

The First Black British Columbia Novel: Truman Green's *A Credit to Your Race*

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An important little-known text in the history of Pacific Northwest black writing is Truman Green's moving and haunting novel from 1973 called *A Credit to Your Race*, a compelling account of growing up as a black Canadian in a largely white culture. Green's novel uses a deceptively straightforward story—narrated from a young adult perspective—to explore the “variable meanings” (Sandwell 192) of race and racism in British Columbia. Wayne Compton contextualizes the novel in his introduction to *Bluesprint: Black British Columbian Literature and Orature*, noting that “[m]ost of the [black BC] writers who broke the twentieth-century publishing silence in the 1970s—Christopher James, Truman Green, and Fred Booker—were self-publishing, suggesting that the dearth of books in this interim may not have been due to a lack of writing, but rather unwillingness or disinterest on the part of professional presses to take on black writers” (27). Compton further notes how the rejection of Green's novel, by Anansi Press, led to its self-publication “in a limited-run of 300 copies” (27) only two of which are available in the Canadian library system. The novel is dedicated to “aleteia and alexis [sic]” daughters of the BC artist and photographer Phyllis Greenwood; Greenwood drew the ornate cover design (reproduced in *Bluesprint* [27]) and helped with the production process. Greenwood's involvement in the production is intriguing, because she has since gone on to document marginalized and underrepresented groups in BC, for example, with her photography in the “work issue” of *Event: Journal of the Contemporary Arts* (1982), and through exploration of the relationship between private autobiographical memory and the displacement and internment of Japanese Canadians in her hybrid multimedia text *An Interrupted Panorama* (Lane, *The Postcolonial Novel* 109-14). Compton argues that “*A Credit to Your Race* is an important document of an ‘indigenous’ black experience” (27), and I contend that the production of a sophisticated “mobile identity” in Green's novel reinforces this assessment and, moreover, that this identity mimetically re-enacts the history of black Canadian resistances to slavery and racism through continual motion, passages, and movement, in the process asserting autonomy and self-creation.

Given a cursory reading, it would be possible to misunderstand the full critical and historical force of Green's novel, because of the fact that he has chosen to narrate it from the perspective of a teenager, Billy Robinson, who at the age of fifteen years struggles with society's racist notions of his identity, the complications surrounding his girlfriend's pregnancy, and his own transition from childhood to early adulthood. The novel is written in the form of a *Bildungsroman*, that is to say a novel of education and development, set in the Fraser Valley, BC, in 1970. While it hints at the historical background, this remains largely at the level of allusion, such as the use of the occasional key historical phrase, such as the "under-ground railroad." The original migration of black Americans to BC starting in 1858 had been largely successful, with blacks settling in Victoria, nearby on the Saanich Peninsula, and then further north in Nanaimo, Vancouver Island, and on Saltspring Island, but there were enough instances of serious discrimination and forced segregation to prohibit extensive population expansion. For example, the rural economy of Saltspring Island offered opportunities for land pre-emption that were attractive to a wide range of ethnic minority groups, including African Americans. Examining the 1891 census data, Sandwell notes:

People had moved to Saltspring Island from Hawaii . . . a number of European countries, Japan, China, India, Scandinavia, the United States, Bermuda, the Argentine Republic, the Azores Islands, and Mauritius. The population included Hawaiians, African-Americans, Americans . . . Europeans, Scandinavians, and Aboriginal peoples, in addition to the English, Scots, Irish, and Welsh. (163)

While African Americans had been among the first settlers of the island and significantly contributed to the growth of its economy, between 1867 and 1868 three black islanders were murdered—an unnamed man, William Robinson, and Giles Curtis—with a fourth murder, of black islander Louis Stark, occurring in Nanaimo several years later. As Sandwell notes, "We cannot know for certain what role the Saltspring Island murders had in the decisions of the many other African-Americans who left around this time" (190). But on a larger scale, it is a statistical fact that the number of black immigrants declined over time "relative to the total population" of BC (Winks 286). Twentieth-century examples of hostility to non-white immigrants to BC includes the Komagata Maru incident in 1914 (when a ship carrying Sikh and Punjabi immigrants to the Port of Vancouver was

denied entrance to two thousand people, scrapping of which focus was the beginning of most significant (329-503).

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denied entry [Lane, "Performing History"]) and the internment of twenty-two thousand Japanese-Canadians during the Second World War; the scrapping of Canada's racist Immigration Act in 1962, to be replaced by one which focused on a migrant's education and skills rather than their ethnicity, was the beginning of a new phase in Canadian multiculturalism, followed most significantly by Bill C-93, the Multiculturalism Act of 1988 (see Foster 329-503).

In *A Credit to Your Race*, the white community is generally hostile to, or profoundly misunderstands, Billy's black identity. The plot of the novel is straightforward, if not minimal: Billy lives with his mother and sister Sarah and spends time with his best friend Dickie and girlfriend Mary. Much of the novel narrates mundane childhood events at school, playing with friends, and visits to Seattle and Vancouver, but all of these events are deliberately examined—or, focalized—from a black Canadian perspective, while the novel thus has "the feel of a young adult book," as Compton puts it. He crucially adds that "... the range of content—including interracial sex, abortion, and racist vigilantism—makes it a study in controversies that are still powder kegs" (28). Furthermore, the youth perspective leads to a series of encounters and intensities that suggest that Billy wishes to guard his own sense of *mobility* or *becoming* from the mainly racist modes of *being* that are imposed upon him by society. As such, Green's novel is a powerful demonstration of the ways in which black Canadian identity has to constantly resist normative modes of being and hegemonic attempts to "pin down" in one time and place—or to stabilize and normalize—notions of race and ethnicity. Green's act of "self-publishing" is part of this resistance, which in turn has historical significance for black Canadian aesthetics, as George Elliott Clarke has noted:

self-publication remains a critical necessity for many Black Canadian writers. From Peter McKerrow in 1895 to Toronto's "Black Katt" (Robert O. Brown) in 1995, self-publishing has been an honourable way of putting one's work before the public. Crucially, Anna Henderson, of Saint John, New Brunswick, brought out her set of Miltonic poems, *Citadel*, in 1967, when she was eighty, thereby producing probably the first *complete* collection of poems by an African-Canadian woman. Authored by Mairuth Sarsfield, a native of Montréal, *No Crystal Stair* became, in 1997, the first novel in a century to be published by an indigenous, African-Canadian woman. Had it not been for Gershon William's solo effort in 1968, Austin Clarke would have

remained the sole, published-in-Canada, anglo African-Canadian novelist from 1964 until 1974 [sic; Green's novel is dated, by hand, 1973], when Truman Green and Frederick Ward both released novels. (335)

A Credit to Your Race opens with the protagonist being made aware of his identity through a newspaper account of the desegregation of African-Americans: "I guess I found out for sure that I was a coloured boy when Mary was afraid to show me what she had been reading when I went over to pick her up for the square dance last summer" (1). Billy goes through a complex Lacanian "mirror stage" process of recognition here, with the newspaper account revealing the fact that resistance to desegregation was still ongoing in the 1960s in some parts of the US. Although Lacan's mirror stage is considered as a process of identity formation that takes place early on in childhood, it provides some useful developmental coordinates for Billy's transformation from an autonomous individual to one firmly situated or embedded in a realm of racism. Furthermore, by noting that it is the racist characters who drive this racial "mirror stage," we can see how racism constantly infantilizes Billy (at the same time that he constitutes a threat through his more adult sexuality):

The advantages to this process [of the mirror stage]—an awareness of separate objects and beings, demarcated boundaries and differences—can also lead to future difficulties, with subjectivity always being defined by some exterior image or separate object. From this stage on subjectivity necessarily becomes intersubjectivity. The mirror stage also charts the movement from the realm of the Imaginary, to that of the Symbolic: for Lacan, the Imaginary is pre-linguistic and image-based whereas the Symbolic is linguistic and cultural. The transition between the Imaginary and the Symbolic depends in large part upon a shift in identification from the (m)Other to the law of the father.

(Lane, *Fifty Key Literary Theorists* 193-94)

Green narrates the way in which racist notions of Billy, be they fantasies or neuroses, function as mirror stage images to which Billy is pressured to conform; if he "successfully" (from a racist perspective) passes through this mirror stage, he will have internalized and incorporated such images as being at the core of his identity. But Billy does not "successfully" pass through to become what the surrounding white society appears to want of him; Billy resists the racist images throughout the novel, but in the

process of resistance, he becomes what Julia Kristeva calls the "abject": that which occupies a liminal or in-between state, not quite inside or outside society, not quite subject or object, and also that which is disgusting, or loathed, and therefore in need of being expelled. The process of abjection also takes the subject into a territory "where meaning collapses," as Kristeva argues (2).

As a black Canadian, Billy identifies with the "two little coloured girls marching to school past soldiers with fixed bayonets" (2), girls who are, of course, American; it is the experience of being treated as essentially different and somehow problematic that Billy relates to. In the novel, he immediately thinks of this account in relation to his own experiences of school and the fact that his intellectual achievements are negated by his girlfriend Mary's racist father, Mr. Baker, who says, "if I [Billy] was so smart how come I didn't know that coloured boys aren't supposed to go out with white girls" (3). Billy is a character situated in a network of competing discourses: journalism, school reports, comments made by neighbors, and the private statements of family and friends. The recognition of difference that Billy feels so forcefully when reading the newspaper account of the American situation is one that he equates with a general hatred of black Canadians, knowledge that he has been trying to suppress: "But now with this whole front page dedicated to telling about other white people who were just as full of hatred as Mr. Baker. . . . well I just didn't know what to say" (2-3). Billy suggests that through supplementary experiences of racism, his "mirror stage" is over by the age of fifteen:

Maybe I was sure I was different when my mother had to protect me from a neighbour who insisted that pickaninnies should wear their names on their clothes. Or it could have been that night on the way home from scouts when Richard Bailey wanted me to laugh like a nigger. Anyway, I was positive that there was something wrong with people by the time I turned fifteen. Mary's father began lecturing her about miscegenation and black apes around this time and she was only fourteen years old. (4)

Billy's resistances to the racist images offered him are multiple. Early on in the novel, Billy enters a new class at school and is identified by his teacher, in an essentialist move, as being a natural athlete: "I remember walking into his class for the first time and being told that at last the school could look forward to competing in the Fraser Valley Track Meet because we had a good runner now" (12). In a contemporary black British Columbia

novel, David Nandi Odhiambo's *Kipligat's Chance* (2003), teenage protagonist John Kipligat has similarly internalized the demand to perform as a black athlete. John wishes to gain a scholarship to university through his performance on the running track, but there are also intense social and family pressures placed on him to succeed; like Billy, John also refuses throughout the novel to be stereotyped; for example, when a white friend of his, Svetlana, is astounded that he does not like jazz, he responds to her question "Don't you listen to jazz?" by saying: "Why? . . . Because I'm black?" (97; see Lane, *Routledge Concise History*, chapter 9). When Billy runs in *A Credit to Your Race*, he usually runs away from, or out of, situations where he feels misidentified, yet, at the same time, under intense pressure to conform. Being at home does not always help him, because he is caught between his alienation from his sister as he starts to grow up—becoming sexually involved with his girlfriend much to the anger and disgust of his family—and the fact that his mother is concerned that he is developing "a bad complex about being a coloured boy" (21). When Billy responds to his mother's accusation with another example of racist misidentification that he has experienced, this time being offered at school the mirror stage image of the "shoe shine boy," her reaction is that he is going to have to learn how to handle what will become an ongoing, daily reality. During a visit to Seattle, Billy ponders some of the stories about segregation that his Aunt Elsie tells him and his sister: "Aunt Elsie said that down in Mississippi they got signs in front of the restaurants saying that only white people can go in" (41). While this difference between Canada and the US appears shocking to Billy, ironically he does not understand his Aunt's desire to get his hair straightened and what this signifies from a racial perspective (see Byrd and Tharps). These, and many other examples, structure Billy's teenage life, but it is the "threat" of miscegenation that registers as the most powerful mirror stage image, and the one that truly makes Billy the abject.

Miscegenation

In discussing with his teacher Mr. Willard the fact that his white girlfriend is pregnant, Billy truly finds himself situated in a liminal space. In fact Mr. Willard imagines and projects that liminal space as an outcome of "interbreeding":

Being a person of mixed race is one of the most difficult and pathetic problems a human being can have, Bill. On the one hand it's more likely that a mulatto will have brain damage or be feeble-minded or physically

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For Mr. Willard, this stark choice creates the liminal space of being which is the abject: "It's like belonging to two worlds but being accepted by neither" (52). Billy's response is the desire "to say that I'd heard it all before" (52-53) as well as the more critical thought that "[Mr. Willard] sounded like he was at last making the speech that he'd saved up for a long time" (53). Whether he has "saved up" this speech for Billy in particular, or *any* black child that eventually came to him with a similar issue, is not clear, but by casting this mixture of eugenics and ignorance as a "speech," that is, a discourse that is publicly delivered, Billy is suggesting that it is the culminating racist assessment of his own potential. Mr. Willard's suggestion that the baby should be aborted is in line with the need to expel the abject. Yet it is also clear that through his speech concerning Billy's baby, Mr. Willard is also targeting Billy. Earlier in the novel Billy rejects another teacher's request that he give a presentation on his "African" ancestors: "Well, Mr. Higgins, there's a lot of different kinds of people in my family, you know. There's even some Chickasaw and Choctaw Indians" (49). Hybridity, which Billy celebrates, leads to Mr. Willard's ravings. The violence that descends upon Billy soon follows as the "threat" of miscegenation is perceived to be too high by his girlfriend's father, Mr. Baker, but shooting at Billy and nearly killing him ironically leads to a temporary reprieve in Billy's situation and a closer relationship with his mother.

As the abject, Billy suffers not so much from a double or split consciousness, but rather a foreclosed consciousness: he must be expelled from white racist society to ensure its safety and purity (Lane, *Fifty Key Literary Theorists* 249). Within the novel, however, the opposite happens: Mr. Baker is arrested for attempted murder and is sent to prison. This apparent physical victory for Billy does not compensate for the psychological trauma that he has suffered. As George Elliott Clarke notes, "Canada is a location where . . . blackness is threatened with psychological evisceration" (44). While Mr. Baker has to pay a penalty under the law, this does not compensate for Billy's abject status; in other words, his black identity is the "meaning" which has collapsed (Kristeva 2) under the weight of repeated misidentification. That which is foreclosed, however, can become that which is foundational: Billy does not just exist as some kind of empty sign to be re-coded by the next racist who comes along; he allows the boundary-

making of those racists. In other words, he is a constitutive sign, without which boundaries would be impossible. Billy haunts the racist imagination in myriad ways, occupying not a doubled location, but multiple, mobile locations. As George Elliott Clarke argues,

the African-Canadian consciousness is not simply dualistic. We are divided severally; we are not just "black" and Canadian, but also adherents to a region, speakers of an "official" language (either English or French), disciples of heterogeneous faiths, and related to a particular ethnicity (or "national" group), all of which shapes our identities. African Canadians possess, then, not merely "double consciousness" but what I will call poly-consciousness. (40)

As the foreclosed abject, stripped of all personal meaning, Billy should simply disappear, but instead his multiple resistances, allegiances, and strategic re-positionings, as well as his official location within Canadian culture, lead to his "poly-consciousness." Where Billy should be effaced, he becomes more powerfully multiple. And yet the reader would be forgiven for asking if too much is being read into a youth narrative. As previously suggested, just because Green has chosen to narrate his novel from a youth perspective does not mean that it is simply a straightforward children's novel; instead, it is complex and many layered.

Throughout the novel, almost throw-away comments reveal a layer of symbolic complexity and significance that opens up an entirely other level of reading in this foundational and important novel of the black British Columbia experience. One such remark, in an exchange with Mrs. Baker, concerns the underground railroad:

"My relatives came from Alberta," I said.

"Really? I didn't know that."

"Yeah, from Evansberg; that's near Edmonton."

"Oh."

"My grandpa says that there was a place near Evansberg where a bunch of slaves used to get off the under-ground railroad."

I don't know what I said that for cause it made me feel pretty funny to talk about slaves. (96)

Mrs. Baker asks for more information, but Billy cannot go beyond these comments, although it is significant that the history of black slavery, however little he knows about it, contributes to Billy's feelings of abjection.

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The phrase "under-ground railroad" has immense symbolic status, not because it reveals a factual substrate to Billy's adolescent vision of the past, but because it reveals the intersection of fact and myth in the construction of Canadian identity. This reference, therefore, suggests that there is another way of understanding why Billy spends a lot of time running from certain situations, in other words, not as a mode of "escapism" but a mimetic repetition of a symbolic escape *per se*, where the reference is to African American slaves, escaping through an interconnected chain of helpers and contacts, to Canada. Bothwell notes: "The absence of slavery in the British provinces meant that escaping slaves directed themselves there, using a network of helpers collectively styled 'the Underground Railroad.' Once on British territory, they were free, and safe from legal extradition. Perhaps thirty thousand ex-slaves arrived as a result, and most of them settled in the province of Canada" (206; see also Winks 233-41). As Bothwell further notes, once in Canada, these ex-slaves "were not entirely welcome" (206).

In relation to Green's novel, it is clear that Billy's ever-running or moving identity can be read in light of the promised mobility of this escape route; Billy, then, has a "mobile identity," one which the racist characters in the novel simply cannot pin down. This mobile identity, and the associated youth perspective, offers an alternative vision to official discourses and some of the overarching historical accounts of black Canadian existence. Recent sociological research has, however, turned to a youth focus, such as Philomina Okeke-Ihejirika and Denise L. Spitzer's project *In Search of Identity, Longing for Homelands: African Women in Alberta*, which involved uncovering important experiences from young African women's perspectives. But *A Credit to Your Race* explores possibilities and potentialities in an individual's existence; in other words, Billy's mobile identity resists not just racist, but other accounts, of within what type of community he can eventually find a place. Community in this novel is closer to Agamben's notion of "the coming community," that which is not predicated upon a unique essence or universality. Tested from a youth perspective, current notions of community are (always) found wanting. Walter Benjamin argues that in childhood, the new can be recognized and re-imaged/imagined in a symbolic space or *Symbolraum* (Lane, *Reading Walter Benjamin* 45); the *Symbolraum* in *A Credit to Your Race* is fractal, composed of a sequence of problematic visions of adult community, such as being the prisoner that Billy imagines is his future role (Green 89). The coming community, for Billy, needs to go beyond this fractal *Symbolraum*, without

reducing or negating other black Canadian experiences, such as those of his sister:

Sarah knew what I meant when I told her about being so afraid all the time.

"I was afraid of lots of things, Bill," she said, walking ahead of me a little on the trail. "Before you came to school I was the only coloured person in the whole school and just about everybody treated me funny."

"Yeah, I know," I said.

"Like that one time Mr. Waggoner asked me in front of the whole class if I could speak Negro."

"Boy, nobody ever asked me that." (89)

Another possible way of conceiving of the coming community for Billy is to visit the city, where Mary has moved to. Initially the experience is simply disorientating, with the humorous irony that this is a typical rural-neighborhood boy visiting the big city of Vancouver: "Walking in the city is sure different than walking down a trail in the Fraser Valley. People seem like they're a lot meaner too" (116). Dionne Brand, in her novel *What We All Long For* (2005), suggests that urban mobility *increases* with each immigrant generation. This is illuminated in Brand's novel by acts of Situationist *flânerie*, which are also symbolic processes of decolonization (Lane, *Routledge Concise History* 141). Billy, however, has not yet learned to handle the distractions and new cartographies of urban space. As he cannot afford a taxi to get to Mary's house, he attempts to ask for directions so that he can use the bus instead, but he is inevitably ignored or avoided. The "typical" scene rapidly shifts to one of menace: as Billy waits at a red traffic light, a car pulls up at the curb beside him. The men inside are threatening to him, and here his language begins to loop back upon itself with a claustrophobic repetition as he realizes that he is the object of their attention: "The guys in it [the car] were real big, like football players and they were really having a good time laughing at something. Then something told me that what they were laughing at had something to do with me cause one of them pointed at me then they all really laughed" (117). Billy begins to run, but this time there appears to be no escape; the car follows him and again pulls up to the curb beside him: "one of the guys said, 'Hey, boy, who owns you?' But before I could answer somebody else yelled, 'Nigger, nigger, pull the trigger'" (117). Billy's "something" has been replaced by two words: "slave" and "nigger."

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Analogous incidents to Billy's experience above are found in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* (2000) and in David Nandi Odhiambo's *diss/ed banded nation* (1998). In Robinson's novel, Haisla First Nations protagonist LisaMarie jeers at some men in a car who shadow her and her friend Erica: "A young white guy stuck his head out of the passenger's side of the car and invited her in, they'd show her a good time. All three guys in the car were wearing black baseball caps and sunglasses even though it was cloudy" (250; see Lane, "Reclaiming Maps and Metaphors"). Erica makes herself scarce while the men focus their aggressive attentions on LisaMarie: "'Hey, looky, we got a feisty little squaw on our hand,' the driver said" (Robinson 250). LisaMarie finds herself in a situation where she would probably have received extreme physical violence if she had not been rescued by a stranger, her attackers being further incensed by her transgressive "talking-back" to her potential rapists. In Odhiambo's *diss/ed banded nation*, the protagonist Benedict and his First Nations girlfriend Anna have just been refused a sale in an electronics store in Vancouver, ostensibly because of their attempt to barter, but with the underlying sense that they are being treated differently from white customers; walking through East Vancouver, a car "slows down beside them":

... a man in black denim rolls down a window.
 "hey, it's lucy rox ...luuuuucy rox." they walk faster. staring ahead.
 "white meat ain't good enough for ya?"
 "fuck you," anna shouts back. veins appearing in skin at her neck.
 "fuck you."
 the car stops. n' the driver steps out. a beer bottle in hand.
 "nigger-lovin bitch." (113)

Benedict and Anna retreat before they can be assaulted, although as with *Monkey Beach*, the threat of violence is aimed at a young woman, almost as if Benedict is invisible. In fact, Benedict is subject to indirect interpellation by the labeling of Anna as a "nigger-lovin bitch"; Benedict is thus doubly effaced from the scene, and yet clearly he will also be subject to physical assault.

The focus in *A Credit to Your Race* is similarly on the way in which violence is implicit in language itself. This is not to say that the sexually explicit language in the incident in *Monkey Beach* is not violent, rather, that the episode in *A Credit to Your Race* is closer to the "discursive" situation that Frantz Fanon analyzes in chapter 5 of *Black Skin, White Masks*, which

opens with the highly disturbing reported speech: "Dirty Nigger! Or simply, 'Look, a Negro!'" (109). Fanon talks about the way in which in his search for identity his subjectivity "burst apart" with the "fragments" being put back together by others (109). But in this particular existential situation, a child exclaiming to his mother, there is an additional element: that of fear—"Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible" (112). Later on in the chapter, Fanon feels that he is "being dissected under white eyes," becoming for them "a new kind of man, a new genus. Why, it's a Negro!" (116). So-called factual statements are revealed in his existential situation to be untrue: "There was a myth of the Negro that had to be destroyed at all costs" (117). Billy finds himself embedded in this myth, and in a situation where when he wants help, he is ignored and then threatened. Situating him as a "slave," therefore, re-situates him as an "escaped slave" roaming the streets of Vancouver; if this is totally parodic, then more worryingly, the racist taunts in turn reveal racist anxiety concerning Billy's equality, or, in other words, his absolute right and freedom to be standing at a city junction. In this latter sense, Billy does "frighten" the extreme racist, who would want nothing but a black Canadian to be imprisoned, bound to slavery, fixed in one place and lacking in rights. As George Elliott Clarke notes, "[t]o be black in Canada is, then, an existential experience" (279). Billy's disorientation is existentially countered by this attempted racist double displacement of identity: "slave" and "nigger".

Billy's mobile identity is a way of sidestepping the mechanism of abjection, where he is a subject to be violently assaulted and driven away from white society. Taking control of his own mobility may appear to be a small achievement, but for a young black Canadian, it is also a way of minimizing his vulnerability, which is precisely the problem of always being exposed to personal misinterpretation and the associated violence. Fanon has shown how this vulnerability, this exposure, is initially linguistic as previously noted in relation to racist language; as Agamben also notes: "exposure is pure relationship with language itself" (97). Billy's existence, in society and with its use of misidentifying language, is a continual torment, which is a word that Agamben also foregrounds in *The Coming Community*:

To exist means to take on qualities, to submit to the torment of being such (*inqualieren*). Hence quality, the being-such of each thing, is its torture and its source—its limit. How you are—your face—is your torture and

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your source. And each being is and must be its mode of being, its manner of rising forth: being *such* as it is. (98)

Agamben refers here to Levinas, among others, with the notion of the face, and the ethical awareness and relationship triggered through seeing the face of the other. Billy's torture is even more fundamental: not even to be recognized as having a human face to trigger such an ethical intersubjectivity. Instead, Billy is situated as *the creaturely*, that which Santner suggests "is a dimension of human existence called into being at . . . historical fissures or caesuras in the space of meaning" (xv). One of the signs of creaturely life is that of shame—Billy is forced to feel ashamed for something he is not: a threat, a contaminant, the absolute other that must be foreclosed. Creatureliness, then, is obviously about being subjected to power, but Billy's mobile identity manages to sidestep and evade a "top-down" model of power. As Santner puts it, "creatureliness is a by-product of exposure to what we might call the *excitations of power*, those enigmatic bits of address and interpellation that disturb the social space—and bodies—of . . . [the] protagonists" (24). Billy's loss—his pregnant girlfriend moves to Vancouver with her mother after her father is arrested for shooting at Billy—is also the loss that Mr. Baker suffers for breaking the law. While the small fine imposed on Mr. Baker as a punishment is virtually an insult to Billy, it is Billy who expresses an awareness of the more profound result: "Mom said that she didn't think a five hundred dollar fine was very much punishment for him. But I figured that he lost a lot more than that. He lost Mrs. Baker and Jimmy and Mary, same as me" (132). Billy's mobility means that he evades the murder attempt and crosses the border between abject space and the novel's white social space: the law addresses and interpellates him (as well as Mr. Baker), and while it falls short, Billy regards Mr. Baker as also having entered the zone of the creaturely as a result. Such a crossing means that verbal misidentification has been replaced by a more active and strategic "disidentification," where misinterpreted subjectivity is "disavowed" (Siemerling 46, n. 9) and Billy can start re-positioning other people's social status.

A more insidious attack on Billy's otherness is the act of staring at him, *without* speaking. Some time after Mr. Baker had attempted to murder Billy, he drives past him; Billy initially opts to defiantly stand still: "When the car pulled along side of me it stopped and Mr. Baker just sat there for a few seconds and stared to me [sic]" (112). Similarly, after the racist attack in the city, people stare at Billy: "What actually bothered me most was being

embarrassed cause a few people were kind of looking at me, trying to figure out what was going on. I sure didn't want them to think I was doing something wrong" (117). In this second example, Billy reflects on how he feels about people staring at him:

The sidewalk seemed even more crowded than it did before. All the faces seemed to be staring at me, too. I remember talking about psychology with Mr. Higgins and he said that was called paranoia. Anyway, it sure is an unpleasant way to feel. For a while, nothing was important except to get out of the city and all those staring people. (118)

Unlike the uncomfortable feeling of being invisible within society, that is, through not being valued in any way whatsoever, here Billy is enmeshed within a zone of unwanted and "unpleasant" visibility. In his additional sense of responsibility for something he has not done (caused trouble on the streets and so on), he becomes paranoid, but this is a doubled, not straightforward, state of consciousness: Mr. Baker and "the faces" *are* staring at Billy, and he *is* psychologically traumatized by this action, accepting personal responsibility for that which he has not caused. Billy is in effect a scapegoat figure, being held responsible (or, put another way, personally *introjecting* this responsibility), and held accountable for society's ills. René Girard maps out this doubled consciousness by noting that "[s]capegoat indicates both the innocence of the victims . . . [and] the collective polarization in opposition to them" (39). Such a doubled consciousness is also an aspect of a "post-slave" society (Gilroy 126), and thus it provides another link in the novel between black Canadian and black American experience. Paul Gilroy notes that the doubled consciousness is the result of an "unhappy symbiosis between three modes of thinking, being, and seeing," the first two relating most closely to Billy's experiences: "the first is racially particularistic, the second nationalistic in that it derives from the nation state in which the ex-slaves but not-yet-citizens find themselves, rather than from their aspiration towards a nation state of their own" (127). Yet Billy does not remain in this state of a doubled consciousness, however much it articulates an affinity with a black American experience and however much it expresses his liminality. His consciousness is mimetic of his mobility: the "collective polarization" creates a series of misidentifications in the novel, none of which can fix Billy in place, and the act of staring, creating a negative zone of visibility, also leaves Billy free to re-articulate his sense of self, either verbally or

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physically in his choice to go elsewhere. Billy is still a vulnerable subject, and he remains exposed, linguistically and bodily, but he chooses the final word, sent back to Mr. Baker, who in his loss is "the same as me" (132).

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