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**Little house on Gold Mountain:
A micro-analysis of racialization and colonialism in children's
historical fiction**

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ABSTRACT

Grade three students in the Ontario education system learn about “pioneers” to satisfy the requirements of the Social Studies curriculum. Historical fiction can be used as an addition to the curriculum, and may offer children a way to learn about, and perhaps even identify with, Canada’s past.

The purpose of this study was to problematize two works of historical fiction that have been used in an Ontario classroom: *Little house in the big woods* (Wilder, 1932), and *Ticket to Curlew* (Lottridge, 1992). These stories present racialized, colonial depictions of European resettlers (i.e. “pioneers”), and perpetuate *preferred* or *dominant* discourses about history (Hall, 1993; Furniss, 1999). Presented as a “micro-context” (Cohen, 1992), this discussion utilizes Snead’s (1994) analytical categories (i.e. *marking*, *mythification*, and *omission*) to understand how these works of juvenile historical fiction are racialized through the use of “colonial narratives” (Furniss, 1999).

As an alternative to colonial, dominant readings of history, Paul Yee’s *Tales from Gold Mountain* (1989) offers a collection of short stories, which focus on the possible experiences of Chinese-Canadians. While the characters in Wilder’s and Lottridge’s books are implicitly and explicitly marked as “white,” Yee’s characters are Chinese, providing readers with non-European Canadian history. Providing alternative narratives is important because, as some literature has shown, students may emotionally or physically disengage from the educational system if they feel that they are not given, nor are they encouraged to seek, *negotiated* or *oppositional* (Hall, 1993) readings of history that might reflect their identity, or life experiences (Dei, Mazzuca, McIssac & Zine, 1998; James, 1994/1995).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND (pp. 1-14)

- 1.1 Purpose of the study
- 1.2 Laura Ingalls – Interrogating a childhood fantasy
- 1.3 'Little house' – A cultural trope
- 1.4 Sam – The Canadian re-creation of Laura
- 1.5 Disrupting the discourses – *Gold Mountain*
- 1.6 Why this study matters

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW (pp. 15-44)

- 2.1 (a-c) Historical fiction
- 2.2 Colonial discourse and culture in Canada
- 2.3 Racialization – The social construction of 'race'
- 2.4 'Common sense' racism – Exclusion and inclusion
- 2.5 Racism and gender
- 2.6 Conclusion

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY (pp. 45-53)

- 3.1 Studying racism in a micro-context
- 3.2 Critical discourse analysis
- 3.3 Definition of terms
- 3.4 The adaptation of Snead's methods

CHAPTER 4: *LITTLE HOUSE IN THE BIG WOODS* (pp. 54-75)

- 4.1 The story
- 4.2 Gendering the Little house
- 4.3 Marking
- 4.4 Omission
- 4.5 Mythification: The myth of the frontier
- 4.6 Concomitant inclusion
- 4.7 Conclusion

CHAPTER 5: TICKET TO CURLEW (pp. 76-92)

- 5.1 The story
- 5.2 Gendering Curlew
- 5.3 Marking
- 5.4 Omission
- 5.5 Mythification: The myth of the frontier
- 5.6 Concomitant inclusion
- 5.7 Conclusion

CHAPTER 6: TALES FROM GOLD MOUNTAIN (pp. 93-117)

- 6.1 The stories
- 6.2 Gendering Gold Mountain
- 6.3 Marking
- 6.4 Omission
- 6.5 Mythification: De-"mythifying" the frontier
- 6.6 Concomitant inclusion
- 6.7 Conclusion

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION (pp. 118-124)

REFERENCES (pp. 125-131)

Language, we are now beginning to see, does not simply record our experience, it actually shapes it, structuring it in a way that determines what we see and do not see, what we know and do not know, who we are and who we are not (Berlin, 1990, p. 9).

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Historical fiction has the potential to be an excellent way for students to become aware of, and interested in, events of the past. But when popular texts repeatedly depict versions of the same story, the representations can become *naturalized*, internalized, and indeed, taken for granted as 'fact' (Furniss, 1999; Hall, 1993; McLean, 1995; Stanley, 1998). These internalized 'facts' become a society's "selective tradition" or its "official story" even though they provide only a "partial vision of history" (Williams, 1977, p. 116). Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) infer that these selected historical traditions were invented by colonial governments to promote nationalism and to legitimize colonialism. Elizabeth Furniss (1999) claims that the colonial monopoly over historical 'facts' creates and maintains the "colonial culture" in Canada (pp. 3-26). Colonial culture includes racialized and racist discourses about the past and about the imagined 'pioneers' (Furniss, 1999, pp. 11-26), or resettlers. Racialized or racist discourses become naturalized in part, through "popular literature of pioneer life" (ibid, p. 54). As Furniss shows, schools are one institutional domain through which fictionalized accounts of history are delivered. In the absence of critical examination of the colonial contents of curricular materials, the effect is the institutional omission of alternative narratives that may include the histories of those generally marginalized or omitted by the colonial culture.

In this study, I propose that books can perpetuate what Stuart Hall (1993, p. 98) describes as the *dominant-hegemonic* reading of history.¹ The dominant messages about resettlers are infused with discourses of the colonial culture. Students who are being exposed to historical fiction should be given the opportunity to engage with alternative historical texts, and should also be encouraged to read dominant discourses in *negotiated* or *oppositional* ways (Hall, 1993, pp. 102-103). If not, students may perceive fictional accounts of history as 'the-way-things-really-were,' and thus be given a narrow, colonial, and perhaps an even racist account of the past. In addition, those who do not identify with, or accept the dominant reading, and are not encouraged to engage with alternative readings, could possibly feel excluded from the idea of being Canadian.

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Philip Cohen (1992) describes one way of tackling racism as an intervention (p. 95). While one type of intervention takes place on a macro-level, challenging the underlying structural or institutional effects of racism, the other type of intervention takes place on a micro-level, aiming to interrupt the "circulation" of racist ideas and to "introduce alternative story lines" (Cohen, 1992, p. 95). In a micro-context then, this study is aimed at three works of historical fiction for young people: two that represent the narratives of a colonial culture, and one that disrupts these discourses and offers an alternative way of telling and teaching history. More specifically, I have examined the ways in which these texts variously enact or challenge colonial discourses

¹ A detailed explanation of dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings according to Hall (1993) is available in section 2.6.

through their dominant or preferred readings, and how these discourses racialize their characters, and by extension, the people of the world.

Examining racializations in historical fiction is important for the following reasons: 1) it forces one to question the acceptance of what has been taught as 'the truth' in the colonial culture; 2) it becomes possible to imagine a more diversified narrative about the past; 3) it challenges the idea of Canadian membership – who is truly Canadian and who is not – creating “a richer understanding of the past,” (Stanley, 2000, p. 79) and thus, of the present, and finally; 4) one can begin to look for disruptions in the dominant narratives offered in texts.

Three works of historical fiction for young people have been analysed to expose some of the textual strategies that are working to racialize history through the dominant colonial discourse. Each of the texts reflects a similar time period in history (i.e., 1850-early turn of the century), and each tells a story (or stories) about post-Aboriginal 'settlement.' I chose Laura Ingalls Wilder's, *Little house in the big woods* (1932), a wildly popular work of historical fiction, because of its impact on me as a child, and because of how it affected my perception of the Ontario curriculum as a pre-service teacher. The “Little house” series has become a cultural “trope” (Payne, 1996, p. 542) representing all that is imagined about the so-called resettlers. That is, the little house and its inhabitants are widely recognized and accepted as icons for all that is good about the 'settling' of America. Next, I selected Celia Barker Lottridge's (1992), *Ticket to Curlew*, because, not only has it won the Geoffrey Bilson award for historical fiction for young people (1993) and the Canadian Library Association Book of the Year Award (1993), but it was also part of the same unit as *Little house in the big woods* in my practicum classroom. *Ticket to Curlew*

represents how the colonial Little house discourse is being perpetuated even now in a Canadian context. Finally, Paul Yee's (1989), *Tales from Gold Mountain: Stories of the Chinese in the new world*, was chosen precisely because it offers an alternative historical reality from the first two texts. *Tales from Gold Mountain* disrupts dominant readings of history.

With these three texts in mind, this study has attempted to answer the following research questions: 1) Do the narratives in *Little house in the big woods*, *Ticket to Curllew*, and *Tales from Gold Mountain* perpetuate colonial cultural discourses, and if so, what linguistic strategies are at play to produce them, 2) To what extent and in what ways are the story topics, characters, and settings in these works of historical fiction racialized; that is, do they authorize discursive positions that normalize and represent the possible experiences of some Canadians, while excluding, marginalizing, or essentializing the experiences of others, and, 3) Do these texts offer pedagogical moments that can be used to disrupt colonialism and racism?

1.2 LAURA INGALLS – INTERROGATING A CHILDHOOD FANTASY

Laura Ingalls, the young protagonist in Wilder's Little house series, was one of my most cherished fictional girls when I was growing up. She held special appeal because she also happened to be the main character in one of my favourite television programs, *Little house on the prairie* (Friendly & Landon, 1974-1998). I can fondly remember a time when supper was eaten almost every night in front of this show. It was the time of day when most families were watching the news, but for me it was the time I got to share with my mom. Laura's nickname, 'Half-Pint,' was

lovingly given to her by her Pa – the man I secretly fantasized would meet my single mother and, falling in love with her, become my Pa in real-life. I longed to live on a farm where there were always outdoor adventures, but even staying in the house making butter with Ma seemed great. I laughed when Laura put apples in her dress to impress a boy; felt scared when a pack of wild dogs trapped the Ingalls' children in the barn; and, cried when Laura's sister Mary went blind. Her life seemed to epitomize the 'olden days' when the people were wholesome and you could count on your neighbours to bring you a fresh pie when times were tough.

By the time I entered the teacher education program at the University of Ottawa in 1999, *Little house on the prairie* (Friendly & Landon, 1974-1998) was only a lingering childhood memory, filed somewhere in the back of my mind. As a pre-service teacher I was on to bigger and better things – like teaching the 'pioneer' unit to a grade 3/4 class at an alternative school. I could hardly believe it when one of the novels chosen by the classroom teacher to accompany the unit was *Little house in the big woods* (1932) by Laura Ingalls Wilder. The novel that I had loved, with the girl I had longed to be, was now part of a unit I was expected to teach, and suddenly Laura with all her appeal was fresh in my mind again.

I went home that night anxious to reread an old favourite, thinking how fortunate I was to have the chance to teach something I knew so well. There had been so much about Laura Ingalls that I had admired and that made it easy for me to love her: she had two parents (something I wanted); she was my age (between 6 and 10); and, she was from a place that seemed familiar, yet romantically in the past. However, later that night after finishing the text, I felt disappointed that the book was not all I had imagined it to be. Perhaps it was me that had changed, but I now saw

Laura as just a regular little girl living on an isolated farm in the American mid-west; Pa as just an average farmer who played the fiddle on cold winter nights; and, Ma as a 'housewife' whose character had very little to say about anything, other than washing, mending, and baking.

This was the family I loved? This was the literature I grew up on? This is what I was expected to teach to a group of children at the turn of the twenty first century? This was a story written *by* an American woman, *about* the American mid-west, featuring an all Euro-American cast – and this was the book I was given to teach a *Canadian* 'pioneer' unit? In addition, I was to teach Lottridge's (1992), *Ticket to Curlew*. This work of historical fiction turned out to be virtually the same story as *Little house in the big woods* but in a Canadian setting, and with a male protagonist. My exposure to anti-racist pedagogy at University made me newly aware of the shortcomings of a unit that focused only on a portrayal of the past in which everyone was 'the same.' Yet, when it came to looking for material that would be more interesting, accurate, and diverse, to share with the young students, I didn't have the experience to know where to begin. In my mind, Laura Ingalls was no longer a girl I envied, but instead she had become a symbol of my perceived inadequacies of the resources available to me.

1.3 'LITTLE HOUSE' – A CULTURAL TROPE

My disappointment in Laura Ingalls led me to the present project, in an attempt to expose the inadequacies of using such an exclusivist text as the sole means of teaching history. Harmon (August, 2001) in a recent article in pop-culture magazine, *Biography* described Laura Ingalls Wilder as, "the woman who would

come to define the American pioneer experience for children all over the world" (p. 89). Likewise, Cullinan (1989) claims that the Little house stories "have become *the best loved historical fiction today*" (p. 460; italics mine). If Laura Ingalls is the defining character of "the pioneer experience," then her life in the Little house saga can be understood as a cultural trope, or as a metaphor (Payne, 1996, p. 542) of a larger cultural phenomenon – namely, popular conceptions of resettlers. Furniss (1999), in her study of colonial culture in Williams Lake, B.C., found that the colonial resettlers' story has been retold so often, that this way of imagining history "comes to dominate common-sense understandings of Canada's past" (p. 54). The colonial discourse perpetuates racism, "a fascination for the exotic, moral superiority [of] Western society," and the depiction of Aboriginal people as "noble savages" (ibid, p. 13). Furniss quotes Said saying that there are a "variety of discourses that are fundamentally racist in nature, being centrally concerned with the construction of...difference and inferiority, and that have specific effects of power" (p. 12). In other words, language and discourse are not necessarily neutral (see James, 1995, p. 32; Morrison, 1992): what we say can have profound effects on the world.

The opening line of *Little house in the big woods* (the first in Wilder's series) begins, "once upon a time, sixty years ago" (Wilder, 1932, p. 1), which places the story in the 1870's. I used this book, on my associate teacher's suggestion, in a millennium classroom – over a hundred years after the story is meant to take place. It is clear then that (at least in this circumstance) popular perceptions and teaching of resettlement times (i.e., the beginning of European colonization) haven't changed that much over time. If an elementary school teacher in the year 2000 is still using the book as a teaching aid, it seems true that *Little house in the big woods* (Wilder,

1932) has indeed established itself as one of the main 'pioneer' narratives, and has become one of the dominant readings of history. Furniss (1999) states that a main narrative will be established over time by the ideas of the dominant culture, and will be represented in "everyday life, family life, schooling, the media, organized religion, literature, and the arts" (p. 14). The idea of a dominant culture was established by Marx in the nineteenth century, and implies that there is a "set of common-sense, taken-for-granted truths about the nature of reality in the social world" (Furniss, 1999, p. 12). The settings and characters in the "Little house" series have endured over time, and are so widely accepted and recognized that they have embodied the dominant cultural idea about the so-called realities of the past. The Little house trope has established itself as one of the main narratives to represent "the" resettlement experience.

In the Little house series, a strong foundation has been laid upon which common ideas about the past have been built. This foundation has contributed to the main narrative representing European settlement: the land was empty (Stanley, 1998; Furniss, 1999), wild and untamed, and; the land would remain empty if Europeans (like the Ingallses) had not transformed it into something more hospitable. The Little house discourse, or the dominant narrative about resettlement, implies that the Europeans belonged on the land and became the true owners of it. This conclusion can be drawn from the fact that within this discourse, the possible experiences of the European resettlers are taken for granted. Any mention of 'others' such as Aboriginal people tends to be racialized, represented in a stereotypical way, or excluded altogether.

The racialization of the past is problematic because it normalizes the experiences of certain people, and excludes others. In the case of the Little house, these others are European resettlers. Racializing the past also leaves little room for a diverse realm of possible experiences by those who also lived on, or supposedly 'settled,' the land. The Ontario Curriculum (1998) states that children in grade three will learn about "pioneer life" to satisfy the social studies requirements for "heritage and citizenship" (p. 19). It is plausible then that the first exposure a child going to school in Ontario might get to history is through the grade three pioneer unit. If *Little house in the big woods* (Wilder, 1932) represents the novels that children are given to accompany a social studies unit, then the main narratives that children are taught about resettlers and the past are being perpetuated. The perpetuation of racialized, dominant narratives raises issues about the picture that is being painted of Canadian history because students are exposed to a limited set of experiences, often American ones at that. Teaching only one possible 'pioneer' experience perpetuates false notions of who counts as a Canadian, and who belongs in this country. It portrays the European colonial experience as normal and any other experience as unimportant, or simply invisible.

1.4 SAM – THE CANADIAN RE-CREATION OF LAURA

The fact that the Little house story is situated in the United States seems to be very consequential in the context of a *Canadian* classroom. Is this American text still used because there are no Canadian alternatives? Or perhaps the "Little house" is such an educational tradition that, given the financial and curricular constraints on teachers, it is an easy selection to accompany the "pioneer" unit. However, sixty

years after the telling of life in the “big woods” with the Ingalls family, Lottridge (1992) tells a similar story from a Canadian location in *Ticket to Curlew*. Sam and his family leave Jericho, Iowa for a better life on the “newly opened-up land in Alberta” (Lottridge, 1992, p. 9). Once in the “new country” (ibid, p. 8), Sam notices that there are no signs of inhabitants: “no houses...not even a ploughed field” (ibid, p. 13). Like *Little house in the big woods*, there is little mention of the first Canadian inhabitants, nor of those who came before Sam and his family, and there is a strong feeling of ‘settling’ on untouched land. At one point, Sam’s Pa claims, “I guess you could say that this land belonged to the buffalo and Indians back then...but it’s ours now” (Lottridge, 1992, p. 21).

The idea that the “Indians” once existed but are gone now, and that what was once “theirs” is now “ours,” is another way that racialized exclusions get played out in the Little house discourse (being perpetuated in *Ticket to Curlew*), and contribute to the dominant reading of resettlement. There is no explanation of where the Aboriginals were when Sam and his Pa arrived on the “new” land, what happened to them, or why the land now belongs to the Europeans. Similarly, the fact that Sam and his Pa arrive in Curlew on the Canadian Pacific Railway is taken for granted as a normal and natural part of the Canadian landscape. That people came to Canada ahead of Sam and his Pa to build that railway is never mentioned. It appears, through Sam’s eyes, as if the Euro-American folks were the first ones to ever set foot on that land – regardless of the fact that there is a railroad running through it, and buffalo skulls lying around everywhere. Sixty years after *Little house in the big woods*, the popular colonial narrative still exists.

1.5 DISRUPTING THE DISCOURSES – *GOLD MOUNTAIN*

While colonial narratives may not have (metaphorically) emerged from the big woods, there are alternatives to this popular way of portraying history. The eight short stories in Paul Yee's (1989), *Tales from Gold Mountain*, offer a wonderfully rich alternative to Euro-colonial versions of retelling the past. According to some, there "may have been as many as six or seven thousand Chinese in what is now British Columbia in the early 1860's" (Con, Con, Johnson, Wickberg, & Willmott, 1982, p. 14). These (mostly) men, intent on the gold rush and the building of the railway, travelled from China to the United States and Canada (Con, et al, 1982, pp. 13-14). Set in the frontier times of the early nineteenth century, Yee's collection of stories "draws on the real background of the Chinese role in the gold rush, the building of the railway and the settling of the west coast" (Yee, 1989, jacket). Yee describes how during the gold rush years, North America was referred to as "Gold Mountain" by the Chinese (1989, p. 63).

The stories about Gold Mountain, says Yee, are relevant to Canadians and Americans because both countries experienced their gold rushes at the same time, and both countries established firm anti-Chinese immigration laws that forced the Chinese into "Chinatowns" (Yee, 1989, p. 63). Yee has written this book in small part from his own personal childhood memories as a third generation Chinese-Canadian, and in large part from his research and reading as an historian, in an effort to evoke the North American imagination, and to recognize Chinese-Americans and Chinese-Canadians as "pioneers" (Yee, 1989, p. 63; Yee, as quoted in Hancock, 1990, p. 344).

1.6 WHY THIS STUDY MATTERS

Laura and Sam's experiences in the mid 1800's and early 1900's certainly have the potential to teach us about history. Although fictional, these accounts say something about that day to day life might have been like in the past, and about how society has changed between then and now. But these types of books offer a particular representation of history that seems to stand for all experience. Yet, why do varied representations of history matter? Why not leave the past alone and move forward into the future? Margaret Atwood (1996), popular Canadian author, asks this question by simply stating: "by taking a long hard look back-wards, we see ourselves" (p. 27). Placing ourselves is a two-fold project. On one hand we owe our own personal history - who our ancestors were, where they came from, what experiences they had. Yet on the other hand, we have our social history (from which ever nation that might be), which is inextricably mixed with collective memories (Atwood, 1996; Morrison, 1992; Pajaczkowska & Yi, 2002). The act of "placing ourselves" in history is important to our perception of where we fit in culturally on the historical time-line, and consequently, where we are in the present. And, as Canadian children's author, Heather Kirk points out, "reading about the past is especially important in Canada "where many children are apt to feel rootless, because they come from another country, or because in their daily lives they see little or no visible evidence of the past" (1996, pp. 8-9). Often in literature, a sense of national and personal identity can be formed.

Author, teacher, and Tor, Toni Morrison (1992) states that, "cultural identities are formed by literature" (p. 39). If society does not represent

'us' textually, then placing ourselves becomes even more difficult. For students, the effects of not being able to "place themselves" can result in serious disengagement from the educational system (see Dei, Mazzuca, McIssac, & Zine, 1998; Henry, 2000; James, 1994/1995). Carl James (1995), in *Multicultural and anti-racism education in Canada*, shows that in Toronto, 'blacks' and Aboriginal students fare poorly in general and basic level high school courses, and are more "at risk of failing and/or dropping out" (p. 36). Likewise, when authors and researchers Dei, Mazzuca, McIssac & Zine (1998) interviewed 'black' high school students in Toronto they found that there was an over all feeling that school wasn't about them – that to truly succeed, they must conform to the dominant school culture, in this case a Euro-Canadian culture. The consequence for the students at this school who felt excluded, marginalized or "streamed" (Dei et al, 1998) by the system was that they literally, "dropped-out." Similarly, James in his article, *I don't want to talk about it* (1994), described the elementary classroom experiences of a 'black' child who was a minority in a mostly Euro-Canadian school. This child's teachers described him as "disengaged," "emotionally flat," and as "a difficult nut to crack" (James, 1994, p. 26). Yet, when asked, the teachers confidently claimed that racial exclusion from the school experience was not a factor in this child's failure to achieve (ibid).

The accomplishments, realities and histories of non-European students in these Ontario classrooms were ignored or dismissed by the teachers, leaving students (at least) feeling bored and excluded, and (at worst) dropping out. Through James' example of the emotionally disengaged child, it is tacitly understood that if students want to be accepted by their teachers, they should exhibit the normal, expected behaviour (e.g., engagement and obvious emotions). In fact these

normalized behaviours are also racialized – the ‘black’/non-European students in the schools portrayed by James (1994) and Dei et al (1998) were the only ones represented as disengaged, not the ‘white’/European ones. Any deviance from the normal, expected behaviour was not seen as, or considered to be, inadequacies of the curriculum, teachers, schools, or society at large. Rather, deviances in behaviour at these schools were passed off as the fault of the students. This phenomenon supports the claim that there are preferred ways of being and living, constructed by the discourses of the colonial culture. Those who buy into the dominant discourses have more social power than those who don’t or can’t. If textual codes are the pieces of language which make up larger discourses, which then in turn become naturalized and taken for granted, then feeding students socially constructed, racialized accounts of history in mass quantities could produce a population that all buy into preferred reading – a reading which is exclusivist, inaccurate, and racist.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the three research questions named in the introduction, there are two different types of literature that are essential to this study. The first part of Chapter 2 (sections 2.1-2.1c) offers an examination of what type of material is available pertaining to historical fiction for children. I look at what historical fiction is according to those who write about it, how it can be used in classrooms, and finally, what material is available in contemporary journals, books and edited works about Canadian historical fiction for children. The second part of Chapter 2 focuses on the main concepts that have been operationalized in the analysis of the three works of fiction in this study. Section 2.2 looks at the concept of colonial culture and how it is manifested in Canadian works of fiction; section 2.3 examines the key idea of racialization; 2.4 describes what 'common sense' racism is; 2.5 shows the links between 'race' and gender, and how this link fits in to the present study; and, 2.6 discusses various ways of "reading" texts according to Hall (1993).

2.1 HISTORICAL FICTION

There are many differing opinions regarding what the purpose of historical fiction should be, what it should be about, how it should be written, and how much importance should be placed on the 'facts.' Some authors place more importance on dates, times, and places in defining historical fiction. Joan Blos portrays historical fiction as either, "a) a work of fiction in which the story takes place twenty-five or more years before its publication date, or b) a work of fiction set two or more generations before that of the author so that the author may be presumed not to have had any direct knowledge of it" (1993, p. 14). Heather Kirk quotes Jane Yolan

saying: "for children, an historical novel is about anything that happened before they were born" (1996, p. 11). The definitions given by these authors of historical fiction for children revolve around dates or periods of time, but differ considerably from several other authors who, when defining historical fiction, focus mainly on the concept of history.

Pam Conrad (1993), for example, disregards dates and describes historical fiction merely as a "truthful setting for an illusion of non-truths" (p. 34). Like Conrad, Margaret Atwood (1996) claims that historical "fiction is where individual memory and experience, and collective memory and experience come together" (p. 3). Also Waterston (1992), in her section on historical fiction, quotes Russian novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn saying that "literature...[is] the living memory of a nation" (p. 149).

Defining historical fiction for this study then, is not a simple task. Judith Robertson, points out in her essay on teaching difficult material to students, that traditional definitions of historical fiction are "problematic" because they "mark the value of historical fiction as one that emanates from the 'truth'" (1999, p. 277). The 'truth' is at best an elusive concept, guaranteed to be slippery and questionable, and always reflective of the values, experiences, memories, and influences of the person telling it. In this study, historical fiction will refer to a telling of the past that can be proven to be somewhat historically accurate. The events may not necessarily have occurred, and the people may not necessarily have existed, but the story must be convincing as a possible reflection of the past.

2.1A SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT HISTORICAL FICTION

There are three main but separate types of literature in which to find information pertaining to historical fiction. The first two are: 1) reference journals which list published works, and; 2) journal articles that review, analyse, or critique historical fiction. The third type of literature is the books and edited collections that describe or feature chapters *about* children's historical fiction as a genre, and/or thoroughly analyse specific stories.

The first type includes volumes which record the names, authors, and dates of published texts under several different headings, for example: books about nature, books about magic, and historical fiction. The information is also organized by age group (e.g., children 6-10; young adult, etc.) and language (e.g., French and English). A few examples of these volumes are: *Canadian Material for Schools and Libraries*, *School Library Media Quarterly*, and *Children's Book Review Index*. These journals are meant mainly for reference purposes and only offer very brief summaries of the books, if summaries are provided at all. Some however, such as *School Library Journal* and *Bulletin of the Centre for Children's Books*, will feature specific texts each week or month and provide more thorough reviews.

The second type of literature featuring historical fiction is the journals that are dedicated to reviewing and analysing specific works of juvenile fiction, including historical fiction. A few examples of these journals are: *Canadian Children's Literature*, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, *Great Plains Quarterly*, *Language Arts*, and *English in Education*. These journals are not, however, aimed specifically at reviewing historical fiction, and therefore, will only occasionally review an historical text among the other types of fiction. In addition, most of these journals are

American, so that reviews on Canadian works of historical fiction are scarce (a more in-depth look at Canadian material is available in section 2.1c).

The third type of literature pertaining to historical fiction is the books and edited works that are dedicated completely to critique of specific texts, such as Ann Romines' (1997), *Constructing the little house: Gender, culture and Laura Ingalls Wilder*, which beautifully and thoroughly reviews the entire Little house series (volumes 1-8), and was consequently used extensively in this study. There are also edited books which contain chapters about specific works of historical fiction, such as Robertson's edited work entitled, *Teaching for a tolerant world (grades K-6): Essays and resources* (1999). This edited text contains, along with academic essays, critical analyses of children's books such as, *A handful of seeds* (by Monica Hughes), and *Number the stars* (by Lois Lowry).

All of this literature contains many authors who describe what historical fiction is, and what benefits there are in using it in a classroom setting. Because this information is quite varied, section 2.1b is devoted to a discussion of the uses of and trends in historical fiction, and section 2.1c is devoted to a discussion about Canadian historical fiction in the context of this study.

2.1B USES OF, AND TRENDS IN, HISTORICAL FICTION

Much of the information in the various types of literature describes how historical fiction can contribute to the learning of history in educational settings. It is important to mention these contributions because the premise of this study is that historical fiction is used and will continue to be used in classrooms. To this effect,

three major trends in the literature emerged during the course of this study and are outlined in the following paragraphs.

The first point of agreement in the literature is that historical fiction can teach students the “concept of citizenship” (Epstein, 1993). The study of history itself involves tracing the development of a nation over time and the life circumstances, contributions and struggles of its citizens. Thus, looking at history can bridge the gap between past and present, and can “not only situate people and societies in and across time; [but it can] also situate them in space” (Epstein, 1993, p. 3). Historical fiction then, “can mediate between two periods – the one of which it tells, and the one in which it is read” (Blos, 1993, p. 16). By looking at national history, students may begin to ‘see themselves’ as part of a social time line, and as part of the ‘national identity,’ thus generating feelings of citizenship. Students may also gain an understanding of the people who have come before them, giving them a sense of the cultural diversity that contributed to the creation of Canada.

The second pattern in the literature shows that historical fiction can offer something to the educational experience that textbooks can not. Several studies have been done on the use of textbooks in teaching history. Ken Montgomery, for example, critiques historical texts being used in Canadian classrooms (1997/2001). Less information, however, is available in the existing literature that describes the benefits of using fiction in conjunction with teaching history. Whereas textbooks tend to emphasise “names, dates, facts, and treaties” (Blos, 1993, p.11), fiction “serves well as a vehicle to convey historical characteristics” (Bannister, 1980, p. iv). It is possible that “students may identify more closely with characters in the life-like situations created in novels than they do with typical textbook material” (ibid, p. iv).

Historical fiction may allow students to develop sensitivity to the characters and their situations or conflicts (see Epstein, 1993). Although the goal of historical fiction is not necessarily to teach the “facts” (Blos, 1993, p. 11), it would serve well along side the traditional history texts. Textbooks can be very valuable as educational resources, but fiction can bring the past to life. For example, after reading several works of historical fiction, a young girl in Levstik’s 1989 study revealed her personal connection to the stories by saying that, “even if it weren’t all true, it could have been true...it could have happened like that” (p. 116). Thus for this student, the past had been brought to life in the present, something that a textbook perhaps could not have done.

Thirdly, those who write about historical fiction agree that it can be the “instrument by which students acquire or expand an interest in history” (Bannister, 1980, p. iv). Fiction invites readers to speculate on, and challenge the retellings of the past, and to see situations from different perspectives (Levstik, 1989). Blos (1993, p. 16) asks the question: “how may we offer students incapable of reading outmoded or archaic works (or unready or not willing to do so) the immediacy of historical experience that literature provides?” Her subsequent answer to this question is: through historical fiction. Given the potential of historical fiction to bring the past to life in the reader’s imagination, it is no wonder that teachers find it useful as an educational tool.

2.1C CANADIAN HISTORICAL FICTION

Although Agnes Machar published *For king and country* in 1874 (Waterston, 1992, p. 148), historical fiction written specifically for young readers is said to have

arrived on the Canadian *educational* scene in the 1890's, in an attempt to expose students to the concept of citizenship (Epstein, 1993). But since 1874, says Waterston (1992), "the function of historical fiction has changed" (p. 148). Whereas most of the stories once had male protagonists, now many of the characters are female; whereas many of the stories once centred on patriotism, some stories are now troubling those patriotic notions (Waterston, 1992).

Waterston claims that "writers of historical fiction for young people fantasize about the past in order to develop a complex sense of national heritage" (1992, p. 149). In doing so, authors of historical fiction are preserving their own versions and memories of history and the imagined past. If schools and teachers, as I witnessed in my practicum, have been using historical fiction as an educational tool for over one hundred years, it seems pertinent that studies be done on the value of using historical fiction in Canadian classrooms. The purpose of this study is not to look at the value of historical fiction per se. Rather, assuming it is used, the purpose is to ask the given research questions: how are colonial discourses enacted in the texts, how are racializations at work in the stories, and what possibilities for discursive disruption are available?

As noted, the existing body of literature that academically analyses historical fiction written for children is somewhat limited in a Canadian context, and this is an issue of concern. There are many excellent Canadian award winning works that have been, and are still being written, but formal, academic analyses of these texts are scarce. Perhaps this is due to the general devaluation of children's literature and elementary education (see Robertson, 1999). Often, works of historical fiction get labelled in the reviews or journals as something else. For example, books like

Lunn's (1980), *The root cellar*, which deals with Canadians in the American Civil war, and Culleton's (1983), *Spirit of the white bison*, which talks about Euro-Canadian slaughtering of the bison on the prairies in the 1800's, have been labelled by some as "fantasy" (Kirk, 1996, pp. 9-10) rather than as historical fiction. This critique matters because both of these stories are loosely based on historical events, but due to the label of "fantasy," the potential historical value of the material could be overlooked. It is also difficult to find reviews on historical fiction when the books are not being labelled as such in the journals.

One of the welcome exceptions is *Canadian Children's Literature* (published in Guelph, Ontario) which featured two special volumes (83/84) in 1996 which are specifically dedicated to Canadian historical fiction for children. In these volumes, at least two articles talk about Paul Yee (one specifically about *Tales from Gold Mountain*, 1989) and one briefly mentions Lottridge's, *Ticket to Curlew* (1992). The material in these issues covers a wide range of historical topics such as, Canadian heroes, the war of 1812, Chinese and Ukrainian settlement in Canada and Canadian historical fiction as a genre.

The following sections explore the second part of the literature pertaining to this study; sections 2.2-2.5 look at the main concepts contributing to this study – discourse, colonial culture, racialization, common sense racism, racism and gender, and "readings" – and attempt to explain how and why these concepts are relevant in an analysis of historical fiction for children.

2.2 COLONIAL DISCOURSE AND CULTURE IN CANADA

Discourse is more than just language and how we use it: it is a way of constructing meaning while talking about something, and represents a history of dominant ideas (Hall, 1996a, p. 201). Stuart Hall (1996a) describes discourse as “the production of knowledge through language” (p. 201). He goes on to discuss Foucault’s take on discourse (and its genealogy) which shows that simply by using a particular discourse, one necessarily implicates oneself in that discourse (Hall, 1996a). For example, by entering into the discourse that Hall (1996a) has named “the west and the rest” (pp. 185-190) – whether I agree with its implications or not – I automatically place myself in that statement as part of “the west.” Therefore, I assume I am the subject in this discourse and not the object of it. Implicit in this, is the power that I give myself as the “west” because I can identify myself in relation to the “rest.” This example shows that discourse itself gives its users power – the power to identify and label ‘self’ in relation to or against ‘others,’ and hence to position bodies in relation to a discourse (i.e., discursive positions).

Discourse has the power to influence, even create, knowledge. It also makes evident the subjective and objective positions that are available to consumers of information (such as that available in institutions and media, etc.). In the Ontario curriculum for example, popular and institutional discourse about ‘the pioneers’ influences what students will learn. The subject positions that are available in the curriculum are either the white European resettlers, or the Aboriginals. Nowhere is there mention of African-Canadians or Asian-Canadians for example (see Ontario Curriculum: Social studies grades 1-6). If readers of such information self-identify as neither Euro-Canadian nor Aboriginal, they may not relate at all to the content being

given. Colonial culture tends to establish discursive positions which normalize 'white' Europeans and marginalize 'others.' The concept of self-identification through discursive positions is a significant concept in this study, and will be more adequately addressed later on. As will be shown, students who do not identify with, or see themselves in school curriculum have the tendency to disengage (emotionally or physically) from the educational establishment.

Young (2001), in *Postcolonialism: An historical introduction*, states that colonialism, unlike imperialism, which is the emergence of an empire for "ideological as well as financial reasons," is based on the development of an empire for settlement or commercial purposes (p. 16). Colonial settlement then, involves the people of one territory moving to another territory, generally motivated by the desire for land and/or wealth. According to Young (2001), the original purpose for European colonization (of North/South America, South Africa, Australia, etc.), was not to "rule over indigenous peoples, or to extract their wealth," but rather to maintain their own (European) culture in a place where they could have a better life (p. 20). The desire to maintain European culture is equated with the desire of "migrants today" – to move somewhere else in hopes of a better future (Young, 2001, p. 20). Young does, however, admit that because these new lands were generally already populated, which was something the Europeans did not expect upon arrival, colonization did often involve exterminating or moving the Native peoples off their land (ibid, p.20). This extermination is seen as simply a 'by-product' of the primary aim which was to settle the previously unsettled land. Whether or not the main objective of colonial re-settlement was to exterminate or to remove Aboriginal people from their land, the European invasion of Canada most often did just that. Donald

and Rattansi (1992, pp. 1-8) imply that it is pointless, and even degrading, to debate over the intentions of the European colonizers when the aftermath of colonization was, and continues to be, so devastating for many people.

Furniss conducted an ethnographic study of the persisting effects of colonialism as seen in the small B.C. town of Williams Lake entitled: *The burden of history: Colonialism and the frontier myth in a rural Canadian community* (1999). She implies that until Canadians and Canadian culture cease to be permeated by the discourses of colonial domination, the concept of *post*-colonialism doesn't really exist (1999, pp. 11-16; see also Hall, 1996b, pp. 242-260). Canadian colonial culture, according to Furniss (1999), is based on what she calls "the frontier myth" (see especially pp. 53-103). The frontier myth consists of two major characteristics: the "presence of racist discourses," and the devotion to "contemplating Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations either through the assignation of difference – negative, neutral or positive – or through the denial of difference" (Furniss, 1999, p. 13). This myth is permeated by European values that work their way into the text and celebrate "expansion, settlement and industry" (Furniss, 1999, p. 53). The frontier myth has "survived as a dominant historical mode," claims Furniss, due to its flexibility (Furniss, 1999, p. 55). That is, the myth has the ability to serve different purposes at different times: to portray Aboriginal people as noble savages, surviving colonial power in one instance, and then celebrating Aboriginal culture in an attempt to downplay colonialism at another (ibid, p.55).

In order to contain the present study, this discussion focuses on the first aspect of the frontier myth: the presence of racist colonial discourses as they manifest themselves and are perpetuated by the dominant culture. Specifically, I will

document how these discourses are perpetuated and retold in fictional accounts of history for young readers. In other words: who is represented or included as a member of Canadian history, society and culture, and who is not. Manufacturing feelings of belonging and membership for certain Canadians produces “psychological and cultural problems regarding power” (Bannerji, 2000, p. 66) – especially for non-members. The concept of Canadian membership fosters the imagined differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Bannerji, 2000; Furniss, 1999; Hall, 1996a).

Author and educator Himani Bannerji personally experienced the effects of Canadian colonial culture, and felt what it is like to be labelled as ‘them’ (and not ‘us’) when she moved to Canada. In *The dark side of the nation: Essays on multiculturalism, nationalism and gender* (2000), she describes her arrival in Canada as feeling like she was walking into an “episode” of a “pre-existing historical narrative” (2000, p. 65) which quite obviously did not include her. She was immediately labelled as an “immigrant,” and as a “visible minority woman” (Bannerji, 2000, p. 64), exposing her to the harsh reality that Canadian discourse around membership still requires certain criteria (e.g., white, European, Anglophone, perhaps even male, etc.). The contemporary existence of racist/colonial discourses (as will be further made evident in the analysis of *Little house in the big woods* and *Ticket to Curllew*), reveal Canada as relatively unchanged from the past – the culture “remains colonial in shape, content, meaning and practice” (Furniss, 1999, p. 12).

Colonial culture then, according Bannerji (and others), is still the dominant culture in Canada, and relies heavily on representations of the frontier myths. The majority of the cultural representations reflect the taken-for-granted dominion of

Euro-Canadians over Aboriginal (and other non-European) peoples. Also infused in the colonial culture is power: social power of the Euro-Canadian institutions (e.g., school, churches, publishing companies, etc.) to represent themselves and not 'others,' and "epistemological" power (Furniss, 1999, p. 15), or the power to determine what people will 'know'. Even the contemplation of non-white/white 'difference' (the assignation of or denial of) is itself an indication of who holds power over whom, and who is privileged at the expense of whom. Not only is Canada's culture still rooted in colonial power, but the very construction of the idea of Canada is infused with colonial discourse.

The concept of the colonial/dominant/racist culture is important in this study because texts themselves are cultural representations (see Furniss, 1999; Hall, 1997; Morrison, 1992; Snead 1986). Texts can (and most often do) serve as sites for the reproduction and distribution of the ideologies and discourses of the dominant culture. Some of the discourses of colonialism are: Euro-Canadians are superior to Aboriginal (and other non-European) people; the Canadian landscape was untamed, unsettled, and "free for the taking" prior to European arrival; and, Aboriginal people can be represented freely as alternately noble or savage. If texts reflect any or all of these colonial discourses, then they are in effect perpetuating colonial, and therefore, racist discourses about history. The manifestation of colonial/racist discourse in text plays out in the way stories, characters and settings are *racialized*. In other words, it is evident who belongs in the story and who doesn't; who has power over whom, and; who the imagined reader is supposed to be (or what discursive positions are set up for the reader), through the subtle codes in the text.

Racializations are implied, and in effect, naturalized to the point of being taken for granted.

2.3 RACIALIZATION – THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF ‘RACE’

More and more widely accepted is the fact that ‘racial’ categories are not biologically or socially acceptable ways of categorizing human beings.² Where physical traits (e.g., skin colour or head size) were once believed an accurate measure of such characteristics as intelligence or personality, it is now known that ‘race’ is a social, human-made phenomenon, rather than a biological or natural construction³. Some may claim that there is indeed empirical proof that specific characteristics (such as intelligence) are related in to physical traits (such as cranium size). But, as Donald and Rattansi (1992, pp. 1-8) point out, it is irrelevant to speculate on the “truth” about the ‘race’ categories because, regardless of the knowledge that such divisions are trivial and inaccurate, the implications of the imagined categories of ‘race’ are very tangible in society, and are accompanied by real consequences for individuals and groups. In addition, Brah (1992) states, “no matter how often the concept is exposed as vacuous, ‘race’ still acts as an apparently ineradicable marker of social difference” (p. 126). What matters most then, is recognition of, and admittance to the consequences and effects for individuals and groups of ‘racial’ categorization.

It is possible for so-called ‘race’ categories to exist because, historically over a continuum, discourse (and therefore culture) has become *racialized*. Robert Miles

² See Brah, 1992; Dei, 1996; Dei et al, 1998; Diamond, 1994; Donald & Rattansi, 1992; Miles, 1989; Snead, 1986.

³ See same as above.

(1989) defines racialization as a process whereby over time, *meaning* is ascribed to human physical characteristics which become socially significant and accepted. Defining a person or groups of people based on their skin colour for example, creates a clear distinction between self (the definer) and 'other' (the defined). Marla Morris (2001) has even said that, "identity formation is *always* in relation with the other" (p. 54, italics mine). The consequence of racialization, and defining oneself in relation to the 'other,' is that the dominant groups, institutions and structures in society benefit from a false conception of what is normal and also preferred. While the dominant groups benefit from a natural sense of belonging, the non-dominant groups (i.e., people who are physically or emotionally disabled, those who are not 'white', the elderly, etc.) often times do not benefit.

The consequence of racialization is that human beings become effectively "essentialized" (Brah, 1992; Sampson, 1993; Snead, 1986; Stanley, 2000) where groups of people are reduced to sets of "knowable" characteristics. Essentialism implies an "ultimate essence that transcends historical and cultural boundaries" (Brah, 1992, p. 126). James Snead (1986), warns that reducing individuals to concepts dehumanizes them, and essentializing people based on racializations causes them to become "social reference points" (p. 7) rather than human beings. It then becomes possible for one to identify the imagined 'other' against the 'self' based on these social reference points. Once someone or some group has been effectively racialized, the division between the 'races' becomes natural and part of the everyday discourse.

Sampson (1993) states that marginalized groups have become essentialized by the discourses of the mainstream, and by the dominant narratives that exist about

social groups (pp. 2219-2230). These essentialized identities have become so natural or normal that they are actually invisible, or taken for granted. The invisible norms over time become taken for fact (Furniss, 1999; McLean, 1995; Sampson, 1993), and silently but pervasively privilege (Apple, 1997; Frankenberg, 1994; McIntosh, 1989) those who belong to the narrative over those who don't. McIntosh (1989) describes privilege as an "invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks" (p. 10) of which the wearer was meant to remain oblivious. In other words, those wearing the knapsacks are the recipients of privilege which is unearned and unnoticed by them.

The concept of, and effects of, racialization are not confined to divisions based on physical appearances, and at times are not confined to human subjects. Timothy Stanley (2000), in his article, *Why I killed Canadian history*, discusses the racialization of Jewish people. While the skin of a person who is Jewish may or may not be white, there are racialized assumptions and stereotypes that could exist purely on the basis of one's 'Jewish-ness.' Although these stereotypes are not based on any real proof of racial difference, they are racialized as if they were, and hence qualify as racism. These racialized assumptions are in line with George Seffa Dei's (1996) critique that "racism...extends beyond the view that skin colour is the only signifier of difference" (p. 25), and thus the only cause of racialization.

To take the concept of racialization even further, some have shown how subjects other than human bodies are also subjected to racializations. Kobena Mercer (1991) states that rap music has effectively been racialized as 'black' and could, one might imagine, connote implications of violence, danger and sexual aggression (see also McLean, 1995 & Snead, 1994). In Snead's analysis of

Hollywood film *King Kong* (1933), he describes how there is a "blatant linkage of the idea of the black with that of the monster" (1994, p. 7). The character King Kong is portrayed as a black (and therefore dangerous, ominous, threatening) ape that is the ultimate intrusion into "white normality" (ibid, p. 8). Another early attempt to code 'black' non-human characters in Hollywood cinema is in Disney's 1941 cartoon, *Dumbo*. Maltin, in his book, *The Disney films* (1973), identifies the five crows in *Dumbo* as "undeniably black" (p. 52). However, in retaliation to controversy over the crows, Maltin (1973, p. 52) states that the crows are:

black *characters*, not black *stereotypes*. There is no denigrating dialogue, or Uncle Tomism in the scene, and if offence is to be taken in hearing blacks call each other 'brother,' then the viewer is merely being sensitive to accuracy.

In response to Maltin's defence of the 'black' characters, I would argue that any type of characterization is *necessarily* based on culturally available tropes of racialization. And, as Polly McLean points out, "stereotypes are not neutral, and it would be a mistake to underestimate their influence" (1995, p. 86; see also James, 1995). Read allegorically, there have to be certain traits commonly accepted as 'black'/African American in humans, which are attributed to the crows, thus allowing the audience to know who is being represented. After reviewing this film as an adult, it was clear to me that the crows indeed are racialized as 'black' due to the way they sing (in "jive" African-American style), dance, and interact with one another. This is not to suggest that the crows are represented in a racist way, rather that they are racialized as African American characters. Not only are the crows clearly racialized as 'black,' but *Dumbo*, the other elephants, and Timothy the mouse, are also racialized as 'white,' even though the elephants are either African or Indian. One racialization exists in relation to the other – the elephants (and Timothy) don't speak

in the “jive” style of the crows, and their mannerisms and accents place them as ‘white.’

The racializing of cartoon characters is significant because popular, cultural depictions of ‘blacks’ typically places non-Europeans in specific character slots: as dangerous and sexually aggressive, as slaves, or as the comic entertainer (see Hatcher & Troyna, 1993; James, 1995; Snead, 1994). The crows are not dangerous or sexually aggressive, and they are not slaves – they are entertainers, lounging around and singing. Although they are not necessarily represented negatively, they are still slotted into an accepted ‘black’ character. Once again, racializing the characters as ‘black,’ can be considered as reducing them to a set of understood and accepted characteristics which might place them in a lower social position (Snead, 1994; see also Furniss, 1999). Furthermore, the racializing of characters as ‘black’ feeds into the typical European stereotyping of “black-evil/white-good” (Snead, 1994, p. 85-86). Based on these few examples, it is clear then, that human bodies and skin colour are not the only ‘signifiers of difference,’ nor are they the only places where racializations take place.

2.4 ‘COMMON SENSE’ RACISM – EXCLUSION AND INCLUSION

Because Canadian culture is so saturated with racialized discourse, racism has become ‘common sense’ (Furniss, 1999, pp. 104-137; Stanley, 2000, p. 82). For some, claims Stanley (2000), ‘common sense’ or racialized accounts of history have ceased to become “stories about the past, but have become the past itself” (p. 82). Schools, being formal institutions which spread ‘knowledge,’ are not exempt

from (and are arguably even build on) colonial/racist practices. These practices have structured the curricula around various inclusions and exclusions of knowledge.

Consequences of racialized exclusion can be seen in the Ontario schools portrayed earlier in this study by Dei, Mazzuca, McIssac & Zine (1998), and James (1994/1995). Students that were not part of the dominant group, did not see themselves as part of the educational landscape, and disengaged from, or 'dropped out' of, the system. The racializing of various groups, colours, backgrounds, countries, etc. means that some students will see themselves represented in a positive way, while 'others' will see themselves in a stereotypical way, or will not see themselves at all. It is necessary for students to feel that "their group experiences [are] acknowledged and validated, [otherwise] they will feel invisible and insignificant and that their differences are irrelevant" (James, 1994, p. 27). In effect, the interests of students who are not part of the mainstream are excluded from the curriculum, the culture of the school, and from teachers' day-by-day choice of resources. And, to quote Stanley (2000), "the term for such exclusions is racism" (p. 84). The cumulative effect of such exclusions from representational field is psychologically damaging, and hence, racist.⁴

The same can be presumed about textual (mis)representations. Popular depictions in texts, for example, (as will be shown in *Little house in the big woods* and *Ticket to Curlew*) typically tend to represent exclusively the dominant, privileged group (i.e., white, middle-class, Euro-Canadian/American). In the school James (1994) described, teachers were still using textbooks from the 1960's and 1970's,

⁴ While moments of negotiation with racialized exclusions are possible, some of the students in these particular studies clearly felt devalued by their educational experiences. Please refer to section 2.6 for examples of negotiated or oppositional readings.

that portrayed “strange” people from other cultures such as: “primitive native tribes, black people living in slums,” and as “prehistoric” people of various colours (p. 26). Perhaps due to economic reasons, there were no other options for teaching history available to these teachers. In the same textbooks, European (i.e., white) people were always “kings, queens, nobles and explorers” (James, 1994, p. 26). This specific historical picture portrays a past where people of any colour were strange or primitive (i.e., unintelligent and savage), in fact pre-history or pre-anything important, and Europeans, regardless of age, gender, religion or class, were represented as normal and civilized. Through these representations, the dominant narrative and preferred reading states that European people are more civilized, whether or not this reflected the true conditions of the times, and that any person who is non-European is naturally inferior – also a racist representation.

Seen in a contemporary context, non-European children could be kept at a historical distance based on textual (mis)representations, while seemingly validating the normalcy of children of European descent. This textual model of history fails all the students who read it, for no one is accurately represented, and extreme social status (e.g., a white king) is normalized in ways that do not reflect reality. Students may perceive this information as ‘the truth’ and as ‘common sense’ because they are learning it at school. As James (1995) clearly points out, “education is not neutral” (p. 32). Schools are institutions that hold immense power over students. Teachers, although constrained by many factors such as budgets, curricula, parents, and culture, are deliverers of ‘knowledge’ and thus have the partial responsibility of selecting what information is delivered to students.

Even more powerful in some ways, is the government regulated curriculum that serves as an educational vehicle for perpetuating the dominant discourses of society. In Ontario, the curriculum guidelines indicate that certain material must be taught at various stages of the educational process. As indicated earlier, the 'pioneers' must be taught to all Ontario students in grade 3. This means that thousands of young people across the province will be exposed to similar material. Unless educators disrupt or ignore the expectations, the curriculum itself does not encourage a wide range of knowledge to be valued in this subject area. Some of the expectations are that students will: "examine the lifestyles of pioneer settlers and their contributions to early communities in Upper Canada," and "investigate the contributions of Aboriginal peoples to pioneer communities" (Ministry of Education and Training, 1998, p. 19). These expectations are centred around the experiences of the European re-settlers – the contributions they made to the Aboriginal communities and the ways that the Aboriginal peoples contributed to their society. The discursive positions available to young students through the curriculum then, are those of the Euro-Canadian colonizer or the helpful Aboriginal.

The curriculum also essentializes 'the' Aboriginal experience as one coherent entity that can necessarily be described neatly by the teachers of this material. Again, essentializing Aboriginal existence is, in effect, racializing their experiences as discourses that can be taught and learned in school. By not suggesting that alternate story lines be told (e.g., the disadvantages of European re-settlement; experiences of non-European and non-Aboriginal people in Canada such as Chinese-Canadians and African-Canadians; ways that Aboriginal communities differ from one another; non-white/Aboriginal resistance to European domination, etc.) and

by not offering different discursive positions, students in grade three are merely being spoon-fed narrow and racialized information about the diverse history of Canada. The 'information' has been socially constructed around ideas of 'race,' difference and common perceptions of 'the past.' What gets taught and what does not, is socially selected to make comfortable the dominant and the mainstream. Through early exposure to 'common sense' ideas about the past, young people may begin to develop ideas about who naturally belongs and who does not (Roman and Stanley, 1997). From an oppositional standpoint however, readers/interpreters of culture (be it representations in media, school curriculum, or texts) have the power to resist the dominant story lines. The concept of negotiated or oppositional readings will be further addressed in section 2.6.

Hatcher and Troyna conducted a study entitled, *Racialization and children* (1993), and their findings offer evidence of the way racializations permeate the "cultures of childhood" (p. 110). This study shows that despite "common sense understandings of childhood innocence," even young children evaluate and consider themselves and their peers according to "popular ideologies" based on racism (Hatcher & Troyna, 1993, p. 109). The British children in this study were mainly 'white' and aged nine to eleven. Despite their age, they articulately describe the kinds of 'racial' insults routinely used against non-white students, such as: "go and have a wash" (p. 115); "blackie" (p. 116); "burnt sausage" (p. 115), and; "go back to your own country" (p. 120). They also express ideas like, "well this is our own country, isn't it...we don't really want that many more [blacks] here, do we, because they take over, don't they?" (p. 112), and; "I think a coloured is more dangerous" (p. 113). Their responses show that the children have strong ideas about who belongs

and who does not; who is dangerous and who is not; and, who has the right to insult whom.

The racialized assumptions of these children have come from somewhere, and Hatcher and Troyna (1993) believe they come from accepted and perpetuated cultural representations of 'blackness' from the broader adult world around them. The responses of these children are extremely significant because the 'common-sense' racism being perpetuated by these children is that of inclusion and exclusion – 'whites' belong and 'blacks' don't; 'blacks' are dangerous and 'whites' are not. This discourse is racialized because the children attach meaning (i.e., non-belongers and dangerous) to 'blacks', and this is done purely on black skin alone. Even at a young age, racialized discourse is so permeated in culture that it is actually 'common knowledge'. The non-black children agree on the danger and nuisance of integrating and including those they perceive to be unlike themselves. These young minds have established multiple positions on 'race' relations, some of whom have already placed themselves in positions of power and privilege over the imagined 'other' which is enacted as racist exclusion. Racialized discourse is unconsciously conveyed in all aspects of society; over time these discourses can become internalized as accepted reality and can have psychological effects on individuals who experience either belonging or alienation (Bannerji, 2000; Brooks, 1987; Pajaczkowska & Young, 1992).

2.5 RACISM AND GENDER

When this study was still in its beginning stages, an analysis of gender in relation to historical fiction did not seem possible, or even relevant in a study about

racialization. However, after reviewing some of the anti-racist literature, I realized that several authors, particularly the ones who also write about various aspects of feminism, analyse racism and gender issues together (see Alladin, 1995; Bannerji, 2000; Brah, 1992; Dei, 1996). A thorough study of gender and the gendering of historical fiction is not possible in the present study. However, the places where artificial constructions of 'race,' and the imposed categories of 'gender,' *intersect* are indeed relevant in this study. This intersection occurs when looking at the creation of Canada. Historically, 'race' and gender provide the foundation upon which Canadian society has been organized (see Bannerji, 2000; Furniss, 1999). Because the texts examined in this study are based on, albeit fictional, accounts of history, there are numerous indications of the ways in which patriarchy and colonialism work together. These specific moments will be outlined in subsequent sections, while the present discussion focuses on the concept of 'racism and gender' as mutually inclusive exclusions.

Bannerji (2000) points out that "the making of Canada was accomplished through the exclusion and marginalization of women" (p. 67). To emphasize this point, Bannerji describes the development of the work force in Canada, and its "attempt to seek able-bodied young men" (Bannerji, 2000, p. 67). This attempt, she claims, "was also racialized...as white and non-white," with permission being given to 'whites' to 'settle' and begin families, while restricting the non-'whites' (e.g., Chinese and Aboriginals) through "head taxes, quotas, and miscegenation laws" (ibid, p. 67).

Those considered the 'best' people (the Europeans) have been selected for many social privileges such as work, political office, lower taxes, and even

citizenship (Bannerji, 2000, pp. 63-86). One of the implications of the Indian Act, is that it "created a zone of non-identity for indigenous women" (Bannerji, 2000, p. 68). This Act ensured that Aboriginal women were excluded from some aspects of Canadian membership. Along with Aboriginal (and other 'non-white') women, Aboriginal (and other 'non-white') men were also subjected to discrimination and racial exclusion. Thus, again according to Bannerji (2000), "in Canada, gender and race have always mediated the overall social production and relations of class" (p. 68).

Mitsuo Yesaki wrote a book entitled, *Salmon canning on the Fraser River in the 1890's*, and in an interview for the *Richmond Review* (2000), he provides an example of 'racial' exclusions in the Canadian work force. Yesaki describes the canneries on the West coast, proclaiming that, "the Chinese men did most of the butchering, Native women filled the cans, and there were a few Caucasian supervisors – and that was it" (Yesaki, as quoted in Bryan, 2000). It is evident then, that non-Europeans, racialized as 'other,' were lumped together as lesser human beings according to the Euro-male criteria – which implies it is preferable to be white, and to be male. Only some Caucasian men had positions of authority; the 'others' were merely low-level workers.

The phenomenon of the 'Caucasian boss' in Canada also highlights a place where gender and 'race' intersect. European men have often been portrayed, and have taken on the role of, the father figure; as patriarchs over women, non-Europeans, and the environment (see Furniss, 1999). Women have accordingly been represented as the 'lesser' gender, and non-Europeans as the 'lesser' of the 'races.' In Ming Chen & Parungao's (1999) essay on the female characters in Paul

Yee's stories, they single out the theme of female patriarchal oppression. In Yee's stories it is often the fathers who decide the fate of the daughters, and the degrees to which the daughters rebel, vary. Likewise, Furniss (1999) describes the "paternal domination of Aboriginal peoples" by the European resettlers (p. 63). The Royal Canadian Mounted Police became an extension of British authority and treated the Aboriginal people as if they needed to be protected and guided, as a father would direct his children (Furniss, 1999, pp. 63-67). In treating Aboriginals and (all) women like children, the superiority of Euro-males is reaffirmed. Non-Europeans and women are reduced (through the colonial gaze) to a childlike state of dependence and helplessness.

Women and non-Europeans were, and are, subjected to the paternal and colonial domination of 'white' men. Interestingly, Yee states that he has tried to suggest that the only way for the female characters in his stories to overcome paternalism, is to move into larger city centres where there is more mingling of the 'races.' This way, the fathers will begin to see that their heavy handed ways are cultural, and perhaps not the only way of raising their daughters (Davis 1996b; Ming Chen & Parungao, 1999). This idea is somewhat slippery however, because although cultural integration is being praised by Yee, the reality of 'white' culture is being essentialized. It is difficult to say that fathers in 'white' culture raise their daughters with a lighter hand than Chinese fathers, or that cultural integration is necessarily a remedy for patriarchal parenting. In fact, several of the Chinese fathers in Yee's stories have much in common with the Euro-American/Canadian fathers in Wilder and Lottridge's books. Nonetheless, Yee's female characters offer

a wider variety of discursive positions, and invite the reader to challenge the confines of patriarchy.

2.6 READINGS

Hall (1993, pp. 90-103) describes three ways of “reading” a text that either coincide with the “intentions” of the author, or challenge these intentions in some way. While the intentions of the author may never be distinguishable, it is possible to flesh out what Hall (1993) calls the *dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, or oppositional* readings of a text (pp. 90-103). How a text will be read depends partly on the discourses that are made available within it, and partly on the unlimited ways individuals may relate to, or identify personally with, a text. The purpose of this study is certainly not to attempt to understand what an author's literary intentions may be, nor is it the intention to question the ways in which individuals make meaning from text (for this could be another study all on its own). Rather, the goal is to show that texts set up, through discourse, various positions that are normalized, and taken for granted as understood by the reader.

Taking a dominant-hegemonic reading of a text is to accept the dominant discourse within it: that is, to unquestioningly believe that what is going on in the story is normal. Dominant-hegemonic codes operate on a “macro-level” (Cohen, 1992), relating “grand totalizations...views-of-the-world...national interests” that are “natural, inevitable, [and] taken for granted” (Hall, 1993, p. 102). When a consumer encodes a message in precisely the way the author/producer it to be encoded, Hall (1993) describes this as “perfectly transparent communication” (p. 101). The Ontario curriculum, for example, portrays dominant representations of history that become

normalized as they are repeatedly delivered to students. Dominant readings also exist on “micro-levels” (Cohen, 1992) when they are perpetuated in specific circumstances, such as at a museum exhibit, a community festival, or in a printed story (Furniss, 1999, pp. 3-26).

There are situational moments in consumption where *negotiated* or *oppositional* readings are possible, meaning that, although the preferred code is understood, it is somehow challenged or negotiated by the consumer (Hall, 1993, p. 102). Negotiations also recognize that while a specific code makes sense on a national or “corporate” level, they may not pertain to specific or local circumstances. Hall (1993) offers the example of the Industrial Relations Bill, which restricts the “right to strike” (p. 102). While a worker may understand the necessity of this in terms of the national interest, he/she may feel differently about this Bill when there is desire for wage increases at his/her job site (p. 102).

Claire Whitaker's (1985) study entitled: *Hollywood transformed: Interviews with lesbian viewers* (pp. 106-118) provides an excellent example of how consumers of Hollywood film negotiated and/or opposed dominant-hegemonic cultural representations. During interviews with women about the ways they “related to” movie stars as children, Whitaker asked questions pertaining to which movies impacted them in childhood, which characters they identified with, and which roles they would choose to act out. One woman claimed that rather than accepting Mariiyn Monroe as a beautiful sex symbol (the dominant code), she found her “dumb” and “boring” (p. 108). Another woman found herself identifying with male characters (rather than female ones), such as Robin Hood (p. 107). Still other women admitted to falling in love with female stars, rather than the male ones (p.

109). Similarly, Jacqueline Bobo (1990), shows how 'black' women's reactions to the often-critiqued film, *The colour purple*, often resist notions of racism (pp. 100-103). When she interviewed 'black' women, Bobo (1989) found that they indeed "constructed their own meanings from the film" (p. 100) that perhaps would not be expected, given its narrative structure.

2.7 CONCLUSION

In Chapter 2, I have attempted to do two things: to outline the literature available pertaining to historical fiction – what it is, what's available, its potential uses, and historical fiction in a Canadian, educational context; and, to introduce why the concepts of discourse, colonial culture, racialization, common sense racism, the intersection of race and gender, and textual "readings" are important to this study.

Through reviewing the literature it is apparent that historical fiction may have the power to perpetuate notions of white vs. non-white, Canadian/ American vs. foreigner, member vs. non-member, Christian vs. heathen, and hero vs. villain. However, more critical, academic analyses of children's Canadian historical fiction would be a valuable addition to the existing literature. While historical fiction can indeed be a worthwhile part of the educational curricula, only entertaining the possibility of colonial narratives can lead to the exclusion of alternative story lines which may offer a richer understanding of the past and in effect, of the present. By critically analysing the key concepts, it is evident that the perpetuation of colonial and racialized discourses have had profound effects on the development of Canada and its institutions (e.g., schools). In turn, these institutions affect the lives of individuals directly, including young readers of historical fiction.

Chapter 3 looks at the methodological approach of *critical discourse analysis* and how this method has been operationalized in the present study to examine some of the above concepts. I have adopted the methods of Phillip Cohen (1992), Elizabeth Furniss (1999), Teun van Dijk (1996), and James Snead (1994), to critically examine the three works of historical fiction for children. In Chapters 4-6 I present an analysis of each of the three texts in an effort to reveal how racializations are at work in them. Chapter 7 provides a summary of this project and its results, and based on what I've learned through the process of writing this thesis, points to the possibility of further investigation of some of the topics addressed here.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 STUDYING RACISM IN A MICRO-CONTEXT

Philip Cohen (1992) differentiates between macro and micro-level analysis of racisms: the former seeks to examine the functional, structural ways that racism works as a system to maintain “the power of specific groups,” the latter seeks to pick out specific cases where racism is evident in everyday life (p. 83). Cohen claims that because racism can take on many different forms, its analysis must also have different “forms of organization and styles of action” (1992, p. 95). While examining racisms in both contexts involves a theoretical approach, a macro-context deals with underlying structures which allow racism to exist, while a micro-context aims to disrupt the circulation of racist discourses in specific circumstances, and to offer alternative discourses. An anti-racist intervention at a micro-level then is more than just an examination – it requires the suggestion of alternatives and challenges one to find ways of carrying them out.

The micro-contexts that have been examined in this study are three representations of historical fiction for children, and more specifically, the colonial discourses within them that allow racializations to occur. Cohen (1992) states that racist discourses can be understood in two different ways: first, they can be understood as simply reflections of “social reality” which are external forces at work and not to be bothered with, and; second, racist discourses can be understood as integral to the execution of power and the “practices of discrimination” (p. 62). He then proposes that analysing these discourses becomes “a central aspect of antiracist education” (Cohen, 1992, p. 62).

The challenges in the present study are: to be able to recognize racialized discourses, and to recognize some of the macro-structures that underlie them (e.g., colonial culture); at a micro-level, to suggest ways that the discourses might work through readings, and; finally, to offer alternatives to dominant narratives, or disruptive reading practices. This has been done in the present study by critically examining the three narratives and exposing some of the textual strategies that produce racializations.

3.2 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The practice of critical discourse analysis has been simply described as “reading critically, reading with a particular point of view in mind” (Kress, 1996, p. 23). Some of the existing literature that utilizes this analytical strategy includes studies where the statistical occurrence of various words in text are analysed (see Krishnamurthy, 1996), and studies that analyse the different uses of various words in text (see Hoey, 1996).

According to Tuen van Dijk (1996), critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA) “should describe and explain how power abuse is enacted, reproduced, or legitimized by the text and talk of dominant groups or institutions” (p. 84). The power abuse that van Dijk is describing here is “social power,” meaning that dominant groups have the power, through access to resources and support, to control the minds and actions of other groups, “thus limiting the freedom of action of the others, or influencing their knowledge, attitudes or ideologies” (van Dijk, 1996, p. 84). Likewise, Kress (1996) claims that CDA brings power structures “into crisis by uncovering its workings and its effects through the analysis of potential cultural

objects – texts – and thereby to help in achieving a more equitable social order” (p. 15). Therefore, one of the goals of CDA, and the goal of using it as the methodology of this study, is to “account for relationships between discourse and social power” (van Dijk, 1996, p. 84).

Critical discourse analysis is mainly concerned with the underlying messages of membership, privilege, and normalcy in text, namely “who may say/write what, how, to whom, in what circumstance” (van Dijk, 1996, p. 87). Power abuse is enacted when the dominant groups, who have more access to creating public knowledge through education, politics, etc., manipulate events through specific discourse. Public knowledge of history, the Little house discourse around “pioneers” for example, becomes the accumulation of the stories of the dominant. These taken for granted discourses can be problematic because, as van Dijk (1996, p. 85) points out:

Unless the readers or listeners have access to alternative information, or mental resources to oppose such persuasive messages, the result of such manipulation may be the formation of *preferred models*...which may in turn be generalized to more general, preferred knowledge, attitudes or ideologies.

The preferred models are those that suit the purposes of the main narrative. Hall (1993) calls these preferred models the dominant-hegemonic reading of culture. The dominant/preferred codes become normal and accepted in everyday life by the majority. It is apparent that language or discourse then, “has real effects in practice: the descriptions become ‘true’” (Hall, 1996a, p. 204). The present study uses CDA to show how preferred discursive models are reflected in historical fiction for children, namely those which tell colonial stories of the past, reflecting the supposed

experiences of Euro-Canadian/Americans, or those popularly considered 'the pioneers.'

3.3 DEFINITION OF TERMS

It would be preferable not to categorize human beings into groups based on skin colour or continents of origin (e.g., Euro-Canadian, white, Aboriginal, etc.). However, because this is a study about racism and its effects, it is impossible to avoid reference to the human-made categories that have been assigned to people throughout history. Snead (1994, p. 5) uses the "racial terms black and white [to] refer to a wide range of hues that cannot be positively described...but only by negative contrast: black is not 'white' (where 'white' itself is a term difficult to fix)." In this study, however, specific terms will be used to describe people in American and Canadian contexts. Every effort has been made to be as respectful as possible to all groups of people mentioned, keeping in mind that a 'group' is made up of individuals and is not one coherent entity that can necessarily be known or labelled. The following terms have been adopted from the work of Elizabeth Furniss (1999) and her ethnographic study of colonial culture in Williams Lake, B.C..

In the two Canadian texts, *Ticket to Curlew* and *Tales from Gold Mountain*, the terms *non-Aboriginal*, *non-Chinese*, and *Euro-Canadian* will be used to describe people of European origin who have been racialized as 'white' and who are recognized as the dominant, colonizing group in Canada. The terms *First Nations*, *Aboriginal* and *non-European* will be used to describe some of the original inhabitants of Canada, noting that specific groups are not mentioned. Likewise, in the American text, *Little house in the big woods*, the terms *non-Native*, and *Euro-*

American will be used to describe racialized 'white' people, and; the terms *Native American*, *African American* or *non-European* will be used in reference to those who did not immigrate to America from European countries, or to those who were the original inhabitants of America. When the word *Indian* is used, it is done to imitate the language within the studied texts, but refers "less to real Aboriginal [or Native American] people than to the *idea of the other* as created and perpetuated in the dominant culture and discourse" (Furniss, 1999, p. xi, italics mine). Like Furniss, I use the term "Indian" to refer to European *representations* of Aboriginal people.

When the term 'black' is used in quotation marks, it is done so to reflect the common language used to describe people of African descent now living in Canada, the United States, or Europe. For example, Snead (1994) uses the term 'black' when referring to non-whites in Hollywood film. In this study, quotation marks are used to distinguish between the instances where people are the subject (e.g., 'black' actors, Snead, 1994, p. 6) and the instances where non-humans are the subject (e.g., Black Susan, in Wilder, 1932, p. 16; black face paint, in Snead, 1994, p. 22). The usage of all these terms will occur when the identification of specific groups (e.g., Osage Indians, in Romines, 1997, p. 31) or individuals is not possible or relevant.

3.4 THE ADAPTATION OF SNEAD'S METHODS

In his critique of Hollywood films, James Snead (1994) looks at how the "coded" language racializes the positions of non-white actors as 'other,' thus consigning them to "minor significance" (p. 4). According to Hall (1993), consumers of culture (e.g., film and television audiences, book readers, etc.) engage in a

process of “encoding” and “decoding” the discursive messages being delivered to them (p. 91). “Un”consciously, these discursive messages are categorized into codes, or common ways of understanding the world. Codes are necessary in order to understand the meaning of the communicative exchange (Hall, 1993, p. 91). The codes that producers (of movies, television, text, etc.) want the audiences to receive are the *preferred* or dominant codes – or, those which achieve “near-universality,” are naturalized, and become in effect, common sense (Hall, 1993, pp. 90-103). As stated earlier, if the preferred code is not taken up by the audience, the consumer may be engaging in a negotiation or opposition with the given text.

Snead (1994) looks at how Hollywood uses specific visual devices in film to convey the preferred reading of ‘black’ actors on screen. He claims that Hollywood places ‘black’ actors in roles where they always appear as “caricatures” (p. 3) rather than as real human beings. He refers to these three filmic devices as: *marking*, *omission*, and *mythification*, and it is through them that the dominant messages are conveyed. These three strategies, plus a fourth that has been developed through the evolution of this study, which I call, *concomitant inclusion* (inspired by Stanley, 2000, p. 95), serve as tools for analysing the three texts. Following are detailed definitions of each of these devices, and a description of how they have been used in this study.

Snead (1994) describes *marking* as the visual over-exaggeration of ‘black’ skin (p. 5). He claims that Hollywood cinema has typically marked ‘black’ actors to emphasise the fact that they are *not* white, thus making that person’s role or character obvious through their ‘blackness.’ For example, in a black and white film, white actors would play ‘black’ characters by marking them with a black face.

Likewise, a 'black' servant (played by a non-white actor) would wear bright white gloves, seemingly to emphasize the 'blackness' of the character's skin. The glove would be a filmic code for the marking of, and the making of race that audiences soon become familiar with (Snead, 1994, p. 6). Therefore, colored skin becomes a negative marker, or a "'man-made' sign" (Snead, 1994, p. 5) for all those who are *not* white. In this study, the physical appearances of the characters, the description of non-European people, and the use of coded language are all literary devices used to mark a racialized 'other.'

For this textual analysis, the strategy of *omission* will also include the strategy of *exclusion*. The difference between the two terms is that while omission simply implies that certain groups of people are not there (yet we are unable to name who is missing because they are completely omitted), exclusion implies that certain people are around, they are just *not included* in the story. Stanley (2000) describes exclusions as an "active process: something that one human being does to another" (p. 96). If typically excluded groups (e.g., Native Americans) are included it is done so in a marked or dismissive fashion. Stanley (2000) and Dei (1998) suggest that omission and exclusion are types of racism, and Snead (1994) eloquently states that "omission and exclusion are perhaps the most widespread tactics of racial stereotyping but are also the most difficult to prove because their manifestation is precisely absence itself" (p. 6).

Mythification is "the replacement of history with a surrogate ideology of elevation or demotion along a scale of human value" (Snead, 1994, p. 4). In other words, a story retells a history that glorifies some and represses others in a way that does not represent reality. Mythification also requires an audience which desires

self-identification, and is willing (perhaps not consciously) to do so through the codes (see Hall, 1993) of a text. The audience which derives pleasure from the retelling of certain stories that they can identify with, will readily accept the mythification of the past because it feels familiar to them (Snead, 1994). In the following chapters I will be describing how the "myth of the frontier" (Furniss, 1999, especially pp. 53-78) is at work in the texts, mainly through the normalization of racist discourses.

Finally, *concomitant inclusion* refers to the seemingly natural accompaniment or *inclusion* of some people with others. In relation to the texts, concomitant inclusion refers to the way that friendships and connections are naturally made with some, while not with others. There is an assumption on the part of the main families (especially the Ferriers in *Ticket*) that others who *seem to be like them*, will want to be friends. In their study, Timothy Stanley and Leslie Roman (1997) call this the "being friends" discourse (p. 220). Implicated in this is the idea that being friends is necessarily a way to avoid or even conquer racism, and that some people make for natural companions, while others (the not-friends) do not. Each of these devices and the ways in which they are relevant to the texts will be explained more fully as they are operationalized in the following sections.

In an attempt to understand how racializations are played out in text, the above strategies will be used as analytical tools. For example, I'll know a racialization when I see one, if a textual representation *marks, omits, 'mythifies,'* or *concomitantly includes* a specific person, group of people, setting, or event based on imposed 'racial' categories. 'Race' doesn't necessarily exist outside representation. If one is not racialized as 'black' through linguistic strategies such as marking, then the imposed racial category of 'black' doesn't exist. Racializations make 'race,' and I

will be looking for discursive performances that indicate this. For example, Snead (1994) describes how in Hollywood film, white articles of clothing (gloves, aprons, scarves, etc.) were meant to be signifiers of “a certain coding of race” (p. 6). When audiences saw a black and white film, it was obvious who the servants were by the sharp contrast between their white uniforms and their black skin (Snead, 1994, p. 6). White clothing then, became a recognizable marker for ‘blackness.’ ‘Blackness’ is also not just a physical marker, but comes to represent all that is not-white, thus inferior and abnormal. Therefore, marking makes imposed ‘racial’ categories explicit, and one must be either white, or not white; mythification circulates racist cultural tropes, such as “the pioneer girl” (Harmon, 1991), or “the” European re-settler; omission points to the racialized groups whose experiences are ignored, such as the “Indians” in *Little House*; and finally, concomitant inclusion implicitly portrays who is worthy of belonging to the main narratives and who is not through the friendships and relationships made, or not made.

While the physical markings of the characters in the novels I’m concerned with may not be as blatant as white gloves/black skin, there are other ways in which ‘race’ is constructed through marking, mythification, omission, and concomitant inclusion. Blue eyes, for example, is one marker of the Euro-whiteness of the Ingalls family. Pa, the ultimate patriarchal figure in the text, has blue eyes that Laura greatly admires. Because Pa is represented as being a strong, blue-eyed man who has dominion over his family and environment, his ‘whiteness’ is constructed out of these desirable colonial qualities.⁵

⁵ Another means of identifying the characters is through the illustrations in the text and on the cover. Visual representations of the characters could indeed provide evidence of racialization. However, for the purpose of containment, this study has focussed only on linguistic performances in the texts.

CHAPTER 4 – LITTLE HOUSE IN THE BIG WOODS

4.1 THE STORY

In her eight book series, Laura Ingalls Wilder details the events of her life from childhood to motherhood. The series was written “expressly to give children some insight into pioneer life on the American prairies in the 1870’s and 1880’s” (Mackey, 1992, p. 61), and because the books “operate in the domain of memory [they] unfold under the sign of ‘the real’ rather than that of ‘the imaginary’” (White, 1987, p. 9). The “complexity of the reading experience” (Mackey, 1992, p. 73) increases with each book in the series, and since *Little house in the big woods* is the first, it is written as though through the eyes of a young child (age 3). Wilder establishes herself (as a child) as the sole narrator, and the story deviates from this only when Pa tells his daughters of his adventures. All the events in the text are told from Laura’s point of view, “making a place in the book for the implied reader” (Mackey, 1992, p. 65) – a young European girl.

The unfolding of the text takes place over the duration of one year. Events are revealed in chronological order, revolving heavily around the passing of time: the seasons; the preparation and storage of food, and; daily, monthly and yearly routines make up the bulk of the story (Mackey, 1992; McCullough, 1992; Romines, 1997). This chronology provides a *narrative* through which connections between characters and reader are made possible (Bal, 1995, p. 11). Hayden White (1987) describes a narrative as “a structure of relationships by which the events contained in the account are endowed with a meaning by being identified as parts of an

integrated whole" (p. 9). Because there are "hardly any moments of real action" (McCullough, 1992, p. 34) in the story, but rather a stringing together of routine events, the story is convincing as a tale of "real life." Therefore, it is possible to imagine how child readers might identify with the characters and with the overall narrative. In order to appreciate the intricate structure of this story, Judith Robertson (in personal conversation, September 9, 2002) suggests turning to *narrative theory*. She states:

Narrative theory in this instance could provide a way to understand how it is that a story like *Little house* could open up spaces of meaning for child readers – especially little girls. It also challenges us to consider the multitude of ways in which readers may resist or oppose dominant or preferred reading positions.

Although narrative theory will not be specifically addressed as a concept in this study, it is continually evident that the narrative structures of the texts are significant to the way that dominant/preferred, negotiated, and/or oppositional readings are made. *Little house* provides a narrative space that revolves around the day to day living of a family, which is perhaps a structure that children can, or would like to, relate to in some way.

Any moments of "real action" (McCullough, 1992, p. 34) occur in Pa's stories, which are inset in the main body of the text. Publisher George Bye complained to Wilder that her original manuscript entitled, *Pioneer girl*, lacked "high points [and] crescendo", and asked her to add some "meat" to fill in the gaps around Pa's stories (Romines, 1997, p. 21). Until this point, it seemed as though the narrative simply provided a way of stringing together Pa's stories, and didn't focus enough on Laura (ibid, p. 21). Wilder added sufficient "meat" – mainly the details of daily life on the

farm – and resubmitted the manuscript to Berta Hader who published the story in 1932 under the new name: *Little house in the big woods* (Romines, 1997, p. 21).

The main characters in the story are Laura's immediate family – Pa (Charles), Ma (Caroline), older sister Mary, and baby sister Carrie. Jack the brindle bulldog, and to a lesser extent, Black Susan the cat, are also included in the daily goings-on of the Ingalls family. Pa's role within the family is the all encompassing figure of authority and patriarchy. He is responsible for providing food, making decisions on the family's behalf, working the fields, and disciplining, teaching, and entertaining the two older girls. Ma's role is confined to the house: cleaning, cooking, and sewing take up all her time with only a few exceptions. Baby Carrie is not mentioned often, but when she is, it is always in connection with Ma. Pa seems to never come into contact with her, and Laura talks about Jack much more often than she does about Carrie. Laura and Mary play together sometimes, but argue often as well, usually about whose hair is the prettiest or about who gets to (or has to) do what chores.

Laura's relationship with her Pa is one of the main features of the book, and she quite shamelessly relates to him much more intimately than she does to her mother. Pa is a constant source of admiration and happiness for Laura, yet this is quite obviously not the way Laura feels about Ma. After several pages of describing a day spent with Ma (making butter, bread, and paper dolls) Laura claims, "but the best time of all was at night, when Pa came home" (Wilder, 1932, p. 33). Laura is happy to help him clean his gun or make bullets (pp. 45-50)⁶, and is even willing to go to Pa and sit on his lap after he punishes her (p. 184). While helping Ma all day feels like a chore, helping and spending time with Pa is something she looks forward

⁶ Any time throughout this study where page numbers are given but no author or publication date, the page numbers refer to the main texts (*Little house*, *Ticket* or *Gold Mountain*).

to and does willingly. The connection between father and daughter is significant because it sets Pa up as the authority figure whom Laura never questions. In the evenings Pa plays the fiddle and tells the girls stories, while Ma sits and sews. Pa's stories and songs are important narrative features in *Little house*, for through them we get action, an external perspective of life in the woods, and an overarching sense of patriarchy in the family dynamics.

The family's larger outside connections are mainly Charles' relatives: grandma and grandpa; the brothers, Henry, George, and James with his wife Libby and their children, and; the sisters, Docia, Ruby, and Lotty. It is made known in the text that Ma moved from the East to be with Pa in the West, and was once "very fashionable" (p. 128). Because she is the one who moved, there is no mention of Caroline's relatives or of her past, except for the Delaine dress she brought with her to the woods. The story is centred around Charles Ingalls and his family's experience. However, in the first few pages of the book there is a picture of the "Little house family tree," and it indicates Eliza (a minor character that we meet in *Little house*) as Ma's sister. Romines (1997) describes an incident where Eliza says something to "her sister, Ma" implying that Eliza is Caroline's sister (p. 24). In *Little house*, Laura just refers to these relatives as Uncle Peter and Aunt Eliza, but doesn't name them specifically as Ma's relatives. There are also a couple of neighbours – the Petersons and the Huleatts (more on these characters in following sections). The small nearby town of Pepin is where store goods are bought and traded. With the exception of the Petersons, whose house can be travelled to on foot, all of these connections are a wagon ride away. Although Laura gives the reader the impression, from a three year old's point of view, that the family is quite isolated and

alone in the big woods, this is simply not the case. In reality, Pa can walk to and from the town of Pepin in one day.

4.2 GENDERING THE LITTLE HOUSE

Wadsworth (2001) points to the gendering of children's fiction by stating that, "the discrepancy between boys' and girls' literary fare reflects the divergent roles of boys and girls in nineteenth-century society" (p. 26). These divergent roles are apparent in *Little house in the big woods* – Laura spends her days indoors with Ma taking care of domestic chores. We will see later that in *Ticket to Curllew* (Lottridge, 1992), Sam, in contrast to Laura, spends much of his time outside, exploring and having adventures. Because *Little house* is told from the point of view of a little girl, the things that Laura focuses on "gender" the story as feminine. The story of her young life in the big woods is centred on the internal environment of the little house, her chores, and her family (especially Pa). This is not surprising if girls' books were meant to reflect the roles expected of them.

Part of what Laura is fixated on in her daily life is *patterns, designs and rituals*. She notices the way things look, how they are textured and patterned – like the patterns on fabric used for clothing. For example, when Pa returns from town with fabric for Ma to make clothes with, the various materials are described as such: "Mary's was a china- blue pattern on a white ground, and Laura's was dark red with little golden-brown dots on it. Ma...had brown, with a big, feathery white pattern all over it (pp. 108; see also pp. 69, 128-129, 139-142, 161, 168 & 170-171). Patterns are also noted on the frosted windows (p. 27); made with hot maple syrup in the snow (p. 63); in the mould for the butter (p. 32), and; cut out for paper dolls (p. 33).

Patterns and designs decidedly interest the females of the family, for Pa makes no mention of them. In the one instance where design is mentioned in relation to Charles Ingalls, it is in reference to the little wooden shelf that he carves *for Ma* (p. 61). While the entire Ingalls family is at grandma's house for the maple sugar dance, Laura intently watches the women preparing themselves. She describes their rituals, their hair styles, and the design of their dresses in great detail (pp. 138-142).

MacLeod (1994) sums up what is already apparent in *Little house*: "...girls' novels focus on character and relationships, as, of course, girls' lives did..." (p. 14). Laura's attention is tuned into the internal domestic life of the little house as well as on her family. While Pa is the object of her adoration, Ma is less enviably Laura's role model for womanhood. Because the story unfolds through Laura's daily rituals in the home, the reader gets the details mainly of the events a woman's or a girl's day. Ma teaches the girls a rhyme to help them remember their routine (p. 29):

Wash on Monday,
Iron on Tuesday,
Mend on Wednesday,
Churn on Thursday,
Clean on Friday,
Bake on Saturday,
Rest on Sunday.

The monotony of the daily rituals is set up to inform the reader that these are the details of a girl's life, and these are the things that occupy her time and thoughts. Pa is outside hunting all day, and the reader is only informed of these outdoor activities when Pa returns home at night. The indoor rituals belong to the women, while the outdoor rituals belong to the men. Because the reader sees the story through Laura's eyes, and she stays mainly indoors with Ma, the story itself is gendered as feminine: that is, a story about and for girls.

Notably, although *Little house* is told from a little girl's perspective, the only important, significant moments in the text *seem to be* those which occur in Pa's stories.⁷ Pa's stories, inset in the text, seem to be the only place where any "real action" takes place. Of this, Romines (1997) asks the question: "Is the first purpose of *Little house in the big woods*, then, to preserve a body of male narrative or to inscribe a girl's story?" (p. 22). These inset stories retell the experiences of Pa as a boy, his father, his grandfather, and himself as a man, bringing the "patriarchal legacy" (Romines, 1997, p. 24) from the past, into the present. The Ingalls men in the stories are always hunting, shooting, chasing, running, and being brave in general. The men use guns, sticks, and loud voices to fend off their enemies. Pa tells these stories with great authority and always has his daughter's full attention. While the list of activities for the women (wash, iron, mend, etc.) focuses on "service, routine, and contained domesticity," the list of activities for the men (hunting, shooting, chasing, etc.) focuses on "adventure, surprise, and uncontained mobility" (in conversation with J. Robertson, 09-09-02).

Pa's voice, and the voice of other men in *Little house*, always takes precedence over the women's. While Uncle Peter and Aunt Eliza are visiting, Peter tells the story of what happened to Eliza while he was away (pp. 67-72). Their dog Prince wouldn't let Eliza out of the house because, as they discovered later, he was protecting her from a panther that was lurking around outside. Peter tells the story even though the incident happened to Eliza. She only interjects in her husband's rendition to tell her sister Caroline (Ma) that she was wearing her dress with the blue

⁷ Here I emphasise *seems to be* because later on in this section we see how one of the moments of "real action" takes place with Ma and Laura, yet is not played up the same way that Pa's adventures are.

print at the time (Romines, 1997, p. 25), to which Ma replies, "Dear me!" (Wilder, 1932, p. 69).

This small interaction between Eliza and Ma tells once again of the women's fixation on domestic and personal detail, in this case, dress colour. The near run-in with the panther seems to take on real meaning for Ma ("Dear me!") only when she hears what her sister was wearing. It's as if ruining a dress symbolizes the ruining of a woman. When the girls (Laura, Mary and their two girl cousins), who overhear this conversation from their bed, begin to whisper about the situation, Ma silences them by asking Pa to play the fiddle. The women's (and girls') voices are always silenced, or are of second importance to the men's, making this text a place for patriarchal male values to be perpetuated. This little incident almost became a place where "women, men and children all find a voice," (Romines, 1997, p. 26) but Ma, in an effort to restore order, "dutifully calls up the solo voice of the resident patriarch, her husband" (ibid, p. 26). In one of Pa's stories, *The story of grandpa and the panther*, he describes the scream of a panther as, "like a woman" (p. 41), and at the end of that story, Grandpa shoots the panther. Again, the voice "of a woman" is (in this case, literally) shot down by a man.

Although the male voice overwhelmingly dominates within the text, the only instance of "real action" (apart from the action in Pa's stories) involves Caroline and Laura (pp. 101-108). This moment provides an opportunity for a negotiated reading of the text – generally Ma perpetuates the colonial (and preferred) reading of the woman as passive, silent caregiver – but in one particular situation, Ma is the initiator of real action in the story. Yet, this incident is treated as another daily event, rather than like an adventure that Pa might have. One evening, mother and daughter go to

the barn to feed the cows because Charles is late arriving from his trip to town. As they approach the pen, Caroline sees a shape in the dark that she mistakes for their cow and slaps it on the shoulder to coax it back into the barn. What she has really done is slapped a bear who was making its way into the barn. Caroline essentially saved the cows (and herself and Laura) from being attacked by the bear. When she realizes what she has done, she orders Laura into the house, who quickly but quietly follows her.

The next night, with Pa safely back from town, he tells the girls a story relating the events that occurred on his way home the previous night. His story is inset in the text and is called: *The story of Pa and the bear in the way* (pp. 109-116). The bear in Pa's way was really just an old stump, but in the dark clearing in the woods, Pa couldn't tell. He had waited a long time for it to move on, but after a while he realized he would have to try and scare it away or he would never make it home. So, he ran into the clearing, yelling and waving his arms only to find it was just a stump (p. 112). Ma's experience, on the other hand, does not "become institutionalized as a part of the family fund of stories" (Romines, 1997, p. 25). Her story is not inset into the text, and in fact, *Laura* tells Pa the story, rather than Caroline. Pa's reaction to the *real* bear was to not "say anything," but to hug Laura tighter (p. 114), reacting only physically, and with emotion. The meaning of this is unclear – does Pa hug Laura tighter because he is so grateful to have her safe that there just aren't words? Or perhaps he simply finds her "story" endearing, and can't be bothered to respond. The point is that Pa doesn't react with words, meaning the conversation is over. Pa, who was never in any real danger because his "bear" was only a stump, then proceeds to tell his story in his usual dramatic fashion. Ma's real

life bear experience is passed off by Pa – perhaps he felt that Caroline was just doing what she had to, to protect her child. Hers is not an experience or an adventure, but merely what happened when Charles was away. The focus of the evening is placed upon the goods that Pa has brought back from town, and on Pa's story.

In a story that glorifies a patriarchal social system, Caroline Ingalls steps outside her expected role and negotiates with a bear. Moments like this make it possible to imagine women as having alternate roles, but in reality, Pa's stories dominate. What this can teach about women is that they don't usually participate in adventure or action, and don't normally do anything with real meaning; but when they do, their words are not given the status of "story." Pa's role is to teach the reader that in all circumstances the stories of the men will be preferred, and the real life experiences of the women will be undermined. However, Ma does indicate that negotiated moments are possible, and could serve well as challenges to the dominant codes of patriarchy.

4.3 MARKING

While Snead (1994) uses marking to describe how 'blackness' is coded in Hollywood film, this study uses marking to describe how the categories of 'white' and non-'white' are coded linguistically in text. In the three texts, marking happens mainly in two ways: a) through physical representations of the characters; and, b) through the use of what Snead (1994) describes as coded language.

Physical representations of the characters

Although never overtly named as such, it is apparent through subtle mention of skin colour in the text, that the Ingallses are Euro-American. Perhaps the most obvious indication of marking are the physical characteristics of the people, namely skin colour, eye colour, and hair color/texture.

Skin colour is evident when, in the summer months, Laura and Mary's "ankles and feet [became] as brown as their faces" (p. 157), thus indicating that brown is not their regular colour, nor is it the colour of the parts unexposed to the sun. Also, as Ma scrubs corn, Laura observes how pretty she looks with her "bare arms plump and white" (p. 220). When the aunts are preparing for the dance, they brushed their hair so it shone and Laura could see the "straight white part" (p. 138) down the middle.

Pa's blue eyes are an especially glaring marker of a Euro-American (white) skin tone – the colour of his skin need not be mentioned because the blue eyes give it away. The tell-tale colour of Pa's eyes are mentioned seven times in 238 pages: "his blue eyes were shining" (p. 35); "his eyes were blue and merry" (p. 39); "Pa's blue eyes laughed" (p. 99); "his blue eyes twinkled" (p. 121), and; again, "Pa's blue eyes twinkled" (p. 128); "Pa's blue eyes were snapping and sparking" (p. 149); and, "Pa's blue eyes shone" (p. 184).

Similarly, there are several references to hair colour and texture in the story which signify colour (or the supposed lack thereof). Laura is constantly jealous of her sister Mary's golden hair which she describes five times (pp. 162, 168, 175, 181, 183), and complains that her own brown hair is "ugly" (p. 168) and "dirt-coloured" (p. 162). The word "golden" is a strong adjective to use about hair, for it symbolizes richness, and prosperity. The Oxford dictionary defines golden as: "coloured like

gold; rare and precious" (1998, p. 787). Prosperity and richness are qualities associated with royalty, and not necessarily with people who are not white. Golden then, can be an indicator of whiteness, purity, and a higher class.

Clarence Huleatt, a visiting neighbour child, is described as being "red-headed and freckled" (p. 179), and when Ma was getting ready for the big dance, her "dark hair [was] smooth and shining" (p. 220). As blue eyes are a marker of Euro-American 'whiteness,' so is golden, red, and smooth shining hair. This marking becomes especially apparent with the introduction of Uncle Ned later in the story, a character in a song whose hair is described as "wool" (p. 99). If smooth, shiny hair belongs on Euro-American women like Ma, then woolly hair belongs on someone other-than Ma, someone not Euro-American, not white – someone 'black' like Uncle Ned.

These linguistic markers are representations of racialization. When the characters are repeatedly marked through subtle "*semes*, or smallest units of meaning...[they] form larger codes, like letters combining into words" (Snead, 1994, p. 6). Words as codes produce meaning that begins to shape our understanding of the world and our place in it (Berlin, 1990, p. 9). Racialization occurs in text when a particular person or a group of people are linguistically consigned to specific roles through marking.

Coded language

The second way that the characters are marked is through the use of coded language, often in Pa's songs and stories. Susina (1992) claims that "Wilder uses music to symbolically link the settlers with the landscape...[and] connects the music

of pioneers with the other voices of the prairie" (p. 158). The following song (pp. 99-100) is only one among many that Pa sings. I chose this song because it is an example of the type of marked language Pa uses that indicates the 'whiteness' of the family, and the apparent normalcy of their occupancy of the land. If Uncle Ned was once a "voice of the prairie" (Susina, 1992, p. 158) that Pa's music could be linked too, he certainly isn't now.

There was an old darkey
And his name was Uncle Ned,
And he died long ago, long ago.
There was no wool on the top of his head,
In the place where the wool ought to grow.

His fingers were as long,
As the cane in the break,
And his eyes they could hardly see,
And he had no teeth for to eat the hoe-cake,
So he had to let the hoe-cake be.

So hang up the shovel and the hoe,
Lay down the fiddle and the bow,
There's no more work for old Uncle Ned,
For he's gone where the good darkeys go.

There are several overt instances of racialization in this song. The term "darkey" is a common racial slur, indicating that Uncle Ned is 'black'/African-American. 'White' becomes what Sampson (1993) describes as the "absent standard," meaning that, when 'whiteness' is not stated, it is almost always implied (p. 1225; see also Roman, 1993). By marking him as 'dark' he is placed in the category of the un-'white' and is subjected to the implications of this characterization. Second, the fact that he died long ago, indicates that while a man of colour used to be here, he isn't now. Like the Indians, the extinction of the 'black' man appears "irrevocable and final" (Mackey, 1992, p. 70). The mention of "cane in the break"

(Wilder, 1932, p. 99, L. 7) suggests perhaps that Uncle Ned worked in the cane fields, and thus, it is conceivable that he was a slave. Uncle Ned must have worked until the day he died because the second last line suggests that it is only through death that there will be no more work for him. Ned could have also been Christian because he went where “good darkeys go” (L. 14), which is presumably heaven.

Uncle Ned is portrayed as a bald, toothless, nearly blind “darkey” (perhaps a slave) who has died, and this is the song that Pa has chosen to sing to Laura on her birthday. Played to the tune of the fiddle and taken in the context of Laura’s party, this song might seem quite natural and innocent. First Pa sings “Pop goes the weasel” (p. 99) then he sings “Uncle Ned.” The former is a song that I grew up with, the words and tune to which, even now, I could easily recite from memory. On the very same page is a song that I didn’t recognize (Uncle Ned), but who’s to say that another child not recognizing either song, wouldn’t simply consider these normal childhood songs?

The significance here, is that, not only is Uncle Ned racialized as a ‘black other,’ but Pa is discursively positioned as ‘white,’ which implies that he is higher on Snead’s (1994) scale of human hierarchy. The subjective and objective positions set up for the reader in this song are either as the ‘white’ man (the patriarch), or the “darkey” (the subservient). Pa is the subject who has the discursive power to oversee and describe the life of Uncle Ned, who is the object of Laura’s entertainment. This song would ‘read’ differently if Uncle Ned were a ‘white’ man, or if Pa were a ‘black’ man – there would be a sense of ‘likeness,’ and perhaps ‘brotherhood’ between the character and Pa, rather than a sense of master/slave, patriarch/dependant.

Another instance of overtly racist language is the use of the word "Injun" (rye'n'Injun bread, p. 62). Although the context is mild (the baking of bread), the term is not. Perhaps this language was not considered racist at the time this book was written (1932), nor in the time frame in which it happened (1860's), but it is very offensive today, and the use of a book with this language should be used in contemporary classrooms with a critical and questioning eye. The physical appearances of the characters, and the use of coded language all mark the Ingalls and their friends and family as Euro-American (i.e., white), while marking the non-Europeans as 'other.' Marking the Ingalls as European is a device used to perpetuate the normalcy of colonization, thus their story about "pioneer" life neutralizes European authority and dominance of the territory. Marking the 'others' as such makes them seem somehow disposable, moveable, unreal, and perhaps not even human.

4.4 OMISSION

In the opening pages of the story, Laura describes the landscape of the big woods from a child's perspective. She says: "there were no houses, there were no roads, there were no people. There were only trees and the wild animals who had their homes among them" (pp. 1-2). In reality, there were homes (if not in 'Ingalls style'); there were roads (or major hunting and travelling trails as we see later on in the Little House series), and; there certainly were people (Native Americans). Yet right from page one, anyone other than the Ingalls family is omitted from (textual) reality and existence.

During the historical time period about which *Little house* was written (mid 1800's), Native Americans were most certainly present on the mid-Western landscape, including the Osage Indians who become regular characters later on in the Little House series (see Kaye, 2000; Romines, 1997). And yet in *Little house in the big woods*, the first book of the series, Native Americans are only mentioned as the imaginary villains or prey in a child's (Pa's) game (Wilder, 1932, pp. 53-58; more on this following). There is an implicit statement here that the 'white' man's settlement on the land is natural and deserving, when in fact, the "Ingalls [were] squatting illegally on Osage land" (Kaye, 2000, p. 125). Anyone other than the Ingalls and their Euro-American neighbours is omitted from the story, unless through characterization in story or song (e.g., Uncle Ned).

Kaye (2000) describes this type of literary exclusion as "working from within the paradigm of the 'Vanishing American'" (p. 125-133). She claims that critics of the Little house series have typically noted this 'vanishing' as "sad, even tragic, but [they do not find it] culpable" (Kaye, 2000, p. 125). Racialization occurs through omission because, "it does not evoke either in Laura or in Wilder's readers any sense that, as receivers of stolen property, the story entails for them a sense of responsibility" (Kaye, 2000, p. 125). While a sensitive reader may feel saddened by the removal of the Osage Indians from the territory, the sadness will feel "ennobling, not wrenching" and "emotionally quite bearable" (ibid, p. 125). The fact that the Native people are not recognized as being there visibly seems normal, and the *idea* of them is an afterthought or a figment of one's imagination (as they are in Pa's story). The reality of the displacement of human beings is not realistically presented.

Worthy of mention also, is the early indication of “wild animals” (p. 2) who live in the trees (the big woods). After the initial read through this book, one discovers that, later on in the story, the Indians are referred to as wild men and are likened to wild animals in Pa’s childhood game. Truly, if the Indians exist at all in the conscious mind of the child as author of this story, they are simply not “men,” and so not fit to be mentioned.

4.5 MYTHIFICATION: THE MYTH OF THE FRONTIER

As well as a literary manifestation of racialization, the omission of Native Americans from *Little house* can also be seen as a tactic of mythification. Similarly, in the single instance where Indians are (mis)represented, the racialized discourse surrounding them perpetuates the myth of the frontier. In her ethnography, Furniss (1999) discovered the frontier myth at work in several different public arenas – including “popular literature of pioneer life” (p. 54). As stated earlier, the *Little house* series is *the* most popular retelling of the ‘pioneer story,’ and the frontier myth is quite obviously present in the objectification of Native Americans in the text. Snead (1994, p. 3) states, “the history that Western culture has made typically denies blacks and black skin [or any non-white skin] of historical reference, except as former slaves or savages” (see also Furniss, 1999). Following, is an excerpt from *Little house* which provides the only example of a time when Native Americans were not omitted from the landscape. Here, they are presented as Snead (1994) said they would be – as savages. *The story of Pa and the voice in the woods* (pp. 53-58) is one of Pa’s inset stories in which he tells a childhood tale of looking for his missing cows in the woods.

I began to play I was a mighty hunter, stalking the wild animals and the Indians. I played I was fighting the Indians until the woods seemed full of wild men, and then all at once I heard the birds twittering 'good night.' It was dusky in the path, and dark in the woods (p. 54).

Through story, Pa equates the Indians with "wild men" and "animals." Here, the historical existence of Native Americans on the mid-Western land is mythified in a way that makes Pa (the Euro-American man) seem like a natural hero, fighting off these 'others' who are obviously wild or savage. Because Pa is simply *playing* at fighting them, the Indians don't seem to really exist. This suggests that to Pa, "Indians were games" (Romines, 1997, p. 56) and the possibility that they may in fact be in the woods does not seem real, hence perpetuating once again the myth of the "Vanishing American" (Kaye, 2000, pp.125-133). Likewise, the fact that the Indians are introduced through one of Pa's stories "fictionalizes" their existence (Campbell, 2000, p.112), so that they appear only as characters (the villains) and not as real people, and as part of the landscape. As was the case with Uncle Ned, discursive positions are set up in this passage again to glorify the position of the 'white' hero. The Indians are positioned as objects, games, and essentially as myths, while Pa (the subjective describer of these 'objects') is positioned as the all-knowing, patriarchal force in the wilderness. Implicit in this for the reader is the understanding that in Pa's game, you could either be the hunter (the preferred reading of this excerpt) or the hunted.

The term *wild* in this passage reflects much of the Western colonial discourse which names Aboriginal people as noble or ignoble savages (Kaye, 2000, pp.125-133; Furniss, 1999, p. 18). The use of the word 'wild' to refer to animals and people alike is problem enough. However, it becomes even more problematic alongside its

subsequent use later on in the text. During maple sugaring season, the Ingalls family goes to grandma and grandpa's house to help with the sugaring-off, and to enjoy a dance with several of the other relatives (pp. 131-155). One of the relatives is Uncle George. Laura overhears Pa telling Ma that, "George is wild, since he came back from the war" and notices that Pa shakes his head "as if he were sorry [for George], but it [his wildness] couldn't be helped" (p. 137). After hearing this conversation, and then later listening to George blowing his bugle in the yard, Laura isn't sure if she's afraid of Uncle George or not – after all, she "had never seen a wild man before" (p. 137). Uncle George belongs to the Ingalls family, yet is considered wild.

The characterization of Uncle George as wild emphasises the racialization of Native Americans in the story. If the Indians are wild, and George is wild, how can being wild be a negative characteristic? The distinction is that wild in the case of the Indians represents something savage, untamed and dangerous (literally, lurking in the woods), whereas wild in the case of Uncle George represents someone not naturally or originally wild, but *turned* wild, and who must now be tolerated and pitied. George is wild because he has just returned from war, suggesting that perhaps he has seen or experienced things that somehow changed him. The Indians are considered wild because, in Pa's game, they live in the woods with the wild animals and would pose a threat to unsuspecting children passing through. Making Native Americans seem imaginary or as just a myth of the woods, automatically puts the Ingalls family (even Uncle George) in a space of normalcy, associated with un-wild, tamed and civilized. Interestingly, Uncle George's eyes are blue like Pa's (p. 136), even though he is wild. Perhaps the fact that George's eyes are blue makes it more

acceptable for him to also be wild, because his blue eyes are a linguistic marker or code for his 'white' skin. Pa himself often appears to struggle between the threshold of "wildness and civilization" (Campbell, 2000, p.112). This becomes more evident later on in the Little house series as Pa serves as the cultural interpreter between the Osage Indians and his fellow Euro-American 're-settlers' (see Campbell, 2000; Romines, 1997).

4.6 CONCOMITANT INCLUSION

There are times in *Little house* where people other than the Ingalls and their extended family are mentioned. The Huleatts for example, are neighbours who come to visit (pp. 179-181), but because they are not described (only marked by the red hair), and because they are worthy as company in the Ingalls' home, one can assume that they are *just like* the Ingalls.

Another neighbouring family proves to be an interesting feature in the text. The Petersons (pp. 178-179) are an older couple who live within walking distance from the little house, and Ma allows Mary and Laura to walk there alone to visit with Mrs. Peterson. Mrs. Peterson gives the girls cookies and they are allowed to look at all the pretty things she has brought over from Sweden (p. 178). What is striking here is that although Mrs. Peterson and the girls do not speak the same language, Laura feels that they "understand each other perfectly" (p. 178). Later on in the story, Pa, Uncle Henry (another of Pa's brothers), Grandpa and Mr. Peterson all come to the Ingalls' farm to help with the threshing (pp. 212-228). The Peterson's are foreigners who don't speak English and have different types of criterion inside their home than the Ingallses do, but friendship and labour with them is quite acceptable.

The question becomes then, what are the criteria for someone to be recognized as a civilized person, worthy of neighbourliness, approval, and integration? What conditions must apply for someone to be included? There seems to be an inherent “scale of human value” (Snead, 1994, p. 4) in the text. There are certain criteria for “being friends” and concomitant levels of what is acceptable. It would seem that skin, hair, and eye colour play at least a partial role in who gets included in the text in what role, while speaking English and coming from the same country are not necessary conditions. Perhaps based on these criteria, ‘Indians’ and ‘darkies’ (if they really even exist beyond figures of entertainment for the Ingalls’) are not fit for friendship. The concept of concomitant inclusion is essential in this study and will be further developed in subsequent sections.

4.7 CONCLUSION

Through the literary tactics of marking, omission, mythification, and concomitant inclusion, the racializing of characters, setting, and story can be seen in Wilder’s *Little house in the big woods*. The Ingalls family and their friends are racialized by explicitly (blond, red, smooth hair, and blue eyes) and implicitly (not-Indians, not “darkies”) marking them as ‘white.’ Because people ‘other than’ Euro-American resettlers are omitted and/or excluded from the text, the Ingalls are normalized as the rightful inhabitants of the land. Likewise, the perpetuation of the frontier myth (i.e., Indians are non-existent, imaginary, or wild characters) establishes ‘whites’ as higher up on the implicit human scale of value. Being friends with only those who also aspire to the colonial dream excludes anyone different from the Ingalls.

The subject positions available in this text for self-identification then, are the normal, civilized, 'white' European colonizer; the savage, animal-like, forest-dwelling 'Indian'; or, the died-and-gone-to-heaven 'black' slave. Hall might argue that the dominant reading of this text would be to buy into the idea that the Ingalls are the natural settlers of this land and that the 'others' are simply part of the landscape, meant only to entertain the 'white' folk. While negotiation or opposition to this text is possible, there are very few moments of textual disruption from the colonial narrative.

Because Laura is the narrator of this story, the reader is also positioned as 'white,' and female. The perpetuation of gender roles provides the implied reader with a girl's perspective, and it is likely that boys of this reading age (grade 3) might not identify with much of the story. Although Laura narrates, Pa is really the main character, as all significant happenings are centred around him, or on his reaction to events. Therefore, Pa (and all males) are cast into stereotypical male roles: the hunter, provider, and disciplinarian; leaving Laura (and all females) in their prescribed roles; to become a good woman/housewife, like Ma. Wilder may be applauded for the space and importance she gives to feminine roles in domesticity, surely a modern conception of her times. However, stereotypical representations are still at large in this narrative. Charles Ingalls is positioned as the ruler of not only the women and the home, but as ruler over his environment (including the 'Indians' and "darkies") as well. At no point in the story is Pa's dominance questioned or challenged. The preferred reading of this text then, is to accept patriarchal familial roles, and to accept colonial representations of the past.

CHAPTER 5: TICKET TO CURLEW

5.1 THE STORY

Ticket to Curlew is similar to a Canadian, masculinist, contemporary retelling of the *Little house* story. Written in 1992, *Ticket to Curlew* offers an “historical portrayal of Canadian rural life” (Reid-Walsh, 1992, p. 32). The story is set on a the Canadian prairies, and focuses on the theme of Canadian multicultural assimilation. Lottridge tells this historical tale from the point of view of the main character, Sam Ferrier, who arrives by train to Curlew, Alberta in 1915 (Resource Links, 1997, p. 252). Sam and his family move to Curlew from Jericho, Iowa when Sam’s father hears of “good land for sale in the Canadian west” (Lottridge, 1992, p. 13). Upon arriving, “Sam wonders why his restless father ever decided to bring the family to this lonely barren land” (Groundwood publishers, 2002). But over time, Sam learns to find his own adventure on the prairies, and discovers that it “holds some unexpected beauties and surprises” (Groundwood publishers, 2002).

Like *Little house*, *Ticket* revolves primarily around the “cycles of seasons...which Lottridge sensitively evokes by seizing on fine details of animals, birds and vegetation” (Reid-Walsh, 1992, p. 32). The first part of the story details the necessities of daily survival, focussing on how life on the prairies was “restricted to the basics” (ibid, p. 32). Part way through the book, Sam’s father buys the children a horse (Lottridge, 1992, p. 60), and from then on the bulk of the story revolves around the relationship between Sam and the horse. It is partially through this relationship, that the theme of “domination over nature” comes through. Not only do Sam and his Pa conquer nature by attempting to “civilize” the vast Canadian landscape, but Sam

also “tames nature” as he tames his horse. Sam grows up and matures as he explores his new territory and becomes more comfortable with his new surroundings. He faces several coming-of-age challenges, which he resolves either alone, with the help of his friend, Gregor Chomyk, or with his horse, Prince.

Remembering Hayden White's (1987) description of a narrative, the events in *Ticket* are in some way related to the larger story – each of the situations have meaning which is related to the whole. The overall narrative of *Ticket* is of a young boy learning to find his way (personally and geographically) on the prairie. Sam becomes more independent with the help of Gregor and Prince, leaving behind the security of his home, and especially of his father. Although the passing of time is significant in this story, it is not as much so as in *Little house*. Perhaps because the narrative revolves around the activities of a pre-adolescent boy (rather than on a little girl), the events in *Ticket* are centred more on spontaneity, adventure, and a boy's connection to his environment. The story focuses less on the day to day happenings of life, and more on moments of “real action” (McCullough, 1992, p. 34).

The main characters in *Ticket*, are Sam and his immediate family – Pa (James), Mama (Clara), younger sister Josie, and youngest brother Matt. Pa assumes a patriarchal role over the family, making all the major decisions and doing all the physical labour. Even the decision to sell the farm in Iowa and move to Curlew was Pa's decision, regardless of Mama's hesitation and concern (p. 13). Pa and Sam start from scratch on their new land, building a house and a barn, and digging a well. When Mama and the children arrive (p. 37), all they need to do is arrange the furniture inside the new home, and settle in. Although Sam and Pa were capable of taking care of themselves on the open prairie, Mama takes over the

domestic care as soon as she arrives. Sam is much older than Laura, and therefore, is much more independent from his parents than she was in *Little house*.

Unlike the Ingalls in Wisconsin, the Ferriers have no extended family in Canada. Their outside connections consist exclusively of their neighbours and fellow townspeople. While *Little house* is set in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, *Ticket to Curlew* is placed in the early twentieth century. Curlew is more highly populated than Pepin (the nearest town to the Ingalls), and there are many more people around to share the Ferrier's daily existence. The first friend that Pa and Sam make is with a local man named Chalkey – named so for his white blond hair (p. 10). Chalkey and his friend Eli take Sam and Pa to their new land and later help them dig their well (pp. 23-26). Their closest neighbours are the Martingales, consisting of a mother and father, and two grown sons named Adam and John (p. 28). The Martingales offer to help Pa and Sam build their house and barn in exchange for the same favour (pp. 27-29). Part way through the story, Sam befriends Gregor Chomyk, the only boy he meets who is his age. The children attend the newly built school, run by Miss. Barnett. All in all the family members get along fine, with the usual sibling rivalry between Sam and Josie (Sam's sister), and one bitter exchange of words between his parents.⁸

Sam encounters several situations that he must deal with, which all add to the grand narrative of growing up on the prairie. His first independent challenge comes when he and his younger brother Matt become lost during a long walk together, far

⁸ Interestingly, several of the male characters in this story have biblical names: Eli, Sam, James, Adam, John, and Matthew. The Ferriers also come from Jericho, Iowa, surely not a place name chosen by coincidence. The Chomyks' (different - as will be made known as the study goes on) names are not biblical. This concept will not be addressed in any depth here, but if anything, the usage of biblical names would tend to support the argument being made for a Euro-centric representation of history.

from their home (pp. 50-58). Feeling the weight of the responsibility to return his young brother home safely, Sam begins to worry. He must rely on his instinct and the positioning of the sinking sun to find their way back to the road. There they meet Gregor who, unable to speak English at the time, gives them a ride home in his wagon. Sam's parents are unhappy with him when they finally return, hours later, but rather than scold them, they decide the children will need their own horse so they have a means to escape the confines of their small house and not worry about getting lost. This incident is significant because it was the first time Sam was in charge of someone other than himself, and the boys nearly lost their way. As the story goes on, Sam becomes better and better at dealing with these situations, evidence of his increasing maturity and growth, and his deepening awareness of his environment.

The next challenge comes when their neighbours, the Martingales, lose their two oxen in the field (pp. 77-87). Adam Martingale asks Sam for his help in finding them, so Sam goes riding off alone to look. Once on the road, he meets Gregor again (who still doesn't speak English), and through a series of charades, Sam manages to tell Gregor what the trouble is. Gregor leads Sam to a water hole that he knows of, and sure enough, there are the oxen, drinking peacefully. Sam and Gregor round up the oxen, and lead them back to the Martingales' farm, much to the family's joy and thanks. Again Sam (with Gregor's help) manages to pull through a crisis.

Sam's greatest challenge is an internal one that he must face alone. Pa can't afford to feed all of their livestock over the winter, and since Prince is not a work horse but simply a pet, they must turn him loose in the fields to fend for himself (pp.

107-113). Sam has to be brave and let Prince go, trusting that he'll find other wild horses to be with in order to survive the cold. To Sam, Prince represents freedom, friendship, and independence from his family. To the structure of the story, Prince represents the colonial man's struggle to tame "his" land; man's desire to have complete dominion over his environment and everything in it; and, ultimately the wild, unpredictability of nature. Living without Prince over the winter is very difficult for Sam, and he must often fight back his emotions. He also has to resolve himself to the possibility that Prince might die, or simply may not want to return to the farm in the spring. Once the ground starts to thaw, Sam and his Pa venture out to the prairie to look for Prince. Sam sees him in the middle of a circle of wild horses but when he gets close, they all run away (p. 130). While Sam feels betrayed by Prince, he also gains a new found respect for him, seeing him in his natural habitat. Prince seemed to be the leader of the wild horses, so Sam renames him "King." Prince, now King, does return to the Ferriers' farm, with the help of Sam's wooing and coaxing (p. 142). The horse comes "home" on his own time, but Sam has still won the struggle over nature. Perhaps the prairie landscape is immense and somewhat wild, but it is not untameable.

5.2 GENDERING CURLEW

While Laura's attention is often on the internal world of the home, Sam's attention is most often on the external environment. If *Little house* is gendered as "feminine," *Ticket* is gendered as "masculine." MacLeod (1994) claims that, "...boys' books...revolve around a young man's encounter with the outside world...and around active, extroverted adventure" (p. 14). In Laura's experience, most of the

action happens to Pa, or is relived through Pa's stories. Sam on the other hand, is truly the main character in *Ticket* and he is the one experiencing all the action and adventure. He has an independence and freedom that the girls (and women) in both stories do not. A young boy, with his male horse companion, are often left to their own devices to seek adventure and independence whereas, in *Little house*, the females are mostly confined to the house and yard. Josie and Mama in *Ticket* are seldom spoken of, and with the exception of going to school, are also confined to the Ferrier's property. Once Sam is given Prince, he is allowed to venture out on his own – a luxury none of the female characters have. On his own, Sam faces real adventures and deals with real issues of danger and hardship.

Unlike Laura, Sam is not concerned with things like patterns, material, or clothing. He instead describes the environment: "prairie wool...it was dry and matted underneath with light straight grasses rising from the thick base. There were little blue and purple flowers, too" (p. 20); "birds' nests and grass-hoppers, wild roses and garter snakes" (p. 30); "a little grove of tress with dusty silvery-green leaves" (p. 51). Only once does Sam use intricate detail to describe his family members or their home, and this is only when Josie fusses about her make-shift bedroom in the kitchen. Sam describes in detail how Pa rigged up a special curtain so Josie would have her own private space. The contrast in the observations and priorities of Laura vs. Sam is significant because it points to the effort the authors have made to represent what girls find important, and what boys find important. Therefore, the narratives themselves are gendered.

The women in *Ticket* are assigned the same roles as they are in *Little house*, but because the story is told from Sam's perspective, much less emphasis is placed

on the female characters. Mama is in charge of the internal domestic life on the prairie, and only once in a while does she say anything. When she does, it is always in relation to their neighbours, the children, food, or to worry about something. A good indication of Mama's domestic, "feminine" fixations is when the family drives to their neighbour's place to welcome them (p. 45). Clara brings them cinnamon buns as a token of friendship. When the neighbour's (the Chomyks) house becomes visible down the road, the Ferriers are surprised to see that it is a "soddy" made of earth (p. 45), rather than a house made of wood like theirs. Mama is the one to explain to the children that "lumber is costly. Some people spend all they have just to get here. They have to build with what's around them. I do imagine that housekeeping in a soddy is hard work" (p. 46). Mama comments on what she knows best: housekeeping. This is her way of identifying with, and empathising with, her new neighbours. An oppositional reading of Mama's comments here would be to suggest that she is a rather thrifty economist, noting the cost of bringing lumber over seas.

A slight difference between the two books, is that Clara in *Ticket* disciplines the children more than Caroline does in *Little house*. This could perhaps be read as an evolution of women's voices in text – where once the "mother" characters (e.g. Caroline Ingalls) had next to nothing to say, as time progresses, they are given a bit more of a voice (e.g. Clara Ferrier). When Sam and Matt are late getting home Clara says, "'oh son,' ...in a sharp voice she almost never used. 'You are far too late. It's nearly dark'" (p. 57). This is an interaction we would have found only between Pa and his girls in *Little house*, never between Ma and the girls. But then Clara is easily

placated when she notices the flowers Sam brought her, and quickly gets him into the house for some soup.

5.3 MARKING

Like the marking in *Little house*, marking in *Ticket to Curllew* can also be broken down into two categories: a) physical characteristics; and, b) coded language.

Physical representations of the characters

Lottridge is much less focussed on the physical markings of her characters in *Ticket* than Wilder is in *Little house*. There is very little evidence of the skin, hair or eye colour of the Ferrier family or their community members. Mama and Matt both have brown hair (p. 37; p. 51) which is mentioned only once each. When she arrives, Mama comments on how "brown" Sam is looking (p. 38) which implies (like Laura and Mary's tanned faces and feet) that brown is not Sam's natural colour. Chalkey also offers evidence of 'whiteness.' Obviously, by virtue of his white-blond hair (p.10), Chalkey is a Euro-Canadian (white) man. Aside from these minimal representations, it is obvious that the Ferriers themselves are Euro-Canadian (or more precisely, Euro-American) for the following reasons.

First, the very fact that in *Ticket* the colour of the main family and their immediate circle is *not* mentioned indicates that they are 'white,' because in text when the characters are *non-European*, the colour or 'race' is specifically named (e.g., Uncle Ned the "darky," and "Indians" in *Little house*). Roman (1993) states that "white culture is the *hidden norm* against which all other subordinate groups' so-

called 'differences' are measured'" (p. 71). In other words, whenever color is not mentioned, white is the default (see also Morrison, 1992 ; and Snead, 1989).

Secondly, the neighbours that the Ferriers become friends with are significant in two ways. The Martingales are from Britain, wear tweed coats and speak with gentlemanly accents (p. 28). Because colour is not named, it is apparent by default that they are not people of colour. If they were different from the Ferriers, one assumes that there would be some sort of literary tactic for making this apparent. The Chomyks, another neighbouring family, represent a perfect example of how Lottridge only describes people who look different from the Ferriers. The appearance of the Martingales' (except for the tweed coats) is not named, but several references are made to the physical traits of the Chomyks (a more in-depth description of the Chomyks is available in section 5.6). Obviously the Chomyks are different from the Ferriers, otherwise (like the Martingales) they would not need to be described. Again 'white' is the taken for granted as the norm.

Coded language

Perhaps because *Ticket to Curlew* was written sixty years after *Little house in the big woods*, there is virtually no racist language (explicit or even coded) in the text. Most of the questionable language in *Little house* is in Pa's stories and songs. There are neither stories nor songs in *Ticket*, and with the exception of the use of the word "Indian," there is no linguistic representation of racism. Further on in section 4.2E, it is apparent that the *more* different neighbours (as opposed to the *less* different ones) serve as a code for those who are not like the Ferriers. However, even these people become friends with the Ferriers, and so the code of 'difference'

here is not a strong case of coded language, but rather a case of concomitant inclusion.

5.4 OMISSION

Like Laura's description of the woods in Wisconsin, Sam describes his new home of Curlew, Alberta, as having "no signs of settlers: no houses...not even a ploughed field" (p. 8). Sam is much older than Laura (he's 11, where Laura is about 3) yet still to his child's mind, signs of settlement would obviously make this land feel less "empty." Sam's criteria for the existence of other people include only things that he was used to seeing back home (Jericho, Iowa), such as a house, or perhaps indication of land that has been worked over by machinery. Without these things, the possibility of other people doesn't exist, yet again, people had already inhabited the land at that time. The omission of Aboriginals from the Canadian landscape is a literary tactic to support the idea of settling the "new country." Omission in this case seems to provide textual evidence that the Ferriers are among the first inhabitants of the Alberta prairie, and that simply settling on it gives them automatic membership to Canadian society and natural ownership of this "new" place.

5.5 MYTHIFICATION: THE MYTH OF THE FRONTIER

While there are no non-European characters in the book, Sam does learn about the existence of the "Indians" from his Pa. Feeling alone and bored in the wide open landscape of the prairie, Sam goes exploring and finds a buffalo skull, which he carries back to his makeshift camp to show Pa. Following is the interaction between Sam and his father about the skull (p. 21):

"This old fellow had quite a life out here in the old days," he said, turning the skull over in his hands. "I guess you could say that this land belonged to the buffalo and the Indians back then."

"How long ago was that?" asked Sam.

"Forty, fifty years," said Pa. "But now it's ours."

This interaction is a very telling indication of Pa's beliefs, undoubtedly shared by the many resettlers of the 'new country.' The discourse that is being perpetuated here is again that of the "Vanishing American" (Kaye, 2000), but in a Canadian context. That people may have once existed, but don't now, is a myth that Pa is enforcing by marking the Aboriginal people as existing only in the "past" (forty, fifty years ago).

Later, while he walks alone on the prairie, Sam wonders about his father's statement of "the old days." He "couldn't feel that this land was really theirs. He thought about the thousands and thousands of buffalo and the Indians on their horses. They would fit this big land" (p. 22). There are at least two different ways of reading this excerpt. The *preferred* reading would be to accept the fact that the "Indians" and the buffalo have vanished (on their own, with no explanation), and that the land now belongs to the Ferriers and their European neighbours. As in Charles Ingalls' childhood story, the "Indians" exist only as part of a little boy's imagination. Nostalgia for the imagined past, felt through the daydreams of a thoughtful boy, allows the reader the preferred option of believing that the Aboriginals must have just vanished on their own a long time ago. The description given to Sam by his Pa, and the tactile reality of the skull, produce a fantasy of "the Indians" which perpetuates the myth of the frontier. Sam wonders about the situation, but neither he nor the reader is meant to worry about it. The Aboriginal issue has been addressed (in Sam's private thoughts) and so, on with the story. Kaye (2000) states that this tactic in writing is meant to "whitewash" the realities of colonial displacement, "greed,

violence, and racism" (p. 126). The preferred reading then, is to buy into the myth of the frontier.

Read another way, this excerpt could actually provide opportunity for a *negotiated* reading of the text: perhaps the land doesn't belong to the new settlers, and perhaps the "Indians" and the buffalo are indeed its rightful owners. Hall (1993) states that a negotiated reading occurs when the reader is aware of the preferred and intended message, but opposes it (p. 102). The very fact that Sam doubts his father is, in effect, opposing the notions of patriarchy that dominate this story (i.e., men rule the home, the people, and the environment; and the Indians have vanished). Challenging patriarchy, challenges colonialism. Sam secretly disputes the naturalization of his family on the land, which allows the reader to do so as well. The frontier as Pa describes it – as once being filled with buffalo and Indians, but "ours" now – indeed seems like a myth through Sam's eyes. Hall (1993) describes negotiated moments as situational (p. 102). While the story generally acts out a colonial narrative, which naturalizes and glorifies European re-settlement, this is one particular situation where the frontier myth is open for negotiation.

However, although Sam's musings may allow the reader to believe that the colonial displacement of Canadian Aboriginals is being questioned, Canadian multicultural assimilation is still being perpetuated. Even though the skull provides a moment of resistance to the dominant colonial narrative, the "Indians" are still rendered part of nature. This is still a form of racialization. Once again, Aboriginal people are seen as imaginary, or just as naturally gone. The buffalo have vanished, and because they are part of the natural landscape, so have the "Indians." The "Indians" and the Ferriers could not have lived together in this story, because they

are represented as too different from one another. For cultural assimilation to take place, the Aboriginals would have to live just like the Ferriers. In the following section we see how only those who have a desire for dominion over nature can be included in the story.

5.6 CONCOMITANT INCLUSION

The Ferriers on the Alberta prairie have several neighbours to whom they offer friendship, despite their obvious cultural differences. *Less* different from them are the first people they meet (besides Chalkey) – Mr. Martingale and his two grown up sons, Adam and John (p. 28). Sam is quite taken with the young British men and their “tweed trousers and vests” (p. 28). He also imagines that they speak as “English gentlemen might speak” (p. 28), indications of a higher class. The men all help one another build the two new Martingale and Ferrier homes. The Ferriers assume an automatic friendship with the Martingales, and these neighbours pop up from time to time in the story as good reliable people to have around.

Once Mama, Josie, and Matt come to the prairies, we meet the *more* different neighbours, who live a wagon ride away – the Chomyks. The first indication that they are *more* different from the Ferriers and the Martingales are the three shaggy black dogs that meet the Ferrier's wagon before the family comes out (p. 45). The dogs are barking loudly, even if they don't necessarily seem unfriendly. There is no indication anywhere else in the story that anyone but this family owns dogs. They do not seem to resemble 'domestic' prairie animals. The dogs in this case contribute to the positioning of the family as different from anyone the Ferriers have met. Thus, the Ferriers are positioned as the 'normal' family, and the Chomyks are positioned as

the different family. Nevertheless, the Ferriers ride to out meet them, bring them baked goods, and welcome them to the area – hence, perpetuating the “being friends” discourse (Roman and Stanley, 2000).

The neighbours’ home is called a “soddy” and is made of “blocks of sod cut right out of the prairie soil” (p. 45). Pa Ferrier says, “I’ve heard of them [soddies] but this is the first one I’ve seen” (p. 45). The big barking dogs and the strange house make these new neighbours instantly mysterious and foreign. Mama however, comes to their defence (solidifying the gendered reactions of the parents) by saying that some people have to spend all the money they have just to come to Canada, and she sympathises with the trouble an earth floor must cause for cleaning the house (p. 46).

Then the residents of this strange house emerge, and right away we *know* they are different. They speak a language to one another that Mama has never heard before. Pa responds by saying, “you never know who you’re going to meet out here...they’ll be good neighbours, I’m sure” (p. 46). But Sam’s internal dialogue (once again) tells us that Pa sounded disappointed. The people themselves seem friendly, and appear to be very thankful for the cinnamon buns that Mama brought them. “The woman wore a shawl over her hair and the man had a beard” but Sam can only look at the young boy his age standing in the doorway who had “dark hair and level eyebrows that made him look as if he was frowning a little” (p. 46). These physical indicators as well as Mama’s suggestion that they spent all their money getting to Canada (which is why they can’t afford to build a log house) suggests that these people have come from over seas, and even though they’re Europeans, they’re not exactly like the Ferriers.

Yet nonetheless, Sam and Gregor Chomyk (the boy in the doorway) become very good friends, and eventually Sam teaches him to speak English (pp. 118-121). By the end of the story, Gregor is able to explain that he and his family have come from Ukraine funded by his uncle (pp. 132-133). Once there is enough money saved, the Chomyk family will send for the uncle and they will build a log cabin like the Ferriers' when he arrives. So, even though they don't live in the same type of house as the Ferriers right now, the Chomyks are planning to fix that as soon as possible. The Chomyks are going to become "like" the Ferriers, thus portraying *Ticket to Curlew* as a story of multicultural assimilation. The Ferriers are not going to learn Ukrainian, or learn any of the Chomyks traditions or customs. Rather, the Chomyks will follow in the footsteps of the Ferriers who represent the "typical" or "normal" Euro-(white)-Canadian.

According to Snead's scale of human value (1994, p. 4), the Martingales obviously rank quite high because Sam openly admires their accents and clothing, likening John and Adam to British gentlemen even though they are farmers like himself. These men are also educated and well-read, indicated by the large supply of books they have brought with them from England. They also get to work right away on a house exactly the same as, although bigger than, the Ferriers. They believe in working together with their neighbours, and an automatic friendship is assumed.

Despite the fact that the Chomyks are just as foreign to the prairies as the Ferriers are (see Campbell, 2000, p.118), they appear different and therefore, 'other.' Yet, they must possess a quality that allows them to be acceptable, despite their inherent differences. Here are the qualities represented as *not* necessary criteria for

being friends: speaking the same language; coming from the same country; living in the same type of home, and; looking the same or wearing the same style of clothing. It's curious then, why the Indians are not friend-worthy since they likely don't speak the language, don't come from the same places, don't live in the same types of homes, and don't look the same as the Ferriers either. Obviously, there is something that the Chomyks have that differs from the Indians – and that is colonial motivation.

The Ingalls and their neighbours (the Petersons), and the Ferriers and their neighbours (the Martingales and the Chomyks) all have two things in common – they are all from European backgrounds, and they have all come to an 'untamed' land with the intention of taming it – the ultimate shared colonial project. The authors of these texts seem intent on the idea of how natural and right it is for these people to be on the land they have taken from its original inhabitants. The European criteria for acceptance once again normalize their presence on the land, and does so necessarily at the exclusion of others. These others are not just Native Americans and Canadians, but are also the Chinese (see Stanley, 2000, pp. 84-86). This idea becomes more significant upon reading and analysing *Tales from Gold Mountain* (Yee, 1989).

5.7 CONCLUSION

Like in *Little house*, the literary devices set out by Snead (1994) reveal instances of racialization in Lottridge's *Ticket to Curllew*. While there are a few instances of explicit marking, most of the racialization in this text is implicit. James Ferrier describes the 'Indians' as gone, and as no longer part of the landscape,

implying that the Ferriers themselves are not 'Indians' or anything like them.

Because they find the Chomyks (also European immigrants) slightly different, it is apparent that even people with dissimilar clothes, homes, or languages are not exactly like the Ferriers. Likewise, they find the Martingales quite acceptable as neighbours and friends, and it is explicitly stated that this family is British. If the Martingales are more acceptable than the Chomyks, then the Ferriers are more like the Martingales – meaning 'white,' and superior resettlers of the Canadian prairie.

While Sam's internal dialogue does provide limited space for negotiation, the overall preferred reading of this story is, once again, to buy into the frontier myth. The implied reader in this case is positioned as 'white' and male (like Sam), and therefore, the gendering of familial roles exists as it does in *Little house*. The subject positions available to readers here are: the adventurous boy/patriarchal male; or, the stay at home mother/sister.

CHAPTER 6: TALES FROM GOLD MOUNTAIN

6.1 THE STORIES

Paul Yee's (1989) collection of eight short stories, *Tales from Gold Mountain: Stories of the Chinese in the new world*, offers an example of a text which does not normalize or take for granted Euro-Canadian/American 'settlement,' but rather, depicts the Chinese as active players in Canada's past. After interviewing Yee, Hancock (1990) notes that the stories in *Gold Mountain* come directly from British Columbia's "history of capitalism, the labour force, racism, the landscape and the everyday folk culture that [Yee's] people brought over here" (p. 346). The Chinese were early contributors to the development of Canada, and Yee's stories illustrate this. Because Yee's characters deviate from the 'standard' colonial heroes (e.g., the Ingalls and the Ferriers), he wants to be sure not to depict the Chinese-Canadian men who settled in North America as purely "victims of white racism," as other stories have done (Yee, as quoted in Davis, 1996, p. 53). Instead, Yee wants to capture the experiences of the workers, focussing on "community... survival techniques...and [the] celebration of being here" (ibid, p. 53). Each of the eight stories has a different twist, but they all represent possible real-life experiences of Chinese-Canadians living and working on the west coast.

Unlike *Little house* and *Ticket*, *Tales from Gold Mountain* "intermingles the real with the surreal, the historical and social with the magical and mythical, thus transcending limited/limiting time and space boundaries" (Ming Chen & Parungao, 1999, p. 32). The mythical elements in the stories, such as the ghost in *Spirits of the railway* (pp. 11-15) represent another way of challenging the colonial narrative. In

Spirits of the railway, Chu sets out from China to the New World in search of his father, who has (unbeknown to Chu) died in an explosion. Once Chu arrived, he found himself in a place full of unemployed Chinese men like himself and joined a labour force heading for a railway building site (p. 12). When winter came the men could not continue working but they stayed in the work camp, suffering until spring came (p. 13). Finally they were able to return to work. One day the men refused to re-enter a tunnel they had been digging in, claiming there were ghosts inside. But their boss shouted, "no work, no pay!" (p. 13). Desperate after the long winter with no food and supplies, Chu ventured in, determined that if he survived the night, the men would agree to resume the next day. Once inside the tunnel, he encountered his father's ghost. The ghost explained that rather than bury the bodies of the Chinese workers in the churchyard, the white bosses had thrown them into the river, leaving them "no final resting place" (p. 14). Chu followed the instructions of his father's ghost to give the deceased workers a proper burial. Finally they had peace and Chu's fellow workers were now willing to return to the tunnel (p. 15). Through his father's ghost, Chu was forced to deal with the harsh reality of racism in his father's life, and to acknowledge the injustice and social imbalance between Chinese workers and their 'white' bosses.

Likewise, the protagonist in *Rider Chan and the night river* (pp. 53-56) is also forced to deal with the past by facing a ghost. The Chan brothers, one hard-working and honest, and the other lazy and greedy, left their mother in China to search for work in the New World. Both brothers promised to send money home to their mother when they could. Hard-working Chan found a job as a courier, delivering messages and medicine to and from miners (p. 54), and the people began to call him Rider

Chan. As promised, he sent his earnings home to his mother in China. Greedy Chan however, broke his promise to his mother by disappearing without a trace. One night as he crossed a river, Rider Chan encountered a water spirit who attempted to take his life, but failed. Chan noticed the spirit had a knife in its back and asked what had happened (p. 55). The spirit explained that he and a friend had struck it rich in the gold mines. The man (now the spirit) did not want to share the gold with his friend so he poisoned his food. But the friend also wanted the gold for himself so, before he had a chance to eat the food (which he did not know was poisoned), he stabbed the man in the back with his knife and dumped his body in the river. The friend then ate the food and died. The friend who ate the poisoned food was the greedy Chan brother (p. 56). To pay the river spirit back for sparing his life, Rider Chan agreed to dig up his bones and send them back to China. To pay Rider Chan back for doing this, and to apologize for killing his greedy brother, he told Chan where the gold had been buried. Chan dug it up and sent it home to his mother. Like Chu, Chan was given the opportunity to help the dead rest in peace by providing a proper burial.

Whereas the characters in *Little house* and *Ticket* do not address, let alone come in contact with, anyone from the past, the characters in Yee's stories are haunted by the ghosts of their ancestors. Here, ghosts are not only acknowledged, but are active players in the stories. *Little house* and *Ticket* seek to silence or disregard those who came before them, but *Gold Mountain* does not buy into the colonial 'lie' which places Euro-Canadians/Americans as the 'original settlers.' James Ferrier in *Ticket* can describe the Aboriginals as "gone now" because he doesn't see, and therefore does not have to feel accountable for, their absence.

Likewise, Charles Ingalls in *Little house* can sing about the “darkies,” who have all “gone,” without any sense of responsibility or even remorse because they are simply not a visible feature of his everyday life. The characters in *Gold Mountain* must come face to face with the past, and acknowledge the reality of those who came before them. Chu and Chang can’t assume they were the first ones on the land, and do not attempt to describe those before them as “gone.” Making ghosts a part of the stories is one way of refusing to ignore the sins of the past, something the traditional colonial narrative does not do. These ghosts however are not Aboriginal ghosts, thus not representing the full range of previous Canadian west-coast inhabitants.

While true that the stories contain mystical elements – ghosts (pp. 11-15; pp. 53-56); magic seeds (pp. 47-50); forty loaves of bread that never go stale (pp. 27-31) – Yee makes it clear that he is not “writing Chinese mythology... not writing in a ‘Chinese’ tradition” (Yee, as quoted in Hancock, 1990, p. 346). Rather, his writing incorporates “western folklore [such as]: *Little red riding hood, Hansel and Gretel, [and] Sleeping beauty*” (ibid). Some of the stories read more like “classic fairy tales” (Davis, 1996, p. 54), while others read much more like myths or legends, but this is not to say that the legends are necessarily based on anything ‘Chinese.’ They simply contain a mixture of historical facts, oral storytelling, social commentary, and fairytale, meant to teach children (or adults who are not resistant) “what the Chinese have done in Canada” (Yee, as quoted in Hancock, 1990, p. 346).

In the following sections, the analytical strategies used to examine *Little house* and *Ticket* will be applied to *Gold Mountain*, using specific stories as examples where applicable. When I began looking at these stories, I felt that although *Gold Mountain* is being used here as a tool for disrupting colonial

discourse, it would be important to analyse the stories in the same way that the first two books were, to maintain consistency in the study. However, because *Gold Mountain* is meant to offer a disruption to the colonial narrative, I will be focussing more on the ways in which the strategies of representation are *different* from the first two texts. I have kept the methodological categories (i.e., marking, omission, mythification, and concomitant inclusion), but focus on the ways in which Yee does *not* mark, omit, 'mythify,' or include based on the 'being friends' discourse.

6.2 GENDERING GOLD MOUNTAIN

Because Yee is openly mindful of including strong female voices in his stories (see Davis, 1996; Ming Chen & Parungao, 1999), the intersection of 'race' and gender is as significant in the analysis of *Gold Mountain* as it is in the two novels. While the women (and girls) in *Little house* and *Ticket* play submissive roles to the men (and boys) with only an occasional exception, this is not the case in Yee's repertoire of historical fiction. Yee's female characters provide a way of negotiating with the patriarchal readings of the two novels. These women and girls offer subject positions that are far more varied than the European perpetuation of the "farmwife" model shown previously in this study.

Incidentally, the men in Yee's stories also offer various interpretations of masculinity. In *Little house* and *Ticket* the men and boys were farmers, carving out a literal space for themselves in the 'untamed' wilderness. The male characters in *Gold Mountain* inhabit many different positions – low class workers, 'white' and Chinese bosses, miners, railway builders, fathers with disabilities, and so forth. While the following interpretation of gender in *Gold Mountain* focuses mainly on the

roles of the female protagonists, the stories themselves present many possible ways of inhabiting masculinities as well as femininities.

In their analysis of female characters in Yee's books, Ming Chen & Parungao (1999) claim that historically, when the Chinese originally 'settled' in Canada, they re-established the same patriarchal system that they had known "for generations in the homeland" (p. 21). But in many of his books such as: *Teach me to fly* (1983), *Curses of the third uncle* (1986), and *Roses sing on new snow* (1991), Yee typically "refuses to allow his female characters to be swallowed by tradition" (Ming Chen & Parungao, 1999, p. 21). Thus, Yee allows his female characters to inhabit many different discursive positions – they are not confined to the patriarchal, colonial positions that the women in *Little house* and *Ticket* are. There is wide open space for the women and girls in his stories to be heroines, and to make a place for themselves outside (and inside) of the colonial culture.

There are three stories out of the eight in *Gold Mountain* that have significant female characters: *Sons and daughters*, *Ginger for the heart*, and *Forbidden fruit*. Of these three, *Ginger for the heart* (pp. 35-38) has the strongest female protagonist. Yenna had a beauty that was "beyond compare" (p. 35). She lived in Chinatown, sewing and singing all day with her mother. Her father, Chang, was a merchant tailor and knew the craftsmanship of his wife and daughter were unbeatable. One day a man entered the shop, returning there often to watch Yenna sew. The couple fell in love but the man soon had to leave to find work. All that Yenna had to give him to remember her by was a lump of ginger which she pressed to her lips (p. 36). Every night, Yenna burned a lamp in the top window to signify the undying flame in her heart for him. Illness swept through the city and Chang lost "his wife and his

eyesight" (p. 37), leaving Yenna to sew alone and sing to her blind father while waiting for her love's return. Years later, a man entered the store with a shirt to be mended, and out rolled a lump of ginger, slightly eaten but still "firm and fragrant" (p. 37). The man tossed the ginger into the fire but it refused to burn. Taking this as a sign, the estranged couple married and promised to stay together forever.

Yenna is quite unlike the female characters in *Little house* and *Ticket*. She has a marvellous gift for sewing and must take over her father's tailoring business when her mother dies and her father becomes blind (Yee, 1999, pp. 35-38). Ming Chan & Parungao (1999) state that it is common for Yee's strong female characters to exhibit a heightened ability or skill in some area. Yenna's customers considered her the best tailor as they "could not discern where holes had once pierced their shirts... buttonholes never stretched out of shape, and seams were all but invisible" (Yee, 1989, p. 35). This young woman's exceptional beauty and talent set her apart as an individual. She is very capable of maintaining the business, even though she has to sew twice as much without her mother's help, often working well into the night (pp. 36-37).

In some ways Yenna is alone, with eventually only her blind father for company, yet no matter how many suitors come to see her, she refuses them. She maintains her hope that her one true love will keep his word and return to her from his venture to the gold mines. Interestingly, Yenna's father "treasured his daughter's happiness and let her be," even though in China her marriage would have been arranged by her parents (p. 36). Obviously, her father has been influenced by the ways of the new world, confirming Yee's idea that "the Canadian experience is an indispensable ingredient in the Chinese immigrants' process of assimilation" (Ming

Chen & Parungao, 1999, p. 23). When Yenna's true love does come back for her, she will not leave with him out of loyalty to her blind and aging father. This is a decision that she makes on her own regardless of the fact that the man threatens to leave her. While she is still bound by the obligations of a woman as caregiver, Yenna has a strong personality that she upholds even when she is faced with potential loss. She also proves herself to be influenced by 'modern' ideas when, as her true love threatens to leave, she cries, "but this is a new land...must we forever follow the old ways?" (p. 38).

Forbidden fruit (pp. 47-50) has a significant female character as well, but, unlike Yenna, she is made to suffer immensely from the decisions made for her by her father, Farmer Fong. Interestingly, this young woman is not given a name in the story, but is simply referred to as "Farmer Fong's daughter." Hurt and angry at being abandoned by his three sons, Farmer Fong took his anger out on his only daughter, making her do more work than she could handle (p. 48). One day, a young man (farmhand Johnson) arrived, looking for a job (p. 48). Fong hired him, and gradually Johnson and Fong's daughter fell in love. But when Fong refused to let Johnson marry his daughter because he had no "means," the young man left the farm (p. 48). Fong's daughter became bed-ridden with grief, and eventually died of a broken heart. After her death, Farmer Fong found a few seeds that Johnson had sent his daughter before she died. Fong recalled how some of the seeds had actually sprouted in his daughter's hand (p. 49), but the plants all died one night when a terrible frost spread over the valley. So, to honour the memory of his daughter, Fong planted the remaining seeds. The tomato plants flourished and over time Fong

became very prosperous. Every day the tomato plants reminded him of "his daughter's gentle nature and his own foolish pride" (p. 50).

Unlike Yenna and Fong's daughter, Madame Moy in *Sons and daughters* (pp. 19-23), does not rebel at all against her husband. When Merchant and Madame Moy (the "richest Chinese in town" p. 19) were blessed with twin daughters, Merchant Moy was very disappointed that the Moy name wouldn't be carried on. So, he tricked his wife, saying he was going to take the new baby girls to China to visit his aged parents, when instead, he did take them to China, but sold them, purchasing twin boys in their place (p. 20). When Madame realized what her husband had done, she "wept and wept and would not eat" (p. 21). Yet, gradually she softened to the cries of the little boys and raised them as her own. When the brothers were grown, their father sent them to China to find wives. They brought home twin sisters and married them in Chinatown (p. 22). However, as time passed, and despite the many measures taken, the young Moy women couldn't conceive. Moy sought advice at the temple where he was told, "The gods above, they say, no man can wed his sister" (p. 22). Soon after that, Moy died and requested that his sons "change their family name" so they would not carry the same name as their wives (p. 23). Only after the Moy name was lost did the gods allow the young couples to bear children.

Madame Moy is horrified that her husband has taken her new twin baby daughters to China and returned with two twin boys who are strangers to her. But rather than voice her rage at being tricked and losing her children, she just sits "like a statue," even though she feels as if "someone had cut her open and cast a piece of her into the cold dark ocean" (p. 21). She then raises the boys as her own and

eventually goes on as if nothing happened. There is no mention of her lingering grief over the years, and husband and wife "smile softly, for they were proud of their sons" (p. 21). Not only has Madame learned to love the boys as her own, she has evidently forgiven her husband for selling her daughters. Even in the end when Madame suspects what has happened (that her true daughters have married her adopted sons, each bearing the Moy family name), she says nothing, in order to honour her dead husband (p. 23). Like the women in *Little house and Ticket*, the authority of the husband (in this case, even in death) is more important than the happiness or independence of the women. As for the young twin daughters, no mention is made of their lives until they return to the new world to (unknowingly) marry their non-blood brothers.

These stories present readings with a full range of feminine roles. Unlike the women and girls in the two novels, the female characters in Yee's collection are not necessarily or always bound by stereotypical roles – some of them are strong, some weak; some are rebellious, others are not; and, some adhere to tradition, while some do not.

The other five stories in *Gold Mountain* are centred around male protagonists. In each of the five (except for *Revenge of the iron chink*, which doesn't mention a single female character), mothers are mentioned, but do not play active roles. As we have seen, Chu, in *Spirits*, and Chan, in *Rider Chan*, both left mothers behind as they travelled to the new world in search of work and fortune. Likewise, in *The friends of Kwan Ming* (pp. 27-31), Kwan Ming sets off for the new world after his father's death. The family needs money and Kwan Ming plans to send money back to his mother in China. On the ship he meets Chew Lap, Tam Yim, and Wong Foon

(p. 27) who became his instant companions. Once they arrive, the four friends are offered work. Three of the offers are decent but one of them is for a houseboy of the richest but “stingiest man around” (p. 29). Being a generous soul, Kwan Ming takes the lowest paying position (houseboy), while the others are employed as a tailor, a shoemaker’s assistant, and a baker (pp. 28-29). One day Kwan Ming’s boss threatens to fire him, and so, desperate to keep his job, he accepts his boss’s unreasonable demands for “a fine woollen suit...leather boots...and forty loaves of bread” (p. 30). Kwan Ming is wondering how he will ever afford these items, when he meets up with his three old friends. “Don’t worry!” they cry and offer him their services (p. 30). From their experience at their various occupations (tailor, shoemaker, baker), the friends “deliver the goods” (p. 30). The bread was so delicious that the greedy boss ate twenty loaves. He filled up so much that he “exploded into a million little pieces” (p. 31).

The only woman mentioned in *Gambler’s eyes* is the “blind” man’s mother; and in *The revenge of the iron chink* (summary of these stories to follow), no women are mentioned at all. By way of explaining the dominant male presence in his stories, Yee states that “history didn’t really allow it [female protagonists] because the early population was so predominantly male. The role of women was tightly controlled and constrained by the men” (Davis, 1996, p. 54). Given that most of the Chinese-Canadian population at that time was male, and that women hadn’t yet started to come to Canada in large numbers, it makes sense that the stories in *Gold Mountain* would reflect this trend (Davis, 1996, p. 55).

Even though most of the tales are centred around the experiences of single men, the female characters play much more active and independent roles than do

the females in the two novels. It is evident that the liberation of women and 'interracial' relationships are linked. Yee suggests that only through "sufficient interracial contacts [can] the Chinese system of male-centred values be challenged" (Ming Chen & Parungao, 1999, p. 23). Yet in some of the short stories, such as *Forbidden fruit*, where the family lives on the isolated prairie, 'interracial' contact is minimal. However, it does seem to hold true in *Ginger for the heart*. For it to be possible for Yenna to choose her own husband, she had to be living in the new world; for in China, her marriage would have been pre-arranged. In *Forbidden fruit* Farmer Fong refuses to allow his daughter to marry farmhand Johnson (presumably a 'white' man), perhaps because he lives on the isolated prairie rather than in the city where there would be more exposure to different ways and different people. Fong's daughter suffers because of his resistance to change, while Chang's daughter (Yenna) has happiness, in part, because of her father's willingness to be changed and moulded by the customs of the new (white) world.

Yee challenges the notions of femininity that have been established by colonial representations such as *Little house* and *Ticket*. By presenting a variety of female characters, Yee refuses to essentialize the roles of women and girls. Caroline Ingalls, with one exception, always allows her husband to dominate. The fact that there is only one break in her usual role, gives evidence to the normalization of patriarchy in the story. Likewise, Clara Ferrier has little to say about anything other than to her children, and identifies only with other women in the story, hence perpetuating the European notion of the wife as home maker.

6.3 MARKING

One of the most significant differences between *Gold Mountain* and the two novels, is that unlike Lottridge and Wilder, Yee *explicitly* marks his characters as Chinese. Where the characters in the novels are implicitly marked in subtle (and at times, not so subtle ways), Yee's characters are deliberately and always introduced as Chinese. When they are not, it is apparent that they are *not* Chinese. Explicit marking purposely challenges the tactics of the colonial narrative, by not hiding the fact that these are the stories of the colonial-made 'others.' We know the characters in the novels are Europeans, because 'white' is the implied category when none is offered. We know the characters in *Gold Mountain* are Chinese, because Yee names them as such.

Another difference in Yee's text, are the characters themselves. *Little house* and *Ticket* are about two 'traditional' families with a mother, a father and children, whereas the characters in Yee's short stories are mostly single men. When interviewed by Davis (1996), Yee stated that this reflects the "dislocation of men away from family, their loneliness, and their search for home" (p. 54). In the cases where families are represented, they are one parent families, due to the death of the other (e.g., *Ginger for the heart* and *Forbidden fruit*). *Only Sons and daughters* revolves around a family with a mother, father and children, although this family is not like the Ingalls or the Ferriers, in that they are haunted by a dark family secret. Also, the Ingalls and Ferriers are farmers, whereas the characters in *Gold Mountain* are railway workers, merchants, city labourers, tailors, and factory workers. Only the characters in *Forbidden fruit* are farmers; the rest live in the city, and generally work away from their homes and families.

Physical representations of the characters

The characters in this collection do not necessarily need to be marked physically for the reader to know they are all Chinese. The title itself tells us that these are "stories of the Chinese in the new world." The opening paragraphs of each of the narratives tell us that the characters have either recently moved to the new world to work (pp. 11, 27, 47, 53, 59) or live in Chinatown (pp. 19, 35, 41). In each story there is explicit statement of Chinese origin: "Merchant Moy...the richest Chinese in town" (p. 19); "Kwan Ming huddled together with hundreds of other Chinese deep in the ship's hold" (p. 27); "Chinese workers would arrive...the Chinese would clean the fish" (p. 59), and so on. The names of the characters are also an indication that they are non-European. In *Little house* and *Ticket*, people's names are "English" sounding, for example: Sam, Laura, James, and Caroline; whereas in *Gold Mountain*, we hear non-"English" sounding names like: Lee Jim, Wong Foon, Chang, and Chu.

However, physical characteristics *are* presented in the case of those who are *not* Chinese. In *Spirits of the railway* and *The revenge of the iron chink*, it is apparent that the bosses are 'white.' The workers in *Spirits* talk about how their explicitly identified 'white' boss treats them like "mules and dogs," and shouts at them (p. 12). In *Revenge of the iron chink* (pp. 59-62) Lee Jim is always made foreman because he can speak English (p. 59), enabling him to speak with the owner of the cannery. In the spring, Lee Jim would bring a crew of Chinese workers to a fish cannery on the west coast of the new world (p. 59). Each year new machines were installed at the cannery, replacing more and more of the workers. At last, with the arrival of the "iron chink" (p. 60), the owner informed the workers that

they were no longer needed – including Lee Jim (p. 61). Their last assignment was to can a case of fish that would be sent to the Queen of England. After that, they were finished for good. The next day, after the workers had their final pay checks in their hands, Lee Jim showed the owner his hands. They were “wrapped in bloody bandages” (p. 61). Lee Jim told him and all the workers that as a gift to the Queen, he had cut off his baby fingers and canned them with the fish! The crew “laughed and cheered” (p. 62) but the owner was furious. Once safely on the boat, away from the angry boss, Lee Jim lifted the coloured bandages to show the men his hands – each with five fingers fully in tact.

Although the owner is not described as ‘white,’ he is obviously not Chinese – the fact that the workers are described as Chinese and the fact that he does not speak Chinese, marks him as non-Chinese. It seems that the bosses in *Spirits* and *Revenge* are being marked as mean or hard on their employees. These two bosses are ‘white,’ but Yee is not racializing ‘white’ as cruel and disrespectful, because in two of the other stories, *Kwan Ming* and *Forbidden fruit*, the bosses are Chinese and are just as bad. So, although Yee marks a few characters as ‘white,’ he does not racialize, stereotype or exclude these characters on this basis, the way that Lottridge and Wilder do with their non-white characters.

An interesting case in point is farmhand Johnson in *Forbidden fruit*, for he is not marked physically at all. The absence of marking seems in itself to mark him as ‘white,’ because ‘white’ is generally the unmarked or invisible category. However, this is not absolutely clear, because Johnson speaks the language of the Fong’s (which may or may not be English), and is only described as being “without means”

(p. 48). Yee does not buy into the fixed categories of 'race' – Johnson could be 'black' or could even be Chinese, but this is not clearly marked.

Yee blurs the racial categories again in *Gambler's eyes* (pp. 41-44). This story introduces a man of "mixed blood" (p. 44) who must keep his blue-green eyes shut to avoid being mocked, but as a result gains a gift for hearing "the hearts of greedy gamblers" (p. 44). Thinking him blind, and therefore a vulnerable target, the men at a casino in Chinatown are at first reluctant to bet against him. But, at the urging of the dealer, the men oblige (p. 42). To their astonishment, the 'blind' man wins game after game. When he opens his eyes the men see that they are "blue-green, sharp as mountain ice, hard as emeralds" (p. 43). He tells them of how his father came to the new world from China and married a white woman who gave him his eyes (p. 44). But everyone had made fun of him for his mixed blood so he "shut [his] eyes and opened [his] ears" (p. 44). He had closed his eyes and was then able to better hear the greedy hearts of men. Blue-green eyes in this story are a code for racial intolerance and a metaphor of the landscape. Like the blue sky or the "mountain ice" (p. 43) which are part of the British Columbia scenery, the man's eyes are blue. Like the green pine trees, also part of the scenery, the man's eyes are green. It is apparent that, like the Canadian landscape around him, this man is from 'here,' yet has never been able to fit in to the artificial categories of human society.

By introducing the gambler, Yee once again troubles the colonial narrative as well as the narrative of the 'others.' This man is not marked as 'white' or as Chinese, yet is both. The identity of the 'pioneers' is challenged here, for all of the 'settlers' in British Columbia could be considered 'pioneers,' but contrary to popular/colonial belief, they were not all European, and not all of "pure blood." In *Little house*, Pa's

and Uncle George's blue eyes serve as a visible marker of their whiteness. Yee seriously challenges this 'racial' marking by giving a "mixed blood" Chinese man blue eyes. While blue eyes allows Uncle George to maintain his accepted position as a 'white' man in the Ingalls family (even though he is wild), blue eyes is the sole reason that the gambler can not be accepted.

Counter to the colonial narratives then, the main characters in *Gold Mountain* are (the so-called) 'others,' and the minor characters are marked as 'white' and as somewhat insignificant. These tactics disrupt the traditional way of telling the 'pioneer' story – the 'pioneers' are Chinese, and the 'others' are white – even though they are not racialized as such.

Coded language

Coded language in *Gold Mountain* is used by the author purposefully, to reflect racist terms used to refer to Chinese immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century. In the two novels examined in this study, when the language is coded, it represents specific racializations that are inherently or tacitly understood and taken for granted by the reader. The example given earlier in reference to *Little house*, is Wilder's inclusion of the song "Uncle Ned" (Wilder, 1932, pp. 99-100). The term "darkey" implies that Uncle Ned was an African American man without calling him 'black,' and because of his 'darkness' and his work in the fields, one can imagine that Uncle Ned was a slave. The 'dark' code represents a lower position on the human hierarchy, someone who is 'other' (i.e., un-white), and someone whose experiences serve as entertainment (i.e. for Laura on her birthday). However, in *Gold Mountain*,

the language is artificial and purposefully coded to represent the author's awareness and acknowledgement of racism at the time.

Specifically, I would like to refer to *The revenge of the iron chink*. The term "chink" [sic] is an extremely derogatory term used to mark the Chinese as having a lower position on Snead's (1994) scale of human hierarchy. However, Yee does not use it to secretly refer to Chinese people as "chinks" [sic], nor to imply a taken for granted inferiority. Rather, he uses this term ironically to represent the reality of racist language. Nowhere in the story are any of the characters named as "chinks" [sic], nor are any of the characters in the other stories. By using the racist term in the title, Yee acknowledges that the Chinese were considered 'other,' but he does not allow his characters to fall into this role.

Yee is also playing at words in this title. Even when the characters do fall into the role of the inferior (as they do when they all get fired from the cannery), they are not passive recipients of racism, but active initiators of revenge. The term "iron chink" could perhaps refer to Lee Jim for being a strong (iron) Chinese man (chink). Lee Jim stands up to his boss by playing a terrible trick on him, thus maintaining his dignity in the face of oppression. The "iron chink" is not simply a device that replaces the Chinese workers, but is also a strong willed man, unwilling to be a victim of 'white' racism, which we know is something Yee does not want for his characters (see Yee, as quoted in Davis, 1996, p. 53). Yet again, 'taking revenge' is a tactic that Yee uses to disrupt the assumptions of the colonial narrative. The *Gold Mountain* actors do not fall into stereotypes and are not made simple "caricatures" (see Snead, 1994, p. 3) of Chinese people, but rather are shown as normal people with regular life experiences.

6.4 OMISSION

Although *Gold Mountain* offers a refreshing change to the depiction of 'pioneers' in colonial narratives, this collection still only focuses on the experiences of one group, and does not include 'others' such as Aboriginal Canadians or African Canadians. In each of the stories, it is apparent that the main protagonists are Chinese (with perhaps the exception of the "mixed blood" character in *Gambler's eyes*) and that any of the other more minor characters are European (i.e., white). Like *Little house* and *Ticket*, these stories naturalize and normalize the existence of the Chinese in Canada, to the exclusion of 'others.' Given Yee's commitment to an alternate representation of history, this is a disappointing exclusion indeed. Aboriginal people especially could have, and should have, been included in this collection of stories. As Yesaki points out, in the 1890's, Aboriginal women worked alongside Chinese men in the salmon canneries on the west coast (as quoted in Bryan, 2000). This is a situation that would have fit in to the repertoire of stories in *Gold Mountain*, and would certainly have provided a more inclusive depiction of Canadian history.

The exclusion of Aboriginals is problematic in this collection of short stories, because Yee does not exclude in the same way that Wilder and Lottridge do. In *Little house*, Wilder racializes Native Americans as imaginary, invisible, wild "Indians," rather than acknowledging them as people who have been colonially displaced from their homes. Native Americans are mentioned, but are excluded or omitted *because* they are "Indians," and are therefore very unlike the Ingalls. Likewise, in *Ticket*, Lottridge racializes Aboriginal people as "gone now," excluding them in a way that mythifies their disappearance from the landscape. Lottridge

makes it seem as though they moved away on their own, or as though they don't really exist any more. This type of omission is racist – the “Indians” are being excluded *because* they are not like the main characters. The fact that ‘others’ (e.g., the Petersons and the Chomyks) who are similar but still different from the main families (the Ingalls and the Ferriers) are included, makes it obvious that being European is one of the main criteria for inclusion in the two novels. Yee, on the other hand, simply does not mention Aboriginal-Canadians or African-Canadians at all. This too is a form of omission, but by not naming who is absent in the stories, it is not a racialized exclusion. The reader can imagine who is omitted, but Yee does not provide any specific reference to who is being omitted.

The literary tactics of Wilder and Lottridge imply that “Indians” are not part of these stories, don't belong, and are not worthy of friendship. ‘Others’ are mentioned but in dismissive, racialized ways. Yee also omits Aboriginal Canadians from his stories, but does not do so in a racialized manner: he simply leaves them out. The title of his book sets the stories up as being specifically focused on the Chinese resettlement in Canada. Yee explicitly makes it known who these stories are going to be about. *Little house in the big woods* would certainly provide a much different reading of history if it had been named: *Little house in the big woods: A story of European resettlement in America*, and Lottridge's novel would read very differently if it was called: *Ticket to Curlew: Colonialism on the Canadian prairies*. Perhaps the exclusion of all ‘others’ in the novels would be “less racist” if the titles themselves named who was going to be included in the story.

The Laura Ingalls story has evolved into a cultural trope, representing all that is “pioneer” in America (and arguably in Canada as well). *Little house* represents

“the” resettlement experience, and because the identity of the characters is not explicitly stated, it is (through many of the tactics discussed) obvious that they are white-Europeans. The absence of overt naming implies that this story represents *all* “pioneers,” whereas *Gold Mountain* means only to represent the experience of the Chinese in Canada. Yee also does not fall into the trap of essentializing Chinese experience, due to the diverse roles his characters play, and the varied settings they are in. Even though Yee’s omission of Aboriginals is not racialized in the same way as it is in the two novels, his historical representations would be stronger if he included those people that he omits. Again pointing to Yee’s commitment to alternative retellings of history, it is surprising that he does not include Aboriginals in any of his short stories. On the other hand, it is possible that Yee could be accused by some of appropriating Aboriginal histories for his own purposes, had he been inclusive of them in his collection. The question then points to what right one has to tell someone else’s story – perhaps Yee’s omission of Aboriginals is a purposeful way of avoiding essentializing the tales of a group with which he does not self-identify.

6.5 MYTHIFICATION – DE-‘MYTHIFYING’ THE FRONTIER

Contrary to the two novels in this study, *Gold Mountain* does not perpetuate the myth of the frontier, which places Euro-Canadians and Americans as the natural inhabitants of the land, and as the only people who contributed to the development of Canadian society and culture. Rather, in his book, Yee places the Chinese at the head of the action, and as the main characters, making them the main Canadian inhabitants. He makes it seem natural that the Chinese were city dwellers, property

owners, trades people, railway builders, miners, merchants and factory workers. In these stories, it seems that the Chinese were the only ones around, except for a few 'white' people who were typically bosses. This, in effect, unmakes the myth of the frontier.

6.6 CONCOMITANT INCLUSION

Some of the stories in *Gold Mountain* deal with the topic of friendship, and they conform to the same "being friends" discourse as the two novels do. That is to say that the characters only make friends with people who are 'like' them, and not with those who are different from them in some way. For example, Kwan Ming makes friends with three Chinese men headed for the new world, but not with anyone else when he arrives. It is also evident that the man Yenna falls in love with in *Ginger for the heart* is Chinese, like her. Yenna cries, "must we forever follow the old ways?" (p. 38), implying that the man she loves understands, and is also part of, the old (Chinese) ways. There are two exceptions where the reader can't necessarily determine if the 'friend' is Chinese or not, because the characters are not marked at all. Farmer Fong's daughter in, *Forbidden fruit*, finds a companion in farmhand Johnson, although as stated earlier, we can't say with certainty that Johnson is Chinese. His name would suggest that he is 'white,' but he is not marked as such so it is possible that he is Chinese. Similarly, the greedy brother in *Rider Chan and the night river* made friends with a man with whom he was going to share his wealth from the gold rush. This friend (who is now the ghost in the river) is not marked in any way so it is not possible to determine if the man was Chinese like the greedy Chan brother or not.

In two of the other stories, it is evident that the Chinese make friends with the Chinese, and not with 'others,' or those whom they imagine are different from them. *Gambler's eyes* introduces a character who no one wants to be friends with because he is different. At the beginning of the story, when the other gamblers think the man is blind, they call out to him, "hey brother" (p. 41), showing that he *appears* to be 'like' them. They think he is Chinese because, at first glance, he looks like them, and so they address him as "brother." When the gambler shows exceptional skill with the dice, the men become angry with him. It is then that the man reveals his blue-green eyes (p. 44), showing that he is not exactly like the other Chinese men. The gambler describes how he has been rejected all his life – "whites and Chinese alike, they mocked my mixed blood" (p. 44). This is a telling example of how both 'whites' and Chinese alike, in the two novels and in Yee's short stories, prefer to be friends with those who are 'like' them – 'whites' with 'whites' and Chinese with Chinese. In the case of the gambler, the man who is neither Chinese nor 'white,' yet is both, is not worthy of friendship or acceptance from either group.

Lee Jim's case is slightly different in *The revenge of the iron chink*, but he does experience what it's like to be excluded from friendships based on perceived difference. Lee Jim has never been accepted into the camaraderie of the other Chinese workers at the cannery. Although the workers respect him, he can't eat or socialize with the men because the company rules state that bosses are not to mix with the workers (p. 60). Lee Jim is also different from the others because he speaks Chinese and English, and can therefore communicate with the English speaking owner. The workers seem to resent the fact that he is Chinese with a higher status than the regular workers because he speaks two languages. At the

end, when he tricks the owner into thinking he cut off his baby fingers and cans them, the workers rally around him, and laughing and joking they say, "welcome to the working life, Lee Jim!" (p. 62). It is only when Lee Jim stands up to the 'white' owner that he is accepted among the Chinese workers. He had to lower his status from boss to worker in order to make friends.

Even though, according to 'white' standards, the Chinese in the new world are lower on the scale of human hierarchy (Snead, 1994), there is still hierarchy within the Chinese community. Men of "mixed blood," and men who are of a higher working class are not as readily accepted by the masses, and are singled out and even rejected because of supposed differences. This is similar to the Chomyks in *Ticket to Curllew*. Although they are European like the Ferriers, they do not make for the same kind of friends as do the British Martingales. In that case, inclusion was based on a mutual frontier desire, yet limitations were placed on friendships with those who were slightly different. In *Gold Mountain* the same phenomenon is played out – inclusion is based on an inherent "Chineseness" and on status as working class. Those who deviate slightly from these two requirements are not as fit for being friends, whether they are Chinese or not.

6.7 CONCLUSION

The analytical categories used in this study have been applied to Yee's collection of short historical tales, but in general, these stories do not mark, mythify, omit, or include in the same ways as *Little house* and *Ticket* do. The characters are explicitly marked as Chinese, and are purposefully named as such, rather than being implicitly and ambiguously identified. Yee challenges the frontier myth by

normalizing the possible experiences of the Chinese, and by making the protagonists Chinese rather than 'white' Europeans. While the Chinese are nonetheless portrayed as resettlers (like Euro-Canadians), these stories offer alternative discourses about history.

Readers are provided with many varied subject positions, and stereotypical gender roles are bent on several occasions. Women may be subservient to their husbands, such as Madam Moy is to Merchant Moy, or they may challenge their father's wishes like Farmer Fong's daughter does; men may be strict bosses like Chimney Head is, or may do the best they can to make a living, as is the case with Kwan Ming. The characters are high class and working class; farmers and seamstresses; city and urban dwellers.

The preferred reading of *Gold Mountain* is to accept Chinese-Canadians as early inhabitants and contributors to this country. However, the text itself (because its preferred reading is an alternative one) provides a negotiated reading of history on a macro-level. Rather than being limited to a 'white'-European "reading" of history, Yee's text breaks the mould by providing a means through which to negotiate, and perhaps even oppose, the dominant or preferred discourses about Canada's past.

CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION

On a micro-level, this study has attempted to outline how works of historical fiction for children can perpetuate the discourses of a colonial culture. The literature revealed that historical fiction has many meanings and parameters to those who write it and study it. Historical fiction can be defined strictly by time periods and dates, or can represent a collective idea about the past. Depictions of the past can narrate and normalize colonialism by depicting only the 'same' characters and the 'same' settings – namely those that glorify the resettlement of the 'white' European, and marginalize the imagined 'others.'

The literature also showed that racialization, or the social construction of 'race,' makes known to the reader who the characters are, without having to explicitly name them. Images of 'white' and 'black' play on the "literary imagination" (Morrison, 1992) to create a sense of belonging or alienation. This study implies that, based on the findings presented by Dei (1998) and James (1994/1995), one of the possible consequences of the absence of non-'white' representations in schools is for students to withdraw emotionally or physically. Similarly, not representing a diverse range of experiences in schools can allow 'white' or mainstream students to take the dominant discourses (which may seem to reflect their experience) for granted. Finally, by reviewing feminist, anti-racist literature, it is clear that the stereotyping of gender roles in fiction can serve as another vehicle for racism. By portraying males as the patriarch over family and environment, 'others' (i.e., women, non-'white' men) are assigned childlike, dependant, or marginalized roles.

The adaptation of Snead's (1994) methods (i.e., marking, omission, and mythification) for the purposes of this study, has made observable the colonial discourses at work in at least two of the three works of historical fiction. In *Little house in the big woods* and *Ticket to Curlew* skin, hair, and eye colour externally marked the main characters and their friends as 'white' Europeans. By also marking 'others' as not-like-us, as was the case with the 'Indians' and Uncle Ned, the Ingalls and the Ferriers are again marked as 'white.' Coded language, or the commonly understood way of speaking about things/people, also marked the colonizers as 'white.' Derogatory terms such as "darky" and "Injun" placed the dominant characters as not-dark and not-Injun, which is implicitly understood to be the preferred reading of these texts. By marking the characters as white, two discursive positions are made possible – us and them; the west and the rest (Hall, 1996a). The preferred reading of these two stories is to identify with the main characters and accept them as the natural, rightful inhabitants of the land. While negotiated or oppositional readings are possible, it is likely that the preferred codes will be absorbed, because they go (mostly) unchallenged in the books.

The very fact that Native Americans and Aboriginal Canadians were either omitted or included in negative ways, buys into the colonial discourse of this land being "ours" now. No explanation or justification is given for the apparent disappearance of the original inhabitants, which allows the reader the option of not worrying about it. If the books do not challenge or question their vanishing, then discursive moments of negotiation with this text become more difficult. Granted, there are specific moments of negotiation in the texts – Ma slaps a bear, departing momentarily from her role as submissive housewife; Sam questions the legitimacy of

his fathers description of the 'Indians,' challenging the patriarchal figure and the normalcy of colonialism – but mostly, the dominant codes hold the discursive power in the texts. By omitting or excluding 'others' from the stories, the colonial narratives are enforced; 'white' Europeans were the first settlers of the land, and now own it, regardless of who has been displaced.

The tactic of mythification proved to be very important in this study, for through it, the colonial narrative is created and strengthened. The Natives in the big woods don't really exist – they are positioned as part of the past, as imaginary, and as the villains in Pa's childhood game. Again the discursive positions established for readers are the hunter or the hunted; the strong patriarchal male, or the wild, animal-like 'Indian.' The myth of the 'vanishing Canadian' also perpetuates colonial discourse, for, who knows where the Aboriginals have gone, or why – they must have vanished.

Finally, through the strategy of concomitant inclusion, it was possible to see that some people were included, even thought of as friends, as long as they had specific criteria in common with the European protagonists. Being friends means sharing the colonial dream of taming an uninhabited, wild land – regardless of the fact that everyone has come from another place, may dress differently, and may not even speak the same languages. The racialized 'Indians' also share some of these qualities of different dress and different languages, but because they did not 'settle' down in the European fashion, they were not fit to be friends.

In an attempt to provide an alternative reading of history to the colonial one, *Tales from Gold Mountain: Stories of the Chinese in the new world* was introduced as a disruption to the dominant discourses about Canada's past. The Chinese were

among the first Canadian resettlers; they too came from elsewhere to a new place with intentions of establishing a better life. Yet, it has become apparent that the Chinese are not commonly represented as part of Canadian history. Even now, Chinese-Canadians are fighting head-tax laws from the 1800's – and losing – and are struggling to have aspects of their Chinese-Canadian contribution to society recognized (e.g., the preservation of west coast canneries and traditional Chinese cemeteries).

Yee normalizes the contributions of the Chinese in the development of Canada as we know it, thus refusing to buy into the myth of the frontier. Although the same devices were used to analyse *Gold Mountain* as the two novels, I found that the narratives in it did not represent a colonial cultural discourse. Rather, these stories portrayed alternatives to the patriarchal, racialized depictions in *Little house* and *Ticket*. Yee consistently challenges racialized categories. The characters in *Gold Mountain* are explicitly marked as Chinese – no implicit linguistic coding is necessary to decipher who these stories are about. However, by not including Aboriginal people, Yee does display the colonial tactic of omission. Despite this omission, *Gold Mountain* does disrupt colonial discourse and does present an alternative way of looking at and thus, of teaching, history. While novels which retell colonial narratives can perhaps offer moments of disruption to the preferred readings, negotiated readings will likely not take place unless these moments are specifically called to attention. For this reason, books that prioritize alternative representations of the past offer a realm of possibilities that traditional, colonial stories do not.

Over the course of this study, several things have become apparent. Not least is the fact that this analysis could potentially go on forever. In choosing to focus on racialization in these texts, there are undoubtedly many things I have missed, undermined, or inadequately discussed. One area that has been under-represented is the intersection of 'race' and gender. This entire project could have been redone with only gender as the focus; but in an effort to contain the parameters, decisions had to be made. The short analysis of the depiction of gender roles in these three works does not adequately show the impact of gender stereotypes on the colonial narrative. Further study in this area would certainly be worthwhile and extremely interesting. This study also falls short in its discussion of the key concepts: racialization, racism, colonialism, and discourse. Each of these concepts could be theses, and therefore, for the present purposes, only the basics of each could be covered. Tuen van Dijk's portrayal of discourse and power is a concept that also warrants further investigation. It would be especially interesting to look at this concept in conjunction with Phillip Cohen's "micro-context" – that is, to look at how discourse perpetuates power in specific, micro-contained aspects of culture.

Finally, this study has not explored the depth of the effect that *Little house in the big woods* had on me as a child. This perhaps can be saved for another paper. Writing this analysis has been a meaningful experience for me both personally and academically. It has permitted me to revisit many cherished childhood memories, to discuss difficult concepts with individuals who have inspired me, to engage with interesting literature that I might not otherwise have been exposed to, and to challenge myself to 'read' and think outside my own Euro-white-woman box.

Analysing these texts has not tarnished my love of children's literature, nor turned me against classic depictions of history. Rather, it has made me acutely aware of the numerous moments for self-identification in text, of the many ways a text can be read, negotiated and opposed, and of the infinite capacity of the imagination.

If I knew then what I know now, my practicum experience at that alternative school in the year 2000 might have turned out differently. If I had it to do over again, I would challenge the students in grade 3 to look beyond the preferred readings of *Little house* and *Ticket to Curlew*. I would point out the gendered roles of the Ma's and the Pa's, the girls and the boys, and ask the students to notice how (thankfully) these roles have begun to change. The whole concept of the "pioneers," and who-belongs-where would be brought into question, and attention would be drawn to who is missing from these stories. I might ask the children to write a different song about Uncle Ned, to retell the *Little house* story from Ma's point of view, or to imagine how the Chomyks might have felt arriving in a new country where they don't speak the language. To expand the "pioneer" unit, we would talk about the original Canadian inhabitants, and about some of the first Canadian resettlers, such as the Chinese on the west coast, or the African-Canadians who made the east coast their home. I would not resist open conversation about colonization, and might inspire the students to brainstorm on what it might have been like to be forced from your home as an Aboriginal person. In short, the social studies unit would encompass much more than a quick look at Euro-Canadian history – it would allow students to engage with some of the concepts and alternative discourses that I have had the privilege of working with in this project.

Although I may not choose (if I had it do over again) to use the texts that were given to me to teach in my practicum, that is not to say they have no literary or educational value. *Little house* does perpetuate colonial cultural discourses, but stating this fact is not meant to imply that it is not a cherished and worthwhile piece of historical fiction. Instead, acknowledging this fact opens the door to discussing the many possible ways of reading and teaching this story in critical, negotiated ways. Admittedly, after reading *Little house* – now more times than I care to remember – I still love the Ingalls family. I still identify with Laura and her tomboyish ways; I still think it would have been nice to have grown up with a father figure like Charles Ingalls; and, I still want to live on a farm someday where life feels just a bit more simple. The dreams and fantasies of childhood are not easily nor readily let go of. In the words of a Canadian song writer:

These precious illusions in my head,
did not let me down when I was a kid,
and parting with them
is like parting with a
childhood best friend.

Alanis Morissette
Precious Illusions

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