

Critical Counternarratives to Canadianness:
The Tragically Hip and Canada as a Work in Progress

by

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Abstract

Canadian national identity occupies a contentious space wherein there are tensions between singular narratives of Canadian experience and more nuanced understandings of the complexity of national identity. Considering these issues, this thesis aims to demonstrate how constructions of Canadianness are created, shaped and dispersed through Canadian music, specifically through the iconic Canadian rock band, The Tragically Hip. Drawing on discussions of identity and belonging in the Canadian experience, I suggest that through their lyrics, the band create critical counternarratives that oppose more singular and celebratory versions of Canadian identity. Yet at the same time, there is a reassertion of hegemonic Canadianness through their music. In this sense, The Hip hold a dichotomous position as both critical of dominant national narratives and as embodying hegemonic Canadianness. I conclude by examining the legacy of The Tragically Hip and suggest that The Hip as ‘Canada’s band’ represents a consensus that Canada is a ‘work in progress.’

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Chapter One **Canadianness and Narratives in Canadian Music**

The concept of Canadian national identity has continuously been a subject of debate. Throughout the nation's history, reflections about national identity have remained constant, wide-ranging, and anxiety ridden (Mackey 2002, 8). A number of government initiatives – ranging from attempts at imposing cultural homogeneity to the application of multicultural policies – have been implemented over the years, all with the intent of fostering certain forms of Canadian identity (Mackey 2002, 22). Since Canada has a complex history and a diverse array of citizens, the state of Canadian identity remains without a core or consensus view but instead encompasses multifaceted experiences and expressions of Canadianness. Yet there are also more simplistic and problematic reductions of Canadian experience that still exist as prominent narratives of national identity. The tensions between these generalized narratives of Canadianness, and a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of national identity, remain central to the surrounding discourse.

Music has been an important factor in the construction of Canadian identity. Culture has been often mobilized in Canada's quest for nationhood (Edwardson 2008, 24). Ryan Edwardson notes that since the mid-twentieth century, many Canadians have used music to connect, individually and collectively, to a national sense of self, and in turn vest musicians, particularly the famous expatriates who could be reclaimed, with special status as national representatives (2009, 4). In other words, there was a nationalizing transformation that changed "music in Canada" to "Canadian music" (Edwardson 2009, 5). Yet this process has not been without much conflict, as Edwardson describes:

Canadianizers...have not had an easy time trying to imprint a sense of Canadian nationhood through culture. Division and conflict have characterized the entire process as

cultural patrons, participants, producers, distributors, intellectuals, the state, and the public as a whole fought over issues of nationhood, culture, and intervention. (2008, 22)

In addition to this conflict surrounding culture and the nation, this nationalizing shift to “Canadian music” is laced with uncertainties and often conflicting realities as to what ‘Canadian’ and ‘Canadian music’ actually mean. As Edwardson elaborates, “the contentious terrain on which Canadian music is debated, negotiated, and reified reveals as much about the subjectivity of ‘Canadian’ as it does about the inability to come to a specific definition” (2009, 22).

Considering these issues, this thesis aims to demonstrate how, in one particularly important case, constructions of Canadianness are created and shaped and then dispersed and distributed through Canadian music. I will explore these conceptions of Canadianness through an examination of the iconic Canadian rock band, The Tragically Hip.¹

There is an abundance of literature pertaining to these defining qualities of Canadian national identity, and to the negotiation of belonging in Canada. As such, this following section will not serve as a comprehensive literature review of Canadian identity, but rather an examination of various themes and concepts that are more directly related to my discussion. I selected examples that will highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of Canadianness, and that will convey various narratives that commonly arise in discourses surrounding the Canadian experience. These narratives will function as connected threads within the larger concept of Canadianness. They will provide an overview of many of the dominant themes that are reoccurring in the discourse, as well as give insight into many of the issues and hegemonic patterns that arise in constructions and representations of Canadianness. I hope these selected

¹ The Tragically Hip consists of lead singer Gord Downie, guitarists Paul Langlois and Rob Baker, bassist Gord Sinclair, and drummer Johnny Fay. The band formed in 1984 in Kingston, Ontario. They played many gigs around Kingston (notably in student bars at Queen’s University) and after some time, they moved to larger venues across Ontario, recorded an EP, and eventually signed a record deal with MCA in 1988.

threads underscore the shifting definitions of many facets of identity and highlight, as Beverley Diamond observes, that the “fragility of our consensus [is] transparent and central to our identity” (2006, 332). By examining these threads, I aim to connect their interrelated ideas to create an overview of issues within constructions of Canadian identity. This overview will act as a backdrop to subsequent discussions of The Tragically Hip. It will serve as a point of comparison to how the band engages with and represents Canadianness. In choosing to use a series of narratives as the basis for this overview, I hope to create a pluralized point of view that allows for discussion of the multiplicity of meanings, contested points of view, and different aesthetically defined politics in music and identity (Diamond 2013, 162).

The Tragically Hip do embody a particular kind of Canadian identity and the band does make artistic choices that maintain and even reinforce current hegemonic positions. Because of these factors, one would assume that The Tragically Hip would commemorate more singular and celebratory narratives of Canadianness. Yet as I will demonstrate in this thesis, there are elements of the band’s output that go against these one-dimensional constructions of Canadian identity. The Hip put these singular narratives into conversation with more critical counternarratives that ultimately seek to portray the dimensions of nuance within belonging and identity in Canada. These kinds of constructions of Canadianness by a group like The Tragically Hip allow for current power dynamics to be problematized. This group—both in their own identity and in their artistic choices—is quite representative of many forms of hegemony in Canadian discourse. Yet they are creating a more nuanced picture of the defining features of Canadianness that critically comments on the status of these forms of hegemony. This can perhaps allow for an opening up of these power dynamics for discussion, reconsideration, and change.

However, throughout this thesis, I also aim to acknowledge and recognize the limiting factors of The Hip's ability to wholly and effectively communicate, represent, and advocate for these critical counternarratives to hegemonic Canadianness. I will demonstrate how, not only in their own identities but also in their artistic choices, the band create a sonic barrier that reinforces many of these dominant power dynamics. In this sense, their position as 'Canada's band' and their ability to author these nuanced and critical perspectives is obscured through their strengthening of hegemonic forms of power. Therefore, The Tragically Hip construct a version of Canadianness that is representative of a 'work in progress': it aims to be critical and nuanced, yet it still embodies and perpetuates many of the hegemonic ideals that it intends to counter. More plainly, The Tragically Hip's construction of Canadianness is an attempt to acknowledge, recognize, and overcome the nation's failures while maintaining and extending many of the qualities that enabled those failures to happen. In recognizing these limiting factors of The Tragically Hip, I aim to take a more critical perspective that creates another layer of nuance within these counternarratives to hegemonic Canadianness.

Negotiations of Belonging

Since Canada is a multicultural nation, issues of power are never far away. Rather than erasure and homogeneity, Canadian multicultural policies have often attempted a goal of inclusion and tolerance. Power and dominance are often mediated through more liberal, inclusionary, pluralistic, multiple, and fragmented formulations and practices concerning culture and difference (Mackey 2002, 16-18). This section will serve as a discussion of the negotiations of belonging that aid in the construction of different kinds of Canadianness. First, I will describe a typical kind of unmarked Canadianness. Unmarked Canadianness encompasses within itself

many different elements of identity and for each of these facets of identity, the unmarked quality reinforces hegemonic positions of power: for gender, it maintains a masculinist perspective; for race, whiteness is pervasive; for sexuality, there is a heteronormative viewpoint; for religion, there is a Christian perspective; etc. In this manner, unmarked Canadianness upholds various forms of power dynamics. This unmarked identity functions as normative and generally holds a hegemonic position in Canadian cultural authority. Next, I will discuss the relationship between marked identity and narratives surrounding inclusion and multiculturalism. Specifically, I will ask how Canadian identity uses cultural difference to reinforce the idea of a tolerant, multicultural nation while also perpetuating the hegemonic qualities of unmarked Canadianness. Finally, I will discuss a few narratives of Canadian identity that offer more overarching ways of representing these dynamics of identity and belonging. These notions of Canadian identity and narratives of belonging will inform my reading of The Tragically Hip's music and lyrics by providing a backdrop of how Canadianness has been informed and represented. By taking into account how identity and belonging have been characterized, embodied, and represented, I will present how The Tragically Hip both personify hegemonic forms of identity and create a more nuanced reading of Canadianness.

Unmarked Canadianness

Under the recommendations of Book IV of the report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, multiculturalism began to be officially legislated into Canadian identity under Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau in 1971 (Dewing 2009, 3). The 1971 Multiculturalism Policy asserted that “there is no official culture, nor does any ethnic group take precedence over any other” (Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada 1985, 15). Yet Canada's

legislated multicultural identity hides a paradox: it promotes cultural difference while also exercising liberal notions of tolerance which in some forms seek to manage populations and manipulate identities by fiat. In this sense, ‘tolerance’ for ‘others’ aids in the solidification of an unmarked and yet dominant national identity. This identity takes the form of the ‘Ordinary’ or unmarked Canadian – an identity characterized by an association with certain geographic and linguistic tenets and an absence of overt ethnic markers. As a result, unmarked Canadianness functions as a normative default for the national identity and as such, maintains and perpetuates hegemonic ideals within the Canadian cultural context.

Unmarked Canadians have the privilege of being simply ‘Canadian,’ with no hyphen attached (Mackey 2002, 33). As I will address in the following section, this statement suggests that markedness (or hyphenated differentiation) is often the case for Canadians whose identity encompasses specific ethnic or national associations (e.g., Somali-Canadian, Ukrainian-Canadian). However, the privilege of being simply ‘Canadian’ is also dependent on region. Discussing unmarked identity within a Canadian framework must recognize the implications of regional identity. How people perceive their region in relation to the nation as a whole indicates complex power relations (Mackey 2002, 180 n.11). In her ethnographic research, Mackey observed that those who saw themselves as “ordinary Canadians” were from Southern Ontario, “the perceived centre of the nation to those who live there” (2002, 180 n.11). In historical terms, Canadian nationalism and its symbols have come from this power centre of Ontario and Quebec, and there is a Central Canadian perception that the important events in Canadian history all take place in the Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal-Quebec City nexus; all other events are of merely “regional” interest (Hodgins 2003, 260). Therefore, defining oneself as simply ‘Canadian’ reveals a geographic hegemony, as Mackey describes:

[The self-proclamation of just ‘Canadian’] reflects a regional nationalist conceit that comes from having a position of power and thus conceiving of one’s region as the geographical and conceptual centre of the nation. People from out West call themselves ‘*Western Canadian*’, and from the East, ‘Maritime’ or ‘*Eastern*’ Canadians, whereas many from Southern Ontario have the privilege of simply calling themselves ‘Canadian.’ (2002, 180 n.11)

This is evident in common music categorizations, where artists from outside Central Canada are often strongly associated with their respective regions. For example, artists from Atlantic Canada often maintain a strong sense of regional association. Artists like Ashley MacIsaac, Natalie MacMaster, The Rankins, Don Messer, Joel Plaskett, and Great Big Sea are all more readily identified as East Coast musicians rather than simply ‘Canadian’ musicians. In this sense, identification with the centralized part of the country seems to allow for more of an entitlement to the unmarked, generic Canadian identity, whereas those who hold identifications with the North, West, or East maintain a geographic marker in their sense of Canadianness.

Officially, Canada is a bilingual nation. However, throughout the history (and pre-history) of the nation, Canadian governments have adopted various methods of erasure, inclusion, and/or appropriation of French identity within the larger national framework (Mackey 2002, 62). These versions of national identity all aim to create a distinct differentiation from external others, namely from the United States and Britain—both Anglophone nations. In declaring a need for differentiation, Canada identified itself with the Anglophone nature of both nations and assumed a conceptual English-speaking majority. In essence, these methods have reinforced British or white settler hegemony and construct a settler (usually British) nationalist identity (Mackey 2002, 62). There is an implicit construction of a core English-Canadian culture, and other cultures become “multicultural” in relation to that unmarked, yet dominant, Anglo-Canadian core (Moodley 1983, 321). French-Canadian identity—though legislated as part of the national identity—becomes a marked and distinct ‘other’ because of the hegemonic normalcy of

the Anglo-Canadian identity. This is evident in music where artists who sing in French often do not achieve a mainstream, 'Canadian' success. For example, artists like Madame Bolduc, Patsy Gallant, Robert Charlebois, and Beau Dommage are quite successful and highly esteemed within Francophone regions of Canada, but their artistic outputs do not reach anywhere near the same level of praise or discussion in more mainstream Canadian discourse. In this sense Quebec, and French Canadians in general, are marginalized and treated as other to the 'core' English-speaking majority of Canada (Fast & Pegley 2006, 22).

Ordinary Canadians are most often white and this identity maintains an absence of any overt ethnic markers. As Brodie observes the "Canadian-Canadian" is often a character defined primarily by what he is not:

The ordinary Canadian is disinterested, neither seeking special status nor treatment from the state. He is neither raced, nor sexed, nor classed: he transcends difference. So who is he? A close reading of the current conception of the ordinary Canadian reveals that he can be only a white, heterosexual, middle-class male because in contrast to him everyone is 'special' in some way or another. (1995, 72)

The ordinary Canadian therefore draws on many forms of hegemonic power. An examination of the whiteness of the ordinary Canadian can facilitate a discussion of the subliminal nature of how this hegemonic power is formed and maintained. In considering 'whiteness,' I do not intend to suggest that there is an inherent homogeneity among white people or that whiteness is significant as a biological category. Instead, Ruth Frankenberg's interlinked dimensions of whiteness should be taken into account. She argues that whiteness is a location of race privilege and that it also functions as a standpoint from which "white people look at ourselves, at others and at society" (1993, 1). She also suggests that whiteness refers to a "set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (1993, 1). In the context of the ordinary Canadian, the standpoint and position of privilege stem from the normalcy of whiteness given its unmarked and unnamed

character. In other words, the power of whiteness is embodied precisely in the way that it becomes normative (Mackey 2002, 34). The model of ‘normal’ Canadianness as white and unmarked is not defined by any particular characteristics, but instead by its difference from (and often its ability to tolerate) other marked Canadian identities, such as multicultural-Canadian, French-Canadian, and Native-Canadian. (Mackey 2002, 162). The whiteness of the unmarked Canadian identity allows for it to maintain a privileged standpoint through its assertion of normalcy.

During her ethnographic work at festivals in celebration of Canada’s 125th anniversary of Confederation, Mackey observed this kind of whiteness in practice, wherein the normative nature of unmarkedness was exemplified. There were aspects of events that were blatantly marked with ethnic and/or national characteristics: multitudes of tables selling “ethnic food”; performances by Polish, Croatian, Irish, Sikh, Portuguese, Dutch, Hindu ethnic and religious groups, etc. (Mackey 2002, 106). Yet in juxtaposition with these obviously marked events, there were a series of events that were not marked as culturally specific. These kinds of activities were conceived simply as ‘normal’ – the cultural specificity of these activities was not marked as salient except when the cultural activities were not “just plain Canadian” but were “other” (Mackey 2002, 106). She argues:

the unmarked ethnic and racial character of the ‘white’ activities works through marking difference. Those who are different become located in a distinct conceptual space, as ‘other’ to that unmarked norm. They are defined by their cultural *difference from* what is simply ‘normal’. (2002, 106)

While there is acknowledgement and recognition of cultural difference in this context, the multiculturalism does not give an equality of power to all involved. Because the unmarked, white events function as normative, they hold more power and dominance. More plainly, while ‘others’

are acknowledged and tolerated, this unmarked identity still remains *the* normative identity. It articulates the idea that unmarked white Canadianness *is* Canadianness.

By refusing categorization as other than just ‘normal,’ whiteness sustains its dominance, and as a result white, Anglo-Canadians are positioned on the centre of the national “cultural map” (Mackey 2002, 35; Hage 1994, 31). In this sense, the difference between minority cultures and the dominant cultures is that minority cultures “*exist for* the latter,” whereas the dominant cultures simply exist (Hage 1994, 32). This state of simply existing, of being unmarked (and therefore normal or ordinary) is, as Mackey argues, “constitutive of, and an effect of, structural advantage and power, and the cultural authority that power brings” (2002, 34). Fast & Pegley observe the power of unmarked Canadianness in practice at the *Music Without Borders: Live* benefit concert that took place in Toronto shortly after the 9/11 attacks. This concert was a live show that was also televised nationally by MuchMusic. Fast & Pegley examine how this event functioned to raise money for displaced people geographically distant from Canada (Afghani refugees), while at the same time also strengthened hegemonic power relations within Canada, chiefly through the reinforcement of the unmarked Canadian identity. Fast & Pegley examine the lineup for this concert and determine that while this lineup was described as “[the] Canadian A-list [of] musical talent”, there was a substantial lack of racial, linguistic, geographical, and gender diversity (Fast & Pegley 2006, 20). They elaborate as follows:

The unproblematic homogeneity of this ‘A-list’ of Canadian talent is not only telling but deeply concerning: all but one of the headlining musical artists—Chocclair—are white, and all but the African-Canadian rapper Chocclair are associated with rock, or the related singer-songwriter tradition. With few exceptions, both these musical genres have historically been defined and perpetuated by white, middle class performers...Furthermore, all of the artists were English-speaking Canadians (and all from Ontario...). (2006, 20)

In other words, aside from Chocclair, all artists embodied unmarked Canadianness.

As evident in this description, it appears as though unmarked Canadian identity permeates Canadian music, or as Fast & Pegley suggest, “the finest Canadian musicians’ happen to be predominately white, rock-oriented, from Central Canada, and English-speaking” (2006, 22). It is significant that this was the case for this particular event, as it was billed and presented as a “national concert,” an event meant to be representative of Canada’s place in the world post-9/11 (Fast & Pegley 2006, 37). Yet this permeation of unmarked Canadianness in Canadian music expands to much of Canadian music history. Edwardson’s (2009) chronology of how “music in Canada” became “Canadian music” deals nearly exclusively with rock-related genres of music. As such, he explores how Canada, Canadianness, and nationalism have been symbolized within Canadian rock music, and by extension, how unmarked Canadian identity via rock music has substantiated a powerful normalcy within Canadian music. Ian Tyson, Gordon Lightfoot, Leonard Cohen, Neil Young, Bruce Cockburn, Tom Cochrane, Bryan Adams, Justin Bieber all perpetuate the white, masculine identity within a rock, singer-songwriter, or rock-related context. Artists such as Anne Murray, Joni Mitchell, Alanis Morissette, Sarah McLachlan, Shania Twain, and Feist provide a female dimension to the unmarked identity, but the predominately white, English-speaking rock and rock-related aspects persist.

The epitomization of unmarked Canadianness in Canadian music can be seen in the importance of the white, male rock band (Fast & Pegley 2006, 27). Groups such as The Guess Who, April Wine, Rush, Trooper, Bachman Turner Overdrive, Barenaked Ladies, Blue Rodeo, The Rheostatics, Sloan, Eric’s Trip, Our Lady Peace, and perhaps most importantly for this discussion, The Tragically Hip, all embody and disseminate an unmarked Canadian identity. All of these bands have successful careers in Canada, and the hegemonic persistence of unmarked Canadianness is evident, both in terms of the musicians’ own identities and also regarding their

artistic choices. Focusing on The Tragically Hip, this unmarked quality is especially true. As evident in The Hip's own identities and in the overwhelming majority of the band's output, experiences of the white, heterosexual, middle-class male are almost exclusively highlighted. In this sense, while The Hip themselves do embody an unmarked Canadian identity, the band's artistic choices further prioritize and maintain many hegemonic power dynamics such as race, gender, class, region, etc. Given these observations, The Tragically Hip's connection to Canadianness is problematic. In their description of The Tragically Hip's *Music Without Borders* performance, Fast & Pegley note that the introduction of The Hip was by CBC nightly news anchor Peter Mansbridge,

perhaps the most recognizable media personality in Canada and associated unmistakably with Canadian national identity because he works for the country's national public broadcaster...Most importantly, he introduced The Hip as "Canada's band" and pointed out that "for the past 15 years they have been the greatest musical chroniclers of our time." (2006, 25)

The Tragically Hip have worn the name of "Canada's band" for much of their career, but the notion of The Hip as representative of Canada perpetuates a masculinist, white, English-speaking, central-Canadian idea of what the country is about (Fast & Pegley 2006, 27).

Unmarked Canadianness upholds various forms of power dynamics in many different facets of identity including race, gender, language, region, class, etc. As a result, it remains normative and relatively invisible. Yet it has a dominant and powerful position in the creation of national identity: it functions as the default for Canadian-Canadian identity and as a result, maintains power, hegemony, and cultural authority. Unmarked Canadianness works in a position of power and privilege that allows for 'tolerance' and relegation of those who are considered other. This is visible in terms of music, wherein many of Canada's most prominent artists

embody unmarked Canadianness and as such, white, masculinist, Anglo-, central-Canadian culture seems to stand in for Canadianness in general (Fast & Pegley 2006, 22).

Marked Canadianness

Canadian civic nationalism does not create exclusions through concepts of descent and blood as in ethnic nationalism (Mackey 2002, 173). Canadian national identity has been built on various narratives that evoke a sense of benevolence and tolerance. Plainly, the assumed belief is that Canada is a place where everyone can belong and is accepted. The Canadian nation-building project has lived with difference from the outset, and has done so through flexible strategies of managing, appropriating, controlling, subsuming, and often highlighting it (Mackey 2002, 174). Effectively, the central issue is *who* decides *when* and *how* marked Canadians are or aren't represented, or are or aren't managed, in the interests of the nation-building project (Mackey 2002, 62). Unpacking these notions of representation and management of identities enables a more nuanced understanding of marked Canadianness that recognizes the injustices and marginalization within a multicultural society.

From the days of colonialism through to the early days of nation-building, creating Canadian identity was built on a necessity for differentiation, particularly from the United States. White Anglophone settlers in Canada (re: unmarked Canadians) often mobilized representations of others and managed non-British cultural groups as part of the project to create a differentiated national identity. Indigenous peoples in particular have played important supporting roles in defining Canada, as images of Indigenous peoples have been mobilized throughout nation's history in the effort to build national identity. Mackey argues that through the perpetuation of Indigenous images, British Canada was able to construct itself as gentle, tolerant, just, and

impartial, while also constructing Indigenous peoples to represent Canada's heritage and past (2002, 51-52). In doing so, the settler identity is asserted to be significantly different to that of Americans, and further, a link is created between the settlers and the land, helping to negotiate how to create Canada as "Native land" to settlers (Mackey 2002, 51-52). Electric powwow group A Tribe Called Red often uses these kinds of images to accompany their live shows and their music videos. For example, their music video for "Red Skin Girl" repurposes clips from the films *Mortal Kombat: Annihilation* (1997), *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (2007), *Night at the Museum* (2006), and *The New World* (2005).² The sampled images from these films are exemplary of stereotypical portrayals of Indigenous peoples, yet in the music video, A Tribe Called Red heavily manipulates the samples with colour changes, changes in speed, and oftentimes it appears that the characters in the sampled clips move with the rhythms of the music. In sampling these images, the group exposes their stereotypical nature, and at the same time reclaims and repurposes those images to create symbols of power that challenge their racist origins. But despite such critical counter-practices, these kinds of images continue to persist in contemporary discourse: not erased from Canada's national narratives, but still frequently used as "important supporting actors in a story which reaffirms settler progress" (Mackey 2002, 51-52).

Marked French Canadian identity has also been manipulated to differentiate Canada from the United States. At times, French cultural differences are erased. Yet at other times, French presence is celebrated and made paramount, often alongside the argument that Canada allows the retention of local traditions and heterogeneity, unlike the homogenous USA (Mackey 2002, 45). This is evident in the recognition of Québec chansonniers within the more mainstream Canadian

² The music video for "Red Skin Girl" can be viewed in A Tribe Called Red 2011. A Tribe Called Red did not cite their sample sources for this music video, therefore this list is made upon my observations.

context. The music of Félix Leclerc, Raymond Lévesque, and Gilles Vigneault is often mobilized in a wider Anglo-Canadian context to highlight and celebrate difference within Canadian music, particularly emphasizing the French language in broader North American popular music. This music often contains social and political implications that are in opposition to the idea of a Canada unified in its differences, yet the adoption of “flexible strategies” is made to construct cultural pluralism as central to the ideas of nationhood (Asad 1993, 12). In this sense, Canada’s tolerance for cultural others is mobilized to create a discourse of differentiation.

Yet while Canadian identity has a history of mobilizing cultural difference in national identity projects, there is a marginalization of those deemed Other. As Walcott observes,

The histories, memories and experiences of dispersed peoples always act as a transgression of nation-state principles. If we look at the history of Canada, with its ethnic mix...what we get is a complex picture of who and what the Canadian might be. All of these groups (except for the Natives) migrated at different points in time, and have found themselves placed differently in the narratives of the nation...It is clear that each successive migrant group represented a rupture in the myth of the nation as constituted from sameness. (1999, 29)

Each cultural group within the larger Canadian society does disrupt the idea of Canada as a country rooted in sameness, and yet that plurality has been pushed as the unifying feature of Canada. However, there is a disconnect between the notions of tolerance and benevolence with regards to Canada’s plurality and the realities expressed by history. As Walcott argues “[there is a] process of forgetfulness, coercion and various forms of privilege and subordination” wherein unmarked Canadians are positioned as “real Canadians” while others are imagined as adjunct to the nation (1999, 29-31). In this way, cultural difference is used to reinforce the myth of Canada’s tolerance while it simultaneously subjugates and excludes any real power or agency to those deemed Other.

The introduction of multiculturalism has been viewed as a response, by the elites of Canada, to attempts by others at redefinition of the symbolic system of Canada (Breton 1988, 39-40). As a symbolic intervention, the policy could address the dangerous and ambiguous situation emerging from Quebec separatism and also from the increased politicization of cultural minorities through the recognition and management of culture (Mackey 2002, 64). The policy has been criticized as a means to undercut Quebec's demands for special recognition, by bestowing recognition on other cultural groups.³ Therefore, multicultural policy extends the state recognition of multiple forms of difference so as to undercut Quebec's more threatening difference: rather than trying to erase difference and construct an imagined community based on assimilation to a singular notion of culture, the state attempted to institutionalize various forms of differentiation, thereby controlling access to power and simultaneously legitimatizing its own power (Mackey 2002, 64).

The language highlighted and celebrated in these policies – “multicultural,” “diversity,” “difference,” etc.—are used as markers of ‘other’ Canadianness. Consequently, multiculturalism and the related policies also function to identify and reference non-whites. As Walcott suggests, “the nation-state administrators try to force what it means to be black on people through various mechanisms of domination and subordination” (1999, 35). While there is an emphasis on plurality, the key issue remains that despite the proliferation of cultural difference, the power to define, limit, and tolerate differences still lies in the hands of the dominant group (Mackey 2002, 70). Walcott elaborates:

These appropriations of the term [multicultural] are rife with the recurring myth of Canada as a benevolent, caring and tolerant country that adapts to ‘strangers’ so that strangers do not have to adapt to it. (1999, 32)

³ See Hutcheon and Richmond 1994, Lewycky 1992, Moodley 1983, and Satchewich 1992.

The dominant group therefore maintains its hegemonic position through the management and limiting of cultural difference.

Notions of belonging are made tense by this management of cultural others. As Walcott observes, “the ‘other ethnic groups’ require stewardship into Canadian citizenship, while it is inherent for the French and the English/British” (2014, 130). In other words, there is a clear divide in the path towards belonging in Canada. For unmarked Canadians, belonging is assumed. But for those with a marked identity, their notions of belonging are managed and determined by those in power. Rosenberg explores these issues of belonging in his study of black country musicians in the Maritime provinces. He argues that although this genre is typified as a white, lower-class music, black country musicians in the Maritimes problematize racial boundaries by adopting country music as their ethnic music. Yet he concludes as follows:

But rural Maritimes blacks for whom country music is a class and ethnic music are, in the perception of many white Canadians, caught in a double bind: they do not look like Canadians and their music does not sound like Canadian music. (1994, 433)

In his conclusion, Rosenberg reasserts that by having an element of markedness, there is a distinct separation from belonging. This statement reinforces the notion that “look[ing] like Canadians” and “sound[ing] like Canadian music” is an ability reserved for certain people. In other words, those who have a more marked identity do not belong with the term Canadian.

Fast & Pegley observe a similar experience. In their analysis of the concert order for *Music Without Borders: Live*, they note that Choclair (the only non-white artist in the lineup) opened the show at 6:00 p.m. at the Air Canada Centre with only a fraction of the audience in attendance, and with an allocated performance time of just fifteen minutes (2006, 23). The other artists received thirty- to forty-minute sets and had a significantly larger live audience. Further, when the program went to air at 9:00 p.m., rockers Our Lady Peace appeared first –live—

followed by pre-taped broadcasts of more marginalized performers like Choclair, with only one song from his set making it to the televised show (Fast & Pegley 2006, 23-24). This analysis demonstrates that concert order assigns and reaffirms notions of celebrity and cultural capital (Fast & Pegley 2006, 23). In this example it is clear that organizers perceived Choclair to have less cultural capital than the hegemonic permanency of white rock bands.

Fast & Pegley also provide an analysis of the show's finale that gives insight into marked identity on the national music stage. For the finale of the concert, all performers joined onstage to sing Neil Young's "Rockin' in the Free World." Their analysis of this event is as follows:

Again, this is a "rock" song, by a white rock artist. The verses were sung in pairs of artists: Gord Downie and Alanis Morissette, Steven Paige and Tyler Stewart from The Barenaked Ladies, and Bruce Cockburn and Raine Maida, lead singer for the group Our Lady Peace. In between each verse, guitar solos were played by Bruce Cockburn and Hip guitarist Bobby Baker. The choice of genre excluded the one non-white artist, Choclair. He stood behind a line-up of electric guitars, an instrument that plays little role in rap, and did not contribute a verse of the song but rather joined in on the chorus only. He seemed decidedly out of place in this rockist environment. (2006, 24)

Hegemonic patterns and hierarchies of difference emerge from this finale. Rock music takes the position of the normative, representative genre of Canadianness and there is a clear differentiation in who can and cannot enact belonging through participation in this 'national' music. Choclair's involvement is limited by the choice of song, and as a result he appears as though he does not belong on the stage representing "Canadian A-list musical talent" (quoted in Fast & Pegley 2006, 20). In this sense, his participation in the event appears tokenistic; he is there to represent the 'multicultural' Canada. His involvement is managed through concert ordering and he is limited through the finale. This kind of multiculturalism draws on and reinforces racial exclusions and hierarchies of difference. The difference of marked Canadians is recognized but there is a marginalization in terms of any sense of power to acknowledge and manage their own narratives.

While hegemonic forms of power exist, it allows for the continuation of hierarchies of difference and practices of exclusion which ultimately have an impact on histories. If a group is marginalized, their histories can be omitted and their narratives forgotten. This is particularly evident while examining blackness in Canada. As Erin Manning notes, “In Canada, blackness functions as the signifier of disappearance – that which is always out of sight, out of history, and out of circulation” (2003, 67). This instance of marked Canadianness therefore associates with a sense of national forgetfulness wherein entire histories are omitted from national narratives. In a further example, Rosenberg added a postscript to the republished version of his article on black country musicians in the Maritimes. Rosenberg acknowledges critical responses to his arguments, particularly noting George Elliott Clarke’s responses regarding Africadian folk culture. Clarke criticized Rosenberg for failing to acknowledge the “experience of this group that has been in the region for over two centuries” (cited in Rosenberg 1994, 443). Rosenberg’s failure to recognize this experience in his original text exemplifies how entire histories—even those well-established over centuries—can be forgotten and omitted from the dominant discourse, even by those who sincerely wish to avoid such oversights and erasures.

Walcott argues that the position of blackness in contemporary Canadian identity remains complicated as “[this is] a Canadian identity that can hardly come to terms with its slave holding past, let alone deal with the contemporary existence of black bodies in its midst” (1999, 35). The inability to recognize, acknowledge, and reconcile this extremely difficult history and complicated present allows for a forgetfulness that ultimately acts a concealed racism. As Walcott elaborates,

Canada’s racial forgetfulness *has* resulted in a Canadian articulation of blackness that can sometimes seek, and desire to work with, a form of racism that speaks its name differently in the south (the form of American racism that does not mask itself as benevolent). (1999, 37)

Omitted histories function as a form of prejudice wherein those marked as other are promised a nation where “there is no official culture, nor does any ethnic group take precedence over any other” (Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada 1985, 15). Yet in reality, the power to control national narratives is with the dominant group. This is particularly evident in Indigenous musics, which often recount how Indigenous communities have been faced with attempts at cultural genocide. Artists like Susan Aglukark, Kashtin, Tanya Tagaq, and A Tribe Called Red reclaim and reassert aspects of their cultural musics that were forcibly removed from national narratives, and as a result bring attention to this forceful exclusion and reaffirm the importance of their presence in national discourse. However, stories that do not benefit the national narratives that keep hegemonic ideals in power— histories and narratives of others—continue to be forgotten and omitted.

In summary, marked Canadianness is built from the myth of Canada as a benevolent, tolerant, multicultural nation. Cultural difference is used to build and reinforce this myth while perpetually marginalizing those identified as other – those who do not experience the normative, unmarked Canadianness. Entire histories and experiences of Canadianness are omitted and forgotten due to the continuation of hierarchies of difference and practices of exclusion. These elements of marked Canadianness will inform my discussion of The Tragically Hip, particularly in my interpretation of their lyrics. Through my lyrical analysis, I will examine how The Hip address and investigate some of the darker, more nuanced Canadian narratives. I suggest that the stories they are telling do not reflect the idea of Canada as a tolerant, benevolent nation, and I will argue that this allows their lyrics to align with various criticisms that arise in the discussion of marked Canadianness. Yet, at the same time, I will attend to the fact that these tendencies are in tension with the personal identity of The Tragically Hip, since as individuals and in aesthetic

terms they almost entirely embody unmarked Canadianness. My analysis will also consider how the band perpetuates this idea of default normalcy, of sameness. This will be of primary concern in my discussion of their music, where I examine how an appearance of difference interacts and negotiates with an overall sense of homogeneity.

In preparation of this reading of *The Tragically Hip*, I would like to explore a few more aspects of Canadian identity that draw on those previously discussed. The following section will provide an overview of a few national narratives: specific tropes which are often used to dramatize and embody the more general dynamics of belonging, identity, and nationhood previously discussed. My exploration of these narratives is intended to examine the dynamics between marked and unmarked identities, and particularly how the negotiations and tensions between these identities have asserted stories about national identity that often remain in regular circulation.

National Narratives

Narratives of Canadian nationhood are powerful opportunities to shape Canadians' cultural memory, and offer the occasion to produce – and reproduce – concepts of the Canadian nation (Fast & Pegley 2006, 19). Some of these stories have forged into a 'grand narrative' of Canadianness. This grand narrative has traditionally been called upon by unmarked Canadians to reconfigure the Canadian past in a manner that supports their current hegemonic position in Canadian society (Hodgins 2003, 15). Ultimately, it describes a history of Canadianness wherein Canada is a prosperous, peaceful, tolerant, and just society (Hodgins 2003, 218). This section aims to describe the qualities of the grand narrative as well as its different modes of presentation. Peter Hodgins suggests the Canadian grand narrative is comprised of two concurrent modes of

presentation, which both act as distinct sub-narratives of “Overcoming” and “Reconciliation” (2003, 15). I will first examine the characteristics of these sub-narratives—the dynamics between notions of identity within them— before providing a similar examination of the Canadian grand narrative. Throughout this section, I also aim to provide a discussion of how these national narratives play out in the realm of popular music. These examinations will inform my subsequent analysis of *The Tragically Hip* by providing a point of comparison. By characterizing what kinds of stories have been told about Canadianness, I aim to demonstrate how *The Tragically Hip* create more critical constructions of Canadian identity.

Overcoming

The narrative of overcoming follows the traditional plot of the romance wherein there is an individual hero who overcomes an obstacle to bring peace and prosperity to the community (Hodgins 20013, 15). As Hodgins elaborates,

In the Canadian grand narrative, this employment is used to represent Canadian history as one of the progressive overcoming of natural, social and cultural obstacles on the road to peace, order and good government. (2003, 15)

This narrative expresses Canadian history as a story of progress. It evokes a nostalgic quality through its focus on success and its assertion of a distinctive sense of self. Yet because this narrative is so closely tied to progress, there is an implicit notion that the present is the most progressed or the best version of this society. It tells the history of those who ‘overcame’ and reached a position of power, and as such there is reinforcement of current hegemonic positions. The narrative of overcoming both legitimizes and celebrates the present social order (Hodgins 2003, 230).

This narrative of overcoming is frequently employed in discussions of more colonial perspectives of Canadian history, specifically through the retellings of European ‘discovery’ of the land. Considering this context, there is an implicit emphasis of the notion of whiteness – that overcoming and discovery are intrinsically tied to European presence on Canadian soil (Hodgins 2003, 300). In his examination of the historiography of discovery, Hodgins notes that while there were a variety of European groups that settled and lived on what is now Canadian soil, the dominant narrative remains focused on the accomplishments and ‘discoveries’ of specifically northern European settlers – other groups like the Basques, Portuguese, and Spanish are omitted from dominant genealogical representations of Canadian history. Hodgins argues that perhaps a combination of the “southernness” and/or the “fluid nomadicism” of these groups led to their exclusion from Canadian national narratives (2003, 303-304). As Walcott argues, there is a tendency to view contemporary Canada through a distinctly nostalgic lens, with a dream of reviving “the romance of the unified nation-state and the lie of national sameness” (1996, 5). Yet, this romance can only be achieved by reasserting the classification of ‘Canadian’ as ‘settler’ and this identification requires the silencing of the voices of those racial others who claim a more flexible relationship to Canadian national boundaries (Hodgins 2003, 305). Therefore, the authors of this hegemonic version of Canadian history employ the narrative of overcoming in such a way that excludes marked Canadians; they are denied full Canadianness by self-identified ‘real Canadians’ on the basis of their mobility and multinational affiliations and as a result, their stories are simply written out of Canadian nationalist histories (Hodgins 2003, 304-305).

In this manner, the narrative of overcoming –with its notions of discovery, nostalgia, and distinct sense of self—furthers a particular version of Canadian history and experience. This version of Canadianness is present in celebratory colonial perspectives of Canadian history. In

this sense, the narrative of overcoming forges a representation of Canadianness that is tied to the qualities of an unmarked identity. Yet at the same time, this perspective of Canadianness omits the stories and contributions of marked Canadians from the national narrative. Therefore, this narrative works to marginalize markedness while simultaneously reinforcing the presence of whiteness in the protagonist of the Canadian grand narrative. As such, unmarkedness is maintained as the normative Canadianness.

Reconciliation

As Hodgins argues, the dynamics of Canadian history necessitate that the romantic mode of the narrative of overcoming must be supplemented by another mode in order for the Canadian past to be “‘usable’ for would-be hegemon” (Hodgins 2003, 15). This mode takes the form of comedy. Unlike the romance that focuses on the individual hero, the traditional comedy focuses on the struggles of the segments of the community to resolve their differences and be reunited (Hodgins 2003, 15). Typically, in the Canadian grand narrative, this mode is more political in character than the romantic mode in that it employs Canadian experience as a progressive reconciliation between competing cultural groups (Hodgins 2003, 15). In this manner, the narrative focuses on the coming together of many different groups, the facilitation of compromise, and the hopeful attainment of harmony and unity. As a result, it further perpetuates the notion of Canada as tolerant and kind and leads to marginalization of concrete issues faced by those who have received Canada’s ‘benevolence.’

This narrative appears in situations of intercultural conflict and political compromise (Hodgins 2003, 232). Particularly, this narrative can be seen in the management of marked Canadianness in an effort to create a distinct and differentiated national identity. In his analysis

of the Heritage Minutes, Hodgins argues that the narrative of reconciliation involves a process of rewriting and redescribing history by those with hegemonic power in order to reflect a more acquiescent perspective of Canadianness. Particularly, looking at his examinations of Minutes describing French Canadian history, Hodgins notes that the dissident quality of this history has been erased. Instead, opposing narratives are absorbed into the larger Canadian national narrative in a way that emphasizes political compromise. As Hodgins observes, this redescribing of Canadian history seeks to simultaneously draw the founding events of the Quebec nationalist “mythistory” into the Canadian national narrative, thereby reducing the power of a competing form of collective belonging (2003, 262). Elements of this narrative are evident in the career of Céline Dion, particularly when looking at her parallel successes as a pop singer in both English and French languages. There are tensions surrounding the societal dualities in her position as both an Anglophone artist from Quebec and an artiste Québécoise within a larger Anglophone Canada (Young 1999). However, her high levels of success in Anglophone markets—and the recognition of her success as an English-speaking artist by Quebec music organizations—suggest a kind of reconciliation and compromise that absorbs her cultural difference as Québécoise into the larger ‘Canadian’ narrative (Young 1999). Effectively, this appropriation of cultural difference aids in the creation of a national identity that reinforces the hegemonic power of unmarkedness. As Mackey argues,

These cultural groups become infinitely manageable populations as well as bit players in the nationalist imaginary, always dancing to someone else’s tune. They become helpmates in the project of making a Canadian identity that defines itself as victimized by outsiders and tolerant of insiders. (2002, 62)

This narrative therefore mobilizes marked difference to build a national identity based in compromise and compassion. It paints Canada as tolerant and kind to its citizens yet at the same

time, this narrative neutralizes persons or events that might support competing counternarratives (Hodgins 2003, 271).

When these reconciliations or compromises take place, there is usually an attempt at creating commonality and unification between the reconciling parties. A sense of national unity begins with a sense of a common homeland, constructing a sense of “autochtony” and national identity among Canadians (Hodgins 2003, 243-244). Manning argues,

The landscape, foregrounded as the ‘true’ image of Canada, is understood as an essential proponent in the nationalizing attempts to relegate the discourse of ‘Canadian identity’ to notions of vastness and emptiness, where the nation represents the ideal image of an ordered universe, its limits fixed and identities secured. (2003, 2)

In this sense, the Canadian landscape and Canadianness are linked to an ideal state. The Canadian land therefore functions as a unifier amongst various cultural differences and creates a story of nationhood that links past, present, and future (Mackey 2002, 89). The presence of Indigenous peoples is also imbedded in this discourse and Hodgins suggests that they are often figured as “communities of memory” (2003, 241). They are “constructed as peoples for whom the ancestors are still present and for whom the preservation of their links with the collective past takes precedence over present action” (Hodgins 2003, 241). This presence and construction creates a historical connection to the land that helps make Canada a “Native land” to settlers and immigrants (Mackey 2002, 90). This aspect of the narrative is particularly evident in Gordon Lightfoot’s “Canadian Railroad Trilogy.” Throughout the song, Lightfoot sings praises of the Canadian natural world by employing picturesque lyrical descriptions. His lyrics explain that the natural beauty of the Canadian landscape acts to join the workers: while they come from many different backgrounds and many different parts of Canada, they are all connected through their unifying experience with the Canadian landscape. Effectively, this narrative reconciles cultural differences in Canada by providing a unifying element—a “Native land”—for all Canadians to

belong. It emphasizes the kindness of Canadianness, yet at the same time, it downplays the politically problematic history of Indigenous experience in Canada in favour of constructing Indigenous peoples as guardians of the land and as helpmates in the project of progressive nation-building (Mackey 2002, 92).

In summary, the narrative of reconciliation reasserts the notion that Canada is tolerant and accepting of everyone. Through its emphasis on political compromise and cross-cultural cooperation, it paints a picture of Canadian experience that is harmonious. Yet this narrative actually represents appropriated cultural difference without granting any real agency or power to those whose cultures have been mobilized. Hodgins argues that these kinds of stories are

part of English (central) Canada's continued attempt to make itself feel better about the choices it made at the same time that it seeks to make the French-Canadians and the native population forget about the fact that they were violently deprived of the power to make choices about the nature of the country in which they lived. (2003, 278)

The narrative of reconciliation encourages the forgetting of counternarratives to hegemonic ideals. As a result, stories that oppose dominant ideals and which discuss complex issues in critical terms are lost, while narratives that celebrates 'kindness' and 'reconciliation' remain widespread and unproblematized.

Mountie Myth: The Canadian "Grand Narrative"

The narratives of overcoming and reconciliation represent two modes of presentation of a larger Canadian grand narrative. This dual employment of Canadian history along the lines of romance (overcoming) and comedy (reconciliation) serves as a "pragmatic character" that both legitimizes and celebrates the present social order and ensures maintenance of the status quo in the future (Hodgins 2003, 230). Mackey calls this grand narrative the "Mountie myth," which "utilises the idea of Canada's tolerance and justice towards its minorities to create national

identity” (2002, 2). The Mountie Myth creates a construction of Canada that conserves hegemony through its self-identification as morally superior to other nations, namely the United States (Fast & Pegley 2006, 28). This moral superiority is established in the narrative by painting Canada as “the humane nation” that attends to the world’s needs and by reasserting that Canadians have an “all-seeing” perspective on world issues (Fast & Pegley 2006, 28). In this manner, the Canadian nation-state is put forward as a leader in the “globalisation of forgiveness,” modelling values of civility and tolerance for the world (Henderson & Wakeham 2013, 7). The Mountie Myth seeks to reaffirm the Canadian faith in what Hodgins calls “‘soft power’—persuasion, dialogue, compromise and negotiation—as more efficient means of ensuring peace, harmony and prosperity as opposed to uncivilised America’s use of violence” (2003, 252). As Pauline Wakeham observes, “one need only recall the slogan for the nascent Canadian Museum of Human Rights – ‘From Canada. For the World.’ – to grasp how integral the belief in Canadian planetary moral leadership is to the nation’s phantasmatic self-construction” (2013, 7). In this manner, the Mountie Myth’s deep emphasis on pragmatism and an ‘all-seeing’ quality suggest that these are inherently Canadian inventions and as a result, the narrative paints Canadianness as more ‘civilized,’ ‘worldly’ and even ethically superior to other nations. (Hodgins 200, 252).

Fast & Pegley describe how the Mountie Myth can be established through music by using the “rhetoric of a nation” (2006, 28; Angus 1997, 20). The musicians performing at *Music Without Borders* take on the role of “national actors” who communicate the content of the national identity (the Mountie Myth) to the audience (Angus 1997, 20). Fast & Pegley observe how “Canada as the humane nation” was articulated at the *Music Without Borders: Live* concert by Raine Maida, front man for the band Our Lady Peace. In introducing one of the band’s songs, he said to the crowd “I don’t know about you guys but I’m damn proud to be Canadian tonight.

This next song is about compassion, understanding, it's about treating people the way you'd like to be treated. It's a song called 'Life'" (quoted in Fast & Pegley 2006, 29). This introduction creates patriotic sentiments concerning this national characteristic and highlights the importance of kindness, tolerance, and reconciliation in Canadian identity (Fast & Pegley 2006, 29). As such, Raine Maida and Our Lady Peace further establish the national rhetoric of Canada as a humane nation and thereby assert a sense of moral superiority of Canadians over Americans (Angus 1997, 20; Fast & Pegley 2006, 28). In a similar manner, the notion of Canadians as having an 'all-seeing' perspective on world issues can be seen in the careers of activism-centred artists like Bruce Cockburn. Cockburn's lyrical output is often dedicated to discussions of world issues with a strong push to help others. These lyrical narratives draw upon notions of kindness and tolerance and overall act as a pragmatic call-to-action for ethical responsibility. In this sense, Cockburn's lyrics take on an 'all-seeing' perspective through their romanticized mission to save the world. These examples of elements of Canada's grand narrative exemplify the pragmatic, worldly, and wise qualities that are inherent within the Mountie Myth. They reinforce Canada as distinct from other nations through its humane, all-seeing, and reasonable nature. Yet these examples also demonstrate the continued prevalence of these hegemonic ideals as well as the absence of a more critical interrogation of markedness in Canadian society.

These different elements of the Mountie Myth have been implemented throughout Canadian history as a means of creating a sense of national identity. As Wakeham describes:

This ever-accumulating list of reconciliatory gestures risks being read as evidence of a state coming to historical self-consciousness, in the manner of an awakened, repentant individual who has crafted a progressively enlightened program of righting wrongs. In practice, however, the list of redress initiatives...has been amassed inconsistently, shaped by the shifting ambivalent domestic forces of a series of different government administrations and policy changes, partisan one-upmanship, and domestic and international political pressure. (2013, 7)

In other words, these narratives of the all-seeing, humane Mountie stem from hegemonic forces. They romanticize a highly problematic history that thrived off the subjugation and violence against the very people it remembers as allies and ‘friends.’ These kinds of national narratives create a space where white, Anglo-Canadian culture is perceived as the normal, go-to iteration of Canadian identity, and where this particular identity holds the power and cultural authority. This Canadian-Canadian identity allows for ‘tolerance’ and relegation of those perceived as other. Hierarchies of difference and cultural erasure perpetuate these national narratives while simultaneously marginalizing those with marked identity.

Working towards Counternarratives to Canadianness: The Tragically Hip

These narratives of nationhood exemplify negotiations of belonging and dynamics between unmarked and marked Canadianness and they remain in a dominant position in Canadian society. There is a need to challenge these dominant national myths, and one way can be through the writing of counternarratives. Such texts describe alternate viewpoints to those highlighted in more hegemonic narratives, and as such, can provide a more wide-ranging and perhaps realistic perspective on the concept of national identity. As Manning suggests,

It is not only through the writing but also through the reading of counternarratives of the nation that we can begin to deconstruct the totalizing boundaries of the nation-state, initiating an engagement with the dislocations of the local in the global and vice versa. (2003, 140)

In this sense, writing, disseminating, and reading counternarratives can be a means to deconstruct hegemonic patterns in Canadianness. In the following chapters, I will argue that *The Tragically Hip* can be read as frequently presenting this sort of challenge.

Chapter Two **The Tragically Hip, Canadian Identity, and the Nice Guy**

The Hip have a strong connection to Canadian national identity. They have been a fixture in Canadian popular culture for over three decades, and in many ways, this band and Canada have become synonymous for many fans and commentators. In fact, they have been celebrated as ‘Canada’s band’ for the majority of their career. While it appears that this designation of ‘Canada’s band’ became widespread after the breakout success of their 1992 album *Fully Completely*, it is nearly impossible to determine *exactly* how the band gained this title.⁴ However, the association between the Hip and Canada can be illustrated by looking at particular aspects of their career: touring, lyrical references, national celebrations, success in Canada and lack of success elsewhere, and the fans.

The Tragically Hip and Connections to Canadianness

The first element to consider is the band’s touring career. Since the band started in the mid-1980s, they have defined themselves as a live act and toured incessantly across the nation. As the band gained more and more success, they graduated to larger and larger venues and ultimately performed cross-Canada arena tours. By playing the largest and most prestigious venues across the nation, The Hip strengthened their position as ‘Canada’s band.’

⁴ The album *Fully Completely* was very commercially successful in Canada and it obtained Diamond status (Zeilner 2017). While their previous album *Road Apples* also reached this status, reviewer Mike DeGagne notes that *Fully Completely* truly solidified The Hip as “a mainstream contender” with “more than half of this album’s songs being released to Canadian radio” (accessed 2018). The album also marked a stylistic change for the band. They moved away from a more traditional blues-based rock approach and instead much of this album features Downie’s “poetic finesse ...[and] peculiar unequivocalness” at the forefront, with the band’s musical efforts taking a supportive role to Downie’s “complex philosophical idioms” (DeGagne accessed 2018).

The Hip's lyrical references are another important aspect to consider. One of The Hip's biggest fans, Stephen Dame, extensively catalogued the band's lyrics and has noted 291 references to Canada, Canadian place names, Canadian people, Canadian events, etc. within The Tragically Hip's catalogue (Dame "Directory" accessed 2018). This sheer quantity of Canadian references in their lyrics strengthens the connection between the band and Canada.

Further, since their breakout success, The Tragically Hip have headlined many national celebrations, such as Canada Day. Perhaps most noteworthy is the Great Canadian Party in 1992, where they headlined multiple live shows (that were also televised) in celebration of Canada's 125th anniversary of Confederation. In this sense, The Hip provide the soundtrack to many events celebrating Canada and as such furthered the connection between this band and Canada.

As evident in this example, The Hip have achieved a high level of popular, commercial, and critical success at home in the Canadian music industry and in wider popular culture. In addition to this, the band has also received accolades from outside of the music industry. For example, in the 1990s, they were given the key to their hometown city of Kingston, Ontario by the mayor and more recently the band was awarded the Order of Canada in 2017. Yet despite this success in Canada, The Tragically Hip never really broke into international scenes or markets. They had some mild success in the United States and throughout Europe, and they maintained a sense of international critical appeal through invitations to tour with Robert Plant and Jimmy Page and the Rolling Stones. However, they never gained the level of success that they have in Canada. In this regard, the band achieves a kind of "insider" status – they are like a secret handshake for Canadians, a way to establish an exclusive commonality (BBC Magazine 2017).

Perhaps the most important aspect to consider is the fans. It appears that The Tragically Hip's nickname as 'Canada's band' stems from a grassroots initiative by the fans. Canadian

iconography is very common at the Hip's live events: wearing maple leaves, bringing and waving Canadian flags, singing "O Canada" before the band takes the stage – all of which appear frequently at The Hip's shows and strengthen the association of The Hip as 'Canada's band' and as a cultural entity in Canada. All of these aspects of their career strengthen The Hip's connection with Canada and heighten their platform as 'Canada's band.'

Yet it is important to contextualize The Tragically Hip in relation to this success as 'Canada's band.' In many ways, their rise to being representatives of the nation was a result of many different factors coming together. The band's location in Kingston in the late 1980s and early 1990s allowed them easy access to the centralized locations of the Canadian music industry. Further, The Hip's musical style is quite representative of the dominant commercial rock music styles of the 1990s in North America. As a result, their path to mainstream success could be considered relatively straightforward. They were within close proximity to major industry resources, and their music would have been easily marketable as their sound aligned with what was already widely popular. Perhaps the most significant factor to consider is the Canadian content regulations. As The Hip were establishing their career, there was already a relatively concrete framework in place to foster, cultivate, and support Canadian musicians in their endeavors to achieve a successful career at home in Canada. Ryan Edwardson elaborates:

The Canadian content regulations, which took effect in 1971, opened the airwaves to musicians previously avoided by station owners interested in the proven profitability of foreign, primarily American, recordings. The regulations led to the creation of new studios, record-pressing plants, managers, trade papers, and so on to meet the need for Canadian records. Radio stations...made a significant contribution to the industry in 1982 with the creation of the Foundation to Assist Canadian Talent on Record... One also needs to note the role of City-TV, as in its pursuit of the youth demographic, the station produced *The New Music* and Moses Znaimer later built upon this success in creating MuchMusic, which brought Canadian musicians – not only their music but their lifestyles—into the view of audiences... By the 1990s, the Canadian music scene seemed to have 'come of age.' (2008, 266-267)

In many ways, the nascence of The Tragically Hip's career coincided with the refinement process that created the immensely successful outcomes of these regulatory efforts. Therefore, this resulted in The Hip highly benefitting from the Canadian content regulations as well as from newly formed cultural institutions, like MuchMusic. Without the help of these efforts to prioritize Canadian music, it is dubious whether The Tragically Hip would achieve the levels of success they have or if they would ever reach the status of 'Canada's band.'

Considering this contextualization, it seems as though The Hip's rise to success was indeed a result of a certain place and time, and was greatly assisted by content regulation policies. Therefore, it becomes evident that there is another set of factors that delineate how this band is limited in their ability to represent Canada. The Tragically Hip's success is dependent on these factors relating to contingency and specificity and this means that, to some extent, they represent that context in particular. In other words, this contingent and specific context limits the band's ability to be more broadly representative. The Tragically Hip did not achieve the status of 'Canada's band' as a result of some inherent ability to represent the nation, but rather The Hip are 'Canada's band' due to a variety of factors including time, place, and policy that aided in their rise to mainstream Canadian success.

Though this position as 'Canada's Band' is rooted in a particular place and time, The Hip and this status received a nation-wide amplification due to the band's 2016 *Man Machine Poem* tour. In support of their new album under the same name, this tour became known as the final tour due to the announcement that lead singer Gord Downie was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer. The announcement of this diagnosis had an obvious impact on interest surrounding this tour, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) gave extensive attention and coverage to the band, their music, and the final show in the band's hometown of Kingston. While The

Tragically Hip already have a highly dedicated following, the promotion and presentation of the band, their music, and the final concert through CBC's traditional and new media platforms has provided fans – old and new – an engaging opportunity to learn about and connect with The Hip's music.

In anticipation of the final show in Kingston, the CBC introduced several initiatives in celebration of The Tragically Hip and their music. First, the online presence of The Hip on CBC platforms increased significantly. CBC Music posted more than twenty online pieces about The Tragically Hip, which include examinations of the Canadian stories within Hip lyrics, descriptions and links to watch live performances, biographical stories of the band and their career, and news coverage around the final concert. The CBC also dedicated a domain name specifically to The Tragically Hip, where there is access to any piece CBC Music has posted in relation to The Hip.⁵ In curating this immense presence for the band on CBC music's online platform, CBC has differentiated The Hip from other Canadian music artists; they elevated the band's importance and considering that it is the national public broadcaster who is doing this, it is emphasizing the national importance of this band. Another important initiative was that CBC branded the final show in Kingston as "The Tragically Hip: A National Celebration." Again, this branding decision enforces the idea that the band are representatives of Canadian identity and that their concert is something the nation should celebrate. Perhaps the most high-profile of CBC's media coverage surrounding the final concert was Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's support of The Tragically Hip as 'Canada's band.' The Prime Minister was in attendance at the concert, and before the show, he gave an interview with CBC Sports correspondent Ron MacLean, both of whom were wearing Tragically Hip merchandise. In his interview, Trudeau

⁵ This domain is www.cbcmusic.ca/thehip

says the following:

They [The Tragically Hip] really remain so anchored in Canada in so many ways: their lyrics, their sense of place, the sound, the vibe, the feel. This is something that is a piece of the extraordinarily multi-layered definition of Canada that we try and give ourselves. Gord and The Tragically Hip are an inevitable and essential part of what we are and who we are as a country. (quoted in CBC Music 2016)

It is important to remember that Justin Trudeau is, in many ways, first and foremost a fan of The Tragically Hip. He has spoken about seeing The Hip live on campus when he was in high school and university and celebrating them as his local band. Yet he is also a politician and the leader of the country, and as such, he does have a position to take on Canadian culture and issues in Canada. Considering these implications here in this example, The Tragically Hip are literally being approved as representatives of Canadian identity by the highest official in the nation.

While these media initiatives garnered a lot of national interest for the Kingston show, perhaps most important to consider is the fact that CBC broadcasted this show in its entirety (in excess of three hours) and advertisement-free. This final concert really did have national access as it was broadcasted on all of CBC's available platforms of radio, television, and online streaming, and in addition to these options, there were around 400-500 live viewing events across the country (CBC Media Centre 2016). Overall, statistics reveal that approximately 11.7 million—or nearly one in three Canadians—saw at least a portion of this final concert (CBC News 2016). Even though The Tragically Hip have worn the name 'Canada's Band' for decades, this iconic identity reached new heights with their final show in Kingston. CBC's involvement – both in their decision to broadcast the show in its entirety and in their intense promotion of the event – made the connection of The Hip and Canadian identity even stronger. All of this attention, presentation, and promotion by a government agency evokes a sense of The Tragically Hip as being “government approved”– they are literally being approved and promoted by a

government organization (CBC) and the highest official in our government (Prime Minister Justin Trudeau). In this sense, The Hip are put forth as vetted officials of Canadianness.

“Canada’s Band”: A National Platform

The Tragically Hip’s platform as ‘Canada’s band’ therefore has two sides. One is identified by the band’s populist appeal, the mainstream of fans dubbing them ‘Canada’s band.’ The other is more of an official position: they have been approved as representatives of Canadianness by Canadian government agencies and by the leader of the nation. Through this strong connection between the band and Canada, The Tragically Hip forged a substantial platform as ‘Canada’s band.’ This position allows them to speak to a large, national audience, both in terms of fans and regular citizens, but also with the ear of the political sphere to potentially listen and create change. Given this platform, this power and influence, I argue that The Tragically Hip are an important case study to consider in examining critical counternarratives to Canadianness.

In Chapter Three, I will engage in an analysis of a representative selection of The Tragically Hip’s lyrics. In this analysis, I aim to demonstrate how the band create stories of Canadianness that are darker and more nuanced than the more common narratives and representations already discussed in Chapter One. These narratives within their songs create constructions of Canada that oppose more singular and celebratory versions of Canadian identity. The lyrics bring light to many of the faults of Canadian national narratives, particularly highlighting the falseness of Canada’s mythologized kindness and tolerance. The Tragically Hip are not celebrating Canadianness, rather they paint a picture of Canada that acknowledges some of its flaws. In this sense, their lyrics offer counternarratives to hegemonic Canadianness.

Yet there are some limiting factors as to the band's ability to convey critical counternarratives. In the present chapter, I examine the general qualities of The Tragically Hip's musical language and how those qualities compare to the more critical tone of the lyrics. I will examine the impression of sameness that accompanies their music. In a similar manner to the mobilization of marked identities in the Canadian grand narrative, there is an appearance of many different musical styles coming together in unity, but there is no real agency associated with these different influences. I will also consider the notion of voice and persona. The Hip's musical language appears to only facilitate a singular voice; they do not incorporate a plurality of voices. In this sense, there is a reinforcement of an unmarked Canadian voice as *the* Canadian voice. By looking at these elements in the music, I will highlight certain limiting factors of The Hip's counternarratives to hegemonic Canadianness. While The Tragically Hip do engage in creating critical counternarratives and broadcasting them through their platform to a large, national audience, the band still reassert hegemonic notions of identity and belonging in Canada through their music.

Considering The Tragically Hip's Musical Language

For my discussion of The Tragically Hip's music, I decided to treat the music largely as a unit. Rather than discuss a variety of individual examples, I intend to generalize about their overall style. This decision stems from observations made about The Tragically Hip's musical language. While there are distinct musical differentiations between songs, The Hip's musical sound is often immediately recognizable as *their* music. They often remain within a rock or alternative rock genre or draw upon closely related styles. In this sense, The Hip's music has a quality of sameness; there are many commonalities between the various pieces in their musical

catalogue. Because of these consistent similarities, I feel that certain broad generalizations can be made about The Tragically Hip's musical language. Further, I argue that these general observations can provide insight into how The Tragically Hip can be read as authors of critical counternarratives, particularly the limiting factors upon their activities in this direction.

Throughout this chapter, I will discuss the relationships between musical sounds and social groups and identities. I will first explore how musical genres can express markers of identity, drawing on Fabian Holt's view of music collectivities. I will then examine notions of voice and persona, and specifically how in exploring these concepts music can be heard in terms of different identities expressing themselves. Following these explorations of genre, voice, and persona, I will provide an analysis of The Tragically Hip's music that draws upon the previous discussion of music and identity. I will investigate the kinds of meanings that can be interpreted from the band's voice and their persona. Through a general discussion of their musical style, I present the tensions between the appearance of difference in aspects of their musical language and the impression of sameness that is ultimately evident in their sound. I conclude by offering a suggestion as to the kind of persona that is being expressed in the musical setting created by The Tragically Hip, and ultimately discuss the issues and limiting factors of this musical persona in relation to the more critical tone of the band's lyrics.

Musical Sounds as Social Identities

Musical genres can function as sonic identifiers of social identities. For this discussion, I will not necessarily be focused on the lived experiences of social groups that identify with a particular genre or musical subculture. Instead, I am referring to textual representations and their ability to communicate social identities. There are historic correlations between textual

representations and lived experiences of social groups, and as a result, there are strong associations and parallels between the two. In this sense, musical sounds can evoke and communicate notions of social identities.

Genre, Voice, and Persona: Music and Identity

Fabian Holt's analysis of genre classifications in popular music works as a useful model for how musical sounds are connected to social groups. This model aims to understand music genres in the totality of social space and particularly how genres "create boundaries, because they have a static nature, and because they have political ramifications" (Holt 2007, 7-8). He describes the formative process of genres as being characterized by intense work on "defining an emerging canon or tradition in relation to a number of core artists and 'texts'" and notes that social identities have been implemented within music genres, resulting from negotiations of "a set of shared ideas about the music and its values and origins, and in the hegemony of a single term" (Holt 2007, 20). Music genres therefore express group identities and continue to negotiate terms of representation and belonging.

The social definitions of music genres undergo basic processes: foundation and codification in center collectivities. These processes exemplify how genres are created and identified by social and discursive networks and how specialized groups within these networks codify and signal the terms of belonging (Holt 2007, 20). In other words, genre foundation and codification function to establish a particular genre identity. Due to the social implications of these processes, the genre identity maintains distinct correlations and connections to the experiences of social groups and more broadly to social identities.

Holt argues that the foundations of music genres are sustained through networks (2007 20). Within these networks, there is communication of relations between many different agents that create and sustain the genre identity. These interconnected processes of musical and social specialization come to fruition in groups, which are described as “collectivities” (2007, 21). Various collectivities are comprised within networks, but some hold more power and influence than others. Those with power are centre collectivities; they function as expert groups and authoritative subjects (Holt 2007, 21). They have an iconic status that allows them to have influence (and the possibility for a more hegemonic effect) over the larger network. Networks and center collectivities therefore create a discourse that founds and solidifies the identity of a music genre.

Genre identity is further set through a process of codification by center collectivities. Genre identity can be communicated on the discrete musical level, meaning certain sounds evoke genre signification. But it can also be conveyed through broader conventions, particularly using codes, values, and practices to distinguish the genre’s boundaries and its interior (Holt 2007, 22-24). Music genres can take on systemic functions, allowing them to be defined and influenced by past iterations. Genres can also function like a scene or subculture through shared values, yet this would be in less specific and more broad terms. Genre identity may also be achieved through practice, by witnessing how repetition and change are negotiated. In this sense, genre identity is defined through various signs, standards, and customs that are discussed and agreed upon by networks and centre collectivities (Holt 2007, 22-24). Genre identity is therefore carefully negotiated and codified by those who participate in networks and center collectivities.

This *collectivities* view of music genres encourages hearing music in terms of different voices. By acknowledging the social discourse that happens in establishing, defining, and

codifying music genres, the concepts of voice and persona are made more explicit. The musical markers of what makes a genre are intrinsically linked to representations of social identities. In this sense, when an evocation of a musical genre within a song occurs, the social identities associated with that genre are also evoked. The musical sounds therefore function as various voices and personas that communicate social identities.

Music Analysis: Marked and Unmarked Identities

In analyzing music, there is an inherent sense of identification. Analysis functions to point out the different qualities within a musical work, what stands out as unusual and what follows the genre norms. This kind of identification correlates with the previous chapter's discussions of identities, particularly the marked and unmarked qualities of Canadianness. The musical qualities that are differentiated connect to notions of marked identities; they stand as oppositional and disruptive. Musical elements that are not highlighted or marked act as background conventions; they relate to an unmarked identity as they operate as a kind of glue that allows basic assumptions to happen. In both musical and societal terms, these basic assumptions lead to ideas of belonging and un-belonging by determining what is defaulted as normative. By identifying marked and unmarked elements within music, the connection can be made to notions of social identity: through conventions of genre, we can recognize which identities are being communicated as unmarked or normative and which identities are emphasized as marked. In other words, by examining the use of different genres within a song, we can see how musical expressions reinforce or challenge the hegemonic positions of marked and unmarked identities.

Since musical sounds can be illustrative of notions of marked and unmarked identities, it is important to consider in specific circumstances which personas are being communicated and whose voice is speaking. Lyrics set to music, and especially when played by a band, have a variety of ways in which the music can suggest different personas. In other words, there are many layers of voice that are interrelated and interact with one another to create different personas. This is evident in all forms of popular music, and the role of the singer in this respect is rather complex (Frith 1996, 198). As Frith (1996) observes, first there is “the character presented as the protagonist of the song, its singer and narrator, the implied person controlling the plot, with an attitude and tone of voice” (198). Yet at the same time there is another persona embedded within the song, the person whom the song is about (Frith 1996, 198). Frith calls this persona the “quoted” character and describes that singers “like lecturers, have their own mannered ways of indicating quote marks” and thus they can indicate a variety of different personas within the overall narrative of the song (1996, 199). There is also the character of “the singer as a star, what we know about them, or are led to believe about them through their packaging and publicity” (Frith 1996, 199). Further, there is an understanding of the singer as a person, what we like to imagine them to be, what is revealed by their voice (Frith 1996, 199). Given all of these different emergences of voice, there are many different layers of meaning and interpretation with regards to persona. By recognizing the different levels of significations by the voice, songs therefore function as multi-layered narratives that express the dynamics of various identities.

The Musical Language of The Tragically Hip

Throughout this section, my focus will be to establish how The Tragically Hip's musical language can be viewed as communicative of certain identities, and further, how the implication of these identities affects The Hip's output of critical counternarratives to Canadianness. I will discuss The Hip's musical language in general terms, specifically highlighting the tension between their employment of multiple genres and the sameness of their sound. I will also continue the discussion of persona, particularly by examining what kind of persona is potentially being expressed in The Hip's music. This investigation aims to provide an alternate perspective to the subsequent lyrical analysis. By analyzing The Tragically Hip's musical persona, I aim to underline the limiting factors of this band and their criticisms of hegemonic Canadianness.

Appearance of Difference and Sound of Sameness

In reviews of The Tragically Hip's catalogue, the sound of their music does not often receive much discussion. Gord Downie's lyricism regularly grabs the attention of music critics, and the rest of the band's contributions are usually summed up briefly. However, the musical efforts in supporting Downie's poetry are important to consider. The Hip identify their musical output in terms of a collective, and as such, analysis of what supports Downie's lyrics is needed in order to understand The Tragically Hip's collective identity (Barclay, Jack, and Schneider 2001, 633). Further, The Tragically Hip's position as 'Canada's band' implies that *the band* has an ability to represent Canadianness. Therefore, consideration of the overall sound of the full band is required in order to understand this connection between The Hip and Canadianness.

The Tragically Hip started as a fairly-typical guitar-based hard rock band and became known as having a "bar band persona" (DeGagne accessed 2018). The band had substantial

blues-rock roots, but as their career progressed their musical influences broadened and became less genre-specific (Rudnick 2016). Though The Hip draw on a variety of musical influences and blend them into their sound, in general terms, The Tragically Hip can be described as a generic rock band. In their recordings, the band aims to capture the sound and energy of their live performances but lean towards an accessible, radio-friendly sound (Slingerland 2016). Music critic Calum Slingerland describes that this reshaping and polishing process happens “without sacrificing [their] blues-based spirit, with Downie’s emotive side on display” (2016). The band’s “bluesy sound” is something that remains a trademark of their musical voice as they never strayed terribly far from their blues-rock roots over the course of their career (Rudnick 2016; Slingerland 2016).

Yet while blues-based rock often remains at the forefront of their musical language, many other genre influences are evident in The Hip’s style. The Hip’s choices in harmony vary from song to song, and while some arrangements adhere to straightforward folk-rock idioms, others draw on well-established progressions from heavy metal. Their choice of chord voicings sometimes relies on power chords, but they also frequently explore more complicated approaches as found in jazz-rock and progressive rock. The forms of their songs vary from more standard twelve-bar blues to those that resemble conventional pop forms. These nods to other genres are particularly evident in their use of instrumentation. The sounds of strumming acoustic guitars, slide guitars, and pedal steel all evoke country and folk music; heavily distorted guitars nod to hard rock and heavy metal; liberal use of guitar harmonics, hand percussion, vocal harmonies, and an overall meditative presentation connect to more atmospheric and new-age musics; and syncopated bass riffs and organ suggest funk and gospel influences. Considering all

of these observations, it is clear that The Tragically Hip draw on a diverse array of musical influences that they incorporate into their sound.

Yet despite this proliferation of difference, there are many commonalities that emerge from a general observation of The Tragically Hip's music. Instrumentally, the band is usually very groove-based. There is a consistent implementation of repetitive gestures that form a strong sense of beat and meter, and this groove remains throughout entire songs and mostly throughout their entire repertoire. The Hip's tempos also remain rather consistent. They have this 'in-between' quality; they are not too fast or too slow, but stay in a comfortable middle ground. Melodically, Gord Downie's vocals stay within a very limited range and the vocal melodies usually take the form of cells that are repeated and modified throughout the tracks. The group's harmonic language is rather conservative, and many songs consist of just two to four chords repeated over and over. Formally, the band eschews typical genre norms in favour of more vague formal markers. For example, they have sections that resemble a typical pop chorus, but do not function in the typical manner established by genre norms. Both "Ahead by a Century" and "Tired as Fuck" have recurring sections that act as a kind of refrain, or at the very least, it is obvious to listeners that there are repeating musical sections. However, these quasi-choruses do not adhere to the typical formal structure of a chorus; they are not regularly interspersed between verses and they do not mark any clear shift in mood or musical accompaniment. There are many examples in the band's repertoire that adopt these kinds of vague formal structures.

But perhaps the most obvious commonality throughout The Tragically Hip's catalogue is lead singer Gord Downie's idiosyncratic vocal quality. His distinct vibrato on ends of phrases and sustained notes, as well as frequent sighing and gasping, remain constant identifiers throughout. Downie's voice often takes on a conversational tone, and overall his vocal delivery

is more like speech than singing. This unique quality combined with the much more subtle, groove-based nature of the instruments results in Downie's voice becoming emphasized and foregrounded in The Hip's musical sound.

As a result of these many points of consistency, The Hip's musical language has a sense of sameness. The band are drawing on a variety of genres but they are not strictly conforming to any one of them. Instead, these genre signifiers are blended into a more unified, homogenous sound. In this way, the band are bringing in more diversity of musical languages, and as a result bringing in the values, histories, and codified elements of these genres, but there is still a generic element to their sound—nothing stands out too much, even within their own repertoire. In this sense, Tragically Hip's music has a presence of pluralism, yet at the same time, there is a continuous sound of homogeneity. There is an appearance of difference through the employment of many genre signifiers, but the overall sound remains rather singular, one that is steeped in sameness.

Unmarkedness and the Nice Guy Persona

Remembering that music can be heard in terms of voices, it is important to examine The Tragically Hip's overall musical style in terms of social identities. As previously argued, music genres are created through social processes, and as such are intrinsically tied to social groups. By referencing music genres, musicians also draw upon the genres' corresponding social identities, and therefore music can act as a way to hear various voices from different identities. Further, these voices may communicate through many different layers of signification, thereby allowing songs to function as expressions of the dynamics between various identities. We can also see how musical choices communicate marked and unmarked identities by examining the

implementations of different genres within a song. Given the dichotomous position of The Tragically Hip's music as both varied (in terms of the numerous genre references) and homogenous (in terms of their overall sound), it is important to consider the social implications of this musical style. By examining The Hip's mobilization of genres and their overall unified sound, I will examine how the dynamics between marked and unmarked identities are articulated through The Hip's music. Based on these tensions between diversity and sameness, in both musical observations and their social implications, I will conclude by establishing what kind of persona is being communicated by The Tragically Hip's music and the effects that persona has on the band's position as 'Canada's band' and as authors of critical counternarratives.

On the surface, it is evident that The Hip do draw on many musical influences and fuse those different genres into their style. Elements of funk, gospel, country, heavy metal, and folk are all present within the band's songs. In this sense, there is an element of markedness to their musical sound; there are musical influences within the band's style that stand out as different and noticeable. Therefore, there is an appearance of multiple voices. Multiple genres and their corresponding social identities are brought into the musical situation at the same time and these voices could be viewed as peacefully coexisting or creating a meaningful dialogue.

Yet despite the proliferation of many different genre influences (and therefore many different social voices and perspectives), The Hip's musical sound is immediately recognizable as *their* music. They are comfortable welcoming and combining multiple genres but there is some constraint in how much of those genres are communicated. There are obvious influences, but the way they come across in any particular song is rather subtle for the most part. These references are not blatant and the band maintains a sense of an un-fragmented, unified sound. In this sense, all of these different genres and all of these different voices are absorbed into one

unified sound that remains rather generic. The unmarked qualities of the music take on the prominent role and act as a type of glue, smoothing over any blatant or obvious markedness. This overall sound is not recognized for its hybrid quality or even for its ability to draw on various influences. Instead, it is recognized as The Hip's *own* sound. In this sense, it sonically communicates a more singular identity: *their* identity. Further, the most easily identifiable and overall consistent sonic marker of this sound is Gord Downie's voice. Therefore, in more specific terms, this sound of sameness can be viewed as emphasizing the notion that this is *Downie's* identity at the forefront, accompanied sonically by *the band's* musical voices.

Based on these observations, The Tragically Hip's music has two conflicting musical realities. On the one hand, there is a distinct element of markedness. Marked voices that do not hold an obvious authority do appear throughout their sound. In fact, many of these voices often appear concurrently and this appears to create a musical space wherein multiple voices can speak and share their own perspectives. But this musical space does not come to full fruition. Because of the continuous sameness in their sound, these multiple voices and multiple genres do not hold any real sense of agency. The generic quality of the band's music acts in an unmarked fashion. The sameness further perpetuates a powerful and autonomous position of unmarkedness. Additionally, there does not appear to be this large dialogue of multiple voices. Instead, there is really only one voice communicating at the forefront: the identity of The Tragically Hip, as particularly exemplified by Downie's voice.

Considering these conflicting musical realities, what can be said about musical persona? What kind of persona is being communicated through this musical situation set up by The Tragically Hip? These musical interactions between marked and unmarked identities establish a

Nice Guy persona.⁶ This Nice Guy is sympathetic to diversity, but this persona is not doing anything overt to acknowledge the issues of markedness. There is an attempt to acknowledge difference and showcase multiple identities, but these marked elements are not acting with agency; they are present on a surface-level but they are still rather marginalized. The Nice Guy's singular and unmarked identity connects to the protagonist within the narrative of overcoming; his attempts to tolerate and find compromise with many different identities aligns with the narrative of reconciliation; and his deliberate niceness and wide range of musical borrowings corresponds to the pragmatic and 'all-seeing' qualities of the Mountie Myth. In other words, many of these qualities of the Nice Guy correlate with characteristics of hegemonic national narratives discussed in Chapter One.

While there is an appearance of difference, the Nice Guy persona operates within a singular and distinctly unmarked identity. This notion of unmarked voice functions both in terms of the band's own identity—they truly embody the white, Anglo, central identity that is unmarked Canadianness—as well as their musical identity. The generic rock and rock-related genres that perpetuate the sameness of their sound act as sonic signifiers of hegemonic representations of Canadian musical identity. In essence, the Nice Guy persona replicates the dynamics between unmarked and marked identities within larger narratives of Canadianness. Unmarkedness remains sympathetic while tolerating and highlighting diversity in marked identities, but the Nice Guy is still the one with power to act with cultural authority. The generic quality of the Nice Guy allows for an unmarked identity to flourish; the sameness within the band's music and in their own identity maintains the idea that unmarked Canadian identity is *the* Canadian identity.

⁶ In conversation about The Tragically Hip's musical identity, William Echard suggested the idea that they appear as the "Nice Guy." Thank you for coming up with this fitting title for their musical persona.

The Tragically Hip's musical persona as the Nice Guy creates some problematic realizations. Considering the band's platform as 'Canada's band,' this musical persona acts on a truly national level—one that has been approved by government agencies like the CBC and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Yet this persona continues to perpetuate hegemonic ideals. The Tragically Hip's position as ambassadors of Canadian culture, and as representative musicians that speak for such a diverse nation, perpetuates the notion that Canadianness *is* white, English-speaking, and from the centre of the country, and at the same time, it further marginalizes marked voices that have been silenced for much of the nation's existence. In other words, the notion of The Tragically Hip as "Canada's band" creates a construction of Canada where the diversity of Canadianness is rather limited.

Yet while The Hip have these limiting factors in terms of the Nice Guy persona in their music, their lyrics provide a more critical perspective on issues in Canadian society. The Hip's musical persona presents reiterations of sameness and unmarkedness, and does not have a sense of critical nuance. While their musical language does create a platform for 'nice-ness,' it fails to acknowledge the critical reality that needs to move beyond just tolerance and 'nice-ness.' However, listening to The Tragically Hip's music reveals that the music is often playing a supportive role. Downie's voice is nearly always the focal point and as such the lyrical narratives tend to take precedence. The band's musical contributions often remain in the background, giving space to foreground the stories within the lyrics. As journalist Natasha Rudnick observes, The Tragically Hip's music acts as "a beautiful vehicle for Downie's poetry" (Rudnick 2016). In this sense, because the band's music maintains a more supportive role, an analysis of the band's lyrical output is needed.

In the following chapter, I will provide an analysis of The Tragically Hip's lyrics. Building on the general themes of Chapter One, I will introduce some common specific tropes of Canadianness and examine how these tropes are framed in The Hip's lyrics. Through an analysis of a few representative songs, I will demonstrate that The Hip take a darker, more nuanced approach to the discussion of Canadian symbols. I will argue that through this darker and more critical tone, The Tragically Hip's lyrical stories function as counternarratives to hegemonic forms of Canadianness. They create constructions of Canada that oppose more singular and celebratory versions of Canadian identity.

Chapter Three **Critical Nuance in The Tragically Hip's Lyrics**

In conjunction with their platform as ‘Canada’s band,’ The Tragically Hip are celebrated for their engagement with Canadiana in their lyrics. As previously mentioned, the band have nearly three hundred references to Canadiana in their discography, and for this reason it is important to consider what ‘Canada’s band’ says about Canada. This chapter aims to investigate the lyrical narratives created in The Tragically Hip’s music. I will first outline selected tropes of Canadianness to lay a framework as to how The Hip are engaging with Canadianness in their lyrics. Using a representative song for each trope of Canadianness, I will illustrate how The Tragically Hip frame these tropes within their songs. This analysis aims to demonstrate that the band create stories of Canadianness that are darker and more nuanced than is typical of many hegemonic narratives of Canadianness, thereby functioning as critical counternarratives to these constructions of Canada.

Tropes of Canadianness

Expanding on the notions of identity discussed in Chapter One, this section aims to provide specific case studies that explore constructions of Canadianness. These case studies will take the form of common tropes of Canadianness. For this discussion I selected hockey, the Canadian landscape, and specific Canadian place names to act as representative tropes of Canadianness. I chose to use the term *tropes* to describe these elements because they are commonly recurring images, closely tied to Canadian culture, which because of their frequency often function in some way to establish a sense of national identity. While there are a variety of other tropes that could also be used, these three have been chosen specifically because of their appearance in Canadian popular music lyrics. It is likely that other tropes of Canadianness (e.g.,

beavers, loons/loonies, the north) also appear in Canadian popular music, however a more complete exploration is beyond the scope of this analysis. I will first highlight how these three tropes of Canadianness embody both elements of marked and unmarked identities, and also make connections to elements of dominant national narratives, before moving to an analysis of The Tragically Hip's lyrics.

Marked and Unmarked Identities:
National Differentiation and Internal Unification

Hockey, the Canadian landscape, and specific Canadian place names all function in some sense to establish a sense of national identity in Canada. Canadians and hockey have a long-standing history. By examining the sport's appearance in advertising or statistics of Canadians who play the sport, one can see the importance of hockey in Canada.⁷ The sport's significance in Canadian national identity was further solidified in 1994, when the "National Sports of Canada Act" was passed and officially recognized and declared hockey as Canada's national winter sport. In other words, hockey was legislated as part of Canada's national identity. The Canadian landscape has also been celebrated throughout the nation's history. From its inspiration to artists like the Group of Seven, to its ubiquitous presence in tourism advertising, the landscape has been thoroughly drawn upon to establish Canadianness. As Mackey determines "images of land and nature are key symbols in the task of building national identity" (2002, 90). The image of the Canadian landscape therefore draws an immediate connection to a sense of Canadianness. In a similar manner, the reference to specific Canadian place names functions as an overt and recognizable marker of Canadian identity. The place names of towns and cities across the nation

⁷ See Martin accessed 2018 for a discussion of the prominence of hockey in Canadian advertising and Harrison 2004 for a more general discussion of the sport in Canadian life.

are all connected to how Canada defines itself; the nation of Canada is comprised of all of these places. Therefore, by naming the places within Canada, there is a direct link to how the nation identifies itself.

One of the most common characteristics of discourses which seek to define a Canadian national identity is the distinction between purported Canadian identity and that of other nations, namely the United States. Canadian national identity therefore aims to differentiate itself from American nationalism and patriotism (Angus 1997, 206). As Fast and Pegley note:

The narrative of not selling out to the United States is echoed throughout Canadian celebrity discourses...The paradox is this: while many are proud when a Canadian is recognized south of the border, success within the American market often results in the loss of Canadian markers and renders these icons “less Canadian” to their fans at home. (2006, 26)

Therefore, in order to keep a clear and recognizable Canadian identity, Canadian markers that clearly distinguish the icon from American society are needed. Fast and Pegley’s observation about celebrity culture can be applied to a larger, national example: in order for Canada to distinguish itself as a nation from the United States, distinctive, specific markers of Canadianness are necessary.

Hockey, the Canadian landscape, and specific Canadian place names all have direct connections to the Canadian nation. All three of these tropes frequently play a role in Canadian attempts at self-definition, helping to create a distinct identity for Canadians separate from those of other nations. Therefore, they function as representative of markedness in an external sense. Because these tropes are often mobilized in efforts to differentiate Canada from other nations, they distinguish Canada as unique on the international level. Though these are *common* images of Canadianness, they give Canada a marked identity in this external context. Hockey’s legislated presence in Canada differentiates the nation from other countries where hockey is not a

sport of national importance. Similarly, the naturalness of the Canadian landscape differentiates Canada from other western, industrialized nations and reference to specific Canadian place names focuses the discussion on Canada and reasserts an explicitly Canadian presence. These tropes give Canada a marked identity in the international field. They effectively and clearly differentiate Canada from other nations by creating a sense of markedness. From an external perspective, Canada is marked as distinctive through its sport, its landscape, and its place names.

Although these tropes create a marked identity for Canada on the international level, on a local Canadian level they all function more to foster unmarkedness. These three tropes of Canadianness are *tropes* because of their ubiquity within Canada. Internally, hockey, the landscape, and place names are commonplace; they function as overused, clichéd, or stereotyped identifiers of Canadianness. All three of these tropes can create an idea of regional differentiation. Different hockey teams across the nation, distinctly different landscapes from coast to coast to coast, and of course, different place names all over Canada—in this regard, there are discrepancies and diversities throughout the different regions of Canada. However, these tropes tend to function more so on a national level. They work as unmarked elements of Canadian identity; they do not stand out as different in Canadian society, but instead work as unifying features of what makes a singular ‘Canadian’ identity. Therefore, they perpetuate an idea of sameness; they operate as unifying measures to create a more generic, unmarked notion of Canadianness.

These tropes of Canadianness therefore create correlations with dominant national narratives. They function to establish Canada as different, or marked, from other nations while simultaneously attempting a sense of unification internally. The markedness of Canadian identity at the international level relates to elements of the narrative of overcoming. It celebrates the

discovery and assertion of a distinct sense of national self. Further, the internal homogeneity of these tropes connects to the narrative of reconciliation. The differences of sport, landscape, and place names throughout the country are reconciled and compromised in order to achieve a more harmonious, unified national experience. As with the Mountie Myth, an unmarked identity that upholds an idea of benevolence, pragmatism, and unity is maintained as the normal version of Canadianness.

Tropes of Canadianness in Music

By employing these tropes within music, musicians have the ability to create narratives of Canadian identity. For the purposes here, I will mostly focus on how these tropes are utilized through lyrics; however, tropes of this kind can be musically signified through choices of genre, instrumentation, and sounds that evoke aural connections between the music and sports, landscape, and geographic regions. These artists can shape these tropes into stories about the defining characteristics of Canada and what it means to be Canadian. Narratives of nationhood illustrate the negotiations of belonging and the dynamics between marked and unmarked identities. The employment of these tropes within musical narratives can therefore establish stories that reinforce national myths or that describe alternate viewpoints to hegemonic ideals. In other words, these musical narratives can replicate dominant national narratives or create oppositional counternarratives. As I will argue in the following section, The Tragically Hip are employing these tropes of Canadianness in such a way that create counternarratives to hegemonic representations of Canadianness. The framing of these tropes within their musical narratives create stories that are darker, more nuanced, and perhaps have a more realistic perspective as to the concept of national identity.

The Tragically Hip's Lyrics

Throughout this section, the focus will be on establishing how The Tragically Hip's lyrics can be viewed as critical counternarratives to Canadianness. Drawing on the previous discussion of common tropes of Canadianness, I will provide an analysis of The Hip's usage of these selected tropes within their songs. I selected one representative song to correspond with each trope. While The Hip have a variety of songs that engage with the tropes of hockey, the Canadian landscape, and specific Canadian place names, I chose "Fifty-Mission Cap," "Wheat Kings," and "Bobcaygeon" as a result of their popularity within the band's discography. All three songs were not only successes upon their initial releases, but they all have achieved an enduring quality in The Tragically Hip's legacy. These songs remain fan-favorites. They are cited and discussed nationally by the CBC, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and various other publications, and The Hip continued to play these songs throughout their career. All three were heard at the band's 2016 final show in Kingston. As such, I believe "Fifty-Mission Cap," "Wheat Kings," and "Bobcaygeon" serve as important representative songs from the band's catalogue that illustrate not only The Hip's nuanced engagement with Canadiana, but also the wide-spread distribution in their work of counternarratives to hegemonic Canadianness.

Ultimately, the subsequent sections of this chapter aim to illustrate how The Tragically Hip can be read as being a challenge to more hegemonic patterns of Canadianness. To do so, I will provide an analysis of each song's lyrical narrative. I will examine how the trope of hockey is framed within "Fifty-Mission Cap," the landscape within "Wheat Kings," and specific Canadian place names within "Bobcaygeon." Within each of these discussions, I will consider the story told by the lyrics and how the tropes of Canadianness are framed within each respective narrative. In each instance, I aim to illustrate that The Hip are creating more nuanced narratives

that bring awareness to the death and disappearance of a national sports hero, the critical mistakes made by the Canadian justice system, and the presence of hate and violence in Canadian cities. These lyrics present a challenge to hegemonic representations of Canadianness as they complicate the celebratory status of Canadian sports culture; they highlight the errors that are made by Canadian institutions; and they problematize the harmonious unity of Canadianness. I will also consider the band's musical language, and how at the level of the individual song it can support their creation of more critical counternarratives despite the problematic sameness of their musical style at the global level already discussed in Chapter Two. I will conclude the chapter by looking at The Tragically Hip's relationship with Canadian patriotism. I will discuss how the band's uneasiness about national pride connects to these counternarratives to hegemonic Canadianness.

Hockey and "Fifty-Mission Cap"

The Tragically Hip's "Fifty-Mission Cap" was released in 1993 as a single from the band's third album *Fully Completely*. It remains one of the band's most popular songs, as evident in the fact that The Hip opened their final show in Kingston with "Fifty-Mission Cap." The lyrics use the trope of hockey as the focus of the story:

Bill Barilko disappeared that summer,
 He was on a fishing trip.
 The last goal he ever scored
 Won the Leafs the cup.
 They didn't win another until 1962,
 The year he was discovered.
 I stole this from a hockey card
 I keep tucked under
 My fifty-mission cap, I worked it in
 To look like that
 (Downie 1992a)

“Fifty-Mission Cap” chronicles the story of Toronto Maple Leafs defenceman Bill Barilko, recounting his winning goal, his tragic end, and the resulting curse on the Toronto Maple Leafs (Dame “Fifty-Mission Cap” accessed 2018). Barilko was a professional hockey player for the Toronto Maple Leafs during the 1940s and early 1950s. He is perhaps most famous for scoring the winning goal in the 1951 Stanley Cup final against the Montréal Canadiens. The summer after this win, he was involved in a fatal plane crash near Cochrane, Ontario. Despite many searches, his body was not found. After Barilko’s death, the Leafs experienced an eleven-year losing streak in a six-team league and some suspected that the Leafs were cursed against the Stanley Cup until Barilko’s body could be found (Dame “Fifty-Mission Cap” accessed 2018). However, this ‘curse’ was actually the reverse: in 1962, the Leafs finally did win another Stanley Cup and roughly seven weeks later, Barilko’s remains were discovered (Dame “Fifty-Mission Cap” accessed 2018).

The final lines of The Hip’s “Fifty-Mission Cap” move away from the details of Barilko’s story and contain the titled lyrics, “I keep tucked under/My fifty-mission cap, I worked it in/To look like that.” The “Fifty-Mission Cap” references the caps given to elite bomber pilots of the Allied Air Forces during World War II. These caps served more as morale-boosting status symbols rather than material reward, and pilots who possessed these caps were revered and allowed to break military protocol and work-them-in or dirty them to add to their mystique (Dame “Fifty-Mission Cap” accessed 2018). While this reference moves away from the overtly hockey-specific narrative, it does tie in to Barilko’s story, though in a more symbolic or poetic way. The mention of “work[ing] it in/To look like that” could allude to Barilko’s elite status and the mystique of his disappearance. Additionally, the reference to World War II bomber pilots provides a connection to Barilko’s death from an aircraft crash. By linking the story of Barilko’s

death with specific elements from World War II, The Hip emphasize the tragedy inherent in this story.

The majority of lyrics in “Fifty-Mission Cap” focus on Barilko’s death. This choice creates a much darker story than other common uses of hockey imagery. Typically, hockey has been used to celebrate Canadian success, to explore Canadian pride, and to hope for a better future.⁸ By eschewing these more dominant framings of hockey, The Hip create a darker narrative. Here, the Hip are focusing on death and loss, rather than just victory and celebration. They are linking hockey to combat during World War II, and as a result, they make a definite jump from nationalistic celebration to the extreme difficulties of international warfare. By telling this ‘ghost story’ of Bill Barilko, The Tragically Hip create layered and nuanced lyrics that frame this sport in a much darker setting than typical narratives of hockey in Canada.

The band’s musical choices appear to support the darker narrative established by the lyrics. The song draws on a heavy metal or hard rock style. This style of music is strongly associated with “darkness” and a rejection of dominant ideals; as Robert Walser argues, “Heavy metal’s fascination with the dark side of life gives evidence of both dissatisfaction with dominant identities and institutions and an intense yearning for reconciliation with something more credible” (1993, xvii). The Hip’s use of this genre then supports their darker and alternative framing of the trope of hockey in “Fifty-Mission Cap.”

Throughout the majority of the song, one can hear the sounds of distorted electric guitars playing a I-VII-VI-VII-I progression. This progression frequently occurs in metal, where it normally functions in an aggressive and dark Aeolian mood (Walser 1993, 80). Walser suggests

⁸ Examples of these kinds of celebratory framings of hockey can be seen in “The Hockey Song” by Stompin’ Tom Connors, “Gretzky Rocks” by The Pursuit of Happiness, “Ballad of Wendel Clark” by the Rheostatics, and “Big League” by Tom Cochrane and Red Rider.

that because this progression differs from the tonal syntactical norms that underlie other popular musics, this progression's affective character is discursively coded as aggressive and defiant (1993, 48). This progression in "Fifty-Mission Cap" is not strictly in the Aeolian mode as it resolves to a major I. However, the progression does borrow the VI and VII chords from the Aeolian framework, and thereby also borrows the aggressive and dark qualities of this mode though in a slightly altered context. This progression is also accompanied by the bass playing a pedal tone throughout, giving the song a sense of urgency. The song is therefore marked as dark, aggressive, and defiant and these qualities are heightened through the anticipating drive of the pedal tone. All of these musical choices create a sonic atmosphere that supports the more nuanced lyrics.

The choruses and second verse add backing vocals to the texture. The backing vocal line comments on the narrator's cap and also provides the listener with more information on Barilko's story:

It's my fifty-mission cap
(It's his fifty-mission cap)
 And I worked it in **(worked it in)**
 I worked it and I worked it in **(worked it in)** to look like that
 Bill Barilko disappeared that summer **(in 1951)**,
 He was on a fishing trip **(in a plane)**.
 The last goal he ever scored **(in overtime)**
 Won the Leafs the cup.
 (Downie 1992a)

These additional vocals literally bring another voice to the lyrics. In the chorus, the backing vocals repeat the narrator's process of working in his fifty-mission cap, again connecting the story to World War II. Throughout the second verse, the backing vocals add more details to the story of Barilko's death: he disappeared "in 1951," he was "in a plane," and the goal that he is remembered for was scored "in overtime." Here, the multiple voices are working together and

provide more of a collective viewpoint on Barilko's story. The backing vocals in "Fifty-Mission Cap" are only contributing to the lyrics' connection to World War II and the tragic story of Barilko's death and disappearance. They are not celebrating or expressing solidarity, but instead providing more detailed comments to these dark elements in the lyrics. In this sense, Barilko's tragic story is told by a collective; the story of his death and disappearance is shared with many. The Tragically Hip's musical choices therefore support their lyrical framing of hockey. The power and mystery embedded in the genre conventions and the multiplicity of voices telling this sad story enhance the darker, more nuanced tone of the lyrics.

By having Bill Barilko's story as the main plotline of the song, "Fifty-Mission Cap" is quite obviously a song about hockey. Yet by framing the trope of hockey with Bill Barilko's untimely and tragic death, the subsequent lyrical narrative follows a much darker approach than more common hockey stories. These lyrics are not an exploration of pride surrounding hockey and Canadian culture. The Hip do not solely celebrate Canadians' success in a sport that is legislated into the nation's identity. Further, the song does not overtly attempt to unify all Canadians in celebration of the sport. Instead, the lyrics to "Fifty-Mission Cap" are darker than these typical uses of hockey imagery. The Hip's lyrics concentrates on the devastating death and disappearance of a well-known Canadian hockey hero and the effects that tragedy had on the successes of his team. Musically, the band support this framing by drawing on well-established conventions from hard rock and heavy metal and by offering more than just Downie's voice to tell this story. In this sense, "Fifty-Mission Cap" functions as a more nuanced story of hockey in Canada. It resists more singular and celebratory notions of the sport in Canadian identity and as such can be read as a darker counternarrative to hegemonic Canadianness.

The Canadian Landscape and “Wheat Kings”

“Wheat Kings” employs the trope of the Canadian landscape. The song starts with a picturesque description of the natural scenery of the country’s western prairies:

Sundown in the Paris of the prairies
Wheat kings have all their treasures buried
And all you hear are the rusty breezes
Pushing around weather vane Jesus
(Downie 1992b)

After this quick illustration of the beauty of “The Paris of the prairies,” the song’s narrative quickly morphs into a much more serious discussion. The remainder of the lyrics in “Wheat Kings” examine the criminal conviction of David Milgaard. Stephen Dame discusses the details of Milgaard’s case in his extensive catalogue of The Hip’s lyrics. He describes the Milgaard case as follows:

In January of 1969, Milgaard and two friends took a road trip to Saskatoon. On the same night that the trio intended to briefly visit their friend Albert Cadrain, Gail Miller was attacked and killed in a downtown alley. Such a crime shook Saskatoon, and the local police were under serious pressure to find the killer and halt the minor hysteria that was spreading through the quiet Prairie town. After four months of no leads, the police used high pressure interview tactics and a \$2,000 reward to coax a statement out of Cadrain. Although he and David's fellow road trippers kept changing their stories, Saskatoon's finest felt they had their man.

The jury showed no sympathy for the hippie who had already been convicted of petty theft and taking a truck for a joyride at age 14. The evidence seemed to fit, especially since such a horrific murder had to have been committed by an outsider. No one in idyllic Saskatoon could do such a thing, the police had said so themselves. David became a 17-year-old convicted murderer and was condemned to spend the next 23 years of his life in prison. (“Wheat Kings” accessed 2018)

Throughout Milgaard’s sentence, his mother championed her son’s innocence and the CBC gave frequent airtime to discussions of the case, the flaws, unanswered questions, and other speculations surrounding Milgaard’s initial conviction (Dame “Wheat Kings” accessed 2018).

Milgaard was released 23 years later, after DNA evidence proved his innocence and thus his wrongful imprisonment.

The details of Milgaard's story are clearly referenced throughout "Wheat Kings." The second and fourth verses contain particularly explicit examples:

In his Zippo lighter, he sees the killer's face
 Maybe it's someone standing in a killer's place
 Twenty years for nothing well that's nothing new
 Besides, no one's interested in something you didn't do
 ...
 Late breaking story on the CBC
 A nation whispers "We always knew that he'd go free"
 They add "you can't be fond of living in the past,
 'cause if you are then there's no way that you're gonna last"
 (Downie 1992b)

Here, Milgaard's wrongful imprisonment, and the perhaps apathetic nature of the Canadian public and judiciary, is revealed to the listener. He served "twenty years for nothing" by "standing in a killer's place" all while the nation that "knew that he'd go free" pushes him to move forward and forget the Canadian judicial system's failures of the past. These ramifications of Milgaard's case are interspersed between the choruses' many iterations of the landscape's beauty, "Wheat kings and pretty things."

The band members have publicly stated the song's relationship to Milgaard's case. According to Gord Downie, "Wheat Kings" is about "David Milgaard and his faith in himself. And about his mother, Joyce, and her absolute faith in her son's innocence. And about our big country and its faith in man's fallibility. And about Gail Miller, all those mornings ago, just lying there, all her faith bleeding out into that Saskatoon snowbank" (quoted in Kinos-Goodin 2016).⁹

⁹ Here, Downie suggest that this song references many different experiences that go into this story; however, this is not the case. The experience of Milgaard's mother and perhaps most importantly, the tragic death of Gail Miller are never mentioned explicitly in the lyrics. Instead, "Wheat Kings" focuses exclusively on the experience of David Milgaard. This is again another example of the shortcomings of The Hip's critical counternarratives. By failing to acknowledge the female experience that is absolutely central to this story, The Hip reinforce the hegemonic position of the masculine perspective.

In 1993, after his release, David Milgaard met with The Tragically Hip at one of their live shows. Milgaard shook hands with Gord Downie and stood in the audience as the band dedicated “Wheat Kings” to him (Kinos-Goodin 2016). Therefore, while the title and chorus articulate the landscape of the Prairies – “Wheat kings and pretty things”—the primary focus of this narrative is decidedly the David Milgaard case.

The band often musically underscore important elements in the lyrics. In the second verse, when Downie sings “Twenty years for nothing,” a slide guitar enters, creating an obvious disturbance to the otherwise calm texture. This sonically underlines the importance of the line “Twenty years for nothing” by differentiating it from the other lyrics. In this sense, Milgaard’s wrongful imprisonment that cost him twenty years of his life is highlighted through the musical accompaniment. In terms of vocal style, Downie’s melody uses a very limited range. Most of the song centers on just three notes. The melody is also in a lower register and as such takes on a conversational quality. His articulations evoke a kind of a casual drawl, adding to the conversational tone of the song. It is as if the singer is holding a relaxed conversation with the listener. In this sense, the story of “Wheat Kings” is communicated in a very accessible and casual manner, with important lines emphasized musically by the band.

Throughout “Wheat Kings,” the band creates a subtle groove with influences from folk, country, and rock, yet overall the music remains rather atmospheric. The song begins with the sound of loons and other nature sounds before the meditative, acoustic groove begins. Each section of the song does add more and more to the overall sonic texture. Soft acoustic strumming, wind chimes, hand percussion, guitar harmonics, casually improvised melodies on acoustic guitars, bass grooves, cymbals on the backbeat, snare drum played with brushes: all of these are added one by one, creating a slow and subtle textural build as the story of Milgaard’s

conviction comes to completion. Yet all of this musical accompaniment remains just that; it never takes the forefront until the final thirty seconds of the song, where a vampy outro carries on where the story of Milgaard's experience leaves off. For the majority of "Wheat Kings," the musical accompaniment remains in the background, giving the lyrical narrative space to be front and centre.

While "Wheat Kings" does employ the Canadian landscape, this trope is only used to progress into a much more somber discussion. "Wheat Kings," in its title and in its chorus, does reference the picturesque quality of the prairies; however, the primary focus is an exploration of a Canadian national controversy. "Wheat Kings" does not use the trope of the Canadian landscape in such a way that promotes national connectedness or celebrates the diversity in the nation's natural beauty. Instead, The Tragically Hip frame this trope in a scenario in which the landscape is indifferent. "Wheat Kings and pretty things" act as removed from the distinctly human concerns of David Milgaard. The musical texture of this song parallels the use of the Canadian landscape in the lyrics. The placid, new-agey landscape of this musical setting similarly act with passive indifference to the critical tone of Milgaard's story. Overall, by investigating Milgaard's case and discussing this shameful blight on the record of Canadian crime and punishment, The Tragically Hip are bringing the symbol of the Canadian landscape into a much more critical narrative (Dame "Wheat Kings" accessed 2016).

Specific Canadian Place Names and "Bobcaygeon"

As evident in its title, "Bobcaygeon" makes reference to specific Canadian place names within its lyrics. The song makes reference to just two Canadian places: Toronto, Canada's most populous city, and Bobcaygeon, a small town in the Kawartha Lakes region of south-east

Ontario. This song also features a poetically rich text and therefore the lyrics are oftentimes vague and figurative. However, there are dominant themes that emerge from the song's lyrics.

The first theme follows a love story. The narrator describes the commute from Bobcaygeon, where he "saw the constellations/Reveal themselves one star at a time," to the city, where "the sky was dull and hypothetical/And falling one cloud at a time" (Downie 1999). After pondering the effects of "the Willie Nelson" and "the wine," the narrator also considers leaving his job: "I thought of maybe quitting, thought of leaving it behind" (Downie 1999). In the music video that accompanies this song, the narrator (played by Downie) is a police officer, and oftentimes in live performance Downie refers to "Bobcaygeon" as a "cop love song...One lives in the city, and the other lives in the country" (quoted in Smith 2013). This theme is further supported by the music video wherein Downie's police officer character returns from the city to a loved one in the country by the end of the video.

In the second section, the story shifts to events that took place in Toronto. The lyrics are as follows:

That night in Toronto
 With its checkerboard floors
 Riding on horseback,
 And keeping order restored,
 'Til the men they couldn't hang,
 Stepped to the mic and sang,
 And their voices rang
 With that Aryan twang
 (Downie 1999)

Here the lyrical narrative shifts from a typical love story to an event that suggests issues of racism, namely through the statement of "their voices rang/With that Aryan twang." It is likely that the setting for this section is an actual place in Toronto, the Horseshoe Tavern, as the iconic bar does have checkerboard floors (Mazerolle accessed 2018). Further, The Men They Couldn't

Hang is the name of a British band and one of their most popular songs, “The Ghosts of Cable Street,” is about a 1936 riot between anti-fascist groups and London’s Metropolitan Police, who were protecting a fascist march (Mazerolle accessed 2018). This connection between The Men They Couldn’t Hang and Toronto may also be an allusion to a number of riots that happened in Toronto. In 1933, the city fell victim to the Riot at Christie Pits (Dame “Bobcaygeon” accessed 2018). At an afternoon softball game at Christie Pits, a group of young Jewish men were attacked by a horde of Nazis from a Toronto gang called the Swastika-Club. Word of the confrontation spread quickly throughout the city, bringing additional fighters and onlookers to the crowd; as a result, the police in the area were overwhelmed and were unable to restore order until 2:30 the following morning (Dame “Bobcaygeon” accessed 2018). Toronto faced another episode of hate-induced violence in 1993 when members of the Neo-Nazi group the Heritage Front engaged in a bloody street fight with a protest group, the Anti-Racist Action (Dame “Bobcaygeon” accessed 2018). Once again, the Toronto police seemed relatively powerless and struggled to restore order. Though these references are not explicit in the lyrical text of “Bobcaygeon,” this bridge section works to connect the events of “That night in Toronto” with the sounds of peoples’ voices ringing “with that Aryan twang.” Through this allusion, The Tragically Hip bring attention to the hate and violence that sometimes occurs within Canada.

The connection to hate is emphasized through the corresponding music video. As the viewer hears this bridge section, a band takes stage to perform at the venue with checkerboard floors. The police officer narrator, in uniform and on horseback, observes the band from the back of the crowd. As the musicians perform, a protestor takes over the microphone and appears to be shouting angrily at the crowd. The protestor is forcibly removed from stage and he gives a Nazi salute as a riot breaks out in the audience, perhaps between fascist and anti-fascist protestors.

Further, when the rest of the band finally appears near the end of the music video, Rob Baker has “This machine kills fascists” written on his guitar. This is in reference to Woody Guthrie’s famous anti-fascist action in 1941, and the gesture expands upon the song’s allusion to hate, violence, and the fight against fascism in Canada.

In terms of the music, “Bobcaygeon” has an overall improvisatory and free-flowing feel. The vocal melody is very cellular. Throughout the entire song, there is a phrase where the melody ascends followed by a descending melodic phase. However, in the bridge section the pacing of these rising and falling phrases increases. These gestures become much more closely packed rhythmically and the background instrumentation also becomes more active in texture and movement, resulting in more drive and anticipation. In this sense, the bridge section is emphasized through this increased melodic rhythm and intensified instrumental movement and texture. Therefore, the events in this section are underlined and marked as important or significant by these sonic accentuations. The vocal melody reaches its highest note on “voices” and “Aryan” and both instances are marked with slight echo effects. This again provides a sonic underline marking the significance of “voices” and “Aryan” to the narrative.

Yet while there are these sonic emphases, the musical language in this song tends to take a secondary position. The band create another groove-based song, drawing on funk, country, rock, and gospel and they maintain a kind of jam-band sound throughout the song. There is some variety in terms of chord choices, but “Bobcaygeon” overall sustains a meditative quality. There are textural builds, particularly in the bridge section and the instrumental outro. However throughout the majority of the song, the music stays in a supporting role as the lyrics truly take the foreground.

The rural/urban split between Bobcaygeon and Toronto is emphasized as the narrator drives between the two throughout the song. The pastoral qualities of Bobcaygeon appear to offer a kind of refuge, as it offers an escape from the violence in Toronto as described in the song's bridge. This framing of the rural does indeed follow more standard iterations of Canadiana tropes, wherein the pastoral is celebrated over the urban.¹⁰ However, these pastoral, sanctuary-like qualities given to Bobcaygeon would not necessarily exist without the violence in Toronto. It is because the narrator works in the city, witnesses hatred, and experiences the riots that he feels safety in Bobcaygeon and is able to calmly see "the constellations reveal themselves one star at a time." In this sense, the rural in "Bobcaygeon" differs from the rural in "Wheat Kings." Whereas "Wheat kings and pretty things" continue to exist as indifferent to Milgaard's difficult experiences, the peaceful countryside qualities of Bobcaygeon exist *because* of the narrator's difficult experiences with hatred and violence in Toronto. In other words, while the refuge of the countryside in "Bobcaygeon" follows a standard Canadiana trope, this dominant trope cannot exist without acknowledging the violence in Toronto.

While the lyrics in "Bobcaygeon" may be rather vague, poetic, and not explicit, the song does provide a darker exploration of what can happen in Canadian cities. Through the reference to Bobcaygeon and Toronto, The Tragically Hip immediately create the connection between the lyrics and Canada. But the lyrics of "Bobcaygeon" do not necessarily celebrate Canadianness in referencing these place names. The lyrical narrative presented in the bridge is generally emphasized through the band's musical choices, and as such it stands out as important in relation to the rest of the song. This section provides a much more critical recollection of events in

¹⁰ For examples of celebrating Canadian rural life, and/or painting Canadian small towns as refuges, see "Runnin' Back to Saskatoon" by the Guess Who, "Helpless" by Neil Young, "Prairie Town" by Randy Bachman, and "Western Skies" by Blue Rodeo.

Canada and therefore these events are also marked as significant. As noted in introductions to “Bobcaygeon” in live performances, Downie contends “This one asks the question: evil in the open or evil just below the surface?” (quoted in Dame “Bobcaygeon” accessed 2018). These references to hate crimes and Nazi-propagated riots provide a depiction of Canadian towns and cities that perhaps, as Downie suggests, illustrate the evil that can occur in Canadian society. By alluding to the brutal violence that happens in Toronto, The Hip effectively create a more critical narrative of life in Canadian towns and cities.

The Tragically Hip and Their Construction of Canada

Though The Tragically Hip have a recognized, national status and they are very often associated with Canadian pride and nationalism, the band does not necessarily support patriotism. Lead singer Gord Downie was rather vocal about his criticisms of nationalism throughout the band’s career; his positions are not necessarily anti-Canadian, but they reflect an unease about the weakness of a unified nationhood (Duffett 2000, 9). These uneasy feelings about patriotism are reflected in the band’s performative and creative process, as bassist Gord Sinclair notes: “We’ve never consciously tried to elicit a patriotic response from our fans, nor have we tried to embody that in our lyrics” (quoted in *canoe.ca* 1996). The Hip do not willingly buy into a construction of a unified Canadian identity, and during their performances at national celebrations Downie has been known to use what Mark Duffett calls his “demented genius persona” to critique the entire nationalist project (Fast & Pegley 2006, 26; Duffett 2000, 8). When commenting on their 1994 Canada Day performance in Barrie, Ontario, Downie exclaimed, “Stupid day...Who are we kidding?” (quoted in Duffett 2000, 9). Playing in Vancouver, Downie said of his previous venue, “Barrie, Toronto. Ontario. You don’t want to go

there: Molson world” and as an over-excited fan was forcibly led off stage, Downie quipped “We’re under the iron curtain here in Molsonia” (quoted in Duffett 2000, 8). Here Downie’s criticisms connect to the corporatized version of national pride, created by Molson at this event. Yet this Molson-ized version of Canadianness aligns with many hegemonic constructions of the nation that have been discussed throughout this thesis: it presents Canadian nationalism as a singular, uncontroversial, corporate-backed collective feeling that ultimately excludes any dissenting voices (Duffett 2000, 9).

Through this persona, Downie frequently speaks a biting cynicism, but these critical observations continue offstage. Reflecting on that 1994 Canada Day performance, Downie suggested “Ultimately, I believe everything would have been way better if we’d done the whole thing on July 2nd – we could have celebrated the Canada of the self and not the Canada that is sold to us” (quoted in *canoe.ca* 1996). When collected together, Downie’s comments show he was not against the idea of the nation but felt disappointed by a premature and insincere celebration of unity (Duffett 2000, 9). In this sense, his words are an act of resistance towards a particular view of national identity.

The Hip replicate these skeptical sentiments on patriotic Canadianness in their lyrical narratives. Within The Tragically Hip’s lyrics, the band reframes common tropes of Canadianness into a dark and more nuanced viewpoint. They create a new construction of Canada that reflects their ideas on nationalism and patriotism, as Gord Downie suggests, “I love this country. I love *my idea* of this country” (quoted in Warner 2016a, emphasis added).

While The Hip use common tropes of Canadianness that reflect dominant and hegemonic notions of national identity, the ways in which they frame these tropes create much darker and nuanced narratives. Instead of creating a patriotic celebration of Canadians and hockey, The Hip

frame hockey with a story of the death and disappearance of a nationally-known athlete. The Canadian landscape is often highlighted for its wild and untamed beauty in a story that evokes national connectedness, yet The Hip place the beauty of the Canadian landscape in conversation with a story of a Canadian man who was wrongfully imprisoned for rape and murder for over two decades. Instead of celebrating Canadianness through referencing specific Canadian place names, The Hip frame these specific Canadian place names with events of Nazi-propagated hate and violence. Through their reframing of these tropes of Canadianness, The Tragically Hip are creating counternarratives to hegemonic Canadianness; they are providing an alternate reading of Canadian identity. Considering the band's popularity within Canada and their immense presence in Canadian popular culture, the band's counternarratives to hegemonic Canadianness are communicated to a large, national audience. In this sense, the band arguably has a large impact on the formation of a sense of national identity: The Tragically Hip are reshaping the constructions of Canadianness by offering a more critical perspective.

Conclusion The Legacy of The Tragically Hip

The Tragically Hip maintain an important status in Canadian culture. Since the announcement of Gord Downie's terminal brain cancer in 2016, the national attention to the band was significantly amplified. As previously mentioned, the presence of the band on CBC's media platforms considerably increased and The Hip became a staple in the Canadian public consciousness. On October 17, 2017, Gord Downie died at the age of 53 and again there was a surge of interest in Downie's artistic work, his life, and his legacy with The Hip. Public discussion was filled with stories of Downie and The Tragically Hip. Their position as 'Canada's band'—both in terms of their populist appeal and 'government-approved' quality—was truly strengthened across the nation. As a result, The Tragically Hip's songs and stories and Downie's philanthropic work were brought to the forefront.

Yet a reminder that The Tragically Hip have a tension in their musical output and in their status as 'Canada's band.' Considering one perspective, The Hip are authors of critical counternarratives of Canadianness. They do not celebrate hegemonic Canadianness, but rather they create constructions of Canada that recognize some of the issues in our society. However, they also truly represent hegemonic Canadianness both in terms of their own identities and in their sonic output. As such, there is this barrier that limits the effectiveness of the band's critical tone due to their reinforcement of dominant power dynamics.

This tension between their criticisms and their limitations did not go away with Gord Downie's diagnosis and subsequent death. Instead, more critical dialogue was brought to the forefront. On the one hand, their limiting factors have, in many ways, been acknowledged and rightly criticized. Yet on the other hand, the band's critical counternarratives—due to their unmarked identities and unmarked sound—may have reached listeners who might have not

otherwise questioned the celebratory nature of hegemonic Canadianness. Further, these criticisms of the band's shortcomings have led to fruitful conversation as to better and more effective means of moving forward with these kinds of critical efforts. This tension that I have been analyzing and trying to acknowledge throughout this thesis has created a space for dialogue on these kinds of power dynamics. There has been criticism and scrutiny of The Tragically Hip, but there is also credit being given for their efforts. In this way, The Tragically Hip's critical counternarratives combined with their embodiment and artistic representations of hegemonic Canadianness create a space for dialogue. There is an opening up of these power dynamics for discussion, review, and hopefully, change.

Remembering Gord Downie and The Tragically Hip

As 'Canada's band,' The Tragically Hip elicit meaningful and powerful responses, experiences, and connections from fans. *Maclean's* YouTube channel posted a video entitled "The Tragically Hip's last song rings out across Canada" and it showcases audiences from viewing parties across the nation watching the CBC livestream as part of the band's final show in Kingston, and features The Hip performing the final song, "Ahead by a Century."¹¹ The video starts in the Commodore Ballroom in Vancouver, BC, and as soon as the audience realizes the band is playing "Ahead by a Century," they erupt with screams and applause and start dancing. The video pans to crowds gathered in Bolton Street in Bobcaygeon, ON, the National Music Centre in Calgary, AB, Grand Parade in Halifax, NS, Horseshoe Tavern in Toronto, ON, and Springer Market Square in Kingston, ON. At all locations, there are fans dancing and singing without restraint. Aerial shots from Kingston show thousands and thousands of people

¹¹ The video can be viewed through *Maclean's* 2016

congregating to watch. At one point, a few audience members in Bobcaygeon dance with a Canadian flag wrapped around them and the crowd in Toronto sing so loudly that Downie's voice from the livestream is almost completely drowned out. Yet as the song progresses, the mood seems to shift. The singing continues but more somber and serious expressions appear throughout all of the crowds. There is a close-up of a man in Toronto fighting back tears and another sequence that focuses on a couple who stand embracing one another, eyes fixed on the livestream, both with sad, serious expressions as tears stream down their faces. The band have an obvious national impact, as evident in the CBC's decision to livestream and broadcast the show to Canadians across the nation. Yet further, fans feel profound experiences with the band that range from joyful dancing and singing to somber expressions and tears in a matter of six minutes. In these instances, the strong emotional connection between fans and The Hip is evident.

The influence of the band spreads further, into the political sphere. Many Canadian leaders praised The Hip for their artistic contributions to Canada and their commitment to promoting Canadianness. On August 10, 2016, Toronto Mayor John Tory proclaimed the day as "Tragically Hip Day" (Tory 2016). He explains further:

They told Canadian stories in a Canadian way. Their songs were rich with all kinds of references to our country and to small towns and Canadian things...I just want to say thank you for telling us our stories. You've been sort of the quintessentially Canadian band. You've told our stories the way we want to have them told. You haven't really sought to be big on the international scene. You've been big at home, very big with all of us. (quoted in Bowsher 2016)

This is one of many examples where the band received official praise and public celebration from Canadian leaders. Here, The Hip are thanked for "telling us our stories," for researching Canadianness and spreading that research through song. The band's importance is solidified

through the designation of “Tragically Hip Day” and their ‘official’ status is marked through Mayor Tory’s personal involvement in the dedication.

Since Gord Downie’s death, the amount of tributes, statements of thanks, and memorializations to Downie and his contributions with The Hip has skyrocketed. The town of Bobcaygeon had residents marching in a candlelight vigil to remember Downie (McKenna 2017). In the band’s hometown of Kingston, hundreds of people gathered to sign a book of condolences, while others held candles as music from the band played in the background (CBC News 2017). All in all, many, many fans across the nation mourned and celebrated the life of Gord Downie and his contributions with The Tragically Hip.¹²

Downie was also remembered in the Canadian sports world. Several NHL players, teams, and the league itself paid tribute to Downie through social media, praising The Hip’s popularity in the realm of professional hockey (ESPN.com news 2017). Moreover at the Air Canada Centre, The Toronto Maple Leafs honoured Downie before their game with a moment of silence (McLaughlin 2017). Some of The Hip’s most memorable songs were played in the locker rooms of both the Leafs and the Red Wings, and in honour of “Fifty-Mission Cap” Bill Barilko’s retired-jersey banner was suspended from the rafters throughout the game (McLaughlin 2017). Outside of hockey, a tribute to Downie and The Hip appeared at the 2018 Winter Olympic Games. Ice dancing champions Tessa Virtue and Scott Moir performed to The Tragically Hip’s “Long Time Running” during the figure skating gala event in Pyeongchang. Moir describes this decision as follows,

we worked a lot with our team and focusing on what it means to be Canadian and focusing on how proud it makes us. When I think about Gord and I think about The Hip and what they’ve been able to do, giving us, you know, the soundtrack to *being* Canadian

¹² For some more information about fans’ responses to Downie’s death see Crawford 2017, CBC News 2017, The Telegram 2017, Kamloops This Week 2017, and Toronto City News 2017.

almost. It's special for us that we get to skate to The Hip. (quoted in Toronto Star 2018, spoken emphasis in original)

As CBC's Olympic coverage notes, this performance sent "a distinctly Canadian message back home" (2018).

Canadian media also featured tributes to Downie and The Hip. Canadian radio stations greatly responded to Downie's death. Estimates suggest that airplay for The Tragically Hip's music on the day after his death increased by 1500% when compared to a regular day (Cross 2017). CBC Radio eschewed a large portion of its regular programming for a special Radio 2 broadcast. Hosted by Rich Terfry, *A Celebration of Gord Downie* "looks back at how The Tragically Hip frontman touched the lives of millions of Canadians through his unforgettable live performances, activism, and, most of all, through his music" (CBC Editorial Staff 2017). This remembrance was loud and clear, as "Ahead by a Century" was the most-played song on Canadian radio the day after Downie's death (Friend 2017). Most recently, the 2018 Juno Awards paid tribute to Downie in a montage of Canadian celebrities answering the question "How would you describe Gord Downie?"¹³ This video featured appearances by The Trailer Park Boys, Gordon Lightfoot, George Stroumboulopoulos, Rick Mercer, David Suzuki, Buffy Sainte Marie, Peter Mansbridge, Don Cherry and Ron MacLean, National Chief Perry Bellegarde, Sarah McLachlan, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, among many others. The descriptions range from "eternal," "prolific," "truth," and "dreamer," to "committed," "compassion," "Wicapi Omani,"¹⁴ "fearless," and "conscience." Overall, Canadian media played

¹³ The video can be viewed through CBC News 2018.

¹⁴ This is Lakota spirit name given to Downie in ceremony by National Chief Perry Bellegarde at the Assembly of First Nations gathering in December 2016. The name roughly translates to "Man who walks among the stars." For more information see Tasker 2016.

a huge role in broadcasting memorials for Downie across the nation and as journalist Lisa Yeung suggests, “Everyone, it seemed, loved Gord” (2018).

In addition to these responses across the nation, more official goodbyes took place from the Canadian government in remembrance of Downie and The Hip. Conservative Member of Parliament Tony Clement called on the government to consider a state funeral for the iconic singer, stating “I think he matters that much to Canadians” (quoted in Pedwell 2017). Several other MPs delivered statements paying tribute to Downie in the House of Commons and the day after his death, members stood united in a solemn minute of silence in honour of the “late, great Gord Downie” before the daily question period (Harris 2017).

Perhaps one of the most striking examples of this kind of ‘official’ tribute was by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. As previously mentioned, Trudeau is a fan of The Hip but his position as the leader of the nation gives substantial weight to his comments. In the official “Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada on the death of Gord Downie,” he states:

For almost five decades, Gord Downie uncovered and told the stories of Canada. He was the frontman of one of Canada’s most iconic bands, a rock star, artist, and poet whose evocative lyrics came to define a country...Our identity and culture are richer because of his music, which was always raw and honest (2017b)

Trudeau also gave an official press conference at Parliament to discuss the national impact of Downie’s death. He said:

We lost one of the very best of us this morning...Our buddy Gord, who loved this country with everything he had. And not just loved it in a nebulous, ‘oh I love Canada’ kind of way. He loved every hidden corner, every story, every aspect of this country that he celebrated his whole life... We are less of a country without Gord Downie in it. And we all knew it was coming, but we hoped it wasn’t. [starts to cry] And, I thought I was going to make it through this, but I’m not. It hurts. (quoted in ET Canada 2017)

While Trudeau is a fan of Downie and The Hip, this example shows an official response from the Prime Minister of the country. He addresses Downie's death as an event of national importance and as a deep loss for all Canadians.

Remaining Issues with "Canada's Band"

But while there have been all of these celebrations and remembrances of Downie and his legacy with The Tragically Hip, the issue of The Hip as 'Canada's band' still remains contentious. Downie and the band's centrality to Canadian identity perpetuates a masculinist, white, English-speaking, central Canadian notion of Canadianness (Fast & Pegley 2006, 27). Artist K-os speaks to this kind of issue in an interview with CBC's *q*, after performing his rendition of The Hip's "Ahead by a Century." The interviewer asks "I read in an interview that you mentioned that you grew up in Whitby, ON and I read in the interview that you said 'this helped me understand white Canada.' This band. So talk to me about that." (quoted in *q* 2016). K-os appears shocked that his previous statement is being brought up in the context of a celebration of The Hip. He says things like "uh...[laughs] oh wow, I said that?" but then goes on to explain via an anecdote involving his high school crush and The Tragically Hip's music:

The song "Courage" by The Tragically Hip. I came home from university and we all met at...some bar...in Whitby. And there's this girl Heather there that I loved in high school. She never paid me any attention... And we were sitting there...and that song came on. And she came over to me and said 'you know what? I just want to let you know that I really, actually did like you in high school...' And you know as cliché as it sounds, this song is called Courage. I think that song was played every time I went to a bar...It was always played. It's a part of your culture, but at the same time, people, I think they subversively, like, react to it. Like they know it's a part of their culture without even trying or thinking. And I think that's what made me—that's what I understood about The Hip the most, is that it's written in people's DNA, it's written in the fabric of what they do. And they respond to it without even knowing it... You know, being the one black guy in that reality, I always took notes on that and how music would affect people. So that's what I meant by that I think. It made me understand how deep people were affected by the music without even thinking about it. (quoted in *q* 2016)

Even though k-os speaks to a kind of universality—The Hip are “written in people’s DNA”—he does not feel this same sense of connectedness. Though k-os is also a Canadian himself, he asserts that “it’s part of *their* culture...it’s written in the fabric of what *they* do. And *they* respond.” He concludes his anecdote by affirming his difference in his position with his friends in Whitby, that he was “the one black guy in that reality,” thereby implicitly emphasizing the whiteness in *their* culture, in The Tragically Hip.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau also briefly addressed the issues with The Tragically Hip as ‘Canada’s band.’ In the official press conference after Downie’s death, he describes a disconnect between French-speaking Canadians, particularly Quebecois, and Gord Downie. Speaking in French he stated, “My Quebecois friends who did not know Gord as well as other Canadians, but who loved him just as much” (quoted in ET Canada 2017).¹⁵ While the latter half of this statement aims to unify all Canadians’ love for Downie, the first half acknowledges a linguistic divide in The Hip’s fanbase. The Tragically Hip’s popularity in French Canada has never really reached the immense height that they have in English Canada (Fast & Pegley 2006, 21-22). In this sense, Trudeau’s acknowledgment that Downie was less well-known among Quebecois is telling of The Hip’s less-than-representative status as ‘Canada’s band.’

There have also been some critical responses to Gord Downie’s advocacy for issues facing Indigenous peoples. Much of this criticism came to mainstream attention after Downie received the Order of Canada on the same day as twenty-nine other people who were being recognized for their “outstanding leadership on Indigenous issues.” (CBC Radio 2017). Out of many of these important leaders, Downie was certainly the person who garnered the most media

¹⁵ The original statement was “Mes amis Québécois qui ont moins bien connu Gord que les autres Canadiens, mais qui l’aimaient autant aussi.”

coverage (CBC Radio 2017). Clayton Thomas-Müller, a member of the Mathias Colomb Cree Nation, says at a time of reconciliation the most visible face in the discourse around residential schools and reconciliation should not have been a white rock star:

There are moments when [non-Indigenous advocates] should step back and push forward the living survivors of Canada's colonial legacy to be the spokespersons, to get the awards, to get the recognition... They don't need it... There's a long history in Hollywood and the entertainment industry of non-native allies leveraging their stardom. (quoted in CBC Radio 2017)

Thomas-Müller adds to this criticism that Indigenous voices should be able to tell their own stories with the ear of the mainstream actively listening: “If I’ve learned one thing as an activist it’s that we don’t need white people to translate our narrative to the mainstream... The mainstream can take up our narrative without having a non-native intermediary to translate for us” (quoted in CBC Radio 2017). In this sense, Downie’s position as an ally presents a barrier wherein his celebrity potentially makes it more difficult to actively hear the perspectives of Indigenous voices.

In all of these instances, there is a tension between Gord Downie and The Tragically Hip as ‘Canada’s band’ and the multifaceted nation they are supposed to represent. On the one hand, they are ‘Canada’s band’; they are approved by the government, media, and much of Canadian society as musical representatives of this country. They also succeeded in securing a legacy wherein the highest official of the nation publicly declares that “Canada’s identity & culture are richer for Gord Downie’s work” (Trudeau 2017c). Yet like their musical identity, their actual representation of the nation of Canada is rather singular. The Hip’s sound is one that is steeped in sameness and perpetuates an unmarked, Nice Guy identity. K-os’ anecdote, that describes The Tragically Hip as a source of insight into white Canadian culture, along with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s acknowledgement of the linguistic barriers in the Canada that The Hip

represent, and Thomas-Müller's critical appraisal of Downie's role to speak to issues facing Indigenous peoples – all of these examples highlight the limiting factors which constrain The Tragically Hip's ability to function as 'Canada's band.' They are the Nice Guys who acknowledge and are sympathetic to many of the issues in Canadian society. But the generic quality of The Tragically Hip allows for unmarkedness to thrive, and it maintains the idea that unmarked Canadian identity *is* Canadian identity.

Moving Towards Critical Counternarratives

Although this position of The Tragically Hip as 'Canada's band' is particularly problematic, there have been significant discussions in Canadian society that correlate with some of the stories The Hip tell through their songs. The Tragically Hip's counternarratives to hegemonic Canadianness have gained entry into public discourse, not only through the songs themselves but also through critical engagement with Downie's lyrics. Stephen Dame founded www.hipmuseum.com which functions as an extensive online catalogue of the entirety of The Tragically Hip's output. He recounts: "I found that deeper understanding of the lyrics greatly added to my enjoyment of the music. This is something I wanted to share" ("Mission Statement" accessed 2018). His catalogue notes all of the references within The Hip's lyrics and provides information "about the people, places and things mentioned in the music or credited with its inspiration" (Dame "Mission Statement" accessed 2018). The archive allows for fans to explore the real-world inspirations for many of The Tragically Hip's songs. His online museum has had significant traction and he welcomes input, information, and differing opinions from visitors to the site and oftentimes gives them voice on the various webpages (Dame "Mission Statement"

accessed 2018).¹⁶ As a result, Dame's archive allows for critical dialogue concerning The Tragically Hip and provides a platform where the public have the opportunity to engage with many of the darker elements of Canadian history and Canadian society as they appear in The Tragically Hip's lyrics.

CBC Music created a video series entitled "Made in Canada: Soundtrack of a Nation" that also aims to allow viewers to engage with stories in Canadian music. The Tragically Hip's song "Wheat Kings" was the first song to be featured in this series. The video details the story of David Milgaard's case and also describes the band's personal connection to Milgaard.¹⁷ The other videos follow a similar trend of telling the stories behind these songs in order to show a more nuanced picture of Canadianness. The video for Joni Mitchell's "Little Green" describes the singer's personal struggle as a young single mother without the means to care for her daughter.¹⁸ A Tribe Called Red's "Electric Pow Wow Drum" tells the story of the group's unique sound and how they use their music for critical conversations about Indigeneity, showing that "you don't need to separate the politics from the party."¹⁹ Michie Mee's "Jamaican Funk – Canadian Style" shows how the young MC blended dance hall, reggae, and contemporary hip hop, but the video also highlights the struggles she faced due to her young age, her realizations that hip hop was a "boys club," and the barriers she faced in the United States where the belief was that "Canadians don't rap."²⁰ Leonard Cohen's "Suzanne" describes the real-life story of the woman from Montreal for whom the song is named and the difficult negotiations that she and

¹⁶ CBC Music published an online article (Warner 2016b) that brought awareness of Dame and his website. The piece features an interview with Dame about his relationship with The Hip and describes his process of creating and maintaining this online museum. Not only does this publication serve as active national promotion for Dame's website, but in the interview, Dame also speaks to the levels of outreach of his website. Speaking about the steady flow of emails he receives in relation to hipmuseum.com, Dame said "it's been pretty consistent for 11 years now" (quoted in Warner 2016b).

¹⁷ The video can be viewed through CBC Music 2017a.

¹⁸ The video can be viewed through CBC Music 2017b.

¹⁹ The video can be viewed through CBC Music 2017c.

²⁰ The video can be viewed through CBC Music 2017d.

Cohen navigated between romantic love and deep friendship.²¹ In The Tragically Hip song that opened the series, and in all of the other videos, the viewer is encouraged to recognize the difficult terrain that exists in Canadian society.

Although there are valid criticisms to be made of Downie's position as an ally to Indigenous communities, his final call to action has had some resonance with people who unfortunately might not have otherwise listened to the conversation. As one writer puts it, Downie was "bringing Indigenous issues into the consciousness of 'white Canada'" (Burger 2017). Downie was advocating for all Canadians to recognize and address the systemic horrors that Indigenous peoples have faced and continue to face. In his own words, he said "Canada is not Canada. We are not the country we think we are" (quoted in Burger 2017). Through his music and activism, many of the tenets outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada are receiving public discussion. Additionally, there does appear to be concrete change taking place as a result of these efforts. Downie's solo album *The Secret Path* tells the story of the eleven-year-old Anishinaabe boy Chanie Wenjack who died while trying to walk 600 kilometers to get home after escaping a residential school. This project also established "The Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund" which aims to "aid our collective reconciliation journey through a combination of awareness, education and action" (The Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund 2018).²² Prime Minister Justin Trudeau noted his own encouragement from Downie's actions:

²¹ The video can be viewed through CBC Music 2017e.

²² Downie does have a history of philanthropic work, particularly in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, previous to his initiatives with *The Secret Path*. He was a board member of Lake Ontario Waterkeeper and was described as "a tireless supporter and Trustee for Lake Ontario beginning around 2006" (Waterkeeper, accessed 2018). Further in 2012, The Tragically Hip were invited by Joseph Boyden to play and participate at The Great Moon Gathering, an annual educational conference in various communities along Northern Ontario's James Bay Coast (Boyden and Boyden 2012). The conference focuses on youth learning and combining Cree education with the contemporary world (Boyden and Boyden 2012). Downie collaborated with a local music group, Northern Revolution, and The Hip's song "Goodnight Attawapiskat" resulted from this trip (Woods 2016).

He wanted to make it better. He knew as great as we were, we need to be better than we are, and that's why his last years he was devoted to Chanie Wenjack and to reconciliation. This is something that I've certainly drawn inspiration and strength from. (quoted in ET Canada 2017)

It appears that this personal inspiration led to concrete changes, as in the release of the 2018 federal budget this fund is specifically addressed. Under the "Reconciliation" chapter and under the section "Achieving Better Results for Indigenous Peoples," the heading "Supporting the Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund" is listed. The description states:

The Fund supports tangible projects that encourage cross-cultural dialogue and awareness among Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and that create places and spaces dedicated to reconciliation...To support these reconciliation initiatives across Canada, Budget 2018 proposes to provide \$5 million in 2018-19 to support the Gord Downie and Chanie Wenjack Fund. (Government of Canada 2018)

In this sense, there appears to be evidence that this kind of widespread discourse is happening and there is space in the federal budget to facilitate and support the continuation of this process towards reconciliation.

However, it is important to remember that Downie is not the first to make this kind of call to action. There is a long legacy of activists, particularly Indigenous activists, who have been consistently fighting for these issues for many, many years. Downie has been heralded as a strong ally by many Indigenous leaders and his attempt to bring awareness to the impact of residential schools to his fans has been praised (Tasker 2016). Yet criticisms of Downie's actions as an ally to Indigenous peoples have raised important discussions of what makes a good ally: working closely *with* communities and letting *them* speak to the issues, but providing them a platform to do so. Allies are important for making voices heard on a large platform for regular citizens and also for the political sphere to listen and make change. But allies should recognize when it is necessary to step back from the limelight in order to make space for Indigenous voices

(Thomas-Müller, quoted in CBC Radio 2017). Or more simply, as Chantelle Bryson puts it, they need to know when it is time to “pass the mic and get out of the way” (quoted in Raynard 2018).

Criticisms of Downie’s actions as an ally have also resulted in more conversation about the kinds of stories told in the process of truth and reconciliation. Downie’s *Secret Path* has received particular criticisms in part because, as Susan Fast emphasizes, “it is a reflection crafted from a settler’s point of view” (2017). As Anishinaabe writer Hayden King notes, the almost exclusive focus on pain risks a “chronic re-victimization that accompanies most discussions of residential schools” (2016). Further, Sean Carleton notes that Downie’s focus on the individual child results in the exclusion of the state’s role in facilitating “colonial dispossession and capitalist accumulation” (2016). These criticisms lead to more discussion, awareness, and education as to how Canada should move forward with this process. As Thomas-Müller suggests, there should be more stories about people who persevered in spite of the hardship they faced rather than just tragic ones like Wenjack; he says we should “lift up the stories of living survivors...[and] push those people forward to stand on the microphone with [Downie and allies] standing behind them smiling. And let them tell their story” (CBC Radio 2017).

The Tragically Hip and Canada as “a Work in Progress”

As with their music and lyrics, the legacy of Gord Downie and The Tragically Hip contains two seemingly conflicting realities. On the one hand, they are lauded and celebrated as ‘Canada’s band’ and they have done significant work to bring the darker and more nuanced stories of Canadianness to the forefront through their lyrics. Downie, especially, has fought to bring discourses of truth and reconciliation into the mainstream. These critical counternarratives of Canadianness calls for a rewriting of what is commonly thought of ‘Canadian,’ and in doing

so there is a gesture made towards more discussion and more recognition of the negotiations of belonging inherent in Canadianness. Overall, it appears that they have been successful with these efforts. The Hip's songs and stories are being explored and examined through a variety of public domains, and Downie's efforts with *Secret Path* received substantial financial support from the federal government.

Yet on the other hand, there are some limitations as to the band's abilities to effectively advocate critical counternarratives to hegemonic Canadianness. Their musical sound presents a sonic barrier in that they perpetuate many of the musical qualities that reinforce hegemonic Canadianness. The Tragically Hip themselves, in their own identities, also truly represent unmarkedness and the dominant Canadian identity. These limitations have not gone unnoticed. As previously discussed, the racial and linguistic divides which are obscured in descriptions of The Hip as 'Canada's band' have been brought to national attention by the CBC and the Prime Minister. Further, many critical discussions continue to take place in the academic, public, and governmental spheres as to Downie's role as an ally to Indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, these considerations do present an opportunity to learn from these mistakes and do better as Canada continues to move towards truth and reconciliation.

The Tragically Hip therefore occupy a unique space in Canadian culture where they both challenge and uphold hegemonic constructions of Canadianness. Through a balance between The Hip's critical counternarratives and a recognition of these limiting factors, there is the opportunity to move towards eliciting concrete changes that address these deep barriers of belonging and identity in Canada. In this sense, music has the ability to shape history, sway collective memory, and influence what we think of the nation. Musicians can shape the discourse of national identity through the stories they tell in music. In the case of The Tragically Hip, their

career shows that iconic popular musicians can shape, influence, and change the perspective of what we think of Canada: to not only celebrate the nation, but also discuss critical issues that must be recognized and addressed. This recognition and discussion of important issues, combined with the concerns surrounding The Hip's more singular construction of Canadianness relate to much of the discourse of where Canada was in 2017. As Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated on Canada Day, in celebration of the nation's 150th anniversary of Confederation,

as we trace our history, we know that our record is far from perfect...As a society, we must acknowledge and apologize for past wrongs, and chart a path forward—one that promises a bright future for all Canadians...Canada 150 gives us reason to reflect, not only on our success, but also on our remaining challenges. (2017a)

In this sense, The Tragically Hip's legacy as 'Canada's band' shows a kind of consensus that Canada is indeed "a work in progress" (Justin Trudeau, quoted in Zimonjic 2017).

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