

**STAGING IDENTITY: THE CO-CONSTRUCTION OF WHITENESS AND
INDIANNESS IN THE DRAMA OF TOMSON HIGHWAY**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the construction of Indigenous peoples as Indians: as the degraded and dehumanised Other in relation to non-Indigenous peoples on this continent. It explores the operations of a White colonial manichean binary that simultaneously exalts and obscures Whiteness, while degrading and devaluing Indigenous identities. The operations of the manichean binary impose upon Indigenous peoples images that distort our perception of ourselves and foster racist stereotypes that encourage violence, both from within and from outside our communities, against us. The thesis argues that the hidden pole in the construction of Indianness is co-construction of Whiteness. In order for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to fully understand and overcome racist stereotypes, it is necessary to understand the role of Whiteness in the construction of Indigenous peoples as degraded Others. At the center of this thesis are Tompson Highway's two important plays: The Rez Sisters and Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing. While these plays have been criticized for promoting racist and sexist ideas and images, the thesis argues that the plays contain within them evidence to argue against and overcome such criticisms. An examination of the representations of Whiteness in the plays allows the critical reader/viewer an understanding of the social context in which the images of Indigenous identities are presented. The co-construction of Whiteness and Indianness, which is clearly explored in these plays, provides a context in which the images of Indigenous people can be understood as something other than stereotypical: as counter-hegemonic cultural productions that open up a space of resistance.

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Introduction: The Author and this Thesis

In a number of ways, my personal history raises many of the same issues raised in this thesis: Indigenous/ non-Indigenous relations; gender violence; colonization; degraded images of Indigenous identity that construct Indigenous people as *Indians*; the overcoming of fear, shame, confusion, and misunderstanding; and an attempt to achieve some balance in relations between interacting social identities. My personal history intersects in very real and very intimate ways with the subject of this thesis, and this has had an influence on the terminology I use, on the ways in which I use language. Therefore, prior to embarking upon a reading of this thesis, it is important for the reader that I identify myself, that I identify where my voice as an author is coming from, that I identify the construction of my voice in this text.

I was born in northern Manitoba, in 1967, the son of Elmer Lundy, a man of Irish/Norwegian descent, and Marguerite Kenney [nee Bighetty], a woman of Cree/Scots descent. My mother's mother, Caroline Bighetty, was an Indigenous woman from the community of Brochet, Manitoba, located north-west of Reindeer Lake. My mother was not recognized as a Status Indian under the terms of the Indian Act, since at the time, children born to Indigenous women and non-Indigenous men were not considered Status Indians. This policy was patriarchal because it discriminated against Indigenous women and their children, while non-Indigenous women were recognized as Status Indians if they married an Indigenous man. Furthermore, the children of such a union as the latter were also recognized as Status Indians. The policy was also racist since the intent and hope behind the policy were that over time there would be fewer

and fewer Status Indians to whom the Federal Government would have financial and treaty obligations. In the case of my immediate family history, the sexist and racist policy was having the desired effect since my mother, and hence I and my siblings, were not recognized as Status Indians at the times of our births.

When I was three years old, in 1970, my father left my mother and took me with him. At my father's insistence, I was separated from my mother and my sisters and brothers for the next twenty-plus years and had no contact with them during that time. I was raised by my father, in close proximity to much of his family, in Hudson Bay, Saskatchewan, and my mother and siblings were topics which were simply not open for discussion. In other words, I was raised in ignorance of my Indigenous heritage. However, my dark eyes, hair, and skin color relative to those of my father and his family made it clear to everyone that I was different. As with most children, I did not want to be recognizably different; I simply wanted to fit in. As such, whenever my physical differences led others to single me out, it was an embarrassing and painful experience.

My physical characteristics also identified me as different from most of the other people in the community. There was a small number of other Indigenous students in school, most of whom came from a small community, called Reserve, south of Hudson Bay. However, these students never quite seemed to fit in, and, looking back, I am not surprised that most of them had dropped out of school, and, by Grade 8 or 9. At the time, I had no understanding of the circumstances for the seeming *disappearance* of

these students. While I do not remember overt racism toward the Indigenous students from Reserve, they were marked as different by physical characteristics; by economic indicators such as clothing; often by their speech patterns; and by geography, since they were from a tiny community, hidden in the bush. In other words, they were socially and economically marginal in relation to the community I lived in. Without an understanding of how or why they were different, I saw these students through my own colonized vision. I saw them as dark—usually darker than me—poor, dirty, and somehow vaguely threatening. Rather than identifying with these Indigenous students, I saw them from a thoroughly colonized perspective and had little to do with them. When I looked at these students, I saw my own difference reflected back to me, a difference of which I had little understanding or knowledge, and I wanted nothing to do with being different; I was still struggling with my own desire to fit in and ignorant of my past.

I remember a particular incident from my childhood that, on the surface, seems rather insignificant but that wounded me deeply. One day on the playground at school, I became engaged in a verbal sparring match with one of my classmates. As the bell rang summoning us back into the school, she shouted at me: "At least my parents didn't abandon me to be raised by strangers." I can still feel the effect of acidic tone in her voice. I found her comment deeply troubling and beyond my understanding. However, I was somehow aware that the comment had to be related to the facts of my eye, hair, and skin colors, which identified me as different from my father and his family. I was deeply hurt, embarrassed, and confused by this comment because it cut to the heart of

my own ignorance about who I was and where I had come from. In spite of my feelings, I told no one about what had been said. I never forgot the incident, or the pain it caused me, and never fully understood it until years later.

I moved to Saskatoon to attend university in 1987; my father died in 1990; and in the spring of 1992 my phone rang; it was my sister Dorothy. After 22 years the silence was broken. A few weeks later, my mom worked up enough courage to call me, and my life was irrevocably changed. After these events, I remember talking with a friend whom I had met when I first came to Hudson Bay in 1976. He had been my friend for approximately 20 years when the conversation took place. I told him that my sister and mother had contacted me, and that, suddenly and unexpectedly, I was back in touch with my mom and brothers and sisters, whom I had never known. After listening to this, he asked a question that stunned me; he asked if I had ever found out who my real father was. I was stunned because I had been raised by my father, and here I was listening to someone who had known me for twenty years asking who my real father was. Suddenly, that comment I had heard on the playground years before made complete sense. Although no one had ever said anything to me, other than that one time, it was obvious that some of my peers had always assumed that since I looked different than my father and his family, I couldn't possibly be one of them!

Recently, a friend suggested to me that, in some ways, I had grown up as if I were adopted, and it seems some of my childhood peers had assumed that was the case. I think there is some truth in my friend's statement. I grew up in ignorance of half of my family history, and with the shame and confusion that caused; certain physical characteristics set me apart from my father and his family and made people suspect I

was not really who I seemed to be; and many years later I was reunited with my mother and my siblings. In some ways, I have journeyed a path similar to that of adopted people. I think of the thousands of Indigenous children who were torn from their families and communities by racist policies that assumed Indigenous people were incapable of raising their own children. I, too, was torn from my Indigenous roots by a dominant and oppressive White patriarch, who did everything he could to keep me from those roots; he was my father. However, such violence must be overcome, and in my case it has been.

Through years of studying the history of Indigenous/ non-Indigenous relations on this continent, through talking with my mom, siblings, and other friends and teachers, I have come a long way from my childhood shame and confusion about my own identity. After the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the law denying Indian status to Indigenous women married to non-Indigenous men, those women and their children could apply to have their status reinstated. My mother and siblings did so, and after learning from them that I could do the same, I did. In 1995 I became a registered member of the Barren Lands First Nation. For me, in many ways a circle was closed. However, through ongoing contact with my mom and siblings, through studying Indigenous history and literature, and through teaching at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, I continue to learn about a part of my own identity that was long suppressed. I continue to learn about a community, Indigenous peoples, which has long been oppressed and of which I have proudly become a part. I have become a member of the Indigenous community by my self-identification as an Indigenous person and by the community's

acceptance of me. I have been engaged in the process of reclaiming my identity as an Indigenous person for some time now, and the process continues; this thesis is a part of that process.

In her book White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness, Ruth Frankenburg explores racialized and gendered identities arguing that "whiteness refers to a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced and, moreover, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination" (6). If Frankenburg is correct, and I believe she is, then what she says applies equally to Indigenousness, as it does to Whiteness. In other words, terms signifying membership in a group are discursively constructed rather than being based strictly on naturally occurring phenomena. This position is opposed to essentialist notions of identification that suggest that there is something essential or inherent in the race or blood of a person that makes them who and what they are. Essentialist models of identity were and are the soil in which racism takes root and flourishes. Since this thesis works against racism and its effects, it is necessary that I work with an understanding of identity as a social construction rather than identity as an essence.

In Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics, bell hooks argues for the need to "eschew essentialist notions of identity, and fashion selves that emerge from the meeting of diverse epistemologies, habits of being, concrete class locations, and radical political commitments" (19). In her argument, "an identity politics based on essentialism is critiqued, while the connection between identity and politics is affirmed" (20). She emphasises the value of such an approach by quoting Linda Alcoff: "Identity politics provides a decisive rejoinder to the generic human thesis and the

mainstream methodology of Western political theory . . . If we combine the concept of identity politics with a conception of the subject as positionality, we can conceive of the subject as nonessentialized and emergent from a historical experience" (20). In Black Looks, hooks describes such an understanding of identity in the following way:

identity . . . is a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being.' It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. . . . identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical . . . [f]ar from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous play of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (5)

This is the understanding of identity I work from in this thesis. As such, I adopt Frankenburg's term *social construction* to distinguish the provenance of Indigenoussness and Whiteness from natural, biological sources. At the same time, I recognize my use of the term *social* to function as a generic term to refer conveniently to a range of non-natural sources--history, economics, politics, culture, and other social relations--for the

production of Indigenusness and Whiteness.

I must also explain my use of the terms Indian and Indigenous. In her book Iskwewak--Kah' Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak: Neither Indian Princesses Nor Easy Squaws, Janice Acoose states that "I use the more politically appropriate and literally correct term Indigenous rather than the more commonly used terms such as Indian, Native, native, First Nations, Halfbreed, halfbreed, Aboriginal and aboriginal" (13). In a thesis written for her Master's Degree, which bears the same title, Acoose offers the following explanation for her choice of the term Indigenous:

As Indigenous peoples . . . we believe that our bodies are created from the land we live on and hence, the land is also our relatives who came before us and those who come after us. Thus, this thesis uses the more politically appropriate term Indigenous to describe generally the peoples that are more commonly referred to as native, indian, First nations, aboriginal, native american, or native Canadian. (1)

Since my maternal ancestors were Indigenous in the sense that Acoose uses the term, I adopt the term to signal my identification as an Indigenous person. When I use the inclusive pronouns *we*, *us*, and *our*, I am using them to signal my identification with other Indigenous peoples of this continent. On the other hand, I use the terms Indian and Indianness in their negative valence to signify a White colonial construction of Indigenous peoples as degraded and dehumanised Others. While acknowledging the efforts of organizations such as the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College and the

Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations to reclaim the term Indian, I stress that I am using the term to denote a specifically White colonial construction. In spite of the fact that I am a registered member of the Barren Lands First Nation and an employee of the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, the term Indigenous is both more politically appropriate and literally correct than the terms First Nation and Indian.

Lastly, in identifying myself as an Indigenous person, I do not deny or disclaim my paternal Norwegian/Irish ancestry. I identify myself as an Indigenous person based upon the concepts of social construction, identity politics, and subject as positionality, as outlined above. In the preface to Writing the Circle, Emma Larocque writes, "We must know the places of invasion in our histories and in ourselves so we may illumine the paths of those who cannot see or who do not know" (xxvii). For too long my Indigenous ancestry was a subject and source of misunderstanding, confusion, anger, fear, and silence. These feelings and emotions, the silence, were invasions of my life, mind, and spirit. These invasions of my personal life mirror the White colonial invasions into the lives, minds, and spirits of all the Indigenous peoples of this continent. Thus, when bell hooks asks "From what political perspective do we dream, look, create, and take action?" I identify myself as an Indigenous person. I identify myself as an Indigenous person to restore personal dignity and to restore dignity and honor in my relationship with all of my ancestors. I identify as an Indigenous person in an attempt to illuminate a path for all those who wish to see and know, including myself.

Tomson Highway's plays The Res Sisters and Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing examine the lives of contemporary Indigenous characters on the fictional reserve community of Wasaychigan Hill. Representations of Whiteness in both of the

plays suggest that to fully understand the representations of Indigenous peoples, the reader/ viewer must also critically examine the images of Whiteness. In representing Whiteness and Indigenous identities as socially co-constructed, Highway assigns responsibility for decolonization to both White and Indigenous peoples.

Chapter One examines the varying reactions, some positive and some negative, to Tomson Highway's plays. This chapter asserts that the plays contain within them the bases for defences against the charges that they promote stereotypical images of Indigenous peoples and communities.

Chapter Two argues that Indigenous peoples on this continent have been systematically constructed as Indians, as the degraded and dehumanised Other to Euro-North Americans. The chapter examines the White colonial manichean binary and its effects upon Indigenous peoples and communities.

Chapter Three argues that the hidden pole in the construction of Indigenous peoples as Indians is Whiteness. Furthermore, this chapter argues that if anyone is to fully understand the dehumanisation of Indigenous and White peoples, then Whiteness must be critically examined and interrogated for its effects upon both peoples.

Chapter Four examines representations of Whiteness in The Res Sisters. This chapter also argues that the behaviour and attitudes of the women in the play reveal an internalisation of manichean thinking, which is undermined by narrative that reveals Whiteness as domination.

Chapter Five examines representations of Whiteness in Dry Lips Oughta Move

to Kapuskasing. This chapter argues both that Whiteness represented as desirable reveals manichean attitudes among the men, and that such thinking, along with anger, fear, and frustration, leads the men to actively oppress the women in the community.

The Conclusion of the thesis argues that Highway's plays actively subvert stereotypes of Indigenous peoples and women current in the dominant and overlapping White and patriarchal cultures. The conclusion asserts that Highway's plays are counter-hegemonic cultural productions that implicate Whiteness and patriarchy in the degradation and dehumanisation of Indigenous and White communities and, in doing so, open up a space of resistance in which anti-racist, anti-patriarchal forms of identity become possible for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Chapter One: Why Study the Plays of Tomson Highway?

The year 1986 marked the emergence of an exciting and controversial new figure in Indigenous theatre in Canada. In her article "Weesageechak Begins to Dance: Native Earth Performing Arts Inc.," Jennifer Preston narrates the story of this emergence:

In the fall of 1986 two very small and financially unstable Toronto theatre companies, Act IV and Native Earth Performing Arts Inc. (NEPA), pooled their meager resources to mount *The Rez Sisters*, one of the first plays by an unknown Canadian playwright, Tomson Highway For the first week of the run audiences were sparse; on the second night people were enticed in off the street to fill a Canadian Actors Equity requirement of having more people in the audience than on the stage. During the second week one member of the Toronto press came and gave the show an exceptional review. By the final night of the three-week run, 200 people were turned away from the 100-seat auditorium. (135)

This sudden attention led to further attentions paid to this new play and playwright:

Requests came in from across the country and Native Earth was approached by Bernard Bomers, a booking agent from Vancouver, who offered to set up a national tour. *The Rez Sisters* won the Dora Mavor Moore Award for Best New Play of Toronto's 1986/7 season and a Floyd S. Chalmers Award for Outstanding Canadian Play, 1986. The national tour ran from October 1987 to February 1988 and played in five major

cities from Ottawa to Vancouver. During this time Native Earth received an invitation to take the production to the 1988 Edinburgh Festival, where it was one of two plays to represent Canada. The script was published in the fall of 1988 and was a finalist for the Governor General's Literary Award for Drama in that year. (135)

Preston goes on to write that "Indisputably successful, it was also notably the first play written by a Native Canadian to receive this kind of attention and it succeeded in putting the spotlight on both Tomson Highway . . . and NEPA" (135). Indisputably, these were exciting developments for anyone interested in Indigenous literature or theatre in Canada.

In 1989 Highway followed up the success of The Rez Sisters with a second play, Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing: "Tomson Highway's second *Rez* play was mounted as a coproduction with Theatre Passe Muraille and presented at TPM's Mainspace, 21 April-22 May 1989" (Preston 145). Preston observes that those involved with the production "were a little worried about the reception of the play as it dealt with some very difficult issues...[and they] wondered if people would be able to accept the way Christianity and its effects on Native people were portrayed" (149). As Preston goes on to document, Highway's second *Rez* play soon received critical praise and awards:

Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing was nominated for six Dora Mavor Moore Awards and won four The play also won the 1989 Floyd S. Chalmers Award for Outstanding Canadian Play performed in the Toronto area. The text was published in 1989 and was one of three plays shortlisted for the Governor General's Literary Award for Drama

in that year. In the fall of 1990 *Dry Lips* was produced by the Manitoba Theatre Centre . . . [and went on to be produced] at both the National Arts Centre in Ottawa and the mainstream Royal Alexandra Theatre in Toronto. (149-150)

Preston goes on to observe that "For Native Earth the premiere of *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* represented a confirmation of the artistic growth of the company and its artists. Not only has the play received an overwhelmingly positive critical reaction, but is also regarded as an important resource and is being taught in both Native and non-Native schools" (150). From the overwhelmingly positive narrative Preston presents, it would seem that Tomson Highway and these two plays epitomize successes to be celebrated.

However, Preston neglects to acknowledge that, in 1991, performances of Tomson Highway's play *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* drew plenty of angry criticism from women, particularly Indigenous women. In the pages of *The Globe and Mail*, Marion Botsford Fraser, a non-Indigenous woman, writes "The two central events in the play are horrible abuses of women, unmitigated by compassion *Dry Lips* is not only about misogyny but is a drama studded with misogyny" (17 April 1991, C7). Two of the most damning responses to the play are those of Anita Tuharsky and Marie Annharte Baker, both Indigenous women. In a letter to the editor published in *New Breed* (April 1991), Ms. Tuharsky writes that the play "terribly misrepresented the Aboriginal peoples [and] only represented a dysfunctional sector of any community The play did nothing to balance the negativity being presented about life on the reserve and the attitudes prevailing there the playwright and play clearly misrepresented the Aboriginal women, Aboriginal men, life on the reserve, and the Spirit

Wesakaychak." (5). Furthermore, Ms. Tuharsky expresses her particular concern regarding the representation of Indigenous women:

Aboriginal women, were portrayed as loose, unfaithful, sleazy, [sic] drunks with no respect for human life and childbirth. The women in the play were nude and showed no modesty for their body but allowed it [sic] to be portrayed in a degrading manner. I, for one, would like to tell Mr. Highway, that Aboriginal women are not like this This is pornography, this disrespectful portrayal, [sic] only reinforces damaging stereotypes against our women.

(5)

Furthermore, Tuharsky is quite correct when she observes that in the play "Aboriginal men fared no better. They were portrayed as unfaithful drunks, uneducated, slovenly in dress, uncaring, selfish and self-absorbed failures. The men had no respect for women" (5). In Ms. Tuharsky's opinion, "Mr. Highway's images only open the wounds and adds [sic] salt to them. He does not go far enough because he does not help the audience to overcome the obstacles, to heal the wounds of the past and develop directions for building stronger spirits in our people and acceptance and responsibility by the institutions and Europeans for the damage they have done to us" (6). Her observations about the play lead her to the conclusion that "It is images such as this play which breed oppression, racism, and disrespect for the Aboriginal peoples and their culture, traditions, and spirituality" (6).

Most of the concerns raised by Ms. Tuharsky, an unknown commentator, are very similar to those voiced by well-known writer Marie Annharte Baker. In her article "Carte Blanche: Angry Enough To Spit But With *Dry Lips* It Hurts More Than You

Know" published in the Canadian Theatre Review 68 (Fall 1991), Baker begins with a reference to "the perpetrators of racism and sexism" (88), presumably implying that Tomson Highway and his play are among those perpetrators. She also makes reference to "Our internalized racism and sexism [that] seems to get financial rewards, literary or artistic rewards" (88), again with the implication that Highway's play and the success it has enjoyed are representative of such internalized racism and sexism and the positive attention their manifestation can attract. That this implication is clearly Baker's intention becomes obvious when she writes that "Now it is even fashionable to sit and watch plays written 'for' us and 'about' us. We even find excuses to praise our further degradation on stage or screen" (88). In the published version of the play, Highway has included a quotation from Lyle Longclaws "before the healing can take place, the poison must first be exposed," and Baker tells her reader that the same quotation was printed on the playbill for the performance she attended. However, far from finding any comfort or solace in the quotation, Baker responds to it in quite another way: "It is convenient to make enough commentary to be unaccountable for any inadvertent racist or sexist imagery. But it arouses my suspicion about the audience because it is not popular to attend 'politically incorrect' performances that might *intentionally* endorse racism or sexism. I worry about the unintended" (89). It is clear that Baker believes that the play, even if unintentionally, promotes the same racist and sexist stereotypes that Ms. Tuharsky writes about in her letter to the editor of New Breed: "A Yuppie would go home feeling relieved that Indians live on the rez and in the other part of the city. For Whites and white-nosers, the play is a wonderful revelation about the contradictions in Indian lives. But to a young Native person, the play might be another affront to one's identity" (Baker 89). Furthermore, Ms. Tuharsky

is concerned that the play does not assign responsibility to non-Indigenous people and institutions for the damages they have caused in our communities, and Baker raises the same concern:

I wanted to see that the average white Canadian gets a bit of responsibility. It is obvious that white guilt is milked to what I may guess is the consistency of cottage cheese, but would the average Native woman or man walk out of the theatre with a greater understanding of either racism or sexism? Would our Yuppie boss or co-worker find anything in the play to better understand the inequity of the workplace where racism and sexism is [sic] a structural and hierarchical reality?

(89)

It is clear that for Marie Annharte Baker, as for Anita Tuharsky, the answer to these questions is a resounding no.

Having presented the concerns raised by Anita Tuharsky and Marie Annharte Baker at some length, it is necessary to summarize their positions in order to show that, while their concerns should not be summarily dismissed, the play can certainly be defended against the position that these two women hold. The main charges that they raise against the play can be summarized in the following manner: the play presents stereotypical images of both Indigenous men and women as lazy, drunken, sexually promiscuous, and otherwise dysfunctional human beings; the play does not do enough to help the audience members, Indigenous or White, to understand the images presented and move beyond them toward healing; the play does not assign enough or any responsibility to non-Indigenous peoples and institutions for the damages done to

Indigenous communities; and for these reasons the play simply promotes misunderstanding, prejudice, oppression, and racism.

Before attempting to answer these charges made against Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing, it is necessary to state that the same charges, pushed to their logical extent, could be made against The Rez Sisters, and that both plays employ the same strategies that make such interpretations inaccurate. If we allow ourselves to consider for a moment the intentions of the author when writing these plays, then presumably we must read or view Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing in the context of the quotation from Lyle Longclaws: "before the healing can take place, the poison must be revealed." The orientation signalled by this quotation is significantly different from what is signalled in the notes printed in the published version of The Rez Sisters: "Tomson Highway's ambition in life is to make the rez cool, to show and celebrate what funky folk Canada's Indian people really are" (IX). The stated intentions of the author, as signalled at the beginning of each of the plays, are obviously quite different from one another. It is the difference between the signals at the beginning of each of the plays that accounts for the significant difference between the tone and mood of the two plays. In Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing, the anger, violence, dysfunction, alcoholism—all the so-called social problems of reserve life—are overt. In The Rez Sisters, on the other hand, the dysfunction and social problems are considerably less overt. However, this is not to say that these issues are not present in the first play. On the contrary, if one reads or watches the play closely, there is plenty of evidence to show that the same social issues that plague the reserve in Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing are equally present in the first play. Both plays are set, of course, on the same fictional reserve. To choose a somewhat mundane example, the images presented

in The Rez Sisters could be interpreted as portraying Indigenous women as lazy, irresponsible wives, mothers, sisters, whose only concern is to play bingo. Indeed, this is exactly the criticism Susan Bennett raises in her critique of Preston's article: "For the predominantly white audiences that have flocked to see Highway's plays, there has been comfort in knowing that they were right all along--Native women are, indeed, 'like that' (sex, alcohol, and bingo)" (10, letter to the editors of TDR). Suffice it to say that there are in The Rez Sisters plenty of examples of violence, alcoholism, and the desire to play bingo.

While women such as Ms. Tuharsky and Annharte Baker charge that Highway's work supports rather than subverts the stereotypes of Indigenous people and women held by the dominant and overlapping White and patriarchal cultures, male theatre critic Alan Filewood makes an equally damning argument that the plays reinscribe White colonial domination. Filewood begins his article, "Averting the Colonizing Gaze: Notes on Watching Native Theatre," with the following assertion: "I can't write about native theatre; all I can write about is my response to it. When I watch native theatre I see my own gaze returned; my watching is an appropriation, even when it is invited. As the colonizer I am the invisible presence in these plays" (17). He proceeds to a discussion of Tomson Highway's work, refers to the long list of awards the plays have received, and then suggests that

The [positive critical] response is . . . problematic because this celebratory response erases the politics of the play and reestablishes the narrative as a generalized statement of anticolonialism, permitting the colonizer to assume the posture of the colonized. It is inevitable that we should come to Highway's plays through an identification

with the oppressed characters rather than an awareness of our place as colonizer. (21)

In these statements there is, again, an emphasis on the invisibility of the colonizer, and this emphasis continues when Filewood states that "not only do we erase our own culpability in Highway's plays, but we reconstruct their cultural patterns to serve our own cultural project--a project that has historically erased native peoples" (21). He goes on to note that "*Dry Lips* has been picked up by a major commercial producer" and suggests that

The anger in the play . . . is transformed through a change in material conditions and audience into sentimentality. Put simply, it lets the Anglo audience off the hook. If it didn't, it could scarcely appeal to a commercial producer . . . it is regression when that redefinition upholds the cultural myths by which Anglo Canada excuses its marginalization of native Indians. (22)

Perhaps because of his confidence in the invisibility of the colonizer in Highway's plays, Filewood is fearful of the message they promote: "My fear is that so long as Highway narrates the native struggles as a process of spiritual regeneration audiences will be less accepting of an angrier voice that narrates the struggle in terms of political action" (22). Speaking for non-Indigenous audiences, Filewood asks "Do we applaud Highway's plays because we can write into them the image of the native that makes us most comfortable?" and then answers his own question by asserting that "we are comfortable with what we hear" (23). These statements are reminiscent of Susan Bennet's opinion that, for non-Indigenous people, "there has been comfort in knowing that they were right all along--Native women are, indeed, 'like that' (sex, alcohol,

and bingo)" (10). Filewood's charges against the plays are related to charges such as Tuharsky's and Annharte Baker's in that all of these critics argue that the plays reinscribe, rather than challenge, the dominant White and patriarchal ideologies.

If both of the plays could be interpreted as presenting oppressive stereotypes of Indigenous peoples and women, then how do the plays work to avoid such interpretations? In two related ways, each of the plays makes unjust any condemnation that they present stereotypical and prejudicial images of Indigenous peoples and women. If the images were presented without a social context in which to understand them, then they would indeed be open to the interpretation that they present stereotypes. However, The Rez Sisters and Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing are important contributions for understanding the contemporary situations of Indigenous peoples precisely because of their contextualization of the social problems, including sexual violence, that the plays examine. The plays do not simply present images of social problems, but they examine and interrogate these issues and the social context out of which they have arisen and the social context that allows the dysfunctional behaviour and attitudes to continue. The plays show that the confusion, frustration, and anger the characters feel and the violence they enact are direct results of colonization. Contrary to stereotypic representations, in providing a context for social problems, the plays allow the reader or audience member to understand that alcoholism and sexual violence, for example, are not in any way natural characteristics of Indigenous communities, as the discourses of racism would have us all believe. In constructing a social context in which to understand the images presented, the plays offer evidence that the Indigenous population in Canada has been violently subjected to a White colonial ideology, discourses that dehumanise us, and a resultant social and

economic marginalization that has wreaked havoc in many of our communities. The plays make it clear that these characters have internalized degraded images of themselves and elevated images of Whiteness that are produced and perpetuated by the discourses that embody the White colonial ideology of the dominant culture. Furthermore, the White colonial ideology is shown to overlap with patriarchal ideology, and it is these interlocking systems of oppression that are the source of the social problems and dysfunction, rather than the reverse.

The second way in which the plays counteract charges of presenting stereotypical images of Indigenous peoples and women is by bringing into focus the hidden pole in the social construction of Indigenous peoples as dehumanised and degraded Others. While Canadian society has been and continues to be rife with images of us as dehumanised and degraded, the opposite pole in this social construction has been and is the socially constructed category of Whiteness. In the introduction to her book White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness, Ruth Frankenberg identifies the inter-dependent nature of the social construction of the White self and its Other: "while discursively generating and marking a range of cultural and racial Others as different from an apparently stable Western or white self, the Western self is itself produced as *an effect of* the Western discursive production of its Others. This means that the Western self and the non-Western other are co-constructed as discursive products" (17). Knowledge of the social co-construction of the categories of *Whiteness* and *Indianness* is necessary to an understanding of the Manichean binary opposition that JanMohamed identifies in his article "The Economy of the Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature" as central to the White colonial ideology and which leads to an

overvaluation of Whiteness and a simultaneous devaluation of our identities. The White colonial ideology's devaluation of Indigenous identities expresses itself in a specifically gendered form in the stereotype of Indigenous women as *squaws*. In this way, the White colonial and patriarchal ideologies overlap and both must be examined as interlocking systems of domination in Indigenous communities. By bringing into focus the often invisible category of Whiteness, the plays draw attention to the social constructedness of the binary opposition and suggest that decolonization of our minds requires a recognition of the distorted vision of ourselves produced by the Manichean binary at the core of the White colonial ideology and the discourses associated with it. At the same time, attention to the often hidden category of Whiteness allows for an interrogation of the ways in which colonial and patriarchal ideologies interact and support each other. Such an approach provides an opportunity to situate "patriarchal violence within the context of racism and the histories of colonialism and imperialism" (Razack 84) without ignoring the danger that "culture, community, and colonization can be used to compete with and ultimately prevail over gender-based harm" (76). In the epilogue to her book, Frankenberg writes that "the process of altering present and future meanings of whiteness is inextricably connected to that of altering the meanings of other, co-constructed racial and cultural identities" (243). While she is undoubtedly correct, from the perspective of Indigenous peoples her observation could be reversed. What the plays make clear from their examination of Whiteness is that the process of altering present and future meanings of our identities is inextricably connected to altering the meanings we associate with the co-constructed racial and cultural identity of Whiteness.

Chapter Two: *Indianness* as a Socially Constructed Category

Dehumanization, genocide, and crimes against humanity are not terms that routinely arise in discussions of Canadian history. However, in Canada, a dominant White, colonial ideology has governed relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and renders the use of such terms entirely appropriate. For Indigenous peoples, Canadian history is the history of racism and of our colonization and dispossession by non-Indigenous people who enjoy one of the world's highest standards of living primarily because of the appropriation of our lands and resources. In this country, a dominant White, colonial ideology is expressed in dominant discourses and pervasive images that construct what Abdul R. JanMohamed calls a Manichean binary. This manichean binary constructs Indigenous peoples as degraded and dehumanised Others and, thereby, seeks to justify our dispossession, our social and economic marginalization, and the resulting social diseases that infect too many of our people and communities.

For much, if not all, of the history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations on this continent, Indigenous peoples have been constructed and represented as the Other in relation to non-Indigenous peoples. As Robert F. Berkhofer Jr. observes in his book The Whiteman's Indian, "the essence of the White image of the Indian has been the definition of Native Americans in fact and in fancy as a separate and single other the Indian as an image was always alien to the White" (27); or in the words of Margery Fee, "Native people . . . are so rarely depicted as individuals, because they must bear the burden of [the] Other" (29). If it is true, as Berkhofer asserts, that "Whites primarily understood the Indian as an antithesis to themselves" (27), as "an absolute antithesis" (15-16), then the dilemma is that such a pattern of thinking inevitably

leads to stereotypes that dehumanize Indigenous peoples. In his book The Imaginary Indian, Daniel Francis observes that

When two cultures meet, especially cultures as different as those of Western Europe and indigenous North America, they inevitably interpret each other in terms of stereotypes. At its best, in a situation of equality, this might be seen as a phase in a longer process of familiarization. But if one side in the encounter enjoys advantages of wealth or power or technology, then it will usually try to impose its stereotypes on the other. This is what occurred in the case of the North American encounter between European and aboriginal. (221)

Berkhofer observes that non-Indigenous peoples have tended to use "counterimages of themselves to describe Indians and the counterimages of Indians to describe themselves" (27). Such an attitude leads to a further "tendency to speak of one tribe as exemplary of all Indians and conversely to comprehend a specific tribe according to the characteristics ascribed to all Indians" (26). This tendency is the first of what Berkhofer identifies as three

persistent practices found throughout the history of White interpretation of Native Americans as Indians: (1) generalizing from one tribe's society and culture to all Indians, (2) conceiving of Indians in terms of their deficiencies according to White ideals rather than in terms of their own various cultures, and (3) using moral evaluation as description of Indians. (25-26)

As Berkhofer notes, "Description by deficiency all too readily led to characterization by evaluation and so most White studies of Indian culture(s) were (and are) also

examinations of Indian moral character" (27). Unfortunately for Indigenous peoples, we were and are too often perceived by non-Indigenous people as culturally and morally deficient. Hence, the category of Indian is constructed by the colonizer and is then systematically devalued by a moral evaluation that distances colonizer and colonized.

The process of Othering that Berkhofer details as characteristic of Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations on this continent is an essential feature of the White, colonial ideology. In The Wretched of the Earth, Frantz Fanon identifies this process of othering as typical of colonial societies: "The colonial world is cut in two The two zones are opposed they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity This world is divided into compartments . . . [and] is inhabited by two different species" (31-32). Fanon's choice of the term *species* is significant because in order to serve the purposes of colonialism the process of Othering cannot be restricted to a simple recognition of difference. In his article "The Economy of the Manichean Allegory," Abdul R. JanMohamed observes that the Manichean self/Other binary leads to "a field of diverse yet interchangeable oppositions between White and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilization and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality, self and Other, subject and object" (82), which effect "a transformation of racial difference into moral and even metaphysical difference" (80). JanMohamed goes on to explain that "This non-dialectical, fixed opposition between the self and the native operates by substituting natural or generic categories for those that are socially or ideologically determined" (84-85). The deficiencies that the colonizer perceives in the colonized, and which are determined by ideology and social relations, are projected onto the colonized and, hence, perceived as natural characteristics: "All the evil characteristics and habits with which the colonialist

endows the native are thereby not presented as the products of social and cultural difference but as characteristics inherent in the race--in the 'blood'--of the native" (85-86). What JanMohammed draws our attention to is nothing more than bold-faced racism, which Berkhofer defines in the following manner:

racism rests upon two basic assumptions: (1) the moral qualities of a human group are positively correlated with their physical characteristics, and (2) all humankind is divisible into superior and inferior stocks upon the basis of the first assumption. Racism . . . is an understanding of human diversity mainly or solely in terms of inherent racial differences (and the moral judgements thereon) and an explanation of that diversity entirely or mainly in terms of racial inheritances. (55)

It is not unusual that racism characterizes Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations on this continent for, as Albert Memmi observes, "racism is part of colonialism throughout the world" (69-70), and, "appears . . . not as an incidental detail, but as a consubstantial part of colonialism. It is the highest expression of the colonial system" (74). Imperially ascribed racial inferiority of Indigenous peoples is the primary justification colonialism offers for its dispossession of Other societies and this justification is rigorously reinforced by the colonial ideology. In the words of Albert Memmi,

Colonial racism is built from three major ideological components: one, the gulf between the culture of the colonialist and the colonized; two, the exploitation of these differences for the benefit of the colonialist; three, the use of these supposed differences as standards of absolute

fact What is actually a sociological point becomes labelled as being biological or, preferably, metaphysical. (71)

This racism, then, is characteristic of colonial encounters, and the colonial encounter between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples on this continent is no exception.

Racism establishes the manichean binarism of the White, colonial ideology, and it is manichean, racist, colonial violence that Jean Paul Sartre describes in the introduction to Fanon's Wretched of the Earth. As Sartre points out, the primary aim of manichean colonial violence is the justification of the dispossession of one society by another:

since none may enslave, rob or kill his fellow-man without committing a crime, they lay down the principle that the native is not one of our fellow-men the order is given to reduce the inhabitants of the annexed country to the level of superior monkeys in order to justify the settler's treatment of them Violence in the colonies does not only have for its aim the keeping of the enslaved men at arm's length; it seeks to dehumanise them. (13)

As Berkhofer puts it, Indigenous peoples defined as "a negative reference group could be used to define White identity or to prove White superiority over the worst fears of their own depravity" (27). If a people's own humanism dictates that it is wrong to steal from, to forcibly dispossess their fellow human beings, then in order to justify such behaviours it is necessary to deny the humanity of the peoples being so dispossessed. While denying the humanity of the colonised people, the coloniser assumes a pose of relative superiority. This pose of superiority acting as a cover for colonial crimes is what John Snider indicates is characteristic of colonial relations on this continent. He

affirms this point by quoting Francis Jennings: "All conquest aristocracies have followed such paths. It would be incredible if ours had not" (33-34). Furthermore, Snider writes, "A fact that scholars, activists, and Indian leaders all agree on is that of Indian poverty. Indians are disproportionately poor relative to Whites" (33), and such poverty is understandable because, as Memmi contends, "the idea of privilege is at the heart of the colonial relationship--and that privilege is undoubtedly economic . . . the *deprivations* of the colonized are the almost direct result of the advantages secured to the colonizer" (Memmi xii preface). Ward Churchill describes this assumption of superiority and its economic motivations in the following manner:

It is a given in any colonial situation that the colonizing power presumes that its culture is inherently superior to that of the colonized. Hence, it assumes the right . . . to explain this to its subjects, rendering the colonized ever more accomodating to the 'material condition' of their domination by the colonial master, ever more compliant to the inevitability of material exploitation by the colonizer. This has been the clear purpose, historically, of the interpretation of indigenous cultures by their conquerers. (182)

Thus, many non-Indigenous Canadians and Americans enjoy two of the highest standards of living in the world while many Indigenous peoples live in dire poverty and with the social problems that poverty too often engenders: alcoholism, malnourishment, disease, suicide, and family violence. For anyone who would dispute the poverty and other debilitating social conditions under which many Indigenous peoples suffer, plenty of examples are available in books such as Geoffrey York's The Dispossessed and Heather Robertson's Reservations are for Indians.

Hence, the humanity of Indigenous peoples is denied in the interests of the economic/material exploitation of our lands and resources, and an entire system of representations is created that serves the purposes of justifying our dispossession. This system of representations is of central importance because it is primarily through the creation, circulation, and perpetuation of images, or representations, that the colonial ideology, with its inherent racism, functions. In his article "Ideology," James H. Kavanaugh writes that "Ideology designates a rich 'system of representations', worked up in specific material practices, which helps form individuals into social subjects who 'freely' internalize an appropriate 'picture' of their social world and their place in it" (310). He explains that "Ideology offers the social subject not a set of narrowly 'political' ideas but a fundamental framework of assumptions that defines the parameters of the real and the self" (310). He goes on to say that ideology--and this would include the White colonial ideology--functions primarily through the construction of images:

Ideology is less tenacious as a 'set of ideas' than as a system of representations, perceptions, and images that precisely encourages men and women to 'see' their specific place in a historically peculiar social formation as inevitable, natural, a necessary function of the 'real' itself. This 'seeing' precedes and underlies any ways in which social subjects 'think about' social reality, and this 'seeing' is as likely to be shaped through a relaxed fascination with the page or the screen as through any serious attention to political theory. (310)

Just as the manicheism of colonial societies attempts to enforce social or cultural differences as racial or metaphysical differences, ideology, Kavanaugh explains, has

"the function of producing an *obvious* 'reality' that social subjects can assume and accept, precisely as if it had not been socially produced and did not need to be 'known' at all" (311). In colonial societies, this system of representations, with its overdetermined ideological function, is what JanMohamed, after Fanon, calls the manichean allegory:

The dominant model of power- and interest-relations in all colonial societies is the manichean opposition between the putative superiority of the European and the supposed inferiority of the native. This axis in turn provides the central feature of the colonialist cognitive framework . . . the manichean allegory. (82)

This allegory lies at the core of the White colonial ideology, and "Just as imperialists 'administer' the resources of the conquered country, so colonialist discourse 'commodifies' the Indigenous subject into a stereotyped object" (JanMohamed 83). These discourses serve the White colonial interest of erasing or destroying the humanity of the colonised. As JanMohamed points out, "we can observe a profound symbiotic relationship between the discursive and material practices of imperialism: the discursive practices do to the symbolic, linguistic presence of the native what the material practices do to his physical presence" (83). The primary function of the allegory is to absolve the colonizer of any responsibility, any feelings of guilt, for the inhumanities of colonization:

The fetishizing strategy and the allegorical mechanism not only permit a rapid exchange of denigrating images which can be used to maintain a sense of moral difference; they also allow the writer to transform social and historical dissimilarities into universal,

metaphysical differences The ideological function of this mechanism . . . is to dehistoricize and desocialize the conquered world, to present it as a metaphysical 'fact of life', before which those who have fashioned the colonial world are themselves reduced to the role of passive spectators in a mystery not of their own making. (87)

The rigid binarism, the central feature of White colonial ideology, functions not only in literary discourse but is also central to a wide variety of colonialist discourses. The manicheism is consistent with widespread social attitudes and is functional not only in literature but also in movies, television, comic books, educational and religious institutions, and so-called scientific theories about the nature and origins of Indigenous peoples.

Thus, while Indigenous peoples in Canada were faced with oppressive legal and political measures such as the reserve and pass systems, Indian agents, residential schools, prohibitions against fundraising for legal or political actions, and the outlawing of cultural/religious ceremonies, such as the potlach and sun-dance, we were also faced with images produced by White colonial discourses that sought to erase our humanity. In Prison of Grass, Howard Adams suggests that "native people cannot avoid seeing the cultural images and symbols of White supremacy, because they are everywhere in society, especially in movies, television, comic books and textbooks" (14). In her preface to Writing the Circle, Emma Larocque shows she shares Adams' opinion when she writes, "There are not enough superlatives in English to say how deeply Aboriginal peoples' worlds have been falsified in White North American literary traditions and popular culture Some missionary and fur-trade journals, even some standard Canadian history books, would qualify as hate literature, even under the most

stringent court requirements" (xxiv). In the same preface, Larocque lists some of the terms, many of which immediately call to mind specific images, that have been applied to the detriment of Indigenous peoples:

savage, primitive, pagan, medicine man, shaman, warrior, squaw, redskin, hostile, civilization, developed, progress, the national interest, bitter, angry, happy hunting grounds, brave, buck, redman, chief, tribe, or even Indian are just a few of the string of epithets that have been perjoratively used to *specifically* indicate the ranking of Indian peoples as inferior to Europeans, thus to perpetuate their dehumanization. (xx)

The images, symbols, and stereotypes to which Adams and Larocque draw our attention display an overvaluation of Whiteness and a simultaneous devaluation of Indianness as categories, which is consistent with the White colonial ideology's manichean binary. In agreement with Fanon and JanMohammed, Larocque, in Defeathering the Indian, draws attention to the mechanical functioning of the manichean allegory: "When one considers himself superior, he mechanically judges others to be inferior. And just to make sure he is superior, he creates characteristics in others to confirm their inferiority, using his standards as criteria, of course" (50). In agreement with Larocque, Adams writes in A Tortured People, that within the White colonial ideology "there is only one view of human reality: the 'self-evident' superiority of European culture" (26). The stereotypical images that are created, circulated, and perpetuated in White colonial discourses distort and disfigure Indigenous peoples' lives and realities in an attempt to dehumanise us.

Parker Duchemin's article "A Parcel of Whelps': Alexander MacKenzie among the Indians," provides specific examples of the dehumanisation of Indigenous peoples through the use of specific images that define us as inferior in relation to non-Indigenous people. It also serves as a perfect example of the hate literature that Emma Larocque suggests is an integral part of Canadian historical records. In Duchemin's observations regarding the attitudes inherent in the journals of MacKenzie, Duchemin states that MacKenzie "as a European [considered himself] the representative of 'civilised' men among the 'savages'", and such an attitude is understandable, Duchemin explains, because "From the initial period of contact, the fundamental assumption in dealing with the Indians was the idea of European superiority" (52). Furthermore, his assumption of superiority leads MacKenzie precisely to the White colonial racism that is central to the colonial situation, as Duchemin explains:

he shows almost no interest in the Indians as individual men or women MacKenzie appears to regard the behaviour of Indians...as generic; when an individual Indian performs an action . . . he takes it to be characteristic of his tribe . . . if the Indians persist in behaving like 'savages', then he cannot be held accountable for their hostility. It is just the way Indians *are*. (59)

Duchemin points out that the effect of MacKenzie's attitude is "to dehumanize them [the Indigenous peoples], by robbing their behaviour of its individual meaning, transforming it into . . . instinctive or biological patterns of behaviour" (60). He goes on to explain that "The cumulative effect [of MacKenzie's writing] is to make the Indians appear to live their lives without pattern or meaning, to reduce . . . their religion to superstition, and . . . their art to mere decoration" (65), which the author does by

"representing them as childlike, primitive, lazy, unreliable, improvident, drunken, contradictory, deceitful, jealous, treacherous, cruel, irrational" (68-69). If such attitudes toward Indigenous peoples were restricted to the travel journals of one explorer/fur trader in the remote north west and applied to only a few relatively small groups, then perhaps we could dismiss his observations and attitudes as an aberration. However, as Duchemin explains, "Eventually, ideas of the kind we have observed here [in MacKenzie's journals] were incorporated in theories of 'scientific racism', which declared Indians, with indigenous peoples all over the globe, to be both culturally and biologically an inferior species" (69). Far from being an aberration, MacKenzie's attitudes towards Indigenous peoples were consistent with widespread cultural attitudes.

While White colonial discourses create, circulate, and perpetuate images that dehumanise Indigenous peoples in an attempt to justify to the colonizers their treatment of us, such images simultaneously attempt to justify to us our treatment at the hands of the coloniser. This process of winning the consent of the oppressed to their own oppression is what Antonio Gramsci calls establishing hegemony, which allows for ideological control of the oppressed, without the need for a constant reliance on the use of force. Stuart Hall describes the establishment of hegemony in the following manner:

The ways in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subjected in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalization They had the power to make us see *ourselves* as 'Other' . . . It is one thing to position a subject or set of peoples as the Other of a dominant discourse. It is quite another thing to subject them to that 'knowledge', not only as

a matter of imposed will and domination, but by the power of inner compulsion and subjective confirmation to the norm. (3)

The establishment of hegemony is a central function of colonial discourses: "In the colonial context the settler only ends his work of breaking the Indigenous when the latter admits loudly and intelligibly the supremacy of the White man's values" (Fanon 35). Such an internalisation of the ideology by the colonised allows Whites to enjoy their privileges without guilt, while nurturing self-hatred, anger, despair, and similarly self-destructive attitudes in Indigenous individuals and communities.

In Defeathering the Indian, Emma Larocque argues that "One of the most severe problems the Native person is faced with today is that he is defined outside himself" (8), by the oppressor's ideology and discourses, and this problem is of central concern because "the prevailing attitudes of the dominant society affect the self-image of a minority group" (2). bell hooks draws attention to this very difficulty with a quotation from Pratibha Parmar: "Images play a crucial role in defining and controlling the political and social power to which both individuals and marginalized groups have access. The deeply ideological nature of imagery determines not only how other people think about us but how we think about ourselves" (5). Far from being restricted to the distant past, attitudes that Indigenous peoples are inferior are still highly visible in the circulation of images "of Indians as grunting and bloodthirsty savages in the cowboy and Indian movies", for example, "both of which are amply available on late night shows, VCR's, or comic book stands" (Larocque xxiv preface). In an observation that might be directly applied to MacKenzie's journals, Emma Larocque suggests that "misguided notions of Indian culture (still prevalent today) . . . portray Indians as having taken no direct control over their environment, their children, their urges, their

resources, their art, their thoughts, or their knowledge" (preface xix). The effect of White colonial images of Indigenous peoples, on both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, is illustrated by an anecdote Emma Larocque relates and by her subsequent comment on the incident:

The public in general has low expectations of Native people. Recently, on a train to Winnipeg, a woman beside me began discussing the 'Indian problem'. She listed the usual vices: 'They're always drunk, they don't work and they're all on welfare'. But she also said something . . . that caught my attention, 'It's no use; we've tried everything. Nothing works for the Indian. It's no use—nothing will ever work'. The tragedy is that so many Native people have also come to believe in the 'failure-of-Indians' syndrome. (43)

The tragedy that Larocque writes of indicates the power colonial discourses have to convince the colonised that they in fact deserve their dispossession and the marginality it has imposed upon them. This attempt to justify the dispossession of Indigenous peoples serves to ease the consciences of the colonisers, while reducing the potential for resistance among the colonised by subjecting us to a hegemony that seeks our consent to our dispossession.

In her article "Jeannette Armstrong and the Colonial Legacy," Noel Elizabeth Currie points out that "Internalized oppression, the result of indoctrination of their [colonized peoples'] deficiencies as defined by the colonizers...can be more damaging than material forms of oppression" (140). Internalised oppression and its accompanying rejection of one's Indigenous identity, as defined and constructed by the coloniser, is testified to by Janice Acoose when she writes, "I shamefully accepted that I was not

only different but inferior....I learned to passively accept and internalise the . . . stereotype that subsequently imprisoned me, and all indigenous people . . . I shamefully turned away from my history and cultural roots" (29). However, as Howard Adams argues, Indigenous children "surrounded with White colonial ideas and stories . . . become conditioned to accept inferiority as a *natural* way of life" (A Tortured People 14-15, my emphasis) The ideology attempts to naturalise the great social and economic disparities which exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Currie observes, "the colonizers put their definitions of the colonized . . . into the heads of the colonized. The result is that everyone '*recognises*' the inadequacy of the colonized relative to the colonizers" (140, my emphasis). Howard Adams, in Prison of Grass, adds that "Racial stereotypes . . . play an important role in shaping a Native's consciousness. Subjective feelings, such as inferiority, are an integral part of consciousness, and work together with the objective reality of poverty and deprivation to shape a Native's world-view" (37). The White colonial ideology, its discourses and images, help to produce and reproduce White domination, and the resultant social and economic marginality of Indigenous peoples. White domination makes it difficult for many Indigenous people not to believe in the myth of our inferiority and not to blame ourselves and each other for the degraded social and economic conditions of many of our communities.

The internalisation of images circulated by the White colonial discourses sets off a chain of disastrous effects within both individuals and communities. When internalisation of the ideology takes place we come to see ourselves through the eyes of the oppressor, to see ourselves as Other, as *Indians*, as constructed by White supremacy. Howard Adams indicates the result of the self-contempt that comes with seeing

ourselves as Other: "It is not surprising that our behaviour is inclined toward apathy" (43). However, beyond mere apathy, self-contempt can very quickly turn into self-hatred: "The nation's racist ideology can cause us to hate ourselves as intensely as bigots and racists hate us" (Adams 43). If this self-hatred is internalised, the colonised often turn to self-destructive forms of behaviour. As bell hooks explains, since the colonised "are bombarded by messages that we have no value, are worthless, it is no wonder that we fall prey to nihilistic despair or forms of addiction that provide momentary escape, illusions of grandeur, and temporary freedom from the pain of facing reality" (19). If this self-hatred is externalised, then it is often projected onto members of our own communities who reflect to us our own self-hatred, despair, and feelings of powerlessness:

We feel our self-hate, but, instead of dealing with it honestly, we project it into the entire native race. A Metis fellow I met at a bus depot one day expressed this self-hate when he said, 'It's when you see someone very dark, Indian-looking, vulgar, dressed like a bum at the bus station, and you see him acting like all stupid halfbreeds; that's when I could just kill him and all the halfbreeds.' (Adams, Prison of Grass, 148)

The internalisation of White colonial ideology, when and if it takes place, fosters despair, apathy, self-hatred, and violence, all of which can lead us to destroy ourselves and our communities as completely as any coloniser might destroy us. Unfortunately, in Indigenous communities these self-destructive tendencies are all too often expressed in gendered terms, in male violence against women.

The sexual violence that Indigenous men commit against Indigenous women must be understood within the historical context of the violent colonization and subjugation of Indigenous peoples and communities. In their book Native American Post-Colonial Psychology, Eduardo and Bonnie Duran write that

Once a people have been assaulted in a genocidal fashion, there are psychological ramifications. With the victims' complete loss of power comes despair, and the psyche reacts by internalizing what appears to be genuine power--the power of the oppressor At this point, the self-worth of the individual and/or group has sunk to a level of despair tantamount to self-hatred. This self-hatred can be either internalized or externalized. (29)

Sexual violence in Indigenous communities can be understood as men vainly attempting to grasp some of the oppressors' power by externalizing their self-hatred in violence directed at women. Such an interpretation is borne out when the Durans quote Paolo Freire's observations regarding oppressed men: "Their ideal is to be men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors" (158). Situating male sexual violence within the history of colonization need not imply that colonial history has been a heavier burden upon Indigenous men than it has been upon Indigenous women. The situation is much more complex than such a simplistic formulation can account for. The violence Indigenous men enact against Indigenous women has its roots in both White colonial and patriarchal ideologies.

While White colonial ideology dehumanises Indigenous peoples as a group, patriarchal ideology invites Indigenous men to participate in patriarchal dominance,

while, at the same time, reinscribing White dominance of both Indigenous men and women. In her book Looking White People in the Eye, Sharene Razack writes that

rape trials involving aboriginal offenders and victims are propelled by two dominant narratives: the savage and the squaw. The stereotype of Black men as bestial, violent, and criminal has an Aboriginal counterpart in the bloodthirsty Indian. The gendered version of the violent Indian is the squaw on whose body violence may occur with impunity. (69)

So, while "people all over the world have been led into the deep and unquestioned belief that American Indians are cruel savages, a number of American Indian men have been equally deluded into internalizing that image and acting on it" (Paula Gunn Allen, The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions 193), and the men's violence is further encouraged by the equally dehumanised image of Indigenous women as squaws:

the portrayal of the squaw is one of the most degraded, most despised and most dehumanized anywhere in the world. The 'squaw' is the female counterpart to the Indian male 'savage' and as such has no human face; she is lustful, immoral, unfeeling and dirty. Such grotesque dehumanization has rendered all Indigenous women and girls vulnerable to gross physical, psychological and sexual violence.

(Razack, quoting Larocque, 69)

In The Sacred Hoop, Paula Gunn Allen identifies how the image of the bloodthirsty Indian justifies White violence against Indigenous peoples: "Allied with the view of the Indian as hostile savage is the common practice (I should say obsession) of proving

that Indians mistreat their women brutally . . . the implication being that civilized people revere women, and savages, who don't revere them, deserve extermination" (5). Thus, while violence against women in our colonized communities can be ascribed to racism, poverty, and alcoholism, such forces and conditions can also be ascribed, in large part, to images that suggest Indigenous women deserve such treatment and to images that invite Indigenous men to act out patriarchal domination.

In attempting to develop an understanding of sexual violence within Indigenous communities, it is vital to understand the role White colonial images play in disrupting relations between Indigenous men and women. In her book Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics, bell hooks quotes Cornel West, who emphasizes the impact of White supremacy upon relations between Black men and women:

The very notion that black people are human beings is a new notion in western civilization and is still not widely accepted in practice. And one of the consequences of this pernicious idea is that it is very difficult for black men and women to remain attuned to each other's humanity . . . this refusal to acknowledge one another's humanity is a reflection of the way we are seen and treated in the larger society. (207)

In an article entitled "The Politics of Representation," Barbara Godard uses a quotation from Lee Maracle's I Am Woman to make the same point regarding Indigenous gender relations:

That an entire culture has been 'raped', has made it impossible for them to love themselves, for Indigenous men to cherish Indigenous women. Admiring the dominant White culture, they adopt its values, seeing only 'dark-skinned sensuality' in Indigenous women as Other--

the Squaw, not the Princess—raping them and beating them up (52-73, esp. 71). Rage against the colonizer is deflected and turned inward on the colonized's own culture in a process of self-destruction. (202)

While Maracle's use of the word impossible may be an overstatement, colonial violence has certainly made it extremely difficult for Indigenous men and women to respect, value, and love one another. From reading the works of these critics, it becomes clear that understanding gender relations in colonized communities, and the sexual violence that is too often a component of these relations, is impossible without attention to both White colonial and patriarchal ideologies, as interlocking systems of domination.

While the danger in raising the issue of sexual violence is that it will simply reinscribe White colonial stereotypes of Indigenous peoples, it is the position of many that gender conflict and sexual violence in Indigenous communities is a corruption of the pre-colonial situation. Paula Gunn Allen supports this position when she writes, "During the five hundred years of Anglo-European colonization, the tribes have seen a progressive shift from gynocentric, egalitarian, ritual-based social systems to secularized structures closely imitative of the European patriarchal system" (195). Currie, in her article, is somewhat more hesitant in her description of the pre-colonial situation but arrives at the same position about gender relations as Gunn Allen: "it may be impossible to determine whether pre-conquest Indigenous cultures were gynocratic, matriarchal, or patriarchal. However, it is . . . all too possible to state unequivocally that the well-established European system of patriarchy became dominant as the colonizers imposed their religion(s), laws, and economies on Indigenous ones" (140). Debates about whether pre-colonial Indigenous communities were primarily matriarchal or patriarchal, and to what degree, may be largely unproductive and may

miss the point. What seems clear is that pre-colonial Indigenous communities allowed for equality and complementarity in gender relations: "Every part of the oral tradition expresses the idea that ritual is gender-based, but rather than acting as a purely divisive structure, the separation by gender emphasises complementarity" (Gunn Allen 82).

Sherene Razack adopts a similar position when she draws upon the Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba:

While the role of Aboriginal women in Aboriginal society is not well understood in non-Aboriginal circles, we have been told, and accept, that a resumption of their traditional roles is the key to putting an end to Aboriginal female mistreatment . . . the ultimate goal is to encourage and assist Aboriginal women to regain and occupy their rightful place as equal partners in Aboriginal society. (67)

The need for Indigenous women to regain and occupy their rightful place as equal partners clearly links their current disempowered position to the disruptions imposed by White domination. This is a point clearly stated also by Janice Acoose in her book Iskwewak:

Our once community- and consensual-based ways of governance, social organization, and economic practices were stripped of their legitimacy and authority by White christian males, who imposed an ideologically contrasting hierarchical structure. Of specific importance to this discussion is the removal of women from all significant social, political, economic, and spiritual processes. Where women once participated and contributed in meaningful ways as part of clan, tribal,

and council consensus governments, under the colonial regime . . . they were generally excluded. (47)

Clearly, then, it is one of White supremacy's gross distortions to characterize Indigenous communities as inherently dangerous places for women. To do so is to maintain a fallacy. When gender conflict and sexual violence are understood within the context of colonial violence, a characterization of Indigenous communities as inherently misogynistic can be seen as one of the self-serving contradictions of White colonial ideology. Sexual violence in indigenous communities must be understood as the product of White colonial ideology and patriarchal ideology functioning as interlocking systems of domination. Patriarchal ideology invites Indigenous men to direct self-contempt, self-hatred, and feelings of powerlessness against the women in their communities. Both the devaluation of Indigenous women and the violence directed at them, often used to reinscribe White dominance, are products of the self-hatred White colonial ideology has violently imposed upon Indigenous peoples and communities.

Chapter Three: *Whiteness* as a Socially Constructed Category

While Canadian society continues to be rife with images of Indigenous peoples as *Indians*, as the degraded and dehumanised Other, the opposite pole in this social construction is the category of Whiteness. Sherene Razack identifies the relational nature of this social construction with a quotation from Trinh T. Minh-ha, who writes "the barbarian, the pagan, the infidel, the wild man, the 'Indigenous,' and the underdeveloped . . . can only exist in relation to their other" (23-24). In the introduction to White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness, Ruth Frankenberg provides a more detailed account of the inter-dependent nature of the social construction of the White self and its Other:

Colonization . . . occasioned the reformulation of European selves. Central to colonial discourses is the notion of the colonized subject as irreducibly Other from the standpoint of a White 'self.' Equally significant, while discursively generating and marking a range of cultural and racial Others as different from an apparently stable Western or White self, the Western self is itself produced as *an effect of the Western discursive production of its Others*. This means that the Western self and the non-Western other are co-constructed as discursive products. (17)

In order to understand fully how we have come to be constructed as the Other, it is necessary for Indigenous peoples to examine the construction of Whiteness. The manicheism of White colonial ideology defines Indianness and Whiteness as mutually exclusive categories, thereby reinforcing White domination: "White is as much as

anything else an economic and political category maintained over time by a changing set of exclusionary practices" (Frankenburg 11-12). It is only by critically examining both poles in this social coconstruction that we can begin to understand and free ourselves from the manichean binary produced by White colonial ideology, discourses, and images, all of which justify and reinforce White domination.

As Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz point out in the introduction to White Trash: Race and Class in America, "Minority intellectuals like Toni Morrison and bell hooks, among others, have called for Whites to reevaluate themselves and their identities self-consciously, eschewing a vision of Whiteness as the 'norm' for a more realistic and fair-minded understanding of Whiteness as a specific, racially marked group existing in relation to many other such groups" (5). Specifically, what bell hooks calls for in Yearning is an understanding of "Whiteness as a concept underlying racism, colonization, and cultural imperialism" (166). Ruth Frankenburg argues for the value of examining Whiteness in the following manner: "Naming 'Whiteness' displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself a product of its dominance. Among the effects on White people of both race privilege and of the dominance of Whiteness are their seeming normativity, their structured invisibility" (6). Such calls for a study of Whiteness understood as a socially and culturally constructed category are based upon a particular understanding of race, an understanding that Wray and Newitz describe in the following manner: "Critics of Whiteness understand race to be socially constructed, not a biological category. Racial difference is viewed primarily as a result of socially and historically contingent processes of racialization, constituted through and embodied in a wide variety of discourses and practices" (3). Calls for critical examinations of Whiteness, then, are not based upon an essentialist us-versus-them

understanding of race, but, rather, are based upon a desire to understand the social construction of interacting social identities. However, as bell hooks writes in Black Looks, "Repudiating us-and-them dichotomies does not mean that we should never speak of the ways observing the world from the standpoint of 'Whiteness' may indeed distort perception, impede understanding of the way racism works" (177). Furthermore, such an understanding of race as a specific social construction is consistent with the contemporary understanding of race as identified by Kwame Anthony Appiah in his essay entitled "Race": "there is a fairly widespread consensus in the sciences of biology and anthropology that the word 'race' . . . refers to nothing that science should recognize as real" and "that such classifications as *Negro*, *Caucasian*, and *Mongoloid* are of no importance for biological purposes" (277). However, this contemporary understanding of race replaces earlier quite different ones.

As Appiah points out, by the middle of the nineteenth century an understanding of the concept of race had developed that "had at its heart a new scientific conception of biological heredity" (276). By this time most of the educated people in England believed that "we could divide human beings into a small number of groups, called 'races', in such a way that all the members of these races shared certain fundamental, biologically inheritable, moral and intellectual characteristics with each other that they did not share with members of any other race," and that "[t]he characteristics that each member of a race was supposed to share with every other were sometimes called the *essence* of that race" (276). As Appiah points out, "by the middle of the nineteenth century the notion that all races were equal was a distinctly minority view" and even liberal thinkers "largely acknowledged that nonWhite people lacked either the intelligence or the vigor of the White races" (280). Appiah writes that "when a

conception of 'primitive' peoples became biologized . . . especially under the influence of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* . . . In the age of Social Darwinism [a hierarchy of races developed in which] the highest, it was widely agreed, was the Indo-European stock from which the Germanic peoples emerged. In England and North America, there was a further narrowing of focus: the Anglo-Saxons were the favored offshoot of the Germanic stock" (279-280). This hierarchical ranking of the races led to "an inevitable element of moral evaluation in most theories of race" (280). It was a simple, logical step to rank non-White peoples as morally inferior to Whites because "the racial essence accounted for more than the obvious physical characteristics" (280). As Appiah goes on to explain, such theory had taken firm root in European minds by the close of the 1800's: "By the end of the nineteenth century most Western scientists (indeed, most educated Westerners) believed that racialism was correct and sought to explain many characteristics [including moral and intellectual characteristics] . . . by supposing that they were inherited along with (or were in fact part of) a person's racial essence" (276). What Appiah identifies as nineteenth-century racialism inevitably led to the practices and institutionalization of the structures of racism, and it is these nineteenth-century conceptions of race that governed race relations well into the twentieth century.

While the nineteenth-century understandings of race may now seem outdated, such ideas, albeit in a new disguise, have lingered into our own times. Ruth Frankenburg describes the transition in the understanding of racial difference in the following manner:

beginning in the 1920's . . . race difference came to be named in cultural and social terms instead of, or simultaneously with, biological ones the notion of 'ethnicity' displaced 'race' as a descriptor of difference.

Within this new paradigm, belonging to an ethnic group came to be understood more behaviourally than biologically (although, since a cultural group continued to be understood in terms of descent rather than practice, one could add that biology continues to underwrite conceptions of identity). (13)

Sherene Razack is even less willing than Frankenburg to view this transition as true progress in our understandings of difference. Razack explains what she calls "the culturalization of racism" (60) in the following manner: "Cultural differences perform the same function as more biological notions of race once did: they mark inferiority. A message of racial inferiority is now more likely to be coded in the language of culture rather [sic] than biology" (19). Rather than erasing explicit expressions of racism, Razack argues that culturalized racism simply reinforces and masks White supremacy: "overt racism, which rests upon the notion of biologically based inferiority, coexists with a more covert practice of cultural or acquired inferiority . . . [the] concept of culturalized racism . . . highlights a major feature of how modern racism works: its covert operations" (60). While contemporary understandings of race as socially and culturally constructed may seem to be very different from nineteenth-century notions, both Frankenburg and Razack argue that these contemporary understandings may not be so different because in the nineteenth century, "it was common to offer the racial superiority of the 'White man' as an explanation for the contemporary successes of imperialism" (Appiah 281). There still appears to be a need for the kind of justifications Appiah identifies: "it is more than just colonialism that needs to be justified. What needs to be justified is the especial brutality of the colonization of nonWhite peoples--Africans and Indians" (278).

In an attempt to achieve a critical understanding of Whiteness as socially and culturally constructed, it is important to be aware of nineteenth-century understandings of race because even while such ideas may be cloaked in a new language of cultural difference "races are like witches: however unreal witches are, belief in witches, like belief in races, has had—and in many communities continues to have—profound consequences for human social life" (Appiah 277). Calls for an understanding of Whiteness as a socially and culturally constructed category cannot ignore the role of nineteenth-century conceptions of race if one hopes to achieve a "recognition of the ways in which Whiteness serves as a sort of invisible norm, the unraced center of a racialized world" and the ways in which Whiteness "has long held the privileged place of racial normativity" (Wray and Newitz 3). The attempt is to achieve a recognition of "Whiteness . . . [as] an oppressive ideological construct that promotes and maintains social inequalities" (3), for, as Appiah observes, "however mythical the notion of race seems to be, we cannot deny the obvious fact that having one set of heritable characteristics—dark skin, say—rather than another—blonde hair, for example—can have profound psychological, economic, and other social consequences" (285). In our attempts to decolonise ourselves and our communities, Indigenous peoples must be vigilant in recognising the ways in which the language of cultural difference may simply reinscribe White domination. The language of difference too often reinscribes White domination because "minorities are encouraged to keep their culture but enjoy no greater access to power and resources" (Razack 61). While the language used to discuss the racialized Other may have changed, Ruth Frankenburg maintains that "'Whiteness' signals the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than

disadvantage" (237), and, therefore, "It is not . . . realistic or meaningful to reconceptualize Whiteness outside of racial domination when, in practical terms, Whiteness still confers race privilege" (243).

In Black Looks, bell hooks writes that "Searching the work of post-colonial critics, I found much writing that bespeaks the continued fascination with the way White minds, particularly the colonialist imperial traveller, perceive blackness, and very little expressed interest in representations of Whiteness in the black imagination" (166). She goes on to write that

My thinking about representations of Whiteness in the black imagination has been stimulated by classroom discussions about the way in which the absence of recognition is a strategy that facilitates making a group of the Other. In these classroom discussions there have been heated debates among students when White students respond with disbelief, shock, and rage, as they listen to black students talk about Whiteness, when they are compelled to hear observations, stereotypes, etc., that are offered as 'data' gleaned from close scrutiny and study. Usually White students respond with naive amazement that black people critically assess White people from a standpoint where 'Whiteness' is the privileged signifier. Their amazement that black people watch White people with a critical 'ethnographic' gaze, is itself an expression of racism. (166)

Hooks's further discussion of the reactions of White students involved in classroom discussions in which they are forced to see Whiteness through the eyes of black

students demonstrates how invocations of pluralism mask people's ability to see Whiteness as a socially constructed category:

Often their rage erupts because they believe that all ways of looking that highlight difference subvert the liberal belief in a universal subjectivity (we are all just people) that they think will make racism disappear. They have a deep emotional investment in the myth of 'sameness,' even as their actions reflect the primacy of Whiteness as a sign informing who they are and how they think. (167)

This is fascinating precisely because no such expressions of rage, shock, or disbelief would come from the same students if the class were discussing representations of ethnic minorities in the White imagination. They may condemn the stereotypes and be sympathetic to the damage the stereotypes have caused, but they would not react with surprise. Such an undertaking would appear normal. Whiteness needs to be encouraged to see itself through the eyes of the Other if it is to fully recognize and understand the role it has played in that Othering. This is not simply to cry victimization and attempt to evoke a paralysing guilt in people but to have them come to understand the dialectic of the manicheism that has robbed both Indigenous and White peoples of their humanity. Whiteness must come to see its own role in this Othering if the damage is to be repaired. Simply studying its own representations of others or having Whiteness gaze into the mirror of its own representations of itself is not sufficient.

Simplistic invocations of pluralism or multiculturalism amount to nothing more than a denial that seeks to erase or ignore the entire history of White imperial and colonial domination and, as such, offer little or no possibility of truly challenging White dominance. As bell hooks writes in Black Looks, we live in "a world where

evocations of pluralism and diversity act to obscure differences arbitrarily imposed and maintained by White racist domination" (166). The kind of anger and hostility hooks records in situations in which White students are challenged to critically examine Whiteness arises because "To speak of Whiteness is . . . to assign everyone a place in the relations of racism" (Frankenburg 6). To speak of Whiteness, to assign White people a place in the relations of racism disrupts simplistic notions of ethnic or cultural difference and the comfort they provide: "If we live in a tolerant and pluralistic society in which the fiction of equality within ethnic diversity is maintained, then we need not accept responsibility for racism. We can conveniently forget our racist past and feel secure in the knowledge that at least the residential schools are closed" (Razack 60). While "words like Other and Difference are taking the place of commonly known words deemed too uncool or too simplistic, words like oppression, exploitation, and domination," this new language of difference is, as hooks observes, too often "neatly divorced from a recognition of racism" (Yearning 52). Such evasiveness, Frankenburg argues, allows White people to avoid taking responsibility for their place in the relations of domination, leaving the oppressed to struggle alone: "when White people . . . look at racism, we tend to view it as an issue people of color face and have to struggle with, but not as an issue that generally involves or implicates us Racism can, in short, be conceived as something external to us rather than as a system that shapes our daily experiences and sense of self" (6). Such unwillingness to see Whiteness as a cultural category or identity with a significant place within relations of domination makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to understand Whiteness as "a racial and classed group among other such groups," an understanding which would bring us "one step closer to a world without racial division, or, at the very least, a world where

racial difference does not mean racial, symbolic, and economic domination" (Wray and Newitz 4).

In order, then, to fully understand the social construction of Indigenous peoples as Other and to move beyond a simple oscillation between the poles of the racist ideology's manichean opposition, Indigenous people must strive to understand not only our position as Other, but also the socially constructed category of Whiteness and the manichean dehumanization of both identities. If we are to overcome stereotypical constructions of ourselves, we must also overcome idealizations of Whiteness, which are also stereotypes, and which have penetrated into our perception of ourselves and our relations with non-Indigenous people. Richard Dyer, in his essay "White", argues that it is necessary to engage in a struggle to understand "Whiteness as a culturally constructed category" (141) because "White power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything at all" (141). In citing the French social philosopher Herbert Marcuse, Dyer asserts that "Power in contemporary society habitually passes itself off as embodied in the normal as opposed to the superior" (141), and as a consequence, Dyer argues, "White domination is reproduced by the way White people 'colonise the definition of normal'" (142). In what seems to be an obsession with studying images of the Otherness of non-White groups, too often Whiteness as a category has been ignored, and this ignoring, Dyer argues, "has had the effect of reproducing the sense of oddness, differentness, exceptionality of [non-Whites], the feeling that they are departures from the norm . . ." and, in this situation, "the norm has carried on as if it is the natural, inevitable, ordinary way of being human" (141). bell hooks in *Yearning* uses a quotation from Coco Fusco to make the point that "Racial identities are not only black, latino, asian, native american . . . they are also White. To ignore White ethnicity is to

redouble its hegemony by naturalizing it. Without specifically addressing White ethnicity, there can be no critical evaluation of the construction of the other" ("Fantasies of Oppositionality" 171). Wray and Newitz further address the necessity of a critical assessment of Whiteness when they state that

the invisibility of Whiteness is an enabling condition for both White supremacy/privilege and race-based prejudice. Making Whiteness visible to Whites [and to the colonized] --exposing the discourses, the social and cultural practices, and the material conditions that cloak Whiteness and hide its dominating effects--is a necessary part of any anti-racist project. (3-4)

The difficulty in seeing Whiteness is a result of the functioning of an ideology of Whiteness that obscures our ability to see. In his article "White," Dyer writes that "This is an article about a subject that . . . seems not to be there as a subject at all. Trying to think about the representation of whiteness as an ethnic category . . . is difficult, partly because white power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular" (141). Such an approach to Whiteness allows for an understanding of Whiteness as an ideology, an understanding of the ideology of Whiteness. In his book Ideology, Terry Eagleton quotes John B. Thompson, who states that "To study ideology is to study the ways in which meaning (or signification) serves to sustain relations of domination" (5). Dyer goes on to argue that

whiteness secures its power by making it hard, especially for white peoples and their media to 'see' whiteness. This, of course, also makes it hard to analyse. It is the way black people are marked as black (are not just people) in representation that has made it relatively easy to

analyse their representation, whereas white people--not there as a category and everywhere everything as a fact--are difficult, if not impossible, to analyse qua white. The subject seems to fall apart in your hands as soon as you begin. (143)

He discusses the necessity of approaches "where we might begin to see whiteness--where its difference from blackness is inescapable and at issue" and goes on to write that "What all of these approaches share, however, is reference to that which is non-white, as if only non-whiteness can give whiteness any substance. The reverse is not the case--studies of images of blacks, Native Americans, Jews and other ethnic minorities do not need the comparative element that seems at this stage indispensable for the study of whites" (144). At this point, Dyer seems to fall prey to the very ideology of Whiteness that he seeks to analyse. The comparative element in the studies of images of minorities is Whiteness, but is it hidden, unspoken, invisible; it is the hidden assumption of normality from which these studies begin; Whiteness is the assumed and unmarked norm from which other identities are deviations. It is precisely the ideology of Whiteness as norm that allows for the study of Other ethnic identities. In order to fully understand the construction of any group of people as Others, it is necessary--for both dominant and subordinate group--to understand that construction in relation to Whiteness. Part of achieving such an understanding lies in studies such as Dyer's, in which he examines the construction of Whiteness in mainstream cinema; in studies such as Toni Morrison's Playing in the Dark: Whiteness in the Literary Imagination, in which she studies "the way in which black people ignite critical moments of discovery or change or emphasis in literature not written by them; and, surely, in studying how

Whiteness is constructed/represented in cultural productions by those who have been Othered."

What all of these authors suggest is that the manicheism of White colonial ideologies, and to overcome its distortions, it is necessary to understand not only constructions of Otherness but also how Whiteness has been constructed to reinforce its own power and dominance over the Other. In order for Indigenous peoples to understand our construction as the Other in ways that will allow us to overcome White domination, we need to understand how constructions of Whiteness have infiltrated our consciousness. Each of us has been exposed to images that deny our humanity and also to images that elevate Whiteness into a category that represents our desire for success, self-definition, and humanity itself. As bell hooks explains, in an attempt to establish ideological hegemony, White colonial logic encourages oppressed peoples to pursue Whiteness at the expense of valuing their own identity: "White colonial logic Rather than using coercive tactics to colonize . . . seduces black folks with the promise of mainstream success if only we are willing to negate the value of blackness" (Black Looks 17). However, this flight from our own identities toward Whiteness is a seduction that merely continues to imprison us within the manicheism of the White colonial ideology.

The internalisation of the White colonial ideology by the colonised implies not only the internalisation of negative images of self but also the internalisation of elevated conceptions of the oppressor. The opposite pole of the self-hatred is a longing for a White ideal. As surely as we internalise a degraded, dehumanised image of ourselves, we at the same time internalise a culturally constructed image of Whiteness that represents power, success, and well-being. In Prison of Grass, Howard Adams writes

about a White ideal and suggests that "this White ideal is not rational; it is subconscious" (144). Adams goes on to explain how an idealized vision of Whiteness comes to be an unquestioned assumption:

As soon as Native children enter school they are surrounded with White supremacist ideas and stories--every image glorifies White success They soon recognize that all positions of authority--such as teacher, priest, judge, Indian agent--are held by Whites. These people make all the rules and decisions that determine the fate of Metis and Indian people. (14-15)

Images and stories that equate Indigenous identity with degradation exist in relation to elevated images of Whiteness: "White supremacy dictates that Whiteness is beautiful, that mainstream lifestyles are the most desirable, and that mainstream life is the only successful way of life" (Adams 14-15). The White colonial manicheism that is central to such images and ideas encourage both a flight from Indigenousness and one towards Whiteness. There is, then, a longing, a desire within oppressed peoples for the very Whiteness that is the source of our oppression. Adams documents his own experience of this longing or desire, a flight from one of the manichean poles to its opposite:

When I left my ghetto as a young man, I made a complete break with my parents and home. To me, everything about them and the community seemed so definitely halfbreed, and therefore ugly and shameful. As a result, I attempted to dissociate myself from everything and everyone that appeared halfbreed. I wanted to be a successful White man in mainstream society. If I maintained a close identification and

relationship with my parents, home, and community, they would anchor me to halfbreed society and prevent my success in the White world. I was fully aware of how Whites mocked and condemned halfbreeds and their way of life. I wanted to escape from all that ugliness and mockery. (15)

This longing for Whiteness, a result of the White colonial construction of Indigenous peoples as the degraded other and of White economic domination, is documented by Emma Larocque: "I saw Dick and Jane and Sally's suburban home and their grandparents expansive and, oh, so clean farm. Not for a long time was I to appreciate my home again" (Defeathering the Indian 68). Margery Fee draws upon a quotation from Beatrice Culleton's April Raintree to illustrate a similar sentiment:

And when I grew up, I wouldn't be poor, I'd be rich. Being a half-breed meant being poor and dirty. It meant being weak and having to drink. It meant being ugly and stupid. It meant living off White people. And giving your children to White people to look after When I got free of this place, when I got free from being a foster child, then I would live just like a real White person. ("Upsetting Fake Ideas" 175)

What becomes clear from these narratives is that discourses that construct Indigenous peoples as the degraded and dehumanised Other combine with the objective realities of economic poverty, imposed by White domination, to encourage Indigenous peoples to see Whiteness in an uncomplicated, idealized manner.

In narratives that document a desire for Whiteness, we can discern evidence of what Paolo Freire calls "an attitude of adhesion to the oppressor" (Duran and Duran 158). Freire describes this attitude in the following manner:

This phenomenon derives from the fact that the oppressed, at a certain moment of their existential experience, adopt an attitude of adhesion to the oppressor. Under these circumstances they cannot consider him sufficiently clearly to objectivize him--[their ability] to discover him outside themselves as oppressed is impaired by their submersion in the reality of oppression. At this level, their perception of themselves as opposites of the oppressor does not yet signify engagement in a struggle to overcome the contradiction, but to identification with its opposite pole. (Duran and Duran 158)

In other words, the attempted flight from Indigenusness and toward Whiteness does not challenge the manichean construction of the White colonial ideology, but is simply an attempt to escape the degradation associated with Indigenusness and to achieve the success associated with Whiteness. The flight from the degraded pole toward its opposite is simply an attempt to move from being one of the oppressed, to being an oppressor. This is not an attempt to challenge racist stereotypes of Indigenous peoples but simply a way of trying to escape having them imposed upon oneself.

The colonized's flight toward an idealized vision of Whiteness from the socially constructed images of their own degradation and the actual social and economic degradation, which the images seek to justify, is only half the story. The colonized may internalise the colonial ideology because, as bell hooks writes, "Ideologically, the rhetoric of White supremacy supplies a fantasy of Whiteness this fantasy makes Whiteness synonymous with goodness" (Black Looks 169). However, the very treatment of the colonized by the oppressors may serve to counteract this internalisation. Francis Jennings writes that "Persons and groups reaching for illicit power customarily assume

attitudes of great moral rectitude to divert attention from the abandonment of their own moral standards of behaviour" (Snider 33-34), and it is the very disjunction between the assumption of moral superiority and the abandonment of moral behaviour that can counteract the idealization of the colonizer. The gap between colonizers' humanist ideals and actual practices becomes a gap from which the colonized voice arises. In the introduction to The Wretched of the Earth, Sartre writes of the colonized that "the mouths opened by themselves; the yellow and black voices [and red voices, one might add] still spoke of humanism but only to reproach us with our inhumanity our values and the true facts of their lives did not hang together" (8). And from the mouths of the colonized Sartre hears this: "You are making us into monstrosities; your humanism claims we are at one with the rest of humanity but your racist methods set us apart" (8). Sartre points out that the humanism Whiteness supposedly represents applies only to Whites and not to the colonised: "Our victims know us by their scars and by their chains, and it is this that makes their evidence irrefutable" (Introduction to Wretched of the Earth 12). Elsewhere Sartre observes that "colonialists do every day in reality what they condemn in fantasy" (Introduction to Memmi xxv). The gap between the rhetoric of humanism and the practices of the colonial project, with its accompanying White colonial ideology, can work as a counterbalance to the idealization of Whiteness in the minds of the colonized. The counteracting force on the White ideal is "the Indigenous person's awareness of the racism he experiences in his daily life" (Prison of Grass 144). In Black Looks, bell hooks writes that "Systems of domination, imperialism, colonialism, and racism actively coerce black folks to internalize negative perceptions of blackness, to be self-hating" and the opposite pole of this self-hatred is a "contradictory longing to possess the reality of the Other [Whiteness], even though that

reality is one that wounds and negates" (166). Hooks's words imply what Adams states explicitly [as quoted above]; a conscious critical focus on the wounding and negating character of Whiteness can be the key that unlocks our understanding of the functioning of the White colonial ideology. A struggle to overcome the contradiction of our longing for a White ideal can only come with the recognition that Whiteness is not the solution to, but rather the cause of, our degradation. As Indigenous peoples we must come to recognize the role of power and White domination in any belief in the superiority of Whiteness. A conscious recognition of Whiteness as domination can act as a counter-force against idealizations of Whiteness as promoted by the White colonial ideology and can free us from idealizations that negate our humanity.

Cultural productions play a significant role in our construction as Others and can play an important role in understanding and overcoming such constructions. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, in Writers in Politics, argues that "to make economic and political control the more complete, the colonizing power tries to control the cultural environment: education, religion, language, literature, songs, forms of dances, every form of expression, hoping in this way to control a people's values and ultimately their world outlook, their image and definition of self" (12). He goes on to argue that "Cultural imperialism was then part and parcel of the thorough system of economic exploitation and political oppression of the colonized peoples and literature was an integral part of that system of oppression and genocide" (15). If Ngugi is correct that literature is intimately involved in colonial oppression, then it seems safe to assume that counter-hegemonic cultural productions, including literature, have an important role to play in overcoming oppression.

In Tomson Highway's plays, Whiteness may not always be physically present, but Whiteness is often an absent presence both in the minds of the characters, often unconsciously, and, hopefully, in the minds of critical viewers. This absent presence of Whiteness in the plays marks Whiteness as a category and calls for an emphasis on the invisibility of Whiteness as the unspoken, unmarked norm and reminds the critical viewer of the ideology of Whiteness and its role in constructions of its Other. Though not always physically present, Whiteness is brought into view, emerges from invisibility and a demand is made that Whiteness be interrogated as to its function in the plays. Hence, the plays invite the viewer to view Whiteness in relation to the images of Indigenous peoples as they are represented in the plays. Learning to read for idealizations of Whiteness simultaneously with the degradation of Indigenous identities is a decolonizing strategy. Reading the plays for Whiteness and its functions provides a social context that generates the implication that degradation in Indigenous communities has social rather than natural causes, social sources with roots in the ideology of Whiteness, which implicates both Whites and Indigenous people in the continuing degradation. Sherene Razack argues that "Colonization, when it is mentioned, achieves the status of a cultural characteristic, pre-given and involving only Aboriginal people, not white colonizers" (19). She goes on to argue that White colonizers avoid responsibility for colonization because "when difference is thought to reside in the person rather than in the social context, we are able to ignore our role in producing it" (21). By foregrounding Whiteness as a necessary, though often hidden, pole in our construction as degraded Others, Highway assigns responsibility to Whites for their role in the continuing degradation of Indigenous identities and communities. Furthermore, by bringing Whiteness into focus, Highway assigns responsibility to

Indigenous people to begin understanding how the ideology of Whiteness has affected our sense of who we are and to work to overcome the degradations that have infected our identities and communities. As Indigenous peoples, we are called upon to "know the places of invasion in our histories and in ourselves" (Larocque xxvii) and work toward overcoming these invasions. Reading Whiteness as represented by an Indigenous playwright can destabilize Whiteness as norm, revealing Whiteness as a category of both desire and oppression, thereby offering a counter-hegemonic discursive construction of Whiteness.

Chapter Four: Representations of Whiteness in The Rez Sisters

In keeping with the White colonial ideology that dominates Canadian society, Canadian cultural life is rife with manichean discourses that constantly proliferate images of Whiteness as desirable, normal, and natural and, in counterpoint, images of Indigenous peoples as *Indians*, as undesirable, abnormal, and unnatural. The manichean constructions serve to reinforce and justify the intolerable social conditions many Indigenous peoples live in and for which the dominant society is in significant part responsible. However, Tomson Highway's play The Rez Sisters destabilizes and disrupts the manichean assumptions of White colonial ideology and discourses in two ways. First, while many of the characters display an obvious longing for Whiteness, there are also moments when the stories they share reveal Whiteness as a source of loss, threat, disempowerment, and fear. Second, issues of gender are introduced and the category of gender interrupts the oversimplification of a manicheism that reduces human relations to an Indigenous/non-Indigenous binary, and which privileges race over gender. The ambivalence the play displays in its representations of Whiteness and the introduction of gender concerns, which challenges the privileging of race, are destabilizing strategies, opening up sites of resistance, and providing hope for a balance in which Indigenous identity need not represent the undesirable, abnormal, and unnatural that provides stability to representations of Whiteness as desirable, normal, and natural.

In her discussion of The Rez Sisters, Diane Debenham writes that "The play is remarkable because it simply does not address many of the usual perceptions of native people. It does not define them in terms of their struggle to exist in White society

White society exists only peripherally" (152). While it is true that the play is set on the fictional reserve of Wasaychigan Hill, far from White society, there is an obvious tension in the play between reserve life and a variety of centers of White society, such as Espanola, Sudbury, and Toronto. In fact, the entire motivation for the central action in the play is provided by the women's desires to go to Toronto. Beyond mention of the actual geographical centers, references to and representations of Whiteness abound in the play: Philomena's dreams of a new toilet, Annie's desire for a relationship with a White man, Marie-Adele's White picket fence, and Nanabush's appearance as a seagull. Debenham may be right when she asserts that "the personalities of the Rez sisters are comfortably complete. None of them experiences the anguish and despair of the Indian seeking to find his or her true identity; all these colourful women know who they are" (154); however, the sheer number of references to Whiteness and the encounters of Philomena and Zhaboonigan with White males, for example, insist that these representations of Whiteness be interrogated. While Whiteness may not appear in the foreground of the play, it certainly provides a close backdrop for the action. The very isolation of the reserve and the social and economic conditions of reserve life, which are directly related to White domination, shape the women's lives and concerns in relation to White society. Hence, to read the play as a happy paean about the lives of Indigenous characters unaffected by relations to the dominant White society is to miss much of the potential meaning of the play. The play is rife with narratives of longing and desire for Whiteness, in a variety of forms, which are also problematized by narratives in which Whiteness can be read as dehumanising of and disempowering to the lives of the Indigenous characters.

The complicated and sometimes contradictory nature of the construction of Whiteness in The Rez Sisters is apparent in Pelagia's desire to go to Toronto. As the play opens we are immediately introduced to Pelagia Patchnose, the elder of the rez sisters, and what might be read as her desire for Whiteness, represented by the city of Toronto. However, close attention to Pelagia's words quickly situates her desire in a social context and opens up a space of ambivalence within that desire. The play begins with Pelagia expressing the desire to be somewhere else: "Philomena. I wanna go to Toronto Boats on the North Channel I wish I was on, sailing away somewhere....I'm here in plain, dusty, boring old Wasaychigan Hill . . . Wasy . . . waiting . . . waiting I'm tired Philomena, tired of this place. There's days I wanna leave so bad" (2-3). Pelagia's desire to go to Toronto is a desire to escape impoverishment and boredom, but the very conditions from which she longs to escape have been created by and are sustained by White domination. While Pelagia claims that she wants to leave Wasy because it is plain, dusty, and boring, other reasons for Pelagia's desire to leave begin to appear as the conversation continues: "Four o'clock this morning, I was woken up by . . . Andrew Starblanket and his brother, Matthew. Drunk. Again. Or sounded like . . . fighting over some girl. Heard what sounded like a baseball bat landing on somebody's back" (2-3). Philomena responds, "Nothing better to do" (3). Contrary to the stereotype that Indigenous people are lazy and do not want to work, what Pelagia's words indicate is that the people have nothing better to do because of the economic and social marginalization of the reserve community: "Everyone here's crazy. No jobs. Nothing to do but drink and screw each other's wives and husbands and forget about our Nanabush My old man has to go the hundred miles to Espanola just to get a job. My boys. Gone to Toronto. Only place educated Indian.

boys can find decent jobs these days" (6-7). While Margery Fee may be correct when she writes that "Highway is only one writer among many . . . repudiating the idea that reserves contain only miserable and degraded people, all alcoholic and completely dependant on welfare, whose only salvation lies in taking their Manpower Training more seriously and leaving for the big city to get a real job" (108), Pelagia's words serve as a reminder that there is more going on in the play than a simple inversion of negative images into positive images. Fee may be right in asserting that the play "ends by valorizing life 'on the rez'" (108); however, Highway certainly does not deny the hard social and economic realities imposed by White domination. Further evidence of the economically marginal circumstances of the women's lives comes when plans are being made to attend the bingo and Emily asks, "Now how the hell are you guys gonna get down to Toronto? You're all goddam welfare cases" (56). There is a contradiction at the heart of Pelagia's desire, then, since the very conditions she wishes to escape from are the result of White domination and oppression of Indigenous peoples, yet what she wishes to escape to is the heart of Whiteness.

As well as the social and economic demoralization of the community, Pelagia also identifies an accompanying cultural and spiritual decline. The picture of Wasaychigan Hill that emerges is of a community with high levels of unemployment, with little opportunity for economic self-sufficiency, where alcoholism, violence, and marital infidelity are common, and where the residents have begun to lose their cultural identities, as embodied in their Indigenous language and stories. Pelagia's words serve as a precaution against over-simplified, overly-optimistic readings of the play. When Debenham writes of the play's characters "None of them experience the anguish and despair of the Indian seeking his or her true identity" (154), she is correct.

The vitality and resourcefulness displayed by the women in the play are testimony to their adaptability and survival skills. However, the characters still exhibit an awareness of things that have been lost in the encounter between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Pelagia laments the current state of life on the rez: "It's not like it used to be," and her sister Philomena acknowledges the necessary state of all societies everywhere and always: "People change, places change, time changes things" (4). The message seems to be that, yes, things have changed, but change does not imply death, destruction, and decay; change only implies these negatives when people do not adapt and adjust--or are not allowed to--to the changes that time necessarily brings.

Nanabush's constant presence, in both of the plays, seems to suggest that she/he has well survived the changes time has brought, but her/his people, as evident from their loss of contact with her/him, continue to struggle to adapt and adjust to changing times and circumstances in ways that allow them to maintain contact with, and a life affirming awareness of, their own cultural uniqueness. Pelagia observes: "the old stories, the old language. Almost all gone...was a time when Nanabush and Windigo and everyone here could rattle away in Indian fast as Bingo Betty could lay her bingo chips down on a hot night" (5). The emphasis here is on *old*, again emphasizing what has been lost or forgotten. The irony of Pelagia's lament becomes fully apparent when we consider that it concerns the absence or disappearance of Nanabush, when as audience members or readers we are well aware of the almost constant presence of Nanabush onstage. Paving the roads of the rez will not and cannot bring Nanabush back since Nanabush is already and always present. Pelagia seems to have internalized the conception that Nanabush has died or disappeared and accepted the dominant culture's assumption or arbitrary declaration of the death of Indigenous culture and spirituality.

However, just as these Indigenous people have not disappeared, neither has Nanabush gone.

Given the social and economic conditions that prevail in the community, it is not difficult to understand Pelagia's desire to flee the reserve, and it is against the background of these conditions that we must read her desire. If the Indigenous community of Wasaychigan Hill is characterized in significant part by poverty, alcoholism, and violence, then it is the White community, Toronto, that serves as the counterpoint to Pelagia's community. For Pelagia, Toronto and Whiteness embody and represent economic prosperity and psychological health in contrast to the degradation that infects Wasy. While an outside observer from someplace such as Toronto might observe the conditions of the reserve and ascribe them to some defect inherent in the character of Indigenous peoples--*Indians* are naturally lazy, uncivilized, drunken and violent--Pelagia recognizes the economic marginalization of the community as a cause of social conditions such as alcoholism, violence, and family breakdown. Pelagia does not blame the people of the community for the conditions that exist. She recognizes the causes of the social conditions that infect her community. However, this recognition leads Pelagia to a desire to flee the reserve rather than to an identification of Whiteness as an oppressive power that enforces marginalization upon the Indigenous community.

In the character of Annie and her longing for a relationship with a White man, we find a parallel to Pelagia and her longing for Whiteness. Just as Pelagia's desire for Whiteness is a desire for escape from degraded social and economic conditions, Annie's desire for a White man is a desire to escape from abusive relationships. Annie characterises Indigenous men as drunken and violent, and White men as tender and

caring. Her narrative of desire for Whiteness is straightforwardly manichean. Indigenous men are bad and White men are good, in Annie's eyes. Her vision is narrowly stereotypical and her longing for Fritz the Katz is based upon her stereotypes of both Whiteness and Jewishness. Again, as with Pelagia, her longing for Whiteness involves no recognition of Whiteness as the very cause of situations from which she desires to escape. Furthermore, Annie's desire is similar to Pelagia's in that it would lead her away from the reserve and into the surrounding White communities. Annie plans to win the next reserve bingo and then tells Pelagia and Philomena, "when I win, I'm going to Espanola and play bingo there The bingo in Espanola is bigger. And it's better. And I'll win. And then I'll go to Sudbury where the bingos are even bigger and better" (13). The trail inevitably leads away from Wasy, and eventually to Toronto where the biggest and best bingo will be. The obvious implication is that the further one moves away from Wasy, the Indigenous community, the bigger and better things get. Annie's dream includes visiting her daughter Ellen, "who lives with this White guy in Sudbury," as we continually hear (13). Everytime Annie mentions Ellen, Pelagia and Philomena chime, "who lives with this White guy in Sudbury," and they are obviously tired of hearing it and have begun to use the line to mock Annie. However, it is equally clear that to Annie escape, into the arms of a White man, and thereby into the White community, is a desirable end. The Whiteness of Ellen's partner is an important marker here. As Annie says, when she visits Ellen in Sudbury, she will "go shopping in the record stores and drink beer quietly—not noisy and crazy like here" (13). Again, as with Pelagia, here [Wasy] represents degradation, while the elsewhere [a White community] represents sanity, normality, civility. It is not much of a leap to suggest that the binary in operation here is a simple one of *Indianness*, the Indigenous

community, equals savagery, and Whiteness, the White community, equals civilization. This is clear when Annie asks, "What's it like to go to a big bar . . . like the Silver Dollar?" and she is disappointed with Emily's reply, "Lotta Nishnawbs" (82). Annie's disappointment stems from her desire to associate with White people rather than Indigenous people, in this case Anishanabe people. Later, on the trip to Toronto, Annie again raises the issue: "Lots of White people at this Silver Dollar?" (87). The references to the Silver Dollar and the fact that it is frequented by Indigenous people suggest that it is what is popularly known as an *Indianbar*. Hence Annie is disappointed, and Pelagia's desire to find prosperity in the city is further complicated by this reminder that many Indigenous people face social and economic marginalization not only on reserves but also in large urban centers.

As mentioned, one of the driving forces behind Annie's desire seems to be the fact that her daughter, Ellen, has a seemingly successful inter-racial relationship. This detail in itself challenges White colonial thinking, if Rabillard is correct that such thinking includes "a profound fear of miscegenation" (11). While Ellen's relationship acknowledges the possibility and reality of successful inter-racial relationships, the situation is not, however, the simplistic, uncomplicated matter Annie seems to think it is. Annie's dream seems to be to follow in her daughter's footsteps, since her desire for Whiteness expresses itself in the specific form of a man, namely Fritz the Katz. Annie sees Fritz as desirable not only because he is the lead singer in a band but also because he is from Toronto and is White. Annie's longing for what is a stereotype rather than a reality is emphasized when she tells Emily, "He's Jewish, you know . . . Those Jews make a lot of money, you know." Emily quickly counters Annie's enthusiasm by stating "Not all of them" (85). But Annie will not be so

easily dissuaded: "I'm gonna be one of them Jewish princesses." And when Emily asks "What's wrong with being an Indian Princess, Annie's response betrays her narrowly colonized thinking: "Aw, these White guys. They're nicer to their women. Not like Indian guys. Screw you, drink all your money, and leave you flat on your ass" (86). And when Emily responds "Apple Indian Annie. Red on the outside. White on the inside," Annie continues with her stereotypes: "White guys don't make you do things to them. You just lie there and they do it all for you" (86-87). This stereotypical view of passive female sexuality is not surprising in light of Annie's tendency to see in terms of stereotypes; it is, however, particularly disturbing in relation to the stories of sexual violence elsewhere in the play.

In the character of Emily Dictionary, it becomes clear that Highway is not interested in simply inverting the terms of the manichean binary by idealizing Indigenism and inferiorizing Whiteness. Emily is the one character in the play from whom we hear of actual abuse at the hands of Indigenous men. First there is the character of Henry, and, second, there is the character of Big Joey, with whom she is currently involved. Big Joey's abusive behaviour towards women is documented in the play. We also hear Emily's story of her relationship with Rose Baez, which ended when Rose killed herself. Rose's words, as reported by Emily, provide a context in which to understand much of the play. Emily recounts the event that brought her back to the rez:

Rosabella Baez, leader of the pack . . . She was always thinkin' real deep. And talkin' about bein' a woman. An Indian woman. And suicide. And alcohol and despair and how fuckin' hard it is to be an Indian in this country

. . . No goddam future for them, she'd say. And why, why, why? . . . Cruisin' down the coast highway that night . . . Big 18-wheeler come along real fast and me and Pussy Commanda get out of the way. But not Rose. She stayed in the middle. Went head-on into that truck like a fly against a windshield . . . I loved her like no man's ever loved a woman. (97)

The story Emily relates is about how difficult, confusing, and dangerous it is to be an Indigenous person, particularly an Indigenous woman, in a society that all too often hates Indigenous people and hates women. If you happen to be an Indigenous woman, then you are doubly hated.

From the details of the triangle that exists among Big Joey, Gazelle, and Emily, a picture emerges of the male violence with which the women are faced. Emily has received a black eye at the hands of of Big Joey. As Emily tells the story, she and Gazelle get into a fight over Big Joey's company, and when Big Joey tries to punch Gazelle, he "misses that nympho [Gazelle] and hit me [Emily] one in the eye" (52). Emily promptly "put him out for the night right then and there" (52). We learn that Emily has learned to fight from her experience in a previous relationship with an abusive partner:

You see this fist? You see these knuckles? You wanna know where they come from? Ten years. Every second night for 10 long ass-fuckin' years that goddam Yellowknife asshole Henry Dadzinarare come home to

me so drunk his eyes was spittin' blood like Red Lucifer
himself and he'd beat me purple. (50)

Given that Annie seems to hope to escape such abuse by fleeing into the arms of a White man, it is interesting that it is often Emily who provides a corrective to Annie's overwhelming enthusiasm for White men. Emily, in many ways, is the most worldly of the women. Her hard exterior can be accounted for by her experiences with Henry and Rose. However, she avoids falling into the simplistic vision Annie holds. Emily's experiences have led her to an understanding of the complexities of the contemporary situation, and she resists at every opportunity Annie's oversimplified vision. By the end of the play, we see Emily's ability to embrace the complexity of race and gender relations blossom into hope for the future. She is an expectant mother, and as the critic Sheila Rabillard suggests, "Her baby, shortly to be expelled into the world, will be the triumphant product of past penetration [by a man, namely Big Joey], vulnerability turned to evidence of the transformative strength of the women before us" (12). Furthermore, by the end of the play, Emily has taken on a nurturing role toward Zhaboonigan, which is quite a reversal of her brusqueness towards the young woman earlier in the play. Emily's hard exterior, which served her well as a defence and survival mechanism, is somewhat softened as she begins to let go of the past and look toward the future with hope.

If at times the women in the play idealize Whiteness, viewing it as the desirable pole in a manichean construction, there are also moments when this idealization is undermined by the evidence of harsh realities Whiteness can also represent. While Emily attempts to correct Annie's oversimplified vision of race and gender relations, it is Zhaboonigan's tale of her rape at the hands of two White boys

that provides for the reader the most powerful disruption of the simple manichean vision to which Annie clings. Zhaboonigan tells the story of her rape by "White boys. Two" (47). For emphasis the phrase is repeated, this time in normal syntactical order: "The two White boys. Left me in the bush. Alone. It was cold" (48). Narratives such as Zhaboonigan's clearly subvert the construction of Whiteness as desirable/civilized and Indigenusness as undesirable/uncivilized. In Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics, bell hooks suggests that Whiteness represents a constant and very real threat to minority women, "you knew everytime you walked from your mama's place to your grandma's to avoid any direct eye contact with white men . . . and not to be caught in any secluded place with white men because you might be raped" (4). The simplistic colonial manicheism is undermined when Whiteness is represented as brutal violence and shown to be a source of fear, threat, and dread.

Significantly, Zhaboonigan's tale of her rape comes near the end of the first act when the women are in the middle of a fight sparked by the love triangle of Big Joey, Gazelle, and Emily. Rabillard makes the following observation regarding the timing of Zhaboonigan's revelation: "after the peak of vituperation has been reached, stage directions indicate that the battling women freeze and the lights go down on their fight while Zhaboonigan . . . tells Nanabush how she was raped" (10). At the moment when the women are most divided against one another, Zhaboonigan tells Nanabush of her rape by two White boys:

Boys. White boys. Two. Ever nice White wings, you. I was walking down the road to the store. They ask me if I want ride in car. Oh, I was happy I said, 'Yup.' Took me far away. Ever nice ride. Dizzy. They took all my

clothes off me. Pointing to her crotch, underneath her dress. Many, many times. Remember. Don't fly away. Don't go. I saw you before. There, there. It was a Screwdriver. They put the screwdriver inside me. Here remember. Ever lots of blood. The two White boys. Left me in the bush. Alone. It was cold. And then. Remember. Zhaboonigan. Everybody calls me Zhaboonigan. Why? It means needle. Zhaboonigan. Going-through-thing. Needle Peterson. Going-through-thing Peterson. That's me. It was the screwdriver. (47-48)

This crime is marked both by race and gender and must be read as such. We might be tempted to read this rape as symbolic of the rape of Indigenous culture by White culture, as critic Marc Maufort does when he writes, "The loss of identity of Indian culture is given theatrical expression in the symbolic rape of Zhaboonigan" (233). However, as well as being a symbolic rape, it is an actual physical rape committed by Whites upon an Indigenous body, and it is a crime committed by males upon the body of a female. As Rabillard acknowledges in the notes of her article, "the rape of Zhaboonigan...is meant to allude to the rape of Helen Betty Osborne who was penetrated fifty-six times with a screwdriver, and whose attackers--all but one of four--were not convicted, even though the assault, reportedly, was known and discussed by many of the folk in the small Manitoba town in which it occurred" (24). Such a crime and the willingness of people to conceal it can be ascribed to the specifically gendered stereotype of Indigenous women as easy squaws. Read as the rape of one culture by

another, this reminds us again of the contradiction at the heart of some of the characters' longing for Whiteness. For example, read as both a racial and gendered crime, Zhaboonigan's rape reveals the utter simplistic foolishness of Annie's manichean vision of White and Indigenous men.

If there are dangers in reading Zhaboonigan's rape too symbolically, in the character of Philomena we encounter a situation that might be read as a symbolic rape. She has an affair with a married White man, becomes pregnant, and then gives up the child when the man's wife finds out and the man abandons Philomena. Maufort reads this encounter as "another symbolic rape of the Indian individual [and culture] by White culture" (233). Philomena's revelation is a powerful corrective to both Pelagia and Annie's rather uncomplicated desires to escape to Toronto or into the arms of a White man. It shows that life in Toronto is not necessarily a solution in itself, as Pelagia seems to want to believe, and it shows the same of Annie's desire for a relationship with a White man. Philomena describes her encounter in the following way:

Toronto. Had a good job in Toronto. Real live secretary
in the garment district. He'd come in and see my boss.
Nice man, I thought . . . Loved me. Or I thought he did.
I don't know. Got pregnant anyway. Blonde, blue-eyed,
six foot two. And the way he smelled. God! His wife
walks in . . . He left with her...I don't even know to this
day if it was a boy or girl . . . You know what I'm gonna
do with that money if I win? I'm gonna find a lawyer.
Maybe I can find that child. (81)

As with Zhaboonigan's confession, Philomena's tale of abandonment is marked by both gender and race. Certainly it is the tale of a man cheating on his wife and deceiving his mistress by not telling her that he is married. But it is also significant, in this context, that he is a White man and she an Indigenous woman. He cheats on his wife and then abandons Philomena and the child she is carrying when he is caught. Given discourses that construct Indigenous women as easy squaws, we can read Philomena's tale as one in which a White man uses a Indigenous woman to satisfy his physical desires and then abandons her once his desire for other relations and all they entail is threatened.

However, in spite of, or perhaps as a result of, her encounter with her employer, Philomena expresses a desire for Whiteness that is highly ambivalent. Philomena's dream consists of the desire "to go to every bingo and . . . hit every jackpot between here [Wasy] and Espanola and . . . buy me that toilet I'm dreaming about at night . . . big and wide and very White" (5). Philomena's dream is for what is White, very White, one might say, the essence of Whiteness. However, there is an obvious ambivalence at the core of Philomena's dream since her desire for Whiteness expresses itself in the form of a toilet. In Philomena's toilet then, the reader sees both her desire for Whiteness, but also her desire to urinate and void her bowels into that Whiteness. From another perspective, the image of the toilet might be read as an image of Whiteness flushing away brown excrement. In either case, the longing for Whiteness that Philomena expresses is ambivalent at its core, suggesting a much more complicated relationship to Whiteness than any for which a manichean binary can account.

Philomena's desire for Whiteness expresses itself in the form of an object, and in the character of Marie-Adele the desire for Whiteness expresses itself similarly. As Pelagia informs us, Marie-Adele has a "White picket fence" (2) and, later, we are

again reminded, in the stage directions, that it is a "White picket fence" (18). Marie-Adele does not recognize Nanabush in her guise as a seagull but is terribly concerned by the seagull's expelling its excrement on her White picket fence. As Rabillard observes, "Nanabush . . . shits amazingly and where he wills, usually to the frustration of specific human wishes and the general desire for order" (7). The importance of the fence and its Whiteness is reinforced when Marie-Adele articulates her dream of buying an island to which she and her and her family can retreat, and which will have as one of its features "this real neat picket fence, real high, long and very, very, very White" (36). As with Philomena's desire for a toilet, there seems to be a strong ambivalence in the image of the White picket fence. A White picket fence has long been a symbol of White, middle-class, suburban success. The picture of this might include a husband and wife, a house in the suburbs, a two-car garage, 2.5 kids, and, always, a White picket fence. However, while Pelagia's and Annie's dreams might be seen as slightly assimilationist, evidence of a manichean White ideal, Marie-Adele's dream sounds somewhat isolationist. Rabillard suggests that Marie-Adele's dream is "Perhaps the one note of resistance to the beguilements of the White consumer culture" (12), and Renate Usmiani suggests that "Marie-Adele's utopic private island will provide an ideal spot to bring up a happy family" (136). Her dream of "eem-shak min-stik", a great big island, might be seen as a retreat or escape from White culture, since it will rescue her husband, Eugene, from the "smelly, stinky old pulp and paper mill in Espanola" and will be covered with "lots and lots and lots of sweetgrass" (36). However, Marie-Adele's island paradise needs to be read as utopic and as an idealization. Her desire is also for a retreat or escape from the reserve, since, as she articulates it, her dream will include only her and her immediate family: "my twelve

Starblanket boys and my two Starblanket girls and me and my Eugene" (36). It is possible then to see Marie-Adele's utopian dream as a rejection of both the White community as well as her own Indigenous community, at least in its current state. Her desire understood thus seems to be a desire to retreat to a timeless place beyond having to deal with current circumstances, which include both the White society and the many problems obvious on the rez. In this sense, her desire is for escape to a Golden State that never was, nor is likely. Her vision can be understood to be ensconced within Whiteness, the fence, in the sense that in its attempt to avoid the contemporary situation, her dream simply reinscribes the colonial situation. A longing for a past that never was or that can never be returned to is not a realistic decolonizing strategy. The sometimes chaotic conditions of the reserve from which she desires to escape have been created by the encounter with Whiteness, and this reality needs to be confronted rather than fled from. Her dream to cut herself off from White society and from the problems of the reserve has been created by the confrontation or encounter of White and Indigenous societies. To simply wish that this never happened is no answer to the realities created by that encounter.

The character of Marie-Adele is also significant because of her relationship with Eugene, her husband. This relationship is significant because it provides an example of a healthy relationship between an Indigenous woman and man and, thus, provides a corrective to the oversimplified manichean thinking that characterises Annie's understanding of race and gender relations. While we do not see a whole lot of their relationship, what we do see seems to suggest that Eugene is a loving and supportive husband. In spite of images of drunken, violent, abusive Indigenous men, such as Big Joey, Marie-Adele offers an intimate confession of love and tenderness as she

speaks of Eugene: "The curve of his back, his breath on my neck, 'Adele, ki-sa-gee-ee-tin oo-ma', making love, always in Indian, only" (96). When she also confesses that her illness is causing some difficulties in her relationship with Eugene, Pelagia offers some advice: "You gotta have faith in him and you gotta have faith in life . . . There's only so much he can do. He's only human. There's only so much Eugene can understand, Marie-Adele. He's only human" (96). Along with the erosion of the simplistic binary of White equals good, Indigenous equals bad, this intimate portrait of tenderness and affection between an Indigenous woman and man, with the repeated emphasis on humanity, contributes a re-valuation of Indigenous identity. There is also an obvious erosion of the stereotype of Indigenous men as drunken, violent, savages devoted to the mistreatment of women, an image Annie seems to have accepted.

As further evidence that Eugene is a suitable partner, at the end of the play, Veronique leaves her drunken husband to live with Eugene and care for Marie-Adele's children. Veronique shows no particular desire or longing for Whiteness, but, again, her choice presents a corrective to Annie's foolishness. Veronique does not fall into the kind of binary, dualistic, manichean thinking that Annie does. While Veronique's husband, Pierre, seems to be a drunken good-for-nothing, she does not express a simplistic desire to be saved in the arms of a White man. Rather, when she has the opportunity, she finds an Indigenous man who will presumably treat her well and, at the same time, becomes a mother to Marie-Adele's potentially motherless children.

Of all the challenges that the play poses to the manichean binary at the core of White supremacy, the representation of Nanabush provides one of the strongest. The first time we encounter Nanabush in the play he is disguised as a seagull and Marie-Adele is concerned about his shitting on her White picket fence (19), and as we have

seen, in her dream of an island get-away there will be "No bird shit" to mess up her "very, very, very White" fence (36). Even though Marie-Adele does not recognize Nanabush at this early point, Usmiani points out that "When Nanabush first appears . . . the author immediately makes the connection between Native mythology and native language: Marie-Adele addresses him in Cree in the longest Native language passage of the play" (138). Near the end of the play, when she finally recognises Nanabush, Marie-Adele again addresses him in Cree. Usmiani suggests that "Marie-Adele's last words, spoken, significantly, in Cree, convey only trust and serenity" (139). Such observations might tend toward a kind of essentialism that would suggest Nanabush, and by extension Indigenous spirituality and culture, is accesible only through Indigenous languages. However, a closer examination of the role of Nanabush reveals a much more complicated reality.

Philomena draws for us a clear connection between the 'legendary' Bingo Betty and Nanabush. In contrast to Pelagia, Philomena invokes her own vision of "the old days, when Bingo Betty was still alive and walking these dirt roads" (16). It is clear that Bingo Betty, who would "come to every single bingo and . . . sit there like the Queen of Tonga, big and huge like a roast beef, smack dab in the middle of the bingo hall . . . in the middle with twenty seven cards!" (16-17), has assumed a status akin to that of Nanabush, at least in the mind of Philomena. This mythological status is made clear when Philomena informs us that "to this very day, they say that on certain nights at the bingo here in Wasy, they say you can see Bingo Betty's ghost, like a mist, hovering in the air above the bingo tables, playing bingo like it's never been played before. Or since" (18). And Pelagia, in her typical fashion, asserts that "She should have gone to Toronto" (18), because it is Toronto, the elsewhere, that represents true

success. Bingo Betty has become a legendary presence on the reserve and her memory has come to be preserved in the oral tradition of the community, as is emphasized by the repetition of the phrase "they say". Bingo Betty is associated with a glorious past, before the bingos in Wasy started to get "smaller and smaller all the time" (16). Near the end of the play Veronique buys "A great big roast beef. Almost 16 pounds . . . probably the biggest roast beef that's been seen on this reserve [Wasy] in recent years" (111). Veronique describes the roast beef "sizzling and bubbling with the most succulent and delicious juices" (111), recalling the earlier image of Bingo Betty with "the foam sizzling and bubbling between her teeth" (17), as she prepares herself to play bingo. Bingo Betty, then, represents health, prosperity, and plenty, at least on a material level. In Philomena's mind and memory, Bingo Betty has displaced Nanabush.

A further example of the loss of a memory that would include Nanabush, and an example of the displacement of one spiritual tradition by another occurs when Marie-Adele first encounters Nanabush and does not recognize him: "Who the hell do you think you are, the Holy Spirit?" (19). Such a confusion on the part of Marie-Adele emphasizes for the audience/reader the conflict and violent antagonism that saw Christianity, with its hierarchical and patriarchal structures of authority, attempt not only to displace but to destroy Nanabush as a central figure in Indigenous spirituality. Marie-Adele does not recognize Nanabush for the same reason that Philomena would not recognize Nanabush--because colonization has effectively erased the memory that would recognize and affirm figures from Indigenous spirituality. However, the continued presence and activity of Nanabush, who has come to usher Marie-Adele into the world of the spirits, suggests the continuing presence and viability of Indigenous spirituality even after five hundred years of colonial assault.

The Rez Sisters is essentially a play about seven Indigenous women who through cooperation overcome a variety of obstacles to achieve a common goal. The obstacles include disadvantaged economic and social backgrounds imposed by interlocking oppressions of race and gender. Given the seriousness of the obstacles the women must work together to overcome, their common goal--attending a game of bingo--might appear to be somewhat ridiculous. However, Diane Debenham in an article entitled "Native People in Contemporary Canadian Drama" suggests that "Bingo, in The Rez Sisters, is life itself, the supreme game of chance" (153). In "The Bingocentric Worlds of Michel Tremblay and Tomson Highway," Renate Usmiani, at first, offers a less flattering interpretation when she suggests that bingo serves as a "symbol and illustration of the consumerism of the women represented and the spiritual emptiness of their lives" (127) and, in a review of the play, Margery Fee writes that the play "starts with the ubiquitous colonial fantasy of finding the biggest, the best, the most prestigious and the most important in the imperial centre" (108). In "Absorption, Elimination, and the Hybrid," Sheila Rabillard adopts a similar interpretation when she writes that bingo shows the women to be "vulnerable to the seductions of the dominant culture. They all fantasize about THE BIGGEST BINGO IN THE WORLD" (12). Later in her article, Rabillard quotes Tomson Highway and approaches a more forgiving position, closer to the one taken by Debenham: "In Highway's words, bingo 'a game otherwise as tawdry and mundane as laundry day on an Indian reservation' becomes on his stage 'a bizarre and fantastical adventure' for his seven rez women and a vehicle for the expression of 'their passions, their tragedies, their exhilarations'" (18). Even if Usmiani is correct in asserting that "The women's bingo mania...[provides] a wonderful opportunity for satirizing their cheap consumerism and materialistic

attitudes" (129), she later acknowledges that "an underlying spirit of cooperation and genuine sisterhood permeates the play. The women work together, rather than against each other, and thus manage to carry out their ambitious project of going to Toronto" (135). Usmiani continues to temper her position when she writes that "In The Rez Sisters, crass materialism is tempered by some more humane ideals: Veronique dreams of a shiny new kitchen stove, but she also plans to use it to cook for all the motherless orphans on the reserve; Marie-Adele's utopic private island will provide an ideal spot to bring up a happy family" (136). Rabillard, too, must acknowledge the women's activities as representing more than simply a crass materialism: "The rez sisters, far from passive, analyze their situation and get things done . . . the passion here is clearly directed toward a communal aim and the audience is made to feel the emotionality of the women as creative rather than destructive; active rather than passive; part of their ability to seize and shape the direction of their own lives" (9-10). Whether these critics read bingo as representing life's struggles or the seduction of imperial materialism, or both, the dominant impression upon the reader is of a group of Indigenous women who must cooperate, pool their resources and talents, and overcome imposed disadvantages of race and gender in order to achieve a common goal.

The Rez Sisters works toward disrupting the White colonial manichean binary that constructs Whiteness as an ideal while constructing Indigenous peoples as degraded and dehumanised Others, as *Indians*. By foregrounding images of Whiteness as desirable, the play reveals the internalisation of a manichean idealization of Whiteness, which implies a degraded perception of Indigenous identity. This internalisation of the White/Indian binary is evident in some of the characters' longing to flee from their own identities toward idealized images of Whiteness.

However, while revealing the infiltration of the ideology of Whiteness into the lives and minds of the characters, Whiteness is also revealed to be a source of fear, loss, and violence. Whiteness is revealed as an oppressive and destructive force. White domination is revealed to marginalise the community and present obstacles the women must overcome. Such representations undermine and disrupt the binary. If it is possible that Whiteness is something other than an ideal to be longed for, then it is also possible that Indigenous identity can signal something other than degradation and inhumanity. The women in The Rez Sisters are shown to be resilient, intelligent, creative, and cooperative people, while, at the same time, Whiteness is revealed as an oppressive and destructive force to be resisted and overcome.

Chapter Five: Representations of Whiteness in *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*

In the stage directions that precede the opening of Act One of *Dry Lips*, the description of the set includes the following: "Prominently displayed on one wall is a life-size pin-up poster of Marilyn Monroe." In his article "White," Richard Dyer makes the following observations regarding Marilyn Monroe, the Hollywood icon: "the codes of glamour lighting in Hollywood were developed in relation to White women, to endow them with a radiance that has correspondences with the transcendental rhetoric of popular Christianity. Of no woman star was this more true than Marilyn Monroe, known by the press at the time as 'the Body'" (160-161). Dyer's remarks are significant in an informed reading of *Dry Lips* because female bodies, as objects of desire as well as fear and loathing, are an almost constant preoccupation of the male characters in the play. In a brief discussion of Monroe's film *The Seven Year Itch*, Dyer argues that the film "lets on it knows about male fantasy and its remote relation to reality. Yet it is also part of the Monroe industry, peddling an impossible dream White women are constructed as the apotheosis of desirability, all that a man could want, yet nothing that can be had, nor anything that a woman can be" (161). If this male construction of a specifically White ideal of female sexuality is something White women cannot achieve, the question must be asked: how much more unrealistic is the ideal in relation to Indigenous women?

The internalized racism and sexism, the obvious misogyny, that the male characters of Wasychigan Hill display must be read in the context of the presence of the male fantasy Monroe represents. The men's behaviours and attitudes toward women in the play must be considered in relation to the prominently displayed poster of

Monroe, the single dominant image of Whiteness in Dry Lips. Furthermore, an investigation of the representation of Whiteness in the play must also consider how this dominant image of Whiteness relates to the two other major themes of the play, namely the language and the spiritual tradition of the colonizers, since "Highway more than hints at an association between opposition of the sexes and White oppression" (Rabillard 15). What the play suggests is that the male construction of a specifically White ideal of feminine sexuality as an object of male desire, as a male fantasy, is enabled and perpetuated by the discourses of the English language and the Christian spiritual tradition of the colonizers.

The play, which opens with the exclamation "Hey bitch!" (16), makes it clear that much of the men's confusion, anger, general feelings of powerlessness, and dislocation from their people's spiritual traditions arise from a lack of understanding of, or a rupture of the relationship with, women and feminine realities. The first dialogue in the play is an indicator of the attitude toward women that is prevalent, and the first words are spoken by Big Joey, the most violent misogynist in the play and also the owner of the Marilyn Monroe poster. Much later we learn of the source of Joey's fear and hatred of women. Big Joey refers to the violent confrontation between Whites and Indigenous people at Wounded Knee: "Wounded Knee, South Dakota, Spring of '73. The FBI. They beat us to the ground. Again and again and again. Ever since that spring I've had these dreams where blood is spilling out from my groin, nothin' there but blood and emptiness. It's like . . . I lost myself. So when I saw this baby comin' out of Caroline, Black Lady . . . Gazelle dancin' . . . all this blood . . . and I knew it was gonna come . . . I . . . I tried to stop it . . . I freaked out. I don't know what I did . . . and I knew it was mine . . ." (120). Robert Imboden suggests that

Big Joey, in attempting to flee the fate of misery on the reservation, [sic] goes to Wounded Knee in 1973. But instead of finding liberation [sic] from his fate, he finds murder and assassination. When he returns to the reservation, he brings with him the hatred and violence of the South Dakota site. Seething in hatred and despair, he becomes responsible for the three strikingly tragic events of the play: the damaged birth of his son, Dickie Bird, whom he refuses to recognize, the brutal crucifix rape of Patsy by Dickie Bird, and the subsequent accidental, suicidal death of her lover, Simon. His hatred has both caused and allowed Black Lady Halked to drink constantly for three weeks preceding Dickie Bird's birth. This same hatred allows him to watch silently as Patsy is raped. Every one of these events can be seen as one of the steps that binds Big Joey and his people more securely than ever in their agonizing fate of impoverishment. (116)

When Zach asks Joey why he allowed the rape to happen, Joey responds: "Because I hate them! I hate the fuckin' bitches. Because they--our own women--took the fuckin' power away from us faster than the FBI ever did" (120). As Sheila Rabillard observes, Big Joey's words "make an explicit association between political domination and male/female antagonism Big Joey appears to assert that the women--who, offstage, have intruded into an exclusively male sport--and the agents of White domination both emasculate" (15). The association Rabillard identifies becomes clearer if one understands the patriarchy that many see as characteristic of the American Indian Movement. Lee Maracle writes that "sexism . . . was inherent in the character of the American Indian Movement" (137) and that "culturally, the worst dominant,

White male traits were emphasized. Machismo and the boss mentality were the basis for choosing leaders. The idea of leadership was essentially a European one promulgated by power mongers" (126). Thus, in Big Joey's mind, non-Indigenous males and Indigenous females are characterised as threats to Indigenous male longing for political power.

Big Joey's sense of himself and his identity as a Indigenous person are heavily influenced by the conflict between White and Indigenous men. Big Joey's dream--nightmare might be more accurate--is a dream of castration or emasculation, making it clear that his understanding of power is based upon his penis. In other words his understanding of power is phallogentric, meaning that social and political power are the domain of men. Nigel Hunt suggests that the men in the play suffer "the consequences of their own insecurity about women and their lack of trust for the traditional values which kept their societies strong for centuries" (60). In response to Big Joey's declaration that women took the power away from Indigenous men, Spooky responds, "They always had it" (120). We can understand Spooky's response if we consider the role of women in pre-colonial Indigenous societies as Paula Gunn Allen explains it: "During the five hundred years of Anglo-European colonization, the tribes have seen a progressive shift from gynocentric, egalitarian, ritual-based social systems to secularized structures closely imitative of the European patriarchal system" (195). Janice Acoose also identifies this change from a situation of balanced gender roles to an unbalanced hierarchical and patriarchal model: "Our once community- and consensually-based ways of governance, social organization, and economic practices were stripped of their legitimacy and authority by White christian males, who imposed an ideologically contrasting hierarchical structure. Of specific importance . . .

is the removal of women from all significant social, political, economic, and spiritual processes" (47). It is within the context of this colonial shift that Big Joey associates Indigenous women with colonial domination.

Big Joey's association of Indigenous women with colonial domination can be understood as a specifically gendered internalisation of the manichean image of Indigenous peoples as degraded and dehumanised. In The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions, Paula Gunn Allen writes "one wonders if the focus on male traditions and history that has characterised the whole field of American Indian literature and lore was not part of the plot to exterminate Native American tribal peoples and cultures....However he is viewed...the Indian is always he" (262). In a discussion of Lee Maracle's *I Am Woman*, Barbara Godard remarks upon "the centrality of this denial of womanhood to the imperialist project" and suggests that "In refusing a place for women and for love, the Native has played out the colonialist reduction of a people to a sub-human level" (209). The emphasis on male history that Gunn Allen identifies is reminiscent of Big Joey's preoccupation with Wounded Knee. Furthermore, since Joey seems to use the events at Wounded Knee as an excuse for his abuse of women, he is complicit in the colonial reduction identified by Godard. Lee Maracle writes that "The dictates of patriarchy demand that beneath Native man comes the female Native. The dictates of racism are thus that Native men are beneath white women and Native females are not fit to be referred to as women" (128). It is within the context of these complex operations of race and gender oppression that Big Joey's misogyny can be understood as an internalisation of the White colonial manichean binary. Thus, while it is possible to trace the roots of Joey's misogyny, these roots do not excuse his behaviour and attitudes, and "During the rape scene, Big Joey is

transformed from a harmless bully to a representative of weakness and evil in modern Native society" (Denis Johnston 261). The weakness and evil revealed are those of an Indigenous man whose misogyny makes him an active agent in the oppression of the women in the community.

The shift from cultures based upon balanced gender roles to patriarchal hierarchy can in part be ascribed to differences between the Indigenous languages in the play and the English language. Lucy Bashford observes, "the presence of the genderless Nanabush [although, in the play, Nanabush significantly appears only in female guises] ...indicates the confusion Cree/Ojibway speakers have with the gender differentiation of the English language. There is an underlying intimation, but not accusation, that much of the conflict between the sexes has been imported into the culture from the outside" (109). Indeed, the play certainly supports Bashford's observation:

SIMON: ...Weesageechak! Come back! Rosie! Rosie Kakapetum, tell him to come back, not to run away, cuz we need him...

NANABUSH/PATSY: ...her...

SIMON: ...him...

NANABUSH/PATSY: ...her...

SIMON: ...weetha ("him/her"--i.e., no gender) ... Christ! What is it? Him? Her? Stupid fucking language, fuck you, da Englesa Me no speakum no more da goodie Englesa, in Cree we say "weetha," not "him" or "her" Nanabush, come back! (110-111)

What Highway and the play suggest is that at least part of the solution to the social problems that the play exposes (for example, alcoholism and violent misogyny) lies in

the men's returning to a healthy relationship with each other, with the women, and with Indigenous spiritual traditions which are governed by the internal logic of the non-gendered Indigenous languages, rather than gendered English. Highway does not simplistically advocate that Indigenous peoples abandon "da Englesa" (113); to do so would be to oversimplify grossly the situation and condition of Indigenous peoples in the late twentieth century. What Highway does advocate is a balanced relationship between language and its users and between English and Indigenous languages, in this case Cree and Ojibway. Simon Ortiz provides a useful context for these ideas when he states, "My formation with regards to language was the *dzehni niyah* of the Acoma people: 'the way they spoke'....The language I use is English. Nevertheless, my English language use is founded on the original and basic knowledge of myself as an Acoma person" (107). In order to reach the stage where the much needed healing can take place, Highway's Cree and Ojibway characters in Dry Lips must progress to a situation which parallels that Jeannette Armstrong writes of: "the meanings of the English words I use arise out of my Okanagan [Cree/Ojibway] understanding of the world" (75). For, as Armstrong states, "Words have a covering of meaning derived from unique relationships to things....Thousands of generations of relating to things in a given way give rise to cultural meaning attached to words" (76), and when these unique relationships and cultural meanings are lost or destroyed, the result is the kind of confusion and dislocation displayed by the men in Dry Lips.

Maria Campbell, in "Strategies for Survival," states that, "For a long time I couldn't write anything, because I didn't know how to use English . . . when I was writing I always found that English *manipulated* me . . . then I was able to manipulate English, and once I started to be able to manipulate English, I felt that was

personal liberation" (9-10). The use of language, then, becomes an issue of power, of resistance and liberation. Joy Asham Fedorick makes a statement similar to Campbell's when she writes, "I was trapped--trapped in English, in English structures, with English ideas of story content and formula, with English ideas of values" (49). Fedorick expands upon her theme when she observes that "understanding the structure of English and its noun-predominance freed me to begin to understand the materialistic influence When one is immersed in a language that primarily gears our thoughts to *things*, we become trapped in a value system of materialism" (54). The play does not suggest that all, or even most, speakers of English are necessarily more materialistic than are speakers of Cree or Ojibway. However, the men's ineptitude in the use of English suggests that they are highly susceptible to the materialistic bias that Fedorick points out. In other words, as with Campbell's experience, the men's ineptitude in their use of English means that they are manipulated by the language and its biases. The men are unable to manipulate the English language into a transformative decolonizing tool. Marc Maufort's comment, then, that dreams or goals which remain "purely materialistic [will] fail to re-establish connection with the spirit of [Nanabush]..." (235), assumes a particular significance. Big Joey's and Zachary's dreams of an economic recovery based on a radio station or a bakery will not solve the spiritual crisis that plagues Wasaychigan Hill. The spiritual bankruptcy that characterizes the men in *Dry Lips* is reflected in their inability to harness the English language to their own need for healing.

While at the beginning of the play it seems as though the motivation for the action is going to be the rivalry between Joey and Zach, it is not long before the news of the women's hockey team becomes the true motivation. When Pierre initially arrives

with news of the formation of the team, the men's reaction is one of disbelief and resistance. Big Joey's response is that "They never booked the ice" (30), but Pierre says "Booked it through Gazelle Nataways" (30), and it is clear that the male authority/power structure has been subverted. The women have even gone so far as to pick Pierre as their own referee because Big Joey's referee, as Pierre explains, is "too damn perschnickety. That drum-bangin' young whippersnapper, Simon Starblanket, he's got all the rules mixed up [according to the women]. They kinda wanna play it their own way" (31). Interestingly enough, early in the play (16-17), it is clear that for the men, hockey is a domain of contest between White and Indigenous men. So the formation of a women's hockey team is understood by the men as a female invasion of one of the last bastions of male authority and power.

The most prolonged, extensive passages in Cree and Ojibway in the play are spoken by Big Joey during the hockey game sequences. It is quite natural for the play-by-play of a reserve hockey game to be delivered in the reserve's Indigenous language. However, since a return to the world view embodied in these languages is part of the solution to the very misogyny that Big Joey represents, it is significant that he, the most violent misogynist, should deliver the lengthiest speeches in Cree/Ojibway. As Highway observes, Big Joey "talks in monosyllables" (Enright 24), but becomes most articulate when using Cree in his descriptions of the action on the ice. The significance of these connections lies in the fact that Big Joey's descriptions of the on-ice actions of the women represent an overcoming of the men's resistance to the perceived threat of the Wasy Wailerettes. For most of the play, the men perceive the women's forming of a hockey team as a challenge and threat. The forming of the hockey team is characterized as a "revolution" (48), which is a term applied by those whose power is

being threatened, and is called "Wounded Knee Three! Women's version!" (63). While it may be true that "the boys are exiled to the most powerless place, that of perpetual observer" (Baker 88), in providing commentary on the hockey games, Big Joey forgets, at least temporarily, his own feelings of powerlessness, and transcends his resistance to the women's initiative. He vicariously participates in the women's assertiveness. Hence, Big Joey becomes articulate when he adopts his Indigenous language, blended with English, and in this way momentarily sets aside his fear and loathing of the women.

If the play makes it clear that the English language has significantly contributed to the men's inability to have a healthy relationship with the women in their lives, then it also makes clear that this language has perpetuated a similar disruption in the men's ability to understand Indigenous spiritual traditions. In an interview with Nancy Wigston, Highway states that when using the English language "you must always deal with the male-female-neuter *hierarchy*. God is male, irretrievably" (9). In an interview with William Morgan, Highway expands upon this theme: "The Cree and other native languages are structured in such a way that we look at the universe not according to that hierarchy . . . in our mythology by virtue of the fact that the sexual hierarchy is completely absent . . . our superhero figure is neither exclusively male nor exclusively female or is both, simultaneously interchangeable" (135). Further, Highway states his concern over what he calls "the Genesis to Revelations line: progress, progress, progress, from point A to point B, until the apocalypse comes. As a result, the circle [of Indigenous spirituality] was shattered, and got stretched open to a straight line. The impact, psychologically and spiritually, was devastating" (8). Thus, the English language is intimately involved with, and

conditioned by, specific non-Indigenous spiritual traditions which are founded upon the vertical male-female-neuter hierarchy and the straight line that extends from Genesis to Revelations. While such explanations cannot adequately account for the entire history and literature of the Christian religions, it must be remembered that Highway is, according to Enright, concerned with "a very specific type of experience with Roman Catholicism" (Enright 26). In the play, Spooky Lacroix is the representative of a specific type of Christianity, namely a born-again, evangelistic Christianity. It is significant that the very first occurrence of Indigenous language in the play comes when Spooky says, "Igwani eeweepoonaskeewuk (The end of the world is at hand)" (36). Spooky, then, represents a very particular brand of Christianity that is presented in the play in a less than positive way. The antagonism between the Christianity that Spooky has adopted and the traditional Indigenous spirituality he has abandoned becomes clear when Spooky refers to Rosie Kakapetum, the reserve's only medicine woman and midwife, as a witch: "No way some witch is gonna come and put her witchy little fingers on my baby boy" (88). Spooky's use of his Indigenous language to express an idea that functions, within the context of the play, in an essentially foreign and destructive way emphasizes the gulf that characterises the men in their relationship, or lack thereof, with their Indigenous spiritual traditions.

The White colonial attempt to erase Indigenous languages and replace them with English was intimately related to the attempt to erase Indigenous spiritual traditions and replace them with Christian spirituality. In A Tortured People, Howard Adams argues that "the principles of Christianity were easily moulded into a racist ideology that matched the economic and political needs of expanding European colonialism Western imperialism was a 'holy alliance between European culture,

Christianity and a colonial economy The Christian church and its institutions was [sic] the arm of colonial destruction of indigenous culture and thought" (53). In A Prison of Grass, Adams argues that "The missionaries believed that God had commanded the clergy to save the souls of the heathen savages, so that conversion resulting in cultural genocide was regarded as Christian service" (31). The colonial destruction and cultural genocide Adams ascribes to the Christian churches were practiced largely through these churches' role in *educating* Indigenous peoples. As Noel Elizabeth Currie points out, "the role of education and the Church--for a century indistinguishable forces in the lives of Native people--cannot be underestimated in any discussion of the imposition of European ideologies and traditions on Natives" (140). One of the primary effects of the Christian churches in the education of Indigenous peoples was the imposition of the English language and the attempt to erase Indigenous languages. The imposition of English was necessary to the imposition of European ideologies and traditions, including Christian spiritual traditions. These impositions were rooted in the colonizers' belief in the inherent superiority of their own values and in White colonial manichean constructions of Indigenous peoples as degraded and dehumanised.

Central to the conflict between Spooky's brand of Christianity and a traditional Indigenous spirituality, represented by Simon Starblanket, is the mute figure of Dickie Bird Halked. Everyone seems to want Dickie Bird to speak--Spooky wants him to learn sign language so that Dickie can share the word of God with the people of the reserve (53); Pierre tries to get him to say 'daddy' (58); and Nanabush/Patsy tries to communicate with him just before he rapes her with the crucifix (98). If the rape functions as "a symbol that Christian civilization has metaphorically destroyed Indian culture with the help of Indians themselves"

(Maufort 237), then it is also true that this complicity, symbolized by Dickie's rape of Nanabush, must be viewed in light of the disastrous confusion that Christianity has spawned in the minds of the characters. Just prior to the rape, Dickie holds the crucifix aloft and tries to chant like Simon, symbolizing Dickie's confused search for truth and the confused, precarious relationship between the two spiritual traditions. On three occasions in the play (68,73,78) Dickie appears on stage placed directly between Simon and Spooky to emphasize that he is "symbolically lost between the tradition of Indian myths and Christian religion" (Maufort 236). It must also be remembered that the rape is not only symbolic of a crime committed by Christianity against Indigenous culture, but that it is also a crime committed by a man against a woman. The rape is symbolic of the conflict between the irretrievably male Christian God and the female manifestation of Nanabush, which is a reflection of the rift between the Indigenous men and women.

Dickie Bird is the only character in the play who is less articulate than Big Joey, and there are some revealing parallels between these two characters. Just as Big Joey becomes articulate when speaking in his Indigenous language, Dickie Bird, when he speaks, speaks only in Cree, except on one occasion, when he blurts out "Mama! Mama!" (93). Dickie Bird speaks only out of the need to satisfy his deepest personal longings. For example, he asks about his Grandfather, Spooky's father, who was a medicine man: "Tapweechee eegeemachipoowamit nimoossom? ("Is it true my grandpa had bad medicine?") (96). Nanabush/Black Lady Halked replies, in English, "Your grandpa talked to the devil. Don't talk about him" (96), which further emphasizes the conflict between Indigenous languages and English and between the two spiritual traditions. This exchange is clear evidence of what David Wilson identifies as the influence of "the Christian church and its historical efforts to purge Natives of their

traditional spirituality and replace it with a foreign value system" (40). Dickie Bird is better able to express his needs when speaking Cree than are the other men when speaking English. Dickie's ability to articulate his deepest personal needs in Cree and the almost complete absence of his speaking in English suggests that the healing needed before the men can return to a proper understanding of Indigenous spirituality and their female counter-parts will come, at least in part, from a return to a proper understanding of their Indigenous languages.

If Spooky represents a clear abandonment of Indigenous spirituality to embrace White spirituality and Dickie Bird represents the confusion of being trapped between two antagonistic traditions, then it is Simon Starblanket who represents the hope of a return to a traditional spirituality. The obvious question that arises, then, is why is Simon allowed to die if Highway is interested in subverting the manichean binary that degrades and dehumanises Indigenous peoples? Why does Simon's quest fail? Again, a consideration of the languages Simon uses, when and where he uses an Indigenous language, for example, reveals some interesting possibilities. In the passage quoted earlier, Simon banter with Nanabush/Patsy, until the structure of his use of the English language begins to reflect his confused state. Simon concludes by saying "Me no speakum no more da goodie Englesa" (111). However, immediately after resolving to abandon English, because of the gender differentiation that hinders his attempts to contact Nanabush, Simon immediately reverts to English:

Simon: . . . Dey shove dis . . . whach-you-ma-call-it . . . da crucifix up your holy cunt ouch, eh? Ouch, eh? Nah . . . yessssss . . . noooo . . . oh, noooo! Crucifix! Fucking goddam crucifix yessss . . . God! You're a man.

You're a woman. You're a man? You're a woman? You see, nineethoowan
poogoo neetha ("I speak only Cree"). (112)

For a second time, Simon rejects English and resolves to speak only Cree, but Simon immediately reverts to English. Simon then asks, "If God, you are a woman/ man in Cree but only a man in da Englesa, then how come you still got a cun...", and Nanabush/ Patsy corrects his derogatory term with, "womb" (113), symbolic of female generative/creative power. In these exchanges, it is clear that Simon has been unable to overcome the gender confusion that the English language has caused and that this gender confusion is largely responsible for his inability to realize his quest. At one point in the play, Simon sings "... and me I don't wanna go to the moon, I'm gonna leave that moon alone. I just wanna dance with the Rosebud Sioux this summer . . ." (113). Of course, the reference to the Rosebud Sioux recalls Wounded Knee. The Rosebud Sioux reservation in South Dakota was one of the centers of activity that led to the Wounded Knee conflict in 1873. If we understand the moon to be a symbol of female power, then Simon's words seem to indicate that he has in a sense forgotten the source of his teachings. He expresses a desire to return to the site of the male phallogocentric conflict associated with Big Joey and his misogyny. Robert Imboden suggests that "Instead of being a source of transcendence, Wounded Knee casts a long shadow of devastating drunkenness, brutal rape, razor-edged misogyny and accidental death over the reservation [sic]" (117). However, Imboden further observes that "Big Joey and Simon had lived with the illusion that travelling to Wounded Knee would free them from the grinding poverty and misery of the reservation" (119). Simon's dying words are in Cree and after he has died "*we see Simon, wearing his powwow bustle*" (120) for the first time; throughout the play Simon had been carrying the bustle, as if unsure what to do

with it. The final image of Simon is of him "*dancing in the moon*" (120), the very place he said he did not want to go, symbolizing his reconciliation with female spiritual power.

Following Simon's death, Zachary engages in a monologue that is the dramatic climax to the play:

Oh, lordy, lordy . . . Holy shit! Holy shit! What's happening? What's become of this place? What's happening to these people? My people. He didn't have to die. He didn't have to die. That's the goddam most stupid . . . no reason . . . this kind of living has got to stop. It's got to stop!

Talking and then just shrieking at the sky.

Aieeeeeee-Lord! God! God of the Indian! God of the Whiteman! God-Al-fucking-mighty! Whatever the fuck your name is. Why are you doing this to us? Why are you doing this to us? Are you up there at all? Or are you some stupid, drunken shit, out-of-your-mind-passed out under some great beer table up there in your stupid fucking clouds? Come down! Astum oota! ("Come down here!") Why don't you come down? I dare you to come down from your high-falutin' fuckin' shit-throne up there, come down and show us you got the guts to stop this stupid, stupid, stupid way of living. It's got to stop.

It's got to stop. It's got to stop. It's got to stop. It's got to stop (116)

Marc Maufort has interpreted Zachary's rant, thus,

This monologue thus unites the two traditions, Christian religion and Indian mythology. All feelings of rejection have now vanished and Zachary considers all men equal in front of the indifference of God. The latter qualifies as a cruel figure, who does not deserve to be ranked above ordinary mankind. Departing from the depiction of the plight of Indians, Highway elevates this ethnic standpoint to universalize his vision and include the world at large through the sense of tragedy pervading *Dry Lips*. A multiculturalism stance is complemented by a more traditionally humanistic attitude . . . he . . . manages to transcend the particular to formulate a compelling statement about mankind lost in a universe dominated by an indifferent God.

(239-240)

Maufort betrays his own biases in his use of the terms *religion* and *mythology*, and he seems to have entirely missed the irony of Zachary's monologue and the irony of the image of Nanabush:

. . . sitting on a toilet having a good shit. He/she is dressed in an old man's White beard and wig, but also

wearing sexy, elegant women's high-heeled pumps.
Surrounded by White, puffy clouds, she/he sits with
her legs crossed, nonchalantly filing his/her
fingernails. (117)

The irony in this image and in Zachary's monologue lies in the fact that Nanabush is not "up there in [the] stupid fucking clouds" and never has been. Scott Momaday has stated that, "before a man could write, he could draw; but writing is drawing, and so the image and the word cannot be divided" (96). The statement that image and word cannot be divided highlights the confusion the men in *Dry Lips* encounter when trying to approach traditional Indigenous spirituality through a vision of reality which is governed largely by the internal logic and thought patterns of the English language. When Indigenous peoples lose the vision of the world embodied in their first language they "lose not only the ability to express the simplest of daily sentiments and needs but they can no longer understand the ideas, concepts, insights, attitudes, rituals, ceremonies, institutions brought into being by their ancestors" (Basil Johnston 99-100). In his attempt to shout Nanabush from the sky, Zachary engages in the same hierarchical/linear thinking which plagues the quest for a return to a traditional spirituality.

While it may be true that "the essential characteristic of Highway's craft resides in the fusion of various types of influences" (Maufort 230), Tompson Highway is no advocate of easy answers, or the simplistic resolution of competing or divergent influences. Maufort's observation about the realism of language betrays an extremely limited understanding of the central importance that issues of language occupy in Highway's drama: "The use of realism is evident in the speech which the characters

use, meant to reproduce as closely as possible the way *real Indians* speak. Passages in Cree and Ojibway are included, which augment this sense of realism" (235). Highway is well aware that language is the true embodiment of diversity and difference and that "it's a frightening prospect to be faced with, a world where nobody speaks any language but English" (Lutz 91). As has already been stated, and in keeping with his aversion to simple solutions, Highway never suggests a simple abandonment of one language in favour of any other. However, "For Highway, the road to recovery for the Native culture begins with the rediscovery of traditional spirituality" (Lewis 40), and this rediscovery must be accompanied by a balanced understanding of the relationship between language and spirituality, and of the possibilities and limitations of language. Furthermore, the play clearly shows that issues of language and spirituality are intimately interrelated to gender issues, which, in turn, have been complicated by patriarchal colonial competition.

The image of Marilyn Monroe represents Whiteness as desireable, while the conflict at Wounded Knee reveals Whiteness as a source of fear, death, loss, and disempowerment. Both are gendered, since the latter was largely a conflict between White and Native men. Big Joey is central here because the poster of Monroe belongs to him and he is also the one to narrate the story of the defeat at Wounded Knee. It seems then that the female body is a site of contest for male domination. Big Joey views the defeat at Wounded Knee as a castration/emasculatation. And, in a sense, he is doubly castrated/emasculated in that he cannot possess the ideal of feminine sexuality. It is after all an ideal and not a reality: "The Marilyn Monroe poster, with no powwow bustle draped over it at the beginning of the play, can be interpreted as a symbol of illusion. Norma Jean, the original name of Marilyn Monroe, was a signifier of the real,

but the face of the woman named Marilyn on the poster is an image of illusion that led to drug abuse and suicide" (Imboden 119). The discourses of pop culture, Christian mythology, and the English language all seem to converge. Pop culture suggests that the female body is primarily an object of male desire, a construction of male fantasy, and an object of male domination. Christian mythology seems to offer no room for a female expression of divinity, and the language, with its gendered pronouns, offers no place for the female except in subjugation to the male. All of this adds up to a highly patriarchal system.

And where are Native women left in all of this? Well, they cannot live up to the idealized image of female sexuality, either in terms of gender or race. They cannot meet the ideal of female sexuality Monroe represents, nor can they meet the Whiteness of that ideal. They are left seemingly without value, worth, or desireability. Hence, Native women are left to bear the brunt of the frustration of men like Big Joey, who is frustrated on all fronts. It is these very women, however, who evade the conjunction of disempowering discourses and invade what the men understand to be an exclusively male realm of practice, namely hockey. In their invasion of this phallogentric male sphere, the women seize the initiative and assert their own agency, thereby holding a mirror up to the failure of the men's agency. At the end of the play, as Imboden observes, "Hera speaks Cree to Zachary, and a powwow bustle hangs over the poster of Marilyn Monroe on the wall...The bustle hanging over the photograph appears to imply that the richest roots of Native society can become more powerful than some of the more superficial, glossy Hollywood aspects of western society" (119). Furthermore, in the last scene of the play, Hera is clothed, while her husband, Zachary, is

portrayed as vulnerably naked. Rather than being a misogynistic drama, Sheila Rabillard suggests that the languages and images of the play

counteract any sense that women should be seen as victimizers and impress upon the audience, rather, a pervasive wounding in which the mutual enmity of male and female seems most closely allied with the self-inflicted wounds of alcohol, a species of self-division induced by a state of pain and oppression. In short, the drama seems to invite the audience to see the opposition between the genders as a hurtful condition analogous to—if not the product of—the sufferings brought about by White colonization. (15)

While Highway acknowledges that "the whole gender issue, the male/female dichotomy, the sexual hierarchy, knows no racial boundaries" (Border Crossings 24), it is equally true that "Through his work, the once sacred relationships of land, women, men and children are revealed as disconnection and distortion through subjugation to a patriarchal colonial society" (Loucks 11).

Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing works toward disrupting the White colonial manichean binary that constructs Whiteness as desirable and Indigenous identity as degraded and undesirable. Idealizations of Whiteness are shown to be a disruptive force in the community, particularly in relations between the men and women of the community. Male desire for White female sexuality is shown to be a destructive idealization that interferes with the men's ability to value properly the Indigenous women in the community. Christian spirituality is revealed as supportive of patriarchal attitudes among the men, which contributes to the men's undervaluing of Indigenous women. The English language, with its gendered pronouns, is shown to

contribute to the men's patriarchal biases, while interfering with any attempt to reestablish Indigenous spirituality and gender balance. Such White colonial invasions are given a more concrete expression in the Wounded Knee conflict, which further reveals Whiteness as a source of fear and oppression. The play directly levels responsibility for colonization and its effects at the White coloniser, but does not excuse the violent misogyny of the men. While the roots of the men's attitudes and behaviour are located in the violence of colonization, responsibility is assigned to Indigenous peoples to discover these roots and grow out of the violence and self-hatred we direct at ourselves and others within our communities.

Conclusion: *Whiteness and Indianness in Highway's Drama*

In the Preface to her book Playing in the Dark, Toni Morrison asks the question, "how is [sic] 'literary whiteness' and 'literary blackness' made, and what is the consequence of that construction?" (xii). What is significant in the question Morrison asks is the focus placed upon both Whiteness and racialized Others. While studies such as Thomas King's The Native in Literature, Leslie Monkman's A Native Heritage, and Margaret Atwood's Survival, have carefully and importantly examined the literary Othering of Indigenous peoples, similar studies of Whiteness have been slow to appear. Such an absence can be explained by differential power relations, namely White domination, and the subsequent normalization of Whiteness, which have allowed Whiteness a structured invisibility. However, spurred by the work of critics such as Morrison and bell hooks, the study of Whiteness has begun to gather strength, as evidenced by works of Dyer's, of Frankenburg's, and of Razack's, for example. This is an encouraging development, but such studies of Whiteness are often undertaken by those who are themselves White [Razack's book is an exception here]. Frankenburg acknowledges this when she writes of her book that "it is a study of whiteness and women undertaken by a woman who is white" (18). Although this is a necessary development in any anti-racist project, it is important to heed the warning that Whiteness examining itself might serve to further silence the voices of those who have suffered dispossession. In his essay "Can Whiteness Speak?", Mike Hill raises this very concern when he writes that "in 'our' anxiousness to 'decompose' whiteness, 'we' have continued to speak ever more and ever louder than 'those' who might best be heard if 'we' were quieter" (156). Since "whiteness secures white power by making it

hard, especially for white people and their media, to 'see' whiteness," (Dyer 143) the efforts of White critics to see Whiteness must be applauded. It is critical to emphasize, however, that oppressed peoples bear a unique relation to Whiteness and, therefore, have unique and necessary contributions to make to its study.

Toni Morrison writes of "the hopelessness of excising racial considerations from formulations of white identity" (21), and her assertion has significant implications for understanding oppressed identities. If Morrison is correct, then it is reasonable to argue that central to an understanding of oppressed identities is an examination of White identities. For oppressed peoples, such as Indigenous peoples on this continent, White identities cannot be understood apart from White domination. For Indigenous peoples, the racial considerations central to understanding White identities include our dehumanization, genocide, and crimes against our humanity. The construction of White identities on this continent is intimately involved with the dehumanization and dispossession of Indigenous peoples and the despair and self-destructive behaviours spawned in many of our communities. For too many of our people, despair and self-destructive behaviours are undeniable daily realities, and, as Barbara Godard writes, "to hide the rage and madness created by the colonial process is to collaborate in maintaining an equally powerful mythology of the Native as untouched by imperialism" (213). While we must acknowledge rather than ignore or deny the impact the colonial process has had upon our identities as Indigenous peoples, this does not mean that our cultural productions need represent us in destructively stereotypical ways, nor does it mean those productions need portray us as wallowing in victimization. As Eduardo and Bonnie Duran argue, "intervention, albeit a theoretical one . . . starts from an intolerable present situation and then invents a genealogy of that situation

that serves as a means for transforming the present" (110). If an Indigenous writer produces a play that depicts an intolerable situation, then one could argue that the writer is addressing the impact of the colonial process. Critics must then attend to the question of whether the play supports stereotypes held by the dominant culture or whether the play invents a genealogy of the situation, thereby offering a means for transforming the intolerable situation.

The danger for a writer such as Tomson Highway in acknowledging the impact of both the colonial process and male domination is that he/she will be open to the accusation of promoting stereotypes held by the dominant and overlapping White and patriarchal cultures. A writer who seeks to explore the interaction of racism and patriarchy must be wary of the ways in which "culture, community, and colonization can be used to compete with and ultimately prevail over gender-based harm" (Razack 76). On the other hand, the writer must also be aware that "when we bring sexual violence to the attention of white society we always risk exacerbating the racism directed at both the men and women in our communities" (58). Highway's plays have suffered both accusations from people as diverse as Anita Tuharsky, Marie Annharte Baker, Susan Bennet, Marion Botsford Fraser, and Alan Filewood. Botsford Fraser, for example, has written that "Dry Lips is not only about misogyny but is a drama studded with misogyny" (C1). Having been labelled, by some, as misogynist, Highway's work has also been accused of promoting racism or, at the very least, not assigning responsibility for the intolerable present situation to White domination. This is the position taken by Alan Filewood when he writes that "Not only did the play [Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing] assume the possibility of reinforcing overt racism, as Tuharsky claims, it also enabled the [mainly] white establishment audience to

identify with the oppressed and therefore deny the racism in which they were complicit" (372). Given the pejorative qualities that have been collocated with Indianness in colonial discourse and with femaleness in patriarchal discourse, the danger in representing such qualities in relation to Indigenous characters is that such representations may promote rather than subvert stereotypes.

However, Highway's representations of Whiteness as domination in The Rez Sisters and Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing provide a context in which to understand his representation of an intolerable situation. A direct and active analysis of the representations of Whiteness in the plays reveals it as the cause of intolerable social conditions and self-destructive behaviours that threaten to lead the reserve community to implode. The plays document what Jeannette Armstrong in her essay "Racism" identifies as "psychological oppression and an internalized spiritual disintegration" (80). It is these oppressions and disintegrations, the effects of White domination, that provide the context for the despair and violence the plays represent. It is these effects of White domination that make understandable the despair and violence and the complicity of the male characters in the intolerable conditions that largely dominate the reserve. In a comment that might be applied directly to Highway's drama, Sharene Razack argues that "Understanding their [men's] violence begins with understanding the factors that minimize a sense of self, family, and community. In the Aboriginal context, this story has to begin with the violence of colonization" (65). Razack continues her argument by asserting that "continuing colonization and the devastating impact of past domination are the contexts in which Aboriginal family violence must be examined" (65). Razack's line of argumentation is one that is supported by Eduardo and Bonnie Duran when they write that "The

objectification of Native American family violence deprives it of its material history and hence of a crucial aspect of its truth...The history of native/ white relations since colonization . . . presents the context . . . of family violence" (26-27). In their representation of Whiteness as domination, Highway's plays return the violence they depict to its proper context, namely the violence of the colonial domination of Indigenous peoples.

Rather than promoting racism and misogyny, Highway's plays seek to make the violence they represent understandable as the results of White colonial domination. Sharene Razack maintains that

we need to understand sexual violence as the outcome of both white supremacy and patriarchy; culture talk fragments sexual violence as what men do to women and takes the emphasis away from white complicity. When the terrain is sexual violence, racism and sexism interlock in particularly nasty ways. These two systems operate through each other so that sexual violence . . . cannot be understood outside of colonialism and today's ongoing racism and genocide. (59)

Without excusing male sexual violence, Highway's plays seek to situate that violence within the context of colonialism and ongoing racism and genocide. In each of the plays an Indigenous woman is brutally raped, in one case by White males and in the other by an Indigenous male while other Indigenous males look on. These rapes emphasize for the audience that "the history and present-day legacy of colonization has affected Aboriginal women, rendering them as the victims of sexual assault" (Razack 71) at the hands of both White and Indigenous men. This emphasis addresses the problem that "many cultural communities understand culture and community in ways that reflect and

leave unchallenged male privilege" (58) and fulfills the need "to talk about culture and violence within the context of white supremacy, a context in which racism and sexism and their intersections are denied" (59). Razack argues that "when histories of imperialism, colonialism, and racism are left out of sexual violence, we are unable to see how these systems of domination produce and maintain violence against women" (90). Highway's plays situate sexual violence within the history of White domination and therefore within the histories Razack enumerates.

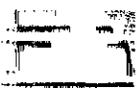
The value of Highway's plays and their positioning of sexual violence within the context of White domination is that "complex operations of hierarchies of gender and race point to contradictions in hegemonic systems" (Razack 13). Highway's plays begin to break down the racist manichean binary by introducing gender concerns. At the same time, by emphasizing the unique position of specifically Indigenous women, the plays do not allow for racial concerns to be subsumed under the category of gender. Razack expresses a concern that some social critics, including herself, have conducted themselves with a particular oversight: "What we had failed to consider was how social hierarchies operated among subordinate groups" (49). Highway's emphasis on the violent patriarchal attitudes and behaviours of the male characters focuses attention on this oversight. This emphasis serves as a reminder of the degree of truth of Razack's assertion that "we can all claim to stand as oppressor and oppressed in relation to someone else" (47). In the plays, Indigenous men and women suffer from the effects of White domination, while, at the same time, the patriarchy that is so obvious reveals the Indigenous men as oppressors of their Indigenous female partners. Thus, the plays avoid the pitfall that "an argument about what men do to women masks what white people have done to aboriginal peoples and the role that sexual violence has

played in these colonial encounters" (62). The portrayal of the male characters as violent patriarchs and the location of their behaviours within the context of colonial oppression does not subsume gender violence under racial concerns.

The brutal rapes that occur in each of the plays remind us of both the disastrous effects of White colonial domination and of violent patriarchal attitudes and behaviours. In her book Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics, bell hooks writes:

The discourse of black resistance has almost always equated freedom with manhood, the economic and material domination of black men with castration, emasculation. Accepting these sexual metaphors forged a bond between oppressed black men and their white male oppressors. They shared the patriarchal belief that revolutionary struggle was really about the erect phallus, the ability of men to establish political dominance that could correspond to sexual dominance Sexism has always been a political stance mediating racial domination, enabling white men and black men to share a common sensibility about sex roles and the importance of male domination. Clearly both groups have been socialized to condone patriarchal affirmation of rape as an acceptable way to maintain male domination. It is this merging of sexuality with male domination within patriarchy that informs the construction of masculinity for men of all races and classes. (58-59)

Her words might be applied directly to the Indigenous men in Tomson Highway's plays. However, in considering the ways in which bell hooks's words can be applied to



men such as Big Joey, we must remember that "Viewing Aboriginal men as dysfunctional (and not, for example, oppressed), and Aboriginal women as inherently rapeable confirms the superiority of white men" (Razack 69) thus maintaining both racial and gender hierarchies. We must also remember that "many of these wrongs [suffered by women at the hands of men] work in concert with other systems of oppression [such as racism], systems that benefit some women at the expense of others" (95-96). In other words, to consider Highway's work as emphasizing gender concerns alone is to ignore the ways in which interlocking systems of domination converge: "The dictates of patriarchy demand that beneath Native man comes the female Native. The dictates of racism are thus that Native men are beneath white women and Native females are not fit to be referred to as women" (Maracle 17-18). However, to emphasize racial concerns alone would be to deny that the male characters are complicit in the oppression of a segment of their own community and, by extension, of all Indigenous peoples, since "The denial of Native womanhood is the reduction of the whole people to a sub-human level. Animals beget animals" (Maracle 17).

Highway's representations of Whiteness as domination assign responsibility for the intolerable social conditions of the reserve to White colonial domination and patriarchy and to Indigenous people who act in complicity with colonial and patriarchal ways of being and doing. Thus, the responsibility for decolonization is assigned both to Euro-Canadian peoples and Indigenous peoples. The representation of Whiteness as domination begins a subversion of White colonial manichean thinking by revealing Whiteness as something other than desirable. The representation of gender hierarchy within the oppressed community also undermines the manichean binary by destabilizing the universalizing category of racialized Other. Indigenous women are



represented as having concerns specific to them as women, and these gender concerns undermine a simplistic manichean vision that would configure social relations in terms of racial concerns alone. In their presentation of social relations, these plays undermine simplistic binary patterns such as non-Indigenous versus Indigenous and Male versus Female. The representations of Whiteness invite non-Indigenous audiences to acknowledge their own role in racial oppression and work toward anti-racist formulations of White identity. The representations of Indigenous characters acting in complicity with both racialized and patriarchal systems of domination invite Indigenous people to begin examining the ways in which some members of our communities act out against one another their despair, self-hatred, and self-loathing.

As Indigenous peoples we cannot ignore the impact and effects of White colonial and patriarchal domination in our communities, nor can we simply wallow in our victimization. However, the process of overcoming victimization and affirming Indigenous identity beyond victimization are connected with acknowledging the roles that systems of domination have played and continue to play in our Indigenous communities. What bell hooks writes of her own communities is equally true of our communities: "We cannot value ourselves rightly without first breaking through the walls of denial which hide the depth of black self-hatred, inner anguish, and unreconciled pain" (*Black Looks* 20). Elsewhere hooks affirms that "Understanding marginality as a position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people", and reminds us that "If we only view the margin as a sign marking the despair, a deep nihilism penetrates in a destructive way the very ground of our being" (*Yearning* 150). In the same book, hooks encourages people to see "marginality as much more than a site of deprivation . . . [being also] a central location for the

production of a counter-hegemonic discourse" (149). Hooks's observations are significant in relation to Highway's plays because in representing Whiteness as domination and in revealing how racial domination contributes to gender hierarchy within an oppressed community, these plays invite Indigenous peoples to face their pain and also to recognize how it can lead them to act in complicity with various systems of domination. In doing so, the plays open up a space for agency and resistance to hegemonic ways of seeing.

Finally, these plays refuse to represent the lives of Indigenous peoples in solely tragic terms. In an article entitled "The Desire to Crunch Bone," Rob Appleford writes that "the dominant mode of presentation of Native images by non-Natives has been the mode of tragedy. Tragedy is serious business, and is therefore perceived to be a fitting vehicle when dealing with what non-Natives configure as the 'reality' of Native life" (21). Later in the article, Appleford remarks upon the limitations of such an approach: "The isolation of individuals and the narrative closure that often occurs in tragedies depicting Native people does not reflect an organic living culture that, by living, resists closure" (22). Neither of Highway's plays, however, end on a tragic note. In fact, both plays literally travel full circle to end exactly where they began: The Rez Sisters ends with Pelagia on her rooftop while Nanabush dances triumphantly and Dry Lips ends with Zachary waking from his vision and holding his and Hera's child aloft while Hera looks on laughing. Both of these texts resist closure, refuse the finality of tragedy, and affirm the margin as a space of possibility, responsibility, resistance, and agency. Denis Johnston has argued that

The tragedy of *Dry Lips* is of the men keeping on in their straight lines, absurdly reiterating their preoccupations instead of responding to the

events around themselves. They participate in tragedy, but they do not seem to learn from it as the women in *The Rez Sisters* do . . . Highway . . . weakens the credibility of his indictment in *Dry Lips* with a palliative 'dream' ending which seems gratuitous. (263)

However, what Johnston sees as a considerable weakness in the play is, from another perspective, one of its strengths. Like the ending to The Rez Sisters, the ending to Dry Lips avoids the narrative closure of tragedy and its representation of Indigenous communities and cultures as dead or dying. The open-ended conclusions to these plays assert continued survival and the possibility of a revisioning of Indigenous identities. In particular, the conclusion to Dry Lips suggests that Zachary and, by implication, other Indigenous men must find ways of revisioning their identities if they want to avoid the nightmare Zach has seen and in which he was an active participant. Indigenous communities need not be places of despair and violence. Highway assigns responsibility to us all, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, male and female, to insure that our communities are not places of degradation.

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