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## **“NO WOMAN IS NATURAL”: THE (RE)PRODUCTION OF RACE, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY IN SUZETTE MAYR’S *MOON HONEY***

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The oft-evoked contrast between the visibility of race and the invisibility of queer sexuality, then, hierarchizes queer sexuality over race by ignoring the cultural terrorism that maintains race as a stable category to contain its manifestations. (Dhairyam 32)

Prefaced by a quotation from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and opening with a reference to the central character Carmen “back when she is still a white girl” (1), Suzette Mayr’s *Moon Honey* pivots on transformations, of race, of sexual orientation, even of species. The 1995 Alberta novel is an investigation of the social and discursive production and reproduction of raced bodies and sexual identities – and ruptures of that process and lineage. So weddings as a synecdoche for marriage (and marriage as a synecdoche for heteropatriarchy) provide moments of parodic excess. The novel itself is a curious generic hybrid, a cross between comedy of manners<sup>1</sup> with its mordant, realist attentiveness to social and surface detail, on the one hand, and expressionism,

with its distorted, symbolic representations or exaggerated projections of internal states, on the other. This allows Mayr to focus on the site where the imagination meets the skin.

The “still” in the opening description of Carmen denaturalizes race as a given identity, constant over time and place, producing it instead as a contingent feature of an evolving history. The nonchalance of this casual anticipation of race-change is startling. Its unexpectedness highlights the degree to which, for all the talk of social construction and pseudo-scientific categories, race continues to function, in everyday thinking, as an immutable, biological fact, a box to be ticked off once and for all. As opposed to the briefer, alternative wording “back when she is a white girl,” the line “back when she is *still* a white girl” establishes Carmen’s white identity as always already temporary, a phase or stage, a not-as-yet something else, hearkening towards a future outcome. The doubled and unstable perspective in time, simultaneously past and present – “*back when she is*” – reinforces the contradictoriness or doubling of a narrative that seems to ascribe incompatible racial identities to its protagonist, and, in so doing, stages the question of what and how race means.<sup>2</sup>

Race is not, after all, a fixed, physical feature like skin colour (nor, for that matter, is skin colour so very fixed, even in hue, let alone in perception).<sup>3</sup> The very categories of race themselves have revealing and self-defeating histories: Omi and Winant point to the presence, in much nineteenth-century US federal and state law, of only three legal categories – “white,” “Negro,” and “Indian” – and to the California Supreme Court ruling in *People v. Hall* (1854) that the Chinese should be considered “Indian” (75). Race then is a practice, a conjunction of performance and reception, negotiated and produced within geographically, historically, socially, politically, and economically specific constraints. Race is, in Omi and Winant’s definition, “*an unstable and ‘decentered’ complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle*” (68). Why be surprised if Carmen fails to be or remain the white girl she appears to be, any more than if another character, such as Renata, fails to be or remain the heterosexual she appears to be?

Identity politics can mean the politics of changing given identities.  
(Perreault 29)

The meanings of the categories of identity change and with them  
the possibilities for thinking the self. (Scott 410)

Using examples – of Daphne, of Echo, of Lot's wife – from Ovid and the Bible, Mayr's narrator explains that women transform into birds, plants, voices, or pillars of salt, "at the moment of crisis" (25). (The explanation occurs in the first of the italicized passages of metamorphosis that temporarily lift the narrative out of the realistic.) Carmen's transformation into a "brown girl" (proffered as literal through the absence of italics) occurs at just such a moment of crisis. In the novel's sardonic rewriting of the myth, though, the "crisis" is a minor one, fear of losing her waitressing job over an ill-considered outburst to her South-Asian-Canadian employer, Rama. Carmen's escalating diatribe to Rama is a breathless compendium of the manoeuvres of common-sense racism<sup>4</sup>: othering ("Where do you come from Rama?"), power evasion<sup>5</sup> ("My boyfriend's Scottish from all the way back"), coding Canadian as white<sup>6</sup> ("You speak... just like you're Canadian"), appeal to exceptionalism ("You're not like other coloured people"), the discourse of deficit<sup>7</sup> ("A lot of the time I don't even notice"), token apology ("I'm sorry. But..."), downplaying ("I don't understand what the big deal is"), liberal humanist universalizing ("I mean we're all the same underneath"), appeal to intention not effect<sup>8</sup> ("I would never say anything racist intentionally," "People don't mean to be mean"), demand to be educated ("Why can't you just tell me"), reducing to the personal ("why it bugs you so much"), deflecting from cause to effect ("Why are you so angry all time?"), inverting the offence ("What d'you have against white people anyway?"), invoking extremist racism as the exculpatory paradigm ("it's not like the KKK goes galloping up and down the streets"), demanding accommodation ("Why try to stick out all the time?"), blaming the victim ("Don't set yourself up as a target"), and false or trivializing analogy ("Being called a Canuck may hurt my feelings") (19–21). The passage's comic and disturbing power comes not from the originality of its formulations – the individual phrases are all too familiar – but from the masterful concision of its consolidation. Everything you wanted to know about everyday liberal racism, in one efficient little package.

The formulaic predictability of Carmen's arguments is the point. She is disseminating cultural doxa, in almost automaton-like fashion: "the words that come from her mouth don't come from anyone she knows" (21). Her off-key voice, inebriated with power or daring, is figured as the product of violin strings wound too tight. It is Carmen, though, who is in a larger sense the instrument, played upon by ideological systems that she serves to further (and that serve to further her). Carmen's self-estrangement here – the words

issue from “the other, another Carmen” – functions in multiple ways. It simultaneously signals the character’s facile evasion of responsibility, gestures towards larger discursive and institutional forces, and proleptically disrupts the unitary, stable self, anticipating the production of a (racially) other self that is to come. “Show me the difference!” demands Carmen, and the novel does. Or does it? Through Rama’s look, a gaze that flays Carmen’s face and refashions her, from the bone outward, with the skin colour, hair texture, scar tissue, and history of a brown girl, Carmen’s request is taken literally. The alteration is immediate, even retroactive: “Her history is etched out in negative.” “[N]ow a brown girl,” Carmen profits from Rama’s resulting capacity to receive her diatribe differently, to appreciate it as insider irony, a parodic pastiche of racist clichés, and to reply in kind: “Yeah, some of my best friends are coloured people too” (23).

In Carmen’s transformation, Mayr uses racial absolutes against themselves, while maintaining a “power cognizance” (Frankenberg 157) mindful of the real effects of these imagined racial categories. Engaged in enforcing (while denying) a system of racial difference and inequity, Carmen undergoes a change that, on the one hand, confounds a racial economy insisting on an irreducible divide between “white girl” and “brown girl.” How or what can such a divide mean, when the same person can occupy both locations from one eye blink to the next? On the other hand, the change promises to expose her to the difference she has demanded, to unimagined, racialized new realities, beginning with the words she has just spoken, the same, yet transformed. The scene stages and heightens notions of a deeply biological permanence to race; Carmen’s change requires a radical physical excision that “burrows through the layer of subcutaneous fat and splays out her veins and nerves... snaps apart Carmen’s muscles and scrapes at Carmen’s bones, digs and gouges away Carmen’s life” (22). The scene stages this biological determinism, though, only in the very process of transgressing it, through the simple instance of instantaneous racial transfiguration. The novel presumes to think the unthinkable, that (biological signifiers notwithstanding) the gears of racialization can slip – or be sabotaged – that race-change can just happen, even over the course of a conversation. Simultaneously, it asserts graphically that such change, at least in a thoroughly racialized society, is, in its implications, profoundly bone-deep.

Naturally, says Isabelle. Naturally you’re joking I hope. (Mayr, *Moon Honey* 163)

In denaturalizing *sexual* identity, Mayr selects a different strategy from her handling of race, relying less on an instantaneous and thoroughgoing shift between ostensibly incompatible identities and more on an array of sexualities that confounds any simple taxonomy. *Moon Honey* also carefully situates fluidities of sexual identity in the context of racial instability and inversion to ensure that, as Sagri Dhairyam cautions, challenges to the naturalness of heterosexuality do not draw support from implicit contrast with the presumed, relatively greater immutability of racialized identities.

"Two flats do not a note make, you hear me? You need a man because what are two women gonna do? ... they're gonna do nothing because no woman is natural without a man. No woman is natural!" (108). So shouts Bedelia, in *Moon Honey*, to her fourteen-year-old daughter Fran who is burning with love and the memory of a kiss from a distant (engaged) relative Stephanie, at a cousin's wedding. So shouts Bedelia (herself "maybe even funny with her housekeeper the family thinks, until the arrival of Fran" [117]), for whom the heterosexual act producing her daughter is an isolated, fleeting, and anomalous one. By a quirk of her thinking, "[h]aving sex with the priest..." we are told, "is the next best thing to becoming the nun she wanted to be" (117). The Blessed Virgin Mary is, instructively, the model whom Vesta, the housekeeper, holds up for Bedelia, to hearten her at the prospect of abrupt and unanticipated single motherhood. Figured, then, as deviant, vestal, virgin, sexually suspect, and associated with figures of celibacy, Bedelia makes a queer proselytizer for heterosexuality.

Fran, after all, (like Heather in the Leslea Newman book that became a test case for lesbian juvenile literature in Canadian schools) has two mommies. In the mutuality of taking on the unborn Fran as "our" pride and joy, Vesta, the housekeeper, attains status as a full member of the household, as Bedelia's partner: "this baby in Bedelia's stomach is hers too, which makes Vesta a member of the family" (121). Biological reproduction, the ultimate signifier of heterosexuality, is here reconfigured ironically as enabler of homosocial/homoerotic legitimacy, entitling Vesta to claim a seat literally at Bedelia's family table. "Family values" takes its revenge.

Fran is the child not only of a female-female household ("No other girl Fran knows has two such loving mothers") but, as the reference to Vesta's "brown, wet face" implies, of a biracial one as well (123, 120). That this unconventional arrangement produces the homophobic and virulently racist Fran is not simply ironic, but one of the phenomena of social reproduction that Mayr sets out to investigate (in part through the evidence of Bedelia,

whose ideology of sexual identity runs roughshod over her own practice). Two flats, Bedelia and Vesta, do and do not a note make here. They create and sustain a relationship and a social unit (susceptible to being read as lesbian), but not one that is socially legible, even apparently to themselves (or at least not to one of the participants, Bedelia).

**Natural** sb. I. 7. Music. One of the white keys on a pianoforte or similar instrument. (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

“Two flats do not a note make” (108 [104, 105, 110]). An archaic, inverted syntax invests this saying with the authority of longevity and accumulated wisdom. Its import, though, is less obvious, the saying bewildering, even unintelligible. Every key on the piano keyboard produces a note or tone, and each has a note or musical symbol for that tone. Two flats would produce two (possibly simultaneous) aural notes or tones (and a richer sound) and would be represented by two written notes or symbols on the musical staff. At face value, the aphorism doesn’t make sense, though it clearly wields considerable social force and communicates an interdiction powerfully: “Two flats do not a note make, says Bedelia. A phrase passed down from generation to generation so that it has barely any meaning, carries only a stench of confusion and panic” (110). Semantic or conceptual coherence is not necessary here for personal and social regulation, an indirect comment possibly on the broader sexual norms that Bedelia’s sentence invokes.

The musical metaphor is a rich one, though. A piano key and the sound it produces signify as a flat only in relation to another piano key and sound (often, significantly, named the “natural”), and within a larger framework or key (such as the key of F flat). Configured otherwise, they might function as a sharp. To my rather uninitiated mind, flat (like sharp) conjures up black keys, as that is where these notes would be introduced for the simple, preliminary example of the scale of C major. And indeed, the natural keys on the piano are defined as the white keys. Race, reductively signalled by colour, and colour, reductively represented by polarities of black and white, begin to hover at the edges of Bedelia’s maxim. The musical signs signifying flats and sharps are named “accidentals,”<sup>9</sup> with the scale of C major called “the natural scale” because of the absence of these accidentals. This language in music of “natural” and “accidental” (with connotations for the latter of inessential, subsidiary, even unfortunate), and their associations with white and black, do not only echo the notions of marked and unmarked locations, of norm and deviations from it, applied in Western culture to

genders, sexual orientations, and racial identities. They also connotatively encode hierarchies of value, like those so crucial to the regulation of such identity systems.

Two flats, two women, two women wanting each other, two lesbians, (and subliminally perhaps, given the colour coding of flats and naturals, two women of colour<sup>10</sup>) do not a note make. "Flat," the potentially neutral designation of a key or tone, in Bedelia's contemptuous context accumulates its negative connotations of secondary, inflectional, deficient, below true pitch, or discordant, its association with the minor chord or key as less robust, more plaintive, or less consequential (and, in non-musical contexts, its implications of insipid, lacklustre, or deflated). "You keep those thoughts where they belong in the garbage with the rest of the trash" (108), Bedelia warns, of Fran's memories of her homoerotic kiss, assuming the insufficiency of women, as demonstrated and intensified by the insufficiency of women together without the male keynote.

Woman is not a reaction to Man; she is not a response. She is her own first statement. Black is not a reaction to white; it is its own first statement. I am only Black and female, if you are white and male. (Philip 68).

Yet the musical analogy undermines Bedelia's position, and not simply through its incoherence. The metaphor of flats points to the arbitrariness of assigned identities, their functioning only within a system of agreed-upon and mutually defining relationships. The tones designated as flats exist as flats only within specific contexts and musical traditions. Even within conventional, Western notions of tonality, enharmonic notation recognizes that tones can have the same sound and be produced by the same piano key but be identified differently. So the white piano key known as B can also be evoked by the sign of C flat; the black key for E flat is also D sharp. Within different scales or key signatures, the flats that are Fran and the relative she is mooning over could well be sharps or naturals, capable presumably of producing (the same but now) quite recognizable and acceptable notes. Bedelia's "knotted and indecipherable bundle of words" (109) about flats that don't belong together, that aren't natural(s), that are unable to produce (or signify), dismantles itself. The truncated conclusion to her prescription of heterosexuality exposes the skeleton, the anxiety of the gender system: "no woman is natural without a man. No woman is natural!" If no woman is natural without a man, then perhaps, no woman is natural. Full stop.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps

gender itself is at stake. Bedelia's outburst illustrates Judith Butler's observations about heterosexuality's "panicked imitation of its own naturalized idealization" and her argument that "[t]he internal coherence or unity of either gender, man or woman, thereby requires both a stable and oppositional heterosexuality" ("Imitation" 23, *Gender* 30).

**Natural** *a. I. 1.* Of law or justice: Based upon the innate moral feeling of mankind; instinctively felt to be right and fair, though not prescribed by any enactment or formal compact.

**Natural** *a. I. 3. b.* Taking place in conformity with the ordinary course of nature; not unusual, marvellous, or miraculous. (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

Natural as a measure is itself under contention in *Moon Honey* here, as well. An array of women-desiring female characters displaces normative heterosexuality, challenging easy categories of straight and lesbian. Despite the insistent overlay of weddings and wedding talk, proto- and quasi-lesbian moments and characters proliferate (often, pointedly, in the context of weddings), even before the central lesbian union of the conclusion. The first, major, italicized transformation of the novel involves a marriage of social and economic convenience, intended to dispose of a contrary and unmanageable daughter, a marriage foiled when the brusque maid of honour moves from snickering to nickering, metamorphosing into a horse to carry off the bride. Fran, five-year-old flower girl at the wedding, lets out what I read as a celebratory whoop, one matching that of the bride Mabel herself, as Mabel jumps on the Maid's back and "[t]he two women gallop from the church" (40).<sup>12</sup> Years before her youthful passion for Stephanie, then, Fran is marked, in passing, as sympathetic to female attraction, although Bedelia's shaming ultimately proves conclusive: "So she meets God because who else is there to meet?" (110). With women eliminated as possibilities, Fran's options for a mate become indistinguishable, and the selection listless and perfunctory. God himself (and Mayr plays mercilessly, campily, on the diminutive of Fran's husband's name, Godfrey) proves to be an inadequate substitute for what Fran has desired.

Mabel and Honour's defection from marital and heterosexual compulsion prefigures Renata's flight with Mika, during Renata and Griffin's wedding reception, in the novel's closing action. Renata earlier has alternated between lesbian panic – "people think she's some kind of lez" – and

nostalgic longing in response to her caressing of a girl's breast on a dare at age eighteen (145). "An expert at young men" for some time thereafter, she feels "all of one piece" for the first time ever only after bedding Mika, cashier at the liquor store, on cases of beer in the back room, on the eve of her own wedding (145, 155). This does not, however, immediately put an end to the wedding. Mika is in fact the novel's only unequivocal or classic lesbian, a fact that intensifies rather than diminishing the pervasiveness of the lavender menace. If Bedelia with her homophobic slurs, Fran relieved that her son Griffin is at least "sticking to girls, whorish and unmannered as Carmen may be" (3), Renata first glimpsed wiping Griffin's semen off her stomach, Mabel at the altar, if all these women are not reliably heterosexual, then what woman is? Lesbian desire colours the narrative, from five-year-old whoops to bridal mutinies, although sexual identity remains less easily defined.

*I became a lesbian on December 6, 1990, at 11:30 in the morning. I can be precise about the date because it was one year, to the day, after the massacre of female engineering students at l'École Polytechnique in Montreal. That morning, back when I am still het, I attend, in a Minneapolis plaza, a public re-enactment of the massacre, in which fourteen costumed, female students mime accomplishments – as graduates, brides, lesbian lovers, athletes, artists – tearing off red, paper bull's-eyes pinned on their coat fronts, oblivious of the bull's-eyes remaining on their backs. After a laborious, slow-motion mime of attempting to climb makeshift stairs, they line up facing the spectators with placards of the murdered women's names around their necks and, as another woman impersonates the Montreal killer, drop to the ground as one. In a new country, with a new daughter and a new job, I am already suffering from various forms of loneliness and dislocation, and when I go to thank the organizers of the event, tiny maple-leaf pin in my lapel, I find myself unexpectedly bawling my head off, while identifying myself as a Canadian.*

*As I am cutting through Loring Park afterwards on my way to Amazon Bookstore nearby, head down, feet sinking so deep into untrampled snow that my coat hem is dusted with white, I look up, still swollen-eyed in the bright sunshine, to discover that I am unwittingly halfway across Loring Lake. Winter has been late this year, and the ice is a few weeks old at most, of unknown thickness or strength. I am literally on thin ice, debating the merits of spread-eagling my way across the pond on my stomach or taking chances with my dignity. I am on thin ice, as I will be twenty minutes later, in the Loring Park Café with lesbian theorist Marilyn Frye, whom I've run into at the bookstore and who is asking me if I am lesbian.*

*This is our first private conversation, Marilyn Frye and I, since she arrived at the University of Minnesota as a visiting scholar. She has been a guest at the lesbian-*

*feminist discussion group I attend (one needn't be lesbian, just interested) and has joked there about the Lavender Menace and herself as a lesbian recruiter making overtures to those hanging around waiting to be invited to the party. She knows about my partner, although I avoided the male pronoun for as long as conversation in English permitted. She tells me now that she and her research assistant (a raspy-voiced grad student who talks about baby dykes and about going to lesbian discussion groups just to get laid) have debated whether I'm lesbian. "I call myself a non-practising lesbian," I tell Marilyn.<sup>13</sup> In Lethbridge I was pleased with my cleverness in inventing the term. In Minneapolis I haven't said it to anyone. In Minneapolis, women really are lesbians.<sup>14</sup> "I think of myself as pre-lesbian," I tell her, adding that I have decided that any future relationship of mine would be with a woman.*

*Marilyn isn't taken with this "pre" talk. What about "premature birth," "pre-cancerous cells," "premenstrual syndrome," she asks. What about "the rights of the pre-born"? We talk about marriage resistance and anti-racist work and the concentration camps. She describes watching how painfully long it takes some women to come out, when their orientation is obvious to everyone but themselves. Clearly she doesn't see me as pre-lesbian. She sees me as a lesbian, a lesbian burrowed deep, deep in the back of the closet. Pre-lesbian has felt somehow bold, adventurous; a deeply closeted lesbian, well, I've had years of training on how to feel about that.*

The first time that I taught *Moon Honey*, a British graduate student, exposed hitherto to a thoroughly heterosexual reality (finding even the book's critique of marriage eye opening), described the pervasiveness of its lavender brush strokes as among the "unrealistic" features of the novel. All the women in the book, she argued, seem to be somehow lesbian, and how representative is that? I, on the other hand, was inclined to see such characterizations as welcome evidence of a rarely represented lesbian sensibility, reflecting my own inclination (by then) to read for lost possibilities and muted tendencies in the women around me, even in the absence of overt lesbian identity. It was a world that felt familiar to me. We discussed the strategic normatizing of same-sex desire in the novel. The fantastic or expressionist nature of the book necessitated a distinction, in any event, between "realistic" and "realist," between the persuasiveness of the novel's vision and the verisimilitude of its representations. Certainly, the fantastic turns of the narrative advance its reframing of sexuality. In a novel where one bride, Demeter, can literally turn into an asshole during the hysterical preparations for her wedding day, requiring heavy veiling to conceal the anal puckers that have become her face,<sup>15</sup> a bride who runs off with another woman (even another woman transformed into a horse) is hardly shocking, at least by

comparison. The rupturing both of identities and of the realist level of the narrative, through extraordinary metamorphoses, produces "unfinished space[s]" (156) for less confining narratives.<sup>16</sup>

But does *Moon Honey* construe lesbianism as natural? If Bedelia's challenge to the naturalness of lesbians is undone, does that make the inverse true, make lesbians natural? "It's not like we're *seeing* each other, but of course she can't go through with this marriage crap now that she's slept with a *girl*.... Sleeping with me cancels out the wedding. Naturally." (163). So asserts Mika, after her rendezvous with Renata, only to be met with her sister Isabelle's scornful repetition of "naturally." Renata insists, instead, on the social and economic power of "the wedding business" to trump both infidelity and emotion. And the marriage crap/trap does proceed, albeit temporarily. My graduate students appreciated the contradictory echoing, in Mika's claim, of Bedelia's invocation of the natural. They welcomed Mayr's willingness to challenge conventional and progressive pieties alike. With both homophobes and lesbians having recourse to assumptions about what is "natural," with a "white girl turned brown girl" speculating about racialized traits existing "in her blood" (212, 49), *Moon Honey* opens up questions about the degree to which the body<sup>17</sup> – gendered, racialized, and desiring – carries its own meanings or has those meanings thrust upon it.

Bodies and pleasure, she says. Foucault, Grrriffin. (Mayr, *Moon Honey* 44)

The normalization of race – as with the normalization of gender and sex – as an obvious, visible, and predictive feature of the body is thus a discourse that gestures to the problem of how mechanisms of power produce proper and improper bodies. (Britzman 32)

On one level, with what Lisette Boily calls an "appropriate tone of superficiality and glibness" (165), *Moon Honey* sardonically represents characters who dwell less in possibilities than in externalities. And the narrative voice, with an ingenuous absence of analysis, echoes that value system: "When Carmen and Griffin are together they are so much in love. These are the kind of dishes we will buy, says Carmen" (8). Even late in the novel after her racial transformation might be expected to have initiated a process of self-awareness, Carmen, condemned to singleness by Griffin's wedding, rests resolutely on the surface: "Besides, she's not ready to go through the hell of looking for another wedding dress" (211). She considers getting a roommate – or, better yet, a satellite dish. The novel details the appropriate couture (black clothes),

libations (“tiny cups of black coffee,” followed by Maalox), décor (“dried mourning flowers”), and solace (Mocha Panther lipstick) that occupy the contemporary jilted lover (100).

On another level, more than one character is shown “commenting with her body” (39) – through fantastical transformations (into a rescuing horse, a fountain, a cactus, a basilisk, a magpie) – on personal desires or social constraints producing responses of flight or resistance. Figurative moments in the narrative – Fontana’s body frightened to stone, Pascale growing eyes in the back of her head – become literal. As with the surfaces – of smell, hair, food, skin, makeup – so central to the text, such figurations, often in the form of cliché, are locations where understandings of race, gender, and sexuality are encoded, maintained, or proscribed.

Bones, skulls, hair, lips, noses, eyes, feet, genitals, and other somatic markers of “race” have a special place in the discursive regimes that produced the truth of “race” and repeatedly discovered it lodged in and on the body. (Gilroy 35)

*Moon Honey* produces a thoroughly embodied (and simultaneously fantastical) narrative. The novel opens with Carmen’s being accidentally knocked out during sex, both the blow to the head and the sex being forms of feeling through (and being vulnerable through), as well as being taken out of, the body. Using black comedy, the opening paragraph invokes the Freudian notion of biology as destiny, through Carmen’s ability to time her unconsciousness by the length of Griffin’s orgasm: “they’ve learned that orgasm speed relies on biology, the difference between men and women” (1). From the couple’s mechanical clocking of their orgasms<sup>18</sup> to Griffin’s oblivious humping of the woman he has knocked unconscious, the passage bristles with warning flags, suggesting that speed to orgasm (and gender differences more broadly) may be a product of much more than just physiology. In contrast, Carmen’s racial transformation is triggered specifically by her Shylock-inspired appeal, with Rama, to shared human biology: “If I cut you you bleed, if I cut me I bleed, we’re all the same underneath. Show me the difference” (21). By the time she is studying the colour contrasts of her naked limbs criss-crossed with Griffin’s, she is already wondering, “The same underneath? Just bones? Maybe not” (44). Reductive uses of biological commonality, like reductive uses of biological difference, meet their come-uppance.

Certainly, Mayr’s characters experience their gendered, racialized, and sexually oriented selves, and those of others, through their bodies. The

question is what we are to make of this. Take smells. In othering Rama, still-white Carmen begins with her smell: "Rama even smells different." Although Rama uses an ordinary hand lotion, Carmen smells a distinctive, spicy, "strange brown-skin perfume" about her and speculates that skin chemistry can alter odour (13). This could be dismissed simply as racist invention. Later though, frustrated as a newly brown girl by the racial partiality of cosmetic counters, she recoils from the white-girl colours and from "that smell of foreign, unfamiliar bodies" (55). Even the "scent of her old self... from when her skin was pink," carried in Griffin's clothes, becomes tantalizingly strange (52). The smell of ferns links Renata, as a legacy of blood (along with her springy hair<sup>19</sup> and the calluses on her hands and soles), with her African-American great-great-grandmother (43, 149, 151, 177), and signals, to the hostile, her obscured racial heritage – "a smell Fran *knows*" (176). In each of these instances, the novel requires the reader to gauge carefully the degree to which white racism and racialized Black solidarity actually *produce* sensory data (olfactory markers of racial distance), the degree to which existent, neutral genetic traits acquire positive and negative significances, even the degree to which, in this expressionistic book, smell functions symbolically rather than literally. Or, take orgasms. Renata's sexual ability to come for the first time, with Mika, after considerable non-orgasmic heterosexual experience, registers as a physical fact in the novel. Filtered through dim, distasteful Griffin – "Generally, lesbians turn Griffin on" – though, the conclusion that this biologically confirms Renata's sexual orientation ("he should have guessed when he found out she was incapable of having an orgasm") becomes more suspect (185). Griffin's simplistic misreading of Renata's sexual unresponsiveness – this from a man who can overlook his sexual partner's unconsciousness – cautions against a similar misreading of her responsiveness. The body speaks, in *Moon Honey*, but what does it say? The body speaks, but where is its voice coming from?

There is no raw, untrained perception dwelling in the body. The human sensorium has had to be educated to the appreciation of racial differences. (Gilroy 42)

Contexts, then and what I am calling readers of gender fiction, as much as bodies, create sexuality and gender and their transi-tivities.... [O]ccupying a gender or fictionalizing a gender for

some people requires an other, or others, witnesses or readers who will... confirm the gender performance, who will read the gender fiction. (Halberstam 220)

Much of Carmen's attempt to make her way as a person of colour in the world is represented through the challenges she faces to find a workable hairstyle and suitable makeup. Symbolically this is a fine instance of Mayr's imbrication of race and gender. The paucity of makeup for brown faces and lips, makeup that doesn't make Carmen feel like a clown or a "dark brown ogre," that makes the mirror her friend, reflects a larger cultural context contrived so that, rendered anomalous, "she looks WRONG" (56). Simultaneously, the frantic compulsion to find makeup in the first place reflects the gendered inadequacy of the female body: "You have beautiful eyes, says Kevin, and she knows this is because she's put on a lot of mascara, Smoked Ebony, and Black Onyx eyeliner which make her eyes..." dada dada dada (60). Mayr shows the gendered, racialized body both as product of and as exquisite seismograph registering the social vibrations acting upon it. Renata, whose wiry, red curls speak to her of "her great-great-grandmother's blood winding through her and bursting out her scalp," listens urgently, "with her hair poised like antennae," to blues singer Billie Holiday, seeking out her racial connections (177, 147). Even more dramatically, now-brown Carmen, assaulted by images of piccaninnies and Aunt Jemimas of which she's previously been oblivious, feels as though "[s]he's been fitted out with some kind of radar over the past year, her skin sensitive to stereotype" (169).

This brings us to the biological crux of the book. How is one to read Carmen's new body? What is the nature of the dramatic racial change that "scrapes at Carmen's bones ... gouges away Carmen's life" (22)? For me the critical, and risky, scene is the one in which Carmen is confronted with Griffin's reassurances about her new "pelt" and his long-standing interest in "having" a Black woman. Enraged – and irritated by her own touchiness – Carmen wonders, "Maybe her skin has something to do with this, making her want to be more violent, making her feel downright raw, maybe she *isn't* the same inside. The difference is more fundamental than pelt. Maybe it's in her blood. Like some sort of virus" (49). The passage seems to invite an essentialist reading of race. Carmen's change of skin colour, her race change more broadly, has, it seems, changed her identity, her very nature, transformed her more than just physically. And that new character is rooted in her body, her race, her skin, her blood. Biology is indeed destiny, it would seem.

To claim that discourse is formative is not to claim that it originates, causes, or exhaustively composes that which it concedes; rather, it is to claim that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body. (Butler, *Bodies* 19)

It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation... but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced. (Scott 401)

Besides the dehumanizing of “pelt” (the long-standing, racist association of people of colour with animals), which Carmen takes into her lexicon even as she challenges Griffin’s language of ownership, my students noted the pejorative connotations of the virus simile. At the same time as Carmen is shown drawing on her “experience,” sensing her responses as biologically innate, her own language insidiously betrays the social construction that confines her to her (devalued) body and simultaneously delegitimizes her observations and responses.<sup>20</sup> Through her expressionist strategy, Mayr conveys the experience of being transported, not so much – or simply – into a new body, as into a new – or newly perceived – world, an environment impinging upon the racially marked body so insistently that its tainted messages come to feel visceral, blood-borne. (We should note that, even before her metamorphosis and her awakening to some plausible causes, Carmen has recorded the media message of excessive Black rage: “All the coloured women Carmen meets seem so *angry*... She’s seen them on television at demonstrations and riots and things in the United States” [14]). Most damagingly, the objects of racism experience its insinuations as their own and read themselves into existence, as subjects, in its terms.

Carmen is shown living the experience of race quite physically, in her body, through her very skin. Concurrently, Mayr implies, but only implies, (in part through the defamiliarizing speed with which a transformed Carmen acquires drastically new perspectives) how thoroughly such ostensibly intrinsic perceptions are mediated through social practice. Yes, Carmen experiences her anger as emanating from her skin, but it is this same skin we later learn that is so *responsive* (like “radar”) to external stimuli. Yes, her skin does “have something to do” with her anger, but as recipient of provocation, not as arbitrary, genetic determinant. Carmen, through the magic of Mayr’s narrative,

takes on instantaneously the effects of years, even generations, of racial injury.<sup>21</sup> By that abruptness, Mayr highlights the contingency of a rancour that might otherwise arise so imperceptibly as to seem a given. Here today, but absent yesterday, Carmen's chronic hypersensitivity raises the question of whence it might be emanating, what might be generating it. Where did *that* come from? The socially staged visibility of her "race" – by contrast with the insidiousness of its staging – makes that the easy explanation, but not the only possible one. As Teresa de Lauretis observes, in a different context, about experience producing subjectivity, Carmen "perceives and comprehends as subjective (referring to, originating in, oneself) those relations – material, economic, and interpersonal – which are in fact social and, in a larger perspective, historical" (159).

What is original here is less Mayr's excavation of how culture constructs race (and gender and sexuality) than her representation of how those significations can occupy even the most fundamental avenues of physical perception and response (which might otherwise be used to counter them) and come to be embraced as immanent. "Internalized oppression," Mayr shows us, colonizes not only the mind, but also the body, so that Carmen can indeed be said to have some sort of virus in her blood. Yet even this intimate formulation might spuriously differentiate between Carmen's pre-existing self and a foreign infection. More disturbingly, the virus can be said to be part of the constituting process through whose noxious terms the subject who is Carmen, including her self-alienated body, comes to be known, even to herself.

In a sense, *Moon Honey* is Mayr's answer to the impertinence of John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me*.<sup>22</sup> (Griffin's name, in Mayr's novel, is presumably a deliberate allusion to that text.) John Howard Griffin, in his 1961 documentation of his experiences of racism, as a white man turned Black man (by darkening his skin) in Jim Crow America, makes a number of assumptions that Mayr plays with. *Black Like Me* assumes (and the book's success with whites at the time would seem to substantiate the assumption) that the authority of a white voice is required to convey the injustice of racial discrimination and mid-century segregation, already experienced so fully by millions of Black Americans.<sup>23</sup> It assumes that two months permit an assimilation of the lived experience of being Black. It assumes, because a mere change in pigmentation utterly alters social perception and reception, that, in a segregated, thoroughly racialized and racist society, racial difference is only skin deep. It assumes – this is indeed the crux of the exposé – that, no matter the colour of his skin, John Howard Griffin is/will be the same person underneath.

Like the paired subjects – straight/gay, white/visible minority, male/female – used to test discrimination in housing or hiring, Griffin's experiment did serve a useful liberal purpose in exposing inequity and the superficiality of criteria bearing profoundly life-altering effects. What it couldn't address was the incommensurability of black and Black, the difference between a black(ened) Griffin and his Black counterpart. Mayr goes much further in complicating Griffin's scenario, simultaneously undermining and reinstating racial difference. The product of meanings projected upon the body, race can – and does – shift in a moment, at the behest of performer and audience, *Moon Honey* declares, through Carmen's metamorphosis. Race is that transient. Contrariwise, that new performance,<sup>24</sup> that new reading constitutes a new self, which goes far beyond blackface. To have a race, as Mayr shows, is not simply to have a particular colour, or even a particular genetics,<sup>25</sup> physiognomy, and physical morphology. To acquire a race, especially for the racialized Other, is to be (the "same" and yet) very much not the "same" underneath any more, for the occupier – as much as for the readers – of that fiction.

As biographers and autobiographers know, every identity is retro-active. Identity comes to us from the future, rather than the past, and is *what will have been*, a defensive editing of the past (even the past of the body in transsexual and cosmetic surgeries) to make it all come out right, with the proper ending – for the moment. (Tyler 121)

*What Marilyn Frye sees, in that Loring Park Café, splays out my veins and nerves, snaps apart my muscles and scrapes at my bone, digs and gouges away my life. I discover that sexual orientation can change just like that, even over the course of a conversation. I don't know what I'm going to do about it (and in fact, more than a dozen years later, as I write this, I am still with my male partner), but the difference is immediate. Thoroughgoing. I can no longer, for example, pick up a book, watch a movie, or turn on the television, without seeing from another place, without feeling frustration at the resolutely heterosexist world created. I experience my desire. The self who walks into the Loring Park Café on December 6, 1990 isn't the self who walks out.*

*My history is etched out in negative. I turn over my past, spadeful by spadeful, memories of playing doctor and confessing innocent impurities committed with my next-door neighbour Karen, of exquisite crushes on female teachers. I recall the eventual, occasional dances and dates that I undertook to develop the well-rounded personality required by the era. Carrying my purse on his side to thwart handholding, turning my head from kisses. I recognize my consistent homosociality, seeking out the women*

*in a room (except as necessitated by professional considerations). Above all I return to the day Kathleen, grad-school friend and weekly lunch companion for years, about to marry the man she'd been living with, turned to me and kissed me, on the cushions in my Toronto flat. And the hours that followed. (Never mind the eight-year marriage to Christopher that preceded that moment. The many years, after, that I've shared with Thomas.)*

*Of course I know that I am reconstructing myself, retrospectively piecing together a coherent (and selective) narrative of myself as the lesbian subject. Moreover, Toni McNaron, a senior lesbian faculty member at the University of Minneapolis, has already reported, in the lesbian-feminist discussion group, her informal survey of feminist colleagues, which discovered the same accounts of bookish isolation, female crushes, and tomboy non-conformity among hets and lesbians alike. I know that I am putting pressure on my history (as we do routinely, remedially, in less dramatic circumstances) to produce the self I have, it seems, suddenly always been.*

How am I inside this problem? (Verdeccia)

It is the aspect of "identification" and how it is used by my students that concerns me the most... It is crucial for these students not to weave their narratives together with their inner city counterparts in a blanket of shared victimization, which obscures the ways that racist domination impacts on the lives of marginalized groups in our society. (Rosenberg 83)

When I taught *Moon Honey* in an advanced seminar on women's writing, I referred early in the course to a student evaluation I'd received in a second-year Women in Literature course. "Most of the books," the student commented, "concentrated on lesbians, and being a different colour – which I do not have a problem with and at times found interesting, but I felt I could not relate to what was being studied. 'Women in Literature – Growing up Female' – how is it that I can't relate to this??" I quoted the evaluation not to mock the student or encourage a smug superiority in the new class. Rather I named it as evidence of a failure of teaching on my part and tried to use it to frame the problematics of the advanced course, since the focus in this case was fiction by lesbians of colour, and the majority of students were (at least overtly) white and straight. Discussing how we all become gendered, sexually oriented, and racialized (those who form the unmarked norm, as much as those marked "different"), and using Verdeccia's formulation, I asked students to consider the questions, "in what sense am I inside this problem?" and "how do I function inside this problem?"

I quoted Chandra Mohanty's idea of "co-implication," of power-laden, contentious, but mutually constitutive histories, relationships, and responsibilities (194), pairing it with Himani Bannerji's reminder that "a whole social organization is needed to create each unique experience, and what constitutes someone's power is precisely another's powerlessness" (74). I discussed Kathleen Martindale's concern that racism and sexism not be treated as effects of an already existing difference (but as producing that difference) and her lament, "My colleague and I had successfully taught our students how to 'read for the absence' of gays and lesbians in a way that did not implicate themselves and therefore did not teach them 'how to recognize heterosexuality' either" (159). I was explicit that I wasn't arguing for universalizing readings and clarified the risks of a liberal humanism that would argue we are all the same, while framing that sameness in dominant terms. The course was intended, I indicated, not to teach about some Others, but to use a particular constellation of texts to look at larger material, social, and discursive structures, at systems of power, operating on us all in diverse, but interlocking ways. How are *you* implicated in what you are reading here? I asked my students.

At the beginning of the next class, on *Moon Honey*, the first student who spoke had clearly taken my lecture to heart. She spoke of how she connected with the character of Carmen. "I don't know if I have some Black in me," she said, "I'm just as mixed as people of colour are. How do I know that I'm straight, and not lesbian?" The student who spoke after her echoed the sentiment. Evidently, for these students, implication meant identification (and the focus was specifically on individuals). I had thought I'd done a good job. (And my students *had* made difficult stretches, challenging familiar boundaries and identities.) So, later in the course, I made a point of exploring the "politics of empathy" (Rosenberg 83). Referring back to the *Moon Honey* discussion, I quoted Regenia Gagnier on middle-class students' desire to identify – and to identify with characters whose reflective, self-occupied subjectivities resemble their own – and Ron Scaap on the liberal need to re-describe the Other as oneself before being able to sympathize (Gagnier 136; Scaap, qtd. in hooks 13). We discussed possible textual efforts to create aesthetic distance, including Bertolt Brecht's alienation effects. Much in this novel, I argued, beginning with its non-realist narrative, suggests that identification with the characters is not the appropriate form of engagement.

Reviewer Eva Tihanyi remains unsure whether the novel's constant "flavour of parody" is intentional and deplores the failure of the women

characters to inspire “the slightest bit of empathy” (35). Yet the wry distance *Moon Honey* maintains from its narrative, supplely varied though that distance may be, is central to its strategy. Lisette Boily refers, with more perceptive appreciation – and Mayr has been graced with this intelligent, lengthy, early review – to the “vacuity of so many of the characters” (165). A comedy of manners in the third person, the novel uses free indirect discourse ironically to let the characters’ inanities speak for themselves. Exposition in the vapid voice of fashion magazines – “She never realized how vital make-up is to making a girl feel good about herself” (28–29) – cautions readers against being guided by the surface level of the narrative. Forestalling identification, Mayr bitingly juxtaposes self-presentation and action, to expose the characters’ self-deceptions: “She has never cried so much [over Griffin’s departure], never been so much in love. So that when she slides her tongue into Kevin’s mouth at the Night Gallery, it’s just by accident” (60). Even on the novel’s penultimate page, where conventional fiction promises achieved insight, there is irony aplenty in Carmen’s all-too-recognizable self-affirmation (just before she picks up the phone, unenlightened, to try reaching the presumably married and clearly untrustworthy Griffin): “She wasn’t so bad in the old days, just a little naïve” (211).<sup>26</sup> In some ways, Carmen’s improved insight seems only skin-deep.

It is no accident that, along with Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, *Moon Honey* begins with an epigraph from *The Perfect Wedding Planner*. Ovid is about *change*, the “happy alternative” (113, 125) – although, inevitably with Mayr, irony inheres at times in the latter formulation. By contrast, weddings, in *Moon Honey*, are about *reproduction*, about social sanctions (both authorizing and penalizing), about socially sanctioned heterosexual reproduction. Mabel’s father, having used blackmail to get his unruly daughter to the altar, bribes the groom with a job offer tied to the first baby, while her mother joyfully anticipates grandchildren, whom she hopes will be as nasty to Mabel as Mabel has been to her. When Carmen throws her wedding dress and accessories in the garbage, she mentally buries together her wedding day and the cocoa babies she and Griffin would have produced. Renata “knows that by getting married she is making the right decision. This is the normal thing to do, the accepted way; maybe she will even have a baby once she has thoroughly forgotten her own childhood” (156). In *Moon Honey*, weddings are about babies (babies as fantasy, babies as punishment and social disciplining); weddings are about heterosexual gendering; weddings are about ritual and the conspicuousness of one’s consumption; weddings are about the

reproduction of consumers and consumption through heterosexuality and through discourse; weddings are about babies. Offspring.

Treating the emergence of a new identity as a discursive event... is to refuse a separation between "experience" and language and to insist instead on the productive quality of discourse. (Scott 409)

In particular, the text represents the degree to which racist, sexist, and homophobic narratives circulate and are reproduced, in the service of order, even when they run counter to the speaker's own history and interests. Note Bedelia's passion in the service of heteronormativity, despite her own happy abdication from those expectations, or Renate's readiness above to set aside her own cautionary experience of childhood. In representing the intractability of stereotype and media representation, even in the face of contrary personal experience, Mayr permits the characters to convict themselves through their own obvious contradictions: "All the coloured women Carmen meets seem so *angry*, not that Carmen's ever met any really" (14). Carmen can sweep over the Winnipeg origins of Rama's parents and commend her accent as just *like* a Canadian's, because popular-culture definitions of "Canadian" override what she has just heard.<sup>27</sup> Luce can insist on the beautiful complexions of "these Pakistani-types" – only belatedly acknowledging the bad skin of her cousin's Black husband, which challenges her generalization about "these coloured people" (13). Through Fran's ability to let caricatured art, golliwogs, and racist clichés about Black women erase Vesta's mothering, and, even more alarmingly, through brown Carmen's "experience" of Black rage in her blood, Mayr complicates experience. In *Moon Honey*, it proves to be as much a reflection of one's assumptions as the basis for or measure of one's conclusions.

Demeter's metamorphosis into an asshole is propelled by her determination to make the putative "happiest day of her life" conform to that prescriptive ideal, even at the cost of increasingly unhappy exertions: "All I want, she whispers, is to have the happiest day of my life be the happiest day of my life" (67).<sup>28</sup> The anxious gap in this apparent tautology is subversive. Demeter's "happiest day," the label, the expectation, the burden, is comically at odds with the emotion it names, as is the case also for the weddings of Fran, Mabel, and Griffin. In this novel, institutionalized heterosexuality and the social ritual that celebrates it seem to have little relationship to the desires they supposedly represent. The formula rules. Or attempts to. Predictably then, the surface is where this novel happens. The cliché is

where it happens. And because reflex and unexamined verbal formulas claim such authority, the figurative demonstrates their power, dead metaphors becoming literalized, taking on life.

Far from being grounded in a mere “recovery” of the past, which is waiting to be found ... identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (Hall 212)

It [identity] can signal to not only who one is historically and at present, but at its best it can speak to who one can become – it can speak of agencies and political possibilities. (Bannerji 34)

*Moon Honey* can be read as a novel of passing. And critics have read it that way.<sup>29</sup> Drunk with the empowering elixir of self-affirming brownness, Carmen discovers, on the final page of the novel, “That’s what being a white girl turned brown girl is all about. Or a brown girl who was brown all along but nobody knew, not even herself” (212). There is an ambiguity here: is the second sentence an independent, quite different alternative or a correction, a refinement of the first? Does Mayr leave the reader to choose between the two possibilities or does she clarify a process of self-perception that Carmen is undergoing? In the preceding paragraph, Carmen has been described as having “pulled off being white,” fooling even herself, and as able now only to think of herself as always having been brown (211). If so, how could such an earlier identity (as brown) mean, separated from any human recognition, known not even to her? (If a tree falls in the forest...?) In a society where social understandings are so powerful, can an unacknowledged identity have any meaning? And how are we to read Carmen’s subsequent identity? Is she “now and for the time being a brown girl” or more permanently so? Perhaps, as with Benedict Anderson’s documentation of the retrospective longevity projected onto nations to bolster their identities, Carmen’s final state is more a representation of how identities get naturalized, come to seem long-standing and inevitable. One thing is clear. She hasn’t become a brown woman, still at novel’s end self-described as a brown girl.

No woman is natural without a man. No woman is natural. No woman is. No woman. No.

Femininity is thus not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment. Indeed, there is no "one" who takes on a gender norm. On the contrary, this citation of the gender norm is necessary in order to qualify as a "one"... (Butler, *Bodies* 232)

*Moon Honey* doesn't seem to challenge gender in the same way that it challenges essentialist notions of race and sexuality. Or does it? Whereas characters in the novel change their race, their sexual orientation, even their species, sometimes realistically, sometimes surrealistically (or, I would argue, expressionistically), this is not an *Orlando*, by Virginia Woolf, or a *Self*, by Yann Martell, in which characters' sex shifts from male to female (or vice versa) dramatically and provocatively, as Carmen's race changes. I am bemused by this authorial decision. But it doesn't leave the sex/gender system unchallenged. Honour provides just one of several examples of gender destabilizing. As maid of honour at Mabel's wedding, Honour is so ill at ease in that hyper-feminized role as to seem almost in drag. She resists her gendering, fidgeting and fussing, bouquet drooping, hair escaping its comb, stocking seams crooked, hands clumsy and paw-like arranging Mabel's veil. In a more extreme version of transsexuality, Honour's restiveness performing human femininity catapults her not only out of the female gender but also out of the very species that ordains it.

Comedy of manners, with its detailed attention to the stylized mores and conventions of an artificial, dominant society, satirizes the follies and deficiencies of predictable types. *Moon Honey* even includes the convention of pairs of amoral lovers and characters known only as their roles, Maid or The New Boss. The genre allows Mayr to scrutinize the replication of the social order in accumulated detail – although she departs from the genre's ultimate allegiance to social conformity. Hence the tutelary genius of *The Wedding Planner* and *Bride's All New Book of Etiquette*. At the same time, expressionistic techniques, which abandon mimesis and express extreme mental and emotional states through distorted, grotesque, and hyperbolic representations, allow Mayr to rend those surfaces with what cannot be contained. If unimagined spaces are necessary to break out of the familiar, then the novel must move beyond the language of verisimilitude. Hence Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. While the satiric surface of *Moon Honey* shows the power of hegemony to conscript voices and bodies in its task of reiteration, ruptures of reality – through the fantastical – and ruptures of identities signal possibilities of

resistance. Even the yoking of these two fairly incompatible genres – comedy of manners and expressionism – itself signals *Moon Honey*'s resistance to the programmatic and coherent, its embrace of the mixed, the “miscegenated,” the gender-bending, the sexually ambiguous, the border-blurring, the untidy. The novel's concluding lines, in Carmen's voice, speak with an irony that should by now be familiar to the attentive reader: “The world's a tidy place” (212). The superficial, prescriptive surface of the novel, we have learned, is where tidiness leads.

## NOTES

1. Boily has noted the "parallels between the genre of the novel of manners and the popular consumption of racially defined contemporary magazines devoted to fashion, beauty, and notably, wedding planning" (165).
2. Alterations in a formulaic opening ("Back when she was still a girl"), through the tense shift and the radical effect of a single, new adjective, "white," signal the degree to which the novel is going to choose the language of banality for startlingly revisionist ends.
3. Paul Gilroy discusses Franz Fanon's use of the term "epidermalization," in the context of shifts in raciological science from biopolitics (phrenology and physiognomy) to dermo-politics to nano-politics (cellular and molecular explanations) (46).
4. The term "common sense racism" is Erol Lawrence's.
5. Ruth Frankenberg provides useful analysis of the discursive repertoires of racism, race- and power- evasion, and race- and power-cognizance (139, 142-43, 156-58).
6. See, for example, Arun Mukherjee on "Canada" as "a code word for white" (434).
7. A "discourse of deficit" (used somewhat differently, in contrast with a discourse of potential, in her argument) is Linda C. Powell's phrase (4).
8. Compare Omi and Winant's distinction between "equality of opportunity" and the more socially significant "equality of result" (141).
9. Significantly, though, the natural sign, used to cancel a flat or sharp and temporarily alter the pitch of a note, is also termed an accidental.
10. Here the text gestures towards the triumphal and contestatory pairing of its conclusion, signified in its title, the moon honey of Mika and Renata, Asian-Canadian Mika and Renata whose great-great-grandmother was "one slave among many" (177).
11. Theoretically susceptible to a liberatory, postmodern deconstruction that challenges the very notion of gender, Bedelia's formulation, Mayr demonstrates, carries the power simultaneously to incapacitate, on a personal, emotional level: "No woman is natural. Fran is trash" (109).
12. Given the association of "maid" with sexual inexperience, the dropping of "Maid" in favour of "Honour" to designate Mabel's chosen new partner,

mane now bedecked with wedding finery, may subtly suggest and endorse the consummation of their relationship.

13. I was already uncomfortable with this formulation. I knew the arguments about the desexualizing potential of Adrienne Rich's lesbian continuum: "just where on this line do women actually get into bed with one another?" But I knew too the error of narrowly limiting lesbian practice to sexual activity alone.
14. Of course I knew lesbians (and presumed lesbians) in Lethbridge, but their identity was more covert, so that Mayr's representation of eruptive identities may have regional and urban/rural specificity. I thank Robert Gray for raising this issue, at the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Studies Association in Toronto, where I delivered a version of this paper in May 2002.
15. This passage anticipates the TV reality series "Bridezillas" (Life Network), "profiling brides-to-be who turn into monsters while planning their weddings."
16. Too easily, sometimes perhaps. Several of my queer white grad students protested that lesbian erotic practice in the novel is largely closeted or off-stage, noting Renata and Mika's back-room love-making and the speed with which they leave the country and the book. Renata "exits Stage Left forever" – yes, with all the positive political connotations of "Left" and of abandoning an unpromising scene, but an exit nonetheless (185).
17. Note Adrienne Rich, on the dangers of speaking impersonally, in a disembodied, homogenizing way, of "the body" rather than of "my body": "it's also possible to abstract 'the body.' When I write 'the body,' I see nothing in particular. To write 'my body' plunges me into lived experience, particularity: I see scars, disfigurements, discolorations, damages, losses, as well as what pleases me" (*Blood* 215).
18. Even the calculations of orgasm speed – Griffin fifty-eight seconds, Carmen ten minutes – give me pause. If this is duration of orgasm itself, Carmen's seems implausibly generous; if period from arousal through orgasm, Griffin's haste sheds yet more suspicion on physiological explanations of the gender difference.
19. The redness of Renata's wiry hair characteristically disrupts simple figurations of racial phenotypes.
20. If the inherited virus of black irrationality infects Carmen's reactions, are any of her judgements to be trusted, including her biological

reductionism? And if not the latter, then her reliability ceases to be suspect, in a circular unraveling and reknitting, similar to the Paradox of the Liar or Eubulides' Paradox ("This statement is false").

21. Nicole Markotic similarly suggests, "The metamorphosis is not merely superficial, it is deeply historical and social. Carmen absorbs into her body the personal 'essence' (and I employ this word gingerly) of being Black. I don't intend to invoke the term 'essential' which implies a state of being that automatically accompanies skin, but I use this word to indicate that, for Carmen, the transformation includes occupying and assimilating a lived experience of growing up Caribbean-Canadian in a white-dominated racist society" [3-4].
22. Susan Patrick has noted the connection – "*Moon Honey* is a sort of surrealist, whimsical take on *Black Like Me*" (3056) – as has Katie Petersen – "*Moon Honey* draws from two works, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me*, both of which deal with transformation, the transgression of boundaries, and the deconstruction of established categories" (73).
23. John Howard Griffin himself was aware of this ironic injustice, later pointing out, "I knew, and every black man there knew, that I, as a man now white once again, could say the things that needed saying but would be rejected if black men said them" (Lagada).
24. Or, more precisely, performativity, to use Judith Butler's distinction: "performance as bounded 'act' is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice'" (*Bodies* 234).
25. Even skin colour, Paul Gilroy suggests, is not genetically so simple: "Current wisdom seems to suggest that up to six pairs of genes are implicated in the outcome of skin 'color.' They do not constitute a single switch" (49).
26. Note the deep irony, too, in the narrative's ostensible endorsement of Carmen's self-assessment, in her projected conversation with Griffin: "We can be friends, she'll say, her mind sharp, shockingly brilliant" (212).
27. Compare former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien's formulaic parry, "Don't ask me; I'm not a lawyer," when in fact he is one.
28. The insistent, five-fold repetition of this phrase ("the happiest day of my life") and its close pairing with contradictory evidence ("and already

you're trying to ruin things," "I'm going to have to gag down a big log of fruit cake," "lasting out the day is what counted") underline the simultaneous power and complete insufficiency of the formula. Even the apparent resolution of its final application to the happy couple must be read sardonically, at best, with the banality of the "drunken sloppy kisses" of typical newlyweds or, more scathingly, with appreciation of the groom's inability to see that he is (still) dancing with an asshole (65, 67, 69, 71).

29. See Boily 176, and Victor Ramraj, panel chair, commenting on Markotic's MLA paper.

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