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Mixing in the Postcolonial Diaspora: Writing Race as Fiction in the Works of Lawrence

Hill, Shani Mootoo, and Danzy Senna

by

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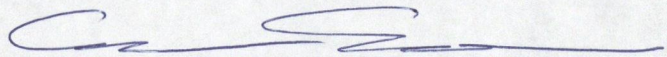
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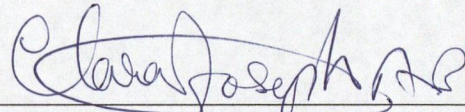
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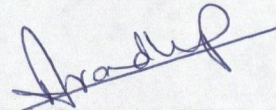
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled “Mixing in the Postcolonial Diaspora: Writing Race as Fiction in the Works of Lawrence Hill, Shani Mootoo, and Danzy Senna” submitted by Natalie Wall in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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ABSTRACT

This thesis will investigate how contemporary fiction written by mixed race North American authors challenges theories of cultural and racial fluidity. Specifically, I will look at the works of Lawrence Hill, Shani Mootoo, and Danzy Senna, because their work uses similar conditions of hybridity in identity, through the lens of cultural performance. These authors represent my politics of an inclusionary mixed race theory by representing differences amongst themselves that resolve into a focus on language, as it reflects on mixed race literature. I will first consider each author individually, within their own contexts, as a means of understanding the ways that different racial configurations work to create a hybrid perspective on the role that race plays in North America. What these authors have in common is that race is ultimately revealed to be a fiction in each of their works.

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Introduction:
The Language of Race, Writing Race as Fiction

This thesis will examine mixed race literature, and the ways that this literary genre can explore (explode?) concepts of race that texts less interested in the multiplicity of racial identity do not. I will demonstrate that race is a fiction, a fiction that is performed every day so that it becomes a self-sustaining lie that relies on the use of creative biology, false science, illusions of culture, and stereotypes. I am interested in the process of racialization¹, its implementation and implications. The title of my thesis is “Mixing in the Postcolonial Diaspora: Writing Race as Fiction in the Works of Lawrence Hill, Shani Mootoo, and Danzy Senna.” The opening to my title (pre-colon) refers to the world in which my project is set. I will use a mix of postcolonial and feminist theory throughout this project², alongside cultural critiques, race studies, and performance theory. This “mix” reflects the points that I believe most relevant in consideration of this important topic. We are living in a diasporic³ global community, and no one exists in a vacuum. My interdisciplinary approach reflects this attitude and embraces the culmination of ideas that it brings about. I will use these theories to investigate the relationship between race and language. This project is intensely interested in language and the ways that words work to create living fictions. I will show that race is nothing more than a set of labels and misnomers, inconsistently applied. I will use mixed race authors interested in writing mixed-race fiction to bring race center-stage and examine why it has spent so long in the dark.

Mixed, mixed-race, mulatto, zebra, miscegenation, biracial, multiracial, *métis*, etc.: There is an almost inexhaustible list of names and phrases that delineate people one from another. Racial differentiation relies on a shared lexicon of words which define a hybrid of

¹ Racialization is the process by which race is written onto a person or group of people: the active decision that certain features belong to certain races and not others, that certain groups share cultural habits that are inherited biologically (in some way).

² I consider myself a Third World feminist and you will see this attitude reflected throughout the course of my thesis.

³ I define ‘diasporic’ using *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, which says “diasporas, the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions, is a central historical fact of colonization” (68-69). As my project focuses on North America, I take this use of the term diaspora to be relevant to my site of study.

physical and cultural features that homogenize a group of people in the effort to distinguish them from other groups. I concern myself here with words that describe the intersections of race, words that attempt definition of a group of people that may or may not fall into already established racial categories: that of mixed race. I am interested in examining the phenomena of the *attempt* to address, in words, an inherently indefinable quality of non-categorization through hyphens or the insertion of “bis” or “multis.”

Let us look at race mixing, by examining the list above:⁴

- (1) Mixed – A short method of referring to “mixed-race” (see below).
- (2) Mixed-race – Belonging, through parentage, to more than one race.⁵
- (3) Mulatto – “A person having one white and one black parent. Freq. more generally: a person of mixed race resembling a mulatto. [...] Now chiefly considered *offensive*.”
- (4) Zebra – “Applied to things having stripes resembling or suggesting those of a zebra.” Colloquially refers to a person that is half black and half white. Often offensive.
- (5) Miscegenation – “The mixing or interbreeding of (people of) different races or ethnic groups, *esp.* the interbreeding or sexual union of whites and non-whites.” Also, please note that the first recorded use of this word in 1863 directly referred to the offspring of an “American White Man and a Negro.”
- (6) Biracial – “Concerning or containing (members of) two races.”
- (7) Multiracial – “Of, relating to, or comprising several racially differentiated peoples.”
- (8) *Métis* – “A person of mixed descent.” Please note that this term primarily refers to a person of white and Native Canadian racial parentage.

Please remember that this is not a complete list of all terms and phrases used to describe the act of racial mixing or people descended from one or more races. There are terms that are

⁴ The definitions in this list that appear in quotation marks are taken from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd edition.

⁵ My own definition. The Oxford English Dictionary has only this entry for “mixed-race”: “**1971** *Guardian* 17 Sept. 1/5 A delegation of six *mixed-race Rhodesians. **1995** *Amer. Jnl. Polit. Sci.* **39** 438 Blacks who live in suburban and mixed-race neighborhoods should feel greater solidarity with other blacks.”

quite specifically located that I choose not to list (think of the South African “coloured” or the enslaved American “quadroon”), as they do not pertain to my argument for a language that moves towards an opening of the strict demarcations of race. The terms I define for you here are all to be found in the criticism that I use throughout this thesis, these are words that exist popularly in the literature of mixed-race studies. Some of them I will use, as words and definitions are necessary in the examination of subject, and some I will not (for instance, those labeled offensive above) for my own reasons of bias and choice. Either way, I am attempting to destabilize the ways that we see race, through an analysis of the words and language that are used (carelessly, in most cases) to describe that elusive phenomenon of racial identification; or, in this case, of multiple racial identifications.

Three out of the eight terms listed above refer, either historically or colloquially, to the individual who is born to one black and one white parent. This assumption that the world is only made up of black and white reflects a trend that follows throughout popular culture and mixed-race studies. In North America, it is the image of the mulatto that haunts our perception of racial mixture. While the reception of that image will differ in Canada and the United States, the image itself is static, born of a shared history that polarizes race in an effort to conceptualize it as a real and definable binary.

In his article “Canadian Biraciality and Its ‘Zebra’ Poetics,” George Elliott Clarke attempts to define the place of mixed race Canadians in a national literature. He traces the literary image of the mixed race person from incidents of miscegenation during African slavery in both the US and Canada and moves into literary representations of that historical moment, saying that:

Certainly, like all African diasporic writing, African-Canadian literature engages the symbol and the image of the mixed-race black, for this figure violates the sanctity of racial polarities, reminding Africans and Europeans of white-practised violence against enslaved African women. (211)

Clarke then moves from the global to the specific, claiming uniqueness for the Canadian point of view on race. He argues that American interpretations of race rely more on an assumption that everyone is black or white, while Canada hedges more towards conceptions of grey. While I disagree with many of Clarke’s assertions of a mixed race

identity (and his apparent belief that there is a homogenous and clearly articulated mixed race culture that he has managed to encapsulate into a twenty-six page paper), I will agree that there are differences between Canadian and American perceptions of race. There are differences that rely on a shared history of colonialism and the oppression of minorities as a starting point which moves in directions that are similar, but not the same.

Indeed, for Clarke (who has argued for a distinction in the consideration of African-Canadian and African-American literature⁶), it is the differences that matter most, although he has pointed out the similarities between Canada and the US himself. Describing Canadian literature's take on mixed race writing (and writers), he says:

An incorrigible ambivalence about racial identification is, arguably, more common in African-Canadian than in African-American literature. In Canada, brown skin is not always identified with blackness – either as a state of (nationalist) consciousness or as a matter of pigmentation.
 (“Canadian Biraciality” 221)

Again, as we examine Clarke's criticism on biraciality in Canada, it is important to note that this is strictly a black/white phenomenon. Though Clarke acknowledges that Canadian culture sees race more fluidly than American culture does, he only goes so far as to say that those born of one black parent and one white parent can be identified as either of those or something completely different. Here, there is no desire to examine the definition of that other (for that would complicate the claim to understanding the homogeneity of Canadian biraciality). There is only a wish to see the world as black, white, or black/white, never a heterogeneity of difference and self-identification.

There are those that would argue against using binaries to transpose one set of suppositions about race (that race is real and concrete) onto another level of racialization. By ordering mixed race theory into a dichotomy of black and white, and thereby ignoring any other race or mixture of races, there is a simplification of race that only substantiates a system of stereotypes and oppressions. In their article “Same Difference: Towards a More Unified Discourse in ‘Mixed Race’ Theory,” Minelle Mahtani and April Moreno explore what it means to be mixed with races other than black and white, in the context of

⁶ Please see the “Introduction” to his critical work *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*.

contemporary mixed race theory. Mahtani articulates her concerns regarding the assumption that black + white = mixed race. She says:

We have found that discussions in 'mixed race' circles, as well as public conceptions of 'mixed race', have tended to disregard the experiences of non-white 'mixed race' people. [...] This is reflected in the common societal perception that the term 'mixed race' is synonymous with a black and white 'mix'. Part of our concern stems from the theoretical assumptions inherent in many writings on 'mixed race'. It is apparent that a privileging of particular voices is taking place. (Mahtani and Moreno 71)

It is this privileging of voice – seeing mixed race only as a black/white occurrence – that creates an imbalance in theory. It is only in complicating ideas of race (and mixed race) that true analysis occurs and allows for a movement beyond race.

Mahtani and Moreno are concerned with the general acceptance (popular and academic) that racial mixing always results in an individual that is part white and part *something else* (most often black, but not always). This view of racial mixture supports the supposition that white is the norm, and that mixed race is just a deviation from that. Mixed race becomes easier to visualize: simply picture a race (and all of the stereotypes therein) and *whiten* it. That is, take any ethnic feature and normalize it in your mind, and you have your mental picture of racial mixture. Mahtani, again, would like to argue against the dangers of this simplification:

The current discussions in 'mixed race' theory perpetuate a kind asymmetry that has tainted many critical analyses of race theory, where race is a code word for non-white. The binary logic of race, in which the world is perceived in terms of oppositions (white versus non-white) encodes a hierarchy, with the first term of these oppositions superior to the second. (Mahtani and Moreno 71)

I find myself nodding as I read Mahtani's words, so different from Clarke's assessment of mixed culture, and agreeing that it is the exclusionary tactics of some critics that enable a blanketing of assumptions onto mixed race theory. Rather than reiterate the same

stereotypes and marginalizations that represent race, I would rather put forth an inclusionary method for examining mixed race.

This thesis will investigate how contemporary fiction written by mixed race North American authors challenge theories of cultural and racial fluidity. Specifically, I will look at the works of Lawrence Hill, Shani Mootoo, and Danzy Senna, because their work uses similar conditions of hybridity in identity, through the lens of cultural performance. These authors represent my politics of an inclusionary mixed race theory by demonstrating differences amongst themselves that resolve into a focus on language, as it reflects mixed race literature. I will first consider each author individually, within their own contexts, as a means of understanding the ways that different racial configurations work to create a hybrid perspective on the role that race plays in North America. What these authors have in common is that race is ultimately revealed to be a fiction in each of their works.

This project attempts to move literature into a moment of post-raciality. I desire to use mixed race authors of varying backgrounds to demonstrate that race is, indeed, a fiction. Fiction is used in two ways here. Fiction refers to the works written by the authors but also to a manner of expressing a believable falsity. Fiction is real (in both cases) as it represents the imagination, but fiction is also, inherently, *not true*. Though primarily novelists, these three authors write in a mixture of forms, both fictive and not. By exploring their works to highlight the many uses to which “fiction” can be brought, I hope to also illuminate the complexities of writing race. Indeed,

this move towards post-raciality requires a repudiation of the vocabulary of ‘race’. To merely mix ‘race’ it to concede too much to those who would divide and judge human beings on the grounds of biologically inherited characteristics. (Parker and Song 11)

Race must be thoroughly refuted as a biological condition, in order to accept mixed race as a category. If race is pure and genetically based, then mixed race is an identity based on deviance and is inherently unnatural. I do not believe this to be true⁷. Instead, let us posit

⁷ I do not have the space here to elaborate on the scientific refutation of race as a biological condition. Please see the work of twentieth century race theorists (Claude S. Fischer, Steven Fraser, Naomi Glauberman, Russell Jacoby, Jonathan Marks, Richard Nisbett, etc.) for renunciation of the revival of this school of thought.

that race is a fiction and that mixed race theory is the means to expose this fiction. In this supposition, it must also be recognized that fiction does not mean *unreal*, simply untrue. Racism and systemized marginalization are all too demonstrative evidences of the material *reality* of 'race' in North American culture. Therefore, while race is a fiction it is always already a real phenomenon.

Now, you will notice that the authors chosen for examination in this project suffer from the same complaint that Mahtani and Moreno have pointed out in their observations of mixed race studies: they all have one white parent. While I respect Mahtani and Moreno's point on this matter, it cannot be ignored that most of the work done in mixed race theory relies on the assumption of one white parent. I have attempted some diversity by having authors that hail from different countries and have different racial 'mixes;' however, I feel the need to conform somewhat to the expectations of the field. I hope that this concession to the expectations of mixed race theory only helps you to read my thesis responsibly, never forgetting that this is a representation of work that has been done and not a representation of a complicated and varied population of people of mixed race backgrounds.

My theoretical framework is informed particularly by Homi Bhabha, most well known for his theories of postcolonial hybridity. Speaking of miscegenation, Bhabha says "*almost the same but not white*: the visibility of mimicry is always produced at the site of interdiction" (128). This site of interdiction is the "writing of the partial nature of fantasy" (127), the story that confronts through mimicry. The writing of race as fiction is the overarching theme to my project, though four issues will guide my investigation: 1) the function of *race* as a concept in postcolonial theory; 2) the relationships between identity and hybridity; 3) the ways that multiculturalism and border-crossing are complicated in and by mixed race writing; and 4) how performance works in particularly useful ways for examining notions of difference. These four issues will help me to understand the function of race as fiction, and the ways that Hill, Mootoo and Senna use that fiction to undermine the racial divides on which North American society is built.

My first chapter delves into the interaction of performance, postcolonial, and feminist theory on critical race studies. These critical standpoints meet as I attempt to

reconcile the performance of race with its reality. I take my cue from Judith Butler, and her theories of performativity, and analyze the ways that race works in popular North American culture. This chapter is the fundamental argument guiding my entire thesis: that race is performed and that mixed race performances undermine the belief that race is a biological fact.

My second chapter focuses on the works of Lawrence Hill. Hill was born in Canada to two American immigrant parents, one white and one black. He has written extensively on issues of race, culture, and nationalism, and has self-identified as a mixed-race author in both creative and critical books of national acclaim. In his novel *Any Known Blood* and his non-fiction text *Black Berry, Sweet Juice*, Hill looks at racial identities alongside national borders, as he blurs the way that we see race and nationality. Hill's strategic use of artificial boundaries, such as national borders, underlines the constructedness of demarcations such as race. Hill's use of miscegenation parallels his use of narrative as a storytelling tool, undermining the generic divisions between fiction and non-fiction.

My third chapter examines the work of Shani Mootoo, who was born in Ireland and raised in Trinidad, before emigrating to Canada when she was nineteen. Mootoo has a white Irish mother and an East Indian-Caribbean father, and refers to her own mixed heritage in her poems about hybridity. I will be looking at Mootoo's collection of short stories, *Out on Main Street and Other Stories*, and her novel *Cereus Blooms at Night*. In her work, Mootoo uses the oral technique of an intrusive narrator, which emulates the Trinidadian method of storytelling, in order to introduce a complex rereading of hybridity. Here, miscegenation acts as a narrative device, entwining itself into the story and rewriting the performative reality of race.

My fourth chapter is about the works of Danzy Senna, who was born in the USA to a white Jewish mother and a black radical father. Senna has worked in fiction as well as non-fiction (she has published several articles as a journalist), and her writing is always questioning the ways that race is complicated through its own fictionality. I will be looking at Senna's two novels, *Caucasia* and *Symptomatic*, alongside a selection of her journalistic works, as she is constantly looking for the lines between fiction and non-fiction as they

mimic divisions of race. Miscegenation exposes the arbitrary racial divides which underwrite the fiction of identity.

My fifth (and final) chapter is an analysis of racial *passing*. Passing exists as the primary fear of racial mixing, the worry that race will become blurred and distorted as it loses “purity.” I feel that it is necessary for me to acknowledge this fear and support it in my examination of mixed race theory. Passing is confusing; it creates doubt and confuses a world that relies on the truth of blacks and whites. In this chapter, I remind you that we are all of us “passing” in some way or another. Race is a fiction, and, even when performed exceptionally well, it relies on the performance of passing.

The importance of language guides me throughout. In the list at the beginning of this introduction, I attempt to demonstrate that there is a failure of language to conceptualize mixed race identities and personas. This failure relies on the fact that terms defining mixed race rely on the truth of race, as a starting point. If race is a fiction, than mixed race is a subcategory of a fictional category and becomes almost indefinable as a result:

It is important in future research, therefore, to foreground ‘mixed race’ not just in itself, but rather as offering more general insights into dense, multifaceted “textured identities”. The rethinking of “race” through “mixed race” disrupts the certainty of a social category central to the organization of modern societies. For the notion of “mixed race” thwarts the ideal pristine, pure “races” with the undeniable historical truth of mixture, while simultaneously highlighting the inescapable contemporary fact of racialisation. (Parker and Song 17)

I believe that race is a fiction. I also believe that fictions can be dangerous. This project seeks to illuminate the dangers of race, while simultaneously highlighting the potential of acknowledging its status as fiction. The authors I discuss in this project focus their own attentions on the nuances and pitfalls that language and fiction provide. You will notice that I use the term “miscegenation” a great deal throughout this work. I do this purposefully and knowingly. Though I cautioned you earlier that “miscegenation” is rooted in the description of the offspring of a white man and a black woman, I believe its use reminds us of the

dangers in uncritical reading. I use this word to remind you that, though mixed race theory stems from an historical and popular conception of the black/white person, it is a complex and versatile set of identifications that merit an explosion of definitions, rather than a narrowing down of terms.

Performance as Cultural Critique:
Moving Theories of Performative Identities

As I sketched out in my introduction, race is fundamentally a performance. Race is a physical performance that relies on a set of social strategies to integrate the role with the person, in the effort to convince marginalized persons that their lack of access to the privileges of North American society is, in fact, not a calculated manoeuvre to assure that a small minority of people hold the most power, but a chance of birth. Race is a strategy that relies on a set of preconceived ideas of the Other⁷, which view difference as inherited and not designated. Race loosely bases itself on the notion that people of historically marked ancestry (marked by the moment of English colonial discovery of them) have shared physical features that can be defined and described and that these physical differences are underscored by social difference.

In his article “Writing ‘Race’ and the Difference It Makes,” Henry Louis Gates Jr. sets up an historically based analysis on the relationship between race and literature in the Western world. I look to Gates now to impress upon you the relevance that race plays in the Western literary canon, and by implication, the world around us. Gates tells us:

Race is the ultimate trope of difference because it is so very arbitrary in its application. The biological criteria used to determine ‘difference’ in sex simply do not hold when applied to ‘race.’ Yet we carelessly use language in such a way as to *will* this sense of *natural* difference into our formulations.

(5)

Gates reminds us here that race is a strategic economic ploy that works to enrich the privileged upper classes and indebt the impoverished Other by creating social strata which rely on the supposition that people are made up of distinct groups, and that these individual groups share a biological predisposition to certain physical features and social inclinations. Gates also makes an aside on the difference between race and sex. I will be looking at the relationship between sex, gender, and race more extensively in my third chapter, but for

⁷ I use capital “O” Others here (and throughout this thesis) to represent difference from ‘the norm,’ the Other is that which represents a marginalized position (racially, sexually, socially, etc.) with respect to a rich, white, male, heterosexual centre.

now I am focussing on the relationship between race, fiction, and performance and gender plays a part only insofar as I examine the ways that feminist theory uses performance.

In this chapter, I will sketch out the fundamental theories that underline this thesis: postcolonial, feminist, and performance theories, alongside critical race and mixed race studies. I believe that all of these approaches work together to illustrate that race is a performative fiction, that is to say, a fiction that relies on a socially constructed (and accepted) performance to insinuate itself as reality. I believe that it is important to remember the role that fiction plays in this argument, as Gates says “in much of the thinking about the proper study of literature in this century, race has been an invisible quantity, a persistent yet implicit presence” (2). In order to make the invisible visible, I use mixed race fiction as the practical repudiation to the social convention of race as a natural category of difference. It is the mixed-race performance that blurs the lines of power. Passing, racial identity, and access to cultural multiplicity⁸ move the act of performance into the light. Miscegenation demonstrates that racial performance is, indeed, just that. The performance of race itself becomes the main event (no longer implicit and invisible). The fiction of race is illuminated under the rubric of the mixed race performance, a spectacle of negation. Before I look at mixed race performance, however, let me analyze the roots of performance theory as it critically engages in discourses of marginalization and difference.

Performance theory and feminist theory have long been allies in a melee of thoughts and conclusions about the performativity of culture. That gender is performed is a long-standing argument, with a firm background and intense study. Simone de Beauvoir told us that “one is not born a woman” and Monique Wittig took that argument and structured her own around the combined performances of language and gender in *The Straight Mind*. In her prodigious text on feminist theory of performance, *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler takes her cue from these impressive women and moves feminist theory more solidly into the realm of performativity. She tells us:

that the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological

⁸ I will examine these concepts of “passing, racial identity, and access to cultural multiplicity” more thoroughly in Chapter Five. For now, please note their importance and know that I will revisit their performative relevance later in this thesis.

status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the 'integrity' of the subject. (185)

Butler clearly delineates between the identity and the gender of the subject, by imposing an acknowledgement of performance as a cultural tool of social negotiation. Skin becomes the barrier between identity (person) and performance (role); it marks the disjunct between an interior reality that is personal and an exterior reality that is lived. The performance of the skin negates the functionality of the person because it strays too far from the known reality of the interior. As the performance becomes unsustainable, the integrity of the individual becomes blurred, creating a static, a buzz, an insurmountable difference between thought and reality in the individual.

Gender Trouble was first published in 1990, and there has been a great deal of scholarship on the subject of gender performance in the interim. Many academics⁹ have mapped performance theories regarding gender onto theories of race as cultural performance. Butler, on looking back at *Gender Trouble* in the "preface" to the 1999 reprint, says that she would add "a discussion on racialized sexuality and, in particular, how taboos against miscegenation (and the romanticization of cross-racial sexual exchange) are essential to the naturalized and denaturalized forms that gender takes" (xxvii). Race and sex move together performatively, the two terms reflecting each other in their forceful declaration of group affiliation based on ambiguous physical features. However, Butler warns that applying theories of performance, initially used by feminists, directly onto theories of racial performance is inaccurate, and only impedes discussion of the issues at hand:

I would note here not only that racial presumptions invariably underwrite

⁹ Here, I am thinking of of Butler, Wittig, Striff, Turner, Austin, Roach, Foster, Arrizon, and Mahtani, all of whom I go on to discuss in this chapter.

the discourse on gender in ways that need to be made explicit, but that race and gender ought not to be treated as simple analogies. I would therefore suggest that the question to ask is not whether the theory of performativity is transposable onto race, but what happens to the theory when it tries to come to grips with race. (*Gender Trouble* xvi)

Race and sex are not interchangeable; rather, they are issues which are woven together intricately, in a fabric of oppressions that make up contemporary North American society.

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the ways that the performance of gender has created a method for looking at other social performances, especially that of race.

Moreover, I will show that it is through miscegenation that the performativity of gender and race becomes most complicated, a purposeful complication that denounces the corruption of identity that the arbitrary assignation of performative categories has encouraged. Butler also says that:

to the extent the gender norms (idea, dimorphism, heterosexual complementarity of bodies, ideals and rule of proper and improper masculinity and femininity, many of which are underwritten by racial codes of purity and taboos against miscegenation) establish what will and will not be intelligibly human, what will and will not be considered to be 'real,' they establish the ontological field in which bodies may be given legitimate expression. (*Gender Trouble* xxv)

It is the negotiation of racial performance that allows for the exposition of imposed roles of marginalization, and miscegenation is a concrete tool for this exploration. It is through the recognition of the static created by the merging of performances (in the mixed race body) that performance is rewritten to merge identity with role, not in a refusal of performance, but in the careful selection of roles among the many available performances. I will look to mixed race authors Shani Mootoo and Danzy Senna to explore the role that text and fiction play in exploring and exposing the ways that racial performance are complicated by the language of miscegenation.

In the "Introduction" to *Performance Studies: Readers in Cultural Criticism*, editor Erin Striff says that "to consider performance is to study how we represent ourselves and

repeat those representations within everyday life, working on the assumption that culture is unthinkable without performance” (1). Please keep this in mind, for it is this notion of repetition that I will come back to, over and over again, throughout this chapter. This is the key to moving performance in-between theorists, texts, and cultural criticism. It is repetition that binds Butler’s performativity to that of theorists before and after her. It is repetition that moves performativity between life and text, and allows for a mutuality of expression in that space between here and there, in the in-between. After saying this, Striff goes on to examine the origins of performance studies, citing Richard Schechner as the first to treat the subject as truly interdisciplinary in 1979. She reminds us that Schechner himself points out that “Performance studies is ‘inter’ – in between. It is intergeneric, interdisciplinary, intercultural – and is therefore inherently unstable” (7). Striff acknowledges that there is a division between theatre studies and performance studies, though the two have similar parentages, so far as theories go. She relies on this notion of “inter” to delineate the two disciplines, all the while allowing for a fluidity between them.

Striff looks at prominent names in the field of performance studies (Victor Turner, J.L. Austin, Judith Butler, etc.) in her effort to demonstrate that “in the same way that there is more than one style of play, and some are more likely to wind up on theatre studies reading lists than others, some styles of performances are especially privileged in performance studies” (5). There is an acknowledgement here that performance studies is a broad field, often subject to conflation with other disciplines (because of its inherent interconnectedness), with a host of theorists that agree, disagree, agree in principal but not in practice, etc. This is important to remember as we delve into the ways that feminist theories of performativity can be applied to race theory, in particular and intricate ways that require a responsible reading¹⁰ of bodies and text. It is through recognition of the distinct manners of theorizing performance that Striff moves on to the practical applications of this field, most particularly in areas of activism and protest. Striff looks at the ways that “acting

¹⁰ I have used this term “responsible reading” earlier, in the introduction to this work. It is the fundamental assumption behind my project, that my readers are critically engaging with my topic as I am. My dual use of fiction underlines this idea of “responsible reading” with a homonym that requires thought and digestion in its different used to describe the writing or the theoretical desires of my authors.

out” moves performance studies into a space of activity, rather than passivity; from theory into practice. She says:

Acting out unconscious desires, acting out of place, out of turn, particularly when so many in this volume are dealing with marginalised subjects in terms of race, class or sexuality, may be an appropriate gesture. Acting out questions the status quo and makes possible Judith Butler’s theories of queer performativity and Joseph Roach’s references to cultural liminality. Furthermore, performing in culture often involves making a spectacle of oneself. (13)

Though Striff has, earlier in her introductory chapter, warned us that the languages of performance and theatre studies are not interchangeable, she strategically uses the term *spectacle* to inform her argument regarding the potentiality of performance theory to engage a political world. Spectacle becomes a tool in the hands of responsible performance theorists, a space to turn the performance around, to make the voyeur viewed. “Acting out” becomes the method in which performance theorists manage to move between theory and practice, much as performance studies gives the means to take an interdisciplinary method to cultural criticism. The mediation of all of these theories, through spectacle, inform both gender and race theory in a particular way, allowing individual agency in a monolithic world of staged marginalizations and oppressions.

Though, as Striff has shown us, performance studies has its roots in a myriad of interdisciplinary fields, Judith Butler moves performativity into the realm of gender theory. Butler uses performance theory to engage with gender in a way that allows for a simultaneous entrapment in and freedom from the female body. If gender is merely performed, a set of “feminine” acts given power through repetition, then every woman has the power to reject her role; she can choose another performance. Yet it remains inescapable that gender is an all-encompassing performance, one that is nearly impossible to walk away from. Butler tells us that “gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence” (*Gender Trouble* 34). She goes on to explain that “within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of

substance, gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” (*Gender Trouble* 34). Gender performance, in Butler’s terms, is always an action, thereby giving the subject both power to act and an inability to see the performance of which she is a part. Performative cohesion relies on the constant reinforcement of gender through successive action – a continuous repetition of the gender mores – in order to keep the machine in operation. The performance sits in the center, as a cross between the set of actions that keep gender a stable social construct and as the potential for destruction of gender norms through “acting out.” “Acting out” is spectacle, but not always a rejection of the performance itself. Butler looks to Monique Wittig’s theories of performative language in order to consider the different ways that gender performance is actualized and reinforced, she says that “domination occurs through a language which, in its plastic social action, creates a second-order, artificial ontology, an illusion of difference, disparity, and, consequently, hierarchy that *becomes* social reality” (*Gender Trouble* 161). Language is the point of divergence and functionality of gender performance, the omnipresent system of oppression. It is the systemic fictionalizing of women that reinforces gender as a social norm, the performance of femininity as reality underscores the need to locate performance in textual representations of both theoretical constructs and lived actualities. Language is the fiction behind the reality.

Language is impermanent, malleable, and contentious. Language moves the world, always already representing itself and the fictional performances of a coherent mould. Language is everywhere. Monique Wittig tells us that “pornographic images, films, magazine photos, publicity posters on the walls of the cities, constitute a discourse, and this discourse covers our world with its signs, and this discourse has a meaning: it signifies that women are dominated” (25). Text is not always found on a sheet of paper: the world around us is filled with notes, memos, and abstracts, all of which signify that women have a prefigured “feminine” identity. This identity is a fictional construct which is validated through the language of the world, for “there is nothing abstract about the power that sciences and theories have to act materially and actually upon our bodies and our minds, even if the discourse that produces them is abstract” (Wittig 26). Language becomes the

focal point for “acting out,” by creating a spectacle of the fiction-making contrivances of text that move alongside the role of “femininity” in order to create the great gender performance. Recognizing the fiction that exists in reality is the start, “but language does not allow itself to be worked upon, without parallel work in philosophy and politics, as well as in economics, because, as women are marked in language by gender, they are marked in society as sex” (Wittig 82). It is only through a truly interdisciplinary approach to language that “acting out” becomes possible. Spectacle requires the use of all the fields of study within performance theory, in order to create a counter-performance, an insurgent language, a new fictional discourse that empowers, rather than oppresses.

Moving back to Gates and the language of race for a moment, I would like to consider that though language relies on the environment in which it grows, environment is also shaped by language. Specifically, differences that are historically marked, such as race and ethnicity, become more potent through reaffirmation in the literature of yesterday and today. Gates says:

we must determine how critical methods can effectively disclose the traces of ethnic differences in literature. But we must also understand how certain forms of difference and the *languages* we employ to define those supposed differences not only reinforce each other but tend to create and maintain each other. (15)

Thus, according to Gates, literature has a responsibility to create a fiction that challenges the conventions of race and exposes the fictions on which Western society is built. It is the responsibility of language to create a new reality, one where race becomes visible and is recognized for the fiction that it is.

Language, therefore, is exceptionally powerful. It has the ability to create and destroy identities and the constructed roles of a society. If it is true that texts create an oppressive discourse, then it is equally true that texts enable a counter-discourse that empowers the marginalized by forcing a recognition of the initial fiction. I look to Shani Mootoo’s poem “A Recognition,” from her collection *the predicament of or*, to illustrate my point. Mootoo opens:

’You’re Trinidadian!’

I blurt out proudly, smugly,
accusation not, of course, intended.
'I recognize the accent!'
Mine suddenly dips deep, curves like a kite, thickens like sugar browning
in oil for stew. (1-8)

Language here signifies more than intended: the Trinidadian accent is a symbol of an attempt at camaraderie, an excuse to explore a partial identity. The narrator needs to emphasize her difference. Where the recipient of the exclamation is instantly identifiable, the narrator exists between here and there, and chooses her nationality at will. She rewrites herself. The poem continues:

she has turned,
but I hear her say, 'I am Canadian,'
the reply dropped flat,
mercilessly terse
These are things I know:
anonymity, autonomy
freedom to self-define
to forget
to come out
to escape. (15-24)

The exchange comes to a halt. The narrator feels chagrin at her assumption of a shared identity with the unknown woman. They do not play the same roles, they write different fictions. The narrator recognizes that "sometimes there is (something I understand)/no room to negotiate" (25-26). Performance and language work, in this poem, in tandem. The Trinidadian text written by the woman's accented voice is undescored by her desire to be Canadian. Words do not convey the entirety of her desires; it is a combination of words, dialect, and sentiment that establish the narrator's confluence of thoughts and identities. The narrator has transgressed this performance by attempting to rewrite her own nationality, and has become spectacle, rather than voyeur. The other woman's silence

highlights the narrator's assumptions of difference and thereby allow her no space to hide, no implicit ethnic language that renders her invisible.

In her article "Choreographies of Gender," Susan Leigh Foster criticizes Butler's theorizing of gender performativity, claiming that bodies are more socially relevant than text. Foster sees Butler's work as too far removed from the practicality of the female body, and all that it represents in a socially constructed world of gender performance. Foster says that "for Butler it is difficult to envision how either performance or performativity extends beyond the verbal realm into non-verbal dimensions of human action" and that,

although Butler emphasises that performativity can be located only in multiple rather than single acts, the focus on reiteration stresses the repetition of acts more than the relationality among them. (169)

Foster looks to choreography to imagine a performative discourse that can, practically and bodily, "act out" against socially constructed performances. These choreographed dances move in and out of the performative fictions of gender, class, and race, in the effort to draw attention to these written roles while simultaneously rewriting them with the female body. Foster says that "choreography also disrupts the traditional divisions of labour between verbal and nonverbal acts by fusing the experiential and 'feminine' cultivation of bodily presence to the intellectual and 'masculine' analysis of representation" (175). While Foster's desire to see the body as the disruptive space of gender performance through a politically engaged choreography is compelling, it also relies on a dismissal of text that risks removing the all-important "inter" from the inter-disciplinary strength of performance studies. Throughout her article, Foster consistently equates the body with women and the text with men, an approach that relies on the performative essentialisms that Butler is attempting to denounce. The strategy is self-defeating. Though the desire to see theory actualized in body is tempting, it should not be attempted at the expense of the text. Language exists in all aspects of the world, and the body speaks in more ways than can be choreographed.

Like Foster, Minelle Mahtani sees Butler's theories of gender performativity as a useful starting point, but impractical and too theoretical. In her article "Tricking the Border Guards: Performing Race," Mahtani suggests "that the experience of 'mixed race' identity

can offer a site for the performance of potentially enabling political identities” (426). She conducts a series of interviews, asking women of mixed racial backgrounds questions about their own views on racial performativity, based on her study of Judith Butler’s work in *Gender Trouble*. Mahtani says:

I draw from Butler’s work because I believe it is imperative to consider the linkages between the real-life worlds of “mixed race” women and our theoretical developments in feminist theory [...] I am primarily concerned with exploring two aspects of Butler’s theory: namely, Butler’s tendency to ignore space and race in her discussion of performativity. I draw upon this critique in order to bring energy to Butler’s largely theoretical discussion, and to ground racialized meanings in the spatial. (“Tricking” 426-27)

Mahtani feels that Butler has ignored race and place in her discussions of performativity, and has concerns about how theories of performativity can be used practically, to create a counter-performance in the lives of mixed raced women.

Mahtani uses quotation marks when she references the multiracial background of her subjects, because she is uncomfortable with essentializing these women. In this work, she relies on discounting several women who self-identify as mixed race, since she is only interested in a very particular use of racial performance. Mahtani is not interested here in women who cannot ‘pass’ for more than one race. I find this demarcation of mixed women limiting and at cross purposes to the initial investigation. Mahtani says that:

To assume all women of ‘mixed race’ experience a freedom to perform racialized identities is to essentialize the very diverse population of women interviewed. I draw upon those experiences of certain ‘mixed race’ women who do experience racial ambiguity regarding others’ perception of their racial appearance, in order to demonstrate the links between performativity and race. (“Tricking” 429)

This argument limits Mahtani’s theories of performative miscegenation in ways that expressly reiterate the constructed fictions of race. By supposing that women who possess some unidentifiable racial ambiguity have more performative power than those whose race is presupposed (incorrectly) because their facial features take after one parent and not the

other, Mahtani rejects the real power offered by performativity, as well as rejecting a large percentage of her sample population. Mahtani sees “acting out” as a confrontation between the voyeur and the performer; she says that “clearly, some ‘mixed race’ women choose to play with discomfort of an audience – a discomfort which arises because the process of racialization cannot be successfully completed. They decentre and confuse others’ perceptions of their racialized identities” (“Tricking” 435). Mahtani uses the experiences of her subjects to reinforce this notion that performance is empowering only in ambiguity; she asks all of the women interviewed how they react to strangers who demand of them “what are you?” Mahtani is particularly interested in the women who take the opportunity of the question to make the questioner uncomfortable, citing an example where two women exchange racial identities in order to challenge assumptions. She claims that it is the disruption of the “social script” (“Tricking” 437) that gives these exchanges power. However, Mahtani herself must also acknowledge that these confrontations are only on a very individual level, and, more often than not, only reinforce notions of racialization, by conforming to a counter-performance that is written in an already established canon of racial essentialism.

Though Mahtani’s argument relies on the tenets of spectacle, her analysis of the enabling capacity of performativity is negated by her own limitations of language. Mahtani discounts many of the fundamental arguments of Butler’s theories of performativity, in her effort to create practical situations in which performance is used to disrupt perceptions of racial “truths.” Though Butler’s work is primarily interested in gender performances, she has always acknowledged the importance that her theories have for race, despite Mahtani’s assertions to the contrary. Mahtani’s system of interviews is interesting, yet lacks a concrete grounding in which to actualize Butler’s theories of gender performativity in the realm of miscegenation studies. By ignoring the mixed race women who do not comply with her own views of racial ambiguity (those who can only pass for one race), Mahtani has seriously limited herself and her investigations, serving no purpose but to reinforce stereotypes and fictionalized racial categories. Mahtani’s work is simply a rewriting of the fictions of race: rather than assume the white perspective as norm, she writes in the mixed

race woman who is racially ambiguous. This is merely the creation of a new fiction, one that relies on marginalizing a good part of Mahtani's subjects of study.

If miscegenation offers any sort of challenge to racial performativity, it is not in the exclusion of people based on adherence to or divergence from racial norms. In her novel *Caucasia*, Danzy Senna looks at two sisters of mixed parentage: Birdie, who looks like their white mother and Cole, who takes after their black father. The text unfolds as the two girls learn that race is performed and that they have choices as to what role they will play. Choice, here, becomes a fiction of circumstance. As the girls move through childhood to adulthood, they realize that race is as much reality as it is fiction and that if they do not write it themselves then it will be written upon them. The novel looks at the ways that language moves to define these girls, as they learn more about the world around them: "'we talk like white girls, Birdie.' She picked up the magazine she had been reading, and handed it to me. 'We don't talk like black people. It says so in this article.' I glanced at the article. The heading read, 'Black English: Bad for Our Children?'" (53). Language works to blur the lines between self-identification and racial essentialism; Cole desires to perform the role of a black girl, while Birdie recognizes the limits of that particular role, acted out through a spoken language that represents the results of a poor education. Though the girls share the same parentage, they soon learn that there are different choices available to them, and some racial identities will be performed more successfully than others.

In his article "Culture and Performance in the Circum-Atlantic World," Joseph Roach argues that "the study of restored behaviours in their diachronous dimension, however, is a relatively new field of research, organising itself around what I call 'genealogies of performance'" (126). Roach wants to analyze the ways that performance is located spatially and temporally, in its potential application for critical race theory and cultural criticism. He looks to "restored behaviours," performances that are repeated in the effort to make them seem natural, as the means to investigate "genealogies of performance," the textual representation of cultural performativity over time. Roach, unlike Foster and Mahtani, reinforces the idea that the text is where performance is documented and read. The "genealogies of performance" are the sites where culture, history, and performance meet, with the intention of using these static spaces as tools for investigating

the moving world around us. Roach says that “genealogies of performance approach literature as a repository of the restored behaviours of the past. They excavate the lineage of restored behaviours still at least partially visible in contemporary culture, in effect ‘writing the history of the present’” (126). In looking at the fiction of cultural performance in today’s world from a postcolonial perspective, Roach claims that “cultural appropriation [...] appears most emphatically where the genealogy of performance encompasses what I call surrogation, the theatrical principle of substitution of one persona for another” (129-130). It is this surrogation that draws the line between performer and voyeur in the fiction of racial performance.

Surrogation is the fiction created by the voyeur, the one watching the performance. Surrogation relies on a performativity of racial, cultural, and gender roles; it maintains itself by insisting that marginalized roles are predictable, to one degree or another. Surrogation, traditionally, is written onto the character, the voyeur’s voice substituting itself for the performers. Roach outlines the theory for us:

like theatrical doubling, surrogation operates in two modes. In the first mode, one actor stands in for another (as in the film trade’s ‘stunt double’ or ‘body double’) so that, in effect, two actors share one mask. In the second mode of doubling, one actor plays more than one role – two (or more) masks appear on one actor. (130)

This theory of surrogation brings us back to the limits of Mahtani’s investigation of mixed race women. Mahtani could only consider performance in light of the second mode of substitution, where the mixed race women performs as multiply raced individuals. Mahtani could not see the power in a woman of mixed race background managing to stand in for only one race, and thereby illuminating another way in which performative fictions work to condition society to see race in a very particular and essentializing way. Looking back on Mahtani, it is evident that she is not interested in Roach’s theory that “the persistent power of surrogation in the performance of such cultural and ethnic difference resides, I believe, in the social liminality of the designated performers” (131). It is not only the audience that makes the performance a type of counter-discourse, through a confrontation with preconceived ideas, but also the actors’ perception of self, in their in/ability to choose

performance of race. It is the framing of the event, in textual representation, that allows for a diachronic interpretation of racial performativity that moves in between culture, race, gender, class, etc., in the effort to understand and “act out” oppression and the negation of freedom of identity.

This attempt to use text as the site for investigating racial performativity as historically and culturally located is demonstrated in Alicia Arrizòn’s article, “Race-ing Performativity through Transculturation, Taste and the Mulata Body.” Arrizòn uses the recipe for a Cuban cocktail as her method of analyzing the mixed race body, as it performs itself in South America. The recipe for the *Mulata* is:

1 ounce light rum

1 ounce dark crème de cacao

1 tablespoon fresh lime, or to taste

1 cup ice cubes

Combine all of the ingredients in a bar shaker, cover, and shake well.

Strain the mulata into a martini glass. This combination serves one. (136)

Arrizòn is careful to note that her use of the term mulata embraces not only those of partially African background, but all of the socio-cultural associations that the word holds for the South American population. She says:

it is only by engaging a rupture of absolute heterogeneity that one recognizes there can be no pure identity posed to the very conditions of the mulata subjectivity. I chose to use the mulata cocktail here as an embodiment of discursive configurations that help us conceive some constructs of the mulata body. (137)

The drink’s disparate ingredients, none of them indigenous to Cuba, echo the conflation of origins in the mulata body itself. Arrizòn is particularly interested in transculturation – the movements of race and culture as they are performed historically – in her article on the politics of the mulata body. She says that “transculturation is closely connected with the mulata body, inhabiting the performativity of race in a self-conscious conduct” (137). Arrizòn uses a strategy similar to Roach’s in her examination of the mixed race body. She desires to find subjectivity in performance, through a construction of the transcultured

reality, and the subsequent exposition of the fictionality of race. For Arrizòn, “the mulata epitomizes the in-between-ness of cultural hybridization. Her presence blurs the essential distinction marked by the effects of racial intermixture” (145) and it is “the act of being caught in-between [that] opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be obvious because agency is constituted through these interactions” (150). The text moves back into the performative imagination with Arrizòn’s unique investigative techniques, using a cocktail to create a “genealogy of performance” that persists in challenging racial performativity through a conceptualizing of race as historically and culturally located in a strategy of oppression.

Performance theory has a long history of inter-disciplinarity: performativity looks at the ways that language and text work for or against social constructions of oppression, and mixed race studies make full use of all of these theories in the effort to understand the ways that race is written onto the individual for the purposes of reinforcing the fiction. It is only in making full use of Roach’s “genealogy of performance” that miscegenation can be situated and investigated, in the effort to explore all of the ways that race is performed. In this way, racial performance is undermined, not just in one way, but in several consistent emphases that work to create a spectacle of race itself, rather than its actors.

Bordering Race, Bordering Nation:
Performing Genealogies in Lawrence Hill's *Any Known Blood*

In his essay "Zebra: Growing up Black and White in Canada," Lawrence Hill touches on the relevance of language to race and race to fiction. Hill traces his own realization of racial identity as a process of growth from childhood through adulthood. This process relies heavily on recognizing the importance of *words*. Thinking back to his first experiences of racially charged language, Hill recalls:

People rarely called me *nigger*. But the word had a way of vaulting into conversation at times when nobody – not even I – was conscious of the racial difference between my white friends and me. I would object to the word, but that drew attention to my own racial identity – something I would take years to define. (45)

This process of self-definition is important to the development of Hill, both as person and as author.

Throughout the course of his life, Hill also describes his attempts to define himself racially through his writing, by reading more black literature and writing some of his own. His first short story is an attempt to amalgamate these thoughts on race and the differences between how race is treated in Canada and the US. Hill tells us that "in the United States – the country of my paternal great-great-grand-father, who was born a slave – anyone known to have any African ancestry has been defined as Black" ("Zebra" 45). Hill goes on to explain that his own process of racial growth took place between these two countries and resulted in his understanding of race also being split, depending on geography. In the United States, Hill is black, and in Canada, he is something Other. He is not necessarily black, but not necessarily white either; in Canada Hill has the choice to choose his race in a manner that is not available to him in the US.

Finally, as Hill reaches maturity (physically, emotionally, racially, and as an author), he comes back to the roots of his critical engagement with race: words. Thinking on the ways that words work (and have worked) for him, Hill says:

I didn't grow up under apartheid, or slavery, or racial segregation. I grew up in a country in which I had a say in what I would be. That meant periods of ambiguity. It meant confusion. It meant anxiety. But it also meant the opportunity to come full circle and to decide, years after my father first poked my in the ribs and teasingly called me a zebra, that I truly was both Black and white. ("Zebra" 50)

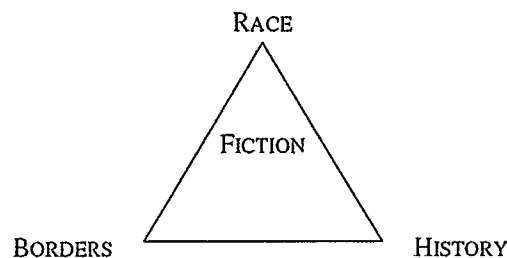
Hill is content with his own identity as a mixed race man; it allowed him the chance to choose his own ways of self-identification, a process that took years and was complemented by his maturation as an author. Even Hill's choice to capitalize the word "Black," but not "white," is a reflection on the ways that he thinks about race¹¹. He chooses to stress the identity that he marginalized as a child (and which is socially marginalized), now that he has reached adulthood.

In this chapter, I am looking at Lawrence Hill's novel *Any Known Blood*, as a work interested in its own fictionality. Hill uses this novel to highlight the ways that documents of history and borders work alongside race to produce a fiction of the self, a fiction that he and his protagonist have chosen to use as a tool for racial self-identification and social integration. I am going to revisit the theories of performance that I prepared in the last chapter in order to demonstrate that this novel is a work interested in the ways that borders, race, and history work alongside fiction to create the world that we inhabit, a world that can also be rewritten to suit our own ideas of fiction.

Any Known Blood is a novel about miscegenation. Langston Cane V is the protagonist of the novel, as well as a Canadian of mixed racial background. He has an ambiguous set of racial features, most notably his light-brown skin colour. His parents are from Baltimore and he has never met his American family. The Canes have been crossing back and forth over the Canadian-US border since the 1800s, in the time of Langston Cane

¹¹ You will notice throughout this thesis that race exists in a generally ambiguous space, grammatically. Often, my critics will write the word 'race' in quotation marks and here, Hill emphasizes race by writing 'Black' rather than 'black.' I have chosen not to mark out race in this manner in my own writing, as a personal preference. To highlight difference by changes in grammar, as many do, is to give race more importance than I deem necessary. Though it is Hill's choice to do this, I feel that it simply reinforces the notion that white is the norm and Black is the alternative.

I. This novel traces the history of the Canes alongside the present of Langston Cane V as he attempts to write his family. Langston is a speech writer who has decided to become an author and his first step in that direction is to write the history of the Canes. This novel uses race, borders, and history, written as fictions, to examine the ways that mixture and crossing are important for a man who is half black and half white in contemporary North America. In *Any Known Blood*, these three concepts (race, borders, and history) are all written in such a way as to demonstrate their fictionality, in this work of fiction by Lawrence Hill. Fiction is the underlining precept to understanding these concepts; fiction (as I use it to mean untrue, but not unreal¹²) is the key that holds the novel together (please see diagram below).



(Figure 1)

I plan on triangulating the concepts of history, borders, and race, as they are used in the novel *Any Known Blood* through an analysis of the ways that Hill uses fiction. This trinity exists in sympathy with itself (race, borders, and history are all entwined in this novel); these concepts are not distinct, but, rather, blur the ways in which stories get told.

Before I go any further, I would like to broach the topic of borders in North American culture. Here, I use Amitava Kumar's critical work titled *Passport Photos* to frame my argument. *Passport Photos* is an investigation of the border, the way that it exists in reality, but also its existence in the collective consciousness of the public. This critical work also engages with the different ways that different people react to borders, most specifically how nationality and race make border-crossing easier or harder. Kumar uses pictures and documents, as well as his own words, to create a book that echoes my thoughts

¹² I spoke of fiction as untrue, rather than *unreal* in my introduction. I am using the word fiction in two ways, here: as a description of the type of novel and as a method of distinguishing what is *true* and what is not.

on *Any Known Blood*: he criticizes the trinity of race, borders, and history as he examines the subjective ways that these three concepts are *read* by the border guard and the border crosser.

In *Passport Photos*, Kumar seeks to expose the conditions of borders. He organizes his book like a passport, demarcating different methods of identification through his chapters: "Language," "Photograph," "Name," "Place of Birth," "Date of Birth," "Profession," "Nationality," "Sex," and "Identifying Marks." Kumar analyzes the way that nations construct citizens (or potential citizens) as objects to be "read." Ignominious interactions between the immigrant and the border guard pepper his text in this attempt to write the border. Kumar describes the scene:

The officer reads the name of the new arrival's place of birth. He has never heard of it. The immigrant has spent all of the thirty-one years of his life in that village. This difference in itself is quite ordinary. But for some reason that he does not understand, the immigrant is filled with shame.

My attempt, as an immigrant writer, to describe that shame as a part of a historical process. (4)

Kumar is locating his immigrant and border guard both within a localized setting and a diasporic world. These two people represent a confrontation of race, culture, and nation. They represent a merging of two distinct worlds, and it is up to them whether or not they confront this new world with suspicion or enthusiasm. However, the power in the scene most obviously belongs to the border guard, who uses the immigrant's passport as the means to determine his/her worthiness of crossing into a new national boundary. The "shame" that Kumar negotiates is the shame of ignorance. The immigrant feels it most keenly in his global isolation, in the fact that he is a virgin to border crossing. Implicit, though, in Kumar's concept of shame, is the ignorance of the border guard as well. The border guard reads the immigrant's passport, but he does not recognize that the text is incomplete. Kumar says:

the immigrant has a scar on his forehead at the very place his passport says that he does. For the officer this probably means that the man is not a fraud.

For the immigrant, that scar is a reminder of his childhood friend in the village, the one whose younger sister he married last May. (3)

The passport is a document that enables the border guard to glean only the surface; his shame is that he does not even know of his own ignorance, though the ongoing narrative in *Passport Photos* of the border guard and the border crosser eventually leads to a shared understanding of shame on behalf of both of them. The power of the border exchange relies on the border guard's belief in his own ability to "read" the immigrant. It is to the shame of both that each believes this to be true.

Lawrence Hill's novel *Any Known Blood* plays with this notion of shame as well, in its movement across racial and national borders. The protagonist and narrator, Langston Cane V, loses his job, his wife, and his unborn child before he accedes to his need to write himself through his family history. Langston decides to become more than a writer; he decides to become an author. He will write himself by authoring a novel on the history of his family, a family that rejects all that he currently stands for. Langston is a disappointment to his family and to himself. His shame is in his denial of borders. He grew up in Oakville, Ontario to a black father and white mother, both of whom moved to Canada from Baltimore, USA in the 1950s. Langston knows nothing of his family in America and his ignorance is a shame that weighs on him, through he will not acknowledge this until he loses everything that matters to him. When Langston asks why his father moved to "boring" Oakville, his father replies that "I like to put my head down at night knowing the lake is there. What do I like about water? It offers itself up like a bridge for people to move between countries and continents. Water, my son, was an escape hatch for some of your own ancestors" (46). Here, Langston Cane IV is articulating his own shame: having left behind his family in Baltimore, he never crossed that border again. His shame gives him a respect for divisions, as he understands that borders can be both salvation and damnation, all in one. Langston Cane I crossed a watery border to reach Oakville in the mid nineteenth century. To him, Canada represented freedom from slavery. Langston Cane IV crossed the American-Canadian border and became a man with no history, only stories. His shame is reflected in his son. Langston V responds to his father by saying "I think it stinks of dead fish. And I heard that rats get into the big houses closest to the lake. Is that true?" The

father then says “Son, you’ve got a way of plugging your ears like no Cane who came before you” (46). With this statement, the father sets up a genealogy¹³ for the son to follow. As the story unfolds, we learn that the current Langston Cane is no more unknowing than those who came before. The current Langston merely recognizes his own ignorance and seeks to reconcile the divisions in his life by writing a book about family, a novel that moves back and forth across borders in its effort to problematize the gaze of the border guard.

In “Ain’t No Border Wide Enough: Writing Black Canada in Lawrence Hill’s *Any Known Blood*,” Jennifer Harris looks at the positioning of Canada and the USA as spaces of confluence within the novel. The history of Canada does not exist independently. As a matter of fact, Harris declares that the border between these two nations is more myth than reality, especially in the particular case of black North Americans. Harris says:

In displacing blackness elsewhere and limiting the terms of its acknowledgement here, the dominant discourse in Canada has attempted to sever the transnational allegiances that facilitate critiques of racist practices. This is accomplished through the constructing and disseminating of a national history that privileges external rather than internal conflict, the privileging of a harmonious contemporary “Canadian Mosaic” over the contributions of nonwhite peoples, and the effacing of the historical reality of slavery, racism, and disenfranchisement. (368)

Canada’s disinterest in the history of its neighbours to the south is a disavowal, as well, of any axis of history that exists between the two nations. For black North America, history is a culmination of racial categories and national mythologies that move between the citizens, back and forth over borders.

¹³ Here, I am echoing the thoughts of Joseph Roach (whom I discussed in the previous chapter and will get back to shortly) while simultaneously using the word “genealogy” to hint at the difference in the ways that father and son attempt to maintain a history of the Canes. The father sets up his genealogy as a challenge to the son.

While there are distinct differences in the people of Canada and the USA, there is also a shared history that traces the genealogy of performance¹⁴ in miscegenation. In particular, as elucidated by *Any Known Blood*, race is treated differently in the two nations. This is especially evident in the case of our mixed race protagonist, who finds himself moving across racial lines as he moves across borders. While in Oakville, Langston is an ambiguously featured man of *all races*. He tells the people at work that he is Algerian and they believe him. Multiculturalism in Canada acknowledges that brown skin can mean just about anything. In Baltimore, Langston is black or white. There are no other options. His first encounter with an American in Baltimore is a conversation regarding the number of black ancestors he can claim. Langston remarks, “what I thought I had heard was ‘Octoroon,’ I presume. Where I came from not very many people knew the word meant someone who was one-eighth black. But Baltimore was obviously not Oakville” (94). Canada and the USA treat race differently, but that does not mean that there are no convergences in history that have led both nations to adopt very different official and unofficial policies on race within their borders. Harris claims that “the novels of Lawrence Hill provide us with the opportunity to reconsider the mythologies that have structured thinking about nations and blackness in North America more broadly” (373). The two nations are prominent figures in *Any Known Blood*; national borders become emblematic of racial borders. Once Hill blurs one, he moves onto the next one and problematizes that as well. As Harris says, “that Hill returns to American and Canadian mythologies suggests that the very notion of a border that divides the two is a myth unto itself” (373), and this mythologizing works for his treatment of race in the face of identity politics. Black and white exist differently in Canada and the USA. A man of mixed racial background is written differently on both sides of the border. His race is a matter that shames the border guard; it cannot be read as straightforward and this uncovers the inadequacy of the borders themselves.

¹⁴ Again, I am thinking of Joseph Roach and his genealogies of performance: the sites where culture, history, and performance meet in order to uncover something new about the world around us.

In *Any Known Blood*, borders, race, and history all work together under the rubric of *race mixture* to create a representation of North America's complex racial identity through the theme of fiction and fiction-making. When asked about the difference between African American and African Canadian literature, Hill says:

In *Any Known Blood*, I was interested in exploring what links the African American and African Canadian experiences. I was interested in the migratory backward and forward across the borders. While many Canadians know about the Underground Railroad, not many of them know that after the Civil War many of the Blacks living in Canada moved back to the USA. I wanted to write a saga that follows a family back and forth across the border for five generations. (Thomas 133)

For Hill, it is history that links these two nations. It is that shared history, across a well-travelled border, which motivates Langston into writing the genealogy of his family.

Langston discovers a need to write history, and through him Hill manages to create a novel that uses a genealogy of performance to demonstrate that race is, like history, a written fiction. Langston Cane V lives in the shadow of his forefathers, all of them are makers of history.

It is the current Langston's discovery of his great-great grandfather's scandalous past that enables him to see himself as more than a sum of his genealogical parts. However, this is not a dismissal of history, but an embracing of the real over the *untrue*. History is not stagnant, it is vital and alive. After finding out that Langston I was a bigamist as well as an escaped slave, Langston V tells his aunt that he feels "strangely connected" to him. He also says, "I love the fact that he didn't fit in. I love him for his mixture of weakness and dignity" to which his aunt responds:

don't make a hero out of him [...]. He lived in hard times, but he was a regular man. But you're right about him not fitting in. If you ask me, the man had a loose chromosome that skipped a few generations and turned up in you. (497)

As Langston aunt states, history has come full circle, not to imitate the past (and therefore learn nothing from it), but to embrace it in a mixture of similarities and disparities. The past

and present border each other in *Any Known Blood*, creating a cacophony of fictions, both real and untrue. The recognition of history as a blur of fiction and non-fiction also compromises the idea that any of the Langstons have one solitary and true story of themselves. It is “the metafictional aspect of *Any Known Blood* that further draws attention to how the writing of individuals in or out of a nation is a deliberate strategy in the creation of a genealogy or a family tree” (Harris 371), and Hill sets history up alongside borders as fragile and malleable. Hill constructs History as relevant, but demands that the reader reads that history critically, in order to decide for her/himself whether s/he wishes to accept it as true or not.

Any Known Blood is the textual representation of the power of articulating miscegenation through Joseph Roach’s theory of *genealogies of performance*. As I argued in the previous chapter, genealogies of performance are approaches to analysis that rely on constructing performance through a lens of socially, historically and culturally situated restored behaviours. Restored behaviours are the repetitious performances that create the illusion of normalcy in socially constructed fictions like race and gender. It is only by approaching these fictions responsibly, in order to read them as constructs, that the possibilities of the theoretical framework set up by the genealogies of performance can be analyzed in a novel like Lawrence Hill’s *Any Known Blood*. Roach says:

genealogies of performance approach literature as a repository of the restored behaviours of the past. They excavate the lineage of restored behaviours still at least partially visible in contemporary culture, in effect “writing the history of the present”. (126)

This is the impetus behind *Any Known Blood*, to recognize the interaction between history and the present, fact and fiction. Moreover, Hill moves these historical spaces into a culturally relevant venue that requires a negotiation of race and nationality. Race, history, and borders are all being performed in this novel. They are being performed as fictions of fact (or the fact of fictions) and require a careful consideration of the ways that they all work for and against one another, representing a collective memory that is implicit in the genealogy of performance. Hill’s novel works:

in opposition to the official voice of history, which [...] has tended to emphasise the cultural annihilations of the diaspora, the voice of collective memory, which derives from performance, speaks of the stubborn reinventiveness of restored behaviour. (Roach 134)

Collective memory works in conjunction with history to disturb the ways that Langston sees himself and his family. By undertaking the task of writing his family's history, Langston has also set himself the task of *rewriting* the stories that he grew up with. Just as Langston's ambiguous facial features are rewritten every day by the people around him (and their assumption of race), his history is also a hybrid of the known, the written, and the ability to choose.

Langston Cane V travels to Baltimore on the strength of his father's stories of family and history. The stories teased and taunted, never complete. Langston Cane IV always left his audience hanging, so that they would beg for more. He told stories about living in Oakville, about moving from Baltimore, about the Canes that came before him. Our protagonist's father planted the seeds that would lead to the creation of his son's historical account of their family. Langston says, "when my father got going, it was like being at a séance. Every drop of his hand, every rise and fall of his tone, every whisper and shout, I felt in my bones." The stories are even more vibrant for their oral structure; history becomes exciting in Langston's use of rhetorical strategies. Langston goes on to say, "I grew up with four family legends – one about each of my direct paternal ancestors. Every year, my father would add another tantalizing detail, but refuse to go any further" (4). These stories prove to be less than reliable as the novel goes on. As Langston Cane IV stories unravel, Langston V's story comes together. As the current Langston learns more about the Cane family history, we learn that history truly is malleable.

One of Langston IV's favourite stories is that of Dr. Norville Watson. Watson would not rent an apartment to him and his wife fifty years ago, because he did not want to have a black man in his house or in the neighbourhood. As time goes by, Watson and Langston find themselves working at the same clinic (both of them being doctors), but the resentment between the two men is insurmountable. Eventually, during the course of the

novel, the two men are kidnapped and must spend a harrowing time in each other's company. Langston speaks of this time:

We talked about our children. Did you know that one of his sons is severely disabled? Lives in a group home. His wife has rheumatoid arthritis. I told him my mother had suffered from arthritis in her final years. We talked about our captors. They wore masks the whole time they were with us. You know what they gave us to eat? Canned ravioli. Canned peas. Canned peaches. Neo-Nazis can't cook worth shit. Norville Watson was constipated up to his ears. Kept asking our captors for fiber. They didn't have a clue what he was talking about. (357)

The villain crumbles and the man steps forth. The story of Norville Watson relies on the man being a raging racist with nothing but hatred in his heart. In exceptional circumstances, Langston IV learns that his arch-nemesis is a man with troubles of his own. He has a family that he loves, and people that care about him. Thus, the story of Norville Watson crumbles. It is reborn into Langston V's narrative of a history that must be rewritten, revisited, and reknown. History is not stagnant, but living, and Langston V finds his identity in seeking to write his family's stories over again. In the "Introduction" to his book *Black Berry, Sweet Juice: On Being Black and White in Canada*, Hill says that he has "always been fascinated by personal identity – how it is shaped and transformed. Your identity, to a large degree, reflects the society you live in" (5) and that "racial identity is about how you see yourself, about how you construct a sense of belonging, community, awareness, and allegiance" (11). So, history, race, and borders all come together once more in Langston's conception of himself, his identity. His father's stories prepared him to rewrite himself, and in doing so, allow the history of Langston Cane V to begin.

The first chapter of *Any Known Blood* opens with these words:

I have the rare distinction – a distinction that weighs like a wet life jacket, but that I sometimes float to great advantage – of not appearing to belong to any particular race, but of seeming like a contender for many. (1)

Langston Cane V is racially ambiguous. He has divested himself of his race(s), and instead, makes up his racial identity as he goes. If he overhears someone making derogatory

comments about any race, he immediately claims association with this group. He performs race in the stilted and disempowering manner of Mahtani's mixed women, who:

play with the discomfort of an audience – a discomfort which arises because the process of racialization cannot be successfully completed. They decentre and confuse others' perceptions of their racialized identities. ("Tricking" 435)

Harris says that "Cane has been engaging in 'playful' passing, styling himself whatever ethnicity people are currently denigrating, for the purpose of undermining their arguments or publicly embarrassing them" (Harris 370). I believe that this "playful passing" is simply a tool of deferment. Langston does not want to *grow up*; he is a perpetual child. His desire to live a stagnant life, one that *passes* as happy when viewed from the outside, is tied up with his desire to remain racially ambiguous.

Langston obtains a job with the Ontario provincial government as a speech writer. The job application said that the employers would give preference to those applying from minority groups. Thus Langston the Algerian was created, and,

somewhere between the playful passing of the job application and his actual existence as a state employee, Cane's passing becomes not so playful, and instead psychologically debilitating. [...] Cane dehistoricizes himself, removing himself from that context which would make his life meaningful. (371)

Langston addresses racism on an extremely individual level. He makes sport of it. There is no political action here, only mockery by a man who can move into a multitude of racial performances. Even Mahtani recognizes the danger in "playful passing" as she says that it "is crucial to note that some of the examples cited here may actually reinvest racist ideals by reidealizing them and reconsolidating their hegemonic status – far from what antiracist practitioners would see as a progressive move" ("Tricking" 436). Playful passing is, in essence, an individual act with no real political repercussions. It is a passive activity, requiring no agency or thought on the part of the actor.

It is Langston's move to Baltimore which ends this performance of "playful passing." Crossing the border has, most succinctly, ended his racial crossing. In Baltimore,

Langston is black or white, maybe even some variation of the two, but he cannot play the multicultural mosaic for laughs anymore. In this, Hill manages to criticize racial treatment in both nations, while underlining the necessity of seeing race across borders, in the effort to understand how personal identity works for and against racial categories. Langston is free to be black in Baltimore, a narrow freedom indeed. However, this assignment of race is necessary for Langston to allow himself to think about how he would write himself. When Langston meets his aunt for the first time, she looks at him and says “so what do you want?” When he tells her that he is her nephew, she responds with “I ain’t got any white nephews. Not around here. So git off my –” (111). In order to connect to a family that he has only just met, Langston must accept his racial background. He must acknowledge that “playful passing” is just another way of escaping/avoiding his own history, and he must write his own story alongside that of his family’s, in order to finally reach racial and emotional maturity.

Any Known Blood is a novel that traces the history of the Cane family through five generations. This history is one that moves across boundaries of race and nationality. Here, history, race, and borders become mixed together, so that the fiction of the work becomes self-evident and transparent. These three themes rely on the writing of their own fictionality in order to move each other forward. The novel ends (as we began) with the border guard. When Langston’s aunt claims him as family, the border guard casts suspicious looks on the dark skinned woman and the ambiguously brown skinned man:

“May I see some identification?”

“You really got to see all that? Mill said. “Okay, folks, get your ID out.”

“Not everybody,” the officer said. “Just yours ma’am, and your nephew’s.”

I tendered my passport. Mill showed her seventy-year-old certificate of Canadian citizenship.

“I haven’t seen one of these old certificates in years,” the officer said.

“That’s ‘cause I was born a long, long time ago,” Mill said. “But I’m a long way from dead.”

The man laughed. “Have a safe trip home, folks.” (505)

With that exchange, like Dr. Norville Watson before him, the border guard becomes human. He writes himself into the Cane family history by looking past his suspicions, the passports, and the border itself, and into the hearts of a family returning home.

Here, the border guard moves past that moment of shame (as evidenced in Kumar's interactions between border guard and border crosser) and instead inhabits the familial space, a space where race matters but does not impede their relationship. The fiction of race stands out here, as it matters only so much as the border guard will allow it. The documentation from Mill, her ancient birth certificate, only reinforces the fictionality of the border; her certification of Canadianness is valid but outdated, as she has lived in the US for most of her life. However, this certification is enough to help her (and her American passengers) to *pass* for Canadian. This scene, like the novel, demonstrates the ways that race, borders, and (the documentation of) history work as fiction in order to maintain a fictional identity that is validated through others' acceptance. It is the interplay of these three concepts that both undermine and reinforce the power that fiction has, to be real, and yet, not true.

Performative Hybridity:
Negotiating the Roles in *Cereus Blooms at Night*

In the introduction to his book *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, Robert J. C. Young looks at the ways that theoretical models of hybridity are complicated at their base by intersections of race and sexuality. He says, “hybridity as a cultural description will always carry with it an implicit politics of heterosexuality, which may be a further reason for contesting its contemporary pre-eminence” (25). Young goes on to say that hybridity (as a colonial fear) works solely as a consequence of interracial sex; he sees hybridity as the by-product of an illicit liaison between two people of different races. He insists that same-sex interracial relationships do not fall into the same category as that of differently sexed couples, as no children will be produced in the former. Indeed, Young emphatically insists that “hybridity must always be a resolutely heterosexual category” (26). Thus, hybridity to Young is most exactly a miscegenation of races, but never a reconceptualizing of the heterosexual norm.

Here, I would like to argue instead that hybridity is a useful strategy for examining the intersections of race and sexuality, through the social practice of normative performance. Performance is key to negotiating the world around us. If you are a lawyer, you will dress in a suit and speak eloquently. If you are at a dance club, you will be wearing alluring clothing and speaking to strangers in a way that would be inappropriate in any other setting. If you are watching a small child for her/his parents, you will moderate your language and behaviour in order to keep the child happy and safe. All of these are just examples, but the point is that in all moments all people act out a performance of one kind or another. Performance is a necessary tool for adapting to the social roles we lay out for ourselves and the roles laid out for us. *Performative hybridity* is the means by which it is possible to move beyond the act that is laid out by society and into the role that you choose for yourself, by choosing which roles you want to take up and which roles you will actively reject. It is through choosing their performances that diasporic subjects gain agency, a means to act instead of react to their environment. It is this action which is crucial: one

must make a spectacle of oneself in order to maintain individual heterogeneity in a homogenous world.

I coin the term *performative hybridity* to signify a marriage between hybridity and performance theory, in the effort to fictionalize race and demonstrate *both* its visible reality *and* its inherent untruth. I take my lead from Homi Bhabha's interpretations of race in his reading of Frantz Fanon's¹⁵ "The Fact of Blackness" in the conclusion to *The Location of Culture*. In "'Race', time and the Revision of Modernity," Bhabha sketches out the positioning of race and culture in the ambiguous space between modernity and postmodernity. Looking to Fanon, he says:

I want to start by returning to that essay, to explore only one scene in its remarkable staging, Fanon's phenomenological performance of what it means to be *not only a nigger* but a member of the marginalized, the displaced, the diasporic. (339)

Fanon is interested in the implicit quality of race to remain invisible, yet always obvious. He contemplates, in this particular essay, the fact that his race is never addressed until he is in the company of those who are not black. When he is among family and friends (who are black) he is invisible, one of the crowd. When Fanon goes out into a multiracial public space he becomes spectacle, a mockery of a man that is one removed from the white norm. Bhabha is interested in this performance, this spectacle. I am also interested in this spectacle, as "performing in culture often involves making a spectacle of oneself" (Striff 13). Performative hybridity makes use of this spectacle, elaborates on it, in the effort to make race less implicit and more explicit.

Before I go any further, I would like to say that I am using the term "hybridity" in much the same sense that Bhabha does in his book *The Location of Culture*. Bhabha uses hybridity to describe the spaces between assumption and reality. Looking at the ways that hybridity can be used theoretically in his examination of culture, Bhabha says,

terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be

¹⁵ I will come back to Fanon more extensively in my fifth chapter where I look at passing and the politics of racial performance.

hastily read as the reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed table of tradition. (3)

It is here, in the “Introduction” to *The Location of Culture*, that Bhabha explains that culture is a performative act, and hybridity is the space between the failure of performance and the reality of the individual. He further explains that “this interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (“Introduction” 5). Hybridity, in this sense, becomes a site of empowerment. It becomes a location from which to analyze the space between performance and reality, in the effort to undermine social norms that oppress through the creation of a hierarchy that provides unearned privileges for certain members of society.

Bhabha, like Roach and Butler,¹⁶ is interested in the value of repetition in racial and cultural performance; the interaction between history and the present, as time stands in for truth to create the idea that race is a biological fact. In this paper, Bhabha asserts that the “power of the postcolonial translation of modernity rests in its *performative, deforming* structure that does not simply revalue the contents of a cultural tradition, or transpose values ‘cross-culturally’” (“Conclusion” 346). I propose *performative hybridity* as just such a space, one that redresses issues of diasporic marginalization by opening up discussions of difference, through spectacle and language, and seeing disjunctive space between reality and truth: the fiction of race.

In this chapter, I will look at the resonance between race and sex in my efforts to demonstrate that performative hybridity is the means to disrupt the fiction of race. I will examine the writing of Shani Mootoo to do so, most especially her novel *Cereus Blooms at Night*. I began with Young in order to position my argument against the idea that sex and race only move together as a form of heterosexual interspecies mating. Even though it is true that “a look at recent discussions about race and sex in everything from the popular press to science articles and historical scholarship reveals that many Americans still believe that there is a special category of sex that is ‘inter-racial’” (Lemire 145), this is

¹⁶ I am thinking here of Joseph Roach’s “restored behaviours,” where culture becomes confused with nature through the act of repetition. This is similar to Judith Butler’s theories of performativity.

symptomatic of popular mythologies (relying on a shared acceptance of racial performances), not a fact of life. It is my hope that through a careful analysis (using my theory of performative hybridity) of the ways that sex and race are performed together, we can come to a new conclusion regarding the ways that race and sex work together.

Race and sexuality complicate everyday performance¹⁷ by creating arbitrary roles. Race *seems* uncomplicated, for instance, dark skin=black. However, what happens when we add another element to the equation? Dark skin+hijab=Middle Eastern. Or, dark skin+hijab+sari=South Asian? Suddenly, we realize that skin colour is not enough, and that dress, speech, affectations, etc. are needed to decipher the mystery of race. The physical is not enough; race is dependent on the negotiation of performance. In this way, race is much like sexuality. Sexuality also requires performances in order to reinforce social norms. Women wear make-up to emphasize difference from men; men do not wear sundresses, as it would confuse the delineation between genders. These are grand generalizations, generalizations of a normalizing performance that persists in a heterosexual world.

I would like to look at what happens when we challenge the acceptance of the time-lagged conditions of race and sexuality through the acceptance of a performative hybridity. Performative hybridity relies on the necessity of performance, without accepting the roles bestowed upon us by a patriarchal and oppressive society that supports and upholds a stratified hierarchy in order to assure the deification of the white heterosexual man as social norm. I will use literature to demonstrate the ways that performative hybridity moves to challenge those who believe, like Robert Young, that sexuality and race are distinct from each other under the rubric of hybridity. Performative hybridity uses *spectacle, farce, language, and mimicry* as the means to challenge the socially normative performances of the everyday. In particular, I will look at the ways that Shani Mootoo uses performative hybridity in her novel *Cereus Blooms at Night* as a means to look at the ways that sexuality and race move together as a cumulative act that can use or be used by the individual.¹⁸

¹⁷ Everyday performances are those that most of us choose for ourselves: students, parents, grocery shoppers, etc.

¹⁸ Here, I propose that if you do not take part in the performance (as you wish yourself to be seen) than you will be relegated a role that you might not have chosen for yourself.

Shani Mootoo is a Canadian author of Irish (white) and Trinidadian (Indian) background. She was born in Ireland, grew up in Trinidad, and moved to Canada. She is a lesbian. Most of her work is concerned with the politics of hybridity, as she herself embodies all elements of it. Shani Mootoo's particular race(s), culture(s), and sexuality/ies share in her life and work. In her article "Sexuality as (Counter) Discourse and Hybridity as Healing Practice in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*," Miriam Pirbhai looks at the potential that hybridity offers in reconciling a postcolonial world both within and without the western mind. She says that

the sexual and cultural hybridity of Mootoo's characters thus disorients rigid binaries to disclose the heterogeneous, transecting and complicit discourses upon which identity is built. Her novel delights in its own conviction that in "difference" there is not opposition but empathy, not instability but coherence, not the mechanical preservation of self but the compassionate triumph of survival. (185)

So, difference is built on a site of conjunction. Rather than treating culture and sex as static, we can see these as exciting and changeable spaces of individual expression. Mootoo's use of hybridity recognizes that disorientation is the tool with which to recover subjectivity, and performative hybridity is the means by which her characters enact this sentiment.

Cereus Blooms at Night is the story of Mala, a woman gone mad as the result of a lifetime of physical and emotional abuse. Mala's existence is a culmination of racial, cultural and sexual frustrations, a life fraught with colonial and patriarchal dangers; she is a woman who has been traumatized by performance. Mala grows up in Paradise, an imaginary town in the imaginary and decolonized island of Lantanacamara that largely resembles the island of Trinidad. She is the child of Chandin and Sarah Ramchandin, two parents in love with the same woman. This love for the beautiful (and white) Lavinia Thoroughly results in Mala's physical abuse by her father, a consequence of Mala's mother running away with Lavinia and leaving a mad man alone with her two daughters. Mala's devastating and appalling familial circumstances lead to her becoming mute and agoraphobic. Throughout the novel, Mala negotiates the role of daughter, wife, mother, lover, hermit, madwoman, and friend. It is through the acceptance of all her roles, and the

subsequent reconfiguring of them, that Mala finally finds happiness in a performative hybridity.

Mala moves through life acting out the expectations of others. She has her roles to play, and she works to fulfill those. It is her inability to successfully perform these roles that lead to her insanity. Even as madwoman, Mala fails to perform as the residents of Paradise would like. Her nurse, Tyler, touches her hair and thinks “I expected it to be coarse and wiry, qualities that would have fit the rumours. But her hair, though oily from lack of care, was soft and silken” (11). Though the characters of *Cereus Blooms at Night* are all identified as either white or of East Indian background, we know that the ethnic demographic is more complicated than this, as one character says “since the Africans let go from slavery, all eyes on how the government treating them” (30). Saying that, the expectation of “coarse and wiry” hair juxtaposed with the “soft and silken” actuality, can be read as the space between the performance of race and the reality of the person. The “coarse and wiry” hair represents the undesirable, the mad black woman, the woman in the attic. Mala performs this role, *but not quite*. She fails when Tyler touches her hair. The act fails and the curtain is drawn. However, the space between performance and reality still exists as the site of performative interdiction, if Mala wills it so.

Mala’s life is a spectacle for the residents of Paradise. The story of her molestation at the hands of her father is well-known. The reader learns of this history through Tyler, who heard the story from his grandmother when he was a child. Tyler says “I remember the first time I heard the name Chandin Ramchandin. It was long before arriving in Paradise to work in the alms house. Indeed, the recent rumours were elaborations of what I had heard many years ago when I was too young to pay attention” (26). When Mala is first brought to Paradise Alms House (as a known murderer), she is watched and mocked by the staff there. She is a spectacle for the people there, an object of derision to be feared. No one attempts to see past the performance of madness; no one attempts to see her as a human being. It is Tyler, also performing as spectacle, who is assigned to her care. He is another outsider, unable to reconcile his performance of self with the reality. When helping the handyman to fix the roof, Tyler “refrain[s] from dwelling on the verbal rocks he tossed... and say[s] only that he made no effort to hide his disdain for my ways” (11). Later, we learn that Tyler’s

“ways” are homosexual. He does not hide this from his co-workers, and is punished as a result. No one speaks with him, and Mala is his first patient, assigned as a punishment for his “ways.” However, it is Mala who helps Tyler embrace the potential he holds as spectacle, an experience that helps him to complicate his performance and create a persona that comes closer to the reality of his identity. After Mala steals a dress for him, Tyler says:

I stared speechlessly at the calf-length dress and the stockings. I could only guess that she had heard my conversation with Mr. Hector. I felt she had been watching me and seeing the same things that everyone else saw. But she had stolen a dress for me. No one had ever done anything like that before. She knows what I am, was all I could think. She knows my nature. (82)

Tyler goes on to put on the dress, stockings, and make-up; indeed, he slowly dresses himself up in the trappings of feminine performance. He becomes a woman by donning the garb that reflects an essentialized and popular idea of femininity. This act, this layering of roles, this performative hybridity, is Tyler’s first step towards becoming an active performer. It is here, alongside Mala, that Tyler discovers the power of spectacle. Spectacle, as potentially demeaning as it is empowering, is a concrete tool of performative hybridity.

Mala’s ability to perform has been hindered by her sexual abuse at the hands of her father. However, though her father is remembered in *Paradise* as the man who assaulted his own daughter, his story begins with an “old man [who] kept himself awake by worrying about the future of his only child” (28). Chandin’s parents, like all of the other indentured labourers on the island, hope for a better future for their son. They are willing to do anything to make this to happen, even play the role of devout Christians. Tyler’s grandmother, in telling Chandin’s story, says “they used to tell us that we must study hard so that we could have the luck of that Ramchandin fellow. Hmmm, I wonder what become of him?” (27). Once, Chandin was a lucky child, with the potential to move away from the shack that his family lived in and to become more than just another indentured labourer. Instead, Chandin became a farce.

Seeking to perform a role that was not his (that of the prosperous white man) Chandin Ramchandin made himself a farce. The Reverend Thoroughly takes Chandin into

his home to educate him, so that he can perform the role of the grateful Indian boy, raised above his status. However, Chandin is not content to perform this role and seeks to marry into the Reverend's family through the daughter, Lavinia. Chandin is dissuaded in his pursuit of Lavinia by her father, who says to him that "she is your sister and you her brother. A brother protects and helps and supports and comforts his sister. There is no harm in loving your sister. Or your mother or your father. But that love must remain pure, as pure as God's love is for his children" (39). Reverend Thoroughly's denial of Chandin is sharply contrasted with his approval of Lavinia, when she expresses her desire to marry Fenton Thoroughly. Chandin responds to this announcement with: "her cousin! She is in love with her cousin? I don't understand" (48). It is at this point that Chandin realizes that, though the Thoroughlys adopted him and called him a member of their family, he is (and will always remain) the marginalized *other*, a man without access to the privilege that Lavinia represents. Chandin's transparent endeavour to gain access to power through domination of the colonizer's woman (wife/sister/daughter/etc.) is reflective of his desire to change the role that fate has dealt him. In her article "Race and Sex," bell hooks acknowledges the role that Chandin is acting:

unfortunately this is a continuation of the notion that ending racist domination is really about issues of inter-racial sexual access, a myth that must be critiqued so that this society can confront the actual material, economic, and moral consequences of perpetuating white supremacy and its traumatic genocidal impact on black [decolonized] people. (61)

The fact that he has failed is "indicative of [Chandin's] adherence to and reckoning with the Victorian/colonial model of 'normalcy' to which he has been subject" (Pirbhai 176). Indeed, "Chandin's sexual desire for Lavinia symbolizes the psychic trauma of one who is made to feel unworthy of the love of those who profess to have his best interests at heart" (Pirbhai 178). So, instead, Chandin marries Sarah (Lavinia's best friend and the only other person of Indian background in Reverend Thoroughly's missionary community) and proceeds to perform the patriarchal norms of marriage by his treating Sarah as a working domestic and nothing more. Sarah rebels by having an affair with the object of Chandin's affections, Lavinia, who has come home after her failed marriage. Chandin's entire history is a farce.

He cannot perform the role he is allowed, and he cannot have the role that he desires. In the space between these roles is Mootoo's recognition of performative hybridity as a tool for self-identification.

Mala's own inability to perform roles in life is a direct result of her father's continued farces. His attempt to make her wife to himself and mother to her sister, Asha, has fractured Mala's ability to perform as child and daughter. Incest stands for the negation of hybridity, its complete absence. When Chandin calls for Asha one night, Mala tells her to "stay!" and begs her: "don't move. I'll go. Shhh, he too drunk. He'll never know the difference. Go to sleep. You close your eyes and go to sleep, Asha baby. Nothing will happen to you, I promise" (72). Mala inserts herself into another unnatural role, by portraying her sister who has been called to bed with their father. It is the incompatibility of these disparate roles that leads to Mala's insanity, her inability to perform as a sane person in Paradise.

However, this is not Mala's story alone. Tyler, the narrator of the story, is also the key to understanding the manner by which this novel is both told and read. Tyler is the only one at Paradise Alms House who treats Mala as a human being; he recognizes a kinship (in performing difference) with her, one that allows him to look past the broken exterior and into the girl she once was. He is also our intrusive narrator. He opens the novel saying that "by setting this story down, I, Tyler – that is how I am known, simply as Tyler, or if you wanted to be formal, Nurse Tyler – am placing trust in the power of the printed word to reach many people" (3). The power of the postcolonial storyteller is reiterated by Tyler throughout the novel. Bhabha tells us that the power of a location in hybridity is the enabling of voice, the ability to rewrite what has been written through an acknowledgement of colonial non-sense. Here, Mootoo reinforces this point by having a narrator who writes his own story alongside the main narrative, because no one is erasable in the hybrid space of performativity. Tyler tries to tell Mala's story without talking about himself, but finds the task impossible; he says:

I cannot escape myself, and being a narrator who also existed on the periphery of the events, I am bound to be present. I have my own laments and much to tell about myself. It is my intent, however, to refrain from

inserting myself too forcefully. Forgive the lapses, for there are some, and read them with the understanding that to have erased them would have been to do the same to myself. (3)

Tyler cannot remove himself from the story; his role as narrator will not allow it. Though he only learns to perform hybridity throughout the novel, he is unable, as Mala does, to force roles onto himself. Tyler exists.

Tyler is a gay male nurse, whose gender change throughout the novel is always in the background of the main narrative. Tyler is the frame in which we read Mala; it is his transitory and fragmented personal identity, and the ways in which he negotiates the roles that he would like to play alongside those that others force onto him, which lay the groundwork for reinterpreting Mala through the underlying thread of performative hybridity in *Cereus Blooms at Night*. Though born male and self-identified as such, saying “I was, after all, the only Lantanacamaran man ever to have trained in the profession of nursing” (6), Tyler is in the process (during the period of time in which the novel takes place) of re-gendering himself feminine (he does not alter himself surgically, only aesthetically). When Mala gives Tyler the dress, he is ecstatic and says: “I reached for the dress. My body felt as if it were metamorphosing. It was as though I had suddenly become plump and less rigid. My behind felt fleshy and rounded. I had thighs, a small mound of belly, rounded full breasts and a cavernous tunnel singing between my legs” (82). Then, when Ambrose (Mala’s childhood crush) comes visiting with his son Otoh (who, though born female, genders himself – and is gendered by his community – masculine), he comments on the intimacy between the two: “‘Mr. Tyler appears to be painting his face more diligently as time goes by,’ I heard him whisper – albeit loudly – to Otoh. ‘My boy, I think Mr. Tyler fancies you, wouldn’t you agree?’ Then he whispered much more softly, ‘He is a Mr., isn’t he?’” (135). By this point in the novel, Tyler has begun to reconcile his gender performance with his personal identity, and by the end, in tandem with his romantic partner Otoh, has moved beyond gender binaries and into a new performative hybridity of sexuality. The two, physically male and female, choose to gender themselves otherwise; they do not rely on binaries (substituting male for female and female for male), but rather, choose to live a hybrid existence without an essentialized sexual identity. It is this narrative

frame that moves Mala's experiences from a succession of performative disasters into a poignant comment on the necessity of performative hybridity; a recognition of the power of hybridity to renounce dangerous hierarchical norms and embrace a disjunctive space of *différance*.

The potential for performative agency, through silence and language, becomes clear by looking at Jacques Derrida's "*Différance*." This text reveals a new method of reading women in a postcolonial and performative context, one that allows for an analysis of difference (whether racial, cultural, or sexual) itself. In "*Différance*," Derrida looks at the ways that deferred spacing moves through silences, encouraging an opening up of ideas and concepts; a dialectical synthesis of opposing forces that merge to create (never the same, but) an interstitial location of difference. He says:

we must let ourselves refer to an order that resists the opposition, one of the founding oppositions of philosophy, between the sensible and the intelligible. The order which resists this opposition, and resists it because it transports it, is announced in a movement of *différance* (with an *a*) between two differences or two letters, a *différance* which belongs neither to the voice nor to writing in the usual sense, and which is located, as the strange space that will keep us together here for an hour, between speech and writing, and beyond the tranquil familiarity which links us to one and the other, occasionally reassuring us in our illusion that they are two. (5)

Phonologically, Derrida chooses a different spelling for the word "*différance*" in order to expose the potential of the space between what *is heard* and what *is seen*, as "the *a* of *différance*, thus, is not heard; it remains silent, secret and discreet as a tomb: *oikesis*" (Derrida 4) and "the inaudible opens up the apprehension of two present phonemes such as they present themselves" (Derrida 5). This silent space that differentiates the *e* from the *a* becomes a metonymic representation of the potential that spaces of difference offer in a philosophically engaged concept of self and other in the presence of sameness and difference. It is this point beyond the *e* that becomes the site of potential, in recognizing that the same is always already different. Derrida reminds us that:

the sign, in this sense, is deferred presence. Whether we are concerned with the verbal or the written sign, with the monetary sign, or with electoral delegation and political representation, the circulation of signs defers the moment in which we can encounter the thing itself, make it ours, consume or expend it, touch it, see it, intuit its presence. (9)

That which signifies is always already changed by the signification, and it is this deferred presence that allows for an interpolated space of hybridity within all acts of *recognition* and *naming*. The woman is not a woman because we have seen her breasts; she has breasts because we call her woman. The black woman is not black because we have met her parents, but her parentage is assumed through the visual cues offered by her skin. The reasoning behind the label (woman/black) is constructed through a set of circular social essentialisms, and it is the examination of where the signifier refers to the sign that reveals the complex conspiracy concealed in the acts of *recognizing* and *naming*. You will notice the similarity between this and my use of the term *performative hybridity*. By signifying individual differences, the similarity of objects becomes more pronounced, while simultaneously remaining constantly apart. Thus, the art of *différance*, as a tool for recognizing this paradoxical space of expectation and realization, becomes instrumental in understanding the potential of silences and language as a means to complicate social performance. Language is the negotiation of performance, and alongside silence, it becomes key to using performative hybridity.

I recognize that there are arguments against the validity of using *différance* as a tool for exploring performative hybridity. In her article “Monique Wittig: Bodily Disintegration and Fictive Sex,” Judith Butler enters into a conversation with Simone de Beauvoir and Monique Wittig on the subject of performative silences in feminist theory. De Beauvoir uses *The Second Sex* to illustrate that gender is a social performance that benefits men while convincing both men and women that this performance is somehow *natural*. In “One is Not Born a Woman,” Monique Wittig uses de Beauvoir to examine this performance from a materialist feminist perspective, with the result of seeing lesbian politics as the point beyond the performance. Butler says that “in distinction from a Derridean position that would understand all signification to rely on an operational *différance*, Wittig argues that

speaking requires and invokes a seamless identity of all things” (“Monique Wittig” 161). I would argue instead that speaking (and language itself) moves between the space of thinking and acting in much the same way as performative hybridity does. The power is in the words. To speak is to be. It is only by rewriting the roles that society has written for us that a freedom through performative hybridity becomes possible. It is at this point in the argument that Butler enters and declares that “clearly, the norm of compulsory heterosexuality does operate with the force and violence that Wittig describes, but my own position is that this is not the *only* way that it operates” (“Monique Wittig” 166). Rather than attempt to move beyond gender performance, Butler would like to complicate the act in order to renegotiate the roles we play in a heteronormative society. She says:

The more insidious and effective strategy it seems is a thoroughgoing appropriation and redeployment of the categories of identity themselves, not merely to contest “sex,” but to articulate the convergence of multiple sexual discourses at the site of “identity” in order to render that category, in whatever form, permanently problematic. (“Monique” 174)

Butler reiterates the idea that identity is complicated, and it is only the negotiation of gender performance that enables a problematizing of these roles. I believe that language and silences play a part in this problematizing, as the means by which all roles are conveyed, changed, and caricatured.

In *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Mootoo moves Mala through a succession of traumatic incidents: she is abandoned by her mother, abused by her father, lost to her lover, and tormented by her community. Throughout it all, Mala learns, by way of isolation and introspection, the value of *silence*. Mootoo sees silence as a thrusting beyond words; a movement through the space(s) of performative hybridity into a location of *différance*:

in the phase just before Mala stopped using words, lexically shaped thoughts would sprawl across her mind, fractured here and there. The cracks would be filled with images. Soon the inverse happened. A sentence would be constructed primarily of images punctuated by only one or two verbalizations: a noun tentatively uttered in recognition, a descriptive word

confirming a feeling or observation.... Eventually Mala all but rid herself of words. (136)

Here, the failure to perform a multitude of conflicting roles has resulted in Mala's muteness. She has given up on her desire to act in the world around her, and has embraced silence as a space beyond performance. Mootoo recalls Derrida's assertion that silence functions to remind us that "there is no phonetic writing" (4-5), and that language itself is limited in its capacity for true expression. Indeed, it is Mootoo's positioning of *différance* through hybridity that brings Derrida's theory into a space that performs the ambiguity of culture, race and gender confluences.

While Mala's movement beyond performance into a realm of silence makes it possible for her to step away, momentarily, from the performances required of her, this is not the solution that Mootoo offers as reconciliation to the destructiveness of social performance. Mala's silence is a space in which she reconciles the performances that pull her in difference directions, but it is not the space that helps her move into a performative hybridity. For this, Mootoo offers us the performative power of mimicry.

In his chapter "Of Mimicry and Man: the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," Bhabha looks at mimicry as a "sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power" (122) and goes on to say that "it is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double, that my instances of colonial imitation come" ("Of Mimicry" 123). Mimicry becomes the site of both colonial empowerment and disempowerment, all in the same moment. It is the interstitial location that exists, naturally, within mimicry, that lends it its own ability to subvert the original object being mimicked.

In *Cereus Blooms at Night*, there is one character who manages to convincingly *mimic* a masculine gender, though he is sexed female. Otoh, originally named Ambrosia, enters the novel as a trans-gendered person, comfortable in his own hybrid sexuality (unlike Tyler, who moves through this process during the novel). At the age of five, Ambrosia became Otoh and

the transformation was flawless. Hours of mind-dulling exercise streamlined Ambrosia into an angular, hard-bodied creature and tampered with the flow of whatever hormonal juices defined him. So flawless was the transformation that even the nurse and doctor who attended the birth, on seeing him later, marvelled at their carelessness in having declared him a girl. (118)

It is this mimicry of masculinity that opens up the space of *différance* once again in Mootoo's novel; it is not that Otoh is masculine or feminine (female or male), but that he is neither, that rejects patriarchal binaries and moves us into a new space of subjective gendering. Pirbhai says that "in his seemingly flawless transformation into a man, together with his sexual encounters with men and women, Otoh underlines the shifting codes of nature and, by extension, the constructedness of truth/conviction/identity" (183). So, reading Mootoo through Bhabha, it becomes obvious that colonial and patriarchal mimicry share space in a hybrid location outside of hegemonic norms, and enter into

a discursive process by which the excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*) does not merely 'rupture' the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence.

(Bhabha, "Of Mimicry" 123)

It is this slippage which enables Mootoo to confront the normalization of heterosexuality, and draw on the paradox of forced performance, in order to create a new freedom in choice. Otoh, as representative of this slippage, learns at the end of the novel that he is not only one among many others who have chosen to live in a sexual freedom, but also, that these individuals are necessary to survival of the community in a postcolonial world. Otoh's mother says,

what you ma-ing me for? You think I am stupid or what? Now the fact of the matter is that you are not the first or the only one of your kind in this place. You grow up here and you don't realize almost everybody in this place wish they could be somebody or something else? That is the story of life here in Lantanacamara. (258)

Thus, it is that hybridity and slippage are the foundations on which the postcolonial island of Lantanacamara is built. In the ambivalent location of hybrid-gendering, Otoh manages to access his own agency outside of the conformities of a seemingly patriarchal and colonial society that exists as a reflection of the western imagination, and to reconcile a harmonious negotiation of performative hybridity.

At the end of *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Mala is reunited with her lost lover, Ambrose E. Mohanty. She recaptures the relationship that she could not maintain when she was acting the part of wife to her father. Finally, Mala is choosing her own roles. While waiting for Ambrose to visit, Mala

sits on a stool while I [Tyler] pin her hair up into a waterfall, or braid and set it off with a little ribbon or flowers. She giggles and twitches her feet. On visiting days she wears a garland of snail shells about her neck or a crown of wreaths that we wove with feathers and the wings of expired insects. (267)

Mala is now performing the role that she desires, that of a woman waiting for her lover. She has not accepted the normalizing roles of social convention (the insects woven into her hair can never be interpreted as Mala's being "normal"), but has chosen what to use and what to discard in her new interpretation of herself. It is here that Mala demonstrates the true power of performative hybridity to create the roles in life that will make you happy.

There is no eradication of the performance, merely a freedom to choose the life you perform. So when Young says that "hybridization as 'raceless chaos' [...] produces no stable new form but rather something closer to Bhabha's restless, uneasy, interstitial hybridity: a radical heterogeneity, discontinuity, the permanent revolution of forms" (25), I agree completely. However, it is this chaos of hybridity that allows for sexuality and race to move together in performance, both as categories that undermine themselves. It is here, in this heterogeneity of selves, that performative hybridity demonstrates the potential for social normative roles to become self-reflexive and valuable as tools for reinterpretation of lived performances.

Structuring the Position of the Neo-Mimic Man
in Danzy Senna's *Symptomatic*

I turn now to my third author, Danzy Senna. In this chapter, I use Homi Bhabha's theories extensively, in order to reflect on the role of the mixed-race person in contemporary postcolonial theory. Senna is American and I include her with my other (Canadian) authors to broaden the mix of voices in this project. Together, I hope that these three authors hint at the wide range of diasporic authors in North America interested in the politics of mixed race writing. Like Hill and Mootoo, Senna uses language in a complicated way, in her effort to write race as fiction. In an interview, Canadian mixed race author Wayne Compton is asked about his thoughts on labeling and naming those of multiple races and he replies:

there's a book by Danzy Senna called *Caucasia*. The author is from Boston, and is mixed-race, and her protagonist is mixed-race. The novel does a really good job at getting at all the problems that mixed-race people encounter, but avoids the metaphors mixed-race people get reduced to. (60)

Compton recognizes the importance that Senna's work has in helping to shape a new way of looking at mixed race people. Rather than revisiting the trope of the Tragic Mulatto or the identity-stricken biracial, Senna (and Compton) would like to see the ways that mixed race literature can complicate the stereotypes that exist (in the popular imagination) about race. This chapter does not focus on *Caucasia*¹⁹ (Senna's first book), but her second novel *Symptomatic*. I feel that *Symptomatic* is an appropriate novel for discussing issues of fiction and fiction-making, as the protagonist herself is a journalist who is constantly reflecting on the fictionality of the pieces that she writes, as she simultaneously worries about the ways that her racially ambiguous features are read by those around her. However, first I turn to Bhabha for scene set-up.

The colonial object exists as reflection of the imperialist subject, where the postcolonial subject gains agency through reinterpretation of performance under the

¹⁹ I do look more intensely at *Caucasia* in the next chapter, so please bear in mind that it is also a work pertinent to the arguments I make in this thesis.

neocolonial gaze. In his essay “Of Mimicry and Man,” Bhabha examines the role of the Mimic Man in a diachronic interpolation of parody and metonymy within the postcolonial world. The Mimic Man exists in an interstice of location and culture, representing both the colonizer and the colonized, performing his role *too well*, and so giving lie to the act itself. It is the inability of the Mimic Man to occupy this position of exact replication of the imperial man that allows for a narcissistic reinterpretation of the positions of both the colonized and the colonizers: the Mimic Man becomes an ironic representation of colonial subjectivity, given agency through deconstruction. The *metonymy of subject* (the insidious perception of the colonized as race first, person second) is devalued in the reversal of gaze that is offered by the Mimic Man, allowing, rather, a reconsideration of the postcolonial subject: stereotypes are revisited, and the colonized gain agency through a reevaluation of the in-between space that the performance of the Mimic Man offers. It is the examination of the space between performance and identity, the interstitial location of the Mimic Man in his slippage between the reality of colonization and his fantastic portrayal of the colonizer, which allows for a reinterpretation of both subject positions within the context of postcolonial theory.

In particular, “Of Mimicry and Man” offers a unique view of the in-between space that Bhabha emphasizes as the crucial point of interdiction for postcolonial theory. Between reality and performance exists the interstitial location of objective theoretical deconstruction.²⁰ Bhabha insists the postcolonial scholar examine this location, not only as the space in which to analyze the position of the colonized, but also as the point from which to reverse the gaze, so that colonized and colonizer look towards each other. Bhabha says:

It is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double, that my instances of colonial imitation come. What they all share is a discursive process by which the excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*) does not merely “rupture” the discourse, but becomes

²⁰ This space between one thing and another, forever holding the middle-ground, is the scholar’s preferred vantage point. It allows the objective consideration of two (or more) sides and though this does not parallel exactly the position of the mixed race author, it does offer some interesting ways of seeing race.

transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a “partial” presence.... The success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace. (“Of Mimicry” 123)

This *slippage* offers Bhabha an interstitial location for postcolonial deconstruction. This location is where the analysis of the metonymy of subject allows him to diffuse the dangers that this subject position potentially represents to the postcolonial scholar. It is this interstitial location of hybridity that allows for a consideration of mixing as metaphor, for a reconsideration of what barriers *mean* and where they *converge*.

Miscegenation is a concrete example of the theory of hybridity put into physical practice in a diasporic and postcolonial world. Miscegenation offers a new way of looking at ideas of performance, and the location of the colonial subject, and restructures the notion of *slippage* in a new way that allows for the constitution of a *Neo-Mimic Man*²¹ under the auspices of mixed-race fiction. By “mixed-race fiction,” I am referring to work that is engaged in exploring racial and cultural hybridity, written by authors who are self-identified *politically* as “mixed race.” Through the texts offered by mixed-race authors, race is deconstructed in a particular and critical interstice of location, which allows for a hybrid way of looking at the world and engaging in critical race and postcolonial theory. The globalized space of difference becomes more than diaspora, and instead moves towards a homogeneously heterogeneous situated position for analysis.

Mixed-race literature has an inherently dialectic quality, a merging of voices in its appropriation of simultaneous heterogeneity and homogeneity in the use of simultaneous multiple racial perspectives. In examining adaptations of a predominant racial meta-narrative, there exists a subversive between-space of a new diasporic condition. Of the mixed race person, Bhabha says “almost the same but not white: the visibility of mimicry is always produced at the site of interdiction” (“Of Mimicry” 128). Rather, I would posit that mixed literature examines the conception of identity and ethnicity, while simultaneously

²¹ Again, my own term and it is crucial to the reading of this essay. I take the basis for Bhabha’s *Mimic Man* and create a new semblance: that of the mixed race author as a *Neo-Mimic Man*. The *Neo-Mimic Man* uses theories of performance and hybridity in order to demonstrate the fictionality that is race.

reinforcing and subverting the category of *race* itself. It is not the Mimic Man himself that reflects the interstice of in-between space, but the location of the mixed-race author as the Neo-Mimic Man, neither parody nor an ironic reflection of imperialism. Rather, the mixed-race authored text allows for a simultaneous occupation of (at least) two subject positions, neither of which is privileged as holding power over the other. There is no reversal of gaze because there is no looking outwards, but, instead, an inward-looking, self-reflexive analysis of an inherent and immediate interstitial location of identity. In the blending of races – a homogeny of miscegenation – ideas of race become irreconcilable with the reality of a globalized space of difference.

The Neo-Mimic Man is a transcultural phenomenon, existing always at home and abroad, within the postcolonial mind. The Neo-Mimic Man is a blurring of distinctions, an obvious reclamation of the metonymy of subject and a rejection of the *synecdoche of multiculturalism*.²² The stereotype never stands for the person, as the person is a confusion of racial subject positions, and the person never stands for the cultural whole, coming from (at least) two simultaneous racial locations. Race is a myth, and the Neo-Mimic Man is the affront to that myth. The colonized and the colonizer are one and the same, and it is the responsibility of the mixed-race author to acknowledge this sameness from the position of transculturation, and her/his position of hybrid subjectivity. Racialization is the categorization and application of racial misnomers, both physical and cultural; mis-racialization is the tool of the mixed-race author of deconstructing these falsities of identity. There is no correct manner of racializing the individual, and in recognizing the absurdity of adhering to a cultural metonymy of subject, the biracial text offers its own brand of slippage through an analysis of the power of mis-racialization.

Performance is the key to understanding the relationship between the Mimic Man and the Neo-Mimic Man. Where the colonized perform a role for the colonizer as “*almost the same but not quite*” (“Of Mimicry” 127), the Neo-Mimic Man uses his position as “*almost the same but not white*” (“Of Mimicry” 128) as more than a space of interdiction. Performance is inherently recognizable in the Neo-Mimic Man. There is no either/or dichotomies of position, only a blurring of distinctions that deconstructs the reality of the

²² My own term, the synecdoche of multiculturalism is an extrapolation of Bhabha’s metonymy of subject.

colonial cultural performance. The Neo-Mimic Man offers a new perspective through the postcolonial reversal of gaze. Rather than positing cultural difference as the point of interstice, racial in/difference becomes key to deconstructing the metonymy of presence. This in/difference is reflective of Edward Said's *Exile*. Exile is the means by which the postcolonial scholar may achieve a complex objectivity by embracing pure subjectivity. The mixed-race text similarly posits a confusion of subject positions through the notions passing and illusion, whereby race becomes deconstructed as a physical trait and leaves the mixed-race subject emotionally and physically isolated as a racialized individual. This complicated position is best examined through Danzy Senna's novel *Symptomatic*, which represents the multi-racial interpretation of two women in relation to each other. The unnamed first-person protagonist views her own position in relation to the situationally ambivalent Vera Cross, with whom she shares (both irrelevantly and intrinsically) the same skin colour. This novel offers insight into the interstices of racial position, not just through self-analysis, but through a narcissistic self-referential gaze that relies on the position of another who is *almost the same, but not quite*. It is this complicated and dialectical subject position, as always already existing the interstitial space of blurred categories and imaginary boundaries that allows the Neo-Mimic Man the objectivity of an a sympathetic hybrid subjectivity.

Race mixing is as fictional a biological concept as that of race itself. However, the biological reality of race has little bearing on the impact that racialization has on North American society. There is no such thing as racial purity; humanity consists of individuals possessing an infinite variability of biological mutations. Miscegenation is simply not a possibility within the human race. Yet, there are many individuals that identify themselves as belonging to a mixed race, and thereby confuse an already invalid construct. In his book, *Almost White*, Brewton Berry acknowledges the disruption that those of mixed race parentage present to the norm:

How many races are there? To what race do the Australians, Polynesians, and so forth, belong? What are the best criteria to use in assigning people to their proper racial categories? Small wonder, then, that the man on the street has difficulty with a people in

whose veins flows the blood of two races – or more. (51)

Race, as a biological supposition and as a social construct, cannot exist in the face of race mixing. As a category that includes just about everything, the mixed race becomes a metonymic representation of the human race itself.

Race is both a scientific fallacy and a social construct. As Eugenia Shanklin says, in her book *Anthropology & Race*, “race is not a valid scientific concept but [...] it is a critical construct in folk taxonomies” (v). In the constant human endeavour to individualize and separate, race has become a modern method for easy identification. Racialization is the effort to create simple binary truths in a world of complex lies. North America lives by (among others) the lie that race matters; that human beings can be relegated to associations of stereotypical behaviour based on arbitrary physical characteristics. This lie represents North America’s effort to maintain a social hierarchy that allows for some members of society to live in a state of unearned privilege. Black and white, rich and poor, good and bad: the human mind is comforted by awkward polarizations. When the line is divided clearly, with only two choices, individuals can easily categorize others, as well as themselves. However, the middle ground, the gray space, is an imposition on this line of thinking. Racialization requires distinct physical and cultural definitions, an impossibility when considering the vast variation of physical differences found in the human race. The truth is that most populations differ more genetically within their respective racial group than from other, outside racial groups. In their book, *Black, White or Mixed Race?*, Barbara Tizard and Ann Phoenix examine the manner in which race mixing contradicts the polarization of racialization:

The construction of “mixed parentage” as necessarily problematic has occurred, and continues to occur, in a context where it is taken for granted as common sense that here are clearly differentiated “races” who are, in essence, binary opposites. (5)

The very notion of race mixing acts contrary to racialization, as both a biological idea and a sociological construct. Race mixing cannot operate along binary divisions, a mixed-raced person is neither black nor white, but an amalgamation of both.

Louis Gates says that “‘race’ as a meaningful criterion within the biological sciences has long been recognized to be a fiction” (4), but “nevertheless, our conversations are replete with usages of *race* which have their sources in the dubious pseudoscience of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (4). Mixed literature examines the concepts of identity and ethnicity, while simultaneously reinforcing and subverting the category of *race* itself. Boundaries become blurred, and strategically divided groups learn to question the hegemonic conditions that reinforce systematic hierarchical conditions of difference. Writers specializing in mixed-race literature offer a unique and playful look at all aspects of postcolonial studies. Race is a hegemonic tool used to support hierarchical privilege between disparate individuals, and although race itself has been scientifically disproved, this only reinforces the relevance of race as it becomes more intrinsically linked to the human social condition. Mimicry is both ambivalent and dangerous, when considered in light of critical race theory:

If, for a while, the ruse of desire is calculable for the uses of discipline, soon the repetition of guilt, justification, pseudo-scientific theories, superstition, spurious authorities, and classifications can be seen as the desperate effort to “normalize” *formally* the disturbance of a discourse of splitting that violates the rational, enlightened claims of its enunciatory modality. The ambivalence of colonial authority repeatedly turns from *mimicry* – a difference that is almost nothing but not quite – to *menace* – a difference that is almost total but not quite. (“Of Mimicry” 130-31).

Bhabha reminds his audience that the Mimic Man’s racial authority exists in the in-between space of cultural *slippage*, an excess that gives lie to the ethnic mores of colonial discourse. The Mimic Man relies, not on an empirical set of definable traits, but, instead, on the loose and essentialized metonymy of subject; a metonymy of subject that racialization allows within its negotiable and unstable framework. The deconstruction of this racial position both denies the colonial authority, through an analysis of the interstitial space of cultural difference, and reinforces it, through the subversive notion menace that pervades the very idea of the Mimic Man, as a concept. By contrast, the Neo-Mimic Man exists not as a point

of ambivalence, but as a hybridly located subject of postcolonial discourse; the mixed-race text is always in-between, and always recognizant of the responsibility that occupation of this space requires.

Miscegenation offers, at the outset, a contemporary literary analysis that lies in self-mimicry. There are no strict borders between the colonized and the colonizer; instead there are only interstices of performativity. Racial performance relies on an interaction between the marginalized person and the privileged position in a world of hegemonic perspective. Racial performance adheres to the condition of the metonymy of subject, a reliance on race as precursor to behaviour. This interaction is based on the notion of race as a normalized social condition, one where the marginalized recognize their inherent difference from the privileged, where the privileged rely on *not* understanding the everyday relevance of race. It is this ability to ignore race that distinguishes the top of the hierarchy from the bottom, and the further one falls in the chain, the more racial performativity is required as a tool of social negotiation. The key to colonial success is a performance in which the colonized acts the part of the metonymic subject while skirting the edge of personal identity. In this way, the colonized person manages to resist through submission. However, the biracial text is always already existent *between* worlds, as it is constantly in flux between states of subjectivity. The performance of the mixed-race author is always ironic; a challenge to the colonial performance of fighting through acquiescence, and the Neo-Mimic Man becomes the political actor on the postcolonial stage.

In the Mimic Man, Bhabha sees an actor negotiating the dynamics of colonial authority in the only manner offered, as the recipient of a disempowered and marginalized position under colonial authority. The Mimic Man counters stereotypes through subversive ambivalence. Bhabha looks at the danger of representation (for the colonized person) as it requires a careful negotiation of actual identity and naturalized essentialisms. He says that “the desire of colonial mimicry – an interdictory desire – may not have an object, but it has strategic objectives which I shall call the *metonymy of presence*” (“Of Mimicry” 128). This metonymy of presence is a pervasive colonial tool for reconfiguring the colonized perception of self, offering cultural traits as self-evident, and thereby requiring the colonized to “act the part” of ethnic assumptions. In mimicry, the colonial performance of

imitating the imperial authority, Bhabha sees a subtle empowerment of the colonized in the slippage between the performance and the real. Bhabha says that “the ambivalence of mimicry – almost but not quite – suggests that the fetishized colonial culture is potentially and strategically an insurgent counter-appeal” (“Of Mimicry” 129-30). This counter-appeal is a movement towards acknowledging that the interstices of ambivalence that colonial mimicry offers is only a partial solution in refuting cultural essentialisms. The word “appeal” only offers further authorial privilege to the subject position occupied by the colonizers, and a further disempowering of the colonized, as persons recognizant of their own reality outside of the metonymy of presence. The appeal is never made by those in power, but only by those who serve under it.

Mixed-race literature offers a new analysis of performativity through an inherent self-mimicry of the metonymy of presence. It is the ironic appreciation of essentializing norms and social mores that allows for the creation of an in-between space, not of ambivalence, but of *creative subjectivity*. Acceptance and denial of person, racialization and realization of the extenuating identity in the mixed-race individual, these are the moments of interstitial recognition of cultural misrepresentation. Through creative subjectivity, the biracial text finds itself both the *norm* and the *other*, existing beyond the either/or dichotomy, and instead in a space of apprehensive understanding. In Danzy Senna’s *Symptomatic*, the protagonist finds herself accepted within the privileged group without question as she performs as if she were unaware of race, and therefore an automatic member of the upper tier of the racial hierarchy. Senna’s protagonist is able to leave off performance and accept her own position as colonizer so long as she forgets the reality of the metonymy of presence. It is during a game of charades that Senna’s protagonist remembers her position as a racialized individual, when one of the women at a party acts out the role of a black woman:

Sophie stood, arms held in the air, transformed. She had rubbed something maybe shoe shine – all over her face. She’d put bright orange lipstick around the edges of her mouth. And when she turned around in a fashion-plate pirouette, I saw she’d punctuated her behind with twin pillows she’d strapped on with a belt. She

strutted into the center of the room and began shaking her head
and sucking her teeth and talking in a voice that wasn't her own.

(*Symptomatic* 12)

Senna delivers a reversal of Bhabha's colonial performance by offering the colonizer's mimicry of the colonized, an ironic interpretation of group dynamics both inside and outside the postcolonial world, as Senna's protagonist straddles the interstitial space between. The only person in the room who understands her position as both colonized and colonizer, Senna's protagonist leaves the room and thinks to herself, "I thought of things I could do or say – things I'd already said and done. But I was all of a sudden so sleepy" (*Symptomatic* 15). In the end, it is this inability to translate the colonized/colonizer experience that results in a self-mimicry in Senna's protagonist. This self-mimicry relies on a pseudo-acceptance into the privileged group, and this acceptance itself relies on a negotiation of a multitude of performances. The mixed-race protagonist performs as if she were race-less, a position of colonial empowerment, while always already understanding that she exists in-between her actuality of racialization and mis-racialization. This combination of performance and reality creates an ironic perception of self that allows for the Neo-Mimic Man to embrace his status as both performer and writer within the postcolonial dynamic of the metonymy of presence.

Mixed literature also offers a reversal of gaze, a postcolonial complementary eye that exists in a dialectic of observation. The heterogeneity of the mixed-race focus reminds us that mimicry is an inadequate metaphor for the postcolonial subject. Mimicry is always already looking towards and outwards, a subject position that relies on the objectification of another in its adherence to the strict dichotomy of colonized and colonizer as reflections of each other. This either/or dualistic reasoning is where Bhabha's Mimic Man falls short of self actualization in the face of colonial authority, despite the subversive potential of ambivalence and slippage. The resistance that mimicry offers relies on the metonymy of presence that Bhabha disparages:

In mimicry, the representation of identity and meaning is
rearticulated along the axis of metonymy. As Lacan reminds us,
mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization or repression of

difference, but a form of resemblance, that differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically. Its threat, I would add, comes from the prodigious and strategic production of conflictual, fantastic, discriminatory “identity effects” in the play of power that is elusive because it hides no essence, no “itself”.

(“Of Mimicry” 128-29)

Identity and gaze become inextricably linked in the interaction between the colonized and the colonizer, the two always viewing themselves through the eyes of the other. It is the relevance of this colonial gaze that challenges Bhabha’s strategy of mimicry as performative reality. In analyzing the subject positions offered by a multitude of identity claims (race, gender, location, class, etc.), Bhabha posits that “what is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences” (“The Postcolonial and Postmodern” 765). To further Bhabha’s theory of the relevance of interstitial difference, it becomes necessary to deconstruct the position of the mixed-race text in conversation with itself. Rather than gazing outwards, the mixed-race author recognizes the need to look *within*, in order to move beyond performance into the realm of self-identification, and thereby creating a subject position that is always already both inside and outside the essentialisms of racialization. Through a gaze that turns inwards, the Neo-Mimic Man finds himself capable of moving beyond the colonial stage and into a postcolonial reality of internalized self-reflection.

Danzy Senna’s novel *Symptomatic* is the articulation of that in-between space that mixed literature offers. It is the reinterpretation of the colonial gaze that allows Senna to move beyond the colonized/colonizer dichotomy in order to create a hybridized space of *racial in/difference*. It is the occupation of these simultaneous positions, both understanding that race is a social more and a social construct, that disavows the cultural essentialisms that permeate the postcolonial world. Bhabha claims that mimicry allows for a reevaluation of subject position, not outside of, but through the metonymy of presence. However, it is the confusion of mimicry which lends this novel relevance. Looking at her lover, Senna’s

protagonist muses that “his eyes were a strange color. An opaque swirl of gray and blue. They looked odd to me, half-blind, like the eyes of a newborn, before they turn a more ordinary, permanent shade of brown” (*Symptomatic* 19). The colonial gaze here is both recognized and refuted through the confusion of the mixed-race woman contemplating the eyes of her lover, looking at her. This passage offers a reinterpretation of the colonial gaze, through the position of the mis-racialized protagonist. Senna’s character is a blurring of distinctions, both colonized and colonizer, and a self-referential postcolonial subject.

The author of mixed-race texts also offers a hybrid objectivity through studied situatedness. To be situated is to locate oneself as an individual within the larger global structure, to recognize that norms are conditions of hierarchical imbalance and not real conditions of deserved privilege. The biracial subject is constantly aware of that in-between space, as a location for identity and observation. It is the racial, interstitial point of being always already between subjectivities that removes the temptation of cultural essentialism, while simultaneously offering an ambivalent location for colonial deconstruction. This location of being always already between race and culture is the in-between space that moves beyond subjectivity into a hybrid objectivity, through a studied situatedness that allows for self-scrutiny that implodes into a position of racial in/difference.

Bhabha contextualizes his discussion of the Mimic Man within Edward Said’s description of “the tension between the synchronic panoptical vision of domination – the demand for identity, stasis – and the counter-pressure of the diachrony of history – change, difference – [to which] mimicry represents an ironic compromise” (“Of Mimicry” 122). In his essay “Reflections on Exile,” Said demonstrates that location and transculturation are imperative strategies for deconstructing the postcolonial position. It is the rejection of the nation, and the embracing of the exile location, that allows the colonized object to achieve a subjective position that moves beyond the metonymy of presence, the position that so worries Bhabha. The Exile, for Said, becomes the position for objective critical thought. The Exile exists in opposition to Nationalism, and allows for a plurality of thought in recognizing his/her distancing from the idea of home. Looking at Said’s notion of the Exile as objective postcolonial critic, this notion of mimicry becomes a complicated site for intricate analysis. Said claims that “exile is life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic,

decentered, contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew” (186). Contrapuntal reading is a blurring of identities, reminiscent of the position of the mixed-race author and text, allowing for a dialectic of thought, rather than creating new either/or dualistic notions of contemplating the postcolonial world. The Exile is never stuck in one point-of-view, but always has, instead, at least two points of reference. It is this plurality of vision that allows for a new understanding of the world around him/her, and a nomadic and decentered way of living that critically engages with literature and life itself. Exile is objectivity achieved through subjectivity. Only through acknowledging love for one’s home and working through that loss can the Exile accept his/her position as intellectual and scholar. The location of the Exile becomes the point of cultural interstice, a movement beyond subjectivity. The mixed-race text offers a different type of subjectivity that allows for a new objectivity of location. The Exile becomes conflated with this new position, a traveler in a cultural situatedness that exists outside of racial metonymy.

Symptomatic’s mixed-race protagonist is always already disassociated from her position as a racialized individual, always already existing inside and outside herself as a colonized nation. Greta, another mixed-race woman in the novel, confronts the protagonist about her romantic inclinations towards a black man by stating:

You’ve got that look. Like your own the prow. If it’s not him, it’ll be somebody else. Not a white boy. You’re done with that. It’ll be some coon with a hankering for high-yella ass. You’ll fall head over heels and next thing I know you’ll be doing the jitterbug up I Harlem with Mr. Milky Way, discovering your black heritage astride his dick. And I’ll just be some sandpile you used to play in. (124)

Here, Bhabha’s metonymy of presence is impossible to ignore as Greta uses stereotypes and essentialisms to express a hidden racialized anger. Here, there is the reality that there is no cultural homogeneity for the mixed-race person. The mixed-race protagonist is without cultural home and racial nation, she is always already residing in the interstitial space of non-conformity. Senna’s protagonist finds herself enacting the tragedy of Said’s Exile when she thinks to herself “with a sudden, childish hunger, I missed my family, missed the sounds of my parent’s voices and my brother’s teasing and even the sound of their laughter,

mocking me and all my aspirations” (*Symptomatic* 125). The objectivity of Said’s Exile is not found through distance and remote contemplation, but, rather, through an intense personal scrutiny of physical location and cultural position: “exile is never the state of being satisfied, placid, or secure” (Said 186); “exile is life led outside the habitual order” (Said 186). Exile is the location of the Neo-Mimic Man, a subject position that relies on him always already existing in the boundaries between worlds, an example of the racial interstitial reality and cultural metonymical fabrication.

The Mimic Man exists as a colonial remnant, relevant in his ambivalence, a subject position juxtaposed with the inherently objective position of the colonized. The Neo-Mimic Man represents, as the mixed-race individual, a homogeneity of heterogeneous cultural assumptions and physical racial attribute, all slowing hinting at the lie inherent in Bhabha’s metonymy of presence. In her article “Passing and the Problematic of Multiracial Pride,” Danzy Senna looks at the politics of the *Miscegenation Movement*, as a means for both conflating and de-essentializing race. Senna positions herself as a mixed-race author who can *pass* for white, and examines what that means for her cultural location. It is the emotional reaction to the politics of *passing* that make this article interesting, the inherent guilt that this position offers the postcolonial subject as she occupies a position not her own. This self-referential guilt underlies Senna’s article in conjunction with her novel *Symptomatic* in a way that confuses all notions of race, and diffuses the danger of Bhabha’s metonymy of presence, as it undercuts the notion of race as a valid method of social identification. Bhabha echoes Senna’s theories when he says that “the very concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions or ‘organic’ ethnic communities – as the grounds of cultural comparativism – are in a profound process of redefinition” (“The Postcolonial and the Postmodern” 768). Race is supposed to be a visible distinction between one group and another and the mixed-race person denies this “fact” simply by existing. More pragmatic than a metaphorical interstitial subject position, the mixed-race author can, rather than mimic, occupy the position of colonizer in reality, negating the need for performance. In thinking about her own situatedness as a biracial woman, Senna says:

Unlike people who are automatically classified as black or white,

my race has always been up for debate. I am forever having to explain to people why it is that I look so white for a black girl, why it is that my features don't reveal my heritage. It's not something I should have to explain, but in America, at least, people are obsessed with this dissonance between my face and my race.

(“Passing” [*Black Renaissance*] 76)

Mixed-race texts do not encourage a privileging of another racial group, those of mixed-race backgrounds, but reveal the danger of racial complacency. Miscegenation requires thought, a reexamination of the metonymic subject as real, in the effort to undermine the danger that race represents to the postcolonial world.

Mixed literature is a contrapuntal reinterpretation of the predominant structural narrative of life. Mixed-race literature is the point where identities collide and prove both profound and meaningless as socially constructed concepts. The Neo-Mimic Man represents a new way of deconstructing the essentialization of race, taking flight where the Mimic Man falls short. Bhabha himself says that “mimicry, as the metonymy of presence is, indeed, such an erratic, eccentric strategy of authority in colonial discourse. Mimicry does not merely destroy narcissistic authority through the repetitious slippage of difference and desire” (“Of Mimicry” 90). The Neo-Mimic man reinvents himself through an interstitial location between (at least two) cultures, and disavows the hegemonic conditions of colonialism through a hybrid objectivity of subjective situatedness.

Passing, Performance, and Perversity: Creating Narrative Anxiety in the Works of Hill, Mootoo, and Senna

This chapter will examine the function of *passing* in the works of Lawrence Hill, Shani Mootoo, and Danzy Senna. Passing, here, means to perform a race not one's own. I see "one's own race" as that by which one identifies oneself. This identification is troublesome, especially in the case of those of mixed race parentage, but this is the point of this chapter (and my thesis) so please bear with me. The term "passing" is problematic in itself, suggesting both that race is a concrete identity that certain persons may transgress in order to assume another racial identity and, simultaneously, that race is fluid and changeable as the transgressor is capable of performing one identity or another. I plan on tracing the historical use of the term passing, as it moves from a static conception of the black person passing for white to a theoretical practice of acting out any/every race, in order to open the term up and explore why passing is considered perverse by so many and potentially freeing by a few. I have, throughout my thesis, been more interested in language and hybridity as theoretical constructs of the imagination than in racial passing. However, I recognize that passing is one of the most prevalent themes in works by mixed race authors and it is imperative to reflect on the ways that it is used in this genre in order to appreciate the fears and hopes that miscegenation offers. I take the opportunity now to examine the ways that passing works alongside language to create works that challenge race in the face of a new multi-raced diaspora.

Passing, itself, is as hard to define as race. In *Any Known Blood*, Hill uses *playful passing* to help Langston define himself, and the rejection of passing becomes a moment of development for this character, the moment when he begins to grow and see himself as a raced man with a responsibility to himself, his race, and his family. The short stories in Shani Mootoo's collection *Out on Main Street* all look at the ways that race, nationality, and language work as tools of negotiation, as she moves from Trinidad to Canada and attempts to define herself in the midst of a multicultural diasporic community, where she

attempts to pass as herself.²³ Finally, Danzy Senna uses the more conventional form of passing (black for white) in her novel *Caucasia*, where the mixed-race protagonist Birdie is guilt-ridden over her loss of racial identity as she is forced, by her mother, to pass for white. She realizes that race is more than performance; it is the means by which she defines herself as somewhere between white and black. These three authors move through and past traditional ideas of passing in order to convey a complexity of subject. This complexity is necessary in order to re-think the ways that passing is portrayed in popular culture, in the effort to re-create the ways that purity of race has been historically conceptualized. Absolutes and certainties are the underpinnings of race and the complexity of miscegenation, demonstrated through a repositioning of racial passing, disrupts these supports and allows for the realization that race is a fiction built on a faulty base.

In his book *Who is Black?: One Nation's Definition*, F. James Davis offers definitions and explanations of beliefs regarding miscegenation and passing. I begin here because Davis places his text specifically in the sociological space of the African-American community, citing this community as unique and precious and completely distinct from the rest of the United States and the world. This point of view also specifies, for us, a popular method of seeing passing in contemporary North America. Davis suggests that:

The black experience with passing as white in the United States contrasts with the experience of other ethnic minorities that have features that are clearly non-caucasoid. The concept of passing applies only to blacks – consistent with the nation's unique definition of the group. A person who is one-fourth or less American Indian or Korean or Filipino is not regarded as passing if he or she intermarries and joins fully the life of the dominant community, so the minority ancestry need not be hidden. It is often suggested that the key reason for this is that the physical differences between these other groups and whites are less pronounced than the physical differences between African blacks and whites, and therefore are

²³ In this collection, Mootoo's complicated racial background and her Indo-Trinidadian roots create a complexity of identification with other Canadians, most specifically those from India. I spend more time on this later on in this chapter.

less threatening to whites. However, keep in mind that the one-drop rule and anxiety about passing originated during slavery and later received powerful reinforcement under the Jim Crow system. (14)

Davis essentializes and simplifies complicated issues of racial identification by claiming that Black America is somehow unique, and all other race/national categorizations the same, in his treatment of miscegenation and passing. He reminds us that passing grows out of a history of black slavery (though this colonially sanctioned enslavement of Africans is not unique to the United States of America) and that, until recently, passing meant portraying yourself as white if you are black.

Passing from black for white is an important historical moment, but not the only manner in which to view passing. This is the basis for the ways in which I will eventually deconstruct the idea(s) of passing. Let us look to the relevant moments in (international) colonial history in order to think about Davis' claims of passing as specifically situated in the African American community. I will quickly look at one of the most influential novels about African-American slavery, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe, to understand the ways that passing has worked historically. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, begun as a serial in 1851 and published in 1852, was cited often in debates on the emancipation of African slaves in the period. Stowe claims that "the object of these sketches is to awaken sympathy and feeling for the African race, as they exist among us" (xxii), so the novel is written in a particular style of ethnological pity. Looking at the ways that passing is used in this novel helps to illustrate a broader view than that which Davis uses in his definition.

In her article "Creole family politics in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," Carolyn Vellenga Berman tells us that "again and again in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, mixed-race slaves pass as something other than slaves not by passing as white Anglo-Americans, but by passing as Spanish or French" (9). George is a runaway slave who needs to disguise himself in order to make his way to Canada. He decides that passing is the only way to manage his disappearance and opts for presenting himself as a wealthy man of Spanish background, in complete contradiction to the expectations of his former owner, who claims that George will attempt this journey by passing for white. In fact, George actually darkens his skin to complete his transformation, as "from his mother he

had received only a slight mulatto tinge, amply compensated by its accompanying rich, dark eye. A slight change in the tint of the skin and the color of his hair had metamorphosed him into the Spanish-looking fellow he then appeared" (Stowe 135).

Passing, here, not only moves us outside of the black/white binary, but creates a layering of racial identities that can be adopted on an "as-needed" basis. Davis' argument for the insularity of passing as an African American phenomenon that moves from black to white becomes inconceivable in light of Stowe's important and historically located novel.

Harriet Beecher Stowe claims empathy as the impetus for her novel. She plays on the similarity of the restriction of women's rights and the plight of the slave to encourage sympathy in her audience. She says "I have been the mother of seven children, the most beautiful and the most loved of which lies buried near my Cincinnati residence. It was at his dying bed and at his grave that I learned what a poor slave a mother may feel when her child is torn away" (xviii) in her consideration of the events that inspired *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The comparison of women and slaves in the nineteenth century (and throughout British colonialism) is a relevant, if completely superficial, consideration. Stowe's empathy with slaves, as a woman, is a common argument in favour of emancipation. In light of this, I would like to keep the roles that gender plays in and around racial marginalization in the forefront our minds as we move into the Caribbean in the year 1952 in order to consider another significant text on the subject of passing.

In his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon analyzes the place of the black man in a white world. In this foundational text to postcolonial theory, Fanon uses French psychoanalytic theory, existentialist thought, and powerfully charged rhetoric to demonstrate the effects of colonial subjugation on the educated man. Fanon's title *Black Skin, White Masks* is a visual description of the black man's desire for power, the authority of the self in performing something other than self, race, and personhood. Fanon is of mixed racial background; he was born in Martinique to a black father and a biracial mother. His arguments are all personally located and he relies heavily on psychoanalytic theory to support his views on the relationship between France and Martinique, black and white, men and women.

Fanon is particularly interested in miscegenation and passing. He devotes a great deal of his text to analyzing the responsibilities of the black man and the failures of the mulatto woman. It is important to note that, for Fanon, the black person is always male, the mulatto is always female, and the female mulatto always desires to pass for white. The black man, meanwhile, desires not to pass, but to *be* white. Fanon tells us that “out of the blackest part of my soul, across the zebra striping of my mind, surges this desire to be suddenly *white*” (63). Fanon’s treatment of this “desire” is fundamental to the reading of his text; it is not white skin that is desirable, but the privilege of normalcy. Fanon desires to present himself without skin, to *be*, rather than to *be black*; he is “uneasy and anxious indeed. An anxious man who cannot escape his body” (65). The black man is in crisis, but where does this leave the black woman?

The black woman desires to be white. She does not desire the complicated whiteness of a body without skin; she desires to marry a white man, to have white children, and to live a generally “white” life. Fanon captures the role of the black woman here, when he says: “I shall attempt to grasp the living reactions of the woman of color to the European. First of all, there are two such women: the Negress and the mulatto. The first has only one possibility and one concern: to turn white. The second wants not only to turn white but also to avoid slipping back” (54). For Fanon, the mulatto is the black woman and she desires to pass as white. She will do this by marrying the white man, and thereby sharing in his race privilege. Where the black man desires to achieve whiteness through self-accomplishment, the mulatto will sell herself into marriage in order to achieve a lesser condition of passing. She desires this at all costs. Fanon says that:

Something remarkable must have happened on the day when the white man declared his love to the mulatto. There was recognition, incorporation into a group that had seemed hermetic. The psychological minus-value, this feeling of insignificance and its corollary, the impossibility of reaching the light, totally vanished. From one day to the next, the mulatto went from the class of slaves to that of masters.

She had been recognized through her overcompensating behaviour. She was no longer the woman who wanted to be white; she was white. She was joining the white world. (58)

Reminiscent of Davis, and his argument for the insularity of the African American experience of passing, Fanon situates his argument in essentialisms and absolutes that should warn the reader of his true intentions. Fanon writes of the mulatto woman as an object of contempt, a failure of the black race in the face of English colonialism.

Fanon is using racial passing in much the same way that Davis sees it. While Fanon does not restrict his population to those located specifically in the United States of America (with no consideration for the origins of the black people he essentializes, whether they be from Africa, the Caribbean, or descended from American slaves, etc.), he does make serious claims as to the desires of the mixed race woman to pass for white. Both Fanon and Davis thus locate their arguments in a tradition of racial passing, that of the black person who attempts to pass for white. This usually means lighter skin colour, physical features that blur racial categorizations, and the ability to cross class distinctions (Fanon would say education, but I believe that the topic is a little more open than that). Of these three methods of passing, I find the movement between social classes to be the most relevant “moment” of passing.

I now look for a new definition of passing, one that allows for complexity and opens up the discourse for an inclusive view of the diasporic performances required in order to negotiate a “multicultural” world. I turn to Valerie Smith’s article “Reading the Intersection of Race and Gender in Narratives of Passing” in the hopes of finding a version of passing that offers more than the narrow definition that Davis offers on the subject. Smith says:

I locate passing within the discourse of intersectionality because although it is generally motivated by class considerations (people pass primarily in order to partake of the wider opportunities available to those in power) and constructed in racial terms (people describe the passing person as wanting to be white, not wanting to be rich), its consequences are distributed differently

on the basis of gender (women in narrative are more likely to be punished for passing than are men). (43)

Smith both localizes and globalizes her argument by recognizing that while there are specific differences in the manners in which different groups pass as others, it is intrinsic to her argument that passing is about privilege and access to the benefits of a higher social class. Class here is the key. Class privilege is granted to certain races, religions, ethnicities, nationalities, etc. In other words, there is a real benefit to passing as *other*, which may most likely be white, but not necessarily.

Passing as desire for access to power, in light of class considerations and intersectionality, is the crux of my argument. I have demonstrated that there is a tradition of passing that follows from black to white, a tradition that simply does not apply in today's world as "the narrative trajectories of classic passing texts are typically predetermined; they so fully naturalize certain givens that they mask a range of contradictions inherent within them" (Smith 43). Passing from black for white, what I term *traditional passing*, follows in the wake of racial fear. Traditional passing reminds us that race is fluid and impossible to define biologically. There are no physical characteristics that occur in all the people of one race, and racial ambiguity is further enhanced through mixed parentage. Passing demands that we re-think race as a biological fact and *class passing* (a version of passing that recognizes its roots in that of class privilege) requires that we re-think an ahistorical representation of traditional passing that promotes the conceit that all non-white persons desire to be white.

In Lawrence Hill's novel, *Any Known Blood*, the protagonist Langston Cane V engages in "playful passing" (Harris 370) in his desire to refute the mores of traditional passing. Langston's racial features are ambiguous, which allows him to assume racial identities that are not a part of his parentage. Langston's ability to perform any race presents a flaw in the argument that race is real, rather than a fiction. Langston's

light-skinned black body thus both invokes and transgresses the boundaries between the races and the sexes that structure the American social hierarchy. It indicates a contradiction between appearance and 'essential' racial identity

within a system of racial distinctions based upon differences presumed to be visible. (Smith 45)

Langston attempts to use playful passing as a tool in his efforts to destroy the myths of traditional passing; he poses as any race other than white in order to confuse and complicate ideas of racial passing. Playful passing acts on the individual level. Langston passes as Algerian to get a job as a speech writer, the requirements of the position are that “only racial minorities need apply” (*Any Known Blood* 2) and Langston decides to “test [his] theory that nobody would challenge [his] claim to any racial identity” (*Any Known Blood* 2) in another attempt to undermine traditional passing with playful passing. Langston’s efforts do not prove to anyone (except, perhaps, himself) that race is an ephemeral construct that is perpetrated by and for a normalized social hierarchy that privileges a few at the expense of many. In the end, playful passing is a useless pastime that disturbs no one except Langston’s father.

Langston is at odds with his family, his race, and himself. Passing, for Langston, is symptomatic of a larger problem of racial misidentification. Langston recognizes the absurdity of race, as a social category without real biological basis, without understanding the ramifications that race has as a class category. Playful passing, for Langston, always involves passing as another marginalized group – he refuses to pass for white. However, to his father, Langston’s passing is always a betrayal. After he finds out about Langston’s role of office Algerian, he says “but you haven’t done it yet. What’s the matter? You ashamed of me? You trying to pass for white?” (21). The condition of the passing, that it is playful rather than traditional, matters not to Langston Cane IV. Passing is a political act that reflects a need in the individual attempting to pass, a need for access to a race (class) not his own. Langston’s father then laughs,

at his own joke. It was the same laugh I’d heard as a child at countless Sunday breakfasts, when he had told stories of light-skinned blacks trying to pass as whites in the States. Stories of evasion and discovery had always been my father’s favourites. (21)

Here, Langston does not think about passing as a political act. He does not think about what passing means when he chooses a new race for himself, on a whim. It is this

thoughtlessness that makes playful passing a useless tool for re-thinking race. Langston has not yet realized that there is value in accepting race, as well as refuting it, and understanding the difference in both. While race remains arbitrary and ambiguous, it is also a fact of life.

When Langston begins to attend a black church in Baltimore, he feels the need to reinforce certain aspects of his racial features. He does not desire to pass for anything but black; he wishes to be considered one of group. Langston says: "I was glad that my hair was longer than usual, and combed out into an afro, because I didn't want to be seen as a white visitor. I wanted my race clearly marked" (119). Here, Langston desires to be raced as a black man. He is invested in marking himself with the attributes of blackness, as it is required to gain acceptance into the group (or so he thinks). It is throughout his time in Baltimore that Langston learns that race matters, even if it does not. He needs to negotiate the in-between space of the ambiguity of race and its social ramifications, in order to claim himself and his family (for whom race has always held importance). At the end of the novel, Langston, his aunt, his partner, and his friend visit a museum. Langston's aunt claims that they are family and "the clerk looked at her. The clerk looked at us. There was Yoyo, who was as dark as dark got, and a good deal darker than Mill. There was Annette, who was of a medium complexion, and then there was me – Zebra Incorporated" (400). Choosing family becomes more important than choosing race; Langston learns to identify himself first through his family and second through race. It is the gaze of the clerk that forces him to consider race as real, but the support of his family that makes that stare familiar and negligible. *Any Known Blood* acts as counter to traditional passing by working through playful passing (as a stunted counter-performance of race) and into a more complex understanding of race. Narratives of traditional passing work on,

the combination of these points – passing as betrayal, blackness as self-denial, whiteness as comfort – [and] has the effect of advocating black accommodationism, since the texts repeatedly punish at least this particular form of upward mobility. (Smith 44)

Hill's novel uses this idea of passing as a jumping-off platform, in order to demonstrate that race is a complicated issue that is both real and not, all at the same time. At the end of the

novel, the group is passing as family, in spite of race. Rather than a novel complicit in promoting ideas of hegemony by punishing the transgression of passing, *Any Known Blood* is a novel that celebrates the fact that we are all passing as one thing or another, whether we desire it or not.

Returning to the idea of class passing, I would like to revisit Valerie Smith's argument that passing is the desire for social mobility. There are layers to society: class is one of them, and passing is the attempt to negotiate these layers; it is the pursuit of acceptance and privilege. Smith says (of characters in narratives of passing):

I would suggest [...] that their conditions are productive sites for considering how the intersectionality of race, class, and gender ideologies are constituted and denied; not only do these bodies function as markers of sexual and racial transgression, but they signal as well the inescapable class implications of crossing these boundaries. (57)

Smith reminds us that passing is an act of intersectional transgression. Race is one way of passing, but it is informed by all other social categorizations, and the end result may be the transgression of simultaneous class boundaries. Think back to Fanon's considerations of the mulatto as female: her gender requires that she desire to pass and thereby betray the black race. However, I do not wish to limit my subject to the act of traditional passing, as this narrows the imagination and implicitly requires that passing move from black to white.

Shani Mootoo's short stories from the collection *Out on Main Street* all look broadly at acts of passing that involve, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and nationality. I would like to take a closer look at the title story as an example of an opening-up of narratives of passing to include different ways in which people attempt to pass as other, in order to attain class privilege. In this story, the unnamed protagonist reflects on the negotiation of performances she (and her partner, Janet) must attempt as they walk down a crowded street. It is the confluence of outsider objectification and performative passing that make this narrative an intersectional experience of difference and social cognizance.

The protagonist and Janet are immigrants from Trinidad, now living in Canada. They are a lesbian couple who desire to find themselves in the (racial, ethnic, cultural) groups of Canada; they yearn for acceptance and solidarity. However, this yearning is

complicated by difference and, as a metonymic representation of diasporic politics of identity, “going for a outing with mih Janet on Main Street ain’t easy!” (48). Trinidad is comprised of four major racial groups: Indian, black, white, and Chinese. Two of these classifications are by colour, and two are by nationality. This is just one example of the ways that race invents itself through contradictions and misnomers. Suffice it to say, Janet and her partner are Indo-Trinidadian, they call themselves Indian and identify as such both racially and culturally (if not nationally). The protagonist reminds us that the “reason we shy to frequent [Main Street] is dat we is watered-down Indians – we ain’t good grade A Indians. We skin brown, is true, but we doh even think ‘bout India unless something happen over dere and it come on de news” (45). The protagonist recognizes that there is a disjunct between the Indian of the Caribbean and the Indian of India, but this is not her opinion. This is an immigrant’s recognition of her own status, a reinterpretation of events as a result of new information. The protagonist has discovered her own lack, after moving to Canada and becoming witness (through the eyes of others) to her own failure as an Indian. She tells us: “I used to think I was a Hindu *par excellence* until I come up here and see real flesh and blood Indian from India. Up here, I learning ’bout all kind a custom and food and music and clothes dat we never see or hear ‘bout in good ole Trinidad” (47). The protagonist is corrected as she walks down Main Street, taught the right names for foods that she thought she knew, told the correct pronunciation for words that she believed she could say. The protagonist and her partner are told, all down Main Street, that they are inadequate as Indians.

The protagonist and her partner desire group solidarity, but they lack the prerequisite amount of culture needed to inform them of their roles. So, instead, they perform the act of Indian, by keeping conversation to a minimum and letting their brown faces speak for them instead. However, nationality is not the only barrier to acceptance. A lesbian couple, so the protagonist warns, will attract attention no matter how quiet you keep yourselves. She says:

Walking next to Janet, who so femme dat she redundant, tend to make me look like a gender dey forget to classify. Before going Main Street I does parade in front de mirror like a strong-man monkey I doh exactly feel right

and I always revert back to mih true colours. De men dem does look at me like if dey is exactly what I need a taste of to cure me good and proper. (48)

The protagonist worries about her performance as a homosexual woman, walking with her partner, while simultaneously worrying about her performance as an Indian (-Caribbean) woman walking through an Indian (-Indian) neighbourhood. She is an Indian passing for Indian, a lesbian passing for gay. She needs to announce these identities in the way she holds herself, in the way she walks, because otherwise there will be confusion. However, this desire to pass as oneself becomes invalidated when the protagonist and her partner attempt to pass for heterosexual, in their efforts to establish a rapport with the Indians they meet in a shop.

A group of men walk into the shop and start harassing, not only the protagonist and her partner, but another group of women. Suddenly, there is cohesion in the room, a group solidarity formed in the bonds of womanhood; recognition that women everywhere must help each other to overcome the mistreatment of all at the hands of some men. The protagonist says that “de atmosphere in de room take a hairpin turn, and it was man aggressing on woman, woman warding off a herd a man who just had dey pride publicly cut up a couple a times in just a few minutes” (55). It becomes important to be recognized as part of the group, even though it requires the suppression of the lesbian identity. The bridging together of the women is dependent on the fact of their similar sexualities, and the protagonist and her partner are willing to pass as heterosexual in order to participate in the group. This does not last, however, as two other women walk into the room and “all cover get blown. If it was even remotely possible dat I wasn’t noticeable before, now Janet and I were over-exposed” (57). The two women are friends of Janet and her partner, another lesbian couple, and they are not interested in passing as heterosexual. They perform their homosexuality loudly and disrupt the grouping of the women in the room. Passing, here, is nigh impossible, because no one can decide what they are passing for. The desire for class passing is infected with the loneliness of the immigrant, as she moves through a re-identification process in a diasporic world.

Smith links passing with class privilege, saying that the act of passing is a response to a desire for moving upward in a normalized social hierarchy. I would like to consider

that passing also relies on a certain amount of status already, as “racial fluidity, ambiguity, comes with privilege” (Senna qtd. in Arias 449). The ability to move oneself from one social class to another (indeed, into a more privileged space) is itself a luxury. The ability to choose is not one that all people have. In an interview with Claudia M. Milian Arias in *Callaloo*, Danzy Senna looks at the ways that race and passing are conceptualized and says that “when we talk about race, we are not talking simply about physical features or racial ancestry, but about racial fantasies and about what a person, given their appearance, their language, their financial status, their gender, represents in the national imagination” (449). Economy and status are both elements that are tied irreparably to race, and thereby passing. If I am to interpret the ways in which passing works in a diasporic world, then we must consider what race *is*.

Danzy Senna’s first novel *Caucasia* is the story of two sisters of mixed racial background, one of whom looks white and other black. The novel questions the role of race in identity (by the self and others), for if appearance is not the root of race then what is? Senna draws from her own experiences as a mixed-race person for this book. She has a sister who looks black, and she herself is often considered white. In her article “Passing and the Problematic of Multiracial Pride (or, Why One Mixed Girl Still Answers to Black,”²⁴ Senna examines those issues of her own life that affected the ways in which she wrote race (and race politics) in *Caucasia*.

Passing, for Senna, is complicated. She tells us how she has gone through different periods in her life where she felt to be passing as black or white, both identities feeling artificially constructed as she had to perform them for an audience that could not immediately identify her race. When thinking of traditional passing, Senna says that “in those situations where I was silent in the face of racism, where I ‘passed,’ I felt a part of me die. I was witness to the things that white people say when they think they’re alone” ([*Black Cultural Traffic*] 84-85). Senna also reminisces about herself and her sister attending an Afrocentric school as children. She remembers being ostracized for not being

²⁴ This is a revised version of the article “Passing and the Problematic of Racial Pride” that I quote in Chapter Four. There are subtle differences in the two versions, so I have simply referenced the title of the journal/book in-text to clarify.

black enough, despite her every effort to perform the role of a black child. It is only as she and her sister move on to a more “traditional” school setting (meaning a school with a white majority in population) that Senna is finally able to pass for black, in retaliation to racism against her sister. She says:

At a young age I made the decision that if the kids around me were going to call my sister a nigger, they had better call me one too. I feel now that this choice was not so much one between black and white, but one between speech and silence. It was how I learned to find my own voice, rather than letting my body speak for me. ([*Black Cultural Traffic*] 85)

Here, Senna reminds us that racial performances can, in fact, be acted as well as imposed. Senna chooses to use her voice in conjunction with her body’s implicit passing, in her effort to undermine popular assumptions about race and racial identities. Senna says that “race has never been about blood, and it has never been about reason. Rather, it has to do with power and economics and history. One of my concerns about the multiracial movement is that it buys into the idea of race as a real, biological category” (Senna 85). The multiracial movement is of ongoing concern to Senna in her article; she examines what it means to be mixed race in a political sphere that enjoys static identities of easily discernible social classes. Miscegenation becomes, like passing, an enabler of complex thoughts about race, or just another way of supporting a system predicated on the marginalization of the majority, to the benefit of a few.

Thinking about identity, and the construction of the self through racial performances, Senna says that,

ultimately I’m not so fixated on what I call myself or anybody else calls himself or herself. I think that identity politics (and all questions of racial pride) can be a form of narcissism, and at their worst are a distraction from real questions of power. ([*Black Cultural Traffic*] 86)

Senna simply wants to complicate the issue as much as she can, in order to disrupt the ways in which race is constructed “traditionally.” Race becomes transformative, and passing becomes political. If passing is both a privilege and the desire for privilege, then it must be either imploded or exploded, as a means to deconstruct race and reinvent it as a new self-

indulgent fiction. Reflecting on her work and her life, Senna comes to the realization that “[her] multiplicity is inherent in [her] blackness, not opposed to it. To be black, for [her], is to contain all colors” ([*Black Cultural Traffic*] 85). We are all passing, perhaps not in the sense of traditional passing, but everyone seeks to better their own condition. Even if all you seek is access to a group that denies some part of you, then you are passing. Passing is the act of self-denial; it is the fact of mis-identifying (racially, ethnically, nationally, sexually, etc.) and it exists in all layers of life.

In chapter one, I began my discussion of performance and race by looking at Judith Butler’s theories of performativity. I would like to remind you of these theories here, specifically her notion regarding the state of the body, as it interprets itself and recognizes interpretation from others, and the idea that there is a disjunct between the identity we have internally and that which is put upon us externally, which I referred to earlier as a “performance of skin.” Again, on this topic, Butler says “if [the reality of the gendered body] is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse” (*Gender Trouble* 185). I would like us to think about the ways that this “public and social discourse” work in conjunction with our interior selves, the selves that are *passing* whether we desire them to or not. Public perception meets with our internalized ideas of self, but the two rarely reflect each other accurately. We are all passing because we are never always exactly what we seem: the performance never stops and the audience will always misread something.

I would like to turn, for a moment, to Amy Sara Carroll’s piece called “Interracial” (please see *figure 2* on the next page). I must say that I really enjoy this piece. The words “like two chicks passing in the girl...” resonate for me; they remind of Butler’s disjunctive self. The girl(s) in the picture is (are) divided from her(them)self(selves). The face the world interprets is different from what she sees in herself. Her mixed identity is ruptured somewhere along the skin. The phrase “two chicks passing” stays with me, haunts me. Passing as what? As who? Are they passing each other? The phrase is reminiscent of the famous poetic line: “two ships passing in the night.” I imagine a brief encounter, a short momentary touch of selves (through the skin, the “interface”). Like Mootoo, Carroll’s “two chicks” are passing for something other in the attempt to pass for themselves.

"Still struggling with the boxes people
try to put me in" . . . resisting the labels



(Figure 2)

This interracial girl represents a performance of the skin, a performance that disrupts the mind from the body and creates a static between the person who is seen and the person seeing herself. She is passing, but passing as what, passing whom, passing where? She is passing because she is passive. She is stagnant. She is a two-dimensional picture that reflects thoughts on race and race mixing without being active, because a static picture is by nature non-moving, passive. It is passivity that I have been challenging throughout my thesis, and the acknowledgement of race as fiction is the performance that I pose as a creative obstruction to this passivity.

We are all passing. We all contain all colours. Race is an imaginative construct that permeates the world (a result of British colonialism) and degrades us all. Davis would have us believe that "those who agonize over whether to pass are already mostly white genetically, and perhaps entirely in some cases. Thus, the struggle is mainly about permanently leaving the social status category, the community, that is called black" (143-144), but we know that his "genetics" is a lie, a falsity to give race a legitimacy that it would not have otherwise. Davis slips biological race into a discussion on the social aspects of passing in the effort to hedge a guess on the anthropological tendencies of the mixed race person. Passing, for Davis, is a unique experience; it is felt in no one else but in the

African American. I disagree. I say that we are all passing, that we cannot help but pass. I say that race (alongside other social categories that marginalize and minoritize) forces us to pass for something other. Smith reminds us that intersectionality is the main consideration in acts of passing and I say that it is this very intersectionality that requires all social acts to be acts of passing. Mootoo's protagonist is forced to pass as herself, and so are we all passing in our own performances, perhaps successfully, perhaps not. Senna must rewrite her body because it attempts to pass for something she has no desire to access. It is only through agency, through the rewriting of bodies, that passing becomes something other than passive. Passive passing is letting others write our bodies. It is enabling Butler's disjunctive skin to disrupt our sense of selves. By passively passing, we all become "two chicks passing." We are all passing, but that does not mean that we cannot confront passivity.

Conclusion:

Passing on Passivity and Choosing Agency in Performance

I have ended this project with a chapter on passing. I have attempted to use passing as a means to examine the nature of racial performance, and thereby to demonstrate the active condition of writing oneself a racial identity rather than having that identity (passively) written onto one by an audience. Passing, in this way, becomes an act of empowerment, a method of using race to rewrite oneself. However, this leads to the question: what happens to those who choose not to pass, who are written as something other than themselves, despite their desire to remain as they are? In order to think about this, I would like to return to Minelle Mahtani's work on multiethnic women in Toronto, Ontario. In her article "'I'm a Blonde-haired, Blue-eyed Black Girl'," Mahtani creates a geographical survey of women that charts mobile paradoxical spaces, where she "explore[s] a new spatial metaphor to map out the experience of multiethnicity as described to [her] by participants in this study" (178). Here, Mahtani seeks to discover the ways in which multiethnicity can work to create an active participation in racialization. Through a series of interviews, she attempts to create a new language to describe the experiences of multiethnic women.

What I find most fascinating about Mahtani's work is her focus on the active component to multiethnicity. Her mobile paradoxical spaces reflect a layering of racial subjectivities that occupy multiple social, physical, and psychological locations. Juxtaposing her own study with that of popular conceptions of multiethnicity, which (erroneously) claim a disjunction of identity in most people who have a complicated racial background, Mahtani looks at the reality of a group of women who choose an active (rather than passive) method for racializing themselves. She says:

for these women, senses of identity were not described as rootless or homeless. Instead, they referred to notions of movement, or moving through categories, and developing scattered senses of belongings with a diverse range of collectives. ("I'm a Blonde" 187)

Mahtani notes that most women of multiethnic background will be written, by those around them, as something other than themselves. She says that this too is a mobile gesture, through which, over time, multiethnic individuals might go from black, to white, to South Asian, to Iranian, all depending on social conventions and expectations. Someone might also be consistently identified by those around them as one race, though they self-identify as multiracial. These undesired “passings” are inevitable, as social conventions regarding race desire a conclusive method of identification, a singular identity.

Mahtani suggests that these undesired passings are resisted by most of the women she interviews through the desire for activity, rather than passivity. She says:

instead of concentrating on the absolute resolution of identity (as if identity is something that must be resolved), these studies of multiethnic identity conceive of identity as something which is continually shifting and changing. They allow for the possibility that the individual may have concurrent affiliations and multiple, fluid identities with different social groups. (“I’m a Blonde” 176)

In my last chapter, I have attempted to articulate this space for activity, as it exists as a tool for the self-empowerment of racialized people in a racialized world. I have noted that our identities are written onto us, whether this coincides with our perceptions of ourselves or not, but that race is (in a mixed race world) fluid and mobile. It is through an active performance of ourselves that passing begins to matter less and less. Indeed, passing then moves into the realm of passive participation, a reality that is no truer than the fiction that is race.

I am trying here to delineate the differences that I see in agency and action, as these concepts relate to passing and passivity. Not all passing is passive; in the last chapter I tried to show that passing can be a performative act for some, but a debilitating state for others. The key to understanding the difference is agency. Through action, subjects gain agency into their own racial performance; they get to choose whether or not they pass, and if they are passing, then they choose what to pass *as*. Action denotes desire, a movement that results from the desires of the mind. Performance must always be active to ensure racial

agency, to ensure the resistance of a passive passing (where identity is written onto the individual, rather than written *by*).

My project has sought to examine the role that race plays as a fiction written as performance and so I have ended with the study of passing, as it encapsulates a certain element of performance that (has historically and continually) grasps the imagination. I would like now to remind you that it is the languages of passing, race, and miscegenation that truly give power to the performative power of the fiction of race.

In describing her childhood, Danzy Senna tells the story of growing up white, with a sister who obviously looked black. In her article “Passing and Problematic of Multiracial Pride,” she explains that she began her academic career at an Afrocentric elementary school. She goes on to say that she felt left out and marginalized during her time there; that “the black community of those heady times told me that I’d better identify as black, but that I would never be black enough. It was the ultimate double bind” ([*Black Renaissance*] 76). Senna continues by saying that she and her sister eventually changed schools, ending up at a school where the majority of students were white and her “sister was the outcast amidst a group of racist Irish kids from the projects known as Whisky Point. Rocks and racial slurs were thrown at her on a regular basis” ([*Black Renaissance*] 76). So, in this new environment Senna sees the ways in which environment shapes and changes identity, as she goes on to say that she, “on the other hand, had never been more popular” ([*Black Renaissance*] 76). This story leads Senna into contemplating the first time the fact that she *passed* as white. Whether intentional or not, Senna feels the burden of this passing, as it exists to the detriment of her sister who was bullied for her inability to pass as anything other than a minority race.

Senna says that “in those situations where I was silent in the face of racism, where I ‘passed’, I felt a part of me die” ([*Black Renaissance*] 76). Again, it is the inactivity, the passivity of passing that allows the performance to control the individual. It is her inability to speak her multiraciality that haunts Senna’s memories. Speech, language, and performance come together to create a possibility of action, the potential to rewrite the fiction that others have written onto us. Therefore, I would like to say that it is the power of language that produces the ability to create one’s own fiction. This fiction allows for a new

method of self-identification in order to re-racialize oneself into a multiplicity of active identities.

Lawrence Hill also tells the story of his childhood, in his article “Zebra: Growing up Black and White in Canada.” In Hill’s story it becomes obvious that it is the language of race that shapes and defines early understanding of one’s own racial identity. To demonstrate this, Hill begins by describing his own reactions to highly charged racial slurs and his changing attitude (throughout the course of his life) towards language and the power of words. The story opens:

as the light-skinned son of a Black man and a white woman, I felt safe from the word *nigger* during my boyhood. Nobody aimed it at me, in my first ten years. And when I did hear it used generally, I did not feel singled out.

Somehow, it didn’t apply to me, I recognized it as an attack on a whole race of people – including my father, his parents, and their ancestors. But years would pass before I saw myself as belonging to that race. (“Zebra” 44-5)

For Hill, passing is a matter of inaction. His refusal to acknowledge one of the most highly charged words in the English language is a direct result of his own inability to consider himself black. There is no recognition here that his father’s race has anything to do with him, because his skin performs otherwise. Hill’s childhood self exists in a state that separates his racial identity so distinctly that language cannot penetrate.

Hill goes on to describe the language that his family used to describe race, most specifically his race, in his childhood household. Speaking of his father, Hill notes that race was never truly addressed for himself or his siblings. They were never told that they were black or mixed race; they simply learned to identify themselves as whatever they chose to be. Hill says, of his father, “he made only one type of reference to my race, and it was in jest. Occasionally, he called me a zebra, which I thought quite funny. Within our family, it became a private expression for people of mixed race” (“Zebra” 47). Again, Hill demonstrates, in his childhood self, a tolerance for racially charged language. I remind you that in the introduction to this thesis, in which I listed several terms used to describe mixed race, “zebra” was listed as a term usually considered to be offensive. Hill’s easy acceptance of this word relies on a state of racial innocence (or ignorance), a condition founded on the

fact that a person has little to no experience with racism. Here, it is the easy acceptance of language that demonstrates Hill's easy *passing* in his home of Oakville, Ontario (a community where 18.43% of the population are visible minorities and 11.66% of visible minorities are black, according to Statistic Canada's 2006 census). Language here is key to understanding the stages that Hill goes through in coming to understand his own performances as a racialized man.

As he grows, as a person and as a writer, Hill becomes sensitive to the ways in which language shapes the world around him. He starts to question terms that he had always accepted, no longer passively passing but actively using words to write himself (and his mixed race) through his novels, his articles, and the performance of everyday. He returns to the word "zebra" in order to reconcile his previous relationship with words to his current position:

"Zebra", of course, sounds faintly ridiculous. I wouldn't use the word in a serious conversation, but I do prefer it to "mulatto". Indeed, "mulatto" offends me more than "nigger". To say "nigger" is to say, "I hate you because you're Black". At least I know where I stand. But "mulatto" reduces me to half-status – neither Black nor white. ("Zebra" 50)

Here, Hill learns that it is not the refuting of words that enable a (multi) racial consciousness, but the exercising of choice in the use of words. Hill decides, through an informed, mobile, paradoxical, multiethnic viewpoint, which words he will use to describe himself and thereby writes himself a new fiction of identity.

Finally, I would like to reflect on Shani Mootoo, and analyze the ways that she thinks about words. In her article "This is the Story You Must Write," Mootoo also revisits the past. She remembers the ways that her family (in Trinidad) used language and words, most specifically the ways that her family shared some stories but not others. She opens with the story of her schoolteacher, during a lesson on English colonialism and indentured Indian labour in Trinidad. While explaining that England sought plantation workers after the abolition of African slavery, the teacher goes through a list of nationalities that were recruited (before the Indians) to work. Mootoo recalls the teacher's reply to a question about why the Germans were not able to work the plantation: "'too hot.' But the smirk

accompanying her smile was instructive.” The teacher goes on with the lesson, telling of the Chinese workers next. However, Mootoo says “stories, stories, yes, but what lingered in our minds was that smirk. It seemed to say ‘look deeper’.” This smirk undercuts the stories, gives lie to the official history. Mootoo’s writing itself is like this smirk. She is always calling to us to “look deeper.”

Mootoo’s article goes on to trace the curiosity of an adult who enjoys family stories. She desires to write her family, to write stories of them. She pursues her grandmother, and asks her all of the questions that were never answered in her youth. However, her grandmother dies having promised her the story that she has always wanted: that of how her family came to Trinidad, for though there is no other explanation, everyone asserts that their ancestors were never indentured workers. Her question is finally answered by her Auntie Jess, who succinctly tells her that her grandfather had arrived on the island as an indentured labour, but was dismissed when people found out that he was a holy man. The answer is slightly anti-climactic. However, Auntie Jess is not done. She says, “But I can tell you stories. Do you want to hear? Did you bring a notebook? Because one day you will want to put these in a book.” And so Mootoo learns more of her family than she thought possible.

Auntie Jess’ stories enlighten Mootoo; she learns from this woman that there are some stories that are told and some that are not. The stories that Auntie Jess tell are of her father and her sisters. One of her sisters leaves the island to go the America, where she marries a white man. This begins a personal reflection on Mootoo’s part:

how much I missed of the story that followed I don’t know, for I thought of Richard, the White boyfriend I had when I was 15. My parents, when they found out about him, were livid, and forbade me to see him ever again. Whether it was because he was White-skinned, or because I was 15 (he, 16) and should have had my mind on Shakespeare and algebra, not boys, I was not really sure.

Auntie Jess’ stories create an echo in Mootoo, a sensation of familiarity though she has not heard these stories before. Her own untold stories, that of a lost love perhaps, haunts the story that she hears. Mootoo remembers her parents’ expectation that she be a “nice *Indian*

girl” and I feel the smirk of the author behind that line, knowing that, though she refers to herself as Indian,¹ she is indeed of mixed race (equal parts white and Indian).

Mootoo now remembers being back in Canada and receiving a package from her mother with news clippings inside. Inside the package, there are articles of an old woman, “Tant,” sharing her life, most specifically sharing stories of her past with Mootoo’s Uncle Sankar. Mootoo says:

I flipped quickly through the clippings and found another celebrating Dora “Tant” Ferguson’s 91st birthday. In the photo in this clipping she was being hugged by one of her daughters. This daughter was, clearly, a mixed race woman, with skin fairer than her mother’s, high cheekbones and bright, smiling almond-shaped eyes. This daughter, my Uncle Sankar’s daughter, would have been in her sixties.

Mootoo finds it strange to find, in a package sent by her mother, proof of Uncle Sankar’s affair with a black woman. She finds it even stranger that her mother would have sent her these articles. These are the stories untold of Mootoo’s life, her family, her past, and her present. It is the stories that are left out that strike Mootoo, as she considers the official stores of her family; stories of racial mixing and a love that “Tant” has no shame of. I still see the smirk in Mootoo’s writing of these untold stories. That she, as a mixed race woman, is slowly allowed to learn of these untold stories of miscegenation, for the sake of her own writing, reads a deeper meaning into her article. Though she might be a nice, *Indian*, girl, Mootoo shares much with these untold stories, and they may be crucial to reading the stories that she shares with the world now.

I have chosen these three authors as the focus for my thesis because they all share an obsession with language, a recognition that words matter. Senna, Hill, and Mootoo have grown, from childhood, to appreciate the potential that words offer, for good or bad. These authors write themselves into their fiction, and by doing so they also write who they desire to be (and be seen as). It is this power that enables them to draw their own conclusions about themselves: fictions of identity that rely on their own fictionality in order to work.

¹ Much the same way that Hill and Senna often refer to themselves as black.

Speaking of language, I would like to return to Mahtani for a second. In the article I have discussed, she uses specifically strategic terms to categorize the women she interviews. She uses the term “multiethnic” rather than “mixed race” or “multiracial” because she wants to move us away from thinking about race in concrete and substantiated ways. On the topic, she says:

The term “race” is problematic and I employ the phrase somewhat suspiciously. Given that “race” is a social construction, and that it is an “arbitrary system of (dis)organisation”, I believe that the notion of “race” can obscure, and sometimes even prevent, promising epistemological and pedagogical analyses of racialised experiences. (“I’m a Blonde” 173)

Throughout this project, I have (consciously) chosen to use words that position “race” as central; subcategories, such as “mixed race” or “multiracial” are used strategically to remind you that, though I posit race as a fiction, that does not mean that it does not have a *real* impact on our lives.

I have tried to bring about a project that is interested in demonstrating that race is a fictional concept with real repercussions in the world. I have also tried to demonstrate that race is a performative activity, and that this performance can be active or passive. Indeed, it is through the active participation in this performance that racialized subjects gain agency in their lives and the ability to “write” their own racial identity. I have attempted to accomplish all of this through an examination of the role that racial mixing plays in the performance of race. I admit, though, that I have done this by using the very language that structures race itself and sets it up as incontrovertible fact. However, I believe in the power of words and that a responsible reading by an audience will generate more thought through the highlighting of these biased uses of language than by ignoring the popular terms in use today. By naming “mixed race” or “miscegenation”, I hope that I am illustrating my point, rather than undermining it. In her book *Miscegenation*, Elise Lemire puts it thus:

So whether the particular word “miscegenation” is used today is irrelevant. The idea that there is a special kind of sex that is “inter-racial” is just as much a racist social fiction as the idea that there is something namable as “miscegenation”. (147)

She sees the words as irrelevant so long as there is no responsible reading of subject.

Language gains power in use, not in censorship.

Race is a fiction. However, this does not make it unreal, merely untrue. Fiction has power; words have power. I believe this as strongly as Senna, Hill, and Mootoo, and I wish to leave you with the thought that the true strength of language is in its performance.

Strategic use of language in a mobile paradoxical space allows for a reconceptualizing of the individual by the individual. This reconceptualizing is a racializing that empowers, rather than a racializing that disempowers. It is a writing of one's own fiction.

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