

ALTERED STATES OF RURALITY

ALTERED STATES OF RURALITY:  
CULTURAL FORAYS INTO SOUTHERN ONTARIO COUNTRY

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation examines contemporary cultural representations of rurality in southern Ontario. It demonstrates how literary and cultural texts construct, support and/or expand our understandings of the social composition and character of rural culture. Examining various literary forms (drama, life narrative, and the novel), music, and photography, my research and analysis responds to Chris Philo's pivotal call in the field of rural geography "to pay more careful attention to 'the multiple forms of otherness' present in . . . rural areas" ("Neglected" 199) and to foreground what he identifies as "neglected rural geographies." I argue that dominant literary and cultural representations of rural southern Ontario overwhelmingly mobilize and rarely contest white heteromasculinist rural discourses that support rural cultures of sameness and exclusion. As a means of exposing the motivations for and deleterious effects of these discourses, I draw attention to alternative representations of the region's rural social geography that expand the imaginative scope circumscribed by hegemonic conceptualizations of what it means to be rural in southern Ontario. As such, my project responds to Philo's call in three ways: first, it repositions southern Ontario as a rural locale of critical relevance; second, it addresses a gap in Canadian literary and cultural studies by taking up new and evolving approaches in rural studies, with respect to rural "others," being developed in disciplines like geography, sociology, history and political science; third, it intervenes in dominant socio-spatial discourses currently circulating in Canadian literary and cultural studies that eagerly address issues of gender, sexuality, race and class in Canada's urban environments while too often neglecting how they intersect with discourses of rurality.

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Said Nuru, my love, for keeping me in touch with needed and necessary realities and other joys, for feeding and loving me and being firm every now and again;

Phanuel Antwi, let me count the ways...

“She tells all our friends that I've got my Ph.D.,  
But it stands for post hole digger, it ain't exactly a degree.”

(Eaglesmith, “White Trash”)

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## **Introduction, or How We Came to Know Mariposa**

This dissertation takes as its object of inquiry contemporary cultural representations of rurality in southern Ontario. It demonstrates how literary and cultural texts construct, support and/or expand our understandings of the social composition and the character of rural culture. Through an examination of various literary forms such as drama, life narrative, and the novel, as well as music and photography, my research and analysis responds to Chris Philo's pivotal call in the field of rural geography "to pay more careful attention to 'the multiple forms of otherness' present in the rural areas of Britain and beyond" ("Neglected" 199) and to foreground what he identifies as "neglected rural geographies." In this dissertation, I argue that dominant literary and cultural representations of rural southern Ontario overwhelmingly mobilize and rarely contest white heteromasculinist rural discourses that support rural cultures of sameness and exclusion. As a means of exposing the motivations for and deleterious effects of these discourses, *Altered States of Rurality* draws attention to alternative representations of the region's rural social geography that expand the imaginative scope circumscribed by hegemonic conceptualizations of what it means to be rural in southern Ontario.

As such, this project responds to Philo's call in three ways: first, it repositions southern Ontario, presently a neglected rural geography within Canadian studies, as a rural locale of critical relevance; second, it addresses a gap in Canadian literary and cultural studies by taking up new and evolving approaches in rural studies, with respect to rural "others" (Philo, "Of Other") being developed in disciplines like geography, sociology, history and political science; third, it intervenes in dominant socio-spatial



discourses currently circulating in Canadian literary and cultural studies that eagerly address issues of gender, sexuality, race and class in Canada's urban environments while too often neglecting how they intersect with discourses of rurality.

This introduction explains why southern Ontario is a location of interest for the field of rural studies and shows how the rebranding of Ontario's provincial identity, consistent with broader Canadian trends, has resulted in the diminution of attention paid to the rural cultures of the region. I make a case for why we ought not to neglect the rural in southern Ontario, a move which is frequently the result of an oversimplification of the region's relevance in relation to popular contemporary topics of scholarly interest in Canada. Then, after providing a breakdown of the chapters and my approach to the topic, I suggest readers may come away from this dissertation with a distinctly different portrait of the cultural geography of rural southern Ontario than conventional representations may inspire. Finally, this introduction concludes with a brief discussion of changing approaches to "the rural" that have shifted away from demographic and spatial categorizations in favour of thinking about rurality as a predominantly imaginative construct.

- **Why Southern Ontario?**

Southern Ontario might seem a peculiar choice of locale for a project concerned with rurality. Most likely when you think of rural Canada, images of prairie farming communities, east and west coast fishing villages, and northern logging and mining towns more readily come to mind. Presently, southern Ontario is not known foremost for its

rural character. It is the most densely populated region of Canada, the largest part of its population concentrated in the Greater Toronto Area and in the rapidly growing urban centres contained within the geographical region known as the “Greater Golden Horseshoe.”<sup>1</sup> Yet the history of the region’s urban and rural development has been and continues to be intimately connected. Recognizing these urban/rural dynamics, in their introduction to *The Trajectories of Rural Life: New Perspectives on Rural Canada*, Raymond Blake and Andrew Nurse suggest that contemporary investigations concerning rural life in Canada ought to be attentive to “its symbiotic relationship with urban life” (vii). It is precisely the necessarily close geographical relationship between rural and urban southern Ontario that encourages the foregrounding of their shared histories and futures, making the region rich investigative terrain in which to consider rural/urban cross-migrations of people, goods and ideas and to explore the interdependent relationship between urban and rural spaces and cultures.

From a geographic, environmental and economic perspective, southern Ontario is fraught with competing interests in rural and urban development. In this respect southern Ontario finds itself dealing with similar challenges confronting rural spaces on a global scale, challenges resulting from shifting demographics and changing land and resource

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<sup>1</sup> The official boundary dividing southern and northern Ontario has not been historically fixed. However, currently, this regional division between the southern and northern parts of the province is generally defined by extending the southwestern Quebec border westward across Ontario through Lake Nipissing to the top of Georgian Bay. Below this line, the other borders of the region are clearly defined on all sides by the Great Lakes. Within southern Ontario, the Government of Ontario defines the “Golden Horseshoe” as the region surrounding the western tip of Lake Ontario, which finds within its borders the cities comprising the Greater Toronto Area as well as Hamilton, St. Catharines, and Niagara Falls. The “Greater Golden Horseshoe” extends beyond the Golden Horseshoe to include cities like Brantford, Barrie, Kitchener-Waterloo, and Peterborough, a region identified as “one of the fastest growing areas in North America” (“People”). The adjective “golden” has been attached to this region in recognition of the cultural, financial and political capital generated by the population and institutions residing within its borders.

use. Among other concerns in southern Ontario, the region's growing population either already lives on or is expanding into much of Canada's best agricultural land – raising questions about food security and the sustainability of agricultural production in the province. Hence investigations into the socio-cultural and related physical development of rural southern Ontario are extremely pertinent in considering the long-range health of Canadian society, which will be jeopardized if the country's most populous region finds it increasingly difficult, economically and logistically, to feed itself.

From a cultural standpoint, the current predominantly urban culture of the region tends to overshadow its deeply embedded rural roots. Alongside other important works foundational in a tradition of Canadian land and rural-based writing produced by the Confederation Poets and many prairie writers, historically southern Ontarians have been fundamental in constructing and disseminating perceptions of Canadian rurality, producing some of Canada's seminal early literary works on the topic – Catharine Parr Traill's *The Backwoods of Canada*, Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*, Stephen Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, and Raymond Knister's *White Narcissus* are a few examples. While contributing to a broader discourse of Canadian rurality, each of these texts is grounded in the author's rural experience in southern Ontario. Continuing in this tradition, some of Canada's most influential modern writers, in their depiction of rural southern Ontario, have significantly influenced how the Canadian rural is imagined

– think of authors like Robertson Davies, James Reaney, Alice Munro, Matt Cohen, Jane Urquhart and Margaret Atwood.<sup>2</sup>

The strength and robustness of this cultural tradition of representing rural southern Ontario has had an unintended yet unfortunate effect on the state of contemporary rural literary and cultural studies in the province: the illustrations of rural southern Ontario culture and society presented in these works have been so profoundly influential that they have left critics with the impression that there is nothing new to say about the province’s rural cultures; about much of the rural-themed literature that continues to be produced in Canada, Darryl Whetter writes: “I for one am tired of counterfeit stories with no more heart than a provincial tourism poster.” In “Canada’s an urban nation. Why is our literature still down on the farm?,” Whetter blames “publishers, big media and universities” for perpetuating this tradition of Canadian writing. As Whetter argues more broadly in Canada, in Ontario high schools and universities, when we teach texts about or set in the province’s rural regions, these texts are drawn almost exclusively from the canonical works and authors noted above. The way in which these authors and their works have been studied *ad nauseam*, in Ontario and beyond, has raised

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<sup>2</sup> My inclination to switch back and forth here between references to southern Ontario and Canada when writing about these authors and the way in which their works are discussed within Canadian literary studies speaks to how Ontario has often been awkwardly positioned within Canadian regional discourses. As W.J. Keith asserts, “Ontario . . . is a region that sees itself as a centre – or even, perhaps, *the* centre – and is reluctant to acknowledge its position within regionalist categories. It is certainly a region that hesitates to admit that it has a regional literature” (14, emphasis in original). It is for this reason, at times, I have felt some of my findings in this dissertation could be easily applied to a broader investigation of Canadian rurality. However, ultimately, I believe that the validity of examining southern Ontario rurality and its own particularities is enlivened by the “local matrix” (15) of the region. Southern Ontario’s local matrix is not only characterized by the particular bioregional characteristics that influence the region’s rural history and contemporary cultures, the region’s cultural matrix also complicates the study of rurality in the province; the propensity to view the region as not regionally inflected, even though it is routinely defined as culturally urban, effectively writes the province out of rural Canadian cultures.

the ire of urban Canadians (and rural Canadians like Whetter) who feel these works are unrepresentative of contemporary Canadian cultures that are predominantly urban. The indignation inspired by the sense of incongruity between representation and reality is supported by official identity rebranding strategies at work on the national and provincial levels.<sup>3</sup>

- **Rebranding Ontario**

In 1982 Ontario changed its license plate slogan from “Keep it Beautiful” (used from 1972-82) to “Yours to Discover” (currently still in use). This change in provincial slogans marks a discursive shift reflective of a cultural transition in the province. The old slogan, “Keep it Beautiful,” an imperative plea for preservation, connects the province’s past, proclaimed as beautiful, with its present value. Unspecified as to whether it is a physical or cultural past in question, in either case, the historically rural character of the province and its associations with “old values, family, purity, peace, stability, reliability, and space” (New 156) is invoked. In contrast, the new slogan, “Yours to Discover,” foregrounds agency, possibility and futurity, qualities associated with the ever-growing urban centres of the province. While the new slogan is unclear about what the object of discovery may be – the province merely existing in its present nebulous form waiting for

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<sup>3</sup> Comments made by Allen Bonner, a crisis management and communications consultant who has worked with the Canadian federal government, on CBC Radio’s *The House* concerning the marketing strategies employed during the 2010 G20 and G8 meetings held in Toronto and Muskoka offer an excellent example of contrasting marketing visions for contemporary Canada. Bonner criticized how the infamous fake lake, built on Toronto’s Canadian National Exhibition grounds, worked against the marketing agenda established for Canada: “officials in the foreign ministry, including me on contract, over some years, have tried very hard to present an image of Canada that is more urban and more technologically advanced than the . . . pastoral Muskoka lake setting” (“Refugee”).

the individual to locate and ascribe value to its innumerable treasures – what is clear is that what one discovers may entirely depend on who *you* are, making a unified portrait of the province both impossible and undesirable.<sup>4</sup> The heterogeneous possibilities of the second slogan associate the provincial vision with its urban centres, characterized by their diversity, as opposed to the province’s rural places, characterized by their perceived monocultural homogeneity. I draw attention to this discursive shift in the branding of the province because it mirrors a realignment in Canadian literary and cultural studies that has resulted in the stagnation of cultural discourse pertaining to southern Ontario rurality.

For a long time, land and rural-based cultural production and criticism held a significant place in Canadian literary and cultural studies with considerable influence in defining the relationship between our cultural texts and Canadian national identity. Supporting this critical focus were theorists like Northrop Frye who contended that “everything that is central in Canadian writing seems to be marked by the imminence of the natural world” (247) and D.G. Jones who claimed that “The life of the land has been central to the experience of most Canadians and to the literature which reflects their experience” (33). In this way, literary cultures in Canada replete with theories about “garrison mentalities” and “survival” complexes conceptualized Canadian national identity as forged out of our experiences in or confrontations with the natural world and the livelihoods we found therein. Commenting wryly on the endurance of this tradition, Douglas Coupland maintains that institutionalized Canadian Literature

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<sup>4</sup> The language of “discovery” used in the current slogan is reminiscent of colonial language. Hence, depending on the “you” responding to this call, the new slogan may draw the “discoverer” to the rural and wilderness spaces of the province; however, it equally has the potential to inspire exploration of Ontario’s urban centres.

is the literary equivalent of representational landscape painting, with small forays into waterfowl depiction and still lifes. It is not a modern art form, nor does it want to be. Scorecards are kept and points are assigned according to how realistically a writer has depicted, say, the odor of the kitchen the narrator inhabited as a child, the sense of disjuncture a character feels at living in a cold northern country with few traditions versus the country he or she has left behind, the quirks and small intimate moments of rural Ontario life or, metaphorically, how well one has painted the feathers on the wings of a duck.

As for southern Ontario's contribution to this tradition, Thomas McIlwraith claims, "The arts community found in rural Ontario a place to rediscover their country" (45).<sup>5</sup> In an article titled "Exurban Myths: How Our Rural Identity is Sucking the Life out of Cities," like Coupland, Anna Bowness begrudgingly notes the legacy of this tradition:

Oh, the bleak maritime rocks; the crags, the cod, the salt air, the reliably eccentric locals: every one of us who can read (or, indeed, rent a movie) has an intimate understanding of these things. And every one of us who can read or rent a movie or watch TV, or get books out of the library has an intimate understanding of lonely prairie vistas, of the desolate calm of a grain elevator at sunset. We are Canadian: we know wheat fields and coal mines like the back of our hard-working hands. These things are our cultural legacy, and we inherit them unquestioningly.

Far from an arbitrary choice, the construction in Canadian literature of Canadian identity as fundamentally tied to the land can be read as the result of earlier national branding strategies. During and after Confederation significant efforts were underway to etch out the national character, and out of this desire grew a penchant for nationalist literary criticism. Distinguishing Canadian identity from that of our American neighbours was and continues to be an integral feature of this endeavour (Kuffert 107-8), and Canada's perceived and imagined rurality has been a pivotal factor in this differentiation

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<sup>5</sup> As a result of the dominant agricultural character of rural southern Ontario, I consider the desire to ground national identity in this region as part of a tradition of agricultural nationalism that connects Canadian identity to rural values associated with farming cultures and communities.

(Edwards and Ivison, “Epilogue” 197). Prior to the contemporary Canadian inclination to celebrate and promote the cultural capital of Canada’s urban centres, historically intense urbanization was discussed as a phenomenon happening to the south and abroad, while Canada continued to subscribe to “the metanarrative of Canadian nordicity” where “Urbanization . . . gives way to the harsh nature of the landscape, an unexplored and threatening wilderness” (198-199). This nordic metanarrative and its associated rurality has always been somewhat ironic, considering that two thirds of the Canadian population lives within close proximity to the American border. Eventually, continued growth in Canada’s urban centres, perhaps unsurprisingly, ushered in a reaction against land and rural-based national mythologies. This reaction, which I think of as an urban revolt in Canadian literary and cultural studies, is fuelled by the perceived incongruity between traditional constructions of Canadian national identity, rooted in rural narratives and themes, and the current experience of the majority of Canadians who are thought of as inhabiting urban spaces, and for whom these “old” narratives seem outdated. Bowness goes as far as to suggest that with regards to development policy and political agency “Urban Canada is suffering in real ways from the overestimation of the rural in our arts and culture.” In order to overcome the pervasiveness and persistence of this cultural legacy, Bowness suggests Canadians “internalize the urban mythologies that our artists are giving us, and let them implant themselves in our minds, so that when we close our eyes and think of Canada, we can see its cities on the imaginary horizon.” This vision enunciates the central thrust of the urban revolt, expressed as a desire to switch the focus of Canadian cultural production and criticism from the rural to the urban, “to assert the



centrality of the city and the urban within the Canadian spatial and cultural imaginaries, to help us see the city as a place of Canadian society and culture, including its literature” (Edwards and Ivison, “Introduction” 4). Particularly in southern Ontario, this call did not seem wholly unreasonable. Indeed, as urban life asserted its dominance in the region, rural narratives increasingly seemed neither relevant nor accurate in their representation of regional realities and concerns. Bowness’s observation that “almost as many people take the TTC [Toronto’s public transit system] in one day as live in all the Maritime provinces combined” illustrates this discrepancy.

In addition to the sheer numerical demographics that position the majority of Canada’s culture consuming public in urban centres, particularly in southern Ontario, those urban centres also house large populations of visible minorities whose Canadian realities have not been traditionally represented in Canada’s rural narratives. Tamara Palmer Seiler points to the exceptional demographic makeup of Toronto, noting that “over 40 per cent of visible minorities in Canada live there” (131). With this in mind, it seems hardly coincidental that the urban revolt in literary and cultural studies coincides with Canada’s multicultural debates. The 1971 policy legislation of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework, the enshrining of multiculturalism in The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982), and the implementation of the official Multiculturalism Act (1988) are policy developments that resulted in rurality being displaced as symbolic of Canadian distinctiveness. Anne O’Connell suggests that not only has multiculturalism in Canada become “the hallmark of a ‘civilized’ northern nation striving toward a cultural mosaic” (537), but also that since it is “More closely associated with urban life . . . rural

communities have been largely left out of this configuration” (537). Thus, definitions of Canadian national identity focus increasingly on multiculturalism and its associations with Canada’s urban centres, places theorized as model sites of socio-cultural diversity (Richard Florida’s *The Rise of the Creative Class* as well as his subsequent works on this theme single out Toronto, in particular, as a prime example of his thesis). Accordingly, when we want to talk about diversity in southern Ontario, we tend to turn to cities like Toronto and authors like Dionne Brand, Austin Clarke, and Michael Ondaatje. Yet, as discussions about rurality in southern Ontario fell out of popularity in the face of the province’s growing urbanization, rural southern Ontario did not vanish; rather the city and its associated cultural significations merely came to increasingly define the region, in a way that has resulted in a perilous neglect of significant developments in rural studies that have profound implications for the ways in which rurality in southern Ontario ought to be imagined.

The desire for a new “cognitive map” (Jameson 51) in Canadian literary studies, one that positions urban places at its centre, resulting in stories of “complex urban spaces that tread the unstable ground between the local and the global, the authentic and unauthentic, cultural specificity and cosmopolitanism” (Edwards and Ivison, “Epilogue” 208), erroneously assumes that similar complexities are not present in rural places. This is an assumption this dissertation firmly disputes through an investigation into representations of other rurals in southern Ontario. The propensity to characterize southern Ontario’s urban centres as culturally heterogeneous in contrast to its rural, supposedly monocultural, counterparts perpetuates the continued polarization of

Canadian literary studies that has traditionally considered Canadian fiction to be “spatially oriented around two opposing *topoi*: the city and the country” (Hutcheon). Intervening in metrocentric discussions of Canadian multiculturalism that think in terms of “Relatively intense pockets of urban multicultural diversity . . . interspersed with vast stretches of ethnically uniform hinterland” (Fleras and Elliott 251), I assert that the relationship between diversity and Canadian rurality requires closer consideration. In *Altered States of Rurality*, I revisit the rural in southern Ontario to tease out its frequently ignored complexities; I mine southern Ontarian cultural texts to understand how it is that we come to associate “particular sorts of people . . . with particular sorts of places” (Philo, “Neglected” 199). In resisting the pull of the urban revolt in Canadian cultural and literary studies, I do not deny the cultural importance of Canada’s multicultural policies and critical discussions concerning Canadian diversity or suggest that the city has not been previously overshadowed by the rural in Canadian cultural history. In many ways, I commend this revolt for the way it has made room for us to consider the many socio-spatial cultures and realities that matter to Canadians and inform Canadian literary and cultural production. However, my dissertation seeks to balance the critical pendulum, asking that we pay attention to representations of other rurals in southern Ontario, thereby considering the way in which diverse subjectivities have historically been and are presently (un)imagined in dominant cultural discourses of southern Ontario rurality. Furthermore, I suggest we consider how hegemonic rural cultural representations replete with exclusions may impinge upon the lives of marginalized rural citizens. While the cultural texts in this dissertation introduce us to a wide spectrum of possible ways of

thinking about rurality, I am most interested in cultural texts that disrupt dominant perceptions of who inhabits rural southern Ontario, that call attention to institutional myths and structures in rural southern Ontario that facilitate the writing of certain peoples in or out of rural cultures in the province. As a counterpoint to this trajectory of thinking, I also attend to dominant cultural texts that support the imagined rural status quo by working against these disruptions.

Readers may find, however, in my selection of texts some notable absences. In accordance with the objectives I established for this dissertation, I decided not to focus on authors like Robertson Davies, James Reaney, Alice Munro, Matt Cohen, Jane Urquhart, Margaret Atwood and others whose works are frequently associated with literary representations of rural southern Ontario. This decision was made despite the fact that I recognize many instances in which some of this writing intersects with my research interests and analysis. In particular, Alice Munro's work, through her representation of rural small towns, makes an extraordinary contribution in challenging representations of the rural idyll in southern Ontario. She also disrupts masculinist rural discourse by bringing women's perspectives to the forefront of her rural narratives. Nonetheless, for the most part, these perspectives do little to break from the tradition of representing rural culture in the province as white and heterosexual. Munro's stories often focus on the interior lives of her female characters' rural experience. Among other objectives, my project seeks to draw attention to, decipher and critique the organizational logics of rural society that circumscribe the positions from which these female voices emanate. With this in mind, I found it helpful to examine texts that are more deliberately oppositional,

even though close readings of Munro's narratives may go a long way in contributing to this endeavour.

An argument could be made about the necessity of returning to canonical representations of rural southern Ontario to examine where other rurals may or may not enter these narratives. However, considering the urban revolt's vociferous reaction concerning the over-representation of many of these works in CanLit studies, for the moment I am inclined to leave this project for a later time. Presently, I feel the most judicious way to invigorate rural literary and cultural studies in southern Ontario is through the study of alternative and lesser known literary and cultural texts that make exciting contributions to the discourses circulating about the region's rural cultures.

- **Beyond Mariposa: Breakdown of the Project**

Taking a literary and cultural studies approach to rural studies, each of my chapters focuses on a neglected facet of rurality in southern Ontario as it is touched upon or absent in various cultural texts. My first chapter turns to dominant depictions of rural southern Ontario to examine the objectives and outcomes of these narratives primarily by questioning whose rural is being represented in these texts and for whom. The remaining chapters explore other rurals with attention given to the ways non-traditional cultural representations challenge dominant discourses of rurality as they have been produced and reproduced in southern Ontario's cultural productions. Each chapter begins by providing the contextual foundations for my textual analysis – a background for the chapter's area of focus and a discussion of relevant critical and theoretical concerns. In the latter half of

each chapter this context informs my reading of various cultural texts drawn mostly from a body of popular and lesser known representations of southern Ontario rurality that have to date received little or no critical attention.

Chapter One, “Play Farming and the Drama of Southern Ontario AgriCulture,”<sup>6</sup> provides an in-depth introduction to the cultural evolution of rural southern Ontario and reevaluates the polarization traditionally structured through urban/rural binaries. Then, through an examination of Theatre Passe Muraille’s *The Farm Show* and Dan Needles’s *Letters from Wingfield Farm*, I demonstrate how representations of rural southern Ontario are frequently dominated by urban perspectives, resulting in what Christopher Stapel describes as “a colonization of rurality by urban knowledge claims” (2). As we see in these texts, urban perspectives on rurality frequently result in nostalgic portraits of rural society, which Blake and Nurse contend have “not served rural Canadians well” because they depict “rural life as somehow less complicated than urban life” and consequently “mystify the concerns and experiences of rural Canadians” (viii). While in many instances both *The Farm Show* and *Letters from Wingfield Farm* are attentive to the complexities and challenges of rural living, their zeal in celebrating our supposedly shared rural roots ultimately results in nostalgic portrayals of rural southern Ontario that arguably do not serve the populations they represent.

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<sup>6</sup> This neologism was introduced to me in a seminar named “Why We Need AgriCultural Studies” that I participated in at the 2007 Cultural Studies Association conference in Portland, Oregon. This refashioning of the word “agriculture” is intended to move the term beyond the naming of an industry or occupation to highlight the cultures of agriculture (values, traditions, social organization, etc.), their histories and continuing evolution, and the way these cultures may influence the social dynamics and organization of agricultural communities and beyond. Throughout this dissertation, I will use the less awkward term “agriculture” but hope readers will keep the broader definition invoked by the term “AgriCulture” in mind.

Chapter Two, “Talking Trash: Two Faces Contesting Rural Whiteness in Southern Ontario” examines representations of race in rural southern Ontario, particularly as they relate to constructions of whiteness and the racialization of hired labour in the province’s agricultural sector. Through an analysis of three collections of photographs – Vincenzo Pietropaolo’s *Harvest Pilgrims: Mexican and Caribbean Migrant Farm Workers in Canada*, the Red Tree Artists’ Collective’s *From One Place to Another/Las dos realidades*, and the Ontario Farm Animal Council’s *Faces of Farming* calendar – I explore how the enduring belief in the traditional family farm as the foundational unit of rural culture in southern Ontario shores up the normalization of white southern Ontario rurality, thus marginalizing and concealing the presence of a significant and growing body of racialized farm labour in the region. However, beyond merely pitting the representation of one racialized group of rural southern Ontarians against another, this chapter also delves into opposing representations of rural whiteness. Inspired by the music of southern Ontario country-folk musician Fred Eaglesmith and its celebration of “white trash” identities, this discussion considers how socio-spatial divisions have been mobilized to hierarchically define and distinguish between various classes of white people.

Chapter Three, “Sex and the Country: Gendering and Queering the Rural in Southern Ontario,” returns to the music of Fred Eaglesmith as well as other texts discussed in the previous chapters to examine how representations of tractors and their solo male riders expose gender divisions and other hierarchies in rural society and have much to tell us about the construction of hegemonic rural masculinities. Once again, this

chapter points to the ideal of the family farm as a powerful rural institution contributing to the highly stratified gender dynamics of rural culture as well as the centrality of the heterosexual family unit in the countryside. Not surprisingly, this social organization leaves little room to imagine queer rural cultures in southern Ontario. Yet challenging the heteronormative imperative of rural cultures as well as the metronormative (urban-centric) assumptions of queer cultures, this chapter meditates on queer ruralities and contemplates the significance of building a queer rural archive in southern Ontario through readings of Timothy Findley's *From Stone Orchard: A Collection of Memories*, Michael Riordon's *Out Our Way: Gay and Lesbian Life in the Country*, and Robert McGill's *The Mysteries*.

In all of these chapters, I must acknowledge how heavily indebted my research and analysis is to the theoretical developments and conversations taking place in rural studies in other disciplines, namely geography, sociology, history and political science. One of my principal objectives in this dissertation is to resituate rurality by bringing it to the foreground of Canadian literary and cultural criticism and to disrupt the stark rural/urban divisions in the socio-spatial discourses of southern Ontario's regional cultural production and criticism. However, I also hope that my research possesses an interdisciplinary appeal that will make it of value to the conversations about critical ruralities taking place in other disciplines. It would be a great honour if my research can make a contribution to the very discussions I have found so fruitful and invigorating.

I have learned through the dissertation process that when it comes to research and writing one does not always end up where one thought one would at the outset. The



unfortunate downside of this reality is that many topics and texts of interest have not made their way into the final version of my project. One of the most significant changes in the evolution of my project was my diversion away from the field of ecocriticism, which I initially intended to be one the main critical lenses through which I approach this topic. In the end, my research led me to focus primarily on representations of rural social dynamics, leaving me insufficient space to delve into environmental perspectives circulating in rural southern Ontario. However, important work being done by ecofeminists, queer ecologists and critical race scholars who bring race issues to bear on environmental concerns have raised our awareness about the ways in which human identities and their contingent social relations have important ramifications for how we relate to the natural environment, a trajectory of thinking I hope also makes itself apparent at various points in my own analysis. Ultimately, taking note of David Matless's modest objective set out in his essay "Doing the English Village, 1945-90: An Essay in Imaginative Geography," I am inclined to make a similar claim about my project: This dissertation "does not developmentally chart a myth, or project a future imagination from a past continuity. Its intent is to gently [and sometimes not so gently] unsettle, at the same time conveying a rich complexity and variety in the imagined" (9) cultural landscapes of rural southern Ontario.

When Stephen Leacock begins the first chapter of *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* with the statement "I don't know whether you know Mariposa. If not, it is of no consequence, for if you know Canada at all, you are probably well acquainted with a dozen towns just like it" (9), he presumes that readers enter the world of the text with a

firm image of the rural small town already in mind. While Leacock's humour depends on the reader's foreknowledge of Mariposa, this dissertation suggests we are generally overly presumptuous about what we know about rural southern Ontario, and, too often, what we presume to know sometimes literally, sometimes figuratively excludes other rural knowledges and bodies. More often than not, cultural representations of rural southern Ontario have contributed to a dichotomous urban-influenced perception of the rural that pervades the cultural narratives produced by and about this space and sector of society. On the one hand, rural southern Ontario is celebrated for its sense of quaintness and community values, as a place where people escape from the pressures and the perceived moral vacuum of urban life (Blake and Nurse viii), a pattern of representation consistent with constructions of the rural idyll, a construct most famously explored by Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City*. The rural idyll is a construct that has been supported and forwarded by rural and urban populations alike. Davidoff, L'Esperance and Newby suggest that "It is a tribute to the endurance of this convention that even today, to many of us the adjective 'rural' has pleasant, reassuring connotations – beauty, order, simplicity, rest, grassroots democracy, peacefulness, *Gemeinschaft*" (149). However, in southern Ontario, particularly in the southern Ontario gothic tradition, literary representations also often depict the region's rural communities as closed societies, hostile to outsiders, diversity or change.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the close-knit community is

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<sup>7</sup> Margot Northey's *The Haunted Wilderness: The Gothic and Grotesque in Canadian Fiction* and Justin D. Edwards's *Gothic Canada: Reading the Spectre of a National Literature*, two book-length studies of gothic and grotesque writing in Canada, trace this tradition back to the nineteenth century, with significant contributions by Upper Canadian authors John Richardson and Susanna Moodie. Some contemporary Ontarian writers associated with this tradition include Robertson Davies, Margaret Atwood, Jane Urquhart, Michael Ondaatje, Timothy Findley, and Alice Munro (Greene; Howells, "Alice"; Northey; Edwards). In

paradoxically both desirable and oppressive, and rural southern Ontario is imagined as a society and landscape to escape to and from. In either case, dominant cultural representations of rurality in southern Ontario exhibit the same shortcomings as elsewhere in Canada, Europe, and a number of regions in the United States; notably, they are overwhelmingly white and invariably heterosexual, and have a tendency “to reduce the real complexity of the rural population to the ‘same’, and to turn a blind eye to the presence of all manner of ‘other’ human groupings within this population” (Philo, “Neglected” 200). *Altered States of Rurality* examines a number of cultural texts that encourage us to imagine rural southern Ontario differently; it opens a space for the contemplation of non-normative rural representations of race, sexuality and gender. I hope that at the end of these cultural forays into southern Ontario country, for those of you who do claim to know Mariposa, you may have the distinct feeling that we’re not in Mariposa any more.

- **Imagining Rurality**

Before entering the body of this dissertation, it may be helpful to dwell for a moment on what is meant when we refer to the “rural.” With its evolving boundaries between the

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relation to rural southern Ontario, Munro’s representations of the region’s small towns have had a particularly strong impact on the way these rural communities are imagined. From her earliest portrayals, described as “social chronicles of small-town life in southwestern Ontario with precise attention to domestic surfaces and social decorum, though they also retail socially unspeakable events with their scandalous stories of transgression and desire as well as provocative speculations on the mysteries and secrets hidden within ordinary lives” (Howells, “Alice” 770), onwards, her fiction works within a pan-national tradition of Canadian gothic and grotesque writing that delves into “mysterious, non-rational levels of experience, whether one chooses to call these the dark side of the soul, the night side of life, or the impulses of the id; both [the gothic and grotesque] react against the conventional ordering of reality, seeking in strange ways a truth beyond the accepted surface of life” (Northey 8).

country and the city as well as the tensions between its rural roots and urban present, discerning where the rural begins and ends in southern Ontario is a tricky question: is rurality defined by how we inhabit and use a geographical space or do we construct it and exist in it as a psychological terrain?<sup>8</sup> Theorists in the field of rural studies are increasingly emphasizing the importance of thinking about the rural as an imaginative construct, encouraging us to consider rurality “a state of mind” (Mormont qtd. in Kenworthy Teather 1), a “cultural construction” (Little, *Gender* 11) or “formation” (Cloke and Thrift 1), “a dynamic process rather than a place” (Sim 23), a dynamism shaped by cultural significations generated by rural insiders and outsiders through identifications with what it *means* to be rural that are dependent but not always tied to the contingent and shifting materiality of rural space and population. More often than not, as Michael Riordon suggests, “What counts as rural” (xii) is a matter of perspective. Hence, if we are to gain a more nuanced understanding of rurality, inclusive of the experience of rural others, Murdoch and Pratt argue that “there is a need to understand how we come to know the ‘rural’” (“From the Power” 55).

Examining the cultural texts whose engagement with rurality has shaped and/or has the potential to shape what we imagine rural southern Ontario to be is an important part of this endeavour. As my project demonstrates, different constructions of rurality in southern Ontario circulate through a variety of cultural media – plays, novels, music, advertising, photography, newspapers and magazines (and these are only the limited

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<sup>8</sup> In this dissertation, I use the term “rural” to refer to what New calls the “non-city,” which he argues comprises “farms, rural communities, and small towns, and includes but sometimes extends only gesturally into ‘wilderness’” (156).

sources I draw from in this dissertation). The representations examined in this dissertation all have their own biases in representing rurality in southern Ontario. They all have gaps, omissions, and inconsistencies. As such, would we be better off to look to statistical analyses or interviews with rural citizens to gain a more accurate portrait of the shape and character of rural southern Ontario today? In his own investigation of the English village, Matless suggests we ought not “treat images as lower in a hierarchy of truths than some *thing* more ‘real’ . . . Rather such images are here considered as speaking their own particular and partial truths; they *may* be seeking to deliberately evade other truths” (8, emphasis in original). The goal in my project, like Matless’s, is not so much to accurately apprehend the true culture of rural southern Ontario but rather to delve into the imaginative rural cultures, what Matless refers to as the “imaginative geography,” of the region. My project aims to make sense of how cultural texts that influence these imaginative rural cultures speak to each other, to rural “realities,” and to us as consumers and producers of rural cultures.

In their “Preface” to *Writing the Rural*, Cloke et al. acknowledge that, in writing the five cultural geographies that make up the text, there was “no one theoretical framework that would allow [them] to negotiate the ‘rural’ and articulate its diverse nature as a category” (v). Turning to literary and cultural texts to access some of the ways we have come to think about rural southern Ontario is merely one of a number of useful frameworks. However, my reading of Cloke’s and Thrift’s breakdown of the various phases of rural studies suggests literary and cultural analysis can intersect in critical ways with other methodological approaches to the study of rurality. They write: “the way in

which the meanings of rurality are constructed, negotiated and experienced will interconnect with the agencies and structures being played out in the space concerned” (3). Since literary and cultural texts are sites through which rurality is constructed, negotiated and, in particular for many non-rural residents, experienced, Cloke’s and Thrift’s assertion makes a strong case for how these texts have the potential to reflect and impact rural realities beyond textual boundaries.<sup>9</sup> For instance, if literary and cultural texts representing southern Ontario depict it as predominantly comprised of white and heterosexual Canadians, then it will be difficult to imagine the usefulness of or make a case for developing and providing programs to support people of colour and queers in southern Ontario’s rural regions; or, if the family farm is represented as the primary operational structure in southern Ontario’s agricultural economy, it makes it harder for hired agricultural labourers to gain public support for needed changes in agricultural labour regulations. As rurality is increasingly theorized as a cultural construct, it is only logical that literary and cultural studies will have a role to play in evaluating how cultural texts have the potential to shape the imaginative contours of the rural, altering by extension how the public thinks about and consequently lives in rural places and develops rural futures.

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<sup>9</sup> It is also worth noting that the arenas in which many literary and cultural texts circulate are frequently different and discrete from those in which other more technical and specialized knowledges about rurality are disseminated.

### **Play Farming and the Drama of Southern Ontario AgriCulture**

This may be the same *location*, but it has become  
a new and different *place*.

(Martin 56, emphasis in original)

This chapter begins with a brief introduction to rural southern Ontario, paying particular attention to how the growth of urban centres in the region has been historically contingent on the composition and evolution of the province's rural social and physical environment. This background lays the groundwork for the chapter's subsequent examination of two well-known plays – *The Farm Show* and *Letters from Wingfield Farm*.<sup>10</sup> Each offers a revealing portrait of the shifting urban/rural power dynamics and evolving cultural relations between rural and urban southern Ontario. I argue that, while both plays are grounded in rural southern Ontario, they contribute to broader discourses of Canadian nationalism through their depictions of urbanites making forays into rural southern Ontario to explore what is constructed as the shared history of our rural roots. I also explore why, although both plays are similar in content, they have received quite different critical receptions. While each play is written with evident affection for the rural society it depicts, I contend that these cultural representations of southern Ontario rurality exploit the rural populations they represent to appeal to a nostalgic rural Canadian mythos; furthermore, they show little concern for the way their representations of rural southern Ontario normalize images of intolerant rurality in the province and, by extension, in Canada.

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<sup>10</sup> The *Wingfield* series of plays written by Dan Needles comprises six plays that have been published in novel form in *Letters from Wingfield Farm* and *Wingfield's Hope: More Letters from Wingfield Farm*. *Letters from Wingfield Farm* consists of the first three plays in the series: *Letter from Wingfield Farm*, *Wingfield's Progress*, and *Wingfield's Folly*.

The power balance between rural and urban southern Ontario has shifted dramatically since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Historian Robert Bothwell observes that in Ontario in the late 1800s “farmers were the dominant class and elections were won and lost in village halls and along concession roads” (98). Growth in Ontario’s population in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was entirely in cities (98), and Bothwell suggests the corresponding decrease in the province’s rural population resulted in a “change in the character of the province, from rural to urban, from agricultural to industrial” (98) and that this “took its toll on ‘old’ issues” (100). He goes on to note that “Where before agriculture and related issues were the sinew of politics, politics now concentrated on matters like sanitation, factory legislation, and workmen’s compensation” (100). Despite ongoing rural/urban power imbalances, the development and prosperity of urban southern Ontario owes much to the natural geography and rural resources of the region (Martin 55). Susanna Moodie may have complained that for the colonial Upper Canadian farmer agricultural life meant a “struggle with difficulties on all sides” (387). Yet the unforgiving, toilsome and frequently unfruitful land Moodie describes in *Roughing It in the Bush; or, Life in Canada*, one of the earliest detailed depictions of agricultural life in southern Ontario, is ironically now considered some of the best agricultural terrain in Canada. According to the Canada Land Inventory, with respect to agricultural potential, Ontario contains just over half of all Canada’s Class 1 land,<sup>11</sup> and the majority of that

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<sup>11</sup> Class 1 is the best of seven class designations for agricultural land outlined in the Canada Land Inventory. These designations are determined by the potential and limitations of the land’s suitability for agricultural production. Better classifications will be able to accommodate a wider variety of crops with fewer management concerns (necessary improvements and conservation practices, for example). In “Classifying Prime and Marginal Agricultural Soils and Landscapes: Guidelines for Application of the



land is situated in southern Ontario; additionally, with respect to favourable climatic conditions, Ontario contains all of Canada's best ranking land ("Farmland in Ontario" 2). Indeed, even for Moodie's contemporaries, rural historian Thomas McIlwraith explains that favourable soil and climate conditions coupled with an abundant water supply made southern Ontario a desirable location for colonial settlement (32-34). While McIlwraith may be accused of exaggerating the ease of the conditions of settlement when he states "In Ontario, inexperienced settlers could make mistakes and survive, and they took to it with little risk" (37), large populations of First Nations people who inhabited the region prior to colonial settlement similarly testify to southern Ontario's capacity to support flourishing human communities. Like the First Nations here before them, settlers also found a region rich in forests that could readily supply building materials and waterways that facilitated transportation and power generation. Later, other mineral resources like sandstone, granite, clay and gravel were exploited for the construction of buildings and transportation infrastructure (McIlwraith 33-37). While these features drew a large number of settlers to the region, with the onset of industrialization the region also provided the materials to build the cities to house a growing population and food to nourish it.

Whereas before the turn of the last century Ontario could be comfortably described as a "rural province" (Bothwell 98), the 1911 census recorded that, for the first

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Canada Land Inventory in Ontario," Class 1 land is described as having soils that are "level to nearly level, deep, well to imperfectly drained and [with] good nutrient and water holding capacity. They can be managed and cropped without difficulty. Under good management they are moderately high to high in productivity for the full range of common field crops" ("Classifying Prime").

time, Ontario's urban population was greater than its rural (98). Not unsurprisingly this rural/urban demographic shift ushered in transformations in the leading cultural and political concerns of the province (100). As an industrial-based economy flourished in southern Ontario around the dawn of the twentieth century, the region's agrarian roots came to play a diminished role in the provincial identity. At the same time, as a centre of manufacturing, banking, and government, urban southern Ontario solidified its economic, political and cultural clout both provincially and nationally. Yet it is not merely the case that urban southern Ontario waxed as the rural waned; while rural southern Ontario continues to shrink in population<sup>12</sup> and land mass, changes in the urban fabric of the province also influence the character of what rural society remains in very much the same way that the strength of rural southern Ontario's resources historically shaped the development of its urban centres.<sup>13</sup>

In the introduction to *Downtown Canada: Writing Canadian Cities*, editors Justin Edwards and Douglas Ivison suggest that "Through a complex series of economic and

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<sup>12</sup> The issue of population decline in rural southern Ontario is somewhat debatable. While the urbanization of southern Ontario has gained significant attention, migratory trends in the latter quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and continuing into the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>, as has been observed in other developed Western nations, have resulted in a proportional population increase in rural southern Ontario that is consistently higher than in urban centres. Much of this increase is the product of urban out-migration which has contributed to changing definitions of rural space and understandings of the quintessential rural resident (see Stanley R. Barrett's *Paradise: Class, Commuters, and Ethnicity in Rural Ontario* or Thomas McIlwraith's *Looking for Old Ontario: Two Centuries of Landscape Change*).

<sup>13</sup> It is likely that rural southern Ontario will also play an integral role in the future evolution of the region's urban centres, particularly when taking into account issues like food security and agricultural sustainability in the face of rising energy and fuel costs. Emergent political lobby groups such as the Greater Toronto Countryside Mayor's Alliance (GTCMA) – formed in 2004 to represent the interests of the towns of Aurora, Caledon, East Gwillimbury, Halton Hills, Georgina, Milton, Newmarket and Whitchurch-Stouffville; the townships of Brock, King, Scugog, and Uxbridge; the City of Pickering; and the Municipality of Clarington – are already taking formal steps to think about the development of what it classifies as "near urban agricultural municipalities." One of the GTCMA's priorities is to examine the challenges and benefits of a growing agricultural subcategory in southern Ontario – "near urban agriculture" – and suggest necessary urban and rural development strategies to ensure its survival ("Farmland Disputes").

social relations many . . . putatively non-urban spaces and populations are incorporated into the spatial economy of cityspace” (10). In a physical sense alone this incorporation is easily apparent; with immobile marine boundaries on three sides accompanied by the squeeze of steady urbanization, nowhere in Canada is rural society feeling the presence of its urban neighbours more than in southern Ontario. In addition to physical expansion, however, demographic shifts have ushered in significant cultural transformations even where the physical geography (landscape, architecture, infrastructure, etc.) may appear largely unchanged. As McIlwraith notes, to the trained eye there are subtle yet observable differences in this new rural environment:

former city folks (“exurbanites”) attempt to maintain a country look, but with no intention of being rural. An overgrown field becomes a recreational place, where city-based owners enjoy rambling over moraines and squidding past bogs. A rototiller is an urbane plough for the vegetable garden, the nearest that most exurbanites come to farming. (298)

McIlwraith’s tone here suggests a bias that privileges an earlier rural lifestyle; he lauds traditional rural and agricultural modes of existence over what he depicts as degraded, frivolous and, thus, morally inferior urban lifestyles and the exurbanite recreational enjoyment of rural nature. However, his observations do support the veracity of Edwards and Ivison’s claim about the changing spatial economy of rural space. In large part, technology facilitates this extra-urban incorporation: the automobile makes it easy for citizens working in the city to live beyond its borders (McIlwraith 255-8); similarly, the Internet allows people to work at formerly urban jobs, for instance, office jobs provided by companies and industries with physically urban roots, without leaving the comfort of their rural homes (Reed qtd. in MacGregor “Who says”; Blake and Nurse ix).

Yet even before the heyday of the automobile or the Internet, Bothwell notes that in the first quarter of the twentieth century rural depopulation was already a political and social concern. Bothwell observes that, at that time, shifts in the former agricultural character of rural life were evident even in places where rural communities still appeared to be thriving: in places “Where a rural county did not lose population, it was because people were attracted to the local village or town, doubtless because of some jobs available in manufacturing, distribution, or service industries” (121). According to writer, farmer and rural advocate Thomas Pawlick, more recently these technology-driven changes in the make-up of rural society have been encouraged and rewarded by recent government planning and policy incentives through biased funding decisions that give preferential support to rural communities with large populations of urban commuters (“War”). Furthermore, in addition to an influx of exurbanites, many previously farming rural residents have forsaken farming as a consequence of the decreased economic viability of small scale mixed-farming. Thus, even the roles traditional rural residents play in rural society are increasingly altered in character.

While conspicuous and consistent urbanization in southern Ontario marks evolving rural/urban dynamics as attention-worthy, the current state of affairs is not unprecedented; although the contemporary landscape of rural/urban exchanges may raise new concerns – competing interests for political and cultural representation, challenges for ensuring environmentally sustainable development, conflict concerning indigenous land rights, to name a few – the relationship between urban and rural space and society in

southern Ontario and beyond has always been foundational and complex.<sup>14</sup> As Virgil Martin observes,

It is no mere coincidence that our fastest growing towns and cities are situated in the midst of some of the best agricultural land in the country. Historically, farm incomes provided the economic base for urban development in Southern Ontario. Furthermore, modern land developers value the same qualities that characterize superior farmland – moderate climate, good drainage, and relatively little slope. Little wonder then that our cities have acquired the nasty habit of biting the land that feeds them.  
(55)

Again, as was the case earlier with McIlwraith, Martin’s final editorializing comment demonstrates the prevalent polarization of the country/city binary that frequently reveals commentators staunchly supporting one side of the two perceived poles. In southern Ontario, when the relationship between the country and the city is represented, it often seems the dynamics between the two zones may be more aptly defined as country *or* city.

However Martin’s project in *Changing Landscapes of Southern Ontario* is noteworthy. In this text, he visually tracks development in southern Ontario from the late nineteenth century to the early 1980s. He accomplishes this tracery by using a technique he calls rephotography, wherein, using old photographs, dating anywhere from 1888 to the 1950s, he determines the location, position, and angle used for the original shot and then takes another picture from the same vantage point so as to be able to compare the changes observable when the two photographs are compared side-by-side. So, for example, Martin uses aerial photographs to chart the industrialization of Hamilton’s waterfront and draw attention to other expanding border regions of southern Ontario’s

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<sup>14</sup> Raymond Williams is well known for his analysis of this dynamic in the British context where, in *The Country and the City*, he writes of an “active and continuous” history between the urban and rural realm wherein, he suggests, “relations are not only of ideas and experiences, but of rent and interest, of situation and power; a wider system” (7).

cities. He documents the evolution of country roads alongside the devolution of former railway routes, and shows the residual effects of power generation on waterways and mining on escarpments and moraines. One of his most surprisingly counter-intuitive revelations comes from his photographs of agricultural land that display significant reforestation in southern Ontario since the periods of his earliest photographs. As part of his analysis, Martin observes that “The landscape exists as a continuum; sharply defined divisions can never be entirely satisfactory” (12). In a physical sense, Martin’s comment speaks to the blurring of boundaries between rural and urban spaces most evident in the geographical zone he refers to as the “urban frontier,” the space surrounding cities “where farmland is being transformed into city . . . a temporary landscape in transition between two relatively stable but totally different states” (55). As mentioned earlier, with its “profound legacy [of] suburban Ontario” (McIlwraith 47), the car has played an integral role in changing rural demographics and has contributed to the increasing shiftiness of rural/urban boundaries. Martin’s photographs bear witness to evidence of this change apparent long before a casual observer may have noticed this transformation.

In cultural terms, however, Martin’s continuum also speaks to the human flow between these spaces: farmers bringing their produce to market; rural residents visiting the city for shopping and entertainment unavailable in the rural environment; urban residents vacationing in the countryside; and, increasingly, rural/urban commuters. While these movements have practical dimensions, I am particularly interested in the cultural significance of these connections. As southern Ontario becomes more urban-centric and we are increasingly accustomed to thinking of ourselves as part of a globalized economy

and culture where our livelihoods, energy, food, and entertainment are tied to regions far beyond our immediate surroundings, especially for urban dwellers, the practical connections between the country and the city may come to seem less apparent and/or relevant.

Yet journalist Roy MacGregor observes that urban Canadian residents continue to imagine themselves as connected to rural space even if they rarely venture outside the urban arena. In his response to Canada's 2006 census results that proclaimed "Canada's population becoming more urban" (Martel and Caron-Malenfant), MacGregor points to studies showing that "the land" continues to resonate strongly for a majority of Canadians despite their increasing urbanity: "for reasons that are often understandable – a distant family farm, aboriginal heritage, a history that somewhere includes fishing, mining, logging, the railway – as well as for reasons no one can claim to understand fully, there remains among all Canadians this enormous connection with the land and water" (MacGregor, "Even"). While MacGregor initially suggests these sentimental ties are understandable remnants of individual family lineages, I am intrigued by the seemingly intangible sources of connection to which MacGregor gestures. I hope this chapter, through its reading of two plays deeply grounded in the southern Ontario rural environment, will make a more persuasive argument about how these ties between the country and the city have been forged by cultural texts that actively work to yoke "home" to "land" in the dominant Canadian imagination.

*The Farm Show* and *Letters from Wingfield Farm* both play upon these imagined connections; yet these texts are merely two examples in the longstanding literary tradition

in Canada that encourages this kind of rural nostalgia. Earlier in the twentieth century, in *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, Stephen Leacock points to the increasing invisibility of the rural that betrays what he suggests is a deep rooted psychological and emotional connection to a rural “home” lingering in the southern Ontario psyche:

It leaves the city every day about five o'clock in the evening, the train for Mariposa.

Strange that you did not know of it, though you did come from the little town, or did, long years ago.

Odd that you never knew, in all these years, that the train was there every afternoon, puffing up steam in the city station, and that you might have boarded it any day and gone home. No, not “home,” – of course you couldn't call it “home” now. (151)

Here, Leacock calls attention to the nostalgic bent of his urban audience as he slyly ridicules the reader's possible inclination to ground himself or herself in a rural realm to which he or she has little or no actual connection. However, the way Leacock turns his satirical focus to the urban reader at this late point in the text is slight consolation for the rural reader who is the source of ridicule for the greater part of the book. Years later, *The Farm Show* and *Letters from Wingfield Farm* with comparable success and questionable allegiances employ similar nostalgic and comedic devices popularized by writers like Leacock; yet, as Raymond Williams contends, these kinds of rural nostalgias “mean different things at different times” (12). Leacock published *Sunshine Sketches* at a time when southern Ontario's agricultural and natural resource-based communities still held considerable sway in the socio-political life of the province. Indeed, in its origins, even if inaccurately now, Thomas McIlwraith maintains “Southern Ontario' is an agricultural definition” (33), as distinct from Northern Ontario where inhospitable growing conditions meant different kinds of non-agricultural resource-based communities arose.



So then, as part of a lineage of representations of rural southern Ontario, what insights can *The Farm Show* and *Letters from Wingfield Farm* offer readers and audiences about the relationship between rural and urban southern Ontario in the latter half of the twentieth century? What follows is an exploration of the intersections between these rural-themed plays and a broader socio-cultural and political drama.

- ***The Farm Show: Framing a Nation at Play***

Theatre Passe Muraille, formed in 1968, is one of four theatre companies<sup>15</sup> widely acknowledged as having given birth to what has variously been referred to as the “new theatre movement” (Arnott), the “alternative theatre movement” (McKinnie; Filewod, *Collective*), and the “Canadian theatre movement” (Kinch) that flourished in early 1970s Toronto. A formative part of Theatre Passe Muraille’s repertoire, *The Farm Show* is one of the company’s most influential contributions, in both content and style, to the development of Canadian theatre. The play is a cooperative experimental and experiential theatre production created through the collective efforts of director Paul Thompson and Theatre Passe Muraille actors. Devoid of a unifying plot – a central story line that runs throughout – the play conveys an experience of the people, community and lifestyle observed by the Theatre Passe Muraille actors during their stay near Clinton, Ontario in the summer of 1972. Canadian drama scholar Alan Filewod cites the play as “the model for a form of community documentary theatre based on the actors’ personal

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<sup>15</sup> The other companies include Factory Theatre Lab, Tarragon Theatre, and Toronto Free Theatre. Although established much earlier, Toronto Workshop Productions is also often mentioned in relation to the new theatre movement and is frequently credited for planting some of the seeds out of which this later movement grew.

responses to the source material” (*Collective* 24). The characters in the play are non-fictional, and many of the scenes in the play are delivered as eclectic vignettes that closely reenact actual encounters and interviews. The play’s material was gathered by the actors during a lengthy stay in the farming community surrounding Clinton. The actors spent their time in the community interviewing residents, participating in community events, and volunteering as labourers, after which they would together workshop this source material. Although the outcome of their workshopping is published, the printed version of the play clearly states that improvisation and audience participation are integral parts of the performance. Renate Usmiani notes that, like many Theatre Passe Muraille collective productions, “the printed text captures only one fixed moment in an ongoing, dynamic creation process” (45).

*The Farm Show* is widely considered to represent a pivotal moment in the development of Canadian theatre. Filewod signals the play as “a critical point at which our present idea of ‘Canadian theatre’ emerged as a cultural practice” (“Theatrical” 9). As such, the play as temporal artifact represents the inception of nationalist theatre production in Canada. For this reason, it is *The Farm Show*’s cultural aura, infused by the play’s production and reception that provides as much, if not more, insight into the cultural relationship between urban and rural Canada in the latter half of the twentieth century than the particularities of the script. The play stands out for critics not only because of stylistic innovations and its employment of unconventional theatrical representation and spectatorship but also because of its subject matter – the drama is unabashedly nationalist in its intention to make theatre from the people for the people. As

Ted Johns, one of the actors, illustrates in his introductory comments to the published script, *The Farm Show* came to mean much more for audiences than the play's exciting yet humble and uncertain beginnings may have anticipated:

In the early days of that summer of '72, the actors had no idea what they were doing . . . At first the result didn't seem like a play: no lights, no costumes, no set, a barn for a theatre, haybales for seats. Simply pure performance . . . No one anticipated the delight people would take in hearing their own language and observing their own culture. (Theatre Passe Muraille 7)

It is difficult to consider *The Farm Show* now and feel comfortable with Johns's assessment of the play as "pure performance," when, even from the initial stages, there was a sense that more was always at play in this superficially barebones dramatic representation of rural life in southern Ontario. Indeed, in *The Clinton Special*, Michael Ondaatje's 1974 documentary about the creation and earliest presentations of *The Farm Show*, the play's director Paul Thompson unabashedly acknowledges homegrown myth-making as one of the primary functions of the play:

You have to create your own mythology, and our mythology is the people who are here . . . to start making heroes out of people like Jean Lobb and Les Jervis, I think, is really exciting because you have the reality and you have what you did in a play, and, of course, there's a difference because when you make something out of it, it changes and it grows and it breathes; but to be confronted with the two is fantastic because you feel you can respond to both; you sort of are echoing off this one and echoing off that one. (*The Clinton Special*)<sup>16</sup>

Here, Thompson is excited by the ways in which the rather raw material presented in *The Farm Show* is ripe for response. Audience response is both pertinent and complex, for the play was performed in some drastically different theatrical contexts. Originally staged in

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<sup>16</sup> Transcriptions from *The Clinton Special* are mine.

a barn for an audience made up of the community members from whose experiences the dramatic action was drawn, the play went on to be performed for both rural and urban audiences in both conventional and non-conventional venues.

As a result of the particular and, at the time, rather unusual relationship between the actors, the dramatic material and the audience, the spatial dynamics of this play are complex. Considering *The Farm Show* outside of its original creative and performance context, it is, of course, both ironic and symbolic that Toronto, the most prominent of southern Ontario's (and Canada's) urban centres, houses the theatre company most influential in enunciating southern Ontario rurality. In his analysis of the play, Filewod posits that *The Farm Show* speaks to a connection that can be made between "the relationship of theatre culture to national presence" ("Theatrical" 9); he argues that a single dramatic moment may suggest various futures. While Filewod is interested in theatrical futures, the various dramatic lineages he ties to *The Farm Show*'s innovative genesis and style, the connection he makes between "theatre culture and national presence" is significant, first for its suggestion that dramatic events resonate in other theatres of action. For instance, in his analysis of the relationship between urban space and Canadian theatre, Michael McKinnie suggests that Theatre Passe Muraille's survival has been contingent on its ability to purchase performance space, a development facilitated when "the post-Fordist suburbanization of manufacturing in Toronto's urban political economy released former industrial spaces for use by theatre companies" (90). This being the case, on a practical level, Theatre Passe Muraille's existence operates at the expense of rural space that, on the other end of this real-estate transfer, is transformed

into the suburban industrial zones surrounding Toronto. If, as McKinnie argues, “experimental theatre of the late 1960s saw performance space (broadly defined) as a site of theatrical and social contest, where, if the space itself were subjected to consistent re-theorization, the theatrical event could be artistically and socially liberatory” (75), then it is certainly the case that Theatre Passe Muraille’s conceptual recuperation of the rural realm in *The Farm Show* ignores the part its own existence plays in benefiting from southern Ontario rural decline. This is not out of character, for as Filewod suggests, “Rarely in *The Farm Show* do the actors venture into territory where the preference for form over analysis creates difficulty” (*Collective* 42). However, he goes on to suggest that the play protects itself from being criticized for “its avoidance of political and economic complexities . . . by looking at the culture, not the business, of farming” (42-3). The removal of business from the culture of farming may seem a tolerable exclusion for Filewod, Theatre Passe Muraille, and urban audiences, but it is unlikely rural farming audiences would be equally comfortable with this segmentation and the depoliticization of farming culture.<sup>17</sup>

As for other dramatic resonances, attitudes circulated in *The Farm Show* also have cultural ramifications for real-world rural development in southern Ontario, particularly when the play’s performance gains cultural capital with urban audiences whose dominance as a result of both population size and economic influence have the power to

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<sup>17</sup> Ontario farmers (along with Canadian farmers in general) are historically an engaged and politicized segment of the population, with a strong history of collective organizing. In 1969, the Ontario Farmers’ Union (established in the 1950s) joined forces with other provincial farm unions to become the National Farmers Union, which is still active. In the two decades prior to *The Farm Show*’s development and release, farmers through the OFU were actively lobbying the Federal Government and engaging in public demonstrations, including large demonstrations held in downtown Toronto in 1966 and Ottawa in 1968, the latter involving a parade of tractors converging on Parliament Hill (“A Farmer’s History”).

guide socio-political agendas.<sup>18</sup> As seen above, in the separation of the culture of agricultural and business, critical differences in audience reception of the portrait of rural life presented in *The Farm Show* are easily apparent. The transition from rural to urban audience drastically alters the relationship between the play's content and the viewer, influencing possible responses to the dramatic material. Whereas it is not difficult to see how rural audiences may see "their own language" and "their own culture" (Theatre Passe Muraille 7) reflected in the play, this self-referentiality is less clear for urban audiences. How is it, then, that *The Farm Show* resonates so strongly for urban audiences? As we can note in Usmiani's comments, some critics were perplexed by the enthusiastic urban response to the play:

The enormous appeal of *The Farm Show* to audiences everywhere was truly astounding. John Coulter gave a partial explanation when he compared it to the impact of Irish theatre in the 1920s, based on self-discovery and identification. But while this theory may be correct for rural areas, it surely does not hold for big cities like Toronto and Ottawa. (48)

Yet other critics suggest that urban audiences did indeed find in the play a sense of self-discovery and identification. They make convincing arguments about how the play's

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<sup>18</sup> As evidence of this kind of political power, one only needs to look to how the concerns of urban voters encouraged and supported the development of policies like the "New Deal for Cities and Communities," which involves the transfer of Federal money to Canadian municipalities, negotiated by the mayors of large Canadian metropolitan centres and the Canadian Federal, Provincial and Territorial Governments. The long and contentious political struggle over the Adams Mine Landfill Proposal, wherein a mine located near Kirkland Lake became the proposed disposal site for waste generated by the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, is also a classic example of the ways in which urban and rural interests have been pitted against one another. In this case, uncharacteristically, the rural lobby against the proposal was ultimately successful (note that not all local rural residents opposed the landfill development). However, this success was contingent on appealing to Torontonians against the proposal. Moreover, the opposition to the Adams Mine proposal only succeeded in having the waste diverted south of the border, thus supporting Janet Fitchen's point in *Endangered Spaces, Enduring Places: Change, Identity, and Survival in Rural America* that "In many areas rural lands are being redefined by powerful non-rural interests as suitable sites for the cast-off, unwanted byproducts of society, thus creating an urban-to-rural effluent flow of unknown magnitude" (226).

cultural resonance with both urban and rural audiences results from the way *The Farm Show* fits into a history of Canadian cultural nationalism that connects the land and those who work on the land to Canadian national identity. However, I suggest it is the combination of old and new cultural nationalisms that is particularly potent in capturing the nationalist imagination, allowing Filewod to assert that with *The Farm Show* “audiences opened a new sense of the Canadian nation at play” (“Theatrical” 10). Significant for Filewod is not only who is at play (the rural subjects of the drama) but also how they/we are at play (Theatre Passe Muraille’s unconventional dramatic practices). Indeed, Brian Arnott affirms

[*The Farm Show*’s] mission was to declare proudly: this is who we are and it’s good. The particular Canadians who form the protagonist “we” are a group of farmers from Southwestern Ontario. While they do not represent all Canada, they are clearly home-grown, typical and figures of the here-and-now. (103-104)

Here, Arnott minimizes the significance of Theatre Passe Muraille’s object of inquiry, instead suggesting the “home-grown”ness of the topic is of foremost import. However, director Paul Thompson’s inclination to find inspiration in a farming community in southern Ontario is by no means incidental; it is consistent with a deeply entrenched tradition of rooting Canadianness in close connections to the land. As discussed in the introduction, leading up to *The Farm Show*, Canadians had been, in fact, playing at these agricultural nationalisms for some time. As Ellen Mackay suggests “when pressed to define Canadianness divested of the influences of England and the United States, those engaged in this act of community-imagining quite consistently point back to the land itself” (11). Yet, as the title of Mackay’s essay suggests – “Fantasies of Origin: Staging

the Birth of the Canadian Stage” – these are imagined origins fostered and nursed through the stories we tell about ourselves until eventually, as MacGregor muses “*for reasons no one can claim to understand fully*, there remains among all Canadians this enormous connection with the land and water” (MacGregor, “Even,” emphasis mine).

If we delve only a little, it is actually rather easy to see the way cultural productions like *The Farm Show* have their part to play in inspiring this taken-for-granted Canadian connection to our natural geography. The “we” Arnott identifies as being interpellated by *The Farm Show* allows the audience to feel that because these “characters” are connected to the land and they are an expression of Canadianness, the audience therefore is also implicated in this relationship between citizen, nation, and land. *The Farm Show* supports the sustained connection between rural residents and their land even in its most basic production elements like set design. Conceived as a map of the area around Clinton, the set reconceptualizes a rural geography based on people and family lineage, family names taking the place of conventional designations given to town lines, counties, and concessions. Yet if the convention, as Mackay suggests, is to connect Canadianness with the land – then the selective framing of that family lineage is notable, particularly with respect to the conspicuous absence of indigenous peoples, a population who elsewhere have been rightly or wrongly routinely defined in relation to the Canadian landscape and rural realm (Berg et al. 399; Goldie 14). Instead, the “typical” and “good” “we,” whom Arnott claims *The Farm Show* proudly celebrates, dramatizes a broader discourse of white Canadian nationalism that is persistently reinforced in mainstream



representations of southern Ontario rurality, here literally mapped onto the Canadian stage.<sup>19</sup>

Leading up to my detailed exploration of the relationship between race and rurality in southern Ontario in Chapter Two, my examination of the *Wingfield* plays later in this chapter introduces the way discourses of belonging in rural southern Ontario have the potential to make certain groups of people not feel at home in the rural sphere, but for now, I would like to take a closer look at the way *The Farm Show* negotiates the relationship between rurality and urbanity to explore how the play (im)mobilizes the various communities it pretends to include in its collective frame of reference. To begin, let us consider what is to be made of the fact that a play that appears to be genuinely interested in agricultural life in southern Ontario ends up functioning as a nationalist drama deeply invested in an idea of agriculture but devoid of reasoned care for its sustainable futures. What can this mean for the rural communities represented at the literal level of the dramatic action? Do audiences respond to both the reality of the source material and the dramatic representation equally, as Paul Thompson suggests (*The Clinton Special*)? What obligation do audiences have to respect the link between response and responsibility as the etymological roots of these words suggest we ought? Here we return to the topic of *The Farm Show* as (non)politically engaged theatre mentioned earlier.

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<sup>19</sup> In this instance, my analysis responds to Robert Nunn's observation, in "The Meeting of Actuality and Theatricality in *The Farm Show*," that while *The Farm Show*'s stage functions as "a non-representational playing space . . . capable of being transformed into barns, fields, homes, the town square of Goderich, and so on," all the while "it maintains its relation to fact, as a map" (43).

There is superficial evidence that the play strives to call attention to broader socio-political concerns that challenge the sustainability of rural life in southern Ontario. In the play's penultimate scene, one of the most politically provocative, the playwrights use the "Bruce Pallett" speech to acknowledge threats to the agricultural community from which Theatre Passe Muraille derives its inspiration:

Y'see, we're losing agricultural land in Ontario at the rate of forty-three acres an hour. You look at this map of Canada on the back wall. This shows all the areas in Canada that'll ever produce food. *Ever*. Not very many is it? Now, look at this narrow strip of land from Windsor to around Montreal. That varies in depth from ten to seventy miles, and that strip of land provides food for almost forty percent of the nation, and that land is disappearing at the rate of forty-three acres an hour. Now, arithmetic was never my strong point, but by rapid calculation that's about a million acres a year. (Theatre Passe Muraille 100)

As Robert Nunn notes, this scene offers the most overt call for audience response to the perceived "indifference of the nation to the value of farming as a way of life and as part of the national identity" (44). In addition to the disappearance of agricultural land in southern Ontario, the "Pallett" speech also enumerates the deflationary price Canadians pay for food, prices not in keeping with other forms of inflation and dramatically unreflective of the actual costs of food production at the level of the farm. Clearly, the "Pallett" speech is not directed at rural audiences who are well aware of the inequities of farming and are sensible of the precariousness of their lifestyle. Instead, Pallett's speech suggests Canadians, particularly urban Canadians, draw unfairly on an unequal system of exchange that deepens the irony of actor/character Miles Potter's statement earlier in the play: "Boy, it sure must be great being a farmer" (23). According to Pallett's analysis, urbanites draw on agricultural resources with little regard for the sustainability of

agricultural communities. This critique late in the play becomes a large scale representation of the earlier attitude represented by Miles' desire to dismantle Jack Merrill's barn: "Sure would like to get some of these boards . . . take them back to Toronto and make a coffee table out of them" (23). Pallett suggests most Canadians (like Miles) operate within this system of rural/urban exchange obliviously and sometimes incredulously. As he states, "Everybody's so damn sure we're making a lot of money" (102). However, his logic for understanding these problems unproductively and derogatorily focuses on individual – specifically female – purchasing attitudes:

Seventy-five percent of the women in this country don't know how to shop! They don't know how to cook stew – so she goes in [to the supermarket] and buys a T.V. dinner or some silly dumb thing they can't afford, or plastic pails, mops, soap, or panty hose – yeah, *panty hose*. She gets up to the checkout counter, she's two dollars short an' she says the price of *food's* too high! (101, emphasis in original)

Significantly, while the original script of the play existed as a fluid document that evolved throughout the initial performances, Bruce Pallett's speech was added far later and was developed out of an audience member's response to the play (Filewod, *Collective* 48). One of the most overtly politically charged commentaries in the play, this scene was not, however, part of the original material developed out of the actors' community research. The scene's late insertion suggests it contains a critical message the actors and director felt needed to be heard. Yet, in this scene, by individualizing the problem at the level of purchasing practices, Theatre Passe Muraille deflects the blame for an inequitable agricultural system away from food sellers and government legislators, thus diminishing the effectiveness of their critique.

Beside the physical realities of urban expansion and financial challenges of contemporary farming alluded to by Pallett, the play also acknowledges ideological forms of urban influence that enhance the likelihood of out-migration by producing a younger generation that, as one character states “don’t want to work hard” since “they’ve got the T.V. and everything telling them how they can live in the city and make a lot of money” (98). Considering these challenges, the play makes no serious attempt to call attention to or address viable remedies for these concerns. Instead, it persistently and unquestioningly celebrates agriculture rooted in the family farm. The Lobb family is a prominent farming family in the play, who, despite the trends, appear to be successfully maintaining the family farming tradition. Their narrative, told through the “Lobb Song” leitmotif, celebrates the proliferation and growth of this family. Running as a hopeful albeit tenuous current throughout the play, the chorus plods on: “Mobs of Lobbs, Lobb-in-laws, ready-on-the job Lobbs . . . That ever-spreading, farming, Lobb dynasty” (74). This persistent value placed on the mythical importance of the family farm – increasingly incompatible with the dominant face of agriculture in southern Ontario today – continues to echo in legal challenges in Ontario concerning the rights of agricultural labourers to unionize and frequently results in a misrepresentation of the actual social composition of many contemporary southern Ontario rural communities, points that will be taken up at length in the following chapter.

- **Theatre Practice and Community (Dis)Engagement**

In “Contrasting Roles for the Post-Productivist Countryside,” Keith Halfacree describes the post-productivist countryside as one no longer ruled by “the hegemonic domination of rural areas and rural society by agriculture” (72). With this transition, he suggests “A space in the imagination is opening, whereby non-agricultural interests and actors are given an opening to strive to create a rurality in their image” (72). *The Farm Show* debuted at a time when Canada, like many other industrialized nations, was experiencing a similar shift in rural culture. As such, what kinds of new imaginings was *The Farm Show* making way for in representations of southern Ontario rurality? If the theatre scene of the 1970s is generally linked to Canadian nationalism, what is it about *The Farm Show* in particular that enabled Brian Arnott at the time to assert that “Perhaps no piece of Canadian theatre of the last decade better exemplifies this search for a collective selfhood than Theatre Passe Muraille’s *The Farm Show*” (103)? I have been suggesting that both the rural subject matter of *The Farm Show* as well as the particular character of the dramatic production create forms of dramatic exchange that rest upon communal identifications, albeit without requiring a meaningful engagement with the actual challenges of rural life. *The Farm Show* plays with an idea of rurality tied to a broader nationalist project that hopes to enunciate “deeper cultural meaning” (Filewod, *Collective* 22), but at its core this idea is divested of the concerns of actual rural southern Ontarians as expressed by the rural participants interviewed by Theatre Passe Muraille actors. As Filewod candidly admits, “As a documentary about farming in Ontario, *The Farm Show* may not stand up to analysis” (49). For Theatre Passe Muraille actors, it was imperative

that the play be performed to rural audiences: “The most important thing about doing *The Farm Show* on tour will be if we can get a rural audience to come to see it” (*The Clinton Special*); however, it is the urban audience’s reception of the play that would define its legacy in the canon of Canadian drama.

Robert Nunn argues that at its core *The Farm Show* is about community and that its strength resides in its ability to “effect a transformation in the relationship between the company of actors, who had created the show, and the farming community, which was the subject of the show and its first audience” (43). I have already raised some of the downsides of this community-building project by demonstrating how the play’s interpellated “we” excludes certain populations in its reaffirmation of dominant understandings of rurality and “Canadianness” as expressed through this narrative and the national theatre movement. Yet as the most straightforward expression of this community-building and community-based practice, Theatre Passe Muraille’s actors and director who researched, workshopped and presented the play worked communally to create the play. While collective theatre creations were not new to the Canadian stage, having gained some currency through Toronto Workshop Productions since the late nineteen-fifties, Theatre Passe Muraille has been the most successful and influential in its use of this dramatic form. For actors and directors, collective theatre operates in a less hierarchal structure by blurring the conventional divisions between and roles assigned to writer, director, and actor.

However, these are not the only flexible and free-flowing roles within the collective theatre model; as already suggested, the audience is also implicated in this

revisionary style. According to Arnott, “In Theatre Passe Muraille’s terminology, the audience was not so much a group that attended as it was a group that was served” (100); yet more than this, as was most literally the case in the original performances of *The Farm Show*, not only is the audience served, it serves in its own right. After all, the preferred audience is made up of the very kinds of people who provide the dialogue, the vocal timbre, the body movements on which the dramatic action hangs – “the farming people are not simply the subject-matter of the play, they are its co-creators as well” (Nunn 48). Furthermore, as Nunn suggests, the dramatic action of the play is about “the encounter of two communities” (47). Thus, there are two dynamic communities at work in the play. As is clearly evident in *The Clinton Special*, through interviews with the actors, director and the Clinton community members who spent time speaking and working with Theatre Passe Muraille, a provisional dramatic community was formed to create the play. This community also served as the first audience for the play and understandably had a particularly intimate relationship to the drama. In this respect, the dynamics of the original performance of *The Farm Show* fit precisely into the model of documentary theatre Filewod examines in *Collective Encounters: Documentary Theatre in English Canada* in which community is an essential component: “[documentary theatre] is a genre of performance that presents actuality on the stage and in the process authenticates that actuality, and it speaks to a specifically defined audience for whom it has special significance” (16). Yet as Filewod later acknowledges in his analysis of *The Farm Show*, beyond the particular community formed between the company and the Clinton community audience, the play will not appeal to community in the same way for

rural audiences and urban audiences. The distinction between the two is encapsulated within the play itself whenever we see the actors portraying their initially awkward interactions with their rural hosts.<sup>20</sup> However, as both rural and urban audiences experience this form of documentary theatre, “the description of localist matter or historical experience conveys deeper cultural meaning” (22); significantly, for *The Farm Show* this “deeper cultural meaning” is apprehended through an affective response to a real (in the case of the original Clinton audience) or imagined community, to borrow from Benedict Anderson.

While all dramatic performances create some kind of ephemeral artistic community formed by the actors and the audience participating in the event, the form of dramatic action in *The Farm Show* facilitates a particularly strong affective appeal to the imagined community of the play that bonds the members of this community closer than would usually be the case for plays with a clearly defined plot. Without a unified plot, the eclectic vignettes that make up the play are pieced together with no easily apparent overarching logic. As Paul Thompson states, “The form of the play is more like a Canadian Sunday School or Christmas Concert where one person does a recitation, another sings a song, a third acts out a skit, etc.” (Theatre Passe Muraille 7). This form solicits an intimate connection between the audience and the performers in order for the play to resonate. Without this kind of familiarity/intimacy between performer and spectator, the subject matter would otherwise risk being received as simplistic and arbitrary. After all, anyone who has attended a Sunday school or Christmas concert

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<sup>20</sup> For an excellent close analysis of one of these scenes, see Filewod’s *Collective Encounters: Documentary Theatre in English Canada*, pages 36-37.



understands that much of the enjoyment of this genre of production stems from the fact that audience members know the performers and delight in seeing members of their community perform regardless of the quality of the performance or production. This intimate relationship between spectator and performer is one of two positions of spectatorship elicited by *The Farm Show*. For rural audiences, their relationship to the subject matter of the play and the actors performing the dramatic material is more straightforward. Although rural audience responses to Theatre Passe Muraille's interpretation of rural culture may be varied and complex, even for rural audiences beyond the Clinton community, there is a closer resemblance between understandings of their own community and the action of the play than there could possibly be for urban audiences. For urban audiences, their relationship to the play is more complicated; the intimate connection the play solicits requires urban audiences to recognize an aspect of themselves in the drama – those intangible links to the land alluded to by Roy MacGregor – thus leading to a *sense* of understanding. In the absence of a guiding plot, however, audiences are not encouraged to think deeply about what is at stake for people actually intimately tied to rural culture in southern Ontario. The danger with this kind of false intimacy elicited by *The Farm Show* is that it conceals the actual absence of a profound engagement with the pressures being exerted on agricultural life in rural southern Ontario. As David Fox admits in *The Clinton Special*,

The problem in the improvisational form of documentary theatre . . . you don't get deep enough. It seems very shallow because you haven't had very much time . . . as soon as we get up and try and improvise, it just seems that we're just scratching the surface, and the only way I think we can give a . . . that it can be a kind of an in depth thing is through the contrast – scene following scene following scene – the total view of the thing. I don't know,

but I just worry that it's a very shallow picture of the lives of these people, because we butt in for six weeks and come in here for five hours a day and work these things out and say "Here's a character," "There's a scene," and "Here's a danger," and "These are women on the farm," and "These are men on the farm," and "These are kids on the farm," and "This is their social life," and so on. (*The Clinton Special*)

While the company enjoyed the idea of playing to rural audiences, on a practical level, since urban audiences would determine the actual commercial and critical success of the play, its ability to appeal to urban audiences was of foremost importance. As such, I would like to consider another possible position of spectatorship *The Farm Show* sets up for urban audiences, generated by the play's atomized depiction of rural life to which David Fox's comments call attention.

In many ways, *The Farm Show*'s fragmented style functions to display a set of curiosities to be approached in the same way one would approach museum specimens. This style of presentation combined with its rural subject matter has resulted in the play being read both positively and negatively as part of an exhibition type culture, comparable to the CNE with all of its "pungently agrarian atmosphere" (Mackay 11-12). Thinking about *The Farm Show* in this light, the relationship between the audience and the play is as much about the position of spectatorship as the position of the specimen under observation. In this vein, Filewod observes, "*The Farm Show* is not simply about an Ontario farming community. Rather, it is a play about the experiences the actors passed through in the course of researching the material. The performance documents the actors' growing consciousness as they make sense of the lives of the farmers. In that sense, the actors are a community looking at a community" (*Collective* 36). As Filewod suggests, this dynamic creates a binary between two communities that is re-enacted

during performance, particularly when the play is performed for urban audiences. During performance, the actors adopt the various personalities of the community members they researched and the audience takes up the position of observer, replicating the original dynamics of creation, the audience “for the most part cast in the role of these visiting strangers” (Nunn 45). The representation of agriculture in *The Farm Show* is depicted through the eyes of nostalgic urbanites who act as benevolent ambassadors intent on marketing a particular vision of the country to the city. In this way, the play becomes a dramatic illustration of what Murdoch and Pratt argue is the ability of “certain actors [to] impose ‘their’ rurality on others” (“Rural” 411). In *The Farm Show*, even when threatened, the rural once again becomes, what Bill New argues has often been its function, a “prototype of hope and possibility” (157). Writing around the time the play was first being performed, Arnott notes “Urban audiences, in particular, who were only now catching up to the back-to-the-earth movement of some years before, could feel that the decline of the family farm was their loss too. The facts of this loss were made much less bitter by the actors’ obvious affection for their farming friends, who became somewhat like curios in what might have otherwise been an agit-prop event” (105). Here, we note that audiences, particularly urban audiences, are left with a cushioned feeling of loss rather than a call to action. But what kind of loss does the disappearing family farm enunciate? Returning again to consider the “Bruce Pallett” speech near the conclusion of the play, in this scene Pallett elevates his lament for personal survival to the national stage; he asks exasperatedly: “Y’know, how else do you *build a nation*? (102, emphasis in original). Thus, ostensibly at stake here is the ability to look at ourselves and recognize

ourselves as ourselves; within this context, the new Canadian hero of the new Canadian theatre movement of the 1970s is not actually the rural people depicted in *The Farm Show* but rather the collective, improvisational actors who venture into the rural realm and exit with quaint stories with which to build a nation. If we read closely Filewod's assertion about *The Farm Show* as "the model for a form of community documentary theatre based on the actors' personal responses to the source material" (*Collective* 24), we can see it is the actors and their responses that carry the weight of identity. As Nunn suggests, "If we attend to the play itself we discover that the fibre it captures is primarily the process by which it came into being" (45). As such, we are able to "recognize" ourselves in *The Farm Show* as observers who, like the Theatre Passe Muraille observers, feel a bond and a heightened compassion for their rural subject (matter). This is done with extra "authenticity" in *The Farm Show*, because it presents a comfortable vision of Canadianness grounded in rural nostalgia.

Yet there are clear indications that urban perspectives dominate *The Farm Show*'s presentation of agricultural life in southern Ontario. For example, if we return to the logic behind the set design, wherein family names are used as the primary geographical markers on the local map that functions as the stage floor and backdrop, it appears to add a personalizing touch to the rural landscape – visually connecting rural people to rural geography. This shift from the purportedly impersonal – a system of numerically organized side roads and concessions – to the personal demarcates an imprint of urban sensibilities on the set design by presupposing that the usual designations for concessions and side roads lack meaning for rural residents who are actually well equipped to

understand the logic of rural land division. As Thomas McIlwraith thoroughly explains in *Looking for Old Ontario: Two Centuries of Landscape Change*, these seemingly impersonal lines communicate a great deal of information about the historical development of rural southern Ontario, speaking to the progression of the provincial frontier and the desire of colonial administrators to impress late Enlightenment desires for order onto the landscape (52-53). The set design is one clue that, despite overtly expressed intentions, *The Farm Show* does not wholly succeed in dealing respectfully or forthrightly with its rural subject matter.

The play's purported objective was to build an improvisational dramatic experience based on real characters and real dialogue drawn from the theatre company's experiences living in the rural community and interacting with its members. As the character notes state, "All characters in this play are non fictional. Any resemblance to living people is purely intentional" (Theatre Passe Muraille 15). While this may have been an innovative and original idea when Theatre Passe Muraille presented the show to rural audiences in unconventional playhouses, as we have already seen, dramatic intentions are complicated when the play is presented to urban audiences. In the first scene of the play, which explains the ways in which the play came into being, readers are informed "We lived there for about six weeks and put this show on for the people there. They seemed to enjoy it so we brought it back to see if we could brighten up the dull lives of the people who live in Toronto" (19). Here, urban and rural audiences are asked to identify against each other – rural "alive"/urban "dull." In the city, the actors become informants, and rural life becomes entertainment. Linda Griffiths, who has worked on

and off with Theatre Passe Muraille, writes that the Orange Parade in *The Farm Show* is “presented ironically” (Griffiths and Campbell 96). Imposed on the material by the actors, irony on this occasion and others during the play comes at the expense of the community represented. As Bothwell states, “The Orange Lodge had been imported into Upper Canada from Ireland, where it was an ultra-Protestant and ultra-loyal secret society. In Upper Canada it became almost an arm of the government, and an important factor in the politics of the province. It would remain so for over a hundred years” (43). The ironic attitude with which Theatre Passe Muraille opted to deal with the ongoing presence of the Orange Lodge in rural society in southern Ontario reveals a poor understanding of or disregard for the long, prominent and often troubling presence of this institution in the life of the province. Consequently, it renders Theatre Passe Muraille’s original objectives disingenuous, albeit not without precedent in dealing with rural subject matter.

Indeed, the way the play “mock[s] Canadian provincialism with . . . satiric depictions of small-town political, social, religious, educational, and financial affairs” connects it to a lineage of humorous depictions of rural life that are said to define “a distinctly Canadian sense of humour” (Andrews 517). To return to an earlier example, Stephen Leacock’s *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* typifies this genre most famously. However, writing about Leacock’s use of this genre of humour, Isaac Bickerstaff suggests

It is no laughing matter to be the town that Stephen Leacock satirized in *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*. How would you like it, I wonder, if one fine morning you woke up and discovered you had been made the butt of the entire English-speaking world – your leading citizens depicted as

simpletons and buffoons, your fondest customs described in derisive detail, your sophistication questioned and your intellectual pretensions exposed? (1)

As Bickerstaff suggests, satirical and negative portrayals of rural life can be upsetting for rural audiences. It is easy to imagine how any community would quickly tire from having their community painted in broad strokes, would be annoyed by having their citizens reduced to stock personalities and predictable characters. In the case of rural communities, this is particularly irksome because these depictions do not draw meaningful attention to the actual pressures of sustaining rural life. In the case of *The Farm Show*, Jean Lobb, one of the characters featured in the play, states “We enjoyed the show they put on, even if it was embarrassing for us at times; but if it has given others pleasure then it has been worth it” (*The Clinton Special*). This self-effacing response is generous yet worrisome and encourages us to be critical of the legacy of plays like *The Farm Show* for the rural citizens struggling with what it means to be rural in southern Ontario today. Both *The Farm Show* and *Letters from Wingfield Farm* have been described as “entertaining introductions to the modern rural scene, geared to city folks of the 1980s and 1990s seeking refuge in the country” (McIlwraith 379). As I now move on to consider how Dan Needles’s *Letters from Wingfield Farm* takes up the concerns of this “rural scene,” the question of whether it is enough to be entertained by rurality is foremost in mind. As Raymond Williams asserts, “Poets have often lent their tongues to princes, who are in a position to pay or to reply. What has been lent to shepherds, and at what rates of interest, is much more in question” (22).

Audiences and critics alike loved *The Farm Show* – and its importance in Canadian theatre studies was quickly recognized and has endured. Despite its raw, improvised and often deliberately naïve style, the play showcases a complicated drama of competing and seemingly incompatible nationalisms; at the same time *The Farm Show* was breaking ground in relation to a new nationalist theatre culture, it was doing so on the back of an agricultural nationalist trope that was rapidly losing currency in expressions of Canadian national identity. In the 1970s, Canadian theatre culture was already beginning to shift focus as a result of mounting frustration that the majority of productions did not “[deal] with urban life and urban needs” (Kinch 126). Of course, this can be identified as one contingent of the broader paradigm shift in Canadian literary and cultural criticism that I refer to in my introduction as the urban revolt that began in the 1970s and 80s. This change in taste happily coincided with socio-political debates about the institutionalization of Canada’s new multicultural mythology that subsequently made the grounding of Canadian national identity in rural society a more visibly racially charged enterprise, as Dan Needles’s work in his *Wingfield* plays illustrates.

- **Back to the Bush? – Understanding Wingfield’s Progress**<sup>21</sup>

Skipping forward slightly more than a decade, another theatrical institution is established with the 1985 debut performance of Dan Needles’s *Letter from Wingfield Farm*, the first

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<sup>21</sup> *Wingfield’s Progress* is the title of Needles’s second play in the *Wingfield* series. I do not italicize it in this section title in order to invoke it not as a specific reference to the particular play but rather to draw on Needles’s own language to help us unpack the meaning of Walt Wingfield as a figure. Later, I will draw similarly on Needles’s language with reference to the epistolary structure of the plays (*Letter from Wingfield Farm*) and the characterization of Wingfield’s flight to the country and his exploits there as a folly (*Wingfield’s Folly*).



play in a series of seven that chronicle the (ad)ventures of Walt Wingfield – “an ex-chairman-of-the-board [high-earning stock broker] – turned-farmer” (Needles 3). As reviewers have pointed out in “Wingfield, Inc.” and “The World of Wingfield,” to say the *Wingfield* plays have been popular would be an understatement. The plays have been performed on the stage steadily around Canada for over twenty years, also spawning radio and television adaptations.<sup>22</sup> Yet although in content and popularity there is a fairly obvious connection between *The Farm Show* and the *Wingfield* plays, their critical legacies are tellingly different.

At the most basic level a parallel between the *Wingfield* plays and *The Farm Show* can be noted in the production qualities of each. Both make use of rudimentary sets and basic props that serve to encourage the audience’s imagination rather than reproduce in any realistic way the scene or object represented. More than coincidental, these choices support the dramatic context, both plays focusing on a similar dynamic – they explore the experience of urbanites venturing into the rural realm, where they then try to make sense of the society and lifestyles they encounter. However, while the experience of Theatre Passe Muraille actors and the subsequent dramatic product represent a short and temporary immersion, Walt Wingfield attempts to make a permanent switch from city-slicker to country resident.<sup>23</sup> In each case, the simplicity and improvisational quality of the production mirrors what is depicted as a simple yet resourceful society that makes do

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<sup>22</sup> The website [wingfieldfarm.ca](http://wingfieldfarm.ca) notes that Rod Beattie marked his 4,000th performance of a Wingfield play in January 2010 (“Production”).

<sup>23</sup> Also, unlike *The Farm Show*, the *Wingfield* plays are not based on an actual documentary foray into rural southern Ontario, although the plays are presented as a pseudo-documentary based on Wingfield’s fictionalized reporting of his exploits to the local newspaper and thus, by extension, to the audience. Furthermore, regardless of discrepancies in the nature or duration of their rural residencies, Walt, through his progress reports, and the Theatre Passe Muraille actors all engage in forms of rural reportage.

with what it has, not out of keeping with stereotypical understandings of rural life. Yet the superficial simplicity of these plays belies the complexity of their performances and, in the case of *The Farm Show*, the development process. For *The Farm Show*, the cast immersed itself in the society they hoped to dramatically reproduce, extensively researching and workshopping the dramatic material. Yet with no formal script used for the original performances, the actors continued to work with an evolving entity, responding to and producing variations in the performance as they moved seamlessly from one character to another, from human to animal, and from animate to inanimate objects. In the case of the *Wingfield* plays, which are written for a solo actor, the performer alone shoulders the burden of a taxing role in which he must often move back and forth between several characters within the space of a conversation, acting upwards of ten roles during the course of each play.

In the *Wingfield* plays, the drama begins when Walt decides to forego city life and move to the country in south-central Ontario, purchases a farm and tries his hand at farming using “the old ways” (Needles 7). The play is performed as a monologue wherein the action unfolds through a series of recited letters written as progress reports Walt contributes weekly to the local newspaper – the *Free Press and Economist*. Drawing equally on traditions of conservative and liberal journalism, at the very outset of the plays the name of the Larkspur newspaper alludes to the ways in which rural society has been figured as oscillating between these philosophical poles. Needles draws attention to this and other perceived dualities of rural living, wherein the rural idyll competes with images of harsh and unrelenting agricultural toil and hostile wildernesses,

by having Walt on the one hand “stumbling through the orchard, reciting poetry” (Needles 16), in this instance Shakespeare, and then a few moments later observe “Writers who describe night-time in the country are forever rattling on about the chirping of frogs and the rustle of night wind on leaf. They’ve obviously never been around here on a night when the moon is full. The sound I most commonly hear is the scream of some unfortunate creature being mugged at the back of my swamp” (19).<sup>24</sup> Here, initially Walt idealizes the rural landscape through his poetic ruminations; yet his subsequent thoughts and particularly his choice of language go on to disrupt audience expectations when he describes his habitual cacophonous night-time soundscape as the product of “muggings” – crimes customarily associated with the perils of an urban environment. Thus, Walt oscillates between two imagined ruralities, one that idealizes rurality and one that critiques the tendency toward rural idealization.

Similarly, in his desired role as “gentleman farmer” (7), he is also convinced “that a few private-sector principles would go a long way towards improving the farm situation” (11). His desire to utilize these principles, aimed at maximizing his productivity, is juxtaposed with his commitment to forego the use of some basic modern technological farming equipment, like the tractor, because he believes the noise of the tractor will disturb his communion with nature. As such, Walt represents divergent models of agricultural progress. A constant source of wonder and amusement for his neighbours, ultimately Walt discovers that farming is neither as simple a life as he

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<sup>24</sup> This dualistic representation of rurality is supported by Needles’s choice of “Persephone” as the name for his fictional township. In Greek mythology, Persephone is the symbol of spring and rebirth. However, her obligation to return annually to the underworld means she is also associated with winter, darkness, and death.

imagined, nor does it comply easily with the familiar corporate and economic models and principles he hopes to apply to his operation. He describes his own endeavour as “trying to farm in an affordable, sustainable way, on a scale appropriate to the limitations of the land, forging a partnership with Nature” (119). Needles’s invocation of capital “N” nature situates Wingfield’s project within a familiar discourse of the rural idyll. This, in addition to the way Walt imagines himself as a contemporary Montaigne or Thoreau (7), encourages the play to be read as a fictional replica of the back-to-the-land sensibility with a twist. Thomas McIlwraith writes that

For many generations, southern Ontario has been an idyllic middle ground – “the Garden” – lying between the wilderness and the city, where mankind has sought to live since the beginning of time. The first forest clearings, with temporary log shanties strewn over a tangled landscape, had the makings of little utopias with a dwelling-place at the centre . . . Drove of people moved to the cities at the start of the twentieth century, and then a couple of generations later their successors started returning to the countryside. Some day it may be difficult to distinguish the twenty-first century from the nineteenth.

Expressions such as “unnostalgic permanence” and “tradition-bound change” suit the spirit of this orderly ebb and flow. (333)

These little utopias McIlwraith describes approximate Walt’s own vision of what he is trying to create or find in Persephone Township. And though Walt’s project is more-often-than-not depicted as farcical and unsustainable, virtually none of the rural characters in the play are portrayed as being able to exist upon an unadulterated farming model either. Of one of his neighbours, Walt notes: “[Freddy] runs a beef and dairy operation on the farm next door; plants corn, grain, potatoes, turnips; does auction sales, some blacksmithing, small auto repairs and real estate. It’s what I believe is called mixed farming” (Needles 5). This play on the actual meaning of “mixed farming” points to the

various lengths small-scale farmers frequently employ to sustain their agricultural endeavours, a reality to which we have already seen *The Farm Show* call attention.

In keeping with this reality, Walt similarly improvises and makes concessions in order to come close to his ideal vision of rural life. Moving back and forth between country and city life, his urban part-time employment sustains him financially, while his rural employment sustains him psychologically: “The compensation for working two days a week in the city is the relief that comes with escaping back to the country on the train when business is finished for another week. With each passing mile, the cares of the office leave me and my shoulders get a little farther from my ears” (55). As such, Wingfield’s project is not so much a folly, as suggested by the title of the third play *Wingfield’s Folly*, as it is a reflection of the notion of “tradition-bound change” forwarded by McIlwraith. Of course, Wingfield occupies a privileged position by being able to situate himself as essentially a hobby farmer, using his urban employment as a way to support what he envisions as a traditional rural lifestyle. Yet he also tries to introduce new ideas to a society Needles depicts as fairly entrenched in its ways, as when Walt attempts to enhance older established models of rural cooperation by formalizing a barter system to “restore some sanity to the economy and some dignity to what [they] do” (141). However, in these plays, “tradition-bound change” goes far beyond Walt’s agricultural practices. That the *Wingfield* plays have been neglected as serious texts worthy of critical investigation speaks to changes in the way southern Ontario rurality figures in the Canadian literary landscape. Furthermore, the portrayal of Walt Wingfield as an urban-to-rural migrant reflects real-world demographic trends in southern Ontario;

his exploits reveal a problematic relationship between the construction of rural insiders and outsiders that guards the area as a bastion of tradition premised on an exclusive conceptualization of who belongs there.

- **Wingfield’s Project: In Search / Defence of Our Rural Roots**

It ought to be fairly clear by now why one might want to think of the *Wingfield* plays and *The Farm Show* as sharing a dramatic lineage. However, while both shows enjoy(ed) popular success, only *The Farm Show* occupies an elevated position in the Canadian canon. Needles’s work, while garnering unusual commercial success for a dramatic production of its humble character, conversely, has received scant critical attention, despite its longevity and depiction of similar kinds of “home-grown, typical . . . figures of the here-and-now” (Arnott 104) so universally celebrated when they took centre stage in *The Farm Show*.

Defenders of the *Wingfield* plays are not shy in cynically calling attention to this perceived critical injustice. Andrew Borkowski, for instance, suggests that

Theatre critics – particularly those urbane scribes of the Toronto press – have always had trouble with the plays of Dan Needles. Anyone who’s attended a performance . . . can’t deny the readiness with which audiences give themselves over to the bucolic exploits of broker-turned-farmer Walt Wingfield and the denizens of Persephone Township. Yet the “big league” pundits seem compelled to quibble and patronize. (31)

Likewise, in her review “Wingfield, Inc.” Kelley Teahen juxtaposes the immense popularity of the *Wingfield* plays with the dismissive critical reception which has seen the plays “largely unheralded by Toronto-centric theatre types” (25). Thus while *The*

*Farm Show* was championed by theatre critics as groundbreaking in the new Canadian theatre movement centred in Toronto in the 1970s, these same theatre critics by the 1980s do not find similar value in Wingfield's exploits. These plays are instead read as quaint at the best of times or parochial and lowbrow at the worst, with critics coincidentally defining them predictably in relation to the characteristics customarily definitive of the rural side of rural/urban cultural binaries. Earlier in this chapter we saw how rural historians McIlwraith and Martin viewed the changing shape of rural southern Ontario; Borkowski and Teahen both take a similarly defensive stance in opposition to what they consider an urban bias that generates a lack of formal receptiveness for the rural focus of Needles's work. However, this kind of bias does not adequately explain the difference in critical reception received by *The Farm Show*. The positive response to *The Farm Show* can partly be explained by both the material and innovative style that set the play apart from its contemporary Canadian theatre culture. Yet, additionally, the relative situation of *The Farm Show* and the *Wingfield* series in relation to the vociferous concerns raised during the urban revolt offers another possible explanation for the discrepancy in critical responses. The *Wingfield* plays began circulating at a time when proponents of the urban revolt were hoping to "challenge the stereotypes and prevalent myths which associate Canadian culture and identity with small towns, vast woodlands, and unruly terrains, in short, with the non-urban" (Edwards and Ivison, "Introduction" 12-13).

As we have seen, both *The Farm Show* and the *Wingfield* series employ similar conventions of rural humour celebrated most notably in Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches* and also reflect a similarly homogeneous vision of rural southern Ontario. As Beverly

Rasporich observes, Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches* "projects a Canada that is decidedly white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant. Here, there are no racial or ethnic minorities, no Native peoples, and the Church of England is an imposing structure" (61). Although the debut of the first *Wingfield* play *Letter from Wingfield Farm* and *The Farm Show* are separated by just over a decade, the characters depicted in the *Wingfield* plays had rapidly become less fashionably representative of the "here-and-now" as it was then being imagined on the national stage<sup>25</sup>. Moreover, whereas contemporaneously with the production of *The Farm Show*, Theatre Passe Muraille was also producing plays that stepped outside a rural Anglo-centric, white Protestant portrait of Canada, Needles has continued to make Persephone Township and Walt Wingfield's exploits there the singular plot of his dramatic career, from the debut of *Letter from Wingfield Farm* in 1985 to his most recent instalment in the *Wingfield* series *Wingfield Lost and Found* (2009). However, Walt Wingfield and his back-to-the-land project do more than merely rehash the rural revelations shared with urban audiences in *The Farm Show* – nuggets of rural wisdom Walt refers to as "barnyard philosophy" (Needles 7). In fact, Walt's position as an urbanite in rural society is significantly distinct from that of Theatre Passe Muraille's urban informants. As a rural/urban migrant, *Wingfield* is actually a complex figure of the "here-and-now," a figure of mobility who navigates the complicated

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<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, the Orange Lodge makes an appearance in both the *Wingfield* plays and *The Farm Show*. Needles uses the Orange Lodge as the location of the annual harvest dance organized by the Women's Auxiliary. Although, the dance is not an Orange event, the fact that the Lodge appears to be the lone public building able to accommodate a formally organized community event speaks to the ongoing prominence of the institution. Furthermore, the description of the event, although comical, calls attention to Protestantism as the continued religious status quo: "They hire a one-lung orchestra from Lavender and wax the floor of the Orange Lodge for the occasion. A general amnesty is declared on Catholics and the pictures of King Billy crossing the Boyne are retired into the loft to avoid offending anyone" (Needles 97-98). The removal of the potentially offending portrait alerts the audience to residual religious tensions.



ongoing intersections and exchanges between rural and urban southern Ontario. In this capacity, Walt Wingfield's rural vision with all of its inclusions and exclusions warrants closer attention to apprehend the particularities of what is sought after in his relocation to rural southern Ontario.

On various levels, the *Wingfield* plays are imbued with a sense of transience. These are epistolary plays wherein the action described in the letters that compose the plays, letters described as a "series of missives that now form a kind of farm diary" (4), is dramatized by a solo actor moving interchangeably from role to role. Finally, the author of these letters – Walt – moves back and forth between the city and the country on a weekly basis. In this latter form of transience, the *Wingfield* series presents a personalized dramatization of current Canadian migratory trends. In southern Ontario, we now see the tide of rural out-migration reversing as the result of urban out-migration, migrant people Stanley Barrett ironically refers to in the Canadian context as "modern pioneers." Of course, this reference echoes Thomas McIlwraith's more earnest prediction that in southern Ontario "Some day it may be difficult to distinguish the twenty-first century from the nineteenth" (333). Indicative of the wide dissemination of the *Wingfield* plays and the subsequent archetypal status achieved by the figure of Walt, McIlwraith draws an explicit connection between this migratory trend and Needles's work:

Farmhouses . . . from Artemesia to Eldon to Plantagenet have been sold for recreational residences. For thirty years, buyers personified by the fictional Walt Wingfield have been purchasing farms in decline, thereby expanding the cottage culture into a pervasive countryside one. The number of operating farms in Ontario fell from over 227,000 in 1911 to fewer than seventy thousand seventy years later, and this change represents a vast pool of reclaimable marginal land and buildings. (298-99)

However, both McIlwraith and Barrett's research into rural/urban migratory patterns in southern Ontario, would classify Walt, as a *farming* new rural resident, as unrepresentative of the vast majority of Canadians who move to rural areas primarily in pursuit of home ownership but who commute to the city for work. Unlike their counterparts in the United States of America, Barrett observes that these Canadian rural migrants are not "highly educated, middle- or upper-middle-class people, [nor are they] motivated primarily by the prospect of a better quality of life" (Barrett 18). Instead, they are more often lured by the prospect of affordable home ownership in the rural areas surrounding larger urban centres (18).

Interestingly, Walt straddles these models, for while he is upper-middle-class and educated, lack of success in farming eventually forces him to commute to the city to work part-time in order to sustain his new lifestyle venture. However, Walt's reasons for relocating to the country, while often depicted particularly through the eyes of his watchful neighbours as idealistic, unrealistic and financially unsustainable, are morally elevated in the play. This is made particularly clear in the second play when a significant portion of the plot revolves around an "undesirable" land development proposal. In the climactic event referred to as "the Battle of Persephone Glen" (Needles 109), by drawing attention to the nuisances of country life, Walt and his neighbours frighten potential investors away from Darcy Dixon's proposed condominium development planned for the property adjacent to Wingfield's. While Walt, a Toronto stock-broker, and Dixon, a Toronto lawyer and real-estate developer, symbolize similar archetypal city personas, Walt is elevated in both the eyes of the rural community and the audience for his

attempts, albeit often misguided, to integrate into rural life. This presents Wingfield as a desirable new rural resident juxtaposed with the hypothetically less desirable new residents who would relocate to the country to reside in a condominium development as envisioned by Dixon. Unlike Walt, these exurbanites are *a priori* understood as resistant to the essence of rural living, capable of being dissuaded from relocation through exposure to the sights, smells and sounds characteristic of the rural environment. Walt and his neighbours envision these exurbanites as transient residents who would most likely live solely as rural/urban commuters, uninterested in integrating into rural society and thus contributing to what has been noted as an increasing homogenization of the rural and urban realms (Friedland qtd. in Sachs, *Gendered* 4) or, as Edwards and Ivison argue, the urbanization of non-urban space. While as Walt's originally enthusiastic neighbours point out that these new residents would be "Good for the tax base" (Needles 84), Walt's presence in the play ultimately argues that a different kind of investment in the rural community is preferable – an investment that maintains the traditional values and character of rural southern Ontario.

However, the way Needles champions Walt's rural vision reproduces a familiar patronizing relationship between the urban outsider and rural society. Like *The Farm Show*, where we see naïve urbanites who initially think of farming as the good life, Walt's naïveté is speedily quashed by the difficulties of modern agriculture. As he says, "I'm beginning to think there's something wrong with the system. I mean, all my instincts are telling me that agriculture might not be profitable" (118). However, despite

Walt's many stumbles and near failure as a farmer, *Wingfield's Folly* closes with this affirmation from Maggie:<sup>26</sup>

Let me tell you something, Walter. You may not have noticed, but when you came here, we were all standing around looking over the neighbour's fence, wondering who was going to get the highest price for his land. Then you walked in and started farming like it was 1905. Sure we laughed at you. None of us thought the way we live made much sense, and it seemed you were just trying to turn the clock back. But you showed us that it does make sense, the way we all live in each other's kitchens, keep gardens, trade stuff around and help each other out. It scares me when I think how close we came to forgetting that. (169)

Thus, Walt, as an exurbanite, saves the country from the country dwellers themselves and the city dwellers, like Darcy Dixon, bent on exploiting the fact that they no longer have a clear understanding of their valuable way of life.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, the plays ascribe value to what Walt finds in this rural society. In "Wingfield, Inc." Teahen documents Rod Beattie's<sup>28</sup> argument "that because the plays aren't urban, or dwelling on psychoanalytic angst, doesn't mean they don't touch people deeply or have something to say about the experience of being Canadian, 'Especially now, when there is so much bent on pulling us apart, it's important to find those things, like our rural roots, that we have in common'" (25). Beattie's thoughts are reminiscent of the language used in Arnott's description of *The Farm Show's* importance in the establishment of "a national theatre" (99), with both plays appealing to a sense of social cohesion. That the characters in *The Farm Show* are described as "home-grown" (104) and that the show's impetus emerged from the belief that "There was drama to be found

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<sup>26</sup> Maggie is Walt's neighbour's sister whom he marries in the third play.

<sup>27</sup> One can only wonder how the plays' rural audiences might respond to this patronizing depiction of Walt's rural intervention.

<sup>28</sup> Rod Beattie has starred in the *Wingfield* plays for twenty-five years.

in the homeliest corners of the land” (104) exemplifies the connection between origin and land that is the basis of what can be described as roots literature.<sup>29</sup> Here, “land” is both synonymous with “nation” but it also grounds the nation in a rural geography. With roots literature, the search for origin – national and ethnic – is rooted in rural society, the natural environment and those people deemed to belong in this realm.

Yet Walt has his own doubts about whether he belongs in this community (Needles 160). While it is clear that Walt’s neighbours value his presence in their community, his full acceptance in this society nevertheless remains tenuous. If he has any pretensions to gaining the kind of rootedness to which Beattie alludes, then at least his rural neighbours make it abundantly clear he will fail; by the standards of the rural community, he can never be fully integrated into this society, for he has no claim to locality. Walt’s decision to run for municipal council in *Wingfield’s Progress* brings this issue to the fore:

“Running for council isn’t the answer,” said Don, finally.

“Look, Walt, we probably shoulda told you. You haven’t got much of a chance.”

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<sup>29</sup> Genres of “roots literature” have been discussed in various literary traditions ranging from China to Belgium (see Elke Brems, “A Flemish Tale: Flemish Roots-Literature and the Dismantling of Flemish Identity”). The usefulness of the broad connection I draw between these various traditions may at first seem slight. However, I found Alison Bailey’s discussion of Chinese roots literature in *The Oxford Guide to Contemporary World Literature* helpful for theorizing the processes at work in what I identify as southern Ontario’s roots literature. I was surprised by the striking parallels in the way both traditions mine the rural to build national mythologies. Even more peculiar is the fact that in both traditions the desire to root a national mythos in the rural is driven by urban voices. Emerging after 1985 in contemporary mainland Chinese writing, chiefly as the product of writers who were once considered “rusticated youth” – urban intellectuals and youth exiled to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution as a strategy to quell dissidence, protest and resistance (Bailey 85) – Bailey explains that “‘Roots’ literature has its basis in the desire of ‘rusticated youth’ to come to terms with its experiences and in an attempt to understand or redefine Chinese culture. Writers began looking for – and creating – a mythic or idealized ‘China’ through an exploration of past traditions, peasant life, local cultures, and marginal areas where, ironically, the majority Han Chinese culture is least dominant. Ironically, too, most ‘Roots’ writers are urban-based, so there is a distance, mental, geographical, and often temporal, between them and the worlds they describe” (90).

“Why do you say that?”

“Now, d-d-don’t take offence, Walt,” said Freddy. “It’s not that people wouldn’t agree with what you have to say. It’s just that you’re from the city. They won’t even consider you.”

“That’s right,” said The Squire. “A fella lost the last election up here because his wife’s grandmother was born south of Highway 13.” (99)

As Walt’s neighbours illustrate, his struggles to ascertain a sense of rootedness in the community will always be frustrated by the mere fact of his birth. Moreover, the fact that he is forced by financial constraints to keep one foot in the urban world continues to accentuate his position as an (ex)urbanite. This does not mean, however, that he does not continue to try to seek these roots. If, despite all his efforts at integration, Walt’s sense of rootedness in this community is still constrained, can the average non-rural southern Ontario resident have any hope of feeling at home in rural southern Ontario? Can Walt’s experiences in rural southern Ontario, other than through a shared sense of exclusion, possibly be representative of their own “experience of being Canadian” (Beattie qtd. in Teahen 25)? The fact that for non-rural Ontarians the most-likely answer to these questions is a negative, suggests that the agricultural nationalism of both the *Wingfield* plays and *The Farm Show* actually present southern Ontario rurality as an exclusive social sphere. After all, as The Squire’s comments above illustrate, not only is Wingfield excluded from belonging to this society as a full-fledged member with “local” status, even those with a birthright claim to belonging have their rural lineage closely scrutinized, as the story of the gentleman with the grandmother from the wrong side of Highway 13 demonstrates. The local characters are shown as carefully guarding the boundaries that determine who is and is not allowed to belong to the rural community.

Even before Walt's neighbours openly expose the reasons that will foreclose his political aspirations, the municipal officials of Persephone Township offer a glimpse into this reality when Walt attends the township council meeting to present his objections to Dixon's property development. Uninitiated in the ways in which belonging is traced in this community, Walt struggles to understand the logic and relevance of the following exchange:

The clerk interrupted to explain where my farm is located.

"Denton," he said . . . "this is the old Fisher place at the corner of the Twenty-fifth and the Seventh. Down in the valley there..."

"Oh, gollies, yes," said the reeve, nodding, "I know the property, Harold. The Fishers is cousins of my wife's family, and Harriet spent the summer over there the year before we were married, when her dad was burned out. Do you mind that, Ernie?" . . .

"I took hay off the back fields down there with my dad ten years before that," [Ernie] announced, "when the Fishers still lived at the home farm on the Sixth."

Wilfrid Laurier leaned forward from the other side of the reeve and hissed, "My grandfather put the first plough in them fields and held the original deed. It was him sold it to the Fishers."

There was a silence and the reeve looked back at me, inviting me to continue. I was somewhat puzzled by this exchange, but I carried on.

"The property I am concerned about is, in fact, *across* the road...the East Half of Lot Twenty-six."

"That would be the back of Calvin Currie's place, Denton," said the clerk, helpfully.

"Oooohh, yesss," said the reeve. "God, that's a stony field. Just a pasture now, but there was a time when it put up sixty bushels to the acre. Used to be a barn on that place. Do you mind that barn, Ernie?"

"Do I?" roared Ernie. "My dad built that barn. It was the first bank barn in the north end of the township. Damn near broke him but he built her. That's a long time ago."

Mr. Laurier leaned forward again. "My great-grandfather," he said in a voice barely audible, "was the first white man to set foot on the Currie farm. He did the original survey the year Princess Victoria took to the throne." (78-9, emphasis in original)<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Walt gives the name "Wilfrid Laurier" to one of the participants in this exchange as an exaggerated reference to his age. However, in a play invested in grounding a shared sense of Canadianness in our rural

Here, the locals of Persephone Township orally trace their roots in a communal act of remembrance that formulates their sense of belonging, and they also challenge each member to delve deeper than the next to legitimize their individual claims to rootedness. As such, *Needles* depicts a society where one's entitlement to rootedness and locality is vigilantly defended.

According to Sarah Whatmore, the “significance of rurality is ‘centered on the forcefulness of the idea and experience of rurality in social and political struggles over identity and environment rather than on a territorial definition of rural as a category of social space’” (qtd. in Sachs, *Gendered* 4). This disjuncture between the physical and conceptual rural draws our attention back to Martin's assertion with which I began this chapter, his sense that in southern Ontario “This may be the same *location*, but it has become a new and different *place*” (56, emphasis in original). As Whatmore suggests, perhaps it was never the rural location that was significant, but rather who in our current understanding of southern Ontario rurality gets to feel at home/placed in this space. If, as McIlwraith suggests, the *Wingfield* plays and *The Farm Show* can be read as indicative of “the modern rural scene” (379), then what kind of scene is this exactly? Whose “idea and experience of rurality” becomes definitive of the southern Ontario rural? Whose roots are imagined as grounded in this locale? And to what community do new urban-to-rural migrants like Walt seek entry? It appears that *Wingfield* is cultivating an idea as much as he is cultivating land. If, as Keith Halfacree suggests, urban-to-rural migrations are

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roots, choosing the name of a former Prime Minister renowned for his efforts to promote national unity is a symbolically loaded choice.



motivated by a quest for “ontological security” (81), drawing migrants to the country in search of “a lost rootedness” (81) hopefully recovered in rural society, the ontological beginnings of rural southern Ontario presented in the *Wingfield* plays tellingly begin with “the first white man to set foot on the Currie farm” (Needles 79). Notably, there are no First Nations voices present in the play to lay claim to their place in this social structure, to speak to their history on this land before “the first white man.” In fact, the only reference Needles makes to the First Nations in the plays is through Jimmy’s slur ““Whoa, you rotten, scum-suckin’, yellow-bellied son of a Mohawk”” (47) hurled at Walt’s unruly horses. Yet in “An Exploration of Redneck Whiteness in Multicultural Canada,” Anne O’Connell observes that “White people did not just appear in these rural communities” (554). Along with a host of other practices that O’Connell argues have functioned to make white rural presences appear indigenous, the *Wingfield* plays serve as an example of how the repetition of this narrative of white rural locality is an integral part of this process of white “indigenization.”<sup>31</sup>

With this in mind, it is possible to read the *Wingfield* plays and Walt’s migration to the countryside as conforming to a tradition of intolerant rurality, wherein counterurbanization is frequently motivated by migrants’ questionable desires to “‘escape’ from an uncertain, multiracial and crime-ridden urban world into the ‘timeless’ countryside, with its social quietude, peace and beauty” (Halfacree 80). Painted in broad strokes, the portrait the *Wingfield* plays present of fictional Persephone Township appears

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<sup>31</sup> Here, I am invoking Terry Goldie’s concept of “indigenization.” In *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures*, Goldie writes: “In their need to become ‘native,’ to belong here, whites in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia have adopted a process which I have termed ‘indigenization.’ A peculiar word, it suggests the impossible necessity of becoming indigenous” (13).

to reflect the kind of society for which these migrants are searching; as Walt's fictional editor at the *Free Press and Economist* states, nothing controversial or particularly newsworthy normally happens in Persephone Township: "You have to go to the city papers for the juicy stuff" (Needles 2). Both the *Wingfield* plays and *The Farm Show* undermine the perception of easy country living; a close analysis of both plays suggests that effort is also required to maintain the social status quo of rural southern Ontario – the need to defend one's right to place, demonstrated in both plays either through literal and/or narrative mappings of particular human histories onto a geographical location. These mappings are exemplary in the way they participate in what Cloke and Little describe as "the discursive formation of the rural [that] rests on a complex hegemony of domination which both materially and culturally constitutes an acceptance and belonging for some, and a marginalization and exclusion for others" (7).<sup>32</sup> Each play accomplishes this successfully in subtle ways that result in the underlying connections between whiteness and rurality in southern Ontario going unchallenged. As such, the depiction of rural society in both instances certainly falls into what Halfacree refers to as "an exclusive rural of the Same" (89), aligning these works with a tradition of conservative rural representation deeply imbricated in the rural idyll, which, as Chris Philo argues, has consistently ignored and/or denied the existence of "'rural others' and 'other rurals'" ("Of Other" 22).

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<sup>32</sup> The "hegemony of domination" Cloke and Little invoke in this instance refers to "forms of internal colonisation [sic]" (7), drawing on the work of Edward Said. Although both plays discussed in this chapter are written by urbanites (and the urban/rural relationship is subject to its own hierarchies of domination), they do not contest the inclusions and exclusions found within rural society; in fact, they seem to support this social organization.

In this chapter, I have examined two plays that function in very similar ways with regards to their approach to rurality as well as the way in which their representations support dominant conceptualizations of rurality in southern Ontario. The *Wingfield* plays have been immensely popular, attesting to an enduring public taste for the kinds of rural narratives it constructs; however, they have been largely ignored by critics. The few critics who call attention to this conspicuous critical neglect suggest the *Wingfield* plays' populist appeal to audiences outside of Canada's large urban (and cultural) centres offends the elevated sensibilities of urban theatre critics. I suggest, however, that the style and content of the plays, which is very similar to the widely celebrated *The Farm Show*, is not the issue. Of issue is the way in which the rural content of the plays no longer fits into literary and cultural trends more interested in multicultural realities perceived to be found in urban-based cultural productions. I raise this point not to suggest that more attention should be paid to the *Wingfield* plays but rather to suggest that literary and cultural critics have been quick to abandon the rural, to assume that the likes of *Wingfield* and *The Farm Show* are the only kinds of representations of rurality southern Ontario has to offer. Consequently, these plays, uncritiqued, continue to circulate their dominant and problematic representations of rurality to the broader public while other more complex and non-traditional representations of southern Ontario rurality go largely ignored. This chapter stands as an intervention into the unquestioned representations of rural southern Ontario realities presented in *The Farm Show* and *Letters from Wingfield Farm*. The subsequent chapters strive to reinvigorate a discussion of southern Ontario rurality through an exploration of other rurals.

### **Talking Trash: Two Faces Contesting Rural Whiteness in Southern Ontario**

“When exactly did we become white trash?”

(Eaglesmith, “White Trash”)

Encountering Barbara Ching’s essay “Acting Naturally: Cultural Distinction and Critiques of Pure Country” offered me a moment of unexpected recognition. Ching, a scholar and avid country music fan, argues that while “Country music has the fastest-growing audience in America . . . it is still rather scandalous for an intellectual to admit to liking it. Contemporary cultural theory – which is to say cultural studies – has thus had practically nothing to say about it” (231). In Ching’s assertion, I recognized the early formulations of this dissertation project, which began with an examination of my own reluctant enjoyment of the alt-country music of southern Ontario singer-songwriter Fred Eaglesmith. Having sworn vehemently I would never like country music, my reluctant evolution in musical taste gave me cause to reflect on the motivations behind my former adamant disavowal. With what was I loathe to identify? Perhaps it is the fact that, in polarized representations of the rural, country music finds itself decidedly on the wrong side of rurality. According to Ching, for many people who do not find the genre appealing, country music is the purview of “the rural unsophisticate” (232), enjoyed by

a population that lacks . . . in Bourdieu’s terminology, “cultural capital,” a lack announced in a range of labels from the somewhat romanticized yet rustic “cowboy” to the more pejorative “bumpkin,” “cracker,” “hayseed,” “hick,” “hillbilly,” “redneck,” “rube,” “simple folk,” “yokel,” and the name that includes most of the above, and strips away the euphemistic raillery of those other names: “white trash.” (232-233)

Yet, with the development of new country music genres like country-pop and alternative country, there has been both an immense rise in popularity in country music as well as an associated expansion of the traditional country music audience, making broad generalizations about its listeners more difficult. Complicating and at the same time reveling in stereotypical representations of the average country music listener, Eaglesmith's music and performance persona do not shy away from the pejorative associations with this musical genre. At times his music proudly valorizes rural "white trash" identities, yet at the same time it openly addresses the ways in which the hegemony of rural whiteness in southern Ontario functions to marginalize rural people of colour in the region.

While a closer analysis of Eaglesmith's music will be taken up later in this chapter, it is enough to say, for the moment, that, after much research into the topic, it has become clear to me that part of my attraction to Eaglesmith's music results from the way it embodies the subject of this chapter, the tensions present in competing representations of race in rural southern Ontario. It was, in fact, through Eaglesmith's music that I was, in the first place, made aware of the presence of foreign migratory agricultural workers in southern Ontario, workers who are not only essential to the province's agricultural production but who also constitute a large under-represented population of rural people of colour in the region. Hence, Eaglesmith's music served as an entry point to this chapter's exploration of the political, economic and labour dynamics that bring these workers to southern Ontario. The compelling scene he sets in his song "Carmelita" prompted my desire to gain a more thorough understanding of this migratory presence in the province

and led me to pay attention to two collections of photography that document the lives and work of migratory workers in the region in ways that contest dominant conceptualization of white southern Ontario rurality – Vincenzo Pietropaolo’s *Harvest Pilgrims: Mexican and Caribbean Migrant Farm Workers in Canada* and the collaborative collection *From One Place to Another/Las dos realidades*.

Eaglesmith’s music is also a potential thorn in the side of lobbyists eager to distance the rural from its associations with the likes of “hicks” and “rednecks.” Hence, it serves as an interesting contrast to *Faces of Farming*, a collection of photographs presented in calendar form, the final representation of race in southern Ontario taken up in this chapter. The motivation behind the calendar’s production is the desire to introduce the public to local farmers, to make agricultural producers in southern Ontario seem familiar and personal. As such, the *Faces of Farming* calendar seeks to counteract the idea of impersonal and socially irresponsible globalized agribusiness practices and models; it also attempts to distance southern Ontario rurality from stereotypes of the rural “hick” by attaching a sophisticated, young and cultured image to the region’s farmers. Yet through the selection of farming faces it chooses to forward, the calendar also functions to shore up the connection between southern Ontario rurality and whiteness, obfuscating the region’s reliance on globalized exchanges of racialized labour needed to sustain its agricultural economy.

In “Burning Issues: Whiteness, Rurality and the Politics of Difference,” Sarah Holloway observes, “It is simply not enough for academics to articulate awareness that cultural constructions of the countryside are pervaded by whiteness and then to leave it at

that; research is needed to trace the ways in which this is reinforced and challenged, and examine the consequences of this for understandings of the contemporary countryside” (18). The objective of this chapter is to provide this kind of detailed examination of the ways in which cultural texts contribute or speak back to an ongoing tradition of conceptualizing rural southern Ontario as predominantly white space. My analysis of Eaglesmith’s music and three contemporary photographic representations of rural southern Ontario articulates how rural whiteness is currently being reinforced and challenged on multiple fronts, to suggest that while whiteness is traditionally naturalized in rural southern Ontario, it is in not accurately representative of the traditional racial make-up of the region. In “An Exploration of Redneck Whiteness in Multicultural Canada,” Anne O’Connell similarly argues that the cultural tradition of naturalizing whiteness in rural southern Ontario falsely obfuscates the history of people of colour in the province (554). Adding to this argument, I suggest that it also facilitates the way large populations of racialized migratory workers and the exploitative labour programs that circumscribe their residence in rural southern Ontario are hidden from sight. The following section provides a detailed explanation of how migratory farm workers fit into the agricultural economy and communities in the province.

- **The Who and Why of Migratory Seasonal Farm Labour**

Leamington-area residents know that it is better to avoid the No Frills grocery store on late Friday afternoon, when about one thousand Mexican seasonal farm workers employed in the area go shopping there. For Leamington-area residents the Mexican invasion of the local supermarket has become a part of the social landscape, as has the image of Mexican men riding their bicycles along rural roads, particularly noticeable on

Sunday afternoon when most Mexicans get time off work. Over the last twenty-five years, the presence of these men, who look and dress differently from much of the local population and who spend between five and eight months a year in this area, has become more and more noticeable as the number of Mexican seasonal workers has progressively increased. (Basok 3)

Introducing Tanya Basok's book *Tortillas and Tomatoes: Transmigrant Mexican Harvesters in Canada*, this southern Ontarian scene is in some ways representative of the kind of experience for which Manju Varma suggests rural Canadians ought to be prepared. As her title suggests in "Including Immigration in the Rural First Aid Kit," Varma argues that attracting more immigrants from ethnoculturally and multiracially diverse backgrounds to rural Canada, locales she points to as "predominately White" (99), "is a viable strategy for supporting the survival and growth of rural areas" (96). Both Basok's and Varma's portraits (actual or projected) of the "social landscape" of rural Canada mobilize assumptions that speak to a particular history of representing and imagining race in rural Canada and thus serve as helpful entry points into this chapter's consideration of race and rurality in southern Ontario. First, it is worthwhile noting that, while Varma is concerned about the steps needed to create a welcoming and supportive environment for "non-traditional" immigrants to rural Canada, her analysis instrumentalizes this imagined population according to their usefulness as a "valuable human resource" (91) and "human capital" (99). Of course, this is in fact the role many racialized people have come to play in rural southern Ontario; as Basok demonstrates in her investigation, the Mexican population of seasonal farm workers in the Leamington area is critical to the survival of agricultural operations in the province. However, despite the integral role these workers actually occupy in the rural economy of southern Ontario,



thinking of immigration and rural survival in instrumentalized terms has led to both exploitative labour practices and a discriminatory allotment of immigration and citizenship rights. As this chapter will demonstrate, thinking instrumentally about ethnocultural and multiracial diversity in rural Canada has led to models aimed at rural survival dependent on systemic exploitation of racialized peoples in rural southern Ontario.

As Basok's description of Leamington's Mexican seasonal farm workers makes clear, in the technical sense of the word, these workers are predominantly not immigrants to Canada, nor are they ever likely to be. In actuality, they are temporary foreign workers brought to Canada under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP). Workers who enter Canada as part of this program are prohibited from staying in the country after their specified period of employment has concluded. Many workers willingly return to their countries of origin until the following year when they will often return under the same program. However, surveys of workers' attitudes regarding permanent settlement in Canada, as well as the fact that some workers go AWOL (a situation the Canadian government is eager to limit as much as possible), suggest many workers who come to Canada through the SAWP, if given the chance, would seek permanent residency in Canada (Satzewich 114; Preibisch and Binford 24-29). With this inclination in mind, it is curious why, if, as Varma suggests, increased immigration to rural areas is key for rural survival, the Canadian government supports a program that welcomes workers in the agricultural sector on a temporary basis but does not offer these workers permanent settlement options. To make sense of this paradox, one needs to understand how these

Mexican seasonal farm workers in Leamington, and migratory farm labourers more broadly, function within the agricultural sector in southern Ontario.<sup>33</sup>

In *Letters from Wingfield Farm*, Walt Wingfield reflects humorously on the unusual (un)profitability of farming: “[farmers are] the only people I know who can lose money thirty years in a row and then move into a big house in town for their retirement” (28). Here, for comedic effect, Walt draws upon the reality of thin profit margins with which farmers (small-scale family farmers in particular) have traditionally dealt. He aptly notes that in the family farming category, frequently, after a lifetime spent farming, a farmer’s most valuable asset is his or her land. However, an examination of the farming sector of southern Ontario clearly shows that since the 1940s the number of farms classifiable as family farms has been rapidly shrinking (Basok 25).<sup>34</sup> With the transition to industrial/corporate style farms associated with the rise of agribusiness, profit margins increase, but they do so by employing industrial farming techniques that are frequently

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<sup>33</sup> In her study of hired workers in the tomato industry in southern Ontario, Ellen Wall makes the following distinction: “I use the word ‘migratory’ rather than ‘migrant’ . . . Migratory connotes travelling to a destination for work and then returning to a home community. Migrant, on the other hand, may refer to individuals who intend to stay in the new location as well as those who move on after a work period. Because of the possible confusion with the term ‘migrant’, migratory is preferred” (123). I have opted to follow Wall and others in this distinction, particularly since the nuanced distinction between the two terms is also representative of the frustrated aspirations to become migrants documented among many migratory workers who come to Canada through the SAWP. As Elgersma notes, “Temporary workers are often hopeful about a potential future benefit of being able to stay in Canada. This hope persists despite the fact that most of Canada’s temporary worker programs [with the exception of the Live-In Caregiver program] do not include a provision that allows participants to apply for permanent residency. Temporary workers whose visas are due to expire sometimes try to extend their stay by applying as immigrants, or as refugees under the humanitarian and compassionate grounds consideration in IRPA. Neither of these routes has a high rate of success.”

<sup>34</sup> Wall divides farm operations in Canada and the United States into three useful categories: “industrial,” “corporate family,” and “family” (Wall 11). “Corporate family” is a term she proposes to describe farms falling somewhere between the other two models, which exist on opposite sides of the spectrums of size and complexity. Modeling similar trends in the United States, even in the case where farms are still owner-operated, they are increasingly larger, employ more hired farm workers, and require greater capital investment (12).

harmful to the environment and by increasingly depending on a reliable supply of cheap labour. Undeniably, rural southern Ontario has been indelibly impacted by the dynamics of agribusiness. The greenhouse operations now distinctive of farming in the Leamington area represent one of the largest concentrations of greenhouses in the world (Basok 70-71). Leamington's agricultural economy, including its reliance on migratory workers, is one example of the changing character of modern agriculture in Canada.

Interestingly, despite agribusiness's pervasive influence on the way food is produced, marketed and sold in Canada, Ellen Wall suggests "Agribusiness is a term that is widely used yet rarely defined" (25). According to Wall,

It has both popular and technical meanings. The former usage is often pejorative and is associated with the demise of an idyllic, pastoral life in the rural community. Agriculture is presented as a family and farm centred enterprise with dominant interests in land stewardship and traditional values. Replacing the term with agribusiness signifies a change to conducting farming affairs with more emphasis on rational, economic efficiency. In popular terms, the main aim of agriculture is to serve the community, while the main goal of agribusiness is to increase profit margins. (25)

In actuality, as Wall points out, agribusiness concerns far more than the business of farming. Commodity-centric agribusiness encompasses all of the various components – farms, processing plants, government departments, food related institutions, etcetera – that play a part in producing, managing and distributing food commodities from the earliest stages of growth until they reach the consumer. Agribusiness comprises the entire food and drink industry, one of the largest manufacturing sectors in Canada, employing a huge percentage of the population; currently, farming represents a relatively minute portion of this broad sector (25-26). Although the importance of agriculture for the

Canadian economy diminished significantly in the second half of the last century, the size of agricultural operations that comprise the remaining sector have increased and have come to rely far more heavily on hired labour (Satzewich 59). Whereas historically family farms relied primarily on familial labour and some seasonal hired labour, corporate and industrial style farms rely heavily on hired labour both seasonally and year round (Basok 25-26).

Yet hired agriculture workers are not a new phenomenon in southern Ontario. In *A Short History of Ontario*, Bothwell documents wealthier farmers employing “gangs of workmen” (36) to accomplish a variety of farm-related tasks as far back as the 1830s. In *The Blacks in Canada*, Robin Winks also clearly documents the use of slave labour in Upper Canada after 1760 (33-34). With regard to hired labour, from the late 1800s until the middle of the twentieth century, a period of significant rural out-migration, it became increasingly difficult for farmers to attract labourers to the agricultural sector, particularly to temporary, difficult, dangerous and poorly paid seasonal jobs.<sup>35</sup> Thomas McIlwraith notes that in southern Ontario “Tenant farm-hands were the first to go when rural depopulation took hold in the 1890s” (43). Since the stability of Canada’s food supply is dependent (increasingly so) on the availability of hired farm labour, labour shortages are a matter of national concern;<sup>36</sup> consequently, the federal and provincial governments, at the behest of farmers, have been routinely involved in helping source farm labour. Early

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<sup>35</sup> Studies rank agricultural jobs among Canada’s most dangerous (Pickett et al.; Verma 67; Wall 208-9).

<sup>36</sup> Agricultural production in Ontario, particularly southern Ontario, accounts for approximately “one-quarter of all farm revenue in Canada” (“Economy”). In terms of particular crops, Ontario produces more than a quarter of all vegetables and almost half of all of the fruit grown nationally (Satzewich 58). In addition to food production, flue-cured tobacco farming employs a significant number of hired farm labourers and was once an important element of southern Ontario’s economy (Basok 27), although cultivation of tobacco in the province has dropped dramatically in recent years (“Farm Operators”).

responses to worker shortages involved soliciting migratory workers from Canadian regions with surplus labour – usually “the Maritimes, Quebec, northern Ontario and Indian reserves” (Satzewich 60). During the Second World War, other groups – women, the unemployed, students, youth, conscientious objectors, and Japanese Canadian internees – were persuaded and/or forced to work as hired agricultural labourers in southern Ontario (Basok 28; Satzewich 82). Sourced extra-nationally, German prisoners of war were also brought to Canada during the war to work on farms. Yet, in good and bad economic times, in almost all cases, except when workers are legally compelled to stay, farmers have consistently had difficulty retaining hired labour (Satzewich 61). As a short-term remedy to this retention problem, in the latter half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, foreign workers were increasingly sourced extra-nationally using various immigration and migratory labour schemes that tied these workers to the agricultural sector for various periods of time (Preibisch and Binford 9; Satzewich 84; Wall 123-24). Sometimes, these schemes led to the granting of Canadian citizenship, sometimes not, with the latter now more often the case. Some groups who immigrated to Canada after WWII through these schemes included Polish war veterans and Displaced Persons largely from Eastern Europe (Satzewich 84-98), Dutch farmers, Germans and other immigrants from Southern Europe (98-101).

Yet, in *Racism and the Incorporation of Foreign Labour: Farm Labour Migration to Canada since 1945*, Vic Satzewich contends “international migration to the country of permanent settlers during the late nineteenth and throughout the twentieth centuries, was never solely a spontaneous reaction to labour demands” (124). For instance, he observes

that, in the post-war years, despite complaints from farmers concerning continued labour shortages, disregarding persistent interest and effort by various Caribbean governments to establish temporary migration opportunities for labour purposes as well as increased permanent immigration to Canada, and unresponsive to pressure from Britain to consider these overtures (outside the realm of female domestic labourers), the Canadian federal government refused to make use of available Caribbean labour surpluses (Satzewich 147-159). Satzewich convincingly argues that the Canadian government's disinclination to consider Caribbean labour, immigrant or migratory, was primarily motivated by systemic racism that has structured Canadian immigration practices since the earliest days of colonization. In the postwar years, in an effort to discourage non-white presences in the Canadian economy, even on a temporary basis as migratory workers, the active denial of labour shortages (Satzewich 147-53), although detrimental to southern Ontario farmers and the Canadian economy, was one strategy used to remedy anxieties over black immigration. The use of preventative measures were offered as another possible avenue of discouragement: "The leader writer for the *Toronto Globe & Mail* . . . 1954 suggested that Canada might best prevent the rise of a 'racial question' in the Dominion by extending aid to the West Indies so that there would be enough jobs in the islands to keep the black men home" (Winks 473). Thus clearly racist logic initially discouraged accepting certain peoples of colour as workers in Canada, despite a demonstrated need for labourers. To this day, as Tamara Palmer Seiler contends, racism continues to provide "the ideological justification for importing and maintaining the pools of cheap agrarian

and industrial labour that the capitalist system – and the nation that it supports – requires to generate profit” (122).

This ought not to come as a surprise; one does not have to look too deeply into critical investigations of the history of Canada’s settlement and immigration policies to find well documented evidence of the use of racialized and racist criteria employed to determine which categories of people were officially and unofficially welcomed and encouraged to make Canada their home. Agriculture has played a foundational role in the colonial development of Canada in virtually every region of the country through both the recruiting of immigrants to cultivate the land and to work on already existent agricultural operations as hired farm labour. This type of immigration was guided by the same inclusions and exclusions found elsewhere in Canadian immigration strategies. Thus, historically, the recruitment of immigrants destined for the agricultural sector was also guided by racist principles:

agricultural immigrants were recruited within a clear frame of understanding that the descending order of preference for settlers was British or American, followed by French, Belgians, Dutch, Scandinavians, Swiss, Finns, Russians, Austro-Hungarians, Germans, Ukrainians, and Poles, followed by Italians, South Slavs, Greeks, and Syrians, followed by Jews, Asians, Gypsies, and Blacks. (Abu-Laban 252)

Indeed, Daniel Coleman has drawn attention to the fact that agriculture played such an important role in the settlement of early Canada that even among the preferred category of British immigrants, subdivisions were made that gave preference to “rural-born” candidates “well suited to the work of homesteading” (22).

However, the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) differs from past practices in important ways. Finally caving to pressure from farmers and organizations

lobbying on their behalf, the federal government established a temporary migratory labour program aimed at alleviating labour shortages and retention problems in the agricultural sector. Beginning in 1966, the SAWP first brought Jamaican workers to Canada<sup>37</sup>. In 1974 the program expanded to include Mexican workers. Currently the SAWP sources workers from Mexico and a number of Caribbean countries including Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados and the Organization of the Eastern Caribbean States (Antigua and Barbuda, Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Kitts-Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent, and The Grenadines) (“Temporary”; “The Seasonal”). Almost ninety per cent of the workers who come to Canada through the SAWP are employed in Ontario. The SAWP workers account for a significant part of the all hired agricultural labour in Ontario; Vincenzo Pietropaolo observes: “In Ontario alone the migrant farm worker labour force accounts for an astonishing 55 per cent of all horticultural workers” (11). According to FARMS (Foreign Agricultural Resource Management Services), a private sector non-profit organization that helps administer the SAWP in Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, between 17,000 and 18,000 seasonal migratory agriculture labourers from Mexico and the Caribbean, were employed in these provinces in 2008, 2009 and 2010 (“Statistics”). Yet, although the scale of this program is remarkably large (SAWP workers make up over half of the agricultural labour force in Ontario), these workers labour for the most part

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<sup>37</sup> Not all provinces and territories are part of the SAWP. Currently, the program brings workers to British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.



beneath the notice of the Canadian public, and we see no mention of their existence in either *The Farm Show* or *Letters from Wingfield Farm*.

Of the various formal programs catering to particular employment sectors that exist under the umbrella of the Federal Government's "Temporary Foreign Worker Program" administered by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, the SAWP brings in the largest number of foreign workers (Elgersma). Despite increasing awareness about (even within the federal government) and criticism of inequitable and unhealthy labour and social conditions these workers frequently experience (see Elgersma; Lowe; Pietropaolo; Satzewich; Verma; Justicia for Migrant Workers; United Food and Commercial Workers; Agriculture Workers Alliance), the Temporary Foreign Worker Program that governs and facilitates the use of temporary migratory labour in Canada is expanding in many areas; it is now commonplace to find temporary migratory workers in the agricultural, domestic live-in care giving, tourism, hospitality, service and construction sectors. Notably, the federal government reports "There has been a significant shift in source countries over the last 25 years. In 1982, two out of three temporary workers came from Europe and the United States; by 2005, one in three were from these areas" (Elgersma).

Thus, like other countries in the global north, Canada and Canadians benefit from the development and expansion of a precarious racialized labour force needed to maintain the lifestyles to which in Canada we have become habituated: "A temporary workforce in a Canadian context fits seamlessly with North-South geopolitical dynamics, to whatever extent Canada's economic output is made possible and sustainable by the importation of

temporary workers paid at wages lower than what would be required for a minimum standard of living by permanent residents of the country” (Pietropaolo 10).<sup>38</sup> As Makeda Silvera, who has done ground-breaking work in recording the oral histories of Caribbean live-in care givers in Toronto, straightforwardly observes, temporary foreign worker programs in Canada have been designed “to fill labour shortage in certain jobs inside Canada, in particular, domestic labour, seasonal farmwork and other non-union jobs, where the wages are rock-bottom and the working conditions reminiscent of the 19<sup>th</sup> century” (8). Particularly in the agriculture and the domestic labour industries, where workers are often easily exploited, this trend is worrisome. The fact that these programs primarily target people of colour from countries in the economically disadvantaged global south is a point of criticism for many observers. As Brand and Bhaggiyadatta note, “in Ontario, in the two large areas of work where workers are not allowed to organize - domestic work and farm work - there are large numbers of non-white workers” (109). The absence of unionization combined with structural disincentives built into migratory labour contracts facilitates exploitation and abusive labour practices. In the case of foreign temporary workers, even when legislation is in place to protect worker’s rights, language frequently proves a barrier to accessing and acting upon this information. Even more significant, the threat of repatriation or the possibility of one’s place in the program

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<sup>38</sup> In 2010, workers in the SAWP program were paid minimum wage. Workers may also be paid according to a piece work rate set at a level so that the worker ought to be able to reasonably achieve at least the minimum wage rates established for hourly wage labourers in the agricultural sector (“2010 Rates”). It is worth noting that in addition to frequently not receiving payment for overtime work or work on statutory holidays, in accordance with SAWP regulations in Ontario, the worker’s round-trip airfare from their home country, which the employer is initially required to pay in full, can be partially recuperated from the worker through payroll deductions (“Temporary”); this, along with other allowable deductions for CPP and EI, which rarely benefit the worker, cut into the already low wages earned.

not being renewed in subsequent years function as added deterrents dissuading workers from raising complaints about working and living conditions (Preibisch and Binford 9-10; Basok xviii; Elgersma; Silvera 9-10; Pietropaolo 13).

It is worth observing that, in the agricultural sector, the racialized dynamics of this labour force are not new. As Bothwell notes, “Tobacco had attracted an unusual variety of immigrant labour – ‘black slaves’ who had run away from servitude in Kentucky” (36-37). First Nations peoples in Ontario also customarily found seasonal employment in agriculture (Jain; Satzewich 80-81). Like today’s migratory workers, it was not uncommon for these labourers to live in residence on the farm. However, in contrast to what has been described as the “unfree” labour force provided through the SAWP (Basok 140), other migratory workers, because of their status as Canadian citizens, were/are free to seek better employment elsewhere (Preibisch and Binford 11). Indeed, the dwindling Canadian labour supply in the agriculture sector is partially explained historically by the fact that as new and better labour markets opened up in Ontario, jobs in agriculture had a difficult time competing. As Pietropaolo points out, this reality means that in order to work the SAWP program needs to bind workers to the sector in which they are employed in order to ensure a stable pool of exploitable labour: “There’s a reason why some people are opposed to allowing these workers to stay in Canada. Let’s say all the workers this year were granted landed immigrants [*sic*] status. Well, they would immediately try to get a better job. So, they would leave the farm . . . And then what would the farmers do?” (qtd. in Macleod 31). In her full length study of this labour dynamic, Basok concludes that farming in southern Ontario, and in Canada

more broadly, is dependent on the availability of “unfree” labour. According to Basok, the SAWP fills this need by bringing migratory workers to Canada, workers “unfree to change jobs” and who are “available for work on demand” (144). She suggests that “While seasonal migrant workers are legally free to quit or to refuse labour to their employers, economic pressures that force them to accept seasonal contracts in a foreign country, combined with the mechanisms of control inherent in a government regulated recruitment program, make them more willing to accept their conditions of unfreedom” (4).

Thus, the farmers and the Canadian government take advantage of a marginalized labour force wherein workers are hopeful of improving their economic condition in their country of origin and frequently of seeking an avenue to permanent settlement in Canada; of course, there is no possibility of obtaining permanent residence through these programs, although many of the workers meet “many of the requirements under immigration guidelines, such as skilled trades, operational equipment knowledge, and work experience [Canadian experience in particular]” (Pietropaolo 18). Thus, as the advocacy group Justicia for Migrant Workers asserts, the “SAWP strategically creates a racially marginalized labour pool of farm workers from the South that are deemed as necessary labourers but not desired citizens” (“The Seasonal”). As one worker quoted in Satzewich poignantly states: “we have become the new coolies in Canada – good enough to work on the land but not good enough to remain in the country” (115-116). As this worker realizes, contrary to Varma’s vision, foreign migratory workers are welcome in Canada as a structural necessity in the agricultural economy of southern Ontario but are

not welcomed as permanent citizens. Preibisch and Binford assert that racism is the driving force in how these workers are included in the Canadian economy yet excluded from the nation's citizenry, arguing that programs like the SAWP furnish "Canadian employers with easy access to developing country labour markets at the same time that it serves as a mechanism to control the racial/ethnic mix of the Canadian body politic, thus shoring up the hegemonic conception of the (White) 'Canadian citizen.'" (10). In no small part, the particular mythological connection between white Canadianness and rurality helps conceal the presence and labour of migratory workers in southern Ontario, consequently facilitating the perpetuation of these exploitative labour practices.

- **Two Faces of Farming: Racializing Rural Space in Southern Ontario**

Place matters in the experiences and processes that shape racial and ethnic identity. Racial and ethnic identities do not exist in a vacuum; the places and space in which individuals and groups operate influence how race and ethnicity have come to be understood, expressed, and experienced. (Berry and Henderson 3)

In *Rivers Have Sources, Trees Have Roots: Speaking of Racism*, a mostly first-person ethnographic documentation of the experience of race and racism in Canada, editors Dionne Brand and Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta write: "Most people, if asked what a typical Canadian looked like, would conjure up the image of a white man or woman" (2). While this may have been the case in 1986, the year the book was published, right in the middle of the multicultural debates that would have a lasting impact on Canadian ethnocultural and racial discourse, today the answer to this question might be slightly more nuanced. For instance, if asked to paint the streetscape of Queen Street in Toronto

as opposed to Queen Street in Mount Forest, Clinton, Innerkip or Eganville, Ontario, chances are a significantly different picture will be generated by the urban as opposed to the rural locale. My aim in pointing to the likely presence of a more colourful urban picture percolating in Canadian cultural imaginations is not to paint too Pollyannaish a portrait of the way in which people of colour have been normalized (at least in the urban environment) as Canadians. After all, merely considering the frequency with which Canadians of colour find themselves confronted with the question “Where are you from?” speaks to the continued normalization of whiteness in all realms of Canadian society and supports the continued validity of Brand and Bhaggiyadatta’s contention that “The images of non-white people we see around us suggest migrancy and provisional status. While it takes less than one generation for a white immigrant to become Canadian, two centuries of Black settlement is still not incorporated into the image of Canada” (2-3). Moreover, as Cynthia Baker reminds us, “Most large ethnocultural communities are found in relatively few metropolitan centers. In Canada, they are established in one or two cities of five provinces: Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia” (qtd. in Varma 85). Thus, in both urban and rural spaces, “The prevalent demographic reality within the Canadian multicultural context is, ironically, the predominately White location” (Varma 85).

Hence while the multicultural rhetoric of the Canadian mosaic and its attendant association with cultural and racial diversity can be associated with Canada’s largest cities, this version of Canada’s cultural composition has not informed understandings of the rural setting, even though, as discussed above, with regard to migratory workers alone

we know that rural settings in southern Ontario have significant populations of colour. Berry and Henderson contend that “agricultural regions of Canada and the United States have experienced relatively high migrations of international workers. Census data in both countries indicate an exponential growth in farm laborers who become legal residents” (7); this growth can be considered even higher when we take into account the number of migratory workers as well as undocumented workers who also form part of the rural population but are uncouned in census data (7). Yet the way rural space and society is imagined is frequently misinformed about or resistant to the changing racialized organization of the rural economy, consequently having significant impacts on people of colour who compose largely underrepresented, poorly visible and frequently exploited portions of the rural populace in southern Ontario.

In the first part of this chapter, I referred to Ellen Wall’s definition of agribusiness, which she suggests is in the popular imagination “associated with the demise of an idyllic, pastoral life in the rural community” (25). The juxtaposition she suggests exists in popular terms between “agriculture” and “agribusiness” reminds us that both of these concepts hold cultural significations that extend far beyond the realm of the products we imagine farms to produce and how that production is carried out. In addition, both terms speak also to different representations of the culture of agriculture, wherein, as Wall succinctly delineates, “agribusiness” is seen to be defined by a culture of profit while “agriculture” is thought to manifest itself through “family and farm centred” operations that “serve the community” through an investment in “land stewardship and traditional values” (25). Yet while, as studies show, the “family” farm in this nostalgic

sense is increasingly difficult to find in southern Ontario, the association between agriculture and “traditional values” is not. However, what is expressed through the vague notion of “traditional values” deserves closer attention, for this language is connected to a broader system of geographical delineations that inform speech acts used to define urban and rural environments with recognizable racialized codes, codes that are frequently used to speak in oblique ways about issues pertaining to race without resorting to clearly recognizable racist discourse. For instance, Paul Saurette argues that a phrase like “inner-city crime” is clearly coded to be read as “black crime” (“Dog-Whistle”); similarly, when cities are depicted in the media as morally bankrupt, unsafe or unhealthy, these characteristics are linked to the populations perceived as being subject to and producers of these urban dynamics. Conversely, when we hear or speak about “small-town values” or “traditional values” associated with rural culture in Canada, these are understood as values rooted in and associated with white Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture<sup>39</sup>. In this way, in Canada, “rural” and “urban” function as socio-spatial designators that locate people but more importantly house particular understandings of “the local population” that Basok’s portrait invokes, the assumed inhabitants of certain spaces. In the popular imagination, the family farm, particularly its relationship to “traditional values” and its transformation as part of the agribusiness model, holds a fraught place in how the public thinks about agriculture and rural society. The desire to cling to the family farming model of agriculture impacts the way we think about rural society and the people who function in this economy at the level of the farm. As we will see, the family farm continues to be

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<sup>39</sup> In “Whitewashing Race: A Critical Perspective on Whiteness,” Margaret Andersen suggests that a “call for traditional values” is frequently indicative “of a profound sense of white racial angst” (23).



represented in ways that obscure how even family owned farms increasingly operate in accordance with corporate/industrial agricultural models reliant on an easily exploitable racialized migratory workforce that results in “the racialization of the global labour supply with what some authors have termed a ‘global hierarchy of states’ or ‘global apartheid’” (Preibisch and Binford 6).<sup>40</sup>

With this in mind, if we recall Basok’s portrait of Leamington’s No Frills on a Friday afternoon, we note that Basok invokes two rural populations, the “Leamington-area residents [who] know that it is better to avoid the No Frills grocery store on late Friday afternoon” and “the Mexican invasion of the local supermarket.” This juxtaposition between those who “know better” and those who seem out of place, the Mexican men “who look and dress differently from much of the local population,” enunciates a seemingly common sense understanding of who belongs and who does not belong in Canada’s imagined rural community. As Eva Mackey argues in *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*, in Leamington it is those who “know better,” in other words,

the definers of the project [of constructing Canadian national identity] – usually white and most often British settlers – who authorize and define similarities and differences. They are the unmarked, unhyphenated, and hence normative, *Canadian*-Canadians who are thus implicitly constructed

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<sup>40</sup> The global hierarchy of states referred to in this instance speaks to divisions between countries of the global South and North, hierarchical divisions established through colonial and imperial relationships and exacerbated by the politics and economics of globalization, neo-imperialism and neo-colonialism. In this context, economic, political, social and environmental conditions frequently compel citizens from countries in the global South to relocate to privileged countries in the global North. In *Global Apartheid: Refugees, Racism, and the New World Order*, Anthony Richmond suggests that, as privileged nations in the global North increasingly support and develop disincentives and limitations on the movements of this (largely racialized) population, this hierarchical organization of states is more appropriately labelled as an apartheid system.

as the authentic and *real* Canadian people, while all others are hyphenated and marked as *cultural*. (89, emphasis in original)

Interestingly, although the Mexicans in Basok's portrait signify a substantial population, they "still experience minority power status in general Canadian society" (Varma 85). This may be explained by the fact that, even though this group represents a critical mass within the Leamington area, they are positioned culturally (as invasive) and economically (as lower class – here, the worker's choice of shopping at No Frills is in no incidental way a class designator) in this community and legally on a larger national stage. After a presence of over twenty-five years in this community – the Mexican population is marked by "local" residents "who know" as not only culturally alien but also as culturally invasive. Paradoxically, while in Basok's portrait the Mexican men are portrayed as hypervisible, they only appear in the rural setting at limited times – Friday afternoons and Sundays – at which point local attitudes towards their emergence on the rural scene fall in line with how Peake and Ray have argued people of colour in Canada are frequently observed as "negative disruptions of the Canadian landscape" (180). How do these workers figure as part of the rural community for the rest of the week during the many months they make up a significant portion of the rural population of southern Ontario?<sup>41</sup> Elgersma documents two ways in which migratory workers are incorporated into rural society: "Some migrant workers report experiences of racism and harassment, while studies have found some local communities to be indifferent to or ignorant about workers' presence" (Elgersma). Thus, either through overt discrimination or oversight, the racialized presences of migratory workers in southern Ontario are excluded from the

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<sup>41</sup> Many migratory workers spend more months a year in Canada than they do in their country of origin.

rural community; as such, rural southern Ontario functions as one of the Canadian “geographies of ‘absence’ and ‘presence’, which invoke senses of the multiple (un)belongings among people of colour in Canadian society” (Peake and Ray 180).

Up to this point, I have been trying to account for how people of colour in the form of migratory workers come to figure in rural southern Ontario and why it is advantageous for this population to be poorly represented as part of the public’s understanding of the social make-up of rural southern Ontario. In *Black Like Who?*, Rinaldo Walcott delves into cultural representations and concealments of Canadian blacknesses, suggesting that “The mapping of the immigrant experience in Canada has been largely done through the lens of the social sciences. In the case of black peoples it has been overwhelmingly sociological and anthropological. My project is to modestly shift the discourse to questions of discursivity, textuality and the politics and relations of representations” (141). Following Walcott’s discursive shift, I will now turn to visual representations of racialized rurality in southern Ontario. According to Walcott it is not unreasonable to consider what he refers to as the “absented presence” (137) of people of colour in Canada as part of a deliberate process of (un)representation; this leads to a two-faced understanding of race and rurality in southern Ontario. At the most basic level, Preibisch and Binford reveal that “Throughout the history of the SAWP, employers have been subject to community pressure to conceal worker housing from the main roads, symbolically marking the workers’ exclusion from Canadian society” (30). In addition, migratory workers’ movement in the community is constrained by the “need to have their employers’ permission before they can leave the farm property” (Wall 256). As depicted

in Basok's portrait of Leamington and reaffirmed by Pietropaolo, "On Canadian farms the workers live in virtual isolation from nearby communities, except for weekly trips to local shops for groceries" (12). These constraints on movement in the community and physical concealments on the farm, which function to hide workers at the local level, complement a more sophisticated whitewashed representation of southern Ontario agriculture to a broader public apparent in publicity campaigns like the *Faces of Farming*, which will be explored later in this chapter. However, before examining this dominant face of farming in southern Ontario, I would like to focus on visual interventions of non-dominant understandings of the social geography of rural southern Ontario.

- **Face One**

Pietropaolo contends that "Since the early 1990s a virtual explosion of interest and activities has centred on migrant farm workers" (23). In Canada, much of this interest has been generated through the attention legal challenges, aimed at ameliorating agricultural workers' rights, have brought to the situation of these workers in many provinces. In this capacity, United Food and Commercial Workers Canada (UFCW) has taken on a central advocacy role. Not only has the UFCW championed the cause of migratory workers in the courts, it also, in conjunction with the Agriculture Workers Alliance (AWA), opened and now operates nine support centres for agricultural workers in Canada, two in Ontario, located in Simcoe and Virgil. These activities paint a distinctly different picture from Ellen Wall's experience completing her dissertation, titled *Agribusiness and Hired Farm*

*Labour in the Ontario Tomato Industry*, in the early 1990s. There, she notes that when she was conducting her research, agricultural labourers in Canada were not yet a segment of the industrial labour force historically examined in Canadian labour studies or thought of “as part of the total industrial scene” (ix). Now with films like *El Contrato* (2003) and full-length books like Vic Satzewich’s *Racism and the Incorporation of Foreign Labour: Farm Labour Migration to Canada Since 1945* (1991), Tanya Basok’s *Tortillas and Tomatoes: Transmigrant Mexican Harvesters in Canada* (2002), and Nandita Sharma’s *Home Economics: Nationalism and the Making of Migrant Workers in Canada* (2006), the plight of all Canadian agricultural labourers and the particularly troublesome circumstances of migratory workers, largely people of colour, are increasingly visible. Two collections of photographs add visually to this body of work, *Harvest Pilgrims: Mexican and Caribbean Migrant Farm Workers in Canada*, a collection of photographs by Vincenzo Pietropaolo published in book form in 2009, and a collaborative art project, *From One Place to Another/Las dos realidades*, involving migratory workers from Mexico and Trinidad and members of Red Tree Artists’ Collective based in Hamilton and Toronto.

Vincenzo Pietropaolo has been visually documenting the lives of migratory workers in Ontario and in the workers’ countries of origin for over twenty years, beginning in the mid-1980s. *Harvest Pilgrims* is a book collection of Pietropaolo’s photographs, which have been exhibited across Canada and internationally. The most recent photographs included in the book were taken in 2006. Having been introduced to the world of migratory labour in southern Ontario through a chance encounter,

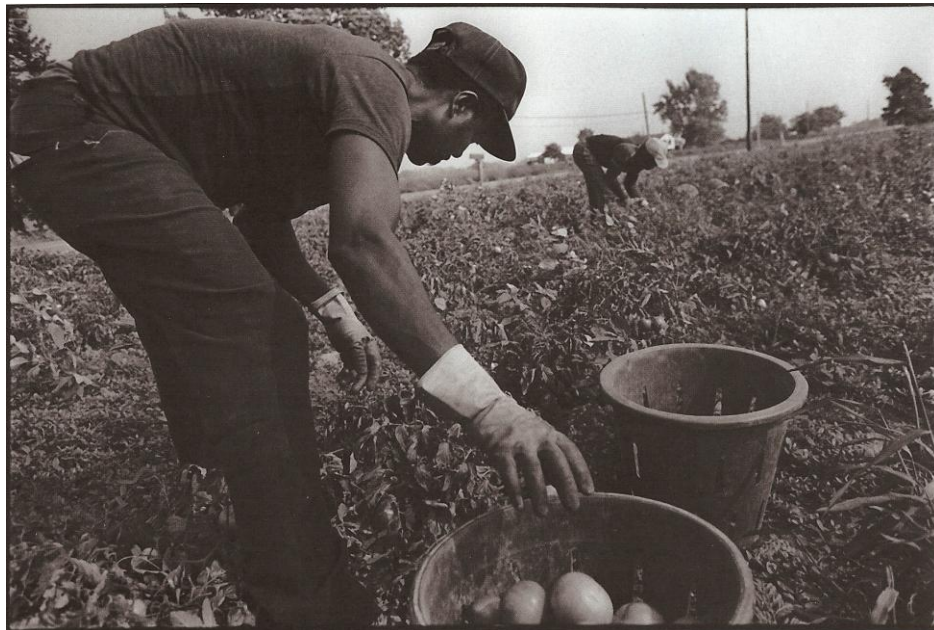
subsequent research into the use of migratory labour in Canada led him to be “astonished . . . at how invisible these migrant workers were in our society” (Pietropaolo 6). Addressing a dearth of representation and with the hope the photographs can help “achieve greater social justice” (Macleod 22), Pietropaolo’s project intervenes in this conceptual and representational void by generating detailed visual documentation of various aspects of these workers’ lives here and abroad. As such, Pietropaolo’s documentary style of photography is accurately described as part of a genre of photography intended to achieve “an ideological explication of the subject” (Sutnik 2). Naomi Rosenblum situates Pietropaolo’s work within an earlier tradition of documentary photography that focused on the lives of migratory workers and was particularly popular and influential in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century (xi).

Cheryl Teelucksingh argues that “skin colour and racism [in Canada] categorize a segment of the labour force as subordinate. This racialized group takes on labour that other segments of the labour force will simply not do for menial wages” (6). Visually, *Harvest Pilgrims* acutely supports this argument; its seventy-nine black and white photographs show workers of colour, men and women, involved in farm labour, in the community and in their places of residence on farms in southern Ontario and in their countries of origin, providing a comprehensive portrait of a racialized Canadian labour force that fills necessary job positions in one of the country’s most dangerous, difficult and poorly paid areas of employment.<sup>42</sup> Despite the inequitable conditions of their

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<sup>42</sup> It is significant that Pietropaolo includes pictures of female migratory workers, since they make up only a small percentage of the workers who come to Canada through the SAWP. Because of this ratio, research frequently focuses on male migratory labour.

employment and residency in Canada, for the most part, as subjects are captured in the process of labour and living, the photographs are unexpectedly unemotional. This lends the images a sense of matter-of-factness in relation to the depiction of frequently squalid, cramped living conditions and the physicality of farm labour performed for long hours in all weather:



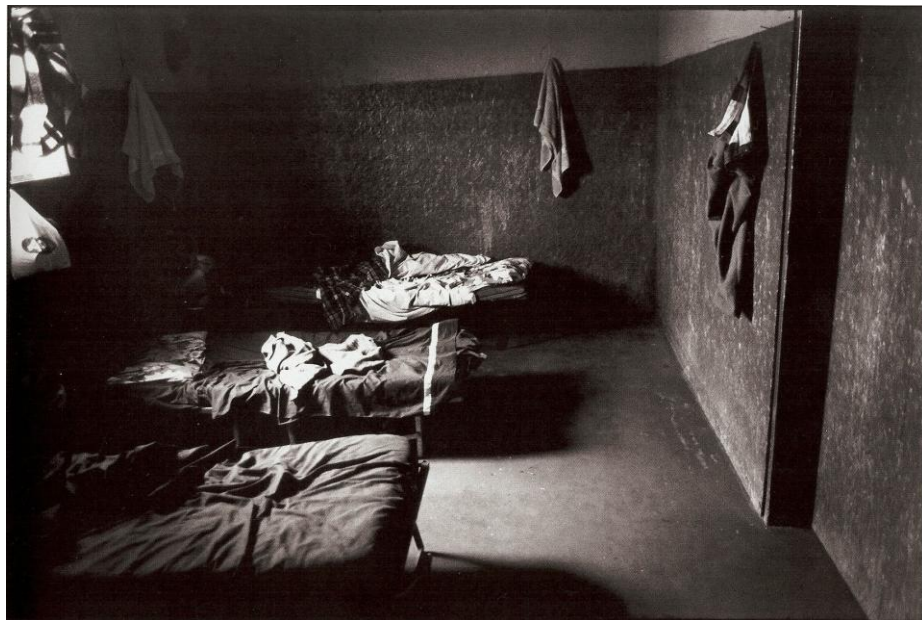
(Pietropaolo 34)<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Photographer's note: "Joseph Wry, a Jamaican tomato picker. Waterford, Ont., 1986" (Pietropaolo 125).



(Pietropaolo 65)<sup>44</sup>



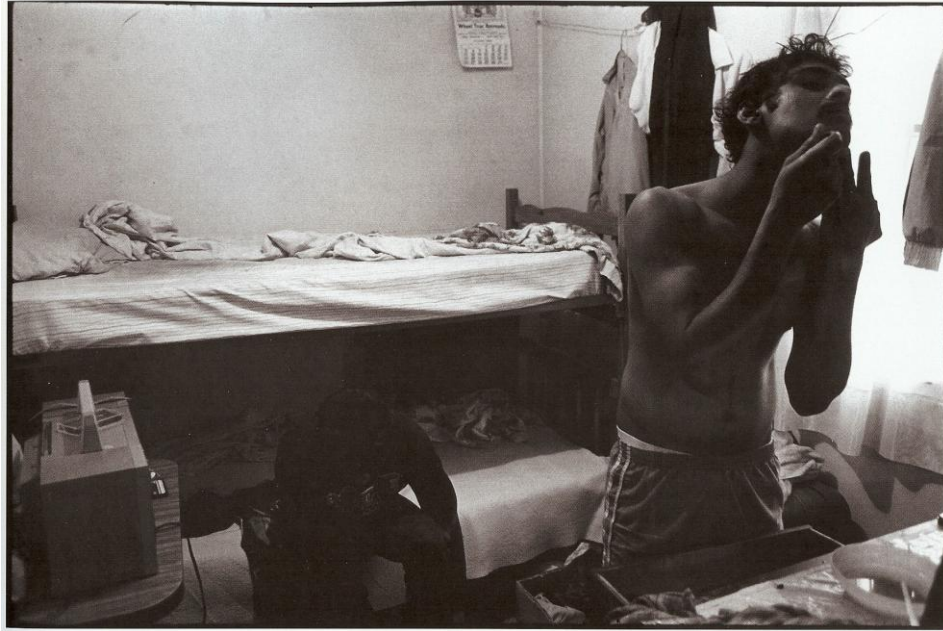
(Pietropaolo 75)<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Photographer's note: "Trinidadian and Mexican migrant workers collecting stakes removed from mature trees. Whitby, Ont., 1995" (Pietropaolo 126).

<sup>45</sup> Photographer's note: "Bedroom facilities shared by four Mexican tobacco workers. Otterville, Ont., 1984" (Pietropaolo 126).





(Pietro Paolo 83)<sup>46</sup>

The banality of the subject matter that makes up the images underscores the seeming lack of exceptionality in the migratory workers' everyday reality in Canada, a reality most Canadians would be unwilling to endure, yet a reality systemically supported and normalized by the migratory workers' farming hosts, host communities and the Canadian government.

The rare occasions when white people, usually farm owners and bosses, are pictured in the collection accentuates the workers' subordinate position within southern Ontario's agricultural economy. With few exceptions, white people, when they appear, are driving tractors and or other farm vehicles or machinery while the hired migratory workers labour around them:

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<sup>46</sup> Photographer's note: "Das Raguba, a Trinidadian worker, Holland Marsh, Ont., 1986" (Pietro Paolo 127).



(Pietropaolo 117)<sup>47</sup>



(Pietropaolo 86)<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Photographer's note: "A gigantic tomato-field harvester, operated by Frank Lehn, slices through the soil and scoops up the tomato vines, including the roots and fruit, which are then separated and sorted by mostly migrant workers who stand all day long on top of the moving machine. Wheatly [*sic*], Ont., 2006" (Pietropaolo 128).

The second photograph above, featuring farm owner Tony Smyrecinsky surrounded by five Jamaican migratory workers, is an exception to the usual way whiteness enters the collection. Unlike many of the images of the workers in Canada, this image stands out as more formally posed and is unusual in the way the workers appear smiling and at ease, some with their hands positioned casually on one another and their employer, who despite the prevalent perception of the racial composition of rural southern Ontario seems to be the one out of place in the portrait. Not only does Smyrecinsky's whiteness situate him apart, his age, his stature and what appears to be his comparative lack of ease (he stands not really smiling with his hands by his side) also stand out.<sup>49</sup> He appears less amenable to posing for the picture than the other men, who, outnumbering him, make up a significant portion of the agricultural labour force in the province. Nonetheless, lest the viewer feel comforted by the relative strength and ease of the Jamaican workers in the photograph, whether intentional or not, Pietropaolo's accompanying note reminds the viewer of the power dynamics structuring this image, which juxtaposes new and older models of agricultural life in Canada: This is a photograph of "Tony Smyrecinsky . . . with *his* [unnamed] Jamaican migrant workers" (127, emphasis mine). Pietropaolo's

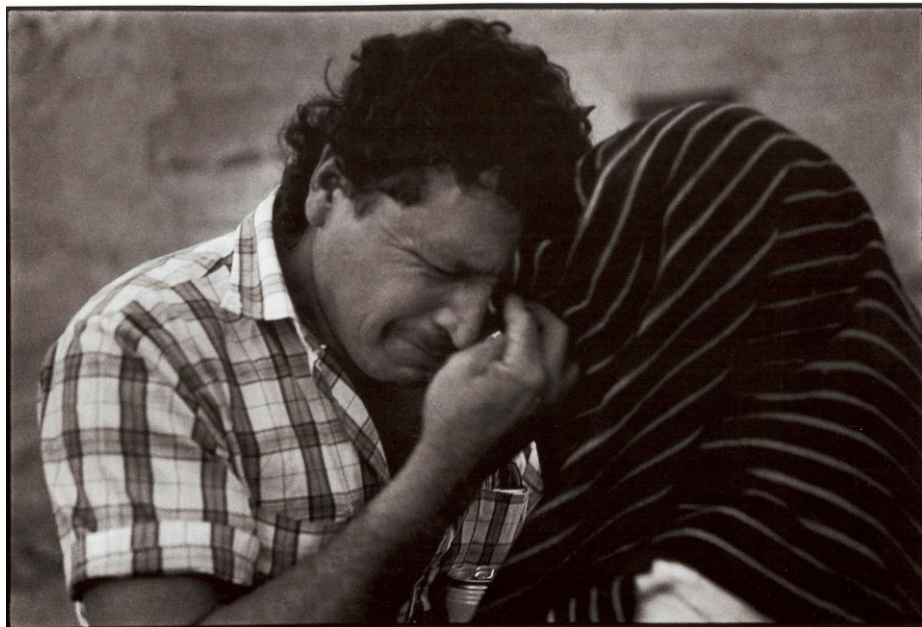
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<sup>48</sup> Photographer's note: "Tony Smyrecinsky, a vegetable-farm owner, with his Jamaican migrant workers. Waterford, Ont., 1987" (Pietropaolo 127).

<sup>49</sup> It has been called to my attention that it is difficult, using only this photograph, to precisely label Smyrecinsky as white, an issue I too pondered in my initial decision to label him this way. It is ambiguous whether his somewhat darker skin complexion may be the result of his racial/ethnic background or his work out in the open as a farmer. Smyrecinsky's family name marks him as most likely of Russian or Polish descent (yet possibly also German or Austrian). Of course, this background also does not easily identify him as white, considering that whiteness has historically been a shifting concept in Europe as well, especially in the classification of people of eastern and southern European descent. Despite these uncertainties, I still opt to identify Smyrecinsky as white for the following reasons: the particularities of Smyrecinsky's heritage are not significant in this instance, as his race here is largely constructed in relation to the Jamaican workers who surround him as well as within the broader community wherein agricultural systems of labour are marked by the hierarchies drawn between employers who signify whiteness and labourers of colour.

choice to mark Smyrecinsky's relationship to the workers through the language of possession and to leave the workers in this photograph nameless in contrast with Smyrecinsky reads as symbolically loaded.

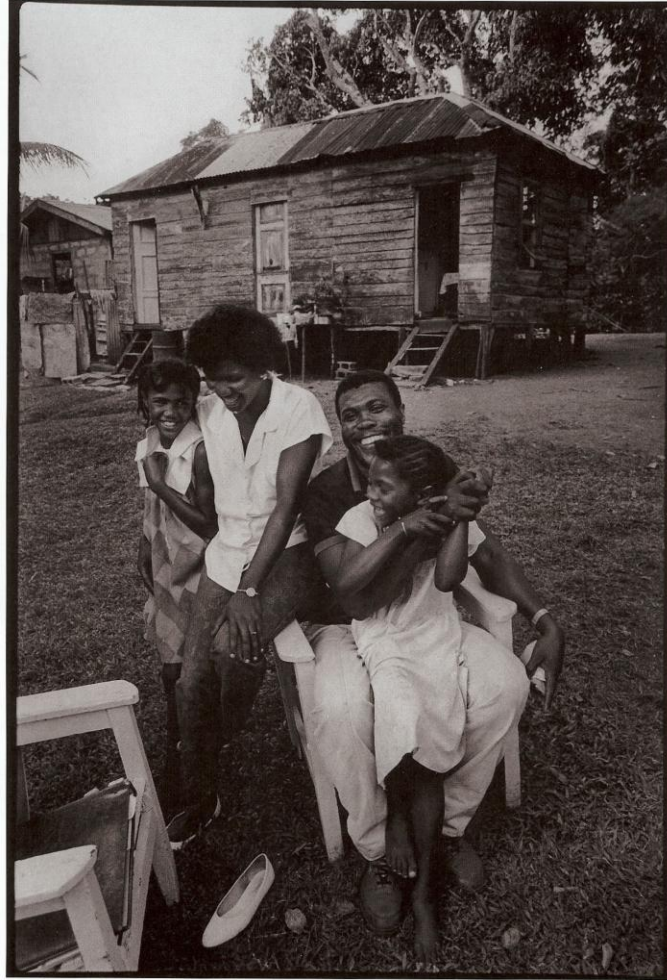
Apart from this smiling portrait, more intense emotions of happiness or sadness enter the photographs infrequently and generally only in the photographs representing the worker in his or her country of origin and, particularly, in moments of transition, such as in the greeting of relatives again after the conclusion of work in Canada:



(Pietropaolo 67)<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Photographer's note: "Manuel González greeting his sister Beda on his return home. Monte Prieto, Guanajuato, Mexico, 1993" (Pietropaolo 126).



(Pietropaolo 88)<sup>51</sup>

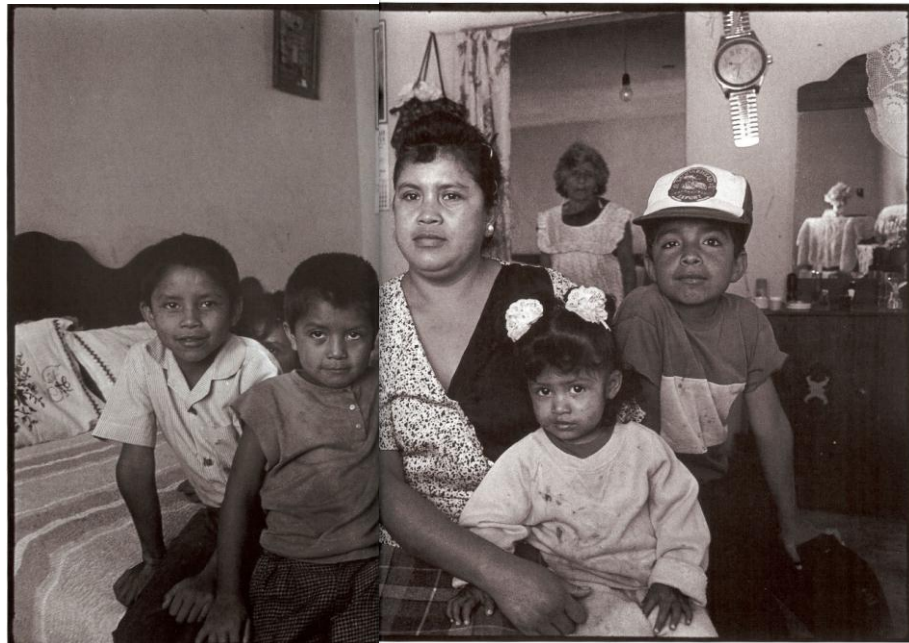
Apart from the increased presence of visible emotion, photographs featuring the workers and/or their families in the worker's country of origin echo the poverty of living conditions pictured in Canada, albeit shared/endured with friends and family. While the Canadian photographs feature workers who appear focused on and unemotional about their work in Canada, other narratives in the text speak to the ever-present strain of working away from one's family for significant portions of the year. One worker states:

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<sup>51</sup> Photographer's note: "Stanley Rollston, who works as an apple picker in Thornbury, Ont., with his family at home in Jamaica. Clonmell, St. Mary's Parish, Jamaica, 1988" (Pietropaolo 127).

If they would say to me, you could stay in Canada indefinitely and bring your family, I would accept with the greatest of pleasure, but unfortunately you can't . . . If I could have my family with me, I would be more content in my work, but it's not possible . . . Every time you return home, the children are older, and you miss them as they grow up. (qtd. in Pietropaolo 35)

Most of the photographs taken in Canada do not reveal how the absence of family is felt by the workers. However, many of the photographs taken in the workers' countries of origin clearly convey this lack. Having visited one Mexican village twice, first when the workers were home and next when they were away in Canada, Pietropaolo states he was interested in conveying absence, "a space in the portrait for the man who is not there" (qtd. in Macleod 26).



(Pietropaolo 94-95)<sup>52</sup>

For example, in this picture, both the empty wall that fills the top left of the image and the watch that hovers in the right foreground of the Castillo family portrait (without

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<sup>52</sup> Photographer's note: "Blanca Anaya Castillo and family. Monte Prieto, Guanajuato, Mexico, 1994" (Pietropaolo 127).

father) capture the presence of absence in this home, a strong sense of temporality and expectation conveyed by the timepiece, as they wait for their father/husband/son(-in-law)'s return. Many of Pietropaolo's pictures in the workers' countries of origin focus on absence caused by a family member working elsewhere; yet, ironically, in the location where the worker is actually present, southern Ontario, he is also culturally absent.

In *Harvest Pilgrims*, Pietropaolo tells a story, a story accented by its deviations from his own family's history, part of what drew his interest to the situation of migratory workers: "my father, as a new immigrant [from rural southern Italy], often spoke of his experiences working on tobacco farms in Southern Ontario – he had gone there during times of high unemployment in Toronto, where we lived. He, too, was a migrant farm worker" (6). While in some senses this is true, Pietropaolo's father was, in contrast, part of a group of "free" agricultural labourers, free to find better employment when and where it was available and free to settle permanently in Canada. Hence, in *Harvest Pilgrims* one descendant of a more desirable immigrant speaks for the reality of a less desirable class.

Significantly, in *From One Place to Another/Las dos realidades* this voice shifts. While both collections of photographs supplement the images with text drawn from the migrants' own words in an effort to not only show but also to tell, *From One Place* takes what Peake and Ray have argued in other contexts is the crucial step to position people of colour in Canada as the "producers of signification and not just signifiers" (184). This collaborative art project offers migratory workers the opportunity to create their own visual narratives by putting the camera in their hands. Teelucksingh writes that "claiming

space . . . is about subjectivity, agency, and the process of ‘becoming’ subjects” (12). In this sense, the migratory workers who participate in *From One Place* claim a visual space in rural southern Ontario customarily denied in dominant representations of this place. Unlike Pietropaolo’s photographs where the workers function as objects of the photographer’s gaze, in *From One Place* the workers become authors of their own telling, subjects who reflect on the world around them.

Whereas the workers themselves and their families are the primary foci of Pietropaolo’s images, interestingly, when visually positioning themselves here, in southern Ontario, a significant number of the workers’ photographs are taken of landscapes and/or buildings without humans featured. These images suggest that revealing the presence of the workers in the rural setting is not the only objective of the photographs. Equally important is an exploration of how the workers understand and view their experience in Canada and their lives lived back and forth between two countries. Photographs like Rafael Larios Barbosa’s captioned “the big house,” with its image of an extremely large, new and modern “farm” house, and its idiomatic caption, which connects the image with slave-era plantation homes, when displayed alongside the workers’ pictures of their own meagre accommodations, offer a not so subtle critique of the class inequalities between migratory workers and farm owner-operators:<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> All of the *From One Place/Las Dos Realidades* photographs featured in this dissertation have been accessed through the Red Tree Artists’ Collective website (<http://www.redtreecollective.ca/simcoe07.htm>) included in the bibliography. Where known, the name of the photographer is used in my text, while the parenthetical reference accompanying each photograph directs the reader to the source of the photograph. Where numbers are listed in some of the parenthetical references, they refer to a corresponding Quick Time slide through which some of the photographs are displayed via the Internet at the web address provided above.



Rafael Larios Barbosa - the big house



(“From One” 50)



(“From One” 48)

Also immediately apparent in the workers’ own representations of their Canadian realities, something that is less clear in Pietropaolo’s collection, is a sense of longing for family and loved ones left behind. As seen in the two examples below from Marcelo Perez Saldivar and Martin Rodriguez Sierra, a number of the photographs feature

workers posing in Canada with photographs of their family back home, composing tellingly dislocated family portraits.



(Perez Saldivar)



(Rodriguez Sierra)

By shifting the photographic gaze to the workers, unlike the *Harvest Pilgrims* images, the *From One Place* photographs celebrate these artists’/workers’ creativity as they exercise a clearly artistic impulse toward visual story telling. Sean Mapp’s photographs, in which he juxtaposes a “foreign” body against the Canadian landscape, provide good examples:



(Mapp)

Displayed as a diptych, the reduction of the whole person to the close-up of the hand, visually reduces the worker to the sum of his manual labour, a reduction resisted by the workers' themselves as their collective poem "Each One of Us Is Somebody" reveals: "We are not mere pairs of hands / We are builders of two nations" ("Each One").<sup>54</sup> The

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<sup>54</sup> A copy of the entire poem is included in Appendix 1.

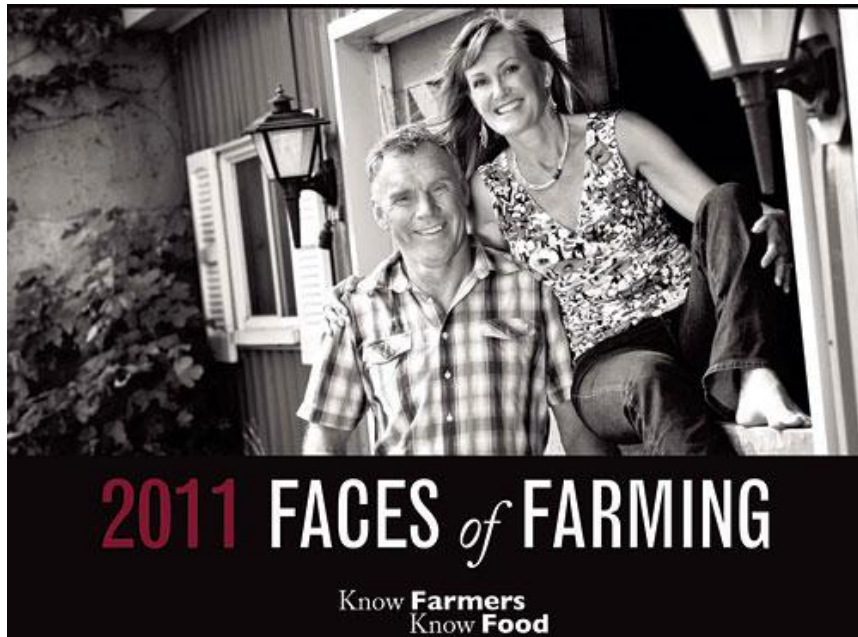
significance of the hand as an image cannot be minimized, for the roughness of a person's hand is one of the evaluative tools used by SAWP administrators in a worker's home country to determine his or her suitability for the program – “They look at your hands and they say, ‘Your hands are soft,’ and they turn you down” (SAWP worker qtd. in Pietropaolo 79). The jewelry that adorns the hand in this picture personalizes the synecdochic hand and also evokes the economic motivation that draws these workers back to Canada year after year.

Spanning approximately a year and a half (summer 2006 to fall 2007), the collaborative project *From One Place to Another/Las dos realidades* involved artists from Red Tree Artists' Collective (Ingrid Mayrhofer, Nery Espinoza, Sally Frater) facilitating migratory workers from Mexico and Trinidad (Marcelo Perez Saldivar, Fulgencio Mejía Ibarra, Rafael Larios Barbosa, Santiago Martinez Rodriguez, Martín Rodriguez Sierra, Jesús Tinajero Rodriguez, Ronald Audin, Sean Mapp, Nigel Espinosa, Christino Pierre, Clarence Pierre) in taking pictures in Norfolk County and their countries of origin. The photographic project was accompanied by a collective writing project, facilitated by Canadian dub poet Klyde Broox. Selected images and writing were exhibited in Simcoe (2007), Toronto (2008), and Hamilton (2008), and a slide presentation of the images was presented in Toronto (2007), Vancouver (2007), and Langley (2008) (“From One”). As part of the Red Tree Artists' Collective mandate to create “cross-cultural collaboration with artists and/or community members” their aim is to draw attention to “specific cultural practices or community issues” (“Mandate”). The driving force behind the images in *From One Place* was the participants' hope “to offer

Canadians a better understanding of a year in their lives” (“May”) lived between two realities. Both *Harvest Pilgrims* and *From One Place* are successful in this respect. Not only do they offer a revealing portrait of the labour conditions of agricultural work, they also reframe the viewer’s understanding of race and rurality, putting a perhaps unexpected racialized face on southern Ontario agriculture, functioning as a “counter-narration of the normalized image of Canadian as chromatically white” (Walcott, ““Who is she”” 37). Through the work of these photographs, southern Ontario farms and their surrounding rural communities become places where people of colour both exist and are seen. More importantly, in *From One Place*, the photographer-workers see and make sense of their Canadian experience through their own visual interpretations. Paul Cloke argues that “ethnic minorities not only find themselves positioned culturally as ‘out of place’ in the countryside, but also experience practices and attitudes which seek to purify that place should it be transgressed” (27). Responding to this reality, the *From One Place* collective art project becomes a way for the migratory workers to know and situate themselves in place, positively working against the ways in which Cloke argues people of colour are customarily expected to “know their place” in rural spaces. Yet these representations of non-white rurality and non-white rural experience enter circulation at a time when agricultural organizations in Ontario are eager also to represent a “new” image of farming, an image that is both new and old but consistently and strategically resistant to the image of southern Ontario rurality pictured above.

- **Face Two**

In 2006, the Ontario Farm Animal Council (OFAC) launched a calendar titled *Faces of Farming* “designed to dispel some of the myths and common stereotypes about today’s farmers and put a face on the people who produce food in Ontario” (“Classic”).



(Ontario Farm, *Faces*)

With a new calendar each year, now in its sixth year of production, this publicity campaign presents a visual and textual narrative that seeks to “tell the story behind our food” (Maaskant qtd. in “Classic”), with each month featuring a different farmer, farm family, or hired farm worker (this last instance is more rare). While the calendar is produced by the OFAC, the farmers represent various areas of agricultural production including meat, dairy and produce and are supported by “many Ontario agri-food businesses and farm groups” (“Classic”). The calendar has been extremely popular, selling out every year; beginning with a circulation of 3,000 copies in 2006, in 2011 there

are 7,000 available copies (up 500 from 2010). In addition to being sold directly by the OFAC, the calendars are sent annually to thousands of “Ontario grocery stores, politicians and media outlets” (Ontario Farm, “Faces”). With a focused and wide distribution, this imagery is clearly reaching an Ontario public.

The calendar’s slogan “Know Farmers Know Food” delineates a clearly educational framework for the calendar, but what message does the *Faces of Farming* campaign convey about southern Ontario agriculture and rurality? As is immediately apparent, in contrast to the photographs in *Harvest Pilgrims* and *From One Place*, these calendars present an entirely racially homogeneous image of the people who farm in Ontario. Like the *Harvest Pilgrims* collection, the images in *Faces of Farming* are black and white. In part, this stylistic choice taps into the aesthetics of high art black and white photography; however, it also resembles the documentary style of photography used by Pietropaolo. However, Pietropaolo’s black and white photographs exhibit a shadowy graininess wherein subjects and/or the activities they perform appear out of focus, poorly lit or obscured by branches or leaves, protective clothing and farm implements, and the texture of the photographs echoes the frequently long hours of farm labour where workers labour from the dimness of dawn to dusk in all kinds of weather conditions including rain, snow and extreme heat and are often pictured dirty and wet:



(Pietropaolo 43)<sup>55</sup>



(Pietropaolo 53)<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Photographer's note: "A worker from St. Lucia during an early-morning harvest of tobacco. Wilsonville, Ont., 1984" (Pietropaolo 125).

<sup>56</sup> Photographer's note: "Jamaicans setting up ladders to pick apples. Thornbury, Ont., 1987" (Pietropaolo 126).



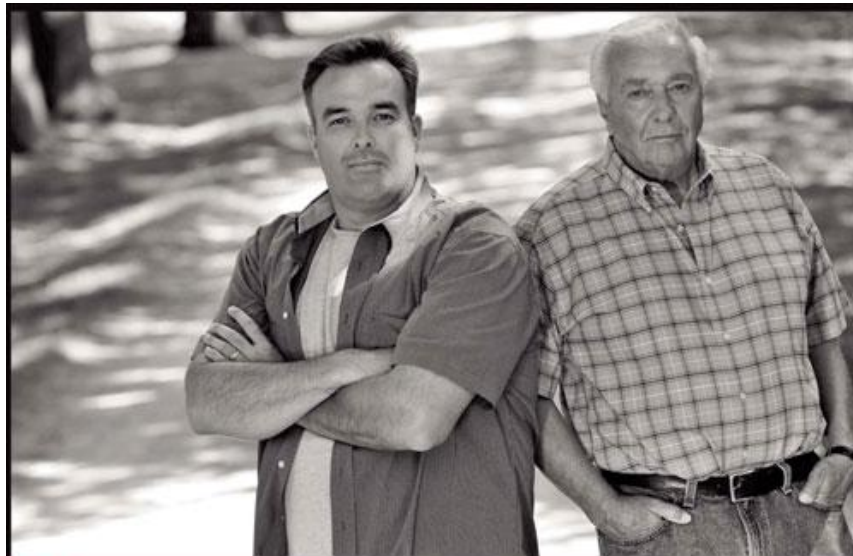


(Pietropaolo 64)<sup>57</sup>

In contrast, the *Faces of Farming* images are high gloss, clean and focused. As described by different commentators, the *Faces of Farming* images “shine” (Newman) and portray a “sexy” (Schaer) image of farmers, offering appealing agricultural “pinups” (Rivers) for the public’s consumption. Indeed, consistent with the sexualized tone noted by various observers, the write-ups that accompany the photographs sound strangely like personal advertisements (although the participants are by and large married) or the pinup girl and boy biographies included in “adult magazines” like *Playboy*, *Penthouse* and *Playgirl*:

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<sup>57</sup> Photographer’s note: “Two workers dig holes for staking apple saplings. Whitby, Ont., 1995” (Pietropaolo 126).



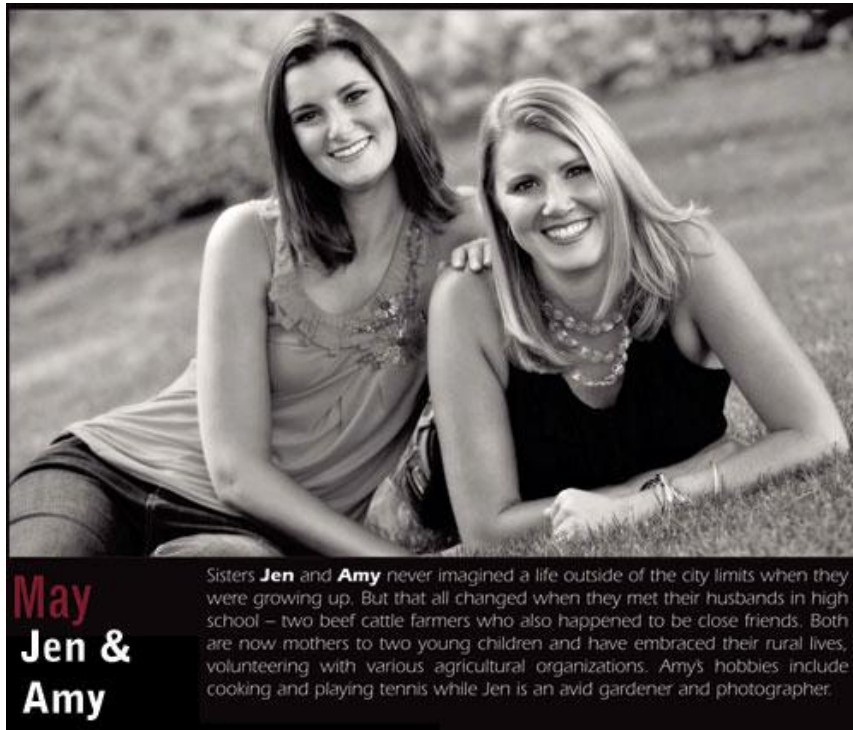
**February**  
**Fred &  
Brian**

**Fred's** ancestors have been farming in Ontario for several generations and he always knew he'd follow in the family tradition. A decade ago, he was joined by son **Brian** who returned home to farm after earning his MBA in agri-business. The two now raise chickens on their farm north of London. Fred is well known as a big picture thinker who has served as a board member on many farm organizations. Brian enjoys coaching his children's sports teams.



**March**  
**Kyle**

**Kyle** is a fourth generation vegetable farmer in the Holland Marsh near Bradford. He came home to farm alongside his father, siblings and grandfather after graduating from the agricultural program at Ridgetown College. He likes "making plans for the farm and watching them come to life" – literally! A sports enthusiast, Kyle enjoys going camping and snowmobiling, playing hockey and baseball.



(Ontario Farm, *Faces*)

What is particularly noticeable is that contrary to the subjects in the *Harvest Pilgrims* and *From One Place* photographs, the farmers and labourers in *Faces of Farming* are never represented as labouring. The work of farming is distinctly absent from these images. Instead the subjects are pictured in non-particularized rural/farm settings. As the narratives that accompany the photographs suggest, setting the photographs in this way expands the viewer's understanding of the southern Ontario farmer as being about more than just farming. The accompanying narratives accentuate this point, by balancing biographical details provided between on-farm and off-farm life pursuits, drawing attention in particular to off-farm hobbies, educational experience, and family lives. Another striking deviation from the previous two collections is the distinct effort made to individualize these farmers through explicit and highlighted naming – the calendars personalize participants with the repetitive and familiar use of their first names. Of course, for migratory workers “naming” has a specific relation to agriculture in Ontario – through the SAWP, “naming” is the process whereby farmers “name” workers they would like to return to their farm in subsequent years, thus guaranteeing a migratory worker a place in the program. However, as critics have rightly noted, this process has the potential to serve as a way to encourage a docile workforce. Challenging one's conditions of labour, complaining about living conditions on the farm, or refusing to work under unsafe working conditions are all behaviours that could lead to a worker being perceived as difficult and consequently not being “named” by their employer (Basok 120; Lowe 53; Pietropaolo 13; Verma 32). While the names of participants in *Faces of Farming* are foregrounded, their privileged position within Canada's agricultural economy as having

the capacity to name is not. Through their use of naming, the *Faces of Farming* portraits strategically draw attention to personality over practice (reasons for this will be explored later). This individualization contrasts with the photographs in *From One Place* where the photographer/worker focuses on practice as often as personality and the many photographs in *From One Place* and *Harvest Pilgrims* where workers are featured in small and large groups where there is no evident relation between the various workers save for the conditions of their temporary employment.<sup>58</sup>



(Pietropaolo 46)<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Pietropaolo does try as often as possible to document “names in the book so that [migratory farm workers] would not be rendered without identity in history” (Pietropaolo xiv). However, available names do not accompany the photographs directly but are, instead, recorded in an “Index to the Photographs” at the end of the book.

<sup>59</sup> Photographer’s note: “Priming or harvesting tobacco leaves at the end of the season. La Salette, Ont., 1984” (Pietropaolo 125).



(“From One” 13)

As the earlier examples from the *Faces of Farming* calendar evidence, while one is able to read some of the portraits as sexy, the images are for the most part meant to depict a wholesome yet sophisticated image of Ontario’s farmers. Although observers claim the calendars put a “new face on farmers” (Schaer) offering the public a “new and exciting image” (“Faces”) of farming in Ontario, in very conventional ways, the calendar still appeals to a popular sense of agriculture and the family farm spoken about earlier in this chapter, a concept of agriculture that invokes an “idyllic, pastoral life in the rural community” (Wall 25) with an emphasis on community and family.<sup>60</sup> Newman observes that every year the calendar helps “showcase family farming.” In the calendar, community connectedness is in one way established by calling attention to the

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<sup>60</sup> The characteristics discussed in the following passage are evident in but not particular to the images from the calendar I have included in this chapter – these are thematic trends that run throughout the calendar. Please consult Appendix 2 to read a transcription of all the biographies that accompany the images in the 2011 *Faces of Farming* calendar.

participant's connection to the land and agricultural life as second, third or fourth generation farmers. The rural community is also elevated as an ideal place to be – younger generations opting to return to the farm accentuating this point. In an article about the calendars, Janet Smaglinski, a 2010 calendar participant, describes her experience in agriculture: “It’s just a really noble job feeding people. And it’s nice, now that we have two young children . . . I’m able to have them with me much of the time. They get to have the rural lifestyle most kids don’t get to have” (qtd. in Newman). Offering a familiar hierarchical juxtaposition between the country and the city, Smaglinski’s comments elevate the rural setting as a better place to raise a family. It is likely migratory agricultural workers in southern Ontario would dispute the nobility of farm work in the province and contest the opinion that agricultural lifestyles in Ontario enhance family life for everyone involved.

The 2011 *Faces of Farming* calendar similarly portrays the rural locale as attractive to exurbanites (albeit unexpectedly) who take to the rural lifestyle characterized in these portraits as being community oriented and caring; most of the participants are depicted as infused with a sense of volunteerism, as coaches for sports teams and/or as participants in agricultural organizations. In addition, the calendar highlights family connections to farming as well as a general sense of family values represented pictorially as children and parents and/or husbands and wives are photographed together and most of the biographies mention time spent enjoying multigenerational connections between family members – children, siblings, parents and grandparents. While for migratory workers in southern Ontario agricultural practices are associated with a disconnection

from family and home, this alternate portrait presented in *Faces of Farming* appeals to a sense of rurality linked to conventional understandings of the family farm and its association with “traditional values.” Yet there is a twist. The fresh and young faces pictured here counter fears of rural depopulation explored in Chapter One and seem to dispel the negative stereotypes that associate closed-mindedness and backwardness with rurality. Hence, the significant focus on participants’ education and sense of culture – many of the young farmers are described as educated in either the science or business of farming; others cultivate high culture hobbies like tennis, photography, travelling and golf.

As one participant in the 2010 calendar, Mike Donnelly-Vanderloo, a bean grower and executive director of the Coloured Bean Association of Ontario, states, “We do believe strongly in promoting farming . . . A lot of people have no idea of what farming is all about” (qtd. in Rivers). Yet even though the organizers and participants believe the goal of the calendar is informational, as mentioned above the focus is on personalities rather than informing the public about practices, and this choice has a propagandistic effect. The program manager for the OFAC, Kelly Daynard, says “The goal [of the calendar] is to introduce consumers to people who grow their food” (Daynard qtd. in Rivers). Yet, how does knowing producers really contribute to a greater understanding of farming practices in southern Ontario? Daynard’s comments about new food movements offer a clue as to why creating closer connections between farmers and consumers is an important and advantageous endeavor: “books like the 100 Mile Diet have helped promote farming and foster a renewed interest in local food” (Rivers). The



thoughts of one important writer in the realm of contemporary food politics help us understand the project underfoot in *Faces of Farming*; Michael Pollan writes:

So many of the problems of the industrial food chain stem from its length and complexity. A wall of ignorance intervenes between consumers and producers, and that wall fosters a certain carelessness on both sides. Farmers can lose sight of the fact that they're growing food for actual eaters rather than for middlemen, and consumers can easily forget that growing good food takes care and hard work. In a long food chain, the story and identity of the food (Who grew it? Where and how was it grown?) disappear into the undifferentiated stream of commodities, so that the only information communicated between consumers and producers is a price. In a short food chain, eaters can make their needs and desires known to the farmer, and farmers can impress on eaters the distinctions between ordinary and exceptional food, and the many reasons why exceptional food is worth what it costs. Food reclaims its story, and some of its nobility, when the person who grew it hands it to you. So here's a subclause to the get-out-of-the-supermarket rule: *Shake the hand that feeds you*. (159-160, emphasis in original)

*Faces of Farming* attempts to shorten the food chain, to “bridge the gap between farmers and their customers” (“Faces”). In order to capitalize on the desire of many Ontarians to know where their food comes from and to allay consumer concerns about food safety, *Faces of Farming* tells stories intended to introduce consumers to Ontario growers as a means of bolstering a sense of trust and familiarity between producers and consumers, to create a virtual handshake, to tell *part* of food's story. As participant Jennifer Christie (June 2007) states, “There's such a disconnect right now among Ontario consumers and they don't know the people that produce the food that goes on their plate” (“Faces”).

Yet the calendars foster a relationship between producers and consumers on two actually contradictory fronts disguised through a clever elision of “old” and “new” farming frameworks that represents producers as “family” farmers, but of the “modern” educated variety. On the one hand, the makers of *Faces of Farming* want to define

southern Ontario agriculture as local, community oriented and infused with “traditional values,” while simultaneously wanting to position agricultural production in the province as also defined by modern, informed, technologically savvy and globally connected farming practices. The tension between these two representations is clearly enunciated in what could be read as a mission statement that closes the calendar and is offered in place of an image for January 2012:

I am a Canadian farmer.  
I am not Old MacDonald or a factory farmer.  
And I don't wear coveralls and rubber boots all the time.  
I use a computer, a tractor and a shovel on any given day.  
If they farm, I probably do know John and Liz and Wayne. And they are really nice people.  
I have a kitchen table, not a boardroom table.  
I am an active environmentalist.  
I can proudly stamp my flag on food shipped around the world.  
I believe in producing safe food.  
And more of it. On less land.  
The best in the world.  
If you ate today, think of me.  
I am a Canadian farmer. (Ontario Farm, *Faces*)

The way in which this statement plays with the form and content of the well-known and celebrated Molson Canadian beer commercial known as “The Rant” is unmistakable. In a similarly nationalist voice, visually enhanced by the way the text is superimposed on a watermarked image of a waving Canadian flag, it attempts to define Canadian farming and the average Canadian farmer as a whimsical amalgamation of family farmer yet global producer, technologically advanced yet not corporate, and, most importantly, ethically principled and proudly Canadian.<sup>61</sup> With the calendar's overall strong emphasis

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<sup>61</sup> Molson released its “The Rant” commercial in 2000. It was an extremely popular advertisement crafted around the Molson slogan “I am Canadian.” The advertisement was so popular that the actor Jeff Douglas,

on the family aspect of farming, this pairing of family tradition with modern techniques obscures the fact that the farming practices in which these farmers are educated, often clearly labelled in the calendar as agribusiness practices, and the agricultural associations that support the calendar and these same farming models, are the very same models that have contributed to the demise of the “family” farm. In addition, these models are frequently associated with unethical farming practices when it comes to environmental protection and the treatment of animals. However, the way *Faces of Farming* frames agribusiness makes it difficult for the public to decode this incongruity. In the public eye, educated farmers reassure the consumer that their food is produced in reliable, financially efficient, and safe ways. By presenting Ontario farmers as “family” farmers, the *Faces of Farming* taps into public misperceptions about the facelessness of agribusiness and misunderstandings about how “corporate family” farms are driven by the same motivations as other non-family owned agribusinesses. For instance, contemporary “family” farms that employ industrial farming techniques frequently rely on hired farm labour, some of this migratory, benefit from draconian farm labour regulations, and exploit the perception of the “vulnerability of family farming” (Basok 17) to maintain this status quo. While the *Faces of Farming* presents one image of “family” farming in southern Ontario, it only tells part of food’s story; a distinctly different reality for workers on these farms is omitted from the narrative:

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who plays the average Joe Canadian in the commercial, was invited to perform “The Rant” live in various cities around Canada, drawing significant crowds (“Selling Suds”). The pro-Canadian nationalist sentiment of the commercial is developed through a monologue delivered by Joe, which becoming increasingly animated in tone makes proud (yet also humorous) reference to Canada’s cultural distinctiveness in contrast to the United States.

In Ontario, farm workers are paid minimum wages and receive little protection from various labour laws (Schultz, 1987: 293). Their exclusion from most sections of the Employment Standards Act means they cannot form associations, and do not have to be paid vacation, sick and/or overtime pay. Pregnancy leave is not applicable, nor is there significant protection against unjust dismissal and discrimination in hiring and promotions. In addition, farm work has no limits on the number of hours worked or on the use of child labour.

The usual justification for this set of exclusions is the “special” nature of farming in Canada. In this case “special” means farming operations are perceived as mainly family enterprises where the division between the private and the public spheres is blurred. Those who picture agricultural activity in this way argue that hired farm labour cannot be treated like industrial labour with respect to hours, benefits, and general conditions. (Wall 192-3)

Some of these practices, although not without resistance by growers and grower advocates, have been or are poised to change. UFCW Canada (United Food and Commercial Workers International Union Canada), one of the principle advocates for the rights of migratory workers and resident farm labourers, recently won agricultural workers in Ontario the right to protection under the provincial Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) in 2005 (“UFCW” 9), and it finally secured the right through the Ontario Court of Appeal in 2008 for farm workers in Ontario to form associations (Pietro Paolo 17).<sup>62</sup> While the latter legal decision has been significant in bringing attention to the conditions of farm labour in the province and – hopefully – in leading to future improvements, it is interesting to note the difficulty of achieving these concessions. After all, the farm labour lobby was already underway in the early 1990s, yet has only been successful almost twenty years later; this protracted path to change is in

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<sup>62</sup> This decision, as of 2010, is still under appeal in the Supreme Court. However, as Pietro Paolo notes, “Given the legal precedents [in other Canadian provinces], it is likely that the final decision, when it comes, will be in the workers’ favour” (17).

no small part due to the counter-lobbies mobilized by agricultural associations on behalf of Ontario farmers (Wall 228-229). Despite the fact that farm labourers have been consistently denied the right to form associations, Wall ironically notes that “Farmers and growers . . . have never been prevented from creating organizations that represent their interests” (227). It is these same organizations that are propagating a particular image of southern Ontario farming through their participation in and financial support of publicity campaigns like *Faces of Farming*.

Through its perpetuation of the myth of family farming in Ontario and its reification of white rurality, the *Faces of Farming*, its producers and participants engage in what has been described as “New Racism”: “an historically embedded, pervasive, and usually unremarked upon form that racism takes in Canada. Distinct from institutional or individual racism, New Racism recognizes the very strong tenor within Canadian society that traditions and norms must continue, even if these implicate racist practices and representations” (Peake and Ray 185). Hence, in an propagandistic effort to “represent the true faces of Ontario farming” (“Faces”), a largely racialized workforce is concealed, unethical labour regulations are unmentioned, dependence upon migratory labour programs informed by racist categorizations of desirable and undesirable citizens are omitted, in favour of images of the professionalized, cultured and white family farmer: in reality, knowing the hobbies and educational background of producers like Holland Marsh vegetable farmer Kyle (featured March 2011) or Leamington greenhouse owner Dean Tiessen (featured May 2009) tell the public nothing about local food production practices in Holland Marsh and Leamington, two agricultural areas in southern Ontario

with high densities of migratory farm workers. As Pietropaolo rightly observes, a local grower does not necessarily contribute to local food production in the way local food movements speak of local food purportedly as being more environmentally friendly with respect to carbon emissions and ideally more ethically produced; in southern Ontario, local food does not guarantee ethical practices nor a reduction in carbon when we import an easily exploitable labour force from thousands of miles away to grow food locally (20). The farmers who fill the pages of *Faces of Farming* may be Canadian farmers producing food in Canada, but they are only one part of an agricultural system that for its sustainability requires sourcing large numbers of “local” workers extra-nationally. The nationalist affirmation that serves as the calendar’s final statement lingers in stark opposition to the government-sanctioned situation of migratory agricultural labourers in Canada who will never be able to claim “I am a Canadian agricultural labourer.”

While the producers of *Faces of Farming* hope to “dispel some of the myths and common stereotypes about today’s farmers” (“Classic”), one can only infer from the calendar what those myths and stereotypes might be. Clearly the calendar does little to dispel the stereotype of white southern Ontario rurality; its high gloss pages gloss over any presence of marginalized farm workers exempt from basic labour protection and practices that most Ontario workers take for granted, as well as the increasing racialization of southern Ontario’s agricultural labour force who actually do a significant proportion of our food growing work.<sup>63</sup> Otto’s portrait, exceptional in the history of the

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<sup>63</sup> As mentioned earlier, over half of all horticultural workers in southern Ontario are workers brought to the province through the SAWP (Pietropaolo 11). Using the findings of a research report produced by The North-South Institute, Preibisch and Binford offer an even more specific account of the agricultural labour supplied by SAWP participants: “From an important, minor complement to a Canada-based labour force in

calendar, offers a rare gesture toward racial diversity in rural southern Ontario in a pictorial narrative that is otherwise glaringly white. Notably, he is the only person of colour featured in the 2011 calendar – a progression from the 2010 calendar where all of the participants were white:



(Ontario Farm, *Faces*)

As the accompanying biography notes, Otto was born and raised in Guatemala. However, Otto's is not the only story of migration in the calendar, of which there are two – Otto and Barend, Marja & Matthijs. It is interesting to note that, as immigrant farmers

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1983, when they accounted for 18.2% of all workers and a lower 14.5% of 'hours supplied' in the important fruit, vegetable and tobacco sectors, foreign workers grew to 52.4% of the labour force and supplied 54% of total hours in 2000 in the two provinces hiring 90% of the workers, Ontario and Quebec (Weston and Scarpa de Masellis, 2003). Weston and Scarpa de Masellis conclude that Canadian seasonal agricultural 'workers can no longer be considered a minor part of the work force; in fact, if present trends continue, it is likely that [non-]Canadian workers will account for a larger share of total hours worked than Canadian workers' (2003:26)" (11).

from The Netherlands, Barend, Marja and Matthijs fit into the traditionally desirable category of agricultural immigrant (Abu-Laban 252; Coleman 22; Satzewich 119-20) while Otto falls into a less desirable category. While it is impossible to know the choices that have led to their different farming trajectories, it is still noteworthy that while both Otto and the Dutch family have resided in Canada for at least twenty years, Barend, Marja and Matthijs are farming owner-operators, yet Otto is a long-term hired farm worker, marking a distinct difference in status between the two immigrant portraits. Besides being the only person of colour in the 2011 calendar, Otto is also exceptional in being only one of two participants who work on farms rather than owning them (Katherine, featured in July, is the other exception in this respect). While one of the official stated aims of the calendar campaign is to show “diversity” in farming and “the diverse nature of Ontario agriculture” (“Faces”), the kind of ethnocultural diversity that Otto represents seems not to be what the designers had in mind. When literature about the calendars refers to diversity it primarily means diversity in the kinds of farm operations and types of agricultural production taking place in Ontario and that the farmers who own and run these operations have human interests beyond the farm. The producers of *Faces of Farming* attempt to include diversity as a means of combating the way “Rural spaces are . . . portrayed as locations that have been left behind in the drive to build diversified global economies and cultures” (O’Connell 542). However, this is a sanitized version of diversity, distanced from any connection to the marginalization of racially diverse members of their communities and agricultural economy.



*Faces of Farming* constructs a portrait of southern Ontario rurality devoid of any allusion to the reality depicted in *Harvest Pilgrims* and *From One Place*. As such, the makers of the calendar demonstrate a lack of interest in educating the public about the part racialized workers play in the story of Ontario's food production. With this in mind, it is difficult to embrace Blake's and Nurse's urging in their introduction to *The Trajectories of Rural Life: New Perspectives on Rural Canada* that "In considering matters of ethnic diversity, it is . . . important to resist the image of rural Canadians as backward, purely white, or representative of an older ideal of Canada" (ix). To support why this would be an erroneous perception of rural Canadians, Blake and Nurse go on to observe that "With the exception of First Nations, the people who live outside Canada's cities are, themselves, the descendants of immigrants. Their families came from Germany and Holland, China and the Ukraine, the United States and India, and many other countries" (ix). Offering a similar ethno-racial geography of rural southern Ontario, in a more detailed breakdown of ethnic diversity in the Leamington area Basok writes,

According to the 1996 population census, some 16,000 people of diverse ethnic backgrounds reside in Leamington. Even though some 4,800 stated in the census that they were immigrants, close to 5,400 people claimed that their mother tongue was neither English nor French. German and Portuguese speakers constitute the largest communities (2,165 and 1,065 people, respectively). In addition, 700 people reported Arabic and over 500 reported Italian as their mother tongue. Among the German-speakers very few were actually from Germany. Approximately one-half were German-speaking Mexican Mennonites. The rest of the German-speaking residents must have been other Mennonites born either in Russia, the United States, or Canada. The Arabic speakers were predominantly from Lebanon. Other immigrants whose mother tongue was neither English nor French came from various regions, including Western and Eastern Europe, South Asia, South-East Asia, the Caribbean, the Middle East, West Africa, and Central America. There is no available information on the ethnic origin of Leamington growers. However, by relying on the town of

Leamington directory of greenhouse growers I was able to use the growers' surnames as a rough indication of their ethnic background. Of 75 growers listed in the directory, 31 had Italian surnames, 18 had German surnames, and the rest represented diverse ethnic origins, including Portuguese, Chinese, Yugoslavian, British, and French. Among those with German surnames, most were probably descendants of Mennonite settlers. (Basok 44-45)

In these comments on the ethno-racial diversity of rural southern Ontario, we note first a familiar ghettoization of First Nation rurality. First Nation peoples figure nowhere in Basok's breakdown, despite the historic presence of the Caldwell First Nation (sometimes referred to as the Chippewas of Point Pelee) in the Leamington area.<sup>64</sup> In Blake's and Nurse's portrait, rather than constitutive of or integral to racial and ethnic understandings of rural Canada, First Nations exist in a category apart. Furthermore, they make no clear reference to large communities of migratory workers comprising part of the rural demographic. In addition, with few exceptions, although some ethnic groups mentioned by Basok, Blake and Nurse may not have been at one time considered "purely white," they have since, when necessary, been incorporated into understandings of Canadian whiteness. Thus, when trying to highlight the ethnic diversity of rural society in Canada, rural citizens like Barend, Marja and Matthijs may be read as representative of this diversity; however, they are also easily and seamlessly incorporated into an image of "rural southern Ontario where communities tend to be dominated by a 'WASP' culture" (Wall 249) in a way Otto cannot. The way Otto appears to stand out in rural society supports Cloke's observation that "'race' rather than ethnicity lies at the heart of

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<sup>64</sup> In 2010 the Caldwell First Nation reached a land claim settlement that will result in part in the establishment of an urban reserve in Leamington, Ontario. Historical documents providing archival evidence of the Caldwell's historic presence in the Leamington/Point Pelee region helped settle the claim and inform the decision to relocate the planned reserve from its initially proposed site in the region of Chatham-Kent (Shreve).

processes and practices by which people of colour are ‘othered’ in and by the rural” (23). Furthermore, the previously discussed class differences between Otto’s and Barend, Marja and Matthijs’s immigrant narratives reflect trends in Basok’s investigation wherein growers, a relatively powerful group in rural society, despite their various ethnic backgrounds, predominantly reflect white rurality, while the smaller category of “other immigrants,” representing the largest proponent of racial diversity, fit in elsewhere in the rural economy.

With this in mind, let us consider why Blake and Nurse encourage their readers to think about rural Canadians as forward-thinking, diverse, and inclusive. What exactly is this “older ideal of Canada” with which we ought not to associate rural Canadians? Interestingly, Blake’s and Nurse’s suggestion remind us of the objectives expressed by the makers of the *Faces of Farming*, and their lack of specificity recalls the vague reference to “rural stereotypes” the *Faces of Farming* publicity campaign hopes to dispel. Clearly, a similar impulse, not without precedent in the history of rural representation, courses through these preferred understandings of Canadian rural culture. This impulse is part of what Neil Chakraborti and Jon Garland argue in the British context is “a ‘no racism here’ mentality [that] permeates much popular imagery surrounding the rural, a line of thought that takes its basis from the rosy veneer that has shaped public opinion over the years” (1). In the Canadian context, this mentality is heavily shaped by multiculturalist discourses that encourage Canadians to espouse, among other things, “the philosophical *ideal* of ethnic pluralism in which diversity is both celebrated and respected” (Abu-Laban 250, emphasis in original). When Blake and Nurse advise that

rural Canadians should not be thought of as “representative of an older ideal of Canada” (ix), an ideal typified in what Coleman identifies as “earlier eras of monocultural nationalism in Canada” (7), it suggests to readers that rural Canadians also subscribe to multicultural principles. In this respect, so deep is the need to affirm that all Canadians are on board that even Pietropaolo, deeply invested in bringing attention to the marginalization of racialized migratory agricultural labourers, when speculating on the nuances of racialization, historicizes Canadian racisms as reflecting “subtle attitudes that are remnants of *prejudicial times of the past* in Canadian society” (23, emphasis mine). With all of these qualifications and reassurances in mind, let us be clear – not only has subtlety itself been explored as one defining feature of Canadian racisms (Brand and Bhaggiyadatta 4; Karumanchery 176; Peake and Ray 185), but there is nothing subtly racist about:

- logic that uses racist stereotypes to single out certain racial groups as suitable farm labourers but unsuitable Canadian citizens resulting in a government policy like the SAWP (Satzewich 179).
- the increase in demand for certain groups of workers over others based on racist fears and assumptions exhibited in grower and community attitudes.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Over the years, the proportion of Mexican workers requested by growers through the SAWP has outpaced Caribbean workers substantially (Think of who is absent in Basok’s portrait of migratory workers in the Leamington area.). Preibisch and Binford provide convincing arguments and evidence showing how anti-black fears of sexual fraternization (Preibisch and Binford 29-31), community “pressure to hire ‘Brown’ (Mexican) workers as opposed to ‘Black’ (Caribbean)” (29), and “racialized ideologies about the suitability of different nationalities to [perform better with] certain crops” (17; also see Satzewich 177) all explain this shift in migratory worker demographics. In accordance with Preibisch’s and Binford’s arguments, Basok also suggests, “It is possible that Canadian growers regard the inability of Mexican

- anecdotal reports claiming workers are prohibited from certain social spaces and unwarrantably monitored in others, as well as having been subject to violent attacks by “local” residents (Basok 125; Preibisch and Binford 30).<sup>66</sup>
- cultural texts like *Faces of Farming* that obfuscate the presence of marginalized workers of colour in rural southern Ontario, integral participants in the region’s agricultural economy, thus perpetuating a well established tradition of racist exclusions in Canadian society.

Although there is nothing exclusively rural about racist attitudes or behaviours in Canada, with significantly different agendas, the makers of and participants in *Faces of Farming* and commentators like Blake and Nurse all find themselves working against the

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workers to speak English as an advantage, since they are less likely to talk back to their employers and demand improvements in their working and housing conditions. Furthermore, there is virtually nothing to distract them from their total commitment to work. Whereas West Indian workers can easily communicate with Canadian residents in English and have made friends with some of them (Knowles 1997, 100), Mexican workers, who cannot do so, are less likely to socialize with people off the farm” (33). When considering the use of racist criteria to guide labour market practices, Wall argues that “the labour process exploits and entrenches [racist attitudes and structures] as they persist in the wider domain” (235). Making a gesture toward anti-black racism, Pietropaolo even suggests that activist work around and publicity about the plight of migratory workers in southern Ontario is disproportionately “directed at the Mexican workers” (23). Preibisch and Binford also note this trend (6). To their credit, both *Harvest Pilgrims* and *From One Place* notably deal with both major migratory worker populations.

<sup>66</sup> Referencing the 2008 Ontario Human Rights Commission report that addresses racist attacks in rural southern Ontario perpetrated against Asian Canadian fishers, titled *Fishing Without Fear: Report into the Inquiry into Assaults on Asian Canadian Anglers*, O’Connell observes how explanations for racist attacks on visible minorities in rural southern Ontario frequently present lack of exposure to people of colour as the root cause of this behaviour, an explanation she suggests is the product of blatant “historical amnesia” (554). O’Connell argues that “There was never any lack of exposure to racialized people as the report states. White settlers and their descendents actively fought for land and resources eventually outnumbering Indigenous communities and making settlement for black pioneers a difficult and dangerous proposition” (555). After tracing another attack on a black man near Owen Sound, a region of southern Ontario with a significant history of black settlement, O’Connell suggests that far from incomprehensible, as the attack was portrayed by local residents, there is a clear history of deliberate acts of violence, expulsion, and hostility that can explain why “this man was more out of place in 2008 than during the 1870s. Owen Sound’s black population was more prominent a century and a half ago than it is today” (554). Consequently, there is reason to believe that violent attacks on migratory workers are part of a pervasive historical effort to assert and maintain the white racial composition of rural space in southern Ontario.

stereotypical belief that there might be.<sup>67</sup> The stereotype that racism, while not exclusively rural, may be more overtly located and less sophisticatedly mobilized in the rural realm is closely associated with a broader rural stereotype represented by the figure of what, among other labels, is variously referred to as the “hick,” “hillbilly,” “redneck,” or “country bumpkin,” terms Barbara Ching argues are euphemistically related to the concept of “white trash” (“Acting” 233). While some rural advocates and commentators attempt to distance perceptions of southern Ontario rurality from this figuration – think back to the way *Faces of Farming* biographies emphasize “cultured” hobbies and education – as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, rural Ontarians like Fred Eaglesmith are less reticent to mine stereotypical understandings and disagreeable aspects of southern Ontario rurality. The fact that he does so complicates representations of whiteness currently emanating from rural southern Ontario.

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<sup>67</sup> A recent, highly publicized incident in the small rural town of Campbellford, Ontario, where two men arrived at the local Legion’s Halloween party, one dressed as a Ku Klux Klan member leading the other (a former police officer) wearing blackface by a noose, provides a revealing example of the yoking together of racism and rurality. While the overtly racist incident was later criticized by many town residents (and outsiders) as repugnant, the costumed pair originally won first prize in the party’s costume contest. The comments about this event made by a former Campbellford resident now living in Toronto speak to the stereotypical perceptions of rural society frequently expressed by outsiders: “Seaborn, who is white, said his former hometown is no hotbed of racism, but rather a ‘unicultural bubble’ where it is easier to be insensitive than in more-diverse [*sic*] communities. He called the costume prize ‘far more troubling, as it implies a general acceptance of something so obviously wrong,’ but had no explanation for it other than ‘some rural, institutionalized ignorance, lack of education and life experience outside the local culture bubble’” (Reinhart). Here, Seaborn enunciates the perception feared by many rural residents that outsiders characterize rural communities in southern Ontario as plagued by “institutionalized ignorance” and are therefore more likely to exhibit “backward” tendencies. In an attempt to combat this perception, the indignant outcry after the event reassured many Campbellford residents and former residents like Seaborn that this was an isolated incident, therefore recuperating belief in their community as by and large a tolerant and inclusive place to live and visit in accordance with Canadian understandings of multicultural progressiveness (Coleman 7), just as advertised by Campbellford’s business improvement association: “We are a very progressive place but we still cherish our ‘small-town’ feel” (“Campbellford”).

- **Talking Trash: Fred Eaglesmith and “White Trash” Cultures**

Eaglesmith is a southern Ontario-born and based independent Canadian singer-songwriter who has produced eighteen albums in his thirty-year career. A hardworking performer, he is renowned for his rigorous tour schedule, which includes several festivals he hosts for his fans to showcase other artists as well as his own music. Never having achieved significant commercial success, Eaglesmith nonetheless boasts a legion of Canadian and American fans so faithful they are known as Fredheads<sup>68</sup> and is well respected in the North American music industry, his songs having been covered by a number of more commercially successful artists including the Cowboy Junkies, Dar Williams, Mary Gauthier, Miranda Lambert, Toby Keith, and Alan Jackson.

Many of Eaglesmith’s songs focus on the experiences of white (frequently rural) working-class males. In this way we may be inclined to situate his music within a broader Canadian cultural movement, which parallels a similar American trend that Anne O’Connell suggests celebrates “the Canadian redneck as a form of rural pride” (537). Having explored this phenomenon through an examination of the Canadian Redneck Games, an annual event held in Minto, Ontario, O’Connell argues that this “celebration of the redneck . . . provides a conceptual space for rebellion and the contestation of tolerance and diversity” (551). However, as well as exhibiting these tendencies, Eaglesmith’s music also occasionally opens a space for the consideration of how white rural cultures marginalize other racialized rural populations. This tension in Eaglesmith’s music between a valorization of “white trash” identities and a more politically engaged

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<sup>68</sup> This name is an obvious play on the notoriously cultish fans of *The Grateful Dead* known as Deadheads.

race consciousness warrants investigation, particularly with respect to how his music is taken up by both rural and urban listeners in Canada and the United States.

In his song “Carmelita,” written “in southern Ontario, Canada, about migrant workers” (Eaglesmith, “Carmelita”), Eaglesmith sings from the perspective of a migratory worker on a tobacco farm in southern Ontario.<sup>69</sup> Amidst his telling of a story of love and loss, he depicts the daily social and labour conditions of migratory work in the region:

And I picked my last tobacco leaf  
Soaking wet up to my knees  
Out there before the sun is on the rise  
And you can have a drink of water  
But don't you look at my daughter  
Or I'll come down there  
And I'll cut you with this knife (Eaglesmith, “Carmelita”)

Here listeners are exposed to the exertions of long hours (at work before dawn) of physical and uncomfortable (in this case wet) labour as well as prejudicial attitudes of some “locals” expressed in this scenario as anxiety about potential sexual relations between migratory workers and Canadian women. Taking into account the conditions of migratory work in southern Ontario thus far discussed, in this song, Eaglesmith demonstrates a fairly well-informed understanding of the social dynamics experienced by members of this labour force; he also shows an awareness of the punitive methods used to control worker behaviour (the ever-present threat of repatriation) and makes a direct correlation between inequitable treatment and race:

And there ain't any flack man

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<sup>69</sup> See Appendix 3 for complete song lyrics. Access audio for the song at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=On33QhZZgLI>.



If you're a black man  
They put you on a plane  
Back to where you're from

Having been born and raised in rural southern Ontario in the 1950s, it is not unusual that Eaglesmith would have grown up with an awareness of the presence of migratory workers in his community. What is unusual is that Eaglesmith openly addresses the inequities of this socio-economic system in his music rather than distancing his depictions of rural southern Ontario from this reality, as do the makers of *Faces of Farming*. Instead, taking up the cause of migratory workers, “Carmelita” aligns itself with the aims of *Harvest Pilgrims* and *From One Place*. It would be simple if the story could end there, with Eaglesmith positioned as an astute and critical rural commentator, willing to admit to the presence of racist attitudes and behaviours in his own community, but this positioning is inconsistent and seemingly incompatible with the other kinds of rurality Eaglesmith celebrates through his music.

In actual fact, Eaglesmith’s musical sympathies openly lie more often with “tried-but-true blue-collar guys, tired cowboys . . . bare-knuckled farmers” (“Eaglesmith Returns”) rather than with the likes of migratory workers, the themes of “struggling farmers and hard travelling” having emerged and persisted in his music since his first albums in the early 1980s (Campbell 53). His interest in these themes is grounded in his personal background: Roddy Campbell explains that, considering Eaglesmith’s upbringing “in a beleaguered farming community, his sympathies for the underdog are understandable” (53). Yet beyond sympathetic, and unlike other efforts afoot in southern Ontario to unhinge the connection between backwardness and the rural, Eaglesmith

creates a stage persona and frequently adopts the voice, in his music, of personalities listeners may be inclined to associate with the stereotype of the rural “hick,” “redneck,” or with “white/trailer trash”; this perception is encouraged by his use of a southern American accent when singing and speaking, his reliance on non-standard English idioms frequently associated with the lower-class, his choice of musical genre (country) and certain instruments (banjo), and the predominance of particular themes in his music.<sup>70</sup> For instance, Eaglesmith sets the scene of his song “Time to Get a Gun” with the opening statement “my neighbor’s car got stole last night” (Eaglesmith, “Time”) – note the use of “got stole” – which then proceeds in a spirit of me-against-the-man and vigilante justice, attitudes evocative of some strains of Republicanism in the United States (and, more recently, the Tea Party movement) and support for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment right to bear arms, punctuated by the chorus:<sup>71</sup>

time to get a gun  
that’s what i been thinking  
i could afford one  
if i did just a little less drinking  
time to put something  
between me and the sun  
when the talking is over  
it’s time to get a gun

Aligning itself with rural anxieties about the changing nature of rural society in North America, the song expresses fear about outside problems literally making inroads into rural places. In “Time to Get a Gun,” this is evidenced through a rise in crime depicted as

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<sup>70</sup> It is also worthwhile noting that “Eaglesmith” is an Anglicization of Fred Eaglesmith’s original family name “Elgersma,” a family name with Frisian origins. The choice of “Eaglesmith” as a stage name connects Eaglesmith’s performance persona with the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture most frequently associated with the dominant rural culture in southern Ontario.

<sup>71</sup> See Appendix 3 for complete song lyrics. Access audio for the song at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xhbIu6XICE>.

hitherto not present in rural society – the theft of a neighbour’s car motivating a change in rural lifestyle; for instance “mary says / she’s going to lock the door / from now on when we go away.” However, it is the appearance of “a government man” who brings news of “plans for a four-lane highway / and a big ole overpass” that ultimately demonstrates the singer’s sense of helplessness in the face of these changes, this situation functioning as a microcosmic representation of the increasing sense of political powerlessness expressed in many rural communities.<sup>72</sup> The singer’s lack of agency is expressed through the inability to have one’s concerns heard. Since “the talking is over,” the purchasing of a gun is presented as the singer’s only recourse to regaining a sense of power and control.

Considering the disturbing connotations associated with the hard-drinking, gun-toting white male, why does Eaglesmith frequently celebrate this kind of figure in his music and cultivate a stage persona that aligns him with the personalities who populate his songs? By taking into account the demographic to whom Eaglesmith’s music is conventionally assumed most likely to appeal, we might speculate that his performance persona would likely connect him with his audience.<sup>73</sup> Barbara Ching argues that “While not necessarily rural, country music listeners are not often found among the elite.

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<sup>72</sup> The *Edible Toronto* article “Don’t Let Them Pave Over Our Farm” by Max Lass, owner of Church Hill Farm in New Hamburg, Ontario, offers a real-life example of this predicament. With his property threatened by a proposed road expansion to deal with highway congestion, Lass appeals to urban readers in Toronto and the surrounding area, “it most certainly won’t be the first time that the agricultural community protests such lunacy. But our community is small and our voice might not be heard without your support. We need you to help send a message to our politicians that we do not want further destruction of some of our most valuable natural resources” (7). In this case, Lass is still hopeful about the possibility of peaceful lobby efforts; however, the sense of voicelessness and powerlessness is the same.

<sup>73</sup> For more information about the stereotypical associations attached to country-music listeners as well as the evolution in country-music audiences, please consult the introduction to this chapter. For an in depth discussion of contemporary and historical country-music listener demographics, see Barbara Ching’s *Wrong’s What I do Best: Hard Country Music and Contemporary Culture*, Ching’s article “Acting Naturally: Cultural Distinction and Critiques of Pure Country” in *White Trash: Race and Class in America*, and Karl Hagstrom Miller’s *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow*.

Sociological research indicates that country music plays in the space of white Americans who are on the whole less educated and hold low status jobs” (“Acting” 232-3). Thus the fact that Eaglesmith’s music “respond[s] to disappointment in classic American ways, like drinking, getting a gun, thinking about God, hitting the road” (Pareles) may play well to the conventional American country-music listener. One fan goes so far as to proclaim that Eaglesmith’s music “makes [him] proud to be an American” (Ford). Eaglesmith’s grounding in and commitment to rural and working class society is persistently reaffirmed in reviews, interviews and articles about Eaglesmith and his music, which almost always mention Eaglesmith’s impoverished rural upbringing as one of nine children in an unsuccessful southern Ontario farming family; the fact that he has also farmed in his adult life; and/or that he resides and records in Port Dover, a small rural town in southern Ontario. Indeed, in an article about Eaglesmith titled “Working Class Guru,” Anne Lawrence Guyon calls attention to Eaglesmith’s “authenticity” and accentuates how motivational “substance and veracity” are for his creative process.

However, Eaglesmith’s music is popular with a wide audience that extends beyond the traditional realms of country music (note the above Pareles review appeared in *The New York Times*, not the customary newspaper choice for “white Americans who are on the whole less educated and hold low status jobs”). He is described as at home in both thoroughly “urban venues” as well as the “isolated rural venues that often need a good scrub before a performance” (Campbell 50). His versatility in this respect has led to his cross-over musical style being described as a “challenging, innovative, boundary-blurring bluegrass, folk and alt country” (50). With this in mind, I am not the first to

wonder how Eaglesmith's music plays for an urban, upwardly mobile crowd, to fans like Shaunt Parthev, the "Armenian immigrant who has never lived on a farm, [and] Saskatoon lawyer who pilots a Jaguar rather than a tractor" featured in *The StarPhoenix* article "Eaglesmith Secret Too Well Kept: Shaunt Parthev is Definitely Not Your Typical Country Music Fan." How, for instance, does a song like "White Trash" resonate for Parthev?

In live performances, at the end of his song "White Trash," Eaglesmith asks audience members to sing along with him, first the women, then the men, then the particular community as a whole, together repeatedly asking "When, exactly, did we become white trash?"<sup>74</sup> Audience members, who can often be heard laughing in live recordings of this song, may treat this as a comical exercise; after all, unlike the couple depicted in the rest of the song, they may not be heavy drinking, mobile-home-living people. They may not own seven dogs and may drive cars in decent states of repair. Yet, beyond the humour of the moment, the question is at least thought-worthy and possibly at some level anxiety-provoking. What does it mean to be "white trash" and, considering the rootedness of much of Eaglesmith's music in southern Ontario, does this concept signify differently in Canada than it would in the United States?<sup>75</sup> How do characters who typify white trashiness fit into Canadian culture? White trash theorists locate the origins of the term in certain specific regions of the United States, primarily the Appalachian region and the South, particularly Tennessee, West Virginia and Kentucky (Hartigan,

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<sup>74</sup> See Appendix 3 for complete song lyrics. Access audio for the song at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8C2re3oG1y8>.

<sup>75</sup> Henceforth, when I use the term "white trash" or variation of this label without quotation marks, I am employing the term as a conceptual designation rather than as a derogatory label, even though the concept has both positive and negative connotations.

“Unpopular” 318). However, use of the term “white trash” and associated terms like “hillbilly” and “redneck” now extend beyond regional specificities to enunciate a broader category of socially marked whites. While historically associated with the United States, it would be difficult to suggest, with cultural contributions like *Trailer Park Boys*, artists like Fred Eaglesmith and events like the Canadian Redneck Games, that Canadian culture has not been influenced by and contributed to representations of white trash culture. In “An Exploration of Redneck Whiteness in Multicultural Canada,” O’Connell remarks that in recent years there has been a “cultural explosion of white trash and redneck identities in music, television and film in North America” (546).<sup>76</sup>

J.W. Williamson makes a case for what he describes as “our ambiguous need for hillbillies” (ix) – this ambiguity driven by both the seductive and repulsive qualities that draw audiences to celebrate and denigrate the figure of the hillbilly in popular culture. Williamson describes the hillbilly figure as an archetypal expression not only of a set of behaviours and attitudes but also of the way in which these characteristics are shaped by socio-economic status, a factor that closely ties the hillbilly to other socio-economic inflected labels like “white trash” and “hick” used to delineate subcategories of whiteness. Williamson observes that, while the hillbilly is frequently associated with a particular locale (the rural realm), geography is not necessarily a defining characteristic. According to Williamson, in tandem with the rural habitat in which the mythos of the

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<sup>76</sup> Some studies that consider the use of labels like “white trash,” “redneck,” “hillbilly,” and other associated terms draw attention to the historical and current nuances distinguishing the meanings of these labels. Other studies use these terms interchangeably or show a preference for one term even though others could be easily substituted without substantially altering the premise of the argument. In this dissertation, I cite whichever term is used in the original but generally opt for “white trash” when the choice is mine. For the purposes of my analysis, focusing on some of the differences between the various terms is not relevant.

hillbilly is located, in all realms where the hillbilly makes an appearance, he or she exists always “on the rough edge of the economy” (ix) as “a symbolic nonadult and willful renegade from capitalism” (ix) who functions as a vehicle through which audiences explore and sometimes revel in behaviours and beliefs that rub up against the ingrained decorum, expectations and desires of late capitalist Western democracies: “coated in barnyard . . . [hillbillies] perversely refuse to modernize, obviously miss the need to be embarrassed. Free of our squeamishness, the hillbilly thrives in squalor. He’s the shadow of our doubt” (ix).<sup>77</sup> This explains why frequently “hillbillies in the mass media are there to make the normative middle-class urban spectator feel better about the system of money and power that has him or her in its grasp” (20). Yet beyond these classist self-assurances, Hartigan points to the way white trash discourse becomes a social means to “achieve some distance from . . . those volatile social dangers of racism and sexism. Part of what the epithet ‘white trash’ expresses is the ‘general view’ held by whites that there are only a few extreme, dangerous whites who are really racist or violently misogynist, as opposed, for instance, to a notion that racism is an institutional problem pervading the nation and implicating all whites in its operation” (“Unpopular” 324). As previously discussed, this was precisely the recourse taken in responding to the KKK costume incident in Campbellford.

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<sup>77</sup> Williamson’s language is intentionally gendered, since he contends that the hillybilly figure, as it is represented in popular culture, is most commonly male. About representations of the hillbilly female (to which he devotes a chapter of his book), he writes: “Even as a she, the hillbilly is often a mock male” (ix).

Yet, a more recent cultural phenomenon draws on white trash aesthetics and behaviour in a celebratory rather than denigrating fashion. Hartigan writes that in America

The status of “white trash” has reached an interesting threshold: it is passing very rapidly from an unambiguously derogatory label to a transgressive sign under which certain whites are claiming a public speaking position. “White trash”, until very recently, was used solely in a disparaging fashion, inscribing an insistence on complete social distance from problematic white bodies, from the actions, smells and sounds of whites who disrupted the social decorums that have supported the hegemonic, unmarked status of whiteness as a normative identity in this country. But in popular cultural productions, “white trash” is used increasingly as a means of self-identification. Such usages were rare prior to 1980. Assertions of “white trash” as a form of self-designation, though, have not dispelled the term’s negative connotations; rather, they coexist in a confusing series of cultural exchanges, largely between whites of distinct class backgrounds. (“Unpopular” 317)

With respect to the recuperation of white trash identities in Canada, O’Connell argues that the redneck, in particular, has become a celebratory figure for certain white Canadians (often but not exclusively rural): “Able to ridicule the apparent political correctness of diversity policies, rural rednecks have capitalized on a conservative politics that features whiteness in ways that multicultural policies either ignore or claim do not exist” (538). However, O’Connell also documents the way in which significant efforts are made when it comes to official celebrations of redneck identity, like the Canadian Redneck Games, which receives substantial funding from the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Culture (551), to distance redneck identity from its racist associations.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> O’Connell notes that “The Canadian Redneck Games have been rated the number one festival by CBC Radio Ottawa and as one of the Top 100 things to do in Ontario by Festivals and Events in Ontario” (550-1). Bolstering this official cultural support for the games, she documents that “In 2010, the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Culture awarded \$32,000 to the games in Minto [and that] numerous local businesses and national corporations sponsor the event” (551).



O’Connell observes how, instead, the Canadian Redneck Games are marketed as “good clean Canadian fun” thus taking up “a national script that quietly associates rural whiteness with good clean Canadian family values absented of racial thinking” (552).

However, through his use of the more racially charged term “white trash,” Eaglesmith’s music mobilizes what Hartigan identifies as “a confusing series of cultural exchanges, largely between whites of distinct class backgrounds” (“Unpopular” 317). After all, unlike the Canadian Redneck Games enjoyed mostly by white Canadians who identify at some level with a rural culture they feel is therein celebrated (O’Connell 551), Eaglesmith’s music appeals to both rural audiences and urban-identifying audiences. As such, his music finds itself taken up within a slippery terrain of signifying white trash that has coincided with the rise of white trash chic, an ironic adaptation of white trash aesthetics that allows principally urban whites to revel in transgressive aspects of white trashiness in what has been described as a troubling search for authenticity frequently sought by “mimic[king] the culture of the lower class” (Bettez Halnon qtd. in Mui). The self-awareness of this performance functions to distance the performer from both the more troubling attitudes associated with the label as well as from any form of “social obligation” (Bettez Halnon qtd. in Mui) to understand and respond to the socio-economic contexts that define and produce the traditional bearers of the white trash label.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> A number of theorists have taken up this necessary task (see Annalee Newitz and Matt Wray (editors), *White Trash: Race and Class in America*; Ashley Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (editors), *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism*). Importantly, the second collection of essays includes Margaret Andersen’s essay “Whitewashing Race: A Critical Perspective on Whiteness,” where she critiques the way in which whiteness studies has played a role in the re-institutionalization of white scholars, who make up the bulk of the field, granting these scholars more terrain in an institutional culture in which they are already favoured. Moreover, Andersen draws attention to the ways in which studies of whiteness often

Exploring the marketing of white trash, one commentator writes, “Once strictly a pejorative label with racist undertones, the term ‘white trash’ is now being taken up by marketers and retailers. Call it white-trash chic, redneck couture or trailer fabulous – whatever it is, the idea is to make it cool” (Mui). In making this conceptual shift, at least in the decidedly urban realms of cool, Simon Sinek argues the term “has shed its connotations of rural poverty and poor education” (qtd. in Mui). According to Rebecca Kirkendall, “Despite their disdain for farm life – with its manure-caked boots, long hours and inherent financial difficulties – urbanites rush to imitate a sanitized version of this lifestyle. And the individuals who sell this rendition understand that the customer wants to experience hillbillyness without the embarrassment of being mistaken for one” (qtd. in Hartigan, “Who” 103). In this way, “true” white trashiness is still housed elsewhere (most frequently in the non-urban setting) (Newitz and Wray 7).

When certain, particularly young, urbanites mimic white trash identity, it is not in the way identified by O’Connell wherein some white Canadians earnestly “cast [the redneck] as a minority identity and one injured by economic suffering, isolation, exclusion, and more specifically marginality” (547). Rather it is conceived of as an ironic post-racial performance. These kinds of performances of white trash identities are frequently adopted where the belief circulates that we have arrived (and, here, the “we” may encompass a group as small as a circle of friends or extend out to incorporate a particular social milieu, a city, or even a nation) at the post-racial society Goldberg imagines in *The Racial State*. Goldberg imagines this as a society where “racial

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focus on white identity without tackling in any significant way white racism or white privilege (from which poor whites still benefit), thus inadequately contributing to a politics of anti-racism and racial equality.

configuration” has been transformed “from the dispositions of homogenizing exclusion and exclusivity . . . towards heterogenizing openness and incorporation, social engagement and shaping to reflect the interests and conceptions of all” (242). For Goldberg this is only a hypothetical and incomplete social configuration that is both untenable and undesirable if the post-racial state does not move further to become to a post-racist state.<sup>80</sup> The problem, however, is that the ironic performer of white trashiness operates as though the post-racial state is already upon us (or is at least close enough), which is not actually the case. As a consequence, the irony of this performance may be lost on some marginalized whites and people of colour who are still affected by an absence of class privilege and/or the presence of racist attitudes and behaviours associated with white trash identities.

Watching Eaglesmith perform in a cowboy hat paired with a black sparkling blazer, these days accompanied by a young female drummer and a fairly hip looking young man playing the upright bass, it is clear Eaglesmith understands the doubleness of white trash discourse, adopting it earnestly and/or ironically depending on the audience. This mobility explains the incongruities frequently noted between his rural working-class background, a music career dedicated to singing about cowboys, truckers, guns, trains and tractors, and other more anomalous features of Eaglesmith’s personality – the fact that he has recently taken up painting as a serious part of his artistic career, that he “runs his farm entirely on wind and solar energy” (Gavin), or that, while he may not strictly

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<sup>80</sup> Goldberg suggests that “Post-racist (in contrast to merely post-racial) states must be those for which state agencies, and most notably law, are vigorous both in refusing racist practice and in public representation of the unacceptability of all forms of discriminatory expression” (248).

define himself as a Buddhist, he is a serious reader of Buddhist philosophy. It remains uncertain to me whether, when Eaglesmith plays with white trash identity in “a representational approach that purports to merge ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture” (Hartigan, “Who” 106), he contributes critically or conservatively to the way rurality is imagined in southern Ontario.

In one way, Eaglesmith’s music and personality deterritorialize white trash discourse, clearly extending its American roots from the “Trash Belt” (Friend 4) northward, calling attention to classed and racialized whitenesses in rural southern Ontario (aspects of rural southern Ontario eagerly masked by the producers of *Faces of Farming*) and entering them into the discourse of what Peake and Ray have referred to as the “Psychic negotiations of whiteness” (181). Yet, on the other hand, extending his performance of white trash into the urban realm, does Eaglesmith contribute to a depoliticized culture of white trash chic that reaffirms a sense of progressiveness in urban whites as they denigrate through their own ironic performances or celebrations of white trash their imagined less cultured rural counterparts, obfuscating their shared complicity in systems of racial privilege (and, with the scope of this chapter in mind, racist exploitation through their common participation in contemporary food culture in Canada that is dependent on marginalized racialized labour)? As Hartigan observes, “representations of racism in popular culture continue to rely disproportionately upon images of ‘rednecks,’ ‘hillbillies,’ and ‘white trash.’ Hence one critical tactic to deconstruct whiteness involves recognizing the complex and emotionally charged contests over belonging and difference that engage whites intraracially” (“Who” 111). In

his ambiguous performance of rural and working-class whiteness, it has always been my sense that Eaglesmith contributes to this kind of necessary intraracial conversation. It is this ambiguity in his musical aesthetic that drew me to Eaglesmith and his music in the first place. Yet now, when the time has finally come to position him in my discussion of race and rurality, I am still unsure of how he operates in this respect and whether too much of Eaglesmith's potential to positively contribute to a more nuanced understanding of race, class and rurality in southern Ontario is dependent on the listeners' power to make Eaglesmith operate in selective ways that speak to this purpose. Perhaps for now, Eaglesmith and his music can function as an open-ended question that draws our attention to the nuanced geographies of Canadian whiteness and challenges the homogenized and sanitized representation of whiteness in rural southern Ontario forwarded by the *Faces of Farming* calendar.

- **Belonging / Here**

The faces of farming explored in this chapter offer quite varied and sometimes incompatible representations of southern Ontario rurality. They tell distinctly different stories about social and economic cultures in rural southern Ontario. In many ways, all present particular versions of who is here in southern Ontario's rural space that are reminiscent of the familiar narrative relationships between oppressor and oppressed, as elaborated by Leeno Luke Karumanchery:

in this time, space, and place in Canada, the social, political, and historical fabric of existence has constituted a relationship between oppressor and oppressed. This is a relationship constructed through discourse, and

through the institutional structures that work to subjugate the margins. Canadian space is racialized, and, as such, everyone within its national boundaries has become framed along racial lines. But importantly, the oppressor has mapped out social space in ways that normalize, idolize, and reify his image, knowledge, and experience – it is as much about identity and belonging as it is about the manifest act of possession. Simply put, space and place are not coterminous, and so real inclusivity cannot be about the marginalized gaining access to physical space alone, but must also include the intangible “cultural” qualities that speak to belonging. (175)

The first half of this chapter’s examination of the structural necessity of migratory labour to sustain current agricultural practices in southern Ontario explores one institutional structure in Canada that subjugates marginalized migratory workers from the global South and creates oppressive farm labour practices in Canada. An examination of *Faces of Farming*, *Harvest Pilgrims*, and *From One Place to Another/Las dos realidades* offers a better understanding of the visual discourse that attempts to shape the contours of belonging in southern Ontario, moving us toward an understanding of “the politics and relations of representations” (Walcott, *Black* 141) of race and rurality in southern Ontario. However, as Karumanchery asserts, “inclusivity cannot be about the marginalized gaining access to physical space alone, but must also include the intangible ‘cultural’ qualities that speak to belonging” (175). Hence, merely representing racialized presences in southern Ontario as being here does not necessarily alter the condition under which these communities operate as part of the rural economy, neither does it guarantee a sense of belonging in rural society in the province. As we know, the dynamics of the SAWP program that brings racialized workers to rural southern Ontario also guarantees their temporary presence in the province, what Pietropaolo refers to as a “permanent temporariness” (18).

The photographs that make up the collections *Harvest Pilgrims* and *From One Place to Another/Las dos realidades* clearly call attention to this transient reality of migratory work. In an obvious way, the title *From One Place to Another/Las dos realidades* invokes both mobility in the case of the English title and a bifurcated reality in the case of the Spanish. Many of the *From One Place* photographs speak to this sense of in-betweenness. For instance, the following photograph of a young man's feet visible underneath the Trinidadian and Tobagonian flag he holds positions a body between two nations, the feet firmly planted in one nation while the hands hold on to another:



(“From One” 61)

In another photograph, a man holds a picture from home of what appears to be a man (perhaps this man) holding a baby, a baby who is growing up in a distant elsewhere with an absent father. The photograph highlights the child who is centrally positioned in the image, and the child's remoteness is accentuated by his or her lack of focus:



(“From One” 60)

The photograph within a photograph stands in contrast to the clearly focused holder’s hand hovering over the foreign landscape in which he finds himself. Both of the *From One Place* photographs contrast sharply with the sense of rootedness conveyed by the frequently multigenerational farming families portrayed in *Faces of Farming*.

In more subtle ways, Pietropaolo’s title *Harvest Pilgrims* invokes both a sense of return and repetition through the use of “harvest” and the idea of travelling with the use of “pilgrim,” yet stretches to a deeper level when we look to the origins of the word “pilgrim,” which we find rooted in the Latin “stranger.” It is this deeper meaning that touches closer to the reality confronted when this migratory work force returns to rural southern Ontario year after year. Of course, both collections also call attention to the duality of migratory work by photographing both the homeland and hostland. Karumanchery uses the term “homeland” “in reference not only to a migrant’s region or country of origin but also to those places with which migrants identify themselves” and



“hostland” “in reference to the nation or region in which such migrants presently reside” (192). When migratory workers spend significant parts of the year away from their countries of origin, the affiliations that structure hostland and homeland belongings become increasingly confused. In response to a question about the theme of home in *Harvest Pilgrims*, Pietropaolo wonders,

If you leave your home, can you ever go back to it? I did go to the homes, in Mexico and Jamaica and in Montserrat, of some of the workers whom I had met in Ontario. I discovered that when the men go back home . . . it isn't really home for them any more. I think they find that they belong a little less each time they go back . . . And certainly they don't belong in Canada, in terms of home, because their Canadian home is a temporary one. (qtd. in Macleod 25)

In many ways, the viewer experiences these slippages in both collections by often being unable to immediately recognize whether a particular photograph is set in Canada or in an elsewhere home that, with each protracted sojourn in Canada, becomes increasingly difficult to define as such.

However, while cultural representations like *Harvest Pilgrims* and *From One Place* are part of a growing body of work that calls attention to the presence of migratory workers in southern Ontario, it is necessary to recognize how the effort to make these racialized presences known facilitates the erasure of others in racially amnesic narratives about Canada's national history and identity. For instance, Dionne Brand contends that “The perception of Black peoples as existing in a state of migrancy further contributes to this construction of invisibility, a construction which legitimizes the racist underpinnings of Canadian society” (qtd. in Peake and Ray 183). As scholars such as Phaniel Antwi, Lily Cho, Rinaldo Walcott and Robin Winks have been tracing, immigrant peoples of

colour have a long history in rural southern Ontario. According to Walcott's logic, the fact that Peake and Ray can assert that "In the national imaginary the 'real' Canada – Canada as the great white north – lies beyond the nation's largest cities in the countryside and small towns (also overwhelmingly white)" (180) is only possible because of a concerted and sustained effort to absent people of colour from the rural landscape ("Who is she" 35). The subtle ways in which this is accomplished is discernible in dominant narratives of rural Ontario history, like the following:

Ontario has been known as a cultural mosaic, but its landscape is in large measure a melting pot . . . During the 1840s Dawn Township, near Chatham, was the promised land for hundreds of escaped American slaves who took up small lots along roads occupied by Scots and English; established residents showed the way for these destitute immigrants, who followed by example, and as a result *the Ontario landscape has no distinct physical markers from that immigration today*. (McIlwraith 300-301, emphasis mine)

Here McIlwraith is perhaps not only overly charitable in depicting early Canadians as benevolent welcomers and Canada as an unequivocal safe haven for settlers of colour, but he also misleads readers with respect to the absence of physical markers of black immigration to the province. While McIlwraith acknowledges a history of black settlement in rural southern Ontario, he argues that the physical and cultural impressions left by black settlers as evidence of their presence here are less discernible than those of white settlers. This argument has the effect of rendering black Canadian historical presence in rural southern Ontario less easily traceable and thus more difficult to position centrally in Canada's colonial history. In *Hidden Signs, Haunting Shadows: Literary Currencies of Blackness in Upper Canada*, Phaniel Antwi demonstrates how the political practice of making black settler presences more visible as part of early Canada's colonial

history, thus representing white migrations to Canada as one of many migrations, shakes the foundations of dominant Canadian settler narratives and frontier mythologies. Elizabeth Furniss argues that, in Canada, these colonial discourses are “framed by a particular historical epistemology that celebrates the ‘discovery’ of a rich, ‘empty’ land by non-Aboriginal explorers and settlers” (187). As Furniss’s study shows, frontier mythologies erase both indigenous presences and other people of colour from Canada’s early history by inevitably presenting these explorers and settlers as white (56). In contrast to McIlwraith’s account, as Walcott clearly argues, incidents in Ontario like the 1996 renaming of Negro Creek Road clearly reveal that efforts to absent racialized presences from Canadian history are frequently not accidental side effects of processes of integration:

the offensively stupid claim of Holland Township Council that using the word Negro in the 1990s was uncomfortable, led that council to change the name of Negro Creek Road to Moggie Road. Renaming the road after George Moggie, a white settler, was yet another paragraph in the continuing story of the ways in which Canadian state institutions and official narratives attempt to render blackness outside of those same narratives, and simultaneously attempt to contain blackness through discourses of Canadian benevolence. Thus, blackness in Canada is situated on a continuum that runs from the invisible to the hyper-visible. (44)<sup>81</sup>

Walcott succinctly points out how a racialized population, like the Mexicans of Basok’s portrait, can at once be both invisible and too visible. As Walcott observes, the effective erasure of blackness in this instance is accomplished under a contemporary guise of benevolence that echoes McIlwraith’s historical portrait of the kind and helpful white

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<sup>81</sup> In the introduction to *Gothic Canada: Reading the Spectre of a National Literature*, Justin D. Edwards provides an excellent reading of *Speakers for the Dead* (2000), a film that documents a similar situation involving a “forgotten cemetery” (xii) in Priceville, Ontario.

Canadian settler showing the way for the “destitute” runaway slaves who settled amongst them.<sup>82</sup> This charitable image of white Canadians is echoed in the paternalistic relationships cultivated between growers and their hired migratory workers. Preibisch and Binford suggest that, in addition to overt racism manifested in physical violence directed at migratory workers and attitudes that position these workers as outsiders in the local community, rural racisms are frequently “channeled through a series of paternalistic ideologies and practices that make it possible for their bearers to ensure, before themselves and members of the rural community in which they reside, that they are determinately not ‘racists’” (15-16).

Warranting closer attention, one photograph in *Harvest Pilgrims* brings these tensions between racialization and migrancy, the concealment of racialized ruralities, and white benevolence into focus:

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<sup>82</sup> This portrait is clearly undermined by Antwi in his analysis of the Charivari scene in Susanna Moodie’s *Roughing It in the Bush*, in which white Ontarians “welcome” racialized presences in the province by dragging a black man from his home and killing him for having the audacity of integrating too well with his marriage to a white woman. Furniss notes how concepts of benevolence are fundamental to Canadian settler narratives and that in the Canadian context “benevolence has been transformed into an icon of national identity, serving as a founding concept by which non-Aboriginal people understand and legitimate their ongoing relationships with Aboriginal peoples” (187) and, I would suggest, also with other Canadians and Canadian residents of colour.



(Pietropaolo 72-73)<sup>83</sup>

This photograph, which also appears on the back cover of *Harvest Pilgrims* and on the front cover of Basok's *Tortillas and Tomatoes: Transmigrant Mexican Harvesters in Canada*, shows Mexican migratory workers at the beginning of their work sojourn in Canada being taken shopping for supplies. The image of the workers transported in the back of a truck covered by a structure that resembles a meagre dwelling is highly evocative of the mobility and transience of their lives and labour. Additionally, the way in which the truck's covering conceals the workers as they pass through the town reminds the viewer of how these workers and their labour is largely invisible to the Canadian public. In this image the workers are situated in a makeshift home that is literally on the move. The trip they are making, facilitated by their employer, also illustrates how

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<sup>83</sup> Photographer's note: "On their first morning in Canada, Mexican workers are taken shopping for food and supplies. St. Catharines, Ont., 1987" (Pietropaolo 126).

paternalistic relationships develop between migratory workers and their employers, a relationship dynamic that may subsequently function as “an important mechanism through which employers ensure their workers’ loyalty” (Basok 124), making workers “more exploitable” (Wall 253), undermining their sense of autonomy, and having potentially detrimental effects for “solidarity among disadvantaged peoples” (257). These kinds of relationships are supported by formal requirements of the SAWP that restrict workers’ movement and encourage dependent relationships between workers and their employer. The program even goes as far as, in the case of Caribbean workers, to subject workers to a Compulsory Savings Scheme, a sort of “forced savings’ mechanism” (Pietropaolo 14), and, in the case of Mexican workers, to make them submit a financial account in their home country of their spending “to make sure that the Canadian-earned money is not spent frivolously” (Basok 99). Thus, the image of the three Mexican migratory workers on their first day in Canada is both captivating and rife with symbolism. However, as the focal point of the image (and as the focal point of much contemporary interest in racialized rurality in southern Ontario), the image of the workers and their passage through the rural streetscape has the potential to obscure other more stable and deeply rooted racialized resonances that frame their journey.

On the left hand side of the image alongside a McDonald’s we see in the foreground the Kim Moon Restaurant & Tavern, a symbolic appearance of another racialized presence in the image, in this case an immigrant rather than migratory presence. The name of this restaurant, with its mixture of various cultural backgrounds, signals how Chinese restaurants in rural locales have functioned as significant “spaces of

interaction between Chinese and non-Chinese communities” (Cho 12). Yet despite the ubiquitous presence of the small-town Chinese restaurant throughout rural Canada, Lily Cho observes that it is “at once everywhere (it is hard to find a town without one) and yet almost nowhere in contemporary discussions of Chinese immigration, diasporas, Canadian multiculturalism, transnational migration patterns, and global movements of people and capital” (7). As in Pietropaolo’s photograph, the restaurant stands out in the rural streetscape, a familiar site, yet in the photograph and in a broader cultural discourse of race and rurality in southern Ontario “strangely visible yet invisible” (7). In her recent book *Eating Chinese: Culture on the Menu in Small Town Canada*, Cho examines the long history of Chinese settlement in small-town Canada, exploring the reasons it “has been submerged” and “what it means to recover it, and other spaces like it, as crucial sites of diasporic arrival” (8). As such, she reclaims the rural locale as a meaningful site to explore race in Canadian studies and to examine “the juncture between old and new diasporas” (10), a necessary endeavour if we are to recognize “the heterogeneity of diasporic communities” (10), which is precisely the relationship formulated in Pietropaolo’s image. In this photograph we see two narratives of racialized and diasporic presence in rural Canada, both of which are persistently expunged in dominant representations and imaginings of rural southern Ontario.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Readers may notice that St. Catharines, Ontario, is the town featured in the photograph. While St. Catharines, at the time the photograph was taken, cannot be classified as a rural town because of its size, the non-rural location is not apparent to a viewer (remember that Pietropaolo’s photographer’s notes are included at the back of his text). Considering the context for most of Pietropaolo’s Canadian photographs, the rural location would most likely be assumed. The presence of the Kim Moon restaurant in this photograph is consistent with Cho’s observation that Chinese restaurants are ubiquitous in small rural towns across Canada.

Only by whitening out rural southern Ontario can the language of “invasion” that Basok’s “local population” uses to describe the presence of Mexican migratory workers in the Leamington area continue to make sense. As Walcott suggests, “Every concealment includes a disruptive return” (*Black* 137). He writes of his desire “to invent a black Canadian discourse that reflects the continuous and discontinuous moments of Black Canadian life. This discourse can in turn produce a grammar that locates Blackness in a history that is longer than simply the latest migrations” (“Who is she” 45). If we expand this desire to include discourses of blackness as well as discourses of other racialized presences, we see how the narratives represented both by the migratory workers in the pickup truck and restaurants like the Kim Moon help us understand the various histories and complexities of different racialized communities in rural southern Ontario. For when we focus only on racialized migratory workers in southern Ontario, this image may disrupt present perceptions of Canada’s rural society as *predominantly* white, but it continues to construct rurality as *traditionally* white.



### **Sex and the Country: Gendering and Queering the Rural in Southern Ontario**

What you do on the farm is what defines you as a male, but my father never took me out to show me any of that. It made me feel there was something horribly wrong with me.

(Riordon 146)

In their introduction to a special issue of *Rural Sociology* focused on rural masculinities, Campbell and Mayerfeld Bell write about the impossibility of pinning down “a singular object called ‘rural masculinity’” (539); they also contest the notion that rural masculinities may be “separated analytically from a parallel object called ‘urban masculinity’” (539). Yet, as Campbell and Mayerfeld Bell go on to suggest, this does not mean that “the intersection of the rural and the masculine” (539) have not produced particular expressions of masculinity that both shape and are shaped by the rural context and that, when examined, speak to rural gender relations as they play out between rural men and women or in male and female intra-group relations. Indeed, theorists currently investigating gendered ruralities (and this group continues to be small) are attentive to the relationship between our socio-spatial environments and the performance of gender identities. They are particularly interested in exploring how rural masculinities and femininities may diverge from or find commonalities with the spectrum of gendered identities located in urban settings. In *Gender and Rural Geography: Identity, Sexuality and Power in the Countryside*, Jo Little clearly delineates the current inclination within the field of rural gender studies to draw

a particular association between *rurality* and gender identity that goes beyond the specificity of individual places; that is, there is a shared understanding within rural communities of gender identity. This

understanding is not fixed or uncontested but it exists as a very strong influence on the way gender identities are constructed, perceived and practiced. While not uniquely rural, the expectations surrounding gender identities are implied in rural areas in a way that is part of the social and cultural relations of the countryside. Responses to attempts to contest dominant gender identities will vary from place to place but . . . a set of shared and accepted meanings about the nature of gender identities continues to circulate and to inform (and be informed by) both our day-to-day experience of and wider responses to the countryside. (42-3, emphasis in original)

With respect to these “shared and accepted meanings,” this chapter argues that rural society in southern Ontario is still overwhelmingly expected to be and accepted as patriarchal and heteronormative space. Yet as Gayle Rubin suggests in “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” merely pointing to the fact that societies in rural southern Ontario are patriarchal and heteronormative does not explain the particularities of the sex/gender system in these societies that leads to gender and sex-based oppression (539). To better understand the sex/gender system of rural southern Ontario, we must consider how the dominant agricultural heritage of the region influences present-day gender roles and sexual relations, and how the upholding of the family farm ideal in spite of changing agricultural practices supports patriarchal and heteronormative social organization more than it does a mode of agricultural production. Within this context, Adrienne Rich’s concept of compulsory heterosexuality resonates with particular force, as heterosexual unions are construed as the basic unit required for the maintenance of the economic, thus also the social, health of the agricultural community. This being the case, Little argues that rural sexual mores, even when it comes to heterosexuality, are deeply invested in policing all “sexual relationships that

might threaten the harmony of the family” and consequently a “sense of stability within the countryside” (*Gender* 162).

This chapter aims to contribute to our understanding of the sex/gender system in rural southern Ontario by first examining some cultural iterations that inform and are informed by normative conceptualizations of rural gender identity and sexuality. Specifically, I focus on gender and sexuality as they relate to the family farm, drawing attention to the way changes in agricultural models threaten to upset traditional gender divisions in rural society. In recognition of the integral role technology has played in the transformation of agricultural production, I turn to cultural representations of tractors to investigate how they use the relationship between men and tractors to both assert hegemonic rural masculinities and, at times, to register anxieties about shifting rural gender identities. I then move on to explore queer sites of contestation – occasions on which the representation of southern Ontario queers challenge the heteronormativity of rural society as well as the metronormativity of queer cultures.

Considered an “emergent research domain” (Little and Morris 2), as mentioned above, work on gender, sexuality and rurality is relatively recent and not particularly prolific, although the voices that dominate this small field of inquiry seem to be persistent in their continued interest in the topic and their call for more research in this area. Interestingly, despite the relatively small field of masculinity studies in comparison to feminist scholarship<sup>85</sup> the balance of gendered inquiry is reversed in rural studies. As

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<sup>85</sup> Although to make my point clear, I juxtapose these two areas of inquiry, many scholars, myself included – particularly in response to challenges posed by queer and transgender theory – see this opposition as problematic and have begun to highlight the discursive connections between these fields which are more and more frequently linked under the broader field of gender studies.

Little observes, “Although studies of rural masculinity are relatively few, they far outnumber those of rural femininity” (“Gender” 372). Moreover, most research focusing on gender and rurality demonstrates a conspicuous absence of discussions of sexuality except when it comes to considerations of queer ruralities, a research area which is even more neglected (372).<sup>86</sup> Only recently have discussions centred around queer sexuality as one of the significant conceptual divisions between urban and rural space, wherein rural spaces and “small towns were considered hostile to queers and urban areas were cast as the queer’s natural environment” (Halberstam 15), an understanding of rurality that “occludes the lives of nonurban queers” (15). If we acknowledge that research in the fields of rural gender and sexuality is relatively sparse, then it would be fair to say that research into these fields in Canada in all disciplines is virtually non-existent, with literary and cultural studies offering no exception to this rule. In fact, most investigations into these areas are predominantly in the disciplines of geography and sociology, with regional focuses for the most part in Britain, Western Europe, New Zealand, Australia, and the United States.

With respect to queer ruralities, at the most basic level this chapter aims to recognize the existence of rural queers. Yet, I also intend to go further than performing merely an exercise of “spot the queer” (Sullivan 192); indeed, by locating queerness in

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<sup>86</sup> In this chapter, I focus on queerness primarily as it relates to sexual orientation. However, in queer studies, the term “queer” and concept of “queerness” is used with reference to queer sexuality as well as queer gender identities, including transgender and other gender-queer identities. Very little research has been done on the topic of transgendered and other gender-queer ruralities, with the notable exception of Judith Halberstam’s *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, wherein Halberstam provides an in-depth analysis of the cultural representation of the Brandon Teena story, most famously depicted in the film *Boys Don’t Cry*. Although by no means extensive, there have also been some interesting considerations of how rural expectations concerning expressions of femininity and female sexuality have made it easier for some gender queer women to live within the hetero-gendernormative culture of many rural societies.

the rural context (at the same time, thus, dislocating it from being imagined solely in the urban environment), I take a practical, necessary step en route to opening up explorations of understandings and expressions of queer ruralities. Doing so not only challenges the imagined and/or assumed heteronormativity of rural society, it also incorporates some queer masculinities and femininities into rural gender studies, thus contributing to a polysemous discourse of gendered and sexualized rurality. Also, by taking up rural masculinities and femininities in both their heteronormative and queer rural iterations, I hope to reconsider the contours and stakes of rural hegemonic masculinities (see Carrigan, Connell and Lee, “Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity” and Connell *Masculinities*). In addition to these objectives, this chapter takes up these topics in rural southern Ontario, a Canadian context that has been virtually devoid of any kind of meaningful analysis of Canadian queerness beyond the boundaries of the city.

- **Working Women in(to) Rural Society**

Above I note that inquiries into the socio-cultural dynamics of rural society tend to focus predominantly on men. Gillian Rose clearly asserts that one explanation for this imbalance is the fact that “women have been and continue to be marginalized as producers of geographical knowledge” (2), consequently contributing to their marginalization as subjects of interest in investigations of both rural and urban space and society. In the rural context, understanding the traditional and ongoing prominence of certain kinds of rural labour and the gender divides both literally and symbolically structuring this field is one avenue that can be used to gain a more nuanced grasp of this

imbalance. In both urban and rural society, labour practices have been historically integral to the formulation of gender identity (Rubin 545; Brandth 124). However, as urban labour markets have diversified, the ways in which masculinity and femininity are interpellated and performed through labour practices have been expanded and consequently complicated (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 13). Additionally, better access to child care facilities in urban areas can facilitate the choice of some women who opt to have children and at the same time participate in other non-reproductive labour (Little, “Feminist Perspectives” 4-5). In the rural context, however, despite changing social demographics and economic restructurings, agriculture and other work in the natural resource sector persist in dominating the actual and the imagined rural employment sector as the primary area of employment even though a variety of other job options are available. As a result, gender identity in the rural context continues to remain largely defined through traditionally gendered farm labour or physical work in natural resource industries. Moreover, the way women and men are conceptualized as fitting into these rural economies continues to be informed by patriarchal understandings of rural labour practices and the normalized gender roles for men and women in rural communities.

Scholars who have considered the relationship between labour and rural women note a propensity to concentrate on women and agriculture while other positions women may hold in the rural sphere and other places in rural society where women figure, such as political office, agricultural organizations, and non-agricultural related occupations, are more often neglected (Little, “Feminist Perspectives” 1; Little and Morris 1).

Moreover, the relationship between women and agriculture is usually explored in relation to the traditional family farm model, with less attention paid to women as labourers within the agribusiness industry; this framework is increasingly an insufficient lens for considering the labour participation of rural women, especially given changing agricultural practices either at the level (and these are frequently interrelated) of technology or in the scale and organization of agricultural operations (Sachs, *Gendered* 7). Historically, in the family farm agricultural model, much of women's on-farm labour pertained to the domestic sphere, while tending large livestock (depending on the task), crop management and farm maintenance was seen to fall under the purview of men. Of course, the division between these realms has always been an inadequate way to understand the overall functioning of a farm – not only are domestic duties and reproductive labour necessary for the successful operation and survival of the farm (Sachs, *Gendered* 130-1; Little, "Gender" 367), but, among other labour contributions, "Women's involvement in the production of food on the farm (for example yoghurt, ice-cream, meat products, etc.) is an important area of diversification" (Little, *Gender* 13). The division between domestic and reproductive labour and other farm labour obfuscates much non-domestic farm labour that women have historically performed, it misrepresents how many farm women define themselves in relation to farm operations, and it cannot explain the labour responsibilities of female-only owned and operated farms.

In the American context, Carolyn Sachs notes that "Fifty-four per cent of farm women consider themselves to be main operators of their farms, with most of these women involved in partnerships with their husbands, sons or other family members"

(“Rural” 121). Anecdotally, in Canada, simply noting the presentation of farm owner-operators in the *Faces of Farming* calendar reveals that farm women in southern Ontario also consider themselves intimately involved in the day-to-day management of their agricultural operations. The 2006 Canadian census documents that almost twenty-nine percent of farm operators in Ontario are women, just slightly higher than the national average (“Characteristics”); yet a number of these women are likely joint operators. As Elizabeth Kenworthy Teather reveals in “Farm Women in Canada, New Zealand and Australia,” the number of female-only owned and operated farms in Canada is significantly lower (8). Nonetheless, current studies of farm labour in developed nations in all types of agriculture document women as far more involved in farm labour at all levels; as well as being more directly involved in the business management, women also represent a growing segment of the student population in agricultural programs (Schmitt 108). Moreover, investigations into gendered farming practices reveal that in the growing sector of organic agriculture women are playing an increasingly active and visible role (Schmitt 110; Little, “Gender” 371).

This more nuanced portrait of farm women’s relationships to agricultural labour in the traditional family farm model complicates the figure of the “Farmer’s Wife.” In this titular definition of a women’s role on the family farm, Deborah Thien notes, “As the grammatical construction makes clear (the wife who belongs to the farmer), the Farmer’s Wife is always an object within a patriarchal paradigm” (78). Yet, as the most commonly circulated role circumscribing the imagined place of women in rural society, the Farmer’s Wife also “serves to exclude the other material and discursive possibilities for being



female in a non-urban setting” (78). This exclusion happens on a number of fronts. First, in addition to the increasing trend of farm women to hold either part or full-time off-farm jobs, sometimes an important means of subsidizing farming operations, many other rural women (and men) have no association whatsoever with agriculture. As Carolyn Sachs notes

We typically see rural life as synonymous with agriculture and farm communities; however, demographic shifts, capitalization of agriculture and global economic restructuring drastically alter rural people’s daily lives . . . only a small proportion of people living in rural areas in advanced industrial economies work in agriculture. (*Gendered* 4)

This is particularly evident in rural southern Ontario, where relatively feasible commutes to more diversified labour markets in cities and towns facilitate this phenomenon. Second, while the “Farmer’s Wife” may belong to a disappearing model of family farming, as Deborah Thien observes, the title “Farmer’s Wife” does signify a certain status in agricultural communities. As one of Thien’s research participants comments, “it’s not the same as being the farmhand’s wife” (75) or a farmhand for that matter, a position more and more women occupy, as Carolyn Sachs argues, in the new era of industrial-style agriculture:

As an increasing proportion of the world’s food and agricultural production shifts to large-scale, nonfamily-managed farms, women do not necessarily benefit. Increased export crop production and the incursion of agro-industries into rural areas increases women’s wage employment in agriculture and alters women’s subordination to patriarchal authority within the family. However, these changes may or may not expand women’s options . . . Women on family farms seldom gain economic power as agricultural enterprises expand; likewise, few women hold positions of power in agro-industries. Rather, such systems tend to exacerbate class, ethnic, and racial differences and privileges in rural areas and often rely heavily on the cheap labour of working-class people, especially racial and ethnic minorities. (*Gendered* 7)

This system Sachs describes is, of course, precisely the agricultural system discussed at length in the previous chapter, and the role female labourers occupy in this system receives as little if not less attention than that of their male counterparts. As noted in Chapter Two, hiring practices for agricultural labour frequently discriminate based on stereotypical understandings of physical and mental suitability for certain kinds of farm labour, resulting in both discriminatory race and gender-based hiring decisions. For instance, although Canadian women now constitute a larger part of the hired agricultural labour force in southern Ontario, women make up only two percent of the workers brought in through the SAWP (Pietropaolo 12). The harsh physical living and working conditions and intense manual labour required of the workers mean that physical considerations are a priority in the selection of male workers and no doubt play a role in the low female participation in the program. In addition to how the perceived weaknesses of the female physique may be evaluated so as to make female SAWP applicants less suitably equipped to meet the physical demands of agricultural labour, the fact that female participants also complicate the provision of required on-farm housing for labourers has the potential to make female workers even less desirable in the eyes of Canadian farmers involved in the program.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, grower concerns about sexual fraternization between male and female workers, which is thought to negatively impact production outputs (Preibisch and Binford 31), may also contribute to lower female participation. From the perspective of potential female workers, the fact that they must

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<sup>87</sup> Workers frequently share sleeping facilities. Female workers are provided with sleeping facilities that are separate from those of male workers.

leave their families behind when coming to Canada means that many women, who function as primary care providers for children in their countries of origin, are unable to participate in the SAWP. However, female farm labourers outside of the SAWP are starting to represent a larger and larger portion of hired farm workers, especially in situations where assembly line style operations are in place. It remains to be seen whether the gender distribution of workers brought to Canada through the SAWP will eventually echo this shift. Even in other non-mechanized and/or factory-style areas, female farm labourers have been a significant ongoing presence in southern Ontario. Despite the fact that female farm labour has been widely perceived to be rooted in the domestic sphere, as Ellen Wall documents in *Agribusiness and Hired Farm Labour in the Ontario Tomato Industry*, workers from the Mexican Mennonite community generally worked as family units (including women and female children) to hand-harvest tomatoes (144-6). However, as reflected in other farming operations, the shift from hand-harvest to mechanization in Ontario's tomato industry was accompanied by an increase in the hiring of female labourers. The balance of workers in hand-harvesting operations of 47% female to 53% male moves to 70% female and 30% male with mechanization (152). Thus, in the lower echelons of farming, changes in technology are accompanied by a change in gendered labour.

In addition to shifting the gender demographic of hired farm labour, the relationship between mechanization and gender has complicated understandings of rural gender identities. Richard White, in his investigation of the relationship between environmentalism, work and the natural world, states: "In the nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries, blue-collar workers regarded physical work as a mark of manhood. They often saw machines that broke their connection with nature as emasculating them; they associated these machines with women” (180). Certainly, the introduction of new technologies in farming meant that much of the physical labour traditionally delegated to men could be more easily performed by both men and women. Despite this fact, as Berit Brandth demonstrates in “Rural Masculinity in Transition: Gender Images in Tractor Advertisements,” the tractor, one of the most significant machines to change the shape of modern agriculture, has come to enunciate a specifically gendered relationship between man and machine. She asserts that “the tractor functions much as a boundary between men’s and women’s work on the farm, and it is an important gender symbol because it is connected to the sexual division of labour in farming” (123). In addition, characteristics associated with the tractor, its size, power, and the control it allows the operator to exert over the natural environment are intimately tied to certain conceptions (especially in the rural realm) of hegemonic masculinity “characterized by heavy, dirty, and dangerous work” (125). Brandth makes her argument by examining how tractor advertisements – their imagery, target audience and language, which draws frequently on key terms like “power, precision, control” (126) – formulate a mutually constructive relationship between farm men and their farm equipment. Following Brandth’s lead, I will extend this analytical trajectory by turning to other cultural representations of tractors to consider what they can tell us about rural masculinities. As it turns out, it is not such a difficult task in southern Ontario to find analytically fruitful examples depicting the relationship between male farmers and tractors. For instance, turning back to the various cultural texts

I have previously discussed, we see that tractors make important appearances in both *Letters from Wingfield Farm* and *The Farm Show*. Visual representations of tractors in both the *Harvest Pilgrims* and *From One Place to Another/Las dos realidades* photographs also symbolically mark hierarchical divisions between farm owner-operators and hired labour.

- **“Purrs like a kitten. Steers like a dream”: On Rural Masculinities and Tractors<sup>88</sup>**

“Sometimes a man gets to taking better care of his tractor than he does his wife!”

(Theatre Passe Muraille 62)

In *Letters from Wingfield Farm*, Walt Wingfield’s relationship to technology is part of what distinguishes him from his farming neighbours and marks him as an anachronistic member of his community. Part of Walt’s mission in farming is “to preserve some of the old ways” (Needles 7); for Walt this means rejecting the use of much modern farming machinery like the tractor in favour of horse drawn equivalents. As we see throughout the plays, his effort to farm using two unruly and stubborn horses results in much hilarity but little successful agricultural production. Yet Walt is initially committed to his choice. As he explains to one sceptical neighbour, “when you drive loud machinery, you miss a great deal of what nature has to offer. You can’t hear the rich pageantry of life in the hedgerows if you insist on riding around the fields on a noisy tractor” (6). Here, Walt’s comments support White’s contention that the introduction of machinery for many people

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<sup>88</sup> The quotation used in this section title is taken from *The Farm Show*, page 80.

working in the natural environment was seen to rupture the user's connection with nature (180). However, as a member of an agricultural community that has long since accepted the way modern technology facilitates agricultural production, Walt's stubbornness combined with his ineptitude prove untenable if he hopes to elevate his farming operation above the level of an "experiment in farming" (Needles 4).

Eventually, his neighbours intervene and, against Walt's will, converge upon his fields with their tractors, "whirling around at top speed, as if [he] wasn't there" (30). Of course, Walt's response to this intervention is, in his own estimation, uncivil. Yet, although he realizes his ingratitude is ungenerous, he finds that his neighbours' actions "left [him] feeling like a complete failure" (30). His neighbours, however, are acting upon a set of rural principles that value community and the concept of "neighbouring well" over individual pride and self-sufficiency. As Timothy Findley (who I will write more of later) notes of his own experience living in rural southern Ontario, "To have it said that you neighbour well is the highest compliment you can be given in a farming community" (58). Following their intervention, one of Walt's neighbours explains,

there's just one deadline in farming that you don't mess around with and that's the spring planting. Now, me and the boys were content to let you ... experiment with them horses so long as you didn't go past June the tenth. But come today and no sign of a crop, well, we did what we had to do . . . [we] wouldn't want to see you stuck. (Needles 31)

Beyond sowing rituals, in tension here are also two understandings of masculinity. For Walt, his neighbours' infringement on his autonomy affronts his masculine sense of self; he states: "where I come from, a man is allowed to fall flat on his face if that is what he wants to do" (31). Yet, for Walt's neighbours, standing by and watching a neighbour fail

is contrary to their understandings of what it means to be men in a rural community. We also ought not to discount, however, how rural masculinities are also connected to sowing rituals. Lance Strate suggests, “The height of masculinity can be reached when men have to overcome nature in order to make a living” (qtd. in Brandth 125). Hence, Walt’s ability to farm his land successfully using either modern technology or more archaic methods will ultimately be the measure of his masculinity in a rural agricultural community. Well-versed in these norms, Walt’s neighbours recognize that his sense of autonomy is worth sacrificing in order to preserve his masculinity, which will be affirmed when he reaps his harvest at the end of the season.

An outsider in his community, Walt’s acceptance of technology throughout the first three *Wingfield* plays is an indicator of his evolving integration into rural society. In fact, despite his initial obstinacy, in the second play, it is ironically the tractor, among other rural realities, that allows Walt to preserve his idealized concept of rurality against the encroachment of other forms of progress and rural evolution – an evolution initially not altogether unappealing to his rural neighbours. When the property adjacent to Walt’s is at risk of being developed into condominiums, in an effort to preserve their rural way of life, he convinces his neighbours to band together and sabotage the development plans, dissuading investors by exposing them to the ills (from the perspective of urbanites) of rural living, which in part involves the noise of tractors and the grit and stench of the dirty work they perform. Although Walt uses technology in this instance to successfully preserve his rural vision, generally his nostalgic concept of rurality and retrogressive approach to farming run contrary to the evolution of the masculine embrace of

technology in agriculture. However, in order to both earn a living at farming and fit into the norms of his chosen community, Walt finds he must eventually compromise, and he does so in the third play when he finally purchases his own tractor. Yet his particular choice of tractor delineates for the reader shifting conceptualizations of rural masculinities as they relate to farming technologies.

Brandth maintains that the increasing computerization of tractors as well as design focus that takes comfort into account as an appealing and marketable feature of modern tractors (protection from the elements, noise reduction, climate control, etc.) “breaks with the image of the heavy, dirty and noisy machines, and with the type of masculinity which is integrated with manual work” (128). As a consequence, we increasingly observe “a changing masculinity in farming – towards a less manual, more white-collar image – a masculine type which seems to borrow some of its characteristics from business and engineering work” (130). In *Letters from Wingfield Farm*, Walt’s neighbour Don, with his numerous modern tractors and his mechanized milking operation, represents this new image of the technoid farmer, a fictionalized portrait that mirrors the real farmers who fill the pages of the *Faces of Farming* calendar – farmers who are well educated and rife with technological and business savvy. Walt’s choice of tractor, on the other hand, indulges his nostalgia for an earlier form of rural masculinity that, if not precisely correspondent with the “gentlemen farmers” à la “Montaigne and Thoreau” (Needles 7) he initially envisioned for himself, at least approximates this role by embracing a form of rural masculinity associated with an image of the simple, hard working and rugged farmer. Opting for his neighbour’s old John Deere AR Model, “the



Model T of farm tractors” (128), Walt happily observes that “It was a very Spartan machine without any options for the comfort of the operator. No cigarette lighter. No radio. Not even an arm-rest. Just the tractor seat and even that was removable for those who prefer to stand” (130). Sparse in comfort and limited in versatility, this barebones machine allows Walt to more closely approximate the metaphorical relationship frequently constructed between the farmer and his tractor wherein the tractor is “pictured as a horse and the farmer as a cowboy” (Brandth 128). While his neighbours may opt for power, speed, precision and control, attributes equally constitutive of the masculine rider, modern tractors complicate a more direct relationship between rider, machine/animal, and the land.

The tension between these two kinds of rural masculinity in *Letters from Wingfield Farm*, epitomized in the differences between Walt, with his elementary tractor, and Don, with his multiple fancy modern machines, is not exclusive to this text. In *The Farm Show* there is an explicit battle between these masculinities in the scene titled “Tractor Tug.” The scene is written as a “*gargantuan war of the tractors*” (Theatre Passe Muraille 79, emphasis in original); the contenders are the anthropomorphized International Harvester Farm-All 656 (“Farmall”) – a young upstart of a tractor – and the reigning champion – the older Case Agriking 770 (“Agriking”). Preceding the battle, Agriking informs the interviewing announcer that “the trouble with young tractors today is they *just don’t know what they want! We give them everything. We give them tinted glass, three-speed air conditioning, acoustical padding, ashtrays . . .* But they still don’t want to be *tractors!*” (80, emphasis in original). This complaint resonates on two levels:

First, it is difficult not to draw a parallel between this commentary and the recurring concern in the play of rural decline caused through the out-migration of a younger generation uninterested in farming. Yet, anomalously, in this scene, Farmall is far from doubtful about his desire to dethrone Agriking, thus establishing his dominance in the agricultural arena. As the announcer observes, he is full of bravado and confidence. Therefore, in tandem with the concern over an outright rejection of farming, Agriking's rebuke also registers anxiety about a younger generation of farmers/tractors that differ in style from the older generation. In this reading, it is not so much that the younger tractor/farmer cannot decide whether or not to be a tractor/farmer, it is more the case that the older generation has a difficult time recognizing him as such since the younger generation's method and style of operating challenge traditional notions of what it means to be a tractor/farmer, in the dirty, tough, hard-labouring and traditionally hegemonically masculine sense of the word. The tone of condescension we note in Agriking's complaint is the same as Walt's when he comments on Don's farming operation:

I was flattered when Don first entrusted me with the milking, but then I found that Don's barn is so highly mechanized, a six-year-old could milk the cows if he could reach the buttons. I push one button to start the stable-cleaner, another button to start the compressor, one more for the silo-unloader and yet another for the stereo system. Don says he has a pitchfork around somewhere, but I've never seen it. (Needles 117)

Walt's inclusion of the stereo system, an item that has no necessary relevance for the farming task, at the end of his list of high-tech, low-physicality button-operated farming machines drives home his sarcasm. If, as the introductory quotation to this chapter asserts, "what you do on the farm is what defines you as male" (Riordon 146), then Walt's and Agriking's conception of farming masculinity along with their relevance as

farmers, if in theory they can, as Walt maintains, be replaced by children (and hence also by women), is challenged by the redundancy of pitchforks and the presence of climate control.

In *The Farm Show*, the battle of the tractors/farmers ends in a stand-off. Rather than the outcome being decided by the authors through a valuation of the tractors'/farmers' respective attributes, which they enumerate during the competition, the winner is determined, instead, by audience applause. The stage directions indicate that a draw may also be called if audience response dictates. While it is unfortunately not possible here, it would be fascinating and perhaps telling to measure whether audiences demonstrate a preference for one tractor/farmer model over the other; to gauge whether preferences change depending on the audience (rural, urban, young, old, contemporary or past); and to examine whether audience response is meaningfully indicative of the viewing public's assumptions and preferences concerning farming masculinities.

Above, I have been conflating tractors and farmers. This conflation is supported by Brandth's excellent analysis of the mutually constitutive relationship between the two entities as well as by the texts themselves, a relationship particularly evident in *The Farm Show* where five scenes out of twenty foreground the importance of tractors to rural life and draw attention to the particular relationship between tractors and their customarily assumed male operators. The propinquity of this relationship is illustrated by the frequent conflation of the two as witnessed in the "Tractor Tug" scene, yet enters the play even prior to this, in the scene "Man on a Tractor" where we immediately note that it is specifically a man positioned atop the tractor and not a woman. In this scene, the

marriage between man and machine is made abundantly clear in the humorous remark at the scene's outset that "sometimes a man gets to taking better care of his tractor than he does his wife" (Theatre Passe Muraille 62). But the tone of the scene turns quickly serious, as the male speaker meditates on the danger associated with tractor driving. In the scene's concluding line, the speaker accepts this danger with resignation and dignity, when he states, "It's all part of being a farmer – it's all part of being a tractor!" (62). The parallel structure of this line, its two halves visually joined by the dash, yokes these entities together – they both assume and are emotionally responsive to the same risks and hardships. In this final line, the farmer/tractor connection is extended beyond marriage to suggest the farmer and the tractor may be considered one and the same. This conflation continues through the "Tractor Tug" scene and comes to a climax in "John Deere," the final scene of the play, where the narrator and all of the actors perform the *Ballad of John Deere*. Exhibiting the familiar nostalgia for a time before tractors exhibited by Walt Wingfield, the ballad, an appropriate if not ideologically loaded form whose canonical antecedents celebrate rurality and community (Frye, Baker and Perkins 58-59), begins: "It was years ago, but I remember when, / There weren't no tractors. Just horses, and men!" (Theatre Passe Muraille 104). In this hegemonically masculine vision, where women are substantively absent, men "walk with men" (107) through their heroism and do what "a good man should" (104) by tending to their families, with the tractor eventually helping them achieve more on both fronts. The ballad narrates the tractor's advent by its eponymous inventor (who for the purpose of the play and community lore is inaccurately claimed as a citizen of southern Ontario) as well as the community's initial

resistance to the tractor – that is, until disaster strikes and John Deere and his tractor save the day. During a thunderstorm and its resulting flashflood, while spooked horses cannot be moved to help save a group of boys (and a kitten) stranded in a river, John Deere and his tractor come to the rescue. Although John Deere dies in the process, the ballad tells us that he lives on through the name the citizens gave to the tractor, a name that melds man and machine, and through their now affectionate embrace of this useful advancement in farming technology. Although the tractor ruptures the bond between horse and man, it is replaced by the bond between man and machine, a machine connected to past rural modalities through its frequent representation as a horse-like figure: “[John Deere] was sittin’ atop an infernal machine / That was spittin’ and buckin’ and fightin’ and mean” (104).

As these examples show, ambivalent and more frequently anxious attitudes about evolving rural masculinities and what they mean for the future of rural society are imbued into and worked out through representations of tractors, through the fraught transition from old to new farming technologies. Yet, as the battle between Agriking and Farmall demonstrates, the relationship between rural men and their tractors is more than an individual connection; it also relates to issues concerning succession. In the introduction to *Gender and Rurality*, Whatmore, Marsden and Lowe argue that

Men enter farming primarily through a structure of property inheritance organized by the male line which in practice, if not now in law, fashions sons rather than daughters as family ‘successors’ (Friedman, 1986). The construction of women as wives and men as farmers and successors is a social process undertaken, sometimes quite consciously, from the birth of children into farming families. (5)

As we have seen, issues of out-migration, particularly of male farm children, or the development of new models of rural masculinity that deviate from traditional models, each a potential threat to the chain of succession, are anxiety-producing. While sometimes contentious, relationships developed between men through their tractors negotiate generational exchanges integral in maintaining a hegemonic male social order in rural society, a dynamic persuasively, whether consciously or not, rendered in Fred Eaglesmith's song "John Deere."<sup>89</sup>

"John Deere" is an epistolary song, sung from the perspective of a farming son writing to his father. The son's letter informs his father that he has had to sell "the old John Deere" (Eaglesmith, "John"), a decision, he explains, necessitated by financial restraints that prevent him from replanting his lost crop. However, on a deeper level, the narrative of the sold tractor laments the disappearance of a particular vision of rural life. The adjective "old" that qualifies the tractor establishes a juxtaposition between the tractor and the farming life in which it played a part and the man who purchases it and plans to decommission it for display in a museum. The sale of the tractor becomes a metaphor for the way "this whole thing's gone," this "whole thing" referring to a traditional agricultural society epitomized by the image of Little Boy Blue. The three-line repeated refrain at the end of the chorus, "The sheep's in the meadow / Can't find the cows / Little Boy Blue's got a job in town," plays upon the well-known nursery rhyme, turning the innocent country boy into a rural out-migrant, once again, pitting urban and

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<sup>89</sup> See Appendix 3 for complete song lyrics. Access audio for the song at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gBFrH-36iA>. "John Deere" is one of two songs Eaglesmith sings about John Deere tractors. The other song "John Deere B" addresses similar concerns.

rural development against each other. In addition to the exodus of Little Boy Blue, we notice other changes in the rural social structure. In particular, we note the presence of outside forces infringing upon the farmer's autonomy; there is the bank who will not loan the speaker the needed money to sustain his farm and the government who regulates farming subsidies that may either support or impinge upon a farmer's ability to earn a living. What is evident in both the case of the speaker and his farming neighbour "old McAlister," who finds himself increasingly dependent on welfare, is that both men are experiencing a loss to their sense of self. McAlister is ready to give up farming, and it seems as though the speaker, by offering no objection to his decision, may not be far behind. The shame associated with having arrived at this point emerges in the first verse of the song; the speaker's sense of failure is palpable in his reticence to share his misfortunes with his father and is accentuated by his compulsion to omit his own name from the letter.

If the speaker is circumspect about sharing his troubles with his father, why does he write the letter? The fact that the speaker refers to the tractor using the definite article "the" rather than the possessive personal pronoun "my" implies that both father and son have a shared relationship and, hence, a vested interest in the fate of the tractor. While the son's voice represents a new generation of farmers, the disappearing lifestyle he mourns is overwhelmingly characterized as belonging to an older generation of farming, enunciated through the aged tractor, father, and the son's "old" farming neighbour. With the tractor sold, listeners get the sense that nothing more than a pretty "picture for people to pay to look upon" remains to be passed down to the following generation. Thus, the

dissolution of the trinity of father, son, and tractor evinces the dismantling of an age-old rural patrimony. In “John Deere,” at stake is not merely a past version of the rural but more specifically a rurality structured by specific relationships between men and the maintenance of their predominance in the rural community.

If Little Boy Blue has moved to town, who will be next in line to inherit the farm and head the traditional family structure to which the rural community is bound (Davidoff, L’Esperance, and Newby 140)? In addition, where do women figure in this portrait of a changing rural society? As with the other representations of tractors and farming men previously discussed, women are again conspicuously absent in “John Deere” until a significant entry in the song’s concluding verse. The speaker sings:

Mary says it’ll be okay  
If nothing else goes wrong  
And she got a job at the five and dime  
And the hours ain’t too long

While the principle concerns of the narrative are revealed in the all-male conversations had between the father, the son, and his neighbour, it is perhaps ironic that Mary’s off-farm employment will enable the farm to remain afloat for the time being. This off-farm employment is consistent, as mentioned previously, with the changing role many rural women are occupying (Kenworthy Teather 7), a role that challenges the idea in rural southern Ontario “that women’s appropriate place was in the home” (5). However, while one might be inclined to read positively the role Mary plays in the survival of the family farm, a conservative view of rural culture suggests that Mary’s movement away from her domestic role on the farm is indicative of a regrettably perishing social order. In “John Deere,” the speaker laments the loss of the rural idyll, a conceptualization of rural life



wherein “Wives remain protectors of the true community, the ‘still point’; a basic moral force to which workers, travelers and seekers can return” (Davidoff, L’Esperance, and Newby 175). As Little suggests, “Today, while rural communities have undergone considerable change both socially and economically, the home, as an integral part of the community, still retains a significant importance as part of the dominant rural ideology” (“Feminist Perspectives” 3). This may explain the ambivalent attitude the speaker exhibits towards Mary’s new vocation. Moreover, although her prominence in the survival of the farming operation is elevated by the outside income she now contributes, there is no indication that her status on the farm is altered; while not entirely explicit, it appears she is still subject to the “psychological alienation that many farm women feel in the context of legal and decision-making structures concerning farming” (Kenworthy Teather 6). After all, although she offers her husband reassurances, he does not address his concerns about the farm’s future to her. She is literally written out of the intimate exchanges between men. As her husband writes, “I had to tell somebody, Dad / And you were *the only one*” (emphasis mine). In this correspondence, in place of gratitude, Mary’s elevation in status resounds in the letter as a shameful admission that accentuates the emasculation already expressed by the speaker, an emasculation, shared by McAlister, resulting from their farming failures.

“John Deere” asks listeners to recognize how the museumification of rural culture and the forces that contribute to this process threaten the future of rural communities in southern Ontario. However, upon closer examination, we might question whether the tractor is a poor, albeit revealing, choice of metaphor used to work through these

concerns. While this trope certainly speaks tellingly about the type of “community” under threat, in fact the relationship between men and their tractors contributes to increasing divisiveness in rural communities. From the depictions we have seen thus far, this may initially not seem to be the case. After all, thinking back to the climactic “John Deere” scene in *The Farm Show* as well as to the scene in *Wingfield Farm* when Walt’s neighbours converge upon and plow his field, readers are seemingly presented with examples of rural community at work; reading closely, however, we see the tractor and its male rider on a day-to-day basis exclude and alienate a host of othered rural citizens. Indeed, in an era of increasingly industrialized farming, the use of the tractor heralds a breakdown of rural community. According to Brandth, “contemporary farming has become a lonely occupation” (128), and in contrast to the traditional prominent place of the family in farming, she argues that the tractor and its solo male rider offer a more solitary image of the male farmer, detaching this image not only from the work of women but also from an environment where men are depicted as working alongside other men (128). In addition, Brandth suggests that “The control of the farmer and his machine over nature . . . is very much in line with notions of masculinity expressed in the scientific tradition that sees progress as a matter of domination and control over nature” (128); this relationship parallels, as others have frequently noted, the domination of men over women, and, in the case of industrial agriculture, it also mirrors a system of racial hierarchy, clearly marking the division between the white Canadian farmer and a growing force of racialized and now increasingly gendered farm labourers.

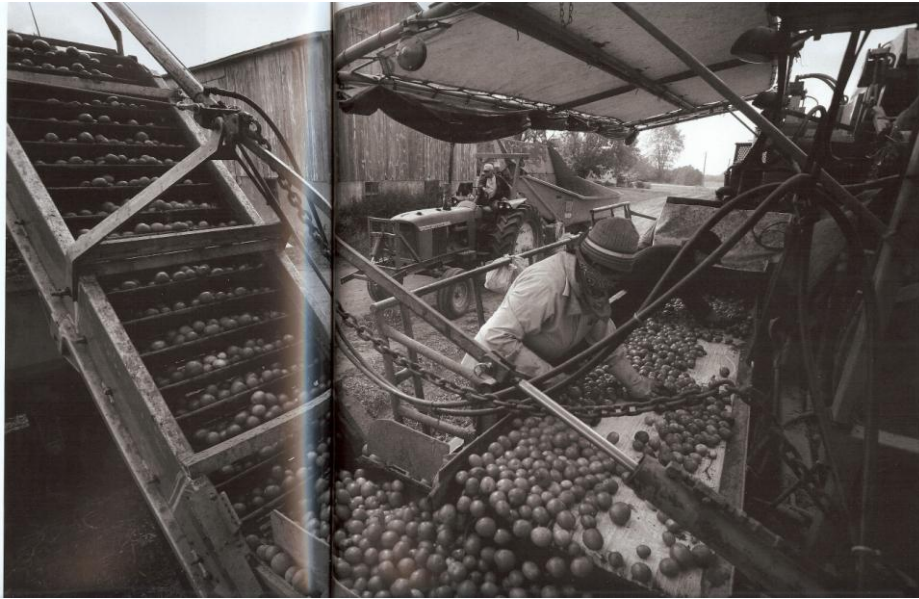
Moreover, currently we frequently see an intersecting logic concerning issues of gender and race as they relate to agricultural labour. As noted in Chapter Two, the increasing preference exhibited by employers participating in the SAWP to request Mexican over West Indian workers is predicated on a perception of docility racially encoded onto Mexican men. As Preibisch and Binford argue, “Growers’ country surfing is a quest for the most docile, reliable and, therefore, exploitable labour force” (32). This argument has also been forwarded to explain the hiring of more female farm labourers (Wall 156). Hence trends in agricultural hiring practices demonstrate an increase in the hiring of female farm labourers (frequently also racialized) as well as male migratory workers who are ascribed the stereotypically feminine quality of docility, two trends that intermingle and reinforce racial and gender hierarchies. In contrast (and this is ironic considering the discussion up to this point about the way rural masculinities have been expressed and celebrated through agricultural labour), through their assertiveness, in the SAWP program, West Indian workers are arguably discriminated against for being *too* masculine.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, for this group of workers, the intersection of race and gender-based hiring further hinges on racist discourses about black masculinity registered in governmental and grower concerns about potential sexual encounters between black

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<sup>90</sup> In analyzing the increasing trend to hire Mexican workers over West Indian, Preibisch and Binford note that, in the eyes of some growers, “‘good’ workers do not question employment practices or housing conditions. As one liaison officer stated: ‘[voicing rights] causes some employers to switch, because a lot of them don’t want backchat or voicing of right’” (24). A Caribbean liaison officer comments: “Caribbean people tend to question things and they don’t back down on what they perceive to be their rights. That could be a negative because some employers don’t want that. They want a peaceful life, a guy who comes and works hard and doesn’t mind if he gets a ten-minute break or not. Somehow our guys use their sense. Why should I work from six in the morning till five in the evening without at least two 20-minute breaks? Some employers don’t see that as a necessary thing. And they don’t see that the guys get some time off or a day off. Working seven days a week is not an easy thing” (24). To anecdotally support this liaison officer’s observations, Preibisch and Binford also cite a grower who claims, “The Jamaicans are no good because they complain a lot, and spend their time partying” (24).

workers and white Canadian women and female farm labourers – white Canadian, racialized Canadian, and racialized migratory women (Satzewich 177; Preibisch and Binford 30). Hence, in contrast to the perceived hypermasculinity of black agricultural labourers, when a song like Eaglesmith's "John Deere" calls attention to rural masculinities under threat of disappearance, he is worrying particular expressions of white masculinity.

Racial and gender divisions in agricultural labour do not, however, stop at the level of hiring decisions; they are also evident in the division of farm labour. Recalling the photography collections *Harvest Pilgrims* and *From One Place to Another/Las dos realidades*, in Chapter Two I briefly mentioned that when white people figure in these collections they are most often pictured atop a tractor or other farm vehicles or machinery. These images suggest that the responsibility for operating this expensive machinery is allotted to farm owners and supervisors, while their workers are either towed by or working around these machines. Not only does the operational role confer a particular status upon the operator, the hierarchical division between the racialized and gendered workers and their white employers and supervisors is accentuated by the literally elevated stature of the machine operator in contrast with the workers whose tasks often necessitate them toiling closer to the ground in work that is still frequently dirty, physically taxing, and exposed to the elements:



(Pietropaolo 114-115)<sup>91</sup>



(Pietropaolo 58)<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Photographer's note: "Erica Carreon-Acosta works on a field-tomato harvester, removing stones, clumps of soil, and other debris. The tomatoes travel on a conveyer belt to a bin towed alongside. Wheatly [*sic*], Ont., 2006" (Pietropaolo 128).

<sup>92</sup> Photographer's note: "A Mexican worker crating carrots ready for shipping. Holland Marsh, Ont., 1987" (Pietropaolo 126).



(“From One” 16)

One photograph from the *From One Place* collection presents an interesting exception to this pattern of representation, a picture that features a young black worker sitting on a tractor:



(“From One” 39)

The viewer observes the tractor is parked with the young man sitting on it in a reclined position, arm draped over the fender as he smiles for the camera. Unengaged in work, it appears as though the worker might have climbed atop the tractor for the photo opportunity, emulating the status customarily conferred to the tractor driver. The photograph is reminiscent of the way in which people, frequently men, pose in front of expensive cars as a kind of fantasy of stature by association. After all, the expensive and powerful farm equipment is far removed from the transport customarily associated with migrant workers in southern Ontario – the bicycle – also frequently pictured in the *From One Place* collection:



(“From One” 42)



(“From One” 43)

Like the tractor, bicycles have also proved to be dangerous vehicles to operate but for entirely different reasons. Each year there are reports of accidents in which workers are injured or killed when hit by cars while riding their bicycles along country roads (“Community”). Sadly, these accidents metaphorically speak to the workers’ invisibility and disposability within the agricultural economy of southern Ontario.

Brandth argues that tractors and other agricultural technologies are “a completely male arena” (126). As demonstrated above, representations of tractors in cultural texts that imagine southern Ontario rurality are consistent with these findings. However, more precisely, in southern Ontario tractors appear to be the arena of a specifically racialized group of hegemonic white male farmers whose “masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted” (Connell 77). Exposing the way these technologies facilitate racial and gender hierarchies in rural southern Ontario contributes to a more nuanced understanding



of the cultural work of tractors in the agricultural life of the province. However, these hierarchies also resonate beyond the local community and the individual racialized and/or gendered body; the intersections between gender, sexuality and race (as the sexualization of male West Indian migratory workers particularly suggests) and their relationship to the exploitative labour dynamics at work in migratory and local farm labour in southern Ontario is clearly exacerbated by changing agricultural practices that depend upon global exchanges of labour, capital and goods. As such, they highlight the urgency of Halberstam's call to work against the divisions between "body/local/personal" and "class/global/political" present in discussions of globalization and transnational capitalism (5).

Competing ideologies about the evolution of agricultural production fuel debates about new technologies in farming, but less frequently consider who uses and controls new technologies or how this distribution of authority may be indicative of power relations in agricultural communities both on and off the farm. Analyses of the relationship between rural masculinities and tractors may superficially appear limited in what they can tell us about the social dynamics of rural society, particularly as changes in southern Ontario rural communities mean many rural residents have little or no connection to agriculture; however, Little argues convincingly that gender and sexual identities constructed in relation to farming often "sustain a broader rural resonance and become accepted as part of a *rural*, not simply a farming, sexual identity" ("Constructing" 852, emphasis in original). Following Connell's analysis of the relationship between hegemonic and marginalized masculinities (76-81), I contend that

the hegemonic centrality of the image of the white male farmer not only subordinates women (of all races) and men of colour in rural communities, but also that its material practices, legitimated within the structure of the family farm, contribute to the marginalization of non-heterosexual rural identities. One notes that, with the exception of the representation of tractors in *Harvest Pilgrims* and *From One Place*, all of the dominant representations of men and their tractors discussed in this chapter consistently elevate the white male farmer as the family farm's central figure. I will take up a discussion of sexuality in the remaining half of this chapter to explore how the desexualized portrayal of the white male farmer's gender identity has meant that the particularities of his sexuality are rarely explored. Nonetheless, presented as the central figure of the family farm, his heterosexuality is always assumed; he works, quite literally, only within the heterosexual discourse of family farming. The centrality of the family farm in the traditional organization of rural social society means that heterosexuality and the heterosexual family have come to define rural culture in a particularly pervasive fashion that works to marginalize queerness in rural culture. Little asserts that

The strength of the “family” in rural society and community both stems from and contributes to the dominance of heterosexuality and while the privileging of male-female over same-sex relationships is clearly a feature of social relations more generally, the normalisation of heterosexuality is, it is argued, particularly powerful in the rural context. (*Gender* 156)

The persistent inclination to cling to the belief that the heterosexual family farming unit functions as the linchpin of rural communities supports normative heterosexual unions as the only desirable and necessary option for the healthy maintenance of the rural community. However, as the following discussion observes, “while same-sex

relationships may be largely absent as part of lay and popular constructions of the rural, gays and lesbians do live in rural areas as couples and on their own” (Little, *Gender* 156). Moreover, in southern Ontario, there are queer rural narratives that challenge the heteronormative imperative of rural culture and contribute to a growing discourse focused on what it looks and feels like to be rurally queer.

- **Bright Lights, Gay City**

The remaining part of this chapter considers why rural sexuality has often been ignored and then seeks to rectify this analytical gap by entering sexuality into our consideration of southern Ontario rurality. More specifically, as a contribution to a broader project of engaging queer knowings (a phenomenological project that explores the ways in which queers may think, feel, experience, or orient themselves differently) and stimulating the production of queer knowledges (the building of queer archives that call attention to and document various expressions of queer knowings), which Sullivan argues aims “to make strange, to frustrate, to counteract, to delegitimise, to camp up – heteronormative knowledges and institutions, and the subjectivities and socialities that are (in)formed by them and that (in)form them” (vi), I hope my discussion will unsettle the institutionalized heteronormativity of rural cultures and knowledges. To begin, it may be helpful to acknowledge two taken-for-granted assumptions about sexuality and rural space and society:

First, housed in a range of humorous to downright disparaging stereotypes sometimes drawn upon in the characterization of rural white trash identity, the concept of

“rural sexuality,” along with its close relative “rural fashion” (Vogels), seems to be widely accepted as oxymoronic, if not even at times grotesque; hence the deliberate effort in the *Faces of Farming* calendar to add some sexiness to the representation of what is generally perceived to be a rather unsexy segment of society (Little, “Gender” 374).<sup>93</sup> In a much easier sell, when the producers of the popular television show *Sex and the City* spatialized sexuality in their title and subject matter, they were merely reaffirming and drawing upon associations already circulating in the minds of viewers. It is this same associative logic that allows listeners to make sense of the sexual dynamics at play in Eaglesmith’s song “Spookin’ the Horses.”<sup>94</sup>

The song begins simply with the statement “you’re spookin’ the horses” (Eaglesmith, “Spookin’”). Unaware of the context for this statement, the listener is nonetheless immediately cognizant that the person being addressed is seen to be behaving alarmingly. The animals’ anxiety is subsequently associated with a woman’s fairly benign appearance (her bright makeup) and behaviour (her dancing outside beneath the trees). While we are not explicitly told there is anything wrong with either her appearance or actions, the state of the horses suggests otherwise; something is definitely amiss,

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<sup>93</sup> David Bell in “Eroticizing the Rural,” J.W. Williamson in *Hillbillyland: What the Movies Did to the Mountains and What the Mountains Did to the Movies* and Lynda Johnston and Robyn Longhurst in *Space, Place, and Sex* all offer engaging discussions of how genres like “hillbilly horror” (Bell 84) construct grotesque representations of rural sexualities, particularly as they are expressed through inbreeding and bestiality. Johnston and Longhurst also examine the ways in which some ecotourism ventures appeal to non-normative rural sexualities by using animal erotica as a selling point. Interesting as these studies may be, with the exception of Bell’s reflection on naturism (which he suggests goes to the opposite extreme of “white trash erotics” and bestiality, with naturism’s practice grounded in discourses of rural innocence and wholesomeness (83)), they do not engage representations of the everyday sexualities of rural citizens. Notably, the examples these authors provide speak to a version of a perversely over-sexualized rurality; these representations resound as hyperbolic depictions of rural sexualities, sensationalized for dramatic effect or capitalist gain, yet none the less still circulating in the recesses of our imaginations.

<sup>94</sup> See Appendix 3 for complete song lyrics. Access audio for the song at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tjm5ce\\_fHkQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tjm5ce_fHkQ).

dangerous and unsettling. This song is not, however, simply depicting anxiety about a partner's changing sexual expression, a change which could possibly lead to uncertainty in one's relationship. Such a development could happen anywhere to anyone; in "Spookin' the Horses," the particularity of the rural setting and the horses' response suggests that this woman's sexual expression is frightening because it is out of place in these surroundings – the now wild behaviour of the formerly domesticated woman eliciting an equally wild response from the domesticated animals. The song makes a clear association between what in the rural realm is considered undesirable unconstrained female sexuality – here expressed through the wearing of makeup and feminine, impractical clothing and the loosening of one's hair – and its connections to urbanity: "those bright city lights / must have shone through your windshield / and got into your eyes." What is particularly powerful about Eaglesmith's song is that the speaker does not explicitly judge his partner's actions or behaviours, nor does he judge the city's influence in eliciting particular desires and forms of sexual expression. Instead, Eaglesmith allows the horses' reactions to serve as an uncontested determinant of what is natural and good sexual behaviour. Thus the song serves as a pseudo-factual warning that this kind of female sexual identity cannot find nor make a peaceful home in the rural setting.

In "Spookin' the Horses," we hear the nostalgic echoes of the rural idyll, which makes its presence felt here through a nostalgia for a time when "wives were untouched by siren calls from the great world and misguided prattlings about independence" (Davidoff, L'Esperance, and Newby 152). With his music frequently delving into the less idyllic aspects of rurality, Eaglesmith is not your conventional cultural envoy for

representations of the rural idyll; however, accordant with this aesthetic, his depictions of rural men and women, particularly his reliance on the perceived divisions between rural and urban socio-sexual geographies, the sexual boundary drawn “where the road meets the highway,” often conform to conservative and nostalgic understandings of heterosexual masculinities and femininities, consistent with dominant real-world heteronormative rural values.

Jo Little suggests that both the rather fiercely guarded heteronormativity of rural culture as well as the formulation of rural heterosexual identities are prominently and routinely defined within rural culture in opposition to urban sexual cultures, and she identifies “a set of morally sanctioned codes” (“Constructing” 851) supported by “a set of specific tactics” (853) aimed at supporting family-based heteronormativity in rural space and culture; according to Little, one of the principal tactics is the conceptual separation of the rural from the urban used as a means to distance rural culture and space from the kinds of sexuality perceived to be associated with the city, both transgressive heterosexualities and queer sexualities. For the moment, I would like, first, to consider rural heterosexual relations and identities by turning to Little’s research into rural dating schemes in England and New Zealand, schemes designed to introduce rural bachelors to women interested in settling in the country. She observes that in the eyes of the organizers and participating bachelors “Particular traits of femininity needed to be displayed by ‘country girls’ for relationships to have any chance of succeeding – thus the social expectations surrounding rural relationships were firmly mapped on to the sexual identities of potential partners and wives” (“Constructing” 856). Little suggests this

process of selection, grounded in the sexual mores of rural culture, results in both “the *de*-sexualization of women’s feminine identities” (“Gender” 372, emphasis in original) and in “the construction of [rural] heterosexual identities as very benign and ‘non-sexual’” (374). Most importantly, the *de*-sexualization of the rural women imagined as ideal partners was clearly contrasted with the perceived overt and confident sexual attitudes and appearances of urban women. For the participants in the match-making schemes,

There was a general assumption amongst the farmers taking part . . . that “city girls” were most obviously and stereotypically attractive but that, appealing though this was, this attractiveness was not appropriate in the countryside and was not likely to make the women suitable partners. Indeed, the possession of what was seen as a “city” appearance was a negative attribute in the search for a serious relationship and wife. It was dangerous and exciting yet also unsuitable and out of reach. There was a clear relationship here between the urban and sexual promiscuity – which was seen to be reflected in appearance, clothing, and makeup. (“Constructing” 859-860)

The parallels between Little’s study and the relationship dynamics presented in “Spookin’ the Horses” are undeniable and demonstrate widespread shared rural attitudes concerning heteronormativity and accepted expressions of female sexuality in rural communities.

Despite the *de*-sexualization of rural cultures, we now see a growing number of researchers delving into the knowledge gap concerning rural sexuality and sexualities, starting to unpack the sexual dynamics of rural culture, dislocating sex and the city from their natural bedfellowship. An important, albeit even more recent, part of this project involves recognizing and addressing the existence and realities of rural queers, consequently entering queer sexualities into a broader and expanding discourse of rural

sexuality within the domain of rural studies as well as expanding our understandings of queer ruralities in the realm of queer studies. With this in mind, it is probably unsurprising now to discover that the other prevalent assumption about rural sexuality is that dominant conceptualizations define rural space and society as heterosexual and heteronormative (Gray; Herring; Hogan; Little; Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson; Riordon; Stapel).

The fact that rural queers are “popularly represented as out of place” (Gray 4) in the country, and that the city is instead constructed as “the queer’s natural environment” (Halberstam 15), where queers are able to find a visibility assumed necessary “for the full expression of the sexual self in relation to a community of other gays/lesbians/queers” (36), is a defining queer narrative Judith Halberstam terms “metronormativity” (36). Kath Weston similarly observes rural/urban binaries figuring prominently in a significant proportion of coming-out stories, wherein queer subjects relocate to the city in search of community and sexual liberation. Consequently, Weston finds that the “symbolics of urban/rural relations” in these coming-out stories “locates gay subjects in the city while putting their presence in the countryside under erasure” (282). It is not difficult to grasp the appeal of urban spaces for some rural queers. As Johnston and Longhurst suggest, “Cities have often been regarded as spaces of social and sexual liberation because of a perception that they offer anonymity and escape from the familiar and community relations of small towns and villages” (80). While this may be the case, contrary to assumed urban anonymity, queers also paradoxically migrate to cities in search of community – queer communities (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 17). The fact that



urban spaces represent and offer the possibility of community for many queers undermines “the easy assumption that community [is] *par excellence* a rural phenomenon” (Davidoff, L’Esperance, and Newby 146, emphasis in original). The seeming impossibility of rural queers to find themselves *openly* accepted as part of many rural communities is consistent with much contemporary research in rural studies that points to the restrictive boundaries defining who is incorporated and accepted as part of the rural community. Yet, as Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson suggest, the narrative appeal of cities for queers seeking community and sexual acceptance becomes a somewhat self-fulfilling prophecy; they argue that “the concomitant erasure of rural gay and lesbian possibilities has *contributed* to their ongoing flight from rural and suburban communities” (17, emphasis in original). As noted in the coming-out stories Weston examines, queers often narrate themselves out of the rural.

As a result of the assumed metronormative imperative of queer lives, Halberstam asserts that

In gay/lesbian and queer studies, there has been little attention paid to date to the specificities of rural queer lives. Indeed, most queer work on community, sexual identity, and gender roles has been based on and in urban populations, and exhibits an active disinterest in the productive potential of nonmetropolitan sexualities, genders, and identities. (34)

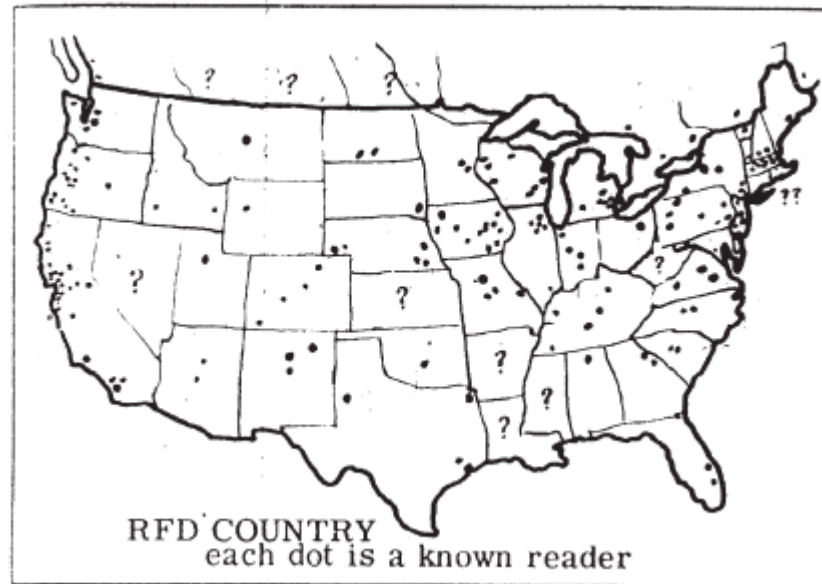
The absence of queer ruralities from queer analyses is certainly not explained by an absence of rural queers. While Halberstam’s project theoretically expands “queer geographies” (15), others have been working on literally documenting and examining the lives of rural queers. Attesting to the geographical expansiveness of queer lives, Katie Hogan observes that “According to the 2000 U.S. census results, ‘partnered lesbians and

gay men reside in 99.3 percent of all the counties in America’ (Martinac 2001)” (245). Unfortunately, Canadian census data is less precise when it comes to gauging the exact geographical location of same-sex couples beyond the level of provincial divisions. Hence it is difficult to ascertain whether an equally broad geographical spread exists in Canada. However, Michael Riordon’s *Out Our Way: Gay and Lesbian Life in the Country*, a collection of life stories compiled through interviews with Canadian rural queers, offers less scientific yet relevant documentation of the widespread presence of queer people – partnered and single – living throughout Canada’s rural areas across all provinces and territories, suggesting a possible distribution comparable to the one found in the United States. Supplementing these contemporary portraits of rural queer demographics, in their introduction to *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson look to historical evidence to refute the widespread “assumption that homosexuality is a product of the *urban*, and that rural and wilderness spaces are thus somehow free from the taint of homoerotic activity” (15, emphasis in original). Drawing on the research of sexologist Alfred Kinsey, they argue that “Nothing, in fact, could be further from the truth. At the end of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, the western wilderness was a space heavily dominated by communities of men. These men – prospectors, cowboys, ranchers, foresters – frequently engaged in homosexual activity” (15). With these historical practices and contemporary realities in mind, I will now explore how rural queer presences have been documented and recorded in contemporary Canadian texts.

In his excellent essay, “Out of the Closets, Into the Woods: *RFD*, *Country Women*, and the Post-Stonewall Emergence of Queer Anti-urbanism,” Scott Herring explores how in the United States the queer rural-based journals *RFD* (*Radical Fairy Digest*) and *Country Women* contributed to a “critical rusticity” (346) in queer culture by creating “a regionalized alternative literary public sphere that connected rural queers outside homonormative ‘ghettoes’ in New York City, San Francisco, and Los Angeles” (367). Both journals’ first issues emerged during what Weston refers to as the “Great Gay Migration of the 1970s and early 1980s” (255) – *Country Women* first published in 1973 and *RFD* in 1974. Connecting queer readers who had opted for rural lifestyles<sup>95</sup> as well as rural-born queers “who could not afford a move to a city, or who could not [and perhaps did not want to] participate in the imaginary metropolitan ‘flight’” (Herring 361), Herring argues these journals intervened in the metronormative “narratives, customs, and presumptions” that increasingly came to “govern the aesthetic, erotic, material, and affective imaginaries of many modern queers, irrespective of ‘country,’ ‘town,’ or somewhere in between” (345). In his article, Herring includes the following map of “RFD Country” published in the journal’s second issue:

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<sup>95</sup> Lesbian separatist movements, connected to the Women’s Land Movement (see Sachs, *Gendered Fields* 51-2), present a particularly organized and fairly well documented example of lesbian cultures (re)claiming rural space and forging a significant queer presence in rural society. For more information, see Valentine’s “Making Space: Lesbian Separatist Communities in the United States,” Unger’s “From Jook Joints to Sisterspace: The Role of Nature in Lesbian Alternative Environments in the United States,” and Sandilands’s “Lesbian Separatist Communities and the Experience of Nature.”



(“RFD Country” *RFD* 2 (1974): 3. Reprinted in Herring 367)

Noting that each dot represents an *RFD* reader or subscriber, Herring suggests that “Though *RFD* only had seven hundred or so subscribers by 1979, we might best read these dots as micro-interventions that re-establish the regional, the rural, and the nonmetropolitan in order to blast open the bicoastal ideals of a normalizing U.S. gay print culture” (366). However, in contradiction to Herring’s concern about the “unexamined national emphasis” (366) of the map, wherein “Mexico and other hemispheric nation-states in North and South America are notably absent” (366), we observe that Canada, albeit peripherally, and particularly southern Ontario do indeed figure in the map’s geographical representation, in a way that clearly includes southern Ontario as part of the journal’s readership. The map documents the fact that queer rural southern Ontarian readers, however small in number, also figure in this anti-urban, non-metronormative

queer reading public. Not only readers, but southern Ontario writers have also been contributing to the literary cultures of queer ruralities and the building of a queer rural archive as active participants in this “alternative literary public sphere” (Herring 367).

- **We’re Here, We’re Queer? – From Stonewall to *Stone Orchard***

Three Canadian texts, Michael Riordon’s *Out Our Way: Gay and Lesbian Life in the Country* (1996), Timothy Findley’s *From Stone Orchard: A Collection of Memories* (1998), and Robert McGill’s *The Mysteries* (2004), all speak to and document southern Ontario rural lives lived queerly. As an eager reader of queer ruralities, I am compelled to caution myself not to make more of these texts than what they are. All the same, I cannot help believing that these texts are extremely significant, first, for the mere fact that *they are*; all of these texts voice queer ruralities in southern Ontario, introducing queer perspectives into our cultural imaginings of rural southern Ontario where previously they have been unheard and unexamined. Riordon’s *Out Our Way* very pointedly contributes to the building of a queer rural Canadian archive, taking as its specific purpose documenting and bringing to public attention the real-life narratives of Canadian rural queers. However, his text is not southern Ontario specific. In fact, only eight of the fifty-four narratives included document rural southern Ontario queer voices.<sup>96</sup> I cannot help but read this small representation as stemming from the broader construct that rurality in southern Ontario is a disappearing concept, unusual in this case since Riordon’s own narrative is situated in rural southern Ontario. As for Findley’s and McGill’s texts, while

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<sup>96</sup> Riordon’s and his partner Brian’s narrative weaves throughout the text in seven separate vignettes. I have counted them all as one narrative.

they are not primarily or only about rural queerness, as I will suggest, they do provide important entry points into thinking about queer ruralities and, in the case of McGill's text, challenging readers to think in complex and intersectional ways about what it means to queer rurality.

*From Stone Orchard* is a collection of personal vignettes originally published in *Harrowsmith* beginning in 1993 (Findley 10).<sup>97</sup> With slight expansions and a few new inclusions for the book, each vignette is based on the experiences of celebrated Canadian author Timothy Findley's and his partner William ("Bill") Whitehead's experiences while living in rural southern Ontario near Cannington, Ontario, on a farm they named Stone Orchard. Moving from Toronto to Stone Orchard in 1964, Findley's and Whitehead's urban to rural migration is a notable contrary progression from the mass queer migrations to come in the following two decades. But, as already discussed, their move is aligned with a broad if less visible segment of the queer population who concomitantly either opted to stay in rural locales or consciously made the decision to take up rural residence. Also contrasting the motivations driving much rural to urban queer migration, these vignettes reveal how Findley and his partner found both a comfortable home and a supportive and welcoming community in their chosen rural locale. This depiction, when contrasted with Riordon's own narrative in *Out Our Way* – both Findley and Riordon relocated with their partners from Toronto to rural southern Ontario (Riordon in 1986, later than Findley) – seems at times overly idyllic.

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<sup>97</sup> *Harrowsmith Country Life* is a prominent and popular Canadian magazine targeted at "those who live in the country...or wish they did" ("Welcome"). The magazine has been in publication for over thirty years.

Amongst the pleasures of country living and the challenges (also shared by Findley) of renovating an old farm house and becoming accustomed to some of the differences inherent in rural living, Riordon, unlike Findley, also candidly writes about the constraints and fears of living queerly in rural southern Ontario.<sup>98</sup> Many of the queers Riordon interviewed speak about how maintaining peaceful queer lives in the country requires not provoking other members of their community through open displays of same-sex affection or by being overly vocal about their queerness. For example, one interviewee, Scarlet, asserts, “I think people are reasonably tolerant as long as you don’t do or say anything that provokes them” (Riordon 46).<sup>99</sup> For rural queers, who migrate to the country, this often means moving, as Riordon and his partner found, “from being quite out to being quite discrete” (39). Despite the effort of many rural queers to keep their sexual lives and identities to themselves, they are still subject to overt displays of homophobia, their quietness at its roots motivated by fear. Riordon recounts that

From time to time people write hate letters to the local paper . . . it’s always open season on homos. Usually I let these poison pen letters pass by, on the theory that responding only extends a bigot’s platform, since he – almost always it’s a he – will surely feel compelled to respond to the response. At the same time I can’t deny that fear is a factor in my restraint. This isn’t *The Globe and Mail*; it’s our local paper, and everyone reads it. (116)

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<sup>98</sup> It could be that this dissimilarity between Findley’s and Riordon’s narrative is the result of differences in their target audiences. However, I find this explanation troublesome in that it presupposes the heterosexuality of *Harrowsmith* readers as well as their indifference, regardless of their sexual orientation, to queer concerns. In actuality, *Harrowsmith* readers do not appear to be indifferent, as Findley’s vignette “Absent Friends” touches explicitly on the devastating impact of AIDS on the queer artistic community in the 1980s. This vignette clearly inserts queer concerns into Findley’s narrative; yet it does so in a way that distances these “problems” from the safe haven of Stone Orchard and its surrounding rural community, a point I will touch upon more later.

<sup>99</sup> Riordon gives pseudonyms to many of the interviewees who would prefer their true identity remain unknown. Other interviewees allowed the use of their actual names. In my discussion of this text, I use the names provided by Riordon without distinguishing the pseudonyms from the others.

The fear Riordon invokes here is not necessarily a fear of harm that may come in the form of physical attacks or vandalism, although this possibility is raised by both Riordon and some of his interviewees:

For many of us with rural fantasies, a common deterrent is the fear of being all alone out there in heteroland. Barry nods. “Oh yes, we imagined all kinds of things – burning crosses on the lawn and so on.” Joey adds, “We had one couple to dinner from town who said they’d been told if they sat on our sofa they’d catch AIDS.” A six-foot-high wooden fence along the road discourages the idly inquisitive. (156)

As the interviewees here themselves admit, their fears about extreme responses to their presence in the rural community are largely a product of a complex and sometimes conflicting multitude of rural fantasies brought with them to their rural environment. Nonetheless, while these rural queers may never awaken to burning crosses (a KKK allusion that supports Halberstam’s contention about “the interchangeability of the queer and the racially other in the white American [in this case Canadian] racist imagination” (35)), their high fence is presented as a necessary security measure guarding them, either psychologically or otherwise, from the prying eyes of a community in which, as Barry’s and Joey’s experience has shown, stereotypical and discriminatory attitudes circulate openly.<sup>100</sup> More often, however, the fear Riordon and his interviewees invoke is the fear of being rejected by the broader rural community they do in many ways find themselves a part of and that they value as an integral part of their rural lives. It is primarily this fear that keeps some rural queers more closeted than they may otherwise choose to be.

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<sup>100</sup> As I make this statement about the unlikelihood of this couple waking to a burning cross, I cannot help but be critical of my own inclination, common in, particularly white, Canadian culture, to associate these kinds of grand racist gestures with American culture. The 2010 racist attacks in Nova Scotia, in which a mixed race couple emerged from their home to find a seven-foot high burning cross with a noose slung around the joint (“N.S. Couple”), followed later in the year by their car being set on fire (Boutilier), cautions me not to be overly confident in my assertions.



However, as Marple and Gray note, we must be careful in how we discuss the rural closeting of queers, so as not to perpetuate discourses of “outness” wherein there is an “association between degrees of outness, and a hierarchical construction of queer lives” (Marple 72). Whereas urban queer discourses position outness as “the desired queer sentiment, the position to which queers grow and develop” (72), the relative closetedness of rural queers has the potential to be used to judge the rural queer’s supposed self-actualization, consequently “privileging some queer identities over others” (Gray 4), rather than being examined as a consequence of the way in which certain spaces, like the rural, “produce and articulate queerness differently” (6). Marple observes that one of the main differences between urban and rural queer relationships to community is that “In a rural region, or a small town, there is most often not a number of communities to choose from, but one within which you choose to operate or not” (72).

All the same, for many rural queers in Riordon’s text, their discretion does not actually conceal their sexual identities. In fact, as Riordon writes, “The neighbours who help us haul our firewood . . . know us as a couple, or as good as. But we never actually say The Word” (39). Thus, although Riordon and his partner are cautious about who in their community they speak openly to about their sexuality, their sexual orientation is, in any case, a known fact. Similar accounts concerning what is frequently known but rarely spoken about with respect to sexual orientation, a phenomenon Eve Sedgwick refers to as the “glass closet” (80), are found in many of the narratives in Riordon’s text, leading readers to believe that this is a fairly common experience for rural queers. As one interviewee, Piers, casually remarks about his own situation, “of course word gets

around, people figure things out for themselves” (162). This conventional characterization of small towns and rural communities wherein everyone seemingly knows and is interested in everyone else’s business is clearly illustrated in a telling exchange between Riordon and one of his interviewees that takes place while they are shopping:

my host points at one of the cashiers. “She’s that way inclined,” he says, in a private undertone for public places. “How do you know?” I ask. “Everyone knows. Her lover teaches at the high school; they’ve been together thirty-six years.” “But how do you know all this?” “It’s a small town; you just know. She and I have never spoken about it; of course we never would. But she’s always been especially nice to me.” (145)

The tension between “good” and “bad” forms of visibility have been commonly used in the respective valuation of urban and rural places as (im)possible spaces to be queer.

Gray suggests

At the heart of the antipathy between familiarity and queerness is the belief that discovering a sense of one’s queer self requires three things: the privacy to explore one’s queer differences beyond the watchful eyes of those who presume to know everything about one; a visible community able to recognize and return one’s queer gaze; and the safe space to express queer difference without fear of retribution. (5)

While it is imperative to acknowledge that rural spaces have been sites of particularized violence directed specifically at queers (Delany 155-157), Gray goes on to challenge these three requirements that position rural places as the “tacitly taken-for-granted closet” (4) against which urban queer lives are celebrated and normalized and to explore how “the expectations and experiences of prosaic familiarity, central to the organization of

rural communities, produce and articulate queerness differently” (6).<sup>101</sup> While at the same time recognizing the very real challenges of being queer in rural places, Gray, like Halberstam, suggests that oftentimes “the rural queer may be attracted to the small town for precisely those reasons that make it seem uninhabitable to the urban queer” (Halberstam 43). Many of the narratives in Riordon’s text illustrate this point, speaking openly about the appealing aspects of rural community, sometimes queer rural communities, but, mostly, about what it is like to be part of the broader rural heteronormative community. One of Riordon’s interviewees, Jerry, “ambivalent about city life,” states: “Here everyone knows your business. In the city no one cares, so take your pick” (Riordon 63). Similarly, interviewee, Lee, comments:

I’d really like to be more out, and you can do that in the city; it’s so much more anonymous there. On the other hand, what if you’re in trouble and people just turn their backs? Here there’s always someone around to lend a hand – even if they don’t approve of you. I like being connected; I like knowing my neighbours; it’s what I remember as a kid. I’d be really sorry to lose that. (67)

Of course, as apparent in these comments, just as stereotypical understandings of rurality frequently inform the urban queer’s view of rural life, the rural queer’s assessment of urban life can also be guided by stereotypes about the indifference and anonymity of urban places and the absence of urban communities.

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<sup>101</sup> It is possible that the prosaic familiarity of the rural community may at times work to the benefit of rural queers by undermining the “knowledge-power” (Sedgwick 164) dynamics of the glass closet. One could argue that in situations where rural queers assume their sexuality, although not discussed, is known to members of the community, their knowledge, akin to the button Sedgwick describes that playfully states “I KNOW YOU KNOW” (164, emphasis in original), deflates the potential excitement and empowerment conferred on “those who think they *know something about one that one may not know oneself*” (80, emphasis in original). However, the successful circumvention of these knowledge-power dynamics will largely depend upon a rural queer’s comfort level with having his or her sexuality known, which will in turn depend on the level of homophobia exhibited in any particular community.

Yet, as seen in the exchange between Riordon and his rural host, contradicting some of the presumptions about the isolation of queer rural life, we discern that rural queers are actually visible and do return each other's gaze. Although, Riordon's host and the cashier have never openly discussed their sexualities, which mark them similarly as "abnormal" members of their rural community, the cashier's choice to always be "especially nice" to Riordon's host suggests that for some rural queers merely knowing who the other queers are contributes to the creation of implied communities that are built upon unspoken solidarities. For other rural queers the way in which queers are known to everyone in the community and thus easily sought out sometimes facilitates the forming of usually discrete but intentional rural queer communities. Additionally, many of the narratives in Riordon's text show rural queers are resourceful and creative in finding and forging rural queer communities that often end up spanning broad geographical zones, bringing together queers from various rural places. As interviewee Joey humorously comments, "'Well . . . where do you look first for gays? In the arts, of course.' They joined the theatre guild in Bancroft, thirty minutes drive to the south. Joey laughs. 'Twenty-five percent gay – it never fails!'" (156). About this community and other rural queer alliances he and his partner have formed, Joey adds "And so community grows" (157). According to Joey's assessment, queer communities in rural southern Ontario are alive and growing, evidence of Halberstam's observations about how many queer rural narratives she has encountered reflect "complicated stories of love, sex, and community in their small-town lives that belie the closet model" (37).

In *From Stone Orchard* Findley often refers to the rich and positive community he and Bill found themselves part of in their chosen rural home, the same kind of community that many rural queers seek and value. However, issues of fear, silence, and the complexities of living queerly in a rural community are not openly dealt with in Findley's text. This conspicuous absence is perhaps in keeping with the understood codes of discretion expected of rural queers if they are to enjoy peaceful rural lives.<sup>102</sup> In *From Stone Orchard*, Findley never explicitly labels his relationship with Whitehead. Yet, like the other rural queers who narrate their experiences in Riordon's text, he does not need to vocalize his queerness – Findley's sexual orientation is publicly known; however, even if this were not the case, the reader is easily able to draw his or her own conclusion.

Reading with this “knowing” in mind, one cannot help wondering whether commentaries about the challenges of queer rural living do form a subtext in some of these vignettes. Findley's writing at length about fences on his property and others in “Fencelines,” “Drought” and “Road Show” come to mind as possible examples. After experimenting unsuccessfully with various fences between their property and the road, he writes that eventually “a high stone wall solved the problem of privacy” (118). Yet in “Road Show” he notes:

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<sup>102</sup> As mentioned earlier, “Absent Friends” is one notable exception where queerness explicitly enters Findley's text. A number of the absent friends Findley writes of in this vignette died as a result of AIDS. Findley writes poignantly of his and Whitehead's involvement as volunteers with communities affected by AIDS. While this vignette is extremely moving, the description of Findley and Whitehead traveling back and forth to Toronto to volunteer at Casey House, an AIDS hospice, risks reifying the problematic belief that AIDS in Canada is an illness that predominantly affects urban populations (a link again frequently wrapped up with other beliefs about urban sexual cultures). Many narratives in Riordon's text that address the issue of dealing with HIV and AIDS in a rural setting productively undermine efforts to distance rural places from these health realities.

On rare occasions, praise be, someone will drive past pointing out the blue house and the stone wall for visitors who stare without apology and nod their heads. *Celebrities, you say. Well!* The car will then return, moving more slowly than before, so the visitors on the other side can be told about the famous and their cats. *And what might they be doing in there today?*

Hiding.

Cars have actually parked out front and once – thank heaven, only once – a woman left the driver’s seat, got out and flourished her binoculars, staring at us from the road. (143, emphasis in original)<sup>103</sup>

What might they be doing in there *indeed*? We will never know the conversations held or descriptions provided in these passing cars. However, based on the stories documented in Riordon’s text, one might reasonably speculate that the literary and cultural celebrity of Findley and Whitehead might not have been the only biographical details provided to curious visitors. In their capacity as rural queers, Findley and Whitehead also function as local curiosities. Nor can the eeriness of the image of a car slowing down and doing two passes outside of one’s home help but elicit an affectively chilling response from any reader who has ever been marginalized in their community as a consequence of their non-normative identity. This response adds an unpleasant soberness to Findley’s otherwise humorous tone. In sum, I am doubtful that the potential for other subjects of interest, the sexual lives of Findley and Whitehead, raised by Findley’s hypothetical question, “*And what might they be doing in there today?*” are unintentional or ignored by the author or his audience.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> As the title of this section suggests, I believe the symbolic resonance of Findley’s and Whitehead’s stone wall would not go unnoticed by readers cognizant of the Stonewall riots’ pivotal role in the LGBTQ rights movement.

<sup>104</sup> A similar subtextual slippage occurs in Findley’s again humorous account of Bill’s dealings with “two nervous members of a local, highly evangelical Christian church, still persisting in their attempts to convert [Findley and Whitehead] to their beliefs” (94). Explaining how these “Church Mice” (94) finally give up their quest for conversion as a result of a strange incident involving Whitehead and an actual wet mouse, Findley writes: “By the time Bill had released [the mouse] and got back to the door, the Church Mice –

In recounting this incident, Findley notes both his and Whitehead's celebrity as explaining these occasional encounters, and he is most likely correct in identifying what draws these inquisitive visits. As prominent members of the Canadian cultural elite, Findley and Whitehead are not your average rural citizens, and it is important to note that their celebrity, because it makes them extremely desirable members of this rural community despite their non-heteronormative orientation, likely shields them from some of the more unpleasant experiences of queer rural living elaborated upon in many of the narratives in Riordon's text. As Marple notes with respect to differences in class between urban and rural queers, class differentials that mirror urban/rural class divides more generally, "The more economically privileged or independent you are from your immediate community, the greater your autonomy around identity. The degrees of this autonomy vary, but the options for a queer individual living in a small town with certain economic privileges, are vastly different from a chronically poor queer in that same town" (74). Not only does Findley's and Whitehead's economic status contribute to their security and autonomy, their residence at Stone Orchard also confers a significant amount of cultural capital upon Cannington and the surrounding area. With these vignettes first appearing in *Harrowsmith*, which reaches a wide Canadian audience, the community could not hope for better tourist advertising. As such, through his work generally as an author and more specifically in his writings about his life at Stone Orchard, Findley

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now in a state of nervous collapse – had gone. Obviously, the inhabitants of Stone Orchard were beyond redemption" (94). The widely known views of evangelical Christians concerning homosexuality render Findley's comments particularly tongue-in-cheek, as Findley's and Whitehead's sexual orientation is more than likely the primary source of the converters' nervousness and persistence – their dealings with their house rodents only amplifying their other moral shortcomings in the eyes of their would-be saviours.

contributes greatly to his local community, a significant factor guiding community acceptance for these particular celebrity rural queers.

Many of the interviewees in Riordon's text speak about the ways in which their community involvement contributes to their acceptance as members of their rural communities, helping smooth over their differently valued sexual orientations that might otherwise lead to marginalization. Commenting on the possibility of being judged on the basis of one's sexuality, one interviewee, Jo, suggests that "You tend to be judged more by what you do as a farmer . . . how well you care for your animals and that sort of thing" (46-47). Another, who serves his community in large part in his capacity as township fence viewer and livestock evaluator, contends: "As long as you fit in certain ways – not coming on with an attitude of superiority, being reasonable with your neighbours, helping out when needed – it's not really that hard to be accepted" (162). Both of these comments recall Findley's own assertion, raised earlier, about the seminal importance of "neighbouring well" (Findley 58) when it comes to maintaining harmonious relationships in rural communities. *From Stone Orchard* depicts Findley and Whitehead neighbouring excellently in many ways: from their contribution to the cultural and economic well-being of the community as a consequence of their celebrity; to their meticulous maintenance of their property, including their fences; and, finally, to their willing and eager employment of many local citizens to help build and maintain their home and property (and care for their many animals) over the years.

It is this last statement that offers an entry point to a significant way in which Findley's text queers concepts of southern Ontario rurality. Findley acknowledges "Bill



and I came to Stone Orchard – city-born and city-bred innocents, unversed in the skills of country living” (105). Working against the association between rural masculinities and physical labour, Findley is not shy in admitting that much of their physically laborious work was outsourced to their indispensable neighbour Len Collins: “he built, single-handed, the final extension to the house, kept us sane during blizzards, flood and power failures (by solving all the attendant problems); planted and tended the vegetable gardens, mended fences, fed the dogs and cats in our extended absences and oversaw our safety” (17).<sup>105</sup> In fact, Findley at one point advises readers of “the prime rule in moving to the country: choose a property across the road from Len Collins. This way, you will survive” (109). Essentially, Collins performs all of the work that, as rural men, Findley and Whitehead would conventionally have been expected to provide for themselves. While both Findley and Whitehead take an active interest in the development of their property, for the most part their work deals with the aesthetic elements of its development and the maintenance of daily chores – work that customarily falls to rural women – while much of the structural work on the property and physically intensive labour – work that customarily falls to rural men – is outsourced to Collins and teenagers (of both genders) from the community. Hence, for readers who enter the text with traditional understandings of gendered rural labour, Findley’s titling the second grouping of vignettes “Field Work” queers the rural field and asks his audience to radically reconsider what constitutes masculine field work in the rural realm. Rosemary McAdams observes, in “Queer in a Haystack: Queering Rural Space,” that, because of the topography of rural

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<sup>105</sup> Again, here, readers might wonder from what unnamed harms Findley and Whitehead need to be kept safe.

space, the “field” is frequently a site for queer explorations, the site of gender-bending and “a space for rural queer expression” (33). Furthermore, Findley’s text suggests that many rural queers feel at home in the field and, therefore, “destabilizes the concept of rural space as ‘straight’” and “further subverts the metrocentric assumption that gender-variation is ‘out of place’ in rural space” (33). For Findley and Whitehead, while they do dabble in the realms of traditional masculine rural labour, field work is, for the most part, a creative endeavour. For instance, he writes:

Cutting what lawn there was taught me I had muscles I had not ever put to work before – *scything muscles*: muscles in the middle back, muscles in the inner thighs, shoulder muscles that previous generations of men had taken for granted. For me, it was something of a nightmare.

On the other hand, nothing is so satisfying as lying down in a field you have cut yourself and staring up at the sky. (Findley 7, emphasis in original)

In Findley’s estimation, the recompense for his physical labour is the achievement of aesthetic pleasure. In contrast to the customary images invoked by the title “Field Work,” Findley’s and Whitehead’s version of field work contributes to their cultural production; this is shown explicitly in the vignette about their creation of the CBC television series based on Pierre Berton’s *The National Dream* and *The Last Spike* and in Findley’s account of his research for *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, which drove him to live for many nights in a barn across the road from Stone Orchard. In Findley’s literary works, in particular I am thinking of *The Wars*, *Famous Last Words*, and *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, he has closely examined and questioned masculinity at work, interrogating communities of men and communities made by men (militaristic, political, and biblical) with all of their flaws, their inclusions and exclusions. I find it interesting that these texts

were produced while living at Stone Orchard in a rural social space that has been historically formative in constructing masculinities.

Findley's and Whitehead's refusal to conform to the expectations of rural masculinity with respect to labour, to measure themselves against the "previous generations of men" whose bodies are shaped by and accustomed to working off the land, rather than validating the stereotypical feminization of queer masculinities, works because readers know that Findley's and Whitehead's significant contribution to their communities make their "house work" and "field work" far more vital (and lucrative) than any of their outsourced "masculine" labour ever could – hence, they stick with their strengths; they sought out Stone Orchard as a place to pursue their writing, and that is what they used it for. The class privilege derived from their cultural works affords them the luxury to hire others to perform the physical labour required to maintain their country property and home.

Inserted into an archive of queer rural labour, accompanied by a text like Riordon's, *Stone Orchard* grants readers access to an expanding field of rural labour. Riordon's text, which reveals queer rural men labouring in traditionally masculine ways, further problematizes the links between this kind of rural physical labour and hegemonic heterosexual masculinities. As interviewee Joey suggests, the arts may be the place "you look first for gays" (156) in the countryside, but Riordon's text shows it is clearly not the only place. When Riordon's text shows queer rural women also participating in these kinds of physical rural labour, it adds to the representation of the changing roles available for rural women particularly as they relate to agricultural production.

Both Riordon, more politically, and Findley, less so, publicly narrate the private lives of rural queers. While Riordon's text is extremely conscious of his task, set out as "looking for rural us" (198), both texts work against what Riordon describes as the heteronormative imperative of rural Canadian communities that compels rural queers to live "thoroughly privatized" (199) lives. Hogan argues that authors who work purposefully to engage queer ruralities suggest "the specific experiences, histories, and theories of rural and small-town queers need to be more carefully integrated into our concepts and understanding of queer intellectual activity, creativity, and organizing" (245). Doing so will have the simultaneous effect of expanding both rural and queer theory and the boundaries of what is believed to be heteronormative and queer space. For queer rural youth, who struggle to map their realities onto their society's sexual geographies, it is worrying that lives like theirs remain largely underrepresented in cultural productions and in activism efforts. As Gray asserts, "Perhaps even more challenging to rural youth's queer-identity work is that the politics of LGBT visibility narrate rural communities as the last place LGBT-identifying young people should be" (168). Texts like *From Stone Orchard* and *Out Our Way* contest this discourse by providing road maps for living in rural places queerly as well as by mapping queers onto the rural landscape, a landscape too frequently thought of as "heteroland" (Riordon 156).

- ***The Mysteries: Imagining Rurality Queerly***

Thus far, the texts I have examined, which delve into the lives of rural queers, are biographical and autobiographical in nature. Robert McGill's novel *The Mysteries*,

published in 2004, on the other hand, offers a fictional narrative set in rural southern Ontario that also speaks to the lives of rural queers. McGill's epigraphs cleverly establish the novel's agenda. Like Browning's epic poem *The Ring and the Book*, from which the first epigraph is taken, *The Mysteries* is a novel comprised of various perspectives, each offering the reader a glimpse into the life of Mooney's Dump, a small fictional southern Ontario town. The second epigraph, drawn from Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, situates the novel within a literary tradition that has given us powerful and enduring representations of rural southern Ontario, representations, as we have seen, that have shaped how we imagine rurality both provincially and beyond. The quotation he chooses, taken from Leacock's final sketch – "What? it feels nervous and strange to be coming here again after all these years?" (Leacock 155) – puts the reader on guard; not only does it implicate the reader in having visited the scene of the novel before, but it alerts readers, without us yet knowing why, that our return gives cause for nervousness.

The connection between Leacock's and McGill's texts is heightened in the very first pages of the novel when readers learn that the name of the novel's fictional town has been changed from Mooney's Dump to Sunshine as a ploy intended "to attract tourists" (McGill 2). Less obvious than choosing Mariposa as the town's new name, McGill's choice, nonetheless, makes readers aware that he intends to play with (or alongside, we are not yet sure) Leacock. Furthermore, his choice of the name Sunshine clearly invokes rosy images of rurality, that familiar rural idyll, which Leacock himself satirized. Yet, McGill's strategic shifting back and forth between the two town names – Mooney's Dump and Sunshine – throughout the novel, suggests the town is neither all dump nor all

sunshine. The deliberate fashion in which McGill makes a connection between his text and Leacock's serves to highlight the many ways in which the two portraits of southern Ontario rurality are incongruous:

*First*, far from being sunny, the plot of McGill's novel revolves around the disappearance and mysterious death of local dentist Alice Pederson, her story and the inquiry into her death connecting the other various characters that populate the novel.

*Second*, the selection of characters McGill chooses sets his text apart from Leacock's and other conventional representations of rural southern Ontario. Amidst the usual rural suspects, we find Mike Pederson, the black husband of the deceased Alice; Rocket DeWitt (the once aspiring hockey star, "probably the biggest reason anyone in Ontario had heard of Sunshine" (116)), Solomon DeWitt (Rocket's father and prominent town lawyer), Lil and Evie, all indigenous characters (some living on the neighbouring reserve, some living in the town) who among other things succeed in bringing into focus the (dis)connections between the town and reserve communities; Marge and Susan, the queer mothers of Daniel Barrie, Alice's former lover; Robert and Quentin, queer urban seasonal residents and/or tourists; and Archie Boone, the mayor's twin brother and the town junk collector/familiar itinerant.<sup>106</sup> These extremely brief introductions do an entirely inadequate job of explaining the myriad complexities of each of these characters. However, my intention in introducing them in this way is to show how through his character selection, McGill brings race, sexuality, indigeneity, and class considerations to

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<sup>106</sup> The less usual description "familiar itinerant" is used here in place of "homeless person," since Archie Boone actually has a home which he is able to keep as a result of his brother's financial support. What I am hoping to get across by referencing Archie's itinerancy is the unusual nature of his chosen work, which necessitates him wandering the town collecting other people's "garbage."

the fore in his narrative, in a way that is quite unusual in the tradition of writing about rural southern Ontario.

*Third*, McGill challenges our assumptions about what kinds of knowledges we may think we bring to the text. Ultimately, none of the characters in the novel discover the actual facts of Alice Pederson death. Only the reader is told that she drowns as a consequence of a good deed gone wrong, her attempt to rescue a drowning tiger (an escapee from Cam Usher’s Wildlife Park). This is an unusual and dramatically different, almost unimaginable, explanation for the mysterious death that we, along with other characters in the novel, have been trying to solve throughout, a radical departure from the circumstances vividly imagined by one character in sinister detail:

[Alice] could have been abducted then, Bronwen thought. All that time they were looking for her, she might have been hidden away in some backwoods cabin, alive. Her mouth gagged, hands bound. Bronwen could almost feel the cords tight around her own wrists. There were holes in the roof, the floorboards rotten. A kerosene lamp burned on the table and threw a pale light on the walls. She saw a shadow pacing in the corner, nearly beyond the lamp’s reach. The shadow of a man, she thought, but wasn’t sure. It wouldn’t hold still long enough to be identified. And another shadow, Alice’s, kneeling in the centre of the room, her head tilted down as though in prayer. (111)

In learning the truth of Alice’s fate, the reader is surprised, if not perhaps even disappointed, that Alice’s death, in its accidental nature, fails to expose a darker side of the rural community that we may have been expecting to find, an expectation no doubt the product of literary traditions like the Southern Ontario Gothic most famously associated with the writing of Alice Munro. Narratives like Munro’s have taught readers to be suspicious of the superficially tranquil appearances of small towns and to expect “the promise of melodramatic violence and buried lives” (Howells, *Alice* 13) when we

delve into the histories of these communities. As we can see in Bronwen's speculation about Alice's death, she too is influenced by the gothic imaginary that defines her community.

*Fourth*, McGill asks us to be suspicious of how inherited knowledges about place that define who does and does not belong in certain places encourage us to self-regulate where we choose to call home. The expectation that we ought to be aware of and heed these knowledges risks making us seem responsible for our own social exclusion if and when we make the “wrong” choices about which locales to frequent and places to reside. For instance, when Bronwen Ferry, a local resident who has been living in Toronto but moves back temporarily to Sunshine in order to investigate, for insurance purposes, Alice's disappearance and death, wonders about Mike “Why did you ever come to live here? Didn't you know how it would be?” (115), readers are reminded of Leacock's opening to *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*: “I don't know whether you know Mariposa. If not, it is of no consequence, for if you know Canada at all, you are probably well acquainted with a dozen towns just like it” (Leacock 9). In her incredulous questioning of Mike's decision to live in Sunshine, she renders him partially responsible for his experiences of racism there. Bronwen presumes that Mike should have known what it would mean for him, as a black man, to move to his wife's hometown in rural southern Ontario and that this knowledge should have kept him away.

McGill's text uses Leacock's tourist-friendly version of rural southern Ontario as a base against which to present readers with a very different looking rural community, one about which readers may feel “nervous and strange” as a result of the way it deviates



from the white heterosexual norms readers have come to expect in cultural narratives about southern Ontario's rural small towns. Clearly an important contribution to the effort to narrate the lives of rural others, McGill populates his novel with characters who reside uneasily in these rural communities. However, the complexities of their social realities, while interwoven into the fabric of the narrative, are not presented as the text's only or central concern. This is true for McGill's queer characters as well. While their lives are not focal points in the text, nonetheless queerness and relationships to queerness are central to the lives of the central characters. In this way, McGill introduces queer realities and subjectivities as mundane elements of rural life, challenging conventional conceptualizations of the ubiquitous heterosexuality of the rural Sunshines of southern Ontario. The effect is similar to what happens when Findley figures his and Whitehead's life narrative into his own version of the rural idyll. Both insertions go against one of the foundational institutions of idyllic conceptualizations of rural life – the heteronormative family and its function as the linchpin of rural community. As Gray argues about the presence of rural LGBT-identifying youth, Susan's and Marge's and Findley's and Bill's "mere presence defie[s] local and national expectations" (26). These queer rural narratives may be less assertive in their queerness than their urban counterparts (they are not coming-out narratives nor does their queerness generate particular moments of conflict), but this calls attention to strategic ways in which rural queers "may label their queerness differently" (Marple 72). Marple argues that

Whether this is read as repression in the face of homophobia or a subversive inclusion of queer within a homophobic context is largely a matter of perspective. Most commonly it appears as though the urban queer ethos would state repression, while my rural framework and queer

sensibility would suggest subversion. It may not appear to be a queer take over [*sic*], instead it is a queer tinge inserted throughout a community, a different form of resistance from the isolationist tendencies of some urban queer communities. (72)

Looking at McGill's text through this lens, it seems possible that the lack of centrality of queerness in McGill's text does not diminish its productiveness as part of a queer rural archive of southern Ontario. If anything, McGill's text demonstrates how queering the rural is about populating the rural imaginary with literal queers as well as thinking about rurality queerly – a trajectory of thought that encompasses queers and others.

*The Mysteries* queers rurality in a much broader sense through its contestation, on multiple fronts, of the normative social geography of rural southern Ontario, exposing and disrupting, as queer texts ought to, the “normative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment and activity in space and time” (Halberstam 6). Noticeably, McGill presents the reader with reconstructions of space and time that impress upon the reader the performative nature and cultural constructedness of rural society.<sup>107</sup> Not only is the town, in renaming itself, a macro-performance of southern Ontario rural identity, the main community event in the novel is also thoroughly performative. Almost from the beginning of the text, the reader discovers that Alice Pederson disappears after leaving a large party held at Cam Usher's Wildlife Park. Storylines relating to this party weave throughout the novel. Yet, only at the end of the text do readers learn that the various anecdotes we have been reading about the party

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<sup>107</sup> McGill's highlighting of the cultural constructedness of rural spaces and society is extremely important in relation to the customary binary relationship formulated between the country and the city. Along with other theorists of this country/city dichotomy, Elizabeth Grosz suggests there is a historical tendency to separate nature and culture as well as a propensity to “happily designate the human sphere as cultural” (49). Consequently, cities, as centres of human activity, have come to be regarded as the quintessential locations of culture with rural locales relative cultural voids.

actually come from two different parties. The second party, held two years after Alice's disappearance, is a performance, a recreation of the events in which the residents of Sunshine converge to observe themselves, to try and figure out the mystery of Alice's death.

The staged quality of McGill's ending engages the discourse of performativity elaborated by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* that is so integral to queer and gender theory. Consistent with the subversive quality of queer identity performance, the party re-enactment in many ways disrupts the normative communal vision forwarded at the first event. Interestingly the communal gaze is again interrupted at the second party by significant interventions like the indigenous protesters who converge upon the party site, land they claim as indigenous territory. The fact that the protesters return for the second party is more than a point of accuracy; as Alice's husband Mike explains, "the band agreed to participate when I explained what we were attempting . . . Besides, the case is still in the courts. The land is still Cam's. It's not a dead issue for them" (McGill 332). Also important are the differences in this re-enactment. At the first party, when Daniel Barrie observes a chain of partygoers, the town residents, linked hand in hand, weaving their way around the party, he remarks that "all connected in one long spiral. It seemed that all of Mooney's Dump was here" (328). However, he then realizes there are noticeable absences: "Where was Mike Pederson . . . ? Where were the hundreds from the reserve? Where were Susan and his mother?" (328). Significantly, it is the characters of colour, indigenous characters, and queer characters who are absent from the community gathering and the connected unity of the whole town that Daniel initially observes. At

this first celebration, these characters are either on the periphery of the party (Susan and Marge, lost in the woods), are marked as an intrusive presence (the indigenous protestors), or are simply not in attendance (Mike). Yet at the second party Mike, Susan and Marge are all present and the indigenous protestors are invited guests albeit still in protest, suggesting the rural community has the capacity to imagine itself differently.

The reappearance of Rocket DeWitt through the delivery of his notebook, expected to reveal secrets about the original party and Alice's disappearance, is also a significant component in the community's attempt to retell its stories to itself. The whole town has been on the lookout for Rocket since his own disappearance shortly after Alice's. While McGill's text expands in many ways Leacock's imagining of southern Ontario rurality in *Sunshine Sketches*, it is ultimately Rocket's notebook that offers a complete rewriting of this narrative. Rocket, who we have earlier learned is a voracious reader, begins his journal with a pointed reference to Leacock. He begins: "I don't know whether you know Sunshine..." (333). Yet Rocket's question warrants a different answer than the expected response to Leacock's; here the reader is not as quick to agree that it is ultimately irrelevant whether we know Sunshine or not. Having worked our way through McGill's text, it is unlikely the reader feels confident that he or she knows a dozen different small towns like it. As readers, however, we do not get to read the rest of what Rocket has to say about the rural community. McGill only alludes to the content of his narrative, which is dismissively described by one character as a two hundred page "dry community history" (334). Yet the parts of his narrative that are referenced, which

include “Some sketches about life on the reserve” (334), suggest new and unfamiliar additions to this old rural story.

In the end, is McGill’s text hopeful about how we can imagine rurality differently? With Rocket’s text misunderstood, considered inadequate in bringing forth answers to solve the mystery of Alice’s death, and the second reenactment party, for the same reason, perceived as a failure, it is hard to say. Despite most of the characters’ blindness about what has and has not been in front of them all the time, I believe the voices present in *The Mysteries* actually do succeed in queering “the smooth face of things.”<sup>108</sup> In the end, McGill leaves readers with an image of Sunshine as an “invisible town in the darkness” (338), which we, along with the character observing it in the distance, “imagine” (338) we are moving toward – a town with far less certain and discernible contours than that with which we began the novel.

*The Mysteries*, *Out Our Way*, and *From Stone Orchard* all write in varying ways and degrees about queer ruralities in southern Ontario, contributing to the necessary expansion of a queer rural archive, making visible queer rural lives. However, as I have already stated, this archive needs to be about more than asserting that rural queers exist in southern Ontario. Drawing on Foucault, Halberstam writes about entering queerness into a broader rural archive as a way of expanding “a discursive field and a structure of thinking” (32-33). Hence, the building of this archive is a thought project, but it also needs to be a political one. Speaking recently in Toronto, Judith Butler commented on her understanding of the relationship between social justice movements and queer politics:

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<sup>108</sup> This line is taken from McGill’s epigraph drawn from Browning’s *The Ring and the Book*.

For me, the term queer has always been a way of characterizing alliance, ways of working across difference . . . a mode of alliance that moved beyond simple identity categories and certainly moved beyond a kind of special interest politics, just mobilizing for this group's rights and not worried about someone else's . . . It seems to me that queerness is a point of departure for thinking about those kinds of alliances, and they're not always predictable alliances, and they're not alliances between identities, but they are alliances among those who face precarity or who face resistance in certain kinds of ways. It strikes me that queerness is part of a radical social justice project, and if it's not, it's become too narrow. ("Judith")

I similarly contend that thinking about rurality in ways that build alliances – attending to those too frequently overlooked rural subjectivities, entering queerness, race, indigeneity, sexuality, ethnicity, gender, ability and class into our understandings of overlapping discourses of rurality – is a queer trajectory of thought. As a recent contribution to this project, when McGill introduces a host of “new” characters into his depiction of rural southern Ontario, although his text may only be a “point of departure” in the agenda Butler establishes for queer politics, he exposes readers to new ways of imagining rurality queerly. In this way, his text honours what Michael Warner suggests is the “critical edge” of “queer,” and by extension queer theory, that rests in “defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual” (xxvi).

## **Afterword**

Many of the cultural texts that inspired the various parts of this dissertation I came across in happenstance ways: I first watched a *Wingfield* play in the auditorium of my London, Ontario high school where Reed Needles, the playwright's brother, was my high school English teacher; I came to enjoy Fred Eaglesmith's music while living with a former partner in Victoria, British Columbia; during the second year of my Ph.D., while attending a poetry reading, organized for Black History Month in St. Catharines, Ontario, I happened upon an exhibit of *From One Place to Another/Las dos realidades*; later that year, I found the *Faces of Farming* calendar on my parent's kitchen counter in Port Severn, Ontario. For a long time the accidental nature of these "discoveries" felt odd, as though I had cobbled together a dissertation out of a number of narrative pieces of rural southern Ontario that have drifted randomly into my life. What I now realize is that even before I took formal interest in the topic, rural narratives have been circulating around me for some time beneath my critical notice, yet, nonetheless, informing my understanding of rural southern Ontario; I also realize that I am most likely not exceptional in this regard. It was only when I decided to pay attention that I realized these various cultural texts are part of a shared, sometimes incongruous, narrative, with a wide geographical circulation (in my case, from Ontario to British Columbia), and that they pop up in both institutional and more personal settings (the high school, the official cultural celebration, the family home).

As I began to think about how these various narratives fit together, I realized that rural southern Ontario has a far more complex social geography than I had ever imagined

or that any one of the individual texts I have examined is capable of representing on its own. I also realized that I was desperately lacking in knowledge of various cultural histories of rural southern Ontario, a set of critical tools with which to approach rural space and culture, and an understanding of current social, political, and economic concerns in the region. Moreover, I recognized that, although critical of how this may have come to be, I had generally accepted the dominant belief that rural society in southern Ontario is white, heterosexual, Protestant and still largely supportive of patriarchal institutions and social organization.<sup>109</sup> Hopefully this dissertation explains why some of these beliefs ring true and shows how certain cultural narratives about rural southern Ontario contribute to making it remain or seem so. On the other hand, this dissertation demonstrates how many of these beliefs are not accurate and sheds light on a number of cultural texts that contest this vision of rurality in southern Ontario. In addition, my aim in *Altered States of Rurality* has been to provide readers of literature and consumers of culture necessary tools to think critically about rural southern Ontario's pasts and futures as well as to increase our sense of awareness about how literary and cultural texts help to shape them.

It is, perhaps, a common experience to arrive at the conclusion of one's dissertation with a feeling of frustration; after all, my research has brought me, among other discoveries, the knowledge that there is still so much work to be done on the topic

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<sup>109</sup> Perhaps from these admissions I may sound like your average Ontario urbanite, ill-informed and full of stereotypical and smug presumptions about rural society in my province. Yet I do not believe this accurately reflects my upbringing or socio-spatial biases. I have lived in rural and urban southern Ontario and worked on farms outside of Canada. When deciding to pursue a doctoral degree, I found myself choosing between two life paths, farming and academia. My decision to work academically on rurality was largely driven by my desire to have a foot in both worlds.



of rurality in southern Ontario. My efforts here seem to me a mere scratch on the surface of this complex cultural geography. If only there were more time to delve into representations of the rural environment and environmentalisms; to explore how animals figure in rural discourses; to examine rural presences in urban spaces – farmers’ markets, for example, or urban farms like the one at the Canada Agriculture Museum in Ottawa or Toronto’s Riverdale Farm, which functions year-round in downtown Toronto as “a representation of a rural farm in Ontario” (“Riverdale”); to study how country fairs “market” the country to rural and city dwellers alike; or to question why indigeneity is hived off from dominant discourses of rurality in southern Ontario. These are future projects, but, relating to the final point, I would like to conclude my current project with another reading of McGill’s *The Mysteries* as a way to provide an opening into this trajectory of thought.

- **Notes Toward Entering “hostile territory” into Rural Discourse**

Concerns about shifting power dynamics relating to resource distribution and cultural and political representation between the urban and the rural evident in southern Ontario are also areas of concern for First Nations scholars, activists and communities (Roslinski 102). Particularly challenging when thinking about socio-spatial discourses in relation to indigenous identities and socio-political concerns is the way in which a growing urban indigenous population – which accounts for about half of the entire indigenous population of Canada (Berg et al. 397; Roslinski 101) – is incompatible with the dominant association between First Nations peoples and rurality (Berg et al. 399; Goldie

14). Berg et al. observe that this “discursive framing,” wherein “Aboriginality and rurality have been closely linked such that urban Aboriginal people have become virtually invisible in much public discourse about Aboriginal issues in Canada” (399), causes problems when it comes to the provision of services and the development of policy focused on urban indigenous peoples.

Considering this discursive framework, one would think that, in contrast, discourses of rurality in southern Ontario and elsewhere would be teeming with indigenous issues. Paradoxically, in southern Ontario, this is not the case. Despite the strong association between indigeneity and rurality, First Nations peoples, on and off reserve, figure only marginally, if at all, in dominant representations of southern Ontario rurality. It is as though for non-indigenous artists, scholars, and activists who focus on the rural, the reserve in particular exists as a distinct cultural space separate from other rural spaces, thus residing outside of the parameters of rural studies. By noting this trend, I am not suggesting that reserves do not have their own socio-spatial cultures; rather I am observing that the absence of the reserve in dominant discourses of rurality in the region is conspicuous. Berg et al. claim that “in hegemonic ‘white’ thinking, the (ostensible) rural spaces of Aboriginality” are already “linked to marginalized rural spaces, poverty, lack of services and lack of opportunities” (399); this marginalization is compounded when discussions of indigenous ruralities are absent in considerations of rural southern Ontario.

If “spaces of Aboriginal communities are most often constituted in relation to the dominant (white) social groups in Canadian society — often defined as those places that

are *not* where the rest of Canadians live” (405, emphasis in original), then *The Mysteries* is anomalous in the way it represents the intersection between indigenous and non-indigenous rural narratives. Sunshine is not the only rural locale in McGill’s text. The town is situated next to a reserve, and indigenous land claims originating from this reserve community form the political backdrop of the novel. As such, the novel works against the perception that “Aboriginal communities are . . . those places that are *not* where the rest of Canadians live” in that the indigenous land claims literally contest the boundaries between these rural communities. Sunshine’s history and future is intimately related to the neighbouring reserve. Yet indigenous/non-indigenous relations in the community recall O’Connell’s assertions about the “historical amnesia” (554) of white Canadian settler logic that pervades rural southern Ontario, wherein indigenous peoples are “the ones seen as the outsiders, not part of the community but barbarians waiting to invade” (McGill 313). Considering Sunshine’s position as the “everytown” of rural southern Ontario, this dynamic highlights the need for indigenous knowledges and considerations of the relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous rural spaces and cultures to inform our imaginings of the region’s rural futures.

Beyond the shifting and contested spatial relationships in McGill’s text, the way in which the main characters inhabit these spaces, initially, seems to support the portrayal of the indigenous and non-indigenous rural communities as relatively isolated from one another. Most of the action in the novel takes place in Sunshine, and the two principal First Nations characters, Solomon DeWitt and his son Rocket, live in Sunshine, off-reserve, with Solomon’s wife Ruth, a white Sunshine local. For other non-indigenous

characters like Esther Fremlin, McGill writes that “Although the reserve had always occupied a place in her consciousness, it was as invisible to her as the far side of the moon. Some of her classmates lived there, but she’d never thought to ask them what it was like” (75). Consequently, Esther’s knowledge of the reserve is informed by local bigotry, “the things that adults had said about the place” (75), which amounts to “fantasies of rural squalor: shanties built out of corrugated tin, stripped-down cars on concrete blocks, feral dogs” (75). Yet upon visiting the reserve, Esther finds, to her surprise, houses that are “neat and respectable, like anything in Mooney’s Dump” (77). These reflections and observations take place during a mushroom hunting trip Esther takes with her father, and two of her high school friends, Rocket DeWitt and Daniel Barrie. This excursion, recalled from Esther’s past, is the only scene in the novel that actually takes place on the reserve. It is on this occasion that Esther’s budding young romance with Daniel comes to an abrupt end when they are happened upon unclothed in the forest by two reserve residents. Interrupted mid sexual encounter, Daniel takes flight with their clothes, leaving Esther trying to conceal her nakedness behind a tree as the two older women – Evie and Lil, with humour but delicacy, ascertain that Daniel is indeed her boyfriend and was not in the process of forcing himself upon her. Assured of the consensual nature of the situation, Lil offers Esther some relationship advice: “Don’t take this personally, but I suspect you could do better than that. You think so, Evie?” (80), to which Evie jokingly replies “I don’t know. He runs pretty fast” (80). Years later, in the novel’s present, Lil and Esther cross paths again, this time in Sunshine when Lil is a client at the Sunshine Variety where Esther works. Although Esther interacts with Lil in

the store “as she would [with] any stranger” (82), she recognizes her immediately and regrets not acknowledging this fact to Lil: “It felt like a chance lost. Esther wanted to call out, to tell her anything that would make her stay a little longer” (82). In the end, Lil is the one to recall their former encounter, when upon leaving the store she inquires after Daniel. After a perfunctory but knowing exchange Esther feels she “should have said more, she should have followed her to the parking lot and asked her about Evie” (82).

In some ways these two scenes could be read as existing in the novel only as a means to introduce the reader, through Esther, to Daniel Barrie’s character; later on, he plays a significant part in the narrative as the young lover of Alice Pederson. However, if this were McGill’s sole intent, the initial scene at the reserve would have sufficed. Yet McGill brings Lil back into the narrative in a way that highlights a small but shared history between these women. Additionally, by situating their second encounter in Sunshine, McGill accentuates the flows that take place between the two communities. Rather than merely having non-indigenous residents of Sunshine occasionally making their way onto the reserve, a place Esther’s father jokingly refers to as “hostile territory” (75), McGill also depicts reserve residents making their own trips into what could more rightly be thought of, considering the pervasive anti-First Nations bigotry of the white town residents, the hostile territory of Sunshine. However, what we notice about the relationship between Esther, Evie and Lil is that, far from hostile, it is actually inflected with care – Evie’s and Lil’s care for Esther’s safety and, later, Esther’s desire to recognize their gesture by engaging in a friendly manner with Lil and enquiring after

Evie, taking a caring interest in some small way in their lives. However, Esther fails to return this care and recognizes this failure as “a chance lost.”

Interestingly, the hypothetical conversation that Esther imagines had she followed Lil out to the parking lot replicates another hypothetical conversation described later in the novel but that takes place in an earlier timeline. This second conversation is one imagined by Alice Pederson on the day of her disappearance and death. As the town dentist, Alice’s first appointment that morning is with Ruth DeWitt, Solomon’s wife. As for the story of Ruth and Solomon, they are “the only white woman and Native man in local memory to marry and live in Mooney’s Dump” (262). When Alice bends over her mouth and requests Ruth “Open wide” (263), she longs for more than a physical opening between them. In her mind, she asks:

What was it like, Ruth? . . . Sticking together through the university years, with people staring and your friends warning you about Indian men and your parents refusing to speak to you? And then the first child, and everyone saying how beautiful mixed-blood babies are. You and Solomon trying to build your careers and still be good parents. At some point you must have wondered if Mike and I went through the same thing, but you’ve never mentioned it, have you? Neither have I. We’d have a lot to talk about, if we could ever get beyond local news. (263)

Of course Alice knows what it was like for Ruth. Although both women reside in Sunshine, their choices in marriage partners alienate them from their communities. Attuned in advance to the consequence of their choices, each couple’s decision to stay in Sunshine is not an easy one, a fact underlined by the exceptional description of Ruth not as the only white woman in local memory to marry a Native man, but rather as the only white woman to marry a Native man “*and live in Mooney’s Dump*” (262, emphasis mine). Alice, for her part, marries Mike, “a man from the city, an African Canadian –

although [Mike] doubt[s] [Sunshine residents] would use that term” (31). Years after making his home in Sunshine, on occasion (such as his wife’s funeral), Mike is still poignantly aware of how race singles him out as an outsider within this community: “With so much of Sunshine gathered in one place, the pale uniformity of their skin was apparent to him in a way it seldom else was any more” (47).

However, Ruth’s and Alice’s intersecting and shared narratives concerning the racist attitudes of the town *vis-à-vis* their mixed-race marriages and mixed-race children do not make for easy alliances. Ruth is “intimately involved in her husband’s legal work” (262), much of which involves representing the band’s land claims in and around Sunshine, and, as Mike notes “Alice wasn’t only the town dentist, she was a Mooney. Her ancestors had founded the town after Elijah Mooney bilked the Natives of their peninsula on behalf of the Queen” (31). All the same, what we see repeated in this scene, wherein McGill presents another hypothetical conversation, another chance lost, is the desire for conversations to take place between local residents, particularly between female residents, relating to issues of race, gender, and indigeneity as they play out in these rural southern Ontario locales. If we read into the death of Alice Pederson, perhaps we can argue it is karma, the price to pay for complicit silences. Leading up to her death, Alice Pederson faces a moral dilemma over how she deals with her discovery of indigenous remains, evidence of a burial ground that will support one of the outstanding land claims. Alice dumps the bones in a swamp and does not tell anyone what she finds. She delays the truth: “Later, she thought, after the henge party, she’d find a way to tell

people what she knew. It was easy enough to stay silent” (267).<sup>110</sup> Yet soon after this discovery and concealment, Alice finds her own watery resting place, her own bones discovered months later at the bottom of Mooney’s Bay, leading readers to wonder whether her death may be a cautionary tale about the perils of not having necessary conversations at the right time.

All of these necessary conversations fail to take place in the novel; yet, as part of *The Mysteries*’s queer trajectory of thought, in which it challenges the “heteronormative knowledges and institutions, and the subjectivities and socialities that are (in)formed by them and that (in)form them” (Sullivan vi), McGill’s text suggests these are conversations that ought to be circulating in the reader’s mind. In this way, the text participates in what Awad Ibrahim refers to as a “*pedagogy of the imaginary*” (97, emphasis in original) that “aims to deessentialize and decolonize public spaces, both represented and imagined” (97) by taking up certain critical questions through our reading and engagement with cultural texts: “how do we as a nation, groups, and individuals imagine ourselves as well as others; what impact does it have on others?, and how can we as pedagogues work with this imaginary to make people imagine themselves and others differently?” (97). McGill’s text inspires us to consider how we shift these hypothetical conversations that challenge dominant discourses of rurality from the realm of the hypothetical to the actual.

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<sup>110</sup> The “henge party” from which Alice disappears was thrown to celebrate the building of a stone henge on Cam Usher’s property. Prior to the celebration, it was while assisting with building the henge that Alice comes across the indigenous burial remains.



While in the previous chapter I suggested this kind of reading is illustrative of a queer methodological approach to rurality, the many thought-provoking and challenging essays that make up the special issue on “Sexuality, Nationality, Indigeneity” of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* have highlighted for me the need to reorient queer methodologies as they relate to indigeneity and rural studies. As Bethany Schneider, one of the issue’s co-editors contends, both queer and indigenous studies can be thought of as subjects and methodologies (Heath Justice, Rifkin, and Schneider 13). Yet, in taking indigeneity into account in queer rural discourses of southern Ontario, as we see happening in McGill’s *The Mysteries*, Bethany Schneider cautions, “we must not fall into imagining that the happy solution is to ‘bring’ queer to bear on Native studies” (14); rather, in consideration of the fraught relationship between sexuality, nationality and indigeneity and the sometimes historical, sometimes current lack of engagement with issues of indigeneity in queer studies (Smith 42), Schneider asks “Is it possible that queer studies needs Native studies more than the other way around?” (23). In “Settler Homonationalism: Theorizing Settler Colonialism within Queer Modernities,” Scott Lauria Morgensen argues that in the colonial history of the United States, “over time non-Natives were able to form shared identities and movements to claim modern sexual citizenship in the settler state. Under such conditions, queer movements can naturalize settlement and assume a homonormative and national form that may be read specifically as settler homonationalism” (106). I believe the same argument may be extended to the Canadian context, as we see in Findley’s *From Stone Orchard* and Riordon’s *Out Our*

Way a propensity to slip into what can be referred to as pioneering discourses of queer rurality.

The way in which Findley positions his and Whitehead's experience in rural southern Ontario in relation to white Canadian settler narratives and their supporting literary traditions is an excellent example of this phenomenon. Throughout *From Stone Orchard*, not only does Findley link his narrative and rural experience to a tradition of settler writing, with reference to the likes of Catherine Parr Traill (20-21) and Susanna Moodie (38-39), but Findley also lays claim to rural space without adequate recognition of how this gesture aligns itself with the colonial processes that have resulted in a history of displacing indigenous peoples from the place where he and his partner decide "to put down roots in a rural setting" (166). In this text, Findley's rural imagination rarely extends back beyond the "days of the first British settlers" (26). Moreover, he contrasts the permanent settlement of white colonizers and their physical legacy of roads and clearings with the historical presence of what he describes as "temporary native encampments" (26) in the region, evidenced only through the occasional retrieval of buried "Animal bones and broken knives, arrowheads and pottery shards" (26). This imagined ephemeral indigenous presence with its fragmented and degraded relics stands in stark contrast to the narrative Findley provides of his and Whitehead's own familial ties to the Cannington region, "*The Heart of Ontario*" (5, emphasis in original):

On such a road, not far from here, the boy who grew up to be my grandfather rode the post horse, learning how to read with book in hand, as he delivered mail in the 1870s. On another road nearby, Bill's great-grandfather stood outside his inn at Vallentyne, handing over the list of his 1861 assets to the census-taker: *one cow, two pigs and a barrel of whiskey*. (140, emphasis in original)

Not only do these family lineages claim a more official connection to place, through their possession of addresses and their documentation in the national census record, but the narrative Findley repeats here is also reminiscent of the scene from Needles's *Letters from Wingfield Farm*, discussed in Chapter One, where Walt Wingfield listens to white locals rehearse historical narratives of rural belonging. In many ways Findley is a real-life version of Walt Wingfield; they are both urban to rural migrants who engage in a form of official rural reportage. As such, through their position as exurbanite narrators of rural experience, both Findley and Walt play a part in what Chris Stapel describes as “a colonization of rurality by urban knowledge claims” (2). Yet Findley's and Whitehead's family heritage also affords them the pretension of locality, offering Findley the opportunity to rehearse his and Whitehead's own narrative of white colonial settlement in rural southern Ontario.

In *Out Our Way*, one of Riordon's interviewees, Joey, claims “You know what I think is the real challenge for us out here? We don't have any map to follow. No one's been this way before us; there are no tracks. We really have to find our own way. We're pioneers” (157). When engaging queer ruralities in southern Ontario, I suggest we must be extremely wary of ways in which breaking new narrative ground in the depiction of rural queers can mobilize pioneering discourses of queer rurality. What is evident in both *From Stone Orchard* and *Out Our Way*, yet challenged in McGill's *The Mysteries*, is the very real danger of white homonationalist rural narratives being affirmed even as they contest the sexual exclusions of their white heteronationalist antecedents. Particularly in Canada where we observe the persistent grounding of white Canadian nationalist

discourses in the rural, Mark Rifkin's question, "How does centering the history of Native peoples and the continuing process of settlement substantively alter how we write the history of sexuality?" (Heath Justice, Rifkin, and Schneider 33), is especially important in our approach to rural studies, if we are to circumvent the already present inclination even in "other" rural discourses to repeat "the logics of settlement" (33) by retaining the figure of the pioneer in our thinking about rural culture, space, and society.

Recognizing this is a complex issue with which to conclude, I hope, however, it leaves readers with the impression that much more attention is warranted with regards to rural studies in southern Ontario and that much work remains to be done on the topic of indigenous ruralities as well as the variety of other rurals that have been the focus of this dissertation. As studies considering population growth in the region show, if we do not attend to rural concerns in southern Ontario now, there will likely be less and less rural southern Ontario to pay attention to in the future. Many of the theoretical concerns taken up in this dissertation and more besides are present in rural regions nationally and internationally, and it is high time they receive the attention they deserve. By engaging new (particularly in southern Ontario), complex, and counter-hegemonic representations of rurality, this dissertation animates discourses around race, sexuality, gender, class, metronormativity and urban-centrism as these issues intersect and inform the southern Ontarian rural cultural imaginary.

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## Appendix 1

### Each One of Us Is Somebody<sup>111</sup>

Each one of us is somebody  
With life, home and family  
Sounds in sights of our lives  
Speak universal humanity  
We sweat with integrity  
Working to be free  
We labour with dignity

We are not mere pairs of hands  
We are builders of two nations  
We are spirits and hearts  
Souls, brains and minds  
We are thoughts, visions  
Memories, dreams, plans

From root to fruit, from branch to stem  
We work from 6: a.m. to six p.m.  
Working to honour our ancestors  
We work to sponsor our prayers

Working for our children's futures  
We work until we lose count of the hours  
Fruits of our labours yield billions of dollars  
Mostly for others, yet still we don't shirk  
Because we come here to work

We are experts in our fields  
We work hard at home and abroad  
Year to year, from there to here  
Here and there, there in here  
Here is there

Two nations on our shoulders  
Back and forth, balance of life  
Working through things and time  
Working from one place to another  
Merging two realities into one fruitful life

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<sup>111</sup> A collective poem written by participating southern Ontario migratory workers and the members of Red Tree Artists' Collective as part of the *From One Place to Another/Las dos realidades* collective art project.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Farmer Biographies from *Faces of Farming* 2011**

#### **January: Julie**

About eight years ago, Julie began raising turkeys as “a bit of an experiment” and enjoyed it so much that it has since turned into a career. She’s generally accompanied by canine companion Ethan who faithfully follows her everywhere on the farm that he’s allowed – waiting patiently outside of the barn doors while she cares for her birds. Julie and Carl are now parents to baby Cole and are also world travelers who enjoy volunteering for charities.

#### **February: Fred & Brian**

Fred’s ancestors have been farming in Ontario for several generations and he always knew he’d follow in the family tradition. A decade ago, he was joined by son Brian who returned home to farm after earning his MBA in agri-business. The two now raise chickens on their farm north of London. Fred is well known as a big picture thinker who has served as a board member on many farm organizations. Brian enjoys coaching his children’s sports teams.

#### **March: Kyle**

Kyle is a fourth generation vegetable farmer in the Holland Marsh near Bradford. He came home to farm alongside his father, siblings and grandfather after graduating from the agricultural program at Ridgetown College. He likes “making plans for the farm and watching them come to life” – literally! A sports enthusiast, Kyle enjoys going camping and snowmobiling, playing hockey and baseball.

#### **April: Roger**

Although raised on a farm, Roger left to pursue a career in a factory after high school. He only lasted a few months though before realizing that farming was in his heart. For the last 26 years, Roger and his wife Lorrie have been egg farmers in Niagara. In his free time, this father of four describes himself as a “motorhead”! He loves working on race cars and building Hot Rods.

#### **May: Jen & Amy**

Sisters Jen and Amy never imagined a life outside of the city limits when they were growing up. But that all changed when they met their husbands in high school – two beef cattle farmers who also happened to be close friends. Both are now mothers to two young children and have embraced their rural lives, volunteering with various agricultural

organizations. Amy's hobbies include cooking and playing tennis while Jen is an avid gardener and photographer.

**June: Marja, Barend & Matthijs**

This close knit family emigrated from Holland to a dairy farm in the Ottawa Valley two decades ago to fulfill a lifetime dream of farming in Canada. Marja now works full time with her two sons Barend and Matthijs who always knew they were destined to farm, proudly following in the footsteps of their father who they lost to cancer last year. Marja enjoys travelling and playing with her grandchildren, while Barend spends his time with his young family or playing hockey. Milking cows is a 24-7 commitment, but Matthijs still has time to spend with his growing family and to fit in a few rounds of golf when he can.

**July: Rod**

Rod raises purebred pigs on his farm in Peterborough County with his wife Shari and their three daughters. He is involved in many farm organizations and works hard to speak up for Ontario's farmers, meeting regularly with local politicians to discuss farming challenges. Rod's been an active volunteer with the pig show for youth at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto for many years.

**August: Otto**

Otto was raised on a family farm in Guatemala and immigrated to Canada over 20 years ago. For the past 16 years, this married father of four has proudly worked as a manager on an Ontario veal farm that's a recognized leader for improving both animal care and the environment. A recent example resulted in the farm's manure being turned to electricity in a biodigester that generates enough power for 500 neighbouring homes on a full time basis. In his free time, Otto enjoys gardening, hiking and exploring his adopted homeland.

**September: Jack & Christine**

Jack and Christine farm with their family in Lambton County where they specialize in raising roosters as well as the hens who lay fertilized eggs that will hatch into chickens that will be raised for meat. These graduates of the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program also grow peppers in their greenhouse. Christine serves on municipal council and has returned to school to take a Masters Degree. Jack is active as a leader in several farm organizations and enjoys travelling and spending time at their family cottage.

**October: Mark**

Mark is a third generation Perth County farmer who works alongside his father, brother and wife Sandi to raise chickens and crops such as corn, wheat and soybeans. Mark says that his greatest reward as a farmer comes from “putting something in the ground and watching it grow”! Mother Nature can be a tough boss, but he likes the fact that every day on a farm brings new challenges. When he’s not working in the fields, this father of two enjoys spending time on the golf course.

**November: Katherine**

Katherine happily admits she doesn’t “fit the regular farmer mold” and wonders at the direction her life has taken. A “city girl” from Chatham-Kent, she studied to become a veterinary technician and, while in college, took a placement working with pigs. She was instantly captivated and now works on a pig farm in Lambton County caring for newborn piglets, where she finds it rewarding to use her veterinary training to better care for the young animals. And what does she do in her free time? Spends time working with cows on another farm of course!

**December: Anthony & Marj**

You think you are busy? Anthony and Marj care for over 1,000 kids a year – that’s goats and their five busy young sons aged two to nine! They are active in their community and with their church near Sarnia. Anthony also serves on a local agricultural advisory committee and on a dairy goat farmer organization. In 2010, they were recognized for their leadership in the Ontario Outstanding Young Farmer competition.



### Appendix 3

#### Carmelita<sup>112</sup>

Spoken introduction to live version from *Ralph's Last Show: Live In Santa Cruz*: "I wrote this song in southern Ontario, Canada, about migrant workers. This song was recorded by our good friends the Cowboy Junkies."

Well down along the railroad track  
I ran into my old friend Jack  
He was dressed in his Sunday best  
But his face was red and his eyes were dead  
He said I lost Marina  
And the last place that I seen her  
She was makin' off with my best friend

I took him to the water  
Spent fifty dollars  
On something that would take him to the moon  
Well he must've gone to heaven  
'Cause just before I left him  
I tried to wake him up but he wouldn't move

[Chorus]  
So come on Carmelita  
You drank too much and I can see that  
Soon you're gonna need a breath of air  
We'll dance across the wheat fields  
There's a place I know just east of here  
And it wouldn't take too long to go down there  
We'll sleep out on the ground  
And in the morning when we wake up  
We'll leave town

And I picked my last tobacco leaf  
Soaking wet up to my knees  
Out there before the sun is on the rise  
And you can have a drink of water  
But don't you look at my daughter  
Or I'll come down there  
And I'll cut you with this knife

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<sup>112</sup> My transcription of lyrics from *Ralph's Last Show: Live In Santa Cruz* (2001).

[Chorus]

And there ain't any flack man  
If you're a black man  
They put you on a plane  
Back to where you're from

[Chorus]

**Time to Get a Gun**<sup>113</sup>

my neighbor's car got stole last night  
right out of his driveway  
we heard the dogs a barking  
we never paid them any mind  
and mary says  
she's going to lock the door  
from now on when we go away  
and i been walking around this farm  
wondering if it's time

[Chorus]

time to get a gun  
that's what i been thinking  
i could afford one  
if i did just a little less drinking  
time to put something  
between me and the sun  
when the talking is over  
it's time to get a gun

last week a government man was there  
when i walked out of my back door  
he said i'm sorry to bother you son  
but it don't matter anymore  
cause even while we're talking  
right here where we stand  
they're making plans for a four-lane highway  
and a big ole overpass

[Chorus]

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<sup>113</sup> Lyrics taken from liner notes for *Lipstick, Lies & Gasoline* (1997).

mary says she's worried about herself and her kids  
she's never known anybody had a gun  
and her daddy never did  
but i think it should be up to me  
'cause when it's all said and done  
somebody's got to walk into the night  
and i'm going to be that one

[Chorus]

### **White Trash**<sup>114</sup>

When I met her she was a beauty queen who wanted something more.  
Now she's hanging out with me in front of the liquor store.  
And it won't start when I shut it off so she has to get the beer.  
She puts it in the back seat and she quietly says to me...

When, exactly, did we become white trash?  
How come we got seven dogs livin' in the garage?  
How come the only eight-track in our car is Johnny Cash?  
When, exactly, did we become white trash?

She tells all our friends that I've got my Ph.D.  
But it stands for post hole digger, it ain't exactly a degree.  
And there's curtains on the windows, and we hardly watch TV.  
And that double wide is triple wide, now that she's with me.  
And she says...

When, exactly, did we become white trash?  
How come we got seven dogs?  
Who burned down the garage?  
How come the only eight-track in our car is Johnny Cash?  
When, exactly, did we become white trash?

Girls: [falsetto] When, exactly, did we become white trash?  
Boys: [deep bass] When, exactly, did we become white trash?  
Santa Cruz [Insert your village/town/city/venue]: When, exactly, did we become white trash?

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<sup>114</sup> My transcription of lyrics from *Ralph's Last Show: Live In Santa Cruz* (2001).

**John Deere**<sup>115</sup>

This letter that I write to you Dad  
Well I will not sign my name  
Though I did not want to tell you  
I felt I had to anyway  
It's rained for weeks  
And it flooded the creek  
And I lost the whole crop of grain  
And the man at the bank wouldn't loan me the money  
To plant that field again.

So today, Dad, I sold the old John Deere  
The man who bought it's gonna fix it up  
And put it in a museum  
Well I guess that's where this whole thing's gone  
A picture for people to pay to look upon  
"That's how they lived in the old days, son"  
The sheep's in the meadow  
Can't find the cows  
Little Boy Blue's got a job in town.

Yesterday old McAlister came by  
Said that he's had enough  
Between the government and the subsidies  
Well he just couldn't keep up  
And if welfare cheques was farmin'  
Well he'd simply just rather not  
And I didn't say nothing', Dad,  
As I watched him drive off.

But today, Dad, I sold the old John Deere  
The man who bought it's gonna fix it up  
And put it in a museum  
Well I guess that's where this whole thing's gone  
A picture for people to pay to look upon  
"That's how they lived in the old days, son"  
The sheep's in the meadow  
Can't find the cows  
Little Boy Blue's got a job in town.

Mary says it'll be okay  
If nothing else goes wrong

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<sup>115</sup> My transcription of lyrics from *Ralph's Last Show: Live In Santa Cruz* (2001).

And she got a job at the five and dime  
And the hours ain't too long  
I hope this letter finds you well  
I'm sorry how it just goes on  
But I had to tell somebody, Dad  
And you were the only one.

And today, Dad, I sold the old John Deere.

**Spookin' the Horses**<sup>116</sup>

you're spookin' the horses  
they're wild and they're scared  
with that bright coloured makeup  
and those clothes that you wear  
and i seen you dancing  
last night 'neath the trees  
you're spookin' the horses  
and you're scaring me

where the road meets the highway  
those bright city lights  
must have shone through your windshield  
and got into your eyes  
and i guess you thought  
that they'd set you free  
you're spookin' the horses  
and you're scaring me

you're not wearing your hair  
tied back anymore  
and you're wearing dresses  
like never before

i can hear the gears grinding  
where you make the turn  
and up on the skyline  
those headlights just burn  
and the horses go running  
and my heart just screams  
you're spookin' the horses  
and you're scaring me

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<sup>116</sup> Lyrics taken from liner notes for *Lipstick, Lies & Gasoline* (1997).