foresee. Moreover, they have little preparation or guidance in dealing with society as métis people because in each case the parents are absent, either because they are dead or because the métis child has been separated from them. A constructivist view of the development of the individual identity or "self" provides a means of understanding the negotiation between individual and society in that it assumes that people have no

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[9] [H]elps us understand that these biological realities are perceived, experienced, transformed into social meanings.

essential or given characteristics and do not "learn" about the world as a set of objective realities. It posits instead that people learn about the world by developing models that they verify by checking them against the outside world (Heylighen 1). In the case of the métis characters that appear in this study, a greater number of possible models appears to be open to them than to non-hybrid characters, but their attempts to fit into those models are frustrated in some way, a frustration that forms a point of crisis in the narrative. The métis protagonists' testing of an apparent possibility (most often in the form of pursuing their desire for a white mate) and the manner in which the resulting social conflict is resolved by each author, makes up the narratives of truncated social trajectories that I believe are revelatory of some of the meanings that hybridity has in the Canadian imagination.

All of these representations show métis characters in situations of intense and constant negotiation. They are "in between" cultures and as such have the power to move from one to another without ever being able to integrate fully into either. The differences between the narratives amount to differences in how the authors perceive the outcomes for their métis characters. Georges Bugnet, for example, sees his protagonist Nipsya as naturally disposed to adapt to what Bugnet considers a spiritually, culturally, and economically superior culture, one modelled on the Catholic agrarian culture of rural France and French Canada. Howard O'Hagan's protagonist becomes trapped in a place between white and Indian culture, a place that is at once an ideal of pure nature and an

uncomfortable place of solitary longing. O'Hagan seems to be saying that a loner such as Tay John might be able to live an (apparently) culture-free existence, but that if he is to have a mate and produce children, the act of joining with another person entails an engagement in culture – the trappings of people's lives together – that includes myths and legends which people tell themselves to explain their existence.

The two more recent novels, *April Raintree* and *Tchipayuk*, are written out of a greater awareness of where métis people's negotiation of their changing position between white and Indian has led them: to a place where, instead of being a "new people," as they were able to proclaim themselves in the nineteenth century, they are increasingly seen, in the words of April Raintree, as having "nothing" (Culleton 142). Gradually squeezed out by the white/Indian binary in Canada, whatever métis space had existed in Western Canada has practically disappeared by the late twentieth century so that, as Beatrice Culleton writes, two métis sisters are divided by their desire to identify with either their Indian or their white heritage, neither of which fulfills a need to feel true to what they are or where they came from. This particular negation is complicated by the acute differential in the social conditions for whites and natives, and by the fact that society equates métis with Indians when it comes to discriminatory practices.

For the purposes of better elucidating the notion of métis negotiating their social position and as a basis for the development of a métis identity, I find that a number of theoretical approaches or notions are useful in gaining an understanding of the nature of

the negotiation, including the forces that come into play and how outcomes might differ depending on the individual (with their particular personality and their consciousness of social positions), the people and situations the individual comes into contact with, and the broader social formations and ideologies in place. The problem for the métis characters in the narratives studied here is that the choices (and thus the agency) they appear to have – Nipsya's and Tay John's choice of mates; Askik's choice of a career; April Raintree's choice to "be" white and her sister Cheryl's celebration of her métis identity – turn out to be problematic at best. Their destinies are decided to a much greater degree than they imagine by the fact that they are métis, and this is one of the distinguishing features in these representations: the choices métis characters appear to have as people possessing some social mobility (certainly relative to Indian people) are blocked by attitudes and power relations that they were not aware of until they began to move socially. For the métis characters in these novels, social movement of one kind or another seems to be inevitable because they are métis, and yet because they are métis that movement is blocked at some point and they are directed towards what the dominant society considers acceptable positions for the métis person. If we agree that there is no essential fixity of identity and that the individual has some agency in producing his social and psychological realities, one major question to be addressed by this study is what sort of agency the métis person has in his negotiations with the society around him. The answer to that question will go far, I believe, in illuminating the ways in which Canadians represent métis people

to themselves.

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe theorize the nature of the interaction between the individual and the social using the insights of Michel Foucault on the all-encompassing nature of discourse. Laclau and Mouffe's conception of social relations offers a means of understanding, in the first instance, the dynamics involved in the formation of the social subject. They reject the notion of "society" as a structured whole into which subjects can be conveniently slotted. Instead, Laclau and Mouffe interpret Althusser's statement that "everything existing in the social is overdetermined" (97) and conclude that "the social constitutes itself as a symbolic order. The symbolic – i.e., overdetermined – character of social relations therefore implies that they lack an ultimate literality which would reduce them to necessary moments of an immanent law" (97-98). This view might be expressed in terms of discourse as the notion that people "actively produce social and psychological realities" through discursive practices, rather than somehow recognizing realities produced outside their own interactions (Davies and Harre 44). The symbolic nature of social relationships means that they are relational rather than absolute. This conception of society has implications for the notion of identity, for "[a] conception which denies any essentialist approach to social relations, must also state the precarious character of every identity and the impossibility of fixing the sense of the 'elements' in any ultimate literality" (Laclau and Mouffe 96). Both society, then, and individual identities within society, should be seen not in terms of fixity, but of unfixity,

so that

> while identity is not fixed, in the sense that it is not reducible to the autonomous individual closed in upon him or herself, it is not equivalent to the social structure either. In effect, an identity is neither fixed nor completely fluid. It is rather the product of a contradictory tension between necessity (the social structure) and contingency (individual autonomy). (Lechte 193)

This recognition of the unfixity of identity is essential to an understanding of representations of métis: their peculiar social mobility (whether figured as a natural propensity towards assimilation or an adaptibility that amounts to a survival technique in a discriminatory society) and its frustration result in narratives that show the complexity of the interactions between the (métis) individual and the society in which she lives. The métis protagonists, rather than being "situated" socially, are represented as moving inevitably on paths that plunge them into social confusion and conflict. The stories of those trajectories and conflicts, and the manner of their resolution, form the core of the representations I examine. To understand the nature of those conflicts, a closer look at Laclau and Mouffe's argument is warranted, for they establish that the basically relational (and thus unfixed) nature of social subjects can best be understood in terms of Derrida's notion of *différance*, a notion that is clearly important as well in understanding hybridity's peculiar nature as a challenge to the same/other binary so central to colonial domination.

Laclau and Mouffe note that Derrida's conceptualization of discourse coincides with their own thinking on social relations in denying the existence of a centre that provides a basis for a social structure. The logical consequence of the "linguistic turn"

(LaCapra 21) in theory is to establish an identity between the social and the discursive, because discourse is "a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences" (Laclau and Mouffe 112).[10] The non-fixity of the signified, Laclau and Mouffe point out, must be the result not of a "poverty of signifieds," but of their proliferation, of *polysemy* (113), and attempts to dominate society must in fact be seen as attempts to establish discursive domination: "Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre" (112). This all-encompassing nature of discourse allows us to understand Laclau and Mouffe's earlier conception of the social as a relational structure of differences that offers various subject positions and which is articulated both linguistically and materially (but not discursively and non-discursively):

> The objective world is structured in relational sequences [...]: it is sufficient that certain regularities establish differential positions for us to be able to speak of a discursive formation. Two important conclusions follow from this. The first is that the material character of discourse cannot be unified in the experience or consciousness of a founding subject; on the contrary, diverse subject positions appear dispersed within a discursive formation. The second consequence is that the practice of articulation, as fixation/dislocation of a system of differences, cannot consist of purely linguistic phenomena; but must instead pierce the entire material density of the multifarious institutions, rituals and practices through which a discursive formation is structured. (109)

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[10] Indeed, it is misleading to refer to an "original or transcendental signified" as though one existed, because Derrida's point is that no such original signified can exist. This is important in my discussion of hybridity's challenge to the notions of "purity" and a singularity of origins.

To complete the picture of social relations, it is necessary also to introduce Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which Nancy Fraser calls his "term for the discursive face of power": "It is the power to establish the 'common sense' or 'doxa' of a society, the fund of self-evident descriptions of social reality that normally go without saying. [...] Hegemony, then, expresses the advantaged position of dominant social groups with respect to discourse" (Fraser 125).

It is significant that the two French novels in this study reveal a preoccupation with the difference in hegemonic power between British-Canadians and French-Canadians relative to Indians and (especially) métis people. Ronald Lavallée shows that his protagonist Askik is fully conscious of the fact that the English are "masters" and the French "servants" in Quebec (312). Bugnet portrays the Scotsman Alec as the colonial dominator who controls the economic life of the region. Father Lozée, the Catholic priest who represents a colonizing force bringing European civilization to the "savages," is portrayed as a non-threatening and unreflecting doctrinaire who perfunctorily baptizes Indians and métis without attending to their true conversion. In these novels, then, the force of French hegemony over the métis is attenuated or cancelled out by the overwhelming hegemony of the British. These authors are thus able to use the sense of their own minority position to ally themselves (psychologically at least) with their métis characters. The novels in English, on the other hand, do not acknowledge the presence of the French in Western Canada, except perhaps for the mention that Tay John's name is a

bastardization of the French "Tête Jaune" ("Yellowhead"). Similarly in *April Raintree*, there is a single "white world" exerting an undifferentiated hegemony for Cheryl, and later April, to resist.

All of this speaks to the complexity of discourse and discursive structures at different times in the history of Western Canada. The notions of "colonizer" and "colonized" and the relations between them are complicated by the presence of more than one group of colonizer and, with the appearance of métis people, a whole new category to fit into the constellation of relationships. While it is clear that binaries such as the "self/other" binary are useful to postcolonial theory and its illumination of the workings of colonial regimes, it is imperative that the complexity of the specifically Canadian context be kept in mind, for the existence of hybrid people is one of the principal challenges to a binary such as "self/other" with its apparent inability to accommodate the hybrid person.

The self/other binary

Central to the questions of identity, of desire, and of colonialism is the self/other binary. Two uses of this binary come into play in the discussion of hybridity in the colonial context and they are not entirely identical: indeed, the juxtaposition of these two uses demonstrates very clearly the relativity of the notions of "self" and "other," a relativity that forms the crux of the problem of hybridity itself. The first aspect derives

from Lacan's theory of the development of identity in the individual to denote the need for the individual to distinguish an other in order to gain a sense of the self: "the Other is crucial to the subject because the subject exists in its gaze. Lacan says that 'all desire is the metonym of the desire to be' because the first desire of the subject is the desire to exist in the gaze of the Other" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 170). The category of "other" is thus a basic psychological need that has far-reaching implications for human inter-relations, not all of which are positive. The self/other binary of which postcolonial theory speaks often takes the form of the pairing of (white) colonizer/(dark-skinned) colonized. In this use, "[t]his Other [...] provides the term in which the colonized subject gains a sense of his or her identity as somehow 'other', dependent" (170-71). Homi Bhabha states that "colonial discourse produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible" ("Other" 70-71). In Canada, this binary is most often expressed as white/native, a binary that cannot satisfactorily accommodate métis people, as the representations under study here show convincingly. A native person might attempt to subvert his or her "otherness" in a colonial régime precisely by occupying and redefining in some fashion one side of the binary, but the métis person who attempts to do the same enters a conflicted state, because what they are opposing is not a remote and foreign colonizer, but rather an identifiable part of themselves.

The authors of the novels in this study use different approaches to represent the

otherness of their métis characters. Much of Georges Bugnet's novel is written from the point of view of his métis protagonist, a technique that would seem to negate the notion of "othering" in the novel. Yet there are specific instances where he accentuates Nipsya's otherness, as for example when she hears a violin being played for the first time: "une sorte de boîte singulière, au-dessus de quoi s'allongeaient quatre fils parallèles sur lesquels, de sa main droite, [Alec] faisait glisser une baguette. C'était de cela que sortaient ces sons inouïs et merveilleux qui lui faisaient palpiter le coeur et contracter la gorge" (210).[11] Bugnet uses a light touch with such passages, but clearly the intended effect is to show the distance that Nipsya must travel to move from her state of "otherness" to a state of "sameness" where she fits into the French-influenced lifestyle and ideology adopted by Vital, the character that represents Bugnet's métis "ideal."

In *Tay John*, Howard O'Hagan also chooses to "other" his métis protagonist, but he uses an entirely different technique. In that novel, it is the external focalization on Tay John that lends him an aura of the unknowable. The narrator emphasizes that mystical (or mythical) quality at every turn. He also tells the story of how Tay John cuts off his own hand in order to win a horse, an act that is so out of the reader's normal range of possible behaviours that it has a powerful othering effect. Although Tay John ends up with a

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[11] [A] peculiar kind of box which he was supporting with his chin and his left hand; there were four parallel strings stretched along the top of it, and his right hand was drawing a rod across them. That was what produced the extraordinary and wonderful sounds that made her heart throb and her throat contract. (Woodrow 179)

white woman for a mate at the end of the novel, a detail that might in some way change the perception of him to more of a "same" (relative to the white/Indian binary, at least), the novel's concluding scene with its heavily mythic overtones ensures that Tay John remains as remote and unknowable as he was at the beginning of the narrative.

The authors of the two more recent novels adopt techniques that seem to run counter to forms of othering, and might therefore be considered forms of "saming." In *April Raintree*, the métis author sets up a parallel between two sisters, one with visibly native looks, the other able to pass for white. April, the pale-skinned sister, spends most of the novel seeing "through white man's eyes" (105), as her sister puts it. She wants to forget she is métis and melt into white society, which she sees as the only road to success. Her experience of being métis as a young girl, her attempts to pass as white, and her rejection of everything métis, allow the (white) reader to become conscious of what her own attitudes may be, formed by the pervasive discourse around native and métis race in Canada. April Raintree becomes the (white) same that, when contrasted with her sister as the racialized other, shows how individual personality and experience can lead to different views of one's (racial) identity.

In *Tchipayuk* too, a form of "saming" takes place in that the narrative voice is centred entirely around Askik. His ideas and reactions are so transparent to the reader that she sees Askik as "same," identifying more with him than with the people around him in Quebec who call him "savage" and believe that epithet sums up all there is to

know about him. The problem with this technique is that it fails to render a full portrayal, as Culleton does in *April Raintree*, of the twisted and damaging effects of racial discrimination on the métis character. Although he is disappointed by the way his benefactors treat him and his rejection by Quebec farmers, Askik's ability to maintain a sense of superiority over these people means that he does not suffer the torment of conflicted feelings about himself that April feels about her own métis heritage and family.

In the end, the question that these narratives struggle with is whether, and how, the métis individual can experience "sameness" and "otherness" simultaneously and harmoniously, and that is one of the most important questions addressed by the novels in this study. If being "same" implies a false assimilation into the white world while being "other" means denying the white heritage that constitutes one part of the métis person's background, then the discursive structures that offer the métis individual those subject positions alone must be changed to accommodate a peculiarly métis subject position. The difficulty for the métis person of developing an authentic métis self in Canada is reflected in these novels by the absence of a generation of parents capable of guiding and giving strength to their children as they come to grips with the challenges facing them.

In fact, one evident and perplexing absence in the novels I am studying here is the lack of any representation of harmonious domestic relationships between white and native individuals (or between métis parents), even where, as in *Nipsya*, such a relationship is known to have existed between the French-Canadian father and Cree mother of Vital and

Alma Lajeunesse. Without the supportive or illustrative presence of the parents, their métis offspring must bear the full burden of working through the problems involved in finding their place in the world. More fundamentally, the absence of parents leaves the métis child with few resources to aid in the formation of a métis self. Sociologists now recognize the centrality of discourse in the form of narrative as a tool for the child's construction of the self:

> A sense of identity and subjectivity is constructed from the interpretative resources – the stories and narratives of identity – which are available, in circulation, in our culture. This subjectivity is also constrained, of course, by other social practices. Some accounts of self are more readily available to some than others. (Wetherell and Potter 78)

Without parents to give the child a sense of where she comes from by passing on those narratives of identity, the child is more vulnerable to hegemonic forces in society that push the métis individual towards assimilation.

The problem is resolved in part when métis people form their own futures through reproduction, so that physical reproduction becomes a necessary basis for cultural reproduction, a reproduction that appears more precarious for métis people than for other groups because of the often tenuous links between one generation and the next. The absence of parents as a theme in these novels emphasizes the difficulty for the métis individual of founding the sort of collective that will ensure social and cultural survival for future generations. The métis protagonists are in some sense "originary" beings who must bear the burden both of creating the next generation of métis people – and by

extension a viable future for them – and of maintaining the sort of inter-generational continuity that they themselves have been denied through the death of their parents or separation from them. The lack of an exemplary model of inter-racial or métis domesticity makes the métis protagonists' search for a mate the central dramatic catalyst of the narratives because it places them in situations of social conflict that they might be spared if their parents were present as guides.

One concern that all of the novels share, then, is the problem of the hybrid person as "originary," as having to discover or even create their identity, cultural as well as individual, rather than receiving an identity as a legacy that they may choose to ignore, to adopt, or to adapt as they see fit. It may be that very quality of freedom of self-identification that makes métis characters attractive to authors interested in a peculiarly Canadian theme. Conversely, a métis author such as Beatrice Culleton effectively peels away the aura of romance adhering to the notion that métis people have the freedom to make of themselves what they wish by selecting from different cultural backgrounds the practices and beliefs that will ensure their superiority and success as a group. She shows the damage that results from broken connections between generations. Her novel ends on a utopian note, but only as a consequence of her protagonist's hard-won recognition that she does belong to a group with a history that must be remembered and passed on if the destructive cycle of inter-generational breakdown is to be interrupted.

Desire, transgression, miscegenation

The pattern of absent parents, together with the pattern according to which the métis protagonist's attraction to a white person propels him or her into conflict and crisis, both point to desire as a crucial element in representations of métis people. The rules about who can be attracted to whom in a society seem to form the very bedrock upon which all other relationships depend, and desire and its social consequences are central to the narratives presented here. Robert Young studies racial hybridity as the outcome of "colonial desire," or the white colonizer's desire for possession and control of the (dark) body of the colonized. Young argues that "it was the very desire of the white for the non-white, and the proliferating products of their unions, that 'dislimned boundaries' [...] and undid the claim for permanent difference between the races while at the same time causing the boundary territories of the racial frontier to be policed even more possessively" (180). Concomitant with that desire comes the sense of transgression that arises from a racially charged idea of miscegenation, which holds that the supposed "purity" of the white race is sullied by mixing with a "dark" race to produce hybrid offspring. It is necessary to look at these notions in order fully to understand the (often shifting) ground of ideas about hybridity.

All of these elements arise in the novels under study here: the desire that produces métis offspring in the first place; the anxiety around crossed boundaries and the insistence on social policing of those boundaries, a policing by opinion that is carried out as often

and as effectively by white women as by white men. Yet Young's explanation does not entirely fit the Canadian context. The effect of racist attitudes, which became more virulent in Europe toward the end of the nineteenth century under the influence of such race theorists as Gobineau, was applied retroactively to colonial relationships that had existed for centuries. As Sylvia Van Kirk points out, until the last years of the fur trade in Canada, inter-racial marriages and families were the norm rather than a source of prurient shame:

> [F]ur-trade society developed its own marriage rite, marriage *à la façon du pays*, which combined both Indian and European marriage customs. In this, the fur-trade society of Western Canada appears to have been exceptional. In most other areas of the world, sexual contact between European men and native women has usually been illicit in nature and essentially peripheral to the white man's trading or colonizing ventures. In the Canadian West, however, alliances with Indian women were the central social aspect of the fur traders' progress across the country. (14)

"Colonial desire" in the fur trade was tied up with the fur traders' need of assistance to survive the harsh living conditions, to communicate and trade with their Indian counterparts in the fur trade, and to prepare the furs for market. Native women recognized, for their part, that their living conditions would be improved by living at a fur-trade post and that they would gain status with their own tribe by marrying a white trader (Van Kirk 73-79).

The "illicit" nature of inter-racial marriage in most colonial countries was tied up with European notions of a hierarchy of races. These ideas hardened into a doctrine that gained strength throughout the nineteenth century. The most prevalent line of thinking

was social Darwinism, which held that races progressed along an evolutionary ladder from savagery to barbarism to civilization. According to this doctrine, naturally superior groups would defeat inferior groups in a battle for "survival of the fittest," and colonial victors were therefore justified in dominating supposedly inferior races (Fleras and Elliott 54-58). According to this doctrine miscegenation, or the mixing of races, posed a threat of social chaos because it upset the idea of fixed racial difference on which the idea of racial supremacy depended. As Vernon Reynolds points out, there is a small distance between notions of racial difference and the enforcement of social domination:

> The idea of 'higher' and 'lower' races, distinguished by their appearance and behaviour, leads naturally to the concept of the ill of 'miscegenation'. One can see the use of this concept as an effort by powerful social groups to keep themselves distinct from weaker or subservient ones by preventing any blurring of the boundaries. (375)

Jean Benoist notes that when we speak of the social effects of hybridity we are speaking of the social definition of a biological fact, which operates through a selective attention to differences: "En ne prenant pas en considération certaines différences, et en attachant de l'importance à d'autres, c'est [la société] qui va dire ce qui est 'métissage' et ce qui ne l'est pas" (539).[12] This study is concerned with how, when a society recognizes the presence of hybrid people, that recognition is expressed in both liberating and limiting social effects: it assumes the ability of literary texts to show how society functions and

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[12] By not taking some differences into consideration and by lending importance to others, it is [society] that says what is '*métissage*' and what is not.

either to reinforce the ideology represented or to question and challenge that ideology or some aspects of it. While Benoist addresses anthropology in particular, his suggestions for the study of hybridity can apply equally well in a sociocritical literary study such as this one. Benoist advocates a study

> qui nous aide à comprendre que ces réalités biologiques sont perçues, vécues, transformées en significations sociales. Et qui parvienne à comprendre comment des significations déterminent des comportements (choix matrimoniaux, barrières interethniques, conduites sociales vis-à-vis des 'métis') qui viennent à leur tour influencer le destin biologique de la population. (540)[13]

As I will show, interethnic barriers and social conduct towards métis have their greatest impact when they determine matrimonial choice, and that in turn is one of the preponderant factors in determining the "biological destiny" of métis in Canada. Biological destiny (the biological futurity of a defined group, in this case a group called "métis") and social destiny (the place and participation of that group within society) are intimately linked. In fact, notes Benoist, métis are most directly affected by what he calls their "social devalorisation" (542). Marginality is inevitable for hybrid people, he says, if both of the "originary communities" reject them. Discrimination is passed down through the generations, "scellée par les marques phénotypiques qui sont devenues des stigmates sociologiques" (542).[14] According to early racist beliefs, hybrids were weak offspring of

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[13] [T]hat helps us understand that these biological realities are perceived, lived, and transformed into social meanings. And that achieves an understanding of how meanings determine behaviours (matrimonial choices, interethnic barriers, social conduct towards 'métis') that can in turn influence the biological future of the population.

[14] [S]ealed by phenotypical marks become sociological stigmata.

impossible unions who were doomed to disappearance either immediately owing to physical and mental debility, or gradually, owing to increasing infertility. These beliefs have only been countered relatively recently thanks to a move away from study too influenced by the science of biology: "Ce n'est donc qu'en s'écartant d'une approche biologisante que l'on peut évaluer à son juste poids le fardeau du métissage. qui est celui de la discrimination raciale" (542).[15] Race and the purported purity of races as ideological tools to bolster colonial domination are still entrenched in discursive structures despite the abandonment of the underlying biologically-based doctrine.

In her study of turn-of-the-century French colonial literature, Jennifer Yee detects a pattern whereby male babies of inter-racial sex are invariably stillborn or weak and sickly. A male child who survives to adulthood is represented as effeminate or sexually indeterminate. Female children tend to survive more often, only to become prostitutes. the objects of white male desire. Patricia Riley finds a similar representation in nineteenth-century American literature, and more particularly in Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*:

> The perceived threat to white racial purity, no doubt a reaction to the increasing presence of Mixedbloods in various communities throughout North America, precipitated a scapegoating impulse [...] that is based on a biologically deterministic belief that the wages of the so-called sin of miscegenation can be found in the biracial offspring who are subsequently portrayed in literature as

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[15] It is only in moving away from a biologically-based approach that we can properly evaluate the burden of *métissage*, which is that of racial discrimination.

> doomed, defective, dangerous, and double-crossed by virtue of the genetic contribution of the Indian parent. (175)

In contrast, none of the novels in this study shows a métis child as doomed to die. Indeed, there is a notable absence in the narratives of depictions of parents' sexual or marital relations or of childbirth itself. There are hints of effeminacy in the character of Tay John, most of them connected with his blond hair, which is hair "a girl might be proud of" (O'Hagan 84), yet on the whole he is depicted as huge and powerful, the epitome of heroic manhood. In *April Raintree*, where one of the métis sisters does become a prostitute and dies by suicide, it is clearly the result of overwhelming social forces that shatter her dreams of an idealized aboriginal lifestyle and lead to a sense of helplessness and hopelessness. The different perspective is natural given the different era in which the book was written, but even Georges Bugnet, who was a young man in France at the time when the stories Yee is studying were written, does not rely on such simplistic views of miscegenation. Although he sometimes describes Nipsya in terms of heightened, even animal-like sexuality, he never implies that she is naturally inclined to promiscuity because she is métis.

It appears, then, that the notion of miscegenation as a "sin" that is embodied in métis offspring is detectable only indirectly in representations of métis in Canadian literature, and is not a determining aspect of those representations. It is present, and must be taken into account, because it is a part of the background that forms notions of racial "purity" and "impurity," notions that in turn help underpin attitudes towards inter-racial

marriage and procreation as transgressions against some transcendental law of God or nature. This sense of transgression can also be linked to what Homi Bhabha calls "the subject's desire for a pure origin" ("Other" 75) or, in terms of the collective, "the myth of historical origination – racial purity, cultural priority – produced in relation to the colonial stereotype" (74). Hybridity disallows reliance on a myth of pure origins and instead shifts the burden of being originary onto the métis individual. As individuals, the protagonists of the novels in this study must become originary to lay the foundations for a métis future without access to a ready-made myth of origins. On the whole, the novels in this study offer a different perspective from that of the (white, male) colonizer who desires the (dark, colonized) other. The narratives follow the desire of the métis person who seeks his or her own other (where reproduction is part of the theme of origination) and then faces questions of newly rigidified boundaries and the ways in which they are maintained in the local collective.

In all four novels under study here it is the surge of desire, the métis character's coming into sexual maturity, that propels him or her into a state of conflict with white society. Essentially, the métis person does not at first feel the force of the self/other binary as parallel with the white/Indian binary. When sexuality becomes involved, however, and with it the threat of miscegenation, the binary is suddenly enforced quite fiercely by a white person who acts as a guardian of racial purity. The métis person finds himself pushed to the "other" side of the binary. No recognition is accorded to the white

part of his make-up, nor is there any question of setting the binary aside or adjusting its terms so that the métis individual might be seen as "same" rather than "other." The métis characters' parents have managed to overcome racial barriers in order to produce their children (and not only through rape, as in the case of Tay John's parents), but in these representations social barriers, disguised as racial barriers (the true significance of miscegenation as transgression is that it serves as a pretext for social stratification and domination), are at the crux of the conflict that in some way fuels the drama in each narrative. The conflict triggers a crisis of identity as the métis individual is suddenly made aware of his or her hybridity and of how it is perceived, that is, of the "meanings" that are lent to hybridity by non-métis people, whether French, British, or Indian. It is in examining the forms and the implications of these crises of desire that one may begin to gain a better understanding of métis hybridity as a racial, social, and cultural concept in the white Canadian imagination.

It is generally acknowledged in studies on the self/other theme that representations of the other in fact arise from a need to distinguish other from self, so that interest in an other is essentially a narcissistic enterprise (Gilman 18). This study aims to avoid, or at least to mitigate the charge of a lapse into narcissism by the strategies it adopts. At the level of theory, we concur with Robert Young's argument that hybridity as a concept does not lend itself to, and indeed tends to negate, the self/other binary as a framework for study (179). I see the studies of the self/other binary as outlined above useful in

conceptualizing the problem under study, but I also acknowledge that this binary may be one of the roadblocks that contribute to the pressures for a polarized (and racialized) view of society. It may be the very thing that prevents us from incorporating notions of hybridity as an enlightening and liberating ideal. The texts in this study show how the self/other binary acts as a tool of social exclusion and hierarchization (as in *Nipsya*), or results in such distortions of self-recognition that it damages individuals and family relationships (as in *April Raintree*). On a practical level, the study of *April Raintree*, a novel written by a métis author portraying métis characters, ensures that the discussion does not remain implicitly locked into the self (white author) / other (métis character) paradigm that perpetuates the conventional division of Canadian literature not only into "English-Canadian" and "French-Canadian" literatures, but also "Canadian" (encompassing both English and French) and "Native" literatures.

Literature and representation

The immense productive potential of literary texts is what differentiates literature from the more rigid political, economic and social discourses of science, including the social sciences. In contradistinction to the rules of exclusion in discourse that Michel Foucault identifies (11-16), literature speaks of taboo subjects, listens to the words of the "insane," and explores human desire and sexuality as the most fascinating and unlimited source of taboos and insanity. The taboo in this case is contained in the discourse of

racism, which sees the racially hybrid person as a sign of transgression through the crossing of a race boundary established and policed by social norms and practices.

This study assumes no strict separation between the literary and the social. The novel in particular, with its narrative foundation, can give us access to a sort of collective psyche, because novels in a national literature contain the stories that we (as a culture or a group of connected cultures) tell ourselves about our existence as individuals, as societies, and as individuals interacting with the social. For Simon During, the novel's implication in the social is the reason for its relative stability as a genre:

> Poetry has gone through several revolutions since Pope, but fiction – though it has been transformed – occupies recognizably the same discursive space in Defoe and Richardson as in, say, Christina Stead and Pynchon. It is this continuity, this immense social effectiveness, that places the civil Imaginary at the very centre of the institution of modern literature. (144)

The narratives examined in this study have diverse forms: *Tay John* is deeply immersed in legend and myth; *Nipsya* takes the form of romance; *Tchipayuk* is closer to a traditional historical novel; and *April Raintree* is a fictionalized autobiography set in contemporary Canada. These different forms are in themselves revelatory of the differences (and similarities) between representations of métis as a function of the positioning of the author. The two French novelists choose to set their novels around the watershed date of 1885, the year in which the Métis Rebellions in Western Canada climaxed and in which the fate of the métis on the Prairies seems to have been finally sealed, leading to landlessness, powerlessness, and rapid marginalization as white Canadians (and more

particularly white settlers and politicians from Ontario) took the defeat of the rebellions to mean that the métis had been silenced once and for all as a political, social, and economic force in the Canadian West. *Nipsya* and *Tchipayuk* tell the stories of Western métis of that era with indeterminate, utopian endings that imply opportunities and strengths for their métis characters with the promise of a "métis space" in Western Canada, the sort of space that might have existed had Riel been successful. From that perspective, these novels are at once positive about the métis and quite unrealistic. Given that the novelists were living and writing in Western Canada decades after the events of 1885 and in full recognition of the disastrous results for the social and economic position of the métis, one might interpret their narratives as productions of bad faith. Yet the freedom of literary creation dictates only, as Henry James puts it, that a novel be "interesting" (81), while it is the prerogative of the reader to decide whether the novelist's particular vision contains some valuable form of truth.

As part of the discourse of a society, the novel with its representations of social agents and their relationships with one another in turn become part of the social fabric, the entire discursive universe that determines how a person views and experiences the world. It extends the notion of discourse (or what can be said) into what can be imagined (and then "said" when it comes out in print). The role of literature, when understood in this way, places it within the domain of the ideological in the Althusserian definition of ideology as "a representational structure which allows the individual subject to conceive

or imagine his or her lived relationship to transpersonal realities such as the social structure" (Jameson 30). Indeed, the representations of the métis protagonists in the novels under study here might be described as representations of individuals "coming into ideology" in that the climax of each of the stories is the point at which each métis individual attains in some way an awareness of his or her "relationship to transpersonal realities." In each case that happens to be a relationship of colonial domination which the character had previously been oblivious to, or had not recognized as such.

One of the consequences of an argument based on the centrality of discourse and discursive practices is that no distinction is made between "thought" and "reality," so that the field of what we think of as "the social" is broadened considerably: "Synonymy, metonymy, metaphor are not forms of thought that add a second sense to a primary, constitutive literality of social relations; instead, they are part of the primary terrain itself in which the social is constituted" (Laclau and Mouffe 110). Clearly, this conception of the social implicates the literary – a privileged site for synonymy, metonymy and metaphor – as much more than a simple "reflection" of social relations. Literature as discourse is capable of playing a variety of roles, whether they be affirmative, prescriptive, contestatory, exploratory, or some combination of these. It carries what Fredric Jameson calls the "political unconscious" of a society, but it also helps constitute the social unconscious as a whole, that is, the fears and desires present in a society and the ways in which some social forces tend towards closure, that is, "an objective and

closed system of differences" (125) while others maintain a relationship of antagonism that prevents that closure. I do not understand such "antagonism" as outright hostility, but rather as the clash or negotiation involved in a dialogic relationship, in which a subject acts agentially to choose or reject the particular subject positions that the other agent in the dialogue offers them. A closed system of differences would result in a series of stereotypes and unchanging relations between the various members of a society. The métis characters in the novels studied here display instead the consequences of the unfixity of identity and the subject's ability to call into question attempts by some social subjects to impose discursive dominance on others: "If the subject is constructed through language, as a partial and metaphorical incorporation into a symbolic order, any putting into question of that order must necessarily constitute an identity crisis" (126). We might see literary texts as lying on a continuum between those that attempt to fix the symbolic order – the order of differences – and those that break it down. The utopian ending of a novel such as *Nipsya* is based on the resolution of social differences into an order that appears perfectly satisfactory to the author and his characters; *April Raintree*, in contrast, shows the cost to one character, Cheryl, of trying to challenge the symbolic order of differences in society (an order that the power hierarchy needs to justify social inequalities and the domination of one group by another) and ends with a vision of the need for a continuing struggle to challenge that order.

In the representations offered by these novels, métis characters are agents and

social beings determined primarily by their hybridity, whether in the form of a racially-based portrayal of the character as the inheritor of traits through the blood, or in the form of individuals whose hybridity forces them to negotiate social spaces and discourses in more complex ways than native or white characters. If meaning is made through difference, the question here is how others in Canada perceive métis difference and what meanings they make of that difference. Such an investigation must also attempt to see how métis voices work to nuance or change those meanings. Part of the fascination with métis in Canadian literature seems to arise from the fact that they are peculiarly illustrative of the unfixity of the self. The post-modern understanding that the formation of the self is a process that never reaches complete closure is reflected in the narratives of métis characters. These characters and their stories of frustrated social mobility are a means of exploring the implications of an individual's subject positions in the face of a dominant culture intent on imposing the premature fixing of hybrid identity through stereotyping and forcing métis into the "other" side of a self/other binary. That imposition of a binary leaves no room for the métis experience of being in-between and of making that in-between place into a unique space for development of the self free of the falsity of assimilation or "passing." All of the narratives under study here end on a note of optimism (more attenuated in *Tay John* than in the other three novels) with the prospect of a change in the position of métis people, either through collective action or through the action of one individual. The aim of that change is, broadly speaking, to

carve out a place for métis people that gives them the possibility of exerting the originary force that is one of the special attributes of the hybrid person.

It is the idea of the struggle entailed by being originary that seems to capture the Canadian imagination and that, for a métis writer like Culleton, also constitutes a basis for strength and hope. It seems that every generation of métis in Canada has had to begin from where they are now and work out all over again what it means to be métis. The absence of a "national history" or a mythology rooted in time immemorial means that métis people must form their own mythology and their own sense of self through a difficult dialogue with a society still burdened by the dead weight of its colonial past. The contrast between the celebration of hybridity in the abstract and the continuing oppression of hybrid people in the real (Canadian) world makes for an irony that is the motivation for this study, whose aim is to explore and perhaps thus to reduce to some extent that ironic gap.

CHAPTER II

MÉTIS IN SEARCH OF A FUTURE

Nipsya and *Tay John* are narratives of métis characters – a woman in the former and a man in the latter – who reject their native upbringing and gravitate towards the white world as a possible alternative for the fulfillment of their desires. The plot of *Nipsya* revolves around the protagonist's choice between three men for a husband, so that the theme of desire is the structuring principle of the novel. *Tay John* has a more complex structure that takes us from the "legend" of his birth and young years amongst the Shuswap tribe in the Rocky Mountains through a series of thwarted desires that culminate in the protagonist doing battle to win the woman he wants for a mate. The ending of this novel gives the narrative a cyclical structure that lends it strong mythic overtones. The utopian endings of *Nipsya*, *Tchipayuk*, and *April Raintree*, although they do not have the overt mythic structure of *Tay John*, open the prospect of a rebirth and regeneration of métis people that promises a future independent of white and native people. Nipsya and Tay John are figures par excellence of "originary" métis called to found a people and a mythology – the sort of tasks that, though they now appear grandiose, it was still possible to imagine in the first half of the twentieth century in

Canada. Askik Mercredi and April Raintree also appear as originary figures, but ones who find the strength to make a new beginning by returning to a métis heritage that is available, if threatened.

Nipsya: the ideal métis

The plot of *Nipsya* has a conventional premise for a female protagonist in the nineteenth century: Nipsya, a métis girl who has been raised by her Cree grandmother, enters adulthood and begins to experience sexual desire for the first time. At the opening of the novel, Nipsya "commen[ce] d'entendre en soi-même des appels inconnus, et comme un chant de désirs, vague et grandissant" (Bugnet 73).[16] This burgeoning "song of yearning" pushes Nipsya into a new social world, one in which she must choose between three possible mates. The differences between the three men are not differences of class or character, but racial differences, which are understood to determine all of their personal and social characteristics. The three men are Mahigan, a young Cree man; Vital, Nipsya's métis cousin; and Alec, the Scottish factor of the local Hudson's Bay post.

The portrayal of Mahigan relies heavily on stereotype: he initially attracts Nipsya with his attitude of defiance towards white men and his physical abilities in breaking a wild horse: "Elle se glorifiait à cette habileté et cette énergie d'un homme de sa race,

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[16] [W]as beginning to hear mysterious calls within herself, and these calls, like a song of yearning, now faint, now louder. (Woodrow 12)

dédaignée des Blancs. Elle pensait maintenant qu'aucun Blanc ne valait Mahigan. Elle était fière de lui et, par lui, de la nation krise" (81).[17] As the novel progresses, however, this "fiery" nature becomes increasingly ominous and even diabolical. When Mahigan participates in a ritual meant to help the Cree decide whether to help Louis Riel in his rebellion, Nipsya, under the influence of her recent introduction to Catholic rites, finds the Cree ritual less appealing than previously: "ce soir-là, elle sentait pour [ces spectacles sanglants et mystérieux] moins d'attrait, et elle ne les pouvait plus aussi bien approuver"(141).[18] The scene is juxtaposed with Nipsya's first experience of a Catholic mass, during which she is transported by the sound of church music: "Et bientôt les chants, accompagnés de sons plus doux et plus puissants à la fois que ceux de la cloche. Tout cela la plongea dans une sorte de merveilleuse extase" (124).[19] Signalling the beginning of a distancing from her Cree upbringing, Nipsya resents her grandmother's refusal to return to the church for the following office: "La grand'mère ne se leva pas [at the sound of the church bell], et Nipsya n'osa point suivre seule son oncle. Cette contrainte, que lui imposait cette fois l'habitude plus que le respect ou l'affection, la remplit d'une sourde colère qui grandit encore lorsque lui parvinrent les sons, trop

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[17] She gloried in such skill and energy in a man of her own race – the race despised by the white men. She thought now that no white man was Mahigan's equal. She was proud of him, and through him, of the Cree people. (Woodrow 21)

[18] She [...] hitherto had approved of [these bloody and mysterious spectacles] [...]. But now she felt that they held less attraction for her. (Woodrow 96)

[19] And soon, there were hymns, accompanied by peals both sweeter and stronger than those of the bell. All this plunged her into an ecstasy of wonder. (Woodrow 74)

étouffés et lointains, des chants et de l'harmonium" (127).[20] The grandmother attributes Nipsya's new spirit of independence to her sexual awakening (127), and that may be the catalyst that sets her self-exploration in motion. The narrative shows, however, that the rapid development of her consciousness encompasses all of the elements that make up her world, and her changing relationship to them.

Following the Cree ritual, Mahigan's chances with Nipsya deteriorate rapidly, and they disappear completely when he attacks her while she is alone in the forest. Nipsya shows that she has internalized the notion that an Indian man is not suitable as a mate when she is shocked at having been "si près de se laisser prendre par Mahigan, un sauvage" (204).[21] This blatant use of what Terry Goldie calls the "standard commodity" of violence (15) in the representation of Mahigan, and Bugnet's overall representation of Mahigan as a "typical" Cree man, indicate more than any other element of the novel its ideological grounding. Mahigan's story ends with an attempt to kill his brother over a valuable fur and then Mahigan's suicide, an act that redeems him: "'Il n'était pas bon, mais il est mort en brave'" (Bugnet 262)[22] is one of the comments made by another Cree. Bugnet shows his adherence to the widely held belief in Canada in the nineteenth and the

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[20] Her grandmother did not get up [at the sound of the church bell], and Nipsya dared not follow her uncle by herself. Such restraint, imposed upon her this time by habit rather than by respect or affection, secretly angered her, and when she caught the muffled, far-off sound of the harmonium and the chanting, she was angrier still. (Woodrow 78)

[21] [S]o near giving herself to Mahigan, an Indian. (Woodrow 167)

[22] He was not a good man, but he died like a brave. (Woodrow 252)

early twentieth centuries that native peoples were destined to die out as a natural consequence of their supposed moral and cultural inferiority. He distinguishes himself, however, by representing métis people, and not white men, as the natural and legitimate successors to the Indians. If Mahigan is "le dernier des vrais Kris" (262)[23] in the words of his fellows, the priest Father Lozée also notes that the métis children and grandchildren of people like Cléophas Lajeunesse carry Cree blood, so that even if mixed with white blood, the Cree bloodlines will continue. Indeed, Lozée believes that this passing of the Indian heritage from the Cree to the métis is part of the natural order of things: "'Tout homme et toute race a son rôle à jouer dans le monde. Le vôtre et celui des Kris n'est pas fini'" (189)[24] and thus expresses the relationship whereby the (ultimately redeemed) Cree heritage will pass to and be protected by the métis. He assures Nipsya's grandmother that "'[ses] descendants sont une forte race. Ils ne sont pas près de disparaître'" (189).[25] By placing the emphasis on bloodlines alone so that genetic survival becomes an assurance that the Cree will not "disappear," Lozée sidesteps the question of cultural survival. In his view, typical of the era, métis who assimilate into a French-influenced way of life and culture based on small farmholdings and Catholic beliefs are able to survive in the face of social and economic change. Their survival in turn ensures the continuance of Indian

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[23] [T]he last of the true Crees. (Woodrow 252)

[24] Each man, each nation, has a part to play in the world, and neither your part nor that of the Cree people is finished. (Woodrow 151-52)

[25] [Her] descendents are becoming a strong race. They are not near disappearance. (Woodrow 152)

bloodlines. Although the author is generally critical of Father Lozée's perfunctory approach to Catholic beliefs, in this instance the priest is expressing an idea that is shared by the author, as the novel's ending clearly indicates. (*April Raintree* provides a more realistic view of the impact of Indian bloodlines on the individual living in a white-dominated, racist society. For the identifiably native sister, her Indian bloodlines amount to the stigmata of racial features that bring discrimination, whereas the sister who does not look native is placed in the position of denying her Indian heritage and her own family ties in order to succeed in white society.) In the utopian view that dominates in *Nipsya*, Western Canada is still a place where the growth of a métis population can provide a counterweight to incursions by white people while maintaining the Cree heritage without their perceived flaws.

In representations of métis people as the heirs of the Cree past, Vital Lajeunesse is the ideal, a man who has been educated by Catholic priests, who is a devout Christian, and whose chosen profession of farming makes him more a caretaker of the land than either the whites or the natives, who are caught up in the destructive machinery of the fur trade. According to Gilles Cadrin, there can be no doubt of Vital's position: Vital, "en dépit de son sang métissé, personnifie le monde blanc, rural et chrétien" (30).[26] A further distinction must be made, however, for Vital clearly represents a French white ideal, in

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[26] [D]espite his mixed blood, personifies the white, rural, Christian world.

contrast to the British who are coming "nous gaspiller le Nord-Ouest" (190).[27] According to the logic of métis hybridity in this text, Vital's assimilation into a Christian life of agriculture strengthens his position against the white settlers arriving on the Prairies. Vital is the local leader who rallies men to fight with Riel in his struggle against those settlers. His hybridity is thus imagined as giving him a capacity to adopt the "good" in civilization (i.e., Christian beliefs and agriculture as a way of life) while defending his Cree heritage – the land itself.

All of the signs of active destruction of native society by colonial domination are present in this narrative: the fur trade that co-opts men and displaces normal hunting activities so that everyone becomes dependent on the Hudson's Bay store and its lines of credit for provisions; the missionary activity that divides families, (an example being Mahigan's family itself, since Mahigan maintains his Cree beliefs whereas his brother Mistatim is a converted Catholic) and works to educate and assimilate as many native and métis children as possible. The result is the increasing atomization of Cree society: Nipsya and her grandmother live in a cabin isolated from other Cree families, as do Mistatim and his wife. Apart from the scenes at the meeting of Cree and métis to discuss Riel's action, scenes which include both a Catholic mass and a Cree religious ritual, there is no depiction of a life of community amongst the Cree and métis. Mahigan, a particularly isolated and devalued individual, represents the ultimate fate of his

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[27] [T]o ravage the North-West. (Woodrow 153)

community. All of his positive attributes become negatives in the course of the novel: his ability to break a wild horse looks worthless when set against Vital's dogged and practical breaking of a pair of oxen; Mahigan's central role in a Cree ritual loses its value in light of the fact that it appeals to older people such as Nipsya's grandmother but has little attraction for a young person like Nipsya in comparison with Catholic ritual; and Mahigan's abilities as a hunter are debased when he tries to kill his brother in order to take a valuable fur for trade. Mahigan as an individual fits with the colonial ideology of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries according to which this gradual decline of the native into impotence and moral degeneration is a sign of the "natural" extinction of native peoples. This ideology holds that in the meeting between "savagery" and "civilization" the latter will always triumph.

In this narrative, the métis are the saviours of the Cree race by the simple fact of carrying on their bloodlines, but it is the métis' adoption of white values and a European-influenced lifestyle that provides the necessary vitality to save, through hybridity, a dying race. Vital, whose name is a clear indication of his role in that process, shows himself to be what Pierre-André Taguieff calls a *mixophile inconditionnel* (unconditional mixophile) (339) when he tells Nipsya: "'Ton âme est comme celle des saules, Nipsya. Elle est comme celle de toute notre race. Elle est vivace, elle est variée'" (Bugnet 291).[28] In this

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[28] Your soul is like that of the willows, Nipsya, like the soul of our race – perennial and ever-varying. (Woodrow 285)

view, the very mixing of bloodlines, hybridity itself, is what makes for the strength of the métis people. It gives them a capacity for endurance and for regeneration following disaster. Again in the words of Vital, the métis are humble men "'qui, tant qu'elle durera à la surface de la terre, referont la vie sur l'écrasement des siècles'" (292).[29] Bugnet does not resort to overblown exaggeration of Vital's merits, but he clearly sees racial (and hence cultural) hybridity as an ideal: their cultural hybridity gives the métis the economic wherewithal and the spiritual resources they need to survive in the changing world of Western Canada, while their racial hybridity ties them to the land and ensures their physical capacity for survival.

Alongside Vital and Mahigan, Nipsya's third potential mate is Alec, the Scottish factor of the Hudson's Bay post. Like Vital, Alec is a man who offers Nipsya access to a world of ideas. Rather than the ideas of Christianity, however, he represents the ideas and ideals of European humanism. One essential difference between Alec the British white man and Vital the assimilated métis is that Vital respects the Cree whereas Alec denigrates them. He openly despises Mahigan, insinuating that he is a drunkard and that the Cree hunters are to blame for the scarcity of beavers (79). When Vital visits his grandmother to hire her to do farmwork, he presents this economic transaction in terms of her generosity and her talent as a cook in order not to offend her (93); when Alec takes

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[29] [S]o long as life shall remain on the earth's surface, will build it up anew on the ruins of the centuries. (Woodrow 286)

his friends to her cabin to discuss the rental of fishing equipment, the men do not remove their hats when they enter the house, thus indicating their essential contempt for Nipsya and her grandmother (213).

This differentiation between the white man and the assimilated métis man shows that Bugnet imagines assimilation for the métis as a process that does not require or inevitably entail the internalization of a sense of inferiority. Instead, it is a disposition towards ideas and practices that are more "right" than others, an ability to choose those elements of either culture that will facilitate survival. In the terms of Laclau and Mouffe, Bugnet accords a greater scope for contingency (that is, individual action) for métis people in determining their own destinies, a scope that comes from their double heritage. In Bugnet's view that heritage is carried "in the blood," so that the sort of disposition towards the benefits of civilization that we see in Vital and Nipsya is not something that is learned (Nipsya has, after all, spent sixteen years learning from her grandmother) but something that is always present, perhaps dormant but available to become a resource and an opportunity for the métis individual under the proper conditions.

The story of Nipsya, then, is how she moves from a state in which "nature" dominates in her life to one in which she can follow her disposition toward what Bugnet sees as spiritual rightness. Nipsya's opportunity to develop that disposition comes through her contact with Vital. It is Vital who conducts her toward religious understanding and acceptance of Christianity, but the narrative makes it clear that Nipsya

is attracted to it prior to Vital's instruction:

> Y avait-il autour d'elle des esprits, les uns bons, prêts à aider, les autres sournois et qui lui voulaient du mal? N'y aurait-il qu'un seul Grand Esprit qui dirigeait toutes les choses au bien, comme l'affirmait les Blancs? Elle inclinait vers cette dernière opinion et avait de l'attrait pour cette puissance unique. Cela expliquait mieux l'ordre toujours régulier des saisons et leur beauté sans cesse renouvelée (75).[30]

The narrative repeatedly stresses Nipsya's yearning for intellectual understanding: during the scene in which Nipsya witnesses her first Catholic mass, she is plunged into a sort of ecstasy produced by being surrounded by music, candlelight, images of Mary and Jesus, and the white and gold vestments of the priests (124), but intellectually she is filled with both wonder and skepticism as she listens to the story of Jesus. Her curiosity about this new religion becomes part of her growing awareness of her need for *self*- awareness: "En face de ces spectacles qu'elle trouvait si nouveaux, si beaux, Nipsya éprouvait une sort d'impatience à n'en pas pénétrer de suite la signification. [...] Pourquoi était-elle jusqu'ici restée si indifférente à ces pensées qui faisaient faire aux hommes de si belles choses et apportaient tant de douceur?" (129).[31] As Paulette Collet shows, much of Nipsya's struggle with Christian doctrine and Vital's teaching of it is a problem of language:

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[30] Were there really spirits around her, some of them good and ready to help her, others evil and wishing her harm? Or might there be just one Great Spirit governing everything, as the white people said? She was drawn to this idea: it explained better the regular order of the seasons and the unfailing renewal of their beauty. (Woodrow 14)

[31] After watching these spectacles, to her so novel and beautiful, Nipsya felt impatient because she could not at once grasp their meaning. [...] Why had she remained so long indifferent to these new thoughts that made men do such lovely things and awakened such sweet emotions? (Woodrow 81)

> Un des préceptes que [Vital] voudrait inculquer à son élève, c'est qu'il faut 'Faire ce qu'on croit bon du mieux que l'on peut'. Mais que signifie le mot *bon*? Bon pour qui, pour quoi? Il est évident que, pour Nipsya, qui n'est pas chrétienne et qui ne sait à peu près rien du christianisme, le mot n'a pas le même sens que pour Vital. (67)[32]

In one instance, we see that Nipsya is held back by her "savage ways" from practicing Christianity as Vital understands it. Nipsya is used to eating as much as she wants at the dinner table, in a manner that is described in terms of gluttony, one of the deadly sins (Bugnet 105). Vital insists that she must give up this behaviour in order to practice Christian self-abnegation. The novel explicitly acknowledges that Nipsya's eating habits are dictated by the cycle of feast and famine, which requires that the individual build up reserves when food is plentiful (150). This is an instance where European religious strictures and social practices are not only foreign, but also potentially disastrous to native society. Vital's insistance that Nipsya abandon the practice of feasting in fact requires that she adopt an entire world view that melds Christianity as an institution together with agriculture: while it is presented here as the virtuous denial of physical wants meant to favour attention to the purely spiritual needs of the individual, this sort of self-abnegation is based on the assumption of the ready availability of food reserves, something that has clearly not been established in a society in which farming is still at its very first stages.

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[32] One of the precepts that [Vital] would like to inculcate in his student is that it is necessary 'To do what you think is good, as best you can.' But what does the word '*good*' mean? Good for whom, for what? Clearly for Nipsya, who is not Christian and who knows virtually nothing about Christianity, the word does not have the same meaning as for Vital.

This is a case, then, where the discourse is at odds with the reality of living conditions (Nipsya and her grandmother still depend on fishing for food, and there is the very real possibility that some form of shortage or even famine might strike). In effect, in exhorting Nipsya to adopt "Christian" self-denial, Vital is asking her to move out of her Cree culture and to become more European. While his discourse is ostensibly religious, it is also essentially economic, posited on the notion that there will be continuing plenty, with none of the periodic food shortages that dictate feasting as a survival technique.

With Alec, the Hudson's Bay factor, Nipsya enters first into a world dominated by a more openly economic discourse, that of the white fur trader. Alec later uses a discourse of secular European humanism to introduce to Nipsya ideas that rival the religious teachings of Vital, but our first introduction to him demonstrates that he represents above all the incursion of capitalism into the frontier, a role about which the novel is by no means uncriticial.[33] Early in the novel, Nipsya goes to the Hudson's Bay post to buy a few items, using the credit Alec has extended to Nipsya and her grandmother based on the recent successful hunting season. She witnesses an argument between Alec and the Cree Mahigan, who insists that Louis Riel and the Métis will soon drive the white men from the country: "'Les Blancs ont ruiné le castor. [...] Les Blancs sont pires que les gros loups des bois'" (79).[34] Alec turns the argument back on Mahigan

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[33] Gilles Cadrin has studied Bugnet's works in light of his rejection of "extreme civilization" with its corrupt materialism.

[34] You white men have destroyed the beaver [...]. You white men are worse than timber-wolves! (Woodrow 18)

by accusing him of overhunting because he soon spends his earnings in "drunkenness" (79). The scene that follows, in which Mahigan breaks a wild horse for Alec, is also the result of a business deal. Later, Nipsya overhears Alec telling his white visitors that rather than try to catch fish for themselves, they should buy it from métis: "'Ils le vendraient bon marché'" (212).[35] Alec represents, in short, the spirit of economic gain for whom all interaction with others becomes some form of transaction or business deal.

At first sight, Alec's seduction of Nipsya appears to take place outside this world view dominated by economics. He seduces Nipsya (innocently at first) with his violin music and by introducing her to new, European ideas. In the end, however, it is economic considerations disguised as social values that dictate his choice of a mate. He marries a white schoolteacher from Edmonton rather than Nipsya: for Alec, there can be no social or economic gain in marrying a métis girl, and in fact such a marriage would cause him to lose status, whereas a union with a white woman brings a certain social status in a white-dominated racist society. Sylvia Van Kirk describes in detail the rise in racism in Canadian fur trade society in the nineteenth century, in part as a result of the arrival of white women on the prairies:

> In various parts of the British Empire, a direct relationship can be traced between the growth of racial prejudice and the arrival of white women on the scene. With the appearance of women of their own race, the fur traders began to exhibit prejudices toward native females which had previously been dormant. [...] [T]he question of colour became an issue for the first time. (174)

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[35] They'd sell it cheaply. (Woodrow 181)

Native women were welcomed as wives for fur traders because they were available and tolerated by the men running the system and because they turned out to be extremely useful economically. Métis women were at first also recognized as being useful because they could act as interpreters and learned native skills from their mothers. It was the white fathers' acquiescence to growing social pressures in the Red River area to "civilize" their métis daughters that rendered métis women less useful to the fur trade and more vulnerable to abuse by white men (129-32). This made it easier for white men to drop them as potential mates as soon as white wives became the "vogue," in Van Kirk's expression. Van Kirk notes the solidifying of racial lines with métis women on the "native" rather than the "white" side:

> As racial prejudice grew and fur-trade society became more consciously stratified with regard to women, even the position of acculturated mixed-blood females was threatened. Was such a woman, tainted with Indian blood, really the most suitable wife for the gentleman officer of Rupert's Land? (151)

This thinking is clearly operating when Alec decides to marry Flora, a white woman; indeed, it is clear that far from being in the nature of sounding out a potential mate, Alec's near seduction of Nipsya was never anything but an amusement for him.

The moment when Nipsya realizes that Alec has rejected her and married another woman instead precipitates a suicidal crisis in the girl. Nipsya runs out into the winter temperatures where she intends to die in the freezing water of the lake. Norman Williamson remarks that it is something of a convention in nineteenth-century novels for "stereotype Indian maidens" rejected by white heros to die soon afterward, either by

suicide or in some other way, most often in "any context with water" (58). Nipsya's crisis fits with the convention up to a point, but there is more to the scene than just a distraught "native" girl fleeing rejection and humiliation. The confrontation between Nipsya and Alec, with his new wife as an oblique participant, is the moment in which the workings of the racist colonial regime are suddenly laid bare in a way that Nipsya cannot help but understand. The various workings of gaze, address, and meaning in the scene provide a snapshot of some of the workings of power in colonial interactions.

Nipsya insists on going to the dance at Alec's store, having already learned from Alma that Alec has married a white woman. This act of assertiveness plays on the power of the (colonial) gaze and the subversion of colonial power through "the threatened return of the look" (Bhabha, "Other" 81). Homi Bhabha argues that the colonizer uses his (or her) power of gaze in a strategy of "colonial surveillance" ("Mimicry" 89) to make a mere object of the colonized. The colonized can counteract that objectification with the "return of the look" and create an ambivalence that throws the colonial dominator off balance at least momentarily. The colonizer is startled by that look into glimpsing the subjectivity of the colonized and all that implies of a thinking, feeling, dangerously unknown and unknowable subject sliding away from colonial subjection.

Significantly, it is not Alec but his wife who reads most clearly the message of the girl's gaze. Alec addresses the matter by speaking not directly to Nipsya, but to his wife: "'Tenez, Flora, voici la petite amie dont je vous ai parlé. Je crois qu'elle a de la peine.

Soyez bonne pour elle'" (Bugnet 240).[36] The dismissive, condescending tone Alec adopts, and his indication to Nipsya that she is no secret he has kept from his wife, are calculated to disarm any possible threat Nipsya might pose to him and his new social position. Flora, however, knows that kindness will not help her to deal with what she sees in Nipsya's eyes, "deux yeux fixes, froidement hostiles" (240).[37] In her reply, she encapsulates the position of white women arriving on the prairies to find their assumed supremacy under threat: "'Je crois que vous l'aimiez autant que moi. Je ne veux plus que vous la revoyiez'" (241).[38] Her reaction fits with Van Kirk's observation about the common reaction of white women arriving in Western Canada and encountering rivals in the form of Indian and métis women: "In a society where marriage defined a woman's position, white women felt threatened by the presence of acculturated native women against whom they might have to compete for husbands" (17). Nipsya's reaction reflects the fact that native women felt at least an equivalent level of threat when their social position too depended on their relations to men, but Nipsya has fewer resources to call on than does Flora in this struggle. Flora's unspoken threat to Alec is that she might remove the social capital that she brings him as the cultivated, blonde, white-skinned symbol of cosmopolitan power, all the details of which Nipsya observes: "la riche robe de satin

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[36] Look, Flora! [...] Here is the little friend I told you about. I think she is feeling badly. Be nice to her. (Woodrow 219)

[37] [T]wo coldly hostile eyes staring. (Woodrow 219)

[38] I believe you cared more for her than for me. You are not to see her any more. (Woodrow 219) The French actually reads "[...] cared as much for her as for me."

blanc, le collier de perles, le bracelet d'or, la bague ornée d'un diamant, le frais visage rose et blanc, les blonds cheveux en boucles, les manières élégantes, la parole facile, le timbre de voix cultivé" (Bugnet 241).[39] Not only, then, does Nipsya fail to open a breach in the colonial façade of superiority and fail to bring Alec to some sense of shame, but she also faces (along with Vital, who receives similar treatment) a situation in which she cannot even bring the colonizer to address her directly: the conversation with Nipsya and Vital in fact takes place entirely between Alec and Flora, who speak about these two in the third person, thus denying them so much as an acknowledgement of their presence. While Vital is self-sufficient enough in his faith and sense of self not to be devastated by such treatment, the cumulative effect of these elements of the encounter with Alec and Flora throws Nipsya into a state of crisis. Her sudden internalization of the denial of presence staged so effectively by the two white people translates immediately into a suicidal impulse, which would realize in devastatingly final form that denial of presence.

This denial of presence – the negation of subjectivity, of voice, of awareness itself in the colonial subject by the colonizer – also has the effect of cutting off instantaneously Nipsya's perceived social mobility. Where before she had access to Alec's discourse, to his social spaces and even to his private space, she loses instantly that realm of mobility: Nipsya realizes suddenly that the idea that she is a potential mate for Alec has been an

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[39] [T]he lovely white satin dress, the pearl necklace, the gold bracelet, the blonde curls, the elegant manner, the fluent speech, the cultured voice. (Woodrow 220)

illusion, that indeed he has no respect for her as a person but instead thinks of her as an insignificant plaything, a "little friend." Instead of being the agent she thought she was, someone intent on exploring all the facets of the social life around her with the understanding that no particular avenue of development is closed to her if she does not wish it so, Nipsya discovers that some of these avenues of development were dead ends all along, inherently closed to her by forces that have not been explicit in her life hitherto, or that she has not recognized as applying to her. Her grandmother casts Nipsya's experience in the defeatist and too conciliatory tones of the colonized female who accepts the way things are: "'Moi aussi [...] j'ai été deux fois abandonnée, et je vis toujours. [...] Il avait bonne intention. Tu rêvais trop beau'" (239).[40] Nipsya's expectations of social mobility are suddenly revealed as "dreams," illusions created by the "good intentions" of the colonial dominator whose power and indifference is suddenly clear. The illusion is that Nipsya's hybridity gives her the power to cross social lines thanks to the very blurring of racial lines inherent in that hybridity. Sylvia Van Kirk establishes in her study of fur trade society that in fact the nineteenth century was a time of intense social change during which the intensification of racist feeling in "white" society on the Canadian prairies led to a hardening of racial lines that had previously been somewhat fluid. She attributes much of this hardening of attitudes to white women whose social capital was

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[40] I was abandoned twice, myself [...] and I am living yet. [...] He meant well. You looked for too much. (Woodrow 217)

their attractiveness as mates:

> In fur-trade society, racism compounded the rivalry which has traditionally existed between women when they are trapped by a social structure in which a woman's lot is largely determined by her success in marriage. If women's social status and economic security are only to be derived vicariously through their husbands, this naturally places them in competition with one another for the best mates. (175)

The first and most significant result of this prejudice was the enormous pressure put on men engaged in the fur trade no longer to marry métis or native women but instead to find "acceptable" white wives amongst the newly-arriving settlers and schoolteachers, or to bring them from Eastern Canada or their home country.

The relationship between Alec and Nipsya plays on the period of ambiguity in this frontier society during which a fur trader might still defy the new social rules and marry a métis woman, although it would likely bar the way for his further advancement. Nipsya's shock at being abandoned in favour of another woman is not therefore wholly attributable to her "naiveté" about the ways of the world. Instead, Alec uses Nipsya's innocence and plays on his position of power as an isolated fur trader to at least tacitly feed Nipsya's belief that with him she has the sort of social mobility that métis women had traditionally enjoyed. Alec is ultimately bound by the strictures of his own social sphere, however, because he is a creature ruled above all by economic considerations, a man who is by no means prepared to defy society for the sake of choosing a métis wife at the risk of losing his position of colonial dominance. On the contrary, he travels to Edmonton to find a white wife – yet another symbol of that very dominance.

As convention would have it, Nipsya would die in her suicide attempt after rejection by the white hero. This defiance of (or at least deviation from) convention is precisely one of the ways in which representations of métis in Canadian literature distinguish themselves from representations of Indians, which fit much more clearly into the sort of "semiotic field" that Terry Goldie describes. In this novel, Nipsya does not die following her rejection by a white man. Instead, Vital rescues her and, in the wake of this purifying and mind-clearing incident, realizes that he loves Nipsya and convinces her that her life is worth living. His argument hinges on the distinction between woman as sexual being and woman as reproductive being, a distinction that is at the crux of notions about and representations of hybridity. Nipsya's interactions with Alec and Mahigan revolve around sexual attraction – the transgressive attraction that Robert Young terms "colonial desire" and which is a major factor in all colonial interactions – but her relationship with Vital is cast in terms of her reproductive ability: the novel ends on a vision of Nipsya's offspring peopling the west like the willows for which she is named: "'Que nos fils, Nipsya, soient comme les saules et comme ton âme, humbles, utiles, et variés; qu'ils demeurent le sang et l'âme du pays, les serviteurs dociles de la Sagesse'" (Bugnet 292).[41] As the humble but enduring inheritors of the land, through their Cree blood, the métis children of Nipsya and Vital are to become the future of a place in which the fur trade as

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[41] May our sons be like yourself and the willows – humble, useful, diverse, – and may they, too, become the blood and soul of the country, the obedient servants of the Great Wisdom! (Woodrow 286)

well as the Cree people are already relegated to the past, symbolized by the deaths of Mahigan and of Vital's voyageur father, Cléophas.

The romantic ending of *Nipsya* ignores the reality that Bugnet would have been aware of by the time he wrote the novel, that métis people in Western Canada were marginalized and virtually powerless. From the perspective of the early twenty-first century, however, the novel's utopian vision seems rather more prophetic, given the amazing power of endurance of métis people and the idea of being métis, a power they are now translating, over a century after the failure of the Métis Rebellion, into a new wave of political and cultural assertiveness.

Tay John: the mythic métis

Like Nipsya, Tay John possesses the sort of mobility that neither native nor white characters either benefit from or contend with. In *Tay John*, however, the protagonist's difference takes a clear physical form in the yellow hair that makes Tay John instantly recognizable in each of the incidents at which he is the centre, incidents that form a narrative line riddled with ellipses and ambiguities. Another important difference between the mobility of Nipsya and that of Tay John is that the narrator of *Tay John* is explicit about the métis man's liminality: "He was a man who had left the world he knew, the world of his own people, and moved now on the rim of the white man's world forming around him" (O'Hagan 99). As in the earlier novel, however, Tay John's story is

propelled forward through the workings of his desire. The object of his desire changes from one incident to the next, but in general terms, the narrative traces the protagonist's undoing by white women or a female principle that the novel associates with civilization. Tay John is a divided man in more ways than one: he is powerful when in the mountains, "his" domain, but is weakest when he is most closely tied to the white man's world and the civilization with which it is associated. In settings that are distant from white people and their influence, Tay John seems to possess an internal fortitude, but his desires – for a horse and for a woman – weaken his solitary strength by making him subject to manipulation by (white) others as he strives to fulfill those desires.

Unlike in *Nipsya*, there is no moment in which Tay John suddenly recognizes or is forced to recognize his own internal difference. That is partly because Tay John is never anything other than externally different. His emblematic yellow hair is a sign of distinction amongst the Shuswap, the tribe that he is born in and with which he lives until early manhood. Tay John's yellow hair fits with a Shuswap legend and marks him as the tribe's saviour, giving him the freedom to make unorthodox choices, as he does when he decides to go into a "dark valley" for his rite of initiation (45-51). After Tay John seems to fulfill the Shuswap's belief that a yellow-haired saviour will lead them over the mountains to a land of plenty, and full of a sense of his own power and distinctiveness, he commits a grave social transgression when he attempts to take a young girl who is betrothed to another. In this case, however, Tay John's difference is the very thing that

bars him from freely making his choice of a mate, as is clear from the words of one of the elders: "'Tay John is a leader. He has brought us to this land where we no longer hunger. Other men must marry. The woman of Tay John is the people. He is a leader of the people and is married to their sorrows'" (67). Unwilling to live with the tribe on those terms, Tay John leaves the Shuswap. The narrator later interprets this act as a sign of Tay John's indifference to power and "fortune," the sort of worldly attributes that motivate ordinary men. He describes Tay John as "the young man, born to be a leader among his own kind, who had turned from his fortune as another man might turn and walk out of the door of his house" (100). A few lines later, however, he acknowledges the mutual nature of the split between Tay John and the Shuswap when he speaks of "a destiny he had forsaken, that had forsaken him" (100-01). The narrator's impulse to admire Tay John for his fortitude in turning away from "his fortune" is thus qualified by the recognition that it may have been "his destiny" that turned away from him. The narrator wants to see Tay John as someone who has control over the direction his life will take and the wisdom to know what that direction should be, but he acknowledges here that Tay John's decisions are not unmitigated triumphs, and that they may contain some trace of failure.

Tay John's battle with a grizzly bear is the first of a series of actions that bring him "into" the white world by making him the subject of "Jackie's Tale" (77), the tale that is now being told to the reader. In this episode, Tay John is still in an "other" world, as symbolized by the impassable creek between him and Jack Denham, the narrator. The

creek symbolizes the cultural gulf between the two men and their different reactions to that gulf: "I have no doubt that he would have spoken to me had we met in the usual way. But here was this rushing torrent between us. We couldn't cross it. Our voices couldn't be heard above it. He accepted that for the impossibility it was, while I was making frantic efforts at evasion" (84). These lines sum up the gist of the narrative, in fact: the narrator pieces together every scrap of information he can gather about Tay John, from whatever source, and gives it all a meaning that suits his own experience of the world and his dissatisfaction with that world. Tay John himself remains a blank page onto which Denham can write his own desires, and in doing so lends greater power to Denham as the man who interprets (or to a great extent cannot fully interpret) Tay John's actions and course in life.

The significance of the battle with the she-bear does not lie solely in Tay John's defeat of the bear, but also in Jack Denham's witnessing it. This incident is the hook that guarantees the reader's interest in Denham's story, and it establishes beyond a shadow of a doubt Tay John's strength, both physical and spiritual. All of Tay John's subsequent actions can be judged in the light of this ultimate act of heroism. It also allows the narrator to establish his precedence as witness to the mystery and heroism of Tay John: "Suddenly it seemed to me like a play being put on for my benefit, with the forest and mountains for backdrop, the gravel bar where this Yellowhead was for stage, and the deep river with its unceasing crescendo for the orchestra pit" (85). Denham uses the most

fitting metaphor he knows from his own culture – the metaphor of the stage – to explain and justify his own role as passive watcher of this primordial scene. Tay John enacts a scene that gives Denham the thrill of vicarious experience: "This was the sort of thing I had sometimes dreamed of – of meeting a bear one day close up, hand to hand so to speak, and doing it in. An epic battle: man against the wilderness. And now I saw the battle taking form, but another man was in my place" (85-86). Denham's identification with Tay John in this vicarious dream becomes explicit later when he states that "[Tay John] was for me cast in an heroic mould" (100). When Denham describes Tay John as "a bronze and golden statue planted among the grasses," he turns Tay John into an object of aesthetic pleasure that has overtones of Greek and Roman antiquity and a time when Western culture was in the Golden Age of its infancy. In contrast, the next episode in the book, in which Tay John cuts off his own hand, takes place in McLeod's cabin, a site that lies on the border between wilderness and civilization. McLeod is a fur trader, and his cabin is the front line of contact between Tay John and white civilization. Where the scene with the bear is an "epic battle," the scene in McLeod's cabin is one of insane horror, and gives a first, devastating indication that the power of Tay John's desire is out of all proportion to the conventions of the white world.

The object of desire that brings Tay John so disastrously into the white man's ambit is a mare that belongs to a wrangler named Timberlake. The horse is a "tall sorrel with cream-coloured mane and tail" (102), a colouring that relates the horse to Tay John

himself and to the picture on the wall of McLeod's cabin. It is a picture of a white girl, on which Denham can see the grimy marks of fingers left by Tay John as he stands and "touch[es] the shape of breasts and the curve of thighs" (100). Denham speculates that Tay John wants the horse because it will lift him above the Shuswap, who do not have horses (103), but he also sees the whole complex of desires that is wrapped up in the horse, and on this rare occasion speaks as though he knows Tay John's mind: "He thought of her out on the flats nibbling grass beneath the stars. His horse, on which he would ride to his destiny like a warrior to the wars. In the dim light I dare say he could see the picture of that white-skinned girl above the head of McLeod's bed" (106). Although Denham sprinkles his narrative with speculations about Tay John's position in the world and his state of mind, there is one passage that corresponds closely to what we know of Tay John from the "Legend" in the first part of the novel and from "Jackie's Tale" itself: "He was a man who had left the world he knew, the world of his own people, and now moved on the rim of the white man's world forming around him. He might never be able to enter it, but he was drawn to it, as the wild fowl are drawn to their flocks upon the breeding waters" (99). The mating instinct, which caused Tay John to leave the Shuswap, thus continues to drive his contacts with the white world, the only other place where he might hope to find a mate. His desire for the sorrel mare, linked to his desire for a woman, foretells even greater tribulations to come.

In order to win the mare, Tay John, who has lost at cards, simply picks up an axe

and cuts off his hand, declaiming a line he has learned from the Bible to seal the bargain: "'"If your hand offend you,"' he quoted, '"cut it off." There,' he said, 'there . . . there is something you have to take! . . . against your mare!'" (109). To satisfy his desire, Tay John carries out an act of symbolic self-emasculation that symbolizes the decline in his powers caused by his increased proximity to white civilization – in this case, through his acquisition of a horse. The narrator is cognizant of the terrible price that the mare will extract from Tay John: "Possession is a great surrender. The more a man has, the more surely is he owned by what he has" (113). The mixed nature of Tay John's actions – heroic and disastrous – becomes evident when Tay John is unable to keep the mare in the mountains with him and must chase her down impotently on foot: "'I could see his bones look out,' McLeod told us some months later. 'I had a vision of his skull [...]. He had been chasing the mare through those hills, herding her alone and on foot, for two months. He was run ragged'" (117). The mare is the instrument that demonstrates Tay John's weakness and brings him "back to the low country" (113) where he becomes further enmeshed in the white man's world.

The next stage of Tay John's entry into the "civilized" world follows on his loss of the sorrel mare. While trying to catch the mare, he is pulled out of a stream by Arthur Alderson, a British man who is on a hunting expedition with his American wife, Julia. The couple hires Tay John as a hunting guide, and his new position in the world is signified by the clothes he now wears: "Tay John [...] wore an entirely new outfit of

clothes – dark doeskin trousers, a blue woollen shirt, a white caribou-hide vest, and on his head, for the first time that McLeod was aware of, he had a black high-crowned Stetson" (119). Tay John's new clothes signify his willingness to try to fit into the white world. In his new role he guides white people into his domain, the mountains. In this instance, as when he earlier guided prospectors in search of gold, Tay John seems willing to serve as an instrument for the purely exploitative use of "his" world. He does not, however, allow white people to gain access to his spiritual world: "The farther [the Alderson party] reached into the mountains the farther it seemed he withdrew from them" (132). For all of his wearing white men's clothes, riding a horse like white men, and guiding them on their hunting expeditions, Tay John is still different in fundamental ways. A parallel symbolism can be found in Tay John's living quarters: an abandoned trapper's cabin in which Tay John sets up his tepee. Like the clothes and the horse, the cabin-tepee is an indication of Tay John's willingness to use what he finds in the white world when it suits him. There is no evidence, however, of any attempt on Tay John's part to adopt white beliefs or values. His quotation from the Bible as he severs his arm is nothing more than an expedient to gain what he wants, rather than a sign that he has adopted Christian faith.

Tay John's desire, which pulls him towards the white world, finally takes the form of the desire for a mate. His rejection of Julia Alderson's advances while they are out hunting alone shows that Tay John does not desire just any sexual encounter with just any white woman. Julia Alderson, whom Denham portrays as a predatory temptress, plays on

the transgressive convention: she believes that the other men will not question her accusation against Tay John because as a native man he will be understood as inherently desiring a white woman. In Julia's mind, the notion of "métis" slides together with the stereotype of "savage" other. The strategy fails, however: Julia's husband believes her allegation, but Charlie, the cook, is more skeptical about Julia and more clear-sighted about Tay John's character. In a sort of backwoodsman show of solidarity, Charlie and Ed (another hired hand) cast their suspicion on the woman rather than on Tay John, who is imbued with a certain code of honour that excuses him, in their minds, from the stereotyping that Julia counts on to carry her accusation without question. In this episode, the female once again poses a danger to Tay John, while men such as Charlie, McLeod, and the NWMP officers who investigate the case, men who adhere to a code that is relatively uncorrupted by civilization (closely associated with the female) are able to defend and free Tay John from his perilous entanglement with the Aldersons. Tay John has one last encounter with civilization, however, an encounter that finally sees him doing battle to win Ardith Aeriola, the white woman on whom his desire finally settles.

The final episode in Tay John's series of incursions into the white world brings him closest to the corrupt heart of civilization, where his métis heritage makes him the object of jealous hatred. Tay John, acting as the guide for Ardith Aeriola, a "dark" European woman and her Spanish maid, turns up at the camp of Alf Dobble, a businessman who is working on a grandiose plan to build a Swiss-style resort town in the

Rocky Mountains. Dobble is the epitome of a grasping, spiritually empty form of civilization whose impotence is symbolized by the "Aphrodine Girdle" that the man wears under his clothes (228). When Dobble decides that Ardith should be his, however, he meets an obstruction in the form of Tay John, who defends Ardith after Dobble insults her at a party at his house. In a monumental battle that echoes Tay John's solitary battle with the she-bear – a symbol of the pure spirit of wilderness – Tay John here does battle with Dobble's men, symbols of the blindly destructive force of civilization and its hatred for any element that it cannot control.

Ardith Aeriola's desire for Tay John coincides with his own. Dobble characteristically reads their desire in terms of control – Ardith has Tay John "under her thumb" (234), he says – but it is clear from Ardith's preparations to leave alone with Tay John that the attraction is equally strong on both sides and that there is no question of either person using the other. Indeed, Ardith is eager to leave with Tay John because it offers her a means of escaping a world in which she is an object without power or agency. Denham traces a similarity between Tay John and Ardith when he describes Ardith as having "black" eyes (198) and skin that is "browned, not so much from the sun as from a quality of its own" (199). Their physical resemblance is reinforced by the parallel in their positions vis-à-vis white society, where they occupy a liminal space rather than being wholly within that society: "Each of them, Ardith and Tay John, in manners distinct, stalked the boundaries of society without every [*sic*] fully entering. They had that in

common" (252-53). Just as Tay John adopts white clothing and white ways in his moments of entry into the white world, Ardith dresses in buckskins and cooks moose once she is in Tay John's domain. Denham notes that Ardith does not appear completely at ease in this new place. A NWMP officer who meets them feels that "if he had held his hand down to her, [Ardith] would have mounted and ridden off behind him" (256), a sign perhaps of the difficulty for a woman of surviving in the "masculine" realm of the wilderness. Indeed, Ardith does not survive for long: the last installment of Denham's story shows her lying dead on a sledge with Tay John pulling her ever further into the mountains.

With that last act of movement between two worlds, Tay John reverses the usual course of movement by taking Ardith Aeriola into his domain. Prior to that moment, Tay John is repeatedly drawn into the white man's world, whether it is by Macleod who must notice Tay John's presence on the edge of his clearing before Tay John will enter his cabin; by the sorrel mare whom Tay John chases for weeks into the "low country" inhabited by white men; by the Aldersons when they rescue him from a stream; or by the NWMP officer who goes to Tay John's cabin to bring him back for questioning about his alleged assault on Julia Alderson. Even Denham's narrative about Tay John is an attempt to pull him into the narrator's field of knowledge. Denham's curiosity about Tay John builds into a fascination that feeds on Tay John's impenetrable otherness. One of the ironies of Denham's narrative is that he ridicules Alf Dobble, the unrepentant capitalist,

for wanting to use Tay John as a scenic prop for his tourist resort because Tay John will make a suitable "impression" on people arriving on the train (234). but Denham too is using Tay John as the focus of his search for a sense of connectedness with the wilderness. Tay John fulfills vicariously Denham's fantasy of engaging in an epic battle between man and wilderness. He personifies the mystery and danger of wild nature for Denham, but because he is part white, he holds out the promise to Denham that he might be able to enter, at least partially, Tay John's world. In the event, Denham manages to do this only by telling his story repeatedly, thus reaffirming his connection with Tay John.

Whatever connection there may be between the white world and Tay John, however, it can never overcome the barrier of difference. The external signs of Tay John's difference – dark skin together with yellow hair, and his missing hand – are emblematic of the rift that separates him from the white world and prevents him from being or becoming white. He attempts to become like other men, that is, like white men, by acquiring a horse and various other trappings of the white man. The Shuswap legend tells us that all of these things – the yellow hair, the new name, his rifle and clothing – have already moved Tay John at least partially out of the Shuswap world: "Tay John now walked alone among them. His yellow hair marked his different birth. His rifle was his own, and no man could touch it. His red coat was a sign of the white man's favour. His name was no more the name come from his people but the name he had earned when he was far from them" (56). It is white prospectors who initially dub him "Tête Jaune," a

name which the Shuswap then distort into "Tay John" (55), so that even his name is neither "white" nor "native" but something of each.

There is no unequivocal indication of how Tay John himself perceives his yellow hair, and indeed one might argue that it is impossible for any individual to be fully aware of how they are perceived by others. During the climactic fight at Dobble's headquarters, Tay John's yellow hair is revealed as the potent marker of difference that the white men read as a provocation: "Tay John was assailed by all at once. It was not only what he had done to Dobble. It was what was different in him – the heritage of his ancestry, the challenge of his hair, which gave fury to their assault" (240). The narrator interprets the attack by the men as an attempt not simply to annihilate Tay John, but to change his otherness to sameness. According to Denham, the men want to "pull [Tay John] down, change his shape, make him one with those who [fight] against him" (240). For Denham, who admits his admiration for Tay John, the latter's otherness is a form of superiority, so that the men who wish to pull him down are not battling with his stature alone but also with an inner strength, evidenced by his solitary, silent nature, that seems to set him above them as well as apart from them.

When Tay John meets the trapper Blackie in the midst of a snowstorm during his final journey, Tay John says first that he is looking for a doctor and then that he is going to a church, both European institutions that the white trapper and narrator understand as appropriate destinations, given that Ardith is dead and Tay John near death. He is in fact

headed toward a mountain pass, away from the white world, and the last line of the novel returns him to the mythic ground of his birth: "He had just walked down, the toboggan behind him, under the snow and into the ground" (264). This couple – the yellow-haired "Indian-like" man and the dark-skinned (i.e., Indian-like) European woman – form in this final scene a Janus-faced symbol of hybridity, one facing the isolated, "unnamed" (132) mountains, the other the lowlands occupied by white men. Ardith's death shows, however, that it is impossible, despite her determination to do so, for her to adapt to and survive in Tay John's world. Yet the Shuswap legend that opens the novel promises that the métis child of Ardith and Tay John can be born even from his mother's grave. The final image of the novel is one of reintegration with the land. The cycle will continue with a métis child born, literally, from the land, a child who will be parentless and who will in turn have to find his or her own way in the world.

Ella Tanner reaches the conclusion in *Tay John and the Cyclical Quest* that

> Tay John is an expression of how the white man, with his religion, commerce and law, has "offended" the gods. O'Hagan invites us to reach outside this system to a nontechnological society where organic vitality is not sacrificed to civilized mechanical pattern, to be 'here' getting our bearings from a stance on our own earth (40-41).

According to this reading, Tay John is the conduit between the white world and that other place outside it. His in-between status allows him to pass from one to the other in order to show white men another way of being, one that his half-white heritage promises may be accessible to them as well. Yet it is clear that Tay John does not return to Shuswap

society when he is absent from white society. The Shuswap do not hold a grudge against him for his transgression and they hope that he will return, but on their own terms: this society too has a religion and laws that its members must obey. Tay John is willing to use the religion and commerce of white society to get what he wants – as when he guides prospectors to gold deposits in order to get rifles, or when he gambles with Timberlake to gain the sorrel mare – but he is not himself the prophet of an alternative, natural existence free of law, religion and commerce. That vision belongs to Jack Denham in the throes of hero worship.

Tay John's hybridity is central to his role as hero because it brings him into contact with the white world and thus gives (white) others access to his experience for their interpretation and emulation. There is no indication, of course, that Tay John interprets his own experience in the same way that white culture, of which this narrative is a part, interprets it. On the contrary, as an individual who belongs to the proairetic sphere – the sphere of action – Tay John is appropriately leery of the discursive as a sphere in which places and people are defined, and thus limited or even misdefined, by discursive practices such as naming. The very act of interpreting his actions by forming them into a narrative begins a process of mythification that makes those actions (and Tay John's hybridity) more portentous, more meaning-laden than they would otherwise be. Dick Harrison notes that "the yellow-haired mixed-blood carries wordlessly at the centre of the action all the struggles between Indian and White, wilderness and civilization,

spirit and flesh, light and dark, life and death, which animate the story" (117). In Denham's words, Tay John is "part of the land – continuous with its motions, participating in its patterns and its rhythms" (O'Hagan 114). He represents a "primeval world-view" (63) to which "civilized" man attempts to return through mythology. According to Roger Toumson, the indeterminate origins of the hybrid person are what make him an irresistible figure for mythification: "Dans un monde où toute origine est problématique son absence d'origine fait de lui une créature mythique. [...] Ce qui rend le Métis intéressant, c'est son énigme" (140).[42] All of this adds up to a considerable burden of signification placed on hybridity.

The ending of *Tay John* is full of the ambiguity that characterizes the rest of the narrative. This ambiguity is, of course, an essential element of the thematic structure of the novel. "Reality" becomes what the hearer of the tale makes of it, and "misheard" information, such as Alderson's's story that Tay John lost his hand in a fight with a bear (O'Hagan 128), becomes a part of reality, or at least a certain type of reality. It influences how people regard and react to Tay John, adding to his aura as a "living legend." The reader might feel that she has superior knowledge about the truth (that the fight with the bear and the loss of the arm are separate stories with different meanings), but it is an ephemeral knowledge owed to a chance encounter with one tale-teller who tells a

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[42] In a world where all origins are problematic, his absence of origins makes him a mythical creature. [...] What makes the Métis interesting is his enigma.

particular version of events, a version that is undoubtedly also full of holes, distortions and conflations.

Another effect of the novel's ambiguity is that the ending can be read in ways that are almost diametrically opposed to each other. One reading of the final scene with Tay John pulling a dead Ardith behind him on a toboggan and going "under the snow and into the ground" (264) might be that while Tay John himself has returned to the myth from which he originally emerged, he is unable to take Ardith with him. This reading is supported by all of the evidence in the novel about Tay John's "guiding" of white people into the mountains which, as we have seen, are journeys in search of the booty the white people are after but can in no way be construed as a spiritual guiding. The narrator longs for insight into the truths that Tay John knows, a knowledge that is reflected in his heroic, larger-than-life actions, in his seeming self-containment despite his wanting to be like other men. Yet that very longing, Tay John's eternal restlessness, his inability to "become" white by dressing the part, obtaining a horse, and working for white people, belie the notion that he is at peace in his possession of a greater spiritual truth than others around him. Tay John is no longer with the Shuswap tribe because his status as a figure from their legend did not allow him to live as an ordinary man and take a wife; his attraction to the white world is in large part because of his human desires – first for the sorrel mare, a status symbol for the horse-less Shuswap; and then for Ardith Aeriola, the flesh-and-blood mate that he is denied in Shuswap culture.

In the end, then, Tay John's ability to win Ardith from weaker white men marks his superiority. He succeeds in warding off their attempted enforcement of the cultural norm, arising from colonial domination and its underlying ideology of racism, that rules out marriage between a métis man and a white woman. Still, the winter conditions are too harsh for Ardith, and Tay John is not able to keep Ardith alive in "his" world. Her wearing of buckskins and cooking of moose roasts is as much an "integration" into that world as Tay John's wearing a Stetson hat is a sign of his integration into the white world, that is, no such sign at all. Tay John tells Blackie, the trapper who meets him, that he is looking for a "doctor" and a "church," but he seems to be deluded, because he is walking directly away from the white world and further into the mountains. While Tay John knows that Ardith needed or wanted those institutions of white civilization, he deliberately persists in taking her further from them. Her position on the sledge, facing back toward that world, places her in direct opposition to him so that they form a symbol of incommensurability as members of two worlds who cannot live together successfully, even given the power of their desire to do so.

Another, more optimistic reading is also possible. If we read the ending as a return to myth that brings a return to the legend of Tay John's birth, we know that the death of the mother does not necessarily mean the death of her child. Leslie Monkman reads this ending as a return to a better world far from the corrupting forces of civilization:

> Having discovered the fulfilment of love, Tay John submits to the cyclical pattern that leads all humans back to the darkness from which they emerged. But death comes to Tay John and Ardith only after they have retreated from the materialism and corruption of the white man's world [...]. In returning to the landscape that provided a focus for the spiritual values and beliefs that sustained his mother's Shuswap culture, Tay John moves into an elemental and purer world. (48)

If Tay John returns to myth by pulling Ardith behind him into the ground, the cyclical nature of the myth means that their child can be born from death. In this reading, it is the difficulty of origins that is evoked. The métis child who has no parents lacks the essential support structure of the family unit with the narratives so important for development of the self. This ending entails the beginning of another cycle for Tay John's offspring in which the child, like Tay John, will live a life of searching for his or her place in the world, including the difficult search for a "same," (i.e., a mate). That search will inevitably lead to conflict in a world of restrictive social practices based on the perception of racial differences as essential differences. This representation is very different from that of Nipsya, where her "same," Vital, is present and available in her social sphere. Nipsya's challenge is merely to recognize Vital as her proper mate and to assimilate into the culture he has accepted in order to ensure their futurity. The death of Tay John and Ardith, even if it is followed by the birth of their child, is yet another instance where the author seems unable or unwilling to depict a durable relationship between a native man and a white woman. Their métis child too will suffer from the absence of parents and will lack a sense of security and the narratives of identity that might help the child understand his origins. The cyclical nature of myth has the effect, in this novel, of

negating any sense of métis futurity in favour of a myth that seems to benefit white men (and the Shuswap) to the detriment of the métis figure that stands at its centre.

The pattern of thwarted social mobility that we see in Tay John's actions means that rather than acting as a conduit between worlds, Tay John is trapped in that in-between place, unable and unwilling to fit into native or white society. His decision to leave the Shuswap is determined by his unwillingness to accept his "destiny" as a leader, which would condemn him to a solitary life without the possibility of having a flesh-and-blood mate. When ultimately his desire settles on a European woman, Ardith Aeriola, he finds that path blocked by Dobble and his men, who act as social police and try to prevent the transgression they perceive in the union between a métis man and a white woman. Tay John's actions and the violent reaction they provoke can be understood as peculiar to the strategy that Homi Bhabha calls colonial "mimicry." Mimicry is in the first instance a desire on the part of the colonizer for "a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is the same, but not quite*" ("Mimicry" 86, italics in original). The colonized's mimicry of his colonizer is a form of submission and an action that the colonizer can interpret as a sign of his superiority. Yet there is something unsettling for the colonizer about being imitated by his other: "mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" (86) and produces in turn a sense of ambivalence on the part of the colonizer. Instead of a colonial subject who is "entirely knowable and visible" ("Other" 71), Tay John is the disturbingly proximate mimic who might just subvert the colonial by

demonstrating his superiority over the colonizers.

The notion of mimicry as a "strategy" as outlined by Bhabha implies that it results from human agency, a willed response to the colonial situation with a view to using its points of weakness to drive a wedge of doubt into the colonizer's mind and produce the moment of ambivalence. Yet in the case of the métis person, these features of mimicry are not willed or strategically deployed: because they are contained in the skin and features of the métis individual, they become necessary and inevitable. Tay John cannot step out of his hybrid persona at will. Instead, one might speak of an "embodied mimicry" as signs of the colonizer that are inscribed on the body of the hybrid person. From that perspective, the métis person is the embodiment of colonial desire and as such flaunts the very thing the white colonizer wishes to keep hidden – the secret "shame" of his desire for the dark-skinned other. Mimicry in the context of hybridity is thus closely connected to the notion of miscegenation as transgression, so that desire, transgression, and the threat of disclosure in the métis body are inextricably interwoven. The combination of desire and threat is constantly evoked in *Tay John* by Jack Denham, who is fascinated by Tay John, regards him as a hero, and longs to cross the gulf that separates him from that hero's domain, but who also depicts Tay John as a hired hand to white hunters, as a maniac capable of dismembering his own hand to gain a horse, and as a weak man who is undone by women. Tay John, for his part, does not seem particularly aware of his own hybridity. He comes to the white world to obtain what he desires, but

shows no inclination to remain there to assimilate. This air of self-sufficiency in his otherness, in addition to otherness itself, antagonizes Dobble's men even further. Rather than adopt the camouflage of white clothing (including a hat to cover his head) as he did with the Aldersons, Tay John wears a "beaded band" on his hair when he works for Ardith Aeriola (205) and lives in a tepee some distance from Dobble's camp. These tokens of his adherence to Indian ways despite working for a "white" woman signal that Tay John is no longer willing even to go through the motions of adapting to the white world. Because neither the Shuswap nor white men will accept Tay John on his terms, it becomes inevitable that he will return to his unnamed, in-between place in the mountains.

Both Nipsya and Tay John as protagonists originate in a certain freedom of frontier society. In both novels, white society is "forming around" the protagonists (O'Hagan 99), and Nipsya and Tay John are represented as necessarily coming into contact with white society as a natural result of their hybridity. Their interaction with that society demonstrates their own desires. While we might understand Nipsya's attraction as stemming from her innate Celtic dreaminess, the narrator of *Tay John* never offers an explanation or even a speculation as to why Tay John wants, at least initially, to be like white men. (Indeed, Denham's narrative betrays his own desire and that of other white men in the narrative to be like Tay John.) The restlessness that moves Tay John and Nipsya towards white society and sets in motion the dynamic of each narrative seems to be an inherent part of their hybridity. In the assumption of the attractiveness of the white

world to a métis person we can see the traces of the ideology of colonialism, in which the assumed superiority of the colonizer over the colonized justifies colonial domination.

Behind the prospect of frontier freedom which Nipsya and Tay John both exploit and suffer in their attempts to find a place that suits them looms the spectre of the underside of that freedom. It is evoked by the transgression tied up in the birth of the two characters. In Nipsya's case the transgressive nature of the relationship between her parents is only hinted at: her father is an Irish man who has disappeared along with Nipsya's mother. Tay John is born from the rape of his mother by Red Rorty, an instance of truly transgressive colonial desire. The Shuswap, who are meant to benefit from Rorty's newfound zealotry, are instead betrayed by him. Ironically, it is because Red Rorty has yellow hair that he is allowed to live with the Shuswap, because one of their legends predicts the coming of a yellow-haired saviour who will lead them back to their cousins across the mountains. Kumkleseem (Tay John's Shuswap name) is induced to come out of his grave-home to live with the tribe for the same reason, and he also transgresses against the courtship customs of the tribe. Sexual transgression, or the perception of such transgression, is in large part the underlying force that accounts both for the existence of métis characters and for their clashes with white and Indian society.

Both narratives are triggered by the coming-of-age of the protagonists, that is, with their attainment of sexual self-awareness. The "Legend" section of *Tay John* provides a mythopoeic explanation of Tay John's existence that sets the tone for his

depiction as an arch-heroic character in the more realistic narrative of the following chapters, so that his story in effect begins when he leaves the Shuswap tribe and is seen by Denham battling the she-bear. Both characters move away from their native upbringing. Not only do Tay John and Nipsya lack parental guidance and support, but they are also moving away from the culture in which they have grown up. Tay John abruptly as he fails to return to his dwelling place with the Shuswap, Nipsya more gradually as she is drawn into the ambit of her métis cousins and thence into the larger world surrounding her. In Nipsya's case as well, however, there is an abrupt break from Cree society, which comes at the moment when Mahigan attacks her.

The narrative focus of *Nipsya*, with much of the story told from Nipsya's point of view, provides us with indications that long before the violent attack by Mahigan, Nipsya is detaching herself from her Cree grandmother's influence. The representation of Nipsya is a portrait of an individual consciousness entering into different aspects of white culture either through attraction (the Catholic church, European music and thought) or through necessity (European-style economic transactions, agricultural production). Tay John's motivations remain more nebulous to the reader, however, because the focalisation on Tay John is external. We have the narrator's interpretation of those motivations, but we must always bear in mind the narrator's own avowal that Tay John is a hero for him, a perception that influences his interpretation of Tay John's actions.

Both of these characters exhibit a degree of restlessness that might in part be

explained naturally as an expression of sexual energy, but which seems to reach a higher pitch than would otherwise be the case precisely because they are able to move between domains that might be broadly characterized as "nature" or "wilderness" and "culture" or "civilization." Their own internal doubleness is denied by the cultures they move between, and particularly by the white culture that is most strongly represented in these novels. White culture alternately pushes these métis characters towards making a choice of identity that will integrate them into white society, and repels them when that choice takes the form of desiring a white mate. It is above all the eruption of desire that determines the social (and narrative) trajectories of the métis characters, and that leads to the containment of desire, or attempts at containment, by white society.

Bugnet and O'Hagan use images of reproduction to explain the failure of white society fully to contain métis desire. Bugnet differentiates between British and French elements in white society to show his métis characters engaging in what he imagines as a benign form of assimilation with the French in order to triumph over a more virulent form of colonial domination by the British. Nipsya's physical reproduction of a strong métis race will also ensure the reproduction of an ideology that, to Bugnet, offers a promising future for the Canadian West. The image of reproduction in Howard O'Hagan's novel fits into a mythic cycle of birth and death that is also subversive of colonial domination. Unlike Bugnet, O'Hagan imagines the world and society in terms of strong binaries and examines them through a métis protagonist who must struggle within liminal spaces, and

with his own liminality as constructed by those binaries. The very nature of Tay John's birth from his mother's grave makes him an originary figure that cannot and will not be absorbed by either side of his racial heritage. Reproduction in this narrative is a means of continuing the mythic cycle of the originary métis born from his mother's grave. It foreshadows the continued subversion of colonial domination through a refusal of assimilation, but does not promise the strength of a métis collective to ensure a future for métis difference.

CHAPTER III

MÉTIS IN SEARCH OF A PAST

In the two novels discussed in the previous chapter, the protagonists grow up in Indian society and are fully integrated into Indian belief and value systems before the promptings of desire initiate the protagonists' movement away from their upbringing, a movement that culminates in a clash with white attitudes and a retrenchment in a separate métis place. Beatrice Culleton Mosionier's *In Search of April Raintree* (1983) and Ronald Lavallée's *Tchipayuk ou le Chemin du Loup* (1987), in contrast, are narratives of métis protagonists whose upbringing reflects forms of métis reality. In *April Raintree* this is mainly signalled by the first-person narrative voice of April herself, and by April's awareness of the difference in skin colour between herself and her sister Cheryl. That difference becomes increasingly significant to April and influences the divergent paths the two sisters follow in the formation of their métis selves. April's determination to use her pale skin in order to "become" white creates a gulf between the sisters that is finally resolved when, at the end of the novel, April comes to accept her métis identity. The narrative in *Tchipayuk* is somewhat more mechanical in that it moves the protagonist through a gamut of social strata and situations, from life with his métis parents to an Indian education with Pennisk, an Anishnabeg "sorceress," to his education by Catholic

priests in Montreal and life with his benefactors, an upper-class French-Canadian family. After returning to the North West, Askik witnesses the end of the 1885 rebellion in Saskatchewan and, like April, sees the possibility of ensuring a métis future by reconnecting with his métis beginnings.

Unlike Nipsya and Tay John, the protagonists of these two novels become fully engaged in a process of assimilation into white society – April by "passing" as a white person, and Askik through education. For both characters, their desire for a white person seems a natural part of that process: it signals their assumption that they can take the final step towards full social equality with the white people in whose society they are living. For Askik, the result is immediate rejection as his mixed blood suddenly becomes the only important fact about him for his (white) benefactress, Madame Sancy. April's situation is somewhat more complex in that she does marry a white man, only to realize that he has married her as an act of defiance against his family. In her case, as in Askik's, it is the mother of the desired person who acts as a sort of social gate-keeper, lending the métis person's mixed blood more significance than any of their achievements or the success of their integration into white society. As in the two earlier novels, these crises push the métis protagonists into a sort of retrenchment in their métis identities, but in these narratives that movement back to being métis is connected both with a place – the West – and with a time – the past that is connected to these characters' métis parents and through them to métis history as a value that April and Askik realize they must recuperate

as a foundation for a métis future.

Like the two earlier novels, *Tchipayuk* and *April Raintree* end on a note of optimism that comes from the protagonists' realization and acceptance of their métis hybridity as something different from either whiteness or Indianness. One of the principal structures in each of the narratives discussed here, and one that is capital for our purposes of tracing patterns of (thwarted) social mobility, is a move to Eastern Canada and a subsequent return to the West. The return westward can be seen as a move back towards a history that has been broken by the lack of a connection between generations. Both protagonists find the determination through their own *prise de conscience* of working to repair their damaged métis consciousness in order to ensure survival by grounding themselves in a sense of their past.

Tchipayuk: the historical métis

Tchipayuk is the story of Askik Mercredi, the son of métis parents living in the St. Boniface region of Manitoba in the second half of the nineteenth century. From a very early age, Askik experiences dualities in his life that mark Lavallée's representation of what it means to be métis. An avid student, Askik moves between the school in St. Boniface and his home in the forest, and is precociously aware of the difference between these two parts of his life:

> Ainsi s'établissait dans l'existence d'Askik une dichotomie parfaite. Comme un voyageur qui va et vient entre deux États hostiles [...] Askik franchissait tous les matins la limite entre le primitif et le nouveau. Il ne parlait ni de tchipayuk [les

> esprits des morts] à Saint-Boniface, ni de poésie à sa mère. [...] lui seul voyait s'affronter la plaine et la ville. (Lavallée 26)[43]

The categories of "primeval" and "new" must belong to the narrator, however, since for the child Askik everything he learns at this point is new. During a métis buffalo hunt, Askik meets the seven-year-old métis girl Mona, who will later haunt his memory when he feels attracted to a French-Canadian woman. It is to Mona that Askik first whispers his great ambition: "'J'veux être un grand homme!'" (120)[44] and he knows that the way to achieve that is to be educated.

Before he receives his European-style education, however, circumstances dictate that he receive an Indian education – although it is in an Anishnabeg village and not with the Cree, which is Askik's Indian heritage. His father leaves him at his fur-trading headquarters in an Anishnabeg camp where Askik, rejected by everyone else in the village, lives with an old woman, Pennisk, who is also shunned by her own people as a sorceress. While this period is a lesson in discrimination for Askik it does not appear to dishearten him, perhaps because he has Pennisk to rely on, but also because he does not particularly want or need to be a part of Anishnabeg society. When he talks to Pennisk about what path to follow in life, there is no question of adopting an Indian way of life permanently. He asks Pennisk, "'Crois-tu que je doive étudier le masinahigonne [lire et

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[43] Askik was now leading a double life. Like every traveller who goes back and forth between two hostile countries [...] every morning he crossed the frontier between the primeval and the new. He never mentioned tchipayuk [the spirits of the dead] in St. Boniface or poetry to his mother. [...] He was the only one who saw prairie and town at odds. (Claxton 19)

[44] I want to be a great man! (Claxton 106)

écrire] et apprendre à devenir un grand homme? Ou est-ce que je dois devenir chasseur et me marier avec Mona?'" (206).[45] Pennisk's cryptic, and prophetic, reply is: "'Ça n'a pas d'importance'" (207).[46] To ensure Askik's survival, Pennisk teaches him how to catch fish and hunt in the forest, and teaches him respect for the spirits (163). Askik's association with Pennisk and his ability to kill a bear, a difficult feat for a young boy, lead the Anishnabeg to suspect Askik. They accuse him (as they do Pennisk) of being a sorcerer, a poisoner, and a demon (203). Lavallée depicts the Anishnabeg as a people in decline owing to contact with white men and their technology:

> Déjà, presque plus personne ne s'habillait à l'indienne: le coton était plus commode que le cuir [...]. Les jeunes ne savaient plus tirer à l'arc. Le fusil les dispensait d'approcher le timide orignal: ils pouvaient l'abattre de loin. [...] [R]ien ne se réparait facilement, tout devait être remplacé, seuls les Blancs pouvaient leur en vendre. Les danses, les fêtes, les cérémonies religieuses ne tenaient beaucoup de place dans leurs vies, car les familles anichnabègues passaient le gros de leur temps à amasser des peaux pour réduire des dettes inextinguibles. (196)[47]

This vision of a web of causality behind the decline of the Anishnabeg – a simultaneous movement away from material and spiritual practices – is presented in the neutral voice of a narrator who seems to ascribe a consciousness of these realities to both Askik and

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[45] Do you think I should study the masinahigon [reading and writing] and learn how to become a great man? Or should I become a hunter and marry Mona? (Claxton 186)

[46] It doesn't matter. (Claxton 186)

[47] Hardly anyone dressed in the Indian fashion any more; cotton was more convenient than buckskin [...]. The young no longer knew how to use a bow. With a gun, they did not have to get near a timid moose; they could kill it from a distance [...]. [N]othing was easily repaired; everything had to be replaced, and only the Whites could provide the replacements. Dances, feasts, and religious ceremonies no longer played much part in the lives of the Anishnabegs, for families spent most of their time gathering furs, trying to reduce their ineradicable debts. (Claxton 176)

Pennisk, even though it is unlikely that they would have been so clearcut at the time. The author uses this move repeatedly in the narrative, so that Askik in particular appears to be aware of causes and motivations, or of the greater significance of events that he is wrapped up in. This device lends the protagonist the appearance of having special knowledge about the world around him, but he has little agency in the terms of the narrative itself.

Askik has his own experience in the hypocrisy of discrimination when he manages to kill a bear, thus helping to ease the famine. The villagers scoff at the idea that a boy could perform such a feat, but when Askik returns to the site of the kill, he finds that they have already cut up and divided the carcass. The villagers take advantage of Askik's work but refuse to acknowledge his deed or his contribution to their survival. The scapegoating of Askik and Pennisk by the Anishnabeg is set against the next part of the novel, in which Askik, now living in Quebec, receives similar treatment at the hands of a "civilized" society equally concerned about preserving the established order by designating certain individuals as outsiders who pose a threat to that order.

The narrative bridges the enormous geographical and social distance between the first part of Askik's education with Pennisk and its continuation in Montreal at a Sulpician monastery through the intervention of a Catholic priest, who finds Askik in the Indian village and brings him back to St. Boniface. Askik's uncle, a rich métis merchant

and trader who "exècr[e] sa race" (215),[48] pays for Askik to go East "pour le retirer à l'influence de ses parents" (218).[49] The presumption that a métis child could be molded into a white person through education and religious instruction was part of the reigning ideology and government policy in Canada well into the twentieth century (Fleras and Elliott 177-80). Askik's experience in being educated far from his family is not particularly unusual, but his ability later to simply reject that education and to return (with some bitterness but otherwise relatively unscathed) to a "métis" self that lies dormant in him makes the problems of acculturation, indoctrination, and internalization of discriminatory attitudes too easily resolved. It is significant that the entire period of Askik's education in Montreal is treated as an ellipse in the novel because it leaves unexamined most of the process of assimilation that the boy goes through. Instead, the young Askik lies abandoned outside the gate of the cathedral at the end of Part Two of *Tchipayuk*, and in the beginning of Part Three he is a young lawyer forging ahead in what promises to be a brilliant career. At this point, Askik appears to be assimilated into French-Canadian society, but his experience indicates the pitfalls of what "successful" assimilation means for the dominant group and for the assimilated individual. Assimilation is "a one-way process of absorption – either deliberate or unconscious [...]. [It] involves a process whereby the dominant sector imposes its culture, authority, values,

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[48] [D]espis[es] his race. (Claxton 194)

[49] [T]o remove him from the influence of his parents. (Claxton 197)

and institutions on the subdominant sector" (Fleras and Elliott 13). In fact, the process never involves complete absorption, since that is not something the dominant group either wants or can achieve. Instead, "[s]ubdominant group members need only express outward compliance with dominant values and practices" (13). As Lavallée shows through Askik's experience, the difficulty for the métis individual negotiating the social process of assimilation is compounded by the existence of hidden barriers that become apparent only at crucial points in the process. Askik discovers that his position is based on his benefactors' influence and is part of a symbolic order that will only hold up if he does not seek to exert agency in the most fundamental aspects of his life: the choice of a career and the choice of a mate. As Askik realizes, race is the ultimate determinant in a society such as the one depicted in this novel, with its powerful class hierarchy, but it is the prospect of inter-racial sex that brings race to the fore as a factor. Because of his Indian heritage and because he wishes to marry a white woman, Askik slips from an illusory position of near-equality with the Sancys to the very lowest rung of the social hierarchy. Askik's seemingly successful assimilation comes to an abrupt end when, by falling in love with Elisabeth Sancy, he oversteps a boundary that he has not realized was there.

The Sancys have paid for Askik's education and welcomed him as something like a son in the family. At the moment when the story is taken up with Askik as a young man, he has suddenly become aware that he now regards Elisabeth not as a sister, but as

his *promise*, or betrothed (Lavallée 170). Where Askik had always been treated as a son and consequently felt that he possessed all of the privileges and freedoms of any man of the Sancys' social rank, he is made suddenly and drastically aware that when it comes to courting and marriage, he is relegated to a universe far from the Sancy entourage. It is a sign of Askik's assumption of a certain mutuality in his successful assimilation into French-Canadian society that he quickly concludes that Elisabeth is equally attracted to him, and that this automatically makes her his betrothed. What assimilation has meant for Askik is giving up his cultural heritage from the prairies and over-writing the education which he has received from the old Anishnabeg woman. In effect, he acquires a new identity that should be his authentic self but that instead leads to internal conflict and feelings of ambivalence because to become completely white would mean denying his Indian background. In return, Askik assumes that his being removed from his homeland and co-opted into the process of assimilation must entail a certain willingness on the part of the assimilating society to accept him as an assimilated person. His expectation, one that he is soon to realize was a massive delusion, is that assimilation is a transaction whereby in return for acquiring this new French-Canadian identity he will be granted recognition by French-Canadians as one of them. He needs to be seen by the other in order to gain a sense of his self – but because that self is a product of a shaping process carried out by the society of his other, Askik might be justified in feeling that the French-Canadian other is obliged to recognize him as the 'same' it has helped shape

rather than as a métis other.

Askik discovers, however, that the process of assimilation earns him no guarantees of acceptance from the society that has imposed it. His desire for Elisabeth opens a dynamic that lays bare the previously hidden French-Canadian side of the transaction of assimilation. Eugène Sancy acknowledges the physical and social distance that Askik has traversed when he declares that "'Alexis [Askik's French name] est né dans un autre monde, une autre culture, je dirais même à une autre époque. Il a fait plus de chemin dans ses vingt-quatre ans que j'en ai parcouru dans mes cinquante et quelque'" (308).[50] Sancy does not doubt that the voyage has been a good one for Askik. In Sancy's view, he has helped Askik arrive at a far better place than his birth would have allowed, and he assumes that Askik is in his debt as a result. When Sancy asks Askik to run his farm, he does it with the absolute assurance of his power over the young man:

> "Je te demande de veiller aux biens de ma famille, pendant quelque temps. Ce n'est pas trop demander, j'espère?"
>
> Il n'ajouta pas: "Après tout ce que j'ai fait pour toi", mais la phrase était là, palpable, entre eux deux. (311)[51]

Sancy knows that Askik wants to practise law, but relies on his idea of Askik's natural "disposition" to justify forcing him onto the farm: "'c'est un homme de la terre'" (277).[52]

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[50] Alexis was born into another world, another culture, I might even say another era. He has come farther in his twenty-four years than I have in my fifty-odd. (Claxton 282-83)

[51] I'm asking you to look after my family's assets for a time. That's not too much to ask, I hope.

He did not add, After all I've done for you, but the words were palpable between them. (Claxton 285)

[52] [H]e belongs on the land. (Claxton 253)

Lavallée shows again in this instance that racism and racially-based notions of personality exist on a spectrum of subtle differences. Eugène Sancy shows enormous understanding of Askik's situation when defending him from charges that he might still be a "savage." Sancy replies that "'il est [...] d'un autre milieu, d'une autre culture'" (265).[53] Sancy's ability to see differences as effects of culture rather than of race does not prevent him from making the assumption that because Askik is part Indian he has a natural connection to the land that makes it more fitting for him to be a farm foreman than a lawyer. At a deeper level, the white man's assumption that Askik should be grateful for his assimilation is also an assumption that he must be ashamed of his Indian blood – the thing that makes him not-white and that necessitates "assimilation" in the first place. Askik's double nature, rather than being erased by assimilation into white society, is accentuated and deformed, so that he is tortured by ambiguous feelings of pride in being métis and of shame when his past is "revealed."

Once he recognizes the falsity of his position in Quebec, Askik sees the French-Canadian position clearly: "Le Canadien français peut se pencher avec sollicitude sur ses pittoresques cousins métis, mais il aime que la frontière demeure nette entre bienfaiteur et assisté. Que le protégé apprenne à subvenir à ses besoins, bien. Mais qu'il se contente de

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[53] [H]is background's different; he's from another culture. (Claxton 241)

peu, qu'il n'aille surtout pas concurrencer ses sauveurs" (439).[54] For an ambitious man such as Askik, it is impossible not to compete with the white people around him: the utter subservience that assimilation requires of him is not part of his character (or his education for that matter) and so it fails.

Madame Sancy indicates what she considers a suitable match for Askik when she pairs him with the servant girl, Céline, during attendance at a church service. The sort of manipulation involved is part of the social machinery of nineteenth-century society, in which masters (here, the upper-class Sancys, heirs of the old seigneurial regime) dominate servants in every way, including in their choice of mate, in such a way as to ensure their continuing service. Askik is at first oblivious to the fact that the Sancys (and particularly Madame Sancy) place him on the same social level as Céline. It takes a series of hints and seeming coincidences to bring home to Askik the reality of how the Sancys perceive him: not as a beloved adopted son, but as a young man who is in their debt and thus in their control.

As a series of indications and events unfold in the narrative, indicating to Askik that he does not occupy the social position he believed was his, the young man also shows a growing consciousness of his métis heritage, a consequence of its sudden centrality in the trajectory his life is taking. Askik's musings about being métis oscillate between a

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[54] The French Canadian may be charitable to his colourful Métis cousins, but he likes the line between benefactor and protégé to remain clearcut. If the protégé learns to provide for himself, well and good, but let him keep his sights low and above all not compete with his saviours. (Claxton 406)

sense of his difference as a social barrier and a belief that the difference simply does not matter. Indeed, he believes that his hybridity is a source of special abilities: "Il était issu de deux races ennemies: qui mieux que lui pouvait réunir les peuples disparates du Canada?" (278).[55] When Askik feels awkward beside a polished French-Canadian man, he depends on memories of his past to restore his sense of self-worth: "A ces moments-là, tout son passé lui remontait à l'esprit et Askik s'imaginait volontiers plus courageux, plus résistant que les hommes qui l'entouraient" (271).[56] Yet this past is something to be ashamed of in a social setting. When his former schoolteacher from St. Boniface arrives in Montreal and attends a party given by the Sancys, Askik is afraid "de voir son passé déballé devant une assistance gourmande" (304),[57] at the same time realizing that his teacher also wants to put his Western past behind him. By the end of the party, however, Askik finds that colourful stories from his past are the only thing people want to hear about: "Les dames frissonnaient délicieusement en imaginant des ours noirs sortant de leurs tanières ou des bisons blessés chargeant tête basse les cavaliers métis. Toute la soirée y passa. Askik avait beau changer de cercle, la conversation revenait chaque fois

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[55] He was the scion of two enemy races; who better than he could unite the disparate peoples of Canada? (Claxton 253)

[56] At such times he remembered his entire past and fancied himself braver and hardier than the men around him. (Claxton 246)

[57] [H]is whole past [is] about to be unwrapped and displayed to an audience hungry for diversion. (Claxton 278)

sur son passé. Il s'y résigna" (306).[58] So the past that comes flowing back in moments of social stress or solitary musing is both a source of strength and something Askik wants to put behind him and hide from the society he lives in. Yet it is in moments of social stress that society fixes on Askik's métis past and racial heritage as the only significant fact about him.

In day-to-day life, Askik meets with everyday forms of racial discrimination. As he walks in the dusk with a friend, his skin becomes "presque noire"[59] and people cross the street to avoid him (282). His oscillation between pride and shame is a sign of the ambiguity that reigns for Askik as an assimilated métis. His intelligence and powers of observation give him insight into the relations between English and French. The English are the "masters" because they control commerce, whereas the French are relegated to the position of "servants" because their highest aspiration is to become parliamentarians or priests (312). Askik realizes that the English "[ont] pour les Indiens et les Métis un dédain à peine qualifiable" (312),[60] but knows that this attitude applies across the board: "Mais qui ne méprisait pas les autochtones? Même les Français voulaient les refaire à

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[58] The ladies shivered deliciously when they pictured black bears coming out of their dens and wounded buffalo with heads down, charging Métis horsemen. This was how he spent the evening. Though he moved from group to group, the conversation would turn to his past every time. He resigned himself to it. (Claxton 280)

[59] [A]lmost black. (Claxton 257)

[60] [The English] scorn for the Indians and Métis [is] almost beyond measure. (Claxton 286-87)

leur image" (312-13).[61] In spite of his insight into how French and English society functions, Askik is naïve about where he himself fits into the social machinery. He does not know what meaning French-Canadian society gives to his hybridity: his sense of self-worth tells him that his intelligence, abilities and ambitions are all that is required to succeed in Quebec, but signals reach him from various directions telling him something is awry, so that his dark skin and the epithet "métis" may be enough to make intelligence and ability count for nothing.

The novel contains a spectrum of attitudes towards Askik's hybridity that offer very concrete reasons for the ambiguity he is experiencing. The ambiguity is not of Askik's making. It belongs to Quebec society itself, which is giving Askik conflicting signals about what his hybridity means. Askik's school friends, who have been an intimate part of the assimilation process, are the most accepting of his difference. His friend Grandet, for example, treats him as an equal, whereas his law-office colleague Lecorbu constantly finds fault and "ne [peut] accepter qu'un Métis le surpasse en se montrant désinvolte, inexact, et plutôt paresseux" (286).[62] His employers and the judges Askik pleads before in his law practice seem to consider his abilities alone in their judgement of him, yet Askik does not forget that Eugène Sancy's influence has been intrumental in getting him the position he holds. Within the social sphere of the Sancys,

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[61] But then, everyone looked down on the aboriginals. The French kept trying to make them over in their own image. (Claxton 287)

[62] [R]esent[s] a devil-may-care, imprecise and rather lazy Métis getting ahead of him. (Claxton 261)

where Askik most wants to succeed in order to marry Elisabeth Sancy, he feels most awkward and out of place. At a sumptuous party put on by the Sancys, Askik feels, bitterly, "comme une bête rare, un sauvage bien dressé en habit de cérémonie. Moi bon Métis. Moi bien parler. Moi pas pisser dans les crachoirs" (303).[63] The attitude of the Sancys is most ambivalent and most ambiguous for Askik. Just as he misunderstands Madame Sancy's intentions when she orchestrates his accompanying Céline to church, Askik is unaware that the Sancys do not see him as potential marriage material for their daughter until the moment Madame Sancy expresses her rejection.

As an ambitious lawyer, Askik is part of the system: one element of the discursive formation in a colonial regime is legal discourse and the rule of law. Askik thinks he can use the system to realize his personal ambitions. He sees himself as a "conciliator" and believes that he can use his position "between" groups to bring them together and incidentally to become a great statesman himself (278). Askik's sense of being between two peoples is repeated in comic form by Étienne Prosy, Askik's teacher from St. Boniface, when he explains that Askik's surname, Mercredi, is a deformation of the Scottish McCready or MacGregor and notes that this is "un cas singulier de prédisposition"[64] because *mercredi*, (Wednesday) is halfway between Sunday and Saturday, "'et le Métis étant lui-même à moitié chemin entre deux civilisations...'"

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[63] [L]ike a rare species of animal, a well-trained savage in ceremonial dress. Me good Métis. Me talk good. Me not pee in spitoons. (Claxton 278)

[64] [A] singular example of predisposition (Claxton 279).

(305).[65] There is never a clear indication in the novel of which two civilizations are being referred to. Prosy seems to imply that Askik is situated between the English and the French civilizations, although Askik's idea that he comes from "two enemy races" indicates that he is thinking of Europeans and Indians as the races in question. The author leaves unexplored the whole question of what is involved in Askik's being "in-between" two races or civilizations. Lavallée shows Askik's ambivalence about his position in Quebec society, and his awareness of the ambiguous signals he receives from those around him, as a series of emotional extremes in which Askik moves precipitously from ecstasy to despair and back to enthusiasm fuelled by his irrepressible ambition.

These different attitudes towards Askik and his hybridity are scaled to the level of danger that he represents to the person in question. For Grandet and other school friends of Askik, he poses no professional or personal threat; at the other end of the spectrum of discrimination is the reaction of complete strangers who equate "Iroquois" manners with stereotypes of bloodthirsty Indians and instinctively distance themselves from Askik on the basis of his skin colour. The discrimination of the Sancys is much more complex, because it involves establishing a subtle line of acceptability that Askik has difficulty discerning. While he has spent most of his life as Elisabeth's "brother," he is utterly unacceptable to the Sancys as a suitor. When Madame Sancy excoriates Askik for desiring Elisabeth, she falls into the colloquial French of rural Quebec as a way of

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[65] [A]nd the Métis himself is halfway between two cultures .... (Claxton 279)

indicating his absolute social inferiority, something that she has never done before this point: "'Dehors que j' te dis! Penses-tu que j' vais donner ma fille à un sauvage? Tu m'écoeures!'" (321).[66] Here, as in *Nipsya*, the white woman guards her social position by keeping tight control over the question of marriageability, in this instance her daughter's. Madame Sancy's use of the epithet "sauvage" for Askik suddenly brings to the fore the issue of inter-racial marriage and sexual relations as transgressions. It points to the spectre of "red rape," one of the anxieties of white women in Canada's "contact zone" (to borrow a phrase from Mary Louise Pratt) that fed on the stereotype of Indian men as sexually threatening and intent on possessing (and violating) white female bodies.

Askik's rejection by Madame Sancy is echoed and reinforced when he is rejected by the *habitants* – the farmers around the Sancy estate – whom he tries to draw into his grand plans for a dairy industry and for mechanized harvesting of crops. These people use racism to justify their rejection of Askik, by pointing to his Indian heritage as a fatal flaw in his makeup. Madame Paradis (the wife of Askik's right-hand man) states that "'Y est sauvage, pi y restera sauvage'" (275),[67] and that sentiment is repeated in various guises. In this case, the epithet does not seem to indicate a real fear that Askik will suddenly revert to some sort of primitive behaviour. Instead, it is a ready-made excuse to designate Askik an outsider and to reject him and his ideas, which threaten established

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[66] Get out I said! You think I'm gonna give my daughter t' a savage? You're disgustin'! (Claxton 294)

[67] [O]nce a savage, always a savage. (Claxton 250)

farming traditions. By the end of his stay at Vieilleterre, the farmers refer to Askik simply as "le Métis" (394), and Askik realizes that the sole fact of his mixed blood will always place him at the very lowest rung of the social ladder in Quebec: "'Des médiocres et des fourbes peuvent prétendre aux positions d'autorité, pas moi. Il n'y a pas un seul ivrogne du Québec qui ne me soit supérieur. Je suis, et je serai toujours, pour les Canadiens, un sauvage'" (399).[68] Askik's final humiliation comes when Elisabeth's fiancé Hubert arrives on behalf of M. Sancy to dismiss Askik as foreman of his farm: Sancy has realized that Askik, through his innovations and warring with the *habitants*, is alienating his voters, a fact that is much more important to him than Askik's plans to revolutionize farming in the region.

Again in his rather mechanical way Lavallée, having denounced through Askik's bitter thoughts the prejudice according to which anyone with mixed blood will inevitably revert to an "other" lurking inside, then shows his protagonist going through the very reversion he condemns as a misguided racist notion. Once he is no longer in a position of prestige and power, Askik gives up all of the habits of rigour that he had adopted for the sake of assimilating:

> La charpente du collégien appliqué, si patiemment érigée en Askik – discipline, renoncement, culpabilisation, prévoyance – s'était effondrée sous l'échec. Son dressage n'avait pas donné les résultats promis : ni position ni prestige. Ses

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[68] Dolts and charlatans can aspire to positions of authority, but I can't. There's not a drunkard in Quebec who isn't my superior. To Canadians, I am and always will be a savage. (Claxton 369)

> habitudes et convictions s'étant avérées nulles, elles étaient tombées d'elles-mêmes. (418)[69]

Having "awoken" from the dream of his existence in Montreal (419), Askik takes a job in a small town and begins going on solitary walks in the forest, climbing mountains, and watching Indians playing lacrosse. The pleasure he finds in these activities seems to point to an atavistic Indian/métis side of him that miraculously comes to the fore to save his battered sense of self: "Il ne faisait rien de la journée et rentrait le soir, fatigué, satisfait, rassasié. En vingt ans de précipitation et d'efforts, cela ne lui était jamais arrivé" (419).[70] The (white) life that he had desired, worked for, and almost attained, suddenly becomes a meaningless expanse, a mirage, "[c]omme s'il n'y avait rien eu depuis son enfance" (419).[71] This sudden erasure of Askik's entire adult life thus far is a particularly unsatisfying section of a novel that purports to examine the roots of racism and racial discrimination in Canadian society, because it elides the entire question of how a person reacts when he is suddenly racialized, or when his racial identity is made the single most important fact about him after years of educational and social success. Lavallée seems to be asserting that a reconnection with nature has an immediate healing effect, a simplistic and even stereotypical treatment of a devastating and complex

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[69] For Askik, the mold of the conscientious student – discipline, self-denial, guilt, forethought – had collapsed in the wake of his failure. His rigorous training had not brought the promised rewards either of position or prestige. Since his customs and convictions had proven groundless, they foundered of their own accord. (Claxton 386)

[70] He would spend all day doing nothing, and come home at night tired, satisfied, fulfilled, a condition he had never known in twenty years of striving and hustle. (Claxton 386)

[71] As if nothing had happened since his childhood. (Claxton 387)

problem for the "near-assimilated" person. In contrast. this problem of near-assimilation and its consequences accounts for much of the tension (and the interest) in Culleton's portrayal of April Raintree as an adult.

Long after reaching his clear-sighted views of power relations between the English and the French in Eastern Canada, Askik finally recognizes some of the mechanisms that have been at work in his own life. To explain why he has been blind so long to the true nature of his position in Quebec society, Askik tells himself that the "you" of his teachers in phrases such as "work and you will succeed" or "shine and you will be accepted" were not meant for him, that this was a case of "mistaken identity," because "les promesses étaient adressées à ses camarades, pas à lui" (439).[72] This interpellation of the student by the education system is one of the powerful tools that a culture deploys in aid of assimilation. Though Askik now believes that he has been wrong in thinking it was directed at him, the fact is that this sort of "misdirected" interpellation is part of the falsity in the process of assimilation, which makes promises in order to pacify or placate potentially reticent subjects, without disclosing that the "success" and "acceptance" it promises are not at all on a par with the success and acceptance to which a white person can aspire.

In yet another plot turn where the author represents Askik as the passive pawn of unseen and often powerfully coincidental forces (and mirroring at the metanarrative level

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[72] The 'you' of the promises meant his classmates, not him. (Claxton 406)

the power of white people such as the Sancys to dispose of Askik as they see fit), Etienne Prosy, now a newspaper editor, offers him a job. Askik will act as guide for a newspaperman who is going to cover the métis rebellion in Saskatchewan. Askik knows that he will accept the job and return home, "[p]arce qu'il [a] la nostalgie du pays, mais surtout, parce qu'il [est] battu et que ce [n'est] pas la peine d'insister. Sauvage un jour, sauvage toujours" (425).[73] The bitter repetition of that phrase indicates that Askik has understood once and for all that Quebec society, from the highest to the lowest level, will never forget or let him forget his Indian background, no matter how irrelevant it may be to the work he is doing. At moments of crisis or social pressure, he will be pushed to the "Indian" side of his double heritage, the binary that is contained within the métis and that makes métis hybridity so difficult to live when it mirrors enormous social disparities. Because of that impossibility of reconciling the two sides of his own heritage, Askik feels truly that he "belongs" nowhere: "'[O]ù est ma place? Ici? Il suffit que je dérange un peu pour qu'on se souvienne que je suis moitié sauvage. Dans le Nord-Ouest? J'ai des goûts et des exigences de Blanc. Mes félicitations, mes pères. Bravo, mes maîtres. On peut dire que vous m'avez réussi!'" (398).[74] Once again, this awareness of the damage wrought by a system that works towards assimilation of the racial other with no guarantee

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[73] [P]artly because he [is] homesick but mostly because he [has] been beaten and there [is] no point struggling any longer. Once a savage, always a savage. (Claxton 392)

[74] [W]here is my place? Here? All I have to do is disturb things a bit and people remember I'm half Indian. The North West? I have the tastes and needs of a White now. Congratulations, fathers! Well done, teachers! It looks as though you've succeeded with me! (Claxton 368)

of subsequent social acceptance of the assimilated individual is swept aside in the utopian vision of the novel's conclusion. In the last part of the novel, which takes Askik back to the prairie, the author does not even refer to, let alone examine, the problems that will be posed by Askik's difference not only from whites and Indians, but now from other métis as well, thanks to his Eastern education.

Instead of a realistic account of a difficult reintegration into his native – but now foreign – homeland, Lavallée shows Askik returning in a relatively unproblematic way. When Askik is reunited with his friend Mona, he protests to her that he may not remain in the West, but for the first time he sees the situation clearly with a clarity that benefits from the author's one hundred years of hindsight:

> [...] Askik voyait la plaine sans attendrissement. Il la voyait telle qu'elle était, avec ses chasseurs démoralisés, ses enfants illettrés, ses tipis crasseux, ses peuplades trébuchant au seuil d'un avenir malveillant. [...] Il revoyait les enfants de Mona avec leurs grands yeux indiens. Que leur réservait l'avenir des Blancs: la tuberculose, l'alcool, les emplois sordides? (501)[75]

His ambitions return, directed towards a new end: "Lui qui avait appris à marcher dans le monde des Poilus, allait-il tendre la main à Mona, à ses enfants, à tous ses frères de race?" (501).[76] Askik's consciousness of his power to help others comes from his

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[75] [...] Askik was seeing the prairie [...] unemotionally, with its demoralized hunters, illiterate children, squalid teepees, its little clans tottering on the brink of a baleful future. [...] He saw Mona's children again, with their huge Indian eyes. What did a Whites' future hold for them? Tuberculosis, alcohol, demeaning jobs? (Claxton 465)

[76] He who had learned to walk in the white-man's world, would he reach out a hand to Mona, to her children, to all of his fellow métis? (My translation)

experience of the white world and the false promises it makes to métis people, and his bitter experience of failed assimilation and rejection by the Québécois pushes him back to a realization that he belongs to a group. His meeting with Mona and his brother is what reactivates his bonds with that group, so that, just as with April Raintree, it is ties of family (and friendship) that give the individual the feeling that he belongs to a larger collective. In the reader's last glimpse of Askik he is riding "à bride abattue vers un village du nom de Saint-Paul, en Alberta" (504),[77] an image that evokes Askik's determination to settle into a métis future in Western Canada but that also touches on the stereotype of the impetuous, hard-riding métis horseman. That image sums up the reasons why a novel that is clearly the result of diligent historical research and a latter-day sensitivity to issues of race, assimilation, and discrimination is ultimately unsatisfactory as a working-out of the problems posed by the protagonist's experience: it shows a sort of "reversion to type" in Askik, a notion that belongs to nineteenth-century racial discourse whose falsity has been long since demonstrated. The distance between the time when the novel was written and its historical setting means that the utopian ending (and it is utopian despite Askik's awareness of the social problems of the métis) contains some irony, given that the author is aware of what will follow for the métis people in the prairies. The ending of *April Raintree* is also utopian, but the promise of a future for the métis people is made on a small (person-to-person) scale, perhaps because the narrative

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[77] [H]ell-for-leather, bound for a village by the name of St. Paul in Alberta. (Claxton 467)

itself is laid out on a smaller scale than is *Tchipayuk*.

April Raintree: the contemporary métis

Like *Tchipayuk*, Beatrice Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree* follows the protagonist from the age of about six until young adulthood. Unlike *Tchipayuk*, however, this novel is set in contemporary Manitoba, spanning the 1950s to the 1970s. Similar themes are present in both novels as Culleton too writes of what it means to grow up métis in Manitoba, of the impact of social institutions on the development of the child's self-awareness and ability to deal with the conditions and "meaning" of being métis, whether that involves internalizing negative stereotypes or finding the strength to reject them and to attempt a re-writing of the social script around métis identity. The greatest difference between the two texts is that *April Raintree* shows the problems of contemporary society rather than the conditions that prevailed a century ago, and the sheer brutality and relative hopelessness of the material conditions lived by the métis (and by native people in general) are far more oppressive than anything Lavallée depicts. Both novels use a move to Eastern Canada as a means of examining some of the workings of assimilation, while the protagonist's subsequent return to the West in each novel marks a sort of "coming into" or coming to terms with métis identity. A comparison of the parallels and the differences shows the significant ways a white and a métis author approach similar subjects: how the individual is made aware of his or her hybridity; the

role of social structures and institutions in defining hybridity with the resulting social constraints on the hybrid person; and the prospect of redefinition by métis people themselves through connection with place and history in Western Canada.

April Raintree and her sister Cheryl are métis sisters who "could have been identical twins, except for [their] skin-colouring" (106). Cheryl is dark-skinned like their father, while April is pale-skinned like their mother, so that she can pass for white with people who do not know of her native background and who have not seen her sister and consequently identified April as native or métis because of Cheryl's native appearance. These two characters externalize the double heritage of hybridity. The author uses this device to explore how the different heritages affect the experiences of the children and their formation of an identity, as well as what might be called the "epidermal" aspects of race. It demonstrates the foolishness involved when a society constructs skin colour as an indicator of anything important about an individual, a construction that has far-reaching implications which Culleton follows in all their intricacy. That two sisters from the same parents can have such different perceptions of themselves and their place in the world demonstrates the strength of social (as opposed to biological) influences on the individual, but it also shows the power that a random matter of skin tone can exert in the life of a person from a visible minority. As Margery Fee points out, "[April's] rapid success [as an adult in the white world] reveals how unearned racial privilege actually works" ("Deploying" 224). April's invisible status within her minority group means that

she must grapple all the more with the implications of accepting and asserting that minority identity.

Like Askik Mercredi, the girls are removed at an early age from the influence of their parents. In *Tchipayuk* that decision is depicted as an act of pure discrimination on the part of Askik's self-hating métis uncle. In *April Raintree*, the Raintree sisters are removed from their home at a young age and placed in foster homes because of their parents' alcohol abuse, which follows on the dislocation they experience after moving from a northern settlement to the city of Winnipeg to obtain treatment for tuberculosis. Both authors point to social forces that lead to atomization of the métis community, a development that tends towards destruction of the community, just as it foretells the disappearance of the Cree in *Nipsya*. Beatrice Culleton shows that these forces do not stem from racial discrimination in a simple way, but that they arise from a complex web of material conditions as well as attitudes and practices both on the part of whites and on the part of natives. The social workers who remove the Raintree girls from their home are not acting purely out of racial prejudice: they are justified in their concern for the welfare of the Raintree girls. That legitimate concern leads to more social problems for the girls rather than a solution to the problem, however, because they are in a social welfare system that discourages reunification of the family and that fails to detect physical and mental abuse by a foster family.

One theme that runs through the first part of the novel is that of passivity – which

often takes the form of submission to (white) authority – and defiance. as April tells the story of the girls' experience of foster families. April is old enough to remember something of her mother, including her submissive reaction when people are "rude" to her in public. The first-person narration adopts the child's perspective to a large extent so that April is unable to give a name to the rudeness, but the reader understands that it is some form of racial discrimination because April follows it with the story of seeing her first black person. April's mother reacts to the "rudeness" of strangers by "get[ting] a hurt look in her eyes and act[ing] apologetic" (13), reactions that give April her first model of a form of submissive behaviour. When social workers arrive to take the girls away, April sees "grown-up things" that she does not understand: "My mother should have fought with her life to keep us with her. Instead, she handed us over" (18). Not yet having dealt with society and social institutions enough to have internalized, as her mother has, the racism she encounters, April judges her mother's actions from an unclouded perspective of what is right – that a mother should fight to keep her children – and uses the power of that perspective of natural justice to show the distortions of an outlook shaped by racism, poverty, and the debility that accompanies illness and alcoholism.

By the time the girls are separated from their parents, April is old enough to have learned to imitate her mother's passive reaction to discrimination, but Cheryl is younger and learns, perhaps from the example of her métis foster mother, to adopt a more defiant

attitude. Although the narrative follows April much more closely than Cheryl, the reader has a strong sense of Cheryl's development through her sister's careful reconstruction of their conversations and through Cheryl's letters to April. This allows the author to create a strong contrast between the two sisters as April learns submission while Cheryl becomes a rebel against an educational system that attempts to label and stigmatize her. Cheryl engages with the stigma by identifying entirely with her Indian heritage. April's strategy is aimed at avoiding the apparently predestined route that society has mapped out for native girls, and which a social worker describes as "'native girl' syndrome" so that the girls' act of running away from home becomes an unavoidable path to alcohol abuse, prostitution, and skid row (62). The all-encompassing nature of racist views, which tie every act of the racialized individual to an essentialist construct of her race, leaves no room for choice or dissent: April and Cheryl must work out for themselves what a native or métis girl might become if she manages not to succumb to the "syndrome." April's reaction is to strive for the ultimate submission of becoming white, while Cheryl resists and rebels, insisting on re-writing métis history as a first step in changing the perceptions responsible for the stigmatization of the métis.

The different experiences of April and Cheryl in their foster homes show the complexity of the problem: the supportive atmosphere April finds in her first foster home, with a devoutly Catholic French-Canadian family, does not translate into pride in being métis for April. Conversely, Cheryl's reaction to an openly racist and abusive home is to

defy rather than lapse into bitter silence, as April does. Culleton shows how individual personalities and choices interact with social surroundings and experiences, so that similar experiences do not lead to similar outcomes for the two girls. April is first placed into a loving, supportive, strongly Catholic home. She learns to love her foster parents and is adjusting to a life of being white, Catholic, and relatively untouched by racism. Instead of helping April value her métis background and maintain a connection with her heritage, this seemingly supportive family atmosphere lays the foundation for April's decision to "be" white as a means of living harmoniously in a white-dominated society. In addition, the Christian beliefs she learns during her stay with this family prove to be yet another force pushing her towards obedience. When April's first foster mother becomes ill and April is suddenly moved into an abusive and racist foster home, her Catholicism leads her to believe that everything that happens is God's will. In her attempt to square Catholic teachings with vicious racial discrimination, April at first interprets her harsh new experiences as God's way of "testing" her (40). This sort of compliant Catholicism gives her no basis for rebellion against social injustice, instead instilling in her the notion that God has ordered the world in a certain way and that she must simply endure that order, with no assurance that God will ever reveal to her the reason for His disposition of her world.

Alongside the influence of religion as a pacifying force on April, she experiences the more caustic effects of open racism. As Jodi Lundgren notes, the name-calling that

April endures when playing near white children or at school with them marks the beginnings of interpellation "during which individuals 'recognize' (or misrecognize) themselves in discourse and adopt subject positions accordingly. [...] [T]he race relations of the next generation are being established as the children of the dominant group hail the Native children as Other" (63). In *Tchipayuk*, Askik discovers that he has "misrecognized" himself as a white person because of his misunderstanding of (positive) interpellation by teachers. In *April Raintree*, the children who identify April and her sister as native use negative interpellation that reinforces April's wish to identify as white in order to escape such persecution. April learns to endure stoically the other children's taunts, and becomes "bitterly passive" (Culleton 50) in reaction to her foster mother's brutal treatment. She emerges from this passive-submissive stance only in defence of her sister Cheryl, who is punished for her defiance after coming to live in the same home. Yet the result is only "humiliation" (56) for April, so that even this attempt to break out of the mold forming around her becomes a negative for her, whereas Cheryl's acts of defiance have an inherent value for her regardless of the punishment that might ensue.

All of these early experiences teach April the "meaning" of hybridity: "Being a half-breed meant being poor and dirty. It meant being weak and having to drink. It meant being ugly and stupid. It meant living off white people. And giving your children to white people to look after. It meant having to take all the crap white people gave" (47). To avoid having such devastating overdeterminations attached to her, April wishes to live

"like a real white person" (47) because her white skin allows her that possibility. The only problem with this plan is that it depends on freeing herself from everything that points to her métis background, including her sister: "What about Cheryl? How was I going to pass for a white person when I had a Métis sister?" (47). The narrative that follows shows April grappling with this same fundamental problem in various guises: the problem that cannot be resolved unless April totally rejects Cheryl, something that her love for Cheryl will not allow her to do. The other possibility, and one that she accepts only after Cheryl has killed herself, is to "become" métis again so that she can stop fearing the exposure of her ethnic background. The sources of métis pride that remain within Askik even when he is nearly assimilated into Quebec society in the 1880s are no longer available to the métis child of 1950s Canada. Askik remembers the métis prowess at riding and hunting, for example, part of a peculiarly métis way of life. He also imagines himself as having special abilities, by virtue of being métis, as an intermediary between hostile peoples. By the mid-twentieth century, the way of life of the prairie métis has changed radically, and the links with the past through connections between generations are more tenuous as a result of growing social atomization. For that reason, April's ultimate move towards recuperation of pride is extremely difficult, given than she is virtually starting from zero. April realizes this when Cheryl introduces her to a native elder and April speculates that "[i]f [she'd] had such a grandmother when [she] was growing up, maybe [she] wouldn't have been so mixed-up" (159). The lack of

connection between generations, like the absence of parents, is a crucial point of weakness that leaves the métis child open to the full operation of white hegemony and interpellation with no countervailing narratives of métis identity. As Culleton and Lavallée both indicate, the atomization of the métis community and the métis family is no accident of history. Specific practices of colonial domination, such as removing native children from their families to place them in white schools and families, are aimed not only at assimilating people while they are still presumably open to assimilation but also at breaking down families and collectives that might work against such policies by maintaining a strong métis identity that the child might have access to. The example of Cheryl Raintree's alternative education shows that even minimal support for an authentic métis identity is enough to strengthen the individual's resistance to hegemonic discourse.

The crucial fact of Cheryl's upbringing is the support she gets from Mrs. MacAdams, a métis woman who is Cheryl's first foster mother. The MacAdams home has "good books on the subject of natives" (71) and Mrs. MacAdams encourages Cheryl to "be proud of [métis] history" (43). Cheryl writes essays that celebrate the unique identity of the métis and she openly challenges the representations of Indians in a school text that tells "how the Indians scalped, tortured, and massacred brave white explorers and missionaries" (53). The different approaches taken by the girls in the face of dominant discursive strategies show how strategies of resistance can be positive, or can reflect an internalization of prejudice that reinforces a sense of self-hatred. Cheryl's

wholesale rejection of the representations offered by school history books with the epithet "'Lies! Lies! Lies!'" (54) clears the way for her to write history from her own perspective, including romanticized accounts of intrepid métis buffalo hunters at work. April refuses to engage with Cheryl's attempts at consciousness-raising: "I had not read the book on Louis Riel. Whenever Cheryl wanted to talk about him, I would change the subject. I guess she got the hint because she began staying away from such topics" (56). When she does read one of Cheryl's essays, it strengthens her wish to become white: "Knowing the other side, the Métis side, didn't make me feel any better. It just reinforced my belief that if I could assimilate myself into white society, I wouldn't have to live like this for the rest of my life" (78). When April does use a discursive weapon to turn on a white persecutor, she does it in terms that reaffirm her negative feelings about being métis: she taunts a white girl who has called half-breeds stupid by declaring that "if we're stupid, you must lack brains altogether" (53). Jodi Lundgren notes that "[m]otivated by 'spite' instead of pride, April's brief acknowledgment of her Métis identity is reactive in nature and does not reinscribe the meaning of 'half-breed'" (64). April has so internalized the hatred of native and métis circulating in her environment that she has no resources, even with Cheryl's example, with which to approach such a reinscription. She cannot begin to perceive how anything but an escape into a white identity will change her reality or prospects. As Helen Hoy points out, "[t]he text is an intricate choreography of (mis)representations, the relationship of the two sisters being no less fraught with the

complications of self-construction (and -invention) than are the versions of themselves and their history that they are fed by a racist society" (278). At every turn, the two girls are pulled to opposite ends of the native/white binary as Cheryl declares "I wish we were whole Indians" while April makes plans to "pass for a pure white person" (Culleton 46).

The psychological and ideological divide between the sisters continues to broaden when April finally leaves the foster home to become a secretary in Winnipeg and then marries a white man from Toronto. The marriage and the move east provide April with the means of leaving behind her métis identity, at least temporarily. In her good-bye to Cheryl, April ascribes her wish to identify as white to her "selfish" nature and emphasizes that she is making a choice: "I want what white society can give me. [...] I really believe that's the only way for me to find happiness. [...] You have to do what you believe is right for you, and I have to go my way" (101). April does not reflect on the implications of her decision to pass for white until she realizes that a visit from Cheryl will reveal her métis identity to her family and their friends. It is not April's own skin that exposes her but that of her sister. The strategy of passing for white takes mimicry one step further because April can "be" white, at least externally, as long as she cannot be identified as related to someone who is visibly métis. She dons the white mask necessary to get where she wants to be – amongst people with wealth and power and far from the shame and discriminatory interpellation of the past. The difference with this sort of mimicry is that once April is "found out" there is no going back. The stigma, even if invisible, is present

once the people around her become aware of it. April's mother-in-law expresses the horror of miscegenation as a hidden, uncontrollable "taint" when she tells a friend that: "[April and Cheryl are] not half sisters. They have the same father and the same mother. That's the trouble with mixed races, you never know how they're going to turn out. And I would simply dread being grandmother to a bunch of little half-breeds!" (115-16). Until this point, April has been a "nice, obedient wife" (115), someone that Cheryl tries to "rouse [...] out of [her] passive state" (110), but her realization that her husband has been cheating on her with his former (white) girlfriend incites her to leave a life in which she has "everything [she] ever wanted" and finds it is "nothing" (112). Although April's break with the white society of eastern Canada and subsequent return to the West parallels Askik's move in *Tchipayuk*, there is a notable difference in agency between the two characters. Askik agrees to a request that he go West to act as an interpreter, yet another instance where circumstances open the path he will follow in the next stage of his life; April, on the contrary, is exerting her agency by divorcing her husband and fighting for a large settlement to ensure that she can continue to live comfortably. Moreover, her return to Western Canada does not signal a straightforward move towards acceptance of her métis identity, as it does for Askik. Culleton shows that the West is far from being an idyllic métis space with the built-in promise of a future for the prodigal son or daughter. It is, on the contrary, a conflicted and dangerous space in which April, as a result of another "misidentification," experiences a brutal rape that raises new questions about

identity, agency, and social justice.

The rape of April Raintree begins with a repetition of Cheryl's exposure of her sister: three white men who intend to "give [Cheryl] a scare" (128) see April from the back and mistake her for Cheryl. When one of the men calls April "squaw" (128), she does not understand how he has "recognized" her: "I wondered how he knew I was part-Indian. Just because I had long black hair?" (128). Only during the subsequent trial does April realize that the men had been targeting Cheryl: once again her sister's appearance has an impact on what happens to April, this time in a more devastating way because it leads to a physical assault against April rather than to a mere loss of social position.

The irony of Cheryl's fall into prostitution and alcohol abuse, an enactment of the "'native' girl syndrome" outlined by the social worker, is that it happens in spite of her efforts to connect with native people. Cheryl's childhood dream of living in British Columbia with April and their parents in an idyllic setting far from all society translates into more practical means of entering the native community as an adult in Winnipeg. When April agrees to attend an Indian powwow with Cheryl, the two sisters are finally able to talk openly about their divergent points of view. The author compresses into a few lines the two views of métis reality that set the girls in such different courses through life, and each can see a truth about the other's viewpoint that shows how ideology and discourse blur any possible distinction between right and wrong. Commenting on the surroundings at the powwow, April says:

> In this atmosphere everything is staged. It's romanticized. On Monday, we'll all go home, and to what? I'll go back to see the drunken Indians on Main Street, and I'll feel the same old shame. It's like having two worlds in my life that can't be mixed. And I've made my choice on how I want to live my everyday life. (152)

The differential in power between the white and Indian sides of her heritage makes it impossible for April to "mix" those two worlds. The powerful/powerless binary that melds with white/Indian in this society does not seem capable of being changed by the non-binary structure of hybridity.

April locates in her childhood the origins of the pressure to choose one of the terms: "To me, the white kids were the winners all the way. I guess what I feel today started back then. It would take an awful lot for me to be able to change what I've felt for a lifetime. Shame doesn't dissolve overnight" (153). For her part, Cheryl realizes that April's basically dishonest position in relation to her racial background will always leave her bereft: "[But] the Indian blood runs through your veins, April. To deny that, you deny a basic part of yourself. You'll never be satisfied until you can accept that fact" (152). Rather than attempting to be white, Cheryl embraces the other side of the racial binary – the Indian side – and works to change its attributes from shame and powerlessness to pride and power. She too traces this determination to her childhood: "Me, I've been identifying with the Indian people ever since I was a kid. The Métis people share more of the same problems with the Indian people. I guess that's why Riel was leader to both" (153). Cheryl's knowledge about the "problems" of the Indian and métis people does not, however, help her accept that her parents, the absent figures whom she has known only in

her fantasies, were destitute, alcoholic, and her mother a suicide. Cheryl's discovery of the "truth" about her parents is the shock that breaks her resolve to avoid the social problems she tackles through her volunteer work at the Native Friendship Centre. April speculates later that Cheryl's fantasies about their parents may have been the source of her strength: "I wondered what sort of image she had built up about our parents? Was it that image of long ago that had sustained her, given her hope?" (201). If so, thinks April, "[t]hat meeting with Dad, maybe it destroyed her self-image" (201). If the absence of parents leaves the child with no narratives of identity, an imaginative child such as Cheryl Raintree produces those narratives from the positive sources available to her and maintains them through sheer force of will. Culleton's clear-eyed view of the dangers of romanticizing the past is an antidote to the utopian vision of a Bugnet or a Lavallée: April's hesitant steps towards accepting her métis identity are mirrored by Cheryl's self-destructive descent into alcohol abuse and the abandonment of her beliefs and ideals. In the end, Cheryl jumps off the same bridge her mother had jumped from to kill herself. Her decline and death illustrate the difficulty, even for a determined and highly motivated métis woman, of combatting endemic social problems and breaking a cycle that severs links between parents and children. The loss of connections between generations of métis leads to a loss of cultural continuity that translates into loss of access to a métis identity for the métis child. Culleton wishes to demonstrate, however, that family and group ties can be regenerated despite divisive social pressures, provided that a sufficiently strong

motivation exists. That motivation is the individual's métis identity and the sense of connection to a larger collective – motivations that may not have been enough to save Cheryl, but that nevertheless remain the only hope for métis survival.

Cheryl's suicide provides the last impetus that pushes April finally to accept the fact that she is métis. Significantly, she expresses that realization not in terms of individual identity alone, but as a sense of belonging to a collective, a "people." In an angry outburst, April smashes an empty whiskey bottle, screaming: "'I hate you for what you've done to my sister! I hate you for what you've done to my parents! I hate you for what you've done to my people!'" (195). That declaration could radiate outward to the entire social system and might threaten to pull April herself into a vortex of destructive anger. April's discovery that Cheryl has a son changes her focus from external anger to internal reconciliation. Her sense of connection with her nephew is joined with a realization that she is also connected to a larger group: "I had used the words 'MY PEOPLE, OUR PEOPLE' and meant them. The denial had been lifted from my spirit. It was tragic that it had taken Cheryl's death to bring me to accept my identity. But no, Cheryl had once said, 'All life dies to give new life'" (207). This image of regeneration through a cycle of death and (re)birth mirrors the cyclical myth of Tay John, with the capital difference that April's spiritual rebirth comes through a renewed connection with a collective, "our people," and with her métis family through her nephew. By making those connections, she will resist the powerful forces of atomization in white-dominated

society. April's resolve to embrace "her people" is momentous because, as Margery Fee notes, April's earlier determination to be white was one that had an impact on that collective: "every member of a minority group who abandons that group makes it more likely that cultural traditions will vanish. Identity for Native people is not just a personal decision, and the community makes it clear that individuals are responsible for the cultural survival of the group" ("Deploying" 216). The responsibility that Cheryl had taken for the cultural survival of her people passes to April at the end of the novel, so that the death of one member of the group does not lead to its further weakening.

One of the most striking differences between *April Raintree* and *Tchipayuk* (and one of the reasons why *Tchipayuk* is the most unsatisfactory of the four narratives studied here) is in the matter of agency. Both Beatrice Culleton and Ronald Lavallée examine the workings of assimilation, but their representations of the forces that bring assimilation into play are diametrically opposed: Lavallée's protagonist is moved from one social position to another by people with more (social) power than him. His only real moment of complete agency comes at the very end of the novel, when he strikes out for Alberta. This representation of the métis individual as the pawn of greater forces elides the entire question of the ways in which the individual in a sub-dominant group is co-opted into the process of assimilation: in *Tchipayuk*, external agents are responsible for moving Askik into white society; April Raintree is the agent of her own assimilation, and that internalization of the will to assimilate proves much stronger than any outside force.

Askik can "forget" that he is métis until reminded of it by white members of society, but April cannot do this because of Cheryl, the dark-skinned sister whom she loves. Askik has two sets of standards operating at once: pride in his prairie background and culture and shame about the same things. The author moves his protagonist towards a "resolution" of these conflicting standards by having him returned to the West. This somewhat simplistic resolution worked by his mere physical presence in what is figured as an already-existing "métis space" is unsatisfying because of the differential between what we know about the ultimate fate of the métis in Western Canada and the utopian future foretold by the novel's dénouement. The story of *April Raintree* contains a parallel move East and return West but with a much more problematic and realistic portrayal of what that "métis space" in the West means: a struggle to regain métis history and pride. The métis pride in their special identity has been destroyed by prejudice and the resulting social disintegration. April's reunion with her sister does not suddenly wash away the burden of discrimination or place them in some supposedly "authentic" métis place where a harmonious future is assured.

Though there are similarities in the structures of desire and mobility in *Tchipayuk* and *April Raintree*, a significant difference between the two texts is their temporal setting. Clearly, the societies depicted in these novels are different, given that one is a century older than the other. Yet, as I noted earlier, Lavallée wrote *Tchipayuk* in protest against Franco-Manitoban discrimination against métis people. Assuming that a similar

motivation lay behind Culleton's writing (and that motivation is clear from the novel itself), the question arises of why one writer chose the form of the historical novel while the other wrote a novel that is a semi-autobiographical dissection of contemporary social conditions for métis people. In fact, in *April Raintree* Culleton points to the question of métis history as one of the crucial elements in a resolution of the social problems she examines. April concludes that she must give her nephew a better future, a future that would include the sort of teaching of métis history that has been lacking hitherto, to judge from the (formal) educational experiences of April and Cheryl. Yet part of the problem for a métis recuperation of métis history is the same problem that Thomas King sees for native history: it is so thoroughly defined by the white imagination through the overwhelming dominance of publication by white writers that native history does not seem to belong to native people. Thomas King states outright that "[r]ather than try to unravel the complex relationship between the nineteenth-century Indian and the white mind [...] most of us [i.e., native writers] have consciously set our literature in the present, a period that [...] allows us the opportunity to create for ourselves and our respective cultures both a present and a future" (xii). One might conclude therefore that a novel such as *Tchipayuk*, which appears to consecrate – and therefore "naturalize" – the notion that discrimination against métis has a long tradition in Canada, makes the work of undoing that "tradition" even more arduous. *April Raintree* is one of the first literary texts in Canada to begin that work, through a process that might be called "self-

representation" by a métis author. Mary Louise Pratt argues that in ethnographic terms a more precise name for such a text is "autoethnographic," and her definition of this category of text applies (with due recognition that this is a literary text) to what Beatrice Culleton is doing in *April Raintree*:

> [B]y [autoethnographic text] I mean a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them. [...] Autoethnographic texts are not, then, what are usually thought of as autochthonous forms of expression or self-representation [...]. Rather they involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or the conqueror. These are merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous idioms to create self-representations intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding. Autoethnographic texts are often addressed to both metropolitan audiences and the speaker's own community. [...] Such texts often constitute a marginalized group's point of entry into the dominant circuits of print culture. (35)

Part of the problem for Culleton (and her narrator) is that she has no knowledge of the "indigenous idioms" accessible to earlier generations of métis. She is imbued in the "metropolitan" idioms (of white-dominated society), the idioms of the very discourse that she is resisting. Much of that resistance comes from the reappropriation of white-dominated discourse (Godard 198-201) for the purpose of recuperating métis history and allowing the development of a positive métis identity with which to build a métis future. Homi Bhabha describes this sort of discursive strategy as one "where adding-*to* does not add-up but serves to disturb the calculation of power and knowledge, producing other spaces of subaltern signification" ("DissemiNation" 312). The conclusion of *April Raintree* offers the utopian vision of a recuperation and revalorization of métis history

without indicating how that thorny problem might be tackled in practical terms. As one of the first narratives by a métis author exposing the enormous barriers to formation of a positive métis identity in Canada, however, *April Raintree* provides the foundation for the sort of "journey of self-discovery" that Christine Welsh describes, a journey "of unravelling the thick web of denial, shame, bitterness and silence that had obscured my past and picking up the fragile threads that extended back across time, connecting me to the grandmothers I had never known and to a larger collective experience that is uniquely and undeniably Metis" (21).

All of the narratives in this study show the perils métis people face when they attempt to form their métis selves through engagement with the surrounding discourse. Nipsya, Tay John, Askik, and April Raintree are characters whose experience illustrates the unfixity of identity, and they demonstrate the tribulations involved in the individual's formation of the self through negotiation with the social. They show that what one might consider a concrete, objective "given" of hybrid identity is in fact a complex set of possibilities that the métis person must constantly contend with and work through. In this way, the narrative of hybridity becomes illustrative of the (discursive) social negotiations in which every individual must engage in forming the self.

I have already alluded to the fact that all four narratives avoid the portrayal of inter-racial sexual relations between men and women as anything other than a shadowy background or "behind-the-scenes" encounters that sometimes result in the woman's

pregnancy (as in *Tay John*). The exception to this pattern is when rape is involved, as when Red Rorty rapes the Shuswap woman Hanni in *Tay John*, a rape that leads to the birth of Tay John, and the vividly described rape of April Raintree by three white men. This inability or unwillingness of authors (including a métis author) to depict scenes of inter-racial sex except as acts of violence seems to echo Sarah Carter's observation that Western Canadians suffer from some form of cultural amnesia in the area of inter-racial marriage:

> Many of the earliest non-Aboriginal "bachelors" [...] married Aboriginal women, while others formed relationships of a fleeting, casual nature. It is curious that this era of intermarriage has all but disappeared from the collective non-Aboriginal memory of the prairie past, at least as exemplified in most memoirs, local histories, and museums. (5)

It may be that the notion of inter-racial sex as transgression is so deeply embedded in the Canadian psyche that even the knowledge that métis people in Canada were often born of long-lasting marriages between white men and Indian women does not counteract a need to depict inter-racial sex as a matter of transgression rather than as scenes of love and tenderness. Clearly, the gender dimensions of hybridity are highly complex and could be the subject of further study specifically aimed at elucidating the ways in which relations between men and women of all groups – white, Indian, and métis – are imagined and represented in Canadian literature. Also required in such a study is further work on gender in postcolonial theory itself, since, as Monika Fludernik points out, "even within postcolonial theory gender issues are indeed constitutive of the colonial situation, and

women are still unwittingly forced to function as the neuralgic point in a system of racial discrimination" (43).

Another set of patterns that is addressed differently by the novels is that of the métis individual's adaptability and his or her assimilation into white society. *Nipsya* and *Tay John* are diametrically opposed in their portrayals of adaptability and assimilation: Bugnet represents Nipsya with an innate "métis" disposition that makes it relatively easy for her to adapt to Vital's lifestyle and belief system. Tay John moves constantly within the "in-between" place on the edge of the white world and has no reason or inclination to enter that world except in search of the mate he cannot find in the Indian world of his upbringing. Tay John is finally ejected from the white world for transgressing against a rule according to which a métis man cannot have a white woman for a mate; Nipsya receives the same lesson, but is saved by Vital, someone "of her own kind" who helps her through the crisis of rejection and offers her an alternative. *April Raintree* and *Tchipayuk* are narratives of failed assimilation in which white society's inability to accept hybridity in its midst is turned into (mutedly) triumphant métis self-realization. All of these narratives are stories in which negative interpretations of difference are transformed into positive difference: hybridity as degeneration through miscegenation becomes hybridity as originary force.

Finally, all of these novels end with the métis characters in an "autonomous space" that is figured differently in each case: in *Nipsya* and *Tchipayuk* it is the space of

the West, which is problematic because in both cases the authors (and particularly Lavallée in the 1980s) are writing with knowledge of the marginalization and discrimination from which métis people have suffered in Western Canada. In *Tay John*, the "autonomous space" is that of legend and myth, a space that makes for a sort of aestheticization of hybridity but that also depends on the representation of the métis individual as a solitary outsider. Only in *April Raintree* is the reader aware that the space to be carved out by April and her nephew is one defined by struggle and resistance to white hegemony in the form of discursive domination of the interpretation and writing of history. Culleton's novel is evidence that whites did not manage to "write" the métis out of existence, though her narrative shows how close that came to happening through a too insistent writing of métis *into* (white) history. In contrast to what Goldie finds with images of Indians, who are "reified" (4), appearing in literary representations as unchanging and therefore devoid of a history, métis people are too often seen as nothing *but* history in Canada, particularly through the use of the dramatic and thus easily dramatized events of 1870-1885. This historicizing of the métis denies them a present, and while white writers have shown themselves amply prepared to continue writing métis characters as history, métis writers such as Beatrice Culleton know that they must engage in the more demanding task of establishing the presence of the métis in contemporary Canada as a prerequisite to taking back their history and their future.

CONCLUSION

It was only when I was nearing completion of this thesis that I found a definition of the methodology I had adopted. I had tentatively thought of my approach as "cultural poetics" (not yet being sure enough of the historical aspects of my critical analysis to classify it as "new historicism") on the basis that my study assumed no strict separation between the literary and the social. I felt that I was on firm ground in aligning myself with Fredric Jameson's affirmation that literature is a reflection of what he calls a "political unconscious."

Although I was aware that the Canadian academy has for the past two decades frowned on "thematic criticism" as reductive and even unliterary, I had to admit to myself that studying "representations of métis in Canadian literature" comes perilously close to placing me squarely in the heretical field of thematic criticism. It was only on reading Russell Morton Brown's "Practice and Theory of Canadian Thematic Criticism: A Reconsideration" (2001) that I was able to understand how I could be practising thematic criticism and still be doing criticism that seemed to me valid and far from reductive.

The name that Brown gives to my approach is "corpus thematics," which he explains thus: "Corpus thematics looks like comparative thematics in that it is only interested in themes that exist in more than one text, but, because it treats a specified and bounded body of texts as if they form a coherent whole, it also resembles explicative

thematics" (676). Brown describes explicative thematics as a methodology that uses an inductive approach to "derive thematic statements from [an] examination of smaller elements within the text" (676). I had used a combination of deductive and inductive approaches to set up the framework for my study, to focus my search for units of comparison (i.e., points of similarity and difference), and to develop my thinking on the significance of those various units.

The deductive aspect of this study was the selection of texts (in English and French) with a métis protagonist or protagonists and the pursuit of a program of reading in postcolonial and social theory touching on hybridity, from which I derived a number of concepts and ways of thinking about hybridity that appeared fruitful for my purposes. The inductive aspect came into play as I read the literary texts, individually and comparatively, to discern significant patterns and variations on or departures from those patterns, both narrative and thematic. I found that the particular context of Canadian métis hybridity requires a refinement of concepts that emerge from theory based on experience elsewhere in the world: the notion of miscegenation, for example, is present in representations of métis hybridity, but its parameters differ from notions of miscegenation found in different regions of the world and at different eras. I believe that the very complexity of my results is evidence that I could not possibly have elaborated in advance thematic and narrative patterns that I then searched for in French and English novels to form a workable corpus for my study. The procedure which consists of discussing only

those texts that support a chosen theme and of discarding all texts that do not support it is one that does indeed vitiate thematic criticism, certainly when a claim is made that the theme in question is the central theme rather than a central theme of a broader body of literature. ("Universal thematics" is the term Brown uses for the former tendency in criticism (677.)

Brown's essay also confirmed my belief that it is valid to consider literature as part of a surrounding culture and society. References in this study to works of history are not used as a blunt form of validation of content in the literary text: my intention is not to resort to a comparison of "reality" (history) and "the imagined" (literature) to see whether an author has given a sufficiently accurate picture of "reality," and to find greater merit in works that appear more realistic. As I discuss in the section of Chapter I on formation of the self, I believe that all texts, whether historiographical or literary, are elements of the discourse of a society. As such, they can be examined as political, ideological, and social indicators of the tenor of a society at a given point in its development, but they are also fundamental to the formation and continual transformation of that society. As Russell Brown points out, the application of corpus thematics can aid in the re-evaluation of our culture, and to the salutary heightening of awareness about previously unexamined aspects of that culture:

> Corpus thematics can, by articulating previously unnoticed themes of a culture, make them available for self-reflection and dialogue [...]. And it can draw useful comparisons between cultures in terms of shared or contrasting themes, making us

> aware that there are more than one way to organize our responses to the world. (677)

I use historiographical texts in this study as a tool to help illuminate the literary texts, but I reject the notion that a historiographical text can somehow be used to explain in a mechanical way a work of the imagination. I do not address the obvious parallels between Louis Riel and Askik Mercredi, for example, because I am purposely reading the patterns in the novel at a greater level of abstraction in aid of what I intend as a broad literary and social analysis.[78]

While I am interested in exploring the connections between literature and the culture it belongs to, I believe that a search for direct correspondences between historical events or personalities and works of literature is the least interesting and productive approach one could possibly adopt. I prefer to look for links that are more suggestive of the ways in which individual authors have absorbed, examined, and turned into imaginative possibilities the cultural matrix around them. In studying novels from Western Canada with a theme of (Canadian) métis hybridity, I have found a rich network of such links, as evidenced in Chapters II and III.

This study demonstrates that there is no one meaning for métis hybridity in Canadian literature. In the novels examined in this study, the unfixity of the self is exaggerated in the métis characters as a result of their hybridity. The earlier novels tend

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[78] Ingrid Joubert discusses the Riel-Askik parallel in "Askik, le Riel anonyme dans *Tchipayuk ou le Chemin du Loup* de Ronald Lavallée."

to attribute that unfixity to an internal division caused by the conflicting influences of two heritages and contained in the "blood," whereas the later novels show social forces in play that deny the métis individual an environment in which they might develop a peculiarly métis sense of self. One of the determining factors in all of the novels is the absence of parents able to provide their children with a stable and secure home life or guidance as they enter the difficult years of sexual maturity and feel the longing to find a mate. As a consequence, the métis characters do not feel that they "belong" in the milieu in which they grow up. This may be the result of rejection or persecution by others (as in *April Raintree* or Askik's Anishnabeg experience in *Tchipayuk*) or as a sense of being unbound by cultural or familial moorings (as in *Nipsya* and *Tay John*), which leaves the métis character free to explore different social spaces in search of a mate and a comfortable social space in which to live.

Gerald Vizenor states that the indeterminacy of the métis identity in the white world view has saved métis people from a sort of cultural death by diorama: "The Métis are divided in white consciousness, denied an absolute cultural corner, and, therefore, spared from extinction in word and phrase museums" (xvi). The images of métis studied here have escaped the sort of "semiotic field" that Goldie discerns for images of the indigene in Canadian literature (17). Representations of métis are not trapped in a self-generating field of literary images, perhaps because no ready-made categories for métis people, such as that of "noble savage" for Indians, were available for importation from

European thought and literature. Even when such an image was available, as the figure of the weak or degenerate métis was for Georges Bugnet, that European influence did not hold sway here. Instead, authors such as Bugnet and Howard O'Hagan emphasize their métis characters' originary force. Nipsya and Tay John are figured as solitary individuals who must contend with powerful social forces in order to find an other, a mate, with whom to create métis offspring. Nipsya, in doing so, becomes the originary mother of an entire métis people in the novel's imagery, while Tay John's return to his mythic beginnings foreshadows a repeated cycle of solitary métis individuals who will be eternal wanderers between worlds, powerful and possessed of transcendental knowledge, alternately admired and reviled.

Yet the lack of fixity inherent in hybridity, with all of its open-ended potential for productivity, also entails a vulnerability to an excess of meaning-making as each group in Canada's original triangle lays claim to or rejects métis people according to its needs.[79] We can see this process in operation in *Nipsya*, where the path of salvation and self-realization for Nipsya lies in adopting Vital's agrarian lifestyle and Catholic ideology. Like Bugnet, O'Hagan sees the dangers of "extreme civilization" and creates a métis character that contrasts with the ridiculous, short-sighted figure of Alf Dobble, representative of the vanguard of that corrupt civilization. Both of these novels end in a

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[79] I have not included Indian authors' representations of métis in my study, but Maria Campbell and other métis writers discuss the (often inharmonious) relations between Indians and métis.

sort of wistful nostalgia for a future that, the authors already know, will not come to pass.

Without abandoning utopian overtones in their endings, the authors of the two novels from the latter half of the twentieth century tie those endings to a reconnection with the past. Their métis characters find new hope for the future when they abandon their attempts to assimilate into white society and instead renew their ties to family as a means of beginning their reintegration into a larger whole, incorporating a métis past lived in a métis space in the Canadian West and serving as a foundation for a métis future. Both of these novels approach the métis theme in a more sociological manner than the earlier novels, demonstrating a consciousness of métis realities that novelists perhaps felt no compunction about reflecting in earlier times (although Georges Bugnet lived near métis settlements in the Lac Ste. Anne region of northern Alberta, the setting for his novel). The two French-Canadian authors give a more nuanced treatment to the power differentials between groups, and particularly between the English and French, groups that O'Hagan and Culleton treat more uniformly in terms of an undifferentiated white side of the "white/Indian" binary. In contrast to Bugnet's positive vision of a French-influenced lifestyle for his métis characters, however, Ronald Lavallée exposes the racist strains in French-Canadians' treatment of his métis protagonist, and presents a British soldier as the voice of enlightened views on race relations in Western Canada.

The emergence in Canadian literature of métis voices such as that of Beatrice Culleton Mosionier opens a whole new era, one that cannot be characterized by

"representations of métis" but that offers "self-representations" as well. Like Lavallée, Culleton reveals the mechanisms of racist thought in a society in which white hegemony – whether French or English – tends to erase any notion of métis difference, seeing the Indian part of the métis person's heritage as the only significant element in constructing the "meaning" of métis hybridity. Culleton's April Raintree knows the paucity of that meaning. Unlike Lavallée, who sets his narrative in a past that is sufficiently distant to leave the (white) reader unscathed, Culleton writes of protagonists whose story takes place in the recent past. The aim is to unsettle the (white) reader with depictions of severe social injustices that cannot be shrugged off as relics of a distant history that we have miraculously left behind. April's and Cheryl's struggles with the impact of racial discrimination and social inequalities are the difficult prerequisite, Culleton tells us, for any turn to the past in an effort to take back métis history for the sake of a métis future. This contestatory métis voice and others bring new inflections to representations of métis in Canadian literature, adding greater richness to Canadian literature and multiple layers of complexity for the Canadian comparatist.

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