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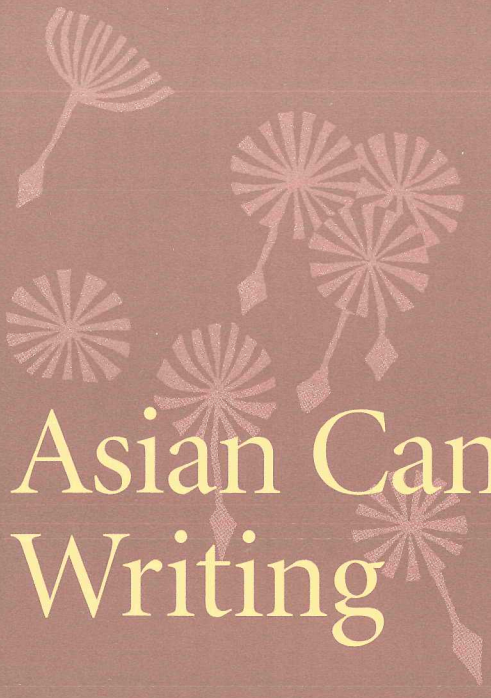

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Canadian Literature, a peer-reviewed journal, welcomes submissions of articles, interviews, and other commentaries relating to writers and writing in Canada, and of previously unpublished poems by Canadian writers. The journal does not publish fiction.

Articles of approximately 25 pages should be submitted in triplicate, with the author's name deleted from 2 copies, and addressed to The Editor, *Canadian Literature*, #167-1855 West Mall, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 1Z2. Submissions must be accompanied by a self-addressed return envelope, either with Canadian stamps or accompanied by International Postal Reply Coupons. Submissions without SASE cannot be returned.

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Editorial

Asian North America in Transit

Glenn Deer

me and the Yano brothers
three asians
in a '57 ford-niagara-
not-so-flashy-model-blue

but we struck out
like the morning sun

JIM WONG-CHU, from "Merritt B.C. Revisited 1965" (Lee 19)

In Sau-ling Cynthia Wong's *Reading Asian American Literature* the concept of mobility in Asian American writing is used to highlight the ways in which Americans of Asian descent have not been permitted to travel the literal and symbolic landscapes with the same freedom as the caucasian mainstream. For the latter "horizontal movement across the North American continent regularly connotes independence, freedom, an opportunity for individual actualization and/or societal renewal—in short Extravagance." For Asian Americans, mobility is "usually associated with subjugation, coercion, impossibility of fulfillment for self or community—in short, Necessity" (121). During the late summer and fall of 1999, the mobility of overseas "Asians" has certainly been a preoccupation of the mass media: four boatloads of illegal Fujian migrants have arrived along the BC coast at various times during August and September. This Fujian mobility—certainly lacking the amenities of extravagance and bearing the determination of a grim necessity—is intertwined in a global movement of people that bears a complex and often contradictory relationship to the immigration policies of Canada and the United States where Asian investments and expertise

have been both courted and feared. Asians in North America, whether fresh off the rusty boat of a snakehead (a smuggler of people) or a fourth-generation descendant of Asian Canadian pioneers, continue to be interpellated as stereotypical and simplified *Others* by an historical narrative that includes acts of exclusion, internment, disenfranchisement, and discriminatory taxation.

An important scholarly contribution to the exploration of inter-ethnic relations and policy options is a work published by the Institute of Asian Research at the University of British Columbia, *The Silent Debate: Asian Immigration and Racism in Canada*, edited by Eleanor Laquian, Aprodicio Laquian, and Terry McGee. Comprised of twenty papers originally presented at a 1997 Vancouver Conference on Racism and Immigration, this work gathers together research by geographers, sociologists, political scientists, economists, and immigration specialists. Such a work tries to open up what is perceived as a Canadian "reticence"(21) in discussing matters of race at the policy level. Certainly, however, the recent 1999 discourse has been anything but reticent on the issue of the Fujian boat migrants.

As Lisa Lowe argues in *Immigrant Acts* in a statement that is meant to apply to the United States but serves especially well for the present Canadian situation, "The presence of Asia and Asian peoples that currently impinges on the national consciousness sustains the figuration of the Asian immigrant as a transgressive and corrupting 'foreignness' and continues to make 'Asians' an object of the law, the political sphere, as well as national culture"(19).

▪

My personal understanding of the politics of immigrant mobility is informed by the stories of my own parents' maritime and racial crossings in our mixed-race family: one side of the family epic has been my mother's journey from Berlin in 1951, via a ship boarded at Bremen, and a train that took her on a classic Westering journey from Halifax, across the Shield, and to Saskatchewan. My father's half of the family journey began on a ship named the SS Tyndareus, a Pacific voyage which took him as a young boy from the Hoi Ping region of China to Victoria. When he arrived on the 29th of October in 1921, he paid a $500 Head Tax fee. Over twenty years later, after working to pay back his debt and criss-crossing the continent from British Columbia to Quebec, and journeying back to China several times, he would meet my mother in a divided town—not Berlin, though we did revisit my mother's family in that complicated city twice—but Lloydminster, a city straddling the border of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

My mother would recount these stories of mobility as if her meeting with my father was fated, a romantic necessity but also a subversive extravagance—the danger and the thrill of crossing territories and race lines, blonde Europe coupled with dark Asia somewhere in the wheatfields in a no-man's land between Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Who were we, my sister and I, and the Eurasian cousins from North Edmonton, too Asian-eyed and dark to "pass" and yet comfortable with hearing the patter of Chinese or German—though we spoke only English in our family—as the visiting paper Uncles or German travellers dropped by for noodles or strudel? Were we Chinese? German? "Simply Canadian" would not answer the curiosity of those who asked, and the sophisticated balance of the term "Eurasian" was not yet on the horizon of our speech, nor was the hyphenated ethnic tag of "Asian-Canadian," a product of early eighties multiculturalism. Balance was certainly not offered by the occasional jerks in our working-class neighborhoods who called us "Chinks" or "Chinamen"—there were few Asians in the Northwest Edmonton neighborhood where I grew up—and I remember angrily covering a Junior High student council poster with outlines of "Black-Power" fists to counter the racist "Chink!" that had been anonymously scrawled on some of my campaign posters. "Fuck 'em," I thought. "I will get through this." Political mobility won out in this case, and I became the student council vice-president, but it was another lesson in the undercurrent of anti-Asian sentiment that often lies beneath the civil exterior of Canadian life.

▪

During the more innocent years of the early sixties, my father would take us to the Edmonton restaurant where he worked as a cook, *The Seven Seas.* I remember how the Jasper Avenue cement would be wet with spring rain, and the water reflected the lights of taxis and buses. The spray that arched from the tires of the passing traffic embodied the romance of a movement through space, a cutting through waves, a movement through urban space: step into the cab or bus and you could go anywhere, uptown to the Seven Seas or down further to Chinatown. No thoughts here of necessity, just pure mobility.

Above the Seven Seas entrance, the neon outlines of masted sailing ships graced the marble-tiled façade, mercantile ships of colonial power—pirate ships, I used to think, the ships of raiders, buccaneers.

Inside the "Seas" were an animated chorus of voices and the aroma of good food, and for over twenty-years it was a popular spot for formal banquets

and receptions. I remember a conversation that my mother had with someone after leaving the restaurant: a Chinese businessman had wanted to buy a house in West Edmonton but the locals were opposed to the presence of an Asian in their genteel neighbourhood. The businessman bought anyways, tore down the older house and built one bigger and finer than the others. My mother, a European, always told this story with great relish and pride, taking the side of the ambitious Asians. This was in 1964.

▪

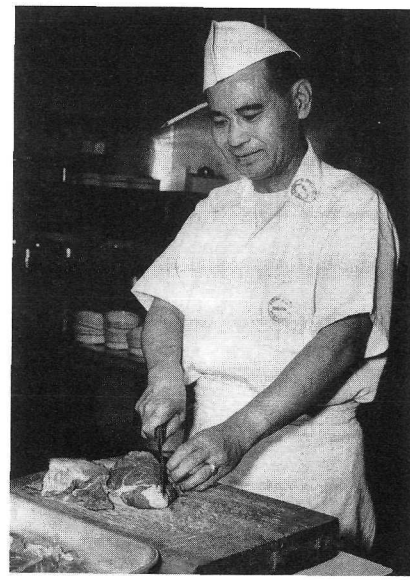
The relatively upscale *Seven Seas* was not in Edmonton's Chinatown but west on Jasper Avenue. The old Chinatown of the fifties and sixties was further east, on 97th Street, a two block strip of restaurants and shops across from the farmer's market, with popular eateries like *The New World* and *The Lychee Gardens.* Two blocks away stood the old Dreamland Theater where, in the 60s, they would show reruns of Chaplin films or provide a stage for Chinese dancers. A stone's throw away further north was the misery of skid row, punctuated by the absurdly named brick flophouse, *The Ritz Hotel.* A sad place for familyless bachelor Chinamen.

▪

"The Head Tax wasn't fair" he always said. "They only made the Chinese pay it."

▪

Many years later I am doing research in the Provincial Archives in Edmonton. I find a photograph of the 1950s clientele at the Seven Seas



Restaurant. Men and women—all caucasian—dressed in the early fifties film-noir style: pointed lapels on their pin-striped suit jackets, women, some with pill-box hats and cigarettes, imitating Lauren Bacall. The only Asian in the photograph is a waiter in a white jacket who is carrying a tray of food, his back to the camera. Yet another photograph is a surprise and a joy: one of my "uncles," dressed in his cook's linens, his muscular fingers wielding a knife at a thick wooden chopping block, trimming rectangular pieces of steak. The Asian face has been restored in the dignified work of the kitchen, and I feel almost relieved by the anonymity of the waiter in the previous shot: Asian necessities, caucasian extravagance.

▪

A front page headline in *The National Post*, September 11, 1999:

> 3500 migrants slipped into B.C. unnoticed: US. (Hume)

And in another column in the same issue:

> Canada has captured yet another ship trying to sneak Chinese migrants ashore in British Columbia in what immigration officials now describe as the largest smuggling operation the country has ever seen. (Hasselback)

■

On the front page of *The Vancouver Sun* on September 9, 1999 a profile was presented of Adrienne Clarkson, Canada's newly appointed Governor General. Clarkson has been a popular television journalist and was a former agent-general for the province of Ontario in Paris from 1982-87, but much attention in the September media coverage was given to her Asian background—her parents came to Canada in 1942 as refugees from Hong Kong. In *The Vancouver Sun*, her picture is juxtaposed against the headline, *Navy tracks fifth suspect ship.*

What is the connection between Clarkson and the media coverage of the ship and the illegal migrants? As a well-known broadcast personality and small "l" liberal, Clarkson's profile in the *Sun* article might be construed as a multicultural sign of Canada's diversity and of the social mobility that is fostered by our society. This was certainly the spin put on the appointment by our Prime Minister:

> The first member of a visible minority and the first immigrant to be picked for the job, she is also only the second woman to hold the vice-regal post as well as the first person in 20 years to come from outside the ranks of politicians. Announcing the appointment Wednesday of Canada's 26th governor-general, Chretien said his choice of Clarkson is 'a reflection of the diversity and inclusiveness of our society and an indication of how our country has matured over the years.' (Greenaway)

The article, which quotes terms of praise from the historian Michael Bliss as well as the Prime Minister, then shifts to a description of how "Clarkson was born in Hong Kong in 1939 but her family fled to Canada as refugees during the Second World War three years later."

The setting of the Clarkson story beside the illegal migrant story could be interpreted in various ways, but both speak to the quality of the migrant story: one is a story of meritorious claims and achievements, while the other is one of criminal smuggling, military alert, and a fourth undetected "ghost ship." Yet if Clarkson is implicitly held up as the model refugee migrant, the fully assimilated Canadian, the language also subtly embeds her in the category of the Other, the "new" Canadian. And why? Did Adrienne have a choice when she came at the age of three? Would her immigrant status have

been worthy of comment if she had arrived from London or Dublin at the age of two? An explicit connection between Clarkson and the migrant boat people is created in another column in *The National Post* by Rosemary Sexton. She praises Clarkson as a politician's dream, "ethnic, intelligent, bilingual," but then concludes by emphasizing that there are "several ironies" in this appointment: "One is that this extraordinarily accomplished former Hong Kong refugee is taking on one of the highest offices of the land, albeit a ceremonial one, at the same time as hordes of Chinese refugees try to enter this country illegally." While the final tone of Sexton generally praises Clarkson, the constant identification of the governor general with a strained refugee status shows how people of visible Asian descent cannot escape a label that makes them less Canadian than their caucasian counterparts. The Asian label is not one that Clarkson went seeking—it was applied to her in order to promote the image of Canadian social inclusiveness: however, the label both professes the mobility of the individual while limiting it by implying she is somehow less Canadian because of her refugee past.

▪

The illegal Fujian migrants have now come to be known as the "Boat People" (haven't we seen this one before?) and they are said to be New-York bound. New York City has one of the largest urban concentrations of people with Asian ancestry in North America. Long before the Fujian ships were tracked off the west coast of Vancouver Island in the summer and fall of 1999, as Jan Lin reminds us in his recent *Reconstructing Chinatown: Ethnic Enclave, Global Change*, "a rusting, unregistered freighter carrying some three hundred smuggled passengers, called the *Golden Venture*" ran aground on the beach in Queens on Rockaway Beach on June 6, 1993. But while New York is often the destination of choice for Asian migrants, other ethnic groups—in even greater numbers—still try to make it there (to echo Sinatra) rather than anywhere else: "An analysis conducted in September 1993 by the New York Department of City Planning, however, revealed that Chinese were thirteenth on a list of the largest illegal alien groups in New York City, with Ecuadoreans, Italians, and Polish [sic] topping the list"(29).

It should be no surprise that New York is the idealized goal of migrant peoples. On the cover of an anthology of personal memoir and literary essays edited by Garrett Hongo, *Under Western Eyes*, there is an amazing black-and-white photograph of a woman dressed in a traditional silk Chinese dress while standing at a busy street corner. Apparently in Manhattan's

Chinatown, she holds a copy of *The New York Times* under one arm while smiling and holding up a sheathed martial arts sword in the other, as if to hail a cab. As ironic counterpoints to this woman warrior, a painted cutout model of the Statue of Liberty stands across from her, the torch of liberation held high and the dates of the Declaration of Independence etched on the scroll in her other hand. Two figures of liberation and mobility thus defiantly stand in a zone marked by a traffic sign that declares "No Standing at Any Time." Yet, as one of my students pointed out to me, all of these figures are, in the implied pun in the title, "underwesternized."

New York, the Statue of Liberty, and the promise of the new order? (And of Tiananmen Square?) The eight chapters of Jan Lin's *Reconstructing Chinatown* trace the history of New York's Chinatown by reviewing traditional and contemporary theories of assimilation, human ecology, and the urban sociology of class transformation. At the leading edge of these theories is Lin's analysis of Chinatown as both a community that can sustain the new immigrant by offering employment and support, and an economic enclave that exploits the labouring classes for the benefit of the managerial classes. New York and other "command centers" of global capitalism (13) create polarized economic streams because "postindustrial global cities require not only a corps of highly skilled and educated managers and administrators but also a phalanx of low-skilled and low-paid clerical staff who are often recent immigrants"(14). As a graphic illustration of the "two-circuit" economy of Chinatown, Lin provides a photograph of a Chinatown street scene where, in the foreground, a produce vendor displays his wares in front of the polished steel columns and glass and stone front doors of the Bank of East Asia. In well-researched forays into the urban economy and politics of New York's Chinatown, Lin uses ethnographic sketches of Chinatown housing and of employment conditions in the sweatshop zones of the garment industry. He analyzes the impact of overseas Chinese investment capital, and the consequences of the development of satellite communities in transferring capital from the centralized enclave.

A critique of the armchair voyeurism that constructs Chinatown as a place of mysterious vice, "tourist spectacle, or enigmatic area" is also presented in the penultimate chapter where Lin critically examines the history of exploitive and voyeuristic tours of Chinatown and how such Orientalist discourses have been recirculated in both lowbrow movies (*The Mysterious Dr. Fu Manchu, Charlie Chan*) and more pretentiously crafted films such as

Polanski's *Chinatown* and Cimino's more controversial *Year of the Dragon.* Throughout this book, Jan Lin pulls together urban sociology, studies of global capital, and intelligent analyses of the cultural perpetuation of stereotypes. However, at the end we only get a brief glimpse of the kinds of counter-discourses and art works that have been produced by the Asian Americans of New York City. Lin, because of his deliberate focus on social and economic patterns pays, only brief attention to the symbolic economy that has been affected by Asian writers from New York City.

Fortunately, to fill this gap, we have *The NuyorAsian Anthology: Asian American Writings About New York City.* This hefty 472 page volume of poetry, fiction, and artwork is edited by Bino A. Realuyo, Rahna Reiko Rizzuto, and Kendal Henry and features lively work by 59 writers and 11 visual artists who write out of or about New York City from an Asian American perspective. The vast coverage of the anthology, published by Temple University Press for the Asian American Writers' Workshop, makes this work a celebratory gathering of a pan-Asian coalition of writers. Represented here are writers with connections to the Philippines, China, Korea, India, Japan, and Malaysia, writers who are queer and hetero, classic and contemporary, high modernists and street jammin' slammin' poets. The energetic range of New York is represented from the dark nostalgia of Pico Iyer's bladerunning cyberpunk images of the stygian smoke in "A City in Black and White" to the warm romance of Eileen Tabios's "Staten Island Ferry Poem." A frank conversation between Jessica Hagedorn and Kimiko Hahn cuts through aesthetic abstractions and reveals the pragmatics of the writing process in bluntly humourous fashion (see 349). The erotics and racialized politics of sex in the excerpt from Mei Ng's *Eating Chinese Food Naked* is juxtaposed to the hybrid blending of Hispanic and Indian culture in the Manhattan story of "Liquid Seasons" by Sunaina Maira, co-editor of the South Asian anthology, *Contours of the Heart* (1997).

Works like *The NuyorAsian Anthology* undertake important political work in building coalitions between diverse groups and in providing exposure for a wide range of authors and artists. The Asian American Writers' Workshop has been especially ambitious in this regard, having published important anthologies of drama and poetry, and group-specific works such as *Contours of the Heart: South Asians Map North America* (edited by Sunaina Maira and Rajini Srikanth) and *Flippin': Filipinos on America* (edited by Luis Francia and Eric Gamalinda). In Canada the Asian Canadian Writers'

Workshop has played a similar role, under the leadership of Jim Wong-Chu and the 1998-1999 editorial vision of Madeleine Thien's guidance of *Rice Paper*. Wong-Chu has organized hundreds of readings sponsored by the ACWW during the annual May Asian Heritage Month in Vancouver and has provided grassroots support for both emerging and established writers.

▪

"Is there a distinctive Asian American creative sensibility?" This is a central question posed in Amy Ling's biocritical reference work and anthology, *Yellow Light: The Flowering of Asian American Arts*. While uses of categories like Asian American—or citizenship status, such as refugee or landed immigrant—can limit the freedom to define oneself in multiple ways, sometimes posing the question above, as directly as Ling does, can turn up intriguing results.

The diversity of Asian North-American writers must always be re-asserted against the stereotypes of the public imagination. Though we must be wary of the appropriating forces of multiculturalism, forces that can compel ethnicized Canadians to play out narrowly prescribed roles for the occasional heritage festival, cross-cultural alliances are important to build. The Asian Canadian race theorist Roy Miki, in his collection *Broken Entries: Essays on Race, Subjectivity, and Writing*, certainly shows us the dangers of multicultural appropriations that elide the contradictions in texts like *Obasan*. We must be wary of how critical energy spent on the celebration of multiculturalist diversity can often serve to distract us from ongoing systemic forms of racism. But Amy Ling's editing of *Yellow Light* is an example of how a reference text that is a coalition of voices can intervene in the negative stereotyping of Asian North American culture. Both mainstream and subversive, *Yellow Light* features a useful blend of capsule biographies, writerly reflections, and excerpts of creative work from forty Asian American writers, artists, musicians, and composers. Ling's Introduction reveals her own experiences of meeting professional resistance to the serious study of Asian American literature in the academy in the early eighties, a time when the American canon was slow to accept the study of non-canonical texts by writers of Asian descent. Amongst the writers and artists who contributed, we are presented with fascinatingly honest responses to questions of identity and influence from Diana Chang, Maxine Hong Kingston, Peter Bacho, Garrett Hongo, Karen Tei Yamashita, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kirin Narayan, Ping Chong, David Henry Hwang, the performance group Slant, Hip-Hop artist Tou Ger Xiong, and twenty-nine others. In addressing the

problem of defining a specific Asian-American sensibility, David Henry Hwang defends the right of the individual to transcend the necessity of genetic heritage. Asserts Hwang, "More important than race, national origin, or genetic heritage are those groups and individuals that define *themselves* in response to shared experiences, frustrations, and needs. The factor of self-definition becomes the key... immigrants become Americans when and if they choose to define themselves as such"(223).

Certainly this is the kind of mobility we would all wish for ourselves, to move beyond the constraints of racial categories and into the ongoing assertions of identity in borrowed or invented voices that we might call our own.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Rita Wong

open the brutal

open the brutal. rupture abundance.
loosen the tyranny of the literal.
slippage is better than nothing,
squirrel running across the grass, a
living question mark bouncing black
& feisty before my eyes. keep moving
like that squirrel, faster than the guard
dog chasing it. change the shape of the
slot slide it somewhere looser. your
teeth a serif that hooks my ear. loose
hair flutters debris in the night. lyric is
not rule but desire. signpost the revolution.
your body's alphabet encrypts the message.
rising on the silent letter that changes the
sound around it. a woman's flesh with light
blue roads winding just below the skin, how a
small wrinkle holds years in its fold condenses
time into her line of skin. my line of vision.

Roy Miki

winnipeg c. 1950

the leaves always
shiver in the snapshot

the eyes filled with frames
of bicycle spokes turning

i embalm myself and
undergo authentication

the tapes are turned off
to observe a minute of silence

a mound later dubbed "mountain"
is still the garbage dump

Christopher Lee

Engaging Chineseness in Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony*

During the Second World War, the Nationalist Chinese government mobilized overseas communities to contribute to the war effort through appeals to ethnic loyalty. The slogan "Save the Nation" (*jiuguo*) was commonly invoked implying that even in diaspora, overseas Chinese were somehow members of the Chinese state. The Chinese Republic's authority among overseas Chinese communities was justified through the association between ethnicity and nationhood.[1] In Canada, ethnicity, or "Chineseness," was also used as the cultural basis for political structures and hierarchies within the Chinese community.[2] A sense of Chineseness gave the community a sense of cohesion, but ethnicity was also used to ensure conformity and unity. The sale of Chinese war bonds in Canada provides a case in point:

> [The Bond-selling Association in Vancouver] required that each adult male in the Vancouver Chinese community purchase a minimum of Ch. $50 (about Can. $16) in Chinese war bonds. Names of those who did not would be published in the Chinese-language newspapers, and those who wished to return to China had first to show the Chinese consulate that they had bought at least the minimum required amount of bonds. (Wickberg 190)

Refusing to demonstrate one's ethnic loyalty was deemed rebellious and therefore required a disciplinary response through social ostracization and the denial of travel privileges. All the institutions involved in this particular campaign—the Chinese media, Chinese consulate, and the Chinese Benevolent Association and other community organizations—owed their existence to some association with ethnicity.

Employed to achieve certain goals such as fundraising, ethnicity itself can be conceptualized as an ideology constructed and expressed through material practices. As Louis Althusser writes in his famous essay on ideological apparatuses, "an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material" (166). Those interpellated as Chinese are expected to act in ways defined by the discourse of Chineseness, which was hegemonically controlled by the community leadership. But the process of ethnic subject formation was complicated through interaction with Canadian society and culture, especially in the context of racism. The World War II period provides a rich historical context in which to examine the discourse of Chineseness in Canada. The war effort fostered a sense of community unity which subsequently propelled the fight for enfranchisement following World War II. Politically, a new generation of community leaders consciously engaged Canadian society hoping to ameliorate the racist conditions that had always plagued the community's existence.

Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony* chronicles the experiences of several Vancouver Chinatown children growing up during this period. Originally a short story published almost eighteen years before the novel was completed, the novel provides a literary space for a semi-autobiographical project based on the author's own childhood. Throughout the text, Choy interrogates the process of becoming Chinese, linking ethnic identity formation with various power structures such as the family and the Chinese community-at-large. In this essay, I intend to examine ways in which Choy problematizes the notion of Chineseness and critiques the linkage between ethnicity and power structures. I argue that *The Jade Peony* offers a re-reading of Chinese Canadian history, suggesting ways to rethink the World War II period through a focus on marginalized voices and experiences.

The third part of the novel is narrated from the perspective of Sek-lung (nicknamed Sekky), the third and youngest son of a Chinatown family. I am particularly drawn to this section because Sekky seems to represent the vulnerable and innocent child who is in the process of being formed by (among other things) the discourse of ethnicity. Following Althusser, we may say that he is constantly defined as a subject by various Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) which propagate notions of Chineseness, such as Chinese school, his family, his location in the ethnicized space of Chinatown, Chinese and English media, and so on (see Althusser, 143-45, 170-73). As a child still to be disciplined and shaped according to standards defined as

Chinese, Sekky is often reprimanded for incorrect behavior. As a result, he develops a sense of inferiority, a vision of himself as someone who lacks Chineseness. He thus identifies with models of ethnicity imposed by his family and the community elite in order to compensate for this lack. (I will discuss the theoretical implications of this identification later.)

Sekky's story starts with a provocative declaration: "in 1939, when I was six years old, the whole family—my two brothers and my sister, and all our relatives—considered me brainless" (129). The label "brainless" stems from Sekky's inability to distinguish between the Chinese titles of various relatives.[3] This shortcoming is significant because naming a relative simultaneously establishes the speaker's position in relation to the person named. Thus to misname "third uncle" as "great uncle," for example, not only represents a misidentification of that uncle, but, more importantly, of the self. Misrecognizing one's place (as determined by age, status of parents and so on) constitutes a challenge to the hierarchical nature of family. In a community where family ties are considered of great importance, the family itself is a heavily ethnicized space.[4] Indeed, it is within the family that Sekky encounters Chineseness as a lived reality, as ethnicity is made a daily reality through interaction with his elders. Misnaming is therefore an act that suggests a potentially rebellious refusal to submit to the community's social standards. Wittingly or not, Sekky casts himself as a dissenting subject who needs to be disciplined and molded until he partakes (and consents) fully in the discourse of Chineseness.

Choy demonstrates how the Chinese family of Chinatown in the 1930s is itself affected by Canadian laws and regulations. For example, Sekky's mother

> [is] the birth-mother of both my sister Liang and myself. She had been brought over to Canada from China to become a family servant or concubine, a kind of second wife, after Father's first wife died in China. Kiam [the oldest brother is] the son of Father and his first wife, and Jung [the second brother is] adopted. (131)

Nevertheless, in deference to Canadian laws against polygamy, Sekky's grandmother re/misnames his birth-mother "Stepmother," a position resulting from a negotiation between Chinese family structure and Canadian law.[5] The existence of "paper sons," immigrants who entered Canada after claiming falsified kinship relations, constitutes another example in which legal conditions create familial relations that are "inauthentic." As Sekky observes,

> if these persons were also tied to us by false papers to obtain immigration visas, they became "paper sons" or "paper uncles," heirs to a web of illegal subterfuge

> brought on by laws that stipulated only relatives of official "merchant-residents" or "scholars" who could immigrate from China to Canada. Paper money could buy paper relatives. (132)

As law and capital mediate subject positions supposedly based on biological kinship, family titles come to designate and conceal relationships simultaneously. Family unity and coherence is maintained through a collective investment in its discursive hierarchy, which includes an implicit (or explicit) agreement to keep certain aspects of family history secret. Thus "false" relations are maintained at the same time as "real" histories become untouchable and unmentionable.

Between 1923 and 1947, Canadian immigration laws excluded anyone of Chinese descent except merchants and students. New arrivals were subject to intensive interrogation by immigration officials, and the improper use of familial titles threatened the survival of those who had entered Canada as "paper" sons and daughters:[6]

> one careless word—perhaps because a *mo no* [brainless] girl or a *mo no* boy was showing off—and the Immigration Demons would come in the middle of the night, bang on the family door, demand a show of a pile documents ... separate family members and ask trick questions. Then certain "family" members would disappear. Households would be broken up. Jobs would be lost. Jail and shame and suicides would follow. (135)

The fact that family structures could be unraveled and brought to crisis suggests that the family itself functioned, to use a psychoanalytic term, as a fantasy, masking conditions that remained politically unknowable. Yet regardless of how it was constituted, Chinese Canadians continued to uphold the family as a survival strategy. Indeed, participating in this "cover up" was a key tenet for inclusion within the community, and thus became intricately bound with up with Chineseness itself. In the text, Sekky threatens to rupture this fantasy not only through conscious acts of resistance, but more importantly through slips and mistakes. He inhabits a discursive space that precedes a complete entry into the symbolic order of Chineseness, a space that erupts through mistakes and threatens the symbolic order itself.[7] As Sekky is taught how to be Chinese, this space is brought under control. Ethnicity acts as a disciplinary tool that mediates the relationship between the individual and the power elite, and is eventually assumed to be a force in and of itself; Chineseness is thus regarded as a fixed, supposedly independent, entity. While Sekky experiences ethnicity in this sense, Choy's subtly deconstructive reading of identity shows how ethnicity is a social construction closely tied to power relationships.

Although ethnic formation occurs through expressions of authority such as scolding, spanking, and so on, Sekky often learns how to be Chinese through relationships with role models imposed by his elders. I would argue that the type of relationship at work here is that of identification. In the context of psychoanalysis, Jean Laplanche and Jean-Baptiste Pontalis write that identification is "not simply one psychical mechanism among others, but the operation itself whereby the human subject is constituted" (206). Stuart Hall notes that identification "is grounded in fantasy, in projection and idealization. Its object is as likely to be the one that is hated as the one that is adored" (3). The profoundly ambivalent nature of this process can be detected in Sekky's own mixed feelings towards his role models. On one level, he displays a conscious resistance to them insofar as they are imposed upon him. But on another level, Sekky has already internalized his own lack of Chineseness—exemplified by the label of brainlessness—and is attracted to (and indeed desires) idealized figures who seem to possess precisely that which he lacks.[8]

To illustrate this condition, let us consider the first episode in Sekky's story, which concerns his indirect relationship with Chen Suling, a close friend of Stepmother. Chen is a Christian convert living in China who frequently writes letters to Stepmother telling of the turmoils of life under Japanese occupation. Finally, Stepmother arranges to have Chen brought to Canada as the paper daughter of Third Uncle, who is a merchant. For Sekky, Chen's impending arrival is experienced as a threat: "'When Chen Suling comes to Canada,' Stepmother said ..., 'she will teach you the right way to be Chinese'" (133). Because she embodies "the right way," Chen serves a marked disciplinary function, but she does so as a figure who is constituted only through discourse: through her letters and Stepmother's comments about her. In such presentations, she is made to seem perfect. When Sekky tries to rebel by saying that he will only learn English, "Stepmother smile[s]. 'Suling once won a prize for her English,' she [says]. 'If only Suling were here ...' I hat[e] Chen Suling" (137).

Although Sekky tries to resist Chen's imposition, there is also a dimension of desire at work here. When he first encounters Chen's photograph, he is strangely attracted to her image. Noticing her stern look, he remarks that

> I thought she should have a steel-edged ruler in each of her hands. Instead, there was an embroidered sharp-clawed dragon slinking down Chen Suling's wide sleeve. Stepmother noticed me staring at it. (130)

In analyzing Sekky's momentary seduction by the photograph, I find Slavoj Žižek's differentiation between imaginary and symbolic identification useful (see 104-07). For Žižek, the object of imaginary identification is the object or role model it(her)self. By contrast, symbolic identification is concerned with the gaze and therefore the subject position of another person/object. It seems to me that something akin to symbolic identification is at work in this story in spite of the fact that Sekky clearly dislikes Chen and the oppression she represents. By identifying with Chen's gaze, Sekky in fact looks right back at himself; his identification with her represents the internalization of codes of behavior deemed to be Chinese, the development of an ethnic super-ego as it were.

But perhaps because Sekky has yet to mature fully as a Chinese subject, resistance is still possible. His determination to learn English is a case in point. After Stepmother claims that Chen has excellent English, Sekky responds by vowing to become better than Chen (again, the borders between resistance and identification are blurred). In the story, it turns out that Sekky's English skills enable him to read the letter informing him and his mother of Chen's death during a Japanese bomb raid. More significantly, he also learns that Chen's English was never as good as Stepmother had claimed. Opening the Bible left by Chen, he notices the grammatical inaccuracy of the inscription:

> TO SEK-LUNG, SUN OF LONGTIME FRIEND LILY. I NEVER TO FORGET HER. LEAF JACKET AND BOOK WITH GOD. BLESSINGS.
> - CHEN SULING (142)

The moment Sekky encounters the "real" Chen, however indirectly, she is demythologized and neutralized as a disciplinary apparatus. The revelation that she is someone less than ideal effectively "kills" her:

> the dragon in my stomach unclenched—twisted once—and flew away. [Stepmother] folded up the jacket and quickly picked up everything, and silently went up to her room. I never heard Stepmother mention Chen Suling's name again. (142)

Although the loss of Chen is certainly tragic especially for Stepmother, there is nevertheless a sense that Sekky psychologically matures through this loss as he is able, at least partially, to shake off his symbolic identification with her. (As we will see, the motif of loss/growth is repeated later on in the novel.)

Sekky realizes Chen's linguistic shortcomings in reference to notions of standard English, which is closely associated with Canadian culture. In the

context of this novel, the terms Chinese and Canadian are considered diametrically oppositional by both Chinese and non-Chinese. Thus Sekky deploys Canadianness in order to resist Chineseness. He prefers to learn English and, when asked if he is Chinese, exclaims, "Canada!" (135). He even decides to exploit his "brainlessness" consciously and vows to misname Chen intentionally in front of immigration officials. Ironically, Sekky draws upon the racist conditions of his environment to empower himself. In this context, it becomes necessary for him to identify with the West, which is, as *The Jade Peony* demonstrates, an overtly racialized cultural space. As Sekky confesses, "I sometimes wish my skin would turn white, my hair go brown, my eyes widen and turn blue ... and I would be Jack O'Connor's little brother" (134). In reality, of course, Sekky is part of a racially excluded group: "I [am] the Canadian-born child of unwanted immigrants who [are] not allowed to become citizens. The words RESIDENT ALIEN were stamped on my birth certificate, as if I [am] a loitering stranger" (136). Lamenting the futility of trying to be Canadian, he notes that

> even if I was born in Vancouver, even if I should salute the Union Jack a hundred million times, even if I had the cleanest hands in all the Dominion of Canada and prayed forever, I would still be *Chinese*. (135, italics in original)

At the same time, the reality "behind" the Chineseness that Sekky resists is actually heterogeneous. In the case of Chen, her ability to speak English and her religious convictions (which caused her to be ostracized by her family) suggest that her own ethnicity is not a traditional, essentialized construction, but rather one influenced by modernity. In this sense, she exemplifies the modern Chinese subject who, both in China and in diaspora, exists in cultural spaces mediated by contact with Western culture, often within quasi-colonial relationships.[9] By exploring Chineseness within this historical context, Choy challenges essentialist, ahistorical notions of ethnicity, treating it instead as a term that is compromised, hybridized, and lacking in authenticity. Yet despite its inherent instability, Chineseness continues to function as a disciplinary apparatus. For Stepmother, Chen functions as a symptom of her own marginalized position within her family and community, providing a source of discursive power over her son. On a broader level, Chineseness can be said to function similarly across the community as elders impose it as a fixed reality while obscuring the complex "real" experiences of the Chinese in Canada. By suggesting that Chen's role as the ideal Chinese subject is maintained independent of, even in spite of,

her actual characteristics, Choy illustrates the contingent nature of being named ethnic. Chen functions as the embodiment of Chineseness not because she actually is that but rather because Stepmother has named her as such. Rather than being merely descriptive of cultural practices, ethnicity is first and foremost related to power relationships within a community, and emerges as a construct used to maintain hegemony.

Interrogating both Canadian and Chinese identities, Choy alerts us to the complexities of ethnic identifications in an environment where a certain ethnic community (in this case Chineseness in Chinatown) is ghettoized within a larger Canadian context. In the end, a complete identification with either is impossible; the Chinese Canadian subject must always negotiate these contradictory positions and racialized identity emerges as a site of hybridity and contamination. As Sekky demonstrates, being Chinese Canadian is about negotiating cultures in ways that may privilege one over the other at any given point. At the same time, such an identity continues to contest the boundaries of Canadian culture and Chineseness itself. In the context of Chinatown, Sekky notes that

> all the Chinatown adults were worried over those of us recently born in Canada, born "neither this nor that," neither Chinese nor Canadian, born without understanding the boundaries, born *mo no*—no brain. (135)

Choy explores the possibility of agency emerging out of a need to negotiate forms of racialization. The notion of "Chinese Canadian" is, from the very start, a tenuous site, positioned in a social context that regards the two terms as oppositional. Historically, this ambivalent term gained currency as a political identity for a new generation during the 1940s. By pursuing the notion of Chinese Canadian, this generation in effect rejected essentialist versions of both Chinese and Canadian identities. In an admittedly positive reading, what resulted was a collective effort to challenge both traditions in order to demand an equal place in Canadian society. Fifty years later, the vision of a Canadian identity that is deracialized is still to be achieved, but Chinese Canadians have created a political position, however tenuous, from which to fight for that vision.

We have seen how Chineseness, despite its inconsistencies and internal differences, is employed in order to maintain community hierarchy. I would now like to turn my attention to ways in which Chineseness itself is constructed as difference through a reading of the concluding chapters

of *The Jade Peony*. These chapters deal with a particularly sensitive aspect of Chinese Canadian history, that of Japanese-Chinese relations in Canada during World War II. [10] Choy reconstructs a period in which Chinese Canadians were preoccupied with the "Japanese threat" and the discourse of Chineseness was inextricably tied to the presence, both real and imagined, of the Japanese in Canada. Since 1937, the Chinese community had been following events in China closely as Imperial Japanese armed forces gradually occupied the Northeast (Manchuria) and moved into Central and Southern China. Guangdong, the region in Southern China that produced the most immigrants, was eventually occupied. Encouraged and exploited by the Chinese government, overseas anti-Japanese sentiment grew as a response to conditions in China. Although the spread of such sentiment in Chinese Canadian communities, as the story of Chen Suling illustrated, was largely due to personal reasons, the unique political and psychological context of the Chinese diaspora also played a part in its development.

Separated from their embattled "homeland," Chinese Canadians could only experience the war as a discursive event perpetuated through language and media. As Sekky notes, "the enemy was everywhere. The *Vancouver Sun* said so. Newsreels said so. Hollywood and British movies said so. All of Chinatown said so, out loud" (171). But regardless of how much the war was discussed, the community could not escape its own physical separation from the sites of conflict. China became a culturally and geographically unattainable place and an object of desire in itself. An overinvestment in ethnic identity developed in response to feelings of exile and alienation as Chinese Canadians played out the ideology of ethnicity through material practices such as buying war bonds. At the same time, continuing (re)assertions of Chineseness only served to highlight the community's own sense of estrangement; be(com)ing Chinese became a drive that, in the psychoanalytic conception of the term, could never be fulfilled. The domination of nationalism in the community can therefore be read as a reflection of fundamental insecurities over ethnic identity in a racialized society.

Anti-Japanese sentiment became an integral part of being Chinese in Canada, but the shift in location from China to, in this case, the West Coast profoundly changed the relationship between Chinese and Japanese groups. While the Japanese were clearly imperialist aggressors in China, the relationship between the two communities in Canada was not as clearly defined. Given the prevalence of anti-Japanese propaganda both in Canada

and China, the conflation of Imperial Japan with the Japanese Canadian community was a process of scapegoating which simultaneously constructed a notion of "Japanese." [11] Elsewhere, Žižek has discussed anti-Semitism in similar terms:

> "Jew" appears as a signifier connoting a cluster of supposedly "effective" properties (intriguing spirit, greedy for gain, and so on), but this is not yet anti-Semitism proper. To achieve that, we must *invert* the relation and say: they are like that . . . *because they are Jews.* (italics in the original). (96)

Substituting "Japanese" for "Jew," we can detect a similar process at work in the novel. Choy highlights the prevalence of stereotypes in Sekky's description of the Japanese: "the monsters with bloodied buck teeth, no necks, and thick Tojo glasses" (196). By suggesting that Chinatown was ultimately fighting a "cartoon character," Choy exposes the constructed nature of the Chinese-Japanese conflict. He is also careful to relate anti-Japanese sentiment to material concerns, detailing how Chinese Canadians readily took advantage of low property prices in the wake of the Japanese Canadian evacuation, a move seen by some as retribution for losses in China (see 234-35). The conscious effort by the community to identify itself with the allied effort (as Chiang Kai-shek was doing from Chongqing) was a politically and economically strategic move—after the war, Chinese Canadians argued that they had demonstrated their loyalty to Canada through military service and thus deserved enfranchisement. But by showing how claims to ethnic identity are often achieved through processes of marginalization, Choy critiques the very construction of ethnicity itself, revealing its human costs. The final chapters of *The Jade Peony* constitute a significant intervention, which critically examines this aspect of the Chinese Canadian experience, using this shameful episode to interrogate the construction of Chineseness itself.

Sekky's own sense of ethnicity develops within the context of wartime politics. He is obsessed with war-related paraphernalia and images, and frequently indulges in war games and other fantasies which revolve around the "Japanese threat." After several incidents land him in trouble, his parents ask Mrs. Lim, a neighbor and close friend of the family, to watch him after school, a task that eventually falls on Lim's adopted daughter Meiying. The relationship between Sekky and Meiying can be read initially as another example of the kind of idealizing relationship he endured with Chen Suling. Meiying is, after all, regarded by people around Sekky as the perfect Chinese daughter: attractive, hardworking, adept at housework, and fluent in

Chinese (even Mandarin Chinese!). Sekky and his siblings are urged to imitate her. But when he learns that Meiying is carrying on a secret romantic relationship with a Japanese Canadian, their relationship enters a new stage in which Sekky must negotiate the contradiction between her role as the embodiment of idealized Chineseness and actions that cast her as a traitor. After all, anti-Japanese resistance was an axiomatic part of being Chinese during the period:

> Everyone knew the unspoken law: *Never betray your own kind.* Meiying was Chinese, like me; we were our own kind . . .
> I could see father's outrage if he ever found out, and I shuddered to imagine how horrified Stepmother would be: *No, no, not Meiying, not the perfect one!* (214)

At this point, Sekky seems to have accepted conventional definitions of ethnic loyalty, but as those definitions are brought to a point of crisis, he tries to negotiate the dilemma before him:

> perhaps I could do some damage in my own way, weaken the enemy. Trap her. Trap them both. Meanwhile, I could pretend to be Meiying's friend: I could be a spy. Turn her in later to the [Clan association] or the RCMP. (215)

As a spy, one can "play both sides of the fence" by deferring a final demonstration of allegiance to one party which would require the betrayal of the other. While unstable, the position (which is drawn from the rhetoric of wartime) nevertheless allows for the temporary co-existence of contradictory loyalties. For Sekky, this position proves to be more difficult to maintain; once Sekky allows himself a space in which to be loyal to Meiying, betrayal becomes more and more difficult. When Meiying makes him promise that he will not divulge their secret, Sekky grapples with the request, uncomfortably negotiating his contradictory obligations.

We can detect signs of this subjective collapse after Sekky returns from his first trip to Oppenheimer Park (a central meeting place for the Vancouver Japanese community located on/near Powell Street) with Meiying:

> I was thrilled to have met the enemy, yet still so reluctantly dazzled by their baseball skills that I found myself tongue-tied and mostly silent. I would begin to speak, stop, then begin again. (214)

Although it is not clear what exactly thrills Sekky, the passage suggests that he perceives a discrepancy between his previous conceptions of the Japanese and what he actually encounters; skill at baseball does not seem to fit in with the cartoon-Tojo invoked earlier. Sekky begins to realize what is left

unsubsumed by the designation "Japanese" as it is employed by the Chinese. The realization of this excess reality marks a moment of rupture in anti-Japanese discourse and by extension, the discourse of Chineseness itself. Although the assumption that one can be a spy may be comforting, Sekky's resolve breaks down as the story continues and the result is a certain paralysis of response. He never does turn Meiying in to any authority and actually begins to lie to his parents regarding their activities. He fails at spying precisely because he is unable to take the final and crucial step of betrayal. As Sekky and Meiying return to Chinatown after that first encounter, Meiying asks,

> "what are you thinking ?"
> "He's a sporty guy," I said, meaning to say that I liked his nerve. But I guess she thought I liked him. She broke into a smile, as if a wonderful thing had just happened between us.
> "Oh Sekky ! If only you were the world !"
> She threw her arms around me, totally catching me off guard, then quickly let me go. (216)

Sekky is not only thrown off guard physically, but more so by Meiying's failure to recognize his intentions. His inability to correct her draws him into her world as a confidant. The metaphor of being "on guard" reveals Sekky's precarious hold on his own beliefs; perhaps it is a subtle hint from Choy just how precarious ethnicity can be as well. As in the case of Chen Suling, we witness another extinction of a role model, but unlike Chen, Meiying remains, continuing to be an object of identification which leads Sekky away from his previous notions of Chineseness. In this sense, identification changes from a tool of discipline to a move that threatens hegemony itself.

Meiying and Sekky confront the very terms of Chineseness through her relationship and his complicity; Meiying herself serves a deconstructive function in Choy's narrative. We can locate this function, for example, in her interest in the notion of alliances, a term again drawn from wartime rhetoric. Meiying's understanding of the word emphasizes equality and individual agency within collective action. Choy juxtaposes these political ideals against the quasi-totalitarian setting of Vancouver's Chinatown, a place where loyalty and submission are demanded and displayed physically through badges which proclaim one's Chinese ancestry. Against a social context dominated by hierarchies that serve to reinforce ethnicity, the notion of alliance becomes subversive even as it is constantly invoked in the common discourse of the time. When Sekky asks Meiying why she still talks to Kazuo, her Japanese boyfriend, she simply explains that they are friends,

and friends have alliances; she has, in fact, used one alliance to subvert another, namely that of the Chinese community with Canada, deconstructing alliances in the name of alliances themselves.

If the ending of *The Jade Peony* can be described as tragic, it is especially so because Meiying's rebellion is unsuccessful and finally leads to her death. Her abortion symbolizes the eradication of an unborn child whose very existence embodies the deconstruction of boundaries between Chinese and Japanese. In the death of mother and unborn child, the symbolic order of Chineseness maintains itself through the cruel repression of dissent. But when the human costs of such an act are considered, her death leads to a shift in consciousness for characters such as Sekky. One of the most poignant moments in the book occurs when Sekky, after seeing Meiying's lifeless body, turns to Stepmother and finally calls her Mother. Throughout the story, Stepmother had raised doubts about the scapegoating of Japanese Canadians, although such comments were ignored or belittled by the men of the family. She was also very attentive to Meiying, acting almost as surrogate parent. Although she remains for the most part an underdeveloped character, we get a glimpse of a free-thinking person trapped in a world in which her status denies the privilege of speaking and the privilege of being heard. In this sense, she is something of a parallel character to Sekky in that both are marginalized. His act of (re)cognition represents a conscious choice to align his symbolic identifications with the potentially subversive. The doubts sown through his interactions with Meiying are brought to fruition when he identifies with his mother's dissenting gaze. Unlike Meiying, Mother knows how to survive, and although that may require acts of compromise, she finally emerges as an independent character towards the end of the novel. When Sekky declares "Mother, I am here" (238), he consciously inscribes his own identity within the mother-child relationship, a relationship that Choy seems to privilege here as liberating against the patriarchal culture of Chinatown. Juxtaposing this moment of enlightenment with Meiying's tragic death, Choy ends the novel on a provocatively disturbing yet hopeful note.

In recent years, several landmark anniversaries have brought the period recounted in *The Jade Peony* into the forefront of Chinese Canadian community consciousness. For example, the fiftieth anniversary of the *Citizenship Act* was celebrated in 1997, and fifty years ago this year, Asian Canadians cast their first votes as citizens. In recognition of these events,

recent projects such as the Chinese Canadian Military History Museum in Vancouver have sought to preserve the history of that period.[12] Read alongside such attempts to entrench a community history, texts such as *The Jade Peony* remind us that the processes of identity formation often have disturbing historical consequences. The commemoration of alternative, even shameful, histories is therefore crucial to developing a critical engagement with ethnicity itself. I would argue that Choy writes against prevalent narratives of the 1940s by suggesting that they marginalize issues such as gender, sexuality and interethnic relations. His critique is launched subtly, from apparently "innocent" children's voices which hide more subversive elements in the narrative.[13] Such strategic moves allow him to engage official versions of community history (the valorization of Chinese Canadian soldiers, for example) while recovering previously marginalized voices.

In a recent essay entitled "Can One Say No to Chineseness ?" Ien Ang argues that while Chineseness possesses "operative power as a cultural principle in the social constitution of identities *as* Chinese,... [the point is to] investigate how this category operates in practice, in different historical, geographical, political, and cultural contexts" (227, italics in original). Choy writes out of specific historical and personal circumstances which frame the expression of Chineseness in Canada and he is aware that the differentiation between oppressor/oppressed is not necessarily synonymous with white/Chinese. In writing about the non-elite, Choy displays an interest in the possibilities of resistance, in the possibility of articulating a Chinese Canadian identity that is inclusive through the exposure of past exclusions. Ethnic subject formation is therefore presented as a dynamically contested process.

In demythologizing Chineseness, he directs our attention to the fact that ethnicity is not so much a matter of conforming to tradition as a continuing process of social (re)construction. As Ang writes,

> 'if I am inescapably Chinese by *descent*, I am only sometimes Chinese by *consent*. When and how is a matter of politics.' The politics involved here reaches far beyond identity politics of individual subjects, in diaspora or otherwise. What is at stake are the possibilities and responsibilities of these subjects to participate, as citizens of the world, in the ongoing political construction of world futures. (242, italics in original)

Writing in the 1990s, Choy's refusal to adopt an uncritical stance towards Chineseness alerts us to the fact that as the Chinese community continues to change, the expression of Chinese ethnicity is in itself (and always has

been) a contingent condition. In making such connections, he ultimately expresses a renewed commitment to the discourse of Chineseness, to the possibility of a more enlightened and humane expression of the same.

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NOTES

1 Lisa Lowe writes, in an Asian American context, that projects of nationalism negate "the material conditions of work and the inequalities of the property system,... inspir[ing] diverse individuals to identify with the national project" (2). Appeals to ethnicity within the Chinese community similarly "smooth out" internal differences. For a discussion of the links between conceptions of ethnicity and modern Chinese nationalism, see Chun.

2 While I am interested in situating my discussion within the experiences of Chinese Canadian communities during the 1930s and 1940s, I can only give a brief outline of this history in this essay. Works such as Chan, Wickberg, and Yee provide a more complete account of the time period.

3 Chinese is a language which contains multiple terms of familial address differentiating the various relationships possible within a family.

4 The prevalence of clan associations in the early Chinese community demonstrates the importance of family ties. For a discussion of such formations, see Wickberg.

5 Choy does not specify why Stepmother was not able to assume the title of First Wife after the death of the first wife, although it should be noted that polygamy was an accepted practice in China at the time. While one can make cultural speculations, the issue seems fundamentally unresolved in the text. Nevertheless, it is clear Stepmother did not merely "replace" the First Wife, and held a correspondingly inferior position in the household.

6 At a recent talk at the University of British Columbia, Choy mentioned that many Chinese Canadians led a sort of double life during this time period, living a "paper" identity for legal purposes even as they used their actual family names in the safety of the Chinatown community.

7 A useful way of conceptualizing this condition is to read Sekky's "pre-Chinese" space as similar to that notion of semiotic as described by Julia Kristeva.

8 Two key figures in Sekky's development I do not examine are his grandmother (Poh-Poh) and his teacher Miss Doyle. While processes of identification can be discerned in both relationships, the contexts in which Sekky interacts with the two women are far more complicated. A sufficient reading of these relationships is beyond the scope of this essay.

9 For a discussion of the problematic nature of essentialist dichotomies between Chinese and Western culture in the context of modernity, see the Preface to Chow.

10 There is surprisingly little written and said about this subject. To cite an example from my own experience, I once asked the former Chinese Benevolent Association of Vancouver English secretary (active during the War) about the subject. I was told curtly that the communities did not interact all that much. Historical records would prove otherwise, as would the oral histories of other elders.

11 We can see a similar process at work in the development of anti-Japanese racism among mainstream Canadian communities. Such processes would lead historically to the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II.

12 The Museum mentioned is housed at the Vancouver Chinese Cultural Centre Museum and Archives. It emphasizes valiant records of military service, focusing on the importance of that experience to the fight for enfranchisement. Although it is important that such projects be available to the public, I simply want to point out that it can present only a limited reading of a complex history.

13 At the same talk (see note 6), Choy remarked (perhaps somewhat facetiously) that he has been spared much criticism from the Chinese community because his use of child narrators has protected him from accusations of "airing dirty laundry." Choy also noted that his current work-in-progress, conceived as a sequel to *The Jade Peony*, may not fare quite as well because of his use of adult narrators.

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Glenn Deer

An Interview with Wayson Choy

Wayson Choy was in the process of researching his memoir, *Paper Shadows* (see review in this issue of *Canadian Literature*), when he agreed to discuss his work and life on September 5, 1997. Before our interview at a Vancouver restaurant, we made a brief trip to a second-hand store to search for the unique eyeglass cases that Choy loves to collect, and which hold the various fountain-pens that are the instruments of Choy's flowing, calligraphic script—the side-trip was a sign of his abiding passion for the symbolic objects in the rituals of everyday life. During our interview over a course of souvlaki, pita bread and tzatziki, we dipped into Choy's preoccupation with the past and his memories of the language of Chinatown. Revealed here are Choy's attitudes towards writing and creativity, and his connections to the writing community at the University of British Columbia in the sixties.

GD We've been talking about how the past returns like a river that's been dammed up and redirected but returns inevitably to its original course. How much of the Chinese language is like this river to you, a form that calls you back? How is the language a part of your memory?

WC My first language was Chinese and I was raised by Chinese-speaking members of the community. Toisanese was the main dialect, but what was interesting to me was what I discovered when I spoke to a Chinese-language expert about the Chinatown voices I hear in my head, voices that were recalled from my childhood. I would say certain sounds, certain phrases, and not only their voices, but the faces of some of the people

would come back to me. She, and another knowledgeable person I consulted, identified about a dozen dialects that are in my head. [Wayson Choy noted later that the *Sam Yup* and *Sze Yup* village dialects dominated Vancouver's Chinatown, but the population also included those who spoke *Tui San, Ha Kai, Hoi Ping, Sung Duck, Nam Hoi* and *Fook Sang.*]

I seem to know the meaning of some of those sounds just as, so long ago, I reacted as a child to their resonance, their sense of directly communicating something to me. Of course, at the time I didn't know the official names of the dialects. I simply absorbed the sounds as meaningful language, sound-puzzles that I could figure out. There were different women and men who had taken care of me, "aunties" and "uncles" who in the privacy of their own homes would speak their particular village dialect. So the streams of Chinese dialects to me are a vital source of who I am as a writer. I think it's quite obviously the source of my character's thought patterns, their speaking rhythms, how they fall back into "sayings" and are sustained by the recurring use of mythic images and their beliefs in positive and negative forces; for example, their beliefs in the male and female elements, in *yin* and *yang*, in ghosts, in wind-water harmonies like *feungshui.* The language memory I have inherited from Chinatown has somehow transmuted into the narrative voices in my writing.

Because of its music and tonal structure, and the amazing subtleties which I'm beginning to appreciate at last, the Chinese language to me is a vital source of who I am and how I write. The village dialects sound very Germanic to me, very guttural and, at the same time, pitched, too, like an aria from the Cantonese opera. These village dialects to me are the music and the drum beat of that past. I recall these rhythms vividly when I hear the voices speak, when I recall that community. They are a source for my childhood memories, like the Madeleine cake had been for Proust; through these voices I can go back to those places in time.

I wrote a scene in *The Jade Peony* where the women were gambling and talking about the Monkey Man and his anatomy. It was interesting to me that I had selected that conversation as one example of that community of women speaking with each other. But I remember as a child that their language was always frank and salty and sexual because they were speaking among themselves. I imagine what was so powerful for these women was that a life force was operating within them which made them a community, gave them discretion, and allowed them indiscretion;

and gave them a kind of bonding within the confinements of a very paternalistic culture.

Social gossip, of course, does help to bond any community of men or women. Gossip (a form of "social storytelling") makes the reality of other people more palpable, makes other individuals a kind of reference point for what is meaningful to the gossipers themselves.

When you ask me how the Chinese language is a component of my writing, well, in a still-living way it remains a major source of my connection to those memories. Ironically, I speak a "Vancouvernese," which is a very elementary Toisanese, mixed Cantonese vocabulary, mixed English grammar, oh, a kind of junkyard mix. It surely must pain those who hear me speak any Chinese whatsoever! After I leave the room, I suspect they double over with laughter.

But the voices in my mind, my memory, seem more intact. They connect my imagination to the past. I think in voices, too. In any rhetoric, there is the sound and the emotive intensity of a speaker that transcends whatever language one speaks. I think that's how all children first absorb language and meaning, through some kind of focused, inner attentiveness. And when I attempt to recreate the past, that's what I draw upon, this focused attention, my *inner ear.*

GD This language is sometimes used for powerful gatekeeping effects, isn't it? Different dialects have different kinds of prestige value in the social setting. We see Poh Poh actually using different dialects to control others and there is a real rift between Grandmother's power and the so-called step-mother's inferior position. As you were growing up, did you sense those power relations being played out amongst the women that you overheard?

WC Yes, absolutely, because sometimes they would suggest that so-and-so from that little village was "that kind", and when you said "that kind" you would say it in a dialect that had a classier or lower intonation or status, depending upon your meaning. In a way, the Chinese of my community understood that, especially in their speaking in English. For example, if the father (in the *Jade Peony*) wanted to be an "equal," he suddenly would speak a reasonably good English. If he had to compromise for his family's well-being or safety, then he would suddenly switch to a very subservient-sounding English, a pidgin English equivalent to the Uncle Tom patterns of the old American Negro. In fact, all lan-

guages have evolved class tones and dialects, social class vocabularies not unlike our *Chinatown-Chinaman English*, or what I prefer to call the railroad, steamship, lumber camp "coolie language." "Number One Bossy, bossy, chop-chop" —and all that.

GD Or sometimes in Frank Chin's work, like *The Year of the Dragon*, Freddie Eng will put on that exaggerated Charlie Chan accent.

WC Yes, that chop-chop language disguised as superior detective-power, and always a bit exotic and *Other*. I think it was one of the tools by which we could both mock and realize in our humility that we had few or no choices.

I remember going to a museum exhibit once and seeing there an actor who was an Australian aboriginal dressed in his native way. He had on a loin cloth, and you would never have expected him, as he did when he was interviewed, to speak suddenly in a pure Oxford English. In fact, he was educated at Oxford and Cambridge. So this kind of juxtaposition of what we imagine must be and what is challenged by the reality, is what I have tried to understand. Why did my father speak this pidgin way when he often knew better, or why did he suddenly *choose* to speak that way? It was not so much a puzzle as an understanding, as I got older, of what that was about. That was about surviving and putting on different language masks to deal with reality, with the enemy, or even with the *low fan* (*foreign*) friend you could not entirely trust.

I love those stories about Tonto and the Lone Ranger, when the Lone Ranger says, "We're surrounded, Tonto!" and Tonto says—no doubt remembering native history—"Who '*we*,' White Man?" (laughter)

GD In your own awareness of the boundary between the so-called "yellow world" and the "white world," language is obviously an important marker of that boundary. There are the Caucasians who speak English, there are the Chinese who provide the immersion in your mother tongue, Toisanese. As you were growing up, did you want to appropriate that master language on the outside? You sound like you were already very comfortable with the Chinese community. At what point did you feel the impulse to master that other language?

WC What's interesting in my life is that I have been a very fortunate person. Among my good fortune has obviously been my love of the English language and my talent for writing. In short, I wanted to speak and write well in the language that I loved. I had unrestricted and encouraging access to English, but not to Chinese.

As a child in Chinatown, my sad experiences with learning Chinese involved expatriates from China as teachers. Many of them seemed to me to be angry, bitter exiled or ex-military men from the Kuomintang.

In the Chinese school I went to at Gore and Pender, they had a terrible attitude to teaching. It was all punishment and drill. Drill and punishment. For me, an imaginative child, it was like being in a prison. I hated it. Now I believe that I would have been one of the children who would have come to love the Chinese language, especially the brush-writing, the calligraphy, but I hated the teaching methods. The one or two kind ones did not save me because there were not enough of them.

I went to Chinese school for three semesters and failed twice. I got to hate the school so much that I started bundling up newspapers so that I could one day crumple them all up, set them on fire, and throw them into the school. Mother thought that was not such a good idea. The school didn't like the idea either. So, abruptly, that door to learning the Chinese language closed forever.

I had a love for the English language. The teachers at our multi-cultural Strathcona school were, bless them, competent to excellent teachers. I actually read English before I spoke it well enough. In fact, I began to "read" in Kindergarten. In *Paper Shadows*, I recreated this experience, how, as a four-year-old, I saw words and mimicked their sounds, mixed with my Chinese vocabulary. To this day, one of my flaws as an English teacher is that I will see a word before I pronounce it, and I will pronounce it the way I see it. My students are always happy to correct me.

GD Is the writing process for you a combination of the sonic and the visual when you compose? You are attracted to the sensuous feel of pen on paper—I know that you collect fountain pens ...

WC I love the look of words. I suppose it's because I always loved the look of Chinese calligraphy. As a young boy, I used to play with brushes as if I were a writer in Chinese. My parents used to tell me that I would have long sheets of paper and I would pretend I was writing Chinese. But I would look at Chinese *running script*, and they said I was able to imitate it even though I didn't know what I was writing. I remember the very aesthetic feeling of seeing the flow of ink on paper. The dip and dash of the brush was something magical. Whether I did it well or not, I could hardly say. The sense that in some former life I might have been a calligrapher felt natural and wonderful to me. But at the school I attended,

Chinese was taught so badly. Those dour textbooks! Dour teachers!

So I went into studying English where you can have fun. But it's interesting that you point this out to me because the look of words is very important to me. When I look at the title of *The Jade Peony* it "looks Chinese" to me, whatever that means. I simply like the P-E-O-N-Y look of that combination of letters. More important, the peony is a flower that has symbolic Chinese meanings.

GD You have referred to how certain objects from the past resonate in an almost immanent way with their overlaid history. The jade peony is a central amulet that brings together many of the characters and their lives. In each section there is something from the past, like Roy Johnson's coat, or Jung's watch, or Sekky's chimes that is a central motif of a past relationship. When you were writing *The Jade Peony* did you visualize these objects and did these help you set up focal points in each of the three chapters?

WC This is something that I can hardly understand myself. I suspect in my creative imagination my subconscious is always operating and connecting elements. I sense something is important before I consciously recognize its importance. I think that in good writing the symbol should arise organically from the situation rather than have meaning imposed upon it. For me what became symbolically important throughout the book was already organically there. I knew, for example, historically, that the jade piece would be important.

The peony flower has a symbolic structure and meaning to the grandmother, for it connected her to the time she met the acrobat who gave her the jade peony. He was her first and perhaps only love. So for me it's a matter of seeing in human life what object is always important to people when they remember others who enriched their lives. To my horror, I have met people who are not able to invest in objects some treasured personal values, people who can't even understand that gesture. Sociopaths, for example.

I like to think that most of us have the need to make our lives more real by understanding that an object that someone gives us, will now have the meaning, will now carry the weight of memory as a kind of triggering point. This object, like the Chinese reverence for jade, will emanate, even if only in our own eyes, as something that connects deeply with something both outside and inside ourselves. I love what

Jung said, that *the outside is also the inside.* To me that comment is very powerful. If you look at the walls of someone's rooms and see what pictures or objects are hanging there, they are also saying here is what is inside me. If they have nothing on the walls, this also tells me much. So I say to my writing students that they should always pay attention to the outside as clues to the inside lives of their characters.

GD There is the outside and the inside, and there is also the old and the new. When Jook-Liang embraces Wong-Bak she seems to embrace an old China, and revivify him so he can become Wong-Suk. When you were growing up, how did you become aware of the old China and the new one, and some of the tensions between being a Canadian and being an Asian-Canadian? I know you address some of this in your other essays.

WC I grew up with some of those tensions as being part of the ordinary way one lives one's life, whether poor or rich, dark-skinned or light-skinned. I did not understand these were tensions in any conscious way until I was old enough to recognize that my confusion was a confusion of identity, of mixed-up associations, of still discovering hidden boundaries and secret borders.

I think that's why at 55 I could finally start writing *The Jade Peony.* From the 1960s, when I was first going to be a writer, and I had some early success as you know in *Best American Short Stories of 1962,* I was self-discouraged from becoming a writer. First, of course, it was a lot of hard work. Second, what did I have to say? I felt I had nothing to say. And there I was falling madly in love with all kinds of literature and meeting the San Francisco writers like Ginsberg and Creeley at the University of British Columbia. It was not due to any humility on my part, but due rather to a kind of internalized oppression that I felt I had nothing to say. I could not understand what I was living through and still struggling with then, that is, with my own banana complex, being yellow on the outside and white on the inside. I think when people are in the middle of these identity struggles, they don't have anything to say because they can't get a fix on anything. Your own compass doesn't guide you when you're caught up in discovering who you are. For those caught being between cultures or between identities, there is no True North on the compass. You find your own way.

Luckily I have lived long enough, that I can now understand that I have much to say, at least to myself if not to anyone else.

GD So what did it feel like when this voice came back to you three years ago? You were able to come back to writing and embark on a memoir and another novel.

WC Well, I hope I can! (laughter) I think that this voice never left me. This voice always said to me that I would one day write and tell stories, ever since I read Hans Christian Andersen's stories as a child. But I did not understand when I would write seriously again or under what conditions. I guess the voice that comes back to me now is the voice of some kind of authority that comes with arriving at my senior age—I'll be sixty in a few weeks. And for better or worse, my experiences now help me to see more clearly what love and disappointment may be about. I now puzzle over the need to understand, in fact, why one lives at all. I want to understand the horrible times my parents and the pioneer generation went through, and why and how they were able to survive at all. Well, I believe I have some answers: there were daily pleasures, there was much to laugh at, and there was strength at being part of a fighting-back community. Chinatown was not a community of victims. There were the racist attitudes towards the sexual activities of a people who were told they had no more right to life than animals. They surmounted all of that, those who did survive.

I really wanted to write a book about survivors. I wanted to write a book about people who were decent and who survived. I think there is very little literature, other than sensationalist [books], that explore ordinary lives lived with decency. I love those grand epics that some people write, and I wish I could write them and make millions of dollars—so don't get me wrong—but I think the grand epics lie. I think it's a phony structure to think of the grand sweep, because you're thinking mainly of camera angles. Rather, you want that inner sweep of character, that enables your characters (and your readers) to transcend storytelling.

I had two reviewers, of Asian-North American background, who reviewed my book and were disappointed. Among their disappointments were that the characters seem to do nothing: they don't do anything, they don't go anywhere, what happened to them? They wanted to know what happened to them. Why didn't the author finish writing this book? These two reviewers, quite intelligent and sensitive in their own way, couldn't understand that one lives one's life in moments, not in the grand sweep of a plotline. And it's the collection of moments, Glenn, as

you yourself told me, of the light that was on that day that you found out your father died, that is all you need to know for the rest of your life. That light says everything of that extraordinary moment. You don't need to know the sweep of his life. If you went to write the sweep of his life, it would diminish the moments that mattered to you. So my book is probably a book of moments and I think a lot of writers are coming back to that. Maybe the bestseller lists will demand a novel that sweeps us from San Francisco to Beijing and to England and all that, but I think plotlines are usually a lot of romantic bullshit. The only plot anyone can be sure of is, finally, to be born, to live, and to die. To quote someone wiser, "Character is plot."

GD But do you think that Asian Canadian writers are forging something that is distinctive?

WC My suspicions are that, if anything, it is a distinctive sensibility. In my case, it has come with maturity, with an angle of view that understands the value of something over the price of anything. I'm thrilled by the children's stories by Paul Yee. I think he wrote a masterwork in *Tales from Gold Mountain* because he developed a narrative voice that captures the allegorical sense of his stories. In her *When Fox is a Thousand*, I think Larissa Lai has also understood the sense of moment. And hers has the honest form of a sweep because it involves an internal sense of revelation, for example, the surrealistic sense of being a woman and a fox creature. There is a marvelous creative sensibility at work here. And of course there is Sky Lee's wonderful book, *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, even though I think her storytelling is not as connected as I would like stylistically. I think her vision is particularly that mix of a Chinese and West Coast Canadian background where she is caught between storytelling and her characters' self-revelations. So all of us story writers—certainly I include myself—may still be finding our way.

GD Many of your stories are set in Vancouver's Chinatown and its specific local history. I know you've spent some time growing up in Belleville, Ontario. Did the Belleville restaurant that your family owned have a distinctive name?

WC It was called *Choy's Fish and Chips* on the Footbridge and then *Jim's Grill* on Front Street. Basically our restaurants had mundane names and they were fish'n' chip restaurants, not Chinese! (laughter)

GD *The Jade Peony* is dedicated to your parents?

WC It's dedicated to my two aunts who took care of me in Vancouver. Interestingly enough, I'll tell you about some signs. When the publishers asked me if I wanted a dedication, I said, "Yes, of course." And I wrote "To my aunts, Frieda and Mary." And then, instead of writing, "To My Parents," and I don't know why I didn't write that, it never dawned on me, I wrote, instead, their names, "To Toy and Lilly Choy." (Somebody pointed that out to me after the novel was published and I discovered I was adopted.) That's odd, I thought. I just assumed that everyone would know that Toy and Lilly Choy were my parents.

GD And both of your adoptive parents worked in the restaurant. Did you also hang around?

WC I worked in those restaurants, yes.

GD A great place to listen to people and their conversations, and get in on the gossip.

WC It is, and I was young enough to be an observer and small enough to be forgotten. When you're a kid and you look like you're harmless, people will talk right in front of you as if you weren't there. Invisible. I have always been a reasonably good listener. I absorb information in strange ways. I retain hot bits. Whatever my kind of mind finds interesting, becomes memorable. I guess this is true for everyone. However, I'm not always conscious about the amount of memory that I am retaining until I call for it, as happens when I'm writing.

GD Later what was it like when you were a student at UBC doing Sociology, English, and Creative Writing with Earle Birney and Jake Zilber?

WC Yes, Earle Birney was one of my teachers. I really had a fine time. Again, I was fortunate, and I was spoiled. Earle Birney, Jan de Bruyn, and Jake Zilber began mentoring me as someone who they thought had a particular talent and potential. But I assumed that all of the students were treated just as well as I was. After all, from that era came George Bowering, Fred Wah, Daphne Marlatt, Frank Davey, and a whole bunch of those future writers and poets who were nurtured by them. I wasn't the only one. I now understand what they did for me, which was to say in their way that I was a writer and that this potential should be supported.

GD As a visible minority writer, this writing ability is a special distinction. Did you feel something special about being able to enter this area of English study?

WC Yes, I did. I felt I wasn't so much special, as having been empowered by

the other writing students' sense of superiority, and by their real talent which was superior to mine, perhaps because I hadn't explored my own talent. The others weren't being snobs about their abilities, and in fact I think, looking back, I was quite welcome to join any group like the TISH gang, and there would not have been anyone objecting. But I hung around with a Chinatown crowd that I grew up with, and so didn't hang out with a university crowd. Mine was a kind of self-alienation; I didn't feel I belonged even though I was welcomed. If I sat too long with the other writing students I discovered that I couldn't speak their literary language. I didn't have all the references they had. Many of them took for granted whole genres of American and British names and I was only beginning to discover these. I probably felt discomfitted by their knowledge and my lack of similar knowledge.

GD Does this experience serve you well when you are trying to create inclusive contexts within your own classrooms at Humber College? You spoke of how, in dealing with students of Afro-Canadian heritage, you urged students to look at their own family and tribal histories. Do you find yourself enabled in your teaching because of your own past?

WC A handful of students are aware of my past, and there are always questions about how I wrote *The Jade Peony*, and why, and all that. My awareness of the past helps me to teach my multi-backgrounded students.

In all my readings and meetings with the public, I always emphasize the power of story, the power of narrative. As Carol Shields puts it, "There is a hunger for narrative in this generation." Because their history—black or white—has been homogenized by television and by the Disney paint-brush, this homogenization has caused many of my students to ignore the stories of their own families. Their own families watch the same television programs that mesmerizes them.

Meanwhile, the grandparents stay silently put away somewhere, probably with a television set, too; and no one talks to anyone else. We all seem to think, as I tell my students, that everyone is supposed to come from Beverly Hills High. They usually laugh at this, so I say, "Find out where you actually came from—explore your family history—because this will guide you to understand who you truly are."

I encourage my students to understand their history. This encouragement probably comes from understanding the importance of my own stories, the power of stories that are true, not those told simply to entertain.

Andy Quan

flight ice blood metal

flying is the sound the heart makes
when it knows what it has hoped for
is on the way. you can close your eyes
to hear it, or open them so wide
you cannot see for the light. so the world
is only whistling wind through the crevices
of your outstretched hands, your breath
joining the quickening air around you,
the delicate straining of your skin
being pulled back on your bones and joints.
it is the pure white noise of silence,
the still black when you touch ground.

the sound of ice slows your heart,
draws you into a solemn waltz,
your arms lifted and frozen in place.
it is a dance between water and sky.
it is time lost in a hall of glass,
and falling asleep. a quiet music,
if you move too quickly, it is gone:
this call of ivory tufted birds
with shiny black eyes fading in
and out of vision, descending from
clouds, ascending from snow storms.

the four chambers of your heart, the echoes
between them, is the sound of blood,
the bustling about of storage, loss and laughter
in different compartments. it is stepping
into a catacomb, the air thick and warm and murky.
and stepping outside. you run as fast
as you've ever gone, the red sparrow within you
expanding and contracting. running out of breath,
you stop in front of a temple, and enter.
smoke and ashes fill the space as bells ring.

the sound of metal could make you lose
your mind or find it again. it is cloth
ripping, a sky rent with lightning, an argument.
but when it is all over, the edges
become clear and smooth, friction wears
away into motion, seawater leaves its salt
on the shore. the sound of metal is finding
a chipped arrowhead out in the frozen wilderness,
a tiny dark sliver in a field of blue snow.
you scrape it against the ice and hear throat-
singing, ceremony, extinction, discovery, new life.

Susanna Egan and Gabriele Helms*

The Many Tongues of *Mothertalk: Life Stories of Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka*

Collaborations

We have begun our work together by trying to understand whose text *Mothertalk* really is.[1] The cover suggests that at least three people were involved in making this book; the life stories of Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka have been written by Roy Kiyooka and edited by Daphne Marlatt. However, what seems to be a collaborative venture poses problems from the start, with the risk that "Mary" is subsumed by multiple layers of reading.[2] Marlatt's introduction to *Mothertalk* outlines the complex procedures whereby Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka's life stories travelled from Japanese conversations to English print: Mary Kiyooka told her stories, in Japanese, to Matsuki Masutani, who taped and transcribed them. He then translated these transcriptions into fairly literal English, which Roy Kiyooka re-translated in order to capture the effects in English of his mother's Tosa dialect. Adding to his mother's stories from his own knowledge and memories of her storytelling through his childhood, Kiyooka also rearranged the material he had received. When he died in 1994 before completing his book, his daughters asked Marlatt (a writer and one-time partner of Roy Kiyooka) to see it into print. NeWest published *Mothertalk* in 1997, rearranged by Marlatt, and now including significant additional materials. Every addition (such as the inclusion of Kiyooka's poetry) and every change marks accretions of meaning and purpose for this text as new readers become involved. From the photographs on front and

* We have used some of the materials for this paper in presentations at two conferences: "Approaching the Auto/Biographical Turn" in Beijing, June 1999, and the "Roy Kiyooka Conference" at the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in Vancouver, October 1999. We regret that publication timelines do not allow this paper to reflect discussion at the Roy Kiyooka Conference.

back covers, from introduction to appendices, this work presents an historical transformation that implicates so many readers that we, reading in our turn, need to examine the finished product as a work in progress.

As we examine the relations among these multiple layers and players and the actual process of making *Mothertalk*, our initial question about authorship and originality becomes increasingly problematic. As Marlatt herself suggests, "there is no original here," which she modifies by adding "the original is inaccessible to us" (Interview). To tease out the layers of *Mothertalk* and understand it as process, we will trace its evolution by reading the published text with and against Kiyooka's earlier manuscript versions and in the context of recent interviews with Masutani and Marlatt. As we describe the changes between different versions of *Mothertalk*, we also hope to show that the kind of complex collaboration informing the *Mothertalk* project forces us to reconsider how we approach this kind of life-writing, what analytical tools are available to us, and what we hope to achieve in our discussion of such material. As a result, we wish to raise questions, explicitly and implicitly, about authority and originality for instance, but some of the answers may lie beyond the scope of this introductory paper.

The complexity of *Mothertalk* and the many questions and comments it prompted in our initial individual readings compelled us to work on this text together. We had collaborated before and had therefore already established the trust and responsibility necessary for such a task. (It is difficult to forget that "collaboration" in wartime contexts describes treachery. This negative meaning highlights the importance of trust, whether maintained or broken, in any kind of collaboration.) With this text in particular, we have benefited from discussion because we have been able to draw on earlier work that each of us had done in related areas. What we could develop together promised to be much wider-reaching than anything we could have achieved separately. We have also experimented with the collaborative writing process itself by talking and writing together in front of the computer as well as rewriting each other's contributions. In the process of these challenges, exchanges, and negotiations, we have blurred our own boundaries as individual speakers and have now produced a shared paper that we both read as "ours."

While on the one hand it seems entirely appropriate that an academic study of a collaborative project should itself be collaborative, we recognize on the other the simplicity of our task in comparison with the *Mothertalk* project. Mary spent several hours in conversation with Masutani. Once her

stories were transcribed onto paper and translated in English, she herself had no further control over them. Kiyooka may well have spoken with his mother about his own work on these stories, but she was in no position to confirm his choices. Similarly, when Marlatt entered the process, Kiyooka himself was no longer alive. Her discussions with Masutani and with members of the Kiyooka family did not enable her to receive confirmation from Kiyooka himself or, of course, from Mary. By contrast, our collaborative enterprise has involved continuous interaction between us, an extended exercise in repeated and reciprocal suggestion, adjustment, and confirmation.

We ourselves come to Mary Kiyooka's life stories as outsiders, but undoubtedly read them for their resonance with our own experiences. As women of two generations, and as immigrants from England and Germany respectively, we respond to Mary Kiyooka's experience of immigration from Japan to Canada. We respond to Kiyooka's involvement with his mother's text, recognizing its power to explain his identity as both Canadian and Japanese. We respond to the challenges of translation and the grounding of Kiyooka's sensibilities in two languages (Miki, "Roy Kiyooka" 59). We respond to Marlatt's editorial involvement derived from her sense of responsibility to Mary and Roy Kiyooka and part of her longstanding commitment to oral and community histories. We also read *Mothertalk* in light of very significant help from those whose readings have preceded our own. The generosity we have received at every stage of this work has been quite inspiring. Masutani explains everyone's willingness to help in terms of Roy Kiyooka's own kindness that friends and family would wish to perpetuate. Marlatt put us in touch with Fumiko Kiyooka, who simply handed over the manuscripts for *Mothertalk* in an amazing act of trust. Kiyo Kiyooka has given us permission to publish from these manuscripts. Masutani gave an extended interview at his home on Denman Island, 11 June 1999, and Marlatt gave an extended interview at her home in Victoria, 8 July 1999. Both the manuscripts and these interviews implicate us as readers, drawing us into the ongoing interpretive process and the earlier community of collaborators; they are crucial to the discussion that follows.

Mothertalk is collaborative life-writing that defies familiar definitions of collaboration. Marlatt herself describes only her interaction with Kiyooka's drafts as collaborative, a collaboration in her own mind, explaining that "it was also partly a way of having an extended visit with him after he died because his voice was so present" (Interview). Although critics have discussed

forms of collaboration, both as acknowledged by double signatures or hidden behind a single name, we are not aware of any critical readings of collaborative life stories that are as self-consciously complex as *Mothertalk*.[3] When Samantha Hodder, for example, describes *Mothertalk* as a "dual autobiography" (13), she accounts for only two of the participants (Mary and Roy Kiyooka) in this much more complex collaborative endeavour. Recent work on collaborative life stories that were first narrated orally and then presented in writing has identified important questions about authority and mediation in the collaborative enterprise (see in particular Cruikshank, Davies, Humez, and Kaplan), although here too the focus has usually been on two participants.

Most of the collaboration in *Mothertalk* is best described as successive or serial as each listener becomes the speaker of another story shaped by yet another listener.[4] Each version thus always belongs to at least two people whose sameness and difference inform their struggle for control over the story. [5] Working beyond mere acknowledgement of multiple voices, we want to examine their relationships in detail, recognizing that collaboration may range from dialogic relations between separate but mutually engaged subjects to a blending of voices which renders them indistinguishable from one another. Although the experience of immediate reciprocity that Marlatt has described in other collaborative projects may be less important in *Mothertalk*'s serial creation,[6] slippage remains a crucial concept to account for what happens in the in-between spaces between collaborators' "distinctive ways of moving in and through language" (*Readings* 116). The term serial collaboration can thus be helpful in setting this kind of collaborative writing apart from the more common dual collaboration; it not only emphasizes the crucial relations among multiple speakers, listeners, and contexts, but it also foregrounds the succession of multiple versions, their mediated quality, and the processual nature of the life stories collected in *Mothertalk*.

The Genesis of *Mothertalk*

Mothertalk originated as Roy Kiyooka's project to record his mother's stories. He had listened to them from boyhood, but felt his own Japanese was too limited for the purpose of recording or translating them for posterity. In his third-person narration of "Pacific Windows," Kiyooka describes how he and his mother began their particular collaboration on *Mothertalk*:

> They spent long summer evenings together remembering distant 'names' and

'faces' and they recounted all the kindred and alien time-warps. Each summer she cited the names of those she knew who had recently passed away, and in her obits she would cite how each of them had passed their presciences onto those who were alive and kicking. . . . she invariably talked about all the family ties they had on both sides of the pacific, and though she never mentioned it, they both knew she was the last link to the sad and glad tidings of the floating world. (*Pacific Windows* 298)[7]

Marlatt's memories of Mary's visits to Vancouver support Kiyooka's lyrical evocation of reminiscences with his mother. Describing Kiyooka and his mother as sharing "a very strong sense of humour and a kind of astonishment at life" (Interview), Marlatt describes Mary as

a great storyteller. She told stories all the time. She loved telling stories about other people too. Whenever she came to visit, she would go down to Tonari Gumi, which is the senior centre, and often find people that she had met through her travels so many years earlier across Canada, and they would trade life stories. And she would come home very excited and pour all this out to Roy, and they would sit and marvel at it and so on. (Interview)

This jubilant intimacy of storytelling began in Kiyooka's childhood and provided him with his earliest comprehension and use of oral Japanese. In "Gotenyama," Kiyooka writes of

this roundabout
saunter
thru Gotenyama backstreets
re sound-
ing inside the shell
of a child's
syntax

(an 'echo'
of a distant echo...

my mother
taught me on the sunday morning
back porch
of a long ago East Calgary
circa 1930s

these
thrasht blossoms clinging to my sleeve

this mid-morning
reprieve

(*Pacific Windows* 227)[8]

Japanese was an oral language for Kiyooka. In his address, "We Asian North Americanos: An unhistorical 'take' on growing up yellow in a white world," which appears as an appendix for *Mothertalk*, he writes: "Everytime I look at my face in a mirror I think of how it keeps on changing its features in English tho English is not my mother tongue" (181). Marlatt remembers Kiyooka working informally at his Japanese which, she says, improved with his visits to Japan later in his life (Interview). Masutani, who says that Kiyooka enjoyed conversing in Japanese and managed very well despite his limited vocabulary, remembers just one instance in which he knew of Kiyooka working on written Japanese:

> In 1985 Roy wrote a poem in Japanese. He wrote it phonetically (in Roma-ji) since he couldn't write Japanese. I first corrected his roma-ji, then rewrote it in Japanese. This poem is reprinted on page 262 of "Pacific Window". This was the only time that I ever helped him with written Japanese. ("Re: *Mothertalk*")

For the larger project of retrieving his mother's stories and translating them from oral Japanese to an English appropriate both to her voice and to a wide audience, Kiyooka looked for help with Japanese translation and turned to Masutani.

Kiyooka asked Masutani to interview Mary in Japanese and to record and translate her storytelling. Despite Kiyooka's personal interest in the project, Masutani describes his own mandate as quite independent. Kiyooka was sometimes present during the conversations but did not become involved and never stayed for long. Kiyooka had expressed interest in recording his mother's stories of Meiji Japan, but did not provide specific questions, leaving the possibilities of these encounters quite open. We were glad to establish these details because they clarify for us the extent to which Masutani could pursue his own interests in these conversations and they also establish the early stages of what we have come to describe as serial collaboration.

Masutani and Mary had not known each other before the interviews but were introduced by Kiyooka with the express purpose that Mary should tell her stories in Japanese. Masutani describes Mary as an eager and voluble storyteller, requiring no prompting. Masutani says that he and Kiyooka-san spoke in different dialects, her Tosa-ben being distinct and also old-fashioned. Her Japanese dated back to the turn of the century and had not undergone any of the shifts of time or the elimination of differences that television had introduced. Their language together was casual and conversational, but he recognized her as a highly educated woman. She had spo-

ken to Maya Koizumi, who had interviewed her some ten years earlier, and Masutani commented on Mary's comfort in speaking to a woman; she had been prepared, for instance, to speak on that occasion about wearing underwear for the first time in her life when she came to Canada. With Masutani, so much younger than she and a man, Mary developed a different kind of bond. Masutani suggests that he unconsciously positioned himself as a grandson might, listening to a grandmother with great respect.

Clearly, she enjoyed talking about Japan in Japanese with a sympathetic listener who could understand what she was talking about. In the original translation, Mary claims Masutani's particular understanding in frequent parenthetical asides: "It's only Japanese," she says at one point in her story of her father's role as second, required to behead young samurai who were committing seppuku or traditional suicide: "Japanese only understand this. My children laugh at this, but you understand, don't you. You come from Japan, you have heard these things from your parents" (MM's Transcript 2).[9] These asides indicate her regret that her children do not speak better Japanese and that the two children she left behind in Japan, and from whom she was separated for many years, have no wish to keep records from that past. While these asides are crucial in affirming the relationship between Mary and Masutani, they create problems when other listeners come to Mary's stories from a different cultural background and miss the specific context on which much of her storytelling relies.[10] The culture-specific nature of these oral exchanges seems to invite Kiyooka's intervention. Had Masutani's responsibility been simply to transcribe oral history in Japanese across generations, the resulting work would clearly exclude us as readers. It would also play a more limited role in Canadian culture. Our work on the genesis of *Mothertalk* suggests that the value of this book for all Canadian readers has been significantly increased by the interventions that followed.

Masutani's role in this project was crucial at the time in providing Kiyooka with an extended text. As Mary's first audience and interpreter in this cumulative project, Masutani provided the first stages of mediation—from oral Japanese to written English. However, the fact that his name does not appear on the cover or title page of the completed book may indicate just how remote his foundational work came to seem after years of work by Kiyooka and then by Marlatt on the written text. It was nonetheless so foundational that Marlatt, as final mediator for this project, returned to Masutani's text when Kiyooka's final version seemed to her muddled and

confusing; while no version can be read as original or authoritative, Masutani's transliteration remains foundational for the English-speaking reader. Close attention to Masutani's text also helps to explain how these stories retain their oral quality through multiple successive interventions. Strangely, given the liberties Kiyooka took with Masutani's text, sometimes for very clear reasons, as we can show, and sometimes to satisfy his own sense of how his mother would sound in English, he seems never to have forgotten his mother's speaking presence or the context of the original exchange.

Masutani's task was to provide a literal transcript from conversation in Japanese and then to translate the Japanese tapes fairly literally into English text. Because Masutani's own English is strongly inflected by Japanese, the effect of the earliest translation is indeed that of reading a Japanese speaker with what Kiyooka has called his mother's "broken-english" (*Pacific Windows* 298). For example, Masutani renders Mary's meeting in Japan with an old school friend who had emigrated to the States:

> Oh Boy Boy, I was shocked to death. He was full of white hairs and bald. We were so happy, though, to meet childhood friend. I was with him for four years in Jinjou [elementary] school days, fighting with him every days. I was a tomboy, and strong, so I was afraid of boys, and fighting with them all the time. I've often beaten up boys to tears. Yea I was a real tomboy when I was small.
>
> So, we hold each others and cried, then took pictures of us.
> (Mrs. Kiyooka No. 2., 16)[11]

(Kiyooka's pencil makes the obvious correction that Mary "wasn't" afraid of boys. Masutani's slip in this instance may be a simple omission or may indicate transition from Japanese to English or from oral to written language.) Masutani retains not only repetitions of narrative as Mary returned to certain topics repeatedly but also the repetitions or rephrasing that suggest the musing nature of oral narrative dependent on a listener for confirmation. "Remember!" she says at one point (#2, 2), or "You know him, don't you?" (#2, 3) or, about Mariko, the daughter she left in Japan: ""I parted with her when she was two. You see her, she'll come soon. She is now about sixty" (#2, 17).

Masutani was unhappy with his own earliest understanding that he was to produce a book from these meetings; he did not feel his English was adequate. Once he had persuaded Kiyooka that further "translation" would be necessary, he began to annotate his own transcriptions for Kiyooka's use. For example, as a parenthetical note in the story of meeting an old school friend, Masutani inserts "about to cry." She talks of her brother at one point

as the rotten son of "such a nice father," and Masutani adds "(tapping the table by the finger)" to include her emphasis. Or she talks about her nephews' weddings in Japan and "(her tone of voice is suddenly like a that of haikara lady ["high-collar" or very elegant])." Or again, describing just how mistaken her father was to think that life would be better for her in Canada than in Japan, "(she raised her voice suddenly,)" in order to say "on the contrary, I had a terrible time, I went through hell!" (MM's Transcript 3). Telling of her father's expectation that she would return to Japan, "(Her voice starts to shake with tears)" (Mrs. Kiyooka No. 2. 24). In two copies of the same story, one heavily edited by Kiyooka and the other annotated in pencil by Marlatt, Masutani's text is interrupted by the parenthetical note: "(Telephone call from her daughter Mariko)." The oral quality of the text is enhanced by the reader's understanding of immediate context, gesture, mood, and expression provided in parentheses and by inclusion of literal renditions of laughter, for example, as "ha ha ha ha ha." Marlatt has described Mary Kiyooka as earthy and ribald (even in her "broken-english"), thoroughly engaged, for example, by the harsh stories she had to tell of picture brides, illicit love, violence, and prostitution. Masutani's annotation of the emotional qualities of Mary's oral delivery and of her laughter conveys one sense of her presence that has been "refined" out of the printed text.

We note these changes that affected both language and storytelling with ambivalence: on the one hand, Mary's first narratives, mediated only by translation, do not assume a wider public than her immediate speaking situation; on the other, Kiyooka's interventions necessarily determine and control the nature of that wider public that the book has reached. Kiyooka edited Masutani's text to provide formal English diction and syntax equivalent to the nature of his mother's Japanese. For example, the meeting with a former school friend is changed with bold pencilled lines straight through words to be omitted, and with rephrasing provided in large pencilled capitals:

> Boy, I was shocked. He was whitehaired and bald. We were so happy to meet each other again. I was with him for four years in Jinjou school days, fighting with him every day. I was a tomboy and strong, I wasn't afraid of boys. I've often beaten them up. Yea I was a real tomboy when I was small.
> So we held each other and cried, he had pictures taken of us.[12]

Part of Kiyooka's work on syntax, diction, and idiom included tidying and focussing Mary's "text" for more public delivery than her intimate conversations with Masutani had invited. So "my Mom" becomes "MOTHER,"

"my Dad" becomes "HER HUSBAND." The clause, "she wait on his drinking," is repaired not only for idiom but also for the precision required for a wider, English public, so it becomes ""she SERVED HIS SAKE" (TALES OF Mrs. KIYOOKA 7, 2). In one heavily edited passage, we find every element of both Masutani and Kiyooka's interventions. In the original:

> my old man came here at 18, he was 28 in this picture and I was 20. (looking at the picture nostalgicly) Poor fellow he was! But that's life isn't it. You guy are lucky, but don't make mistake with woman A HA HA HA" (Mrs Kiyooka No. 2., 11).

Kiyooka's heavy pencil transforms the passage:

> My HUSBAND came here IN 1905. HE WAS JUST 18. He was 28 in this picture and I was 20. My old man was different. He wasn't too much of a talker. . . .

Mediating between his mother's intimate narration and its public reception, Kiyooka's editorial work anticipates the needs of readers who are unfamiliar with Japanese culture and therefore resituates Mary's extraordinary stories beyond their family context into a broader Canadian history. The "Parsha Hotel," for example, becomes the "PALLISER Hotel" (Mrs. KIYOOKA [Pearl-Harbor] 11), and Mary's memory of her age at the birth of each child (or Masutani's hearing) is also corrected: "I had the last kid when I was 33. He [her husband] was 38 or 39, I think" becomes "I had the last kid when I was 43. He was 48 or 49, I think" (11).

These formal distancing elements are worth noting in the work of a man who published very personal correspondence in *Transcanada Letters* with all the idiosyncracies of his own style of address. With his own narrative, Kiyooka creates the illusion of unmediated reality, the personal mail that suggests to an outsider intimate connections to be puzzled over, communities of family and fellow artists both revealed and obscured by cryptic and therefore often incomprehensible pieces of information, trivia lacking explanation. In his mother's story, on the other hand, Kiyooka seems to have wanted somehow to capture her patterns of speech and thought while at the same time translating the most personal of her exchanges into a fully transmissible public voice. He attends to precision and creates authority for Mary by formalizing her public persona, ensuring that the English reader receives her nostalgia and her measured wisdom but not her raucous energy or intense and immediate emotions. Where *Transcanada Letters* plays explicitly with persona and with the opacity of transmission, Kiyooka intervenes in *Mothertalk* to create the illusion of simple clarity. Mary's narrative voice is a

project of Kiyooka's artistry under which she is in fact obscured, but the slippages are only apparent if we examine all the available versions of this text.

Finally, Kiyooka worked to transform his mother's oral Tosa-ben into an English that sounded to his ears equivalent to or resonating with his own understanding of his mother's speech. However, he mutes Mary's very practical approach to events. For example, talking to Masutani about the impoverishment of the samurai class during the Meiji Reformation, Mary says: "some became absolutely destitute. They needed money, so lots of them put their swords in the pawn-shop, just to survive" (Mrs. KIYOOKA No. 3, 3). Kiyooka's final version provides elegant rhythms and translates concepts of absolute destitution and survival into the relative abstractions of "income" and suitability: "the samurai found themselves without a master and hence without an income. They'd all been trained to live by their swords and now their swords were only fit for the pawnshop" (*Mothertalk* 19). Similarly, where Masutani's text has Mary taking pride in the story of her father having to chop off nine heads, *Mothertalk* presents her narration as more restrained and genteel: "I won't go into all the gory details but as each rebel prostrated himself and committed seppuku, Father had to behead him" (162).[13]

However, in tandem with this restraint, Kiyooka's text also introduces lyrical sentences that have no equivalent in the original translations but nonetheless do capture Mary's yearning for the Japan of her childhood. For example, when her father was drunk, "the old songs sang through him" (*Mothertalk* 41), or "When I pass away there won't be a soul left to tell how the heart-of-Tosa sang in our home behind an English facade" (172). Repeated use of "O" as a lyrical apostrophe in *Mothertalk* also originates with Kiyooka. Marlatt says "That's Roy, that's very Roy. He uses that a lot in his poetry" (Interview). When we asked Marlatt about these lyrical passages, she described the work as "almost symphonic in its different tones" but agreed that "the lyrical impulse is there very strongly often in the descriptions. And the descriptions are Roy's. [Mary] was not a describer. She would indicate. She would give an indication, but it would be quite concise, and he liked to elaborate and in the elaboration to try to recreate the feel of that experience, in that place, at that time" (Interview). In no small part, then, Kiyooka's mediation seems to expand on his childhood sense of Mary's nostalgia conveyed in the Tosa dialect that was his "mother tongue."

Clearly, Kiyooka also heard his "mother tongue" inflecting his own English. Miki quotes from the Kiyooka papers: "i do believe that my kind of

inglish bears the syntactical traces of my parent's kochi-ben: everytime i've gone back there and walked the streets of that lovely city on the pacific, i hear the cadences of my own native speech: both nihongo and inglish subtly transmuted into an undialectical syntax" (Afterword 320, fn. 21). Kiyooka's pencil, then, altering text in bold capital letters and scoring through Masutani's printout, translates and selects but also adds his own voice to his mother's. His "reading" of his mother's stories is distinct from Masutani's in particular because of their effect on his own life. Marlatt's pencil, too, in light cursive in the margins, highlights topics but does not affect the text in terms of manuscript markings.

Japanese Components of *Mothertalk*

During the taped interviews, Mary wanted in particular to talk about her father, whom she admired, and who was a significant figure in the Meiji period of Japanese history (1868-1912). Masutani's understanding is that Kiyooka, too, was particularly interested in recording Mary's memories of her father and of her life in Japan. Not only does Mary repeatedly describe Kiyooka as her father's true heir, a true samurai, filled with the bushido spirit that values honour above life,[14] but her stories also carry, from the earliest transcripts, the urgent refrain of her desire to erect a stone to honour her father's memory. She sends money for the stone. She corresponds with her father's former students. She visits Japan in her old age to urge the project forward.[15] Mary also wanted to talk about Tosa, which is now known as Kochi City, remembering the haunts of her childhood with more passion than any other places in her life. The finished text retains this element of the earliest transcripts in that it carries this refrain too, her love for Tosa and her wish to return. She talks of childhood memories. She regrets being unable to return to Japan. For all the nearly 80 years she has lived in Canada, she demonstrates neither comfort here nor any sense of a second home. Times have been cruelly hard. Customs here are different. Old ways are not respected. ("These days people are losing the sense of Giri & Ninjou [honor and compassion]") (Mrs. KIYOOKA No. 3, 4). The only comfort that occurs to her is that wartime in Japan must have been much harder than in Canada. "I've spent most of my life here," Mary says in the published text, "but Tosa's my real home" (*Mothertalk* 29).

Mary and her father, Masaji Oe, had been devoted to each other, he raising her like a son to participate in martial arts and to live according to the

samurai code of honour. Her stories include her early experiences of training with the young boys. "I still remember mid-winter training," Mary says at one point (*Mothertalk* 21). In the transcription, she says "I didn't do that myself but I watch them doing that. Tosas' youth were tough. This is my memory, a fact. Nobody know this except me. Even my children wouldn't understand this" (Mrs. Kiyooka No. 2., 6). Masaji Oe's choice of Shigekiyo Kiyooka as a husband for her was based on his understanding that this young man was also a warrior and could assume the responsibilities of a son, continuing to teach the art of Iai. Masaji Oe died later in the year of Roy's birth, leaving Mary with the lasting regret that she could not keep her promise to him and return to Japan. But stories of his distinction and renown and of her own closeness to him were an early part of Kiyooka's personal inheritance.

One story in particular belongs in Japanese history books but demonstrates in our present context the slippages that occur when the narrative passes from oral exchange to transcription, translation, and then through the multiple revisions that Kiyooka undertook.[16] We have already referred to the restraint and refinement that have been introduced into Mary's story of ten young samurai having to commit seppuku. Lord Yamanouchi ordered the young samurai, Masaji Oe, to be second to ten men, all well known to him, who were to commit seppuku by disembowelling themselves. His task was to behead them in order to abbreviate their suffering. Masutani's transcript reads as follows, prior to Kiyooka's editing and without any typographical corrections:

> The Tosa opposition group was arrested and brought to Senshu Koobe, and ordered SEPPUKU. My dad was summoned by Mr. Yamanouchi to assist the Seppuku. They won't die by just cutting their abdomen, so they need assistance to die. My dad had to cut their heads, after calling them in their names. He did up to nine people. Then Whitemen stopped it, being terribly shocked. Apparently whitemen were there. They came to Japan by boat. Probably Tosa opposition group did something rude to these foreignors, so they were ordered to Seppuku in from of them to apologize thier deed. That's why it was performed in Senshu, Koobe. You see, Koobe and Nagasaki were only ports to the foreignors in olden days.
>
> One person survived. I saw him when I was little, he was still around. He was called uncle DOI. My dad helped him, mr. Doi was ordered to commit seppuku but whitemen said "It's enough. No more." So he was only one came back to Tosa from the ordeal. He live long up till Meiji. He was still alive when I was little. He was running the inn. Do you know why I remember this so clearly? My dad told me about this many many times. It won't disappear from my mind. Tosa is different, very rough indeed. (Mrs KIYOOKA No. 3, 8-9)

The emotional import of the experience and of the old woman's memory of listening, repeatedly, to her father's telling of the experience are conveyed by that repetition, by her comment that this memory is indelible, and by her comparative stance, surely acquired later in life, that Tosa was both "different" and "very rough indeed." However, the experience is also contextualized in terms of "whitemen" having entry to some ports rather than others, likely to have been insulted, and then stopping the proceedings in shock at this unfamiliar form of violence. Given that Mary refers more than once to the lack of contact between Japan and the West, and the resistance to western influences even in Meiji Japan, this version of an old story conveys some sense of her own ambivalence. However, another, briefer version, also in Masutani's transcripts, includes the information that these young men were friends of Masaji Oe and that he was only eighteen when required to behead them. She comments: "Men of olden days were something, now men of 18 or 19 werestill [sic] kids. Men before Meiji were very matured" (KIYOOKA-SAN NO TALE 6, 12-13). Here, Mary's admiration for her father acknowledges the moral courage involved in samurai behaviour. She also describes the shocked white men merely as "people who were watching." Curiously, this unspecific and ahistorical reference, which eliminates even the fact of their being foreigners, provides the ground for Kiyooka's processes of revision.

For example, in this story of seppuku, Kiyooka struggles not just with language but also with political perspective and with publicly verifiable information in his editing. In both Mother 2 and Mother 3, the death sentence follows a "revolt," though Mother 3 indicates "a big revolt." Mother 2 calls these young men "Loyalists," but Mother 3 calls them "young rebels." As for the white men who were so shocked, Mother 2 refers to the witnesses as "all the local people" and Mother 3 calls them "all the locals." Masutani has expressed surprise at this revision, remembering vaguely from history lessons in Japan that these white people were either English or French, horrified witnesses of an execution they had requested because these young samurai were guilty of killing a westerner. Indeed, the whole situation is very strangely altered if foreigners are eliminated and local Japanese witnesses are disturbed by seppuku. In both versions, the tenth man is saved because the witnesses protest. Mary remembered being invited as a small girl many years later to rub the survivor's bald head for good luck. This memory must identify the survivor referred to in Masutani's transcript as the man who kept an inn, but Masutani's transcript makes no mention of the young girl

rubbing his bald head. We can only assume Kiyooka drew on his own memories of his mother's stories to embellish the story she had provided on tape.

In *Mothertalk*, Marlatt has placed this story of seppuku in the final chapter, called "Landscape-of-the-Heart" (162-63), a title that focusses on Mary's intense longing for Tosa and therefore on the ways in which longing colours memory. Situated here, this story belongs not with Mary's memories of childhood but with her visits to Japan as an old woman and her efforts to raise the memorial stone for her father. This story becomes part of the monument, a tribute to his character rather than evidence of a clash between two cultures. Given Mary's preoccupations as they are evident from the earliest transcripts, Marlatt's decision seems entirely appropriate, but we note the shifts in detail, tone, and purpose as examples of slippage from one reader to the next, and as vivid evidence that the final version necessarily obscures its own origins. This final version elaborates not on "the local people [who] were so horrified by the blood-letting" but on the relations between the young men committing seppuku and their executioner:

> He told me the story many times and I listened to it like a boy does. "It was such a pity! Even I felt sorry. They were my friends. They were bidding farewell to each other and saying, Now it's my turn, Good-bye! Good-bye! and then each one would politely ask me to cut off his head. And I had to do it." (*Mothertalk* 163)

Mary comments: "It took tremendous courage. An ordinary person wouldn't have been able to do this" (163). All the ingredients remain from separate incidents in the earliest transcripts: the girl who was like a son to her father, the father's own (repeated) storytelling, the "calling them in their names," the rigour of the samurai code of honour, and the exceptional character of Masaji Oe. However, the effect of this passage has been refashioned over many readings, polished like a stone to eliminate information not essential to Mary's filial piety.[17] Our own sense of Mary's voice, both as it first addresses us from Masutani's translations and as it is affected by Kiyooka's interventions, suggests that she would have been happy with this emphasis on filial piety, that we can read this polishing almost as a search for the very heart of her narrative.

Canadian Components of *Mothertalk*

Given that *Mothertalk* itself is an act of filial piety on Kiyooka's part, we note as ironic the further shift from Japanese stories to the Canadian stories that form so large a part of the book. Kiyooka had wanted his mother's memories

of Japan.[18] Marlatt's extended negotiations for publication with Alfred Knopf gave her to understand that they, too, were interested in the Japanese elements of the stories, that they wanted more about Japan, which Marlatt, of course, was unable to produce (Interview). Not only that. Marlatt also shared Masutani's interest in the Canadian stories but for a different reason from his. She felt very strongly that Mary's stories were important for Canadian history. This Canadian component of *Mothertalk* deserves fuller attention than we can give it here, though we cannot downplay the significance of Marlatt's intervention in this matter. Ultimately, her choices have determined that Mary's life stories find their place in the English reader's understanding of the Japanese Canadian experience.

Masutani, too, a young immigrant to Canada, arriving in the 1970s was particularly interested in Mary's stories of Canada. He recognized that Kiyooka would not have needed stories of their early life in Canada; he had been part of that himself. Laughing, Masutani acknowledged that his role as interviewer just might have skewed Mary's emphasis and led her to talk about the early years of her married life, the hardship and poverty, their work in hotels and laundries, a whaling station, a vegetable market in Calgary, and so on. Certainly, the Depression years, the hungry men hiding on trains, and the food line-ups blend with her sense of "O Canada." These Depression years of Kiyooka's early childhood formed his own most personal memories. Where Japan and the samurai grandfather provided stories from his mother's past, enriching Kiyooka's sense of his Japanese heritage, the Depression in Calgary formed him as a Canadian.

Masutani's curiosity as an immigrant gave rise to stories that belonged in Kiyooka's own foundational memories. Furthermore, just as Kiyooka's poetry can be inserted so readily into *Mothertalk* because Kiyooka shared so many preoccupations with his mother, so his memories of Calgary provide a distinct perspective on hers. Kiyooka's own musings on that Canadian history appear on frayed and yellow legal pages loosely stuffed into a thin black binder that is labelled "AUTOBIOGRAPH - "(what follows could be a Y but looks like a number 9, a number 7, or the letter M). Repeatedly, he refers to the "house" that he carries within him. He looks out through the windows of that house:

> thru all the rooms
> i have lived in in all over canada

thru all the rooms
all over the country

even today, standing with my coat on
at the entrance to a room
somewhere in the world i am the boy who stood
watching the trains leave from
the cpr yards to distant cities.

Repeatedly, in these drafts, Kiyooka calls to his children from his own childhood. He remembers playmates by nickname, the schoolyard, the ball diamond, his slow and painful recovery from serious burns:

It was
his mother come home
from work
who could take his pain
into her arms
& there it would lie
as if it were hers . . .

Some of these drafts are heavily marked with red ink. Many are repetitions with small variations. None seems complete. These pages, however, provide the child's slant on the history that Kiyooka and his mother shared in Canada, the story he did not need to hear because he himself could tell it. Information that Masutani pursued in his interviews with Mary, repeated in preoccupations evident in Kiyooka's notebooks, illuminates the role Mary's life stories must have played in Kiyooka's own sense of identity. One feature, then, of this serial collaboration is an important overlap between the concerns of these two collaborators, Mary and Kiyooka, and the sense in which these stories are reflexively auto/biographical.

Marlatt's Intervention

In her introduction to *Mothertalk*, Marlatt describes the project of writing down his mother's life stories as "Roy's great gift to his mother and his family" (8). Similarly, she speaks of her own personal reasons for taking on this editing project as her "last gift to Roy" (Interview). However, she found her task was much more than copy-editing of Kiyooka's final manuscript, which did not seem to her publishable as it stood. Neither she nor Masutani could make sense of what Roy had done, and both felt quite strongly that Mary's own sense of historical detail and development had been important to her and quite precise. For these reasons, Marlatt's commitment to the project

turned, in the last analysis, on the importance of Mary's stories, Mary's place in the Issei community, and the Issei community's role in Canadian history.[19]

In the end, Marlatt assumed a much more active role as editor than she had expected, taking on significant responsibility and authority in the decision-making process. Although Marlatt's voice does not participate in the storytelling as Kiyooka's does, and she does not insert her own autobiographical overlap into the text, her editorial interventions in the book are clear. Marlatt leads readers into *Mothertalk* by way of an introduction in which she first asserts the personal and historical significance of Mary's stories and then goes on to outline the complex stages of putting this book together, foregrounding and explaining her editorial role and her own investment in the project. While her personal accountability is an important element in setting up Mary Kiyooka's life stories, it seems equally important to us that Marlatt uses the introduction to foreground the much more general realization that life stories are always already mediated. And she is one of the central mediators of *Mothertalk.*

Marlatt's editorial changes are varied. Maybe the most significant difference between Kiyooka's final version and the book edited by Marlatt is their principle of organization. Kiyooka's "free-floating succession of stories" seems driven by a desire to capture the obsessions of his mother's life and a fascination with the process of telling stories (*Mothertalk* 5). Marlatt suggests that readers who lack Kiyooka's familiarity with the stories he had heard so many times would be unable to evaluate the significance of the individual stories to Mary's life. While they might be intrigued by Kiyooka's interest in "troubling the notions of transparent transmission" (Interview), they might fail to appreciate what Marlatt describes as the "emotional weight" and the "emotional shape" of the narrative (*Mothertalk* 5 and 7). Since Marlatt saw the value of Mary's stories preeminently in their content, she felt that publishing Kiyooka's version would ultimately be a disservice to Mary's life stories. Marlatt's decision to choose "a more conservative approach" (6) to organizing the book reinforces the notion that the readers of *Mothertalk,* or at least the readers expected by Marlatt, have indeed shaped its form in its making.[20]

Marlatt's assumptions about readers' responses seem driven by her own work on aural history projects, which have taught her the importance of the chronological shape of a story. In both *Opening Doors* and *Steveston Recollected,* Marlatt found such chronology to be crucial for appreciation of

immigrant histories: "To understand the depth of an immigrant experience, you have to know what the immigrant has come from" (Interview).[21] We cannot forget that Marlatt herself is an immigrant to Canada. She has pointed out that Mary's experiences of immigration resonate with her and her family's own immigration from Malaysia to Canada (Interview).[22] Her insistence on chronology to appreciate "the skeletal arc" of Mary's stories may thus also reflect her reliance on historical progression to explain her own sense of displacement and nostalgia, not to mention the historical irony that Japanese Canadians were victims of World War II in Canada while Marlatt's family were victims of the Japanese invasion of Malaysia (Interview). Each participant in this collaboration has recognized and valued something different in Mary's storytelling. Each has worked in turn, on conflicting principles, to provide a reading that makes "sense" of an immigrant experience.

At a loss for a principle of continuity in Kiyooka's version, Marlatt made the difficult—and contentious—decision to unweave the stories Kiyooka had woven together and to reorganize them. Not only did she consult Masutani, family members, and friends before making this decision, but the actual task of reestablishing dates and content connections was possible only with the help of Masutani's earlier transcripts and other middle-stage manuscript pages. Marlatt therefore reintroduced earlier stages of the collaborative project in the ongoing negotiations of textual meaning and translation. As a result, she has, for instance, inserted square brackets in the text to provide specific dates.[23] To avoid the repetitions characteristic of Kiyooka's version, Marlatt chose to have Mary refer to previously described events or people without repeating sections of the text. She struggled to decide whether stories were about the same or different people, sometimes arriving at decisions that seemed to her, even after consultation with the family, quite arbitrary (Interview). Moreover, she divided Mary's life stories into six chapters, each headed by a quotation from that section (with the exception of Chapter II, where the heading was grammatically adjusted to stand on its own). Marlatt's chapter divisions support her chronological arrangement in that they suggest phases in the overall development of Mary's life, which seem to counterbalance the stories' "incessant moving back and forth between Canada and Japan" (*Mothertalk* 7).

However, one section breaks away from Marlatt's chapter chronology. "Pictures from the Old Family Album" constitutes a separate section pre-

ceded by a Kiyooka poem; this section has its own page number in the table of contents but is not counted as a new chapter. Kiyooka planned to include photographs in his project because they had been crucial in eliciting many of Mary's stories. As readers, we receive visual images of Masaji Oe, of Mariko and George as children in Japan strongly contrasted with the other children wearing their Maple Leaf sweaters in Canada, and of family groups in various combinations—for example, George newly arrived in Canada and now wearing a jacket and a large tweed cap. In keeping with Mary's involvement with other Japanese immigrants to Canada, one picture of a multi-family gathering includes several generations of the Iwamas, on whose movements Mary comments. As hard copy, these photographs also facilitate transitions between speaker and listener, writer and reader. In several cases, distinctive features of the photograph retained on the printed page provide an intimate sense of the original—the torn corner or the photographer's name. Recognizing the centrality of these prime documents, Marlatt has placed the photographs in the middle of *Mothertalk*, inviting readers to see them in relation to each other and to Mary's commentary on them.[24] Marlatt added two photographs of Mary's mother and of her only brother and his son, which she considered important for Mary's stories (Interview). To distinguish these photographs from the family album over which Mary muses in the text, Marlatt has provided them with captions at the end of the section. This varied interface between text and image once again complicates any effort to read the information in *Mothertalk* as transparent despite devices that appear to be unmediated.

In spite of the chronology of Marlatt's edited version and her desire to capture what she considered the overall shape, the arc, of Mary's life, Marlatt does not suggest seamlessness or transparency in the finished product. On the contrary, she highlights the strategic quality of this decision in her choice of the book's subtitle: "Life Stories of Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka." The term "life stories" hints at the tension between the historical information contained in Mary's life and the intervention of the historian or editor in selecting and presenting it. Moreover, the plural also acknowledges the collaborative nature of the book, the many speakers and listeners who have shaped Mary's stories. And finally, the plural picks up on the multiple tellings of these stories that Kiyooka's own title, *Mothertalk*, suggests.[25] Marlatt's editorial intervention therefore may simplify reception of these stories but by no means simplifies our understanding of their process. We

recognize the difficulty Marlatt faced in making changes to Kiyooka's version while she was still grieving his death. Quite apart from our own sense of indebtedness to Marlatt, our reading of this work suggests she showed Kiyooka the greatest respect by "tussling," as she puts it, with him and his manuscripts in her editorial work (Interview).

Let us pause here for a moment on possible responses to Marlatt's intervention, her reconstruction of chronology in Mary's life stories. If we argue that Kiyooka's sense of organization in the manuscripts reflects most accurately his own agenda in the telling of his mother's stories, Marlatt's changes seem at least problematic, maybe even disrespectful. The gaining of chronological order then has been achieved at the expense of Kiyooka's exploration of his own self, his "cultural recovery" in Saul's words (17), which finds expression in circularity and repetition in his manuscripts. Given the extent to which these stories were his, we must read Marlatt's interference as seriously problematic. If we argue, on the other hand, that the focus of this text is the documentary or biographical drive to tell Mary's life stories, then Marlatt has helped readers to enter the text by relying on chronological and spatial markers as well as cause-and-effect relationships. As readers and critics, we find ourselves in a dilemma. Are we reading *Mothertalk* to learn more about Mary Kiyooka, Matsuki Masutani, Roy Kiyooka, or Daphne Marlatt? And is it our task to pass judgement on each collaborator's contributions and decisions, to determine what is a loss or a gain? Rejecting such absolute decisions and evaluations, we have chosen to demonstrate the changes between different versions and examine their implications, highlighting the impact of serial collaboration. While we ourselves admire the final product as a deeply moving story, and particularly appreciate the delicacy of its nuances because we have followed each part of the book from its beginnings, we suggest that assessment of this work is finally a subjective matter. Withholding actual judgement on the value of each intervention, we have seen our task as one of understanding the complex relations within this serial collaboration. We have chosen, insofar as we can, to approach our task from all of the perspectives our archival work has provided.

Given the necessarily serial nature of this project, Marlatt could not seek final approval or authorization, often a crucial step in collaborative projects (Humez 36), from either Kiyooka or Mary. She therefore sought feedback from all of Kiyooka's daughters and siblings, sending them each a copy of the final manuscript, thus returning the trust that they had placed in her.

While nobody asked her to rewrite sections, responses confirmed that the first mediation of our life stories happens when we try to remember them, for some family members challenged the way Mary had depicted specific events. To acknowledge the constructed nature of everyone's memory and the disagreements about Mary's versions, Marlatt includes several footnotes in the text. Most striking may be Frank's insistence, in Chapter V, that he has no recollection of a conversation in which his father warned him against marrying a Catholic woman (*Mothertalk* 155, fn. 2). Two of his other interventions in that chapter also correct stories dealing with his wife Ann (155, fns. 1 and 3). Moreover, Mariko clarifies where her mother and sister Irene stayed when they arrived in Yokohama (130). The most extensive perspective provided by another family member constitutes Appendix 1, entitled "Papa's version." Marlatt's introductory note explains that the text is a transcript of an interview with Kiyooka's father, Harry Shigekiyo Kiyooka, which was found among Kiyooka's papers (175). In this brief introduction and in the note at the end, Marlatt acknowledges Masutani's help in identifying the text and clearing up the confusion about its content, for Kiyooka's father makes a number of points about George that actually apply to Roy. As a result, therefore, of Marlatt's intervention, this rendering of Mary's stories too is contested in the printed text, which now foregrounds these inescapable issues of plural perspectives, partial truths, and the creative role of each reader.

These diverging anecdotes from the family's experiences question the very boundaries of Mary's own life stories.[26] Does her text, the text of her life, begin on page 13 and end with section VI on page 172? Marlatt's footnotes as well as her detailed introduction suggest otherwise. Mary's life was shaped by multiple contexts, her family, her community, the countries she lived in and left, and so on. Marlatt translates this recognition of interdependency, of belonging, or overlapping with other people's lives, in one word of contexts, into a range of marginalia around and within Mary's life stories. Marlatt implicitly characterizes the audience for the book as non-Japanese; most of the square brackets throughout the text provide translations of Japanese terms or expressions, which Mary uses most frequently in the first two chapters that deal primarily with Japan. Other brackets give historical information [for example, dates for the Meiji and Kaei Periods (20); background on the feudal lord Takeda Shingen (22)]; or they translate Japanese measurements (40, 41) or currency (41), and identify place names

(25, 103). The non-Japanese reader, of course, is not Issei, or Nisei, or likely even Sansei—all of whom may easily receive the pre-annotated text. Marlatt achieves the final translation of Mary's life stories into a broader Canadian history, making them accessible for readers who do not share Mary's Japanese heritage.

The Politics of *Mothertalk*

Whereas Marlatt inserts Kiyooka's individual voice in the form of his poetry at the beginning of each chapter to demonstrate how mother and son shared common preoccupations, she inserts his individual voice in the form of two appendices to introduce Kiyooka's political agenda for this work of history. In addition to Harry Kiyooka's version in Appendix 1, we find two other appendices, Kiyooka's talk given at the Japanese Canadian/Japanese American Symposium in Seattle, May 2nd, 1981, and a letter from Kiyooka to Lucy Fumi "c/o Japanese Canadian Redress Secretariat." While Mary's life stories result in "a blend of both mother's and son's vision and voices" (*Mothertalk* 7), Marlatt here emphasizes Kiyooka's role as mediator in the project and contextualizes his own agenda in recording his mother's life stories. Both texts indicate the political significance of Kiyooka's project. The presentation made in Seattle (originally written for two of Kiyooka's friends, writer Joy Kogawa and photographer Tamio Wakayama) prefigures the *Mothertalk* project and anticipates many of the concerns that become central to Kiyooka later on, such as the role of silence and language in his relationship with his mother and father, the loss of his mother tongue, and the feeling of having "been left with a tied tongue" (181).

The letter to Lucy Fumi is addressed to the Japanese Redress Secretariat and accounts for Kiyooka's "'whereabouts' from 1946 to 1949" but also describes the effects of World War II and the Canadian anti-Japanese legislation on his family (187). Although the Kiyookas had not been forcibly removed from their houses or interned and had not suffered the confiscation of homes and property during the war, "they too were subject to the loss of rights, registration and finger-printing, and the stigmata of the term 'enemy alien'" as Miki explains (Afterword 304). Kiyooka has described these experiences as a "death" in his life in "October's Piebald Skies and Other Lacunae," a poem occasioned by the signing of the Japanese Canadian Redress Settlement on 22 September 1988 and the death of bpNichol in the same year. The Settlement acknowledged the unjust actions

of the Canadian government and provided "symbolic redress for those injustices" (Miki and Kobayashi 138). Kiyooka's poem is bitterly critical of the Redress Settlement, indicating a serious tension between his perception of "a token, political stratagem" (*Pacific Windows* 283) and his responsibilities as a second-generation Japanese Canadian.

Retiring from the Department of Fine Arts at the University of British Columbia, Kiyooka wrote a letter, dated June 12, 1991, to Tony Tamayose, Executive Director of the Japanese Canadian Redress Foundation in British Columbia,[27] to ask for funding for his project: "I must [do this work] for the sake of one Japanese Canadian family and their aged mother who will be ninety-five this year. Mary Kiyo Kiyooka belongs to the first generation of Asians who came to Canada at the beginning of the now dwindling 20th century. What befell her in the new World and how she coped with penury and a large family while keeping in touch with her Meiji childhood is the substance of a summer's worth of cassette-tape conversations with Matsuki Masutani."[28] Kiyooka's letter of application explains that his family did not need to seek redress against the Canadian government in the same way that coastal Japanese Canadians did. In contrast, they had spent their entire lives on the prairies and "thus," as he puts it, they "have their Histories inscribed there." Their history as Japanese Canadians is therefore distinct and underrepresented. They were, nonetheless, disenfranchised by their experiences of WWII, becoming , half a century later, "willy-nilly . . . [their] own kind of Anglo-Canadians" even while sharing their mother's "Shikoku vision" of Japanese homelands.

Both appendices recontextualize the *Mothertalk* project in inter-cultural politics and invite readers to approach the book with these contexts in mind. In a much earlier interview with Miki in 1978, Kiyooka had eloquently explained that he understood himself as part of a larger community: "I long ago recognized that I was given a job to do and that job had to do with being, for my own immediate family in the first instance, a kind of voice, and a cultural voice in a collective sense" (Miki, "Roy Kiyooka" 61). Marlatt's inclusion, then, of materials that so distinctly politicize Mary's stories provides a sense of the familial and social contexts that impelled so much of Kiyooka's creativity and his interest in this project.

These cultural contexts do not come as a surprise at the end of the book. The dedication has prepared us early on: "To the Issei women of Mary Kiyooka's generation." Marlatt chose this dedication in consultation with

Miki, who himself had been active in the Redress Movement and was then working on his Afterword for *Pacific Windows* (Interview). The dedication places Mary firmly in the context of other women of her (Issei) generation and reinforces Marlatt's notion that Mary's stories are important as part of the Japanese Canadian community and Canadian history in general. By narrating her stories, Mary enters that history as a subject and claims a space for her lived experiences as a Japanese Canadian woman in a public discourse that had not previously included her. It seems to us, however, that Mary does not associate herself very strongly with the first generation of Japanese immigrants in her stories, which focus so extensively on second- and third-generation Japanese Canadians. Moreover, in her interviews with Masutani, Mary included a number of stories about her grandchildren which Marlatt decided to cut from the book. We can only speculate that Kiyooka may have cut the same material because we see very little pencilling on these sections in the manuscript (Mrs. KIYOOKA (Her Family) No. 5). We do not think that Marlatt's emphasis on Mary's historical context lessens Mary's control over the meaning of her life story, but we are aware that the dedication asks readers to respond to the text with a larger historical context in mind.

Such shifts in focus and possible meaning, with all their attendant reasons, have become central to our understanding of the kind of serial collaboration we find in *Mothertalk*. Humez has drawn our attention to the possible clash between the agenda of the editor and the storyteller in her discussion of "oral history text creation" in *The Narrative of Soujourner Truth* (35). There, she discusses ways in which critics can use textual evidence of different agendas in their analyses as we have done here. Similarly, Davies examines editor-subject relations and concludes, as we have done, that "the editor becomes co-maker of the text" (12). Following Humez's and Davies's lead, we are aware of some tension between Mary's focus on her family and Marlatt's concern to situate Mary and her family in the history of their times and places. As readers, we work with these tensions in order to provide our own introductory layers of interpretation and analysis.

Our initial desire to understand whose text *Mothertalk* really is has shifted. No single author can account for the many versions we have found exposed or subsumed in *Mothertalk*, the published text. We have accordingly entered *Mothertalk* in our bibliography not under Kiyooka's name as author, nor under Marlatt's name as editor, nor under Mary's name as original storyteller but under "M" for *Mothertalk*. Because we read this work as containing the

readings of so many contributors and changing with each reading, we have chosen also to read the whole work as one, referring therefore to Marlatt's introduction as a part of the whole. In the process of recognizing *Mothertalk* as an example of life-writing produced by serial collaboration and reading the printed book as a work in progress, we have also found ourselves struggling with our own critical discourse, which so often equated succession with improvement or loss rather than with difference. Our discussion of *Mothertalk* has thus revealed and challenged some of our own unspoken assumptions—teaching us not only about Mary, Masutani, Kiyooka, and Marlatt, but also about ourselves.

Even as we close the book, the back cover presents further mediation. The standard blurb reintroduces the possibility of an unmediated text, outlining Mary's life and adventures and closing with her death at age 100 in 1996. The blurb, of course, is what leads the bookshop browser to buy the book for its content. However, appreciative comments on the book by Michael Ondaatje and Hiromi Goto situate this work not only in a recent generation of immigrant literature but also among writers who challenge generic possibilities and boundaries. Recognizing the generic instability of *Mothertalk* and resisting all notions of unmediated transcription, we identify each collaborator as co-maker of the printed text. We read the interference of each one as transforming the project as a whole, which can no longer be read as clear or "singleminded." For each reader of the completed book, as for each participant in its making, we note that *Mothertalk* is a different book, not one but many, and may spin off into different directions with each additional revelation of meanings that is given or withheld.

NOTES

1 We thank Titilope Adepitan, research assistant for this project, and Joanne Saul, whose research work has paralleled ours and been useful to us. We are grateful to acknowledge the anonymous readers for *Canadian Literature* and the questions that have been raised by Noel Currie, Janice Fiamengo, Joel Martineau, Laurie Ricou, and Joanne Saul; they have been most helpful to our work.

2 The hybrid nature of this text complicates our use of the name Mary. Mrs. Kiyooka, or Kiyooka-san, was Mary to her Canadian friends, and Marlatt is emphatic about this name being the appropriate one for us to use in the context of this Canadian book. Consulting each other over our choices with all names, we have decided to refer to all participants in this text, including those who have provided very personal help, formally, by their last names. Retaining "Mary" for the original narrator becomes, accordingly, a

signal of her status as protagonist in the text as distinct from a literary figure (like her son or like Marlatt) or an advisor on our academic project.

3 In his chapter on "The Autobiography of Those Who Do Not Write" (185-215), Philippe Lejeune examines ghostwriting as a form of collaborative autobiography. Although he limits his discussion to two people who collaborate, his comments on the problems of determining the "author" of such texts and of recognizing the hidden problems of power relations are relevant to our work. Koestenbaum presents a theory of male collaboration, arguing that men redefined authorship in response to changing definitions of sexuality in the nineteenth and at the turn of the twentieth century. Stone points to collaborative autobiography as an "accepted mode in the modern era for recreating one partner's convincing image" (103), but fails to provide a clear definition in light of diverse examples. Stillinger defines collaboration as two or more people acting together or in succession (v). He covers a wide range of texts and elaborates the implications of commonly unacknowledged multiple authorship for literary theory. Davies's notion of "a multiply articulated text" promises to be helpful to our discussion of collaboration, but does not apply to *Mothertalk* because it describes a text that consists of stories by different people which "can be read collectively as one story refracted through multiple lives" (4) or a text that intersperses individual life stories "in an extended discursive interaction with the editorial voice" (5). See also Clark for another example of unpublicized collaboration and Hubert on artistic partnerships. See also Couser. For a useful discussion of the problems involved in defining collaborative writing, see Ede and Lunsford (14-16).

4 We find Miki's observation useful about the "importance of seriality in RK's work in poetry, visual art, and photography" (Afterword 320, fn. 28), and see a link here with the serial collaboration in *Mothertalk*. As Kiyooka himself pointed out, "I've always been a serial artist. My books are always whole entities. They're not made up of discrete things" (Miki, "Inter-Face" 74). For further discussion of seriality in Kiyooka's work, see McFarlane.

5 We follow Mikhail Bakhtin's understanding of utterance here. Bakhtin emphasizes the simultaneous involvement of both speaker and listener in shaping an utterance rather than a reader's interpretation of a text after it is made: "An essential (constitutive) marker of the utterance is its quality of being directed to someone, its *addressivity*. . . . Both the composition and, particularly, the style of the utterance depend on those to whom the utterance is addressed, how the speaker (or writer) senses and imagines his addressees, and the force of their effect on the utterance" (*Speech Genres* 95, also 121-22). See also Voloshinov: "*word is a two-sided act.* It is determined equally by *whose* word it is and *for whom* it is meant. As word, it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee*" (86).

6 Marlatt has collaborated in earlier projects, such as her work with the British Columbia Archives' aural history project, which resulted in *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End* with Carole Itter (1979) and in *Steveston Recollected: A Japanese-Canadian History* with Maya Koizumi (1975). For other collaborative projects, see *Steveston* (1974/1984) with photographer Robert Minden and *Double Negative* (1988) with Betsy Warland, as well as her collaboration for *Tessera*. For comments on reciprocity, see, Marlatt and Warland's "Reading and Writing Between the Lines" (133).

7 This passage appears as part of the opening prose poem for the published version of *Mothertalk* (11). Reading Kiyooka's poetry as originally distinct from the text of his mother's stories helps us to emphasize the assembled nature of the published text, the

way in which the distinct voices of mother and son have been combined, and the extent to which they shared the same concerns and preoccupations.

8 This section from "Gotenyama" may have been an early choice for the Kiyooka poems to be interleaved among Mary's life stories. It appears in Marlatt's typescript before other poems were added. In *Mothertalk*, it precedes Chapter III, which is entitled "All Caught Up in Our Canadian Lives" (57). We reprint it here with the permission of Talonbooks.

9 In the heavily edited version of this typescript, Mary's claim on Masutani's understanding has been crossed through with double lines in ink. (One section of Masutani's transcript for which Masutani himself provided no title, is headed "MM's Transcript" in Marlatt's hand.)

10 Julie Cruikshank makes this important point about the listener's cultural context in her introduction to *Life Lived Like a Story* (4).

11 This heading, "Mrs. Kiyooka No. 2.," appears in Marlatt's lightly pencilled cursive. Masutani's headings vary: Mrs. KIYOOKA (Her Family) no. 5," "KIYOOKA-SAN NO TALE 6," "Mrs. Kiyoka-san no Tale 9," and so on.

12 We omit the literal inaccuracies that remain. Clearly, Kiyooka was working on idiom and did not return to each sentence to delete a comma, for example, that had become redundant. Such errors, of course, have not found their way into the printed text. However, we retain every detail of typographical eccentricity in other, earlier transcriptions, disturbing as these may be to read, because we resist insofar as we can, positioning ourselves between our readers and the typescript pages that we have been privileged to read.

13 Such delicacy is particularly striking in light of Mary's descriptions of dog fights and "chicken-fights" in Tosa:

> This is also terribly bloody, they don't stop fighting until their neck are half torn up and half dead. I used to watch these bloody fights, that why I am different from women from Tokyo & Yokohama. A woman born & bred in Tosa, a pure Tosa woman, had a strong character like a man. A kind of Tomboy, because she watched rough fights like these from her childhood (Mrs Kiyooka No. 2., 22).

See *Mothertalk* for contrast: "Cock fights used to be very popular in Tosa. They were also swift and bloody and usually ended in a dead bird" (47).

14 In an early transcript, Mary says:

> When they were in Japan my dad saw Roy, and said apparently "This boy has a great fortune, he got big ears." My brother told me that. I still remember this remark. (Mrs. KIYOOKA No. 3, 13).

Kiyooka has crossed out "dad" and inserted "FATHER," but we have to wonder how Masaji Oe could ever have commented on Kiyooka's ears when he did not live to meet this grandson. Given the context for this passage, in which Harry Shigekiyo Kiyooka had to return to Japan because of *his* father's illness, it seems likely that the paternal grandfather is the "dad" in question. In terms of Kiyooka's bushido spirit, Mary continues: "I don't mean Roy became great, he's a normal guy. But if he were in Japan, he would be considered a great man."

15 Neither the working papers nor the published book provide the happy conclusion to this story. While Kiyooka was still alive and in Mary's very old age, her father's stone was duly erected in a traditional ceremony which Masutani has seen recorded on videotape. Miki also refers to this event: "His renown as a former samurai and in the art of swordsmanship 'as the last great master of the Hasegawa school of Iai' (*Mothertalk* 15) are recognized in a large stone monument erected in his honour by Kochi City" (Afterword 303).

16 Kiyooka produced multiple drafts of his own as he coordinated and developed his mother's

stories. His files are labeled Folder A, Mother 2, Mother 3, and so on. They seem repetitive, but contain curious contradictions and variations. As the files are not marked consistently, and as Kiyooka's pencil marks up the computer printout at each stage, it is not always possible to tell which version supersedes which. Mother 3, for example, contains small variants on Mother 2, and also appears in tidy paragraphs, suggesting that it supersedes Mother 2. However, close comparisons suggest that Kiyooka worked back and forth through his files rather than sequentially with one version superseding another.

17 Another example of slippage of information in transition, comparable to the seppuku story's loss of its foreigners is that the young Kiyooka family apparently both did and did not suffer from the German flu epidemic of 1917. However, in contrast to the seppuku story, variants on the flu story seem accidental and serve no political purpose. Masutani's transcript (Mrs. KIYOOKA No. 3, 9) reads as follows:

> We also caught the flu of 1917. I & my husband and Gorge all of us were lying in the bed. Fortunately, a friend of us didn't catch the flu, and he bought us a bottle of whisky. That saved us. You know there wasn't any Aspilinea available. They were all sold out in the drug-store. It cost us 2 dollars to a Aspiline. It was a hard time.

In contrast, *Mothertalk*'s version reads as follows:

> Papa, baby George and I didn't catch the German flu though lots of people we knew came down with it and some of them died. Luckily one of Papa's buddies came by with a big bottle of whisky. Papa always swore it was that scotch that saved the three of us. He even put a teaspoonful in George's milk bottle. (64)

18 Kiyooka commented on his focus on Japan in his earlier work in an interview with Miki in 1991: "all my texts have started in Japan. I don't know why that is so but that's true" (Miki, "Inter-Face" 66).

19 Saul describes Marlatt's focus as "the biographical and the documentary impulse at the heart of *Mothertalk*" (9).

20 Our observation here is the flipside of Cruikshank's conclusion that "the way we tell stories largely determines who will hear them" (356).

21 Saul explains why Marlatt relies on chronology in her aural project, *Steveston Recollected* but not in her poetic work *Steveston*, arguing that the difference reflects Marlatt's concern with the "what" in her documentary and with the "how" in her poetic writing (23). Saul also places *Mothertalk* in the larger context of immigrant autobiographies, pointing to the teleological narrative as a political practice.

22 We should add that Marlatt has written repeatedly about immigration both creatively and critically; see, for example, *Ana Historic* and *Taken* as well as "Entering In: The Immigrant Imagination," which has been republished in *Readings from the Labyrinth*. Unfortunately, we are not able to explore these connections between Marlatt's and Mary's preoccupations with immigration more fully in this paper.

23 See *Mothertalk* 20, 25, 62, 64, 96, 116, 125.

24 It is also possible, of course, that the photographs were grouped together for economy in printing, a decision that would have involved Marlatt even if it did not originate with her.

25 Kiyooka sometimes spelled "Mothertalk" as one word, sometimes as two. Together with the publisher, Marlatt decided that one word was more interesting as the book's title (Interview). Eliding speaker and word and suggesting a generic form of talk, this neologism that encodes both oral transmission and its historical role and value, even, in the end, a certain tenderness in the one word, seems to us, too, more richly effective than the phrase created by two separate words.

26 Davies's discussion raises similar questions about textual marginalia (13).

27 The Japanese Canadian Redress Foundation was established as part of the settlement in order to allocate the $12 million intended for "educational, social and cultural activities or programmes that contribute to the well-being of the community or that promote human rights" (Miki and Kobayashi 139).

28 We thank Joanne Saul for sharing the information she received from Tony Tamayose.

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Roy Miki

on the sublime

a poem does not beg for forgiveness. it's not like real life. not a case of relationships gone awry. its social innuendoes are not a matter of secrets told in privacy.

once the consideration of intent is misplaced. once it was a misdemeanour to forego the forelorn.

memory is a stranger. a maverick sound that crowds out noise. the ease of its deployment is dependent on the size of the ache.

when it drops into a sullied lap.

i hesitate to use the first person in this instance. a binge of bebop is no ticket to oblivion. the causal routes are dogged with yelping signatures with nowhere to sign.

the sojourner notwithstanding.

"we" listened at the fork in the road. "i've heard that before." the clause was held in perpetuity.

*

cacophonous airwaves are all the rage. the rollycoaster on overdrive dallies then engages in tumult. fear is driven deeper into the social debt of syntax controls and formations that giggle on freeway billboards.

if its hem is showing.

"i wander by the corner store, gazing at the figures
winking back." the encounter has ripple effects
that accumulate and announce the dispatch. the few who are
deaf to tonal variations listen to the heat waves instead.

the transportation wins approval.

when logic fails, logic hails a cab. "we" cruise the early
morning city streets. the headlines as headlights. a
concept dying on the dashboard.

Terry Watada

To Go for Broke: The Spirit of the 70s

In 1969, there was no such thing as Asian Canadian writing, at least not as a genre. In fact, there was no such thing as an Asian Canadian. Japanese Canadians were the Japanese; Chinese Canadians were the Chinese. The generic term was "Oriental."

True, *The New Canadian*, a Japanese Canadian community newspaper, had been publishing since 1939. Joy Kogawa had written for it, as had Ken Adachi (he acted as editor at one time), Frank Moritsugu, Toyo Takata (another editor), Muriel Kitagawa, Irene Uchida, and Midge Ayukawa. Although they rose to prominence in their respective careers, they were not considered part of any literary movement.

I had never heard of any of these people. I was nineteen, living in Toronto's east end, about to enter university, and playing music on my guitar. These writers were from another era, another reality—the reality of pre-war Vancouver, the internment camps and post-war exile.

The war meant Vietnam to me. WWII meant John Wayne, television documentaries and the toy soldiers of my childhood. I didn't know a thing about the camps, the injustices, the hardships, even of my own family. My parents weren't talking about that time, and there weren't any books on the subject, including the history books my teachers assigned. Shizue Takashima's *A Child in Prison Camp* was to come out in 1971; Adachi's *The Enemy That Never Was* in 1976; and Kogawa's *Obasan* in 1981.

So, in 1970 when I hung up my rock & roll shoes to concentrate on writing songs, the only role models I had were the mainstream musicians infused

with the militant, activist sentiments of the times. While I was in *The Asia Minors*, an all Chinese and Japanese Canadian top-forties band, I managed to get us booked to do a concert at something called the "Hiroshima Day: Anti-War Festival and Rally." The event was to be held at Nathan Phillips Square on August 8, 1969, and was organized by the Vietnamese Mobilization Committee. It seemed like an ideal way to become involved in the Anti-War Movement. Unfortunately the matriarch of the majority of the band members, a prominent restaurateur and Chinese-community doyenne, didn't like the idea of her children participating in a "festival and rally" that promoted the Communist cause in Vietnam (or so she believed). By pulling various strings down at City Hall, she nearly shut down the entire event, and when she found she couldn't cancel the organization's permit to stage the rally, she simply forbade her children from appearing—which left me to do a solo act during a brilliantly sunny day filled with the spirit of protest and revolution.

Playing Country Joe MacDonald's "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag" for hundreds of people, I felt like I was at Woodstock, drawing great strength from the moment. By the following year, *The Asia Minors* had broken up and I turned to song writing.

The first rule of song writing and indeed writing itself is to write about that which you know. So what did I know? I turned to my mother and asked her how she had met my father, a question that had never come up before. She seemed surprised at my question and dismissed me immediately, calling me *aho* (stupid). That was something I didn't need to hear, she told me. Undaunted, I kept at her and eventually she relented. As she drew in breath, her eyes turned sad recalling all that went before. What emerged was an astounding tale.

At the age of sixteen she was approached by her father with a proposal to marry a man she had never seen and who was living in Canada, a land she did not know. She had no choice but to say yes. No one dared to defy the head of the family in those days. With her approval, my father then came to Japan and the two became husband and wife. Two weeks later, he headed back to Canada to avoid the Japanese army draft. Mother stayed another two years because of the restrictive Canadian immigration laws, which suited her fine. She certainly didn't want to leave Japan.

Eventually she did leave with her family's good wishes, her clothes, and not much else. On the Vancouver docks, she saw the horrible "white devils"

for the first time. Fortunately she was met by a Japanese stranger who claimed to be my father's cousin, whose task was to escort her to a logging camp up the coast. My mother had no choice but to believe him—an incredibly brave act in retrospect, since many women were kidnapped and forced into prostitution.

As fate would have it, the cousin was telling the truth and he did take her to a floating lumber camp near Alert Bay on Vancouver Island. There she reunited with her husband under rather primitive conditions. The only edifice on the raft was a chicken shack! My mother spent days cleaning it. I can still hear her describing it as "Never clean. Never clean."

My mother also told me about the internment camps, places like Sandon, Slocan and New Denver where she, my father and brother and all the family friends were incarcerated because of their birth. The rage of my youth burned in me as I listened and learned.

Alone in my room that evening, I stumbled through several chord progressions and struggled to write the words that eventually became "New Denver," my first song.

The government took all my property,
But I'll survive somehow.
And all I can offer you is a lifetime of hardships, my love.
Maybe love's not worth much in these troubled times,
But it's the only thing I can offer you on the outside in the snow.
New Denver is washed away with the rain.
New Denver will never know, never know
The pain it caused.

The lyrics appeared for the first time in the Christmas edition of *The New Canadian* in 1970. Soon thereafter I received a phone call from Alan Hotta, the English-language editor at *The New Canadian.* He spoke to me about how much he admired the lyrics and how he was organizing a few meetings of *sansei* (third-generation Japanese Canadians) to "rap" about what it meant to be Japanese Canadian. I must admit, I didn't see the relevance at first. After all, I was a working-class kid on my way to the middle via a university education, but then I realized, in hearing my mother's story, I was learning my own. Perhaps there were others doing the same.

The gathering was at the Toronto Buddhist Church where I met Alan, himself a *sansei* with a square face, long, straggly hair, and keen, intelligent eyes. After graduating from the University of Toronto, he had traveled to the west coast in the late '60s to explore what "Asian Americans" were doing in

the Anti-War Movement, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Asian American Movement. At the University of California at Berkeley, he met the flamboyant Ron Tanaka, a third-generation Japanese American who was completing his studies in Milton and was on his way to teach at the University of British Columbia.

It was at UBC that the two committed themselves to the idea of creating an Asian Canadian community, arts, and culture through consciousness raising. Inviting the Chinese and Japanese Canadian students in his class and on campus, Tanaka formed a photography workshop to record images of the community in Chinatown and the old Japantown areas of Vancouver and Steveston. Members at the time were Sean Gunn, Mayu Takasaki, Garrick Chu, Joyce Chong, Naomi Shikaze, Glen Nagano, Connie Kadota and others.

The group organized, in the spring of 1972, the Asian Canadian Experience exhibit in UBC's Student Union Building, a display which included photographs of the present-day community as well as photographs found in the UBC Special Collections Archives and public libraries. The public saw for the first time pictures of the internment and the Chinese Canadian railroad workers.

On a snowy winter day in 1971, Alan Hotta had gathered at the Toronto Buddhist Church a number of Japanese Canadian musicians—a breed of *sansei* I had never encountered before. The names that stand out in my mind of that time are Frank Nakashima and Martin Kobayakawa who later participated in my first album *Runaway Horses.*

Alan introduced us to the Asian American folk group *Chris and Joanne* (Chris Iijima and Joanne Miyamoto). These two *sansei* along with Chinese American musician and songwriter "Charlie" Chin had been singing their songs about the Asian American experience around the country. Although the lyrics displayed a Marxist bent, they spoke to me.

We are the children of the migrant worker.
We are the offspring of the concentration camp.
Sons and daughters of the railroad builder
Who leave their stamp on Amerika [sic].

We are the children of the Chinese waiter,
Born and raised in the laundry room.
We are the offspring of the Japanese gardner [sic]
Who leave their stamp on Amerika.

I left the church bolstered by the knowledge that writing about my Asian experiences, outlook and feelings was as valid as the work of the well-known singer/songwriters of the time—Bob Dylan, Paul Simon, James Taylor, Joni Mitchell and a host of others.

I attended several of the ensuing "rap sessions" in Alan's north-end basement apartment amazed by the number and variety of *sansei* and Canadian-born Chinese who attended. Discussions on racism, subtle and overt, arose. Community politics. The idea of art, its purposes and forms. Identity issues came to the surface, especially when dealing with perceptions of beauty. Ron Tanaka's poem "I hate my wife for her flat yellow face" was the central focus of the discussion.

> I hate my wife for her flat yellow face
> and her fat cucumber legs, but mostly
> for her lack of elegance and lack of
> intelligence compared to judith gluck.

It was late at night, my head swirling with the effects of too much beer. I remember staring at a poster on the wall with a drawing of an Asian woman's face marked up to indicate where a cosmetic surgeon was to cut and alter (the same image was used later in a poster promulgating the Chinese Canadian Youth Conference of 1975) to make the countenance more "Western" and thinking how ugly the poetic imagery was, how obvious the self-loathing and how denigrating the portrait of Asian women contained in the lines. But I was too young and filled with the militant fervour of the times to believe the poem was anything but profound and insightful. Others of that period agree. Mayu Takasaki reminded me that "we were all fresh out of university," in awe of Tanaka's intellect, erudition and presence. Sean Gunn felt the poet was expressing his "hypocrisy" in extolling western values of beauty while belittling his own kind. Such was the belief in the good intentions of a larger-than-life mentor.

About that time, the still unnamed Toronto group split over dialectic differences. The *sansei* who settled into the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre sought *nisei* (second generation) approval and support. Alan's group continued to meet in his apartment to carry on the discussions and to produce the first Canadian-*sansei* publication. The *Powell Street Review*, conceived and published by Alan Hotta, featured many neophyte Japanese Canadian

writers exploring their identities, probably for the first time in their lives.

> The Powell Street Review is new. It is a Toronto-based publication originated by third generation Japanese Canadians and designed for the entire Japanese community. It intends to deal with and pose questions about the character of our community by publishing the viewpoints of its members. It intends to present material from the community that might also give some insight into the Asian Canadian community as a whole as well as into other third world communities. In this way, we might better begin to understand the Japanese community and its relation to other Asian communities and minority groups in general. ("A Reaffirmation")

The newspaper was well ahead of its time—but only one issue was ever produced. The *nisei* seeing it as "radical" and "*aka*" (red) refused to support it. The suburban-bred *sansei* followed their parents' lead. Perhaps they were all frightened by what they read. The issue, for example, featured quite a frank article that echoed the Tanaka poem "I hate my wife for her flat yellow face."

> My parents have tried to encourage me to marry an Oriental, but they also wanted me to marry a man of my own choosing. I have met many Oriental men and they seem to lack many qualities that I would need in any man I would marry. ("White Male")

Again, the self-loathing was evident to all who read it. Those of us who understood its implications considered the attitudes expressed as symptomatic of a racist society.

Ron Tanaka as well contributed what became the seminal paper on Asian Canadian art and artists for the issue.

> The Japanese-Canadian writer is an interesting creature. His most notable characteristic is his extreme rarity. In this paper, I would like to share with you some reflections on why there are so few Japanese Canadians interested in writing (or any of the arts for that matter) and then go on to suggest a kind of program for developing a new breed of sansei writers. In the first sections, I will refer to Asian Canadians in general because I feel that there are certain generalizations that hold for Chinese (and other minorities) as well as Japanese. In later sections, however, I want to deal specifically with the sansei because I know them (us) best. ("Sansei Artist")

The Cultural Centre *sansei* published *Tora*, a journal which delved into Japanese Canadian identity and community issues. Despite the good intentions of the writers, the journal featured a classified section entitled the "Yerrow Pages." The *Tora* members (as they were known) did go on to become prominent figures in the community. Van Hori in particular was essential to the redress movement in Toronto of the 1980s.

Perhaps the culmination of all this activity was the 1972 Asian Canadian Experience Conference. It was the first gathering of second-, third- and even some fourth-generation Japanese and Chinese Canadians from Toronto (*Powell Street Review* members) and Vancouver (primarily the Wakayama Group out of UBC so named by Ron Tanaka because he identified with the Japanese Canadians in the fishing village of Steveston who were originally from the Japanese province of Wakayama. The Chinese Canadians dubbed themselves Ga Hing (or "Brotherhood"). Alan Hotta, co-ordinator, defined the issues as follows:

> Individuals find themselves caught in a cultural whirlpool, desperately seeking a stable common denominator to help them define, establish and develop their own life goals. Specifically, the cultural vacuum has had its effect upon the Chinese Canadian and Japanese Canadian communities. In spite of various manifestations of community life (picnics, camps, festivals etc.), there has been an unfortunate lack of purposes in life and alienation; particularly among the youth of the communities ... Of paramount concern ... is the general lack of awareness of the contributions the Chinese and Japanese Canadian communities have made for Canada. ("Conference mandate")

The conference was held primarily at "The House," a three-storey semi-detached house on Mutual Street near today's Ryerson Polytechnic University in downtown Toronto. Alan and several others had rented the place as their home.

During the week of discussions and performances, many Asian Canadians dropped by to participate, "to check out what was happening." They came to see the photo exhibit developed by the Vancouver Wakayama Group as their part of the first Asian Canadian Experience display presented earlier that year. They also came to listen to symposia conducted by delegates on topics relevant to the two communities and to attend the two "Arts Nights" dedicated to readings by poets and performances by songwriters.

The House itself was filled with music. Alan had brought out his bootlegged tape of *Chris and Joanne* with "Charlie" Chin in concert in New York. Sean Gunn, Martin Kobayakawa and I jammed in the attic. Shannon Gunn and Joyce Chong (prominent musicians in their own right today) sang in sweet harmony just about anywhere. Gerry Shikatani and David Fujino (members of the *Tora* group) dropped by to read their poetry—abstract and sound poetry, the first I had encountered. Garrick Chu sat with Alan Kondo (the future editor of the first Asian American feature film *Hito Hata*) talking about film and media in general as a means of bringing about community.

I myself was excited at the prospect of meeting and hearing Ron Tanaka who breezed in for an afternoon to "rap" in the house's living room. He sat with his confidence brimming over and his eyes glowing with an intensity I had never before encountered, elaborating on his theories about Asian-Canadian art and artists contained in his *Powell Street Review* article. Tanaka with his erudition and arrogance presented such an imposing figure I could see why his influence had seeped into all of us. Unfortunately, he left quickly like mist in the morning sun.

In the kitchen, Mrs. Kobayakawa had left a bowl of tuna casserole which never seemed to empty. There were the drunken late nights at the fabled Le Coq D'Or Tavern (a temple of African-American rhythm and blues in 1970s Toronto) nearby. Conversations and arguments with Mayu Takasaki, Lucy Komori and Diane Kadota. Naomi Shikaze's picture, her long black hair framing her flawless face with sharp, contemplative eyes, hung on the wall next to the photographs of the internment, a juxtaposition not lost on all who viewed the display.

It was also the first time I had heard of Malcolm X, the Black Panthers and the 442, the all-*nisei* battalion during World War II whose acts of heroism were summed up in their battle cry, "Go for broke!" These men had suffered casualties and injuries at an alarming rate to prove themselves to be Americans and to get their families free from the internment camps. There grew a sense in all of us that we too had to "go for broke" if we were going to make any kind of impact on Canadian society.

Well don't you know
We got to go for broke
Every single day of our lives.

You know we can't provoke
We got to be good folk for white eyes.
We got to go for broke!
(Watada, "Go For Broke")

During the two Arts Nights, held at the University Settlement House near the Art Gallery of Ontario, I introduced "New Denver" and another song "Slocan (I'm Coming Back to You)" to an audience which I felt understood what I was saying for the first time. Many poets read their poems about being Asian Canadian. One in particular, Martin Kobayakawa's musical version of Charlotte Chiba's poem of alienation "The Floor of My Room is Cold," was quite poignant.

The floor of my room is cold
I have nowhere to call home
I have no one to call for me
and give me a cup of hot comfort

Where did I go
when the party began
when the people met
and made love
Where was I
when work was finished for the day
Did I miss you too
The bed in my room
will not be slept in
The light shall not be shut off
The moon can no more be alone
with me
I'm going to paint it yellow
and let the days of sunshine
last forever
and let the floor become warm
with my pacing

Sean Gunn as well introduced his satirical poetry to a surprised but delighted audience.

by any means
bleach out your jeans
and when they fade
you've got it made

and you wonder where the yellow went
when you brush yourself with a permanent
brighter than bright
whiter than white
ninety nine forty four one hundred percent
and you wondered, where the yellow went?

The performances and the conference itself ended with a tearful rendition of "Leaving on a Jet Plane" by Shannon and Joyce. All the musicians joined in and then the audience. No one knew what the future was to hold but all held hope in their hearts.

Shortly after the conference, Bing Thom, fresh from his own Berkeley experience, appeared in Vancouver espousing a Maoist approach to community activism. He dismissed Tanaka's strategy of reclaiming history as

inadequate, too passive. "Either you record history or you are part of it," he claimed. "Get your hands dirty!"

Under Thom's influence and in the fallout of the Toronto conference, Garrick Chu and Sean Gunn began to take an active role in the Asian and Chinese Canadian communities. They organized to protest the construction of a firehall in the Chinatown area; they got involved in building the Chinese Cultural Centre; they campaigned for the NDP (where they met Tamio Wakayama and Takeo Yamashiro. Tamio's photographs are celebrated as an essential record of the Civil Rights Movement in 1960's Mississippi and Georgia. Takeo is a recognized master of the *shakuhachi*, bamboo flute); and they formed the Chinese Canadian Writers Workshop. The workshop, which included Paul Yee and Sky Lee, began by producing *Gum San Po*, the first English-language Chinese Canadian newspaper. Jim Wong-Chu, a budding photographer, joined the staff at that time.

The workshop was the precursor to the present-day Asian Canadian Writers Workshop which was first anchored by Sean Gunn, Jim Wong Chu, Raymond Dang (who later wrote the controversial play *Powder Blue Chevy*) and Terry Jang Barclay and later attracted such celebrated writers as Wayson Choy, Denise Chong, and Lien Chao.

1977, the Japanese Canadian Centennial Year, saw even more activity. Alan Hotta organized the Centennial Conference in Toronto as a long overdue follow-up to the 1972 conference. The Wakayama group had become by 1977 members of the Powell Street Revue and the Japanese Canadian Centenntial Project which conceived and produced an exhibition, tour and book called *A Dream of Riches* (written, edited and organized primarily by Tamio Wakayama). Representatives including Rick Shiomi (who later wrote the Off-Broadway hit play *Yellow Fever*) came to Toronto to present a slide show and narrative based on that collection's material.

Tonari Gumi, established in 1975 to help the *issei* (first generation) already resettled in the impoverished Japantown area of Vancouver, attracted by 1977 many *sansei* and *shin iijusha* (post-war immigrants) volunteers like Mayu Takasaki, and Naomi and Ken Shikaze (sister and brother). Later the same volunteers and a handful of others, including Rick Shiomi, Lucy Komori, Tamio Wakayama and Sean Gunn, started the amazing run of the Powell Street Festival, the only festival to celebrate Japanese Canadian art and culture. It gave poets and writers like Roy Kiyooka, Roy Miki, Sean Gunn, Sky

Lee, Rick Shiomi, and me a venue for reading new material. In the ensuing years, Hiromi Goto, Sally Ito, Joy Kogawa, Kerri Sakamoto, Paul Yee, and Jim Wong Chu all participated in the festival and benefited from coming in contact with the sensibilities forged back in the fire of the 1970s.

Also during 1977, the Chinese Canadian Writers Workshop met at Sean Gunn and Ken Shikaze's house to determine the organization's future. Tired of the inactivity, Ken Shikaze entreated them to do something—get a grant and put together an anthology, an Asian Canadian anthology. And so they did, along with the Powell Street Revue.

Inalienable Rice: A Chinese & Japanese Canadian Anthology appeared in 1980. Edited by Garrick Chu, Sean Gunn, Paul Yee, Ken Shikaze, Linda Uyehara Hoffman and Rick Shiomi, the first collection of Asian Canadian writing featured many writers who were later to have a significant impact on Canadian letters and politics: Audrey Kobayashi, Bennett Lee, Paul Yee, Joy Kogawa, Roy Kiyooka, Bing Thom, Sean Gunn, Roy Miki, Jim Wong Chu, and Sky Lee.

The anthology, a perfect-bound magazine of eighty-three pages with a simple black and white drawing of a bowl of rice, fork and knife and chopsticks on the front cover, was a humble first step for these writers but its importance is obvious when considering future publications like *Many Mouthed Birds* (edited by Bennett Lee and Jim Wong Chu, 1991), *Tales from Gold Mountain* (Paul Yee, 1989), and *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (Sky Lee, 1990).

I doubt that Ron Tanaka, Alan Hotta, and Bing Thom could have foreseen what was to become of their desire for an Asian Canadian culture and community, but through their efforts in the early 1970s, a spirit was born that created the possibility of an Asian Canadian writing. I am still affected by it—my own writing of poetry, music, plays and fiction thrives on it. Ultimately, I feel that all Asian Canadian writers (including South Asian, Korean, Vietnamese, Filipino and others) share a common need to "go for broke" in establishing a strong and consistent literary voice in Canada. It is highly likely that we will.

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Leslie Lum

The Purpose of Rooms

The light different
from outside
falls deviously to the left
forced by space,
cramped like a stranger
among old friends.

It is familiar:
sunset.
Is this a sleeping
room?

Objectless
except a body strewn
here and there
but even it
is not
an object.

Tomorrow your voice
becomes a document.

Today you determine
your proportion of importance
in this room.

Here you are
stretched end to end
your face
carefully turned up towards
the light.

Is this not
a living room?

Susan Fisher

Japanese Elements in the Poetry of Fred Wah and Roy Kiyooka

For nearly a century, Japanese poetic forms have provided inspiration for poets writing in English. The importance of Japanese poetry for Ezra Pound and its role in the formation of Imagism have been well documented (see, for example, Kawano, Kodama, and Miner). Charles Olson, in his manifesto "Projective Verse" (1950), drew examples from Japanese sources as well as Western ones. Several of the Beat Generation poets, such as Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, and Philip Whalen, studied in Japan and their work reflects a serious interest in Japanese poetry. Writing in 1973, poet and translator Kenneth Rexroth declared that "classical Japanese and Chinese poetry are today as influential on American poetry as English or French of any period, and close to determinative for those born since 1940" (157). Rexroth may have been overstating this influence; he, after all, had a role in creating it. Nonetheless, what Gary Snyder calls the "mysteriously plain quality" of East Asian verse has served as a model for the simple diction and directness of much contemporary poetry ("Introduction" 4).

Writers belonging to these two generations of Asian-influenced American poets—the Imagists and the Beat poets—had no ethnic connection to Asia. But the demographic changes of the last few decades have produced a third generation whose interest in Asian poetry derives at least in part from their own Asian background. Several Asian Canadian poets have written works that are modelled on Japanese genres or make sustained allusions to Japanese literature. For example, Joy Kogawa's "At Maruyama Park, Kyoto" and Gerry Shikatani's "So What! A Bashoesque: (a rendition for bpNichol)"

and "A Legend, Probably" re-work the famous haiku by Basho (1644-1694): "The old pond/a frog jumps in/ the sound of water." Other examples of this kind of engagement with Japanese literary traditions can be found in Terry Watada's *Daruma Days* and Kevin Irie's *Burning the Dead.*

These connections between Japanese literature and the work of Asian Canadian writers are usually explained as reflections of ethnicity. Cathy Steblyk, for example, claims that "Japanese Canadian poetry reflects a strong dependence on the Eastern mode of communication of the lyric" (77). The Japanese Canadian writer Sally Ito observes that her own work has certain qualities—melancholy, impersonality, and restraint—often associated with Japanese literature. In her view, these values have been "unconsciously transmitted": "The more I read and studied about Japanese literature, the more I realized how much Japanese aesthetics and ways of thinking informed my writing" (177).

In the case of writers who, like Ito, have studied the language and literature of their (or their parents') country of origin, it seems legitimate to assume that ethnicity plays some role in forming their poetics. But attributing everything "Japanese" in Asian Canadian writing to ethnicity neglects the history of Japanese influence—a history which, through the legacy of Imagism and the New American Poetics, prepared the ground so that Japanese-influenced poetry could sound "poetic" in English. The assumption that there is a direct link between ethnicity and poetics is only a step or two distant from the attitude Hiromi Goto ridicules in her poem "The Body Politic":

> People ask me what I do
> and I say, oh, I do a little writing.
> Do you write poetry too? someone will ask,
> and I say, yeah, a little bit.
> Oh! please make up a haiku for us, we'd love to hear a haiku from you.
> Uh—I don't—
> Oh, don't be shy! You Japanese are so clever with haiku! (220)

What is the appropriate way to link poetics and ethnicity? What role does ethnicity play in a writer's choice of form and technique? Two of Canada's most prominent Asian Canadian writers, Fred Wah (born in 1939) and Roy Kiyooka (1926-1994), are among those who have made considerable use of Japanese poetic forms. In focusing on their work, I hope to offer some tentative answers to these questions, and to suggest some difficulties that arise when ethnicity is used to explain poetic effects.

Fred Wah

Since the early 1980s, Fred Wah has produced a number of works in Japanese poetic genres. His 1982 book, *Grasp the Sparrow's Tail*, is a diary-like record of a trip to Japan and China; originally published in Kyoto, it was reprinted in Wah's 1985 collection *Waiting for Saskatchewan*, where it is described in the prefatory note as "a *utaniki*, a poetic diary of mixed prose and poetry."[1] *Waiting for Saskatchewan* contains another experiment with Japanese form: "This Dendrite Map: Father/Mother Haibun." In the preface, Wah defines *haibun* as "short prose written from a haiku sensibility and, in this case, concluded by an informal haiku line."[2] *Rooftops*, published in 1988, is a collection of haiku. In 1989, Wah published *Limestone Lakes Utaniki*, an account of a hiking trip. His 1991 collection *So Far* (where "Limestone Lakes Utaniki" also appears) includes two more works in this form: "Uluru Utaniki" and "Dead in My Tracks: Wildcat Creek Utaniki." *Diamond Grill*, published in 1996, is a prose work, but its form—more than a hundred chapters, all extremely short, with occasional inserted poems (for example, 12, 22) and bursts of lyricism (for example, 31)— suggests that it is not a novel or even a prose poem but rather another experiment in *haibun*.

Although Wah is not Japanese Canadian—his paternal grandfather was Chinese—his interest in Japanese poetic traditions derives at least in part from his self-identification as an Asian Canadian. In his critical writings, Wah has discussed two ideas that I think explain his attraction to Japanese poetics: defamiliarization and "alienethnic poetics" ("A Poetics" 99).

Defamiliarization

In "Making Strange Poetics," his 1985 essay on the Canadian long poem, Wah discusses the importance for his own poetics of Viktor Shklovsky's notion of defamiliarization or estrangement. Shklovsky saw defamiliarization as the essence of artistic language: "The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged" (qtd in Wah, "Making Strange Poetics" 213).[3]

In his own poetry, Wah has certainly tried to "increase the difficulty and length of perception." For example, he avoids complete sentences and conventional syntax, and refers to people, places, and works of literature that are not easily recognizable. His use of Japanese forms can be seen as another of defamiliarizing strategy. Subtitles that include terms like *haibun* or

utanikki turn Wah's poems into foreign objects; they signal that something is going on that does not fit the conventions of poetry in English.

Wah's use of *haibun* in "This Dendrite Map: Father/Mother Haibun" demonstrates the workings of defamiliarization. Each of the poem's twenty-one sections consists of a prose-like passage justified right and left, punctuated with one or two lines in boldface. In his statement on this poem for *The New Long Poem Anthology*, Wah describes the relationship between the "prose" sections and ending lines: "the haiku," he says, "settles out at the bottom" (373). The boldface ending lines are items of denser thought, finding their way to the bottom of the page. A few of these ending lines—for example, sections 6, 11, 13—actually scan like haiku, with phrases of 5-7-5 syllables.

If the word *haibun* and the unusual form of the poem create expectations that it will somehow seem strange and difficult, the poem itself fulfills them. In writing about the long poems of bpNichol, Wah describes how Nichol uses "a labyrinthine network of incomplete thought loops" to keep the reader suspended in an unresolvable, infinitely prolonged process of perception ("Making Strange Poetics" 217). Wah employs the same method in "Father/Mother Haibun," as this passage demonstrates:

> Father/Mother Haibun #10
>
> Working with my back to the window for more natural
> light, dog chasing cows in the field, the words stubble
> today, embedded there in the bracken at the edge of the
> field, Chinese philosophy and numbers, the cloud-filled
> night, "and they swam and they swam, right over the dam,"
> etc., all this, and sugar too, holding the hook, time, the
> bag, the book, the shape, you also carried on your back
> yin and embraced yang with your arms and shoulders, the
> mind as a polished mirror, there, back into my hand.
>
> **I can't stop looking at the field of brown grass and weed and feeling the grey sky** (Waiting 85)

Following the "incomplete thought loops" here requires constant reference to the background sources of Wah's poetry. The field is not only the open land behind the writer's house but also Olson's technique of "composition by field." When linked to the phrase "Chinese philosophy and numbers," the stubble in the field evokes the yarrow stalks used for divining with the *I Ching*. The lyric from the popular song "The Three Little Fishies"—"and they swam and they swam, right over the dam"—reminds us that Wah played trumpet in a dance band; it connects this passage to the many other

references to popular music in Wah's poetry. (The title of his 1981 collection, *Breathin' My Name with a Sigh,* for example, derives from the dance tune "Deep Purple" [Bowering, "Introduction" 16]). "Holding the hook" refers to a movement in t'ai chi, another source of images in Wah's poetry; *Grasp the Sparrow's Tail,* the title of his 1982 book, is also the name of a series of t'ai chi movements. The image of the mind as a polished mirror derives from a Zen Buddhist parable. Throughout the passage, Wah's references alternate between "western" things, such as Olson and popular music, and "eastern" ones, such as t'ai chi, yin/yang, and the *I Ching.*

There are obvious differences between "This Dendrite Map: Father/Mother Haibun" and Basho's *Oku no hosomichi,* the pre-eminent work of *haibun.* In *Oku no hosomichi,* the link between the prose and the haiku is clear; there is often an explicit description of the occasion on which the haiku was written, and the alternation between prose and haiku is not nearly as systematic as the pattern Wah adopts. Moreover, *Oku no hosomichi* is a travel diary that records a coherent itinerary. Its content is restrained and impersonal, in contrast to Wah's focus on family history. If Wah had not labelled "This Dendrite Map" *haibun,* surely readers would never think of comparing it with *Oku no hosomichi.* Apart from "defamiliarizing" his readers, what does he achieve by using this term?

First, he announces his allegiance to poetic and spiritual ancestors outside English literature. But the subtitle "haibun" is not only an ethnopoetic gesture toward Asian precedents. It also reflects a genuinely creative adaptation of a foreign model to the demands of English verse. Despite the many differences between *haibun* in Japanese and what Wah calls *haibun,* one essential quality has survived the journey from Japanese to English. Wah's prose sections present a series of ideas linked associatively; the haiku present an abrupt shift in perception, a summing up of a mood—precisely the role they perform in Japanese *haibun.* By adapting this form to English verse, Wah has developed a way to move from dense, mostly asyntactical recollections in the prose sections to a lyrical, descriptive mood in the boldface lines. It creates a dynamic for which there are no readily available models in English verse.[4]

Similarly, in his "uta niki" or poetic diaries, Wah adopts certain structural devices from a Japanese genre in order to move between ordinary experience and more intense reflection or perception. Prose sections record the events of daily life; inserted poems present moments of greater intensity. In

Limestone Lakes Utaniki, for example, Wah includes an elegy, several poems made up of three two-line stanzas, and a palindromic poem (based on whole words, not individual letters).

In "Making Strange Poetics," Wah quotes approvingly Charles Olson's remark (made in a 1968 BBC interview) that "the exciting thing about poetry in our century is that you can get image and narrative both to wed each other" (216). By adapting *haibun* and *uta nikki* to English, Wah has suggested new ways to achieve this union of narrative and image.

Alienethnic Poetics

The subject matter of much of Wah's poetry is ethnicity: his family background has provided the material for some of his best work, such as "This Dendrite Map: Father/Mother Haibun" and *Diamond Grill.* But Wah has endeavoured to go beyond simply writing *about* ethnicity. He has tried to develop a way of writing that through its form, tropes, and allusions also expresses his ethnic identity. In his essay "The Poetics of Ethnicity," Wah attempts to define what he calls "alienethnic poetics":

> The culturally marginalized writer will engineer approaches to language and form that enable a particular residue (genetic, cultural, biographical) to become kinetic and valorized. For writers in Canada like Joy Kogawa and Rohinton Mistry the stance is to operate within a colonized and inherited formal awareness while investigating their individual enactments of internment and migration. But others, such as Roy Kiyooka and Marlene Nourbese Philip, who are operating from spatial allocations similar to Kogawa and Mistry, have chosen to utilize more formal innovative possiblities. This second group of writers seems to me to embody an approach that might properly be called something like "alienethnic" poetics. (99)

Wah, whose entire career has been devoted to exploring "formal innovative possibilities," clearly belongs in this second group. While acknowledging the success of writers such as Kogawa and Mistry, Wah classifies the kind of realistic novels they have written as "colonized and inherited."[5] He links innovation to the desire to find "the right tools" (100) to represent ethnicity. He acknowledges that there are other reasons to pursue formal innovation:

> This [alienethnic] poetics, while often used for its ethnic imprint and frequently originating from that desire, is certainly not limited to an ethnic, as they say, "project;" the same tactics could as well be used for other goals. Feminist poetics, for example, has arguably contributed the most useful strategies to the ethnic intention. (99-100)

This is a necessary admission, for many of the formal innovators whom

Wah has most admired—Charles Olson, for example—do not belong in the category of ethnic writers.

Jeff Derksen has pointed out that Wah is usually discussed as a member of the Canadian *avant-garde* of the sixties and seventies. Along with other poets such as George Bowering and Frank Davey, Wah was a founder of the newsletter *Tish*. The problem with focusing on this aspect of Wah's career, claims Derksen, is that it has "separated his racial identity from his poetry" (63). In directing their attention to the form of Wah's poetry, critics have neglected its content—Wah's working-class Chinese Canadian background. Derksen points out the irony in this reading, for a central principle of the *avant-garde* poetics Wah embraced is that form and content are inseparable (66). Derksen suggests that Wah's innovative poetics in itself has constituted a kind of racialized statement, a refusal to be assimilated by conventional literary practice.

I think Derksen is right (and Wah's own statements on alienethnic poetics support Derksen), but he neglects to point out how *avant-garde* poetics may have led Wah to the ethnopoetics he practises. Wah's use of Japanese-influenced elements can be traced to the New American Poetics of the 1960s, which in many respects was inspired by the poetry of Japan and China.

In 1963 Wah attended the Vancouver Poetry Conference at which Charles Olson introduced his poetics to a new generation of Canadian poets (Kröller 19). Wah later studied with Olson at the State University of New York and, through his teacher, absorbed poetic values that had East Asian origins. Allen Ginsberg, a central figure in the New American Poetics, sees a lineage of Open Form poets running from Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams to Olson and Robert Creeley (99; see also Beach for another description of Pound's influence). Ginsberg traces East Asian influences in American poetry to Ezra Pound's axiom, "Direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective." According to Ginsberg, Pound

> derived that American application of twentieth-century insight from his study of Chinese Confucian, Taoist and Japanese Buddhist poetry. There was a Buddhist infusion into Western culture at the end of the nineteenth century, both in painting and in poetry. Pound put in order the papers of "the late professor Ernest Fenollosa," the celebrated essay on "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry." Fenollosa/Pound pointed out that in Chinese you were able to have a "direct treatment" of the object because the object was pictorially there via hieroglyph. Pound recommended the adaptation of the same idea: the Chinese poetic method as a corrective to the conceptual vagueness and sentimental

> abstraction of Western poetry. In a way he was asking for the intercession of the bodhisattvas of Buddhist poetry into Western poetics because he was calling for direct perception, direct contact without intervening conceptualization, a clear seeing attentiveness, which, echoing in your brain, is supposed to be one of the marks of Zen masters . . . . (96)

Despite the importance of Asian verse in the modernist revolution, its role was quickly obscured. Its values—brevity, directness, no moralizing or sentimentality, erasure of the speaker's feelings, a reliance on natural images to convey emotion—became naturalized as aspects of modernism. The Japanese verse tradition was more or less forgotten until the 1950s and 60s, when, with the expansion in scholarship on Japan during the Occupation, a new wave of translations became available. Kenneth Rexroth's "hundred poem" collections and Burton Watson's translations of the poetry of Su Tung-p'o and Han Shan attracted a new generation of poets to East Asian verse. Many Beat poets travelled to Japan, primarily because of their interest in Zen Buddhism. Gary Snyder, a scholar and translator of both classical Chinese and Japanese, began to employ haiku and other Asian verse forms in his own poetry (see, for example, McLeod, Norton).

Wah is, in a sense, a northern member of the Beat generation. Like his American counterparts, he was attracted to Japan and its literary traditions as radical alternatives to Western society and poetry. Dan McLeod, in writing about the poetry of Gary Snyder, notes that for American poets, "the Asian influence has, in each poetic generation, offered vital options to the overwhelming presence of the Western literary tradition" (165-66). Wah had an additional reason for turning towards the East: as an Asian outsider in Canadian society, he saw Japanese poetics as a way to make this difference visible in his work.

There is, however, no special match between the themes of Asian cultural displacement that interest Wah and Japanese forms such as the *uta nikki* or *haibun*. If a Japanese-style poetic diary can be written in English, then it can be written to serve many different themes—even those "universal" concerns of love, aging, and the journey of life that pervade the original Japanese models of this form. Indeed, bp Nichol described the *uta nikki* as his "retroactively recognized formal model" for *The Martyrology* (Ondaatje 336).

Wah's choice of Japanese models is awkward for any theory of ethnopoetics. Whatever aesthetic a Canadian-born person of Chinese ancestry might unconsciously absorb from the conversation of parents or grandparents, it is not a Japanese one. It is possible to argue on historical grounds that

because Japanese poetry owes much to Chinese poetry, there is an affinity between these two traditions in East Asian verse, but this argument is uncomfortably close to the view that all Asian cultures are the same. Moreover, the very techniques Wah associates with alienethnic poetics—fragmentation, estrangement, a mixture of genres—are associated with other forms of writing in English, such as postmodernist fiction (see, for example, Hutcheon). In the concluding sentences of "The Poetics of Ethnicity" Wah admits that there is no necessary connection between ethnicity and formal innovation:

> . . . the ethnopoetics toolbox isn't even only "ethnic," at least in the sense of racial. These tools are shared, it seems, by writers who are marginalized, invisible, experimental, political, in short, in need of any tool that might imagine, as the poet George Oppen believed, the unacknowledged world. (108)

Surely this statement comes close to acknowledging that there is in fact no particular "poetics of ethnicity."

Roy Kiyooka

A first-generation Japanese Canadian, Roy Kiyooka was already an established painter and art teacher when he began writing poetry. Although he was born in Canada, Kiyooka had sustained contact with Japanese culture throughout his life. He spoke Japanese with his parents and, as a child, visited relatives in Japan. In 1963 he returned to Japan to reunite with a sister who had stayed in Japan throughout the war years; in subsequent years, he made many trips to Japan to visit friends and relatives. In 1969, he lived in Japan for four months, working on a sculpture for the Canadian pavilion at Expo 70 in Osaka.

Kiyooka's first book of poetry, *Kyoto Airs* (1964), records his return to Japan as an adult. It provides what now seems like the standard traveller's version of Japan: the stone garden at Ryoanji, bonzai trees, shrines, green rice paddies, and, in the midst of Eastern tradition, incongruous touches of Western modernity—here metonymized as "red high heels"(*Pacific Windows* 23). Although it deals with a Japanese subject and setting, it owes very little to Japanese literary traditions, except as they were filtered through the New American Poetics.

When he was in Japan in 1963, Kiyooka met Ginsberg, Snyder, and Corman (Miki, *Broken* 63). Later that year, he attended the Vancouver Poetry Conference. As Kiyooka's editor Roy Miki points out, nearly thirty

years later Kiyooka recognized the conference as a "turning point": *Kyoto Airs* was "in part borne of that memorable occasion" (qtd in Miki, *Pacific* 308). According to Miki, the writing of this first book of poems was dominated by Kiyooka's effort to make himself into a poet, to discover his ability to write in English.

Kiyooka had never finished high school. When the war with Japan started in 1941, his father and brother lost their jobs. In order to survive, the family moved to a small farm, and Kiyooka had to work to contribute to the family income. His lack of formal education embarrassed Kiyooka, despite his success as an artist. When he began to see himself as a writer, Kiyooka laboured to find the right words: "To me it was an act of retrieval in terms of the detritus of my language, just the shit of it. I had to go over and over and over again" (qtd in Miki, *Pacific* 307).

In 1969, Kiyooka visited Japan again. With his father and a Japanese friend, he travelled by train from Kyoto northwest to Tottori and Matsue on the Sea of Japan, circling around to the south through Hiroshima, and back to Kyoto. He kept a journal and took many photographs on this journey; these materials were ultimately turned into *Wheels: A Trip thru Honshu's Backcountry*. Ann Munton unequivocally identifies *Wheels* with Basho's *Oku no hosomichi*:

> His *Wheels, a trip thru Honshu's Backcountry '69* is most like the utanikki models, a travel diary of a trip through Japan.... Unlike Basho with his bed lice and young guide with "short curved sword at his waist," Kiyooka encounters souvenir shops and punk kid taxi drivers. (104)

She also quotes Robert Kroetsch as making the same comparison: "Roy from the prairies, ventured into rain forest, into the Basho-journeys of his far ancestors, into dream, into the color of words" (Kroetsch 77). *Oku no hosomichi* chronicles Basho's travels from Edo (Tokyo) north as far as Hiraizumi, then west to the Sea of Japan coast, and finally back to Ise in the south. This seventeenth-century Japanese work seems a likely model for Kiyooka's own travel diary, but Munton does not consider the parallels between *Oku no hosomichi* and *Wheels*; rather, she seems to assume that Kiyooka's Japanese ancestry is sufficient to justify the comparison.

There are, in fact, many specific points of similarity. Like the *haibun* of Basho, Kiyooka's *Wheels* combines short poems with prose (for example, letters home to his mother). None of the short poems attempts to be a haiku, but some have haiku-like features. For example, many employ a precise

image, such as the following snapshot-like description of Kiyooka's father:

resting his head on his suit-
case father nods off his empty cup
jiggles on the window ledge (138)

Another haiku technique Kiyooka uses is the *kireji* or cutting word (an interjection) to mark a shift in images:

hailed by the slant rain –
bus loads of high school kids stomping
across its prodigious arches
hoot and holler heel to heel hallowed
by this ah Sudden Rainbow! (161)

At "ah," the arched stone bridge is forgotten, and attention turns to the image of the arching rainbow.

In subject matter as well, Kiyooka's *Wheels* provides echoes of *Oku no hosomichi.* Many passages in Basho's diary recount legends or describe famous temples, shrines, or ruins. Kiyooka reports one of the "local legends" associated with the area around Hinomisaki (145); short poems and photographs document his visit to a shrine (146-7) and a temple (154); he also describes a ruined castle (154) and the contents of a museum (155). Basho visits a hot spring; so, too does Kiyooka (158).

Moreover, like Basho's travel diary, *Wheels* is permeated with reflections on death and mortality. Even the title refers to the turning of the dharmic wheel, a Buddhist symbol for the endless cycles of life and death. These themes are particularly prominent in the section on Hiroshima. One poem describing the atomic bomb museum is constructed in couplets, each of which ends with "(click)" as Kiyooka takes a picture of the exhibits: charred clothes, a stopped clock, melted bicycles, and charred toys. The poem builds to the gruesome and pathetic image of the final couplet, and then ends with a chilling envoi:

o the bronze angel with a charred hole for a face
o the lurid, lopsided, sake bottles
(click)
which hand
pulled the trigger?
which hand
turned gangrenous?

In terms of poetic form, there is little in this section of *Wheels* that can be directly attributed to Japanese poetics, unless it is the austere reliance on

images to tell a story. The content, however, is intensely Japanese Canadian, for only Japanese who were living in North America at the time of the war could feel this painful mixture of guilt, compassion, and connection. It is a particularly dramatic example of what Shirley Geok-lin Lim has called the "double perspective" of minority writers (22).

Kiyooka's work through the 1970s and 1980s shows his continuing engagement with Japanese formal models. His *StoneDGloves*, a collage of text and photographs taken at the Expo site in Osaka in 1970, has some affinity with the *e-maki* or picture scroll tradition in Japanese art. In pre-modern Japanese literature, text and image were often closely related; for example, the *uta-e* or poem pictures combined paintings and hand-lettered poems; the *byobu-e* or screen pictures sometimes incorporated poems written on elegant paper. George Bowering asserts that *StoneDGloves* was the result of "a peculiarly Japanese esthetic process" ("Roy Kiyooka's Poetry"). In support of this claim, Bowering quotes the very Imagist lines from the work's title page:

> *gathered*
> *blossoms*
>
> *scattered*
> *a gain* (57)

Bowering does not point out (perhaps because he felt it was obvious) that scattered blossoms is a time-honoured Japanese image of fleeting beauty.

The Long Autumn Scroll (completed in the mid-1980s and exhibited in 1990) was a further experiment in the *e-maki* tradition. A work that combines poetry and sheets of photocopied leaves, Kiyooka explained it as a "long saunter via the Long Scroll [that] has its roots and flowering in the legends & the agendas of one man's asian roots" (qtd in Miki 313). The excerpt reprinted in *Pacific Windows*, subtitled "Written in the Manner of a Chinese Scholar's Autumnal Journal," shows the confluence in Kiyooka's work of Japanese traditions and Asian-inspired American poetics. The notion that this poem is modelled on "a Chinese Scholar's Autumnal Journal" probably owes more to Gary Snyder's translations of the poems of Han Shan or to Burton Watson's translations of classical Chinese poetry than to any direct Japanese source. The opening lines suggest the mountain hermitage of Chinese classical tradition:

> here, the mountain air is already frost-laden:
> 'neath sun-dog moon, scarlet leaves and pine needles glisten.

The poem moves from the timeless impersonality of these lines to Vancouver, in the present, where an old friend has died. The poem addresses the friend directly, remembering the music they shared. Kiyooka then uses a line with numerous Japanese echoes to shift the scene from British Columbia to Okinawa:

> the first snow
> clasping the pine branches sings the plum-colored eventide

"Snow," "pine," "plum," and "eventide" are standard elements in the restricted lexicon of traditional Japanese verse. Kiyooka's use of them is odd: how can the eventide sing the snow, or is it the snow singing the eventide? Perhaps he makes the syntax confusing in order to avoid the too-precious quality of a haiku about snow on pine branches.

The next section of the poem describes Kiyooka's summer in Okinawa.

> umagi-mura interlude)
> down the well-worn path barefeet share with civic ants
> orange tiger lilies abut calligraphic roots & tendrils.
> down the herbaceous incline towards the unrevealed but
> not unheard plaintive mutterings of ol' mother pacific—
> i strode thinking i would find myself a place in the sun and
> let the ol' crone harp me all afternoon. but, need I say,
> i was wronged: hide your tuberous bod under a huge boulder:
> wedge yourself into its seaweed armpit and watch the
> pummelled tide ride the black pebbles up the foreshore to-
> wards your unwebbed feet. beat a hasty retreat. . .
>
> shikoku no aoi yama
> kaigan no osoroshi kaminari
> otosun no hosoi koe

This "interlude" in Japan begins with ten lines of verse that rely on English prosody for their coherence. Kiyooka uses a standard line length of fifteen syllables (with some variation). He also incorporates several sound devices: alliteration ("well-worn"; "plaintive mutterings of ol' mother pacific"); repetition ("abut" and "but"; "feet"; "ol'"); and internal rhyme ("feet" and "retreat"; "tide" and "ride"). After this unmistakably "English" section, he then shifts into Japanese. The three lines of Japanese are not translated; their literal meaning is "blue-green mountains of Shikoku/the frightening thunder of the shore/the thin voice of my father." ("Otosun" seems to be Kiyooka's version of what is usually romanized as "Otoosan" [father]).

Kiyooka's 1987 work, *Pear Tree Pomes*, has been described in terms of

Japanese poetics: Sharon Thesen, editor of the *New Long Poem Anthology* in which this work was reprinted, asserts that it "can be firmly placed in the *utaniki* [sic] tradition" (15). Thesen offers no evidence for this connection other than the poem's "concern with time" and with seasonal change. *Pear Tree Pomes* seems closer to a sonnet sequence than anything Japanese: most of the individual poems range between ten and twelve lines, and all are concerned with defining love and lamenting its loss. In *Pear Tree Pomes*, Kiyooka refers to the work itself exclusively in English terms. He calls it "plain-song" (202), a "small psalm to an old pear tree"(203) and "an ode to an old pear tree" (204). References, too, are overwhelmingly "western" (for example, Wallace Stevens, King Solomon, Adam and Eve), although Kiyooka does compare writing the poem to turning a Buddhist prayer wheel: "i would, given another spin of the wheel chant/ each new-born syllable aloft and watch it haunt the combustible air" (202).

Kiyooka's last series of published poems, the chapbook *Three Nippon Weathervanes*, includes the bilingual poem "Kumo/Cloud/s."[6] One page of this poem consists of three columns of Japanese text, with occasional insertions of the English word "cloud." One column is in typed romaji (Japanese written in the roman alphabet); the next is handwritten romaji; the third is written in Japanese script. At the bottom are Showa 60 (the year according to the Japanese system), Kiyooka's name, and his Japanese collaborator's name, all in Japanese characters. On the facing page appears a loose translation of the Japanese, printed over a background of photocopied leaves. An explanatory note also appears on this facing page: "translated into english / the night after Matsuka-san & i / translated my roma-ji in- / to plausible japanese & sang." Presumably the materials for the Japanese text came from notebooks described in an earlier section of "Kumo/Cloud/s": "i filled 3 notebooks full of / an oftimes indecipherable 'romaji' alternating / with pages of cluttered 'inglish'" (260).

These two pages with Japanese text and translation are best understood as an experiment in combining images and text, similar to *StonDGloves* or *The Long Autumn Scroll.* The Japanese words belong in the realm of image, for few of Kiyooka's readers are likely to understand them; those who do will find the hand-lettering and misspelled words hard to read.

In an interview in 1975, Kiyooka was asked how his Japanese heritage had affected his painting. In reply, he described his 1963 trip to Japan and the writing of *Kyoto Airs*, which he explained as "partly about these very

things—origins, kinships, and what you call heritage." But then he took issue with the question itself:

> I'm truly bored with labels, what they pre-empt, and I'm sick of having my origins fingered. It's as though an utterly "Canadian" experience couldn't embrace either ocean and what lies on the far side of each. (*Roy Kiyooka: 25 Years*)

In the same year, in an essay written for Joy Kogawa and Tamio Wakayama, Kiyooka described how he had learned Japanese from his mother. He acknowledged "the ironical fact" that now he could discuss this experience only in English, even with Japanese Canadian friends ("We Asian" 118). He concluded that "whatever my true colours, I am to all intents and purposes, a white anglo saxon protestant, with a cleft tongue." Yet Japanese remained the language of his emotions: "when I am most bereft, it's the nameless Jap in me who sings an unsolicited haiku in voluntary confinement."

Works such as *Wheels, The Long Autumn Scroll* and "Kumo/Cloud/s" show Kiyooka's efforts to bring together the Japanese and English-Canadian elements in his experience. In a note found in his papers, Kiyooka described how the Japanese spoken on the streets of his parents' ancestral village in Shikoku somehow sounded like his own language: "everytime i've gone back there and walked the streets of that lovely city on the pacific, i hear the cadences of my own native speech: both nihongo and inglish subtly transmuted into an undialectical syntax" (Miki *Pacific* 320 n. 21). "Undialectical" is the key word here, for Kiyooka did not see east and west, Japanese and English, as opposed. In his poetry he attempted to create a imaginative realm that encompassed both.

Conclusion

Roy Kiyooka never downplayed the importance of his Japanese background, and at times wrote passionately about the racism Japanese Canadians had experienced (see, for example, "October's Piebald Skies & Other Lacunae," *Pacific Windows* 281.) But in a 1991 interview, Kiyooka steadfastly avoided making any polemical or theoretical statements about his role as a Japanese Canadian writer. He pointed out the importance of Japan in his formation: for example, he noted that all his texts started in Japan, and he speculated that if things had been even slightly different in his childhood, he might have learned to read and write Japanese. Nonetheless, the interview as a whole conveys the impression that aesthetic concerns, not ethnic ones, dominated Kiyooka's work. Towards the end of the interview, he asserted

that "the most critical thing about my activity is the inter-face between myself as a painter and myself as a language artificer"(Miki *Broken* 73). This interest in both poetry and painting happened to find a congenial match in the traditions of Japanese literature; perhaps this, even more than Kiyooka's own Japanese heritage, explains why he turned so often to Japanese sources and forms in his poetry.

Fred Wah and Roy Kiyooka are not only Asian Canadians; they are also North American poets of a particular generation, a generation that wanted to revitalize poetry by turning away from its traditional European sources. Like so many of their American contemporaries, Wah and Kiyooka found inspiration in Japanese verse. By seeing Wah and Kiyooka only in the context of their ethnicity, we miss their place in this historical pattern of interaction with Japanese traditions, and we obscure their significance as innovators in the broad landscape of Canadian poetry. I am not suggesting that we should ignore their ethnicity. Rather, we should see ethnicity as one factor among many that has determined their interest in and adaptation of Japanese verse forms.

NOTES

An early version of this paper was presented in April 1998 at "Writing, Diversity, and Social Critique," a conference sponsored by the University of British Columbia. A subsequent version was presented at a meeting of the Nikkeibunka Kenkyukai in Kyoto, Japan in April 1999. I am grateful to the members of the Kenkyukai for their thoughtful comments and questions.

1 Wah spells this term *utaniki,* but the standard romanized version is *uta nikki. Uta* means poetry or song; *nikki,* 'diary,' combines *nichi* 'day' with *ki* 'record'. In *Grasp the Sparrow's Tail,* Wah mentions reading the *Tosa Diary,* a tenth-century example of the poetic diary (*Waiting for Saskatchewan* 36).

2 *Haibun,* which combines the *hai* of haiku with *bun,* the character which means prose or writing in general, is usually associated with Basho's *Oku no hosomichi.* Variously translated as *Narrow Road to the Deep North* (Yuasa), or *Narrow Road to the Interior* (Hamill), *Oku no hosomichi* is also a poetic diary or *uta nikki,* and presumably one of the models Wah uses for this genre.

3 This quotation comes from Shklovsky's essay "Art as Technique" (Lemon and Reis 12).

4 One might suggest the relationship between the quatrains and closing couplet of a Shakespearean sonnet as a possible (distant) English model, but Wah's closing lines do not resolve the themes and tropes of the poem, as the couplet of a sonnet would.

5 The Japanese Canadian poet and critic Roy Miki sees *Obasan* not as a conventional novel but as one in which "formal disruptions, such as the generic crossing of fiction,

history, autobiography, and documentary . . . become strategies of resistance to norms" (*Broken Entries* 117).

6 "Kumo/Cloud/s" was also published separately in *West Coast Line* 24.3 (Winter 1990).

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Fred Wah

Ethnogy Journal, Thailand 1999

but the rain fate
some kind of inner magnet
wet and long and alien
Asian road with clouds
guiding the electrical stove
stuff brought time
the uniform of school
can hardly comply
with the geography
that guides these democratic
souls to accommodate pattern
keeps falling into the same old
deep hole in the sidewalk

Wed Jan 12 Samui raining/cool
(I feel uneasy, hesitant. Today
I will shoot nothing but green.)

---

as well. happy. at
the sunshine, and coasted
into the whole leaf
waving, pea-pod green
perfect shells my large
emotional agenda a giveaway
dark so soon, friction
not just sand
seek the one seat
next wave
to sit on

Friday Jan 15 Samui mixed/warm
(Yesterday six people scattered
around the island.)

---

routine trip out
potential for a squall
from the tailgate of song tow
feet cemented on the right
facing traffic almost left behind
scope of variation
sources tapped
dialogue with plan
round trip
revving past the neon
sign for healing child
needs to grin

Sat Jan 16 20's/Rainy/Cloudy
(These words are just notes.
But up close lots of blond farang girls
with packs.)

---

world daily sculpted
to a coast, song tow
periphery each departmental thought
a coherence of flow files
called "home" check agenda
cut grass, motor's
trying to teach me something
if I could find a shadow
as a way to record
the floor tiles—tape this
moment, how much
does that Honda Wave cost?

Sunday Jan 24 Sunny/breeze
(Beautiful day. Took bike back.)

---

some carrier of an anecdotal jet
like that coffee shop
food as photo
just a monk
saffron
the sentence
as a tunnel of love
the intention is to put the words
together and make them thicker

Thurs Jan 28
(The man said he was hard to dry.
You can enjoy the "presentness"
of looking up though an evergreen
jungle canopy.)

Fist to close the circle
of one-way streets "downtown"
cycles rev and spit through this attic
of curios and cottons
tourist shops America
blue for instance
that kickstand scraping
alphabet a mere "sea-green"
conditions of a Chinese-Belgian
choice on the street menu
"Noodle Pour Down with
Strong Soup Vegetable"
some bias in each record
of the day.

Thurs Jan 28
(Butterfly mobiles of coral. Ex-pat
Irishman with German experience
owns mangostina farm just 40k from here.)

John Ming Chen

An Interview with Sally Ito

John Ming Chen has recently been working on a collection of interviews with Asian Canadian writers. In the spring of 1999 he met Sally Ito at the Vancouver launch of her collection of short stories, *Floating Shore* (Mercury) and he interviewed her in a series of written exchanges with her during the subsequent summer months. Sally Ito is the author of two books of poetry, *Frogs in the Rain Barrel* (1995)—which was short-listed for the Milton Acorn People's Memorial Award—and *Season of Mercy* (1999).

JMC Before we start, I want to thank you for granting me this interview. I genuinely enjoyed your reading in Vancouver with Goh Poh Seng as part of the Asian Heritage Month reading series. Your book of poetry, *Frogs in the Rain Barrel*, and your short story collection, *Floating Shore*, have been published in relatively quick succession. Another collection of poetry, *Season of Mercy*, has just appeared. What motivates your obvious creative energy and what are you trying to achieve as a writer?

SI I always knew I wanted to be a writer from the age of sixteen. So in a sense, I've been writing seriously since then. Writing is for me two things: a way of communicating to *oneself* one's understanding of the world, and also to communicate to *others* one's understanding of the world. Writing is private in that it is reflective of a personal journey but public in that it is also meant to convey that journey to readers.

The need to write is inner and compulsive. I always say to people who want to write—if you could only write in water, would you? I think a real writer would say 'yes.' It's that urge to write that makes one a writer. Of course, it would be terribly frustrating not to have one's writing responded to or understood, but not being recognized never stopped a visionary like Blake. Ego is important but not that important.

JMC Many of the writers whom I have interviewed share a strong sense of community or community commitment, for instance, Terry Watada, Joy Kogawa, Jim Wong-Chu, and SKY Lee. Are you influenced by a sense of Asian Canadian community, or is your "vision"—and you mention the visionary work of Blake—more individualistic? What are some of the main influences on your work?

SI I'm not sure where I fit exactly into that loose community of Asian Canadian artists, some of whom you have mentioned interviewing. Certainly I know many of the artists personally and have had some contact with them. Ultimately, however, I think all of us writers have different artistic visions which we pursue relatively individualistically. Although some of us may come from similar cultural backgrounds, we have entirely different obsessions and concerns that we express in our writing.

As for influences, literary and otherwise, after the biggie—the Bible—I have to say writers like Kogawa and Flannery O'Connor have influenced me. I like Kogawa's blend of the poetic with the political. She has a particularly distinctive style that flows and she has the ability to incorporate visual metaphor quite mellifluously into her narrative. That ability to incorporate the visual lyrically I must say intuitively exhibits a particularly Japanese sensibility. It's a style I aspire to myself. Such a style combines what is intuitive from one's own cultural background (in my case and Joy's—the Japanese culture) with what I as writer have received from the more formal Western elements of my education in the English language and English literature. O'Connor I like for her short stories and her uniquely Catholic perspective on things. Her vision is hard and unrelenting—not as compassionate as I prefer to be in my own writing—but the clarity with which she observes things in her short stories is quite marvellous. It was O'Connor who alerted me to the notion of 'vanity' or the idea of the 'vanity of striving after things' which presented me with a more Western/Christian understanding of what I only felt sub-consciously as the transistoriness of things that makes any

kind of striving seem futile, pathetic even. My own sub-conscious understanding of the notion of vanity was probably more Buddhist than Christian; it was O'Connor who provided me with the more Christian vocabulary to deal with this vague sense I had of the world. As for poetic influences, I would have to say that P.K. Page has been an important influence because of her visual acuity and the lush breadth of metaphor she had for matters of the spirit. Margaret Avison is less luxuriant but crystalline in her expression. I tend to like writers who have a strong moral or anagogic vision. I just recently finished a short story by Joseph Conrad that had that kind of anagogic vision that I like. Chekhov is also great for short stories. No matter how many times I read a story of his, I'm drawn immediately into the world that he creates. Alice Munro also has the same effect on me—she's a superb storyteller.

JMC You have talked about the community of writers or influential writing, but I am wondering about some of the Asian North American writers who have been influential or important. And what about your circle of family and friends? Have they encouraged or helped you in your writing career?

SI Yes, it is true that I've mentioned mostly non-Asian writers aside from Kogawa but it is partially because I'm attracted to writings that express spiritual truths that are to me more Christian in persuasion, than, let's say Buddhist. This is not to say I haven't read much Asian North American writing. I have. To this end, I must cite a couple of Asian American writers that have influenced me—Hisaye Yamamoto and Toshio Mori. Hisaye Yamamoto's short stories are profound in their expression of spiritual truths. The short story "Yoneko's Earthquake" is one of her better known stories that deals with a young Nisei girl's coming-of-age both sexually and spiritually—it's a superbly written story. Toshio Mori's stories are realist gems of Nisei life that again reflect a uniquely North American Buddhist sensibility. They are kind of a Nisei counterpart to Yasunari Kawabata's Palm-of-the-Hand stories—these short, short stories Kawabata wrote in which only one or two incidents are briefly presented in the most fleeting of ways. Kawabata, however, has a kind of sensuality that Mori doesn't have. That sensuality, I think, is quite Japanese. Recently, I read a book by a new writer from Japan, Hikaru Okuizumi, called *The Stones Cry Out.* The book won the prestigious Akutagawa prize for fiction in Japan a

few years ago. It was recommended to me by a Japanese friend. I was quite impressed by the story. It was very short—parable like, almost—but expressed the kind of anagogic view of the world I like to see in good writing. I thought Okuizumi's writing had depth—more depth than say, Banana Yoshimoto's work, which I think is more clever than deep.

You mention my family and friends. Certainly writers do not work in isolation with only the books they love around them! I've been very fortunate to have a supportive family. My husband, Paul, in particular has always supported my writing. As for supportive friends, I have many. Since I did my degree in Creative Writing, both undergraduate and graduate, I did make some writer friends during my studies. In Vancouver, Jim Wong Chu was supportive of my writing at a very early stage and he has helped my career in various ways. I met Fiona Lam at UBC during my undergraduate years. Fiona is a poet. We still correspond regularly and talk about writing. Roy Miki has also been supportive of my writing as has Joy Kogawa in the past. In Vancouver, a very good friend of mine, Vivien Nishi has been a constant support to me. Vivien works in film. I met Kerri Sakamoto in 1993 at the Banff Centre and we have kept in periodic contact. Through the Banff Centre, I have also met poets Maureen Hynes and Sue Wheeler. I have kept up some contact with them as well. Here at home in Edmonton, I am friends with poet Tim Bowling and novelist and short story writer Curtis Gillespie. Greg Hollingshead was my M.A. thesis supervisor and I am in contact with him. I see him when I need to talk about my writing. This past fall, I joined a writing group consisting of myself, and two other women, Chris Wiesenthal and Astrid Blodgett. The writing group helped me enormously in that it provided feedback for some short stories I wrote and gave me a deadline to work towards. In addition to my writing friends in Canada, I have a good Japanese American friend, Akko Nishimura who is a visual artist; she did the artwork for my poetry book and will also be doing art work for my next book of poetry, *Season of Mercy*, that will be coming out with Nightwood this fall.

JMC I am interested in the way that you have "floated"—to borrow one of your titles—from poetry to prose in your work, and I wonder if you will soon be moving to the novel form? Are there difficulties in shifting from poetry to prose, or vice versa, and do market or commercial considerations play a role here?

SI I've always written both prose and poetry from the start. I just seemed to have gotten a better handle on poetry first. With prose, one has to develop a voice and I think this takes time—time that eventually reflects the writer's own maturing talent and his/her constant practice of the craft. Poetry, on the other hand, is slightly different in that it deals more directly with lyric expression. It somehow is easier to be more lyrical when you're younger. It's no coincidence that the Romantic poets wrote their best and their most beautiful while still in their twenties (most of them of course, didn't even reach their forties.) Poetry also requires a different state of mind than prose. Poetry is intuitive and it requires a disciplining of the consciousness. Writing fiction or prose is different. Everything must eventually defer to the narrative thread, including the lyricism. It has really only been very recently that I've been able to satisfactorily incorporate a lyric sense into my prose. I've always aspired for my prose to be clean and uncluttered and not overly lyrical because I like to write prose to communicate social and moral messages. What I've discovered lately in my most recent project—a novel—is that sometimes a lyrical expression of something is the only form of expression appropriate for certain kinds of messages about love, God, and other such transcendental and spiritual concerns. This is because one is primarily trying to describe the unseen with the limited tools of the senses.

As for market considerations, certainly, fiction has a larger readership than poetry, but that fact didn't stop me from writing either or both at the same time.

JMC You seem to be a person of strong convictions, with your faith buttressing you. Have specific religious and philosophical stances influenced you?

SI Christianity has been my primary influence, with Buddhism a distant second as far as religions go. I've read a lot of Jung and have been interested in the psychological development of consciousness through myths and folktales.

JMC It is interesting to consider the intercultural and interreligious blending on Asian Canadian issues, and I am personally interested in how Taoist aesthetics and even Jungian archetypal theory can be seen to interact in certain writers. On the other hand, Terry Watada is steeped in Buddhism and makes it a pervasive counter-discourse to Christianity in *Daruma Days*. In your work, which poems or stories are personally

satisfying because of their engagement with spirituality and myth?

SI "The Missionary" is one of my favorite stories in *Floating Shore.* It explores the terrain of spirituality and myth right at the crossroads of the two identities, two worlds I live in and know—that is the world of Christianity and the world of Japan. I don't know yet if I've quite got that story right. . . I've worked on it for several years and it continues to fascinate me even now. Some favorite poems from *Frogs* are "The Green Fire," "Dreaming of Jerusalem." These poems deal with spiritual matters in metaphors I felt were natural and yet distinctively personal. As for poems in the forthcoming collection, I will say that generally they deal with primarily Christian themes.

JMC The diversity of your world, blending Christianity and Japanese culture, is an interesting and complex area. Much postcolonial and anti-racist history draws attention to the dispersion or diaspora of Asian minority groups who have been colonized in some way. What direction, in your view, should the Asian Canadian literary scene take in order to be more sensitive to the Asian diaspora? Where would you situate yourself in the Asian American landscape?

SI I don't know that I'd like the Asian Canadian literary scene to *be* anything in particular. I do know that Asian North American literature by and large has been more popular now than ever before but with popularity come some pitfalls. One tends to get pigeon-holed, for example, and of course, there is a danger of exoticism with both writers and readers capitalizing on it, if you will. For example, the new *Memoirs of a Geisha* is really the re-hashing of an old trope—the exotic Asian female—but just recently I also saw a book written by a Japanese American who had written under her cover-photo that she was the great grand-daughter of a geisha.

JMC Linda Hutcheon's *Other Solitudes* examines various critical responses by 'minority' writers to Canada's multiculturalism. What are your views on Canadian multicultural policies or activities like, for example, Asian Heritage Month in Vancouver?

SI I'm all for multiculturalism if it doesn't end up operating in some hierarchical arrangement where minorities are doing the song-and-dance for the powerful majority. This is a gross oversimplification of a rather complex topic, I know, but often multiculturalism can be reduced to just that—song and dance. Not that I believe that song and dance don't have

their place—they do and in some way, song and dance *are* the arts of a people. It's just that an understanding of a cultural group shouldn't be merely reduced to those elements. Cultures are organic—they breathe in and out—and changes occur over succeeding generations. What I like about AHM or other such activities is that they offer the opportunity and provide a showcase for artists who are experimenting with cross-cultural expressions of themselves. That kind of hybridization, that combining of traditional cultural elements with Western elements, for example, creates new, exciting and ultimately indigenous art. The only problem with doing this, of course, is that viewers may not always know the points of reference in a given work—for example, if a piece explored Buddhism, the artist would also have to be compelled to explain Buddhist ideas in order to communicate his or her piece. Whether the artist decides to do this or not is a matter of temperament, but it can be an extra burden for the artist (although in some cases it might help the artist better understand and cognitively what he/she has only grasped intuitively).

JMC Will some of your future writing projects include more "mainstream" narrative ideas and do you see the use of allusions to Japanese culture and literature as an impediment to addressing a wider audience? What are some of your immediate writing plans?

SI I'm currently working on a novel mostly because I'm in a prose-writing frame of my mind. The novel is the next logical step in terms of form from the short story and since I've done stories, I now want to do a novel. The novel is also more widely read and is the most commercially viable form of writing today and that, of course, is a consideration. Would I like to enter the 'mainstream'? It really depends on what you mean by 'mainstream,' I guess. One can always write what one thinks the reading market might accept, but it's pretty hard to predict what will sell with any sort of accuracy. It's probably better to stick to one's vision and hope that the 'mainstream' will accept it. Yes, references and allusions to Japanese literature/culture can pose a problem and really as a writer, I have to constantly decide whether to explain 'that' one or let 'this' one go. I don't have a rule, necessarily for what to do—I tried to have one before, but it didn't work, so I just play it by ear and hope that I'll have a good editor who will determine what the better choice should be.

Mark Libin

Lost in Translation: Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*

"There's always room for beginnings."
—*Chorus of Mushrooms*

Teaching Without Knowing

How do we learn if we don't understand? This question loomed especially large for me recently, as I endeavoured to teach Hiromi Goto's novel, *Chorus of Mushrooms*, to an undergraduate class in Winnipeg. Goto's novel, a Japanese Canadian coming-of-age narrative set in Alberta, includes extended passages of Japanese transcription, but does not offer any translation of these sentences. As is often the case with undergraduates, my students—none of whom had any knowledge of the Japanese language—looked to me, their instructor, for a running translation.

I, however, am unschooled in Japanese, and therefore was as lost as my students were when reading these passages. I anticipated this pedagogical challenge when adding *Chorus of Mushrooms* to my reading list, and had decided that rather than employing various resources in an attempt to compile translations of Goto's Japanese passages, I would use this impending crisis of knowledge as a means of deferring my own authority as an instructor. Having always bristled at the perception of the professor as the ultimate authority on questions of textual meaning, I felt that Goto's 'bilingual' novel might provide an opportunity to challenge the notion of the instructor as the repository of knowledge. Together, my students and I dealt with a series of common gaps in our ability to read Goto's text: we discussed what meanings might be elided, we argued about how to "read around" what we could not decipher, and together we moved, tentatively, conditionally, towards a series of contingent readings of *Chorus of Mushrooms*.

I still question this choice not to seek translations for myself and for my class. Was this decision an unintentional act of colonialism, an erasure of the text's language of difference and a refusal to accept its otherness? Although I attempted to subvert the New Critical position of the scholar as one who *knows*, perhaps I had merely re-established this framework by creating a cultural vacuum in my classroom that refused resources "outside" the text as a means of explication. Arun Mukherjee, in her essay on teaching ethnic minority literature, describes how a rewarding learning experience may be derived from soliciting translations of unfamiliar terms and exploring their connotations. In one anecdote, Mukherjee relates the example of a student who developed a glossary as a companion to Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*. In such cases, Mukherjee suggests, "the text leaves the printed page to join our day-to-day oral culture and to become embellished with further narrations" (43). However, considering that Mistry chose not to include a glossary of Parsi words or phrases as an appendix to his novel, could this student's act of codifying Mistry's discourse be interpreted as an undesirable intervention, a violation of the novel's own statement of difference?

Who is meant to *understand* the text, and how that understanding might be encoded, is a question the writer of colour must continually examine. Roy Miki articulates the issue in his essay "Asiancy" as an adjunct of the writer's intention: "for whom do you write? for the majority? or for the more limited perspective of a community?" (146). The issue of intention, however, implicates the reader's strategy for engaging with the text. *Chorus of Mushrooms*, like Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*, challenges the reading habits of what Miki terms "the majority" by refusing to translate Japanese passages, and in such a way either directing a certain portion of its narrative to the "more limited perspective of the community" or to the self-motivated reader as active translator. In view of Goto's writing style, my failure to translate the Japanese passages for myself and for my class can be perceived as an active choice as well as an option already encoded in the novel's discursive strategy.

The Failure to Translate

The negotiation between culturally specific terminology and popular comprehension is, as Miki suggests, a matter of authorial intention, and reading through a selection of Japanese Canadian texts demonstrates the options available to writer and reader. Miki's own collection of poetry, *Saving Face*, provides a glossary at the back of the edition, while both Joy Kogawa's

Obasan and Kerri Sakamoto's recent novel, *The Electrical Field*, employ a mimetic writing strategy in which Japanese transcriptions are followed by English translations, as in the following examples:

> "Mukashi Mukashi O-o mukashi . . . ," Obasan says holding the photograph. "In ancient times, in ancient times, in very very ancient times . . . ." (*Obasan* 54)

> How people could have it in their heads to build such hideous things was beyond me; on that afternoon they reminded me of giant ika, standing in the field on their long squid legs. (*The Electrical Field* 28)

In the above passage from Sakamoto's novel, the Japanese word "ika" is translated within the space of the same sentence through the use of "squid" as an adjective. In the passage from *Obasan*, the translation of the phrase "Mukashi Mukashi O-o mukashi" is a textual echo that permits Kogawa to incorporate culturally specific discourse into her novel while allowing the reader unfamiliar with Japanese to comprehend the phrase. Both Kogawa and Sakamoto repeatedly encode this "echo" effect in their prose, and one might argue both for the desire to educate the mainstream reader in Japanese culture and language and against a conciliatory mode of writing that sacrifices the mimetic frame of the narrative and often the graceful style of the prose in order to convey denotative meaning.

Chorus of Mushrooms, however, stands as a text unwilling to adopt the conventions of encoded translation. Indeed, in Goto's novel, the passages of Japanese text are substantial and frequent, and the narrative rarely offers its own translation. Thus, my decision not to seek out translations of these passages is acknowledged by the text, and in choosing not to translate I am deferring a desire I believe to be encoded in the structure of Goto's novel: the desire to know a text, a story, a culture, completely—the desire to subsume narrative into knowledge, story into truth. I am both acknowledging and refusing the desire to translate literally in the belief that this deferred and dual desire is encoded in the act of reading *Chorus of Mushrooms*.

The longing to translate is articulated from the beginning by Goto's narrator, Muriel. Born and raised on a mushroom farm in the rural Alberta town of Nanton, Muriel is unable to understand her Obāchan's ongoing Japanese monologue, and instead makes up her own translations based on intuition and empathy. Muriel's inability to understand Japanese is a consequence of her parents' conscious efforts to assimilate into Canadian culture. Although Muriel's Obāchan talks a steady stream of Japanese words and

feasts on surreptitious Japanese delicacies, Muriel's mother, Keiko, never speaks a word of her mother tongue, and feeds her family a "Canadian" diet of baked ham and macaroni.[1] Her parents' attempt to assimilate for Muriel's sake, however, produces a sudden and irrevocable loss of their former language, as her father, Sam, describes:

> We decided, your Mom and I, that we would put Japan behind us and fit more smoothly with the crowd. And from that day, when we decided, neither of us could speak a word of Japanese. Not a word would pass our lips. . . . So I stopped talking. I used to talk a lot in my youth, that's what won your Mom to me. She was taken with my chatter and my jokes. But after the day I lost my words, my home words, I didn't have the heart to talk so much. I just put my energies into the farm, grew mushrooms in the quiet of the dark. (207)

Translating themselves into Canadian mushroom farmers, Sam and Keiko not only find their personalities transformed, but are unable to speak Japanese anymore. Sam's description of his relationship to Japanese suggests that the language itself has forcefully censored him from its structure. Indeed, the dynamic nature of this linguistic expulsion is evidenced in Sam's explanation of how the family came by their surname Tonkatsu, which, as Muriel eventually discovers, signifies an entrée of deep-fried pork chop:

> It's funny, really. That word. It was the only word I could utter when the change took place. Your Mom suggested we take a Canadian name, if we couldn't remember our real one. But I was firm about that. I said if we couldn't remember our own name, the least we could do was keep the one word I could remember. Tonkatsu! (208)

As the remaining fragment of an abandoned language, the word *tonkatsu* becomes a compulsively repeated token of loss and the lever with which Muriel is able to recover her forgotten language and the abandoned route to a Japanese community.

The position of Sam and Keiko as characters who are denied access to the Japanese language, as well as the position of Muriel, who approaches Obāchan's language through empathy rather than interpretive knowledge, locates my problematic relationship to the untranslated Japanese dialogue in Goto's novel. In its construction of the Tonkatsu family, *Chorus of Mushrooms* allows space for the inability to translate, allows a site where language is purposefully inaccessible.[2] There is, therefore, place for me—a reader who knows no Japanese—to begin to read the text, despite the elisions I am compelled to make.

On the Threshold of Translation

In its frequent use of the Japanese language, *Chorus of Mushrooms* makes conspicuous the gap between the non-Japanese reader and the text: I am challenged to seek meaning to passages I cannot interpret on my own. Yet, as an "outsider" to this text's discursive structure, my desire to *know* may be construed as the presumptuous invasion of another culture. Trinh T. Minh-ha, writing on "The Language of Nativism," suggests the destructive potential inherent in the act of translation in her examination of the imperialism of anthropology. In Trinh's analysis, the anthropologist asserts his authority over his objectified subjects by gaining mastery of their language:

> Language as a "system of social ideas" allows he who knows how it is used and uses it himself as "an instrument of inquiry" to render "the verbal contour of native thought as precisely as possible." The anthropologist's expertise in interpretation gains in scientific recognition as it now swells with the ambition of being also a loyal recording and translation of native mentality. In other words, language is a means through which an interpreter arrives at the rank of scientist. (73-74)

By conceiving of the other's language as an "'instrument of inquiry,'" the anthropologist solidifies the language—and by extension the other—into a fixed object that can, by virtue of its static state, be codified, quantified, and definitively known.

The desire for truth that drives the enterprise of translation has been addressed by postcolonialists and poststructuralists alike. Jacques Derrida, discussing the matter in an interview in *Positions*, suggests that the translator must presuppose "meaning" as a discrete object:

> In the limits to which it is possible, or at least *appears* possible, translation practices the difference between signified and signifier. But if this difference is never pure, no more so is translation, and for the notion of translation we would have to substitute a notion of *transformation*: a regulated transformation of one language by another, of one text by another. (20)

Since the signified is, as Derrida would have it, inseparable from the signifier, an authoritative translation is an impossible dream, and only by acknowledging the illusory nature of the enterprise can we, as readers, begin to excuse ourselves from the destructive potential of that dream.[3]

But is it possible to translate another language—specifically a language that represents a marginalized group within Canadian society—without replicating the presumptuous empiricism of Trinh's anthropologist, without attempting to orchestrate the "'transport' of pure signifieds from one language

to another," that Derrida describes as a seductive fantasy (20)? Trinh suggests one possible answer lies in a "*suspension* of language, where the reign of codes yields to a state of constant non-knowledge" (76). Rather than trying to define the other through observations, laws, and generalities, the reader must understand that there is no means of completely comprehending the other through language:

> In writing close to the other of the other, I can only choose to maintain a self-reflexively critical relationship toward the material, a relationship that defines both the subject written and the writing subject, undoing the I while asking "what do I want wanting to *know* you or me?" (76)

As Trinh suggests, when reading a text that is aware of its difference from the culture of the majority, the reader must examine his/her own motivations as much as s/he analyzes the text as object. The reader who is sensitive to difference, as Trinh contends, must be ready to question identity and willing to let that identity shift in order to accommodate difference. This "suspension of language" situates the reader at the threshold of translation: at the point where s/he is beginning to extract meaning from the text, with the tentativeness and openness that accompanies this position. Signification is perceived, at this threshold, as a boundless possibility on the verge of being glimpsed. Meaning is neither comprehended nor rejected, but rather recognized as something both possible and alien.

I would like to imagine myself as a reader *suspended* at the threshold of Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*. By refusing to forget the gaps in my translation of the text, I construct myself as a reader always beginning to read a novel that is obsessed with the multiplicity of narrative and with the perpetual process of beginning.[4] I linger at the brink of the reading act, and in doing so I recognize that the novel itself never moves far from the inaugural moment of its composition.

Mukāshi, mukāshi, ōmukashi . . .

Chorus of Mushrooms is a novel that is clearly concerned with beginnings, a novel consistently aware of the surfeit of beginnings in a story, the many ways of beginning to tell a story. This notion of ongoing commencement is evidenced in the prolific repetition of the phrase, "*mukāshi, mukāshi, ōmukashi*," which, as I have earlier cited in my example of Kogawa's use of translation as echo in *Obasan*, means "In ancient times, in ancient times, in very very ancient times."[5]

The phrase provides a conventional and structured beginning to the tale that follows. Like the traditional beginning of fairy tales, "Once upon a time," the opening phrase provides an instantly understandable coding for the ensuing story. The inaugural phrase, "once upon a time," offers a context for the story, a set of narrative criteria the reader can expect—whether these are talking frogs or child-eating witches. As a reader who is not literate in Japanese narrative conventions, I do not know if the phrase has the same clichéd resonances as "once upon a time." However, like its English equivalent, it locates narrative in terms of chronology. This "ancient" past, in the case of the fairy tale, is only accessible through the reception of the story itself: time is not measurable by historical or geographical periodicity but can only be accessed by the fairy tale, just as the story is identified through its invocation of "once upon a time."

Although "*mukāshi, mukāshi, ōmukashi*" situates narrative and fixes the structure of the tale, in *Chorus of Mushrooms* the repeated invocation of this formalized opening phrase demonstrates the impossibility of a singular beginning.[6] This is the knowledge of fluid discourse passed from Obāchan Naoe to Muriel/Murasaki, the novel's narrator, who offers her own appraisal of the process of story-telling:

> *There isn't a time line. It's not a linear equation. You start in the middle and unfold outward from there. It's not a flat surface that you can walk back and forth on. It's like being inside a ball that isn't exactly a ball, but is really made up of thousands and thousands of small panels. And on each panel, there is a mirror, but each mirror reflects something different. And from where you crouch, if you turn your head up or around or down or sideways, you can see something new, something old, or something you've forgotten.* (132)

Insofar as Murasaki describes the acts of reading and writing as multiple, partial, continuous, the repetition of "*mukāshi, mukāshi, ōmukashi*" acknowledges traditional modes of narration while subverting their limitations.

Yet, *Chorus of Mushrooms* does not "begin"—if we are to read the novel linearly (and there is no reason to do so, according to Murasaki's reflexive description of the text)—with the Japanese words "*mukashi, mukashi, omukashi*," but rather with the following sentences:

> *We lie in bed, listen to the click of the blinds, watch a thin thread of dusty cobweb weave back and forth, back and forth, in the waves of air we cannot see. The blankets and sheets are a heap at the foot of the bed, and we are warm only where skin is touching skin.* (1)

This opening, from its first word, constructs a linguistic scene that positions text, reader, and writer. The plural pronoun "we" creates a textual space quite different to the standard use of first- and third-person pronouns. The "we" with which Goto commences her narration troubles the distinction between "I" and "you," between sender and receiver. The plural pronoun, "we," if only for an instant, constructs the reader as a figure complicit in the production of the text s/he reads by drawing him/her into the textual frame as an extension of the narrator. The text initiates itself with a pronominal gesture of inclusiveness.

The textual community invoked by the pronoun "we," however, is reconfigured by the verb phrase that follows—"lie in bed"—which constructs a situational specificity that suddenly distances the reader from the pronoun. In other words, textual inclusiveness is disrupted by the beginning of story. The communal "we," it seems, can only exist unproblematically in the absence of the very details the narrative demands.

And yet connotations of symbiosis invoked by the "we" before it is contextualized by the narrative can be found in a notion that persists throughout the novel: the idea that identity, like story, is multiple and fluid. The structure of Goto's novel is deliberate in demonstrating effortless shifts in voice, between Obāchan Naoe, Keiko, and Murasaki, and Naoe and Murasaki both articulate the position that identity is as easily translatable as languages. Naoe, especially, muses on the folly of believing in a singular, static identity:

> Who was that silly Chinese philosopher? The one who fell asleep gazing at a butterfly and dreamt that he was a butterfly dreaming that he was a philosopher. And when he woke up, he didn't know if he was a philosopher or a butterfly. What nonsense. This need to differentiate. Why, he was both, of course. (44)

The novel's ongoing translation of subjectivity reaches its apotheosis when Naoe re-names herself "Purple," thus reconstructing herself as a translation of Murasaki, a name that is itself her translation of the English name, Muriel, into Japanese.[7] Grandmother and granddaughter, while remaining separate, also move through the narrative in unison:

> *Two women take two different roads, two different journeys at different times. They are not travelling with a specific destination in mind but the women are walking toward the same place. Whether they meet or not is not relevant.*
> *This is not a mathematical equation.* (200)

Although Naoe and Muriel perform a fusion of identities that can be seen as potential for limitless possibilities of liberation and regeneration, *Chorus*

of Mushrooms is also concerned with the problem of confused or misrecognized identities as they apply to Asian Canadians. Goto's narrator tells several stories of instances when her physical appearance provokes stereotyped assumptions and responses from white Canadians. In one instance, Muriel recalls the racism of her classmates, who cannot, and do not care to, distinguish between Japanese and Chinese cultures:

> "Me Chinese, me play joke, me go pee pee in your Coke! Hahahaha!"
>
> "But I'm not Chinese," I protested.
>
> "Yes you are! You are! You're a slanty-eye Chinaman. Hweee chong chop chop ching ching Ahhh so! There, what did I just say now. Tell me what I said in Chinaman." (52-3)

The racism of the schoolboy, who sees all those with "slanty eyes" as "Chinamen" develops, according to Goto's narrator, into an indifference that masquerades as a benevolent interest in the exotic other. In a parallel anecdote, Muriel describes an encounter with an inquisitive shopper who assumes she is an expert on Bok Choy, Suey Choy, and other Asian vegetables (90). Although ostensibly more benevolent than the schoolboy's taunts, the shopper's curiosity effaces Muriel's cultural identity by reducing it to the generalized image of the "oriental."

The violent effacement of cultural difference is not the exclusive property of the white Canadian in Goto's novel. Naoe, in her recollections, describes life with her husband in China during World War II, after Japan has invaded that country:

> I stayed behind the walls they built around the cities, the towns, to protect people who lived there from the people who lived without. [My husband] Makoto building bridges across rivers and chasms. He even convinced himself that he was working for the betterment of the Chinese people. To aid in their development. Stupid fool. The bridges were for Japanese soldiers to march across to kill their inland cousins. And I was the stupidest fool of all. I never questioned why the schools were made separate, why Chinese and Japanese were never taught together. Why Chinese children had to learn Japanese, but Japanese children were never taught the words of the land they lived in. (46-7)

In an ominous parallel to the vegetable incident Muriel recounts, Naoe's perspective on World War II describes how imperialism and racism are justified through the rhetoric of kinship. In the propaganda of the state, the oppressed Chinese become "inland cousins" who require improvement by their superior Japanese relatives. The manner in which identity is effaced as a result of persecution is manifest in a refusal of mutual translation:

although the Chinese must learn the language of their colonists, the Japanese are never "taught the words of the land."

The shifting boundaries of subjectivity come to stand, in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, both for the possibility of community and the violent refusal to understand cultural difference. Just as the "we" that opens this text describes limitless possibilities for communal narrative while deflating that ideal by delimiting the "we" in the first sentence, so too does the (in)ability to translate offer equally liberation and oppression, recognition and effacement.

The Scent of Meaning / The Meaning of Scent

If Naoe's wartime experience as a colonial presence in China disturbs her, she finds solace in a trip to Calgary's Chinatown, where she is attracted by the scent of late-night food:

> Of course I know the food is not the same, but there is a compatibility of flavour, a simple nose tongue connection. Now if I can only make my way there. Well I don't need a map. I'll just roll down my window and let the flavours of Chinatown beckon me. (142)

The "compatibility" of flavour is especially welcome, considering Naoe's outspoken dislike for her daughter's dinners of baked ham and macaroni. The "nose tongue connection" offered by Chinatown's restaurants allows Naoe to reunite with the pleasures she rarely experienced in Nanton.

The desire for sensory gratification appears to be the very reason that Naoe runs away from the family mushroom farm. Her meal in Calgary heals the perceived lack in Naoe's Japanese Canadian identity through a rediscovery of the taste of familiar food:

> I eat, I drink. What more could a body ask for when there is shrimp, squid, scallops, and lobster heaped on plates before you? If I measured my happiness at this moment, no one could be richer than me. Simple pleasure of crack crack lobster shell between my molars, pry sweet meat with my *hashi* and suck out the juice still inside, licking the garlic ginger cream sauce, pungent with green onions, and chew chew of lobster flesh, fresh and sweet as sea. Sip, slurp from my cup of tea and choose a shrimp, a scallop. (148)

It is her reconnection with the abundant tastes she remembers as typically "Japanese" that revives Naoe, and her assertion that, "I eat for Murasaki. I eat for Keiko" (148), confirms the belief that food mends divisions in the family, that the taste of food ameliorates a fragmented sense of community.

Sensual descriptions of food through taste and aroma permeate *Chorus of*

Mushrooms, and the example quoted above is representative of the language and diction characteristically deployed. The determination to represent food as a sensual experience is evident in Goto's replacement of verbs with adjectives—"Simple pleasure of crack crack of lobster shell"—and of adjectives with verbs—"chew chew of lobster flesh." This syntax, along with the repetition of onomatopoeic words, represents the adoption of Japanese conventions of grammar in order to translate the pleasures of taste and aroma into the textual discourse of the novel.[8]

Goto's newly adapted syntax of smell and taste is evident in Naoe's description of the family's mushroom farm. Although she has never visited the farming buildings, Naoe comes to know the routine of a day through her olfactory sense:

> Keiko used to come back from the barns smelling like soil and moist. Like birth. I used to press her clothes to my face and breathe deeply, smell-taste her day. Warm semen smell of the first crop of mushrooms. Wet, wet peat moss, the tepid coffee she drank at 10:00, the stink of formaldehyde she used to sterilize her buckets. I can see these things with a scent on my nostrils, a passing taste on my tongue. (37)

The generative potential of this grammar of "smell-taste" is apparent in the comparison of the aroma of the farm to "birth" and "semen." The syntax itself is born out of translation, and reflects an encoded desire to represent sensory perceptions in an immediate and unmediated writing style.

I find myself returning to the word "desire" in terms of Goto's novel; once again reiterating my position that the desire to translate is inscribed within, and refused by, the text. This desire is reflected in the Japanese transcriptions that remain untranslated, as well as in the language of "smell-taste" that allows us to examine the poetics of translation operative in the narrative. Goto's syntax seems designed specifically to acknowledge and honour the untranslatable loss while still allowing itself to be seduced by a desire to translate this loss. The language of "smell-taste" is a monument to these encoded desires.

For certainly food—at least the Japanese and Chinese food described in the novel—signifies desire in *Chorus of Mushrooms*. In the passage earlier quoted, in which Naoe escapes to Calgary's Chinatown, desire is expressed and ultimately sated by the food she enthusiastically describes. The narrative, with its inflected syntax and onomatopoeic resonances, constructs a language of "smell-taste" as an articulation of the desire for individual fulfillment and communal unity. The language of food becomes, as Marilyn

Iwama suggests in her dissertation on Nikkei women writers, "a vocabulary of excess, giving voice to ways of being that lie outside the predictable and ordinary . . . shaping a system of communicating and being whereby the literal and the symbolic merge" (267-8). Goto's narrators strive to describe the smells and tastes of food while demonstrating how these olfactory, gustatory experiences exceed the grammar and vocabulary of the English language.

Because of the constraints of language, the discourse of "smell-taste" becomes a partial translation of the vocabulary of alternative experience. The description of Naoe sharing her daughter's day on the farm by the smells she breathes demonstrates the way in which this sensory language is more evocative than the discourse of visual classification (37). In the context of this novel, the synesthesia of olfactory language overthrows a Cartesian discourse that privileges the scopic and the logocentric. We can return, with this in mind, to the thematics of naming in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, where *tonkatsu*, the Japanese entrée of deep-fried porkchop, becomes the residue of an all but forgotten language and culture. It is the language of food that remains insistently in place when the rest of culture is displaced, revealing the power of signification Goto's text invests in food. This theme eventually resolves itself when Muriel cooks a celebratory dinner of *tonkatsu* as a remedy to cure her languishing mother and silent father (151).

Muriel's cooking of the *tonkatsu* serves, then, as a gathering together of the family, a re-connection of community through the well-prepared, well-eaten meal.[9] Muriel re-assembles the family by calling her parents to a traditional table, where the scent of *tonkatsu* returns them to a language they have forgotten. Just as Naoe eats food not just for herself but for Keiko and Murasaki; Muriel, Sam, and Keiko eat together in order to reconnect themselves to a cultural centre from which they have been displaced.

And of course, Naoe, Murasaki, Sam, and Keiko eat not just for themselves and for other family members but also for me, the reader. The language of "smell-taste" is directed outwards—designed to "call" the reader to a table s/he can only access textually. It attempts to provide—as in the passage in which Naoe visits the Chinese restaurant—the articulation of scent, of taste, of texture, by reshaping, through synesthesia, a system of language that is predicated upon what can be seen and heard rather than on scents and tastes. The diction of "smell-taste" announces the beginning—for Goto's characters as well as for the reader—of "knowing" a community in an essential (but not essentializing) way. As Muriel explains:

> There are people who say that eating is only a superficial means of understanding a different culture. That eating at exotic restaurants and oohing and aahing over the food is not even worth the bill paid. You haven't learned anything at all. I say that's a lie. What can be more basic than food itself? Food to begin to grow. (201)

For Muriel, the line between appropriation and recognition, between desire and consumption, becomes entangled in the act of eating the food of another culture. The dialect of "smell-taste" provides an alternative way of knowing, but it might also be merely another means of assimilating the other. Muriel's previous encounter with essentialism in the produce section of Safeway demonstrates that food is not the perfect signifier of culture.[10] At the same time, Muriel describes eating as the site where the desiring subject begins to grow. Food, as I have suggested, becomes the site where community gathers, and where other "readers" might also participate in this textual congregation. Indeed, Goto's narrator continues to think about food in terms of shared story:

> A place where growth begins. You eat, you drink and you laugh out loud. You wipe the sweat off your forehead and take a sip of water. You tell a story, maybe two, with words of pain and desire. Your companion listens and listens, then offers a different telling. . . . You get dizzy and the ceiling tips, the chair melts beneath your body. You lie back on the ground and the world tilts, the words heaving in the air above you. You are drunk and it is oh so pleasurable. (201)

Food becomes narrative, narrative becomes ingestion, in Muriel's non-linear equation. In this formula, the reader is invited into the possibility of the "we," the possibility of entering a community through food and story, the possibility of a "different telling."

It is important to note that Goto does not privilege Japanese food or Asian cuisine as the site for community, narrative, and meaning. Though the "Canadian" food that Keiko serves her family is never described sensually, this does not so much signify a disrespect for the diet of white Canada as it makes a point about inauthentic cuisine—food that fails to invoke memory, story, community—for the Tonkatsu family. Towards the end of the novel, we are offered a positive reading of white Canadian comestibles in the memories Tengu—the Albertan truck driver who picks up Naoe on the highway—relates of breakfast on his father's farm:[11]

> And I went to wash up and I could smell coffee perking on the gas stove all hot and brown-smelling and the blue eggs cracked and the yolks so yellow all stirred up and scrambled and the floor of the bathroom icy beneath my bare feet, the smell of Janet burning toast, Dad stirring the eggs. (193-94)

The sensual grammar of "smell-taste" permeates Tengu's language of recollection. The scents and tastes of "authentic" food signify the site of the family, a space where one might "begin to grow." This is contrasted, in Tengu's tale, with the memory of his first day of school. When the boy is asked his name, he replies that his name is Son, and his father's name is Dad:

> Even the teacher was laughing. Finally, he said, Son is not your name. It means a boy child. Your dad calls you son because he is your father. Dad means the same thing as father. Do you understand? And everything swung around and words and names all swirling and bang, they smacked into place so that something I had known and trusted was really a solid wall that I could run into and I puked my two cups of coffee and breakfast all over the teacher's shoes.... (195-96)

Tengu's story concludes with the moment of rupture between the "smell-taste" world of food and family, and the considerably less sensual world of institutionalized education. The exchange between the boy and his teacher demonstrates the moment when secure meaning based on family relationships and familial love is troubled by the institution of the State, which declares the need for a proper name, an active forgetting of the family space within the new social sphere. The residue of this forgetting is the remains of breakfast that reappears insistently and on cue.

Goto performs a translation poetics of food into language, speech into sustenance. The discourse of "smell-taste" becomes, for the Tonkatsu family as for Tengu, a signifying system in excess of the structures of the English language, in excess of the conventions of grammar and naming. As Iwama suggests, by emphasizing the act of eating throughout her novel, Goto is "challenging the referentiality of metonymy" even as she relies on this device: "Words are lost to the untrustworthy materiality of food; identities are created by and through the food people eat" (196). In other words, the language of food, the full range of sensual and experiential possibilities, is in excess of any single language or discursive register. Inevitably, the grammar of "smell-taste" begins and ends by falling victim to the limits of the English language and its failure to translate the full range of meanings.[12]

The Banana of Metaphor

Chorus of Mushrooms is a text that implicitly explores the metaphor of "hyphenated" identity. The hyphen in such terms as "Japanese Canadian" or "Asian American"—whether or not it is typographically represented—functions to signify both a plurality of identities and a singular subjectivity.

The individual terms—"Japanese" and "Canadian"—are maintained as separate entities, but since an individual can be both "Japanese" and "Canadian," the hyphen may be seen as a unifying force as well as a mark of division, an indicator of assimilation as well as segregation.

Even as *Chorus of Mushrooms* articulates the implied hyphenation of Japanese Canadian identity, it reveals how all identities are hyphenated in multiple ways. Tengu's memory of his first day of school reveals yet another variegated identity: the identity of a Canadian son-student. The failure to contain these terms as they are determined in prescribed contexts provokes Tengu's narrative as well as the reappearance of his breakfast. Tengu's identity, in this anecdote, is constructed as determinedly *excessive*, with the final act of regurgitation as the most cogent metaphor for his extremity. Bill Ashcroft suggests that in marginalized discourse, "excess can become the *place* in which the post-colonial is located" (34). Insofar as postcolonial discourse functions to absorb and appropriate the "cultural surplus" produced by the colonial centre as language, genre, or theory, "the post-colonial place is itself 'excess' an excess which changes the nature of discourse" (42).

In this sense, the hyphen under investigation in Goto's novel is a metaphor for excess, just as Ashcroft's reading of excess is a metaphor for the hyphenated "place" of the postcolonial. Goto's novel is propelled by an extravagant display of largesse: language, narrative, food, aromas, sexuality, all serve as evocative metaphors in *Chorus of Mushrooms*. The possibility of the "we," as a process of constructing community, delineates an excessive space, a "place to begin to grow." The figure of Tengu—as a white rural Albertan *translated* into a figure from Japanese folklore—represents just such a surfeit of meaning and identity. Tengu's character creates an ambiguous space for himself in a text that presents itself as a struggle to define Japanese Canadian identity *against* the white mainstream. The very definition of the Japanese Canadian subject is extended in the figure of Tengu, who becomes a part of that community by joining the "we" of eating, of story-telling, and—as his relationship with Naoe culminates in a motel room—of sexuality.

The hyphen, as a metaphor of excess, however, must fail to encompass its full range of possible meaning, since metaphor, by its function, admits that what it attempts to represent cannot be rendered literally. Metaphor is a device reliant upon comparison, and as such the significance of what the metaphor describes can only be approached by way of an analogical structure. As the etymology of "metaphor" suggests, the signifying power of this

device is dependent on the notion of transport or transfer. Metaphor transports language into the *meta*, into the "beyond," but metaphor, as its etymology attests to, is always in motion.[13] Constantly moving towards the "beyond" of meaning, metaphor strives to cross the borders of literal language.

At the same time as metaphor tries to enhance language, it is constrained by the linguistic structures it attempts to surpass. The excessive discourse of Goto's text fails to express itself as the means of escaping conventional language and representation. Excessive discourse, in Goto's novel and elsewhere, can only gesture towards the possibility of a "beyond" to language. The metaphor of excess, the metaphor of metaphor, moves towards its own impossible meaning.

It is with this trope of excess as a gesture to an ever-receding destination that I turn to the childhood memory Naoe describes of turning her eyes upwards towards a blimp hovering above the schoolyard. Naoe and her classmates are encouraged by the teacher to sing a song of praise (transcribed in untranslated Japanese) to the zeppelin floating above them:

Gawa gawa gawa gawa
Oto tatete
Are are mori no mukō kara,
Soro soro detekuru hikōsen
Marukute annani hosonagaku
Banana no yō ukuranda
Fukuro no naka ni wa nani ga aru. (21-2)

While they sing, Naoe questions her teacher about the lyrics: why they sing that the balloon "is filled up like a banana," since the blimp is "brown and isn't even shaped like a banana" (22). What the teacher tells her—"It's only a song, Naoe-chan, and the words aren't that important. We are happy to see the blimp and we sing a merry song"—emphasizes the difference between story and "truth," between language and signification. The undeniable fact that the blimp is not a banana demonstrates the surplus and ambiguity of meaning in language and in narrative.

At the same time, the song to the blimp represents the narrative dictates of the State, as represented by the school and by Naoe's teacher. Far from being a subversive exercise, the school's song to the blimp praises a technological innovation that embodies the glory of the State, and therefore of national and cultural identity. By praising the blimp, the schoolchildren are praising Japan, and in so doing praising themselves. The failure of the metaphor of the banana to represent the blimp might be read as the failure

of the subject to translate herself into a singular and coherent narrative.[14] The banana represents the moment of unintentional subversion, a mistranslation of the singular icon of authority, identity, and narrative.

The banana, then, stands as a metaphor for metaphor, a metaphor for excess, for incomplete translation. I choose this as a final symbol in this examination of my continued decision not to translate Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*, and also as an image for the beginning of a hyphenated Canadian text. I offer the banana of metaphor as an understanding of translation and its failure, the compulsion to articulate and the corresponding inability to do so. The banana of metaphor is offered as "a place to begin to grow," to "fill up like a banana" though the site does not resemble a banana, and in the knowledge that bananas do not "fill up." The banana of metaphor is communicated as the beginning of the possibility of "we," a possibility always already forgotten but that is commemorated in the subversive potential of the figurative, which reveals much less and much more than what it purports to signify.

I return, finally, to the question that initiated this inquiry: How do we learn if we don't understand? The answer I find encoded in Goto's text is that we learn by exploring our inability, by suspending our limitations and by *beginning* to understand the Other. The banana of metaphor is proffered as a gesture towards this inauguration, in the welcome knowledge that, "there's always room for beginnings" (63): the beginning of translation, of fertile and provocative misreadings. The beginning of desire as a happy ending, a happy beginning:

Mukāshi, mukāshi, ōmukashi . . .

NOTES

1 In Obāchan Naoe, Goto constructs a figure who re-addresses Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*. For just as *Obasan* begins and ends with a call for *redress*, for a healing of the community, *Chorus of Mushrooms* attempts to provide an "immigrant story with a happy ending" (211), a text that—while addressing the issues of racism and assimilation that concern Kogawa—tries to approach these issues in a playfully subversive way. In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Obāchan is a whirlwind of words, as opposed to the hauntingly silent Obasan of Kogawa's novel. Goto's narrative demonstrates the absent mother to be recoverable, and re-figures dispersal as liberating rather than as a metaphor for absence, loss, death.

Similarly, *Chorus of Mushrooms* might also be read as a re-telling of Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*. Laurence's Hagar is an elderly woman whose words and

actions constantly slip outside her conscious control, who dreads being sent from her house by her concerned children, and who, distraught, runs away from home in an attempt to liberate herself. In contrast, Goto's Obāchan Naoe is always in control, a woman who unleashes her perpetual flow of Japanese words as a reminder to her family of their heritage. When Naoe runs away from home, it is with self-assurance and determination rather than panic. Throughout the text, Naoe remains a self-defined, self-assured, and sensual woman who disappears into narrative rather than into death.

2 In my reference to the Japanese passages as "inaccessible," I am of course speaking entirely subjectively, for these passages would be easily comprehensible to anyone schooled in the Japanese language. I include such subjective statements not in order to convince the reader of the inaccessibility of Japanese, but rather to remind myself that my position as a reader of *Chorus of Mushrooms* is both specific and problematic. As a white male Canadian, it is all too easy for me to forget that what I fail to understand may be easily understood by others, and that the questions of translation that have launched this reading of Goto's novel are not necessarily problematic to other readers.

3 Of course, not every literary critic has such a negative view of translation as an enterprise. Indeed George Steiner, in *After Babel*, advocates the act of scholarly reading as the translation of a literary text out of time in order to restore "all that one can of the immediacies of value and intent in which speech actually occurs" (24). The reader, by engaging with a text composed in another historical period, performs an act of "original repetition," wherein s/he re-enacts, "in the bounds of our momentarily heightened, educated consciousness, the creation of the artist" (26). This view of reading as a learned and timeless translation, a translation that restores the text to a privileged state of orality, is precisely the position that Derrida critiques in his own writings.

Postcolonial writers such as Trinh would find Steiner's assessment of the reading act objectionable. Steiner's emphasis on the "educated" reader who is subsumed by the artist's imagination seems strikingly similar to Shirley Geok-lin Lim's early encounters with "colonial university teachers" in her youth. Lim describes her literary schooling as a time when she was instructed in the British canon while being reminded by her teachers that "English literature was really only for the English people" (5). Thus, for the postcolonial reader, the act of reading as translation, involves subjugation to a higher, British, intelligence; a literary mind that must be admired without full comprehension.

4 I want to return to Mukherjee's essay on cultural translation as a pedagogical tool, for the anecdotes she selects leave room for the inability to translate certain discursive codings. Although Mukherjee describes the benefits of cultural interpretation in teaching the works of Claire Harris, Cyril Dabydeen, Sky Lee, and as I have earlier discussed, Rohinton Mistry, the final anecdote describes her inability to translate passages of Ojibway in Basil Johnston's *Indian School Days*. Mukherjee describes how this incomprehension on her part enriches the text, since the gaps in her knowledge remind her of the "colonial nature of the Canadian state, in that no Native language . . . enjoys the status of 'official' language in Canada" (44).

My reading of *Chorus of Mushrooms* does not necessarily contradict Mukherjee's advocacy of greater multicultural literacy in the Canadian university. Indeed, Mukherjee refuses to offer a single, coherent approach to texts which foreground their cultural difference, and so finally presents a variety of pedagogical options that can be seen as either wide-ranging or self-contradictory.

5 Since I repeatedly refer to Kogawa's novel as a key to some of the phrases in *Chorus of*

Mushrooms, I am indebted to *Obasan*, as perhaps Goto's novel is indebted to *Obasan*. The two texts offer a fluid, and necessarily partial, translation of each other. This example forces me to acknowledge that the representation of myself as having no access to a translation of Goto's Japanese passages is not entirely accurate. Just as the attempt to translate is always partial, the refusal to translate is similarly incomplete and doomed to failure.

6 Within the text, the phrase "*mukāshi, mukāshi, ōmukashi*" is always printed in italics and in bold print, and situated in a paragraph of its own as though it floated free of the novel's narrative while at the same time remaining an integral part of its structure. A great deal could be said about how typography is employed by Goto to situate or disturb narrative expectations and to alternately frame or unsettle the use of voice in the novel. As in many texts of hyphenated identity, terms foreign to most English-Canadian readers are italicized. Thus, although they are not translated for the reader who cannot speak Japanese, these words are marked as a specialized discourse. Unless otherwise noted, the italics used in citations are Goto's own.

7 In the assimilated world of her parents, the narrator is legally named Muriel. However, Obāchan subversively translates this name into a Japanese equivalent, Murasaki, which means "purple," but which also alludes to the Japanese writer Murasaki Shikibu, who wrote the first extended piece of fiction in the Japanese language, and introduced the concept of the antihero (165).

8 I owe acknowledgement and thanks to the anonymous reader who, while refereeing this paper for *Canadian Literature*, provided me with some insight into certain Japanese linguistic conventions, namely the reliance on context and shared meaning that results in sentence "fragments" and "inverted" syntax, and the repetition of onomatopoeic words in order to portray sensory perception.

9 Iwama provides a close reading of the Freudian imagery that is presented and subverted in this scene, suggesting that the eating of the family name calls to mind Freud's writing on totemism only to reject it:

> The evening's entrée for the Tonkatsu family is, of course, a multiple substitution. Because tonkatsu is neither the "real" name of the father, nor treated with veneration by the Tonkatsu clan, neither the primal father nor his literal substitution is being eaten. (251-52)

10 bell hooks' essay, "Eating the Other," examines how, under the guise of good intentions, curiosity, or fascination, a majority culture commodifies the Otherness of a minority culture, and effectively devours the difference of the Other. hooks' analysis of this colonial consumption, especially in the form of interracial sexual desire, is relevant to Goto's text, specifically the episode where a Nanton boy tries to seduce Muriel in order to experience the exotic pleasures of "Oriental sex" as he sees it portrayed in the miniseries *Shogun* (122).

11 "Tengu" tells Naoe that this nickname derives from a trip he made to Japan, where the heat of the summer caused him to stand out because of his red face (110-11). Once again, Goto's novel presents us with an act of translation, as the white Albertan is transcribed by laughing schoolchildren into a figure from Japanese story.

12 It is important at this juncture to remind myself that the limits and range of my understanding do not coincide with the limits of others. Other readers of *Chorus of Mushrooms* can and will remember the taste of the Japanese and Chinese foods described in the text, just as other readers can and will translate the Japanese passages in the novel. This is not to say that these readers can provide a comprehensive translation of the text, but that the boundaries of their reading are located differently from mine.

13 Metaphor: [Gk, f. *metapherein* transfer, f. as META- + *pherein* to bear.] **1.** A figure of speech in which a name or descriptive word or phrase is transferred to an object or action different from, but analogous to, that to which it is literally applicable; an instance of this, a metaphorical expression. **2.** A thing considered as representative of some other (usu. abstract) thing; a symbol. (OED)

14 This reading is strengthened by Glenn Deer's reminder to me that banana is a term applied, most often in a derogatory sense, to an assimilated Asian American (yellow on the outside, white on the inside). In this sense, Naoe's reaction to the incongruity of the banana metaphor highlights the text's continual negotiation of the Tonkatsu family's hyphenated status in Canada, and the issue of identity as a matter of place and cultural identity.

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Terry Watada

The Emerald Sutra
an excerpt

and the brash peasant
stood
        before
the Lord Buddha

Why are you called "Lord"?
he asked smugly.
        Are you God?
a saint?
        an angel?

He turned to him
shaking His head as His eyes opened
His hand reached out
        offering compassion
receiving none

to answer
He whispered slowly,
"I am awake."

and the women in black
slide across the room
like cigarette smoke chasing jazz
        on a peculiar night of
no Coltrane, nor Byrd
or even a twist of Thelonious
no gods of any kind.
  tight leotards,
jewelled sweaters and bright, black li[p]stick
breasts full without age
legs shaped to dance and clench
        writhe naked on the floor

in performance art
adding notes to the saxophone poetry
synchronous ad-lib blue light jam.
        obsidian sky
presses outside
down.
        on the outside
out on the fringe
of that which is asian
and america

I trust I will be welcome
on the field of festival
        of *matsuri*
of *renshu* arms swaying
in the summer heat
of a west coast city.

        in the confines
of a midnight noodle restaurant
down above Houston or on Washington
near Jackson
(Tong Kee greasy
forbidden city of heavenly wonton,
sui gow)
        and Won Kee
restaurant beneath the lions golden twins
of shimmering mountains
set against the sun burning
        where Sid & Sean
pretend to be Japanese
to hit on work-weary
waitresses their hair matted
teeth broken eyes angry
beauty within flat faces and sallow
complexions
        slick-backed waiters
who were called *Chinamen* a generation ago
when Angel Island/the Immigration Building
        held their screams
in jagged lines of wall poetry
ignore
the two playing Hong Kong cowboys

I trust I will be welcome
sinking
within the congested room
of peculiar jazz [west coast northern
california jazz]
and asian women dressed
in black

are you lesbian
are you gay
are you a woman are you
a victim?

badges of glory, of being hip.
and I am hip.

[in 1970
the mantra of the road
white lines in
staccato rhythm
along the innocent highways
that are here & lost,
at the same time they come together
and fall apart
in the face of bones and skin
in the face
of asian soldiers in a war
that is constantly
losing innocence

The images on tv ... form and fade
before
named.

across
the bay bridge out
onto
Oakland where highways
intertwine and connect
to the 99
where brother lawson
and the Buddha Bandits
traverse in free verse and song

and she is there
  empty eyes looking for the self
in conference with the minds
of three generations
on the road towards Salt Lake
past Klingman, Barstow, and Flagstaff
across the Sierras
into the melting lake
and on & on
toward Chicago city of baking expectations
  where the Lakeshore is a highway
in a half hug with the city.
        where once
the Nisei Lounge teemed
with the laughter of a generation
struggling to be American
who fought and died in a war
for the freedom of parents and
siblings and *sansei*
        Hey, we go for broke!
and we are wounded or die 800 times
for our country
        dumbhead haoles

and she is there in Chicago
expectant of change
        the long hair swirling
in the night air
of an open window eyes surprised
by the intruder knife drawn
throat slashed
  death by moonlight
and the roar of the South side

heads hung in mourning
a conference shattered
        Of course it was her always her.
the *shakuhachi* played
a low blues beneath the angry
jazz of a Chicagoland nocturne

Larissa Lai

Political Animals and the Body of History[1]

Entranceways are the most difficult because you have to pass through them alone. I wanted to bring someone with me, someone who in this moment might function as a translator, not from some other language into English but from one English to another. Because I already know this entranceway is not where I come from, and yet I must say I do, in order for you to understand me.

Ashok Mathur, a writer, critic and activist, but mostly a trusted friend was here first, keeping watch over the literary/academic entranceway, asking the leading question. I did not want to come in the door like that. And yet it seemed to be the main entrance. He thought it was important that I enter the dialogue, and so asked the question— a door-opening kind of question, a come-right-this-way sort of question to lead the sniff-sniffing fox out of her lair onto the green. Not to assume she'd be hunted, but no sense denying the possibility.

The question was this: How could you or would you describe your writing as coming from a racialized space?[2]

A question from the middle of a conversation, begun in some other place, long ago and far away. Which is to say right here and now, but of another root, another wellspring. An awkward question because it demands a starting point apart from the self. A question that assumes one already knows how she is looked at from someplace that is by definition outside of her, and yet familiar at the same time.

It took me a long time to answer. I kept turning the question around in my head, asking myself what he meant when he asked it, and how he per-

ceived his own work in that regard. We'd talked about the question before, so I knew he understood my ambivalence. How can a person write from a place constructed for her, pejoratively, by someone else? Why would she want to? But then, does she have a choice? My racialization is a historical fact, begun in Europe centuries before I was born, and perpetuated in a sometimes friendly Canadian sort of way through the social, bureaucratic and corporate structures of this society. I still live with the hope that the body exists prior to race, that experience exists prior to race. Living in a country that could not and does not exist without the concept of race, and for that matter, why be polite, white superiority, it is often hard to maintain this hope. When I say pejorative, I mean, you know, I didn't *ask* for this. And when Ashok asks me how I see my work coming from a racialized space, he is implicitly acknowledging that we both know this. He is asking me, faced with this recognition, what I intend to do about the injustice of it. He is asking me whether I see this othering of my body and my work by the mainstream as my responsibility to undo. If it is not my responsibility, are there reasons why I would choose to do it? He is asking me whether or not I think I have a choice. He is asking me because he faces similar questions.

These questions rise from the context this country has handed me. They are not the centre of my world. What I mean to say is, I didn't want to come in the door like this, nor dressed in these clothes, these shackles. But would you, white or brown, content or discontent, have recognized me otherwise? Perhaps. But I am not yet a creature of great faith.

My work comes from many places at once. There is an aspect in recent years that has been about trying, Houdini-like to break from the box which allows only two possibilities—to understand and work from the racialized position this society allots to the likes of us, or to work from a "colour-blind" liberal position which actively denies the way we have been racialized even as it perpetuates the very racial interests it claims not to see.

Growing up in Canada in the seventies and eighties, I was very much crammed inside the racism-was-terrible-but-now-it's-over box—a quick-fix product of official Multiculturalism that did precious little materially except sweep the problem of white racism under the carpet. This liberal position, so seemingly loaded with good intentions, had a pale, clammy underside that merely masked existing power imbalances while doing little to rectify them. For those of us who grew up in that era, it meant knowing

something was wrong but never being able to put your finger on it.

In the late eighties/early nineties, I was drawn to the anti-oppression movements which, though they had been growing for years, were currently flowering on the West Coast and in other parts of the country. It was and continues to be incredibly empowering to embrace a confrontative politic that refuses to accept the historically rooted racism of this country and to call it into question wherever it rears its ugly head. I was and am very interested in questions of strategy—How can people of colour and First Nations people empower ourselves and one another given the colonial and neo-colonial contexts we live with? In a collective sense, this means taking particular stands on issues such as appropriation and affirmative action as a means of pushing white liberals to look at the hypocrisies of colour-blindness, multiculturalism and other stances that seemed so liberal in the seventies. It means forcing the hand of those who would like credit for a belief in equality without having to put that belief into practice by giving up the ill-gotten gains of racially endowed power.

I took a particular interest in questions of history for a number of reasons. I think part of what is so aggravating about the reactionary racism that is so often the knee-jerk response to an anti-racist critique is the way in which it denies this country's ugly histories—the histories of the residential schools, the Japanese Internment, the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Komagata Maru incident as well as larger international histories of colonialism and exploitation which shaped and continue to shape the globe. It was particularly empowering to be introduced to works by marginalised people that addressed these histories from our own points of view. There was an urgency around their production and reading which I still feel. Gloria Anzaldua and Cherie Moraga's *This Bridge Called My Back* was seminal, as much as a presence as a text. I remember being thrilled by the publication of *Piece of My Heart: A Lesbian of Colour Anthology* put out by Sister Vision Press in 1990. Trinh's *Woman, Native, Other* was also important, as was bell hooks' *Ain't I a Woman.* There were also numerous cultural projects and special issues of periodicals that while problematic in their tokenized status were, nonetheless, affirming and thought-provoking. Although very few of these things became institutionalized or regularized, each served as a forum to move dialogue forward. In some ways the ad hoc nature of these projects was liberating in that they allowed various communities different ways of entering the discussions and validated a variety of voices in a variety of media.

I began to take note, however, of how certain texts became rapidly fetishized by critics, academics and the general public in ways comparable to the way anthropologists and missionaries address field notes. I attended many readings and I can't count the number of times audience members have asked writers of colour, referring to the main character of any particular writer's text: "Is that you?" Or of my own work, which at moments actively resists that question: "Did you get these stories from your grandmother?" The suggestion is, of course, that we are not creative agents capable of constructing nuanced fictions which address historical situations, but rather mere native informants reconstructing, as accurately as our second-rate minds allow, what actually happened. Not, I might add, that I am trying to create a hierarchy of genres that inadvertantly favours narrative fiction—I think it is very important that those who remember "what actually happened" write about it, and I have faith that they have written and will continue to write it well. It is rather the reception of the work, and the assumptions around that reception, that I wish to critique.

I understand that these questions may well be addressed to novel writers across race, class, gender and sexuality lines; however, their anthropological resonance with regard to marginalized peoples can not be denied. (I betcha no one ever asked Dickens if he was really Tiny Tim.) I feel a certain ambivalence here. My authority as an author is of no great importance or interest to me. My one great wish for readers is that they understand writing as a practice rather than as the production of an inert, consumable text. In some ways, the question "Is that you?" affirms this wish.

There are other genres that have a tradition of foregrounding within the body of their texts questions about how we read, that have a history of resisting readings that would consume them. These are the same texts that within many circles, both progressive and conservative, get labelled as too intellectual, too academic, incomprehensible. They are circulated within certain small if thoughtful circles, but do not reach the audiences which novels reach. I do not wish to address the question of whether their "elitism" is inherent or constructed. I am conscious of my choice to write fiction as a strategy chosen because it reaches people. On the other hand, in this age of steroid-enhanced capitalism, the tension between engaging those technologies which enable one to reach large numbers of people, and opening oneself and one's work to quick fix consumption, is no easy thing to resolve. Indeed, the quick fix consumptive scrutiny itself is all too easily

transmuted into a kind of surveillance which generates new stereotypes, dangerous ones if their sources can be traced to a semblance of native reportage. This is the editorial power of capital.

And yet the fact remains that narrative compels me. What is history, after all, but narrative? And she who inhabits that narrative truly has ground to stand on. That grounding is necessary when her belonging to the land she lives on is so contested.

My second interest in the question of history is a more personal one, tied to my own historical situation. It is also very much caught up in questions of strategy: How do we diasporized types make a homespace for ourselves given all the disjunctures and discontinuities of our histories, and for that matter, the co-temporalities of some of them? It is also about the second box, if you were following my Houdini metaphor. The paradox of claiming a racialized space as a space from which to work is an uncomfortable one. To claim a racialized space is empowering in that it demands acknowledgement of a history of racism to which the mainstream does not want to admit. It demands acknowledgement of the continued perpetuation of that racism often, though not always, in new forms in the present. On the other hand, to claim that space also confirms and validates that eurocentric racist stance by placing ourselves in opposition to it, enforcing a binarism which itself is a Western social construct. So how to break from the second box without falling back into the first one, the one which denies a history of race and racialization as shaping our lives?

My strategy in recent years has been to make a project of constructing a consciously artificial history for myself and others like me—a history with women identified women of Chinese descent living in the West at its centre. (I eschew the term "lesbian" because of its eurocentric roots, and because it does not necessarily connote community or social interdependence.) It must be artificial because our history is so disparate, and also because it has been so historically rare for women to have control over the means of recording and dissemination. The writing and rewriting of history has always been the prerogative of men and of the upper classes. I have the added disadvantage—the result of an unfortunate combination of my own childhood foolishness and the pressures of assimilation—of not being able to read Chinese. So my readings of history are bleached not only by the ideological interests of gender and class but also of race and culture.

As a quick example, my research into the life of Yu Hsuan-chi, the courtesan and poet on whom the "Poetess" character in *When Fox Is a Thousand* is based, turned up two records of her. One described her as a woman with many lovers, hence lascivious, hence immoral, hence capable of murder. The second suggested she might have been framed for the murder of a young maidservant by an official who did not like her strong ideas about the role of women in Chinese society. Although she is supposed to have left a sizable body of poetry, very little of it appears in anthologies of Chinese poetry in translation, which tend to favour sanctioned male heavyweights.

The history I'm going to write, I told myself, may be ideologically interested, but no more so than what's already out there.

Several queer Asian theorists caution against projecting the needs and contexts of the present onto the past (see Shah, Lee). How can we understand, for instance, temple images in South Asia in the same terms that the makers of those images understood them, regardless of what we think we see? At the same time, without claiming those histories what are we? Shah suggests that the fact that we are here now in the present should be enough. But it isn't. In the everyday discussions of politically active people of colour, lesbian, gay or straight, I hear this nostalgic referring back to a homeland that no longer exists, indeed, one that never did. I don't think this practice originates so much with naiveté as with a burning desire for that past; that it should have form, that it should have a body. Sometimes I feel our very survival in this country depends on the articulation of this form, the construction and affirmation of this body.

Animals at last. The myth and the tall tale. The secret and the subterranean. The dark, the feminine, the yin. All allies in this task. For, if diasporic cultures in the West are to be living breathing things they must change. We must have the power of construction, as long, of course, as we behave as responsibly as we know how in the act of construction. (By "responsibly" I mean that the ideas I have discussed above do matter. I do not hold the ideal of freedom of speech, or freedom of the imagination above other freedoms and other ideals, especially at a historical moment when these freedoms are regularly invoked in order to justify the reproduction of tired stereotypes and the perpetuation of historically unjust power imbalances. I do not believe in censorship, because I think it solves nothing. I do believe in integrity, and expect it of myself and of other writers.) This project obviously can not be one of creating a totalizing history; it is rather one of uninhibited, zany invention for the sheer joy of it.

My interest in the archetype of the fox began with my stumbling across Pu Songling's *Strange Tales of Liaozhai*, a well-known text of the sixteenth century. Pu is supposed to have collected these various tales of the supernatural from ordinary people and compiled them into this anthology. The preface to one translation (which comes out of the PRC) talks about these tales as proto-socialist in their critiques of class structure, corruption and abuse of power. A reason to love them—or is this merely a pretext to circulate an old text that has been such a pleasurable read for so many years? There are stories in the compilation which are obviously allegorical in their intentions. And then there are the fox stories, which certainly have their allegorical aspects, but I like to think that there is more to them than that. Some are not so politically palatable at all, such as the one about a wily supernatural fox woman who leads an innocent man from his pious life into debauchery, sickness and death. There is another about an unsavory young man who leers at a beautiful woman; the woman turns out to be a fox, and the fox trounces him. There is yet another about how a fox and a young man fall in love—star-crossed love, of course, because the human and the divine are not supposed to have carnal dealings with one another. I suppose this one could be read as a comment on class or a critique of the repression of romantic love.

But what is more compelling in many ways is the figure of the fox herself, as a creature of darkness, death, germination and sexuality. The fox has the power to travel both above the earth and below it. In order to work her mischief she needs human form, which she achieves by entering the graveyard late at night and finding the corpse of some poor young girl who has died before her time. She breathes life into it. In this form, her power over men (and perhaps women too?) is the power of seduction. I find these stories very rich and very visceral. They are also politically compelling for a a number of reasons. The first is contemporary feminism's struggle with questions of sexual representation. What does it mean for a feminist to embrace the power of seduction? And am I a feminist, or is that also a colonized space? The second is the question of how to deal with sexual representations of Asians in the West where we have been so much exoticized and/or de-sexualized in a society which insists on pathologizing the sexuality of the other. I was compelled to find out what kind of warrior the fox could be in that battle. The third is the possibility of employing the fox as a new trope of lesbian representation, or, if that term and its history reeks too much of its western origins, then as a trope of Asian women's community and power.

I have been much influenced by the work of the Vancouver collective Kiss and Tell, and by much of the sex-positive work that has come out of Canada and the United States in recent years. The work is valuable in that it makes sex a site of resistance as well as a site of pleasure. I can't help thinking, however, that much as using one's racialization as a point of entry into political and philosophical discussions shapes what one can say and learn, so using sex as a point of departure shapes the way one thinks about women's community, and how one goes about looking for echoes of it in the past. My concern here, I hope, is not one of prudery or reaction, but one of wanting a little more give in the technologies we use to tap history. Elsewhere I have spoken about my interest in a tradition of spinsterhood, which became radicalized in Shundak (my father's long-ago county of origin, in Guangdong Province) at the turn of the last century. Although my sources on this tradition are entirely and problematically anthropological, I was struck by the argument (see Sankar) that the act that clinched this practice for women was not sex but the acceptance of the idea that younger generations of spinsters could feed, through ancestral worship, the souls of the older generation. This practice is normally reserved for the members of patriarchal families only.

That said, I must also add that it is extremely difficult to find historical materials on Chinese lesbians. I suspect this not because they did not exist, but because for a long time sexual practice was not considered as a focal point for identity. It could be argued, in fact, that the notion of identity arose from Western philosophical traditions, and from the needs of Western colonial practices. Later, the absence of such texts could be ascribed to the fact that women's lives were not deemed important enough to write about, or if worthy of writing, not deemed worthy of translation. The only scholarship on lesbian history in China that I could find in English was an appendix to a book called *Passions of the Cut Sleeve*, which dealt in its main body with the history of gay men. That appendix, perhaps ten pages long, focussed exclusively on the question of sexual practice, which felt empty and unsatisfying in its narrowness.

Insofar as *When Fox is a Thousand* concerns anti-racism—and it does, although I think it also goes much further than that—I think issues of the body are primary. There are the obvious metaphors—the Fox breathing life into the bodies of the dead is like an Asian woman trying to breathe life into the assimilated almost-white self required by the social pressures of liberal-

ism. She can never do it perfectly. There are always moments where the synapses don't connect, where there are understandings missing. But for the Fox, these moments of breathing life into the dead are also moments of passion. This is something she is compelled to do. It is her nature. The work of Calgary writer Yasmin Ladha is compelling in that it talks about colonialism and its effects in terms of romance. A very messy and dangerous romance, rife with the abuse of power, but also tinged with hope. I think in doing so she takes a great risk, particularly as the spectres of Pocahontas, Suzy Wong, Madame Butterfly and their ilk loom above us. But to engage in this way also opens up possibilities for living here that might not otherwise exist.

It did not occur to me until well after completing the book that the notion of transformation through breath is both a Taoist and a Buddhist notion. Or perhaps, indeed, it is a remnant of some earlier indigenous religion that has since disappeared or become subsumed by these more organized forms. Breath, like writing, is stilling and insistent. It moves and it sustains life. To engage the breath is to disrupt the binary opposition of Houdini's two boxes, to break from what Judith Butler refers to as "the discursive site of injury." What happens for me in the process of writing, at certain electric moments, is a contacting of the past that resonates with something akin to truth and belonging. A bit metaphysical perhaps but in a country built on denial, I am used to ghosts and not frightened of things that are only half apparent. These are not moments that sing of hurt but rather compel my interest in Taoist and pre-Taoist cosmologies. Here again, there are dangers. My compunction towards home-making belongs to the realm of the feminine in a way of which some branches of feminism might not approve. I think it is important to remember, to get back to the question of racialization, that there are entire knowledge systems and ways of living in our historical pasts that pre-date white racist modes of identification and their reclamations. How to touch those systems and practices may not be obvious, and the dangers of naive idealization are far from negligible. For me, the consciously artificial narrative construction of history that acknowledges the desires of the present but also resonates with the past, seems a very useful possibility.

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NOTES

1 This piece was originally produced for the conference Making History, Constructing Race at the University of Victoria, October 23-25, 1998.

2 E-mail interview with Ashok Mathur, July 1998. Available at http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~amathur/

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Randal Chin

Nothing is Perfect the First Time

Nothing is perfect the first time.
Before the sewing needle had an eye,
it had a hook of many styles.
What then was the sock puppet?
A hat puppet, a glove puppet,
an underwear puppet,
and a jock-strap puppet.
Canada had the tuque puppet,
but the Americans—
they loved their tube socks.

Jean Eng

Taxi-Driven

In another country
where gender is justice
he would not stand for this fire
coming from a woman's belly
her match-lit voice
searing back drafts
into midnight silence.

When she asked him (politely)
to put the cell phone down
while he was driving
he could have killed her.

Instead—he told her
        just a minute
and waited until a dialogue
concluded with his intended party.
She asked him twice. The meter kept running.

Now, in front of her building
she is trying to burn off his thick accent
to that part of his English
capable of understanding: safety hazards, conscience.

He drives half way around the world
to pick up his own angry god
stone-walling her logic with incantation.
        I did put the phone down.
        I did put the phone down.
        I did put the phone down.

Now—she wants to brain him
with all of the weather inside her.

Instead, she gets out
takes down the cab number
and slams the passenger door so hard
it sends him back to where he came from.

Maria Noëlle Ng

Representing Chinatown: Dr. Fu-Manchu at the Disappearing Moon Cafe

In *Rush Hour* (1998), Brett Ratner's Hollywood interpretation of ethnic bonding, the black Los Angeles detective Carter takes his Hong Kong counterpart, Lee, to Chinatown. While Jackie Chan's character is nonplussed by his surroundings, Carter gestures toward some gaudy architecture in Chinatown and quips, "Look familiar? Just like home, ain't it? . . . I ain't never been to China, but I bet you it probably looks like this, don't it?" Lee's response is to be literally and metaphorically speechless.

Ironically, the film director has replaced the traditionally white racist with a black one, pitting one marginalized race against another. He thereby adds an extra dimension to a scenario of anti-Asian racism in America. Yet, this scene also remains symptomatic of well-established western assumptions about Chinese people and Chinese culture. First, the scene highlights the stereotypical idea that a Chinese will automatically want to visit or feel comfortable in Chinatown, because it resembles his or her native milieu.[1] Second, the exchange between Carter and Lee also insidiously suggests that a Chinese living in a western culture belongs to an area designated as Chinatown. Third, Carter's action illustrates the metonymic power the concept of Chinatown has over the western popular imagination.[2] All of these assumptions raise complex questions regarding the interconnection between race, place, and representation. For instance, what kind of knowledge of Chinese culture and history will compel someone to equate Chinatown, a small urban neighbourhood, with a people of great diversity and long cultural history? The stereotypical image of Chinatown has been,

and continues to be, in part a legacy of literary fiction. What is needed to counteract the persistence of stereotyping Chinese in North America, and to resist the way Chinatown is represented, is for readers to become more knowledgeable about Chinese cultures and history, and to be aware of the changes in immigrant culture within western society. Furthermore, readers must remain critical of orientalist practices in texts written by ethnic writers. As Sheng-mei Ma suggests, it is necessary to read ethnic texts "along with the ever-shifting social realities" (5-6).

To support my claim that stereotypes of the Chinese in Chinatown are of long fictional standing, I wish to examine representations of Chinatown in fiction from the first and the last decades of the twentieth century. My first text is the extremely popular *The Insidious Dr. Fu-Manchu* (1913) by Sax Rohmer, which has spawned a series with many titles, as well as adaptations on the radio, in film and on television, and in comics (Robert Lee 114).[3] As examples of works from the 1990s, I concentrate on Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (1990) and a detective novel by the Anglo Chinese writer Irene Lin-Chandler, entitled *The Healing of Holly-Jean* (1995). Although published eight decades later, these recent texts share with Rohmer's fiction stereotypical features westerners have come to associate with Chinatown and with the Chinese. As Kay Anderson explains in *Vancouver's Chinatown* (1991), Chinatown was seen as lawless in the 1910s, because the Chinese were inveterate gamblers. As the site of opium dens and prostitution, the area was condemned as morally pestilential (92). The typical fictional Chinatown, beginning with Rohmer's version, is based on the model of an ethnic enclave analysed in Anderson's book. While the socio-economic conditions of immigrant culture have changed, representations of immigrant lives have not. The recurrent image of the Chinese as forming an enclave which excludes outsiders, an image that legitimizes the accusation that the Chinese people do not acculturate in a western society, needs to be reexamined. Although Chinese Canadian writing has gained increasing readership and critical attention, fiction about Chinese Canadian culture is very much about the past and of a specific historical context (see M. Ng 182-84). The persistent representation of the Chinese as huddling in Chinatown will not only discourage public acceptance of the Chinese as an integral part of western society, it will also encourage reactionary response against the Chinese community whenever debates over immigration policy surface.[4]

Obviously, a more differentiated general knowledge of Chinese cultures and history will help resist stereotypes; attention to changing immigrant culture will offer the western imagination a different understanding of the Chinese living in western society, so that the Chinese will not be indexed to a "territorial place-based identity" in the minds of the non-Chinese (Harvey 4). To achieve these various ends, readers of fiction about Chinese living in Chinatown need to bear in mind not only the aesthetic aspects of the work, but also the historical and social contexts within which the fictional narrative is enmeshed. That Rohmer's Fu-Manchu stories are orientalist is self-evident; more problematic is the tendency to self-orientalization in fiction by writers of Chinese origin. Or as Sheng-mei Ma writes of Asian Americans, they "often take on the white gaze at their nonwhite object" (25). The comparison made in this paper between Rohmer's, Sky Lee's, and Lin-Chandler's Chinatowns shows that they are disturbingly similar. The persistence of representing Chinatown as a den of criminal activities and a place with its own interests which are contrary to those of the general public, indicates that this is the Chinatown that the writers, whether of Anglo-Saxon or Chinese descent, believe will attract readership, in spite of the changing face of the non-fictional Chinatown.

To contextualize the analysis, this paper begins with a brief history of early Chinatown in the London of Sax Rohmer and the Vancouver in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*. Then it examines fictional images of Chinatown by Rohmer and Sky Lee. A brief profile of recent Chinese immigrants in Canada, a country which has witnessed a dramatic rise in ethnic Chinese population since the 1970s, underscores the differences between fictional Chinese immigrant lives and social reality. The paper ends with some scenes of criminal Chinatown from Lin-Chandler's detective novel set in contemporary London. These examples show the tenacious influence of Rohmer's Chinatown as well as surprising similarities between two ethnic Chinese writers' portrayals of a Chinese neighbourhood.

Chinatowns in London and Vancouver

The history of Chinatown in London, England, like that of Vancouver and other North American cities, is not a savory one. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Chinatown was established because early Chinese immigrants were excluded from every walk of life in Caucasian society; Chinatown was a product of cultural and economic segregation. In London,

the turn-of-the-century Chinese immigrants were predominantly seamen who had settled in the East End. In spite of the term, Chinatown in London was made up of only two small streets in the Limehouse area (Ng Kwee Choo 17-18). Since its destruction in the Second World War, London Chinese have established themselves throughout the metropolis, thus changing the social pattern of an ethnic group which confines itself, in self-protection, to a small area. However, this change in ethnic settlement pattern does not imply that anti-immigrant and racist sentiments against the Chinese have been eradicated. The persistence of the need to perceive and represent the Chinese as the Other will be shown in the analysis of *The Healing of Holly-Jean.*

The settlement history of Vancouver's Chinatown is the history of Chinatown everywhere, in that "[w]hite racism was one factor in the creation of a Chinatown." In Vancouver, "[w]hite landlords would not sell or lease their properties to the Chinese unless the lands were on the fringe of the town and thus unattractive to the white community" (Lai 34). While Chinese immigrants to the west coast of Canada in the 1880s and 90s were railway labourers, the white population reacted to these labourers in much the same way the English did to the Chinese seamen in England. Fear of the so-called yellow peril[5] and the unquestioned belief in their own racial superiority encouraged white residents to practice and sanction residential segregation. Thus, the area of East Pender and Main in Vancouver was linked to those "saffron coloured sons of the East" (*Vancouver News* 3 June 1886, qtd in Anderson 81). The colour saffron, an evocation of the yellow peril, became a short-hand description of the Chinese, whose qualities include immorality, the "herd instinct," and a propensity to contract and spread infectious diseases. To prevent any kind of racial contagion, Chinese immigrants were confined, through social and economic measures, to a few streets of undesirable real estate.

In order to survive in a hostile society, Chinese immigrants voluntarily banded together and formed ethnic enclaves in which various systems of support, through schools, trade associations, political associations and dialect associations, were developed to help Chinese immigrants. However, as Zhou Min points out in *Chinatown: The Socioeconomic Potential of an Urban Enclave* (1992):

> Because of the need for social and cultural support from fellow sojourners and the need to maintain ethnic identity and kinship ties with China, immigrants chose a way of life in Chinatown that reminded them of home. This voluntary

> self isolation created a stereotype of unassimilability that in turn reinforced the community's irrelevance to the larger society. (40)

This "stereotype of unassimilability" and of resistance to acculturation is an image that feeds the suspicion harboured by the non-Chinese against an allegedly enclosed and inscrutable people. Recent Chinese Canadians have tried to discourage, through Chinese talk shows on radio and on television, and advice columns in Chinese newspapers, the tendency of voluntary self-isolation in immigrants.[6] However, the image of an alien and unreadable enclave, metonymic of a whole culture, persists among non-Chinese.

The Lair of Dr. Fu-Manchu

Sax Rohmer (Arthur Sarsfield Ward) wrote the first Fu-Manchu stories in 1912 and 1913, based on "vague stories . . . of a shadowy criminal called Mr. King who ran a gambling syndicate" in Limehouse (Greene v). While Rohmer's Fu-Manchu and Chinese characters "had almost no relationship to real people" because Rohmer knew nothing about the Chinese (vi), his realistic and vivid depiction of Chinatown is based on the Limehouse district in London's East End which housed Chinese seamen and labourers. The very term "East End" suggests "a different world, an unknown world," where poverty was "open, omnipresent and dominating" (Briggs 314-15). These threatening quarters gave rise to the image of a dark, dangerous, and dingy area inhabited by aliens such as the Chinese. The circulation of such stereotypes is partly attributable to the popularity of works such as the Fu-Manchu series.[7]

In the first book featuring the inscrutable 'Chinaman,' *The Insidious Dr. Fu-Manchu* (1913), the hero Nayland Smith, an official of the British government, has tracked Fu-Manchu to a Chinese barber shop in Limehouse:

> A seemingly drunken voice was droning from a neighbouring alleyway. . . . We stood in a bare and very dirty room, which could only claim kinship with a civilized shaving-saloon by virtue of the grimy towel thrown across the back of the solitary chair. A Yiddish theatrical bill of some kind, illustrated, adorned one of the walls, and another bill, in what may have been Chinese, completed the decorations. From behind a curtain heavily brocaded with filth a little Chinaman appeared, dressed in a loose smock, black trousers and thick-soled slippers. (32)

This passage illustrates Rohmer's failure, throughout the Fu-Manchu series, to differentiate among ethnic types: the Chinese barber shop advertises a Yiddish revue; the language is as foreign to the English reader ("theatrical

bill of some kind") as Chinese. The main goal of the description is to house these racial outsiders together. As Robert G. Lee points out, "Rohmer's Orientalism collapses national histories into an ahistorical cultural category of Oriental Otherness" (115). Nayland Smith is unmistakably a colonial Anglo-Saxon, whose attractive appearance as "a tall, lean man, with his square-cut, clean shaven face sun-baked [from serving in Burma] to the hue of coffee" (Rohmer 1), serves as a foil to Dr. Fu-Manchu, who has the face "of an archangel of evil . . . wholly dominated by the most uncanny eyes [which] were narrow and long, very slightly oblique, and of a brilliant green" (Rohmer 36). While Smith's physical attributes are consistently positive (he is tall and fit, and colonial service in the tropics has left him with an attractively tanned skin), Fu-Manchu's features are the opposite: he is evil, uncanny, and his narrow oblique eyes suggest shiftiness. Interestingly, Rohmer alternately describes Fu-Manchu as "tall" and "lean," but also as "feline" and invested "with all the cruel cunning of an entire Eastern race" (13). Thus, although Fu-Manchu at times resembles Nayland Smith, he is the degenerate version of the Englishman, just as the Chinese were viewed as a corrupt race in the beginning of the twentieth century.[8] In the barber shop, the Chinese in the above passage is identified as "little," resembling a monkey who chatters in "simian fashion" and has a "yellow paw" (32-33). The saloon is filthy, the curtain encrusted with dirt; the word used is "brocaded," thus evoking a material frequently linked to eastern interior decor.

As befits a place engaged in shady activities, Chinatown is never seen in daylight but is always shrouded in darkness:

> The mantle of dusk has closed about the squalid activity of the East End streets as we neared our destination. Aliens of every shade of color were about us now, emerging from burrow-like alleys into the glare of the lamps. . . . In the short space of the drive we had passed from the bright world of the West into the dubious underworld of the East. (142)

The metonymic suggestion here of Chinatown as an image of all of China is unmistakable. In the beginning of the passage, the characters are still located in London; but under the shroud of darkness, they find themselves in the evil world of the East, surrounded by ethnic groups described as "aliens of every shade of color." These foreigners are equated with rodents, as they emerge from burrows to begin their nocturnal activities. Although geographically London's Chinatown was insignificant, in fiction it embodies *all* the negative values attributed to the East namely laziness, duplicity, degeneration.

As if anxious that the reader might overlook the connection between Chinatown and the East, Dr. Petrie, Nayland Smith's staunch ally and the narrator of the novel, quotes in detail two news items he is reading: the first on Chinese in Honolulu poisoning their children with scorpions, and the second on a member of a triad society attempting to assassinate the governor of Hong Kong. Rohmer creates the character of Dr. Petrie, who is trustworthy and loyal, as another foil to the evil Chinese doctor, and often Petrie echoes what the masses would say or think on issues of race and social values. Dr. Petrie's reaction to these activities is a prime example of reasoning based on genetic fallacy: "Is it any matter for wonder that such a people had produced a Fu-Manchu?" (62). Thus, Chinese everywhere are rapacious criminals, committing infanticide in North America, involved in gang activities in Hong Kong and China, and planning world domination in London. Perhaps the sophisticated reader will laugh at such fallacies, yet the enduring popularity of the Fu-Manchu series, which have recently been reissued in omnibus format, would indicate that there are readers still interested in this type of stereotypical depiction of the wicked ways of the East. In Vancouver, the image of a criminal Chinese area thrives in spite of rigorous efforts by merchants and property owners in Chinatown (see Mulgrew "The Battle"). The image of Chinese criminals is reinforced with sensational headlines such as "B.C. Cops Say The Asian Crime Ring They Claim To Have Cracked Has No Fear Of The Law" ("They're" A1). Incessant media attention on any illegal activities involving the Chinese, such as smuggling operations trafficking in illegal migrants, strengthens the predominant perception that the Chinese are an undesirable population. Representations of Chinatown as a den of iniquity in fiction and film can only add to this perception as, for example, in Jim Christy's hardboiled thriller, *Shanghai Alley* (1997), set in Vancouver's Chinatown. Thus, Rohmer's shady Chinatown is kept alive through various media.

A Cafe in Chinatown

Although Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (1990) has been acclaimed as a literary landmark in its depiction of Chinese Canadian life (Chao 93) and as a sophisticated subversion of traditional genealogical romance (Huggan 35-36), Sky Lee's novel can also be read as proof of the lingering power of stereotyping in ethnic characterization and setting. Some ethnic Chinese writers' self-exoticization has been analysed in Sau-ling Cynthia Wong's *Reading*

Asian American Literature (1993) and, more recently, in David Leiwei Li's *Imagining the Nation* (1998) and Sheng-mei Ma's *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian American and Asian Diaspora Literatures* (1998). David Leiwei Li calls this tendency to self-exoticize the "romantic embodiment of Asia in genes and consciousness" that one can detect in Asian American writing, which ties "the production of the cultural symbolic and communal identity to the determination of place and history" (126). Sheng-mei Ma is more explicit about the marketing value of using ethnic history and setting in fiction:

> Asian American raconteurs and the American market actively woo each other in appropriating alien(s') stories, the surest sign of ethnicity, as commodity. Indeed, a significant source of that ethnicity is Asian American writers' emplotment of immigrants' heart-wrenching and almost always "exotic" experiences. (11)

Although Sheng-mei Ma targets popular Asian American writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, his comments can also be applied to a writer like Sky Lee, whose novel is featured in university syllabi and who is considered one of the pioneers in Chinese Canadian writing. There is no denying that *Disappearing Moon Cafe* is a ground-breaking work, and that it deserves the attention it receives from both the academic community and the mainstream reading public. Nonetheless, it is useful, in analysing *Disappearing Moon Cafe,* to locate the Chinese immigrant experiences featured in Sky Lee's novel historically, in order to avoid wallowing in nostalgic recapitulation of what the white community has done to the Chinese, instead of actively accepting the Chinese now living in Canada. This process of contextualization may also discourage any desire to homogenize the Chinese immigrants of several generations and from different countries as one single ethnic group. After all, the Chinese immigrant culture featured in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* may be quite alien to recent immigrants. I hope to make this difference between Chinese immigrant history of the 1910s and that of the 1990s clearer in the latter part of the essay.

Sky Lee's saga of tough first-generation immigrants (Wong Gwei Chang, Lee Mui Lan), of second- and third-generation victims (Fong Mei, Suzanne) and, finally, of an enlightened fourth generation (Kae) provides a complex narrative of family intrigue. For the most part unattractive, vindictive, superstitious, and sometimes physically repulsive, the main Chinese characters in the novel are victims of racial prejudice, but they in turn also victimize those who are weak among them. Although some events in the novel take place in China and Hong Kong, the most vivid and detailed scenes are

those confined within Chinatown, Vancouver, where the Disappearing Moon Cafe is located.

One of the most realistically written scenes in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* is set in a darkened room reminiscent of the smoke-filled den in Rohmer's Limehouse district. A group of Chinese men gather to find a scapegoat for a particularly notorious crime involving the murder of a white woman in the 1920s. The clannish meeting takes place in the Chinese Benevolent Association Building. Traditionally, Chinese associations were formed as a network of assistance for new immigrants, and the Chinese Benevolent Association had the responsibility "to serve the needs of the adult male Chinese" who made up the bulk of the community (Bernard Wong 13-23). But outsiders to Chinese kinship structure and dialect networks might also link these associations with images of illegal activities and gang warfare. When Sky Lee chooses the Benevolent Association, the harrowing and objectionable process of finding a scapegoat as a setting for the novel is reinforcing the prejudice that businesses in Chinatown are mere fronts for criminal organizations.

The main room of the association is described as filled with Chinese furniture that has been coldly and formally arranged. Below this meeting room is a floor called the cheater-floor, which houses gamblers and tax-evaders. Thus, fiction affirms public prejudice. As Anderson's historical study of Vancouver's Chinatown shows, "the 'heathen Chinee' was known for inveterate gambling. Successive officers of the city police certainly accepted the label, and they pursued Chinatown's gambling vigorously" until the harassment of the Chinese was too obvious to ignore (101). The meeting in the novel is limited to men, and it is convened to try and force a confession out of the houseboy alleged to be involved with the murdered woman. So far, all images are negative: patriarchal, paranoid, potentially violent, illegal and, as the scene develops, deeply misogynistic. When the young man reacts indifferently to the lewd accusation that he has been "sniffing after white women's asses" (Sky Lee 76), the older men begin to torture him. The Chinese characters in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* are certainly not silent, but the language is a string of obscenity. The accused is addressed as "sonovabitch" or "dead boy-bitch." The possible sexual relationship between him and the white woman is described as "a rotten fish matched with a stinky shrimp" (76), a vulgar reference to the male and female private parts; and when the patriarch tries to call the violent and excited men to order, he chides them

as "mangy dogs sniffing after the stink of a dirty she-bag" (77). The Chinese in this scene are portrayed as men obsessed with fornication who need to verbalize this obsession abusively.

These men, who are respected members of the Chinese community, are described in negative stereotypical terms: Chinese men are crude, they are mere peasants, they may indulge in sexual perversions. Although *Disappearing Moon Cafe* addresses racism against the Chinese in Vancouver and Canada in the first half of the twentieth century, the novel also feeds off the stereotypes created by this racism. Thus, Sky Lee's Chinese men fit a pattern established by western writers like Somerset Maugham and films like Polanski's *Chinatown.* In these works, Chinese men are cast as houseboys (though they are middle-aged) or gardeners. Unlike the vociferous men in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, these domestic males are often silent unless spoken to, but in their silence lurks treachery. The reduction of the Chinese man into a silent and docile object serves two purposes: it neutralizes his sexual presence so that the threat of Chinese contamination is diminished; his silence also enhances the impression that he belongs to a secretive race (Robert Lee 97-105). But when the Chinese man's anger is aroused, he can become frighteningly violent, a response depicted in numerous gangsters' films. The obsession with obscenity in Sky Lee's torture scene also highlights the allegation that sexual vice flourished in Chinatown: "In 1919, the Women and Girls Protection Act had been passed by the BC legislature outlawing white women's employment on Oriental restaurant premises." After some amendments to the act, it was left to the chief of municipal police to decide "in which places it was unsuitable for women to be employed. The legal path was thereby cleared for any such officer to wield old conceptions of the 'lascivious Oriental'" (Anderson 159).

Sky Lee's negative stereotypes are not confined to the bullying merchants and clan patriarchs in the benevolent associations. Ting An, the illegitimate son of Wong Gwei Chang, who eventually commits adultery with his sister-in-law, is yet another ineffectual man. In another scene of male gathering, Sky Lee introduces the reader to the oft-mentioned Chinese vice of gambling. First, Ting An goes to a theatre to meet his friends:

> Ting An ducked into the back door of a blood-coloured brick building on the corner of Pender and Columbia. Inside the lobby, he walked past a little box office, unmanned and unlit. . . . Ting An pushed one back, and the door opened just enough for him to slide into a darkened theatre. (104)

Again, the rhetoric in this passage has uncomfortable echoes. In Rohmer's *The Insidious Dr. Fu-Manchu*, the owner of an opium den "dived behind the dirty curtain" and "shuffled" off silently while another "Chinaman" with "small, oblique eyes" and "a coiled pigtail . . . [crept] nearer, nearer, silently, bent and peering" (33-4). In Sky Lee's narrative, the Chinese ducks and slides in an environment that is "unmanned" and "unlit." The predominant impression created by the diction in both works is that of stealth, deceit, and darkness. Later that evening, Ting An and his friends gamble and drink at the Lucky Money Home Club:

> Whooping and hollering from the next table caught his attention, signalling a potential win. . . . He looked over at the unshaven faces focussed exclusively on their chips. There was blind lunacy in their eyes, like the full moon reflected in a wine bowl. Greasy hair snapped back only when the length of it threatened the vision of both eyes. These gamblers might have been there for days; shirts almost shredding off their backs, flies carelessly left undone after a piss, suspenders dangling. Dirty plates strewn about; they had guzzled their food without missing a turn. (109)

Apparently without a trace of irony, Sky Lee recreates Chinatown as a gambling den and Chinese men as filthy, fanatical gamblers lacking refinement. They whoop and holler. Their faces are unshaven and their hair unwashed. Like animals, they guzzle their food. As a Chinese Canadian reader, I baulk at these scenes and these stereotypical representations, and as a teacher, I feel the need to explain to my students that these characters are not at all representative of Chinese Canadians then or now.

These representations cannot be interpreted as purely formal conventions, since "whether intended or not, [representations] are activities through which objects or subjects take on both meaning and the relationships" inherent in all forms of interpretation (David Li 180). Furthermore, if Sky Lee and other ethnic writers have the power to give voice to ethnic identities, then they cannot "ignore his or her inevitable social function or fundamental relatedness with the world outside the text—that is, the people who read and to whom the writer refers" (181). Another question raised by a critical reading of Sky Lee's Chinese characters and Chinatown is: "[W]here are we to find and how are we to imagine a social space capable of reaffirming and reproducing the ever-changing form of Asian American [and Canadian] knowledge?" (139). While *Disappearing Moon Cafe* provides a complex insight into the history of Chinese immigrant experiences in the

early decades of the twentieth century and the way their early hardship has shaped fourth- and fifth-generation Chinese Canadians, Sky Lee's Chinatown does not contribute to a nuanced awareness of current (or even past) Chinese Canadian immigrant culture.

FOB (Fresh Off the Boat)[9]

1980s and 90s Chinese immigrants differ from the fictional Wong Gwei Chang in terms of ethnic background, linguistic usage, and social class. Immigrant culture, like the geopolitical dynamics which affect it, does not remain static. The communist government in China forbade emigration after it came to power after the Second World War. Thus, the majority of Chinese immigrants to Canada between the 1950s and today have originated from Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, or Taiwan, instead of coming from the South China coastal villages which were the ancestral homes of many early immigrants. Chinese immigrants from Southeast Asia speak English, Putonghua, possibly Malay, and a Chinese dialect such as Hakka. Immigrants from Hong Kong speak English and Cantonese. Those from Taiwan speak Taiwanese, a dialect related to Putonghua, the official Chinese language. Linguistically, all of these languages are distinct. The new generations of immigrants, those arriving in 1980s and 1990s, settle in Canada with new expectations. Some come to invest, others to provide their children with a western education. Thus, their economic profiles are quite different from the Chinese labourers at the beginning of the century. Between 1883 and 1903, the majority of Chinese immigrants in Canada (72.5%) worked as servants (Peter Li 25). In contrast, immigrants in recent decades have had more diversified backgrounds, from middle-class families who establish businesses in retail stores to high-profile businessmen who invest in real estate. Unlike the ghettoized Chinese we find populating *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, these new immigrants are established throughout the metropolis and in the satellite suburbs. This decentralization in settlement patterns not only diminishes the function of Chinatown as an enclave for Chinese Canadians, but the many varied Chinese residential and business neighbourhoods also have changed the urban landscape and culture of cities like Vancouver. While Chinese movie houses have closed in Chinatown, Chinese movies are shown in East Vancouver and in Richmond, a suburb of Vancouver. Any cursory glance at the advertisements in the local Chinese newspapers such as *The Singtao Daily* would show that the majority of

Chinese restaurants bear Richmond, Metrotown, and New Westminster addresses, instead of a Chinatown address.

All these changes do not mean that stereotypical representations of Chinese have been eradicated. In Robert Kaplan's discussion of Vancouver in his influential book, *An Empire Wilderness* (1998), Hong Kong Chinese immigrants are singled out as an economic pillar of society, owing to "a real-estate bubble" (318) which they created by buying $2 billion worth of Vancouver real estate between the 1980s and 1990s. Treating Vancouver Chinese as an off-shoot of the west-coast Chinese-American community, Kaplan presents a simplistic view of Chinese culture in British Columbia and ignores the history of Chinese immigrants in Vancouver, the focus of *Disappearing Moon Cafe.* Kaplan also seems to be unaware of the diversity among Chinese immigrants who come from Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and China. He interprets the Chinese presence in Vancouver as a temporary one, implying that the Chinese investors bear no civic loyalty toward the city, that they are here merely to buy up land and provide their children with the opportunity for a Canadian education. While the chapter attributes the economic vibrancy of Vancouver and British Columbia to the Hong Kong Chinese, thus introducing a new image of Chinese immigrants which contrasts sharply with the beleaguered Chinese in Sky Lee's novel, it also contributes to a new stereotype, that of the real estate magnates who are not willing to put down roots in Vancouver, who are, in other words, not real Canadians.

In a more thorough study, *China Tide: The Hong Kong Exodus to Canada* (1989), Margaret Cannon wants to write a book "about the [Hong Kong] people themselves: about their values, ambitions, anxieties and customs; about the burden of tradition and history they carry, and the impact they are having on all of Canada's people" (15). Similar to Kaplan, however, Cannon centres on only one type of Chinese Canadian: the entrepreneurial Hong Kong Chinese. In Cannon's book, Hong Kong Chinese are well-off, buy properties, own businesses in Hong Kong and Canada, and are ambiguously portrayed as both dynamic and aggressive. Both Kaplan's and Cannon's writing highlights a problem implicit in representations of Chinese Canadian experience: certain social classes are singled out for analysis, usually for social and political reasons, while the increasing complexity of Chineseness and Chinese identity is ignored or simplified. In the past, illiterate and lower-class Chinese immigrants were lampooned in newspapers because these images seemed to justify the racial prejudice of the society. Today,

although Chinese immigrants' economic clout is generally admired, the investment class is also under critical scrutiny because it has the power to change the local culture. For instance, while Vancouver real estate has been benefiting from the influx of property buyers from East Asia, there have also been heated discussions of whether these new residents understand the 'indigenous' culture of areas which have been predominantly white, such as the Shaughnessy area in Vancouver.[10] Therefore, while stereotypes change from the Chinese laundry man to the Chinese business man, fictional and non-fictional representations still take the part for the whole.

The Persistence of Place

In *Immigrant Subjectivities in Asian America and Asian Diaspora Literatures*, Sheng-mei Ma concedes that ethnic Chinese writers might "deliberately employ the Orientalist view in order to debunk it," but they are also products of the West and they "frequently conceive of China in the Orientalist way" (25). This view of the ethnic writer can also be applied to third- or fourth-generation Chinese Canadian writers who were born in Canada, who have been immersed in the Canadian culture, who might not read or write the Chinese language, and whose link to Chinese culture and history in China, Taiwan or Hong Kong will necessarily be mediated.[11] As indicated by Rohmer, Sky Lee, and the last writer to be examined in this paper, Irene Lin-Chandler, an "Orientalist way" of conceiving China consists of exaggerated and stereotypical personal appearances, or the mixture of English, pidgin English and Chinese dialects, or the inclusion of sexual deviation, gambling, and drug trafficking as normal activities of the Chinese and Chinatown. These strategies inevitably perpetuate the general perception that the Chinese are not only different, but different in a negative way, from westerners.

In Lin-Chandler's *The Healing of Holly-Jean* (1995), Holly-Jean Ho is an Anglo Chinese investigator who works amongst the Chinese in London. The novel opens with an exchange between Holly-Jean and her mother, an exchange of generational and cultural conflicts made familiar by Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1975), Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), and Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe*. Holly-Jean's mother speaks a mixture of phonetically transliterated Hakkanese and ungrammatical English, such as "*Ai-yo*, you had a proper job . . . Why you quit—," at which point Holly-Jean cuts her off. Mrs. Ho then swears in gutter Hakkanese, denouncing all and sundry as "dog-fart neighbours" and a "copulating corner-

shop cow" (3). This scene, which condemns Mrs. Ho to pidgin English and scatological Hakkanese, magnifies the role of linguistic differences as an indicator of "the Oriental's alienness and at times degeneracy" (Ma 27).[12]

One of Holly-Jean's clients is a Mrs. Wang, whose daughter has run away after being sexually molested by her father. Unimpressed with western detection, Mrs. Wang boasts: "Word has gone out in the little Middle Kingdoms. . . . Inside our little Chinas, Su-ming would be safe. For everyone knows my family has *guanchi* with the *Ju Lyan Bang*" (85). What Wang is claiming here is a connection to a powerful gang. Wang continues: "We Han people have been over here for many, many generations, but this is not our country." The narrative goes on to explain what *Ju Lyan Bang*'s (Bamboo Union's) activities are:

> Wherever there were Chinatowns, there also lurked the virus known as the Bamboo Union.
>
> Twin fronts. Criminal: drugs, prostitution, gambling, bonded labour, illegal migration, and extortion from the miasma of Chinese commerce. Legit: brand-name market leaders in insurance, entertainment . . . . (89)

In an eerie echo of Sax Rohmer, Lin-Chandler goes on to describe the secret societies' ambition to achieve world domination through economic power and the simple force of demographic numbers: "the Han people would come to dominate the world, as was writ in their five-thousand-year history" (90). This portrayal of Chinese overseas is utter nonsense. But it is hard to dismiss the book, since it has wide circulation among, and thus influence on, readers of detective fiction. While Rohmer's orientalist depictions of the Chinese can be dimissed as symptomatic of his time, stereotypical representations of Chinese in *The Healing of Holly-Jean,* which was published in 1995, are even more disturbing for two reasons. The negative portrayals are authenticated by an insider, since the writer is an ethnic Chinese. The image of the criminal Chinese infiltrating the West adds life to any anti-Asian immigration sentiment at a time when many Hong Kong Chinese and Taiwanese have been trying to emigrate because of the unsettled political relationships between their countries and China. With Lin-Chandler's secret societies in London's Chinatown plotting to take over the world, various Chinese characters conversing in broken English or Chinese dialects, and with sexual depravity as a subplot, representations of Chinese and Chinese neighbourhoods have come full circle from Fu-Manchu to Holly-Jean. Chinese communities remain closed to outsiders; Chinese like Mrs.

Ho and Wang are unwilling to acculturate; and to westerners, the Chinese still spread disease like a virus.

Unlike Rohmer, whose clear objective is to paint the Chinese as yellow devils, the ethnic writer must decide "whether to reconstruct their history in a favourable light that elevates them in the eyes of others, or in a way that portrays them as victims [of racial discrimination]" (David Li 137). The figures of Kae in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and Holly-Jean in *The Healing of Holly-Jean* can be seen as the writers' attempts to show that the Chinese are intelligent and attractive human beings. But both Sky Lee and Lin-Chandler further complicate the problematic position of an ethnic Chinese representing Chinese people living in a western culture when they orientalize their Chinese characters. As quoted previously, an ethnic writer might "employ the Orientalist view in order to debunk it" (Ma 25), which is Fred Wah's strategy in *Diamond Grill,* where Wah ironizes racist depictions of the Chinese in order to undermine these very stereotypes. An ethnic writer may also "employ the Orientalist view" because, as Ma puts it bluntly, ethnicity is "in." Whatever the reason, the lure of harnessing the metonymic power of Chinatown in fiction and in film remains overwhelmingly attractive to ethnic and non-ethnic writers alike. A criminal Chinatown is obviously still an easily identifiable and marketable setting, since both fiction and film continue to feature it, among them S.J. Rozan's detective novel *China Trade* (1994) and its sequels and James Foley's *The Corruptor* (1999), the latest Hollywood film about a white detective trying to change the insidious ways of Chinatown in New York.

This paper is not advocating a boycott of books and films about Chinatown. Nor am I suggesting that ethnic Chinese writers should stop writing about their Canadian experience. I also believe that more people should (critically) read the Fu-Manchu series, because contemporary readers of ethnic writing need to be acquainted with the literary history of the stereotypical criminal Chinese operating in Chinatown. However, I do suggest that writing by and on Chinese Canadians should be read contextually so as not to elide the differences between various types of backgrounds. Although recent increases in Chinese immigration and changes in student demographics (a process which Margaret Cannon in an alarmist way calls the "China Tide") have led to more public and academic attention to ethnic Chinese writers, it is not enough to put *Disappearing Moon Cafe* on the syllabus as a way to understand Chinese immigrant culture. Nor is it sufficient

to use *Disappearing Moon Cafe* as a tool to teach students about the Chinese or the 1990s immigrant culture. As Ma points out, immigrant ethnic writers have concerns different from American-born ethnic writers and tend to address different issues. I see an example of this divergence between works by Canadian-born ethnic writers and those by immigrant writers in Ying Chen's *Ingratitude* (1998). It is a refreshingly original novel by a Chinese writer who came to Canada in 1989. Here the reader will not find any images of Chinatown, opium-smoking Chinese, or members of the *tongs* lurking in the pages. The novel deals with family tension and emotional conflict in ways that are unencumbered by a history of stereotypes about the Chinese, and not interested in presenting easily recognizable locations and plotlines. Indeed, *Ingratitude* holds the promise of a significant new development in Chinese Canadian writing.

NOTES

1 There are, of course, many Chinese native milieus. The Hong Kong and some Taiwan Chinese come from urban environments while mainland Chinese are less familiar with these, since the People's Republic of China is still undergoing various processes of modernization. I use the plural "Chinese cultures" to indicate the differences amongst the Hong Kong Chinese, Taiwanese Chinese, the Chinese of the People's Republic of China, and other overseas Chinese.

2 On the formation of the ethnic canon, see David Leiwei Li and Ma. For most non-specialist readers, "knowledge" about Chinese cultures is readily accessible through popular fiction such as Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, whose superficial treatment of Chinese immigrant culture is given prolonged life through its filmed version.

3 On a recent visit to Reykjavik, Iceland, I found a Fu-Manchu Restaurant in the telephone directory.

4 In July and August, 1999, when three boatloads of illegal Chinese migrants reached the west coast of Vancouver, the media obsessively concentrated on the subject. As one reporter points out, this alleged *déluge* of newcomers consisted of "fewer than 450 migrants" (Mulgrew "Why").

5 The term "yellow peril" came originally from the German term "die gelbe Gefahr," used by Kaiser Wilhelm II to encourage his army to take over territories in China at the end of the nineteenth century. See Gollwitzer.

6 An example of Chinese immigrants analysing their roles as Canadians is the documentary *Beyond Golden Mountain.*

7 For further examples of current representations of Chinatown, see Jan Lin.

8 See Adas on western attitudes towards China as a backward culture. Riis's *How The Other Half Lives* provides another example of views of Chinese at the turn of the century.

9 The term is borrowed from Hwang's play, *FOB.* The term FOB (= Fresh Off the Boat) is, of course, a pun on FOB (= Freight On Board), a common shipping term.

10 On the racial politics of real estate in Vancouver, see Cavell and Mitchell. Cannon also touches on this issue.

11 Sky Lee tells an interviewer that her knowledge of Chinatown was based on her childhood in Port Alberni and neighbouring Comox, both small towns on Vancouver Island. See Michele Wong.

12 According to some critics, the term "pidgin" does not mean broken English, nor should it be used pejoratively. See Lang.

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Jen Lam

my 1st born will be named Nina

that night we were supposed to go to your
brother's for dinner but
we got stuck in that traffic jam
on the 2nd Narrows bridge.
some big rig had turned over
& was blocking all the lanes.
so we sat there listening to Nina Simone singing
nobody's fault but mine
nobody's fault but mine
if i died & my soul is lost
it's nobody's fault but mine.
I simply wanted to reach over
& unsnap your seatbelt.
to uproot your fists from the steering wheel
& plant your hands into my shallow breasts
to untangle your mouth from that
scowl & release your lips
like a pack of wild dogs onto my neck.
I wanted to drag you out by your hair onto
the bird shit armoured hood of the car
& plop pigeon love
onto the windshields of minivans shiny with family values
with Nina grinding her soul into another ashtray
& the traffic stewing in its own juices
soaking in the frustration of a workday
prolonged by that bloody rig lying on its side like
a wounded mammoth.

instead
I got out of the car
& headed for the railing
& I seriously thought about climbing up
& jumping off

just to avoid having to sit
through another evening of listening to your
brother talk about his golf game
when this jogger came by & he pointed
to the sunset & said,
"Ain't it beautiful.
Reminds me of a woman
Her legs spread open."
before jogging away.

funny
it sounded quite lovely
at the time
coming from him.

the traffic was starting to move.
cars started honking at you
you started yelling at me to get back into the car
& I turned
& ran after the jogger
simply because
it's not everyday that
I get to meet a suicide
in the shape of a haiku.

Fiona Lam

Lament of the Bowl

I

Living separately, we're
stacked by category.
I'm up high behind doors,
you're below, slotted
beside others in a tangled embrace,
rolling out, rolling in,
both of us waiting in darkness
for another performance
of the same rite.

When we meet,
a fleshless sound, then
someone else must act.

Lying together like this,
what's the point?

You always take,
always scrape for more. For me,

stillness—
marking loss.

II

At the bottom
of emptiness,
sorrow.

All around, all sides
a belly-want,
concave and glossy:
:
to be filled
with something warm
that will stay.

In-Between Souls

Wayson Choy
Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Childhood.
Viking n.p.

Reviewed by Eva-Marie Kröller

Trying to decipher the print and pictures in his kindergarten books, Choy Way Sun decides that the copyright notices are magic formulae akin to the auspicious words on Chinese New Year banners, and that rubbing them will make his "deepest wishes come true." If one of these wishes was to write nothing but exceptional books one day, then it has become abundantly true, for Choy's memoir of his childhood in Vancouver's Chinatown is every bit as accomplished as *The Jade Peony*. In fact, the two are companion texts, and the memoir makes clear just how deeply rooted in Choy's personal experience the novel is. However, the interest of *Paper Shadows* by no means exhausts itself in the autobiographical clues it provides to *The Jade Peony*, nor does this memoir imitate the tactics of other best-selling authors who simply wish to repeat their earlier success by covering similar ground. On the contrary, *Paper Shadows* is a magnificent book in its own right, and its distinctive voice represents a significant contribution to Asian Canadian writing.

The question of voice is central to both books. While *The Jade Peony* interweaves the narratives of three fictional children, *Paper Shadows* focuses on one, Wayson Choy himself, who reminisces about his Chinatown childhood following the accidental discovery that his life has more versions than he had previously realized. Shortly after the launch of *The Jade Peony*, a woman previously unknown to him informed the 57-year-old Choy that he was adopted. He finds to his surprise that "the truth of my adoption was in fact known by . . . many relatives, yet no one broke the news to me," and he initiates a search for both his adopted and biological parents' past and his own place in it. The identity of his biological parents remains shadowy and his affection for his adopted parents undisturbed, but, as everyone around him insists, the dead are as present as the living in a world where creaking doors and unaccountably wilting trees announce the ancestors' rustling presence.

The discovery of his adoption may have been a startling outcome of the publication of his first novel, but Choy's life-story makes that recent episode sound like a logical sequel to his existence as an "in-between soul." It is surely no coincidence that he has particular difficulty, as a young student, to remember the calligraphy for the word "I," "a killer ideogram, drawn with seven breathtaking strokes. One *upward-dash*; two long, opposite-facing curves-with-hooks; and three *criss-crosses*—or was that two *dashes* and three *criss-crosses*?" As a child, he is forever torn in several directions at once. Thus his fascination with Cantonese opera and its costumes is paralleled by an infatuation with cowboy movies; he loves opera dolls as much as he

does Disney's Dopey, and he is as conversant in Chinese legends as he is in Andersen's fairy-tales. One virtuoso scene shows Way Sun reading in "Chinglish" from his picture-book to his mother who conceals her laughter at his "*Gee*-Piggy *gong-wah*, oink! oink!" in "sudden fit[s] of strange coughing."

However, while for some time Way Sun seems to sample the best of two worlds, English soon wins the day. He believes English to be "more interesting," begins to find Cantonese opera "ridiculous," and embarrasses his family by failing Chinese school but thriving under the tutelage of his English teachers. (In another instance of the importance of "voice," one of them, a mild-mannered lady whose voice he has never known to rise above a whisper, sends a group of bullies scuttling with a bellowed "YOU BOYS GO HOME!") Way Sun's parents themselves, although they urge their son to honour his roots, have "in-between souls." Most of the time, their child goes by the name Sonny, after Al Jolson's "Sonny Boy."

Although Choy critically describes his young self as a "banana . . . yellow on the outside and white on the inside," the book displays a remarkably warm-hearted humour in evoking Way Sun's plight. The pages describing his visits to the opera with his mother and her lady-friends are among the finest and coincidentally an homage to Choy's biological father, an opera actor. "I loved the life that blossomed all over the auditorium, as if it were a busy village square," Choy reminisces, but he also determinedly tackles the "restricted" perspective of a bored three-year-old who entertains himself through a long aria by quietly singing "Old Macdonald Had a Farm" in his mother's lap, and concludes that the "lovesick Princess [looked] very sorry that she had wailed so long . . . Everyone clapped to see [her] leave." Occasionally, the disturbing nature of an incident requires that the child's limited understanding is complemented more emphatically with the adult narrator's perspective. His cousin Garton's near-murder at the hands of a pedophile acquires a mature context this way, as does Wayson's father's determination to stay with his family despite a cooling relationship with his wife. In other words, the humour in *Paper Shadows* tempers but does not erase the author's acute observation of the racism, brutality, and personal anguish that existed all around the boy. This book does not depict a sugar-coated idyll.

Way Sun is an endearing child who looks invariably angelic (and not all that different from the grown-up Choy) in the numerous family photographs provided. Together with the skillful handling of a layered perspective, however, Sonny's temperament prevents this narrative from producing an unduly idealized vision of childhood. He is "tiger-spirited," a disposition he has inherited (or so he thinks) from his father who, in one memorable scene, demolishes the sitting-room while his wife and child barricade themselves upstairs. Indulged and expressive, Way Sun is not yet muffled by the elaborate social etiquette of Chinese culture the exchanges of which have too often been deployed, by Caucasian and emigrant Chinese writers alike, as markers of exoticism. Way Sun and his parents' outbursts are refreshing, but still remain culturally specific: "Like a Chinese orchestra, their wailing and my sobbing see-sawed back and forth," the whole accompanied by flamboyant physical action.

Paper Shadows may have only one narrator, but it offers in fact a whole chorus of voices, giving equal time to the dead and the living. If a jade peony was an apt metaphor for the conflicts depicted in Choy's novel, then the leitmotif in this memoir is the "endless knot," the image of which prefaces each one of the four sections: "All lives are ten *times* ten thousand secrets . . . Whose life, I wonder, is not an endless knot?"

Unrelenting Genealogies

Takashi Fujitani
Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan. U of California P n.p.

Yoshiko Uchida
Picture Bride. U of Washington P $14.95

Gerry Shikatani
Lake and Other Stories. Mercury $14.50

Reviewed by Marilyn Iwama

Because the first wave of immigration to North America from Japan occurred during the Meiji era (1868-1912), the persistence of Meiji culture is a familiar theme among writers of Japanese ancestry. Like the visitation of parents' habits on their children, a sense of Meiji Japan pervades these three books.

In *Splendid Monarchy,* Takashi Fujitani joins the interdisciplinary chorus currently challenging the once popular notion that Meiji cultural practice was an exclusively and essentially Japanese antiquity. Fujitani argues painstakingly that Meiji academics acted with government and military officials consciously to reconstitute a fragmented assortment of folk into a homogeneous nation of internationally minded Japanese citizens. As a focus for his genealogy, Fujitani chooses "the instant of historical rupture" at which the office of Emperor emerged in modern Japan.

Fujitani organizes his material around ritual and "the material sign on the physical landscape," that is, the explosive erection of physical monuments, traces of the popular imperial tour, and the transfer of Japan's capital from Kyoto to Tokyo. He considers both the construction of imperial ceremonies and their reception among the nascent Japanese. Fujitani's exhaustive research also details numerous ways in which the designers of the emperor's dress, deportment, and duties consciously borrowed from contemporary practices in North America and Western Europe.

Splendid Monarchy is an archival cornucopia and a treat for readers who lack Japanese language skills. A liberal use of postcards, woodblock prints, and photographs of the day complements Fujitani's attention to the visual aspect of pageantry. He draws heavily on Japanese language sources, including Meiji newspapers, government memoranda, and the Imperial archives. At times, his argument even founders in this archival detail, as in his discussion of the Privy Council debate over moving the capital, or simply in excessively long quotations.

A more serious problem in *Splendid Monarchy* is that it enthusiastically troubles notions of origin and essence while leaving specifics of gender, class, and region intact. This oversight is, in part, a function of organization. When Fujitani arrives at these significant intersections, he seems to have run out of steam. Fujitani takes pains to portray the normative aspect of imperial ritual, yet accepts that boisterous local festivals are "undisciplined, unself-conscious, and disorderly." In several places, Fujitani treats only fleetingly the persistence of an "untouchable" class (the Burakumin) in this new democracy, and the imperial neglect of Okinawa. Similarly, Fujitani discusses the "masculinization" of the Meiji emperor without adequately addressing the western norms of this gender scheme.

In a novel fully concerned with gender in Meiji times, Toshiko Uchida introduces one Meiji woman, Hana Omiya, who arrives in North America bequeathed to a man she has yet to meet. Uchida's story follows the historical trail common to other "picture bride" accounts, from arrival at the dock in San Francisco, through the process of "becoming American," culminating in that apogee of the assimilation project, the internment camps of the Second Word War. Distinctive to *Picture Bride* is its insistence on the adventurousness and independence of these early pioneering women and on

their potential for success in North America, apart from the men who first drew them there.

This is not, however, a revolutionary tale of subversion by atypical women. Although well-educated and determined, Hana exchanges a future of back-breaking toil in a Japanese rice field for an equally demanding lifetime of making Taro Takeda happy. She soon discovers that the latter course forces her to submerge desire in duty and extracts a heavy price for any transgression. So dystopic is this reality that Hana and her free-spirited friend, Kiku, are only released by the deaths of their husbands.

In this respect, *Picture Bride* demonstrates the ineluctable force of Meiji ideology. First generation Japanese North Americans, or Issei, were formed within this social framework. However quickly that culture was transformed (and in part *because* it was), as a group the Issei found its precepts viable and comforting. From Uchida's Nisei, or second-generation, perspective, the ponderous Meiji culture may have helped Issei endure internment, but it could neither serve the next generation nor survive the "new" American reality. Just as representations of Meiji nationalism erased the heterogeneous realities that contested it, "Japanese American" culture displaced Meiji. Rebellious daughters run off and marry white men, while sons take up arms to fight their parents' homeland, and powerful Americans murder the epitome of Meiji patriarchy, Issei husbands.

I stress "Uchida's perspective" because the author is so present in this text. Uchida sprinkles autobiographical history throughout *Picture Bride*, repeatedly invoking the story of her family's internment in *Desert Exile*, and the autobiography she wrote for children, *The Invisible Thread*. Rewriting parts of a life in this way beguiles the reader with "evidence" of the inside story that may foreclose other tellings. In the case of *Picture Bride*, Uchida's incorporation of nostalgia and personal experience attenuates the authority of her account, leaving less room for the messy complexities of Japanese American society.

Gerry Shikatani takes on this matter of societal complexity with zeal and beauty. The word "beauty" is a challenge: its use may gloss over discomfiting political content or create a gap where politics might have been. In Shikatani's case, at least in *Lake and Other Stories*, the beauty of the text invites me to look politics full in the face: "For here I taste the salt now, over and over, which has permeated the thick dark red strips of salmon roe, the su-zu-ko, into the firm red flesh of the fish, 'shio salmon, shio salmon' we called it at home, the silver light of the dark Skeena. For here, I taste salt which is memory . . . ." Yet in the disruptive *Lake*, the political does not preclude beauty, even in a memory of the Cuban missile crisis, recalled in "the thin smell of sliced cucumbers, the hot steam of rice, and the rich oily smell of frying fish trailing down the long hallway of their house . . . ." Shikatani is a poet. I expect *Lake* to be poetic. Perhaps for the same reason I did not expect *Lake* to be successful as a collection of stories. I suspect it is Shikatani's concern with history—the presence of history—and with the guiltiness of language that enables him to move between the genres without losing his audience.

Years back, when one of Shikatani's narrators was compelled by the presence of a grandmother in the ancient task of washing rice ("Japanese Rice"), the poet clearly knew what it meant to be choked with absence, as his narrator is in the story "B"—"thick with summer, memory and history." Shikatani manages his genealogy by joining together the voices that refuse separation in a series of histories that demand connection. What results is a family history no more separable than dots on a map, no less separable than names.

It is this matter of names that explains the "guiltiness" of language. This linguistic

place where identity might appear individually is the very spot Shikatani chooses to emphasize its interrelation: "When she stands there in my eye she is Sue and she is also Hana her mother, is sable and goat brush and wet tidal sand, the aureole contours of a northern sky . . . ." And so the Sansei writer who might appear most "Canadian" offers a text replete with social constructions that have been named the most "Japanese": interrelated subjectivity, the absence of dualism, the connection of mind and body. And each of these books, bristling with history, cuts another trail through the comfortingly, manifestly similar.

Sunflowers and Apples

Teddy Jam
The Stoneboat. Pictures by Ange Zhang. Groundwood $15.95.

Andrea Spalding
Me and Mr. Mah. Illustrated by Janet Wilson. Orca $17.95.

Reviewed by Eva-Marie Kröller

Both of these fine children's books deal with a young boy's relationship with an older neighbour: Ian finds comfort in his friendship with the elderly Mr. Mah when his parents break up, and the young farmboy in Jam's book softens the heart of a farmer whose greed threatens the existence of the child's own family.

In *Me and Mr. Mah* the growing proximity between boy and man is beautifully captured in the parallel narratives of text and image. The barren backyard of his mother's new home echoes Ian's own feelings of exile from the prairies where he left his father, and the fence that separates him from Mr. Mah's lush garden next door is at first a barricade that keeps him from the kindness next door. A packet of sunflower seeds tucked by Mr. Mah in the fence is a first ouverture to a friendship during which Ian's own garden and memories begin to blossom alongside the old man's. In a particularly stunning picture spread across two pages, the boy and the old man share tea, with the landscapes of a Chinese rice-paddy and a prairie wheat-field seamlessly blending into each other across a golden background. Mr. Mah teaches Ian about Chinese vegetables, and he takes him on outings to the Chinese cemetery (a flower-filled wilderness overlooking the ocean) and to Chinatown, but although the pictures tend to be idyllic and colourful, they do not depict an exotic ghetto. Wilson is careful to include an inline-skater among the customers checking out the produce in Chinatown, and there are black and Caucasian faces among the Asians.

In return for Mr. Mah's grandfatherly attention, Ian goes to great lengths to find him in a home when the old man becomes disabled. An exchange of special boxes, each a miniature store-house of memories, between the two makes the plot a little contrived, but children may enjoy the mystery element introduced by the complication.

While Ian is rendered painfully powerless by his parents' breakup, the young boy in *The Stoneboat* not only lives in an intact home but also capably interacts with an environment that he clearly knows inside out: he goes fishing with his brother, rescues a man from drowning, helps remove rocks from a field at night, and actively watches over his family's welfare when their livelihood is threatened. The pictures in this book do not display the lush colours that characterize Wilson's illustrations. Instead, Ange Zhang (a former designer at the Beijing Opera) has furnished images in which dark colours prevail, occasionally lightened by the pale blue and pink of an early morning prairie sky or the steely blue and white of a foaming creek. Yet, although perhaps a little frightening to young children, these images are full of movement and energy that are expressed not only in the characters' activities but also in the

variety of perspectives that Zhang brings to his illustrations. Mr. Richard ("Ree-shard," as the boy clarifies the pronunciation) is larger-than-life, and Zhang depicts him in midstream, two pitchforks raised to impale catfish as if he were a "vengeful horrible god preparing for a sacrifice," before he almost drowns. Elsewhere, we see him from below as a child looking up to him might see him, his wild face illuminated by his pipe, his hand grossly enlarged. The difficult process of Mr. Richard's conversion to gratitude and compassion parallels his and the boy's joint effort to remove rocks from Mr. Richard's field and, with the help of a stoneboat, to pitch them over the fence. Mr. Richard takes his time to soften, although his offer of an apple along the way is a good sign.

The only nagging concern I had when reading these splendid picture-books had to do with the mothers whose relative absence will need some explaining. But an affectionate prairie father who kisses his capable boy, then "lift[s him]up on his shoulder and [carries him] up to bed the way he used to when [he] was little" is already a lot to be thankful for.

A Mediated/Meditatory/ Mediating Life

Roy Kiyooka, and Daphne Marlatt, ed.
Mothertalk: Life Stories of Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka.
NeWest $16.95

Roy Kiyooka, and Roy Miki, ed.
Pacific Windows: Collected Poems of Roy K. Kiyooka. Talonbooks $29.95

Reviewed by Sneja Gunew

> "The pulse of an English . . . not my mother tongue"

The juxtaposition of Roy Kiyooka's *Mothertalk: Life Stories of Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka*, edited by Daphne Marlatt, and *Pacific Windows: Collected Poems of Roy K. Kiyooka*, edited by Roy Miki, exudes an almost unbearable poignancy.

Paradoxically, perhaps, the mediated nature of each text heightens rather than dilutes this effect; in the case of *Pacific Windows* there is the expected mediation of a dedicated editor whose commitment is modestly expressed in an afterword; in the case of *Mothertalk* the mediation doubles and trebles. In the first instance *Mothertalk* evokes the relatively traditional memoir of a parent by a child, but in this case the parent outlives the child, and the text is in turn edited by a former companion. Further ramifications are created by the fact that the initial interviews were conducted via a translator since the son did not have easy access to his mother's tongue. Marlatt, in turn, well-known for her own nuanced writings on relations among women—including those between mothers and daughters—has gracefully taken on the task of ordering this monologue which is also, in its own right, her homage to her late friend, Roy Kiyooka. In some respects she inserts his life within the mother's text, both in the structuring of these memoirs and in the introduction and appendices, the latter comprising a brief interview with Kiyooka's father and a talk and letter by Kiyooka himself by way of autobiographically contextualising the familial relationships.

For Kiyooka, as this book demonstrates, his mother represented his access to an imagined ethnicity, that of being Japanese as well as Japanese-Canadian at a certain fraught historical juncture: "She and she alone reminds me of my Japanese self by talking to me before I even had the thot of learning anything . . . So that it is that I find myself going home to keep in touch with my mother's tongue and, it must be, the ghost of my father's silences." But indeed fathers do figure prominently in this text. Mary's strongest affiliations, as presented here, are, arguably, to her own father, that last scion of an impoverished samurai fam-

ily who educated his daughter in the particular form of *kendo* swordsmanship (*Iai*) of which he was the last acknowledged master. The other dominant note is Mary's own nostalgia, not for some diffused 'Japan' but for a very specific place—Tosa, conjured up in all its idiosyncracies through the cast of characters which populated her early life. While the stringencies of an arranged marriage and life in Canada are luminously presented as well—enhanced by their fragmented nature because it allows the reader's imagination to enter the text—the defining focus remains Tosa and Mary's overwhelming desire to return.

Pacific Windows represents mediation of a different kind. Miki's refrain is that what began as a collaborative venture was marked at the beginning by his anxieties as an editor to arrest Kiyooka's irrepressible impulse to keep revising his work. But because rewriting was also a manifestation of the living spirit creatively reaching outward into mutability, the death of the poet makes the editor's life easier and the friend's loss palpable. Whereas *Mothertalk* subdues the various voices and interpreters under the one unmistakable and powerful voice of Mary Kiyooka, the collected poetry of Roy Kiyooka, paradoxically, diffuses the voice of one poet into a community of characters and places. His life touched many people and testified to a particular cultural period that, among other elements, illustrated a country coming to terms with its own diversity and hybridity. While the point of view remains uniquely that of the artist-poet, it succeeds in connecting many different places and people. Whether these be the father-son relationship which comes through *Wheels*, a trip across Japan (which in a sense balances the father's ghostly absence in *Mothertalk*) or the meditations on the British painter Stanley Spenser's letters to his wife resulting in the 'found poems' of *Nevertheless Those Eyes*, communal relations and communities retain their specific tonalities while at the same time suggesting a greater whole. The details of difference are suggested in the meditations which bridge a visit to Hiroshima and the internment of Canadians of Japanese descent: "I never saw the 'yellow peril' in myself (Mackenzie King did)." This from a Canadian whose formal education ended with the bombing of Pearl Harbour. ("Dear Lucy Fumi," Appendix 3 in *Mothertalk*).

In *Pear Tree Pomes*, dedicated to Marlatt, Kiyooka registers his own mourning for a relationship that did not take the traditional form of marriage, but rescues from it in the process a different and complex friendship. This ability to face life's betrayals while at the same time finding something to move the spirit onward is a mark of all these poems—compellingly registering the human while resisting critical analysis. Once one begins to pin these poems down, the attempt to plot the subtle balance between the emotional appeal and the aesthetic achievement remains elusive. The final section, *Pacific Windows*, brings us full circle in its depiction of the aging son and the frail mother poring over old photographs (an interesting variation on Roland Barthes's classic text, *Camera Lucida*, of a son mourning his mother embedded in a mediation on photography): "Each summer they peeled away layers of dross and became more and more their essential selves; even their roles as a mother and a son had portent." That portent, of course, acquires an unexpected meaning when one juxtaposes Kiyooka's two books. These collected poems parallel a comparable achievement in Kiyooka's classic *Transcanada Letters* (1975) in which a period and, once again, Kiyooka's unique perspective thread the country together in spite of all its bewildering variety. It may be that with the appearance of both these texts and their consolidation of Kiyooka's legacy we may hope for the reprinting of *Transcanada Letters* as well.

Between Borders

K.S. Maniam
Haunting the Tiger: Contemporary Stories from Malaysia. Skoob Books P £6.99

Yuen-Fong Woon
The Excluded Wife. McGill-Queen's U P $29.95

Reviewed by Vijay Devadas

How to live between borders, how to live at the edges of two contradictory sites of enunciation, how indeed to frame the migrant's sense of self, are the messages that come across from both Maniam and Woon in their narratives of the respective conditions of the Indian Malaysian and Chinese Canadian communities. Although the historical exigencies of the two diasporas differ, these allegories have one thing in common; they take us to the paradox of migrancy, the condition of being diasporic, by opening up an*other* discursive space that is potentially disruptive, insofar as this voice produces a diasporic voice from within the panoramic gaze of the nation.

I begin with Maniam's short stories which centre on the Indian diaspora in Malaysia and attempt to represent the inherent problem of negotiating a multicultural cultural politics that governs the ways in which a collective sense of Malaysianness may be constructed. For Maniam, these stories attempt to represent the "ignored realities" of migrant awareness and to mobilize an understanding of who migrants are today. His message is straightforward—migrants cannot search for an exclusive racial or cultural space of articulation without confronting the multicultural paradigm of Malaysia: "the self . . . is open to . . . influences [and] learns to view itself in a larger context."

Maniam's position is pragmatic because for a majority of Indian-Malaysians the notion of a home(land) has dissipated, overtaken by the reality of living in a multicultural nation-state. Survival is now contingent on the capacity to establish a position in the adopted country. This is how Muthu, in "Haunting the Tiger," reacts to his parents' desire to return to India: "'They can give up this land for a life they've known, . . . But what do I have to give up?'" Indeed this is a dilemma confronting the Indian population for whom India exists only as an imagined home, consumed through various textual representations, while multicultural Malaysia exists as a concrete reminder of home. This is why Muthu recalls, at the time of his death, memories of his adopted country, and not his foundational homeland.

However, a confrontation with the multicultural paradigm should not lead to a forgetting of the migrant's *other* self. In "The Pelanduk" we are cautioned by Govindasamy, the pundit, against forgetting. We are also reminded that there are creative possibilities in the Indian community's origins in "dream-time." Govindasamy's assertion parallels the Australian-Aboriginal notion of dreamtime (*Tjukurpa*), which has been employed as a positive metaphor for reclaiming a dispossessed heritage. This is also Maniam's message, appropriately summed up in the volume's title which hints at the necessity of haunting the tiger—the national symbol of Malaysia. Much of Maniam's terms and references are similar to the theoretical emphasis in postcolonial criticism, which often champions the ambivalence of migrant subjectivity, and especially its location between borders.

When Maniam writes "perhaps tensions bring out the best in us," we hear the familiar postcolonial echo that also reverberates in the second text, *The Excluded Wife*, a novel that developed out of an oral-history project. The intent in this novel is to retrieve and recreate the history of the Chinese-Canadian community through the experience of Sau-Ping, a "grass widow" or excluded wife. Such a gesture forces those of the Chinese diaspora to confront their Canadian sensibilities beyond the shores of

the adopted nation through the "logic" of a diasporic poetic. The earlier part of the novel traces Sau-Ping's traumatic life in the Chinese village, her marriage to Yik-Man, the bigotry of the Chinese Exclusion Act, the political turmoil in China, and her temporary exodus to Hong Kong. These historical exigencies, which take up a considerable section of the novel, provide an insight into the pre-diasporic condition of the Chinese community and function as an archival resource for the contemporary Chinese Canadian *socius*.

It is only after Sau-Ping's departure from her foundational homeland and her eventual arrival "on the foreign floor" of Canada—where she decides "to build a new family on the ashes of her shattered family"—that the narrative "logic" of the diaspora takes hold. This is where idea(l)s of home(land) become problematized and where the self finds itself between borders, straddling different socio-cultural positions. Sau-Ping's initial sense of displacement on arriving is temporarily quelled when she sees the familiar space of Vancouver Chinatown where "there were signs bearing Chinese symbols and pictures . . . like those at home." But the longing for home is quickly overshadowed by the reality of living in Canada, which demands an economic sensibility to produce a discourse of survival for the diaspora.

The rest of the novel replays both the diasporic dilemma and, as Sau-Ping and Yik-Man entrench their lineage in the Canadian landscape, changes in the diasporic imagining; a confrontation between old and new diasporic sensibilities emerges. For instance, when her son informs her of his marital intentions, Sau-Ping accepts the news with a certain sense of discord because his fiancée Jennifer, a third-generation Chinese-Canadian, cannot speak Chinese. Similarly, while her daughter Pauline is unable to come to terms with the silent submission of women in China and their desire for "second-class citizenship" in Canada, Sau-Ping cannot agree, although she is aware that Pauline's argument is cogent. For Sau-Ping, such claims can be made only because Pauline is unable to place herself in their position. After all, Sau-Ping had been one of these women and was able to understand their motivations.

Between the Malaysian and Canadian landscapes and between the Indian and Chinese diasporas, the question of how we negotiate our sense of being *here* and remembering *there* comes across forcefully; it adjoins the two novels across geographical distance. Although this question drives both novels, neither attempts to provide an answer. Rather, we are left in a state of tension, with the dilemma of (non)belonging epitomizing the state of flux in which diasporic selves find themselves. These stories traverse a multifaceted, multicultural Malaysian and Canadian landscape, continuously shifting between the real, material, everyday lives of Indian and Chinese migrants and their complex relationship to a homeland that is longed for but impossible to reclaim.

Vancouver's Early Life

Robert A.J. McDonald
Making Vancouver: Class, Status, and Social Boundaries, 1863-1913. UBC Press $24.95

Reviewed by Lindsey McMaster

Telling a story of frontier opportunism, social formation, and struggles over class, race, and status, Robert McDonald's *Making Vancouver* is a vibrant history of the early social and urban development of Canada's westernmost city. Between 1863 and 1913, a narrative unfolds which sees Vancouver grow from its inception as a few scattered sawmills into a burgeoning metropolis with all the conflict and opportunity of a complex urban landscape.

An impressively comprehensive social history, McDonald's study fills a gap in the research and writing on Vancouver's history, making it a useful addition to the current literature. A brief citation by the author to Kay Anderson's *Vancouver's Chinatown* signals one book that might usefully be read in conjunction with this narrative, hers detailing the racial conflict inherent in Vancouver's origins, his emphasizing the struggles over class and status also fundamental to the city's social configuration.

Indeed, the interrelation of class and status is McDonald's main focus. As he argues, while class was an integral structuring feature of Vancouver society, equally or more important was the construction of status or respectability, qualities related to but not wholly dependent upon class. As he puts it, "Status analysis retrieves from obscurity the manner in which Vancouver's British majority, regardless of class, successfully defined themselves as respectable citizens and the single men, the 'immigrants,' and the poor as not respectable, as non-citizens, as 'outsiders.'" Where class proves a somewhat immobile hierarchy for analysis, status is a more complex and mutable category whose descriptive power is useful for a social scene like Vancouver's, in which the shadings of identity are influenced by a host of markers such as race, wealth, marital status, country of origin and so on, all constitutive of one's potential to attain respectability and social prestige. While McDonald's project is to address the whole social spectrum, the weight of his argument coalesces around the upper classes, the industrial owners and managers, where class and status most fully merged: "It was in the upper class that Vancouverites acted most purposefully in a class-conscious manner. . . . By contrast, the transient and ethnically diverse mill workers lacked the permanence to develop a class identity."

The strength of *Making Vancouver* lies in the wealth of information developed through primary sources and in McDonald's analysis which renders such statistical data meaningful. The shifting distribution of population and attendant ethnic affiliations as influenced by the completion of the CPR and other socio-historical events all find a place in the complex and layered narrative.

While the focus on status provides a usefully flexible term of analysis, allowing for affiliations and differences which cut across class lines, I had some reservations about just how much explanatory power was attributed to it. For instance, the quest for social status was shown to motivate the racial prejudice that relegated non-whites or non-British to outsider status and social ostracism; while this is undoubtedly one aspect of ethnic conflict, I do not think that status considerations alone can be used to describe the virulent hatred that has characterized the city's history since its earliest days.

The complex ways in which social status was influenced by gender relations might also have been developed further. Since the industrialists and mill owners as well as the workers and indeed the majority of Vancouver's early population were all male, it is natural that women occupy a less substantial portion of the narrative. However, since wives and families were a crucial marker of social status in this setting, when McDonald did turn to women, he could have provided a more complex and nuanced explanation of their roles. Readers familiar with Daphne Marlatt's work may recognize the subject of *Ana Historic* when one prominent mill manager's wife is mentioned: "Mrs. Springer, formerly Mrs. Richards, who was Granville's second schoolteacher and had married Ben Springer in one of the earliest 'Society' events of the 1870s, led the way in importing social rituals such as tennis parties, teas, and 'at homes' that aimed to enhance social cohesion and identity among this small exclusive group." Like Marlatt's heroine, one wonders how and why women engaged

in this work of importing social rituals, and whether, as we are told at one stage, the "increasing numbers [of women, children and families] by the 1880's served to lessen the raw edge of masculine dominance."

McDonald is much stronger in describing the battles surrounding class and labour, especially where labour unions began to organize against the more cohesive and powerful elite. The dramatic quality of these conflicts as specific to Vancouver comes to the fore in his account of urban unrest arising in the downtown core where high density housing of mostly single working men gave rise to a vibrant street life of crowded gatherings and public speeches by unionists, political parties and so on. Such "teaming" streets appeared threatening and unruly to the more suburban elite, who in turn pressured police into more aggressive suppression of such gatherings, thus inciting highly politicized disputes over free speech in the city. The ways in which the spatial and political overlap here proves highly fascinating reading for scholars of both social and urban history. With a wealth of detailed accounts like this, McDonald conveys the struggles and social upheavals which attended the making of Vancouver, and his rich documentation and carefully articulated arguments make for a rivetting narrative which Canadian scholars will undoubtedly appreciate.

The Rising Daughter

Patricia Morley
The Mountain Is Moving: Japanese Women's Lives. U of British Columbia P $39.95

Norma Field
From My Grandmother's Bedside: Sketches of Postwar Tokyo. U of California P $24.95 US

Reviewed by Susan Fisher

From John Luther Long's 1898 *Madam Butterfly* to Arthur Golden's current best-seller, *Memoirs of a Geisha*, the Japanese woman has held a special fascination for North American readers. As an icon of erotic weirdness, she has survived world war, trade imbalances, and the rise and fall of the yen. This version of Japanese womanhood may still reign supreme in popular literature, but feminist scholarship of the past ten years presents a much different picture, or rather many different pictures.

In the early 1980s, when Patricia Morley began her research on Japanese women, English-language sources were limited. There were Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), Chie Nakane's *Japanese Society* (1970), and Takie Sugiyama Lebra's *Japanese Women: Constraint and Fulfillment* (1984). Morley's research continued into the 1990s, by which time a new wave of Japan specialists had begun to publish on an enormous range of topics related to Japanese women. It is Morley's misfortune that her book, *The Mountain Is Moving,* has been overtaken by this sudden expansion in specialist research.

A Canadian feminist scholar whose first field was English literature, Morley undertook her research on Japanese women out of personal interest. Lacking Japanese language skills, she has relied on materials in English, with an unfortunate emphasis on works such as Benedict's, which have been largely superseded by more recent scholarship. Perhaps in order to compensate for the lack of Japanese language materials, Morley has extended her sources beyond the conventional range of social science research. For example, her book makes extensive use of fiction by Japanese women and of interviews with female novelists and poets. Her study also draws on interviews with women in many parts of Japan. For information on such matters as government policies and public opinion polls, she relies on articles from the English-language Japanese press.

These sources provide lively and detailed information, but anyone who has been reading feminist scholarship on Japan over

the past decade will find nothing new here. (The notable exception is the chapter that presents Morley's interviews with Japanese women writers.) Nonetheless, Morley's earnest and intelligent effort to understand Japanese society, her clear prose, and her conscientious survey of many aspects of women's lives make *The Mountain Is Moving* a very worthwhile introduction to its subject.

Unlike Morley, Norma Field is not an outsider. The child of a Japanese mother and an American GI father, she grew up in Japan and attended university in the United States; consequently, Field belongs to that small group of people for whom the language and culture barriers are permeable. Moreover, as a scholar of premodern Japanese literature (she has written a critically acclaimed study of *The Tale of Genji*), she can see contemporary Japan in the context of its traditional culture.

Field's 1991 book, *In the Realm of a Dying Emperor*, dealt with outsiders and individualists in Japan–the nails that refuse to be hammered down. Among its subjects was the former mayor of Nagasaki, who was shot by a right-winger for suggesting that the Emperor bore some responsibility for the war. *In the Realm of a Dying Emperor* was not a scholarly study, but a work of serious journalism for the general reader.

Field's most recent book, *From My Grandmother's Bedside*, is something altogether different. It documents Field's experiences in Tokyo in the summer of 1995 when she went home to care for her dying grandmother. After two strokes, her grandmother was bedridden and almost without speech. She was being cared for at home by Field's mother, herself an elderly woman. In her preface, Field explains that she wanted "to draw together the parts of the history we live more and more disjunctively;" in the summer of 1995, the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war, her aim was to find the connections between her own family's story and the history of the nation. The book is made up of a series of short passages with such titles as "Jeweled Dream," "Auntie," "Forbidden Words," "Unfinished Assignment: On Historical Responsibility." Some of these are political commentary; some are family history; others are diary entries that record such events as a trip to the kabuki theatre and a visit to a photo exhibition. Field expresses the hope that this book will not be "only a willful collection of fragments," but finally that is what they seem. The short passages read like notebook entries, a series of minor *aperçus* that never add up to a satisfying narrative. I wonder if, given her knowledge of premodern Japanese literature, Field had the generic model of Sei Shonagon's *Pillow Book* in mind. It too is a collection of *aperçus*, written at a bedside, but Sei Shonagon's observation on court life are delivered with such wit and acuity that the overall lack of narrative coherence is hardly important. In the case of Field's book, the individual passages do not have this kind of strength.

The weakest passages are those that deal with large historical issues: war guilt, and Japan's responsibilities as the only nation to be the victim of a nuclear war. To be sure, these are important issues, and Field's *In the Realm of a Dying Emperor* demonstrated that she is capable of discussing them in a thoughtful and informed manner. But in this memoir/notebook format, her treatment seems incoherent. It is the personal topics that are best served by Field's method. The passages describing her quarrelling aunts, her mother's anxieties, and the visits of the Home Helper and the Mobile Bath Service are not only vivid and affecting; they also tell us a great deal about how Japanese society cares for its aging citizens.

The elegant design of *From My Grandmother's Bedside* deserves special mention. The cover is printed to resemble indigo-dyed fabric, and the dark blue of the fabric pattern is set off by the red of the book's spine. The cover copy is printed on a trans-

parent plastic wrapper so that the beauty of the design is not obscured.

Both Field's book and Morley's make clear that Japanese women still accept many tasks, such as caring for the elderly, that North American women no longer feel are their exclusive responsibility. Yet, while Japanese women may not appear to be overthrowing traditional roles, they are changing and controlling their lives. For example, in the last decade, the age of marriage has risen to 26.1 (the second highest in the world); a full two-thirds of young women aged twenty to thirty are not married; and the birthrate has fallen to 1.46 births per woman. By showing how Japanese women negotiate the divide between the private and the public, Morley and Field remind us that North American notions of personal fulfillment are not universal. The more we learn about the lives of Japanese women, the more clearly we can see the compromises and possibilities in our own lives.

Unsettled, unsettling

Kerri Sakamoto
The Electrical Field. Knopf Canada $29.95

Reviewed by Guy Beauregard

The Electrical Field, Kerri Sakamoto's first novel, has received enormous media attention. An October 1997 piece in the *New York Post* calls it "[t]he most sought-after book of the season" (a quotation emphasized with relish in the Knopf Canada publicity material), and it goes on to tell the tale of twelve publishers signing up to bid on the novel—"and a score of foreign publishers and Hollywood producers are in the wings." Knopf Canada has played its part by publicizing the novel as part of its "New Face of Fiction" series, a designation that has become especially appropriate given the appearance of a photograph of Sakamoto's face in nearly every review or story that has appeared to date. Perhaps most astonishing is the full-colour photograph of Sakamoto that appeared on the cover of the January 1998 issue of *Quill & Quire*, a full *five months* before the novel was published. (Sakamoto has more recently appeared on the cover of the September 1998 issue of *Books in Canada*.) The publicity machine hit full stride in the months of May and June, and in general reviewers have been tripping over themselves to praise the novel. As one commentator puts it, "not since critics celebrated the first fiction of Ann-Marie MacDonald and Anne Michaels has a debut novel been given the kind of kudos that have greeted Sakamoto's *The Electrical Field*."

Against the volume of such hype, the novel's rather quiet narrative may lead some readers to view *The Electrical Field* as a disappointment. I feel, however, that the novel's quiet tone—along with its jagged undercurrents—may be its strongest asset and the defining characteristic of its Ishiguro-like narrative. With considerable ingenuity, Sakamoto tells the story of how a murder disrupts the lives of three Japanese Canadian families in a time (the mid-1970s) and a place (suburban Toronto) that is as stark and barren as the high-voltage towers cutting through the novel's eponymous electrical field.

The novel is narrated from the point of view of Asako Saito, a middle-aged woman who spends much of the narrative looking out her window across the electrical field at the lives and homes of the other Japanese Canadians in her neighborhood. Asako is not content, however, to watch others: she actively tries to control what others can see. Following a visit from her neighbor Yano, Asako hastily shuts the drapes so that her curious bed-ridden father cannot see him; she later snatches one of Yano's redress flyers from her father's hands—"[t]hese things could be unsettling, really, and for no good reason." Asako later tries to hide

Yano's redress meeting from her brother Stum, and refuses to let him see a photo from the internment camp—"Stum had been just a baby then, toddling about in the gloom of the camp, and there was no need to open a can of worms to explain what was well past."

In each case, Asako tries to put the past away, but through the efforts of other characters, it keeps returning in unpredictable ways to unsettle her narrative. Her young neighbor Sachi, who bursts across the electrical field in the novel's opening scene, pushes Asako to make sense of her failed pubescent love affair with her brother Eiji—and her complicity in his death. In one of the novel's finest scenes, Sakamoto writes:

> "I wanted you to come, Miss Saito," [Sachi] said, breathless as she slipped into the moving car and slammed the door. She was nervous again. "I thought it would help you remember something that might help." She gritted her teeth, and the morning sun knifing between trees flashed over her braces. "Because sometimes you forget," she said.

Yano too, with his rage against the internment, works to unsettle Asako's life. He insists on linking Mackenzie Hill, a local landmark concealing a pile of garbage, to "[t]hat bugger Mackenzie King," the prime minister who authorized the internment of Japanese Canadians in 1942; he organizes poorly attended redress meetings; and he repeatedly confides (to Asako's dismay) his desire for Japanese Canadians to "stick together." By the end of the novel, Asako's head is "a hive swarming with voices," and memory becomes something she is thoroughly immersed in (like the current of a stream) or dwarfed by (like the electrical towers outside her home).

The policing of desire; the deep feelings of shame, loss and mourning felt by Japanese Canadians following the internment; the politics of remembering and forgetting—all intersect in *The Electrical Field*, and Sakamoto provides no easy answers. The novel's final words—"It was simple, really"—are perhaps its most ironic, for while Asako has finally revisited the scene of Eiji's death, and while she has witnessed the growing love shared by Stum and his partner Angel, Sakamoto presents us with the way Stum and Angel "sex" chicks, separating the roosters and the hens, and choking and placing into a "third box" the animals that are *both* and therefore "no good." Asako observes: "Girls here, boys there. It was simple, really." The ending thus leaves us with Asako's misrecognition of a very difficult point: at the same time that Stum and Angel can "move forward" with their lives through the shared act of "sexing" the chicks, they do so by participating in the kind of violent "sorting" process that underwrote the internment of Japanese Canadians, whom Asako describes as "neither here-nor-there stock."

I'd like to conclude by returning to the reception of *The Electrical Field*. In a novel so concerned with the politics of the gaze, perhaps we would do well to question the function of repeatedly placing Sakamoto's face on display to promote the novel: Does it authenticate the narrative? Does it (as Ien Ang suggests regarding the place of the "Asian" woman in Australian multiculturalism) feminize and racialize the author to make her a suitable object of consumption? If so, who consumes and what are the effects? Given the way the novel leads us through Asako's deeply unsettled life, perhaps we might ask how reading the novel might unsettle our own. Reverberations of history hum through the novel like the electricity cutting through the electrical field. These reverberations challenge us to understand the ongoing processes through which a nation can sort through its citizens and unceremoniously discard some of them into a "third box"—internment camps, reserves, urban ghettos. Whether

readers will think through these acts of violence and the pain involved in suppressing or remembering them remains one of the many questions raised by *The Electrical Field* and the attention it has generated.

Travelers' Tales

David Suzuki and Keibo Oiwa
The Japan We Never Knew: A Journey of Discovery. Stoddart $29.95

Tomoko Makabe; Kathleen Chisato Merken, trans.
Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada. Multicultural History Society of Ontario $24.95

Reviewed by Marilyn Iwama

Recent challenges to the hardy (and economically useful) myth of a homogeneous Japan have attempted to expose the ideologies of self-interest that have directed the construction of the myth. The challenge contained in the two volumes under review, *The Japan We Never Knew: A Journey of Discovery* and *Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada*, is a more modest one. The writers of these texts simply introduce individuals whose lives contradict the idea of a homogeneous Japan. Scholarly and popular discourses have generally overlooked the experiences of these Japanese: the first women emigrants to Canada, and minority groups resident within Japan.

The Japan We Never Knew is the more ambitious of these texts. For two years, Canadian scientist and broadcaster David Suzuki and Japanese anthropologist Keibo Oiwa traveled the length of Japan, conducting a broad range of interviews which they then gathered into three subject areas: peace, civil liberties, and the environment. Within these categories, Suzuki and Oiwa arrange historical summary, scientific analysis, personal reflection, and excerpts from the interviews. In the introduction, Suzuki relates his personal interest in finding the "hidden" Japan beneath the "monolithic, homogeneous, and conformist" nation he has come to know. The notion of genetic "family" does not sit well with one who appears Japanese yet feels "completely Canadian." In the epilogue, Oiwa shares his reasons for daring Suzuki to explore this other Japan: fuelling Oiwa's interest in minority cultures generally was his discovery, at age thirty, that his "Japanese" father was actually a native Korean. *The Japan We Never Knew* is the diary of the writers' journey to find themselves in Japan's others.

Perhaps because it is a chronicle of assumptions altered and stereotypes corrected, the book is a humble one. Most familiar generalizations resuscitated by the authors are countered, not by the life of one "rare individual" but by individuals who represent a host of others. We read of Kiichiro Tomino who entered a mayoralty race to prevent a forest sanctuary being razed for the construction of American military housing. However, we also learn how an entire system of local government was transformed by Tomino's activism. We meet Okinawan grocer, Shoichi Chibana, who burned the Japanese flag in protest of Japan's historical disregard for Okinawan nationhood, and its sacrifice of Okinawan people during the Battle of the Pacific; then we meet a host of others who sympathize with and actively support Chibana's position. Enclosed as they are between the revelatory introduction and epilogue, these textual encounters transform ideas of Japan as they seem to have transformed the writers.

One of the major contributions of this text is that it attempts to alter perceptions of an exclusivist Japan by introducing a broad range of diversity. Rather than offer a deeper case study of, for instance the "untouchable" class of *burakumin* (individuals once regarded as defiled because they worked with the by-products of dead animals), Oiwa and Suzuki consider *burakumin* as one member of a community of

cultural minorities. This tactic and the writers' attention to the growing popularity of coalitions among Japan's minorities resist the tendency to reinforce ideas of national homogeneity by focusing on what appears to be a singular rarity.

At times *The Japan We Never Knew* is dogged by ideological monoliths of its own, especially its lapses into a stereotypical treatment of gender. Suzuki and Oiwa describe mayor Tomino's frequent consultations with his wife Nanako during his interview as evidence that their partnership is political as well as marital, yet they eliminate all of her comments from this lengthy section. In their description of a dance performed by weaver Akiko Ishigaki, the writers betray their conviction that sensuality is the provenance of youth. They express surprise that Toshi Maruki, an artist famous for her graphic depictions of wartime suffering, is "the picture of softness and grace," rather than "intense" or "tough." They write of "exotic" beauties. Yet, given the scope of this text, and the writers' obvious attempts at self-reflection throughout, these observations are intended simply as cautionary notes.

Of greater concern in a text eager to expose the manipulations of a powerful centre is the manner in which the text reproduces other stereotypes, most often by teasing out one ideological strand and allowing it to define or explain a complex reality. For instance, in their description of daily life in postwar Koza (currently Okinawa City), Okinawa, the writers depend on one individual's perception of the chasm between "rich, violent Americans" and "poor, pacifist Okinawans." This anachronistic and simplistic view of the past homogenizes the highly ambivalent nature of postwar international relations that existed among Okinawa, the United States, and Japan. It also secures Okinawans once more in the position of mute victimhood which has never enjoyed much support in that place.

Suzuki and Oiwa identify "rootedness," or a connection to place, as the common ground in each life they introduce. Generous attention to place, as their subjects define it, might have yielded a more careful examination of Japan's social realities. Instead, the writers choose a quirky blend of travel diary and mid-life *Bildungsroman*, without allowing this self-indulgence to block their discovery of such truths as are so often stumbled upon in the course of a life.

Tomoko Makabe writes of such haphazardness *in Picture Brides: Japanese Women in Canada*. This book is also a collection of interviews, conducted by Makabe and first published in Japanese as *Shashinkon no Tsumatachi* in 1983. Unlike the range of minorities represented in *The Japan We Never Knew*, this oral history is concerned with only one group, those women who journeyed to Canada in the 1910s and 20s to join husbands they had met in photographs, women who became known in written records and popular discourse as "picture brides." Yet Makabe is as interested as Oiwa and Suzuki in dismantling the myth of a homogeneous Japan, in this case by reporting the unique and remarkable achievements of women who have generally been characterized as silent, fertile partners in the pioneering Japanese-Canadian community.

Makabe introduces this translation by Kathleen Merken with an overview of the recorded lives and reflections on her own status as Japanese immigrant. She also includes a brief summary of Japanese-Canadian history, as well as individual summaries of historical particulars relevant to each interview. The summaries are helpful adjuncts to appreciating each woman's situation, as is the historical background of the larger Japanese Canadian community, although its brevity precludes precision. A few more pages would have allowed Makabe to explore more deeply, for instance, the ambiguity that surrounds ethnicity for many Sansei, or third-generation Japanese Canadians, as related by Suzuki in

the above volume. Such an examination may have spared Makabe the conclusion that, for the Sansei, racism and the uprooting of the community during the Second World War are "historical facts belonging to a distant past."

The strength of *Picture Brides* lies in its recording of the life stories which compelled Makabe to undertake this project. As Makabe explains, the five women we meet in this book are all "Meiji women." This epithet describes women raised during the Meiji era (1868-1912) to be quietly submissive and obedient to men. Until recently, historical records have remained faithful to the idea that the lives of "picture brides" realized only the ideals of "good wife, wise mother" through silent submission to heterosexual domesticity and the regular production of healthy sons and daughters. The stories collected by Makabe tell of women willing to gamble on marriage as a ticket to adventure in a foreign land. Once in Canada, they often participated equally with their husbands in a pioneer enterprise where "everyone worked," and usually in a variety of occupations that demanded heavy manual labour.

From the accounts of each of these women we also glimpse the detailed manner in which they remember accommodating their lives structurally to the expectations of those around them, while modifying that standard privately. Yasu Ishikawa could not endure the strain of such accommodation, of submitting herself to life with a husband who, in her words, "didn't have any brains at all [and] absolutely no spirit." She left the marriage and established herself as a midwife. When Hana Murata found that submission to her husband included sharing him with his first wife, she exchanged life with them for a successful career in dressmaking.

At various points in their texts, and for various apparent reasons, each of these writers yields to the attractions of the similar. In *Picture Brides*, Makabe's apparent reliance on notions of an unmediated relationship between thought and utterance, and between the life lived and the one remembered invites an emphasis on similarity. The text also produces similarities by presenting a translation which "smooth[s] out the peculiar language and expressions used by the women [. . .]." Although Oiwa does not explain his translations, the similarities in diction that he reproduces, despite marked regional and class differences in Japanese dialects, suggest a similar smoothing of differences. Given the aims of these texts, it would have been fitting for the writers to entrust their audience with the diversity of language and experience they encountered. Regardless, both *The Japan We Never Knew*, and *Picture Brides* are provocative challenges to tired myths of homogeneity in Japan, and the myth of proper heterogeneity in multicultural Canada.

Varied Stories

Ronald Takaki
A Larger Memory: A History of Our Diversity, With Voices. Little, Brown and Company $20

Evelyn Lau
Choose Me. Doubleday $29.95

Reviewed by Rita Wong

In compiling stories of racially diverse, predominantly working class Americans into one larger composite, Ronald Takaki provides readers with a valuable historical record which addresses some of the silences created by traditional conceptions of American history.

A Larger Memory makes it clear that democracy has never existed in the United States, except as an ideal striven for but still not achieved. Quoting African American scholar Ralph Bunche, Takaki reveals how history has influenced the present: "The fight now is not to save democracy, for that

which does not exist cannot be saved. But the fight is to maintain those conditions under which people may continue to strive for the realization of democratic ideals." Bunche's comment refers to World War II, but is also applicable to a contemporary American society dominated by powerful corporate interests.

In his very down-to-earth way, Takaki makes it clear that examining the history of "the vast, surging hopeful army of workers" in the United States requires an understanding of how racialization has been used by American leaders and elites to economically control and manipulate masses of people. For example, on Hawaiian plantations, Japanese labourers, constituting 70 percent of the workforce, organized their first major strike in 1909, asking for the same pay as workers from Puerto Rico and Portugal. In response, plantation owners crushed the strike and began importing Filipino labourers in a divide-and-rule-strategy, so that, by 1920, Japanese workers represented only 44 percent of the field workers. The Filipino and Japanese workers did learn that the labour movement needed to be based on interethnic working-class unity. In California, the Japanese-Mexican Labor Association founded in 1903 also attempted to build interethnic class solidarity. As a historian, Takaki draws connections between people who have common interests, suggesting that more such alliances need to be made.

Takaki has selected and framed a number of stories to present grassroots perspectives on history which challenge conventional historical narratives in necessary ways. From the Trail of Tears which forced Cherokees to leave their homes on a trek that killed one-quarter of the Cherokee population to Olaudah Equiano's compelling narrative of his experience as a slave in the eighteenth century, Takaki presents histories which demand to be told.

The range of stories is vast, including tellers such as Sioux elder Black Elk, an anonymous Winnebago Indian, Frederick Douglass, Millie Evans, Jenny Proctor, an anonymous survivor of a Georgian peon camp, Irish socialist activist Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Chinese laundryman Lee Chew, Jewish sweatshop worker Sadie Frowne, Japanese American author Monica Sone, Joseph Kurihara, Native American war hero Ira Hayes, Polish professor Thomas Napierkowski, Mexican migrant Camelia Palafox, Italian teacher Joanna Dorio, Puerto Rican student Maria Diaz, Korean business owner Sun Soon Kim, steel plant retiree Jimmy Morse, African American law professor Bryan Fair, and many more. This book is an ambitious project, and Takaki has deftly brought together many individual stories to create a whole which is larger than the sum of its pieces.

In contrast to Takaki's collection of varied non-fiction that attests to the diversity of the American population, Evelyn Lau's fiction closely focuses on the particular arena of troubled relationships between older men and younger women. *Choose Me* presents us with a number of scenarios where human failing is all too evident. Betrayal is a common theme—men's betrayals of their wives, and women's betrayals of their own desires. Perhaps the only constant is inconstancy.

Lau has a brilliant ability to describe subtle emotional shifts with uncanny accuracy. Her stories left me feeling extremely depressed at the absolute loneliness of the characters, their struggle to love and their inability to connect passionately in a sustained, meaningful way. The obsessive return to the father figure in story after story leaves me wondering what else Lau could create if she would turn her talents in other directions.

I was particularly interested in one story entitled "The Outing," in which Lau examines how homosexual acts are distorted and trivialized through heterosexual lenses. With no way to express his desires except in

the context of an orgy, Hugh's desire for a man "outs" him. However, there is no sense that this realization entails any real change in lifestyle for Hugh, who seems to be a man shaped by his lifestyle rather than one who shapes it. Indeed, a number of characters in the other stories are similarly trapped or paralyzed in despairing, unhappy lives. I wanted to shake them sometimes, and ask them what they could do to snap out of it!

The book's obsessive focus on relationships based on extreme power inequity, with men holding the financial reins and women who long to be loved by someone powerful, left me desiring the possibility of more equal relations. I wish Lau would direct her considerable talents to other kinds of relationships and scenarios; she has immense potential if she can broaden her scope as a writer.

What Lau chooses to do, she does well. The outsider's lonely gaze is extremely sharp, as for example in "The Summer Place":

> These people were older, conservative, with certain lifestyles and certain friends. As if through the wrong end of a telescope she saw them laughing over their shared jokes—their heads flung back, their mouths gaping, five sets of thirty teeth, some surely false in their perfection, showing. Their laughter was sharp and horrifying, like the barking of vicious dogs. The women wore heavy gold jewellery and clusters of diamonds, pendants like amulets, though their dresses were in the simple style of the island. Their husbands were well-to-do and famous—famous for their wealth, or wealthy because of their fame. They were snug in their accomplishments, the wits at every dinner party. When they glanced at Catherine it was in expectation of her fawning laughter, the way a television comedian might glance at his sidekick. Their shiny eyes looked right through her, as though she was transparent. It made her feel as if she didn't exist.

Lau perceptively draws out the ways in which the images of women can sometimes be stronger than the women themselves. In "Suburbia," Belinda's sense of self seems to rely too much on Jeremy's view of her: "She could see her own face, suspended in the lenses of his glasses, and for a moment she did not feel so dizzy and lost, so anchorless." The narrator understands how painful it is for women when they see themselves as replaceable objects for a man: ". . . what if he simply stopped loving her—what if the heightened excitement he felt for her, which possibly passed as love, ended—and she became the woman in the wedding photo that another young woman compared herself to?" Similarly, in "A Faithful Husband," there is a revealing moment where Stephen turns to Melody's reflection approaching in a mirror, rather than to Melody herself.

It is painful to read these stories of young women who depend on men for their worth, their self-esteem, leaving me wondering what these women could become left alone, what depths or strengths these characters could develop if their senses of self were not so completely caught up in men's definitions of them.

The Dragon and the Emporium

Paul Theroux
Kowloon Tong. McClelland & Stewart $29.99

Scott Toguri McFarlane, ed.
Transporting the Emporium: Hong Kong Art & Writing Through the Ends of Time. West Coast Line $10.00

Esther Mikyung Ghymn
Images of Asian American Women by Asian American Women Writers. Peter Lang US$44.95

Reviewed by Maria Noëlle Ng

Jan Morris complains in *Hong Kong* (1985) that, although there are numerous studies on the economy, the history, and the politics of the colony, there are very few literary

texts about Hong Kong. By that I presume she means 'serious' fiction, writing that can be included in a school curriculum. Looking at her bibliography, one also cannot help but notice that Morris's sources are singularly un-Chinese. One is tempted to conclude, based on her own study, that not only is Hong Kong not the kind of city fiction writers dwell on, in contrast to London or New York, but that the city, its people, and its culture are best represented by non-Chinese. This conclusion begs two questions: why should a city whose population is 98% or more Chinese be represented in publications written mainly by westerners; and why is Hong Kong, a vibrant and important international city, neglected by fiction writers?

At first glance, Paul Theroux's novel, *Kowloon Tong*, is a redress of this neglect. I began the novel with some expectations. The novel is set in 1997, and much has changed since Somerset Maugham's *The Painted Veil*, set in 1924. Perhaps, I thought, Theroux had achieved a level of understanding of the Chinese and Hong Kong culture that Maugham could not. Unfortunately, such is not the case. Following a genealogy which includes such works as Richard Mason's *The World of Suzie Wong* (1957), Theroux's creates a melodrama involving an insipid expatriate and a host of stereotypical Chinese characters. The racist, self-centred and self-pitying westerner in *Kowloon Tong* is Neville George Mullard, nicknamed Bunt by his undereducated and narrow-minded mother, Betty. The novel traces the last days of Hong Kong as a colony through the life of the Mullards.

Bunt and Betty live in The Peak, the posh hillside on the Hong Kong island where historically only the whites were wealthy enough to build mansions and keep servants who daily had to trudge down and up the hillside to the market, a walk which, when I attempted it recently, was found to be exhausting even without the pressure of labour. Though the Mullards live in splendid isolation, they make their money from a garment factory in Kowloon Tong, which literally means the pool of the nine dragons. Traditionally, the government, the clubs, the headquarters of the banks, and the whites are located on the Hong Kong side of the colony. The factories and the teeming highrises are concentrated on the Kowloon side. Thus the novel is accurate enough in portraying this division, a minor version of 'the two nations.' The typical provincialness of the Mullards is also a recognizable aspect of the colonial culture. Like most colonials, they keep themselves apart from the Chinese majority, although "[t]hey believe they knew the Chinese, he and his mother . . . they [the Chinese] were totally predictable."

As a matter of fact, this novel deals in stereotypes of all sorts. Theroux's western characters are also predictable. Betty Mullard keeps a Chinese houseboy whom the Mullards ignore; she hates Chinese food, cares nothing about Chinese politics, and wants to retire to some English sea resort. And Bunt, a constipated middle-aged man who has never left his mother's house and who eats his lunch from a lunch pail packed by his houseboy, spends his spare time visiting bars called Pussy Cat or Happy Bar which provide him with Asian prostitutes. These are not attractive characters. Reading about Bunt's lunchtime quickies or his fellatio encounters with Chinese factory girls made me want to take a shower. I am at a loss to account for the reason for this novel. To show the ultimate seediness of a fading colonial culture? To indict the materialistic soullessness of Hong Kong's mercantile culture? To sound the alarm against the encroaching hegemonic Beijing government? These are all worthy themes to explore, but they are not developed in Theroux's novel. Although the novel has the raw ingredients, it is a very superficial treatment of the city, the

people, and their historical complexity. There is no suspense in *Kowloon Tong*, and I am hard-pressed to find a gallery of characters about whose fate I care less. As for the Chinese women who provide Bunt with his brief moments of sexual release, haven't we met them before in countless clichéd representations?

To counteract this orientalist vision of a commodified culture filled with available sexual objects in the form of compliant women, one may turn to *Transporting the Emporium*, a collection of essays, poetry and visual arts about Hong Kong, mostly presented by Hong Kong Chinese. The most substantial piece is by Rey Chow, literary critic and author of *Writing Diaspora*. Using the poetry of Hong Kong poet Leung Ping-kwan, Chow analyses the colonial identity of Hong Kong from the perspective of a 'native' and not an outsider like Bunt Mullard. She believes that, rather than beginning with "Europe as the origin, an origin that goes out to conquer and 'civilize' other lands, we may say that it is 'primitive' outposts like Hong Kong" which should serve as centre of any discussion of colonial culture and identity. Instead of reading the coloniality of Hong Kong as a lack—a lack of high culture, or a lack of enlightenment—Chow sees Hong Kong as part of the millennial city-culture, "because it [Hong Kong] makes *port*ability, including the portability of postmodern cultural identities, a fact of life." In her analysis, Hong Kong is not feminized, nor victimized. And the diverse, unique and intriguing contributions to the collection support her argument.

Apart from Chow's article, the collection also contains poetry, photographs, and Fred Wah's interview with Leung Ping-kwan. In a photo by Jam Ismail, a movie billboard shows, in Chinese script, the movie title *February 30th*. Below this is the English title, *The Day That Doesn't Exist*. The theatre is called State. One may read in this picture the complex intersection of politics, fantasy, and cultural layering that constitute the Hong Kong identity. *Transporting the Emporium* is a rich and timely collection. My only reservation is that many of the photographs, apart from their titles, need some contextualizing for their impact to be appreciated. As an example, the photograph "Club World" by Hiram To shows a young man standing by, I think, a station of the peak tram. He looks as if he were wearing the uniform of an exclusive club or hotel. Of course, the posh area around the peak tram route conjures up in my mind the traditional colonial club culture. But I am not sure if this culturally complex image, and others like it, would mean as much to someone who has not been brought up, or has lived, in Hong Kong.

While some white male writers continue to feminize, and fantasize about, various Asian cultures, Asian women writers have thankfully been active in different kinds of publication. Esther Mikyung Ghymn's *Images of Asian American Women by Asian American Women Writers* is a scholarly examination of nine woman writers, including the well-known Maxine Hong Kingston and the popular Amy Tan. Any critical study of Asian North American writing is welcome. Having said that, I was surprised at the author's inclusion of Pearl Buck, James Michener, and James Clavell as examples of writers who can produce "stories about foreign settings and characters [which] the American audience can still understand and enjoy," as if *The Good Earth* and *Shogun* were novels to be accepted uncritically as works about China and Japan. Surely the very reason that these novels were best-sellers alerts us to their eurocentrism, their lack of authenticity, and the acts of cultural appropriation they commit.

Even Ghymn's own examination shows that there is a world of difference between the fantasy of a popular writer and the eth-

nic memory of an immigrant family. The themes of mothers and daughters, growing up in America, and first-generation wives are explored in three separate chapters. The roles of madwomen, prostitutes and social/family pariahs are treated in another two chapters. The book concludes that "the woman warrior is the culmination of various images of Asian American women." Much as I applaud this upbeat note, I hesitate to endorse Ghymn's last analysis, since her literary models are predominantly male and western: Robin Hood, Rocky of the *Rocky* series, and King Arthur, to name but a few. If one can apply universal analytical models to writing by Asian American woman writers, then there is no point in singling it out for its ethnic and historical specificity in the first place.

Apart from some puzzling comparative models which Ghymn uses—"the suffering Scarlet O'Hara" is one example—the book itself suffers from clumsy writing: "Although created and clothed with various colors, the new image of a courageous Asian American dominates each of these works. What emerges from all these works is a new celebration of the Asian American woman. These new images . . ." and on it goes, repetitively. When analysing Amy Tan's use of a daughter who cuts her own flesh to 'feed' her ailing mother, a nice reversal of cannibalistic practice and certainly an image deserving theoretical examination, Ghymn drops this clunker: "Why then does Tan create such scenes? I think that she does so to make the stories more mysterious and entertaining." We expect and should get a more incisive observation than this. In the final analysis, I find *Images of Asian American Women by Asian American Women Writers* useful, but it does not live up to some of the exciting writing it purports to examine.

Chinese Speak

Ye Ting-xing
A Leaf in the Bitter Wind. Doubleday $32.95 h.c.

Ying Chen
Ingratitude. Trans. by Carol Volk. Douglas & McIntyre $18.95

Judy Fong Bates
China Dog and Other Tales from a Chinese Laundry. Sister Vision $12.95

Andrew Parkin & Laurence Wong
Hong Kong Poems. Ronsdale $14.95

Reviewed by Maria Noëlle Ng

What constitutes Chinese writing? The simplest answer is, perhaps, that it is writing by someone of Chinese identity. The writers reviewed here, except for Andrew Parkin, fulfill this requirement. But these writers and works also raise new questions regarding the category of Chinese writing. Three of the writers were born in China but write in Canada. Although Canada enables some writers to publish by providing political freedom or financial support, Canada itself does not always play a role in these works. So these texts are in a way written from a displaced intellectual consciousness. None proves this point more forcefully than the autobiography by Ye Ting-xing, *A Leaf in the Bitter Wind.*

Born in 1952, Ye now lives in Canada. But her autobiography revisits the tumultuous years in Chinese history which saw the establishment of the Communist State, the deification of Mao Zedong, the decade of the Cultural Revolution and its many collateral damages to Chinese society, and the gradual introduction of Communist-style capitalism. As historical narrative alone, these events are intriguing and make for compelling reading. Ye's memoir combines historical events with the personal; what could have been merely spectacular and exciting becomes frightening and tragic. A good example of the grand spectacle being brought down to a human level is Ye's

memory of the Red Guards' pilgrimage to Beijing during the height of the Cultural Revolution in the mid-1960s.

Pictures of enthusiastic young people wearing red kerchiefs saluting Mao in Tianman Square are often used to propagandize the massive support that Mao had or to show the danger of crowd and power. Ye provides a record of such an event from the perspective of a participant. Although her "bourgeois" background prevented her from avidly supporting communism, Ye is nonetheless intoxicated with the idea of travelling to Beijing for the first time at the age of fourteen. However, the journey from Shanghai to Beijing is described as a chaotic experience fraught with political quagmire. The transportation system breaks down since it was not prepared for the hordes of people. Ye sleeps on the luggage rack, her "face inches from the curved ceiling. The train was hot, the air a stew of odors: unwashed bodies, cigarette smoke, urine." Being politically somewhat naive, Ye is in constant danger of compromising herself in conversations with strangers from a more politically correct working-class background.

But, in spite of the harrowing journey and severe illness upon arrival, Ye is swept away by the anticipation of seeing Mao in person. While publicity photos show clean and happy youths shouting support for their leader, Ye's record provides the behind-the-scene details: the marchers are searched; they are under the surveillance of the PLA soldiers; they must not move unless allowed to do so; they have to sing and read from the Red Book as hours creep by. Then, "from far away, came the rumble of engines, then hysterical chanting . . . I was on my feet yelling at the top of my lungs like everyone else." Tears stream down Ye's face as motorcades pass. Less than two years later, Ye is exiled to a prison labor farm in the province for not coming from the correct class.

Life on the prison farm includes back-breaking hours of work, insufficient food, unsanitary living conditions, and political intrigue. But Ye survives six years of such inhumane treatment, including an operation for acute appendicitis during which the anesthesiologist leaves the room and the power is cut off. Ye's life seemingly improved after several years of study at Beijing University, is appointed official translator for the government of Shanghai, gets married and becomes a mother. Ironically, at university, she also meets and falls in love with her English teacher, who eventually helps her to journey to Canada. Ye's autobiography ends with her settling in Canada while attempting to gain custody of her daughter in China. It is not Ye's fault that her life is more exciting and breathtaking during the Cultural Revolution than in the more peaceful years. The trailing-off of her history only shows that we all live within a historical framework much larger and, often, more interesting than ourselves.

Also born in Shanghai is Ying Chen, who emigrated to Montreal in 1989 and writes in French. *Ingratitude*, first published in French in Montreal and Paris, is a first-person narrative of a dead young woman. Fantastic as it sounds, Chen's matter-of-fact style somehow allows the reader to forget the impossibility; indeed, Chen's writing makes the presence of a dead narrator both acceptable and natural.

The novel begins with the narrator lying in the funeral home waiting to be cremated and, in flashbacks, following gradual emotional disintegration and her plans to kill herself. Although the novel is set in China and the characters are Chinese, it is not the kind of fiction that requires specific social and historical knowledge to be appreciated. The political situation in China plays virtually no role in *Ingratitude*. Instead, the reader is imprisoned in a destructive conflict between the narrator, Yan-Zi, and her domineering mother. In a recurrent tirade-lament about her inescapable tie to her mother, Yan-Zi muses on the scar on her

mother's belly: "Sometimes, in the public baths, we eyed each other in silence . . . I came out of there! . . . But the dark line on this stranger's belly cried out to me: You can't get away from me, I'm the one who formed you . . . ." This ownership of the body and mind legitimized by the traditional concept of filial relationship oppresses Yan-Zi so much that her only solution is to kill herself, thus robbing her mother of this ownership.

Because much of the book is written with ironic detachment, Yan-Zi's anguish and despair often lurk in the text as if the narrator herself were unwilling to admit to such debilitating emotions. Yet this glancing treatment of emotional turmoil can have a powerful effect. In a particularly moving scene, Yan-Zi remembers catching her mother in a moment of unguarded happiness chatting to a neighbour: "It was a sunny afternoon. She was on her bedroom balcony. Her entire body was radiant . . . I imagined myself in her arms, my forehead nestled between her breasts . . . She noticed me standing there and walked toward me . . . I must have looked stupid, because she immediately hid her smile, erasing any sign of life from her face, and began to ask me about my homework." For a brief moment, the daughter sees her mother as a warm and benign woman, instead of the harridan portrayed throughout the novel. Because the reader is never allowed another point of view, it is easy to empathize with Yan-Zi against her mother.

Yet her mother is not a Medea-like villain. She is, according to Yan-Zi, strict, humourless, possessive, protective, and not particularly intelligent; all these are rather ordinary human failings. But in *Ingratitude*, the mother-figure dominates as if she were the Queen of the Night in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. This disproportionate reaction against her mother seems to indicate that Yan-Zi's problems lie as much within herself as in her mother. Perhaps an understanding of the all-important role that family and filial piety play in Chinese consciousness will help explain Yan-Zi's alienation and hostility.

Chen often relies on the flesh to provide her with images. A good example is Yan-Zi's description of her own corpse following her suicide by taking sleeping tablets: "Summer continues to corrupt autumn with a strange heat. People are still wearing short-sleeved shirts . . . A smell of urine emanates from my body. They finally promise to burn me as soon as possible." With quiet humour, Yan-Zi adds: "But now Mother and Grandmother are engaged in a pitched battle over what clothes I should be wearing when I'm cast into the fire." This mixture of cerebral irony, corporeal descriptiveness, and black humour makes *Ingratitude* one of the most original works from a contemporary Chinese writer.

Unlike *Ingratitude, China Dog and Other Tales from a Chinese Laundry* are stories set within the specific context of Chinese immigrant culture in Canada. Unlike Ye Ting-xing and Ying Chen, Judy Fong Bates came to live in Canada at an early age and her stories reflect her knowledge of the lives of Chinese immigrants. The collection has a wide range of tones and situations, from poignant remembrance of cultural isolation, to jaunty narrative of cultural clash, to ghoulish treatment of Chinese superstition. But the overall theme is the difficulty of living in two cultures.

In "My Sister's Love," little Irene is a Chinese Canadian who is happy with life in the small town until her half-sister Lily arrives from Hong Kong. Elegant, tall, with "ivory skin, the texture of flower petals," Lily never fits in. Her life changes when a man thirty years her senior becomes interested in her. Tom Leung is a wealthy Chinese Canadian; aware of the significant age difference between them, Leung suggests that he become Lily's Chinese godfather, a kind of guardian and benefactor. Bates

hints at a Humbert-Lolita relationship with the ready compliance of the young woman. The story would have more punch if Bates had said more about the attraction between the couple, instead of expediently writing off Leung and marrying off Lily.

Covering the familiar theme of mixed-marriage between Chinese and non-Chinese, Bates uses a perky style in "The Lucky Wedding" to narrate Sandra's dread of telling her family that she has married a "*lo fon*, a white foreigner." Like Yan-Zi's mother, Sandra's mother also possesses her daughter in many ways: "Her mother was lodged in her head like a permanent resident, an unwanted guest, who wasn't budging. When she woke up in the morning, she saw her mother's disapproving broad face, floating above her like a rain cloud." Although Sandra wants a small reception, the celebration rituals turn into a western reception and, on a separate day, into an elaborate Chinese banquet. Having experienced similar situations, I can vouch for the realism in Bates's descriptions. However, these scenes of cultural misunderstanding do not adequately convey the psychological threat that tradition can pose to someone who has accepted a different culture.

Someone who has not accepted that she is living in Canadian society is Lee Ming in "China Dog." While attending the funeral of her husband's father who has committed suicide, Lee Ming is reminded of a curse placed on the family. This curse obsesses her, to the point that she consults a fortune teller to assuage her fear. In the story, it is not really made clear whether the practices of the fortune teller are just so much mumbo-jumbo. Suffice it to say that the result is not what Lee Ming has expected. Like the other stories in the collection, "China Dog" is competently written but somehow leaves the reader hoping for more depth or a more complex treatment of interesting issues.

Of considerable formal complexity is the collection *Hong Kong Poems* by Andrew Parkin and Laurence Wong. Some of the poems were written by Parkin and some by Wong, but all poems are published in both English and Chinese. Some poems are lyrical evocations of tropical landscape, some elegiac reflection, some poems celebrate love and some describe social conditions. In "Song of an Illegal Immigrant," Parkin uses energetic, monosyllabic verbs to convey the urgency of the illegal immigrant's decision to flee China: "I'll hit the road and quit this place!/ I'll hit the road and grab a better life!" With bravado the illegal immigrant boasts that he will "meet a sweet-smelling modern girl/ who's pretty and rich and born to flirt" in Hong Kong. Wedged between the hope of flight and the illusion of love are pictures of hardship and loneliness in a sprawling metropolis. While the poem has verve and rhythm, Wong's Chinese version conveys the meaning but not the sound. This is an obvious example of the problems presented by translating poetry from one language into a very different one. The difficulties of translation are also evident in Wong's "Gazing South," written in Chinese. Wong's language is inherited from hundreds of years of Chinese poetry. Images resonate. Even the title is an invocation of the many classic poems about the land south of the Yangtze River. But none of the references is transferable to English.

Poems with no overt reference to a literary tradition are more successful. A good example is Wong's "Rhapsody on a Rainy Night." This poem originally appeared in a collection titled *Winter in Florence*. The nature imagery provides non-Chinese readers with languages and contexts that are easily understood. The Chinese version is written in the modern idiom, and since Wong translates it into English himself, the two versions are fairly compatible in style and meaning. Sometimes the Chinese and English versions are different and yet each has its own poetic beauty. For instance,

Parkin's "Storm and Bird" has a charming first line: "Outside the typhoon shakes the sheeted rain." In Chinese, "sheeted rain" becomes "big rain," and the alliteration of "shakes" and "sheeted" is lost. But then the Chinese version of Parkin's "music of two opposing moods" is considerably more economical and elegant.

The technical and literary difficulties in translating the poems in this volume seem to echo the complexity afflicting writers who work within one culture and outside of another. Ye could not possibly have written her autobiography in China, yet it is all *about* China. Ying Chen's novel on domestic conflict and neuroses has its origin in Chinese culture, yet it transcends the culturally specific and becomes something much more than an individual's tirade against traditional constraints. Bates's stories are records of immigrants who live both Chinese and Canadian lives, just as the poems by Parkin and Wong try to reach readers who think in both Chinese and English. Cultural complexity can be challenging and frustrating, but it is an essential element to our lives.

Non-Generic Brands

Rita Wong
Monkeypuzzle. Press Gang $14.95

Goh Poh Seng
The Girl from Ermita & Selected Poems: 1961-1998. Nightwood Editions $15.95

Paul Yee, with illustrations by Gu Xiong
The Boy in the Attic. Groundwood $15.95

Reviewed by Mark Libin

I've often wondered what the project of delineating the field of literature in terms of cultural identity might entail. To declare that a text is a text is a text, and that we can read, for instance, Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café* just as we read D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*, would effectively erase the differences that many contemporary writers are trying to foreground in their texts. On the other hand, elevating national or cultural identity as the criterion for formulating an analytic community begs the question of genre. A good case in point is this particular review, where I have been asked to review a book of poetry by Chinese Canadian writer Rita Wong, another by Malayan Canadian Goh Poh Seng, as well as a children's book written by Chinese Canadian Paul Yee.

This collection of different nationalities as well as of different genres raises more questions than it satisfies: does such a grouping erase the very differences it purports to honour? If so, what sort of assembly of texts could avoid such an erasure? What method might be employed to write a cohesive review of these three disparate texts? On this last issue I have no satisfactory answer, and would prefer to leave it as a question, reviewing each work as a separate entity rather than as a community of works in dialogue with each other.

Monkeypuzzle is Rita Wong's first volume of poetry, and it does indeed, as the book jacket declares, announce a promising new voice in Canadian literature. By turns personal and political, skeptical of the colonizing power of language while still able to wring appealing sounds and tones from that language, *Monkeypuzzle* displays a range of poetic concerns and techniques. The volume's opening section, "Memory Palate," is especially delightful in its deft construction of a narrator able to render personal memory without becoming overwhelmed by sentiment. In this account of a childhood in Calgary, working at the family grocery store, and negotiating between "wannabe bad girl & good chinese girl," Wong neither ignores her marginalized position nor exoticizes it. A poem such as "the jade lady" relates the diversity and interconnectedness of the Chinese commu-

nity of Calgary—as well as the way the narrator, a child, is positioned at once within the community and outside its exchanges—without being overly literal or denotative.

Often displaying an engagement with language as a sensual experience—"i am drawn to elaborate nouns,/ pomegranates, persimmons, speculum, iguanas, drawn to/ the stranger taste on my tongue, this usage that uses me"—Wong's discourse becomes prosaic and rather flat when she turns to poems more explicitly concerned with identity politics and with the split self inherent in Chinese Canadian. In poems such as "chinese & not chinese," Wong's narrator describes how she is conflicted between identifying with China as her ancestral home and disapproving of the country's violent handling of freedom movements in Tibet. As interesting as this doubled concept of "home" might be, the language that frames it becomes unfortunately didactic by the end of the poem.

Goh Poh Seng's *The Girl from Ermita & Selected Poems* provides, as the title indicates, a sampling of almost forty years of Seng's poetry that documents a life spent in Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Tahiti, and Canada, among other countries. The breadth of Seng's travels is reflected in work that demonstrates wide-ranging concerns and a capacity to engage with the communities he visits. At times the narrator of these poems is a detached observer; at times the poems take the shape of dramatic monologues. The title poem, for example, allows the girl from Ermita, a Filipino prostitute, to recount the story of her life. This, of course, can evoke the uneasy feeling of appropriation: the male poet stepping into another culture in order to claim the voice of a marginalized female. At the same time, however, the sensitivity of language with which Seng renders these poems, the magic realist tone—"They call me Fely,/ I was born in Samar,/ I'm the girl with the bird in her head"—allows us to perceive the poem as mediated by a canny poet. Poems such as these might remind the reader of Michael Ondaatje's "Elizabeth" or "The Cinnamon Peeler" in their blending of the narrative and the figurative.

Seng's development as a poet over the course of four decades is significant. The voice gains confidence as well as a sense of balance. The metaphors are precise and unexpected, and Seng's incorporation of a myriad of languages into his poetry allows us glimpses of the cultures he describes. Through his poetry, Seng reveals himself to be a scrupulous polymath in the Modernist tradition, and the knowledge and sensitivity this imbues to his work is a strength rather than an anachronism. The final poems, written in his new home in Vancouver, display an appealing spareness to the lyric line that leaves the reader wanting to read more from this mature and confident poet.

Paul Yee's children's book, *The Boy in the Attic* relates the story of a young Chinese boy's immigration to Canada. Beginning its narrative with the family's final visit to their great-great-grandfather's tomb, the story introduces the traditional Chinese custom of honouring the dead, explains that paying homage to the ancestors is discouraged by the government, and invokes the melancholy of leaving home for the unknown: a complex juggling act indeed. Does this multifaceted story risk confusing a young reader, or does it provide the child with a textured narrative presented without condescension?

I can't help but think that Yee was uncertain as to whether his story was indeed becoming too complex, for when Kai-Ming arrives in Canada the narrative introduces a fairly stock cliché in children's books, movies, and television programs: the ghost child who still inhabits his old playroom. This figure offers a companion for Kai-Ming, who is isolated from the neighbourhood children because he can't speak English, but it also shifts the narrative away

from the newly-arrived Kai-Ming and gives centre-stage to the blonde, apple-cheeked ghost. The reader is left with an unsettling example of how a story seems to inadvertently colonize itself.

Each of these works testifies to a vibrant and diverse community of Asian Canadian writers. Although it may be difficult to discuss these works as aspects of a coherent movement, the poetry and fiction demonstrate the continuing vitality of the Asian Canadian voice in Canadian literature.

Women Writing Women

Traise Yamamoto
Masking Selves, Making Subjects: Japanese American Women, Identity, and the Body. U of California P n.p.

Jill Ker Conway, ed.
In Her Own Words: Women's Memoirs from Australia, New Zealand, Canada & the United States. Vintage $25.00

Reviewed by Susanna Egan

Those of us who work in autobiography studies are no longer naive about the autobiographical nature of our academic work; the texts we choose to work on, the issues we engage, and the arguments we make all reveal something of ourselves. And these revelations have very little to do with recent developments that require us to "position" ourselves. Positioned or not, we are exposed. In the present case, Traise Yamamoto and Jill Ker Conway know exactly what their work explains about themselves and foreground the relationship between their interests and their personal history. However, thinking about both books for one review, I am also engaged by distinctions between the serious, even strenuous theorising and analysis provided by Yamamoto, who is a young academic, and the exuberant abundance of Conway's work that is broad on assumptions and minimal on conceptual framework. I wonder to what degree these distinctions reflect developments in literary studies, to what degree women's issues (as articulated by white women) are more confident of acceptance than minority issues, and therefore not requiring argument, and to what degree audience is the central issue. On this last, as on the very personal nature of academic work, autobiography crosses boundaries; most often intended for a wide and sympathetic readership, life writing of all kinds addresses not only the selves involved in writing and reading but also the cultural contexts of both, as these frame the assumptions on which writing and reading are based.

Yamamoto's work begins from personal experience and examines the cultural assumptions that govern representation of Asian American women. Her frontispiece is a formal studio portrait of her grandparents taken in 1938 with the daughter they sent back to be raised in Japan. Yamamoto's text provides analysis of this photograph (but without mentioning that the seated doll, who forms a parallel to her seated father, is elaborately elegant and definitely white). Yamamoto's introduction also provides the history that follows from this pose: the internment suffered by the family members who remained in the States, and the sense of rejection experienced by the child sent away to Japan. Yamamoto studies the impassive face of the young mother who is parting with her daughter and discusses this young mother's deliberate choice of the English name, Rose, for herself. The mask-like face and the self-naming then ground Yamamoto's whole discussion on Japanese American women as both socially defined and surprisingly self-creating. "How do they construct the self as subject," she asks, "within a society that constructs them as objects without agency?" (4). Overdetermined by the combinations of gender, race, and original nationality, all heavily sexu-

alised within North American culture, Japanese American women have converted the "mask of difference" into a trope for their own self-construction.

With careful attention to history texts, documents from the Western "opening" of Japan, autobiographies, fiction, film, and poetry, Yamamoto demonstrates not only that Japan and Japanese people have been infantilised and feminised by the West but also that Japanese American women in particular are therefore in an impossible bind in terms of asserting their own subjectivity. Physical appearance and sexuality being defined in literature and in cultural experience by the white and "masculine" West, the Japanese American woman belongs, like Yamamoto's grandmother "Rose" and her first child with the white doll, in the apparently inarticulate silence of the "mask." "Masking Selves," Yamamoto suggests, "gestures grammatically toward both the limitations on and possibilities of Japanese American women's agency. Its phrasal ambiguity evokes an implied subject/agent who masks the selfhood of the (Japanese American) other, as well as the Japanese American subject whose self is, in a sense, defined by its own participation in reappropriative acts of masking" (100). Yamamoto's discussion of gender, race, and cultural relations is careful and sophisticated though not always pellucid. Her materials are complex, and she weaves a complex and well-sustained argument with them. However, her strengths, to my mind, reside in the careful textual analyses with which she develops her theoretical concerns. The range of literature she discusses accumulates reference points for various aspects of discussion in a most persuasive way. When she concludes, therefore, that the varied texts she has chosen "constitute a tradition," the complexities of her theoretical discussion do indeed come together. She describes this tradition as one "in which [Japanese American women] write the self as subject, refusing to be spoken or spoken for, a tradition in which they insist on their singularity of perception as well as their ties to community and shared experience" (263).

Yamamoto works in the most approved current mode, extending research and analysis from personal experience for an academic audience while achieving a clear political agenda. Her work will be of value for the burgeoning study of Asian American and Asian Canadian literatures, for postcolonial studies in general and discussion of diasporas in particular. While strong on the role of Nisei autobiography, she seems far less sophisticated in her brief discussion of autobiography theory, citing Olney and Gusdorf as authorities but seeming to discover, as if the works to which she refers were not twenty-five years old and more, that they do not include discussion pertinent to her interests. Laxity in this one area, however, is a small blot on a fine book.

Conway's new anthology is harder to place. I must confess to a personal bias against anthologised excerpts of large autobiographical works. However, Conway has used this method repeatedly, presumably for a popular audience to whom she thus introduces women as autobiographers from around the English-speaking world. Against my own preconceptions, repeatedly against my better judgement, I was seduced. Choosing writers from Australia (Patricia Jean Adam-Smith, Dorothy Hewett, Sally Morgan), from New Zealand (Robyn Hyde, Janet Frame, Lauris Edmond), from Canada (Dorothy Livesay, Gabrielle Roy, Rosemary Brown) and the United States (Lillian Hellman, Shirley Chisholm, Kim Chernin), Conway provides brief biographical introductions and some annotation, but hands the space over to these women "in [their] own words."

However, having confessed my enjoyment of these excellent choices, I return to a cranky academic mode. One does not have to be a scholar in such matters to appreci-

ate some distinction between the terms "memoir" and "autobiography." Conway uses them interchangeably, as if to avoid ugly repetitions. Surely such extracts should not attempt extended narrative on a framework of ellipses. Might Conway's editorial choices and inevitable interference not have provided nuggets of text instead? Small episodes intact, maybe framed by editorial contextualisation? So many transitions are abrupt and therefore shocking because they overlook intervening events that are needed for comprehension. And the notes: I am not clear with these who it is Conway imagines the reader to be. For myself, I did not need to know that a "locum" was a substitute doctor (256) but would dearly like to know what a "bludger" is (64) or what it means to be "on the wallaby" (13, 16). Most of all, I have difficulty with the absence, even in the Introduction, of clear criteria for these choices, or discussion of recurring issues in colonial writing or in women's lives. Despite one brief observation about the unreliability of memory, Conway presents these texts as if they were transparent windows onto the souls of some remarkable women. Nonetheless, she reminds me that autobiography is indeed a popular set of genres. Because her choices are, in fact, rich and interesting, and because I am a woman, and because reading autobiographies is what I do, and because Conway has introduced me to texts that I did not know and that I shall now read in full, I wrestle with my cranky disposition and recognise that I will not be alone in enjoying this work. Maybe in the end the reviewer is the one exposed?

Anthologizing Asia

Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek and Yiu-nam Leung, eds.
Canadian Culture and Literature and a Taiwan Perspective. U of A, Research Institute for Comparative Literature US$30

Eva-Marie Kröller, Allan Smith, Joshua Mostow, Robert Kramer, eds.
Pacific Encounters: The Production of Self and Other. Institute of Asian Research, UBC n.p.

Reviewed by Scott Toguri McFarlane

Canadian Culture and Literature and a Taiwan Perspective is the ninth title of an ambitious and somewhat uneven series concerned with contemporary debates in literary theory and published by the University of Alberta's Research Institute for Comparative Literature. It is composed of papers selected from "The 1997 Taiwan International Conference on Canadian Studies held in Taipei and Hsinchu on the theme of 'Canadian Culture and Multiculturalism: The Importance of Multicultural Social and Cultural Discourse.'" Disconcertingly, the editors do not explain *why* such a conference was held in Taiwan. It would seem important to do so for several reasons: first, the title of the volume is in need of explanation; second, "Taiwan" is rarely the subject of multicultural discourse in Canada, so it would be helpful to hear how the editors placed their work alongside related scholarship; third, Taiwan is soon to be "returned" to China, so to speak of the "Importance of Multicultural Social and Cultural Discourse" carries a particular politic—and the threat of censorship, imprisonment or violence—depending on the location of its pronouncement.

The conference took place in April of 1997. The imminent "return" of Hong Kong to China was, for many, to provide a rudimentary model for the subsequent "return" of Macao and Taiwan, and the first of July was approaching amidst threats and rumours of censorship and job loss

throughout the public sphere including academia. It would seem reasonable to assume that the threat of repercussions caused the editors to avoid situating their anthology within any theoretical trajectory and to simply proceed to thank their funders—a list dominated by Taiwanese sources. The blatant uninterest of the editors in the contents of the volume, however, produces a much more dismaying impression of a group of academics accessing funding, made available due to the political and economic restructuring of the Pacific Rim, for a free trip to Taiwan. Rarely is an anthology compiled with access to university funding and resources with this much editorial neglect. The lack of editing, copy editing and proofing is shameful in this volume, rife with grammatical and typographical errors. Desmond Morton's lead essay contains reminder notes to the author written either by himself or the editors!

The volume begins strongly, however, with creative work by Daisy Chang (Chu Hsiao-yin), Yan Li and Fred Wah. Chang's work appears in Mandarin, which is a nice touch because all three writers engage, in part, with the barriers, translations and quirky transcreations of language. The essays comprising the bulk of the anthology are written in either English, French or Mandarin and discuss work including the fiction of Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, John Marlyn, Antonio D'Alfonso, Marco Micone, Wayson Choy, and Larissa Lai. Linda Hutcheon's criticism and Atwood's *Survival* are the most influential theoretical resources here. Margaret Hollingsworth, Atom Egoyan, Michel Tremblay, Sharon Pollock and Robert Lepage are examined in a section entitled, "Theatre, Drama, and Film." Multiculturalism is discussed by Tötösy de Zepetnek, and the missionary work of George Leslie MacKay and Rogier Vandersteene is celebrated by Earle H. Waugh. The contributions are extremely uneven, often replete with generalizations, and suffer from a lack of familiarity with the theories that they themselves introduce.

Elizabeth F. Dahab's empirical study of Arab Canadian writers is, however, an important contribution. It is meant to introduce, and demand recognition for, this body of literature; the exclusion of the Middle East from discussions of "Asian Canadian writing" speaks of certain interests and political geographies that need critical attention. As well, Desmond Morton's history of the growing separation, over issues of race and immigration, among the leaders of organized labour in Canada with its increasingly conservative rank-and-file, is provocative in that it makes evident the need to integrate discursive approaches to these issues with political economy and social histories of labour.

What stands out in this anthology is the lack of engagement with Taiwan. Only Hsiu-li Juan's "An Understanding of Multiculturalism via Postmodernism: A Slant View of Linda Hutcheon and Canadian Literature" (written in Mandarin and translated for me by Shan He) suggests a possible model for engaging with Taiwan's own cultural and political problematic. In this case the author only hints that Hutcheon's "subversive" sense of postmodernism might be of interest to Taiwan, as it develops a more politically and culturally diverse sense of itself. The overall silence concerning Taiwan is nonetheless telling. It must be remembered that the question of audience and "Canadian multiculturalism" has an international theatre. We can only imagine how *all* those in the audience in Taiwan—including those who had attended theatre in Canada—listened to Sherry Simon discuss "intercultural theatre" and Lepage's use of Chinese in his productions: "The Chinese language is, for the audience, a surface, a texture of sound. But it is also a vehicle which promises depth." Intercultural theatre indeed.

Pacific Encounters: The Production of Self

and Other provides a sharp contrast to *Canadian Culture and Literature and a Taiwan Perspective.* Eva-Marie Kröller's lucid introduction elaborates the central concern of the anthology: the tropology and discourse of travel writing on the "Pacific Rim." She situates the text theoretically within current debates concerning travel writing, debates that are, according to Kröller, concerned with the use by travelers of specific rhetorical and literary structures to convey "facts" that correspond with "existing belief systems" in order to repress "the shock of the unmediated new." In the forceful contest of interested beliefs, even the geographical placement of the Pacific Rim is subject to the plate tectonics of global politics. Responding to such a fluid context, Kröller deftly suggests the Canadian state's own political and economic interests in locating British Columbia within the Pacific Rim and offers the anthology as a challenge to any simplistic mapping of the region.

Pacific Encounters provides a complex social history of the Pacific Rim. Its contributions include discussions of eighteenth century European encounters with North Pacific peoples, Segalen's travels to China, Chinese merchants and tutors in Java, the gritty work of the expatriate, Chinese modernist writer Liu Sola writing in London about China, Okakura Tenshin's visit to India, contemporary Japanese travel within Japan to Tokyo Disneyland, and Tara Singh Bains contemporary perspective on a Sikh's experience in North America. Reading through these intriguing and well-written essays, one gets the sense of the Pacific Rim as a network in which *fixation* is the precarious product of discursive pleasures and powers.

Iain Higgins's essay is suggestive of this precarious operation of pleasure and power. He describes the "chronotopic" narratives deployed by medieval European travelers as collapsing space into time to ensure that the contemporary "Far East" that astounded and thrilled them was made—for European audiences—to stand for an ancient past. Higgins's discussion of the travelers' repeated use of *occupatio,* whereby one either declines or claims to be unable to represent something while at the same time describing it, is extremely provocative. Such glimpses of doubt and hesitation draw our attention to the glimmer of other paths within the repressive shadows of a eurocentric, chronotopic gaze.

Several contributors examine gender as one of the main forces that circulate pleasure and pain along the Pacific Rim. Marni Stanley, for example, argues that even though English women were instrumental in organizing opposition to Chinese footbinding during the heyday of British imperialism, their own "patriarchal Orientalism" repressed the cross-cultural, shared experience of having their bodies fashioned within the patriarchal constraints of the day.

In a problematic essay, Joshua Mostow argues that travel in pre-modern Japan provided women with opportunities for education, spaces for retreat and alternative ways of life denied by a patriarchal court life. Mostow refers to Japanese women's travel as an "Ovarian Journey" because it remained within Japan, in contrast to what Eric Leeds has referred to as the "spermatic journey" of the paradigmatically male European traveler who visits foreign countries. Mostow's naturalizing of sex-roles within a compulsory heterosexuality blinds him to the production of masculinity and femininity in the texts he analyzes, including intimate writing between women. His analysis also accepts the texts studied as a transparent window onto the lives of women even while he argues that "the gap between reality and image" was fundamental to both their lives and writing.

Precisely the problematic of sex and writing informs Philip Holden's discussion of

"something between a trope and a genre: texts expressing the Hong Kong romance." Holden's is the one essay that departs from the conventions of social history to analyse the mechanics of power which make the "Orient" a discursive object in the first place. According to Holden, orientalism, as it was played out in Hong Kong, was part of the ever enlarging discourse of sexuality. Holden argues that in the carnivalesque masquerades of the Hong Kong romance we should attend to the "orientalization of masculinity. . . since it is sexuality, coded as a metonymic meeting of East and West, that is finally invaded by inauthenticity."

The Orient in these romances is thus a category of sex which raises and then problematizes the question of sexual *orientation.* In the campy *World of Suzie Wong,* Holden argues, we should be attuned to the expressions and repressions at work in the theatrics of masculinity and of the West in order to better listen to the *words* of Suzie Wong who tells us that sometimes she makes up stories which she believes. . . and does not believe. Perhaps it is within such an unbelievably believable space that we encounter *Pacific Encounters,* a text that would move us with its socio-historical stories of travel narratives.

Contradicting 1998

W.H. New

Towards the end of the new *Oxford Literary History of Australia*, Susan Lever declares her preference for the "excessive, bulging" novels of Patrick White and Christina Stead over those that are marketed like any other commodity to specific "consumer groups, . . . even . . . men." She likes the earlier works because of their irony, which expresses "not merely a postmodern stylistic tic, but a sense that only a panoramic vision can do justice to the contradictions in the human condition, and that such a vision cannot take itself seriously. These . . . novels are idiosyncratic histories at the same time that they are prophecies, and they refuse to confine themselves to the small portion of experience granted to the single individual in a compartmentalized society." After reading my way through a lot of 1998's Canadian writing, I'm inclined to agree. So much contemporary writing seems so determined to prove something—not its cleverness so much as its right to sympathy—that after a heavy dose of it one longs for a writer who can make use of language to tell story, evoke image, invite understanding, engage the mind and emotions, and still entertain.

That said, I do not claim to have read everything the year produced, but because I could not share in some of the enthusiasms of other reviewers, I had to try first of all to figure out why. I ended up—when it came to weighing the comparative merits of the year's fiction—distinguishing between those books that I considered 'sustained' and those that (whatever their occasional merits) were not. Take the highly-acclaimed Barbara Gowdy novel, *The White Bone* (Harper), to start with. Like the Governor General's prize-winner—Diane Schoemperlen's series of unengaging meditations on the things that invite meditation, *Forms of Devotion* (HarperCollins)—it is sustained; but Gowdy's book at least also captivates. *The White Bone* is a carefully-achieved parable about the communal life of African elephants, and about their rapid death from poachers, marauders, and human stupidity, and I read it, fascinated. (Many readers were emotional wrecks after spending these pages in the company of the gentle giants.) Then, however, I was hugely irritated at having been taken in by its Disneyfied representation of elephants and cheetahs and the telepathic way they spoke with each other—which is my problem, I suppose, not the book's, though I do wonder. No doubt it will one day soon be a successful film. Likely Douglas Coupland's *Girlfriend in a Coma* (HarperCollins) will be also—readers will readily be able to cast it while reading—but it's my example, along with the much-lauded Gail Anderson-Dargatz's *A Recipe for Bees* (Knopf), of a work that is *not* sustained. Both of these books begin brilliantly, Coupland with a futuristic tale in quest of love in a material age, and Anderson-Dargatz with a largely autobiographical tale

about learning to refuse to "die" at others' command. But Coupland's story (capable, as always, of the apothegm: "barcodes should produce fables, not prices") dissolves in an overly effortful declaration of abstract moral meaning, and Anderson-Dargatz's book (with its precise and symbolically functional details about bee-keeping) ends up losing both its force and its point in a mass of competing plotlines. A pity.

Maybe it's the claim on authenticity that invites a lot of writers to produce an autobiography, a feeling that the only story that can justifiably be told (in an age of competing social compartments) is one's own. And, indeed, some of these books are engagingly written. Charles Foran, in *The Story of My Life (so far)* (Harper) tells (happily) of childhood happiness, though the way it reconstructs dialogue from the past bespeaks a startling feat of memory. Barry Callaghan in *Barrelhouse Kings* (McArthur) and Cecil Foster in *Island Wings* (HarperCollins) also return to childhood—Callaghan with a nice sense of image and pacing of speech, tracing his relationship with his father, Morley Callaghan; and Foster, with a fine sense of anecdote, revealing how his Barbadian "barrel" childhood (growing up as the recipient of a hamper of food and clothes from a foreign country) gave him a certain training in social politics. Myrna Kostash, in *The Doomed Bridegroom* (NeWest), aims in another well-written work "to explore the erotic possibilities of female heterosexual desire after the ashes have cooled on the Sexual Revolution;" maybe so: we follow her attractions to various men—and her disappointments. Timothy Findley, in *From Stone Orchard* (Harper) collects memoirs about Stone Orchard Farm on the occasion of leaving it; his essays evoke both place and love. James Houston's *Zigzag* collects anecdotes of his taste for high society in New York. Wade Davis, in the absorbing essays in *The Clouded Leopard* (Douglas & McIntyre), speaks of "reinventing the power of diversity" as he travels the world, trying to come to terms with the cultures that use hallucinogens, that protect or disrupt the rainforest, that perceive others as lesser, that seek health. Rudy Wiebe and Yvonne Johnson's powerful, polemical narrative of Johnson' abused childhood, imprisonment, and quest to be heard, *Stolen Life* (Knopf), tells also of a search for health, and of the difficult process of learning trust that is a necessary part of the achievement of community. Charles Lillard and Terry Glavin, in *A Voice Great Within Us* (New Star) tell both the story of Chinook jargon and something of a personal narrative of their passionate enquiry, in Lillard's last days, into the fascinations of the other language that is history. Janice Kulyk Keefer's *Honey and Ashes* (Harper) extends the form of life-writing to take in her entire family, probing the borderlines between Ukrainian history and family anecdote in order to show that without the borders (often conflicted, often uncertain) no departures can occur at all.

In the face of so much subjectivity, there were those who tried to establish facts, and did so sometimes while openly recognizing the subjectivity of arranging facts. Carl Berger produced a detailed account of *The Iroquois in the War of 1812* (UTP); Penina Coopersmith a local history (with brilliant photographs) of *Cabbagetown* (Lorimer); Nancy J. Turner some data concerning *Plant Technology of First Peoples in British Columbia* (UBCP) which, though it provides "Latin" and "common" names, still omits Native names for the flora; and the *Concise Historical Atlas of Canada* (UTP). Editions and anthologies gave another face to this desire for quick access to whole pictures. Larry Hannant brought together *Norman Bethune's Writing and Art* (UTP)—a welcome collection, though a fast judgment might suggest that Bethune's paintings were skilled, his letters political, and his

poetry not very good at all. Among other collections worth looking at is the fourth volume of Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Selected Journals* (Oxford), ed. Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston, detailing the author's accomplishments during her 50s, her worries about the health of her husband and son, and her concerns over adulation. Barbara Belyea edited David Thompson's *Columbia Journals* (McGill-Queen's); Roy MacLaren edited William Stairs' often repellent *African Exploits* (McGill-Queen's), the 1887-92 diaries of a Nova Scotia man who in his 20s led a merciless expedition through central Africa for the King of Belgium. *Connecting Flights* (Knopf) reveals Robert Lepage in conversation, recording his opinions on many topics and suggesting something of how a creative mind works. And in *Imagining Canadian Literature* (Key Porter), Sam Solecki brings together the selected letters of the publisher Jack McClelland, whose correspondence (with poets Phyllis Webb, Irving Layton, others) reveals the competing attractions of art and commerce in Canada during the 1940s and 1950s.

Three books of new poetry stand out among the twenty or so I spent time with: Michael Ondaatje's *Handwriting* (M&S), Stephanie Bolster's *White Stone* (Véhicule), and Don Domanski's *Parish of the Physic Moon* (M&S): all of them "sustained." Bolster's absorbing book (subtitled "The Alice Poems") constructs a sequence based on perceptions of Alice Liddell, the original Alice-in-Wonderland; here Alice is variously child, adult, and icon: she is a woman beyond the edges of the book, imagined in conversation with Elvis, hypothesized in association with Alice Lake, and more—person turning into language, and language touched gently, caringly, into life. Domanski revisits canonical forms: the calendar of days, cycles of nature, bestiaries, weddings, birth celebrations—reasserting (perhaps rediscovering) their relevance to the recent, the local, and the everyday. And Ondaatje's book is another to pause over; achingly immersed in Sri Lanka's Buddhist past, its landscape, and the figures that populate the present, it doesn't reveal its complexities easily, but its eroticism enlivens every line; interleaving histories (those of the past, those embodied in sightings of people, birds, objects), the poems evoke the fluidity of things (and then time) passing.

Among other poetry books, several were also engaging—whether because of their ideas or their images, always because of the way they invested language with an extra dimension. Some writers were familiar: Dean Irvine's edition of many of the previously uncollected works of Dorothy Livesay, *Archive for Our Times* (Arsenal Pulp), with tributes, comments, and Livesay's inimitable blend of social and gender politics; or P.K. Page's *Alphabetical* (Reference West), a kind of clever rehearsal of the themes that have occupied her entire body of work, a linked series of enquiries into words such as *afterwards, before, carefulness, doubt, even*—all the way, alphabetically, to *zero*, with a circling hypothesis of "afterwards" following. Other writers (established, yet perhaps somewhat less known) deserve a wider readership: E.D. Blodgett's *through you I* (U Alberta) punningly tells a series of intensely intellectual love poems; John Barton's *Sweet Ellipsis* (ECW) tells of gay desire, self-questioning, desperation, and despair; Derk Wynand's *Closer to Home* (Brick) focusses on the ironic and the domestic, coming to terms with life and writing at the same time; Don Kerr's *Autodidactic* (Brick) finds in machines and the blues its metaphors for a celebration of *movement*; Patrick Friesen's *St. Mary at Main* (Muse's Company) celebrates Winnipeg and the "idea of a city" (its blocks, cafes, each an environment for poetry); Robyn Sarah's *Questions about the Stars* (Brick) asks what you can choose to do to give life positive substance, to find in death and love a "lingering grace;" and

Harold Rhenisch's *Taking the Breath Away* (Ronsdale) juxtaposes responses primarily to individual persons, finding in the specificity of experience the beginnings of meditation. There were also new or less familiar poets (like Bolster) whose engagements with words already reveal their skill: Louise Bernice Halfe, with *Blue Marrow* (M&S) and its history of Cree voices; Michael Crummey, with *Hard Light* (Brick), a mix of prose and poetry that brings the voices of the Labrador coast and Newfoundland history again into life; John Steffler, with *That Night We Were Ravenous* (M&S), also closely observing Newfoundland; and Brian Brett, with *The Colour of Bones* (Sono Nis), in which poems of love and politics (naked creativity and zealous denial) alternative in a cycle of caring. Daphne Marlatt gathered some of her essays in *Readings from the Labyrinth* (NeWest); Roy Miki collected his essays on poetry and the politics of race in *Broken Entries* (Mercury); George and Angela Bowering collaborated with Michael Matthews and David Bromige to produce a novel called *Piccolo Mondo* (Coach House), which recalls the 1950s in Vancouver and (a footnote to *Tish*) the youth of 1961, in a funny, sad memoir about poetry and language.

Anthologies, like most of the fiction published during the year, were aimed directly at niche markets: region, ethnicity, sexuality, the subject organizing the effort. Joseph Pivato's *The Anthology of Italian-Canadian Writing* (Guernica), with an extensive bibliography, and Martin Lee Franceschi's *Pillars of Lace* (Guernica), the latter collecting the work of Italian-Canadian women writers (di Michele, Melfi, David, Welch, Edwards), both come with surveys of the field, useful and able guides to themes of immigration, adaptation, resistance, and rejection. Christl Verduyn's *Literary Pluralities* (Broadview) assembles a range of perspectives on the literary experience of being classed as "ethnic" or "aboriginal," and of the difference between that and choosing the categories oneself. David Stouck and Myles Wilkinson's *West by Northwest* (Polestar) collects a range of BC short stories (everyone from Pauline Johnson to Evelyn Lau, with several much better stories in between). Of the three gay and lesbian anthologies from Arsenal Pulp Press, the most serious seems to be Karen X. Tulchinsky's *Hot & Bothered*, and Brett Josef Grubisic's *Contra/diction*, the latter gathering stories by both gay and straight writers about the experiences that shape gay identities in contemporary society; the stories, some of which needed further rewriting, range from the solemn to the satiric. More wide-ranging, Alberto Manguel's *The Ark in the Garden* (Macfarlane Walter & Ross) assembles four fable-writers, including Atwood and Mistry; Maggie Helwig's *Coming Attractions 98* (Oberon) features three new writers, the New Brunswick writer Darryl Whetter's work marked by a provocative edginess; Douglas Glover's *Best Canadian Stories 98* (Oberon) mostly reveals Glover's taste for the grotesque and for "secret" experience, but the stories of Mark Anthony Jarman and Dave Margoshes stand out. Unhappily, one of the most well-intentioned of anthologies, *Who Speaks for Canada?* (edited by the historian Desmond Morton and the sociologist Morton Weinfeld), sampling Great Paragraphs from the history of Canadian writing, ends up feeling stale, fragmentary, conventional—the identity chestnuts of old journalism and older textbooks—and desperate for a literary perspective. Among works perhaps better classed as reprints are *The George Grant Reader*, ed. William Christian and Sheila Grant (UTP), useful for readers who admire Grant; *The Best of Farley Mowat* (Key Porter), aimed at children; Donald Creighton's *John A. Macdonald* (UTP, two volumes in one), with a generous if not uncritical introduction by P. B. Waite; and

Leacock's *My Recollection of Chicago and The Doctrine of Laissez-faire*, ed. Carl Spadour (UTP), a personal essay along with Leacock's Ph.D. thesis, which disputes the virtues of laissez-faire, questions the idea of a university, and asks what the economic duties of government are, what government, and where. Of all these reprints and re-collections, however, I personally prefer Charles and Cynthia Hou's *Great Canadian Political Cartoons 1820 to 1914* (Gordon Soules), which goes back to *Grip, Punch, The Grain-Growers Guide,* Montreal and Toronto papers, and *The Eye-Opener,* gathering the contrary views on settlement, Confederation, political figures, railways, immigration, the US, women, and prohibition that punctuated and helped shape Canada's early national history: a browser's delight.

More argumentative were Francis Sparshott's lectures on the relations between institutions and systems of evaluation, *The Future of Aesthetics* (UTP), and Daniel Francis's *National Dreams* (Arsenal Pulp), exploding some myths and shibboleths of Canadian history, including the CPR, the Mounties, Heroism, the North, and the Wilderness. Bill Casselman's *Casselman's Canadian Words* (Little, Brown) adds to the author's irreverent browse through Canadian mottoes, swear words, and euphemisms, while *Prince Edward Island Sayings* (UTP), ed. T.K. Pratt and Scott Burke, seems surprisingly polite by contrast. And there were engaging, contentious, sprightly, satiric, provocative, smart, and otherwise readable essays on politics, life, love, depression, sport, and being alive, by Mordecai Richler (*Belling the Cat,* Knopf), Stephen Osborne (*Ice & Fire,* Geist/Arsenal Pulp), and David Carpenter (*Courting Saskatchewan,* Greystone), and a series of trenchant and cranky comments on Canadian literary trends by the journalist Philip Marchand, *Ripostes* (Porcupine's Quill), which were sometimes right.

Critical writings ranged from the insightful to the obvious, as usual, but among those that a reader might wish to consult are Denis Sampson's *Brian Moore* (Doubleday), a clear and sensitive biocritical appreciation of the novelist who died in early 1999; Julie Cruikshank's very fine *The Social Life of Stories,* about a range of issues that bear on the 'reading' of oral cultures, focussing on the relation between narrative and knowledge in the Yukon; John Moss's excellent anthology of essays that attempt to reimagine Arctic narrative, *Echoing Silence* (U Ottawa); Marie Vautier's *New World Myth* (McGill-Queen's), which in comparative form (Bowering & Barcelo, for example) asks how specific notions of society inform historiographic fictions; Jonathan Kertzer's excellent *Worrying the Nation* (UTP), which in a series of detailed analyses of writers from Goldsmith to Pratt to Lee to Marlatt shows how Romantic notions of nationhood relate to ideas of a national literature. Daniel Coleman's *Masculine Migrations* (UTP) looks at the "postcolonial male" (Ondaatje, Clarke, Laferrière, Bissondath, Mistry, and Begamudré) in a way that invites comparison with Misao Dean's more familiar reading of gender, domestic realism, and Moodie & Co. in *Practising Femininity* (UTP). Margaret Atwood and Victor-Lévy Beaulieu exchanged sympathetic overtures to understanding in *Two Solicitudes* (M&S). Anne Geddes Bailey, in *Timothy Findley and the Aesthetics of Fascism* (Talon), defines "fascism" widely, proving in a thesis-governed book that Findley's work reveals paradoxes. And in two separate biographies, Nathalie Cooke and Rosemary Sullivan rewrite the life of Margaret Atwood.

The fact that I read comparatively much less children's literature and drama than was published during 1998 means that any comments I make on these fields are overselective. But I enjoyed Carol Shields and Dave Williamson's *Anniversary* (Blizzard), a comic romp of a play wherein two couples

(and a "filth business") meet and pretend togetherness. And Brad Fraser's *Martin Yesterday* (NeWest) is a powerful evocation of a world of compassion, promise, desperation, and failure in Toronto, in a world bedevilled by drugs, HIV, and separation politics; Fraser's polemical introduction doubles the value of this edition. Among other worthy plays: Drew Hayden Taylor's *Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth* (Talon), in which an adoptee returns to his family as an outsider; Daniel David Moses' *Bug Buck City* (Exile), about upward mobility in Toronto; and (all from Scirocco) Djanet Sears' *Harlem Duet*, about Othello's first wife Billie; Daniel MacIvor's *The Soldier Dreams*, in which a young man dies of AIDS; and David Young's *Inexpressible Island*, set during a 1912 Antarctic expedition, balancing command against survival. Among writings for children, the range of writings during 1998 can perhaps be represented by the differences between Thomas King's *Coyote Sings to the Moon* (Key Porter), which tells a wonderful explanation story but needed better illustrations; and Diana Wieler's *Drive* (Groundwood), which tells in a refreshingly no-punches-pulled manner of two brothers (the pitchman and the artist) who have to work out their rivalries in order to find the friendship that binds them. By now one of the year's recurrent themes will be apparent: the *contradictions* of separation politics—what is it that joins those whose passion for difference (in families, in marriages, in relationships driven by gender and ethnicity and sexuality and place) threatens them with isolation instead?

Hence, translations: acts of faith in border-crossing; acts of homage; acts of commitment to parallels of understanding; acts of intent and approximation. Among those that anglophone readers of Canadian literature can now enjoy are Michel Tremblay's *A Thing of Beauty* (Talon, tr. Sheila Fischman), a loving memoir of family that will primarily engage those who have already been enraptured by Tremblay's Plateau Mont-Royal; Lise Bissonnette's *Cruelties* (tr. Fischman), somewhat brittle stories; Claude Péloquin's *Pellucid Waters* (Guernica, tr. Lucie Ranger), the affirmations and abstractions of poems first published in 1993 as *Les mers détroublées*; Fulvio Caccia's *Aknos and Other Poems* (Guernica, tr. Daniel Sloate), in which everything turns into a quest for language, the "nude word;" Claire Dé's *The sparrow has cut the day in half* (Exile, tr. Lazer Lederhandler), a "novel"/love story composed in images and three-line stanzas; and Nicole Brossard's *she would be the first sentence of my next novel* (a two-language edition from Mercury, tr. Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood), in which the character and the novel being written are one, artifice and thought taking precedence over all action except that of composition.

That said, many fictions focussed on action instead of composition, though one has to remember to distinguish not between fictional genres but between accomplishments within genres. So among the fifty or so novels and short story collections I read, what stands out? Some of the annual prize-winners, certainly: Alice Munro's *The Love of a Good Woman* (M&S) for one. It is a brilliant collection of stories, more sophisticated in some ways than her previous collections, which is maybe an odd statement, given the subtlety of her earlier stories; what I mean is that these stories linger on nuance—the reader has to listen for the *pacing*: that's where the "story" lies. The collection visits, then revisits, the lives of a number of different women, each of whom has an event to recall, only to find (on revisiting it, and the reader along with her) that she has to reconsider whether her actions made sense after all, *and to do so without regret*. The balance is all. In one story, for example, a woman abandons her family to run off

with another man; the children survive, happily enough it seems, but the new liaison (much to one's narrative surprise, given the plotline) does not: this is not a tale of Orpheus and Eurydice after all, but something else—and in the recognition that there is always "something else" to deal with in one's life lies the moral heart to these eloquent appreciations of passionate decision and quiet consequence.

But not all prize nominees were so accomplished—so *sustained*—and my own list of what to read again would look quite different. There were new works by Shyam Selvadurai (*Cinnamon Gardens*, M&S), W.P. Kinsella (*The Secret of the Northern Lights*, Thistledown), Neil Bissoondath (*The Worlds within Her*, Random House), Carol Windley (*Breathing Under Water*, Oolichan), Russell Smith (*Noise*, Porcupine's Quill), Sharon Butala (*The Garden of Eden*, HarperCollins), Phyllis Gotlieb (*Flesh and Gold*, Tor), Sarah Dearing (*The Bull is not Killed*, Stoddart), Drew Hayden Taylor (*Fearless Warriors*, Talon), Charles de Lint (*Someplace to be Flying*,Tor), Leon Rooke (*Who Goes There*, Exile), Kristjana Gunnars (*Night Train to NykØping*, Red Deer), Cecil Foster (*Slammin' Tar*, Random House), Douglas Cooper (*Delirium*, Random House): but none of these got to my final list, despite the strong points that each of them might claim. Butala's commitment to biodiversity underpins her tale of a woman's midlife discoveries, but the web of passing relationships does not finally enliven it. Kinsella's talent for anecdote, Gunnars' for meditation, Gotlieb's for fantasy: all are in evidence, but to what end? Windley, a talented story writer, tries to extend this story too long; Hayden Taylor and Bissoondath try to explain too much and end up dramatizing too little; Foster's dialogue between dialect and "formal" English gets the politics clear enough, but the style sags in such phrases as "from whence" and in the overt declaration of Hopes and Dreams; Selvadurai writes of the power of tradition to restrict love, but his plot is mechanical, the dialogue arch. Where were the editors? Maybe working with some other texts: Aritha Van Herk's *Restlessness* (Red Deer), perhaps, or Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the FurQueen* (Doubleday), or André Alexis's *Childhood* (M&S), or Guillermo Verdecchia's *Citizen Suárez* (Talon), or Ashok Mathur's *Once Upon an Elephant* (Arsenal Pulp), or Meíra Cook's *The Blood Girls* (NeWest), or Yves Meynard's *The Book of Knights* (Tor), or Murray Logan's *The King of Siam* (Porcupine's Quill), or Carmen Rodriguez's *and a body to remember with* (Arsenal Pulp), or Tamas Dobozy's *Doggone* (Gutter Press), or Bill Gaston's *Sex Is Red* (Cormorant), or Michael Turner's *American Whiskey Bar* (Arsenal Pulp), or Greg Hollingshead's *The Healer* (HarperCollins), or Mark Anthony Jarman's *New Orleans is Sinking* (Oberon), or the new novels by Jack Hodgins (*Broken Ground*, M&S), Wayne Johnston (*The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, Random House), and David Adams Richards (*The Bay of Love and Sorrows*, M&S)—all of which merit more attention.

Why? It's not that these books do not, in some cases, draw as much on familiar plotlines as the others (reading Meynard's sf fantasy, for example—his first book in English—you know from the start that the boy who trains to become a knight will learn to *read the book* and use it against tyranny), but that they carry their premise through. They will engage different readers in different ways; Van Herk's foregrounding of artifice (it asks, in language, about what a search for silence might mean) will not be to everyone's taste, nor will Jarman's stories about the grittier sides of urban (and suburban) life: cancer, revenge, beer, the streets, the stupid and perhaps unforgiveable mistakes that parents make in their desperate desire for importance or "manli-

ness" (there are a lot of father-son stories here). But talent shows: Van Herk and Jarman are both stylists. So is Dobozy, whose first novel is at once confrontative and comic, taking its 20-something narrator to Hungary and back. So is Gaston in his collection of 13 stories about the meaning of luck, revenge, and shame and the never-quite innocence of sexuality. So is Hollingshead, though I find his novel's portraiture—the studies of smalltown types: abuser, abused, and several kinds of "healer"—more effective finally than the Faulkneresque revelations of eternity in the Canadian Shield country (which is, coincidentally, also the setting for Wayne Tefs' mystery, *Red Rock* [Coteau]). Like Hollingshead in another way, Meira Cook tackles the question of spirituality, taking a journalist out on a story to find out about miracles, discovering that what "story" does is challenge his sense of disbelief. Murray Logan also composes a powerful set of stories, one of them about a young father playing with his son, trying without success to recapture the sense of "innocence" he had before meeting up with an old friend (a now incarcerated sex offender) who doesn't look "different" and "could have been anyone." Violence is everywhere in 1998's fiction. Michael Turner's cross-genre experiment is a kind of *faux* memoir, about "making it" (film, success, pornography, power) and about the character of control. Highway reaches back into autobiography to criticize the Roman Catholic church school, and to attack the sexual abuse and racism that lead one brother to AIDS and another to a creative, if troubled, musical career. Richards' novel (a new direction stylistically that might attract still more readers) tells of the two dozen characters who live on a back bay, who are near to but not of "town," whose lives intersect in a tale of drugs, manipulation, murder, and wrongful conviction. Again, the novel is filled with a number of familiar types: the good cop, the petty thief, the hard-edged woman who runs the gas station. It is not the absence of types that marks the success of this book; it is what Richards does with them stylistically. The novel sets up early (through some reflexive sentences, in part) its need to "revisit" impressions and scenes; when the novel ends up calling for a revisiting of "evidence" the writer gives his stylistic choice another dimension of meaning.

Richards' story clearly draws on, if it does not exactly replicate, contemporary media reports—of, for example, the stories of Donald Marshall and others recently released from prison after having been wrongfully incarcerated for years. Mathur's story results from a cross between Ganesh and Gregor Samsa. Verdecchia's funny, sad, sardonic tale shows a dramatist's ear for dialogue—one section of the book is a revealing troop through the world of theatrical auditions. Johnston's novel results from a cross between history and romance, this tale of "Joey Smallwood's" defensive life and quest for political fame enlivened by the "journal" of his harshest critic and novelistic love, one "Sheila Fielding," and by its feel for a Newfoundland that "Canada" never quite understands. Alexis's *Childhood* shows what can happen when a book stops trying to *be* autobiography as well as fiction, and contents itself with finding a fictional form for what life ("a" life, not quite "any" life, but almost) feels like. Alexis tells, that is, a story about a boy who grows up with his grandmother, his mother, and her two friends, one who is a problem and one who is a black-Chinese philosopher and his most enduring teacher—but what he *does* with this story is what is important. He turns it into a story *about* "childhood." Moving, wry, funny, the novel reveals that life is really just a footnote to childhood, and that childhood stops when one learns a realization of loss. That his character learns love as well as loss just reconfirms that there a variety of ways

of ordering reality, and that these often (more often than we care sometimes to admit) coincide.

Wry, funny, serious, moving: the same adjectives can be brought to Jack Hodgins' wonderful *Broken Ground* as well—his best novel so far, and an eloquently-wrought revelation of the way people dislocate themselves in order to give happiness a chance to prevail over horror. This novel is not only about the places people live, in other words, but also about the mental spaces they inhabit; it tells of a community of First World War veterans trying to forget the war and all it represents (distance, despair, brutality, infidelity, responsibility, irresponsibility, pain) as they blast a new community out of unfarmable ground, and about the failure of history to ever get their experience "right." No one person, it turns out, not even the historian, has the right to truth, the "whole," and it takes the entire novel for the masks to come off, and for the narrator to recognize how he has been constrained, as the town has permitted itself to be constrained, by convention, and why. For the townspeople's version of their history has always focussed on a forest fire that almost destroys them. They accept and aggrandize this tale, doing so because they can deal with it; they can record it, ritualize it, ironize it, as they can never do with the war—it becomes for them an unstated substitute for what has savaged their lives in ways that even they cannot begin to comprehend. And so they live at once with convention and at tangents to it, as the style makes clear: their happiness is racked with unresolvable tension. But this tension leads somewhere *in the fiction*. The novel opens in multiple voices: in passages, we find out, that constitute the text of the interviews that a film-maker much later conducts with the townspeople in order to find out about the fire—but they do more than that. The fragmentation is a sign not so much of the fire as of what the war did to the soldiers *and to the century*—blasted them out of their contentment with a uniform voice and point-of-view. It is a process that kills as well as gives up space to grow in: both the battlefields and the farms are "broken ground," the site of *contra-diction*. To live with this understanding is a challenge. And this novel, which invites readers to meet it, is a substantial and engrossing narrative accomplishment.

Marian Engel's Notebooks
"Ah, mon cahier, écoute..."

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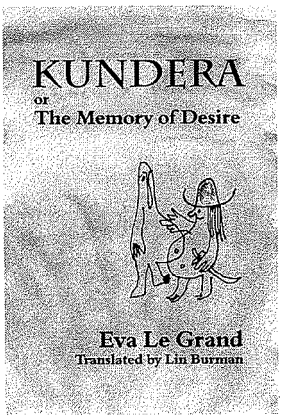

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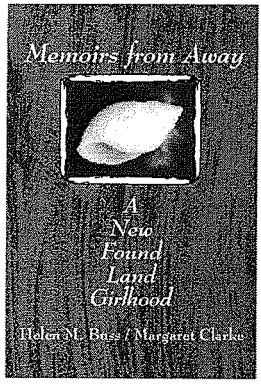

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Essays

John (Zhong) Ming **Chen** is revising a book of interviews with Chinese Canadian writers and is currently working on a critical book on Taoist aesthetics and poetics in Chinese Canadian writing. He has also published on Taoism and deconstruction, Lu Xun and Japanese prose poems, Frederick Philip Grove, Malcolm Lowry, and Paul Yee. His book on English Canadian social realism has been accepted by Peter Lang.

Glenn **Deer** teaches Asian Canadian and Asian American Writing, Canadian Literature, and Rhetorical Theory and Criticism in the English Department at the University of British Columbia. He is the author of *Postmodern Canadian Fiction and the Rhetoric of Authority* (1994).

Susanna **Egan** teaches in the English Department at the University of British Columbia. Her work in autobiography studies includes *Patterns of Experience in Autobiography* (1984), *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* (1999), and several articles.

Susan **Fisher** is a SSHRCC Postdoctoral Fellow at the Centre for Research in Women's Studies and Gender Relations at the University of British Columbia. Her areas of research include Canadian poetry and twentieth-century fiction in Britain and Japan. Her work has appeared in the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* and the *B.C. Asian Review.*

Gabriele **Helms** is a SSHRCC Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of English at University of British Columbia. In her current research, she explores the connections between the generic instability of contemporary Canadian life-writing and reconceptualizations of experience.

Larissa **Lai** is a Vancouver-based writer and cultural organizer. Her novel *When Fox Is a Thousand* (Press Gang, 1995) was nominated for the Chapters/Books in Canada First Novel Award in 1996. In 1997-98 she was the Markin-Flanagan Canadian Writer-in-Residence at the University of Calgary. In 1999 she organized a national touring project, "Writers for Change," and is currently working on a second novel titled *Salt Fish.*

Christopher **Lee** is a graduate student in English at Brown University. His research interests include Asian North American literature and culture, critical theory and intersections between theory and musicology, especially in jazz.

Essays, continued

Mark **Libin** recently completed his doctorate at the University of Manitoba on the idea of beginnings in Canadian literature. He has published articles on Robert Kroetsch, bp Nichol, Dennis Cooley, Nicole Markotic and John Marlyn. He is currently teaching at the University of British Columbia.

Maria Noëlle **Ng** is Chiang Ching-kuo assistant professor in the Department of Comparative Literature, Religion, Film/Media Studies at the University of Alberta. Her research interests include nineteenth-century studies, ethnic representation, and East/West literary interrelations. Her work has been published in *Ariel*, *Canadian Literature*, and *Essays on Canadian Writing*.

Terry **Watada** is a Toronto writer. Among his many publications is *Daruma Days* (Ronsdale Press, 1997), a collection of short stories about the Japanese-Canadian community. He is currently working on a play for the Canadian Stage Company.

Poems

Randal **Chin**, Fiona **Lam** and Roy **Miki** live in Vancouver, Jean **Eng** and Terry **Watada** in Toronto, and Andy **Quan** in Australia. Leslie **Lum** teaches at Bellevue Community College, and Fred **Wah** teaches at the University of Calgary. Jen **Lam** studies at the University of British Columbia, and Rita **Wong** studies at Simon Fraser University.

Reviews

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