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The White Caribou in the Surgical Theatre: Intersex and Whiteness in Kathleen Winter's *Annabel*

KATELYN DYKSTRA

In a way, whiteness itself is a straightening device: bodies disappear into the “sea of whiteness” when they “line up”; [t]his is not to make “the fit” between bodies and spaces natural: white bodies can line up, only if they pass, by approximating whiteness, by “being like.”

— Sara Ahmed, “The Phenomenology of Whiteness” (158)¹

THERE IS AN UNCANNY MIRROR between a scene represented in Toni Morrison’s famous *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* and the prologue to Kathleen Winter’s 2010 novel *Annabel*. In both, white characters in canoes are visited by a large white figure that emerges from the snow. In Morrison’s book, the white characters are Edgar Allan Poe’s Pym and Peters from *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, who have just witnessed the death of NuNu, a black man.² In *Annabel*, the white characters are Graham Montague and his daughter Annabel. In Poe’s book, the white figure that emerges is an unknown “white giant,” a human figure whose skin is the “hue” “of the perfect whiteness of the snow” (qtd. in Morrison 79). In *Annabel*, the figure is a white caribou that has broken from the herd and stands on the edge of the lake: “The white caribou stands still, in a patch of sunlight between black tree trunks, staring at the man and the girl inside the vessel. The moss beneath the caribou’s hooves is white and appears to be made from the same substance as the animal, whose outlines are barely there, considering the light above and below it” (Winter 2). As Annabel reaches toward the creature, the canoe tips, and she and her father, neither of whom can swim, are consumed by the “black, calm water” (2) that surrounds them.

Morrison reads the scene in Poe’s book as indicative of the tropes in American literature that rely on the black slave in order to culturally and socially construct the white American male. She claims that such

scenes establish that, “in a wholly racialized society, there is no escape from racially inflected language, and the work writers do to unhobble the imagination from the demands of that language is complicated, interesting, and definitive” (13). By extension, Morrison argues, our national literatures end up “describing and inscribing what is really on the national mind” (14). I am interested in expanding her reading within a Canadian context and exploring what is on “the national mind” in a country that placed *Annabel* on the national stage in Canada Reads 2014 as an important part of our literary landscape. I therefore examine *Annabel*’s “racially inflected language” and the way that it relies on whiteness to make intersex legible within the Canadian cultural imaginary.³

In a Canadian context, it is not the black slave who constructs whiteness but Indigenous peoples and non-white immigrants (Thobani, qtd. in Francis 9). According to Margot Francis in *Creative Subversions: Whiteness, Indigeneity, and the National Imagination*, whiteness is a banality, an ordinariness, that white bodies slide into in order to go unmarked (17). Therefore, she argues, the only way for the “anti-hero” of Canadian literature (the unlikely heroes or “born losers” [Atwood, qtd. in Francis 15] who famously struggle against a demanding natural landscape) to survive is to disappear into whiteness (16). *Annabel*’s protagonist is an example of such an “anti-hero” and thus must also become benign in his whiteness both so that culturally and socially he can be made legible, despite his queer body, and so that the novel itself can exist favourably within the Canadian nation-state.

Annabel’s investment in both racial and figurative whiteness owes to the power of whiteness as “a straightening device,” as Ahmed puts it, and to its position within Canadian culture. The novel is most famously about an intersex person,⁴ the “anti-hero” Wayne/Annabel, who grows up in a remote community in Labrador called Croydon Harbour. Wayne/Annabel later leaves Labrador and moves to St. John’s and beyond in a search for belonging. The novel, Mareike Neuhaus importantly points out in “Inventions of Sexuality in Kathleen Winter’s *Annabel*,” makes space for Wayne/Annabel to gain access to what Judith Butler calls a “livable life” by rejecting the compulsion to reify gendered categories and allow the reader’s mind to wander to other possibilities. In making intersex part of the spectrum of possibility for a livable identity in Canada, Neuhaus argues, *Annabel* “adds to Canadian discourses of sexuality and nationalism the voices of yet another ‘destabilizing and

counter-normative sexuality” (138). She concludes that “the novel may not be able to speak for intersex people, but it speaks to the need for intersexuality to feature in Canadian discourses of sexuality” (139).⁵ A Canadian discourse of sexuality, however, has not considered the intersections of intersex and race.

In this article, I seek to challenge the omission of intersex from academic discussions of Canadian nationalism and whiteness, in particular by reading *Annabel* as exemplary of a specific Canadian queer liberalism that necessitates the intersex body as racially white as well as figuratively white — as pure. *Annabel* reveals a particular Canadian queer politic that whitewashes the intersex body in order to give it purchase within “Canadian discourses of sexuality.” I will make this claim based on the following three points. First, Indigeneity is conveniently forgotten and/or placed into another space and time. The tactics of erasure uphold Indigeneity as a way to understand biopolitical control of the intersex body while making obvious that an Indigenous intersex person can have access to belonging only if they pass as white. Second, the prevailing whiteness of the text contains the representation of intersex within the boundaries of sexual “purity” through a reliance on metaphors invested in purity and whiteness. I will further show how the novel’s deployment of racialized blackness traps it within racist stereotypes of violence and sexual deviance. The intersex protagonist in *Annabel* must avoid sexual deviance in order to assure the reader’s empathy for his specific kind of queer otherness — his intersex. Third, the urge among many critics to read the novel optimistically makes plain who benefits from *Annabel*’s happy ending and who is excluded from the imagined Canadian nation-state that the novel presents.⁶

Rarely have the ways in which race and intersex affect inclusion in the nation-state been discussed, particularly within a Canadian context. For example, OmiSoore H. Dryden and Suzanne Lenon’s collection *Disrupting Queer Inclusion: Canadian Homonationalisms and the Politics of Belonging*, omits intersex entirely. This omission occurs in spite of their dedication to the “complicated realities of the lives of queer and trans people in the racialized diasporic region known as ‘Canada’” (xi). Dryden and Lenon argue that “contemporary articulations of sexual citizenship are not only complicit with a conservative, neoliberal Canadian nation but also predicated on foundational Canadian national mythologies that inscribe whiteness as the embodiment of legitimate citizenship and belonging” (5). This powerful statement, and the radical and

important intervention that their book makes into the popular image of Canada as a multicultural, multiracial, and above all tolerant nation, are vital. However, the omission of intersex denies the ways in which the designation of physical sex as binary is necessary to whiteness in ways that continue to inflict violence on intersex people (including non-consensual hormone treatments, clitoridectomies, vaginaplasties, etc.) within the country called Canada.⁷

In *Annabel*, the birth of Wayne/Annabel Blake⁸ occurs after a discussion of the story of the white caribou⁹ that Annabel saw while in the white canoe on a lake surrounded by the snow, the caribou that she wished to touch so badly that she reached for it, causing her and her father's deaths. Wayne/Annabel is born into "snow light": "Razor clam shells on [his mother Jacinta's] windowsill glowed white, and so did the tiles, the porcelain, the shirts of women and their skin, and whiteness pulsed through her sheer curtains so that the baby's hair and face became a *focal point of saturated colour* in the white room" (11; emphasis added). Even Wayne/Annabel's father, in the kitchen outside the room, is about to set back out in his "white canoe." "His hat was white and so were his sealskin coat and canvas pants and his boots" (11-12). It is significant that we are made aware that Wayne/Annabel's father, Treadway, is "both Scottish and Inuit" shortly after this scene (27), however, which ties Wayne/Annabel's non-whiteness in his birth scene to the disclosure of Treadway's non-whiteness.

As an extension of Wayne/Annabel's non-whiteness, both figuratively and literally, his intersex is explained in these early pages as a passageway between ultimate lightness and darkness — between life and death. Thomasina, Annabel's mother and Jacinta's friend who helps birth Wayne/Annabel, notices that behind Wayne/Annabel's scrotum — which, she sees, has only one descended testicle — are "labia and a vagina." Her noticing this difference creates a momentary "horror," an opening of a "door to life or death" that only women notice. This door reminds Thomasina that something can always go "wrong" with one's child or someone else's (16). We understand that her daughter Annabel is dead before she does, and by extension the collision of the something bad of Annabel's death and the something bad of intersex becomes obvious.

The scene that first presents Wayne/Annabel's embodied difference sets up how the novel positions intersex: a thing of colour born into a white world, one that "opens the door" for something strange to enter

this pristine, virginal space. The remainder of the novel is an effort by Wayne/Annabel to claim access to white space by rejecting anything about himself coded as non-white, sullied, or dirty. His body becomes increasingly white as the text erases both Indigeneity and blackness in order to uphold Wayne/Annabel's queer embodiment, to "cohere" through his whiteness (Ahmed 59). That said, *Annabel* does suggest that Indigeneity could be the way out of a biopolitical enforcement of the sexed binary if only Wayne/Annabel was born outside a white community. This complication can be accounted for by how the novel makes Indigeneity exist out of time, a common tactic in Canadian cultural production, which renders Indigenous peoples unreal, an uncanny haunting of the present (Francis 5).

In Chapter 4 of *Annabel*, entitled "Phalometer," Jacinta walks into the hospital with her baby and promptly exits it again, running until she comes to a chain-link fence. "In the woods, Jacinta knew, if she managed to find a way around the fence, she would find Innu tents," Winter writes (43).¹⁰ Prompted by the lure of Innu tents in the imagined distance, past the chain-link fence and the hospital, Jacinta recalls a time when she wandered into an Innu camp while picking berries:

[T]here had been a mother and small baby in one tent, and that baby had had something wrong with him.

He had been born with a genetic anomaly but his mother had held him and sung to him, a lullaby in Innu-aimun, and no one had tried to take that baby to Goose Bay General Hospital and maim him and administer some kind of death by surgery. No one had found fault with him at all. His family had cared for him as he had been born. (43)

Following this memory, Jacinta is ushered back into the hospital, where Wayne/Annabel's phallus is measured in a surgical theatre, and because his phallus is of sufficient size, according to the doctor, he is designated male. This first examination is a catalyst for repeated medical monitoring and intervention throughout Wayne/Annabel's life.

In this scene, Indigeneity is brought up only as a foil to the biopolitical enforcement of the gender binary and whitening logic of the hospital. Margery Fee, in "Romantic Nationalism and the Image of Native People in Contemporary English-Canadian Literature," refers to the process of romanticizing Indigeneity only to, or necessarily to, cast it aside as the "identity quest of the bourgeois individual" that is

“crucial to Western literature” (17). Through the white person’s “association with the Native,” Fee notes, much Western literature, within which *Annabel* is a certain addition, allows for a “white ‘literary land claim,’ analogous to the historical territorial take-over.” Moreover, “it allows for a therapeutic meditation on the evil of technology and the good of a life close to nature, the latter offering a temporary inoculation against the former” (17). Jacinta’s moment of reverie allows for “a therapeutic meditation” on the “evil” of the “technology” of gendering. The chain-link fence, the surgical theatre, the technological instruments required to “maim” a body within the hospital, or to end a life “by surgery,” are positioned as not of the Innu camp, not of Indigenous peoples. Instead, Western ideas of “progress” have constructed these “unnatural” categories.

Annabel requires this kind of logic, which places intersex as acceptable within cultures “close to nature” that allow “a temporary inoculation” against biopolitical technologies. Yet the text permits incredible medical and social violence on Wayne/Annabel’s body (including repeated surgeries and hormone treatments) as an effort to romanticize further the Indigenous space outside colonization as an idealized space for queers. The text, therefore, requires the disabled/queer¹¹ Innu child as a counterpoint to Wayne/Annabel’s story, which recalls the notion of what Scott Lauria Morgensen names settler homonationalism. This young child, unnamed in the arms of its Innu mother, provides an alternative to Wayne/Annabel — this is what might have happened had Wayne/Annabel not been born into a white settler community but among his father’s people, the Inuit. Of course, this is a fiction, a convenient and ill-informed fiction, that romanticizes Indigeneity in order to situate it in the past. Thus situated, it becomes a ghostly spectre that can be reimaged and contextualized for a national interest instead of reconciled with in real time (Francis 5). In other words, *Annabel* makes clear how settler homonationalism requires that the Indigenous queer body be placed outside the time and space of the story, simply as a trope necessary for making the white queer body a body that can be used politically to forward a white queer politics.

To establish further a white queer politics in relation to intersex, *Annabel* stipulates that the intersex body not be a desiring or desired body. The novel presents ideal sexuality as situated firmly in the private sphere, which David Eng argues is necessary for the policing of sexuality and race in a “post-racial” world (xi). Treadway and Jacinta’s

early relationship is represented in the text as ideal in order to make the strain of managing the birth of an intersex child on it more obvious. As part of the set-up of their relationship, Treadway and Jacinta's ideal and quiet cohabitation is placed in direct opposition to the boisterous relationships between other couples in Corydon Harbour. Their love lives are on display for everyone to see, like Eliza Goudie, who becomes infatuated with every new visitor to the town, or Joan Martin's husband, known to have an "Innu woman" with whom he has four children (22). Jacinta's judgment of these women is palpable. Jacinta is proud of her relationship with Treadway, who "lived for the whiteness and the silence" (12) of the forest. As an extension of his love for "whiteness and . . . silence," Winter writes their sex life as quiet and subdued: "When they made love, she climaxed every time, and when she did, he knew" (22). Treadway prefers the silence, a kind of privacy in itself. Even in the private space of their bedroom, even during sex it seems, he knows instinctively but is not told about her climax through obvious noises or words. Winter writes — in a sentence that collapses privacy, whiteness, and silence — that "Their bedroom was always quiet. Treadway liked a place of repose, a tranquil sleep with a white bedspread and no music or clutter, and so did she" (28).

It is important to repeat that Treadway is not white but "both Scottish and Inuit," which complicates the simplicity of the white blanket and the white privacy of his and his white settler wife Jacinta's sex life. For Eng, the bedroom is hardly a private space, particularly for queers and people of colour. Legal statutes have long been involved in the bedrooms of nation-states. Anti-sodomy and anti-miscegenation laws in the United States show that the bedroom is a space of disquiet for marginalized people, for whom quiet sex is impossible because of its subjection to biopolitical enforcement, which polices with whom they can have sex and under what circumstances. In Canada, despite Pierre Trudeau's well-known statement that "the state has no business in the bedrooms of the nation," there is a comparable policing of racialized bodies in intimate spaces.

Legal scholar Debra Thomson argues in her excellent comparative analysis "Racial Ideas and Gendered Intimacies: The Regulation of Interracial Relationships in North America" that anti-miscegenation laws in the United States are similar to the Indian Act in Canada. As she writes, echoing Eng, "The politics of intimacy have been a central concern of those who rule, implicating the production and regulation of

raced and gendered bodies and identifying familial relations as a site of power. In effect, the personal is extraordinarily political.” As evidence of the enforcement of the “politics of intimacy” in Canada, Thomson submits the Indian Act, which, as part of Bill C-31 in 1985, “stipulated that Aboriginal women who married non-Aboriginal men and the progeny of these interracial relationships would be denied Indian legal status, while Aboriginal men who married non-Aboriginal women would retain the status that would also be given to their wives and children” (354). Therefore, Thomson states, “Both anti-miscegenation laws and the Indian Act are, in short, striking examples of the state’s regulation of the intimate sphere” (354). In light of her reading of the Indian Act as legislative control of intimacy between white and non-white bodies in Canada, specifically First Nations and white bodies, Treadway’s need to wrap himself in white blankets and his need for intimate privacy can be read as ways of shielding his non-white body from the biopolitical gaze. Moreover, Joan Martin’s husband’s Innu wife is similarly hidden in the interior as a way of keeping the white (Martin’s) body, his non-white partner, and their mixed-race children out of the purview of the white policing community. *Annabel* thus reveals how the community surrounding racially marked bodies puts pressure on those bodies to shroud themselves in order to become ordinary, unmarked.

Wayne/Annabel is likewise not able to hide himself in his small community. His mixed-race and intersex body is constantly subjected to the biopolitical gaze.¹² His sexuality, therefore, must be made as private as possible even from potential sex partners. In essence, his white blanket must be twice as thick as his father’s. Although he does have a few minor sexual encounters with his girlfriend, Gracie, before he moves to St. John’s, *Annabel* does not make much of their sexual intimacy. The text does mention, however, Wayne/Annabel’s masturbation, an act that by all rights should be private. By making the private act of masturbation public to the reader, *Annabel* allows Wayne/Annabel’s teenage genitals to be seen by the reader but not by anyone in the text itself.¹³ As Wayne/Annabel ages and his sexuality bubbles to the surface of the text’s concern, he takes pleasure not in his phallus but in the space behind it:

[Wayne/Annabel] lay in bed and touched his own penis. It did not respond, but the place behind it, underneath it, buried in his body between his legs, did respond. If he touched the skin underneath

his testicle and rubbed it, it made the hunger clamour and grow wild. He pressed and pushed a little, and he thought of penises going into vaginas while he did so, and in a couple of minutes the hunger between his legs opened its mouth and devoured a shuddering, delicious and joyful series of electric jolts that delighted his whole body. (162)

The pleasure that Wayne/Annabel finds is clearly meant to emulate female masturbation, touching the skin behind his testicle, where we learn a vagina is hidden, instead of focusing on the “penis” (which might well stand in for a large clitoris, but *Annabel* does not suggest this possibility). Moreover, it is a straight fantasy — “thinking of penises going into vaginas” — that eventually results in orgasm. Supposedly, what the reader is to understand is that Wayne/Annabel’s sexuality is that of a straight woman, turned on only by the act of procreative “penis in vagina” sex. By making the phallus present but uninteresting to Wayne/Annabel, the novel relies on maleness to arrive at the desire for sex but to allow straight female sexuality to rescue that desire from being queer or deviant.

The second description of Wayne/Annabel’s masturbation makes the collision between heterosexuality and whiteness even more obvious. It includes an object at once strange and familiar — “a small glass salt shaker made in France” (338). This object, imported from one of the countries that colonized the land and people that we now consider to be Canada, comes to serve as Wayne/Annabel’s lover: “He closed his eyes and pushed the warm glass against the deeply hidden vagina that belonged to Annabel. This created an orgasm deep inside” (345-46). That this “small glass salt shaker” that Wayne/Annabel warms on the stove (345) becomes a kind of sex toy is curious. Although the salt shaker is empty, we can imagine, when Wayne/Annabel presses it against his “vagina,” that it is meant to be filled up with salt, a white substance. That Winter refers to this empty vessel as a salt shaker specifically leaves it open to be filled with salt, which returns us to images of purity and snow.

Although this reading might seem to be a stretch, objects, and object choices, are clearly not benign. According to Ahmed, “what you come into contact with is shaped by what you do: bodies are oriented when they are occupied in time and space. Bodies are shaped by this contact with objects. What gets near is both shaped by what bodies do, and in turn affects what bodies can do” (152). The proximity, location, and fact

of the philosopher's desk says something about the philosopher, Ahmed argues; it gives away her orientation. The object of the salt shaker, then, is not arbitrary (though it might have been an unconscious choice of the author's) but implicated in Wayne/Annabel's orientation to and with it. Wayne/Annabel picks the salt shaker perhaps because of how it is shaped — phallus-like — but also, perhaps unconsciously, for what it is meant to hold. As Ahmed suggests, no choice of object or relation is without consequence or precedent. Wayne/Annabel chooses the salt shaker, warms it, and presses it against the space that Winter calls his "hidden vagina" because there is significance to the salt shaker as an object. All of who Wayne/Annabel is — his sexuality, his race, his history, his desires (and the history of imperialism to which his identities are indebted) — affect his relation to and with the salt shaker.

The disturbing collision in *Annabel* between whiteness and sexual purity is part of a long legacy of such interdependence in the Canadian cultural imaginary.¹⁴ Fears of Wayne/Annabel's sexuality, which cannot easily be identified as gay or straight because of his intersex body, necessarily haunt the text.¹⁵ As Neuhaus contends, "Wayne's desires towards others do not feature prominently in *Annabel*" (137). However, she does claim that "fear of homosexuality is present in *Annabel*, however subtly" (136). For example, Neuhaus reads a moment in which Treadway dismantles a bridge that Wayne/Annabel and his friend Wally Michelin built across a creek during their childhood because Wayne/Annabel spends too much time there with Wally, a girl, triggering Treadway's fear of homosexuality. Moreover, Wayne/Annabel's wish not to be caught admiring the prom dresses in the local store is also evidence of this fear of homosexuality (136).

The only instance of homosexual desire in *Annabel* occurs when his teacher attempts to seduce Wayne/Annabel. This scene, exacerbated by a lack of any other representation, reinforces damaging stereotypes that all gay men are pedophilic predators. The teacher, Mr. Henry, finds Wayne/Annabel in the cloakroom and traps him there in such a way that, if Wayne/Annabel wants to escape, he has to "run right under Mr. Henry's armpit" (107). It is dark in the cloakroom, for "hardly any daylight came in." Despite wanting to escape, Wayne/Annabel is aroused by the gentle touch of his teacher's finger on his jaw: "Flowers were bursting open between his legs, but the flowers were ugly flowers he did not like." He cannot back up because he will be burned by the radiator behind him, and he explains that he is in the cloakroom only to get something from

his pocket, to which Mr. Henry responds “I need to get away by myself sometimes too” (107). Mr. Henry takes hold of Wayne/Annabel’s hair, which Wayne/Annabel vows to cut as soon as he gets home (108). The allusions to pedophilia and rape here are unavoidable, as are the assurances to the reader that, though the sensations turn Wayne/Annabel on, he is well aware that those feelings are “ugly” and to be expunged. The hair that Mr. Henry touches has to be cut with violent force, much like organs cut from intersex bodies in order to straighten them.¹⁶

Winter writes, following this scene, that “He had escaped from Mr. Henry, but he could not escape from the fact that a man had wanted him, and that his body had responded to that man with a secret desire of his own. An exquisite stirring, unwanted, involuntary, mysterious” (109). In fact, the rest of the novel attempts to escape from how Wayne/Annabel’s body responds to Mr. Henry in order to make the reader more comfortable with a body that can be wanted by a man in a moment of “unwanted” intergenerational, homosexual desire. It becomes obvious in this scene that the novel does not want to confuse homosexuality with intersex but does want to valorize intersex while condemning homosexuality by replaying a damaging trope: homosexuality is best condemned by equating it with pedophilia, which *Annabel* does here, and violence, which it does in the rape scene (which I will explore below).

Wayne/Annabel eventually leaves his small town and relocates to St. John’s, where he meets a friend named Steve. Wayne/Annabel eventually confides in Steve why his face and body are beginning to look different (he has stopped taking his prescribed hormones). He admits to Steve that he is a “hermaphrodite,” tells him about the time that he impregnated himself,¹⁷ and divulges his other name, Annabel (361-66). This knowledge haunts Steve, and soon he shares this information with the intimidating Derek Warford. Derek and his friends find Wayne/Annabel parked in his van on Signal Hill road and hop in, referring to Wayne/Annabel as a “little girl” (379). Soon Derek threatens Wayne/Annabel with a broken beer bottle and forces him to drive them to Deadman’s Pond. It is there that Derek holds the bottle over Wayne/Annabel’s face. Wayne/Annabel begins to think about “beauty, and how he had never had it, and he realized he had been hoping for it to come. He didn’t want a lot of it but he was hoping for some. Just once to look in the mirror and see a beautiful face, even if the beauty was subdued. Even if no one could see it but himself. It didn’t even have to be beauty; it only had to be a *fair* face. Without big pores. With *creamy* skin” (378;

emphasis added). In this moment of pending violence, Wayne/Annabel begins to think about beauty that is definitively “fair,” “creamy,” and white. The beauty begins to disappear for him in the face of sexual violence. It is replaced by the lewdness of Derek’s conversation and egging on of his friends to rape Wayne/Annabel.¹⁸

In stark contrast to Wayne/Annabel’s internal musings about white beauty are Derek’s lamentations that they did not “get one of those black corncocks off Mary Fifield’s front door — that’d be just like a big nigger cock we could use. Go get it, Fifield; it’s your aunt’s door. Big fucking Jesus nigger cock” (381). His comments seem to be at odds with the rest of the text, so reluctant to discuss race. But now, in the face of pending violence against a body that none of the boys wants to touch, race bubbles up as an aggressive, sexualized force. Wayne/Annabel is the victim, passive and unmoving, threatened by aggressive young men who desire to see the “truth” of his body. In the process, they invoke a popular racist trope — that of the black male rapist who takes advantage of the submissive and defenceless white woman. In invoking this trope, Derek associates himself with such a rapist, which serves to vilify him further in this scene. Wayne/Annabel’s white purity is about to be debased by Derek’s black desire and quest for dominance.

Siobhan Sommerville argues that the spectre of the black male rapist was enough to link homosexuality to blackness through their shared pathologized desire. Black male desire for white women (not white male desire for black women) has been read as a misplaced object choice (262). In *Annabel*, Derek similarly links black male desire for a white woman to Wayne/Annabel’s assumed trans identity — why would anyone want to transition if not to “get fucked” (381)? This logic exposes a looming threat in the text: pathologized or deviant desire in Wayne/Annabel, for whom there is no possibility for anything but misplaced object choice. Because his body exists between male and female, his desire cannot fulfill a heterosexual imperative. The threat of black rape, and the history of pathologization that clings to it, make these anxieties plain. In this moment, Wayne/Annabel becomes white when placed in opposition to the threat of black maleness. The novel therefore requires the black cock as a foil to Wayne/Annabel’s genitalia in order to make them and, by extension, Wayne/Annabel white.

How and when Wayne/Annabel escapes from Derek and his friends is unclear. What exactly happens to him is also not explained explicitly, only that he is hurt in some places that he cannot reach (399). What

is clear, however, is that *Annabel* sets up a distinct dichotomy between blackness, equated with lewd sexuality and violence, and whiteness, a symbol of beauty, purity, and defencelessness. These tropes are well worn in Western culture, and their redeployment here only serves to deepen the significance of their power. Through these tropes, the novel creates Wayne/Annabel's whiteness via the blackness that it conjures up in this scene of violence. It is further evidence of Morrison's claim that blackness is always constructed in relation to whiteness. The scene also ensures an erasure of queer desire from the text, as if queer desire follows the black cock out of the frame of the text, further conflating queer desire and blackness. Following the rape of Wayne/Annabel, his sexuality disappears. He no longer discusses desire or masturbation. In this moment of extreme violence, his body is disciplined to become both white and sexless, as if both would make his intersex less threatening to the state.

In the epilogue, *Annabel* offers readers hope in the sense that all loose ends are preciously tied and all horrors erased. Intersex is not mentioned or brought to mind. Wayne/Annabel seems to move easily in the space of the opera house, where he has gone to see Wally sing. Her vocal cords, damaged during a bizarre accident in childhood, have healed despite doctors' lack of optimism (460). The text suggests that her hard work, determination, and passion have enabled her to sing despite her disability. In this sense, the healed body ends the story. Wayne/Annabel is now studying engineering at a university in Nova Scotia and learning to build bridges. His passion for "bridging" (a rather clunky metaphor for peace building between him and his father, between his parents, and between his two gendered and sexed "halves") similarly seems to have led him to a place of acceptance in and with his body (459). Within the neoliberal space of the university, which prides itself on promoting individual achievement and merit, Wayne/Annabel thrives. His embodied difference is no longer a point of contention in the novel and easily falls away.

Moreover, the university, historically a white and affluent space, allows Wayne/Annabel to disappear among a sea of "ambiguous" students. Winter writes that

among the students he did not feel out of place because of his body's ambiguity, as he had felt on the streets of downtown St. John's. Many of these students looked to Wayne as if they could

be the same as him: either male or female. There was not the same striation of sexuality that there was in the ordinary world outside a campus. There were girls who looked like he did, and here were boys who did too, and there were certainly students who wore no make up and had a plain beauty that was made of insight and intelligence and did not have a gender. He felt he was in some kind of a free world to which he wanted to belong and he wondered if all campuses were like this. (455-56)

Eventually, Wayne/Annabel does belong to a “free” place like this, where he is able to disappear, the reader will assume, within a space without the “striation of sexuality” that exists elsewhere. The beauty that he wants to achieve, once again, is an unmarked one, a plain one, one without a gender. However, his dream of a utopian space sorts bodies into categories of “boys” and “girls” who look ambiguous. But Wayne/Annabel fits into neither category, as the text has made clear. So what kind of utopia does the text make space for?

When Canadian actress Sarah Gadon, advocating for *Annabel* to win the Canada Reads contest, felt backed into a corner at one point about the novel’s “tidy” ending, she became defensive. She argued that social change

doesn’t have to be born from violence. Change can happen out of a positive feeling. . . . I think that is why [the novel] appeals to young people. I mean, yes, the novel ends on a positive note, but these kids are still young people. They still have their whole lives to live. . . . I think you are all taking a real pessimistic view. And, you know, I think that maybe I’m representing a younger generation that has a little more optimism. (CBC Player)

Gadon argued that “the novel ends on a positive note” because readers can project the “whole lives” of the novel’s characters into a more accepting and progressive Canada, a Canada that accepts queers. In the context of “A Novel to Change Canada,” which Gadon was arguing *Annabel* could do because of its promise of optimism, the cost of optimism is too high.

Gadon’s optimism is a profound example of what Lauren Berlant has termed “cruel optimism.” As she explains, “cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing.” It can be an “excitement at the prospect of the ‘change that’s gonna come’” (1-2). This kind of optimism is cruel because it defeats itself in

the very process of making itself happen. For Berlant, “Whatever the *experience* of optimism is in particular, then, the *affective structure* of an optimistic attachment involves a sustaining inclination to return to the scene of fantasy that enables you to expect that *this* time, nearness to *this* thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way” (2). The image of Wayne/Annabel as an image of optimism about progressive queer inclusion constructs an “*affective structure* of an optimistic attachment” to him as an ideal and generic queer who entices readers away from the acknowledgement of the erasure of blackness and Indigeneity that renders Wayne/Annabel an acceptable white queer in the first place.

NOTES

¹ I am a white Dutch settler on Treaty 1 territory. My grandparents came here after escaping from incarceration and starvation by the Nazis in a different kind of occupation. I recognize the violence of my family’s settlement as part of the ongoing global acts of genocide against Indigenous peoples. I also recognize that the enforcement of normative, Euro-Western ideals of gender and sexuality are intimately entangled in this ongoing genocide. As a queer person — in terms of both gender presentation and sexuality — living in a rural space, I feel the pressure to conform to what Kim TallBear calls “settler sexuality” on a daily basis (152). I hope that this essay makes room for further rejection of this pressure not only by my queer kin, forced to do the heavy lifting, but also by everyone living under settler colonialism.

² Similar scenes can be found in Dionne Brand’s *Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* and Isabella Valancy Crawford’s “The Camp of Souls,” which shows how the image of the white person(s) in a canoe on the dark water, entering spaces of whiteness, is emblematic in the Canadian literary imagination.

³ It is not my claim that authors of fiction are fully aware of what their texts do, or what bubbles up within them, in terms of how they present whiteness or queerness, or any other ideological “haunting,” in the Derridean sense, that might occur. In fact, as Morrison writes, things go “awry” in fiction: “As often happens, characters make claims, impose demands of imaginative accountability over and above the author’s will to contain them” (28). To examine the possibilities of the text is what our goal as literary critics should be.

⁴ I use intersex here intentionally, well aware of the increased pressure from medical professionals and activists to change the nomenclature to “disorders of sexual development.” Along with many allies, activists, and academics, I reject this terminology not only because of how it further pathologizes intersex traits but also because it denies the racist (Hsu; Magubane) and homophobic (Clune-Taylor; Dreger; Feder) logics that gave rise to intersex medical management in the first place.

⁵ Stephanie Hsu argues, in relation to *Middlesex*, a novel by Jeffrey Eugenides, which also features an intersex protagonist named Cal/liope, that Cal/liope “amasses white privilege” (88) as the novel progresses in a way that highlights how post-race and the emergence of intersex politics are intertwined.

⁶ Although existing criticism of *Annabel* explores its relation to the Canadian nation-

state (see Chafe; McKenzie; and Neuhaus), no existing criticism thoroughly explores whiteness.

⁷ It is vital not to gloss over the lived reality of intersex people in our current moment. Non-consensual cosmetic surgeries and other medical straightening practices are used on infants globally. At present, the Canadian Criminal Code (s. 268[3]) permits “parents and medical practitioners to undertake nonconsensual cosmetic surgeries on intersex infants” (qtd. in *Egale Canada 1*). According to *Egale Canada*,

these surgeries have proven to result in lifelong physical and psychological pain, amounting to *Torture or Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment* under the UN Convention Against Torture. The existing law deprives intersex children from criminal protections against pathologization of their bodies and instead functions to normalize surgical interventions based on assumptions about medically “correct” or “normal” bodies. (1)

Vitaly, according to *Egale Canada*, “Between 30-80% of intersex children undergo up to five irreversible surgeries” (1). For more analysis, see Carpenter; Holmes, “Cal/liope”; and Holmes, “Rethinking.” For updates on intersex activism, see tweets by @IntersexAF, @Pidgejen, @SeanSaifaWall, and @InterAct.

⁸ I use male pronouns for Wayne/Annabel while continuing the use of Wayne/Annabel as a named duality because the protagonist uses Wayne and Annabel to refer to himself, whereas Winter continues to use male pronouns. I have followed her use, not wanting to ascribe pronouns to a character who has not chosen them as such.

⁹ Neuhaus reads the caribou as a symbol of intersex’s naturalness because both male and female caribou can grow antlers (124). However, this reading reifies categories of male and female instead of undoing them. Neuhaus, like Chafe, relies on intersex bodies to be the “bridge” between male and female (Neuhaus writes that Wayne/Annabel “literally embodies” the reinvention of sexuality [129]), which allows for the categories of male and female themselves to go unchallenged.

¹⁰ Within *Annabel*, little is made of the difference between Inuit and Innu identities, cultures, or land claims. I understand there are substantial differences between the histories, traditions, and struggles of the Inuit and the Innu people. However, the text silences and erases both Innu people and identities and Inuit people and identities from the text equally, which enmeshes both Nations together under the racially and colonially charged logics of the text.

¹¹ We are not told what the “genetic anomaly” is, but that Jacinta laments that “no one had tried to take that baby to Goose Bay General Hospital and maim him or administer some kind of death by surgery” cements a tie between that baby’s “anomaly” and Wayne/Annabel’s.

¹² For further discussions of intersex and race, see Magubane; Malatino; Reis; and Wall.

¹³ *Annabel* thus avoids having to mention Wayne/Annabel’s genitals and other people’s reactions to them in sexual/intimate spaces. Wayne/Annabel’s genitals are what make public what otherwise would be a private trait, encased within his body. The reaction to them, as scholars of intersex argue, is often less aghast than physicians imagine when they decide to alter them surgically. Therefore, the novel engages in further anxiety production in relation to intersex genitalia that requires a difference that can be witnessed, in order that it can be agonized over, as happens early in the text.

¹⁴ See De Szegheo-Lang; Wahab; and others in *Disrupting Queer Inclusion*.

¹⁵ I want to be careful here not to engage in my own act of erasure, that of asexual people. I am troubled by the representation in this novel of asexuality, too, which seems to occur, as I note, after Wayne/Annabel’s assault. It has been well documented that asexuality

is often thought to be the necessary result of sexual assault, a troubling assumption for both survivors and people who claim an asexual identity (see Przybylo).

¹⁶ As Alice Domurat Dreger reports in *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex*, not only does homosexuality haunt intersex bodies, but also homosexuality and intersex have been defined by and through each other. Dreger makes a profound argument that the medical management of intersex bodies remains an effort to “keep people straight” (8-9).

¹⁷ This self-impregnation took up significant air time during the Canada Reads debate and is a challenge to any wholly redemptive reading of the representation of intersex in the novel, because self-impregnation is not possible in intersex humans and can thus be read as another use of a popular cultural trope, that of the “true hermaphrodite.”

¹⁸ This scene is reminiscent of another of Morrison’s texts, *The Bluest Eye*, in which Pecola, the victim of much violence, longs to be white.

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