

**Lessons of Tolerance and the Burden of History:  
Multiculturalism in Eric Walters's *Royal Ransom***

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The problem of rendering difficult history accessible to children is significant, Dieter Petzold suggests, insofar as it requires both that we acknowledge the embarrassments of social injustice and racism and that we communicate them to an audience “whose innocence (many people feel) needs to be protected” (189). In what follows, I will suggest that the problem of rendering the complex effects of historical injustice legible to young readers in a multicultural present offers equally notable challenges. My focus here is a recent attempt to articulate multicultural values in children’s literature: *Royal Ransom*, a contemporary young adult novel by Canadian author Eric Walters. On the surface, *Royal Ransom* seems to avoid many of the pitfalls associated with stereotyping, and the overt lesson of the novel—that we must come to know each other as individuals rather than as types—offers a positive message. Walters focuses on the experience of a thirteen-year-old Cree boy, Jamie

Ransom, and the part he plays in saving the young heirs to a fictionalized version of the current British Royal family from an attempted kidnapping. In the intercultural contact between Jamie and the Royal children, who are thrown together in the northern Alberta wilderness, both sides must learn to look beyond received assumptions in order to survive. This process of coming to mutual understanding is heightened, moreover, by the romantic attraction between Jamie and the Princess Victoria, who is also thirteen. As their friendship evolves, Jamie must correct Victoria’s preconceptions about his culture. At the same time, Jamie must learn to see Victoria as the intelligent, resourceful person she is, rather than as a spoiled, rich princess whose life consists of “having tea or playing polo” (43). Ultimately, we recognize, both Jamie and Victoria are “ordinary” teenagers, who share common interests (such as computers and television) and common problems of

adolescence.

If *Royal Ransom* asks its readers to look beyond stereotypes, however, it also raises the problem of “placing” individuals within a cultural framework determined by historical relationships. In the personal relationship between Jamie and Victoria, Walters offers a model for healing the effects of systemic injustice. Towards this end, Victoria, who is named for her great-great-great-grandmother Queen Victoria, both evokes colonial power and “corrects” her foremother’s legacy by helping Jamie learn to value his heritage. In suggesting an interpersonal basis for righting past wrongs, however, the text reveals historically determined differences between Jamie and Victoria that cannot be contained within its affirmation of liberal individualist ideology as an alternative to stereotyping. My argument focuses specifically on the ways these differences between Victoria and Jamie are expressed as “silences” that direct our attention to the ongoing effects of the past on present experience. The idea that gaps or silences can communicate profound meanings is central to the study of linguistics, where such moments in conversation indicate asymmetries of power that direct our attention to ideological structures through which inequality is reproduced (Tannen 17).<sup>1</sup> My analysis considers how both conversational and discursive silences in *Royal Ransom* suggest the power of history to shape the present. Some of the

“silences” in the text are intentional insofar as they invoke historical contexts that are not articulated but that add significant layers of meaning to the text. If Walters introduces silences that direct our attention to historically inflected social issues—such as the effects of residential schools or the complexities of interracial romance—the text is also complicit in more pernicious silences related to the representation of other cultures.

The problem raised by the appropriation of a First Nations voice in relation to concerns about political multiculturalism has been debated hotly over recent decades, both in political contexts and in literary studies. Politically, First Nations leaders have been critical of attempts to “correct” historical inequities in Canadian society by eliminating the separate legal status of Aboriginal peoples.<sup>2</sup> In a symbolic register, scholars and creative writers have interrogated longstanding traditions of negative stereotyping and attempted to offer correctives.<sup>3</sup> Such engagements demonstrate in specific ways the larger problems associated with multicultural policy that works simultaneously to “manage” colonial history by flattening difference (Bannerji 9–10) and to essentialize and marginalize race and ethnicity in ways that reinforce existing hegemony (Kamboureli 12).<sup>4</sup> In taking up the particular issue of voice, most commentators agree that, in order to speak respectfully about or through another culture, one must first

possess a significant, experiential understanding of its lived experience. Walters, a non-First Nations author, is not only “silent” about Jamie’s Cree heritage in ways that offset his apparent desire to recognize and respect difference, he also represents Jamie’s experience using a genre, adventure fiction, associated with imperialist ideology. *Royal Ransom* is, in fact, a classic wilderness adventure novel that foregrounds within a linear plot structure concerns with both individual (Western) models of development and with individualism. The latter, Raymond Williams influentially suggests, vests power in the “primacy of individual states and interests” (165), an alignment that offers a sharp contrast to First Nations’ emphasis on collective experience and communal values. The former, Edward Said argues, is intimately connected with the power both to claim and administer land and to block other narratives of ownership from forming (xiii). As a vehicle for questioning stereotypes, the adventure novel is therefore doubly at odds with the First Nations values it superficially venerates but does not represent. From a formal perspective,



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moreover, the adventure novel’s preoccupation with individual psychology and progressive, linear structure is ill-suited to express a worldview associated with complex, discontinuous, explicitly political modes of storytelling (Stott 147–48). Despite its interest in promoting multicultural understanding, I argue, *Royal Ransom’s* use of a Western genre and ideology associated with liberal individualism ultimately reproduces the larger dilemmas of assimilation and racialization posed by multicultural policy.

*Royal Ransom* begins by establishing an historical frame of reference for the adventure that shapes Victoria and Jamie’s relationship. It does so, moreover, by invoking personal prehistory that suggests how individual connection and incremental change may cumulatively counter the negative effects of colonial history. As Jamie explains, it “began more than thirty years ago” when his grandfather was “hired as a guide for a couple of ‘Royals’ for a canoe trip” (5). This trip, a formative childhood experience for the current King, establishes a positive frame of reference insofar as it suggests how children’s experiences with other cultures may shape their perspectives. At the

same time, however, the King's veneration for Jamie's grandfather is informed by the romantic stereotype of the noble savage that places him within a register of exotic, essentialized difference.<sup>5</sup> As context for his relationship with Victoria, Jamie's explanation of the story's prehistory establishes a crucial difference between the imperial assumptions that governed intercultural relations among previous generations and those that shape the present. Thus, while Jamie's grandmother identifies herself explicitly as a "loyal" colonial subject of the British Royal family, Jamie, his father, and his cousin, Ray, see themselves as independent Canadians. When his grandmother asks, "How can we be of service to Your Majesties?", Jamie registers an inward challenge: "'Loyal subjects?' I questioned. I was a lot of things but a loyal subject wasn't one of them" (24). The implications of such labels subsequently become clear when Jamie acknowledges the continuing effects of colonization on First Nations peoples. As he explains to Victoria, "sometimes people have things taken away from them—important things—and they're angry and bitter because, no matter what they do, they know they can't get back what belongs to them" (132). "I'm not saying that any of this is right," he continues, "but I understand. . . . I'm Native. Lots of Natives are angry" (132). The encounter between two cultures is thus set up in terms that make clear the tensions as well as the more positive elements of personal history—such as

the relationship between Victoria's father and Jamie's grandfather—that inform the present.

Within this context, Jamie and Victoria must come to know each other as individuals rather than as stereotypes. In their early interactions, for example, Victoria's questions focus on questions of racial and cultural difference. Inspired by her father's romantic childhood memories of Jamie's grandfather, she asks, "Are you an Indian?" (20). Later, she suggests Jamie's name "doesn't sound very Native," and wonders whether he will start the campfire by "rubbing sticks together" or use a "special Native tool" (48, 59). For his part, Jamie must learn to look beyond his early assumption that rich kids are spoiled and snobbish—and that a princess must spend her time "riding around in carriages, or having people do her hair" (43). By the end of their adventure, however, Jamie admits that Victoria is different than he first imagined: "you could be somebody I go to school with," he tells her, "Somebody I could be friends with" (177). Victoria, for her part, offers a forceful condemnation of stereotyping. Informed that she is not the "spoiled little prima donna" Jamie expected, Victoria indignantly replies, "That's nothing but some ridiculous stereotype and it's very offensive to who I am as a person" (176).

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complicate the ideal of individual equality. In conversation, Victoria is more direct and forceful than Jamie. Thus, for example, she clearly articulates her feeling that stereotypes are “offensive to who I am as a person.” By contrast, Jamie’s speech is marked by silences or gaps that suggest alternative cultural norms. The possibility that silence may be meaningful is introduced when his grandmother offers the services of Ray and Jamie’s father to the Royals free of charge. As the two men stand “speechless,” Jamie explains that “once my grandmother had made that offer they had no choice but to do what she said. To disagree would have been a slight against her” (27). In this context, Jamie indicates—albeit obliquely—the cultural value placed on elder members of a community, and especially on elder women, in First Nations cultures.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, however, culturally-inflected notions of politeness take the form of different types of silence. In Jamie’s interaction with Victoria, for example, silences marked as ellipses communicate indirectly his feelings of discomfort when Victoria asks probing questions about his race or culture. To her query about whether he is an Indian, for example, Jamie



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offers a corrective: “I’m Cree, northern Cree. . . . And we like the term Native Canadian a whole lot better” (20). Later, when she notes that his name “doesn’t sound very Native” and then adds “I really meant no offence,” his response is amplified by an ellipsis and an inward acknowledgment: “I held my tongue. ‘I guess there’s none taken . . . at least not this time’” (48). Taken together, this pair of silences (“I held my tongue” and the subsequent ellipsis) suggests the opposite of what he overtly communicates, offering an indication that the effects of stereotyping may in fact be hurtful or offensive. Such moments of silence therefore alert readers to layers of meaning within cultural conventions of “polite” conversation that reproduce asymmetries of power.

Such silences in Jamie’s speech recur throughout the text at moments of personal discomfort. In the passage cited above, however, Jamie’s awkward suggestion that “we” prefer to be called “Native Canadian” also expresses the discomfort non-First Nations people experience in attempting to determine correct forms of address. Walters’s choice of terms here indicates his distance from First Nations culture: he translates an American expression (“Native

American”) for a Canadian context, in effect using language with no extratextual currency.<sup>7</sup> By having Jamie suggest “Native Canadian” as the preferred form of address, moreover, Walters chooses language that some First Nations people associate with attempts to whitewash history under the guise of political correctness. In making the shift from “Indian” to “Native American,” Christina Berry explains, past injustice is bracketed from a present that “need not feel guilty for the horrors of the past.” Understood in this light, Walters’s awkward political correctness indicates a central problem inherent in attempts to revise language to reflect multicultural norms: unless the revision also addresses underlying inequities, the net effect is to reinscribe and mask negative constructions of difference. In *Royal Ransom*, this conflict between language and underlying ideology is registered as Jamie’s apparent discomfort in offering the correction, a textual moment one might read as an effect of his identification with the colonizer’s view of difference. As an effect of Walters’s attempt to express an appropriated identity, however, Jamie’s “discomfort” might alternatively be understood as a conflict within the dominant mode of liberal subjectivity used to frame Jamie’s development in the novel.

The conflict inherent in Walters’s desire to address past injustice using language and notions of individualism at odds with First Nations cultures also

colours Jamie and Victoria’s developing relationship. Here, Walters offers common experience as a point of departure for mutual respect and understanding, even as he introduces historical points of reference that make clear the extent to which Jamie and Victoria’s identities are overwritten by the continuing effects of the past. When discussing the experience of attending school outside his immediate community, for example, Jamie describes his boarding arrangement as a “residential” school. In this case, “residential” indicates the current practice by which children from remote communities are educated in larger centres, where they live with families or stay in band-run dorms (Randolph-Beaver). If the term “residential” indicates that Jamie lives in a dormitory while attending school in Fort McMurray, however, the historical connotations of the term are more complex. Indeed, the phrase invokes both the history of residential schools governed by Canada’s Department of Indian Affairs from the late-nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries, and the horrific legacy of cultural devastation associated with this system.<sup>8</sup> The resonance of the term in the present is clear in Jamie’s description of the experience of living away from home, isolated in a strange environment. Explaining the high dropout rate, he acknowledges the temptation to quit: “There were times I’d been tempted myself—to stay home and forget about school, pick up work in the village like some kids did

and never leave" (64). Jamie further acknowledges that his decision to stay in school is underpinned by ambition: "I had other plans. Big plans" (64). Such statements formulate Jamie's dilemma: that he can only gain access to westernized modes of "success" by sacrificing aspects of familial or cultural connection. Indeed, Victoria reinforces this reality when she suggests that "education is essential to pursue higher learning and professional status" (65). Though Jamie points out that many people in his community have succeeded without university, his alternative to school in Fort McMurray—"pick[ing] up work in the village"—makes clear that his future would be limited by a decision to quit.

When Jamie suggests that Victoria does not "know how hard it is to be away from your family like that," however, she corrects him. "I know exactly what you mean," she says. "I also attend a residential school" (65). The cultural point of interface here is significant insofar as their "shared" experience suggests divergent historical meanings. On the one hand, it is true that both Jamie and Victoria have experienced loneliness and isolation at school. For Jamie, however, access to basic education is not possible unless he leaves home, so the choice to attend is governed by necessity. For Victoria, by contrast, tradition and privilege shape her parents' active decision to place her in an elite institution. The difference is crucial, for even though the British public school system may arguably foster

the same divided subjectivity in upper-class English children as was imposed in residential schools in Canada, it does so in a way that legitimizes existing asymmetries of power. Like Jamie, Victoria has "big plans." Unlike Jamie, however, Victoria's ambitions do not require that she sacrifice aspects of her cultural identity in order to succeed.

Understood in light of the history it invokes, Walters's reference to residential schools thus introduces a dissonance in the text expressed as a critical "silence." Jamie does not overtly connect his current experience to a legacy that has undoubtedly shaped his cultural environment and identity, and Victoria is presumably not aware of this system or its impact, given her privileged position and culturally limited education. By introducing the term "residential," however, Walters suggests an historical context that actively shapes crucial differences between the two teens. In doing so, he arguably provides a starting point for readers to learn more about the history of residential schools, and to think more about their continuing impact. If the strategy is laudable, however, the indirect nature of the reference in *Royal Ransom* means that only readers already familiar with the pertinent history will be able to consider the implications it suggests. Within the text, Victoria evinces no knowledge of this past and Jamie does not overtly discuss it. The problem, therefore, remains that the past is indicated

but not articulated. Indeed, rather than take up the implications of negative history, Walters instead shifts the focus of the novel to the process by which Jamie reconnects to his heritage in a positive way.

This process is facilitated by Victoria, whose fascination with First Nations cultures is linked to her father's stories about his childhood trip with Jamie's grandfather. Initially, her assumptions annoy Jamie, who responds to her curiosity about whether he plans to start their campfire using "a special Native tool" by suggesting, "I have one of those special Native tools. . . . We call them matches" (59). As their friendship deepens, however, and as Victoria helps them survive in the wilderness by drawing on material she has read about First Nations cultures, Jamie begins to think differently about his heritage. As they watch the northern lights together in a central episode, Victoria's appreciation contrasts with his admission that "I see them so often I just don't pay attention" (123). Jamie's tendency to undervalue aspects of his own environment is expressed in his response to Victoria's request for more information about the northern lights. Taking a scientific tone, he explains, "The northern lights, properly called the aurora borealis, are the product of the interaction that happens when solar flares send electrically charged particles that slam into the earth's magnetic field" (124). When she wonders if he knows "other things," Jamie initially resists, mentioning his aversion

to stereotypes: "So because I'm Native you figure that I must know some myth about the northern lights?" (125). Given the deepening romantic cast of their relationship, however, Jamie is able to move beyond this initial reaction and relate to a different kind of history: the personal relationship between Victoria's father and his grandfather. In making this connection, Jamie invokes his past and acknowledges the differences between himself and his elder. "I thought about my grandfather and the things he used to say, the way he told stories," Jamie reflects. "There was no way I could duplicate any of that. I'd just have to try to be myself" (125). When he tells the story, however, Jamie's memories of his grandfather coincide with his reconnection to the oral tradition of storytelling that admits a different kind of history into his experience. The conclusion, "My grandfather told me that stories are never over," thus suggests a positive connection between past and future that may offset (if not eradicate) the dislocating effect of colonization (127).

As an individual open to learning about difference, Victoria thus closes the circle symbolically inaugurated by Queen Victoria, substituting individual understanding for systemic oppression. If individual relationships seem to offer a basis for healing past wounds, however, the text does not address the disconnection between individual and system implicit in the problem of Jamie's and Victoria's



un-equal position as social subjects. Indeed, even the “positive” prospect of the colonizer making right the mistakes of a colonial past is sustained by preserving dominant power relations, since Victoria—like the Queen for whom she is named—is the agent of change.

The underlying conservatism of this “healing” is further suggested by Victoria’s chat room identity as “Torie,” a nickname that puns on a term associated with paternalism and political conservatism.<sup>9</sup>

In attempting to articulate a multicultural view of difference, then, Walters simultaneously underscores the harm historically done to Aboriginal peoples in Canada and imposes a vision of individual equality that reproduces the underlying structures of privilege associated with imperialism. This conflict takes on additional complexity when Walters introduces the problem of extending mutual understanding between individuals to the larger social systems that shape subjectivity and relationships.

*Royal Ransom* explores this issue in the developing romance between Jamie and Victoria, which introduces a Western historical context for understanding the complexities of intercultural relationships. The problems of romance are introduced humorously in the adults’ responses to Jamie

and Victoria’s developing friendship during the canoe trip. Ray begins by teasing Jamie, highlighting problems of adolescent awkwardness: “If you and the Princess got married, would I have to call you Your Highness, or Your Majesty or King Jamie?” (70).



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Despite the fact that this outcome is improbable given their age, Victoria’s bodyguards make clear the hierarchy of power relations that shape the difference between royalty and commoner. “Since a king outranks a queen,” one notes, “it would not be possible for an outsider—somebody who has merely married into the family—to be the actual head of state” (70). When he learns the

cause of Ray’s teasing, however, the guard becomes more serious and invokes rules of protocol. “We appreciate that you have befriended the Princess,” he suggests to Jamie. “But it is extremely important that you understand the parameters of the relationship” (74). What follows is a humorous exchange, in which the bodyguards’ use of formal language confuses the issue. “There are constraints . . . limitations . . . restrictions . . . actions that are prohibited,” one suggests, until the other finally blurts out, “You cannot kiss the Princess” (74). Indeed, the discomfort signaled by Jamie’s use of ellipses elsewhere is

registered here in the bodyguards' squeamishness about specifying the form inappropriate behaviour with Victoria might take.

The negotiation that ensues politicizes the question of protocol and introduces indirectly questions of difference, although race is not openly discussed. Thus, while Jamie stutters, "I haven't . . . I won't . . . I don't want to," Ray revolts against the prohibition: "Why can't he?" (74). In pursuing the thinking behind the limitation on romantic contact, moreover, Ray counters the bodyguards' assumptions about maintaining a proper hierarchy. Following their explanation of "appropriate" behaviour, he poses two interrelated questions: "If she kisses him, he is allowed to kiss her back?" and "Don't you think my cousin is good enough for her?" (75). Ray's response is significant insofar as it looks beyond assumptions about "rules" governing royalty, to the assumptions about difference that such rules obscure. The response he provokes, that Victoria "is a princess and must be treated as such," suggests the limitations of an inherited value system that also precludes the bodyguards from contemplating the prospect that she might initiate the "forbidden" activity. In this blockage of the possibility of her kissing him, the related question of whether Jamie is "good enough"—and what aspects of his identity this might demean—is also obscured.

Despite this silence, however, the process by which

the guards refuse to admit the larger implications of romantic involvement invokes what Robert Young describes as anxieties of a "colonial desire" that threatens to collapse structures of difference (5). In invoking assumptions linked to Victoria's aristocratic birth, the guards silently introduce the parallel issue of Jamie's racial difference as a sexual threat to her privilege—indicated by the "impossible" possibility of him becoming King. At the same time, Ray's question suggests that this threat might not be something forced on Victoria against her will, but rather emerge as a choice shaped by her desire. Far from the threatening masculinity associated with savagery, this second possibility connects Jamie to popular images of Aboriginal men as objects of feminine desire in romance novels: "exotically handsome but not too alien" (van Lent 225). In fact, Jamie's reflection that girls at school "think I'm pretty good-looking because I'm tall for my age and my hair looks good when I let it grow long" (86) places him within this semiotic lexicon of desire for the exotic male among white women. Victoria and Jamie's romantic feelings thus invoke a cultural history haunted by fears of romantic connections between white women and male "others," even as it invokes a contemporary archetype of "Indian" masculinity connected to feminine desire for a racial other.

Such combined cultural points of reference articulate a critical silence in the text on the question

of interracial romance, which is raised, like the socio-cultural meanings communicated by Jamie's ellipses, as an expressive silence. This silence takes on special significance in the story of Victoria's mother, whose fictional history both invokes and excises the real history of the late Princess Diana. In the novel, the Royal family is comprised of a widowed King with two children, the eldest of whom is a girl. Yet, crucial aspects of these fictionalized Royals suggest recognizable parallels with the current Royal family. Not only do the King and Prince resemble Prince Charles (both have large ears), the dead Queen bears a striking resemblance to the late Princess Diana. Early in the text, Jamie's grandmother remembers the death: "That was one of the saddest days of my life. So young—too young. I remember thinking that it wasn't fair that somebody so young and beautiful and loved by so many should be taken from us" (25). This reference to a beautiful and beloved Queen conjures associations with Diana's death and, with the subsequent focus on her beauty, charity, and empathy for the disenfranchised in

public mourning. The connection is later made more explicit when Victoria describes her mother as "the most photographed person in the world" and as one of "the most beautiful women in the world" (166). If the Queen bears an uncanny resemblance to Diana,

however, she also introduces a sanitized version of her history. Thus, Victoria's mother dies in a plane crash without scandal, still married to the King.

In altering Diana's history, Walters specifically excises material related to sexuality and race. Yet, by suggesting coincidences between the fictional Queen and the real Princess, he nonetheless offers a context for understanding the adult complexities of a possible interracial romance between Jamie and Victoria. Indeed, parallels between

the fictional Queen and Princess Diana invite readers familiar with recent history to ponder the implications of interracial union by turning to this history. Both before and after her death, Diana's open romantic involvement with Egyptian Muslim Dodi Al-Fayed provoked conflicted public response. Idealized by some for its multicultural disregard for



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racial difference, Emily Lomax points out, Diana's romance also inspired racist, xenophobic reaction (80). The parallel thus offers a recent reminder of the complex, historically determined systems in which individual relationships must function. At the same time, Diana's history suggests the possibilities and limitations of multiculturalism itself. Mica Nava, for example, reads Diana's interracial romance as a model for national transformation—envisioning a Britain in which “descendants of the colonizers can no longer be distinguished from the colonized, where cultural and racial differences are transformed by their interaction and merger with each other” (116). Where some find the possibility of racial reconfiguration in blending, however, other commentators see anxiety and ambivalence. Thus Jude Davies finds in celebratory readings of the Diana/Dodi romance the same problems associated with policies of multiculturalism. As “paradigms for national identity,” she points out, “they can reiterate conservative formations of whiteness” by reifying difference (197).

Adult complexities of sexuality, cultural imagination, and national identity complicate *Royal Ransom's* focus on individual connection as a way to productively recognize and celebrate difference. Rather than explore the implications of a Jamie/Victoria relationship, however, Walters displaces complexities suggested by the romance plot to the

adventure plot and the intended kidnapping of the Royal children, where they are simplified as a struggle between good and evil. In the children's flight from the terrorists and in their subsequent rescue of Ray and the bodyguard who has survived the initial attack, Walters addresses systemic problems of intercultural relationships in non-sexualized terms. Issues associated with romantic connection are thus reconfigured as qualities of loyalty, bravery, and regard for humanity among individuals—a shift that retracts the possibility of upsetting existing categories of difference in a sexual union. The historic distinction between “us” and “them” that subtly defines the Ray/Albert relationship over the course of the trip—and informs their different responses to a possible Jamie/Victoria romance—is thus reformulated as a second opposition between a humane “us” and the “inhuman” practices associated with terrorism. This shift is highlighted by Jamie and Ray's resistance to the terrorists' anti-imperialist arguments. “You are protecting two members of the ruling class,” one of the terrorists suggests. “They took away your land and exploited your people, just as they have exploited people around the world!” (196). Ray's resistance to such arguments redefines his relationship with Albert, reconfiguring their earlier antagonism as mutual investment in the claims of common humanity. Significantly, at this point, Victoria and her brother redress the systemic ills of the past by acting together

to save the rest of their party. The act is explicitly egalitarian and reciprocal, moreover, since Victoria responds to Jamie's thanks by acknowledging his earlier actions on their behalf: "it's nothing less than what you would have done for me or for my brother" (198).

Such demonstrations of mutual indebtedness and connection are not limited to the children. Indeed, Ray and Albert, who have evinced greater resistance to each other over the course of the trip than have Jamie and Victoria, come together on the issue of universal "human" values. Thus, when a traumatized Ray threatens to shoot his tormentor, who is now their prisoner, Albert dissuades him using the logic of shared experience. "I know how you feel," he suggests. "Exactly how you feel. But we cannot allow ourselves to sink to the level of these animals. They only win when we allow ourselves to become like them" (202). Ray's decision not to shoot affirms the moral identity of the now multicultural group, even as the whole episode disconnects oppression from its historical association with colonization by establishing that the terrorists are interested in money rather than justice. Historical relations between British and First Nations peoples are thus revised to suggest a new basis of difference in moral choice, although it is significant that the distinction between "animals" and "humans" recycles the language used to justify colonization. In a related outcome, Albert

demonstrates a new confidence in Jamie, according him the distinction of hero. "Many of us played parts," he suggests of their adventure, "but you were the one who made all those parts work as a whole" (229).

Albert also recognizes Jamie's merit by allowing him a private interview with Victoria before she leaves, a gesture of trust that confirms feelings of common identity among the group. During this farewell, the two acknowledge how they have been changed by their adventure. Victoria suggests that it has "not only made me different, but stronger, even better" (231). This acknowledgment implies that, just as she has helped to "heal" Jamie's connection to his cultural past, he may be responsible for future systemic change insofar as Victoria is identified with the symbolic power of Royalty. Both protagonists also concur that despite the sense of maturity their experiences have produced, they are not ready to move fully into the world of adults. As Jamie narrates, "It was almost like the week before I'd been a kid and now I was . . . an older, wiser kid" (231). Here, the ellipsis silently expresses both "adulthood" and the complexities it suggests. Significant, at this point, is the culmination of the romance plot in a kiss instigated by Victoria, which is pronounced enough to suggest stronger romantic potential. Jamie reports:

She flung her arms around my neck and pressed

her lips against mine and kissed me! I was so shocked that for a split second I didn't close my eyes or kiss back. Then I did both. My lips were against hers and I kissed her back. Finally she let go. (233)

Both the duration and Jamie's response identify this kiss as a threshold moment of adulthood for both characters, rather than an innocent expression of childish affection. The fact that it is instigated by Victoria, moreover, invokes the subtext of race and desire associated with the novel's indirect references to Princess Diana. If it suggests the possibility of a more complex romantic involvement, however, the moment is suspended by the restoration of social and geographical distance between Jamie and Victoria as she returns to England and he returns to being "just" a kid. With this deferral of adult implications, we end. The final moment of the novel focuses on Jamie contemplating a future in which the kiss is identified with possibility for personal development: "looking up into that endlessly blue sky, remembering that kiss from a beautiful princess, with everything I had to look forward to, I really did feel as if the world was opening up to me" (234).



Indeed, despite Jamie's hopes for a bright future, the text's advocacy of multicultural equality is capped by a series of returns to existing power relations which limit the utopian prospect it seems to raise.

*Royal Ransom's* final image of Jamie anticipating a bright, cloudless future articulates the desired end of multicultural policy and, by extension, multicultural children's literature. If we can address with great success the problems of stereotyping and cultural misconception between individuals, however, the systemic issues that continue to shape adult experience still largely remain, both as problems of history and as problems of genre. Though multicultural education "works" insofar as it helps children understand and appreciate difference (Carpenter 70), its impact on adults is more limited. On the one hand, policy analysts point out, instilling respect for difference does not produce equal opportunities for education or ameliorate social, political, or economic inequities (Mazurek 26; Debicki 31; Harney 82). On the other hand, Neil Bissoondath (2-3) and Howard Palmer (208) observe, there is evidence of persistent antipathy for multiculturalism among Canadian adults. The problem of disconnection between individual and system expressed in the shift from child to adult is ultimately raised but not resolved in *Royal Ransom*. Indeed, despite Jamie's hopes for a bright future, the

text's advocacy of multicultural equality is capped by a series of returns to existing power relations which limit the utopian prospect it seems to raise. Perhaps most notable, in this respect, is the formal recognition bestowed on Jamie as a hero who realizes the Western ideal of success. In their final parting, Victoria extends an invitation to Jamie and his family to come to London and be recognized at a ceremony honouring his bravery. What seems to be an appropriate culmination—and one that offers to widen Jamie's horizons by taking him out of his immediate sphere and into the larger world—also works to subtly reaffirm imperial power. As one Cree student in my Children's Literature class pointed out, recognition on the King's terms places Jamie in the subordinate position of "loyal subject" he has initially rejected. Indeed, this student suggested in class discussion of the book, a more appropriate mark of respect would be for the King to travel to Jamie's community and honour him there, thereby offering recognition of his position as an equal.<sup>10</sup>

Such subtle reminders of the enduring character of power relations between cultures suggest the need to remain vigilant, lest we unwittingly reinscribe the dynamics of colonial history in the multicultural present. In *Royal Ransom*, such dangers are presented in the context of young adult fiction, a genre that is both explicitly transitional and focused on the relationship between self and society. Through this transition, Jamie and Victoria offer the prospect of change informed by a troubled past. If the terms of individual relationship are potentially reformulated, however, *Royal Ransom's* ultimate affirmation of a model of liberal subjectivity in the "fairy tale" resolution of the adventure plot also suggests the dark side of multiculturalism as an ideology and policy that may potentially erase or trivialize difference. Walters's aims, laudable though they may be, thus indicate the larger dilemma that must be addressed on a social level in order to realize a multicultural practice that offers space for a true recognition of difference.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Although Tannen's work focuses specifically on silence in conversations between men and women, her introduction (quoted here) makes clear the ways such silences can also shape intercultural communication.

<sup>2</sup> For useful summaries of First Nations' responses to successive "multicultural" policies in Canada since 1969 see Miller, *Lethal Legacy* 258; Petrone 9–10; and Emberley 88–91.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the collections edited by King, Calver and Hoy; Campbell et al.; and Hutcheon and Richmond.

<sup>4</sup> Representative critiques of multicultural policy include Harney (in a specifically Canadian context) and Žižek.

<sup>5</sup> On the persistent stereotype of the noble savage, see Monkman; Bird; and Francis.

<sup>6</sup> I am indebted to Katrina Buchholz, a student in my Children's Literature class (winter 2005), for this insight.

<sup>7</sup> "Words First," published by Indian and Northern Affairs (Canada), articulates recommended usage for government employees. This document suggests that the term "Native American" is not popular in Canada. The term "Native Canadian" is not mentioned.

<sup>8</sup> For useful discussions of the effects of residential schools, see Coutu and Hoffman-Mercredi; and Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*.

<sup>9</sup> I am indebted to Jennifer Daley and Yvan Prkachin, both students in my Children's Literature class (fall 2006), for this reading of the text.

<sup>10</sup> I am indebted to Jayme Fougere, a student in my Children's Literature class (winter 2005) for these insights.

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