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The Representation of 'Race' in Ondaatje's In the Skin of a Lion

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Vancouver

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Glen Lowry, "The Representation of 'Race' in Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*" <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol6/iss3/7>

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Thematic Issue *Comparative Cultural Studies and Michael Ondaatje's Writing*
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Abstract: Glen Lowry, in his paper "The Representation of 'Race' in Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*" bases his discussion on the observation that critics tend to view Ondaatje's writing in terms of a progression towards complex issues of "race" and post-coloniality. In contrast, Lowry argues that the matter of "race" forms an integral aspect of Ondaatje's oeuvre and Lowry proposes that *In the Skin of a Lion* is a key site in the development of Ondaatje's engagement with issues of "race" and the cultural politics of post-coloniality. Focusing on Ondaatje's depiction of Toronto in terms of its complex history of shifting social spaces and his representation of Patrick and Caravaggio as "racialized" figures, Lowry discusses Ondaatje's engagement with whiteness as a social construct. Rather than critiquing Ondaatje's novel for an apparent absence of race-writing, i.e., writing about so-called "visible minorities," Lowry suggests that Ondaatje in fact "reverses the gaze" and throws the question of "race" back on the readers. Adding the figures of Patrick and Caravaggio to the writing of the city, *In the Skin of a Lion* undermines presumptions about the racial stability and hegemonic power of Toronto 's and ethnic communities. Last, Lowry argues for a more thorough discussion of Ondaatje's critique of nationalism and multiculturalism vis-à-vis the cultural politics of reading and the construction of "whiteness."

Glen LOWRY

The Representation of 'Race' in Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*

With a few notable exceptions, Ondaatje's depiction of racialized subjects has received only limited attention (see, e.g., Turcotte; Mukherjee; Rundle; Lowry). While his identity as a Singhalese emigrant or Canadian immigrant is often noted (see, e.g., Kamboureli; Richler; Wachtel; Young), critics tend to ignore the political implications of Ondaatje's work in relation to that of other writers of colour, effectively eliding "race" as an element of his writing. The elision has meant that the difficult questions of critical positioning, or what I, following Judith Butler, would term the "performative" aspect of his texts *qua* "racialized" writing, have fallen from view. Within the dominant postmodern discourse, i.e., a discourse focused on formalist readings of his texts, Ondaatje's writing becomes abstracted from the colonial and post-colonial contexts with which it engages. In an examination of Ondaatje's writing, up to and including *Running in the Family,* Arun Mukherjee has criticized an apparent lack of "cultural baggage, brought with him when he came to Canada" (114); she argues, because Ondaatje "does not write about his otherness" and his writing shows "no trauma of uprooting" (114), critics have been allowed to oversimplify the issue of Ondaatje's identity. Although it has become dated by Ondaatje's later writing, particularly his overt engagements in the issues of "trauma" and "otherness" at the heart of *The English Patient* and *Anil's Ghost,* both of which deal with (neo)colonialism and complex questions of social justice, Mukherjee's concern about the critical reception of his work is still relevant. Prioritizing social realism and intentionality, her contention that Ondaatje has "simply refused to address himself to the particular needs of his community" (132) is problematic; however, it does locate the matter of "race" blindness in responses to Ondaatje's writing: "The question, then, is whether Ondaatje's work contains more than "the heat and the mountains and the jungle" of Sri Lanka that the white critics are unable to see in their ethnocentrism. For surely, Sri Lanka has more to it than the three things mentioned above. It consists of seven million human beings who ostensibly must have a world view unique to them" (Mukherjee 114).

Inasmuch as a dearth of "third world" (Mukherjee's term) references in the writing, wariness around giving interviews (Fagan 115; Finkle 90), and lack of public identification with writers of color, all seem to be instrumental in the continued construction of Ondaatje as an un-hyphenated -- i.e., non-"racialized" -- Canadian writer by predominantly "white" readers, Mukherjee's question remains vital. In raising the issue of representing "racialized" alterity, which is very different from marginality, Mukherjee's critique foregrounds an aporia in the critical discourse that I hope to address with this paper. Although it is, perhaps, less obviously so in this novel than in the two most recent novels, "race" is, nevertheless, a central concern in *In the Skin of a Lion* . Instead of taking issue with an apparent lack of "racialized" subjects (as Mukherjee might do) or assuming that the absence of non-"white" subjects is tantamount to a lack of interest in "race" (as the majority of critics seem to have done), I contend that Ondaatje's writing, from *In the Skin of a Lion* on, represents "race" as a complex problem of representation that not only puts into play the interpolated identities of so-called "racialized" subjects but of "white" subjects as well. Rather than fixating on Ondaatje's actual identity and becoming caught in a trap of racial positivism, we might think through the way his "passing" as a "white" writer, not to mention the appropriation of "racialized" difference upon which it depends, performs and undoes the dominant "race" codes of CanLit ("Canadian literature," here with reference to the field of scholarly discipline). Reading *In the Skin of a Lion* as a statement on the problematic construction of "whiteness" rather than "color," enables us to re-situate Ondaatje's work, and/or our interpretative performances of it, within a much more contradictory and contentious conception of CanLit as a space of "race." I propose, therefore, to return to this novel to help develop thinking about Ondaatje's writing as writing about "race." Focusing on his depiction of Toronto in terms of a complex history of shifting social spaces and the ethnic and racial identities of the novel's two central characters, Patrick and Caravaggio, this paper looks forward to a more thorough discussion of Ondaatje's critique of nationalism and multiculturalism. Focusing on the issue of "race" *In the Skin of a Lion,* I am

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arguing that this novel is a precursor to *The English Patient* and *Anil's Ghost* and, as such, that it offers insight into a multivalent development of racialized writing, both in terms of Ondaatje's work and CanLit as a whole.

I begin with a quote from *In the Skin of a Lion*: "Patrick Lewis arrived in the city of Toronto as if it were land after years at sea. .. at twenty-one, he had been drawn out from that small town like a piece of metal dropped under the vast arches of Union Station to begin his life once more. ? He was an immigrant to the city" (53). For Patrick, "the searcher," whose life and actions knit together the characters and plot of the novel, entering the city means arriving in modernity, in a space of contradiction, alienation and possibility: "Now, in the city, he was new even to himself … He saw his image in the glass of telephone booths. He ran his hands over the smooth pink marble pillars that reached into the rotunda. The train station was a palace, its riches and caverns an intimate city. He could be shaved, eat a meal, or have his shoes coloured" (54). In the station, Patrick notices "a man well-dressed with three suitcases, shouting out in another language" (54). Two days later, "He saw the man again, still unable to move from his safe zone, in a different suit, as if one step away was the quicksand of the new world" (54). The juxtaposition of these two migrants suggests both Patrick's reluctance to move into this spectacular "new world" and the importance of the city in his reconstruction of self. Sitting on a nearby bench and watching the "tides of movement," Patrick feels the powerful "reverberations of trade" (54). When he speaks out his name," however, it becomes "lost in the high air of Union Station. No one turned. They were in the belly of a whale" (54). The use of the third person plural articulates an affinity between the Canadian born Patrick and this figure of the well-dressed "foreigner," both of whom transform and are transformed by the city.

Ondaatje's narrative blurs the recognized order of originary identities. Overlapping the trauma of immigration with the alienation of urbanization, it refigures the expansion of Toronto, the modern industrial core of an emergent nation state, within an international flow of bodies and cultures. Imagining voices for marginalized individuals and/or their forgotten communities, *In the Skin of a Lion* re-maps Toronto in terms of class struggle; in so doing, it depicts a city under construction, returning readers to key sites in the social development of the nation. Ondaatje's representation of the building of the Viaduct and the Waterworks spatializes the city's historic development; these key sites become representations of complex, contradictory drives to control not only physical spaces but also their conception. Symbolically, the novel reminds readers that the monuments of the modern city bear traces of divergent social meanings and purposes. Thus, *In the Skin of a Lion* destabilizes a linear historical view of Canadian society as a top down initiative orchestrated by a predominantly Anglo ruling, or managerial class. The city Patrick enters is a space of linguistic and cultural diversity beyond the purview of Franco-Anglo biculturalism or Anglo-imperialism, but coterminous with it. If metaphorically, Patrick "begins his life once more" (53) searching for the lost millionaire, Ambrose Small, a heroic figure of prosperity in this depressed city, he ultimately establishes himself in the nexus of Toronto's working-class communities. His identity develops in relation to a host of other, not quite "white" subjects -- Greek, Macedonian, Russian, and Italian. His actions and the kindness of others, rather than his name or his country birth, become the determining factors in his self development.

While this idealized conception of social being coincides with the ideological precepts of official multiculturalism, Ondaatje's engagement with the historical elision of class difference offers an important point of entrance into critiques of what has been referred to as "song and dance" Multiculturalism. Spatializing and historicizing ethnic development within an urban setting, this novel helps to reframe government policy and the ideology of its utopic pluralism. Put another way, Ondaatje's exploration of Patrick's working-class experience challenges notions of Canadian identity as a racially neutral basis upon which a "just" multicultural society is built. Patrick's cultural displacement is negotiated rather than static. At times, his cultural background allows him access to spaces of privilege -- the Muskoka Hotel, Harris's office; however, in general Patrick moves through a complex social network in which cultural differences between any us (Canadian) and them (foreign) are seen in terms of class us (the labourers) and them (the rich): "'I'll tell you about the rich,' Alice would say, 'the rich are always laughing. They keep saying the same things

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on their boats and lawns: *Isn't this grand! We're having a good time!* And whenever the rich get drunk and maudlin about humanity you have to listen for hours. But they keep you in the tunnels and stockyards. They do not toil or spin. Remember that… understand what they will always refuse to let go of. There are a hundred fences and lawns between the rich and you. You've got to know these things, Patrick, before you ever go near them -- the way a dog before battling cows rolls in the shit of the enemy'" (132). Patrick is happiest amongst people with whom he shares little ethnic affinity. His personal growth is predicated on movement away from his Anglo-Irish roots; rather than the inculcation of a kind of parochial Englishness, it points toward a more extensive sense of cultural awareness and identity. Significantly, Cato's letters teach Patrick the identity of the Finnish loggers with whom he shared his childhood landscape. In the city, as a worker, he learns that the separation between himself and the itinerant loggers is more apparent than real. Listening to Alice and reading Hana's archive, he deciphers the unacknowledged social networks, and fundamental material relations, that have, in part, structured his life.

When Patrick learns *gooshter*, the Macedonian word for iguana, he bridges the divide between himself and those around him, and he is suddenly overwhelmed by their "friendship, concern." Crying openly in their midst, exposing his loneliness, Patrick draws an invitation to "The waterworks at eight, Sunday night. A gathering." This breakthrough leads to a remarkable scene in which Ondaatje depicts the Waterworks, not as an empty Mausoleum or new high-tech sanitized filtration plant, but as an inhabited space in which the workers perform and create their own counter-histories. Re-inscribing the monumental site of the R.C. Harris Filtration Plant -- Toronto's official tribute to its own Boulevard Haussmann -- as a social space, re-imagining it as a zone class conflict, the novel challenges us to revisit the official history and rethink our conceptions of the city's spaces.

In an essay examining the archival basis for *In the Skin of the Lion*, Dennis Duffy unearths documentary evidence for the kind of cultural linguistic conflicts depicted in the novel. In terms of this scene at the Waterworks, Duffy's discovery of a pamphlet protesting the intrusion of "foreign," non-English speaking workers into the Beach (the neighbourhood housing the plant) provides an interesting example of historical archive with which Ondaatje engages. Duffy feels that Ondaatje's novel might have included an episode in which "local strollers" take issue with a security guard who blocks them from entering the Waterworks. In fact, the apparent discrepancy between the archival record of the conflict and the events depicted by Ondaatje presents readers with an important impasse. However, Ondaatje's choice to represent imagined events realistically allows the novel to resist the primacy of the archival fact and to refigure agency in a complex manner. In final analysis, the assumed similitude between historical fact and the fiction upon which Duffy's conception of the novel's political potential rests is grounded in a problematic reading of power relations. To put it simply, this assumption relies on a conception of class conflict in which the aggressor is all powerful and the victim completely disenfranchised. Ondaatje's text, on the other hand, presents readers with the problem of having to construct a historical narrative against which to read the fictional one: the event does not appear in the novel because it oversimplifies the complexity of linguistic, cultural, and political relations represented, and therefore contradicts the story Ondaatje is telling.

Read from the perspective of counter-hegemonic historiography -- Marxist, feminist, queer, and postcolonial -- Ondaatje's "fictional history" provides more than a positivist attempt to add the stories of the disenfranchised to the history. More than simply expanding the parameters of Canadian literature to include writing about the working class and ethnic minorities forgotten in the "Official histories and news stories" of Toronto's metropolitan expansion, the novel challenges a dominant discourse which is "always as soft as rhetoric, like that of a politician making a speech after a bridge is built, a man who does not even cut the grass on his own lawn" (145). As others have pointed out, Ondaatje's writing crosses the line between fact and fiction, history and literature (see Kroetsch; Bowering). However, rather than attacking the one (fact/history) from within the bounds of the other (fiction/literature), this novel performs a critical intervention within the emergence of the postmodern or multicultural canon/s to which it is ascribed -- an intervention that draws attention to the historical function of CanLit as cultural praxis, rather than cultural

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expression. The forgotten stories from the building of Toronto, which have caught most critics' attention, are offset by quotations from popular song, art criticism, and Canadian literature. In his acknowledgments, Ondaatje specifies that he has had permission to print lyrics for "Up Jumped You with Love" and "I Can't Get Started," lines from the *Epic of Gilgamesh,* sentences form Judith Mara Gutman's essay, "Lewis Hine and the American Social Conscience," two sentences from the journals of Anne Wilkinson, and lines from Martha Ostenso's novel *Wild Geese*. In addition to these few re-cycled fragments of text, Ondaatje's text gestures toward Al Purdy, Anne Wilkinson, and Judge Sheard of *Judge Sheard's Jokes* (grandfather of Sarah Sheard to whom the novel is dedicated). The novel's revision of the historical account of Toronto's modern development embroils itself in a fanciful depiction of CanLit as social space or geography through which Caravaggio, the name itself an allusion to one notorious Renaissance painter, steals his way back to the city.

To this end, Ondaatje borrows "two sentences" from Wilkinson's journals: "Let me now re-emphasize the extreme looseness of the structure of things" (163) and "Demarcation... That is all we need to remember" (179). Paradoxically, the text does not attribute either of the sentences to Wilkinson or her character, but rather ascribes the former to Alice and the latter to Caravaggio. Without an intimate knowledge of Wilkinson's writing one might pass over the sentences; only the *demarcation* of the text, the fact both sentences are in italics, draws attention to the gesture. In both cases, however, the stolen sentence function thematically. Alice's utterance of "Let me now re-emphasize the extreme looseness of the structure of things" is powerfully ironic. Coming to Patrick as a memory after her untimely death, it functions as a reminder of Patrick's shattered dream of their growing old together: "There was always, he thought, this pleasure ahead of him, an ace up his sleeve so he could say you can do anything to me, take everything away, put me in prison, but I will know Alice Gull when we are old" (164). The sentence also conjures up the chain of loosely related, seemingly coincidental events that brought Alice and Patrick together: her spectacular fall from the Bridge, Temelcoff's miraculous catch, an ensuing friendship with Clara, and Patrick's decision to abandon pursuit of Ambrose Small. As a counter-point to Patrick's searching, Alice 's death is a thread which ties together key elements of the plot. The explosion that wrenches her from Patrick solidifies his connection with Temelcoff, Caravaggio, Hana, and in the end R.C. Harris while cementing his fate.

The second sentence -- "Demarcation, that is what we all need to remember" -- functions like a refrain in the last section of the novel and, as such, is crucial to the unfolding of its final episode. Much as the character of Alice becomes a realization of the first sentence, the figure of Caravaggio is firmly connected to this second one. Again, Patrick recalls this statement; he remembers Caravaggio uttering it while he and Patrick were painting of the penitentiary roof, just prior to Caravaggio's escape. Again, the statement is ironic. On the surface, it is a comment on the problem of painting an "intentional blue roof," which made "the three men working on it [become] uncertain of the clear boundaries" between roof and sky. It also speaks to Caravaggio's genius. We might say that in fooling the guards by painting himself into the scene, i.e., painting himself blue, Caravaggio flaunts the line between himself and his environment. Furthermore, the notion of "demarcation" resonates with Caravaggio's somewhat tenuous identity; it is connected with both colonial history and class politics. Historically, the demarcation line of 1496 was the historical line dividing the New World between Spanish and Portuguese interests or lands. The word is inflected with issues of ownership and proprietary relations between competing economic units. This particular term, particularly in the context of the phrase in which it surfaces, functions to further establish Caravaggio as a "racialized" figure.

A conventional reading of this indirect quotation might suggest that, through the voice of Caravaggio, Ondaatje has appropriated Wilkinson's writing. As literary scholars, we ascribe ownership to the individual from whose journal the words appear to be lifted; however, within the logic of the novel itself, the reverse might also be said to be true: Wilkinson has stolen Caravaggio's language. In fact, this phrase is ascribed to Caravaggio and it has provided the abstract basis for his plan. Realizing as he does that demarcation makes visible, he realizes also that it can be used to render himself invisible. In having himself painted the conspicuous blue of

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the prison roof, Caravaggio escapes by vanishing from sight. This is the story Caravaggio tells Anne when he meets her. We are told that "She sits across from him laughing at the story of his escape, not fully believing it" (201). We might extrapolate from this that Caravaggio has repeated this phrase -- after all, it is the cornerstone of his masterly plan ... and that later it comes to appear in Wilkinson's journal. We are lead to imagine that Wilkinson has picked this story up from the escaped thief. Again, Ondaatje undermines the originary moment of the very material; his novel appropriates and rewrites literary history within the frame of fiction.

To develop the significance of this meeting with Wilkinson, it is useful to consider Caravaggio's encounter with another figure of Canadian literature. During his escape, Caravaggio turns up in Trenton where he meets a young boy who helps him to remove the blue paint. As Caravaggio is preparing to leave, the boy gives him a note with his name, Alfred, written on it. When Caravaggio apologizes for having nothing to give the boy in return, "The kid grinned, very happy. 'I know,' he said. 'Remember my name'" (182). This puzzling exchange does not appear to have a direct bearing on the plot itself: while the young Al is helpful in cleaning the paint off Caravaggio, he recedes into the fabric of the novel after Caravaggio goes on his way. For readers versed in the localism of Canadian poetry, the boy's name and that he is in Trenton suggest homage to Al Purdy. This fits with the Anne Wilkinson scene discussed above to establish a kind of literary map of his escape root. From Trenton to Bobcaygen, Purdy to Wilkinson, Caravaggio moves through a geography of literary reference. As a counterpoint to the historical archive out of which the urban events of the novel are collected, Caravaggio's escape takes place within the sanctified spaces of an agrarian literary tradition.

At the risk of undervaluing the complexity of Ondaatje's literary sleight of hand, one might argue that this figure of the thief moving through the landscapes of Canadian literature can be read as an imaginative reflection of Ondaatje's own presence within the centralist tradition of Canadian letters. The fact that Caravaggio speaks Ondaatje's re-appropriation of Wilkinson's journal entries and shares Purdy's slightly skewed sense of landscape suggests an affinity between writer and character. This affinity is heightened by Ondaatje's description of Caravaggio's gentle teachers, "the company of thieves, who looked refined and wore half-moon glasses" (191). This passage depicts Caravaggio as an acolyte or devoted craftsman rather than as a common criminal: "Caravaggio was welcomed into their midst and lectured with great conservatism on the art of robbery?. They were protective of their style and area of interest. They tried to persuade the young man that what *they* did was the most significant but at the same time they did not wish to encourage competition?. He was in awe of them, wanted to be all of them in their moments of extreme crisis. He hung around them not so much to learn their craft but to study the way they lived when they stepped back into the world of order… he was fascinated only by character" (191). Thus, he learns his way into the art of thievery by shadowing these men "in order to watch their performances." He learns to be comfortable in other people's houses, at home in their absence, "high up on the bookcases? as still as a gargoyle against Trollope and H.G. Wells" (198). Like Patrick who is "always comfortable in someone else's landscape" and who enjoys "being taught the customs of a place" (138), Caravaggio learns to inhabit a space to which he makes no claim of ownership.

The racialization of Caravaggio is a much more explicit enactment of the ambivalence underlying Patrick identity. His escape through the imaginary landscape of Canadian literature on his way back to the city follows Ondaatje's description of his attack at the hands of the bigots, "smug without race." Within the thematic tropology of 1970s Canadian literature, Caravaggio's escape fits the Atwoodian model. On one level, Caravaggio's "survival" is based on his ability to escape through the wilds. His borrowing of a paragraph from Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese,* with which the description of the prison attack begins, further suggests Ondaatje's indebtedness to this tradition. However, in reading Caravaggio's journey in terms of this more mainstream sense of Canadian literature, there is a danger of losing sight of the "racism" that precipitates it. The discursive layering, in fact the highly allusive nature of this section of the novel, points to a kind of double inscription -- by which the character of Caravaggio both articulates and disavows the hegemonic subject of literary nationalism.

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Rehearsing a common theme in the critical discourse, Smaro Kamboureli's introduction to Ondaatje in her anthology of multicultural writing in Canada, *Making a Difference: Multicultural Literature in Canada,* foregrounds the writer's identity as an immigrant of Ceylonese or Sri Lankan descent, without explicitly mentioning the subject of "race" or identifying Ondaatje with other writers of colour. Kamboureli does note Ondaatje's identification with "a generation of writers that "was the first real migrant tradition? of writers of our time -- Rushdie, Ishiguro, Ben Okri, Rohinton Mistry" (Kamboureli 194), which, in the context of this anthology and its somewhat problematic mixture of white and non-white writers under a generalized rubric of difference and immigration, suggests an important shift in the discourse. While there is no suggestion how the excerpted fragment from *In the Skin of a Lion* speaks to this tradition of Asian writers Ondaatje sees himself fitting into, it fore grounds the question at the centre of my paper. How do we begin to read this novelistic depiction of class struggle amongst various European ethnic communities in relation to Ondaatje's implicit self-identification with this particular group of writers? How do we read the construction of a "white" identity in relation to the various interpelated, racialized subjectities, against which it is constructed and over which it asserts power? In the context of contemporary CanLit and/or the emergence of multiculturalism in general, how does the appearance of a "white" subject presuppose an elision of particular class differences or the re-appropriation of racialized histories and experiences?

In resisting the essential binaries of identity by which much of the critical understanding of Canadian literature is figured, centre-margin, "white"-non-"white," immigrant-"native," *In the Skin of a Lion* offers readers a highly complex site by which to theorize the function of "race" in the development of a "white" subjectivity as it is figured against the backdrop of European ethnic communities. One might say that Ondaatje's novel "reverses the gaze" and throws the question of "race" back on the readers. If working backwards, contemporary critics tend to think of "whiteness" (when it is thought about at all) in terms of a kind of homogenous Western or European subjectivity, this novel points towards the history of this emergent racial identity. As a number of postcolonial critics have suggested the assumption that "whiteness" signifies some kind of neutral position in opposition to various "racialized" identities is itself one of the master tropes of modern "racist" thought. As "race" theorists have made clear, the tendency to assume that racism is solely concerned with the construction of others, people of color and First Nations, obfuscates or again naturalizes the fact that "whiteness" is itself a construct. In "returning the gaze," cultural theorists have argued that the formation of a "white subject" and the attendant system of social value to which it is connected is dependent on a series of differences in which "race" functions. As such, "whiteness" is part of the complex and violent history of Western racism; it is a social construct with which divisions of labour and social values are controlled (on this, see Stoler; Razack). A common suggestion made within the circles of anti-racist activism and pedagogy is that more work needs to be done understanding this historical fact. The argument that "race" is only an issue in texts that deal specifically with a "racialized" subject or character or conversely which articulate overt racism depends on the facile conflation of "whiteness" with an absence of "racial" significance, or mores precisely recognizable signifiers of "race" or "racialized" identity.

If, as George Eliot Clarke argues, "The general incoherence of color-based identity in Canada permits Canadian whiteness to exist … as an ethereal force ? a kind of ideal whiteness, ready for export" (100), then the question left open is how does this floating identity, the ethereal force of whiteness, come to depend on the hegemonic control of "race" discourse? By what means does the assumption of "whiteness" as a neutral position, something that simply is rather than something that comes into being (in place and time), effect that construction of a "racialized" other. According to Clarke, the popular conception of Canada as a nation that has developed free from a US-style history of "race" conflict is in itself a particular kind of racism. The oft rehearsed notion that Canada is or has been a predominantly "white country" that came to be peopled by the descendants of European settlers is but part of a recurrent struggle for self-creation, which pits a national identity off against various non-European immigrants and First Nations people (First Nations is the Canadian term for the Indigenous Indian population). With the emergence of state-

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sponsored Canadian Multiculturalism and a revamped notion of citizen articulated in the new Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which provide the historical context into which this novel is published, "racial" difference comes to be re-conceived in terms of immigration and arrival. In the dominant discourses of cultural production, "racialized" identities are taken to be extrinsic to the emerging multi-ethnic "Canadian," a residue of histories and conflicts beyond the borders of this (post) modern nation state. Thus, in the popular histories Canada's multicultural literature, "race" continues to have a silent function. *In the Skin of a Lion,* in focusing on European immigrants and the social struggle of the working classes, does more than legitimize the notion of Toronto as a "white" city. It brings to light a complex set of discourses and identity formations that continue to shape the development of multiculturalism in Toronto specifically and Canada in general. In spite of the fact, that both geographically and historically the city comes into being through the expropriation of First Nations land and culture, that it is illegal for people of Chinese ancestry to vote, that there are restrictions placed on the hiring of "white" women in "Chinese businesses," that neighbourhoods and a number of high profile institutions -- the University of Toronto, the Granite Club, the Royal Canadian Yacht Club -- have by-laws barring "Jews" and "Catholics," that night clubs were paying different rates for Black performers, there is a complacency amongst readers of Ondaatje's novel in acknowledging the ethnic and racial reality of Toronto during the 1930s.

As I have suggested elsewhere (Lowry 2001), the space or neighbourhood in which much of the action in the novel takes place is the spawning ground for a group of fascist sympathizers who walked the streets wearing black arm bands and who were to instigate the Christie Pits riot of 1933. In reading *In the Skin of a Lion* as a novel about the working class without paying some heed to the manner in which labour politics and ethnic identity are connected, without acknowledging the racism rampant within the closed social circles of the ruling class but also in various labour movements, critics perpetuate the idea that Toronto, like the nation of which it would come to be the social and economic centre, developed outside racism. The question that needs to be addressed in the discussion of this novel is how it is that critics have come to see discontinuity, rather than continuity, between the ethnic divisions depicted in it and the systematic creation of "race"-based privilege that we now recognize as the downside of national politics. In adding the figures of Patrick and Caravaggio to the writing of the city, Ondaatje's novel does more than simply expand the scope and texture of what has become Toronto. The struggle these two characters undergo suggests a re-conception of the multicultural citizen that has been emerging in and through the development of Canadian cultural politics during the 1970s and 1980s. The question that I have attempted to open in my reading of this novel is the relationship between the development of "racialized" subject positions and the emergence of "whiteness" as a historically contingent position of privilege -- the invisible identity in the cultural mosaic of a new Canadian Multiculturalism.

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