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# “Words Hide Truth”

## National belonging in Marian Engel’s *Bear* and Tessa McWatt’s *Out of My Skin*

*Thus I am bound and imprisoned on this ship, set adrift as part of a medieval circus to search for my home and my destiny, to perform for foreigners at welcoming ports, the ship of fools and a colony of madmen no longer belonging to Britain or the world. (McWatt, 106)*

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## 1. Introduction

"Canadian literature," Northrop Frye wrote in the early seventies, "whatever its inherent merits, is an indispensable aid to the knowledge of Canada. It records what the Canadian imagination has reacted to, and it tells us things about this environment that nothing else will tell us."[1] This is true of any national literature, the construction of which represents attempts to locate and identify cultural, historical and performative commonalities among often huge undefinable collections of peoples who for cultural, personal or political reasons ended up within the nation-state border. Canada, more perhaps than most other national literatures, has struggled with self-identity. Key to this struggle is what writers have called the melting pot or the mosaic of Canadian culture: one which prides itself on multiculturalism, on "tolerance and diversity" as marks of its "national character".[2] This discourse of inclusion makes complex any efforts to determine a singularity in theme, content or style of a national subject, and thus a literature. What is Canadian Literature, after all, when "Canadian" is not a determined state but a site of constant debate?

The only commonality that appears to have surfaced in decades of national anxiety is an "obvious and unquenchable desire of the Canadian cultural public to identify itself through its literature"[3] as well as an obsession with Canada as a space which must be contended with. This thesis considers the complexity of discursive constructions of nations and nationality as it studies two works of "CanLit" and the ways in which they interact with the history and reality of being Canadian. The goal is to study the protagonists of the two novels and the ways in which they cognitively and corporeally navigate sites of belonging. Both protagonists are, in very different ways, disallowed a sense of fully articulated national identity and thus a sense of belonging – which they unravel and tend to throughout their narratives. The question this thesis poses is thus: what conclusions do the protagonists of these two novels draw about the ways in which they can embody national belonging?

The two novels are Marian Engel's best known novel, a short volume published in 1976 titled *Bear,* and Tessa McWatt's debut novel *Out of My Skin* published in 1998. Marian Engel was a prolific Canadian writer during the middle of the twentieth century, a time when Canada was attempting to establish itself as a literary organ separate from the United States. She was the first

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[1] N. Frye, *The Bush Gardens: Essays on the Canadian Imagination*, Toronto: House of Anansi Press Ltd., 1971, 215.

[2] McGregor, Hanna. Rak, Julie. Wunker, Erin (ed.) *Refuse: Canlit in Ruins*, Toronto: Book*hug, 2018, 22.

[3] Frye, 216.

chair of the Writer's Union of Canada,[4] established in 1973,[5] and has an active Canadian literary award named after her: the Engel Findley Award.[6] Her novel *Bear* is still called her most controversial novel, as it tells the story of a woman who engages in sexually intimate acts with a bear, but it is also regarded by many as a *Canadian* work, engaging patterns "familiar and central to Canadian literature".[7]

Tessa McWatt's debut *Out of My Skin* is explicitly interested in the problem of belonging as a racialised woman in Canada. It sets the stage for McWatt's prolific career as a novelist, critic and academic, her latest contributions to the field being as editor to *Luminous Ink: Writers on Writing in Canada* and the publication of her celebrated memoirs titled *Shame on Me: An Anatomy of Race and Belonging.*[8] The novel *Out of My Skin* lifts several aspects of McWatt's own experience as a Guyanese-born Canadian, but also takes its place in Canadian Literature through the narrative framing of the Oka-Crisis in March of 1990, a bloody land-dispute between the Mohawk people and the city of Oka, originally Kanehsatà:ke, which ended in one provincial officer dead and hundreds of Mohawk civilians injured.[9]

There are several things these novels have in common, not least a preoccupation with a *right to be here*. Engel grew up during the rise of second wave feminism, and her protagonist in *Bear* – the archivist Lou – must tend to her gendered position in her search for belonging. McWatt's protagonist – Daphne – is disallowed a right to implicit belonging due to her existence as a biracial woman with no knowledge of her origins, and must come to terms with the way her body is disallowed access to spaces. Both novels gesture towards the colonial moment in a critical way, and mediate on conceptions of self and belonging in ways this thesis concludes are central to understanding the nature of national identity. However, the most central aspect they share is a *journey north* to find belonging, which I argue engages a central myth of the Canadian identity: that of the pioneer going north to claim land as their own.

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[4] 'Why the novel "Bear" (1976) is still controversial — and relevant', *Ideas with Nahlah Ayed.* CBC Listen, 4 Jan 2021, https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-23-ideas/clip/15816754-why-novel-bear-1976-still-controversial-relevant?onboarding=false, (viewed January 2021).

[5] The Writers' Union of Canada. About. 2021. https://www.writersunion.ca/about (viewed January 2021).

[6] Writers' Trust of Canada. Writers' Trust Engel Findley Award. 2020. https://www.writerstrust.com/awards/writers-trust-engel-findley-award (viewed January 2021).

[7] D. S. Hair, "Marian Engel's Bear" in *Fiction in the Seventies* special issue of Canadian Literature: A Quarterly of Criticism and Review, no. 92, spring 1982, 34.

[8] Penguin Random House. Tessa McWatt. 2021. https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/authors/140747/tessa-mcwatt (viewed January 2021).

[9] Meng, Melinda. Bloody Blockades: The Legacy of the Oka Crisis. *Harvard International Review.* 2020-06-30. https://hir.harvard.edu/bloody-blockades-the-legacy-of-the-oka-crisis/.

**2. Method**

The novels, *Bear* and *Out of My Skin* have been chosen for the following reasons. Firstly: both writers are prolific Canadian writers who have in different ways contributed to the discourse of national literature in Canada. Secondly: the novels give insight into the nation-building of Canada in its moments of occurrence, *Bear* through its focus of a pioneer's library and *Out of My Skin* through its placement at the peripheries of the Oka-Crisis. However, the primary reason these novels in particular are being mapped onto each other is the shared journey north that the protagonists conduct, which forms the central structure of this thesis.

The scope of this thesis does not allow for the analysis of more than two novels, one of which is sometimes classed as a novella.[10] Thus, the conclusion does not concern the nature of political and personal identity in Canada as a whole but how two novels with markedly different backgrounds engage with some overarching themes of Canadian Literature, and how the methodology and theory chosen could be engaged in the study of other literature to consider problematic tendencies in nationalistic discourse.

I conduct a comparative study of the novels' protagonists and contextualise them within larger themes in Canadian literature to map out what the narratives say about the national dimension of belonging to a space. I do this through a close reading of how the protagonists engage with the spaces they inhabit, and with others who inhabit it. In a contextualising effort, I begin by tracing the ways in which the novels' are both iterations of specifically Canadian cultural sensibilities and discursive techniques in the protagonists relation to ideas of self and the *right* way to inhabit the nation. In practise, this thesis is a discursive and linguistic study that flags those moments where the protagonists consider how they enact or perform their identities, or encounter other subjects who in some way force them to perform a certain manner of self and how they react to these demands. This requires engaging theories of identities and bodies which will be detailed in the theoretical section. To conclude, I look at what conclusions the narratives, and the protagonists, draw about the complex relationship between the subject and the space they inhabit, or belong to.

As the analysis concerns the protagonists' engagements with others, some secondary characters will be looked at more closely. Primarily, I study the characters who the protagonists meditate on as having similar or opposing ways of manifesting physically, alternatively who verbally express belonging. Who is included and excluded through this is largely based on my own readings of which characters impact the protagonists in meaningful enough ways to warrant analysis, as well as limited by the span of the thesis. For example, in *Out of My Skin*, the First

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[10] Keeler, Emily M. Marian Engel's Bear, reviewed: The best Canadian novel of all time. *National Post*. 2014-12-08. https://nationalpost.com/entertainment/books/marian-engels-bear-reviewed-the-best-canadian-novel-of-all-time.

Nations woman Surefoot and the protagonist Daphne's biological aunt Sheila are central devises for Daphne to think about belonging and are thus considered. The diaries of her biological grandfather Gerald, revealed to also be her father, similarly feature. There is less room for considering her boss David, despite his critical role in the narrative, as the parts which follow his perspective do not directly infer much about how Daphne considers her own manifestation as a Canadian that is not already expressed. In *Bear,* Lou's relationships with the man Homer is considered more closely than her relationship with her boss David, the Director of the Historical Institute, as Homer steps forward into the narrative more often and more clearly, but both take a secondary place to her relationship with the real, live bear she encounters.

My analysis is largely chronological in structure, as it is concerned with the journey north that the protagonists embark on. The first section is most interested in the introductory sections of the novels: it discusses the starting point of our protagonists' relation to themselves and the nation which directly impacts when they set off north. Following this, I investigate the protagonists' techniques for dealing with the problem of belonging. In *Bear,* this happens when Lou has already traveled from Toronto to Northern Ontario while in *Out of My Skin*, much of this work occurs before Daphne leaves Montreal for the cabin in the wilderness she goes to near the end of the novel. The last section looks at the conclusions of the novels, which go hand in hand with the conclusions the narratives draw on national belonging. This structure is hopefully appropriate, as I begin by placing the novels within the cultural and literary tendencies of Canada, move inwards towards the protagonists' relations to spaces, further towards their actions within those spaces and in relation to others, and conclude by retreating to ponder the conclusions the novels draw: an attitude of contingency and materiality towards the concept of national identity.

## 3. Previous research and theoretical groundwork

The function of this section is to review what relevant previous research has been conducted, as well as establish the theoretical foundations on which my analysis will rest. First, I will consider the critical context of this study, followed by the theoretical. The theoretical sections outline those aspects of discourse theory and discursive activities and practices which will be applied in the analysis.

### 3.1 Studying *Bear* and *Out of My Skin* in context

*Bear* is a fixture of Canadian literary history which had a revival in popularity in 2014.[11] Thus, it has received a remarkable amount of critical and public attention. Most concern themselves with the figure of the bear, reading him as the figure of the mythical mother, an iteration of the unnamable wilderness of the Canadian north, and any number of other symbolic referents.[12] The work I have done of sifting through essays and reviews has resulted in a grouping of texts whose analytical goals are similar enough to my own that I must take them into account. However, I only cite a couple of these authors. Donald S. Hair provides an analysis of *Bear* which captures many relevant points of other critics, as well as provides a study of forms which I tie directly into my conclusions. The other text, Paul Barrett's analysis of *Bear* and one other book, provides context for a history of critical study of the character of the bear, and draws its own resistant conclusions.

When it comes to *Out of My Skin,* there is less. Those critical analyses there are, however, are in line with my own study of belonging. The primary example I have lifted is Andrea Medovarski's essay about belonging in *Out of My Skin,* which studies the manifestation of the body in spaces as a route to understanding Daphne as part of a Canadian diaspora. Medovarski's study makes use of the work of Sara Ahmed, who is central to the theoretical groundwork of this thesis. Ahmed's theory is utilised as well in Elena Igartuburu García's essay on "Failed Emotional Negotiations of Space and Identity" in another one of McWatt's novels. There is unavoidably overlap in those studies and my own, which is highlighted throughout.

This is a study of *Canadian* national identity and how it is expressed in literature. As such it relies on the history of national literature in Canada, and critical ideas about the nature of such a literature. To provide this larger context I have employed the work of Canadian theorist Alexander Beecroft titled *An Ecology of World Literature*, which is an analysis of the historical relationships

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[11] E. M. Keeler, 'Marian Engel's Bear, reviewed'.

[12] Ex. a female divinity, the primitive forces of the world, considered in P. Barrett, "Animal Tracks in the Margin: Tracing the Absent Referent in Marian Engel's Bear and J. M. Coetzee's The Lives of Animals." in *ariel: A Review of International English Literature,* vol. 45, no. 3, 2015, 125.

between literatures and peoples. Beecroft, while Canadian, provides insight into national literatures as formations of literary history, wherein Canada is simply an instance. I have also gathered central ideas about the Canadian imagination and its development through the writings of among others such Canadian authorities as Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood who have taken it upon themselves to provide analyses of such things, as well as the modern situation of Canadian Literature through a recent collection of essays and poetry titled *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*.

### 3.2 National Literatures as discursive constructions

The philosophical position of the thesis is largely a post-structuralist one which wishes to emphasise the relational qualities of signs, bodies, literatures, etc, and how those relations work to establish and produce meaning. The general conclusion that I extrapolate from the work of those theorists I mention below is that fully conceptualised and "embodied" identity is an impossibility, as constant acts of construction of meaning lie behind concepts of identity. Discourse analysis is central to my theoretical work, as it can locate those places where social relations are so conventionalised that they are considered natural. It is lucrative to remember this when considering national literature, which often flies under the radar as a natural extension of the existence of nation states but which is far more properly thought of as a recent and rather unstable *construction* as a result of the *formation* of nation states. Alexander Beecroft writes in *An Ecology of World Literature* that with pressure to reorganise the political realm into nation states, came a pull to reorganise literature in a national model.[13] That reorganisation was in large part done through the writing of literary *history*, which emerges simultaneous to nation states as a "device that […] legitimises a literature and the nation it embodies."[14]

National literature, Beecroft suggests in his analysis, is a mode of reading, "one that reads and interprets texts through the lens of the nation-state, whether as that state's embodiment, [or] as the dissent tolerated within its sphere…"[15] as well as a deliberate *organisation* of existing literature into a group which denote something about the country as a state and as a group of people. Put in another way: the work of sorting, qualifying and disqualifying literature around the significant "the nation" was done through active discourse, both within the institutions which assemble a national canon, and through the interaction between authors and readers. Canadian readers were perhaps singularly engaged in this discourse. Northrop Frye writes in *The Bush Garden: Essays on the*

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[13] A. Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature : From Antiquity to the Present Day,* London: Verso Books, 2015, 200.

[14] Beecroft, 198.

[15] Beecroft, 197-198.

*Canadian Imagination,* which I quote in my introduction, that in the infancy of Canadian literature, what surfaced was an "obvious and unquenchable desire of the Canadian cultural public to identify itself through its literature"[16].

The key to discursive theory with Ernesto Laclau is the relational qualities of and within discourses, where discourse is a structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice.[17] In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* which was co-written by Chantal Mouffe, and the following book *New Reflections of the Revolution in Our Time* which he authored himself, Laclau presents the social world as a field of debate in which processes of affixing meaning to signs and organising them relationally are continually taking place. What this means in practice can be understood through James Paul Gee's book *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* in which he separates practice – stretches of language – from discourse defined as "socially accepted associations […] which can be used to identity oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group,"[18] The socially meaningful group in question here is *Canadian*, and literary historians and theorists, by speaking and writing about *Canada,* are presenting socially accepted associations with which social agents can engage to be identified as "Canadian". That is to say: ways for a social agent to place themselves relationally to the discourse that is Canadian national identity.[19]

Beecroft insists as well that the national model of literature was unlike the ones that came before it (or after it), because it represented a "qualitatively different version of [communal identity, fellow-feeling]" which was "shaping [identities] into a universalising and uniform system of notionally discrete identities."[20] That is to say: the national model, through its attempts to locate and articulate a communal identity and a notion of fellow-feeling, curates characteristics among members of previously numerous groups which can function to denote a nationalistic identity; identities which are de facto different are in this model considered superficially different, subsumed under being "a Canadian". This projection of unification is done by writers of literary history in their sifting of texts, and by literary critics who attempt to name the unifying feature. See: Northrop Frye's *The Bush Gardens: Essays on the Canadian Imagination,* Margaret Atwood's *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* or Nick Mount's *Arrival: the Story of CanLit* to name a

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[16] Frye, 216.

[17] E. Laclau, and C. Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*: *Towards a Radical Democratic Politics,* 2. ed. London: Verso Books, 2001, 105.

[18] J. P. Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*, Routledge, Taylor and Francis e-library, 2001, 17.

[19] Gee provides a division between "Discourse" and "discourse", but when discourse is mentioned in this thesis, it refers always to Gee's "Discourse".

[20] Beecroft, 202.

few. By asking what texts should *count* as part of a national literary canon, and investigating what in those works make them *Canadian*, they are asking: "what does it mean to be Canadian".

These works are attempts to establish meaning, or, in Laclau's terms: they are contingent interventions in the discursive field. They are *articulations*, defined as "any practise establishing a relation among [signs] such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practise".[21] All such interventions construct an appearance of objective truths: they mean to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a *centre*."[22] The writing of a national history constructs a continuous narrative of literary production and national commonalities inside the borders of the nation. This is done through the reengagement of vernacular texts as embodiments of national characteristics. Beecroft calls these *shibboleth texts,*[23] a term used by Derrida as meaning something like key or password[24] but originating in the biblical Book of Judges, where the correct pronunciation of the word proved whether you were a man of Gilead or an Ephraimite. Ephraimites would mispronounce the word, and thus be put to death. The texts that are lifted as shibboleth texts have been interpreted or distorted to fit a nationalistic agenda,[25] and are engendered with the power of inherent knowledge. This work of a nation's literary history and criticism is the work of creating an apparently objective truth about the qualities of the nation and its subjects.

### 3.3 The discourses of national identity rely on exclusionary methods

Inherent to the process of organising signs relationally is to "actualise certain structural potentialities and reject others."[26] Inherent to arresting the flow of difference and constructing a centre is organising some potentialities of meaning outside of the sign, and some within. This *outside* is "simultaneously that which makes the emergence of an inside possible [the condition of its existence as a separate entity] and that which threatens it."[27] The nature of the threat of the outside is simply the risk it poses to the stability of the inside, in its capacity to intervene. For a collective identity - such as *a Canadian* - to emerge, there must be an articulated [decided] set of

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[21] Laclau and Mouffe, 105.

[22] Laclau and Mouffe, 112.

[23] Beecroft, 232.

[24] J. Derrida, A. Fioretos & H. Ruin, *Schibboleth*, Stockholm: Symposion, 1990, 82.

[25] Beecroft, 232

[26] Laclau, Ernesto. *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* as part of the Phronesis series, London: Verso Books, 1990, 30

[27] Laclau and Mouffe, 155

elements[28] that can be found across subjects within the group. However, as important is an articulated set of elements that are decidedly *non-Canadian.* There is no nation without an *inter*national context and there is no national identity without actualising some characteristics and rejecting others. Articulations of such identities are *acts*. Identity is, Laclau says, an act of *construction*, not of definition.[29]

The social agent is situated relationally to the nation within the discourse of national identity, and must articulate themselves to it either in terms of difference or in terms of equivalence.[30] The charged border that separates *outside* from *inside* is termed *antagonism.* Laclau and Mouffe write that "antagonism is the failure of difference",[31] which is to say that it proves the limits of objectivity in the discursive structure. When two different identities struggle to define themselves simultaneously, for example when one agent's definition of their Canadian-ness does not match with another's definition of their own Canadian-ness, that antagonism surfaces. In such a case, the social structure, meaning here the discourse of national identity, has failed to fully constitute the agent as a feature of it. Therefore the social agent is "thrown up"[32] in their condition as *subject;* they are *dislocated* from their position in the discourse. Laclau and Mouffe write that:

> Every identity is dislocated insofar as it depends on an outside which both denies that identity and provides its condition of possibility at the same time. ... On the one hand, [dislocations] threaten identities, on the other, they are the foundation on which new identities are constituted.[33]

That is: all social agents fail to perfectly embody the discourse of the national identity completely. Laclau writes: "the field of social identities is not one full of identities but of their ultimate failure to be constituted."[34]

However, some subjects' dislocations are far more affecting than others'. Who is and is not allowed to move, undisrupted, through discourse is determined, Gee writes, not by logic but by *recognition work*. The mind, he writes, is not a rule following device which is logically structured but a device for "pattern recognition" whose main function is storing and sorting experiences.[35] The

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[28] Elements are defined as differential positions in the discourse that have not been discursively articulated. Laclau and Mouffe, 105.

[29] Laclau, 30.

[30] Laclau and Mouffe, 154.

[31] Laclau and Mouffe, 125.

[32] Laclau and Mouffe, 44.

[33] Laclau and Mouffe, 39.

[34] Laclau and Mouffe, 38.

[35] Gee, 53

social agent performs a "socially situated identity"[36] through *utterances* and *performances* which make use not only of stretches of language but of gesturing, interacting, and using objects so as to communicate their place in the discourse.[37] This performance of identity is meant to be "similar enough to other performances [of identities] to be recognisable. […] If it is not recognisable, then you're not 'in' the Discourse."[38] Participation in discourse thus requires consent by way of recognition by other agents.

Elsewhere Gee adds that "these matters are settled provincially and continually, in practise, as part and parcel of shared histories and ongoing activities."[39] If the identity a social agent is performing is different, but still recognisable as part of the discourse, it can change and transform the discourse. Key to the ambiguous nature of the discourse which Laclau and Mouffe insist is its defining quality is the social agent's ability to "press against" discourse, or to reposition themselves around new centres as a result of being dislocated. However, this does not mean that national discourse is easily malleable and forgiving of difference. The "outside" is after all that which *threatens*.

Nira Yuval-Davies is a sociologist specialising in gender, race and nationalism. In her book *Gender and Nation* she writes that the lie of multiculturalism is that it is not, in fact, genuinely inclusive. Rather, "multi-culturalism is aimed at nourishing and perpetuating the kinds of differences which do not threaten."[40] It is not the minority group which determines the kinds of differences they are allowed to enact and still be recognised as *in* the discourse, this is inscribed on them by the hegemonic group. The boundaries of the collectivity, that is the boundaries inherent to the discourse of national identity, are *assumed* to be "fixed, static, ahistorical and essentialist"[41] whereas we have learned through Gee that such matters are settled in practice. Therefore the minority group is constructed as *objects* in the discourse, rather than *subjects*, and have no access to meaningful discursive work. Since discursive practices are not limited to language but includes acting, gesturing, interacting, and using objects,[42] being made object is experienced corporeally, through the way in which certain bodies are allowed or disallowed movement in the social world. Being made object in the discourse is experienced as lack of mobility.

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[36] Gee, 22.

[37] Gee, 35.

[38] Gee, 18.

[39] Gee, 25.

[40] N. Yuval Davies, *Gender and Nation*, London: Sage Publications, 1997, 55.

[41] Yuval-Davies, 57-58.

[42] Gee, 35.

National identity is often exclusionary along the borders of race. Sara Ahmed writes in *A Phenomenology of Whiteness* that "colonialism makes the world 'white' […] a world ready for certain kinds of bodies." Our conception of self is a spatial experience, she argues, quoting Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann: "The place in which I find myself, my actual "here", is the starting point for my orientation in space."[43] It is from that 'here' that the world unfolds, and one's orientation determines what is and is not within one's reach of movement. Further, how bodies orient and are oriented impacts the spaces in which they move. "CanLit" has been formed as an institution by the work of primarily white bodies, as white bodies are the ones which have had access to the space. It is a flawed institution not based on the presence of those white bodies, but based on the institutionalising work they performed, which accumulated 'likeness'. Ahmed writes: "The effect of this 'around whiteness' is the institutionalisation of a certain 'likeness', which makes non-white bodies feel uncomfortable, exposed, visible, different, when they take up this space."[44] Aligning some bodies with or against other bodies simultaneously aligns also the particular with the general. The individual comes to stand for, and stand in for, its group.[45]

"To be black in 'the white world"' Ahmed writes, "is to turn back towards itself, to become an object, which means not only not being extended by the contours of the world, but being diminished as an effect of the bodily extensions of others."[46] This is experienced as a stopping device which restricts movement and exacts pressure on one's bodily surface.[47] This argument maps fairly consistently onto Laclau and Mouffe's conceptions around *dislocation* as a revelatory and stressful movement out of engagement with discursive structures. However, whereas Laclau and Mouffe imagine the space outside of discourse as a space of possibility where the subject is *made subject*, Ahmed imagines this as being *made object,* resulting in a lack of access. The missing link, I argue, is Gee's *recognition* work: discursive power is only possible by way of consent of other discursive agents.

In another work, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed explores the role of one's bodily surface in confirming and/or establishing identity, specifically in reference to pain and hate as social and political phenomena. Skin is "a surface that is felt only in the event of being 'impressed upon'

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[43] Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann quoted in S, Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness" in *Feminist Theory,* vol. 8, no. 2, Sage Publications, 2007, 151.

[44] Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness", 156.

[45] S. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh University Press, 2014, 48.

[46] Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness", 161.

[47] Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness", 161.

in the encounters we have with others."[48] By impressions, she means the both the physical and the abstract: the pressure of something other pressing onto skin, and the impressions that are projected onto skin in encounters. Ahmed mentions the work *The Absent Body* by Drew Leder to say that in moments without notable impressions, when the body is functioning unproblematically, the body becomes absent: "caught up with a multitude of involvements". For the white body, whiteness "trails behind" because they are not oriented towards their whiteness. This is equivalent to the *constituted* subject in Discourse, one which is not "thrown up" into its position *as* subject. The non-white body, however, becomes turned back on itself through experiences of dysfunction. These experiences are lived as "a return to the body, or a rendering present to consciousness of what has become absent. […] The intensity of feelings like pain recalls us to our bodily surfaces: pain seizes me back to my body."[49]

Pain – and further *wounds* which break the skin surface – creates the desire to re-establish the border than skin provides. A movement away from the imagined or material object one feels is the cause of pain functions simultaneously as a movement towards/into oneself.[50] Pain demands that one attends to embodied experience. In the context of national discourses, her idea of *collective skin* as something which which mediates between the interior and the exterior of a community, and which can carry wounds, is central. A minority group as a collective body enclosed by skin can be *wounded*. Such wounds are inherited, just as likeness is inherited, through the discursive work of forming groups. The problem with the inheritance of collective skin is that the discourse around such injuries includes a fetishisation of the wound.[51] Fetishising a wound, Ahmed says, involves an over-involvement with the wound which cuts it off from its historicity. The event of wounding is denied its complexity and becomes something "that simply 'is' rather than something that has happened in time and space."[52]

In the example of injury dealt to indigenous communities by colonial states, Ahmed writes that: "[r]econciliation becomes, in this narrative, the reconciliation of indigenous individuals into the white nation, which is now cleansed through its expression of shame".[53] Ahmed describes this cleansing as a covering up of the wound dealt to indigenous communities, a covering up that seals the skin of the nation and thus absorbs the pain dealt to indigenous bodies into the body of the

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[48] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 25.

[49] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 26.

[50] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 27.

[51] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 32.

[52] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 32.

[53] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 35.

nation: appropriating that pain as the nation's pain. The solution, she argues, is to reengage the moment of injury, "recovering rather than forgetting the traumas of the past".[54] In the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe, a similar lingering is invoked: an attention paid to that which apparently "is" but is the result of construction: moments where the ambiguity of the social has become invisible through the meaning of some signs being so conventionalised as to be considered natural. By mapping processes of discursive struggle, the acts of construction behind apparent "objectivity" can be exposed, and challenged. This helps us consider the nation as a body, enclosed by a discursive border.

### 3.4 The role of the charter-myth in national identity

"Literature," wrote Northrop Frye, "is conscious mythology: as society develops, its mythical stories become structural principles of storytelling."[55] National mythology refers here not to mythology in the normative sense but to ways in which one gestures towards *the nation* within and through cultural texts. For example, the ways in which shibboleth texts are culturally charged and invoked in contemporary cultural texts is a form of myth-making. Beecroft refers to the shibboleth texts of a nation as engaging with the *charter myth* of the nation. However, Canada has been accused of lacking such a myth. Margaret Atwood writes that when the British Empire retreaded from Canadian shores, there was no strongly defined myth to replace it.[56] Similarly, Carole Gerson explains in her essay *The Changing Contours of a National History* written in 1988 how the "[t]he changing shape of [Canada's] literary tradition – the discarding of once revered texts and resurrecting of forgotten ones – reflects critics' attempts to prescribe and pigeonhole, and authors' practices of confirming or deconstructing the prevailing national mythologies."[57]

In this manner, *myth* is a discursive function; a construction of a vocabulary of nationhood. When Laclau and Mouffe use the term *myth*, they are referring specifically to a kind of floating signifier: a sign which is separate from the structure of articulated signs and thus open to different ascriptions of meaning depending on which discourse is invoking it, but which *appears* to have objective meaning and around which other signs are organised. According to this logic, the sign *Canada* is defined as a myth. Laclau and Mouffe also, however, introduce the idea of a *mythical space of representation:* when something fails to be constituted, whether it be the sign *Canada* or a

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[54] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 36.

[55] Frye, 232.

[56] M. Atwood, "In Search of Alias Grace: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction" in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 103, No. 5, 1998, 1508.

[57] Gerson, Carole. "The Changing Contours of a National History", in *College English*, Vol. 50, No. 8, *Canadian Literature and Rhetoric*, 1988, 888.

social agent who manifests identity in an aberrant way, it enters this imagined space of potentiality, where new inscriptions of meaning can occur. The work of myth, according to Laclau, is to suture the space between structure and potentiality; between what is already inherently accepted, and the potentiality of the other, that which may be invited into the space of the accepted. It is hegemonic in practise, forming new objectivity.[58]

The nation, as it is, is both a nodal point around which signs organise themselves and a floating signifier which is incomplete, constantly reconstituted and replaced. The nation is a myth, it is a *site of inscription of meaning*, onto which tendencies toward national collectivity and likeness are projected by national historians, writers of literary history, and by readers looking for national likeness in their struggle against the threat of being a nation that is less-than. The stability of the national identity relies on a nodal point around which to organise, without which the subject is constantly thrown up, seized back into themselves, unable to move freely through discursive spaces. As dislocation is a constitutive part of the subject, it is inherently thrown up into the mythological space of representation, a subject is only subject insofar as she functions relationally between the structure and potentiality: she embodies charged potentiality, she mediates between spaces.[59] As the plurality of a multicultural nation resists structural stability, national mythologies are a tool with which subjects can do the work of suturing that space of uncertainty.

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[58] Laclau and Mouffe, 61.

[59] Laclau and Mouffe, 62.

## 4. The pioneer's journey

In this first analytical section I show how the protagonists express markedly *national* anxiety which I argue is in line with a common argument among literary critics of Canada that Canadian Literary texts emerge from and react to a perceived cultural and historical instability, or lack,[60] which is comparable to the discursive function *dislocation*. Based on this, I offer my reading of the Canadian charter myth as that of the pioneer journeying into the unknown and dangerous north in order to claim belonging in a new land. Both *Bear* and *Out of My Skin* employ such a journey to contend with contemporary national anxiety, and in doing so subvert the pioneer's narrative in ways that expose weaknesses in the discourse of national identity.

### 4.1 Un-belonging as a feature and fault

Canadian Literature is rarely considered a stable construction, it is constantly evaluated and re-evaluated. The "CanLit Boom" of the sixties and seventies, in which the institution of publishing began to take real shape in Toronto has been called the moment in which CanLit *arrived*, articulated its identity,[61] but such a reading has been criticised for excluding and/or disregarding non-white, non-male voices who were in fact making large literary waves in the period.[62] This is to say, an attempt to arrive at narrative coherency in literary history was immediately negated by the complexities of plurality. The contemporary critical landscape concerns itself largely with contending with a history of sexism and racism in the institutions of academia and publishing, and the ideas of CanLit "breaking up with itself"[63] and being a dumpster fire: something rotten, something ablaze.[64]

This mode of constant articulation and re-articulation is recognised by the criticism of CanLit, McGregor et. al. suggesting a staying in the ruins,[65] but also earlier by Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood. Both critics regard the characteristics of Canadian Literature as lingering in moments of

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[60] Beecroft, 237, Gerson, 888.

[61] N. Mount, *Arrival: The Story of CanLit,* Toronto: Anansi Press, 2017, 12.

[62] P. Barrett, "The Wild Rise of CanLit", *The Walrus*, 2017-10-12, https://thewalrus.ca/the-wild-rise-of-canlit/ ; J. Andrews, "The Danger of a Single Story" ESC: English Studies in Canada vol. 44, no. 1, 2017: 167-170.

[63] Simon Lewsen quoted in Barrett's "The Wild Rise of CanLit".

[64] McGregor et. al. ; 'How Indigenous authors are claiming space in the CanLit scene', CBC Radio, 15 March 2018, https://www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved/how-indigenous-authors-are-claiming-space-in-the-canlit-scene-1.4573996 (viewed January 2021) ; Sookfong Lee, Jen. "Open Letters and Closed Doors: How the Steven Galloway open letter dumpster fire forced me to acknowledge the racism and entitlement at the heart of CanLit" *The Humber Literary Review*, https://humberliteraryreview.com/jen-sookfong-lee-essay-open-letters-and-closed-doors.

[65] McGregor et. al., 11-12.

stress. Northrop Frye wrote that "Canadian sensibility has been profoundly disturbed, not so much by our famous problem of identity … as by a series of paradoxes in what confronts that identity."[66] That is to say: Canada's national literature has been characterised by its state of crisis, failing to fully articulate itself out of cosmopolitan literature and already disappearing into the "world literature" rhetoric of contemporary theory. Margaret Atwood writes that:

> When we hit university in the late 1950s and encountered intellectual magazines, we found ourselves being fed large doses of anxiety and contempt, brewed by our very own pundits and even by some of our very own poets and fiction writers, concerning our own inauthenticity, our feebleness from the cultural point of view, our lack of a real literature, and the absence of anything you could dignify by the name of history.[67]

What seems to be expressed here is an anxiety of comparison: Canada is inauthentic by the standards of other places; Canada is culturally feeble next to the cultural competence of other countries. On an international stage, Canada is scrambling along after the uptake, doing what it should but not *enough*.

This literary anxiety is experienced by protagonist Lou in *Bear* as a nagging idea that she is not living up to her potential. Her job as an archivist for the Historical Institute consists of organising and categorising historical paraphernalia, looking for that which *says* something about Canadian History. In this office the walls lined with books, cabinets, and old photographs are *protective*, one of her refuges from the winter outside.[68] She lives during this time surrounded by discursive productions and reproductions of Canada as a nation, avoiding confrontation with her self by performing the methodical recording of history: an abstraction of lived experiences sorted and presented in order to establish pattern.

> [when] the weather turned and the sun filtered into her basement windows, when the sunbeams were laden with spring dust and the old tin ashtrays began to stink of a winter of nicotine and contemplation, the flaws in her prodding private world were made public, even to her …[69]

The light reveals that she is "slug-pale […] her fingertips stained with old, old ink […] her eyes would no longer focus in the light".[70] However, it is not reality or material conditions which encroaches on Lou, it is the discursive construction of how a good life should be lead. The subjective experience she longs for comes from a collective construction of identity which is impossible to live up to. Hers is an anxiety of comparison. She asks herself: "Where have I been?

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[66] Frye, 220.

[67] Atwood, "In Search of Alias Grace", 1508.

[68] Engel, Marian. *Bear*, Boston: Nonpareil Books, 2002, 1.

[69] Engel, 1.

[70] Engel, 2.

[…] Is a life that can now be considered an absence of life?"[71] The way she has lived, by "getting her growing up done with"[72] and spending her life cataloguing historical texts and maps for the Institute, has resulted in an experience of absence: it has not produced a fully constituted individual but one which can be *considered.* In her work, she longs for a character to emerge: the same is true for her life.

In moments of cultural uncertainty Beecroft tells us that we reach backwards to establish the image of chronological consistency. Lou, living in a moment of personal uncertainty, reaches into national history. Atwood invokes this instinct as she writes: "at a time when our country feels very much under threat – the threat of splitting apart, and the threat of having its established institutions and its social fabric and its sense of itself literally torn to pieces – it feels comforting to escape backwards, to a time when these things were not the problem."[73] What is found when Canadian literary historians – like Lou – escape backwards, is the story of the pioneer and settler.[74] Canada's vernacular texts are the diaries and records of immigrants from continental Europe and the British Isles arriving on the eastern shore. These people were not, however, unthreatened: they faced a provoking, revelatory encounter with nature, and their writing was the beginning of a tradition of Canadians writing about Canada as a space which must be navigated, and about themselves as defined radically in conjunction with this great constitutive *outside.*

Her boss, the Director, tasks her with such a journey by sending her to an island in northern Ontario which holds the *Cary Estate*, settled originally by the pioneer Colonel Cary and passed down to his children until now, when the youngest Cary has passed and left it to the Institute. In traveling north, Lou is meant to rediscover him, the historical period in which he lived, and re-construct it. As such, her methodological reaching into national history becomes corporeal. She takes to the task immediately, reflecting that by doing this she may for once avoid the realisation of lack that comes with spring: this year, "the mole would not be forced to admit that it had been intended for an antelope."[75] Lou experiences this journey into the past as a journey into her own past.

> She had sharp memories of being here before. She remembered a beach, a lake the colour of silver, something sad happening. Something, yes, that happened when she was very

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[71] Engel, 2.

[72] Engel, 3.

[73] Atwood, "In Search of Alias Grace", 1511.

[74] Beecroft, 197.

[75] Engel, 2.

> young, some loss. It struck her as strange that she had never come back to this part of the world.[76]

In *Out of My Skin*, Daphne cannot engage with national history in the same way Lou does. Her non-white body is continually called into being when she engages with the discourse of the nation. Where Lou can ponder how her engagement with abstractions of the nation result in something lacking, Daphne is refused engagements with even those abstractions. The novel opens with an image of Daphne in Montréal, peering in through the windows of other peoples' homes. She is searching for something genuine, which will allow her to lose the feeling of distance she has felt all her life. This positioning of Daphne on the outside peering in through windows, is a reversal of Lou's burrowing indoors to escape the outside. While Lou is escaping contact with the outside so as to not have to constitute herself, Daphne is dislocated from national discourse and denied access from it, in a constant state of "social stress",[77] experienced corporeally and cognitively. She describes a feeling of "falling in between cracks" which sits inside of her, "a gaping hole in reality"[78] which she has felt for most of her life and which appeared the first time she was asked to articulate her identity as something other than *Canadian*.

The *inside* Daphne views is a dense image of the failure of Canada's national discourse. She sees an awkward Oriental carpet which will not lie flat, a wooden frog with "patterns of Mexico" in its insipid stare, and for the third time this week: the same photograph of a 1940's couple kissing in front of Hôtel the Ville in Paris. She describes it all as "desire-paraphernalia" within which she searches for details that will tell her something about the house's occupants, but finds nothing truly affecting. It is a showroom of Canadian multiculturalism which presents its willing inclusion of all manner of things from all manner of places but which, when put together, produce no subject. The sort of multiculturalism on show here is one which nourishes those differences which are un-threatening, and as Laclau and Ahmed agree, it is through threat, pressure, that the subject is called into being.[79] Thus, the insolent grin of the wooden frog becomes a marker of the virtue-signalling of multiculturalism, one which does not produce a fully constituted identity. "Up close," the book's opening line says, "it was all disappointing."[80]

Andrea Medovarski, in her essay "Tessa McWatt's Out of My 'Belonging is what you give yourself'", writes concerning this opening passage that it points to the ways nations themselves,

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[76] Engel, 8.

[77] A term used by Ahmed to explain the state of non-white bodies being made object. Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness", 161.

[78] McWatt, Tessa. *Out of My Skin*, Toronto: Riverbank Press, 1998, 2.

[79] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 27 ; Laclau, 155.

[80] McWatt, 2.

based on regulatory regimes of exclusion, are inherently dissatisfying for those outside their conceptual boundaries."[81] Daphne has, quite literally, been blocked from access to the inside of the conceptual (discursive) boundaries of Canada. Her dislocation in the discourse of national identity is experienced as a lack of knowledge: were she to know "what she is", her "hyphenation", there would be avenues for her to find belonging. Adopted to Scottish parents, Daphne has nothing to say when the way she exists in this nation-state is called into question. It is also experienced corporeally: she is continually stepping around the crack,[82] lacking ground. "She'd been losing weight these last few weeks" she notes early in the novel: "Losing weight and her own gravity. Her body had started to feel transparent…"[83] The novel consists of Daphne experimenting with national history as personal history, and the literal uncovering of personal history. The adoption agency gives her the phone number of her biological aunt Sheila, who in turn gives her the diaries her grandfather wrote while in a mental care facility in former British Guiana, now Guyana. Through this second-hand account Daphne discovers her origins, and only when she has contended with this personal history can she perform pioneering: travel north into the wilderness, retracing the steps of the pioneers.

McWatt presents a succinct paragraph of how failure to constitute a subject intersects the personal with the national:

> Leaving Toronto abruptly, [Daphne]'d hoped to be absorbed into a foreign, cosmopolitan city, but she felt more and more as if she'd marooned herself in an island village. Here, islanders, and villagers from other parts of the country, other parts of the world, met, mingled, and yet remained strangers, isolated from each other. The city was draped in veils. Behind the first, the languages of two empires were still fighting a colonial war. Her life seemed to be developing behind the second veil, where there was a calm, free space, as in the eye of a tornado, which asked for nothing except her imagination for survival. Life in her neighbourhood seemed suspended from politics as played out in the media, relieved of language and culture in the specific.[84]

The space in which Daphne appears to move is something like Laclau's mythical space, in which meanings are floating signifiers and potentiality as present as reality. The distance she describes is thrown into sharp relief by the ever-present Oka-Crisis, a time in history which is part of determining the discourse around the myth *Canada* and how it encroaches on the land it claims.

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[81] A. Medovarski, ""Belonging Is What You Give Yourself": Tessa McWatt's Out of My Skin." In *Settling Down and Settling Up: The Second Generation in Black Canadian and Black British Women's Writing*, 59-85. Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2019, 52.

[82] McWatt, 49.

[83] McWatt, 7.

[84] McWatt, 65.

Daphne however remains “in the hum of white noise, absent from the noise and discussion.”[85] In this space, Daphne’s survival is utterly conceptual, imagined, charged with potentialities.

Atwood named the “single unifying and informing symbol” at the core of Canadian literature as *survival,* a central idea which generates “not the excitement and sense of adventure or danger […] but an almost intolerable anxiety.”[86] In vernacular literature, the threat she calls “death by nature”[87] was attributed to external threats: the dangerous nature of the great white north, its ice storms and wildlife, but would sometimes move inwards to elements of one’s own nature being a threat.[88] I believe this existential threat is best understood through the terms of the pioneer, and the charter myth of Canada that of the pioneer. The task of the pioneer is to delve into the threatening unknown in order to find a ’here’ in which survival is possible. In early iterations, that meant preservation of self against the threat of death. In contemporary literature, it means preservation of self against threat of exclusion, and/or negation in confrontation with a ’here’ that does not allow it.

All acts of pioneering are preceded by dislocation. For the pioneers of early anglo-Canadian history, the starting point of pioneering was the British Isles. Later, it was from one’s conception of self as a British subject. Looking at the landscape of Canadian Literature today reveals a new starting point: the exposed structural fault that is Canadian national identity itself, expressed in a conception of “CanLit” which is ever-criticised as exclusionary. It, as a structure, has dislocated its subjects through failing to constitute them fully, either through narratives of cultural and national anxiety, or by exclusion from the narrative. The land on which the pioneer *settles* is a centre around which a subject can structure themselves, or a place where such a centre may be created by the subject. In the contemporary urban landscape, this can mean a place where confusion of self can lessen. We encounter both Lou and Daphne in moments of fragmentations of self described as complicated engagements with an *outside* and *inside;* a consideration of both the self and the discourse which it moves within. This consideration is markedly *national,* and has a crucial focus on bodies: how they move, what impresses upon them, and what that does to the subject. Lou and Daphne are both dislocated from embodying the discourse of the *Canadian*. There is something inherently *wrong* or *false* in their spatial occupation of the world.

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[85] McWatt, 31.

[86] Atwood, *Survival*, 28.

[87] Atwood, *Survival,* 54.

[88] Atwood, *Survival,* 28.

### 4.2 The idea of north in the Canadian imagery

Key to my argument of the pioneer's journey being the central function these narratives employ to tend to belonging is the idea of *north* in the Canadian imagery. Northrop Frye suggests that the distance between coherent discursive expressions of national identity and the lived experience of the nation for the subject is a general problem in nationalist ways of thinking about literature, but also as a problem especially in Canada whose vast expanse generates intensified locality. The Canadian who faces the strong south is not the same as the Canadian who faces the untamed north – but they, perhaps, experience the same anxiety.[89] The question the Canadian imagination is asking, he argues, is "where is here?". He names that space "the bush gardens", based on Atwood's collection of poetry titled *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* which in turn are based on one central shibboleth text of Canadian Literature: Susanna Moodie's *Roughing it in the Bush*, a piece which was published not in Canada – for Canada had no publishing house of its own – but in the United States in 1852 and details Moodie's immigration to Canada in the 1830s.[90] "The bush" is a recurring denomination of Canada in its literature, further, it's a denomination of that mythical signified *Canada* which seems to always be located *northward*. Canada is, after all, the great white *north.*

The Canadian imaginary is preoccupied with the idea of the north as a place of possibilities and greenery, void of the complications of their circumstances. This imaginary is embraced and complicated by both the novels we are studying. Quoting Amelia Kalant, Andrea Medovarski in her essay on *Out of My Skin* writes that: 'the search for unity amidst diversity has always led, in Canada, to […] the (native) North, a stand-in for ancient authenticity. (41)'"[91] Donald S. Hair, in his essay "Marian Engel's 'Bear'" published in the quarterly *Canadian Literature* in 1982 writes that "Lou's journey is from south to north, […] its nature can be defined by the baseland hinterland distinction which, W. L. Morton argues, runs through every Canadian psyche. The south is an urban waste land, associated with winter, decay, fragmentation, […] The north is a bush garden, associated with spring, a lost childhood, fertility, and the colour green."[92] Engaging the idea of *north* as these critics have opens up avenues for exploring the language of movement which is central to the pioneer-narrative of going away and claiming new land.

Lou begins her narrative deep in the cavities of southern urban Toronto but travels to northern Ontario and the islands which were settled by Canadian pioneers and which she refers to as "the

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[89] Frye, introduction, iii-iv.

[90] N. Besner, Roughing it in The Bush, *The Canadian Encyclopedia,* 2006-02-07, https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/roughing-it-in-the-bush

[91] Amelia Kalant, quoted in Medovarski, 61.

[92] Hair, 35.

bush".[93] Daphne, who has already traveled from Toronto to Montreal – a slight movement northward – longs for a native, untouched north. This is why she agrees to go with her coworkers on a trip to a cabin by a lake,[94] and her ultimate understanding of belonging comes from leaving her coworkers behind to go, alone, into the wilderness. Both Daphne and Lou refer to *the north* as something which is *real* in comparison with their own half-lives. Lou's longing for and mythicised understanding of the north surfaces as she is already moving towards it:

> The road went north. She followed it. There was a Rubicon[95] near the height of land. When she crossed it, she began to feel free. She sped north to the highlands, lightheaded.[96]

When home in Toronto, "things persisted in turning grey"[97] but north, "the land was hectic with new green"[98] and she has "an odd sense […] of being reborn."[99]

In *Out of My Skin,* Daphne's dream of the North is a through-line of the novel, but unlike Lou who travels north on as soon as the novel begins, Daphne is struck moving restlessly through the slow, sweltering city of Montreal that is dragged to a stand-still by both summer heat and political tension which – quite literally – slows the city down. During this time, the north reaches her through levels of mediation. In the opening section, she looks at a painting of a northern Canadian landscape, denied access not only by the literal barrier of the window but by levels of mediation: observing a signifier, not a signified. She is constantly reading books about birds and watching nature documentaries. The bush is a conjuring trick which bases its imagery on magazines and television, and thus tainted by "the tackle-shop pickerel […] bass stuffed and mounted on wood, staring back accusingly, puffed up and indignant".[100] When her colleagues suggest going to a lake house one of them own, Daphne imagines she will experience a lightness that is different from rootlessness, but still the north is represented, this time through language rather than imagery, not realised: "She wanted the woods, the woods by the lake in the way Marc has described his cottage."[101]

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[93] Engel, 34, 41.

[94] McWatt, 29.

[95] A Rubicon is defined by Oxford sponsored Lexico as a *point of no return*. https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/rubicon.

[96] Engel, 7.

[97] Engel, 9.

[98] Engel, 8.

[99] Engel, 9.

[100] McWatt, 1.

[101] McWatt, 66.

### 4.3 Subversion of the pioneer-narrative through gender and race

These texts engage the narrative of pioneering as a way to assert belonging when none is given. At a glance, it seems clear: Lou feels stuck, prematurely aged and blind in her basement at the Historical Institute – she travels north to an island and engages with nature, not least in her relationship to the bear – she ends up feeling new-born and clean. Daphne feels othered, distant – she travels north to a lake-house, where her colleagues continue to other her – she leaves them behind and heads, alone, into the forest – she emerges with a sense of arrival. However, Both Engel and McWatt push against the myth of pioneering by subverting it, and doing so point out the flaws in its appropriative nature. These novels are, I argue, sophisticated critiques of the nature of North American identity-making, pointing out the consequences of a discourse of national identity which subsumes the complexities of social agents into notionally discrete identities. Their prerequisite for movement are intimately connected to their prerequisite for claiming belonging: gendered, and racialised.

The historical events of pioneering – land-claiming – in North America are colonialist. They come with the displacement of native bodies, appropriation of land, and inscribing onto that land a history which focuses on a white subject. Ahmed writes that "colonialism makes the world white."[102] In McWatt's novel the Oka-Crisis, while secondary to Daphne's search for origins, provide thematic context to the struggle of being made other by a white world. First Nations people are attempting, during these weeks of crisis, to enforce a border that is being trespassed. Their ultimate failure shows that native bodies are disallowed the right to geographical spaces while white bodies claim such rights with force if necessary. Daphne is constantly moving: she walks the city streets late at night, goes to the outlook on Mount Royal, is always on her way to or home from work. However, this is the restless moving of a body made not-at-home.[103]

The crack in her being, that material manifestation of dislocation, first appeared when Daphne was in second grade, and heard the word "negro" for the first time. A classmate attributes the word to her, drawing a direct line between this word that she does not understand and her very being. The teacher disagrees, and asks Daphne "What are you, anyway, Daphne?" When Daphne cannot answer, because she had never considered such a question, the teacher explains: "Now dear, people are certain things, like Japanese, Chinese… things like that."[104] Daphne's confusion is visceral.

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[102] Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness", 154.

[103] Used by Ahmed to describe racialised bodies made object by a white gaze. Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness", 155.

[104] McWatt, 16.

Elena Igartubutu Garcia, in her study of the "split between subjectivity and a socially and culturally given subject position"[105] quotes Ahmed as saying:

> In fear the world presses against the body; the body shrinks back from the world in the desire to avoid the object of fear. [...] Such shrinkage is significant: fear works to contain some bodies such that they take up less space. In this way, emotions work to align bodily space with social space (Ahmed, 2004a: 69).[106]

Daphne's response to "what are you, *really"* is affective, physical: she cradles her head in her arms, hugging herself to take up less space in the room suddenly full of gazes turned towards her. "To be black in 'the white world"' Ahmed writes, "[…] means not only not being extended by the contours of the world, but being diminished as an effect of the bodily extensions of others."[107] For the first time in her life, Daphne has been asked to articulate her own belonging in a complicated system of identities. Thus, she is thrown up into existence *as subject* in the Laclauan sense, and simultaneously *made object:* revealed by a white gaze as a body not-at-home.[108] Her father asserts that "You're a Canadian, and don't you let anyone yell you otherwise."[109] but the way Daphne enacts Canadian-ness is not firstly recognised as Canadian, it prompts a question of what she is *really*. What her father has forgotten in his assertion of Daphne's belonging is the crucial role of recognition. As Gee has put it: "If [your performance of self] is not recognisable, then you're not 'in' the Discourse."[110] Nor does she have the discursive power of Laclau's dislocated subject, uniquely positioned to be able to restructure their position, re-articulate their identity. Daphne is not performing a situated identity and so it does not fulfil the criteria of an *articulation*. The crack in her being is not an act of construction, it is a question.

Daphne's lack of access to the pioneer's journey exposes the inherent racialised elements of the charter myth of pioneering out of which Canadian Literature has grown. The struggle for a cohesive narrative which represents the Canadian imagination relies on appropriative acts, lifting and reworking the imaginary of Victorian and Romantic British literary tradition into "patterns that fit the country's immediate political concerns and current social ideology."[111] There are inherent functions of appropriation within CanLit as a phenomenon, which lead to a failure to constitute

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[105] Garcia, Elena Igartuburu. "'Go where the Love Is': Failed Emotional Negotiations of Space and Identity in Tessa McWatt's This Body", *Alicante Journal of English Studies* no. 26, 2013, 59.

[106] Ahmed quoted in Garcia, 70.

[107] Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness", 161.

[108] Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness", 161.

[109] McWatt, 16.

[110] Gee, 64.

[111] Gerson, 888.

national subjects. The way Atwood puts it is: “We are all immigrants to this place, even if we were born here.”[112]. Medovarski writes that “the modern western nation-state is not the best conceptual unit for understanding or forging a sense of belonging, particularly for subjects like [Surefoot] and Daphne.”[113] There is no room in this national history for non-white bodies, and very limited room even for the white woman, exemplified in Lou.

Lou is deeply integrated in British literary inheritances. The narrative framing of her pioneering, her journey north, is following the footsteps of the English gentleman who acquired permission from the Queen to claim and inhabit a northern island. Unlike Daphne, she can go north immediately, but her journeying is inherently gendered. Lou is allowed the conditions for her pioneering by her boss, a man she mainly refers to as the Director and who is revealed to also be a sexual partner; though their physical intimacy is regarded as another way in which Lou has failed to live up to her idea of life.[114] When she gets closer to the island, she meets the man named *Homer*, who has been tasked with taking her to the island and helping her while she's there. That he is named for that ancient father of western literature is worth noting, as it is his guidance she needs to access the island, the ways of survival there, and its secrets. He expressed discomfort when meeting her, and says “I’d expected a man, dunno why.”[115]

It thus becomes clear to the reader that Lou is stepping outside of her designated route, she is crossing some landmark that has been deemed appropriate for men, but not considered for women. The octagonal house on the island which she inhabits is also explicitly constructed not-for-her. Lou notices that whoever built it “had not consulted his woman.”[116] Indeed, Lou often feels like an imposter. She is prone, the narrative tells us, to crises of faith. The faith is faith in herself, faith in her right to exist. It takes the shape of denying her own right to claim: “who the hell do you think you are,” her inner voice asks her, “having the nerve to be here?”[117] The “here” does not refer to the north but to all the spaces she moves within, and her only answer is that she is performing an act of service by ordering others’ lives.[118] Later, she feels empty and angry: “a woman who understood nothing, who had no use, no function.”[119]

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[112] M. Atwood, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie: Poems*. Oxford Univ. Press, 1970, 62.

[113] Medovarski, 63.

[114] Engel, 115.

[115] Engel, 16.

[116] Engel, 42.

[117] Engel, 68.

[118] Engel, 69.

[119] Engel, 106.

Both Daphne and Lou engage those most central aspects of the Canadian imagination, but it is clear that they are not for whom the myth of the pioneer is made. The woman, or the racialised subject, holds a peripheral position in the national discourse of belonging in Canada which is so tightly wound up with a right to move. For these protagonists to re-articulate themselves, to claim a version of ’here’ that will allow them a material, engendered existence, they must do more.

## 5. Articulating national belonging

Daphne and Lou both begin in a state of un-belonging expressed as a failure to embody and articulate identity. They are attempting throughout their narratives to make themselves interior to a national discourse; to belong. Through reading the novels, I have identified what I believe are three central terms for how Lou and Dapne navigate possible ways to articulate belonging. These are: heritage, likeness, and alignment. All three are used by Sara Ahmed in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, but I take some freedom with the concepts, especially the term alignment which Ahmed discusses as an act done upon subjects – hate aligns bodies with or against other bodies.[120] I use the term alignment to include how subjects attempt to align themselves to others. While more or less successful, all three approaches result in failures of articulations of identity. Further, I consider what structural fallacies reveal themselves to the protagonists in their attempts to make themselves interior to existing structures, and how intensification of borders, both personal and national, are explored through a phenomenology of skin.

### 5.1 Heritage, likeness and alignment

In *Out of My Skin*, Daphne's relationship with heritage is dominated by a gaping, cognitive chasm. The temporal line of her family tree begins and ends with her. This is a problem she has attempted to solve by embracing it, see the passage: "she had been born from herself – it was a conviction that had sustained Daphne through childhood and adolescence, and up until recently".[121] It does not sustain her indefinitely, because she carries *likeness* which disrupts that imagination. When she looks in the mirror, she sees "[a] trace of Africa".[122] When she meets the First Nations woman Surefoot at the adoption agency, who is there for the same reason Daphne is – rediscovering origins – Surefoot tries to figure out what Daphne *is*, throwing denominations at her feet as if to see what sticks, saying she looks like she's from the "deep south", but also Indian, or Chinese.[123]

Ahmed writes that bodies come to a relationship of likeness by sharing characteristics as an effect of proximities in spaces: "'The familial' is after all about 'the familiar'", that which is implicitly known due to history and habits. We inherit, Ahmed says, a relation to place and to placement which is called "at home".[124] However, the proximities which have organised Daphne's likeness is the colonially constructed proximity of former British Guiana, now Guyana. The

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[120] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 48.

[121] McWatt, 7.

[122] McWatt, 5.

[123] McWatt, 14.

[124] Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness", 155.

reorganisation of the world by colonial intervention and the physical displacement of Daphne's body through adoption leads to the complex unorganised likeness of many places intruded onto her body, which then manifests as an intrusion in white spaces and a dislocation from 'here'.

When likeness appears for Daphne, it fails to place her in proximity to others, or "at home". The adoption agency she visits to find out her biological origins gives her a note with her biological aunt Sheila's phone number, and it appears to her to be "a direct line to her blood".[125] When she goes to see Sheila, who also lives in Montréal, it is described as a movement *homeward*.[126] However, when Sheila tells her about Guyana: its places, the names of its locations, Daphne feels no connection to it. She has the same sort of mouth as Sheila, but likeness is not enough. "Something was missing", she thinks. Similarly, when she looks at a picture of her mother, she recognises her arms but feels no emotional connection. She can see the signifiers of heritage but the significant is out of reach: her mother's name becomes just a word.[127]

The diaries of her grandfather, Gerald, that her aunt Sheila gives her, on the other hand, gives her affective, physical responses which call embodied existence into being. The first time she opens them blood rushes to her face, "blood that felt shared for the first time in her life."[128] This physical reaction continues in her reading.

> The words were like dust settling on her chest, covering her in desperation. Daphne put the journal down and lay still on the couch. She had been walking in the mind of a related stranger, his pain running along her shoulders and down her spine. […] Her thoughts were stifled under the repetition – *not like this, not like this* – and by the smells evoked by the handwriting.[129]

This likeness, while affective, evoke negative responses. Discovering likeness with her grandfather is traumatising to Daphne, because she has no sense of self which can sustain her as she delves into the first-hand account of someone-like-her slowly disintegrating under the cruel treatment of the facility he is in, described at one point as the "eradication of memory. The annihilation of personality."[130]

Daphne becomes "infected" with him[131] and as she does the crack inside her grows wider. The likeness is not only cognitive but corporeal as well: just as Daphne resents the intrusion of her nose

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[125] McWatt, 61.

[126] McWatt, 76.

[127] McWatt, 80.

[128] McWatt, 84.

[129] McWatt, 96-97.

[130] McWatt, 127.

[131] McWatt, 141.

on her face, her grandfather Gerald describes his nose as "grossly out of proportion."[132] Further, Sheila solidifies this likeness when she tells Daphne that she looks like her father. The reveal it comes with, that Daphne is the product of violence and incest – that her grandfather is also her father – results in a moment of breaking within Daphne. Finally, she has discovered a connection to her past, but it is in not a comforting one. The likeness she has inherited is perverse by faulty proximity. Her family tree, on which she has been unable to structure herself relationally, has had its branches corrupted. "There seemed no spot she could claim for herself, no offshoot to which she could be grafted, to close the gaping hole in her reality once and for all. So many disrupted nests."[133]

Ahmed's *Phenomenology of Whiteness* is written to tend to the complications and violences racialised bodies encounter in their movements through a colonialist world. However, nowhere else can such a successfully theorised language of belonging as a bodily experience be found. Therefore, I will apply the terms Ahmed uses – likeness, heritage, and alignment – in my analysis of Bear. The experiences Lou has are not the same as those of Daphne, nor do I aim to decouple Ahmed's work from violent realities. Instead, I aim to point to how endlessly useful these terms are as keys to understanding how the social and the personal, the cognitive and the corporeal, intersect. Likeness as a *result* of proximities in spaces takes on near-literal proportions in *Bear*. In the beginning of the novel, Lou's body is organised primarily in relation to material manifestations of history: bodies of texts and representations of spaces (maps) which shatter when they are opened. In proximity with these, Lou actively takes on likeness; her body becomes grained with "old, old ink":[134] a striking image of Lou's ennui and the shallowness of her grasp on the real, the *here* and *now*.

On the island, Lou approaches likeness as a result of proximity such that proximity gaps temporal distance. She imagines that by inhabiting the space of the Island that holds the Cary Estate, she is descendant from the great pioneers who inhabited it before her. However, this likeness is not found, but constructed. She imagines that if she can make sense of this place, she can belong there. If she can go through "the imperious business of imposing numerical order on a structure devised internally and personally by a mind her numbers would teach her to discover,"[135] if she can *understand*, she will belong. Looking out through Colonel Cary's window, "she was Cary

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[132] McWatt, 94.

[133] McWatt, 196.

[134] Engel, 2.

[135] Engel, 29.

advancing boldly on the new world, *Atala* under one arm, *Oroonoko* and the handbooks of Capability Brown under the other."[136] These are, she imagines, her people.[137]

As she slowly discovers the island, she articulates her engagement of the space through historical inheritance: everywhere she sees the traces of England, the intellectual and cultural gifts that the pioneer carried with him from England. The furniture has been painstakingly imported and carried up the river, so that the house can be properly interiorised with the settler-taste: bow-legged Victorian tables only big enough to hold a bible.[138] In the library where she spends most of her time, she is "presented with a sharp and perhaps typical early nineteenth-century mind: encyclopaedias, British and Greek history, Voltaire, Rousseau […] the more practical philosophers, sets and sets of novelists."[139] Further, the library has been updated by descendants, tracing the development of intellectual and cultural dispositions, including "those credits to womankind".[140] Even when she is informed that a real, live bear lives on the premises, it strikes her as "joyfully Elizabethan and exotic". Lord Byron, after all, had kept a bear.[141]

However, likeness is linked to that which is known not intellectually but corporeally. When Lou imagines herself an inheritor, she *aligns* herself with the Cary's. Alignment is similar to likeness, in that it situates bodies relationally, but where likeness is a production of proximity, alignment is an action. Through it, Lou's body becomes a signifier in itself. In the library she is but once removed from Cary, an "inheritor".[142], working the garden she is a "colonial civil servant's wife",[143] looking out over the water she is a cartoon sailor.[144] Lou is not acting out belonging, she is acting out a narrative of belonging through language and images she has inherited, but inherited intellectually, not bodily. Inhabiting the space is not wholly unsuccessful, however: Homer grants her access to some of the island's secrets as a result of it. The narrative tells us: "his acceptance of her gave her a feeling she was not a tourist, not one to be scorned."[145] Here, Lou's performance of belonging has been *recognised* as belonging, despite those gendered factors which originally

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[136] Engel, 40.

[137] Engel, 41.

[138] Engel, 86.

[139] Engel, 26.

[140] Engel, 31.

[141] Engel, 18.

[142] Engel, 45.

[143] Engel, 58.

[144] Engel, 35.

[145] Engel, 61.

disallowed it. “It amused her to think she had passed some kind of test without knowing it. She wondered what she’d have had to do to fail.”[146]

The shortcomings of her vocabulary become clear as she tries to make sense of the bear. His presence in this space resist the structures of understanding that Lou has built for herself. When she first encounters him, she searches the word *bear* in her mind, tracing meaning-associations outward. What she encounters are such representations of bears the metropolitan individual may encounter, and they are all wrong: “not a toy bear, not a Pooh bear, to an airlines Koala bear. A real bear.”[147] He resists all mediations. Later, she tries to make sense of him through the space of the island, through who he might have been to Cary, even experiments with naming him Trelawney after the pirate giant of a man who burned Percy Shelley’s body but saved the heart.[148] This also fails. In Lou’s journey from the Institute, a space filled with signifiers of the real, to this Victorian house, a materialisation of “colonial pretentiousness” from “the sort of American we were all warned about”[149] the spaces of Lou’s life has been understood through mediations of meaning. Everyone, she thinks, has to at some point “decide whether he is a Platonist or not,”[150] and now it's her turn.

When Homer tells her the story of the last of the Cary’s to inhabit the island, the female Colonel Jocelyn Cary, he proffers what she has been struggling for in her work: a *character.* Colonel Jocelyn, according to Homer, was “an imitation man, but a damned good one.”[151] He describes her as made for the space Lou is trying to belong to, embodying the English gentlewoman when necessary but utterly capable of survival in rough Canadian winters: “that’s tough work, cold work, you got to be part Indian to put up with it, but she did it.”[152] Lou'd failure to make sense of the bear and to belong to this space is thus thrown into sharp relief through *difference*. The bear is other than her, and Colonel Jocelyn is unlike her. Hearing this, Lou is thrown into her “crisis of faith", which expresses itself through a need and inability to *restructure*. While understanding that her archival work requires periods of redefinition and reorganisation, she suffers when such periods occur as they are accompanied by existential terror.[153] When her structure of understanding begins to fail her, it requires the work of re-construction. The only way Lou can conceptualise this is

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[146] Engel, 61.

[147] Engel, 22.

[148] Engel, 103.

[149] Engel, 35.

[150] Engel, 22.

[151] Engel, 67.

[152] Engel, 65.

[153] Engel, 68.

through her function on the island, but what is simultaneously occurring is a need to restructure her understanding of herself, relative to the discourse of national identity. “Who the hell do you think you are, attempting to be alive?”[154]

Lou justifies her right to exist by her providing a service, having a function. When all else fails, she goes to the books, but the books will not help her anymore. “[S]urely an annotated *Roughing it in the Bush* or a journal”[155] she thinks, will validate her right to occupy these spaces, but there is no sense to make of it. “She felt like some French novelist who, having discarded plot and character, was left to build an abstract structure, and was too tradition-bound to do so.”[156] Lou is a skilful interpreter, and a master of abstraction. On the bear’s face, she can paint any expression she wishes, even her own, but belonging does not function through mediation; identity does not stop with stretches of language, it involves gesture, movement, and recognition. It’s a *construction*,[157] and Lou has not done the work. The falseness of Lou’s ability to grant herself belonging has revealed itself through the story of Colonel Jocelyn who, like Surefoot for Daphne, *performs* belonging. She begins to understand the bear:

> She was wrong: this was no parasitical collection of memoirs, this was no pirate, this was an enormous living creature larger and older and wiser than time, a creature that was for the moment her creature, but that another could return to his own world, his own wisdom.[158]

Alignment is an attempt to make oneself interior to a discourse one has voyeuristic understanding of. Lou throws herself into this practise, to not have to be left alone as subject, but Daphne struggles with it. When asked to express belonging, she has no vocabulary for “what she is”. Yuval-Davies writes that when multiculturalist strategies construct minority groups, they assume collectivity boundaries that are “fixed, static, ahistorical and essentialist.”[159] Daphne is called to stand in for a collective, perceived as containing some essentialist characteristic of a group[160] but when she is turned inwards, she encounters a gaping crack where that group, the proof of belonging, should be: she has no connection to the unnamed group, and so her body is utterly

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[154] Engel, 69.

[155] Engel, 109.

[156] Engel, 68-71.

[157] Laclau, 30.

[158] Engel, 103.

[159] Yuval-Davies, 57-58.

[160] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 55.

othered from her conception of self. This confusion is verbalised to Surefoot, who she asks: “Did you always feel like an Indian? Like one of them, even when you didn’t know where to look?”[161]

When she is a child her adopted mother attempts to enforce alignment by attempting to fit Daphne’s body into her idea of how to exist in the world by tackling her hair. When this fails, she approximates Daphne’s bodily orientation by giving her own hair a perm.[162] Such previous failures of alignment explains Daphne’s surprise when Michel, a man she meets and has a flirtation with in the book, appears to have “aligned himself with her effortlessly.”[163] The reason Michel can do this, I argue, is that what they share is not likeness or lack of likeness, they share a history of proximity: they have lived similar lives. He digs into her habits and movements “with archeological skill she was unable to sidestep.”[164] Were this the solution to belonging, *Out of My Skin* would be a shorter book, but Daphne finds no comfort in this alignment. Her comfort, similar to Lou’s, is in the space of mediation. While Lou extracts meaning through reference, shown in her painting of emotions and thoughts onto the bear’s face, and her experience of likeness expressed through images (the colonial’s wife, the cartoon sailor), Daphne embraces alignment only when it is referential, simplified.

As a child, post the opening of the cognitive chasm of those fateful words “who are you *really?*”, Daphne takes performances of identity to their extreme through imitation. The identities she imitates are, however, mediated through representation. She attempts to be an Arthurian knight and a Chinese concubine, and an Indian. She studies not only their images but attempts to emulate their mannerisms, perform identity and engage in the discourse as that identity explicitly in ways that will allow her to be recognised as belonging.[165] As a Chinese concubine she binds her feet, but her excitement when she discovers Indians results in fallacy. It begins when she hears a story about the spider ’Nansi, referring to the trickster God Anansi, from a man her mother guesses is West Indian. Her quest for belonging takes a detour, because in her research “she had forgotten the qualifier: West.” Instead, she wears saris and says words she has found associated with Indians over and over, “like a mantra.”[166] These performances show an astute understanding of the discourses of belonging, but it is wound tightly with the limited understanding of the complexities of cultural and

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[161] McWatt, 98.

[162] McWatt, 161.

[163] McWatt, 184.

[164] McWatt, 89.

[165] McWatt, 21.

[166] McWatt, 20.

racial identity of a child whose exposure to these things are colonially manifested texts rather than bodies: she will not be able to trick her way into recognition.

Just as language fails Lou, it also fails Daphne. She experiences words as conspiring against her, leading her along paths with no conclusion. Often she lingers on them, making associations to try to follow along the gossamer strings of meaning-connection to some sort of truth. "Guard snake. Garter snake. Guard-er-snake."[167]; "Loon, loon, what tune, tune…"[168]; "words flew up like fragments of a secret message."[169] Daphne has an intuitive understanding of the functions of the discursive structure, its elements, moments and nodal points. She recognises that language is always a code which must be interpreted, and that identities are linguistic. She compares her biological mother's mixed heritage, yellow, white, black to a game of stone, paper, scissors in which there can only be one winner.[170] The right denominator is, her aunt Sheila tells her, as important in this country as "the right papers"[171] but even when she gets it, West-Indian Canadian, she does not belong. It is a signifier but she does not recognise herself as the signified, she is floating still in the mythical space of representation, un-articulated. "Words hide truth" Sheila says, "like fat hides bones."[172] The discursive approach doesn't arrive at embodiedness, which is why Daphne has to, finally, subject herself to the bush.

### 5.2 The structural fallacy of narratives

Just as Northrop Frye wrote that literature is conscious mythology, Beecroft agrees that national consciousness is constructed partially through the engagement of texts which can be gathered as representing the interiority of the nation. These myths provide justification for the discourse of the nation. In Laclau's vocabulary, *myth* is the space of representation where a subject is granted ability to suture the distance between the structure – what is already inherently accepted as part of the conception of national identity – and the potentiality of the other, that which may be invited into the space of the accepted. In this way, narratives can become a place in which to find justification for difference: they can function as sites of inscriptions of self. Lou is an archivist by nature, made for the logical ordering of facts according to objective systems. Further, she understands herself through narratives she knows, even as she derives pleasure from potentially going *beyond* them,

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[167] McWatt, 2.

[168] McWatt, 29.

[169] McWatt, 102.

[170] McWatt, 15.

[171] McWatt, 81.

[172] McWatt, 82.

thinking “a woman rubbing her feet in the thick black pelt of a bear was more than they could have imagined.”[173]

For Daphne, the only comfort from the cognitive chasm are stories. Her habit is to read first the beginning line of a book, and then immediately the end:[174] creating bookends to the story, so she may never feel lost in the uncertainty of the middle. However, her interactions with these narratives prove continuously false, for she is looking for the easily digestible, the narrative which is structurally sound and which does not, in Ahmed’s words, threaten. This reluctance to engage the complicated, the resistant, is clear when she watches the negotiations at the Mercier bridge: “Daphne found it difficult to watch. It was far removed – a circus, a fantasy.” It is, in fact, the furthest from fantasy that fiction gets: a representation of a historical event. “These weren’t the Indians she knew” the narrative tells us and Daphne flees confrontation with this *real* by turning to a descriptions of ’Indians’ by a colonialist ripe with racist characteristics. “She was stepping around the crack, comforted by the second-hand tale of a sixteenth-century Indian. […] The familiarity of the image massaged her.”[175]

It is natural that Daphne, longing for chronological depth of personal history, purviews the texts which helped construct the national literature, and thus the national consciousness, of Canada. The literary inheritance of Britain surfaces in *Out of My Skin* with the example of *Jane Eyre*. The adoption agency tells her that her biological mother’s last name is Eyre – denoting both “heir” as in inheritance and the long-lasting wish Daphne has of having been born of the wind.[176] Knowing this, she goes to a bookstore and picks up *Jane Eyre*, hoping to find herself in its pages. It looks promising: Jane finds her way out of the redroom with “words ... like keys that gradually unshackled…”; Jane confronts the elements on the moors and journeys into the dangerous unknown, moving like a pioneer and finding home. When Rochester reads the story of Jane in her physiology, Daphne finds comfort that perhaps her nature too, fits with her bodily expression. To her distress, however, Daphne finds that she has more in common with the mad woman in the attic than with Jane. Where Lou may have seen herself in the woman stepping into the world, Daphne is not allowed this alignment. When the “locked-up first woman” appears, her physiology that of *thick and dark hair*, Daphne is “jolted out of England”[177] and back into her own body, not-at-home.

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[173] Engel, 45.

[174] McWatt, 33.

[175] McWatt, 70.

[176] McWatt, 6.

[177] McWatt, 63.

These narrative structures rely on the same colonialism which has placed Daphne in her dislocated state. More fruitful were her earlier attempts, her imaginings of being born of a great mythical past.[178] Specifically, she fixates on the myth of Daphne as told by Ovid. Mythological Daphne, chased by the god Apollo, exacts her final escape by turning into a laurel tree, her "feet taking root in the earth", becoming inviolable.[179] For Daphne, escape is linked immediately to being allowed to stay in place – out of reach from hands which trespass on a body she does not understand. Another mythological origin Daphne imagines is that of Aphrodite, told by Homer to be born on the west wind. This is a mantra Daphne has for herself, when her fragile hold onto the world slackens through others' gestures of belonging or through the uncovering of her own past, she tells herself: "the breath of the west wind bore her."[180]

Through these myths, the way her body manifests is allowed validation. "In all of it, Daphne had been able to place her own marginal beauty."[181] Her intrusive, fleshy nose is an Achilles heel, not a flaw but a feature rich with irony because those gods were made in the image of humans. Daphne is made myth in the Laclauan sense, through her dislocation from the discourse, but also through activating mythology as a place on which to project characteristics in order to inscribe meaning. When national discourse fails to constitute her fully, she engages the mythological inheritance of the western world as a space on which to ascribe meaning. It, at least temporarily, sutures the distance between her and the national discourse: it is a shared past. In the end of the novel, when Daphne enacts her foray into the bush, she does not discard this mythological inheritance. It remains a place onto which she can project herself.[182]

Lou relies heavily the story of the pioneer: the Victorian Englishman embraced by the bush. However, this is a narrative that is unraveling throughout *Bear*. Lou's initial belief in its mythos turns sour and fails her. It becomes clear during her crisis of faith, when she loses faith not only in herself but in structural truths as inherent and natural. She is beginning to see those places in the discourse that are so conventionalised as to be considered natural, and expose their weaknesses:

> You could take any life and shuffle it on cards, [Lou] thought bitterly, lay it out in a pyramid solitaire, and it would have a kind of meaning; but you could never make a file card that said, "Cambell, Homer" convey any of the meaning that Homer had conveyed tonight. [Through the story of Colonel Jocelyn] She would soon have to admit that up here she was term serving, putting in time until she died. Colonel Cary was surely one of

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[178] McWatt, ex. 5, 27.

[179] McWatt, 28.

[180] McWatt, ex. 8, 36, 90, 97.

[181] McWatt, 22.

[182] McWatt, 201.

> the great irrelevancies of Canadian history and she was another. Neither of them was connected to anything.[183]

Lou's occupation of the north is a disintegration of those belief systems with which she is familiar. The bear becomes a manifestation of that disintegration through his unapologetic materialism. He ruptures her ideas of separation of spaces by walking up the staircases in the house, moving into the library. The library, while reflecting excellently the sort of minds that have inhabited it, also contains fractured pieces that resist organisation. Throughout Lou's exploration of it, she continually finds handwritten notes placed in the books. The handwriting is Colonel Cary's, but Lou cannot figure out why they are placed as they are – though she files them dutifully. While they all concern bears, there seems to be no inherent logic to them. They consider the folklore, traditions and mythologies of a variety of cultures, all with contradicting ideas of the role and function of the bear, but also note the factual consistencies of the animal. One describes the Finnish myth of the offspring between a woman and a bear, another simply describes the latin name and expected lifespan of the animal.[184] The notes go so far as to disrupt the narrative, manifesting on the page without commentary or narrative cushioning, appearing to the reader as inexplicably as they appear to Lou.

According to Paul Barrett, in his essay *Animal Tracks in the Margins* which studies Engel's *Bear*, Engel's writing of the bear disallows Lou access to him. Instead, the narrative insists on "the unknowable dimension of Bear's subjectivity within the text" performed for the reader not least through "the failure of Lou's language to fully account for his animal presence."[185] Whereas Barrett suggests against reading the bear as animals in fiction usually are: an absent referent whose function in the narrative is a symbolic one, in which the bear becomes a medium through which Lou can "make her psychic journey through the wilderness"[186] I must argue that the bear's unknowable dimension, and the subjective animal presence from which she is too removed to discursively order into sense, are instrumental to her final understanding of discursive structures as places not filled with constituted identities, but failed identities. Cary's notes on bears show that Lou is not the first to attempt to ascribe such a creature with meaning beyond what he is: "Bear. There."[187] Nothing discursive, nothing constructed or semiotic, can explain his presence.

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[183] Engel, 69.

[184] Engel, 31, 39.

[185] Barrett, "Animal Tracks in the Margin", 140.

[186] Barrett, "Animal Tracks in the Margin", 125.

[187] Engel, 22.

### 5.3 The border between self and other: bodies, skin, and wounds

Ahmed tells us that it is in our encounters with others that our sense of self is activated. Were we to remain un-impressed upon by an outside, we would float unaware that the border exists. However, as Laclau and Mouffe explain, there is no remaining in an un-impressed upon state, as the other is constitutive to the self: the subject (or agent of discourse) is defined relationally to the structure (the discourse), not in addition to or separation from it. The encounters Lou and Daphne have with others activate the complexities of borders of self, specifically the function of *skin* as a container of self, and as an impressionable surface which mediates between inside and outside.

Daphne's dislocation manifests not only cognitively but corporeally: she is uncomfortable in her skin, her body seemingly shrinking away from her,[188] or protruding where it should not. Her body has never mapped onto her: "She had learned the biology of it all, *but the map is not the territory.*"[189] Her body makes sense, but only when mediated: she understands it as a map, a representation of physicality, but has no claim to the territory itself. Daphne considers the body as armour which protects something far more delicate inside, but hers surprises and betrays her, not least by not being a dependable border, and springing leaks.[190]

To understand her body, she attempts engaging levels of mediation. She works at a copying place, and left to her own devices she performs fascinating acts of making herself material by taking copies of parts of her own body and changing their proportions. At one point, she takes a poem from the pages of her grandfather's journals, copies and re-copies it, enlarging it in a tactile, literal play with meaning. Then, once the word *chameleon* in the poem has been enlarged to "almost the size of the thing itself"[191] she cuts it into the shape of *the thing itself*, blurring the line between signifier and signified, and tapes it onto her skin. The chameleon is something ever-changing, ultimately adaptable, as well as something which attempts but does not quite succeed it performing invisibility. Daphne attempts, by approximation and tactility, to inscribe her own skin with a feature of changeability. The chameleon stays on her skin until she journeys into the bush, at which point she does not notice when it falls off.[192]

This feature of skin, it's malleability, is in *Bear* primarily expressed through smell. The narrative tells us that Lou once knew a man who told her that it was impossible, these days, to find a

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[188] Ahmed, 7.

[189] McWatt, 60.

[190] McWatt, 60.

[191] McWatt, 179.

[192] McWatt, 191.

woman who smells of "her own self."[193] At the institute, the Director shrinks away from her "smell of mothballs". Homer, near the end of the story, when she has gone far in her physical relationship with the bear, remarks that "you stink of bear."[194] When Lou reaches, finally, an embodied sense of self, we are told that "she felt not that she was at last human, but that she was at last *clean*."[195]

Both Daphne and Lou experience envy in encounters with others who appear as iterations of belonging. For Daphne this is Surefoot, who is defined in the narrative by an excess of skin. "Belonging," she teaches Daphne, "is what you give yourself."[196] Daphne expresses a desire to fold herself into the folds upon folds of Surefoot's skin: "the excess was disconcerting, even repulsive, yet Daphne was drawn to it"[197] and "imagined burying herself in folds of flesh".[198] Similarly, when Lou encounters the bear, his border of self is so thick as to become mythicised. "His skin was loose on his back and his fur was thick, thick, thick"[199] to the point where she can "lose half a hand in it"[200] and when she explores it, she finds that it has "depths and depths, layers and layers."[201] This experience of depth shows how fully the bear inhabits his own body; his skin runs no risk of muddling or springing leaks. "Put your arms around me," she begs him, "enclose me […] make me comfortable in the world at last. Give me your skin."[202]

Disappearing into an other is, ultimately a failed endeavour. For that, skin as a border is far too rigid. Lou learns this from the bear. "There was a depth in him she could not reach, could not probe and with her intellectual fingers destroy."[203] Daphne is shown this not least in how she thinks about her ex from Toronto, Jeremy. "Once she had been intent of dissolving into him […] but the more she became him, the more he disappointed her. […] After that she had slowly retreated, finding everything lacking."[204] Attempting to disappear the border of skin, to unmake the

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[193] Engel, 8.

[194] Engel, 110.

[195] Engel, 117.

[196] McWatt, 98.

[197] McWatt, 13.

[198] McWatt, 15.

[199] Engel, 42.

[200] Engel, 56.

[201] Engel, 44.

[202] Engel, 96.

[203] Engel, 102.

[204] McWatt, 86.

antagonistic space between themselves and what has ruptured them, is impossible. It must be tended to, *as* a border.

Bodies move away from what is painful, and movement away from the imagined or material object one feels is the cause of pain functions simultaneously as a movement towards/into oneself which creates the desire to re-establish the border.[205] The solution to discursive injury is not, however, sealing the skin. Instead, one must accept the impossibility of the skin regaining its state of "unharmed". Ahmed tells us that the only way to content with injuries to communities is by "recovering rather than forgetting the traumas of the past".[206] At a crucial moment on the Mercier bridge, this idea becomes manifest: Daphne watches Surefoot grab onto the edge of a scab covering a wound that extends over her entire elbow and "calmly, purposefully, tore off the dried blood and skin […] underneath the revealed pink flesh, blood welled up to pour again."[207] The wound to the collective skin of the community is exemplified in the wound on Surefoot. Pain is a "rendering present",[208] and when blood wells up on Surefoot's arm as she blocks the colonialist movement of a constructed nationalist force from claiming land they have no right to, the wound dealt to the first nation's people is de-fetishized, it reoccurs in the discourse as present: the result of violence that includes bodies acting on other bodies.

Daphne considers her past a cause of pain and injury which seizes her back into her body, and attempts to retreat from it but cannot. Pain demands that one attends to embodied experience, and thus attaches *this* body to a world of other bodies. Until Daphne attends the pain of her past, she will float in the space of representation, lacking ground. Lou's attempts to unmake herself by engaging with the bear result in a literal wound, the bear injuring her and in that moment seizing her into her body. When he splits her skin open, her body rather than her mind is made the site of her psychological stress. Lou and Daphne struggle throughout their respective novels to suture the mythological space of representation they have been cast into, to find a way through it which sutures difference and allows them interiority into the body of the nation. The discourse of national identity continually fails to give them the tools with which to do so. This begs the question: if sealing the discursive skin-border of the nation without exclusionary practices is impossible, how does one embody national belonging?

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[205] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 27.

[206] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 36.

[207] McWatt, 149.

[208] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 26.

## 6. The phenomenon of the return

The pioneer's journey culminates in a settling, a claiming of new land. A premiere way in which Daphne and Lou subvert this narrative is through the radical act of the *return*. *Out of My Skin* and *Bear* are resisting ideas of the structural integrity of discourses of national belonging through encouraging and engaging gaps. Below, I detail ways in which the protagonists resist normative conclusions, and how such a resistance is a conclusion itself.

### 6.1 The weakness of the octagon

Lou goes north with a fixed goal in mind, to find something "real" in Cary's library. This notion haunts her to the point of acting irrationally and attempting to copulate with the bear. When he slashes her back, she becomes wild with pain and shock and makes him get out of the house. He leaves, but shows no response to this outpouring of emotion. There is "nothing, nothing, in his face to tell her what to do."[209] The wound he causes her has been pivotal, a moment which the feverish tension of the summer has been leading to: an eruption which is followed by stillness and autumn. When she looks at the wound in the mirror, she claims it: "I shall keep that, she thought. And it is not the mark of Cain."[210] After this, Lou continues to spend time with the bear, but she has contended with his unreachability. The Platonic idea of the bear no longer bothers her. He is simply a nodal point around which meanings gather, meanings which are fluid and changeable, open for re-interpretation. "Really," she thinks, considering what she has done and attempted to do with him: "really."

In the wake of the injury, Lou's body manifests differently, lacking its "sedentary fat".[211] Pain has placed her in her body, and it is a:

> [S]weet pain that belonged not to mental suffering, but to the earth. She smelled moss and clean northern flowers. Her skin was solid and the air around her velvet. The pebbles in the night water gleamed with a beauty that was their own value, not a jeweller's.[212]

The *here* and *now* of her corporeal existence manifests itself not painlessly, but utterly – the need for mediation disappears. The value of things are not in use or function, as that of a jewellers use of stones, but in their existence.

Lou conducts her return from the bush by leaving the island, heading back to Toronto. It is not, however, because she had found what she's looking for. She has not discovered a character in

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[209] Engel, 113.

[210] Engel, 115.

[211] Engel, 115.

[212] Engel, 117.

Colonel Cary, nor uncovered the history of the region in his library. The house, instead, has lost all the depths and mysteries of a symbol: it contains no multitudes. It is a fine house, but has no secrets; is not an answer but an "entity."[213] History has lost its mythical dimension and shown itself for the construction it is, a work of fiction with its own agendas of inscribing meaning. Lou believed in the beginning of the novel that she would not have to admit that she had been intended for something greater than a mole, an antelope, but in the north she realises that even here, a grand narrative may not be possible. "Fishwives. Fishwidows. And we all set out to be mermaids."[214]

The house, Hair writes, is an octagon because it is a "symbol of unity and perfection (though it was not perfection itself), and was thought of as showing the way toward the integration of all things."[215] It is an attempted integration of the angles of rigid meaning-affixations of signs and the circular movement of the metaphorical space where connections can be made whenever and wherever: where the bear can stand like a man.[216] It has a library which "purported to reconcile Genesis and *The Origin of Species*"[217] and contains Cary's notes on bears. What had fascinated Lou begins to make her uncomfortable.

> She did not like the parlour. It was full of wrong-angled, unlivable corners, the weakness of the octagon. The furniture was square and sat ill and off-centred. Every time she went into the room, it imprinted on her the conventional rectangle and nagged.[218]

The octagon, the constitution of something which is *both*, is a failure. In the end, the house has nothing to say. When it speaks, it speaks only of a family "who feared more than anything being lost to history."[219] This fear is precisely what drove Lou north, and what drove the original Colonel Cary north. The pioneer's journey is framed by *Bear* as a relentless search for something solid, something with meaning association, but ultimately a new 'here' which is much like the old one. Cary's is an "island kingdom, safely hedged by books".[220]

> With their fine tables and velvet pelmets and pier-glasses the English wives had proclaimed their aristocracy among these Indian summer islands.
>
> Much good it did them, she thought, perishing in the wilderness.[221]

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[213] Engel, 118.

[214] Engel, 89.

[215] Hair, 36.

[216] Engel, 97.

[217] Engel, 54.

[218] Engel, 91.

[219] Engel, 118.

[220] Engel, 78.

[221] Engel, 120.

The pioneers have perished in the wilderness, clinging to victorian sensibilities. Lou has attempted to fit herself into the narrative of national history, into the heritage of British colonialism, but it has given her nothing. She knows, from her years in the basement office, that she does not like herself when she is stained by ink. She plans to quit,[222] and thus rejects the Institute, which stands in for that idea of materialistic, unembodied history. Dislocation is meant to open up for the possibility of repositioning around nodal points. This repositioning, Laclau assents, is not final but immediately re-enters a space for interpretation and engagement. Lou does not position herself discursively in any one manner: she wraps up and takes books for her own consideration which belong legally to the Institute, but she leaves those notes which she considers belonging to her, or the Bear, or God, or Cary, to them, carefully organised and notarised; she moves back towards the space of cities and gas fumes but she is accompanied by the mythological dimension in the image of the Great Bear above her.[223]

"Time to move along,"[224] she says to Homer; move along, rather than move on. After all, what Lou has learned is that it is not through clinging to anything that things happen. The pioneers who tried perished in the wilderness, the library is "a heresy against the real truth"[225] and the "only one who knew anything" was Colonel Jocelyn, because she has manifested beyond articulation: she knew how to skin a lynx.[226] Thus *Bear* enacts and rejects the pioneer-narrative which promises absolution through claim. These pioneers did not fashion belonging out of their claim to this stolen land, and neither can Lou. The journey through the bush has changed her, she has gone through an explicit rebirth, but it does not grant her *belonging*. What the claw has cleansed her from is the guilt of the absence of *a good life*, shown her the weakness of the myth of the pioneer. She turns home. There is no conclusion to the problem of national belonging, just an acknowledgement of what has happened and an assent to continue with the work of articulating and re-articulating.

### 6.2 Bansimande

Daphne's journey into the wilderness is prompted by her colleague imploring her, sick of Daphne's sidestepping, to "admit one thing, Daph, just one small thing. Take it and hold it and admit it's yours, and snap out of the reverie you're in."[227] Daphne leaves the lake house and the others and

[222] Engel, 121.

[223] Engel, 122.

[224] Engel, 121.

[225] Engel, 69.

[226] Engel, 120.

[227] McWatt, 197.

goes, alone, into the bush. Through this journey, she is "closing the crack of time"[228] and lays claim to all the dimensions of her fragmented identity: she hears her mother's voice in her ear, the hyena laugh of Rochester's first wife, the birdcalls. Suddenly, she can decode the shapes of the clouds which other children so easily decoded and she could not. Together, they form the shape of "Daphne, Gerald and the prodigal circus"[229] always moving, performing. Rather than allow them to stress her, however, she makes a choice to *resist* "the temptation to view her life through another story."[230]

This speaks to her continued understanding of the codes of language. While she can now read the coding of the sky, she rejects their importance. Here, she discovers movement, and it is not the restless movement she conducted in Montréal. She sits in the shallows of the lake and watches the fish: "Raising her arm, Daphne discovered she could control them, frighten them"[231] it reads, referring to the fish. Ahmed writes that "[i]f orientations are about how we begin from 'here', then they involve unfolding."[232] Daphne has discovered her body's ability to unfold, that through reaching out she is moving through a space which pushes against other bodies. This capability of impressing on others is a final equilibrium of not only being an object which is impressed upon. "What is reachable is determined precisely by orientations we have already taken. Or we could say that orientations are about the directions we take that put some things and not others in our reach"[233] Ahmed writes. Daphne has discovered where the agents of her origin went wrong: they tried to "reverse the currents of their circumstances."[234] Laclau writes that "the moment of reactivation cannot consist of a return to the origins, to the historic system of alternative possibilities that were discarded."[235] She will, instead, claim them and admit that they are hers – a direct opposite of when she first discovered the trauma of her origins, in which she tried to reject it: "he is not my father."[236]

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[228] McWatt, 206.

[229] McWatt, 201.

[230] McWatt, 203.

[231] McWatt, 199.

[232] Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness", 151.

[233] Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness", 152.

[234] McWatt, 202.

[235] Laclau, 34.

[236] McWatt, 170.

She decides to bury her grandfather's diaries. She claims the soil of Canada, described as "Crown's land"[237] by burying the seed of forgiveness[238] in it and by performatively encasing herself in it, caking her body in soil.[239] While she can now read codes she did not understand before, what she says when she buries the books is not any articulation of belonging. It's "*Bansimande*", a word Sheila has taught her which has no translation, no inherent meaning: it is a word for when there is no other word.[240] It, like Daphne, gains meaning in the spatiotemporal moments in which it is engaged. Garcia writes that identities "emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more a product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are a sign of an identical, naturally constituted unity."[241] When Daphne lets the fish shelter by her body, she accepts that she will "never crack the watery barrier of understanding that separates them."[242] Admitting this is an allowance of borders, and an acceptance that some codes will remain codes.

Lou lingers on the idea of "knowing something", in her moment of rebirth reflecting that she "knew what the world was for"[243] and expresses that valuable knowledge is not that which is historical or cognitive, but practical: how to skin a lynx. Ahmed writes that "'[d]oing things' depends not so much on intrinsic capacity, or even upon dispositions or habits, but on the ways in which the world is available as a space for action."[244] When Daphne feels ready to go home a similar materiality is called to. She encounters tracks in the dirt and does not recognise them. They seem large and heavy, unwavering and steadfast in their course, more like the steps of Surefoot than of Daphne Eyre. It is, of course, her own footprints she has encountered. Surefoot told her that "[a] wolf disappears into the woods, but on its way it leaves tracks in the snow, and this is the mark of its existence."[245] For the first time, Daphne has left trace, and her impressions on the earth is the proof of her ability to move within it. The narrative, despite consisting of language, has managed to express the weakness that language has in articulations of belonging: what counts is the space you inhabit and how you inhabit it. Surefoot will after her arrest at the protests be in her prison cell, still

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[237] McWatt, 194.

[238] McWatt, 203.

[239] McWatt, 204.

[240] McWatt, 203.

[241] Garcia, 64.

[242] McWatt, 200.

[243] Engel, 117.

[244] Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness", 153.

[245] McWatt, 99.

dripping belonging like blood,[246] and Daphne Eyre, or Daphne Baird, whose name engages the two extremes of a rooted tree and the moving wind, "planted her feet like a sturdy trunk into the moss" and listens to the wind.[247]

When Daphne exits the bush, what she returns to is not a place or a home: she returns to a moment of alignment, belonging as a spatial effect of proximity. She hitchhikes back and goes immediately to Michel at the market, which he has told her to do if she ever wants a job there, a job which is "dirty and cold […] very early work."[248] She, like Lou, has been reborn, but not into a moment of rest. The suturing of the fragments of her self emerges affectively as a splitting of skin. She holds Michel's gaze "for the first time", and the words come naturally, her voice small but firm:

"I'm here."

Slender words, but sharp as a deep cut exposing bone.[249]

The novel ends not with a healing, but an assertion that belonging is something which requires a lingering in moments of unknowability, and an act. If words hide truth like fat hides bone, the splitting open of the border between inside and out will reveal truth: identity is contingent, and occurs in practise, not language. Lou and Daphne enact the national literature in ways which allow for the space of re-articulation of meaning, insisting not that there is such a thing as an objective identity, but that we must realise its impossibility.

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[246] McWatt, 202.

[247] McWatt, 206.

[248] McWatt, 184.

[249] McWatt, 208.

## 7. Conclusion and discussion

This thesis set out to investigate in which ways the problem of the national dimension of belonging to a space surfaces in two iterations of the Canadian novel. The study was, of course, predated by both old and ongoing discussions in the Canadian literary field. My conclusion is that these two novels, separated by twenty years and different backgrounds, use markedly similar discursive techniques to come to a conclusion of impossibility – of materiality and contingency over definition. That this is explored in the novels primarily through engagements of and play with mediations is unsurprising, but poignant, since Frye identified the unquenchable desire of the Canadian subject to find themselves expressed in literature: inherently mediated.

Studying two iterations of the Canadian novel through discourse theory and the politics of emotions and pain has revealed not only the systems of national identity-making which lie behind conceptions of self, but also how the work of existing as a woman or person of colour requires constant re-engagement of moments of injury. The failure of the discourse of national identity to constitute embodied experiences of belonging for those identities it subsumes is an inherent weakness in attempts to resist complexity and plurality for the sake of comfort. Lou's journey exposes the weakness of articulating belonging through claiming foreign land as one's own. Daphne's further exposes the flaws in the discourse of inclusivity when it relies on subsuming difference as accidental aspects of a shared identity. Difference cannot be subsumed, it must be called into being.

Considering the nation as a body allows us to uncover the ways in which a perfect seal of containment is ruptured by contingency: the impossibility of an objective identity. The project of national identity attempts to seal a border around what it considers interior to it, expelling that which does not fit. However, as the fluidity of the discourse of CanLit has showed us, the agents of it insist on re-engaging that border, and the acts of injury complacent to it.

These novels both end with a *return,* a return which does simultaneous things. It is a return to the moment of colonial injury which cannot be ignored; a return to the moment of constituting fully realised identities as occurring in time, not defined but acted; a return to the moment of nation-making. This thesis has in no way exhausted the dense pools of meaning in either of these novels, which I believe will continue to stay relevant as the Canadian literary landscape attempts to make sense of itself. Their denseness provided a struggle in this analysis, as decisions needed to be made about what quotes, sections, and plots were crucial. I do not doubt another writer might have made other choices. The methodology used, a discursive study of the corporeal dimensions of identity, I argue is especially appropriate for the literature of Canada, but would be useful in the study of any national literature.

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