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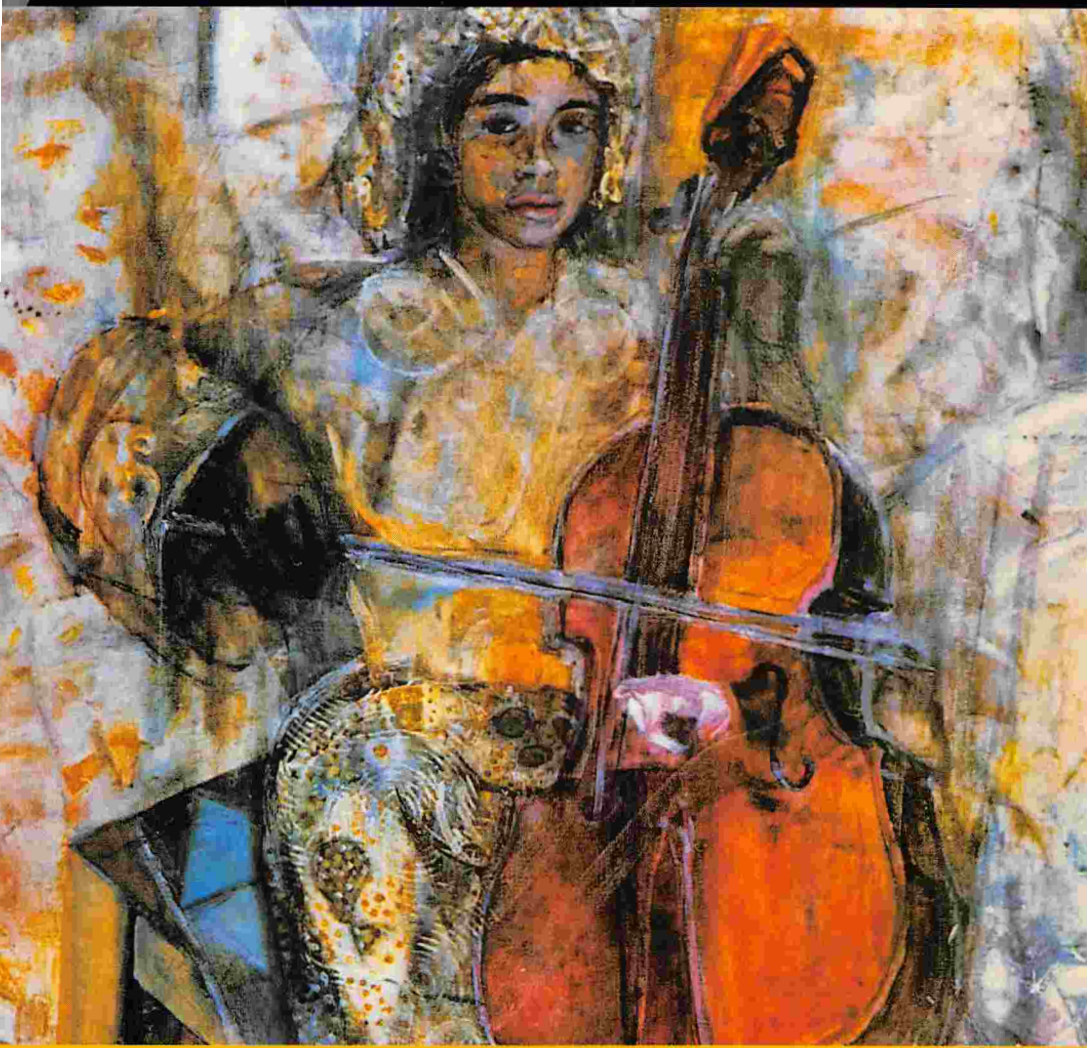

SPECIAL ISSUE: **ASIAN AMERICAN LITERATURE**

Journal of the Malaysian Association
for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies

No. 46 April 2005

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Southeast Asian Review of English

Special Issue: Asian American Literature

Journal of the Malaysian Association
for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies

Aims and Scope
SARE is an internationally refereed journal with a particular interest in writings from the Commonwealth. It explores the cultural and intellectual aspects of the Southeast Asian region and issues connected with language and literature.

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Editorial Note

This publication of SARE is a special issue which focuses on Asian American Literature, an important theme in current literary interests and research. Situating ourselves in a global context, it is pertinent to consider the role of the United States of America, a nation that has had great impact and influence on world literature. In view of the changing international relations between Asia and the US, this issue takes up the challenge of capturing the diversity of voices that suggests an Asian understanding of America. The papers received cover a range of issues relating to different expressions of diasporic experience in America, such as Korean, Vietnamese, Filipino, Indian and Indonesian.

This special issue is made possible by the generous funding provided by the Embassy of the United States of America in Malaysia.* In particular, the personal interest taken by Mr. Karl Stoltz, Mr. Gerard George and Ms Evelyn Ong had been especially encouraging in seeing this project to its completion. Members of the advisory board had also offered indispensable help in providing criticism and feedback. Of special mention is Professor Shirley Lim who went beyond what was required of her in her capacity as advisor in her concern and contribution. Without doubt, this issue would not have been possible without the contributors. Finally, we wish to acknowledge with appreciation the piece of artwork titled *"Musician"* which Mr. Chuah Siew Teng, the artist, and NN Gallery have kindly allowed us to print on the cover.

Due to the enthusiastic response to this issue, the editors decided to omit book reviews, creative writings and other contributions which are not directly related to the theme.

* This project was funded, in part, through a grant; the opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the Author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State.

Postcolonializing Filipino American Literature

Shirley Geok-lin Lim

According to which critic you read, Asian American literature began in 1974, with the publication of *Aiiieeeee!* whose editors argued for an aggressive conceptualization of non-assimilationist Asian American identity along the lines of the Black Arts movement (Hagedorn 93). Or it began in 1976, with the publication of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, which received extravagant praise from white American reviewers who misread it as an autobiography illuminating the experience of Chinese in America (Lim 1990). In winning the National Book Award, Kingston's first book functioned rather like N. Scott Momaday's 1969 Pulitzer-prize-winning mixed-genre book, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. Like Momaday's book, *The Woman Warrior* can be said to initiate mainstream publishers' interest in a new body of works produced by a hitherto unnoticed minority group, in this case, by Asian Americans. Or we may study its history, and say that Asian American literature began with the poems composed in Chinese and written on the wooden walls of the detention building on Angel Island between 1910 and 1945. These poems, translated into English, were finally published in 1980, with annotations on their Chinese literary contexts. Or we may include even earlier works, such as Edith Eaton's stories which began appearing in the 1890s in popular magazines under her pseudonym Sui Sin Far, and which were later published in the collection *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* in 1912 by A. C. McClurgh, the same Chicago press that had brought out W. E. B DuBois's *The Souls of Black Folk*.

This compressed, ever-receding literary history, however, refers chiefly to works by Americans of Chinese descent. In this version of Asian American literary tradition, "Chinese" functions metonymically for "Asian." But the metonymy distorts and reduces what are notably complex and heterogeneous cultural productions. It omits, for example, different

national-origin-works that offer radically different histories. To understand the forms and aesthetics of early works of Japanese American literature, for example, we need to understand not the form of Chinese classical poetry that the Angel Island poems emulated but the haiku, tanka, renga, and senryu practiced by the Issei, first-generation Japanese Americans, who published numerous poems in Japanese-language newspapers, and whose Japanese language aesthetics still require interpretation. Etsu Inagaki Sugimoto's *A Daughter of the Samurai*, published in 1925, suggests a response to the Japanese experience in the United States different from that represented in Edith Eaton's Chinese American fictions; and Monica Sone's autobiography *Nisei Daughter* provides a representation of an anti-Japanese United States in the 1930s and 1940s that differs markedly from the Chinese American success story that Jade Snow Wong's contemporary *Fifth Chinese Daughter* celebrated. Moreover, instating first-generation texts such as Eaton's and Sugimoto's makes visible a tradition of entry or contact literature, different from the second-generation, American-daughter narratives that have been noted about post-1950s Asian American literature. Instead of inaugurating Asian American literary tradition with second-generation autobiographies that appear to fall in with an assimilation-immigration tradition, these texts point to a radically different tradition of first contact, return, and exclusion narratives.

Indeed, if we are to seriously incorporate heterogeneity into our interpretation, we must move even further back to include the heterogeneity of nation-origin-identities that are even now elided in the critical paradigm of Asian American literature. The subject-in-process that informs the linguistic structures of Asian American narrative (Chinese-, Japanese-, Korean-, Filipino-, or South-Asian American, for example), when contextualized in particular nation-origin-cultural histories, emerges with multiple, distinctively inflected shapes than when it is conflated as a single unitary Asian American tradition. Such conflation, actively erasing the pluralistic communities that compose Asian Americans, makes it easier for these groups and their traditions to be appropriated and assimilated into a master canon of immigrant and minority American literature.

Asian American literature, now expanded to include literature by Pacific Islander Americans, encompasses works by authors who trace descent from over fifty national communities. Asia alone covers one-fifth of the earth's land area and accounts for more than half of the world's population. Although historians such as Sucheng Chan "call Asians who lived and worked in the United States before the 1960s immigrants" and

Asian American "for the years after the mid-1960s," Asian American literature should not be read simply as a part of immigrant American writing. For until 1943, when Congress repealed all Chinese exclusion laws and granted the right of naturalization and a small immigration quota to Chinese, Asians were not immigrants to the United States the way that Irish, French, or Italians had been immigrants. Until 1943, Asians were excluded from the United States; they could not become naturalized citizens, were not allowed to own property, and were actively discouraged from forming families and communities by a series of immigration laws that prevented the women folk from entry, and miscegenation laws forbidding the marriage of Asians to white Americans. First-generation Asian American literature reflects, expresses, and is constituted through this tradition of exclusion rather than of immigration, and consequently must be read as "exclusion" rather than "immigrant" literature. Deconstructionist and post-structuralist interpretative strategies foregrounding the gaps, absences, slippages and fissures in narrative structures and linguistic and figurative units therefore are crucial for a mapping of exclusion thematics.

The history of Filipinos in the United States is different from that of other Asian groups because the Philippines was the only Asian territory colonized by the U.S. Beginning in 1882 U.S. legislators worked to exclude Chinese and later Japanese and all Asians from U.S. territory. But in 1898, the United States fought a war with Spain which drew it into the Philippines, a territory most Americans had never heard of, and which President McKinley identified as a place "somewhere away around on the other side of the world" (cited in Stanley Karnow 100). Despite strong opposition within the U.S. to imperial expansion, American officials like Dewey and Merritt, preoccupied with the defeat of Spain, "sought the help of the Filipinos," and "the Filipinos naively believed the promises until they discovered, to their dismay, that they had been manipulated" (Karnow 110). Although Emilio Aguinaldo declared the Philippines an independent republic on June 12, 1898, two months later Spain surrendered Manila to United States forces; and the peace treaty signed between the two Western powers in Paris on December 10 made the Philippines a U.S. possession, together with Guam and Puerto Rico. The annexation began a bloody nationalist uprising that ended officially only on July 4, 1902, when President Theodore Roosevelt, declaring the war over, called it "the most glorious war in the nation's history" (Miller 250). The U.S. toll stood at 4,234 dead; U.S. forces had killed twenty thousand native soldiers, and

as many as two hundred thousand civilians may have died from atrocities, famine and other causes (Karnow 194). This history of American imperialism in the Philippines—"the raising of the flag on distant lands to signify domination over them and their colored inhabitants" (Graff vii)—forms the background to Carlos Bulosan's *American is in the Heart* and Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*.

Just as with Mexican and Indios whose bodies came with the conquered territories of the South and Southwest after the treaty of Hidalgo-Guadeloupe, the colonization of the Philippines brought with it the problem of brown bodies. Legislated as U.S. nationals, native Filipinos were never permitted naturalization into U.S. citizenship. Yet, within two years of annexation, the United States carried out a strategy of cultural colonization that successfully interpellated Filipinos as "American" subjects. *America is in the Heart* and *Dogeaters*, published fifty years apart, carry the shape of that socio-political formation: the anomalous subjectivity of Filipinos as *simultaneously* American national and non-citizen-subjects, a political anomaly with its own particular problematics for Asian American identity formation. Both narratives demonstrate the persistent effects of colonization on subject mentalities. In both, "America" as an intertwined ideology of capitalist free market and freedom devastates and invigorates the Filipino characters. "America" names an acculturating process that reforms and deforms native Filipinos as Other through its instantiation of discursive apparatuses that produce gender, class, and nation identities.

How and when was this Filipino-colonial-American subject formed? Arguably it was initiated as a political American Imaginary by President William McKinley whose address to a delegation of Methodist churchmen in the fall of 1898 is one of the first records of this historical subject-in-process:

> I thought first we would take only Manila; then Luzon; then other islands, perhaps, also. I walked the floor of the White House night after night until midnight; and I am not ashamed to tell you, gentlemen, that I went down on my knees and prayed Almighty God for light and guidance more than one night... And one night it came to me this way—I don't know how it was, but it came: one, that we could not give them back to Spain—that would be cowardly and dishonorable; two, that we could not turn them over to France or Germany—our commercial rivals in the Orient—that would be bad business and discreditable; three, that we could

> not leave them to themselves—they were unfit for self-government—and they would soon have anarchy and misrule over there worse than Spain's was; and four, there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and Christianize them, and by God's grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow men for whom Christ also died. And then I went to bed, and went to sleep and slept soundly. (*Dogeaters* 71)

In McKinley's address, which the novel quotes verbatim, the Philippines appears first as a problem that keeps an American President from sleep. The problem has a female anima; the political status of the islands—whether to return them to Spain, to give them over to another European power, to give them self-rule, or to keep them as a colony—animates questions over the nature of America's identity as a nation. The United States would be cowardly and unthrifty, that is, unmanly, were it to return the Philippines to Spain or to turn it over to European rivals. Occupying a similar objectified status to women, commodified as exchange item, the Philippines is seen as unfit for self-rule, and in need of American protection and moral uplift. Only after the decision is made to colonize the Philippines is the President able to sleep soundly, manhood and virtue secured. McKinley's narrative encodes the logic of American imperialism. The nation, founded on masculine courage, capitalist thrift, and Christian rectitude, is secured through the subordination and possession of an Other whose inferiority lies in its lack of these very properties. That is, America becomes territorialized as empire through its evacuation of an-other culture and the reproduction of American identity in its place.

Because Filipino Americans are a relatively recent arrived group in North America we can expect to find a radical contrast between the way in which description, imagery, and fantasy play a role in the production of images of environment in the texts produced by Native American writers like Momaday and Filipino Americans like Bulosan. The difference may be articulated through Heidegger's contrasting ideas of place and dwelling: the contrast between a people's 'deep' empathy with their place of dwelling, where they feel 'at home' within an environment, and the experience of "placelessness" and alienation which emerges from the attempt of domination over the world and a concentration on control over the environment. The notion of dwelling is taken up in Yi-fu Tuan's use of the term "topophilia" to mean humans' affective ties with their environment that couples sentiment and place. These affective ties

underline a zone of the social imaginary, in which "The spatial [becomes] an intense area of cultural activity" (Rob Shields 30). That is, figures of place are not simply synonymous with an emotional datum of geographical space. Rather, these figures encompass the cultural logic of the spatial and its expression and elaboration in language and institutional arrangements.

An immigrant text, symbolic spatialization in Bulosan's putative autobiography illustrates certain socio-political positions and produces place-images that construct complex concepts of historical, legislative, political and imagined possession of U.S. territory. That is, while *America is in the Heart* sets out to construct a group identity on North American soil for Filipino Americans, its representations of the relations between this ethnic community and U.S. territory that may vivify and legitimate its claims to identity in the U.S. are culturally mediated representations of environments; as Shields explains, "any 'mental images' of places are ... conditioned by the mediation and intervention of conceptual systems, normative conditioning and socialization" (RS 14). The figurative nexus in Bulosan's autobiography is that of person and place as discontinuous. Beginning with the loss of the father's farmland in the Philippines and the immigration of the seventeen-year-old Filipino to the U.S., *America is in the Heart* follows the migratory repetition of the landless worker captured by capitalist middlemen to work in the Alaskan canneries, the Washington orchards, and the Californian pea fields. Sau-ling Wong describes Bulosan's text as figuring "the repetitive, unremitting nature of the work, with no home in sight, deprived ceaseless motion of any overtone of epic adventure or spiritual reinvigoration" (Wong 126). "In Filipino American literature," she argues, "the inability to break out of the endless looping seems to be associated with the inability to sustain a home and achieve a communal culture, which is one of the most unfortunate legacies of American colonialism" (127). More specifically, I argue, this inability to sustain a home is contextually related to the Asian Exclusion Acts, the Alien Land Laws and the miscegenation laws that disallowed the Asian any territorial permanence in the US from 1882 to 1947. Exclusion history explains why "mobility narratives" such as *America is in the Heart* "exhibit no canonical direction of geographical movement; rather, they trace a multiplicity of routes, some linear and coherent, others defying patterning" (Wong 127). Wong reads the memoir as an "intriguing resistance to map-making efforts" (130), and points out that the world of migrant labor is manifested in this "discursive exclusion" (131); Bulosan

"seems to be insisting on imposing a direction on the directionless circulations, with only partial success" (135). The representations of coerced mobility hints at the protagonist's "uneasy holding-in suspension of conflicting ideological forces" (Wong 136). Wong's reading observes acutely the "failure of home-founding" (136) in the memoir, but it needs to be repeated that this "failure" is the result of insistent and violent erasure of Filipino presence on U.S. territory. Such exclusionary violence underlines the primary experience of the autobiographical subject, who is temporarily located and continuously dislocated in an alienated space. In chapter after chapter, the Filipino characters are chased out of town, shot down, escape from angry mobs, move on in search of jobs, ride in freight trains, catch a bus, and are thrown out of rooms and jobs.

Because America is not possible in a permanent material space, it must be inscribed in an idealized dimension. In *America is in the Heart,* when a Filipino veteran tells the protagonist, Carlos, "I found that I couldn't buy land in California. I had served in the United States navy in World War I, so I thought I had the privilege.... I didn't know that three years after the armistice I could no longer file my citizenship papers" (273), Carlos adds, "I found myself in [this veteran], in the strange melody of his attachment to the land that did not belong to him" (273). Filipino American collective identity is founded on an ironic patriotism to a nation that does not honor the soldier that honors it; as in the stories of Carlos living in cramped rooms with a changing community of immigrant Filipino men, the reality of homelessness underlies the evolving social consciousness of an American ideal of justice, two contraries of an imagined U.S. nation that form the oscillating poles of despair and hope that drive the narrative. The material falseness of the American promise of democracy, the absence of such signifying practice, in fact, makes the ideational argument of an American homeland more urgent and necessary. The metaphors of uprooting, disjuncture, and metamorphosis are paradoxically tied to an evolving metaphor of America as that vast sublimated space where the alienated individual finally finds a home: a phantasmagoria of unities of fragmented subjectivities, created in the collective image of and through the collective desire of those dispossessed of property:

> America is not bound by geographical latitudes. America is not merely a land.... America is in the hearts of men who died for freedom.... America is also the nameless foreigner, the homeless refugee, the hungry boy begging for a job and the black body dangling on a tree. (189)

The passage delimits an identity formed outside of legitimated space (the nameless foreigner, homeless refugee, lynched black body), excluded through the territorial imperatives of unnamed others, a social spatialization that textualizes the historical dynamics of immigrants of color within the U.S. during the history of the Asian Exclusion laws.

If, as Yi-Fu Tuan has argued, the pre-reflective life world of the immediate is in the pre-intellectual and offers us the experience of the authentic (1977), then one may argue that Filipino American writing, a group identity that seeks legitimation in and through mediation with U.S. geographical territory, must reside in the dimension of the inauthentic, that is, in the space after the pre-reflective and pre-intellectual. In Bulosan's text, space is ambiguous, ambivalent, multi-faceted, duplicitous, difficult, resulting in a postmodern representation of unreal nostalgia, unreal homesickness which suggests the ironic dimensions of ethnic authenticity for first-generation immigrants. How can the authentic be authenticated? Who is to authenticate the vernacular? A younger Filipino American writer notes, "Identity is cool, but identity without action is masturbation" (Steven de Castro)." *America Is In the Heart* plots the struggles of Filipinos in America through a social history of labor organization that will legislate their identity as Americans, and the last third of the memoir narrates Carlos's increasing activism and the coalescing of his fellow nationals into organized resistance groups. At the same time, the narrative's place-images of migrant labor camps, beer halls and bars, gambling dens, red-light districts, bus stations, and cheap hotels construct a geo-spatial imagination in which space (hooks 1990—149) is the "space of radical openness... a margin —a profound edge.... It is not a 'safe' place. One is always at risk. One needs a community of resistance," reminding us that "for those who have no place that can safely be called home, there must be a struggle for a place to be" (Keith and Pile 5).

For Carlos, the Filipino American protagonist, identity formation is tied to a geography of diaspora, and liminal spaces—the labor camps, whore houses, single-room residencies—become linked to epistemological incomensurabilities. Such marginal places are not simply the spaces of those 'left behind' in the move to modernity nor do they evoke nostalgia and fascination. They are usually illicit, dangerous, and disdained: urban wastelands, the "periphery of cultural systems of place in which places are ranked relative to each other" (Rob Shields 3). Bulosan's life story is hence a history of the transformation of the autobiographical subject between margins, tracing a course of beginnings and endings.

The autobiography operates from a diasporic frame that invokes Filipino communal space as both inside and outside the West. The autobiography as a *Kunstlerroman*, tracing the course of the protagonist from unschooled native to U.S. intellectual and writer, offers a vision of cultural fusion, in which syncretism produces diaspora-specific resources of resistance, opening up subversive new spaces. It envisions a counter-legitimacy that forces open the conventional correspondence between ethnocentric essentialism and political territory. The spatial has an ontological aspect—the forgotten datum of social practice, the everydayness of lots, houses, chophouses, alleys, kitchens, etc, the Filipino space of exclusion in the U.S. *America Is In the Heart* is filled with locations of struggle; communities of resistance construct political spaces, a reversal of the way in which place constructs communities of resistance in Native American texts.[1]

A second thread of Asian American exclusion literature in Filipino-American writing shows how an inscribed, even though sometimes unmarked, specificity of nation-origin-history shapes these works. Understanding the different historical formation of a Filipino-colonial-American subjectivity, as distinct from an Asian-American subjectivity, must necessarily lead us to revise established notions of American national identity and civilization, notions that are subtly and paradoxically both upheld and dismantled in these narratives. Like *America is in the Heart*, *Dogeaters* re-writes a history of the discursive shaping of the Filipino-colonial-American subject, and in so doing calls into question and complicates the conceptualization of Filipino-American identity as an American assimilated subject. While *America is in the Heart* embeds the pre-independence Filipino-colonial-American in the history of Asian exclusion on United States soil, *Dogeaters* imagines the post-independence Filipino-colonial-American subject on American extra-territoriality in the Philippines.[2]

Oscar Campomanes, surveying Filipino American literature, argues that "The orientation toward the Philippines prevents prevailing notions of Asian American literature from reducing Filipino writing in the United States to just another variant of the immigrant epic, even if this in itself must be seen as an ever-present and partial possibility as time passes and Philippine-American relations change" (55). Campomanes sees Filipino American experiences as part of a larger diaspora and Filipino American writing as post-colonial and neo-colonial produced discourse within an exilic tradition. Campomanes' exilic interpretation is derived from a

critique of the continuing relations between resisting subalterns (in Gramsci's use of the term) and U.S. imperial culture. The exilic paradigm emphasizes an historically oppositional binary of bi-nation-identity validated outside of U.S. borders, distinct from ethnic and minority identity-constructs within U.S. borders. The exilic paradigm maps bodies of literature and brings to consciousness complex identity formations that the *Aiiieeeee!* anthology's insistence on "American-born sensibility" excludes, but it does not account for the particular shape of Filipino-colonial-American culture. Jonathan Okamura's categorizing of Filipino Americans as a diasporic community, set in "a global transnational context" (387) that conceives "community, citizenship, and identity as simultaneously here and elsewhere" (citing Clifford 1992), hints at the complicated and ambiguous valences of identity and cultural formation under colonial history, in its notion of a simultaneous "here and elsewhere" process.

Colonialism proceeds by ideological means, and history—the narrative of a people's identity—is a major vector whereby such identities are constituted and manipulated. Hagedorn notes of her education as a colonized Filipino:

> From history books forced on me as a child in a convent school run by strict nuns, I learned a lopsided history of myself, one full of lies and blank spaces, a history of omission—a colonial version of history which scorned the "savage' ways of precolonial Filipinos. In those days even our language was kept at a distance. . . . English . . . was preferred. Tagalog was a language used to address servants. I scorned myself, and it was only later, after I had left the Philippines to settle in the country of my oppressor, that I learned to confront my demons and reinvent my own history. (*Danger and Beauty* 187)

Hagedorn locates her present time in the United States, but in a time-space interanimating the time-space of a neo-colonial Philippines. In this way she describes *Dogeaters* as "a novel set in contemporary Philippines. It is a journey back I am always taking. I leave one place for the other.... I am the other, the exile within, afflicted with permanent nostalgia.... I return, only to depart" (187). This autobiographical gesture, incorporating the repeated cycles of parting, re-turning, and de-parting, informs the novel's structure. The essay explicitly relates the condition of "permanent nostalgia" ("nostalgia," in the original Greek, meaning "homesickness") to the condition of the postcolonial. Imperial ideology, via the vector of

colonial education, afflicts the colonized subject with sickness of home, a disgust of the indigenous and longing for the Occidental Other, which the novel represents as American English, TruCola, white Christmases, George Hamilton, and Las Vegas, for example.

Coming to critical consciousness, the postcolonial subject rewrites her history as a sickness *for* "home"—a yearning for an original, precolonial native Imaginary. In *Dogeaters*, actions are set almost wholly in the Philippines of 1956, although a Philippines bearing still living memories of U.S. colonialism, as seen in the multiple allusions to Rio's elderly grandfather, Logan Whitman, whose lingering death in the American Veteran's Hospital in 1956 locates him as a young soldier in the Philippines War. At the same time it is an anachronistic narrative whose referents to military dictatorship and torture camps come from the era of Martial Law imposed by the Marcos regime, from 1978 to 1986.

In the postcolonial Filipino subject, one that is always already emergent in the Filipino-colonial-American, any original culture is therefore already irretrievably damaged—inducing yet another spasm of nostalgia, this time for the free play of postmodernism. If the crisis of modernity in non-Western societies is also the crisis of nationhood and westernization, postmodernity offers a way to overleap these crises to arrive at non-bounded formations of identity. In her Introduction to *Danger and Beauty*, Hagedorn typically notes her exasperation with the fixities of national borders and her desire for individual multiple identities: "borders be damned. A movement is afoot to assert ourselves as artists and thinkers, to celebrate our individual histories, our rich and complicated ethnicities" (ix). Yet of her own evolution she remarks, "1973 was when I begin discovering myself as a Filipino-American writer....The longing for what was precious and left behind in the Philippines begins to creep and take over my work" (x).

What Rio, the central character and narrator in *Dogeaters*, has left behind, however, is not a pre-colonial pure native society, but a family whose identities encode the colonial history of the Philippines, as in the character of Pucha, for example, who, unlike Daisy or Rio, remains in Manila as a Filipino-colonial-American. Pucha has learned to love Rock Hudson and "Heinz Pork 'n Beans.... because they're expensive and imported" (62). Her dream was to marry into Manilan high society. Married to Boomboom Alacran, however, Pucha must escape his abuse; she has to negotiate a safe space for herself in a nation where money and violence cooperate toward producing a totalitarian state. In the neo-

colonial nation-state, Pucha's colonial Americanism becomes an irrelevant feature, characterizing her permanent marginalization in a society where neo-colonial indigenes have now seized the technologies of surveillance, regulation and repression that the United States had so successfully deployed in its colonization of the Philippines.

Indeed, these technologies wielded by Filipino institutions, of media, army, and commerce, remain embedded in a bi-national polity in which U.S. cultural economy penetrates every facet of Filipino experience. Rio's mother shops for "Made in de U.S.!" foods: "Libby's succotash, Del Monte De Luxe Asparagus Spears, two bottles of Hunt's Catsup, one jar of French's Mustard, Miracle Whip Sandwich Spread, Kraft Mayonnaise, Bonnie Bell Sweet Sliced Pickles, Jiffy Peanut Bitter, packages of Velveeta, party-sized bags of Cheez Whiz, one box of Nabisco Ritz Crackers, and several boxes of Jell-O gelatin," groceries that add up to an "enormous cost" (234), not merely in foreign currency but in the shrinking of local economic production. In contrast to this cornucopia of U.S. manufactured brand-name imports, her local and Asian-based groceries include only Rufina patis, Kikoman Soy Sauce, TruCola, and several unbranded and unprocessed foods (234).

As this shopping list illustrates, *Dogeaters* must be read in terms of the historical, political and social relations between the Philippines and the United States, which are always relations of power, between colonized and colonial, the dominated and the dominant. Institutions of government, education, discipline, economy, and culture that the United States established in the Philippines after 1898 inaugurated a twentieth-century Filipino culture in which the United States served as the "mother-nation" and the Philippines, deterritorialized as subaltern in the imperial space of extra-territoriality, becomes figured as "another-colony." For example, in 1943 while in Washington D.C. as a refugee from the Japanese-occupied islands, Carlos Romulo published an anti-Japanese, pro-American tract aptly titled *Mother America*. The multiple overlapping voices in *Dogeaters* (Rio's, Joey's, Romeo's first-person voices, and the third-person narrative voice) address the ways in which Filipino characters like Rio, Pucha, Joey, Lolita and Romeo become "self"-represented—through masculinist, corporatist, and militaristic systems of representations, systems and representations that are, in the words of Stanley Karnow, made "in the image" of imperial America. In this neo-colonized Philippines, the Other becomes binarized as indigenous, feminine, pacifist, and communalist. Generated by and generating tensions of colonial equivalence, this

discursive dynamics produces the unstable rhetoric of identity in Bulosan's and Hagedorn's texts. A U.S. national, but one who is denied citizenship, marriage to white and other American citizens, and property rights, all the rights provided to European immigrants, the Filipino-colonial-American was a resident in the United States without having rights to citizenship in the United States or, if a resident in the Philippines, a subject reproduced in the cultural image of the United States.

But although the Filipino could not enter the United States as an immigrant, neither was he an alien foreigner in the United States, like the Chinese and Japanese; for the history of the U.S. in the Philippines was also a history of the success of Americanization in Asia. Learning English, losing the use of their original languages, drawn to American metropolises, and away from their village folkways, many Filipinos were already immersed in a U.S. polity without ever leaving the islands. In Bulosan's and Hagedorn's narratives, U.S. imperial values, transmitted through the institution of English-language education and the technologies of representation, evacuate native imaginations to install subaltern subjects readily susceptible to socio-economic exploitation.

Dogeaters, set in 1956, the year that Bulosan died in Los Angeles, demonstrates the increasing enlargement of technological apparatuses that further the control of Filipino subjects through a collusion of post-independence capitalist and military strongmen. The novel pushes beyond the binary of U.S. and Filipino relations constructed in Bulosan's autobiography, a binary that shifts between two national spaces without dismantling the statist guarding of bordered capital, to examine the co-operations of transnational corporatism and fascism in the reproduction and regulation of a subject people.

John Tagg, in his seminal study on photographies, notes that "the photograph possesses an evidential force, whose testimony bears not on the object but on time. From a phenomenological viewpoint, in the Photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation" (1). In *Dogeaters*, the moving photograph, in the technology of the cinematic camera, is continuously re-presented as a mimetic force that establishes a Western social fantasy to undermine and hollow the "social reality" of the Philippines. The novel renders in complex detail the various characters' relations to the media of popular culture—Hollywood movies, Filipino-made films, radio serial dramas, American publications, Filipino magazines and newspapers, Manila television talk shows, musicals, and beauty pageants, all operating through the

reproduction of "celebrity" images, frequently transmitted though "pictures" and photographs. According to Tagg, we must "look to the conscious and unconscious processes, the practices and institutions through which the photograph can incite a phantasy, take on meaning, and exercise an effect. What is real is not just the material item but also the discursive system of which the image it bears is part" (4).

Dogeaters opens in the "airconditioned darkness of Avenue Theater" (3). The narrative takes place in Manila, but the discursive space that Rio and her cousin Pucha occupy is outside the Philippines—a "perfect picture-book American tableau... Hollywood's version of a typical rural Christmas" (3). Rio and Pucha inhabit not simply a different national territory, as did Bulosan in his immigration from the Philippines to California, but a simulacra of that territory, one with "roaring cellophane fires" (3). Similarly, after the movie, the two girls drink TruCola, which is ironically not true but imitation Coca-Cola. This scene is narrated in present tense by Rio, whose pre-pubescent sensibility serves as overt commentary on Filipino hyper-sexualized, hyper-commodified social interactions.

The Philippines' multi-national colonial history produces contingent and opportunistic identities of citizenship. To Rio's mother, her husband Freddie is "a mestizo, yes—but definitely a Filipino" (8), but Freddie "believes in dual citizenships, dual passports, as many allegiances to as many countries as possible at any one given time" (7). When the novel opens, Rio's mother, "who carries American papers because of her father, feels more viscerally connected to the Philippines that [Freddie] ever could" (8). But by the novel's conclusion, it is the mother who leaves the Philippines irrevocably for the United States. The difference between the nation identities of Filipino and American is thus plotted as indifference. The crucial structure of the novel's dominant technique, the montage, is that of multiple and multiple-voiced narratives. The novel's structure resists the temptation to binary organization, between poor and rich, native and foreign, colonized and colonizing, or female and male. Instead, the montage achieves relational instabilities, between characters that at different moments possess differently weighted powers and attributes. Thus, *Dogeaters* does not prescript a plot of victim and victimizer, innocent Filipino native and racist white / mestizo, oppressed woman and dominant patriarch, even as it uses elements of this prescription. The montage's multiplying differences disrupt the totalizing operations of fascism on the social Imaginary; it foregrounds difference as an active force to disrupt

corporatist and statist ordering of the public imagination.

In the novel, the interpellation of different subject identities is centrally sited in institutions and spaces owned by one character, Severo Alacran. Alacran is politically identified with General Ledesmo, whose Special Assistant Carreon, his protégé and surrogate son, marries Alacran's only child, Baby; and with Andres Alacran, owner of CocoRico, the bar where Joey works as a disk-jockey and occasional homosexual prostitute. Severo Alacran owns "The Metro Manila Daily, Celebrity Pinoy Weekly, Radiomanila, TruCola Soft Drinks, plus controlling interests in Mabuhay Movie Studies, Apollo Records, and the Monte Vista Golf and Country Club" (18). Together with General Ledesmo, who runs the torture camp, Camp Dilidili, and directs the Special Squadrons who fill the camp with dissidents, Alacran is figured at the center of a totalitarian matrix.

Social relations in this Filipino milieu are structured as relations of power, and power is derived from technologies cognizant of a psychology of introjective pleasure—oral, visual, auditory, and so forth—to pacify potentially resistant subjects. In her introduction to *Charlie Chan Is Dead*, Hagedorn offers an exposition on this theme:

> I grew up in the Philippines watching Hollywood movies featuring yellowface, blackface, and redface actors giving me their views of myself. It was so easy to succumb to the seductive, insidious power of these skewed wide-screen angles. Better than books, movies were immediate and reached more people—both literate and illiterate. Movies were instantly gratifying. Bigger than life. I was a child. The movies were God." (xxi)

And again, "The colonization of our imagination was relentless and hard to shake off. Everywhere we turned, the images held up did not match our own. In order to be acknowledged, we had to strive to be as American as possible (xxiv).

The difference between men like Severo Alacran or General Ledesmo and women like the actress Lolita Luna, their shared mistress, can be seen as "the division between the power and privilege of producing and possessing and the burden of being that meaning" (Tagg 5). The burden of bearing the meaning of the subaltern is placed on female and ambiguously gendered bodies, on Indio and mestizo, and on the poor and working class, but it is carried also by the rich and powerful. The figure for oligarchic and monopolistic capital, Alacran has the power to tell "the President what to do," "tell the First Lady off," and "call the General Nicky"(18). Yet, in Hagedorn's satirical criticism of Filipino

totalitarianism, Alacran is denigrated as "The King of Coconuts," who presides over "The Coconut Palace," the title for the first half of the novel. Both Alacran and the Philippines are troped as coconuts—brown outside and white inside—that fruit (like the banana) taken as emblematic of colonized Asian peoples assimilated into Western culture. The coconut metaphor suggests that Alacran's corporate kingdom is an indexical representation of American neo-colonialism, a suggestion strongly supported through its repeated association with U.S. diplomatic characters.

The novel instances what Tagg had noted about the emergence of new institutions and new practices of observation and record-keeping, related to new technologies of representation and regulation" which are "central to the restructuring of the local and nation state" (4). In *Dogeaters*, these technologies for producing and manipulating representations operate across gender and class categories to level characters from distinctively separate communities to a common subaltern subjectivity. Beginning with the scene of interpellation of an Americanized subject—both Rio and Pucha "sit enthralled," through the screening of "All That Heaven Allows," focusing on the screen daughter who appears""inherently American, modern, and enviable" (4)—the novel later narrates the construction of General Ledesma's "torture camp," Camp Dilidili, "a brand new complex of buildings" with "modern conveniences: hot and cold running water, toilets that flush, and clean windowless cells for solitary confinement" (110). The scene of Daisy's interrogation by the General in Camp Dilidili is composed of montages of the radio soap opera "Love Letters" and the advertising jingles of its sponsors, many of them Alacran-owned companies. The cutting from interrogation to soap to commercial jingle to rape and so forth calls to question and illuminates the relation between systems of political representation and cultural representation, and the relation between these systems and political repression; in this case, between fascism and capital monopoly. As W. J. T. Mitchell explains it, in the modern age, representation has also become "a crucial concept in political theory, forming the cornerstone of representational theories of sovereignty, legislative authority, and relations of individuals to the state" (11). The assassination of Daisy's father, Senator Avila, and the army's gang rape on her take place within a system of representation sponsored by capital monopoly and abetted by military dictatorship.

Camp Dilidili parallels the establishment of the Alacran-owned SPORTEX,"a futuristic department store in the suburb of Makati" (18),

and General Ledesma's "mission," through "Special Squadron units" (125), to "win the people's minds and hearts," parallels Isabel Alacran's "surprise inspections" (160) and "sponsorship" (161) of the store's employees, so they "can sell more goods to the hordes of Japanese tourists who shop at SPORTEX" (161). In all three sites, the cinema theater, the torture camp, and the department store, superordinate characters like Alacran and his wife Isabel, and General Ledesmo, own the means of production, whether it is the production of images, goods and services, or of pain, while subordinate others do the work of that production.

The United States film industry and the Alacran-controlled Mabuhay Studio, for example, produce and market the actors, actresses, movies, and images that participate in the formation of the characters' identity. Characters associated with high society identify each other as American movie stars: Rita Hayworth, Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, or Audrey Hepburn. Working-class characters aspiring to social mobility identify as Filipino movie stars, Nestor Noralez, Barbara Villanueva or Lolita Luna. In this culture of the simulacra, it is not that social realities and political economy are irrelevant; rather, the simulacrum itself forms the material of social and political exchange; and is what is left after the owners have taken their share. Lolita Luna, who performs in pornographic bomba movies, trapped "alone with her watchdog servant in her white apartment" (174), as the sexual possession of General Ledesma, cannot be separated from her image of herself, which is also her image in her movies. "She is fascinated by her dark and brazen image in the mirror" and has to "tear herself away from the mirror" in response to the General's threats. As her own simulacrum, without agency, she is unable to resist her objectification and degradation.

Because *Dogeaters* critiques these apparatuses of representation, it does not deploy the conventions of realistic fiction, for realism affirms a referential Real rather than problematizes or negates the relation between referent and "authentic" reality. Thematizing the "hyper-representation" of a multiply colonized society, the novel offers networks of representation drawn from distinct and multiple colonial histories. It offers bricolages and collages, dizzying montages, a stream of references to mass media, advertising, movies, popular music, consumer items, in which everything—including bodies—is "indefinitely reproducible and representable as commodity" (Mitchell 16). In this postmodern milieu, sex becomes a commodity and commodities become sexualized. Thus, to Joey, working as a prostitute, luxuriating in the Hilton bedroom with Neil,

his American patron, American identity is commodified as American combustibles, and the desire for both is intricately embodied as an erotic sensation, a hard-on: "We pretend not to notice how hard I'm getting. 'Cheeseburger deluxe,' I say dreamily. 'French fries with ketchup.... and a Coke,' the real American item" (73).

Like Joey, child of a black American G.I. and a Filipino whore, the rich mestizos desire a West whose image is generated by discourse apparatuses that manipulate and constrain their formations of class and nation identity. In their allegiance to particular nation identities, we need to keep in mind, as Mitchell points out, that "the representational sign never... occur(s) in isolation from a whole network of signs" (13). Uncle Cristobal, who lives in Spain, "flies a Falangista flag above his front door to show his allegiance to Franco during the Spanish Civil War. He flies the flag not because he is really a fascist, but because he is a wily opportunist... a man who always knows which side is winning" (8). Similarly, in the historical outcome of the war between the United States and the insurgent Philippines nation, because the United States won the war, the Filipino colonial subjects desire and reproduce images marking their political subjugation to America, desires that include drinking TruCola, wearing denim jackets, and listening to American popular music.

The novel appears to construct poor and working class Filipinos as potentially oppositional to Western(ized) colonial abjection. In her Indio maternal grandmother Rio finds a familial kinship missing among her mestizo relatives. Rio visits Lola secretly, and prefers her company of servants to Abuelita's high society. Lola eats humble peasant food—rice and dilis—and listens to the Tagalog radio series "Love Letters" in the intimacy of her bedroom. "Love Letters" may be construed as a more benign form of popular culture than Hollywood films that ignore local identities. It has been argued that soap operas "offer one of the most influential images of community.... They depend on a range of female characters holding the community together.... and they also have a detailed sense of place" (Gillian Rose 57). Geraghty analyzes soaps as women's stories, possessing a 'mothering structure,' which focuses on the emotional world of personal relations in specific and carefully delineated places and mediates at length on the moral questions that relationships raise" (cited in Rose fn. 66). "Love Letters" is similarly related to Lola; sharing a space in Lola's bed, Rio and Lola weep together over the fate of the suffering Tagalog-speaking characters.

But neither Lola nor "Love Letters" can be privileged as figuring a

resisting indigenous power. "Love Letters" is, after all, the product of yet another Alacran company, Radiomanila. Its sentimentality contains the lower class indigenous Filipinos within a time-flow "for years.... An episode comes on every night of the week, each story beginning on a Sunday and ending on a Saturday" (11), and achieves the same ideological end as made-in-Hollywood movies: the production of separate passive consumers, "straining to listen" (13), pacified with dreams of the Unreal. Lola is an ineffectual subaltern, who does little except to "eat and cry" (15); watching her American husband die, she can only plead in English, "Don't wake him" (17). The effect of the radio serialized soap opera is to reduce Lola into a mute and drugged existence, "eyes glazed and gone.... [rocking] ever so slightly" (17). Instead it is the "ancient Philco radio [that] is alive, hissing and humming to my Lola Narcisa, its dreadful music somehow soothing her" (17). Its discursive technology assembles a Tagalog-speaking Filipino "folk" only to disperse them as individual private imaginations, evaporating the possibility for resistance, and reducing them to "subjects that can be appropriated for monopoly capitalist relations" (Tagg 5).

This mode of subaltern reproduction is evident in the characters of Romeo and Trinidad, the ill-matched working-class lovers, who first appear in a chapter titled "Serenade" (47). An ironic play on Shakespeare's heroic young Montague of Romeo and Juliet, Romeo Rosales, whose "real" name is Orlando (129), is an inveterate movie-fan and dreams of becoming a star, like his hero Nestor Noralez. Romeo meets Trinidad at the movies; she is the ticket cashier whom he must pay for admittance into the Odeon Theater. Their relationship is characterized by the clichés of mass-produced romances—"She couldn't believe it had happened so fast. The man of her dreams was walking next to her" (51)—and by her confusion of him with the commodified images of male actors—"Like Sal Mineo in Rebel Without a Cause. Elvis Presley in Jailhouse Rock" (51). Romeo, however, is only able to have sex with Trinidad by erasing her image and replacing it with that of "the torrid siren Lolita Luna" (53). Their relative satisfactions with each other are weighted by their ability or inability to maintain the image of the other within the discursive practices of subaltern desire. Trinidad fully believes in the image of Romeo as the male star, although her "blind faith only made Romeo doubt himself even more" (164). Sustained by this "faith," like Abuelita is sustained by Catholicism and Lola by Tagolog sentimentalism, Trinidad becomes yet another satisfied employee in the Alacran-owned store, SPORTEX. It is the same "blind faith" that has her

believing that "the job is fulfilling, keeping her in constant touch with the amazing lives of the rich and their wives" (160). Romeo, however, seeing Trinidad through the eyes of his role model, Tito, an expert in "women, shoes, and guns," recognizes that "in Tito's eyes, Trinidad will never do" (166). Plain and skinny, she cannot satisfy Romeo's desire, to "live the life he has always dreamed of" (166), for her very embodiment signifies the loss of his dream.

Unlike Bulosan's construction of the Filipino as racially differentiated from whites, race is not a major category of distinction in *Dogeaters*. Instead, nation identity—marked by language choice—is coeval with class and gender difference. The dominant group is mestizo rather than Indio. Rio's mother's mother, a brown woman from Davao, is consigned to a guest room next to the kitchen in the back of the house, and is never invited to sit at the dining table with the guests; while Rio's father's mother, identified albeit ambiguously as mestizo, lives in Spain and is feted in lavish dinners during her annual visits to the family home. Indio and mestiza, however, are acknowledged and co-exist in the same family; Rio's mother is herself a mestiza, for her native mother had married Whitman Logan, a white American. Mestizo, moreover, covers a heterogeneous mixture of aboriginal with Chinese, Spanish and American, each non-native community embedded in a particular manner in the complex colonial, immigrant, and economic conquest of the Philippines, so that none is innocent of this history. Every character bears the marks of the subaltern, a class of people produced in relation to colonial power. But the subaltern is not a single class; it reproduces the complex stratifications of social power and of disciplinary institutions that organize and regulate relations between rulers and the ruled.

Romeo Rosales, the waiter at the Country Club, descended from the rapacious union of a Spanish priest and native woman, is as much a Spanish mestizo as Rio's proud grandmother. Abuelita's performance of Spanish identity—the perfumes, fan, Catholicism, rich creamy diet—underlines her interpellation as subaltern via the installation of a desire for and fantasy of an Imaginary Spain, in the same way that Romeo's desire for "stardom" in the movies produced by Mabuhay Studios marks him as a subaltern in the myriad circles of power in the Filipino metropolis, "the coconut palace."

The difference between classed subalterns lies in the latitude of their choices over locations. Abuelita has the means to move herself closer to the center, to Spain, and to appropriate the markers of imperial identity.

Romeo attempts to move to the center of power. He requests a promotion from waiter to desk clerk, asks at Mabuhay studio for an appointment with his old friend and new star Tito, and competes in televised talent shows, but he fails on each occasion.

Despite what appears to be their different social success and failure, both characters exhibit a similar abject relationship to cultural hegemonies. To Rio, Abuelita reminds her of funerals; her Spanish "self," constructed on reified bits and pieces of a foreign national identity, images for the grand-daughter the death of the familial and intimate subject. And like Abuelita, Romeo becomes associated with death, a scapegoat for Senator Avila's assassination, and targeted by the military.

The novel does not attribute resistance against gendered and classed neo-colonialism to working-class characters. Rather, critical consciousness of the institutions that produce and maintain inequalities is attributed to the wealthy, educated, metropolitan and female mestizos. These women characters are transformed and achieve agency, in resistance to male domination. In leaving Manila for the United States, Rio's mother escapes the patriarchal, oligarchic domination of her husband's Gonzaga family. Through much of the novel, the mother is seen presiding over the dinner table, her role as "the best hostess in town" (66) dependent on her services to her unfaithful husband and gluttonous male relatives. Later, associating herself with transvestites and bisexuals, she withdraws from the aggressively heterosexual and celibate Gonzaga males into an interior she describes as a "womb": "mysterious mauve rooms" with "boarded up and painted over" windows (84). Self-designed, filled with closets and "full-length mirrors," this woman's space protects her image as a desirable woman: "Whenever she looks at any of the mirrors it is always night and she is always beautiful" (84). The mother as woman desiring her reflection as desirable shapes an enclosure that Uncle Panchito deems a tomb, and poses a threat to her pre-pubescent daughter. The mother's rage recalls the homicidal narcissism of the stepmother in "Sleeping Beauty"; and Rio is able to deflect her anger only through the intercession of Uncle Panchito, who cuts her hair short, changing her into an androgynous Audrey Hepburn waif. When Rio's mother turns fifty, however, she "begins painting" (243). Taking over the means of representation, she moves into her son's room "and converts it into her bedroom studio" (244). "She paints and paints; with furious energy, she covers immense canvases with slashes of red, black, yellow and mauve" (244), colors that suggest non-white and female identities. An inheritance from her

American father allows her to move to the United States where she "actually sells a few paintings" (244). Her career narrative offers one liberatory path, albeit a path that repeats an ideal of individual fulfillment founded on bourgeois liberalism.

Daisy and Rio, daughters of the Ilustrados class, also change in the course of the novel. However, the novel elides Daisy's transformation from sheltered beauty queen to jungle guerrilla; and the final idealized figure of Daisy as an insurgent heroine remains, like the image of the mountain birds that Joey receives, a representation from a movie of prehistoric time. The novel can only offer an indexical representation of a revolutionary Filipino national subject: neither Daisy nor Joey, but the gun she teaches him to use.

In the novel, a precolonial indigenous community is recovered only through redemptive revolution; the erasure of colonial traces and longings achieved through violence. When Joey wakes up in the slum of Tondo and discovers that Uncle, the only kin he has known, who had trained him in the resistant practices of the underclass—to steal and cheat—has betrayed him to the police, he kills Uncle's only intimate, the dog Taruk, and joins the insurgent Filipinos and native Igorats in the mountainous wilderness. The killing scene ("Blood spurted everywhere.... Joey kept stabbing the animal.... The smell of blood in the dark, airless room was unbearable" 207) echoes the scene where Daisy Avila is gang-raped by the General's men in Camp Dilidili: "He assaults her for so long and with such force.... The other men await their turn.... The room starts to stink of sperm and sweat" (216).

Joey and Daisy can be re-imagined as revolutionaries only after such violence; the repeated violence of the stabbing and penile penetration acts in these scenes suggest a disruption, a rubbing away of bourgeois subjectivity. The mysterious "Aurora" or Daisy Avila rejects the military's "condition she remain in permanent exile" (232); instead she returns to join the national resistance. Daisy and Joey have emerged from violence into a state of pure ("somewhere up high where the air is cool and this," 230) and prehistoric nature: "Birds screech and whistle; Joey imagines they are pterodactyls from some movie" (231). Their narratives conclude with Daisy replacing Uncle as Joey's surrogate mother ("She cries while Joey describes his mother, what he remembers of her.... They are together all the time," 233), instructing him in the lessons of revolution: "She teaches him how to use a gun" (233).

In contrast to Daisy's appropriation of and reduction to the male-associated image of the gun, Rio's indeterminacy in the novel's conclusion is ambiguously productive, and generates multiple images. Brought to the United States by her mother, with American citizenship papers from her grandfather Whitman Logan, Rio as narrator and central character is last seen "anxious and restless, at home only in airports" (247). Situated, unlike the rest of her telling, in the moment of present narration, Rio's concluding images of her self clarify the novel's central thematic—how to account for the subject formation of a generation of Filipinos like Rio and her brother Raul. Formed through unconscious processes, as in darkness and sleep, Rio now sees Raul and herself as "nocturnal moths" whose destiny is to "fly around in circles.... in our futile attempts to reach what surely must be heaven" (247). Raul, "distanc[ing] himself from the rest of the Gonzagas" (244), has become a fundamentalist Christian minister; and Rio, according to Pucha's concluding account, is a writer whose "crazy imagination" distorts her family stories. These characters do not participate in the struggle for territorial power in the ways that Daisy, Joey, and even the General and his men do. Nor are they American characters, identified with U.S. territory and social capital. Whether living on Filipino or American territory, their imaginations are neither Filipino-national nor American-national. In contrast to F. Scott Fitzgerald's vision of that all-American character, Gatsby, oars beating toward a green light against which the tide is carrying him away, these characters are drawn to "a mysterious light glowing from the window of a deserted, ramshackle house" (247). They are characters drawn backward to the house of Filipino childhood, even as simultaneously they fly, unselfreflecting, upward, toward "what surely must be heaven" (247). Conflictual desires for a preconscious, precolonial Filipino past—already abandoned—and for a utopian future in the United States—acknowledged as futile—characterize the subjects of Filipino-colonial-American history. *Dogeaters*, picking up on the history narrated in Bulosan's *America is in the Heart*, is one more complex narrative in this tradition.

Notes

1. In their "Introduction" to "The politics of place," Michael Keith and Steve Pile note that in order to "articulate an understanding of the multiplicity and flexibility of relations of domination, a whole range of spatial metaphors are commonly used: position, location, situation, mapping; geometrics of domination, center-margin, open-closed, inside-outside, global-local; liminal space, third space."

2. What happens to Benedict Anderson's theory on the imagined community of the nation in such texts where a nation historically refuses those who fervently imagine themselves as members of that nation (as in *America is in the Heart*) or when one is socialized into an imagined nation which is itself constructed on the image of a "Mother America," as with the Philippines of *Dogeaters*? While Anderson's work (his notion of the nation as an imagined community, both politically and culturally, insists on historical specificity of meanings, emphasis on print culture in construction of nation, and parallels between nation and religion) has set the terms of debate on nations and nationalisms, these texts extend and complicate the debate.

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Immigration Rhapsody: Memory of Geographies in Meena Alexander's *Manhattan Music*

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In *The Shock of Arrival*, Meena Alexander proclaims epigrammatically that "the task of making of memory. This is the dark woman's burden" (144). Born a Syrian Christian in India, raised in Kerala and Sudan until her teenage years, immigrated to the United States after receiving a PhD in English literature at the United Kingdom and teaching at universities in India, Alexander knows from her own diasporic and migratory experiences the immense difficulty of taking up this self-assigned task. Not only does she have to work through the postcolonial shadow of the British Raj, in the land of her immigration Alexander also needs to reorient herself to the identification of a South Asian American woman and participate in the struggles of the larger ethnic community called Asian America. Writing—writing back to the empire and writing about diaspora and immigration—is her way of accomplishing the task of memory-making, although the act of writing is always "scented" by gendered prohibitions.[1] Alexander also writes to give shape and voice to "the dark woman" since, as Alexander states, "what she is has no ready shape. It is all still to be invented. She needs an aesthetic that can rework the discord of the senses, clarify the violations of empire" (*The Shock of Arrival* 145). The protagonist of Alexander's second novel *Manhattan Music* (1997) Sandhya Rosenblum, a South Asian woman who marries a Jewish American and comes to live in the United States, as Alexander has done in her real life, presents an attempt at fashioning this dark woman with all the lived actualities of a new immigrant in the land of promises. What distinguishes the novel from most of immigrant literature is the way in which Alexander insists on spatializing the consciousness of her protagonist by providing specific geographical locations to her memory, what I would like to call composing "memory of geographies." Through representing the "memory of geographies" that attests to Sandhya's

simultaneous routedness and rootedness in multiple places, Alexander juxtaposes the temporal with the spatial and the local with the global in the discursive construction of Sandhya's identity. The novel thus gives a materialist rendition of South Asian American womanhood in a transnational/cultural context, which, in the final analysis, suggests a necessary reconceptualization of Asian America as multiply placed-bound in this age of diaspora and transnationality. What I intend to explore in this paper is Alexander's use of "memory of geographies" in narrativizing the dialogical pull of roots and routes in the memory-making of a dark woman by situating the discussion within the problematics of reimagining Asian America in general and configuring South Asian America in particular.

The emphasis on the diasporic and the transnational in the re-formation of Asian America as exemplified by *Manhattan's Music* places the novel at the center of a critical debate of current Asian American cultural criticism about whether it is necessary to draw a clear line between the diasporic perspective and the domestic one, as Sau-ling Cynthia Wong has suggested in her influential and widely discussed essay "Denationalization Reconsidered." Here I would like to focus my discussion on another important contribution to this debate—Arif Dirlik's analysis of the complex relationships of the Pacific and Asian American ethnicity in "Asians on the Rim." Structuring his essay around the historical backdrop against which the original political vision of the Asian American community is constructed and focusing on the question of Pacific versus community in the contemporary reconfiguration of Asian America after the 1965 watershed in American immigration laws, Dirlik warns against the dangers in the Pacific orientation:

> To the extent that the contemporary Asian American populations identify with their societies of origin in Asia, they are once again vulnerable in their relationships to one another to replicating the divisions and conflicts that beset Asian societies. At the same time, closeness to Asia opens up the possibility of distancing themselves from their immediate environments in the United States, especially in their relations to other minority groups. Finally, a kind of Orientalism in reverse, or a self-Orientalization, has reappeared in discussions of Asian American populations. (84)

These inherent dangers, in conjunction with the tendency of equating Asian American studies with Asian studies and Asian American studies with studies of Rimpeople in academic practices, lead to his

problematization of diaspora discourse that is gaining momentum in Asian American cultural criticism. Dirlik then calls for "the qualification of the diasporic with place consciousness" (88) and the practice of "place-based politics" that "refocuses attention on building society from the bottom up" (89).

What Dirlik has brought to our attention are no doubt real dangers. The significance of community in the configuration of Asian America is certainly as important as, perhaps even more important than, it was in the 1960s. The case of John Huang as presented by Dirlik is also a salient example of how diaspora discourse appropriated and manipulated by political purposes can result in new racist discourses. Nevertheless, the construction of "the historicity of identity" that Dirlik has highlighted is inevitably underwritten by diaspora discourse that forms the bedrock of Asian American identity. One can better practice a politics that "grounds transnationalism in the welfare of local communities" (Dirlik 94), I believe, by paying attention to both roots and routes of Asian American constituency. Dirlik in fact acknowledges both rootedness and routedness by citing Ling-ch'i Wang's concept of taking roots or *luodi shenggen* and James Clifford's metaphor of routes. Yet contrary to what Dirlik has suggested, forgetting is not a necessary part of migratory encounters.[2] Without losing sight of the past, I would argue, an (im)migrant can be multiply rooted in the routing.

It would be more productive, therefore, to think along the line of how rootedness and routedness interact with each other in the formation of Asian America.

David Palumbo-Liu's investigation of the great divide between Asia and America in his important monograph *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (1999) is a good example. The "racial frontier," a term which Palumbo-Liu borrows from the sociologist Robert E. Park, refers to the Pacific which divides Asia from America. This racially constructed division, as Palumbo-Liu points out, is anything but impenetrable:

> the distinctions installed between "Asian" and""American" might be best read within specific historical moments in which such a "great wall" was constructed precisely because modern history had presented the occasion wherein these two entities threatened to merge (in however brief and delimited a manner). This wall, in fact, has proven to be porous and unevenly constructed. (3)

His formulation of "Asian/American" instead recognizes *both* the distinction *and* the ongoing interchanges between the two terms divided/connected by the solidus.

Not only does Dirlik's argument appear to be separatist, his paradigm tends to be overly Rim-oriented, which of course reflects a persistent East Asian emphasis on the history of Asian American cultural criticism. Today this East Asian orientation cannot sufficiently address the problems faced by other members of Asian America originating from outside the Asia Pacific, such as South Asian Americans. With a significant increase of South Asian populations in America, any reconceptualization of Asian America without taking the South Asian constituent into consideration will be insufficient and incomplete. Moreover, an engagement with South Asian American discourse at this juncture can usefully lead us to a more meaningful way of rethinking Asian America and away from any reified definition of Asian American nationhood.[3]

When addressing the issues of South Asian America, we must recognize the fact that oftentimes South Asians suffer the fate of being "familiar strangers" in America like Filipino Americans or Jamaicans in Britain (Shankar 286). Moreover, the South Asian American community is anything but a homogenous entity. Heterogeneous in terms of race, religion, language and culture and with the complications of a colonial history, "South Asian America" is but a contingent categorization for immigrants and their descendents from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan; further, some of the people may even have also journeyed to America from Kenya, Uganda, Trinidad and Guyana, "areas where the long arm of British colonization 'invited' a predominantly merchant class into East Africa, and a mainly indentured laboring class into the West Indies" (Katrak 192-93). The composition of the South Asian diaspora is therefore characterized by multiple migrations and postcoloniality, which for the purpose of our discussion here productively complicates the dialectic of rootedness and routedness. Within the South Asian American context, any kind of rooting/relocation entails an experience of routing/dislocation. Thus Alexander calls the experience of relocations in South Asian aesthetics "an aesthetics of dislocation" (qtd. in Katrak 201). For some critics, it is necessary to combine Asian American and postcolonial perspectives in the theorization of South Asian America. anupama jain argues, for instance, that South Asian Americans need "a broader vision that includes simultaneous attention to South Asia, America, and the global diaspora. When combined, insights from

postcolonial and Asian American Studies offer us models for understanding identity as it is locally and globally inflected for most, if not all, contemporary individuals" ("Theorizing South Asian America" 220). Thus the communal and local model of Asian America is further challenged by this call for an expanded vision that attends to multiple locations and related memories.

Here I would like to turn by way of illustration to Meena Alexander's *Manhattan Music*. As mentioned, the novel centers on the emotional and physical dislocations of the protagonist Sandhya. As a recent immigrant from southern India, Sandhya feels adrift in her American life and tries to create meanings for herself by committing adultery and then by attempting suicide. Thus we have a quintessential and somewhat melodramatic story of a dark woman struggling with her burden of memory-making in a transplanted location. Gabriel Garcia Marquez has once provided an insight into the act of memory, "What matters in life is not what happens to you but what you remember and how you remember it" (qtd. in Hesse 160). In *Manhattan Music* Alexander chooses to re-member the immigrant experience through diasporic geographies. This kind of spatialization of memory presents a version of what Ketu H. Katrak terms "the *simultaneity of geography*" resulted from a colonial heritage of migrancy (201).[4] At the same time, it also suggests an alternative diasporic narrative strategy of the Asian American diaspora.[5]

The spatialization of psychological temporality in the novel functions as a metaphor for the formation of Asian American identification. It traces how South Asian women "have 'taken place' in the United States and how the United States itself bears the imprint of new spatialization" as David Palumbo-Liu has explored in *Asian/American* (7). The memory track of *Manhattan Music* is grounded on these spatial terms. By choosing New York as the site of the main narrative, Alexander attempts to remap an American urban space through the perception of a South Asian immigrant woman. In one scene Sandhya is looking out of her apartment window at dawn and tries to make out words in the twilight. What she gets from the neon sign is "North American Moving and Dispatch," which becomes NAMAD when she jumps the initials. And Sandhya goes, "A vowel shift and it could make sense, NOMAD, a creature of restless passage" (13). This transformed acronym importantly highlights Sandhya's diasporic status and the nature of the city through the protagonist's point of view. As Alexander says about her frequent use of New York in her writing during an interview, "I emphasize New York particularly because the

pressure of multiple ethnicities is always present here. Coming here and trying to make some sense of what one might be moved me toward this self-disclosure" (Bahri and Vasudeva 38)."In *The Shock of Arrival*, Alexander also describes how the scents of migrancy push her to make memory: "The city fronts me. It is here that I must make up memory, a memory coequal to the tensions of a city filled with immigrants. The scents, the stench of migrancy is everywhere in Manhattan..." (137). The multicultural composition of the metropolis's populations provides an excellent background against which any notion of a unified nationhood is contested. The global economic, informational and cultural flows that converge at and are disseminated from the Big Apple makes it the capital of contemporary transnational passages and therefore an ideal background for a discussion of the problematics of diasporic identity.[6]

The constant insertions of other geographical locations—the Indian cities of Hyderabad and Tiruvella, for instance—further highlight the necessary inclusion of global localities in the reconfiguration of Asia/America. With the chapter entitled "Going" Alexander allows Sandhya to journey back to her birthplace Tiruvella to take care of her sick father, which marks one of the many physical returns to homelands in contemporary migrancy. Later on, Sandhya returns again in her imagination to the hometown when her father passed away, with a vision of the father's body being carried through the rice fields with "[r]ice stalks swaying, sunlight on the river" (199). Her indulgence in the peaceful aura associated with a traditional Third World agricultural lifestyle communicates a sense of nostalgia for an imagined geography of the past. Finally, this insistence of presenting memory of geographies is intended to be framed as a comment on the very "discovery" of the New World—how the (mis)adventures of Christopher Columbus has brought India into the Western imaginary of the Americas and how the East Indies finally meets the West Indies in the narrative space. The legacy of Columbus is an obsession for Meena Alexander and her character Draupadi in *Manhattan Music*. For Alexander Columbus is a figure to be recognized within the history of world colonization.[7] For Draupadi, this geographical mistake is the historical origin of her familial lineage. And she talks about how "Columbus struck America and called it *India*. It was India to him till the very end, when mad, bound raving to the bottom of his boat, he was shipped in chains to Spain" (122). The remembered history of how the New World is "found" and founded on a colonizer's error further reinforces the notion of unstable identity.

Alexander's lived experience as well as her writing have a strong connection with geography. As she states in another interview about how she works with different genres, "All my life as a writer I've been touching the complexities, sometimes evading them. It has to do with a postcolonial geography, a geography of displacement" (Ali and Rasiah 72). The representation of memory in the novel clearly follows a geography of displacement. In the first section of the opening chapter "Sitting," for example, readers are taken on a trip to Sandhya's present and past around the world. Sandhya first appears sitting on a bench at Central Park, watching a man balancing mirrors tied to the back of his bicycle and killing time before she can pick up her daughter from the daycare. On the next page her psychological landscape shifts abruptly both in terms of time and space "like a curtainless theater" (6): she goes back to her childhood at her grandmother's courtyard, watching a puppet show about Draupadi with her *ayah*. This theatrical allusion signals that readers will be introduced to the psychodrama of Sandhya's remembering act. The same pattern of juxtaposing Sandhya's American present with her South Asian past continues for the rest of the chapter. A few pages later Sandhya is remembering her repeated dreams about her boy friend and first love Gautam, who was tortured and died at a prison in Hyderabad. Her marriage with her Jewish American husband, we later come to realize, is an attempt to get away from the traumatic memory of Gautam's death.'Yet the specter of the past comes back to haunt her in the form of a mutilated body. In the next narrative, which shuttles back to her days in Hyderabad, we see her running into a dead body, obviously a casualty of the outbreak of riot in the city, and almost being attacked by a drunken man at the neighborhood of her friend's upper-class villa. The changing chronotopes in this section highlight ways in which Sandhya struggles with the uncertainty of her new American life and the trauma and violence of her past. The very intensity of her violent past and the forced narrativization of the trauma though nightmares underscore the difficulty for Sandhya to adjust to her life in the "large, ample-breasted country, *Americanmata*, which fate had drawn her to" (132).

Besides Sandhya's past memory, the political machineries that have been used to exclude Asian immigrants from the full membership of the American society also haunt Sandhya. Her desire to swallow her green card and change her body bespeaks Sandhya's strong sense of insecurity:

> Supposing she were to swallow the green card, ingest that plastic, would it pour through her flesh, a curious alchemy that would make her

> all right in the new world? She gazed at her two hands, extended now in front of her. What if she could peel off her brown skin, dye her hair blonde, turn her body into a pale, Caucasian thing, would it work better with Stephen? (7)

This imagined somatic transformation embodies a deep psychological anguish and demands a careful analysis. The impossible wishes of introjecting a new identity and transforming a racial body are themes that Alexander has been constantly alluding to in her writing. Apparently the author and her character share the same anxiety of unbelonging, which is also a common refrain for ethnic minorities and new immigrants.[8] Sandhya's desire to conform to the American canon of beauty embodied by the Caucasian blonde and to erase her visual differences in order to conform to the mainstream American ideology is not an isolated case in literary discourse, either, and we can easily trace it back to W. E. B. Du Bois's famous theory of double consciousness. What is significant here is the desired / desirable fusion of the biological body with a non-organism that has been used as an instrument of political governance. The imagined ingestion of the green card, the official / artificial document of U.S. residency, signifies the making of a new "cyborg" in the age of trans-national (im)migrations and a literal enactment of the immigrant's anxiety of her alienation, which again ironically comments on the American nation itself. In order to overcome the fear of being denied entry and secure her precarious residency, this Asian immigrant woman is contemplating re-habilitating her self in the form of a hybrid body to participate in the privileges of whiteness. At the same time, this "impure" imagination which betrays signs of internalized colonization also comments on the incorporation and introjection of the bodies of Asian immigrants by American capitalism during the past centuries.

But we must not run through the novel with a mistaken notion that it is a story of individualist development in the tradition of western *Bildungsroman*, although the basic class stratification in the novel is definitely a bourgeois one. In spite of the fact that Sandhya is the center of the emplotment, the narrative flows in and out of the consciousnesses of different characters and becomes a collage of their stories, which include those of Sandhya's husband Stephen, her photographer-turned-poet cousin Jay, her accountant-turned-feminist social worker cousin Sakhi, her Egyptian lover Rashid, and her Asian American performance artist friend Draupadi. What all these characters have in common is that they

are all middle-class intellectuals who have diasporic stories to tell. The inclusion of the character Rashid is of particular importance because he represents another non-European diasporan who is outside the South Asian community. I would argue that Rashid also embodies Alexander's memory of her childhood in North Africa. It is significant that Sandhya first met Rashid in front of Alexandria Hotel, a thinly disguised name for Hotel Alexandria, the place where Alexander has once stayed. She also wrote her first American poem about it. And except for Stephen, the characters around Sandhya are all immigrants who engage in political activism in one way or another. Thus in her reading of *Manhattan Music* as a female *Bildungsroman*, jain rightly stresses the commitment to "activism" in the novel's narrative of maturation.[9]

The collectivity of narrative voices contests against the American individualist ideology advocated by Emerson, whose invocation of a new life without memory is for Alexander egoistically Euro- and androcentric.[10] This narrative strategy is also culturally specific in that it reflects the pattern of the "circular mandala" that Roshi Rustomji-Kerns has identified in South Asian American writing:

> The works that evolve around individual experiences move outward to include relationships with family and then to other members of the South Asian American communities, expand to the larger arena of non-South Asian communities in America and other communities and cultures of the world, and then seem to reach out to spheres not always dominated by familiar human beings. And while the pattern moves outward to larger circles of concerns, characters, and landscapes, it also constantly calls attention to the center, the stories and poems that deal with a specific individual's experience and voice in America. (*Living in America* 6-7)

She also specifically points out that "a constant pattern of a spiral or a mandala" with "an intense self-reflection" at the center can be detected in Alexander's works ("In a Field of Dreams: Conversations with Meena Alexander" 22). Indeed the self-reflexive protagonist is at the center of the evolving and ever expanding narrative of *Manhattan Music*. In the whirlwind of narration the novel attempts to be all-inclusive in its collection of events characterized by violence and injustice, among them the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, the first Gulf War, which for Alexander is essentially an Asian war that has irrevocably damaged the lives of Asian peoples, and the stoning of South Asian women by the racist "Dotbusters" in New Jersey. The representation of

this collection of violence sheds a grim light on world politics and everyday life yet eloquently articulates how the global is inevitably interpenetrating with the local.

Among these different narrative voices that make up the immigration rhapsody of *Manhattan Music*, Draupadi stands out with her vignettes of first-person voice in the novel. To a certain extent the novel can even be regarded as a double *Bildungsroman* of Sandhya and Draupadi, whose narratives of *Bildung* are grounded in their respective memories of geographies. The way in which Meena Alexander chooses to deploy different points of view in their narratives—mainly first-person for Draupadi and third-person for Sandhya—reveals that these two women are meant to be read comparatively. The "Overture" of the novel in Draupadi's voice sets up this comparison nicely. Draupadi is contemplating the differences between them:

> My ancestors were scattered from British sailing ships, dark bits of ground pepper flung onto plantations in Trinidad, Fiji. Bonded laborers from India scratching the dirt of the New World. Men used hard, and women, too, can leaves cutting into their wrists. Papa and Mama migrated to America, settled in Gingee by the Hudson where Mama gave birth to me.
>
> Sandhya's people, on the other hand, seemed never to have budged from the Indian subcontinent. Her veins were etched by centuries of arranged marriages, dark blue blood pouring through. She could point to a plot of land bounded by granite walls and name ancestors who had owned that land for generations. By fields swollen by monsoon flood she imagined her great-grandmother afloat in a black canoe. Then too, she remembered the cemeteries where her grandparents were buried, the house that had held them, the rites under which they were married. But memory swelling like black water threatened to drown her. (4)

Sandhya represents the newly immigrated South Asian woman who is rooted in the subcontinent yet needs to cope with the transplantation and re-root; the daughter of immigrant parents whose ancestors have emigrated to the West Indies, Draupadi is an American-born South Asian who can never be properly recognized as a native daughter because of her race and color and therefore always needs to account for the diasporic experience of multiple im / migrations. Despite their differences, however, what Sandhya and Draupadi have in common is that both of them are learning the meaning of rootedness in countless routings.

The culturally specific naming device for the two women that Alexander has adopted also highlights the significance of their development to the novel. Sandhya in Sanskrit signifies "those threshold hours, before the sun rose or set, fragile zones of change before the clashing absolutes of light and dark took hold" (*Manhattan Music* 227). As literally a transitional figure from the twilight zone, Sandhya needs to face the in-betweenness that is embedded in her identity. Draupadi, the legendary heroine from the *Mahabharata* that Sandhya remembers from her childhood puppet show, on the other hand, embodies female integrity that survives male possessiveness and betrayals. As a performance artist, Draupadi is constantly re-fashioning her art and identity. Her "flexible" identity is something of a model for Sandhya, a woman who desperately wants to escape from a traditional South Asian womanhood and her domestication in an American household which in fact is "thrusting her almost into the very role her mother would have picked for her" (23). Not only do the two women share the same lover, Draupadi's instrument of artistic expression almost puts Sandhya's life on a short circuit since Sandhya tries to hang herself with the rope used for Draupadi's art work. At the end of the novel Draupadi invites Sandhya to participate in a performance piece at Diwali, the Hindu "festival of lights" (Shankar 298)—"A two-woman piece was how she figured it, and Sandhya would play the part of the immigrant women, four generations of women who crossed the black waters. She herself would act the epic heroine's part" (222)—which succinctly summarizes their respective symbolic roles in the novel. Interestingly, Sandhya refuses the part because she wants to find her own words. At the end of the novel Sandhya is left alone to figure out her own identity in Central Park again, which allows the novelistic discourse to take a full circle.

Meena Alexander states at the opening of *The Shock of Arrival*, "Migrancy, a central theme for many of us in this shifting world, forces a recasting of how the body is grasped, how language works. Then, too, at the heart of what happens in these sometimes jagged reflections of mine, is the question of postcolonial memory" (1). Focusing on her own experience as an immigrant in her memoir *Fault Lines*, Alexander underscores the importance of contemplating "the palimpsest of memory, intrinsic to making up the present" so that "[e]ach moment of reflection becomes a threshold" ("The Shock of Sensation" 182). The "dark woman's burden" is therefore to work through the problematic and palimpsest of memory to construct the present and a possible future. Sandhya

Rosenblum's "rite of passage" in *Manhattan Music* is a novelistic embodiment of this task and Sandhya herself exemplifies the migratory dark woman. Her progressive trajectory of working through her migrant memory is marked by the chapter headings, from "Sitting," "Stirring," "Going," "Stoning," "Turning," to the final "Staying." After journeying through all the geographies, imagined and physical, Sandhya ends this aestheticization of diasporic in-betweenness by going back to the heart of New York and starting to take new roots. When she walks "into the waiting city" at the end of the novel (228), Sandhya carries with her the "memory of geographies" from the past that no longer threatens to drag her down but to push her onward to a new route of multiple rootedness.

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Notes

1 In an interview with Susie Tharu, Alexander confesses that she is haunted by the injunction against women articulating their thoughts in the Syrian Christian tradition: "For it is sinful for women to speak. I was brought up with that notion, branded into me. My strict Syrian Christian upbringing. When I was very young this scared me so much that the only place I felt at ease writing poetry, in my father's house, was in the toilet. And the vision was rhapsodic, scarcely excremental..." (71).

2 Dirlik contends, "Encounters in places traversed involve both forgetting and new acquisitions. The past is not erased, therefore, but rewritten. Similarly, the new acquisitions do not imply disappearance into the new environment, but rather the proliferation of future possibilities" (88).

3 Palumbo-Liu points towards the same direction in his conclusion of *Asian/American*. After examining "the formation and functions of 'Asia Pacific' in mapping modern Asian America," he argues for the necessary deconstruction of "this identifying "*topos*...to move beyond its reifications" (392). For him, the engagement with South Asia and its alternate modernities will be crucial for this task.

4 Katrak points out that "In the study of literary works and the parameters of the literary imagination, the *simultaneity of geography* — namely, the possibility of living here in body and elsewhere in mind and imagination — provides significant frameworks for a historical analysis of contemporary South Asian writers, and indeed writers of Asian, African, and Caribbean diasporas" and" "the simultaneity is of a special kind for writers with a colonial history whose socioeconomic, intellectual, and cultural conditions require migrations and displacements, for writers who express themselves in English" (201-02).

5 In "History and Representation: Symbolizing the Asian Diaspora in the United States,"

for example, E. San Juan Jr. enumerates several strategies of coping with the diasporic alienation in Asian American literary discourses: the affirmation of heterogeneity in Frank Chin's *Chickencoop Chinaman* (167); the gathering of all the dispossessed in Jeffrey Chan's "The Chinese in Haifa"; the deployment of "counter-identification" and""dis-identification" by Maxine Hong Kingston; the rewriting of "expatriation as an allegory or montage of spiritual transmigrations" in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (168); and the reconfiguration of home/*habitus* that "is not a place but a process of unifying one's life through acts of solidarity and resistance" with different groups of the oppressed (170).

6 Jain also highlights the importance of heterogeneity and globality of the use of New York in the novel. She insightfully observes that "Alexander employs the Big Apple in *Manhattan Music* as the metonymic representation of a world in which the concept of national belonging is ever more unstable.

It is, after all, the city which is globally the most conspicuous model of multiple nationalities and ethnicities co-existing. Further, the very structure of nationally-defined spaces themselves is called into question by experiences of escalating migration and of challenges to nationalisms which take place in this quintessentially American city" ("Hybrid *Bildungs* in South Asian Women's Writing" 271).

7 She also writes about him as the prototypical colonizer in her poem "Ashtamudi Lake." The poem goes, "Columbus heading west/ dreamt of the Indies/ the gentleness of the natives/ when he struck earth/ appalled him: they greet us with/ affection, he wrote, they would/ make good slaves; in their ignorance/ they pick up swords by the blade/ their hands trickle blood" (*The Shock of Arrival* 76).

8 Alexander once talked about the desire to swallow her green card in a conversation with Philip Roth (Ali and Dharini 74). She also described her experience at a conference in the postapartheid Johannesburg. Being stopped at the entrance to an exhibit entitled "Rights of Passage" heightened her sense of being a racialized body, her fear of "[a]lways expecting somewhere, deep down, to be stopped, denied entry" ("Rights of Passage" 17).

9 For jain, Alexander's novel reconfigures our understanding of the genre. She contends, "*Bildungsroman* by South Asian American women collectively inform us that identity construction is a process of developing a sense of agency through negotiating one's place within different communities, including the nation. Alexander's novel of 'becoming American' in particular shows that achieving agency is not merely a personal quest for mastery, but also a commitment to improving one's world as well as oneself" ("Hybrid *Bildungs* in South Asian Women's Writing" 250).

10 Alexander repeatedly questions the Emersonian ethos in her writing. For instance, she states in *The Shock of Arrival* that "Emerson's invocation to cast off memory, to live in the present above time, presupposed both gender and race, a white male self, which, however pitted by the pressure of introspection, was ultimately at the opposite ends of the social scale from an African-American slave laboring in the field, a Native American herded onto a reservation, an Asian-American working on the railroad. Would a female Emerson be possible?" (156-57)

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Reading Asian American Literature as Gothic: Two Women's Texts and the Resignification of an American Literary Legacy

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Two aspects characterise American Gothic literature. Firstly, according to David Punter, American Gothic is "a *refraction* of English: where English Gothic has a direct past to deal with, American has a level interposed between present and past, the level represented by a vague historical 'Europe', and often mythologised 'Old World'".[1] That is, American Gothic is characterised by a simultaneous nostalgia for an old world continuity and the repudiation of that self-same heritage. But the word "mythologise" suggests, however, that American Gothic's relationship with the old world is ambivalent—one that is precariously constructed on fantasy. This implies that the "Old World" is a selective assembly of "concepts" that the new world constructs in order to claim a separate subjectivity which is viable within this lately retrieved space. But if this is the case, then the newly-derived American subjectivity is also itself a fantasy. It seems to me that the formation of the American self is predicated on an oedipal struggle against British paternalism. The Old World must be "othered" in order for the New one to gain autonomy, but this ultimately implies both a dependence and an unconscious guilt complex. As Punter deliberates, there seems to be a preoccupation with a "pathology of guilt" in the narratives of early American Gothic practitioners (165). And while Gothicists like Charles Brocken Brown and Nathaniel Hawthorne contended with a legacy that continued to emotionally and religiously bind the newly-formed American subjectivity to its past on a more communal level, Edgar Allan Poe internalised this struggle within the dark recesses of consciousness, significantly transforming the trajectory of the Gothic.

Secondly, American Gothic is also "haunted by race" (Goddu 7). As American Gothic struggles to wrest itself from the dialectics of dependence on, and repudiation of, its literary predecessor, it encounters an impasse

in that it does not have enough "history to sustain the gothic's challenge" (Goddu 10). American Gothic, in other words, has little alternative but to persist in demonising its European legacy, which indirectly also implies its continued dependence. With slavery, American Gothic enters a new critical history because this presents the needed opportunity to resituate the discourse "within a more specific site of historical hauntings" (Goddu 10). Yet, despite the fact that slavery helped American Gothic gain a specific configuration that is divorced from its English legacy, what it has also done is to problematise "America's national myth of new-world innocence by voicing the cultural contradictions that undermine the nation's claim to purity and equality" (10). American Gothic questions the national formation of identity that necessitates the repression of historical horrors. This contradiction—the need to simultaneously uphold and deny history—indirectly rehearses the earlier contention that the newly-formed American identity is a fantastic creation enacted through technologies of othering. Again and again, the American identity achieves a semblance of self through separation and repression—initially its European-Puritan legacy, later by blackness and slavery—instigating that the formation of the (white) American self can never be finally independent of its others.

Kari Winters has insightfully established the crucial relationship between (female) Gothic novels and slave narratives. She demonstrates that both discourses share the ability to look "squarely at the horrors that confronted them [and] were able to develop incisive analyses of the forces of oppression within their societies" (53). Her study, however, considers Gothic and slave narratives as merely *sharing* certain affinities, without converging the two. It would take a commanding writer like Toni Morrison to finally write a slave narrative that is *also* a Gothic novel. According to Liliane Weissberg, in writing *Beloved* (1988), Morrison is:

> not only restoring Black history via Black folklore, but also reworking the white tradition of Gothic literature in writing the history of its ghosts. But Morrison's use of the Gothic does more than that. While treating slaves as invisible spirits, American plantation homes–like 'Sweet Home'–are described as Gothic settings that feature slaves as invisible Blacks. Ghosts therefore, do not signify the limitations of white man's power, but a social order that relies on their presence. Morrison's reframing is, therefore, a political one .... (115-6)

Weissberg's analysis of Morrison's work concurs with the argument made thus far that American Gothic sits uncomfortably within American

literary history because of its interrogative nature that indicts whiteness and white history. This assessment also neatly ties in with my reading of Asian American narratives as Gothic. Like the Gothic, Asian American writing questions the formation of a white American identity that is based on selective memories/histories and the negation of otherness. Indeed, there is a deeper ambivalence at stake with Asian Americans: whilst the black subject is "oppositional" and hence, quickly relegated to an extreme form of otherness, Asians have a closer *proximity* to the dominant group because they share with the latter important core cultural values such as diligence and self-reliance. Also, Asians, by virtue of their more recent presence in America, benefit from the nation's commitment to equality and liberty. Yet their acceptance is counteracted by a level of repudiation by the dominant group because they remain racially and culturally other. This state of affairs has prompted literary historian David Li to situate Asian Americans as, following Kristeva, abject:

> The assimilable Asian cannot belong but must be measured by his proximity to the centre/same, which welcomes copies, imitations, and mimicries for the security of its own value while insisting on their inauthenticity and their illegitimacy. The abject Asian, similarly, is not radical enough to be clearly differentiated and objectified, yet her difference is clear enough for a defensive posture to be established against her: the abject, in other words, must be kept at a respectable distance. (10)

Thus, although closer in proximity, the relation between the white dominant group and the Asian minorities also rehearses a dialectic of repudiation and dependence. Once again, the white American identity is located on an axis of difference from otherness. To reassert national inheritance, Asian Americans can only be welcomed without the possibility of merging with the dominant group.

In this essay, I want to proffer a reading of two Asian American narratives as Gothic based on the argument outlined above. Adhering to Robert Miles's recommendation, performing a Gothic analysis should always be genealogically informed so that the power structure implicit in this discourse can be elicited through close attention paid to the dialogic initiated between and through Gothic intertextuality (Miles 4). That is, reading Gothic should not be divested from its historical and cultural materiality even as familiar tropes and discursive patterns are investigated for their emotive or psychological (or psychoanalytical) dimensions. Thus, in studying Asian American Gothic texts, attention to the *material*

experiences of subjects and the *discursive* rendering of these experiences must be equally emphasised: aesthetics and history must be concurrently heeded; art must meet life.

Briefly, I want to point out an interesting affinity between the Gothic and Asian American literature: they both resist becoming subordinated by the dominant literature or what is considered the canon. According to Lisa Lowe, Asian American literature defies canonisation because it always already violates the canonical law:

> If Asian American literary expression is evaluated in exclusively canonical terms, it reveals itself as an aesthetic product that cannot repress the material inequalities of its conditions of production; its aesthetic is defined by contradiction, not sublimation, such that discontent, non-equivalence, and irresolution call into question the project of abstracting aesthetic as a separate domain of unification and reconciliation. It is a literature that, if subjected to a canonical function, dialectically returns a critique of that function. (44)

A canon serves the nationalistic agenda to "unify aesthetic culture as a domain in which material stratification and differences are reconciled"(43). It is an attempt by the dominant group to subjugate and monitor minority productions in the guise of permitting them representation. But Asian American literature flouts this subtle form of subordination with its sheer disparity and divergence. With writers hailing from different national, cultural, educational, and even generational backgrounds, any attempt at homogenising Asian American writing is futile. Likewise, the Gothic has always been regarded as marginal to the official canon because of its refusal to comply with the ideology of the dominant discourse. In fact, following Goddu's assertion, the attempt to curtail the inchoate and shifting nature of the Gothic by identifying (or naming) is motivated *not* by a desire to unify and reconcile it with the dominant discourse, but to "differentiate it from other 'higher' literary forms" (5). This attempt at classification presupposes a fear of contagion brilliantly elucidated by Jacques Derrida in his essay, "The Law of Genre". According to him, this law "is precisely a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy". Genre is a "sort of participation without belonging —a taking part in without being a part of, without having a membership in a set". Hence, if the Gothic is understood this way, it must thus be identified so that it cannot infect the "higher" literary forms; but attempts to make it into a "genre" would necessarily fail because "the consequences

of this division and of this overflowing remain as singular as they are limitless" (Derrida 227-8)—attesting to the expansive capacity and fundamental shapelessness of the Gothic. Like Asian American literature, the Gothic exists uncomfortably alongside the canon, perpetually interrogating and exposing the ideologically problematic sites of the latter.

That Asian American literature contends with issues of liminal existence and fragmented subjectivity already lends itself significantly to a Gothic interrogation. In the rest of this essay, I want to demonstrate how two Asian American narratives significantly deploy the Gothic to address the Asian American experience. I demonstrate that Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* rehearses the American *bildungsroman* of the formation of a new subjectivity in an otherwise hostile world—a theme popular with many early American authors, such as James Fennimore Cooper. However, the narrative cannot escape the paradox of old world (third world) repudiation and dependence in its endeavour to promote an American image that is triumphant. In this way, *Jasmine* (perhaps unconsciously) reworks—through writing the immigrant experience— the preoccupation of early American Gothicists in their complex relationship with their English literary legacy, one that is fraught with a dialectic of desire and resistance. Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman*, on the other hand, addresses the issue of cultural haunting, which I will recast as a form of Freudian melancholia, which nevertheless becomes signified as a tool of survival. Through constant evocation of ghosts and arcane rituals, Akiko draws upon her Korean heritage and the silenced voices of the comfort women to provide her and her daughter a sense of presence and place in an otherwise incomprehensible (American) landscape. In this way, Keller's narrative significantly reconstitutes haunting as positive, as opposed to the Euro-American Gothic ghost stories which often portray the return of the dead as an occasion of evil. More directly than *Jasmine*, Keller's narrative is perhaps more "truthful" to the immigrant experience which is often hampered by social (especially racism), economical (poverty), psychological (fear and confusion) and ideological (culture and belief systems) constraints.

Jasmine and a Critique of American Imperialism

Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* is a *bildungsroman* that echoes the female Gothic plot of transcendence. Jill Roberts's assessment of Mukherjee's

heroine's plight after witnessing the murder of her first husband, Prakash —"running like the hero in an adventure film, sexy, tireless, exotic in her adaptability and mutability" (89)—interestingly recalls Ellen Moer's reading of the female Gothic.[2] In this Gothic plot, the heroine must constantly evade the trappings of the past and her domestication in order to achieve autonomy. As Eugenia DeLamotte sees it:

> the desire for transcendence as Gothic plots portray it manifests itself simply as a desire for escape from the house, the prison ... escape, in other words, from the extraordinary confinements of romantic heroines that signify the ordinary confinements of women's lives. Such escape is fraught with difficulty: the heroine is isolated and weak; she knows too little; she has no place to go if she gets out. (178)

In Mukherjee's novel, the heroine's constant shuttling between selves evinces her adaptibility and mutability—her transcendence—in an ever-shifting landscape. What, however, sets her apart from other Gothic heroines (of the Radcliffean kind, especially) is that she always seems to have a place to go whenever she evacuates her present identity. Fate seems to ensure that she will encounter safe passages into a new country and new identities. Yet, despite the heroine's repudiation of her past in order to adopt an American identity, she often recourses to it during critical moments to help her overcome them. A fierce debate surrounds the interpretation of *Jasmine*, with equal emphasis given to both the heroine's fierce will to survive despite seemingly insurmountable odds, and her passive subjection to fate.[3] It is not the interest of this essay to reify arguments which are already well rehearsed from either sides. I am primarily concerned with situating the narrative as American Gothic, and will thence only draw from current critical interrogations of the text when they directly inform my Gothic reading. Here, I want to argue that Jasmine's escapades not only establish her kinship with previous Gothic heroines but that the narrative significantly replays the traditional American Gothic's ambivalent relationship with the past.

Jasmine's endeavour to dissociate herself from her native accretion requires violence to be consistently performed on the self. As Jasmine herself attests, "There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake oneself. We *murder* who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams".[4] To assimilate into America, past lives must be radically disregarded—murdered—so that they would not interfere with present and future selves. These latter selves must also maintain their inchoate

and non-arriving nature so that the self can easily and rapidly metamorphose into a new form whenever the need arises. There is certainly a postmodern/postcolonial agenda here following in the footsteps of theorists such as Homi Bhabha. Related to his formulation of hybridity, the interstitial experience promises a "passage between fixed identifications [that] opens up the possibility for a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy".[5] To be interstitial is to have access to a multiplicity of selves: that which is useful can be capitalised and that which is not can be discarded. It is a resistance against closure and, in *Jasmine*, to be American is precisely to be shapeless:

> In America, nothing lasts. I can say that now and it doesn't shock me, but I think it was the hardest lesson of all for me to learn. We arrive so eager to learn, to adjust, to participate, only to find the monuments are plastic, agreements are annulled. Nothing is forever, nothing is so terrible, or so wonderful, that it won't disintegrate. (181)

Jasmine exemplifies a successful integration of the immigrant into the American cultural landscape. Her various lives are situated in liminal spaces, making it quite effortless for her to uproot and be transplanted anew. To be American is to be unbridled by her past—neither culture nor family/community nor history nor place has the power to stay the individual indefinitely.[6]

But what constitutes being American? Jasmine associates being American with what she observes in Taylor:

> [Taylor] smiled his crooked smile, and I began to fall in love. I mean, *I fell in love with what he represented to me*, a professor who served biscuits to a servant, smiled at her, and admitted her to the broad democracy of his joking, even when she did not understand it. It seemed entirely American. I was curious about his life, not repulsed. I wanted to know the way such a man lives in this country. I wanted to watch, be part of it. He seemed so wondrously extravagant, that Sunday morning .... The love I felt for Taylor that first day had nothing to do with sex. I fell in love with his world, its ease, its careless confidence and graceful absorption. I wanted to become the person they thought they saw: humorous, intelligent, refined, affectionate. Not illegal, not murderer, not widowed, raped, destitute, fearful.... I did not want to live legally if it also meant living like a refugee. (167, 171, emphasis added)

For Jasmine, American-ness connotes extravagance, intelligence, refinement, ease, confidence, and an encompassing nature ("graceful

absorption"). To be a third world figure is to be illegal on American soil, not only because the relevant documents are unavailable, but because the third world represents fear and defeat. Fear and defeat are necessarily unwelcomed in a land which encourages freedom and success. What is evident in the above passage is a rigid binarism that necessarily "demonises" the other in order to promote the self. The other is, of course, related to Jasmine's nativeness and her past, thus aligning the narrative with the preoccupation of American Gothic to assert its separation from its legacy. This binarism achieves its most significant representation at the end of the novel when Jasmine has to decide whether to follow Taylor and Duff, or to stay with Bud as his caretaker. She "chooses" the former, but the text suggests that there really is no contest: "I am caught between the promise of America and old-wife dutifulness. A caregiver's life is a good life, a worthy life. What am I to do?" (240). The "dutiful" Asian wife image belongs to her old world, and thus would necessarily obstruct her adoption of a new, American, identity. It is not her affection for Taylor and Duff but the desire to be American that influences her to reject Bud and her life with him.

But, as DeLamotte also points out, the Gothic plot of transcendence is not without problems: the heroine's physical attempts at escape are annulled by her own desire for ladylike decorum—a metonymical representation of cultural and historical constraints (178). *Jasmine*'s reframing of the Gothic also replicates this inherent paradox. In repudiating the past to remake herself, Jasmine cannot ultimately renounce it. The heroine's attempts to remake herself often predisposes her to her own otherness (represented in her various past selves) in a way that calls into question her claims of totally disavowing (the word she uses is "murder") her past. Apart from fate, to which Jasmine often submits despite her (and her critical proponents') claim for an "independent agency",[7] nativeness also often serves her well. This nativeness, I would argue, cannot be divested from its cultural and historical situatedness. In other words, her nativeness already constructs her in and as her past selves. One example in which she deploys her nativeness as a survival strategy is when she declines to correct Bud's orientalist view of her, preferring instead to retain her "alien" qualities of "darkness, mystery, inscrutability". She justifies this by asserting that Bud needs her to be this way because it "rejuvenate[s]" him (200). Bud, in fact, knows nothing about Jasmine's past because India "scares him" (13). What is evident here is Jasmine's paradoxical relationship to her past—replicating, interestingly, the

paradoxical relationship which early American subjectivity experienced with regards to its English legacy. For like the early Americans, Jasmine mythifies her history, and selectively retains that which promotes her assimilation into her New World. Also, when confronted by Bud's ex-wife Karin, who accuses her of being a "gold-digger", Jasmine retorts with, "He chose me. I did nothing to encourage it" (204). Yet this retort is ironic for Jasmine's silence about her past—her murdering of her past—is precisely an encouragement. Bud desires an orientalist fantasy which Jasmine quietly complies, but herein lies the paradox that troubles Gothic narratives: the heroine must transcend her historical constraint in order to finally escape, but she is ultimately unable to relinquish her past completely. The fact that Jasmine strategically evokes her nativeness demonstrates her unwillingness (or inability?) to totally murder her past selves.

The most Gothic episode in the novel is Jasmine's rape and subsequent murder of Half-Face. Once again, her native identity, this time in the form of faith, comes to aid her difficult passage into the "next life". Unlike Carter-Sanborn, who reads this episode as yet another example of Jasmine's passivity (587-9), I argue that this is the *only* instance in the novel in which Jasmine actually establishes agency. For although one may argue that it is fate that places her in the hands of her deformed rapist, her decision to kill him is not motivated by any external circumstances beyond her control. In this moment of physical and psychological extreme, the grotesque rapist is murdered by the Goddess of death in the form of his victim, recalling the double motif that characterises the Gothic, but redeployed to recuperate the traumatised self. Instead of the self becoming overwhelmed, and subsequently dissolved, by her double, Jasmine's alter ego actually *saves* her. Killing Half-Face requires the gumption of more than a docile Indian village girl, so Kali is assumed.[8] But this assumption is not a cancellation of agency but a reinforcement of it. Here, Jasmine actually refuses to take the easy route (that is, submitting to fate or running away):

> For the first time in my life I understood what evil was about. It was about not being human. Half-Face was from an underworld of evil. It was very simple, very clear perception, a moment of truth, the kind of understanding that I have heard comes at the moment of death. I had faced death twice before, and cheated it.
>
> Yama will not sneak up on me. (116)

This passage suggests an awakening which leads to conscious action. By declaring that Yama, the Lord of Death, will not sneak up on her, she is implying that she will not yield to fate this time. Her initial response to her rape is to commit suicide but later she decides to kill Half-Face instead. This evinces a shift from passively accepting her tragedy to actively resignifying it. As Kali, she commences to slit her tongue before advancing towards her intended victim:

> I put on my pants and wrapped myself in the towel for the iciness outside.... I drew close to the side of the bed ... where I could study the good side of his face. My mouth had filled with blood. I could feel it on my chin.
>
> I began to shiver. The blade need not be long, only sharp, and my hand not strong, only quick. His eyes fluttered open even before I felt the metal touch his throat, and his smile and panic were near instantaneous. *I wanted* the moment when he saw me above him as he had last seen me, naked, but now with my mouth open, pouring blood, and my red tongue out. *I wanted* him to open his mouth and start to reach, *I wanted* that extra hundredth of a second when the blade bit deeper than any insect, when I jumped back as he jerked forward, slapping at his neck while blood, ribbons of bright blood, rushed between his fingers .... I pulled the bedspread off the bed and threw it over him and then began stabbing wildly through the cloth, as the human form beneath it grew smaller and stiller. (118 – 9, emphasis added)

I quote this passage at length because I want to demonstrate the certainty of Jasmine's decision. Compared to another episode in the novel which Carter-Sanborn also highlights as an example of Jasmine's lack of agency,[9] this occurrence forcefully confirms Jasmine's active participation in charting her next course in life. She kills Half-Face methodically, strategically and determinedly (the sentence structure is consistently active, with "I wanted" repeated three times). Assuming the mythical Kali in this instance does not efface her subjectivity, but impels her to react assertively. She is not merely *possessed* (as implied in Carter-Sanborn's reading) by Kali but *is* Kali. My reason for emphasizing this episode is to fundamentally demonstrate that Jasmine's desire for transcendence is deeply interrelated with her nativeness and history. The repudiation of past selves so vociferously phrased as *murder* is unsustainable in the light of what Jasmine actually experiences.

An interesting parallel with regards to the anxiety of historical legacy

also occurs on the level of *Jasmine*'s textuality. *Jasmine*'s immediate literary predecessor is the Gothic text, *Jane Eyre*, whose name Mukherjee's heroine eventually adopts. Initially, Jasmine found Brontë's narrative "too difficult" and as a result, she "abandoned" her reading (41). But as discourse, *Jasmine*'s pronounced rejection of *Jane Eyre* is constantly underwritten by the heroine's acts of self-remaking which echoes her predecessor. Until the very end of the novel, Jasmine is haunted by her literary other whom she quietly emulates, but whom she nevertheless resists:

> Maybe things *are* settling down all right. I think maybe I am Jane with my very own Mr. Rochester, and it'll be okay for us to go to Missouri where the rules are looser and yield to the impulse in a drive-in chapel. (236, author's emphasis)

Between her identities as Jyoti, Jasmine and Jane Ripplemeyer, *Jane Eyre* serves as the textual unconscious which motivates the narrator's "reincarnations". This intertextual relationship between *Jane Eyre* and *Jasmine* has scarce been given critical attention,[10] but I want to propose that *Jasmine* is a palimpsest of its Gothic forerunner: even as Jasmine is shaped and subsequently scripted by her various past lives (John Hoppe observes that throughout the narrative, "Jasmine refers to herself, and her past selves, as ghosts, phantoms" 140), *Jasmine* is scripted by Brontë's text.[11] It is interesting to note that despite Jasmine's assertion that she could not read Brontë's novel, this is undermined by her adoption of "Jane", and her even more evident comparison between herself and Brontë's heroine. This inability to read, in my view, suggests a kind of intertextual anxiety of influence at work. *Jasmine* is resisting the authority of *Jane Eyre* but in the end, Mukherjee's narrative is unable to escape the latter's influence.

Another way in which *Jane Eyre* scripts *Jasmine* is through the issue of legality. Earlier, I discussed Jasmine's contempt for illegal status because it signifies defeat and fear. Here, I want to propose that Jasmine's eventual legal status is predicated on her successful entry into the American family. For despite procuring the "necessary" documents (through the help of Professorji [15]), they are ultimately illegal (they are forged) and cannot integrate her into the American cultural landscape. Jasmine herself acknowledges that she finally becomes American "in an apartment on Claremont Avenue across the street from a Barnard College dormitory"

where she lived with the Hayeses for two years (165). Read this way, Jasmine's transformation from illegal to legal immigrant is related to a "sequential arrangement of family/counter-family dyad" that Gayatri Spivak has observed in *Jane Eyre* as well (140). Spivak's discussion of *Jane Eyre* reveals an implicit cooption of imperialism as the discursive field that underlies the narrative's ideology (150). Jane succeeds as the Gothic heroine because she represses her other who is embodied in the narrative by Bertha Mason. An outsider to Rochester's family, the only way Jane can be admitted is by dispossessing Bertha of her legalised position. Discursively, this is performed through demonising her as a Caribbean mad woman in the attic. *Jasmine* repeats the formula, albeit with important differences. Like Jane, Jasmine must repress her other in the form of her past lives in order to attain legal status through adopting a family. But her past lives are not the only "other" that pervade the narrative.

At the start of this essay, I referred to David Punter's assessment of American Gothic as ambivalently related to its British literary heritage. In *Jasmine*, the struggle for independence and autonomy from the Old World is radically reworked as a contemporary one between a "'losing-self-sense' that signifies 'white' America" (Drake 82) and what Mukherjee terms America's "new breed of pioneers" (in Hancock 37)—survivors of the immigrant experience. In an interesting racial twist, white ideology is now considered Old World and other, represented especially by the various farmers (Bud, Harlan, Darrell) whose "inability to negotiate change and temporality, their fantasies of the land as permanent and therefore their own identities as fixed by that vision ... doom them to failure, futility, or death" (Hoppe 153). The white, patriarchal institution of America is transfixed in their lack of vision, thus dooming themselves to destruction; the nation now belongs to post-Americans like Jasmine and Du. As Hoppe asserts, these immigrants:

> re-combine, re-appropriate, and re-invent cultural traditions and subjectivities in new combinations, imagining the land as wilderness/frontier/open possibility imaginatively and thus claiming it for their use, in a mutated and shifting echo of the process European settlers used as they imaginatively emptied and rewrote the New World to serve as their destiny. (154)

If Hoppe's assessment is correct, what we have is a re-writing of the American socio-cultural landscape that uncannily repeats the earlier formation of the New World. With this, I come full circle with my

recommendation to view *Jasmine* as a Gothic text. As Gothic narratives demonstrate, the celebration of the newly-constructed self that rebels against old world legacy belies an unconscious desire for and dependence on the latter that cannot be negated. The old world must be mythologised as other in order for the self to achieve some kind of definition. Jasmine too must necessarily set up the others (her past lives, the white farmers) as irrelevant and obstructing the new self from forming. Mukherjee's heroine's accomplishment, which is nothing short of mythical, is predicated on the narrative's deliberate mythifying of otherness as largely inconsequential. This must be performed in order to textually justify the dispossession of otherness, the way Bertha Mason is made marginal in order for Jane to assert her legalised presence.

Rewriting Haunting: Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman*

Keller's *Comfort Woman* provides another version of the immigrant experience.[12] If Mukherjee's Jasmine must deny her past in order to reinvent herself to assimilate into the American cultural landscape and imagined community, Akiko's constant reference to her past is what provides her with the capacity to negotiate her fragmented subjectivity. Unlike Jasmine whose desire for American-ness necessitates the disavowal of her own history, Akiko evokes the ghosts of her past to protect herself and her daughter from cultural erosion occasioned through a newly-acquired subjectivity. For Akiko, the past is also vitally present; however harrowing it may be, it cannot be relinquished because the symbolic effacement (the hiding of one's "true self" [153]) resulting from a forgetting is a fate worse than death. What is communicated through this intermingling of differentiated histories is the self to an-other. Jasmine's dispossession of "otherness" translates her into a floating signifier with little concreteness which can be communicated. Which is why, in her relation with Du, she is fascinated by her stepson who has so much more to teach her. This is because in his recalibration of "the gene pool of the common American appliance" (139)—a metaphor for the assimilative and shape-shifting powers of the immigrant—Du does not surrender his cultural and historical legacies, evidenced in his refusal of an American family to return to his Vietnamese one. Jasmine's shuttling between selves can be seen as a self-centred act which only promotes the survival of her self. Akiko's profound identification with her past is, on the other hand,

centrifugal—it has the capacity to recast not only herself, but her daughter, into individuals that have a strong sense of place and identity no matter where their physical selves are attached:

> In the box I hold for my daughter, I keep the treasures of my present life: my daughter's one-hundred-day dress, which we will also use for her first birthday; a lock of her reddish-brown hair; the dried stump of her umbilical cord. And a thin black cassette tape that will, eventually, preserve a few of the pieces, the secrets, of our lives. I start with our names, *my true name and hers*: Soon Hyo and Bek-Hap, I speak for the time when I leave my daughter, so that when I die, she will hear my name and know that when she cries, she will never be alone.[13]

Within the box are items that represent the mother-daughter bind that cannot be undone. In keeping Beccah's birthday dress and umbilical cord, Akiko is celebrating her present life *in* her daughter, one whom she calls a miracle because she did not think that it was possible for her to have a child anymore after a traumatic abortion at the Japanese military camp where she served as a comfort woman (15). In Beccah, Akiko sees a new reincarnation of herself that is also a preservation of past selves (which include her life before Japanese colonisation, and Induk, one of the comfort women who will eventually come to possess her), that war and history have cruelly obliterated. The reclamation of both the mother's and daughter's true name suggests the preservation of individuality, and family and ethnic history. In the narrative, Akiko's body is colonised thrice over—first through rape, then through the obliteration of her Korean identity by the Japanese (most emphatically reinforced through the denial of her Korean name and language [16]), and lastly, through her missionary husband's machination to turn her into the obedient Christian, Asian-American wife (112). Yet, in transmitting her true name to her daughter and intermingling it with hers, Akiko is not only evidencing the inability of present adoption to negate past subjectivities, but also the value of such subjectivities as well. Through this transmitting of selves, Akiko is presenting her daughter with the gift of history. Beccah will never be alone because her mother, and the many comfort women who have been obscured by time and governmental rhetoric, now live in and through her. Beccah knows in the end that her mother has planted herself as a "small seed" within her, "waiting to be born" (213).

At this point, I want to redirect my argument to an issue with which I began this essay: the concept of genealogy to which Gothic criticism must

attend. If I read Keller's novel as a summoning of a past to empower the present, does this also imply that there *is* a history that is original and, hence, uncontestable? Would this not be mythifying history akin to early American Gothic in order to disengage itself from its English inheritance? Let me stress here that it is not my intention to set up a binarism of original Korean-ness versus the shiftiness of American-ness, and to suggest that Keller's narrative privileges the former. In my opinion, despite *Jasmine's* celebration of the ambivalent, non-arriving self, it actually commits this uncritical binarism in postulating a third-world subjectivity that is defeatist, defeated and fearful as opposed to an empowered, inchoate American identity. Keller's novel, in drawing from a rich history of Korean shamanism and folklore, is actually closer in spirit to Foucault's concept of genealogy:

> Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things; its duty is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, having imposed a predetermined form in all its vicissitudes. Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people. On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations – or conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us .... (Foucault 81)

Genealogy does not demonstrate that the past is alive in the present, because this is ubiquitous and common sense. What genealogy does, however, is to uncover lost or repressed pasts ("the accidents, the minute deviations") and to understand how these have equally shaped the course of history and constructed subjectivities. Keller's narrative performs this notion of genealogy in its privileging of marginal (shamanism) and silenced (comfort women) histories. Akiko's assumption of shamanistic duties in Hawaii (she principally assists immigrants who are haunted by loved ones whom they were forced to abandon when leaving their homelands) is the narrative's implicit critique of Korean, Japanese and American patriarchy and imperialism (both of which are not separable). Basing her reading of Akiko's shamanism on the Korean folk tale of Princess Pari, Kun Jong Lee demonstrates that "in her description of Soon Hyo's (Akiko's name before she became a comfort woman) transformation

into a shaman, Keller builds the axis of matriliny against the axis of patriliny dominant in Princess Pari's patriarchal society".[14] In adhering to a shamanistic belief, Akiko is resisting the devaluation of herself. Her body may be colonised, but her spirit, through an identification with other women such as Induk (the original Akiko), her mother and her aunts—The Seven Stars (78)—is reclaiming a matrilineal community that will preserve her from historical effacement. Following Foucault, Akiko's adherence to the scissions of official history prove valuable and enervating. But Keller does not romanticise; *Comfort Woman* reveals that it is never painless when a dark and silenced past is reclaimed; but to not reclaim it is to deny a vital historical presence that can be usefully translated to a future (an)other.

In her book *Cultural Haunting*, Kathleen Brogan performs an insightful reading of *Comfort Woman* through the trajectories of mourning, haunting and burial. She argues that the narrative "performs a 'secondary burial' in which ghosts of the old country are safely incorporated into America" (152). As much as I value Brogan's critical appraisal, I am not sure how to understand this incorporation-through-burial. This view seems to suggest that the past must be "swallowed up" ("incorporated") by the present, which again privileges America over the "old country" (note the binarism again). That is, the old country troubles the subject with ghosts and guilt which can be repressed (buried) only through an adoption of America. I argue that instead of burial, the narrative actually performs a textual exhumation so that the ghosts of the past are freed, not to haunt, but to assist the living with their struggle to assume a resignified subjectivity. Elsewhere, Brogan recasts her argument in a different, much more acceptable, way:

> Akiko's shamanistic rituals help new immigrants negotiate shifting identities and loyalties by at once confirming ancestral ties and safely distancing the living and the dead. Through her mourning, Akiko's troubled clients redefine their relationships to both the old country and the new. (157)

The word "negotiation" is certainly closer to the narrative's insinuation than the term "incorporation", which suggests hierarchy. Ghosts are evoked to reconnect the immigrant with her past, and simultaneously to separate them. This is a necessary paradox and reinforces the point that meaningful assimilation into a new subject position cannot be

accomplished without acknowledging and negotiating with one's past subjectivity or subjectivities. This is precisely the contradiction that troubles *Jasmine*. In *Comfort Woman*, Beccah initially despairs of her mother's "ghosts and demons that fed off our lives" (2), and prefers her American father whom she imagines as benevolent ("an angel coming to comfort me"), rich ("he would spirit me away, to a home on the mainland complete with plush carpet and a cocker spaniel pup") and heroic ("My daddy, I knew, would save my mother and me") (2). Like Jasmine, Beccah sets up a deliberate juxtaposition between a triumphant (patriarchal) American-ness, and a defeated and fearful (matriarchal) Asian-ness, privileging, of course, the former. Later, after Akiko's death, Beccah will listen to her mother's story preserved in a cassette tape which will help reconnect her to her maternal and Korean heritage;[15] more importantly, it will consequently grant her the power to continue the articulation of an otherwise silenced history of the comfort women. For it is only through the acknowledgement of these legacies that Beccah can come to a realisation of who she is: that her history is both a continuity and mirror of her mother's story and, indirectly, the collective story of the comfort women.[16]

In an interview with Lee Young-Oak, Keller admits that writers like Morrison and Faulkner have influenced her work. *Beloved* and *Sound of the Fury*, two American Gothic texts, are cited by Keller as important textual predecessors that have affected the construction of *Comfort Woman* to some degree (Young-Oak 157-8). If *Jasmine* shares an intertextual relationship with *Jane Eyre*, *Comfort Woman*'s Gothic dimensions are certainly informed by Keller's reading of, and learning from, Morrison's and Faulkner's narratives. Like *Beloved*, Keller's narrative is a tale of a cultural haunting that asserts powerful influences on diasporic women's lives. The present encounters a disturbance due to an unresolved and un-negotiated past because, to couch it in Freudian terms, the subject has failed to perform the necessary mourning, which has become transformed into melancholia. According to Freud, melancholy is a form of an ingestion of an object for whom the subject cannot mourn. This stems from an inability to relinquish the lost loved one, resulting in the subject identifying with her instead. As Freud puts it, "the loss of the object [becomes] transformed into a loss in the ego, and the conflict between the ego and the loved person transformed into a cleavage between the criticising faculty of the ego and the ego as altered by the identification" (159). Akiko's assumption of shamanistic duties—an assumption that can only occur because she has

experienced and overcome *sinby_ng* (possession sickness)[17]—can be read as a form of melancholia: that is, she has ingested Induk who, in turn, now possesses and empowers her. Induk is the original Akiko, a comfort woman who died "reclaiming her Korean name, reciting her family genealogy, even chanting the recipes her mother had passed on to her" (20). In her death, Induk proclaims her unbreakable spirit in the face of Japanese colonialism. For Soon Hyo, Induk's final proclamation is not an act of madness, but of escape. The original Induk is left skewered as an example for other comfort women who threatens to rebel; unburied and, hence, unmourned. Soon Hyo, through her adoption of the name Akiko, has little choice but to assume the dead woman's place. She becomes the site of Induk's burial. Which is why Soon Hyo surmises that the corpse which the soldier brings back is not Induk's, but her own (21). Induk is not dead, but lives on through Soon Hyo, which is suggestive of a melancholic mechanism triggered through Soon Hyo's psychic exchange of bodies:

> She spoke for me: No one performed the proper rites of the dead. For me. For you. Who was there to cry for us in kok, announcing death? Or to fulfil the duties of yom: bathing and dressing our bodies, combing our hair, trimming our nails, laying us out? Who was there to write our names, even to know our names and remember us? (38)

Induk's unmourned death transforms into a melancholic ingestion through Soon Hyo's assumption of the name Akiko; on a wider significance however, it is also Soon Hyo's own symbolic death, and the symbolic death of all comfort women (see 143), that remains unmourned and evolves into a melancholia which Akiko carries within her. Devalued, and sometimes tortured and killed in the camps, comfort women are also known as *hwanhyangnyo* because, being "sullied and labelled promiscuous",[18] they cannot articulate their tragedy when (or if) they return to their homeland lest they invite further shame into their lives. Hence, for many comfort women, their past lives become their unmourned which they now ingest as melancholia and which in turn spiritually and psychically "cannibalises" them. Freud aptly demonstrates that in melancholia, "the relation to the object is no simple one; it is complicated by the conflict of ambivalence" (167). Akin to possession, melancholia however reveals that it is a possession that is occasioned by the inability of the subject to "let go". It is the "return of the dead", but one that is "ambivalent", dialogic and bidirectional. In *Comfort Woman*, this dialogical

melancholic possession is most emphatic in an episode when the ghost Induk assists Akiko (who has recently escaped the military camp) in the birthing of her child who subsequently dies (I will quote at length):

> I do not see her, but I know Induk is with me. She licks at my toes and fingertips, sucking at them until my blood rushes to greet her touch. I feel her fingers wind through my hair, rubbing my scalp, soothing me, while her mouth caresses my chin and neck. My body prickles.
>
> With infinite care, Induk slides her arms around my back, cradling me into her heart. Her lips press the base of my throat, the hollow underneath my jaw, then travel lower to brush against my nipples. I feel them pulling, drawing my milk, feel the excess liquid trickle against my sides and down my belly. Induk laps it up, her tongue following the meandering trails.
>
> She kneads my buttocks, shaping them to her hands, spreading them apart. Her fingers dip into and flirt with the cleft, from anus to the tip of my vagina, where my blood gathers and pulses until it aches. She combs my pubic hair with her long nails, pulling at the crinkling hairs as if to straighten them. I stifle a groan, try to keep my hips still. I cannot.
>
> I open myself to her and move in rhythm to the tug of her lips and fingers and the head of her between my thighs. The steady buzzing that began at my fingertips shoots through my body, concentrates at the pulse point between my legs, then without warning explodes through the top of my head. I see only the blackness of my pleasure.
>
> My body sings in silence until emptied, and there is only her left, Induk. (144–5)

In this passage, possession, birthing, and death are interrelated to suggest the mysteries of the female body and the intricate female community engendered through such mysteries. Induk possesses Soon Hyo, who in turn gives birth to Induk. The child who actually emerges soon dies, symbolising Soon Hyo's own death as well. But Induk is also the rebirth of Soon Hyo as Akiko. Soon Hyo's death and "reincarnation" are simultaneous events. At the same time, through an overt sexual description, Keller demonstrates the profound relationship between Induk and Soon Hyo—two selves merging into one. This passage suggests Akiko's reclamation of her body as liberated and independent, as well as the power of a female community to enhance the individual. In a later episode, when Akiko's American husband finds her allegedly fondling herself, he tells her "in his sermon preaching voice, Ah ... self-fornication is a sin" (146), not realising that what he has witnessed is a spiritual commingling between Induk and herself. To the monological "solidness"

of her American and Christian husband, the flux experienced between Induk and Akiko is mysterious. They are, if Luce Irigaray's theory is deployed, "luminous. Neither one nor two .... It is multiple, devoid of causes, meanings, simple qualities. Yet it cannot be decomposed. These movements cannot be described as the passage from a beginning to an end ... this body without fixed boundaries. This unceasing mobility. This life – which will perhaps be called our restlessness, whims, pretenses, or lies. All this remains very strange to anyone claiming to stand on solid ground" (Irigaray 207, 215). If the colonisation of comfort women is sexual, political and social all at once, this "speaking together" between Induk and Soon Hyo enables Akiko to repossess her sexuality and individuality from patriarchal brutality and silencing.

What I have attempted to demonstrate is that Akiko's melancholia indeed proves empowering, and this is a significant divergence from Freud's theory. For Freud, melancholia is invariably narcissistic and masochistic, taking pleasure in the pain of loss:

> If the object-love, which cannot be given up, takes refuge in narcissistic identification, while the object itself is abandoned, then hate is expended upon the new substitute-object, railing at it, depreciating it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic gratification from its suffering. (161-2)

A psychic mechanism of substitution unconsciously occurs when the subject replaces the lost object (the loved person) with herself. She is not the object, but the object-love, which is metonymic of, but fundamentally *not*, the object. At the same time, she registers this replacement as a kind of usurpation of the lost object, and hence her self railing and depreciation motivated by unconscious guilt. But in *Comfort Woman*, it is clear that Akiko's melancholia is not motivated by guilt, but draws on the power of Induk to help her come to terms with her history and assimilate into a new ideological and cultural landscape. Induk's taking over of Soon Hyo is akin to Jasmine's invocation of Kali. Akiko is, as mentioned, neither Induk nor Soon Hyo, *but both*. There is no narcissistic or masochistic identification here, but a relationship. Beccah of course could not at first understand her mother's possession. She thinks Akiko is crazy, and prays constantly to God, "Daddy ... and whoever is listening" (3) to come rescue her mother. Growing up in Hawaii, Beccah is more enamoured by American-ness (as represented by her father and the movies [32]) than by a Korean heritage that is peopled with ghosts (*yongson*), spirits (*hongyaek*)

and characters from folktales, all of which she grows increasingly weary and "cautious" (32). She does not realise that in relating to her the various Korean folk legends, like that of Princess Pari (48–50), her mother is helping her to "construct and reconstruct their understandings of the conflicted self in relationship to multiple homeplaces and borderlands" (Ho 35-6), and I would add, histories as well.

I will conclude my reading with a brief meditation of *Comfort Woman* as a ghost story. As Gothic, Keller's narrative significantly reconceptualises the aspect of haunting found in many Gothic stories. In Fred Botting's assessment:

> Gothic productions were considered unnatural in their undermining of physical laws with marvellous beings and fantastic events. Transgressing the bounds of reality and possibility, they also challenged reason through their overindulgence in fanciful ideas and imaginative flights. Encouraging superstitious beliefs Gothic narratives subverted rational codes of understanding and, in their presentation of diabolical deeds and supernatural incidents, ventured into unhallowed ground of necromancy and arcane ritual. (6)

Anglo-American-centric literature often exploits the transgressive nature of the Gothic through stories of the supernatural which include "necromancy and arcane ritual". As Botting postulates, these transgressions defy "physical law" and, indirectly, the wealth of Enlightenment inheritance including rationalism, patriarchy, white supremacy, and scientific authority. Anglo-American Gothic pits the irrational against the rational, often revealing the threat of the former (other) which must be eradicated, but whose textual resolution remains problematic and evasive. Asian literatures, however, tend to take a different view of the supernatural, as many Asian peoples continue to retain a healthy and active respect for "the otherworldly". Ghosts and spirits need not necessarily signify threat, but can prove powerful helpmeets for fractured individuals to regain their composure. Arcane rituals, rather than suggesting necromantic proclivities, could be constituted as a survival strategy. In Keller's text, both these Gothic motifs are deployed in resistance against Anglo-American ghost stories. Hence, Keller's novel is indeed Gothic in its textual association with Morrison's work, but rather than a direct appropriation, it is also deeply informed by Asian culture.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have attempted to read two Asian American narratives as Gothic, showing their affinities to, and their divergence from, the concept of the Gothic as promulgated in American literature. Apart from this, I have also tried to demonstrate the different ways in which Asian American writers depict the stories of immigrant experiences (thus adhering to Miles's recommendation to always read Gothic writing in tangent with the history that informs the cultural dimensions and materiality of the text). While Mukherjee's Jasmine reinvents herself through violent repudiation of her nativeness, Akiko in Keller's novel draws upon the past to strengthen her resolve to live. Unlike Jasmine, who must displace herself anew with each reinvention, Akiko can sustain a degree of permanence that is afforded by a negotiation between, and symbiosis of, selves. To conclude, I want to discuss an insightful point raised by Rey Chow in her essay, "Where have all the Natives Gone", and demonstrate how this view can illuminate the idea of the native in both narratives. Chow writes that:

> the agency of the native cannot be imagined simply in terms of a resistance against the image – that is, after the image has been formed – nor in terms of a subjectivity that existed *before*, beneath, inside, or outside the image. It needs to be rethought as that which bears witness to its own demolition – in a form that is at once image and gaze, but a gaze that exceeds the moment of colonisation. (342, author's emphasis)

In *Jasmine*, the native is indeed imagined "*after* the image has been formed" through the binarism of Western versus third-world identities. This presupposes a kind of fixity of images which the native either desires or resists in order to reinvent herself. In *Comfort Woman*, on the other hand, Akiko's articulation of her veiled history to her daughter through a cassette tape is that "witness" to her own destruction of a history and her self which she hopes Beccah will now appropriate as a *living* witness. Akiko's nativeness is not a fixed image which is constructed either before or after it is formed, but one that is *continuously* imagined—"movements [that] cannot be described as the passage from a beginning to an end ... this body without fixed boundaries" (Irigaray 215). In this way, the story of this Korean-American woman exceeds her moment of colonisation and enables her to retrieve a subjective position (the gaze, rather than the

gazed-at) once more. Rather than unconsciously replicating the paradoxical nature of pioneer American Gothic the way *Jasmine* does, Keller's novel, in keeping alive the cultural and historical self and in articulating marginal voices, not only expresses Miles's genealogical concern for the Gothic, but significantly rewrites the American Gothic as well.

Notes

1 David Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, vol. 1, p. 165. Punter is actually echoing Leslie Fiedler, whose study, *Life and Death in the American Novel* (esp. chapter 6), remains one of the most influential criticism of American Gothic literature.

2 Moer writes that Gothic fantasies (especially those of Ann Radcliffe) showcase the "traveling woman: the woman who moves, acts, who copes with vicissitudes and changes" (*Literary Women*, p. 126).

3 While critics like Jill Roberts, Carmen Wickramagamage and Timothy Ruppel argue that the narrative celebrates the power of self-reinvention that nevertheless requires a violent dispossession of past selves in order for the present and future ones to assert themselves significantly, others like Susan Koshy and Kristin Carter-Sanborn have convincingly demonstrated that Jasmine often passively submits to fate and continues to draw on her past lives to strengthen her present resolve. Koshy, for example, takes *Jasmine* further to task for its failure to sufficiently confront "the historical circumstances of ethnicity and race in the United States and ... the complexities of diasporic subject formation" ("The Geography of Female Subjectivity", p. 69).

4 Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine*, p. 29 (emphasis added). All subsequent references in parentheses. The most violent transformation of all is her assumption of Kali, which I will discuss at length later in this essay.

5 Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, p. 4. But Bhabha's theory has recently been criticised for its lack of attention "to economic, political and social inequalities" (Brah and Coombes, p.1) often experienced by interstitial people. See Anthony Easthope's essay "Bhabha, Hybridity and Identity" for a useful critique of Bhabha's theory.

6 Cf. Carmen Wikramagamage, "Jasmine, who has been compelled to undergo many transformations and occupy many roles, knows that no human attachment to community, place, or culture is so final or sacred that it cannot be broken" ("Relocation as Positive Act", p. 193) .

7 Donna Schlosser, "Autobiography, Agency, and Self-Agency", p. 76.

8 Roberts contends that in *Jasmine*, "Mukherjee's attention to Hindu forms ... is designed less to recover an ancient sensibility than to erect new foundations". My reading has thus far shown that, far from erecting new foundations, the heroine's evocation of "ancient sensibilities" often undermines her instigations of agency. Her deployment of Hinduism evidences Jasmine's fundamental inability to divorce herself from her historical and cultural inheritance, an inheritance which she must constantly and

consciously disavow in order to become American. She may declare at the outset of the narrative that she will not bow to fate (3) and that she will be her own sage (5), but throughout the narrative, it is often fate that guides her decisions and occasions her actions. Also, when Jasmine says that she must reinvent herself into "images of dreams" (29), she seems to be adhering to the Hindu school of Advaita Vedanta, the most widely practised of the various Hindu philosophies, and certainly the most well-known in the West. In this school, existence is akin to a dream (*maya*), and nothing is really real (but neither is it unreal; see Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, esp. p. 417 for a useful overview). Self is merely a hallucination until it is awakened. This concept, if applied to *Jasmine*, would suggest the heroine's irreality as she traverses selves, never finally arriving because she is still on a journey to discover her Self (*Atman*).

9 It is the episode in which Jasmine, as Jyoti, kills a mad dog who attacked her (56). See Carter-Sanborn, p. 586. For a useful refutation of Carter-Sanborn's reading, see John Hoppe's essay, pp.142–4.

10 Exceptions include Susan Koshy, "The Geography of Female Subjectivity" and Kristin Carter-Sanborn, "'We Murder Who We Were'".

11 Kristin Carter-Sanborn goes further in suggesting that the narrator's signaling of *Jane Eyre* demonstrates Jasmine's "generic continuity between her *bildungsroman* and [Brontë's] earlier [narrative]" (p. 573).

12 I will not be dealing with the issue of comfort women directly in this essay as my emphasis is in situating Keller's narrative within Gothic. But there are numerous helpful books and essays on this topic. A useful general introduction would be George Hicks', *The Comfort Women: Japan's Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War*. For a more scholarly treatment, see *Position*'s special edition on *The Comfort Women: Colonialism, War and Sex* (ed. Choi Chungmoo) and Yuki Tanaka's *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution during World War II and the US Occupation*. There are also valuable contributions by contemporary Japanese scholars on this matter, of which one of the most significant is Ueno Chizuko's "The Politics of Memory: Nation, Individual and the Self". Sarah Chunghee Soh's essay provides a useful historisizing of the comfort woman issue by postulating that Korean women's enforced sexual labour go back in history to early China and Imperial Japan, and is indirectly aided by a "systemic binary division of women according to normative functions of their sexuality in the history of Korean patriarchy" ("Women's Sexual Labour and the State in Korean History", p.171).

13 Nora Okja Keller, *Comfort Woman*, p. 183, emphasis added. All subsequent references in parentheses. See p. 97 also for another reference to Beccah's umbilical cord.

14 Kun Jong Lee, "Princess Pari in Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman*", p. 442. Keller radically revises the original story of Princess Pari to give it a feminist slant. This legend exists in several versions. See James H. Grayson's *Myths and Legends from Korea*, pp. 352 – 3 for one version and a useful commentary.

15 In *Comfort Woman*, heritage is suggested most emphatically by the many references to folk tales. Indeed, folk tales serve as unofficial (read female) history, which suggests why Akiko, in her shamanistic rituals, often merges her ghosts (such as Induk) with folk tale characters (Princess Pari) to form a potent symbiosis of powerful and enabling women who will come and provide help.

16 In one of her earlier dreams, Beccah met a woman whom she thought was her mother, and then "realised it was myself. 'My name is Induk,' the woman said through my lips.

I looked into the face that was once my own and wondered who she saw, who stood in my place looking at the body that Induk now claimed" (188). This episode is a precursor to what Beccah will eventually come to realise: that her story is intertwined with the stories of her mother (as in, both stories and history) and of the Korean comfort women.

17 This sickness afflicts individuals who have been "fractured" by personal tragedy. Those who survive this sickness become shamans who have the gift to bridge the living to the dead through the medium of their bodies (see Kathleen Brogan, pp. 156–7).

18 Choi Chungmoo, "Nationalism and the Construction of Gender in Korea", p. 13. In a cruel twist, the word *hwanhyangnyon* is derived from *hwanhyangno*, which means homecoming woman.

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Disembodying the Other: US-Korea Relations as Reflected in Cultural Geography

Jinhee Kim

The Paradigm of National Literature in South Korea

Nak-Chung Paik, the most prominent literary critic of South Korea and Professor of English Literature at Seoul National University, once described South Korea as a nation threatened by "the pressure of transnational capital and the dominant cosmopolitan culture" (577). The notion of danger displayed in this declaration summarizes the gist of Paik's on-going cultural discourse launched some thirty years ago. This critical approach is based on the belief that South Korea is still a "colonized" or "semi-colonized" nation, having remained under the continuing influence of US politics since the official ending of the Japanese occupation. As a result, South Korea is deprived of its traditional values and is on the verge of losing its cultural identity. Paik opposes not only the interference of foreign governments but also any domestic cultural force that welcomes Western, in particular American, imports. As a corollary to this declaration of a state of emergency, Paik has proposed the cultivation of a "National Literature" to rescue South Koreans from the impending loss of their indigenous values, which he sees as being pushed to the margin. Known as "Minjok munhak" in Korean, which literally means "literature of the (Korean) people," National Literature can be clearly distinguished from the category of Korean literature as an ideological apparatus whose mission is to restore political independence and self-reliance, and eventually to provide South Koreans a means to progressively enrich their cultural values and exercise their views, in short, to de-colonize South Korea.

Ever since the appearance of his National Literature manifesto in 1974, Nak-Chung Paik's cultural paradigm has been studied and discussed across the nation and even abroad. Among the better-known proponents

of Paik's theories, Chungmoo Choi at the University of California, Irvine claimed in the first issue of *Positions* (Spring 1993), a hard-core Marxist-oriented cultural studies publication on Asia, that "(post)colonial South Koreans have continued to mimic Western hegemonic culture and have reproduced a colonial pathology of self-denigration and self-marginalization, which has long blinded the South Koreans from critically assessing their 'liberator-benefactor' as a colonizing hegemon" (83). The greatest peril that Choi sees South Koreans facing is a lack of awareness of their coloniality, a condition that has permeated the social and ideological fabric in such a subtle and cryptic manner that only a few are able to detect it. As Choi spells out, this colonization of consciousness results from "the imposition by the dominant power of its own world view, its own cultural norms and values, on the (colonized) people so that they are compelled to adopt this alien system of thought as their own and therefore to disregard or disparage their indigenous culture and identity" (79).

For more than three decades Paik has persistently striven to expand his National Literature enterprise. He has discovered and promoted writers whom he considers suitable—writers who arouse political consciousness in the minds of the mass, such as Ûn Ko, Chi-ha Kim, Kyông-nim Sin, Sôk-yong Hwang, and Wan-sô Pak. They were chosen according to two criteria: language and historical consciousness. First, they write only in Korean and, second, the thematic concerns of their work are considered to be identical with the concerns of the nation. To Paik, no writers express better than they the cultural and historical disadvantages South Korea has experienced in the twentieth century. Over time Paik and his followers have popularized the theories of National Literature. The works of the writers listed above have been widely read and have received a great deal of critical recognition. Paik's National Literature program has instituted a genealogy of elite literary models for the masses to learn from and emulate. He has created a profound impact on the intellectual development of many South Korean youths and, more importantly, has mapped a new direction in thinking about literature and its relationship to the preservation of a nation.

Paik's approach has the virtue of exhorting critics and readers to (re)discover the riches of South Korean literature, especially those works produced during the past one hundred years that not only record the atrocities of foreign invasions and domestic unrest but also show South Koreans new directions toward the future. But Paik's model is

exclusionary. By severing readers from any form of literature considered to favor continuing foreign domination or depriving South Koreans of their traditional values, National Literature excludes any text that promotes contact with foreign culture. Nowhere in Paik's treatise is there to be found a discussion of the benefits of foreign literature or contact with foreign cultures. Working under the notion that cultural import, including that of foreign literature, has the potential to become a threat, Paik asserts that the nature of Western products, concrete or abstract, is to push South Koreans to receive them. Western literature is seen as pushing indigenous peoples to adopt a cosmopolitan culture and jump on the bandwagon of the US capitalist economy. In pressing this point, Paik's nationalist paradigm has passed over or condemned a great deal of literature. A plethora of texts have gone unnoticed during the past thirty years among critics and readers devoted to promoting the nationalist agenda because they were not thought to fit the description of National Literature.

Modern drama, for instance, offers a particularly instructive case, because in South Korea this genre is considered fundamentally Western in its theories and practice. Unlike traditional types of performance such as the mask dance, modern dramatic performances in South Korea employ the conventional poetics and dramaturgy of Western realism. Whereas traditional performances require open arenas and employ acting techniques that rely on spontaneity and improvisation, modern South Korean theater involves a formal separation of performer and audience, of stage and auditorium. Basing itself on realistic modes of representation developed in nineteenth-century European theater, contemporary South Korean theater is designed essentially to manifest what is supposed to be private (feelings, situations, conflicts), while concealing the very artifice of such manifestations (machinery, painting, makeup, light sources, music, etc.). This apparent assimilation of a foreign mode of representation has led to the identification of modern drama as pre-eminently a Western import. Consequently, the country's mainstream dramatic and theatrical genres have long been denied critical attention as well as distinction, and its commercial theater practice has been by and large perceived as incapable of nurturing indigenous cultural values, and as alienating South Koreans from their own cultural heritage.

Such is the view of a number of South Korean nationalists opposing Western influence. Even though Western-style theater has become a popular cultural practice whose history now extends over a hundred years,

with academic institutions offering courses on drama and training in acting and directing, it still receives little critical attention. The virtual non-existence of critical theater journals, the lack of serious scholarly interest and research, gatherings and workshops, all point to the marginal status of modern dramatic arts in South Korea.

Not all South Koreans have been deprived of an encounter with those texts because of the power of Paik's group, nor have all publishers refused to publish texts other than those that fit the nationalist program. Although Paik's camp does not control all literary discourse and all publications concerning matters of literature in South Korea, Paik and his followers have repeatedly chosen to establish their own canon, refusing to review other texts. The result has been the creation of an intellectual caste system, and even today the powerful presence of Paik's nationalist discourse can be felt in nearly every corner of the intellectual community in South Korea. Interestingly enough, one of the strongest intellectual endorsements Paik has received originates from the West.

Principal Issues of Postcolonial Criticism

Several theoretical developments that have taken place in the intellectual community in recent years, notably the establishment of the discourse of postcolonial criticism, have served to support the endeavor to bring non-Western cultures and literatures into focus. For many postcolonial critics, the seemingly overwhelming influence of the West has become the primary object of inquiry. Central to their arguments is a concern with the apparent subjugation of the Third World by the economic power of the First World. Basing their cultural theory on the classical Marxist notion that in capitalist societies cultural practices are determined by the class structure, these critics view capitalism as a homogenizing cultural force and the spread of capitalism as subjecting all experiences to the law of commodification. Working from the understanding that the invasion of an indigenous culture by a foreign one is a major aspect of the process of imperialism, they conclude that, in short, the advancement of capitalism originating from the First World prevents indigenous peoples from retaining their cultural heritage and maintaining their separate identities.

Although modern theoretical conceptions of capitalism vary, bringing different issues into focus, all tend to agree on the potential disadvantages resulting from the rampant spread of capitalism from the First to the Third

World and the Third World's subjugation to consumerism. For instance, the British cultural critic David Harvey, whose *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989) traces the history of Western intellectual philosophy from the Enlightenment to postmodernism, asserts that:

> because capitalism is expansionary and imperialistic, cultural life in more and more areas gets brought within the grasp of the cash nexus and the logic of capital circulation. To be sure, this has sparked reactions varying from anger and resistance to compliance and appreciation (and there is nothing predictable about that either). But the widening and deepening of capitalist social relations with time is, surely, one of the most singular and indisputable facts of recent historical geography. (344)

The point of departure for Harvey's inquiries into the relation between postmodernism and capitalism is economic determinism. Harvey asserts that postmodernism is not a passing novelty but a powerful configuration of sentiments and thoughts, at once a new cultural production and an ideological transformation. Harvey warns that the city is "falling victim to a rationalized and automated system of mass production and mass consumption of material goods" (5). Witnessing the force of Western capitalism and the speed with which it spreads, Harvey calls our attention to the potentially damaging influence of First World capitalism on the Third World. The fine line of Harvey's argument is that no land can remain free of the encroachment of the First World capitalist economy. By this account, even if formal colonialism has ceased in most places, the end of the twentieth century stood witness to the still dominant, and even menacing, West.

Harvey's claim that the influx of capitalism effected by international trade and multinational corporations is the cutting edge of Western imperialism is seconded by Fredric Jameson, a leading Marxist theoretician in the US. Describing the impact of capitalism on Third World countries, Jameson notes that:

> In the age of neocolonialism, of decolonization accompanied by the emergence of multi-national capitalism and great transnational corporations, [what] strikes the eyes [is] the internal dynamic of relationship between the First and the Third world countries, and in particular the way in which this relationship is one of necessary subordination or dependency, and that of an economic type. (57)

Echoing Harvey's warning, Jameson asserts that the machinery of Western capitalism will put the Third World populations under the "economic domination" of the West (57). In line with this prediction, Jameson identifies the economic influence of the United States as the predominant cause of the marginalization of Third World cultures. He calls the new world order, or the imposition of capitalism in Third World countries, "bewildering" (57) because he considers global capitalism a pseudonym for cultural imperialism and because he believes that it eventually deprives the indigenous people of their cultural identities. Jameson predicts that Third World countries will ultimately experience a death of subjectivity and lose their own historical consciousness. He views the First World order as an immediate threat, "spreading like a wild fire" and capitalism as resulting in "blood, torture, and horror" (57). The danger is compounded, Jameson argues, by "the feelings of mental inferiority and habits of subservience and obedience" that capitalism imposes on indigenous populations (76). He emphatically warns that, as a "faceless influence without representable agents," Western capitalism will dominate the experience of non-Western populations, eventually destroying their cultural heritage and spiritual legacies (83).

In *Imperial Leather* (1995) Anne McClintock further articulates this sense of distrust and anger against Western capitalism, asserting that "despite the hauling down of colonial flags in the 1950s, revamped economic imperialism has ensured that the United States and the former European colonial powers have become richer, while, with a tiny scattering of exceptions, their ex-colonies have become poorer" (393). For McClintock, the imbalance in economic development between the First and the Third World is something to be morally condemned and immediately corrected. Regarding the devastated Third World economy of the present day, she asserts:

> Since formal decolonization, contrary to the World Bank's vaunted technical "neutrality" and myth of expertise, projects have aggressively favored the refinement and streamlining of surplus extraction, cash crop exports and large-scale projects going to the highest bidders, thereby fostering cartels and foreign operators and ensuring that profits tumble into coffers of the multinational corporations. Now, after the 1980s "desperate decade" of debt, drought and destabilization, the majority of Third World countries are poorer than they were a decade ago. Twenty-eight million Africans face famine. (393)

After describing First World capitalism as a vampire sucking the blood of the indigenous people, McClintock adds that the devastation caused by capitalism has even affected those few ex-colonies that have achieved relatively healthy economic growth:

> The four "miracle" Tigers [Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea] have paid for progress with landscapes pitted with poisoned water, toxic soil, denuded mountains and dead coral seas. In "miracle" Taiwan, an estimated 20 percent of the country's farmland is polluted by industrial wastes, and 30% of the rice crops contain unsafe levels of heavy metals, mercury and cadmium. (394)

McClintock, like Jameson, is troubled by and concerned with the impact of capitalism, which she regards as progressively infiltrating nature itself as well as all levels of human experience. Similar warnings to those given by the above Anglo-American Marxist-oriented theoreticians can be found in the works of the late Edward Said, a Palestinian-born postcolonial critic. Identifying America as the neo-colonialist par excellence, Said wrote:

> Westerners may have physically left their old colonies in Africa and Asia, but they retained them not only as markets but locales on the ideological map over which they continued to rule morally and intellectually. Rarely before in human history has there been so massive an intervention of force and ideas from one culture to another as there is today from America to the rest of the world. (319)

To Said, Western imperialism was much alive, no longer geography-bound, but equally forceful and devastating, dictating the production of ideas, morals, and even emotions in accordance with the cultural politics of the First World.

One of the notable examples Said presented to illustrate Cultural Imperialism of the West was Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1882). It is an exemplary text because it not only advises Britons to pursue their own interests under the assumption that England is entitled to political hegemony but also called upon them to uplift other lands spiritually. In short, in the Arnoldian universe, imperialism is necessary because it serves a higher civilization. Said argued that the central theme of *Culture and Anarchy* is that "what is at stake in society is not merely the cultivation of individuals, or the development of a class of finely tuned sensibilities, or the renaissance of interest in the classics, but rather the assertively achieved

and won hegemony of an identifiable set of ideas" (10). Thus, Said believed that scrutinizing a text such as *Culture and Anarchy* enabled one to understand the ways in which the power of culture comes to authorize, dominate, legitimate, denote, interdict, and validate were transmitted. Said's reading of the Arnoldian framework refutes the assumption that literature is politically and historically innocent, and instead demonstrates that it gives shape to and disseminates hegemony. To put it differently, literature in the Arnoldian program is a form of cultural domination, ensuring the disparity in power between the West and the non-West.

Said's discourse on the Orient likewise examines the connection between texts and the actualities of daily life. With *Orientalism* (1978) and subsequent publications, Said initiated, at least among those engaged in cross-cultural projects, a major re-conceptualization of Orientalism. Said claimed that the Orient is not a concrete cultural entity containing historical as well as individual experience, but a cultural construct, a fabrication of European imperial discourse resulting from centuries of imagination and existing pre-eminently in the minds of Western critics who attempt to theorize the ontological differences between the West and the East. The political motivation behind this ideological project, Said claimed, was to validate the notion of having an empire, just as that of Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* was to validate England's imperialism. Again and again Said showed how the moral and political sentiments embedded in the European construction of the Orient testified to an unrelenting Eurocentrism.

Delineating a New Theoretical Model of Cross-Cultural Studies

The vigorous attack launched by Harvey, Jameson, McClintock and Said against Western hegemony finds further support in the voice of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, an India-born North America-based critic. Although Spivak is a prominent postcolonial critic, she takes issue with her postcolonial peers on the principle of localism and diversity. In *The Post-Colonial Critic* (1990) she asserts "the specific project of territorial imperialism since the middle of this century has changed into neo-colonialism" (140). Spivak supports Jameson's condemnation of Western capitalism. The social and spatial encroachment resulting from the multinational positioning, manifest in Disneyfied mass culture and the spread of gigantic shopping malls and multinational corporations, are

considered by Spivak as concrete examples of the new kind of colonialism. To Spivak, Western imports, whether high technology (medicine, computer, and mass media), consumer goods (clothing, shoes, and accessories), entertainment (film, music, and television), the fast food industry, or giant tobacco companies, bear witness to the rampant proliferation of First World capitalism.

Although in agreement with Marxist views on many points, Spivak distances herself from Jameson and other critics by emphasizing the notion of diversity and of the vital importance of a plurality of voices in theorizing the relationship between the First and the Third World. In her academic discourse, cultural particulars have the same centrality as capitalism does in Jameson's and as Western cultural influence in Said's. Spivak cautions against giving priority to any single issue, in particular with regard to the orthodox Marxist view that explains nearly everything in terms of class struggle and the mode of production. Wary of the many First World (post) colonial intellectuals who examine the non-West only from a Marxist perspective, and critical of their undiscriminating views of Third World cultures and people, Spivak stresses that the experiences and struggles of Third World populations vary and thus must be differentiated. She argues that it is "historically unsound simply to reverse the gesture and try to impose a Marxian *working*-class consciousness upon the urban proletariat in a colonial context" (14-15; italics are original). Furthermore, Spivak urges First World critics to stop patronizing the oppressed and apologizing on behalf of Western civilization, challenging them to develop, instead, strategies to dilute the dominant accounts of non-Western populations produced by the First World intellectuals.

Whereas Said believed that an international transformation of social consciousness was the key to liberation, Spivak articulates in more concrete and specific terms the vital importance of recognizing the existence of different kinds of subjectivity. She believes that representation of the diversity of the Third World will eventually undermine the cultural arrogance of the West. For Spivak, any monolithic approach to knowing or interpreting alien cultures undervalues the immense heterogeneity of the Third World. Spivak's critique confers a special value on heteroglossia, which, she believes, can enable critics to appreciate the vast range of difference within the Third World, and thus to transcend the undifferentiating postcolonial mentality of the First World. On this point, Spivak claims, "the holders of hegemonic discourse should de-hegemonize their position and themselves and learn how to occupy the

subject position of the other" (121).

As part of her demand that the intellectual community of the First World should seek more diversified views of the Third World, and adopt and speak from the perspective of the indigenous people, Spivak proposes taking into account the essential diversity of subjectivity itself. She looks for approaches that will be both sensitive to the conditions of cultural production and cultural reception, and adequate to account for the Third World population. Although Spivak does not make concrete plans to undertake this task, her work unambiguously points to it. Her emphasis on the heterogeneous nature of the Third World community is quite inspiring, as evinced in her recent work on North India, which highlights orality and heteroglossia. As Spivak eloquently argues, the uncritical adoption of any univocal narrative is a disservice to non-Western cultures.

Conclusion

Postcolonial discourse tends to accept the notion of imperialism too readily. There is a need for emancipatory theories that set out to examine the dominance of the West in a non-Western culture in order to probe specific instances of Western influence. However, without looking into the concrete workings of a non-Western culture and people, postcolonial criticism runs the risks consequent on lumping together the experiences of all Third World people. Accordingly, the narratives of postcolonial criticism need to abandon the attempt at a bird's-eye view and start to articulate the experience of the indigenous people in the form of *petit récits*. In *Occidentalism* (1995), her study of Chinese-US literary relations, in particular of modern Chinese drama and its Western counterparts, Xiaomei Chen, a Chinese scholar based in the United States, confirms my position when she insists that particular cultural phenomena need to be discussed "in the light of their own historical exigencies" (12). Chen strongly advocates this approach because it undercuts "the totalizing strategies and universal claims that have all too often been part of interpretive communities" (12). The development of specific accounts of individual people and regions promises the eventual overthrow of the domination of the First World order, and a dilution of the production of grand, but inadequate, First World narratives.

In line with Spivak's position and in view of the pros and cons of postcolonial criticism, I suggest that to account for the experiences and

identities of the South Korean people, first, South Koreans be allowed to speak for themselves and, second, First World intellectuals start to speak from the Third World subjectivity. The crucial point of inquiry into the First and the Third World relationship is that of agency, of 'who does the speaking.' In cross-cultural phenomena, it is indigenous people who give meaning to Western culture and texts, in an engagement with the acts of appropriation, regulation, and domination implicit in these works. Postcolonial criticism needs to refocus its efforts on the subjectivity of actual people. This takes postcolonial criticism in a different direction, casting the ready claim of "imperial forest, native trees" in a new light, and deepening its valuable insights. The centrality of the people has the potential to be a profitable thesis in current cross-cultural studies, once critics take a more careful look at the significance of indigenous people.

The Third World experience is too complicated and diverse to be reduced to theoretical, ideological templates. The assertions made by postcolonial critics, however sincere, have not focused on the vital question of 'who speaks?' This is a meaningful and challenging exercise, because in order to enrich the notions of cultural plurality and ethnic multiplicity, cross-cultural scholarship needs to expand its focus beyond the First World narratives. Once the subjectivity of the Third World is recognized as primary in postcolonial discourse, recognition of the significance of the indigenous people in the cross-cultural situation will be unavoidable. This theory, applied cross-culturally, illuminates the thesis that the key to East-West relations resides in the indigenous people. In other words, scholars engaged in cross-cultural projects cannot afford to disregard the role of the indigenous people.

The East is neither a passive vessel for the West, nor simply an avid consumer of Western products to the point of losing its cultural identity. Michel de Certeau asserts in *The Practice of Everyday Life* that the individual participants in a culture, in order to adapt the alien to their own interests, make innumerable infinitesimal transformations. In accordance with de Certeau's thesis, we can reach a conclusion that Korean readers exercise such a power within the supposedly dominant Western hegemony, thereby debunking the Western myth of the non-Western as victim. However minor the transformations wrought by the indigenous people, non-Western populations are not passively guided by Western rules. Instead, they maintain their differences within the very space of existing. Laws, practices, and representations that are imposed on the indigenous people are subverted from within, as those populations invent rules or convictions

foreign to the very colonization from which the indigenous people are thought unable to escape. These people act creatively in such a way that the West becomes integrated rather than dominating. In brief, the East and the West merge into a new cultural entity.

Although modern drama and theater in South Korea have come under attack from various quarters because of their heavy indebtedness to Western models, there is a sense that these plays ultimately subvert the "Westernness" that, according to the narratives of the postcolonial and nationalist critics, has been imposed on the indigenous culture and people. Therefore, anybody interested in understanding the politics of culture should be aware of the need to closely probe individual works, concrete events, and specific audiences. Western-style drama is at once a text and a cultural specimen through which we discover the personal interests, collective consciousness, and institutional beliefs of its recipients, so as to illuminate their interrelationships as well as the historical conditions of making a culture, and finally the modes of transmitting it. To read and examine contemporary drama not only suggests various subject matters but also opens up new possibilities for learning about the historical process in which they are positioned.

The critical approaches and the theoretical directions outlined here are in relation to, and to some extent in confrontation with, other established forms of postcolonial criticism, including the model of National Literature proposed by Nak-Chung Paik. My theoretical approaches came into being in response to the critics who have explicitly characterized non-Western populations as the victims of Western imperialism and who have argued that the Western hegemony continues even after colonialism has ended officially. I argue that their claims that acts of Westernization endanger the very existence of indigenous cultures fail to recognize the significant role of indigenous populations, and, above all, their creative interaction with the West. A single discourse cannot, and therefore should not pretend to, become the authoritative voice of any cross-cultural situation.

Finally, my theorization of the cultural ideologies enmeshed within the discourse of postcolonialism and South Korea represents an attempt to theorize East-West relations. Culture constantly undergoes changes, keeping its currents fluid. In consequence of the global spread of capitalism and the frequent exchange between nations, the East and West have become closer, at least geographically, and even resemble each other, including the similar theoretical standpoints shared by Nak-Chung Paik

and his Western counterparts. This implies a fusion of two or more cultures, in which differences and similarities are negotiated and eventually amalgamated. I view this process as positive, because this points to the notion of cultural agency and the assertiveness of indigenous values, which help us to challenge the tenets of the discourse of cultural imperialism. Furthermore, we can map out a space from which we can begin to imagine, theorize, and articulate the indigenous culture as an agent with the power to its own will.

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Chang-rae and the Little Yellow Dots

Ronald D. Klein

While preparing to write this paper, I had to commit an act of overt racism of which I am not proud or happy. To explain: my office is filled with 3000 books of English literature, mostly Asian English literatures from Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, India, China, Japan, Korea, etc. Years ago I struggled to decide the best way to catalogue them (Klein, 1994) and ended up classifying by national origin, lumping together residents, expatriates and hyphenates. Hence, all the Kims were on the Korean shelf, all the Yamadas on the Japanese shelf and all the Rushdies on the Indian shelf. Just as there was a subset of books on my Indian and Chinese shelves for works in translation, works by Asian American writers too were subsumed by the home country. It was an imperfect system but so were the alternatives I had considered.

Thus, in order to examine texts by only Asian American writers for this article, I went through the shelves and culled out those books written by American writers from those written by Asian writers. Then, in order to identify those Asian American texts, I placed a small yellow circle sticker on their spines. I felt very uncomfortable doing this, but there was no more expedient way to identify the relevant texts I needed to refer to. Even if they were all mingled among the American literature shelves, I would have had to do the same thing.

When a new academic field emerges, there are bound to be attempts to put it into a changing critical context. For example, the Commonwealth Literature of 30 years ago has morphed into post-colonial or world literatures, ethnic studies, gender studies and beyond. Whereas post-colonial studies look at texts as new literatures in English that devolved colonialism engendered, Asian American literature accepts its lineage as an offshoot of American multicultural studies of the 1960s. It embraces the "other" who has relocated to the "center", has something to report

about identity and exile and was related to the post-war immigrant literature of the East Coast that produced Jewish-American and other hyphenated immigrant fictions of the 1950s.

Although Asian American fiction has attracted academic interest in other parts of the world, it is a curiously parochial field of study, absolutely America-centered. Research on this kind of fiction did not consider similar diasporic fictions that emerged in England or looked at its relationship to indigenous literatures in English or in its Asian homelands. Whereas post-colonial critics usually look at mostly English works written in the colonial country of origin, Asian American fiction generally focuses on works written after the crossing, accepting into its midst second, third and now fourth generation writers.

In putting the novels of Chang-rae Lee into this amorphous context, one finds several interacting and conflicting forces at work. First is the tide of public and academic interest in Asian American writing, not uncoincidental to the release of suitable texts by willing publishers, of which Lee has become a bestselling and award-winning poster boy. Second is the cachet of Asian American literary critique which disengages author, text, context, theme and anything else pertaining to or, conversely, which engages gender, race and political persuasion (of author or critic) making Lee's work more contextualized and, consequently, more confined. Third is the fact that Chang-rae Lee is an excellent writer, by any standards, and he has broken from the Asian American pack in his writing development. This article will examine the interaction of some of these contextual forces before proceeding to look at Lee's work, self-consciously touching on the issue of why this article should have had to be written in the first place. But first, some background.

Socio-Cultural Background

As Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Cheng Lok Chua point out in their introduction to *Tilting the Continent*, there have always been Asian Americans or at least Asians in America since 1763, when the first group of Filipinos deserted the Spanish in Mexico and settled in French Louisiana. The first large scale wave of Asian immigration, however, were the Chinese gold miners of 1849 and the10,000 Chinese brought over to work on the transcontinental railroad (1863-69), many of whom subsequently stayed on to build California's infrastructure. Beginning in the 1880s, Japanese

imin fled social and economic upheaval to work in the sugar plantations of Hawaii, often moving on to the higher paying fields of western mainland America. They were joined in Hawaii by Filipinos and Koreans, brought in as a counterforce to Japanese labor domination. The first wave of Filipino immigration occurred in the wake of the Spanish American War of 1898, which opened the door to Filipino laborers, who, as American nationals, were not counted in the exclusionary laws against Chinese and Japanese (xiii-xvii).

During World War II, Korean Americans and Filipino Americans fought with distinction alongside but segregated from American regiments, while Japanese Americans were systematically rounded up and put in concentration camps in remote former Native American reservations. Ironically, by mid-war, many of the incarcerated Japanese had taken loyalty oaths and formed their own fighting regiment, becoming the most decorated regiment in Europe, while their families remained behind barbed wire in America.

The third wave of Asian immigration occurred as a result of the Hart-Celler Act of 1965 which eliminated the national quotas for immigration, a system in place since 1924. For example, while in 1965 only about 2000 Koreans were admitted, by 1980, 300,000 had settled in America (Cao and Novas, 263). In 1975, the end of the Vietnam War created an extremely unsettling situation in Southeast Asia and in the 15 years that followed an estimated 1.5 million Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians and ethnic Hmong came to America (Lim and Cheng, xvi).

The history of Asian Americans is a tale of neglect and segregation. Elaine Lim states it starkly:

> The nineteenth- and twentieth-century idea of America as a nation of immigrants did not include Asians.... Historically, Asian immigrants were viewed as apart from white America. They were denied by law the right to become naturalized citizens, to own land, to intermarry; they were confined to segregated jobs and residential areas, and sometimes murdered, lynched, run out of town, or set adrift on the ocean. (*Charlie Chan* 2, viii)

It is from these waves of immigration that Asian American literature emerged. In the introduction to his anthology, *Asian American Literature*, Shawn Wong summarizes the early history of Asian American literature. As the first and largest group of immigrants to arrive, it is natural that the earliest works were by Chinese Americans. Wong identifies *An English-*

Chinese Phrase Book, written by "Wong Sam and Assistants" and published by the Wells Fargo Company in 1875, as the first written account of life in America. The phrases reveal the kinds of issues, mainly work, business and legal affairs, which were important to the migrants. The migrants were keen to master their new language.

In 1912, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* was published by Sui Sin Far, a pseudonym for the Eurasian (Chinese mother, British father) Edith Maud Eaton, whose sister also wrote stories under a Japanese pseudonym, Onoto Watanna. Written at a time when William Randolph Hearst was embarking on his Yellow Peril campaign of demonizing and debasing Asians on the west coast, these stories told of the life of ordinary Chinese trying to make and live their lives in America. According to Amy Ling, for Edith Eaton, the pseudonym and the stories were a form of racial resistance, while for her more successful sister they signaled accommodation (311).

However from that point on, with the possible exception of Louis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Rice* (1961), there emerged what the *Aiiieeeee!* editors have characterized as "the products of white racist imagination, not fact, not Chinese culture, and not Chinese or Chinese American literature," (xiii) where:

> The Christian social Darwinist bias of twentieth-century white American culture combined with the Christian mission, the racist acts of Congress, and the statutes and city ordinances to emphasize the fake Chinese American dream over the Chinese American reality...until the stereotype has completely displaced history in the white sensibility. (xii)

In their eyes, this situation has continued up to the present time and includes popular Asian American icons like Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan and David Henry Hwang. As controversial as this assertion is, it has not detracted from these writers' popularity and influence.

Of Japanese American literature, there was little before World War II until the emergence of relocation camp stories such as Toshio Mori's *Yokohama, California* (1949), Monica Sone's autobiography *Nisei Daughter* (1953) and John Okada's *No-No Boy* (1957). Hiyase Yamamoto also wrote in and about the camps but he was not published until the 1950s. And Kazuo Miyamoto's *Hawaii, End of the Rainbow* (1964) describes the Japanese experience in Hawaii, a subset of Asian American culture, where Japanese are the majority but are still displaced.

Filipino novels like Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart* (1946) and

Bienvenido Santos' *Scent of Apples* (1979) pick up the theme of the outsider Filipino trying to make good the American dream.

In 1979, when Shawn Wong's *Homebase* was published, it was the only Chinese American novel in print at the time and the first by a Chinese American male. However five years earlier, Wong and friends, Jeff Chan, Frank Chin and Lawson Fusao Inada—all searching for literature more reflective of their experiences—collected what would become *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers*. In their introduction they explain:

> Chinese and Japanese American, American-born and -raised, who got their China and Japan from the radio, off the silver screen, from television, out of comic books, from the pushers of white American culture that pictured the yellow man as something that when wounded, sad, or angry, or swearing, or wondering, whined, shouted, or screamed, 'Aiiieeeee!' Asian America, so long ignored and forcibly excluded from creative participation in American culture, is wounded, sad, angry, swearing, and wondering, and this is his AIIIEEEEE!!! It is more than a whine, shout, or scream. It is fifty years of our whole voice. (vii-viii)

> For the aspiring writer, Jessica Hagedorn, this collection was an absolute breakthrough for Asian Americans...and a joyous revelation. I was not alone, pure and simple. There were other writers—poets, essayists, novelists, playwrights—like me, and yet not like me at all...it gave us visibility and credibility as creators of our own specific literature. We could not be ignored; suddenly, we were no longer silent. (*Charlie Chan*, xxvi-ii)

As welcome as this collection was for individual writers like Hagedorn, it also helped form a kind of invisible writers' community. At the same time, the Asian American literary academic community that simultaneously emerged found some omissions and deficiencies in this pioneering effort—the 14 writers were mostly male and all second-generation (S.C. Wong 8). This was partially corrected by the 1991 edition of *The Big Aiiieeeee!: An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature*, which included mostly first generation immigrant writing already mentioned, but not writers from the broader Asian community.

This was finally accomplished by Hagedorn's *Charlie Chan is Dead* (1993), which included 48 writers. *Charlie Chan* delivered a greater diversity of voices writing in the greater Asian communities, including many writers never widely published before. By 1996, Shawn Wong's anthology was able to stand on its own two literary feet alongside African American, Chicano American and Native American anthologies in Ishmael Reed's

Literary Mosaic Series. And by 2004, the revised *Charlie Chan is Dead 2* included 42 writers, only15 repeated from the first edition and only seven repeated works.

However in the past 15 years or so, the literary market and academy demanded a greater diversity and the field of Asian American writings began to be categorized according to genre, geographical origin, gender, and sexual orientation. *Into the Fire* (1996) focused on Asian American prose while *But Still, Like Air, I'll Rise* (1997) focused on Asian American plays. *Our Feet Walk the Sky* (1993) focused on work by South Asian American writers, *Tilting the Continent* (2000) by Southeast Asian American writers, *Fiction by Filipinos in America* (1993) and *Babaylan* (2000) by Filipino Americans, *Kori* (2001) by Korean Americans, and *Watermark* (1998) on Vietnamese Americans. *Making Waves* (1989), *The Forbidden Stitch* (1989), *Home to Stay* (1990), *Sister Stew* (1991), *Making More Waves* (1997) were exclusively by women. *On a Bed of Rice* (1995) offered Asian American erotica, *Take Out* (2000) featured queer writing, *The Very Inside* (1994) featured lesbian and bisexual women, *Dragon Ladies* (1997) featured Asian American feminists, and *Queer PAPI Porn* (1998) featured gay Asian erotica. Clearly the field had split into specialist constituent groups, providing a literary outlet for everyone.

As anthologies proliferated, literary criticism matured. In her important study of 1982, Elaine H. Lim insisted on the need to include the social history of Asian Americans as a precondition for understanding the literature. She explains: "The problem of understanding Asian American literature within its sociohistorical and cultural contexts is important to me because, when these contexts are unfamiliar, the literature is likely to be misunderstood and unappreciated" (xv). A decade later, Sau-ling Cynthia Wong created an "Asian American textual coalition" based on maintaining the marginality of the corpus. Her justification for this was, "just as the Asian American ethnic group is a political coalition, Asian American literature may be thought of as an emergent and evolving textual coalition, whose interests it is the business of a professional coalition of Asian American critics to promote" (9).

These influential scholars and many others over the years have contributed much to the critical discourse of Asian American literature, and a considerable academic critical debate has occurred among the ethnicity school, the cultural nationalist school, the text-specific school, the minority discourse school, among others, on how to read the texts. Indeed King-Koh Cheung laments that:

> Historical and biographical contextualization as well as close literary analysis have currently taken a backseat to theoretical discourse; when literary texts are tackled at all, they are often filtered through or submerged in postmodernist, postcolonialist, or Marxist critical jargon incomprehensible to lay readers. (9)

To create a more direct approach, Cheung and a band of graduate students at the UCLA Asian American Studies Center set out to add the voices of the writers themselves in explicating their backgrounds, influences, identities, works, themes, audiences, etc., published in *Words Matter: Conversations with Asian American Writers.*

To further complicate the context, Haresh Trivedi, chair of India ACLALS, has spoken of the "neocolonial cultural hegemony of Postcolonial Studies" from which he predicts that the English-written center of post-colonial studies will give way to more works being looked at in their original languages.

And so, to bring things full circle in echoing Trivedi's notion, Yearn Hong Choi, co-editor of *Surfacing Sadness: A Centennial of Korean-American Literature 1903-2003,* defines Korean American literature as those works written *in Korean* by Koreans living in America. Yet at the same time, ironically, he laments the fact that Korean American literature written *in Korean* is not taken seriously in the academic world of Korea.

Whereas S.C.Wong delights that the "multiplicity of opinions is not an embarrassing symptom of confused thinking or mere factionalism on the part of scholars and critics, but a necessary result of Asian American literature's interdiscursivity in history and in contemporary life" (8), I tend to take a less charitable view. Clearly the concept and definition of Asian American literature has fragmented over the past 20 to 30 years to the point of niche marketing, critical meta-diversity and literary irrelevance. Nowadays, one can read a text in any critical framework, which serves academia well, but leaves the lay readers out of the loop.

Chang-rae Lee: Life and Works

It is in this historical and critical context that we can finally now turn to the works of Chang-rae Lee. Before the disputations of literary claims begin, let us start with some facts:

1. He was born in Seoul in 1965.

2. He moved to America in 1968, in his third year.
3. He grew up in the upscale suburbs of New York City.
4. He attended a prestigious prep school and the Ivy League's Yale University.
5. After working as an investment analyst for one year, he decided to pursue writing as a career, moving to Oregon.
6. His first novel, *Native Speaker*, won many awards.
7. His subsequent novels, *A Gesture Life* and *Aloft*, have also been acclaimed.
8. *Aloft* has been optioned to be made into a Hollywood movie.

To flesh out the biography, his father was a physician who came to America as part of the immigration wave of the 1960s, in the professional category. Upon arriving in New York (most Korean immigrants came to New York), he studied to become a psychiatrist, a career that specializes in language. Chang-rae grew up privileged in the kind of upscale suburban community he describes in *A Gesture Life* and *Aloft* and attended upscale prestigious schools known for generations of WASPish propriety. In other words, upon arriving in the New World, Lee took the express, first class, assimilationist track.

Native Speaker (1995) made Lee a best-selling author, the most successful Korean American writer ever, and an immediate nominee for the pantheon of popular Asian American writers. It won the Hemingway / PEN Award and the American Book Award, among others. Both *The New Yorker* and *Granta* immediately targeted Lee as one of the 20 best writers under 40. The novel received another distinction in 2002 by being selected as New York City's first "One City, One Book" choice, a scheme that chooses one book for all its citizens to read and discuss with each other during one particular week. It was also chosen for Princeton, a warm welcome from the university town where he had just joined the faculty. It is on the required or recommended reading list in more than a score of universities, as well as compulsory reading for students entering the10th grade English honors course at a San Francisco high school.

Perhaps the book's success lies in the fact that it does not fit into neat categories and allows readers to find different aspects to appreciate. Of course it is a quintessential second-generation, ethnic New York Asian American story, where narrator / protagonist Henry Park searches for his place in the world. Called a novel of identity and alienation, it begins with the 30-something Park reading "a list of who I was" left by his

departing wife. Park initially mistakes the list for a love poem. The list contains words like "surreptitious," "emotional alien," "overrated," "stranger," "traitor," "spy"—a shorthand for Park's (or generalized Asian American) personality traits that are displayed, examined and sometimes overcome in the course of the novel. The novel also fits into the political murder mystery genre, which may explain its wider appeal.

Along the way, we hear of Henry's son's accidental death, his wife's leaving, his father's death and his falling into a "suitable" job as a domestic spy, specializing in Asian Americans because of his ability to blend in. Park has two strong role models—his father, the successful greengrocer of New York's other minority neighborhoods, and councilman John Kwang, the rising star of New York politics and possible mayoral candidate, who is the object of his spying. Through Kwang, Henry gains a deeper appreciation of his father. Yet the closer he gets to Kwang, the more his cover starts to crack. Interestingly, it is when the cover melts away that Henry is ultimately able to claim his humanity.

Much has been written about Lee's luminous prose which alone makes the book worth reading. Language itself is a central metaphor in the novel, as reflected by its title. Henry speaks of the communication with his father as "intently inarticulate" (239) and complains that although he speaks almost-perfect English, the result of ESL and speech therapy in school, he knows he will never be a native speaker. However, in the end, he helps his wife (a real native speaker) with her speech therapy classes. As the children go home, Park says, "I can hear her speaking a dozen lovely and native languages, calling all the difficult names of who we are" (349).

A Gesture Life (1999) is more complex and hence a more difficult book to categorize. Lee began research on a book about comfort women in Korea but realized that their story was too straightforward. Picking up a reference to some of the Korean soldiers fighting with the Japanese, the focus shifted to the story of the effects that contact might have had. On the surface, Franklin "Doc" Hata arrived in America in the prosperous 60s, opened a medical supply store in a small upscale community outside New York City and became a model community citizen. He was well liked by all, ran a successful small business, contributed to local baseball leagues and other community-sponsored events and lived in a large neo-Tudor house with a swimming pool in the upscale, desirable part of town. Now in his 70s, he has sold his business and has more time to reflect on his life. What he excavates is at odds with the facade he has created.

Born in Japan to the ostracized *burakumin* caste of Korean tanners, he

distinguishes himself at school and is subsequently adopted by kindhearted, progressive thinking, wealthy Japanese, who give him his new name, Kurohata, and a lifelong obsession for pleasing others. His medical studies are interrupted by the war and he patriotically joins the army as a medical orderly. Stationed at a camp on the periphery of action, his unit is the sudden recipient of four new Korean comfort women who are assigned to Kurohata for medical care. Sexually unskilled, morally repulsed and perhaps ethnically angered, he befriends one girl called "K". They surreptitiously speak in Korean of a country both are far removed from. The fate of the girl is predictable, but at the root is Kurohata's inability to ease her suffering or change her inevitable fate, creating the psychic damage he must carry with him.

Years later, in his new life, Hata adopts a mixed-race Black-Korean orphan whom he raises as his daughter, He tries to provide for her the comforts he could not give to "K." The adolescent Sunny, however, rebels against everything Hata tries to do for her. She feels stifled by his "gesture life" which is void of real emotion. She runs away, gets pregnant by a drug dealer but allows Hata to arrange for a late-term abortion. During her convalescence, she slips away again, spoiling the chance for reconciliation that Hata was hoping for.

All this is told as back-story, where the point of view is clearly in the present. In this present we see a man successfully retired from business but reassessing the sum of his life. His narration is both poignantly honest and frustratingly controlled. He had a chance at intimacy with a widowed neighbor but pulls back and ultimately loses her. The medical supply store he built up and sold is about to fold. He burns himself in a fireplace accident. His lifelong routines of walking, swimming, gardening, cooking are disrupted. Then he learns that Sunny has reappeared, living with her son in a lower class town nearby.

Many reviewers, including Maya Jaggi of *The Guardian* and Dwight Garner of *The New York Times*, have compared Lee's story with Kazuo Ishiguro's *Remains of the Day*, but the comparison is flawed. Although both these novels are retrospective ruminations on a wasted life, Stevens is pathologically self-deluding whereas Hata is poignantly honest. While Stevens attempts to justify the decisions in his life and the value of service that overrides them all, Hata clearly sees his faults and gradually revisits the trauma of his past. As readers, we can either fault Hata for his lack of emotion or understand the trauma he has lived through and desires to put behind him.

The comparison of Lee to Ishiguro, however, is apt in several other ways. Both were born in Asia and moved when very young to English-speaking countries—Ishiguro to England at 5, Lee to America at 3. Both excelled at school and in an introverted way moved toward writing as a profession and married out of their culture. In my opinion, *A Gesture Life* has more in common with Ishiguro's earlier work *An Artist of the Floating World* than *Remains of the Day*. *Artist* is also a story of an ageing man living alone in his empty house, reflecting on his wartime past, filled with phrases like, "I seem to remember a day when". While Ono's recollections are unclear and his narration undependable, Ishiguro's style of slowly unfolding the crucial events of his life and the discrepancy between the outer and inner selves are stylistic techniques also used by Lee.

Accepting *A Gesture Life* as representative of Asian American literature is problematic. The themes of identity and alienation, seen in *Native Speaker*, may also apply here but they are not tied in with feelings of angst and the immigrant story of assimilation. Hata left his Korean identity behind in Burma and his Japanese identity in Japan. He evolves into a successful American and it is in those terms that we see him. His otherness gives way to a kind of invisibility around the town which matches his need to fit in seamlessly. All emotional issues are kept at a great distance.

The trauma of war is a familiar theme in Asian American literature. Degradation, dislocation, alienation and suffering in deportation camps and remote towns feature in Japanese American literature in such works like John Okada's *No-No Boy*, Toshio Mori's *Yokohama, California*, Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and *Itsuka*, Julie Otsuka's *When the Emperor Was Divine*, Kerri Sakamoto's *The Electrical Field* and *One Hundred Million Hearts*, and the stories of Hisaye Yamamoto and Wakako Yamauchi, among others. Young Korean American writers look back to the Japanese occupation of Korea in Nora Okra Keller's *The Comfort Woman*, Linda Sue Park's *When My Name was Keoko* and Mia Yun's *House of the Winds*.

Yet *A Gesture Life* does not dwell on the episodes of Hata's past as much as reveal them as causes of his lifetime strategy to use "gestures" to relate to the world, a pattern that began in childhood. Through recall, reflection and acceptance, as well as the serendipitous events of his hospitalization, reunion with Sunny and bonding with his grandson, Thomas, Hata makes the kind of emotional transformation we saw earlier in *Native Speaker*. A recurrent trope here is the heart. We see the brutality of Captain Ono's live heart vivisection, the pathos of Patrick Hickey's wait in a hospital for a suitable heart transplant donor, and the emotional

heart that Hata ultimately opens to his grandson which brings his salvation.

If *A Gesture Life* represents a shift from traditional Asian American themes toward more mainstream ones, Lee's third and latest book, *Aloft* (2004), goes even further. The protagonist, also a first-person narrator, is Jerry Battle, a second-generation Italian American. His father had shortened the original family name, Battaglia (like "Doc" Hata did) "for the usual reasons immigrants and others like them will do, for the sake of familiarity and ease of use and to herald a new beginning" (23).

At 59, Jerry has retired from the family business, turning it over to his son, Jack. Like "Doc" Hata but for different reasons, Jerry also avoids emotional attachments, resulting in his girlfriend of 21 years leaving him. As he says, "I don't have friends. I never really have. I just have friendlies" (236). He prefers flying his two-seater plane, aloft and alone, soaring above his neighborhood, looking down from a distance.

The book is a commentary on contemporary society, based on Jerry's wry observations and interactions with people, as well as the story of a fractious family—which could have well been written by an Italian Philip Roth. Jerry has two children from his deceased Korean American wife, Daisy, who dies dramatically in the family swimming pool, never having learned to swim. His children, then, are technically second-generation but this is never brought up as an issue in their growing up. Theresa gets the brains and a Ph.D. from Stanford while Jack gets the good looks and social graces and amenably becomes the third generation to run the Battle lawn care business. Scattered throughout the text are lively secondary characters such as Jerry's Italian father, his Puerto Rican girlfriend, the African American plane owner, his Hispanic and Southern belle colleagues and his prospective son-in-law Paul, a Korean American writer.

Paul provides the novel's most direct glimpse of the Asian American experience, more than the ill-fated Daisy. Theresa explains, "Paul's an excellent person and a fine writer, but he's sometimes too much of a good boy. He has this need to please them [parents] and by extension most everybody else, which is okay today but in the long run is going to get him in trouble" (242).

The need to please echoes back to Harry Park and Franklin Hata. But in an interesting inversion, Jerry claims, "Maybe I'm a racialist (or racist?) and simply like the fact that he's different, that he's short and yellow and brainy (his words, originally), and that he makes me somehow different, whether I really wish to be or not" (93). As much as Jerry prefers distance

in relationships and has the same emotional withdrawal at decisive moments as "Doc" Hata, his life is more open to "otherness," perhaps wanting to be outside himself, apart from the others—aloft.

But at the end of the story, Jerry cannot get too far away since the major trope in this novel is the rootedness of his house itself. Jerry is a family man, if a remote one, and after Daisy's death, he has to raise his children himself until Rita comes along. His house "situates" Jerry in his community, roots him to his history. It is where Daisy killed herself, where Rita spent 21 years with him, where his children grew up. He regularly sees his father and looks forward to becoming a grandfather. In the final scene, Jerry's house has become home base to his extended and reconciled family—bankrupt Jack and his family, his runaway father, the returned Rita, the bereaved Paul and his new grandson.

As in *A Gesture Life*, Lee allows his flawed character a last chance to redeem himself—and he gratefully does, opening his heart (*Gesture*) and home (*Aloft*).

Fitting Lee In

With the proliferation of Asian American literature since the 1970s, there have been several waves of critical reevaluations in marking the boundaries of Asian American literature. Mia Yun, author of *House of the Winds*, comments "we are often lumped together simply as 'Asians,' which implies that we are a homogeneous group. But Asia is so vast: there are more differences than similarities among the many Asian countries and people. Each of us comes with different and unique experiences and backgrounds, whether they are cultural, economic, political, or geographical" (7).

Where once identified by national identity, the field has given way to more detailed groupings by themes—race, cross-generational issues, gender—and genres—autobiography, memoir, creative non-fiction, hybrid, poetry, plays etc. Heinz Insu Fenkl refers to this phase as one of "self-reference and genrefication":

> When an initially marginal literature finally establishes itself as prominent through a combination of critical recognition in the academy and commercial success in the mainstream...future works in that category tend to demonstrate a heightened self-consciousness of their subtexts. The

> works tend to become intertextual performances, and the intertextuality begins to cross the boundaries of genre and form....For Korean academics, continuing to struggle with the legacy of recent colonial history and nationalist politics, gestures such as Choi's and Chang-rae Lee's self-redefinition might seem especially charged, particularly when they write novels that focus on Japanese American characters. (Fenkl)

The number of works published by Asian Americans has increased geometrically over the last few decades—twice as many in the 80s as the 70s, doubled again in the 90s and the prospect of doubling again in the present decade.

How long this trend will continue remains to be seen, but based on the fickleness of the marketplace, there will probably be a leveling off with many of the works on offer seen in retrospect as one-hit wonders and under the light of critical scrutiny not so significant or well-written to begin with. Maxine Hong Kingston has not written a novel in over a decade. Amy Tan's recent outing is a collection of essays. In Korean American fiction, Helie Lee has mined the search for her grandmother into two books. Don Lee's latest offering received a lukewarm response. Linda Sue Park is trying to grow out of Young Adult fiction. Fenkl describes the next phase of criticism as "self-redefinition and interstitiality":

> Meanwhile, there are Korean American writers who have continued to push boundaries in other ways that make their works increasingly interstitial...Interstitial works are those that go beyond concepts like hybridity and liminality; interstitial writing defies genre classification or attempts at "high concept" descriptions that merely rely on a merging of two or more forms or qualities.

In the future, Korean American fiction will probably remain as an operational rubric. Those writers who continue to write will either find their niche in a particular genre or will move into hybridity or interstiality. Yet Fenkl does not see far enough into the future and bases his critique on the validity of Korean American fiction. He should look instead to the metaphor of the immigrant itself, so central to Asian American writing i.e. the migrant family needs three generations to evolve from outsider immigrant to assimilated American. This is a more fitting way of viewing the works of Chang-rae Lee.

Although Chang-rae Lee was born in Korea and is technically a first-generation immigrant to America, his body of work mirrors the three

generations of assimilation.

Native Speaker is basically an immigrant novel, told by the son of an immigrant of the struggles to fit into the new world. Yet it departs from the traditional ethnic novel to become an "odd hybrid, combining the qualities of a typical Asian American memoir/novel and a political espionage thriller. This combination proved to be marketable and accessible even to an audience not inherently interested in ethnic literature" (Fenkl, 2003). It is small wonder, then, that *Native Speaker* was chosen to be New York's first "Once City, One Book" selection.

The second-generation immigrant has made the transition and is comfortable in the new world. Ironically in *A Gesture Life*, Franklin Hata is a first-generation immigrant, but acts like a second. He has carved out a place for himself in Americana and fits into the community on its own terms—he owns a successful business on Main Street and lives in a large house in a prized part of town. The protagonist looks beyond issues of ethnicity and identity and focuses on interpersonal relationships and the forces that have shaped them. The reasons for Hata's failure to relate to his daughter are not rooted in assimilation issues. It is not an intrinsically Asian story, nor even an American one, but rather it is a story of the effects of the trauma of war—this marks the book's universal appeal.

In his third book, *Aloft*, Lee has made the traditional third generation ethnic rite of passage into the assimilated mainstream. Jerry Battle does not deal with his Italian ethnicity as much as he describes it matter-of-factly. He could be "Doc" Hata's neighbor, sharing the same pool maintenance company or providing his landscaping services. Asian ethnicity enters the story only in passing references, in the same way Jerry refers to the Puerto Ricans, Hispanics, or African American people he has lived or worked with. The theme of *Aloft* is the redemptive power that resides in the family unit. Although Jerry's emotional avoidance does not mask a hidden trauma like Hata's, he still must go through one last harrowing flight, ironically not solo but with his daughter, in order to ground himself to connectedness. As the story closes, we have four generations living together in Jerry's house.

At the end of *A Gesture Life*, Hata has decided to sell his empty house to ensure the financial security of his multicultural daughter and grandchild, while in *Aloft*, Jerry's house has become the temporary refuge for all, with him in the middle, surrounded by his multicultural family. This suburban hybrid family mirrors the urban ethnic melange described in the final pages of *Native Speaker*, a common theme that sets Lee apart

from the parochial Asian American context into the broader stream of general humanity.

Conclusion

In their groundbreaking anthology of 1974, the *Aiiieeeee!* editors opened the door to the new breed of Asian American literature, which consequently opened the floodgates to more published works, anthologies, and subsequent streams of critical analyses. The field has changed through the years and, as this paper has attempted to show, Chang-rae Lee's place in it is specious.

Coming back to my racist act of tagging the Asian American books on my shelves, there is a kind of satisfaction in seeing so many yellow dots spread throughout the room. But if I want to be really honest, should I not bring them all together, creating a new Asian American shelf, as the new field should demand? For in reality, contrary to Mia Yun's earlier comment, these works have more to do with each other than they do with the literatures of their countries of origin. Somehow I hesitate to do this, so I have chosen the compromising solution and the yellow tags designate these books as "American cousins" to the Asian literatures.

Back in 1974, the *Aiiieeeee!* editors bemoaned the fact that "American culture, protecting the sanctity of its whiteness, still patronizes us as foreigners and refuses to recognize Asian-American literature as 'American literature'" (ix). Perhaps this is where we will come out in the end. Perhaps I am waiting for the time when all these voices will all be gathered on the American literature shelves. And when that day happens, Chang-rae Lee will probably be among the first to take off his yellow dot and make the transition from Asian American writer to just plain good American Writer.

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Beyond The Ghost World: Time Space Compression and Trauma in Lan Cao's *Monkey Bridge*

Stephen Hong Sohn

This paper is grounded in a discussion of how the trauma can be seen through the lens of the collapsing between time and space in Lan Cao's *Monkey Bridge*. I will be using theories developed by Marc Auge, Michel Foucault, and Jean Baudrillard among others to analyze the discrete representations of space and how these spaces are linked to trauma. Ultimately, the simultaneity of time-space is what is at stake in Cao's text, a novel that exposes the complexities of the Vietnam War in a postmodern world filled with ghosts and inescapable memories. As characters move through, interact with, and reside in discrete locations, their time-space compression becomes more pronounced. While this collapsing of time and space can be distressing, the novel suggests the power inherent in spatial reconfiguration and reappropriation. That is, spaces themselves can be transformed by Asian American communities in order to enact a sort of healing.

In *The Culture of Time and Space*, Stephen Kern writes, "The proliferation of perspectives and breakup of a homogeneous three-dimensional space in art seemed to many to be visible representation and confusion of the modern age" (147). Where exactly did this "confusion" arise from during this time period? In part, it certainly has to do with what geographer David Harvey describes as "new ways of seeing" that arose with the invention and utilization of the "telephone, wire-less telegraph, X-ray, cinema" (265). The era of modernism required artists, philosophers, and academics to re-think both notions of time and space. The telephone could conceivably connect two people geographically distant, yet unify them by this strange piece of machinery that transmitted one's voice over wires. Messages that would have taken days to arrive suddenly could be received in seconds.

This time-space compression is defined as the "movement and communication across space, to the geographical stretching-out of social relations, and to our experience in all of this" or "to a spreading out onto a global terrain of social relations that determine the meanings and specificities of local places" (Massey 147). And as the pace of life accelerates today, theorists have distinguished between how individuals in society conceive of and experience this disintegration of time and space from the modernist era. One characteristic in which the modernist era and today's postmodern world become differentiated with respect to time-space compression is that time-space collapses so completely that "there is not even time to agonize" (Harvey 306). David Harvey's analysis of time-space compression in *The Condition of Postmodernity* tends to privilege modes of production and the extent to which these modes of production lead to a fragmentary consciousness. Harvey links the collapsing of time and space to the development of technology that leaves commodities at the virtual fingertips of consumers. Without the restraint of long production times nor long lines at the mall, the virtual consumer can simply click a button as he or she surfs the internet[1] and order any item desired, only to receive this item on the day it was ordered through express shipping. In this example, technology reduces the time necessary to both make and receive a product, but at the same time, minimizes the importance of space as the virtual consumer need not move anywhere at all. Time-space compression clearly has become a key element to media programming in the 20th and 21st century and the postmodern consumer must be able to navigate this complex and constantly shifting world in such a way that does not completely de-center and de-stabilize his or her identity.[2]

However, Harvey seems to dodge certain events of the postmodern era and how they might relate to time-space compression, including the detonation of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during August of 1945 as well as the advent of armed conflict on a massive scale never seen before (an incident that put time-space compression firmly on the global terrain). World War I, which some label as the beginning of modernity, was an event that demonstrated time-space compression. Better modes of mass transportation facilitated the inclusion of distant countries like the United States within the war effort, enabling troops to move across the Atlantic with relative ease. In addition, the development of disturbing, yet efficient warfare technology like mustard gas resulted in an increased death toll such that masses of civilians and armed individuals could be

killed with amazing ferocity in quicker amounts of time and over vaster areas. After the detonation of the atomic bomb (which some mark as the inception of postmodernity), distance in space did not necessarily shield one from the effects of this weapon as evidenced by the nuclear fallout and black-rain that continued to descend on individuals miles from the original blast sight. Time became meaningless as the explosion's force moved at terrifying speeds through the urban space; portions of the city were completely obliterated in a matter of seconds.[3] In other words, there is "no time to agonize" when nuclear bombs are involved. Finally, by this point, television and radio technology easily constructed disasters as world events in that they could be experienced vicariously in households all across the globe. What place then do massive global wars have in the discussion of postmodernity and time-space compression?

Time-space compression also signifies the trauma that individuals face when trying to deal with the effects of warfare on a massive scale. These moments of time-space compression often initiate as a result of individuals moving through what Marc Auge coins as the "non-place," a location that is particularized in its minimization of historical and cultural markers.[4] As Mai Nguyen, the novel's protagonist, enters the generic locales of non-places, her consciousness shifts back to other locations and times because she often connects these spaces to past traumatic experiences in war-torn Vietnam. Simulacrum[5], too, enables time-space compression as Mai watches the fall of Saigon in 1975 from a television set, sitting in a living room in Farmington, Connecticut. As a text then, *Monkey Bridge* maps the "postmodern geographies" experienced by Vietnamese war exiles as they encounter the shattering effects of time-space compression and how these forces can be overcome by community building and place-making. This essay argues that Asian American subjectivity must be seen as being constructed and problematized through relationships not only to nations but to more localized spaces such as supermarkets, suburban housing tracts and cities.

That wars have helped shape Asian American identity and literature is no question. In terms of Japanese American literature, the World War II internment experience has generated a vast number of texts which explore the atrocities of forced incarceration, limited freedom, and the continued queries toward identity. Of course, some that loom large in the field include Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and *Itsuka*[6], Mine Okubo's *Citizen 13660*, Mitsuye Yamada's *Camp Notes and Other Writings*, and Jeanne Watasuki Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar*. A few decades later, Korean War literatures begin to

appear by American writers of Asian descent. Mira Stout's *A Thousand Chestnut Trees* and Susan Choi's *The Foreign Student* emerge as promising new works that deserve more critical attention. Alongside these publications, Vietnamese American writers have slowly, but resolutely begun to insert their novels, poems and short stories chronicling the experience of the Vietnam War into the field of Asian American literature.[7]

Monique Truong's work in *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature* provides a useful early intervention into the field of Asian American literature by narrativizing the early developments of Vietnamese refugees and how these communities came to be represented in print cultures. Truong notes that "The United States in April of 1975 experienced the most immediate and extensive influx of refugees in its history, with over 86,000 South Vietnamese arriving within a span of a few days" (222). Sucheng Chan's influential book, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History*, adds that "the United States opened its doors in early 1979 to 7,000 refugees a month. Later that year President Jimmy Carter doubled the quota. Annual arrivals jumped from 20,400 in 1978 to 80,700 in 1979, to 166, 700 in 1980" (161). With this burgeoning refugee population from Southeast Asia, the landscape of Asian American communal identity became ever more complex. The refugees carried haunting memories of another mother country, captured at first through extensive interviews and sociological studies and later in biographical and autobiographical accounts and poems, short stories and novels. It is not an accident that many consider themselves "sojourners" (455) as Ronald Takaki contends, for many Vietnamese American immigrants still envision Vietnam as their home. Thus, the diasporic subjectivity of the Vietnamese American immigrant remains complicated and often inflected with memories of a different land and epoch. A Vietnamese refugee revealed, "'So, I left briefly, as if chased by a ghost, before they could see my eyes getting red... I was yearning to capture each familiar scene, each beloved face of the place I had lived and grown up in'" (452). The use of the word "ghost" is evocative of a future that would leave "each familiar scene" of Vietnam as memories and denotes an elegiac tone for a lost homeland. Consequently, Vietnamese American works that deal with post-war recollections incorporate the construction of this ghost world, wherein spectral spaces and figures populate a strangely configured landscape where time and space collapse. For some, the traumatic experience of war cannot be escaped as it presses into their daily and newly constructed lives in the American new world.

Hospitals as Non-Places and Crisis Heterotopias

Lan Cao's *Monkey Bridge* also weaves in a ghost world of memories, places and characters, brought forth in journal entries and traumatic flashbacks. In its stylized representation of hospitals, living rooms and supermarkets, the novel expands how we might understand identity and trauma intertwine in discrete locations. The story revolves around an adolescent girl, Mai Nguyen, and her mother, Thanh, who each must deal with the unexplained circumstances surrounding a grandfather they had to leave behind in Vietnam. As they attempt to fashion new lives in the United States, the mystery of the grandfather continually resurfaces and propels the novel forward to its tragic climax. Although just published in 1997, this novel's critical richness has already produced a number of important recent essays.[8] In particular, Claire Stocks' work asserts the importance of Thanh's ancestral homeland in her identity formation. Stocks' reading, tying the very purity and eventual pollution of the Vietnamese countryside by violence and murder, argues for the connection of trauma, space and memory. In contrast, I focus my analysis on Mai's concerted efforts to assimilate in the United States and how she reacts to the local spaces that surround her, such as living rooms, supermarkets, hospitals and transit vehicles. My work imagines the pivotal intertwinement of identity with space and the ways in which time-space compression and past trauma are linked to Mai's new surroundings.

The text first opens in the space of the hospital. The protagonist, Mai Nguyen, visits her mother, Mrs. Nguyen at Arlington Hospital located near Fall Church, Virginia in 1978.

> White, the colour of mourning, the standard color for ghosts, bones, and funerals, swallowed in the surface calm of the hospital halls.
>
> A scattering of gunshots tore through the plaster walls. Everything was unfurling, everything, and I knew I was back there again, as if the tears were always pooled in readiness beneath my eyes. It was all coming back, a fury of whiteness...
>
> Arlington Hospital was not a Saigon military hospital. (Cao 1)

The culturally specific reading of the color white serves to de-stabilize Western readers who often associate white with purity and re-birth. Instead, in this scene, the "white" hospital walls only serve to remind Mai of "ghosts, bones, and funerals," establishing Mai in a ghost world. That the color "white" is able to "swallow" the "calm" of her surroundings

subverts any sense of equanimity. The repetition of this color serves to trigger this harrowing flashback. The universality of white in the shading of hospital walls renders the Arlington Hospital as a locale not too dissimilar to the Saigon military hospital. It is no surprise then that soon after this observation, Mai's thoughts shift to another place entirely – the Saigon military hospital and the death connected with that location. However, Mai is not simply thinking about the past—she is literally reliving her experiences. Mai observes that she "was back there again", revealing the simultaneity of place and time. Although literally sitting in the waiting room of Arlington Hospital, she also endures the traumatic experience of her war-torn past. This abrupt shift from present to past is paralleled in the violent image of the "scattering of gunshots" and the "fury of whiteness" as Mai is jolted between one space and time to another. The collapsing of time and space demonstrates the traumatic effect that war has on individuals; the present and past become inseparable because the past remains tied to the present. In this text then, it would seem that the disturbing memories of war are catalysts for time-space compression in which Mai re-lives her experiences in Saigon.

However, why does this flashback, this collapse of time-space, occur in the *hospital*? Is it perhaps a "non-place" whose generic nature easily allows the character to shift from one hospital space to another? Marc Auge defines non-place as the location that is primarily negotiated by texts rather than by the mediation and interaction between individuals. These non-places often are linked with services that can be provided for the individual, such as transport (airports) or leisure (amusement parks). Furthermore, these locations help to navigate individuals most often through the use of signs and written directions rather than the help of other humans. The non-place is also bounded by contracts that the individual must continually employ in order to "prove his innocence" (Auge 102). The hospital as portrayed in *Monkey Bridge* certainly adheres to this definition of the non-place. Like any individual in the non-place, the patient must have the proper insurance forms in order to be permitted into the hospital. The visitors and family too must maintain their "innocence" by showing proof of identity. Mai notices that "The nurses moved in and out, coaxing a needle into my mother's thick, unyielding veins, whispering... maintaining a constant and instinctive distance of several feet from my mother's bed" (Cao 4). Here, Mai and her mother's separation from contact with the nurses serves to augment the service-oriented nature of the space. Mai and Mrs. Nguyen interact with each

other in their solitary unit of the hospital room, but may not speak to the nurses unless there is a specific problem.

Finally, as Auge elaborates, "the passenger in non-places has the simultaneous experiences of a perpetual present and an encounter with the self" (105). That is, time-space compression can occur in the location of the non-place as the individual experiences the "perpetual present." This perpetual present is arguably what Mai endures in the "non-place" of the hospital at the opening of *Monkey Bridge*. She must confront her presence in this non-place and ask herself why it is that she moves through this location. The answers take her not only to the hospital where her mother is a patient in Falls Church, Virginia, but also to her past in Saigon, where Mai was a volunteer at a military hospital. Mai is both the dutiful seventeen-year-old daughter and the naive seven-year-old war hospital volunteer. This fracturing of self resonates with postmodern notions of time compression and its effect on individuals. The hospital as a non-place enforces self-reflection, and so, Mai encounters two selves, both present at one time and space, moving through "one" hospital that blends chaotic images of death, disease and dismemberment. Just before she falls asleep after having visited her mother at the hospital, Mai remembers her experience at the Saigon Military hospital: "With a notepad and pen in hand, I had walked the halls, acted as a scribe, writing down battlefield memories and dying declarations from those war-wounded who were too weak to write letters" (Cao 12). That Mai is a "scribe" to the dying hearkens back to the hospital as a non-place; instead of being someone to talk to, she records words for the soldiers. Her position is service-oriented, primarily mediated by texts through writing, and reflects the fact that these men have suffered grotesque wounds of war and are probably dying.

In addition, the hospital must be considered a "crisis heterotopia," defined by Michel Foucault as "privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis" (24). The "crisis" of the hospital is the confrontation with death, not only in relation to the patient who is sick and must face the possibility of dying, but also to the medical care worker who must tend to the patient and the family members who visit. The hospital requires the individual to recognize mortality, which has been abstracted in postmodern life. This understanding of possible death comes early to Mai Nguyen as the seven-year-old volunteer in Vietnam. In fact, so acute is her comprehension of death in hospitals that she knows she should not linger near entrances where grenades could

be thrown in and detonated. Mai recalls, "Visitors mingled in the lobby; I had been taught to avoid the front portion of buildings. In Saigon, it would have been a danger zone, as was any zone that a hand grenade could conceivably reach if thrown from a passing vehicle" (Cao 3). The crisis of the *military* hospital goes beyond the death of the patient, since the caregiver, too, can be killed by a "hand grenade" exploding in the entrances of the building. In the unique chronotope of the Vietnam War, lives of nurses, doctors, and medical volunteers are constantly under threat; this non-place is a perennial reflection of the ever-present possibility of death. The hospital becomes the site of the crisis heterotopia for Mai as a location where her mother is sick, where she has seen many people die, and where her own life too has been jeopardized. The crisis heterotopia is another location where the trauma of war experiences appears in the form of time-space compression; its reflective nature forces the individual to see herself and her environment in new and often disturbing manners.

Trains as Non-Places, and Complicating the Space of the Hospital

As *Monkey Bridge* unfolds as a text, it becomes apparent that time-space compression is a recurring element. Mai's traumatic Vietnam War flashbacks are also mediated by other non-places like mass transit vehicles.[9] While Mai is traveling on a train to a college interview, she observes:

> Except for the fecund heat of the tropics and the tall coconut palms, the railroad route from Virginia up north toward Uncle Michael's Connecticut could have been the same route connecting Bien Hoa to Saigon....
>
> The sameness of the landscape gave the peculiar impression that the train, in spite of its movement and speed, was also standing still, and for a moment I felt disoriented, unable to tell whether the train's motion was real or imagined, whether we were gaining ground or simply kicking in place. (Cao 72)

In this passage, the route from Falls Church, Virginia to Farmington, Connecticut is directly compared to the "route connecting Bien Hoa to Saigon." The speed of the train creates the illusion of similar landscapes as the vistas presented from the vantage point of the train window blur together. The space of the train may be viewed as one of the "non-places"

described by Auge as Mai is left to herself to board the train, to follow the designated times and stops that would lead her to Farmington, Connecticut. The train is a "non-place" of transit that requires the individual to sit in similarly arranged seating surrounded by bland décor. And as Mai travels, she reads the text present in the landscape passing her by, visual markers that shift her from America to Vietnam in what Mai calls a "disoriented" fashion. Mai loses the ability to comprehend motion as "real or imagined," paralleling her difficulty in determining her own literal location and time: is she in Saigon, 1968 or America, 1978? The image of "kicking in place" reinforces the notion that Mai feels trapped and suffocated by her inability to situate herself in stable surroundings. Her desire for motion reflects her need for progression; she does not want to remain tied to memories that leave her "disoriented" but rather wants to move ahead in time, to a place where she is reconciled to her past. The non-place of the train only exacerbates her desire to remain grounded in a stable location. The ways in which the train's motion blurs the landscape confuse her ability to locate herself in time and space.

Mai's meditation on the route to Saigon/Farmington coalesces in a chaotic flashback that leads her back to the traumatic non-place of the hospital. In this memory, we learn that Mai had helped to nurse a wounded colonel (later affectionately named Uncle Michael) back to health at the American Third Field Hospital located in Saigon during 1968. Mai recalls, "I could tell he had been freshly hurt: the scooped-out flesh on his face was red, not brown... the blood in his nose had not yet congealed.... I was seven years old, an occasional student volunteer, a novice still unaccustomed to the odor of formaldehyde and rotting flesh and saturated waste" (Cao 72). This memory immediately follows her disorienting experience on the train. In essence, in the non-space of the train, she "yields" to the flashback and relives the experience of seeing a horribly wounded man come in on a stretcher with painful burns on his body. The specificity with which she remembers the experience is striking; she notes gruesome details such as "scooped-out flesh" and "odor of formaldehyde and rotting flesh." The more matter-of-fact tone suggests a change in attitude from the opening point in the novel. Whereas the violence is merely observed here, in the novel's inception, warfare is abruptly integrated into Mai's life as gunshots. Why does this change in description occur? A portion of this alteration may be attributed to the relationship that Mai eventually develops with Michael. As Mai helps to nurse Uncle Michael back to health, she remembers, "He gave me a funny cockeyed

wink that I tried to reciprocate but couldn't, prompting him to show off by blinking both eyes in rapid succession. We became friends over the course of his month-long recovery" (Cao 76). Interestingly enough, this passage problematizes the notion of the Saigon military hospital as a non-place. The establishment of a friendship in the non-place of the hospital is difficult because the individual's experience and duration in the non-place is usually ephemeral. Although hospitals function differently because of extended patient stays, hospital staff nonetheless keep an emotional distance from patients in order to maintain professionalism and emotional security. Mai, however, crosses those boundaries by becoming friends with Uncle Michael; not surprisingly, Uncle Michael later becomes a valued member of the Nguyen extended family. While hospitals are spaces that Mai correlates explicitly with death and war trauma, this scene demonstrates how characters may complicate locations and their individual meanings. The possibility of a good-natured connection between two strangers in a crisis heterotopia, molded around the constant threat of death, offers alternative means of navigating the brutal terrain of time-space compression.

This flashback sequence lucidly problematizes the notion of non-places and crisis heterotopias. That this space fosters a friendship between a young girl and Vietnam War colonel deconstructs notions of the non-placehood of the hospital. Mai's memory illustrates how these spaces are often fluid — hospitals can become non-places or places depending upon the individual's experience. Auge writes, "In the concrete reality of today's world, place and spaces, places and non-places intertwine and tangle together" (107). Clearly, the entanglement of non-place and place parallels the different modalities in which the hospital functions in the text of *Monkey Bridge*. The hospital is not only the non-place with its sterile white walls, prescribed visiting hours and health services, but also a place of friendship and connection. In addition, Foucault's second corollary of heteropias enables one to shift the meaning and reflective capabilities of the hospital space. According to Foucault, "The second principle of this description of heterotopias is that society, as its history unfolds, can make an existing heterotopia function in a very different way" (25). Foucault's addendum suggests that heterotopias are malleable spaces whose importance to society changes over the course of historical time. Is it possible, then, that the heterotopia can shift in meaning for an individual in personal time? The scene between Mai and Uncle Michael as he winks at her resonates as a place of healing. The hospital has been a place in

which death occurs, but nevertheless it has been also constructed to prevent death and to heal individuals physically and, even to a certain extent, emotionally. The hospital as a heterotopia therefore reflects also a constructive and constitutive location, helping to bring back life. Such an oxymoronic juxtaposition illuminates Foucault's assertion that "Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they shatter or tangle common names... and not only that less apparent syntax which causes words and things to 'hold together'" (Reid-Pharr 347). In the heterotopic locale of the hospital, life and death are held together in a complicated "syntax" that Mai must negotiate through the novel as she visits her mother and helps to rehabilitate her.

Simulacra, the Television Set and Supermarkets

Time-space compression also becomes pronounced through postmodern technologies that help to produce flawless simulacra, what Baudrillard has defined as the perfect replica that has no original. The presence of simulacra tends to complicate postmodern landscapes because what is fake can look as "real" as the real (Harvey 289). One of the primary image-making technologies that has been promoted in the postmodern era is that of the television. Clearly, as Harvey points out, the television is employed in capitalistic modes of production in terms of image making and advertising, but the television is also used to broadcast news all around the world. Broadcasting news events on screens across countries, the television is able to bridge distant portions of the world together in the simultaneous occurrence of news watching, thus collapsing time and space.

In *Monkey Bridge*, Mai sits watching the fall of Saigon in April, 1975: "Two months after we left Saigon, although it had seemed like light-years afterward, I saw my future unfold on television, from the family room in Farmington [Uncle Michael's home].... Saigon, I almost smelled, was soaked in an inexhaustible odor of burnt chemicals..." (Cao 98). Elements of time are complicated in this passage as time actually dilates in the space of the migration from Vietnam to the United States, so that Mai feels as if she has experienced "light-years." This relative feeling of time underscores the figurative distance that the migrant must endure in order to assimilate and adapt to a foreign country. Space compresses when Mai is able to view events unfolding half a world away from the luxury of a living room.

Her literal distance from Saigon collapses, resulting in her *almost* "smelling" Saigon. But Mai does not fall prey to the re-living of her own war experiences. Instead, she is able to distinguish the simulacra from her immediate surroundings, noting that the images on the television screen, described as "a luminous color origami cut from the dark of night" (Cao 98), comprised an "imaginary world" (Cao 99). Here, the phrase "imaginary world" is not meant to be Mai's disavowal that the fall of Saigon is taking place in Vietnam, but rather her acknowledgment that the television is constructing the image of an event that is not literally occurring in the living room. The two locations do not collapse together. This fact is made further evident by Mai's description of the television screen as an "origami cut." Origami is a unique way of folding paper into the shape of various forms as cranes or boxes or frogs. When the television is compared to an "origami cut," Mai metaphorically relates the process of constructing forms out of paper folding to the way that the television artificially transports images on screen via transistor tubes. The inorganic but realistic union of an image with place (Saigon) on the television screen does not catalyze the time-space compression of re-lived traumatic flashbacks.

Yet how is Mai able to navigate these television images without re-experiencing her own connection to war? Mai notes that "she had been watching all this [the fall of Saigon], along with Uncle Michael and Aunt Mary, and like the rest of America, in the safety of our living room" (Cao 98). The space of the living room is not abstracted but serves as a haven and refuge for Mai. Her feelings of "safety" in the living room tend to stabilize the fragmentary forces of time-space compression that occur when the television screen relays images of chaotic war scenes. This passage suggests that "place" can possess a stabilizing force on the individual, since place roots the individual in a specific identity framework. Ultimately, Mai knows that her "place" in the living room is as a surrogate daughter and valued friend to Uncle Michael and Aunt Mary. And certainly, only two months after leaving Saigon herself, this living room cannot be much more than a refuge as she sees her old home city crumble before her eyes. In this way, Mai classes herself with "the rest of America." This conflation underscores the simultaneity of experience and the collapse of time-space across the nation. That is, even while she undergoes the time-space compression effect of television watching, she is able to resist and counter the internalized time-space compression (in the form of traumatic flashbacks) that begins to occur as she *almost* smells Saigon.

Mai's establishment in the place of domesticity serves to comfort and ground her, allowing her to assimilate the confusion that arises out of the news program.

Can simulacra, or more simply, image-making and its reproduction be used as a mechanism to combat the fragmentary forces of time-space compression? David Harvey asserts that simulacra augment the fragmentation of identity. As individuals must navigate spaces artificially constructed to represent other places, they must "wander through these worlds without a clear sense of location, wondering, 'Which world am I in and which of my personalities do I deploy?'" (Harvey 301). The notion of fractured identity certainly explains Mai's experience as she attempts to rationalize what she sees on-screen. Is she in Saigon trying to escape the communists or is she in a living room in America, watching Saigon fall? While some scholars such as Michael Dear have read this postmodern fragmentation as negative,[10] Harvey has suggested the amazing potentialities for simulacrum, when he discusses the advent of medieval castles that cater to the public's desire for simulacra in the form of entertainment. In this space of the "fake" Medieval castle, consumers are able to shake off their former lifestyles of work and production and assume a role of the tourist and consumer.[11] Certainly, criticisms can be made about this space, including its affordability and exclusivity (who can pay to go in and who is allowed admittance), but the fact of the matter remains that the space is designed not only for money to be spent, but also for entertainment in the form of spectacle and simulacra. The "negativity" that scholars like Dear seeks to make visible seems to be a reductive conclusion of David Harvey's work, since the entertainment and pleasure that take place in the presence of simulacrum (the Medieval Castle with its antiquated offerings of food and costuming) offer different notions of how to read postmodern fragmentation.

Monkey Bridge also works to expand the notions of how simulacrum can function in ways beyond the fragmentation of the individual and the subsequent traumas related to time-space compression. While Mai attempts to re-connect with her mother and grandfather back in Vietnam, the family friend, Mrs. Bay, begins her own path to assimilation in America by working at the Mekong Grocery store:

> But inside the four walls of the Mekong Grocery, there were no collapsed expectations, and there they could lift their faces unobtrusively among us South Vietnamese... we had fabricated a familiarity with our

> own comfort, which had strangely also become a source of consolation and familiarity for the former GIs: the silk fabric and tortoiseshell accessories in glass cases; the frozen pulps of jackfruits and durians.... (Cao 64)

The Mekong Grocery would be located in the Little Saigon section of Falls Church Virginia, established not long after Vietnamese immigrants settled in the area as exiles. The grocery not only sells food in the form of native Vietnamese produce like durians, but also other novelty items such as silk fabric. Auge writes that "Another example of invasion of space by text is the big supermarket. The customer wanders in silence, reads labels, weighs fruits and vegetables on a machine...then hands his credit card to a young woman as silent as himself" (99-100). The Mekong Grocery, in contrast to the big supermarket, is constructed as a place as it connects Vietnam Veterans with exiled Vietnamese Americans, two groups of people who are not completely welcomed in American society after the fall of Saigon. In this mutual interaction, Mrs. Bay forms close friendships and often engages in conversations with GIs who come to appreciate the grocery for its "consolation" and "familiarity." This familiarity implies the Mekong Grocery is constructed as a "revised" simulacrum of a Saigon market during the 1960s and early 1970s. Not only do the exotic and foreign goods (in a commodity catalogue) call attention to a completely different place, but the unique fusion of American GIs with Vietnamese exiles duplicates the social structure of a Saigon marketplace as well.

Joseph Wood, in studying Vietnamese place-making within Northern Virginia, writes, "Vietnamese specialize in a form, their shops commonly congregated in stripes of stores that replicate the characteristic small spaces and stalls one might find in Vietnam or in a shopping district in Saigon" (62). These shops, as "replications", point to the function of the Mekong Grocery as a"simulacrum. The Mekong Grocery is able to replicate the Saigon marketplace because of its commodities, which include Vietnamese food items like "vats of nuoc mam, salted fish compressed for four months to a year into a pungent, fermented liquid used as a dipping sauce mixed with lime...," (Cao 65). The presence of Vietnamese clerks and shop-keepers contribute to this impression of the small shop-keeping Saigon market economic system. The shop contributes to time-space compression by minimizing the space-time distance for the GIs and Vietnamese exiles from Saigon and South Vietnam. In effect, GIs and Vietnamese immigrants can walk through the markets of a new Saigon without ever having to leave

the United States. Wood further writes that "Eden Center [a Vietnamese retail and shopping center in Fall Church Virginia] is also a refuge.... Spending Sunday afternoons at Eden Center has become an important Vietnamese American family custom. Many patrons are veterans of the war..." (68). Why is Eden Center a refuge? Like the Mekong Grocery, these places function as stabilizing mechanisms for the Vietnamese exiles. They connect the individual to a culture that may appear on the edge of destruction because of the pressures to assimilate. In these places, Vietnamese Americans find still intact native cultures without the threat of annihilation through war, while veterans can find solace in a space that does not vilify them but allows them to re-live their experiences of South Vietnam without the stresses of constant warfare and possible death. Like the experience that Mai and Uncle Michael share in the hospital, the Mekong Grocery becomes a center of healing and community building rather than of trauma and fragmentation. The GIs, Mrs. Bay and Mrs. Nguyen (Mai's mother) form friendships that stabilize their past experiences of war in Vietnam. In this instance, time-space compression occurs through the use of simulacrum in the form of a grocery store that looks like it could be found in Saigon.

The Mekong Grocery also becomes largely a space of resistance, a particular location that resists the fragmentary forces of time-space compression. The store embodies a spatial tactic[12] employed by Vietnam War Veterans and Vietnamese immigrants to re-conceptualize an individualized community on their own terms. Mrs. Bay and the GIs find a way to move beyond the ghost world, to find a foothold in the American space that welcomes them. As noted spatial theorist Henri Lefebvre writes, "social space... contains potentialities—of works and reappropriation—existing to begin within the artistic sphere but responding above all to the demands of a body 'transported' outside itself in space, a body which by putting up resistance inaugurates the project of a different space" (349). Mrs. Bay and Mrs. Nguyen use their very bodies to create "a different space" of the mini-market, and so engender new futures, new potentialities and new social relations. However, not everyone can fully benefit from these "differential spaces." Mai Nguyen's mother, Thanh, cannot escape the quagmire of the ghost world, a world so permeated by time-space compression that her traumatic memories can never be properly handled. On one particularly cold autumn night, Mai was "wearing a bulky wool sweater, but [her] mother was still in her tropic garb...[Mai] could have offered her reality: a sweater, socks. It would have been as simple as that.

But somehow, at that moment, [her] mother, imperfect and unable to adjust, died in [her] mind" (70). Mai notices her mother's inability to acculturate to the United States through her dressing patterns. This figurative "death" of Mai's mother prepares the reader for her tragic trajectory in the narrative. Throughout, Mai's mother is described in different states of injury as she deals with a stroke that paralyzes half her body. Succumbing to a depressive state, the mother begins to embody the living dead that Mai has envisioned, going through the motions but failing to find a purpose in the United States. Mrs. Bay attempts to bring Mai's mother into a concrete community, giving her duties such as throwing parties and working at the Mekong Grocery, but Thanh commits suicide at the novel's conclusion.

Where is Mai Nguyen in all of this and how does she relate to the community building occurring in the Mekong Grocery? Mai believes "As my mother's eyes and mine met and locked for a brief moment, I was afraid I knew what she was thinking: among the four of us [Mrs. Nguyen, Mai, Mrs. Bay, GI Bill], it was not Bill, but I, who would be considered the outsider..." (Cao 212). The grocery is not a place where Mai feels intimately included. The store reminds her that she does not know her own mother well, but also that a generation gap separates her from Bill, Mrs. Bay and Mrs. Nguyen. These three possess a common and shared history in Vietnam that Mai feels she cannot fully understand, as she had immigrated to America at fourteen. Consequently, the adults' relation to the Mekong Grocery is quite different from Mai's whose personal connection to the grocery is more abstracted than felt. Yes, Mai is Vietnamese, but she is also American, and her ties to America push her far forward in looking toward acceptance into college. Mai observes, "Unlike my mother and Mrs. Bay, whose familiarity with one another predated their American connections, I had no emotional attachments that carried the length and depth of time and space" (Cao 226). Mai longs for someone who could comprehend her complicated history as a child living in a war-ravaged city of Saigon, and also as an adolescent in America trying to make her way into adulthood. "The length and depth of time and space" signifies not the desire for collapsing time and space together, but rather for a person who could acknowledge the distance and time that have been crossed as she departs Saigon as a young child for a new life in Falls Church, Virginia. But the novel leaves the reader suspended in Mai's uncertain future. Even as she looks so brightly toward her college prospects, it is never guaranteed that Mai will find the community she seeks.

The representation of time-space compression is related to the representation of places and simulacra in *Monkey Bridge*. Non-places contribute to a sense of disorientation, as one non-place is confused with another. When memories are brought to the surface, a strange doubled world is invoked, replete with spectral figures and ghostly memories. Simulacra too can have this same effect of bridging two places and times, resulting in a traumatic amalgamation, a re-living of war for Mai Nguyen, the protagonist of the novel. However, in Cao's novel, non-places evolve and are re-configured as "places" and simulacra too contribute to the healing of a traumatized community of exiles and war veterans. While time-space compression seems to have deleterious effects on individuals, perhaps there are ways to rethink the possibilities that simulacra and non-places offer us. *Monkey Bridge* demonstrates the shifting modalities of non-places, places, heterotopias, and simulacra and it is in this heterogeneity of spatial meanings that we exist in postmodern geographies. What then are the greater stakes in studying these more localized textual spaces, these suburban communities, hospitals and supermarkets that appear in Lan Cao's *Monkey Bridge*? Clearly, the text argues for the vital potential of communities to re-create new living situations and confront old traumas. Critical discourses on localized spaces are an important aspect of a cultural materialist project to illuminate the social histories of Asian American groups and communities.

Notes

1 Nedra Reynolds, "Compositions Imagined Geographies: The Politics of Space in the Frontier, City, and Cyberspace" in *College Composition and Communication*, Volume 50, Issue 1 (Sep. 1998): 18. An interesting discussion of writing and its connection to spaces.

2 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (New York: Blackwell, 1991), 260-307. Harvey really employs the entirety of the essay to discuss how postmodernity buffets the individual and forces him or her to "ground" himself or herself or else face a loss of identity / stability.

3 For excellent primary texts that deal with the nuclear bomb see *The Wild Iris and Other Stories* ed. by Kenzaburo Oe, *Obasan* by Joy Gogawa, and *A Pale View of Hills* by Kazuo Ishiguro.

4 Marc Auge, *Non-Places: An Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (New York: Verso, 1995), 1-6, 75-107. The non-place will be more fully fleshed out in definition in the course of the paper.

5 Simulacrum is defined by Jean Baudrillard in *Simulations*. He states that the simulacrum

is an image that has lost all reference to any original image, such that entire mediums can be constructed.

6 Of course, I use the term "Asian American" more widely to suggest the United States' connections to Canada in my inclusion of Joy Kogawa's influential works.

7 Vietnamese American literature has never been tied down to the war "master narrative" although it has seen a number of recent publications that deal with the war and its traumatic effects: see poet Linh Dinh's "The Dead", Le Thi Diem Thuy's *The Gangster We are All Looking for*, and Dao Strom's *The Grass Roof, Tin Roof*. Other influential and differently situated works include Alex W. Pham's *Catfish and Mandala*, Kien Nguyen's *The Tapestries*, and Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt*, among others. It is important to note this because as many (Monique Truong and Le Thi Diem Thuy amongst them) have stated, Vietnam is not war and should not have its name tied to a singular notion nor reduced to a particularized signifier.

8 Besides Claire Stocks, Michele Janette has explored the use of irony in Lan Cao's novel.

9 For another good Vietnamese American text that deals with non-places of transit vehicles, see "The White Horse" by Nguyen Ba Trac.

10 Dear writes that David Harvey characterizes "postmodern fragmentation as something negative..." (549). Here, Dear pauses unfortunately on the word "negative" with its vagueness and slippage; it certainly could be rendered a postmodern response to Harvey's own discussion. Dear does seem to be indicating here that the fragmentation that an individual undergoes can be something traumatic and harmful, but adds that this effect of postmodernity cannot be the only way of understanding the different ways in which personalities get deployed and the ways that postmodernity functions.

11 Harvey, 301.

12 The use of the word "tactic" here of course refers to Michel Decerteau's theorization of the space of the other in *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

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In America: The Alien Asian and Cosmopolitan Chic

Eddie Tay

> I was born American. Not in the country itself, but in its shadow. Coca-cola and jeans were always in, no matter how the governments of Singapore and of Asia railed against "yellow" culture in the 1960s and 1970s, or "decadent" Western values. By my late teens, McDonald's and other fast-food joints were the hangouts; others younger than I were born into that urban landscape and cannot imagine life without them. In our mindscapes, TV and movies made us visualise new places and situations. They taught us new words, ways of speaking and dressing, new lifestyles. Sex, drugs and rock-n-roll were part of it; the most censurable part. Harder to keep out (if anyone wanted to) were money, big business and cities with skyscrapers, cars and shopping malls, TV, movies and stars, consumer culture. The whole American cult.
>
> It did not matter that Singapore was almost exactly halfway across the world. (Tay, *Alien Asian* 15)

Although almost exactly halfway across the world from each other, separated by a non-stop 24-hour flight, the social landscapes of Singapore and America are intertwined; contact is possible, if not via travel or expatriation, then via money, big business, cars and shopping malls, TV and stars—that is, the whole American cult.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, however, the rhetoric against Western (read American) decadence was prevalent in the form of notices in post offices informing everyone that males with long hair would be attended to last, while at the Singapore customs, male foreigners with long hair were not allowed into the country until they had their hair trimmed. This was the era belonging to the Woodstock generation of America, the time when the guitar riffs of Jimi Hendrix and songs of rock bands such as Grateful Dead were regarded with disdain by the political authorities. The newly-assembled Singaporean government, with the memory of its having been

ejected in 1965 from the Federation of Malaysia still fresh, then embarked on a national campaign of modernisation and frenetic industrialisation. Discipline and thrift were the order of the day, while decadence in the form of drug culture and free love espoused by the Woodstock generation of America were viewed with suspicion.

Fast forward to the 1990s—things had undergone a sea-change. Instead of sending government scholars to traditional British centres of learning like the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, the government of Singapore was sending its best and brightest, who were being groomed for important government posts, to American universities with the assumption that these scholars, when they returned, would be familiar with the exigencies of a globalised economy as a result of having lived in the United States for a period of time. Davinder Singh, a lawyer and Member of Parliament, contributed an article to *The Straits Times* where he argued that in order to survive what he calls the "New World Order" shaped by forces of globalisation, Singapore had to emulate America by maintaining an open-door policy when it came to the influx of foreign labour (*The Straits Times* 17/8/2004). The urgency with which Singh's article regards the theme of globalisation is not singular. Rather, it is exemplary in the way it links globalisation to the theme of national survival and inserts it in the Singaporean public discourse.

This transition from suspicion to embrace of American culture is synonymous with Singapore's entry into a late modernity characterised by the vicissitudes of globalisation. If globalisation refers to, as John Tomlinson puts it, the "rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependencies that characterize modern social life", then Singapore's fate and condition as a nation is forever bound up with those of America and of other nations (2). The effects of globalisation have been subjected to much debate. Samuel P. Huntington's thesis in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* has found much favour in a post-9/11 America. He argues that the multi-polar, multi-civilisational world brought about by globalisation would result in what he calls "Fault line conflicts ... between states or groups from different civilizations" (252). In contrast, Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake point out that globalisation creates "a new world-space of cultural production and national representation which is simultaneously becoming more *globalized* (unified around dynamics of capitalogic moving across borders) and more *localized* (fragmented into contestatory enclaves of difference, coalition, and resistance)" (1, italics in original).

It has also been said that globalisation is synonymous with Americanisation. In *The McDonaldization of Society*, George Ritzer employs the term "McDonaldization" to denote the way in which efficiency, calculability, predictability and control through nonhuman technology that characterises the workings of companies with global reach, the prime example being McDonald's, has resulted in the cultural homogenisation of the world (11-15). He points out that "the fact remains that most McDonaldized systems have been American creations exported to the rest of the world" (Ritzer 177). What are the consequences for individual and national identities in a world where national boundaries are being traversed by global corporations? Is globalisation to be identified with American imperialism? How may we begin to theorise the nature of the social imaginary of the individual affected by globalisation?

This paper explores how the Singaporean subject grapples with the vicissitudes of globalisation and with the necessity of having to negotiate and find one's self amidst the deterritorialised, disorienting and heterogeneous social landscapes of American and Singaporean modernity. It does so by reading America via two very different Singaporean texts that nevertheless have one common theme: how the individual may seek to understand America. For in a world where nations are reconfigured and re-aligned by globalisation, individuals within one "imagined community", to use Benedict Anderson's term, would have to re-imagine their place and identities (9). This paper proposes that these imaginative texts written by Singaporeans may be read as presenting a transnational space of transaction and negotiation between the social and cultural spaces of Singapore and America. As a reading that moves concurrently between Simon Tay's *Alien Asian*, a travelogue consisting of observations, anecdotes and commentaries and Hwee Hwee Tan's *Mammon Inc.*, a novel that reactivates the trope of medieval romance within a contemporary landscape, this paper explores how individual subjects grapple with issues of identity-formation within a globalised paradigm.

Certainly, both Tay and Tan's life experiences bear testimony to the kind of subjectivities made possible by globalisation. Both are accomplished Singaporean writers whose identities are invested in their nationality, and both have lived abroad and have experienced significant parts of their lives in America before returning to Singapore. Tay is a law lecturer at the National University of Singapore and chairman of the Singapore Institute of International Affairs, a non-governmental think tank. Having served for a period as a Nominated Member of Parliament

since 1997, he is recognised for his ability to provide an alternative voice with respect to issues pertaining to the development of a civil society in Singapore. In 1995, he was named Singapore Young Artist of the Year in recognition of his literary work. Apart from *Stand Alone*, a collection of short stories, and *Alien Asian*, a travelogue drawn from newspaper columns based on his travels in America, he has also written two collections of poems, entitled *5* and *Prism*. The occasion for *Alien Asian* is a series of newspaper columns entitled "Fax from America". Tay wrote for *The Straits Times*, Singapore's national newspaper, while he was studying for his master's degree in Law on a Fulbright scholarship at Harvard University.

Hwee Hwee Tan is a journalist and a writer with an international reputation. Tan has received numerous awards, including those from the New York Times Foundation and the British Broadcasting Corporation. In 2003, she received the Young Artist of the Year Award by the National Arts Council. Born in Singapore, she lived for a period in the Netherlands and received her first degree from the University of East Anglia. She obtained a Masters in English Studies from the University of Oxford and a MFA in Creative Writing from New York University. The plot of Tan's first novel, *Foreign Bodies*, revolves around a Singaporean lawyer who comes to the help of a British friend arrested for masterminding an international gambling syndicate. While her first novel explores the thematics of Singaporean culture and expatriation, her second novel, *Mammon Inc.*, which is set in Singapore, Oxford and New York, explores the exigencies of transnational identity-formation in a world shaped by globalisation.

The Work of Literature in the Globalised Age of Symbolic Reproduction

> The image, the imagined, the imaginary – these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: *the imagination as a social practice*. No longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is elsewhere), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (thus not relevant to the lives of ordinary people), and no longer mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity), the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and

> a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility .... The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order. (Appadurai 31, italics in original)

This reading of *Alien Asian* and *Mammon Inc.* is situated within recent debates pertaining to globalisation, transnationalism and cosmopolitanism. Much scholarship exploring the paradigm of globalisation and transnationalism is devoted to the cultures and political economies of nations, and there is little in the way of looking at how the literary imagination is formed and informed by these world-wide processes. While the above quotation taken from Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* is applicable to works of literature, his interest in his book was to examine the ways in which social imagination is made manifest in cultural practices. Even when he mentions texts like Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, he is interested in it as an anthropologist, citing the debates surrounding the work as a way of demonstrating that it is the transnational nature of the work as a cultural commodity that led to the Rushdie controversy (Appadurai 8).

Other landmark studies of transnationalism are likewise situated within social anthropology and migration studies. In *Nations Unbound*, Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc locate transnationalism "as the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (7). The authors associate transnationalism with "immigrants ... [who] build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders" (*Nations Unbound* 7). Such a formulation of transnationalism is fruitful as it draws attention to how communities, in the context of the changing conditions of global capital and labour, maintain and build social ties between different national territories. However, by identifying transnationalism with migrant communities alone, it disregards short-term travel and temporary expatriation that nevertheless have a significant and lasting impact on social relations that transcend geopolitical borders. As this paper demonstrates, a reading of literary works narrating the experiences of short-term travel and expatriation would show that transnationalism does not apply to migrants alone. These texts articulate and forge relations between what Appadurai calls "*imagined worlds*, that is, the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around

the globe" (33, italics in original).

Luis Eduardo Guarnizo and Michael Peter Smith identify two strands of transnationalism, one that is "above", driven "by transnational capital, global media, and emergent supra-national political institutions", and one that is "below", driven by "informal economy, ethnic nationalism and grassroots activism" (3). While acknowledging that there is a local-global binary at the heart of transnationalism, they point out that the transnational studies celebrating local resistances against hegemonic domination disregard "the enduring asymmetries of domination, inequality, racism, sexism, class conflict, and uneven development in which transnational practices are embedded and which they sometimes even perpetuate" (6). A reading of *Alien Asian* and *Mammon Inc.* would allow us to investigate how individuals imagine and locate themselves among asymmetries embedded in the inextricably linked representations of America and Singapore, thus bearing testimony to Guarnizo and Smith's statement that:

> Transnational practices, while connecting collectivities located in more than one national territory, are embodied in specific social relations established between specific people, situated in unequivocal localities, at historically determined times. (11)

Apart from debates pertaining to globalisation and transnationalism, this paper represents also an attempt to think through those pertaining to cosmopolitanism. Like globalisation and transnationalism, the term "cosmopolitanism" arose from the contexts of anthropological and cultural studies. It is interesting to note that the two recent landmark texts to do with the topic, *Cosmopolitanism* edited by Carol A. Breckenridge and Homi K. Bhabha et al. and *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* edited by Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, do not contain essays devoted to literary works, even though some of the editors and contributors are the foremost literary critics in their field.

This is not to deny, however, that these texts have done much in setting the contexts for the critical vocabulary relevant to the study of literature. Together, globalisation, transnationalism and cosmopolitanism are the urgent issues of the contemporary world demanding close attention. Globalisation, associated with the movement of global capital and labour, activates transnationalism, whereby individuals or communities forge ties and define themselves within more than one "imagined community". While the editors of *Cosmopolitanism* are hesitant in putting a definitive

description on the term "cosmopolitanism", pointing out that as concept and as practice it "must always escape positive and definite specification", I would argue that the term may be used to refer to how an individual, upon realising that one's nationality no longer suffices as the lynchpin of one's identity, attempts to negotiate strategically with multiple localities so as to define one's self and place in a paradigm that necessitates the crossing of national boundaries (Breckenridge 1). In this respect, this paper is interested in exploring, in the words of Pheng Cheah, "the feasibility of cosmopolitanism as an alternative to nationalism in our contemporary era" (21).

Within the field of literary studies, Aijaz Ahmad's *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* comes closest to articulating how works of literature insert themselves into the discourse of globalisation, particularly in his polemic against how the First World literary academy appropriates Third World texts. He points out that "It is in the metropolitan country ... that a literary text is first designated a Third World text, levelled into an archive of other such texts, and then globally redistributed with that aura attached to it" (Ahmad 45). In another related polemical instance in his book, Ahmad takes Fredric Jameson to task for his article "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism", where the latter makes the statement that "All third-world texts are necessarily ... to be read as ... *national allegories*" (69, italics in original). Ahmad's polemics are based on the assumption of a one-way cultural flow whereby the metropolitan academy appropriates, interprets and puts into circulation the otherwise passive and inert Third World text, his example being Jameson who upholds "'Third World Literature' as a global Other of postmodernism itself, under the insignia of 'nationalism'" (126). In a third polemical instance, Ahmad criticises the work of Salman Rushdie in the following terms: "How very enchanting, I have often thought, Rushdie's kind of imagination must be .... One did not have to belong, one could simply float, effortlessly, through a supermarket of packaged and commodified cultures, ready to be consumed" (128). In this respect, Ahmad takes issue with Rushdie for valorising a transcendental subjectivity: "he belongs nowhere because he belongs everywhere" (127).

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to address in detail the various strands of Ahmad's arguments, Ahmad's polemics certainly find resonance when one brings them to bear on the reading of *Alien Asian* and *Mammon Inc.* How may these texts come to terms with and insert themselves into the paradigm of globalisation, addressing the issue of cultural difference

and at the same time escaping a critical reception that reifies the polarity between the Third World and the First? How may a novel or a travelogue, as transnational commodities, address a transnational audience without uncritically positing a free-floating, transcendental subjectivity? Is there a consciousness on the part of the authors that one may call a critical cosmopolitanism operating within these texts that does not valorise their own subject positions?

Cosmopolitanism–Playing with Mistaken Identities

> There seemed to be nothing that [the company] didn't own or couldn't buy. Whether you were in London, Singapore or New York, you would find people in mcJeans drinking mcLite beer while talking about the latest mcMovie. I looked at the headlines of the *mcTimes*, which announced that Mammon Inc. was taking over Apple Computers to form a new company – mcMac. (Tan 4)

The plot of *Mammon Inc.* revolves around the dilemma faced by Chiah Deng Gan, a recent Oxford graduate offered the post of a research assistant to Professor Ad-oy. At the same time, she is the only candidate on the shortlist of Mammon CorpS, a subsidiary of Mammon Inc., the largest corporate entity in the world. The transnational corporation, Mammon Inc., is depicted as one that has achieved global domination through the control of global commodities, from mcJeans to the mcMac. While such a nuanced caricature of an American corporation with global reach may find resonance with those who argue that globalisation is synonymous with American imperialism, what is interesting is that the novel draws attention to the agency of the individual subject.

Chiah Deng is invited to undergo a series of tests for the position of an Adaptor, someone who helps international professionals such as diplomats, bankers and lawyers adapt to different cultures to gain an edge in their professional expertise. The tests require that she transform herself into a member of the Gen Vex, a group of ultra-chic New Yorkers, advise her Singaporean Chinese sister on how to be accepted into Oxford society and train Steve, her British friend, to pass himself off as a Singaporean. While Chiah Deng agrees to undergo these three tests to try out for the position of an Adaptor, she is in two minds about accepting the job.

Mammon Inc. makes the statement that global capitalism necessitates a

renegotiation of one's identity as a result of the shifting relations between global capital and labour. Global corporations, because of their transnational networks, require the transnational capability of labour to negotiate for themselves a social space situated in multiple localities. As this negotiation occurs on the individual level, it requires an agency invested with a critical cosmopolitan consciousness that recognises the drawbacks of identifying one's self solely with communities situated in one specific locality. There is an implication here therefore, that a subjectivity created via appeals to national identification may no longer be a viable option within a paradigm of globalisation.

By employing multiple settings in Oxford, New York and Singapore, *Mammon Inc.* focuses our critical attention on the transnational paradigm. Oxford, we are told, is home to the English intellectual tradition, a place that offers respite to dons such as Professor Ad-oy who muses upon the Christian mystics. The home of intellectual and spiritual contemplation, however, is prone to exclusivity and racism; for instance, when Chiah Deng and her British friend, Steve, are ostracised by the student population as the former belongs to a different ethnic group while the latter is of a different socio-economic class. New York is the domain of the Gen Vexers, a group of high-flying, wealthy and glamorous Èlite. "The Gen Vexers," we are told, "were cosmopolitan citizens of the world ... equally well versed in the work of George Lucas and Joseph Campbell to be able to analyse the mythological archetypes in *Star Wars*" (Tan 143). Glamour and intellectual flair go hand in hand in New York; however, despite their intellectual witticisms, the Gen Vexers are ultimately shallow, "created purely by external details: their jobs, quips, zip codes, CD collections, choice of gyms, Palmpilots and other consumer products" (Tan 149). Singapore is depicted as "an American strip mall running through the middle of a tropical botanical garden" (Tan 244). It is a nation where "coconut trees bowed their bodies painfully towards the asphalt, paying reluctant worship to the BMWs" (Tan 245).

Critical cosmopolitanism also occurs in *Alien Asian*, where Tay recognises that America is an accumulation of differences, not the monolithic centre projected by the media. Tay's travelogue narrates his experiences as a law student in Harvard University and on a farm in Vermont, where he and his wife stayed for a period while she was completing her master's dissertation. Tay calls attention to the fictive nature of the image of America:

> Between and beyond New York and Los Angeles, the usual depictions of the mass media, there is something different. The Mid-West and the South, the mountains and the coasts, the small towns and rural communities: regions differ – not only in geography, but also in culture, people, industry, lifestyle, past and future, needs and aims. ... The picture of America that is broadcast across the world, across the Pacific, is too simple. (26-27)

Similarly, as Tay recognises, to Americans the term "Asian" is a monolithic term that glosses over significant differences among Asian ethnicities and nationalities, within which Singaporean identity is erased. An incident narrated in *Alien Asian* serves to demonstrate the extent of cultural misapprehension. When Tay tries to rent an apartment from a landlord concerned about good housing maintenance, he and his wife have to take pains to present an act of "strategic essentialism", to borrow a term from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (11). Strategically, they adopt the stereotype of the "the new Asian" in order to distinguish themselves from "Asians [who] had a reputation from the smell and mess of Chinatown":

> We complained about the slummy houses we had seen and the mess that students – mainly American— had left behind. We expressed disdain for loud and messy parties. Jin Hua played the role of dutiful Asian wife and home-maker. In the empty apartment, she talked about the possibilities of curtains and paintings ... .We were instead the more monied and house-proud new Asian. One stereotype was exchanged for another. This time, however, to our benefit. (*Alien Asian* 43-44)

In this respect, cultural misrepresentation becomes a deliberate act, one performed so as to secure an economic transaction.

"But stereotypes can help as much as hurt", writes Tay (43). What matters is not so much the authenticity of identity formation but a strategic and essentialised performance of it for the purpose of economic exchange. The above incident exemplifies the cosmopolitanism of the actors involved. Under the aegis of globalisation, the production of identity is based not on nation formation but on the momentary, day-to-day transactions between human agents. Identity formation is formation with a purpose.

In *Mammon Inc.*, the enactment of a Singaporean identity becomes likewise a performance. In her attempt to communicate with students from Oxford, Chiah Chen, the sister of Chiah Deng, attempts to engage

their interest in Singaporean culture by explaining to them the significance of the miniature plastic Merlion statues and the rice dumplings she is giving out, and what follows is a piece of historical kitsch. Chiah Chen tells them of the thirteenth century Malayan prince Sang Nila Utama who travelled by sea to the island where he encountered a lion. "So Sang Nila Utama decided to call the island a new name, 'Singa-pura', which means 'Lion City'. That's how my country got its name" (Tan 194). As for the rice dumplings:

> This rice dumpling also got interesting story ... You eat it during the dragon boat festival. There was a poet called Qu Yuan. He did many good things for the people, but the bad people in the King's court didn't like him, so they kicked him out. After that, he went round China, writing about all the bad things he saw. But one day, he was so sad about all the bad things he saw that he jumped into the Mi Luo River and killed himself. When the fishermen found out, they got in their boats to look for him. That's how the dragon boat festival started. But they couldn't find his body. So the people threw the rice dumplings into the river to protect Qu Yuan, so that the fish would eat the dumplings and not bite his body. (Tan 196)

The above exemplifies the creation and sustenance of identity by appeals to originary myths. Yet it is interesting to note that these fetishistic myths emerged as part of the myths of other cultures – Malayan in the case of Sang Nila Utama and Chinese in the case of the dragon boat festival. Despite the fact that they do not emerge organically but are state-manufactured, these myths do play a role in Singapore's collective national culture. The Merlion is a statue with the head of a lion and tail of a fish created in 1972 by the then Singapore Tourism Promotion Board (now renamed Singapore Tourism Board) as part of its tourism marketing strategy while the dragon boat festival may be seen as the Chinese Singaporean's way of affirming a form of cultural-historical genealogy reaching back into China's mythic history. *Mammon Inc.* presents historical kitsch as instances of mistaken self- and national identity in an ironic and self-conscious manner.

As Ien Ang puts it, "any identity is always mistaken" (viii). Ang's statement is interesting in proposing that there is no such thing as a correct or authentic identity. Any attempt to present identity as "correct" is to arrest its fluid and negotiated nature. As Chiah Deng explains to Steve when the latter asks for Singaporean food:

> There's no such thing as Singaporean food, really. Which is why I find it really weird in England when I see restaurants offering Singaporean noodles, or see a Singapore stir-fry sauce in the supermarket. I mean, you can get Chinese or Malay or Indian food, but there's no dish that you can say is specifically Singaporean. (Tan 224-225)

The novel's treatment of national identity underscores an important point, that identities, once essentialised, are amenable to stereotyping. This applies to ethnicity as well. Chiah Deng's British friend, Steve, understands Singaporean Chinese identity only through stereotypes:

> "Well, you're not very Chinese. You never do any Chinese things."
> "What Chinese things *don't* I do?"
> "Plant rice." (Tan 153, italics in original)

Steve goes on to list out why Chiah Deng is not very Chinese.

> "I mean, you don't have any Chinese friends. You dress like any other student. You don't have any Chinese art in your room. You don't even use chopsticks. You don't do *anything* that's Chinese. All you've done for the last three years is study English books and loiter in the pub with me."
> "I do Chinese things," I said, "only you don't know they're Chinese."
> "Like what?"
> I paused to think. I couldn't think of anything Chinese. What *was* Chinese anyway? "That's not the point. Being Chinese isn't just about eating sweet-and-sour pork, and hanging calligraphic scrolls in my room." (Tan 153, italics in original)

The above examples of misidentification illustrate the habit of thinking via stereotypes. Without a critical cosmopolitan consciousness, the construction of an ethnic identity leads to a predisposition to thinking about self and others in terms of stereotypical representations.

Any attempt at representation is necessarily a misrepresentation. *Alien Asian* bears acute testimony to this as well, as when the following caveat about the portrayal of America is inserted into the text: "I do not claim that the book objectively describes America. There is no absolute objectivity. Whenever something is described or reported, there is the intermediary of the person who is making the observation" (*Alien Asian* xi). This tentativeness when it comes to recognition and representation is not a matter of doubt about the accuracy of one's representation, but a matter of being aware that an act of representation is both mediated and mediation at the same time.

Globalisation and its Discontents

> But whether we stay or went, we were always in a minority at the university. Even if, in class, when gathered together with so many other non-Americans, we did not feel it, the commencement exercise had shown that. Beneath the cosmopolitan surface of the university and Cambridge, in the speeches with all their references to the country, in seeing the 6,000 graduates in one place for the first time, its American nature and the predominantly White atmosphere had become clear. With our robes and scrolls, we were acceptable for a while. But we were still aliens, guests in someone's home. All of us, and all the wider world we represented, were just an island in America's vast continent. (Tay 205)

Both texts end similarly with a sense of discontent and disenchantment, albeit in dissimilar ways. Tay's disenchantment is with the futility of representation. His is not so much a disenchantment with America but with the failure of equal exchange. "We were aliens," he wrote, "That is the official categorisation of those who are neither American citizens nor permanent residents: 'aliens'. The word suggests people from a different world, wholly different and perhaps dangerous. That is how we were treated." (Tay 21). *Alien Asian* lays bare the gap that has to be breached in the mutual representations between nations. For Farmer Doone, an American Tay encountered in the Mid-West, the very concept of Singapore as a nation requires some pause:

> "Where your country?" he asked. When I pointed out Singapore on the map, he remarked on its size. Or rather the lack of it. Sixteen miles from north to south? He shook his head in disbelief. ... But three million people? ... He knew we did not live in huts, but how did we fit so many people in such a small island? What food did our farmers grow? (*Alien Asian* 101)

"No one really knew Singapore", our narrator concludes:

> The Doones were not alone in this. It was not the fact that Singapore was small. Many Americans remain ignorant of even much, much larger Indonesia. Few have ever been to Asia. Most have never left America; those living in Iowa and other more rural states may not even have crossed state lines. (*Alien Asian* 102)

The asymmetrical relations between the two nations, however, cannot be attributed to ignorance alone. In 1994, when America's attention was drawn to Singapore during the Michael Fay incident, what resulted was a deliberate will-to-misrepresentation. Michael Fay was an American teenager arrested in Singapore for having defaced several cars in late 1993. He pleaded guilty to vandalism and was sentenced to jail and six strokes of caning. The sentence was subsequently reduced to imprisonment and four strokes of the cane. This incident served only to widen the gap between both nations. Tay was asked if he would want to appear on the "Larry King Show" to give a Singaporean perspective on the incident: "They wanted a person with an opinion that was wholly in favour of the punishment and about Asia's right to stand up to America. Or they would have a Singaporean on who was clearly against what his government was doing" (111-112). As Tay observes, whenever the issue was discussed, "It was not a conversation about Singapore, but one about America. It was also a conversation in which both sides seemed to speak, without listening to each other" (115). America was interested in Singapore in so far as it was Asia. The Michael Fay incident became a debate about Asia standing up to America rather than about the two nations' different attitudes to crime.

It is under the aegis of globalisation, with the global circulation of commodities, that the transnational moment is created. Dialogue between Singapore and America occurs not as a mutual exchange of ideas and opinions between individuals but on the plane of commodity circulation. Thus, the identity formation of the Singaporean cosmopolitan in America has to be negotiated, structured and mapped onto the plane of commodity exchange in order to find recognition. The American supermarket

> had everything: chilli and other sauces and *bok choy*, fresh *kway chap* and *char siew pau* made for the microwave, the *tau hwei chui* ... even frozen durian .... There were familiar brands like Yeo's and Amoy Canning. There were mysterious packages and tins that I had never seen and knew nothing about, from Vietnam, China and other parts of Asia. (Tay 40)

While commodities from Asia are present in the American supermarket, what is absent in America is the awareness of the cultural specificities of different groups of Asians. When an American couple expresses surprise that Tay's Chinese Singaporean friend, Karen, could speak grammatical English and moreover could not understand the Thai or Vietnamese label on a package, the narrator realises that "to White eyes, Singaporeans,

Malaysians, Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, Thais, Vietnamese, Burmese, all … Asians, were the same" (*Alien Asian* 41).

Similarly, in *Mammon Inc.*, Asia becomes a commodified signifier for sophistication. America's understanding of Asia as depicted in the novel is not really Asia *per se* but a certain kind of Asia, an Asia that has been commodified. A photo-spread entitled "Go Orient Yourself" in the lifestyle magazine *Generation Vexed* offers the following advice on how to be culturally sophisticated:

> If you live on the Upper West Side, in the Western Cape or the West End, go East to master the science of high-rise living in a small space. A smiling Buddha and a lacquered screen might make your local sushi den look Asian, but here at *Gen Vex* that just doesn't cut the wasabi. Forget the futon and ditch the bamboo prints. Mod-Asia is all about the energy and eroticism of the urban east. Venetian blinds play with the shadows across the room and increase the rectilinear divisions of the space. Hazy fluorescent lighting drifts up to the tenth floor – perfect for the complexion of the millennium Madame Butterfly, who kicks off her Jimmy Choo heels and sparks up a Mi-Ne cigarette. Out on the terrace, the violet panorama of the city seems ethereal. She stares out at the horizon, wondering if she's lost her Orientation. (Tan 109-110)

Being Asian is not enough – one must be a certain kind of Asian to be accepted in America, an Asian framed by the Orientalist requirements of mystique and eroticism coupled with urban sophistication. Asia finds recognition in America only when it is reconstituted, fetishised and transformed into "Mod-Asia" on the plane of commodity exchange. Otherwise, it just doesn't cut the wasabi. In such terrain, what option is left for individuals who wish to embed their subjectivity meaningfully onto a foreign landscape? If no one knows Singapore, then an identity based on nationality would find no purchase in America. Tay and his wife have to perform a strategic essentialism to secure a lease on a house while Chiah Deng has to recreate herself in order to be accepted into the society of *Gen Vex*. It was only after Chiah Deng had undergone a twenty-day exercise routine with Iron Belle, an exercise instructor she consulted after seeing her on a Nike television advertisement, an appointment with Monsieur Lucien whose hair salon "looked like a high-tech alchemist's lair, like Merlin meets *Battlestar Galactica*", and a trip to a fashion boutique that she finally felt confident enough to enter into the society of the Gen Vexers (Tan 128).

Mammon Inc. makes the proposition that one's identity within a transnational paradigm would have to be reconstituted by selecting different components from what may be called a "cultural supermarket". Gordon Mathews in *Global Culture / Individual Identity* proposes the notion of the cultural supermarket as the "multiplicity of information and potential identities" on offer and made available by the media and communications technology (20). As in the case of Chiah Deng seen above, individuals may re-create their identities by aligning themselves with cultural icons or through the purchase of commodities that best articulate their sense of self. While Mathews makes the point that one is not absolutely free to re-create one's self, as the ability to do so depends on one's predisposition, level of education, affluence and access to magazines, books, films and the Internet, one may argue that within an affluent society the cultural supermarket is ever-present in the form of popular entertainment (21). In modern societies, one may easily find lifestyle magazines equivalent to *Generation Vexed* on shelves of bookstores. In this respect, identity is simply how one labels oneself by presenting in an ostentatious manner the choices one makes from this cultural supermarket.

Thus, a transcendental, free-floating subjectivity may be fashioned by selectively appropriating images and meanings from the cultural supermarket. Yet such a subjectivity is not posited uncritically in *Mammon Inc.* As evident from its title, the novel's Faustian drama is staged right from the beginning:

> No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (*The Holy Bible*, Matt 6:24)

Caught in the no-(wo)man's-land between East and West, between her interests in theological literature and seductive excesses of a consumerist culture, Chiah Deng is Eve to the serpent of global capitalism. At the end of the novel, Chiah Deng opts for the abyss of empty signifier. She succumbs to the seduction of late capitalism and embraces, as it were, a transnational subjectivity that is at the same time, transcendental, "like a plug-and-play peripheral ... like one of those PCMCIA cards that you can just take out of the box and slot into any computer, anywhere" (Tan 64).

As a global nomad, Chiah Deng expresses her sense of belonging as an agent of global capitalism by articulating her non-attachment to other

localities. As a member of an Èlite group of CorpS, she belongs by not belonging. As an Adaptor working for Mammon CorpS, a subsidiary of Mammon Inc, her job is to help professionals adapt to different cultures. She is by the nature of her professional skill able to belong everywhere, yet at the same time, nowhere. However, it is clear that the novel does not posit the rootless existence as an ideal solution; it is rather critical of its own ending, as Chiah Deng's embrace of the transcendental subjectivity requires nothing less than a collusion with the devil, demanding the abandonment of a prelapsarian existence:

> I would rather die in the company of demons than live in heaven and be alone on earth. Christ's crucifixion brought him the kingdom of heaven but I didn't have the strength to go through that, couldn't imagine being without the love of my loved ones for the rest of my earthly life.
>
> I saw in Christ's eyes the pearl of a great price, but realized that in order to follow him, I would have to weep those tears as well. I wasn't Christ, but was merely Eve. I didn't have the stamina to bear the cross. (Tan 276)

Mammon Inc. is satiric in its presentation of identity under the aegis of global capitalism. It suggests that an identity constructed via appeals to cosmopolitanism is not a perfect substitute for that which is shaped by appeals to nationality—if the latter is a function of misrecognition, the former appears to be diabolical, predicated on the erasure and denial of the national.

Conclusion

In so far as globalisation fosters a dense network of interdependencies and connections among people from different localities, it necessitates the renegotiation of their subjectivities. As identities forged via appeals to the nation as an imagined community may no longer be viable within a transnational paradigm, cosmopolitan subjects are obliged to renegotiate their identities, playing with stereotypes, personae and images so as to find recognition. When Marx, in his critique of capitalism, elaborated on the concept of commodity fetishism whereby human social relations are transformed by capitalism because they "do not come into social contact with each other until they exchange their products", he did not foresee that identity markers are likewise susceptible to commodification and

objectification (77). In *Mammon Inc.* and *Alien Asian*, we see human social exchanges operating in an analogous manner with commodity exchange. Singaporean identity has to be narrated via manufactured images such as the Merlion. Chiah Deng's identity becomes "like a plug-and-play peripheral ... like one of those PCMCIA cards" (Tan 64). Tay and his wife enact the role of the "new Asian" to secure a lease on a house.

Globalisation may thus be said to bring about another level of commodity fetishism whereby cosmopolitan Asian subjects find social acceptability by renegotiating their identities through the conduit of the cultural supermarket, selecting from a number of available manufactured images, narratives and stereotypes appropriate to the occasion. What occurs is the "substituting [of] signs of the real for the real itself" (Baudrillard 170). The pages of a lifestyle magazine tell us that futons and bamboo prints are not appropriate signifiers of Asian modernity. To "master the science of high-rice living" what is required is""Hazy fluorescent lighting ... perfect for the complexion of the millennium Madame Butterfly, who kicks off her Jimmy Choo heels and sparks up a Mi-Ne cigarette" (Tan 109-110). What finds acceptance in America is not Asia but""Mod-Asia", the simulacrum of Asian modernity.

In so far as globalisation brings into intimate contact people from different localities, it brings about asymmetrical social relations between subjects of different nationalities. While Arjun Appadurai may argue that "the United States is no longer the puppeteer of a world system of images but is only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes", one may nevertheless point out that America is still perceived as the world's dominant economic, political and cultural Goliath (*Modernity at Large* 31). When the controversy over Michael Fay erupted between Singapore and America, within America it became not a debate about whether corporal punishment is an appropriate method of addressing the problem of crime, but "about Asia's right to stand up to America" (Tay 112). As Tay puts it, "All of us, and all the wider world we represented, were just an island in America's vast continent (205).

If "imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order", then one must pay heed to the alarm sounded by Tan's novel and Tay's travelogue, both of which are cultural texts narrating the experiences of Singaporeans in America (Appadurai 31). For if we were to extrapolate from these narratives the operations of cultural transactions between Singapore and America, then there is more that can be done in terms of determining

how people from different nations may seek to address one another on equal terms within the framework of globalisation.

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Collecting Seeds of Destiny in Li-Young Lee's *The Winged Seed: A Remembrance*

Pauline T. Newton

A keen awareness of seeds and their progeny resurfaces in Indonesian American Li-Young Lee's migrant narrative, *The Winged Seed: A Remembrance*, and a brief insight into earlier migrant works that precede Lee's shed light on the significance of his solemn consideration of the seed. The canon of Chinese American literature includes a rich variety of texts, including works by Adeline Yen Mah, Maxine Hong Kingston, Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Amy Tan and Gish Jen.[1] These migrant writers of Chinese descent discuss, among other topics, alienation from one's homeland, issues with one's parents and Chinese heritage, and discomfort in the United States due to language, culture and other barriers. Such experiences are encountered and documented by numerous Chinese American and other migrants of other descents. However, Lee chooses to express these experiences in a unique way: through diverse discussions and representations of the seed.

Other non-Asian migrant writers reference gardening and name specific plants in their writings, though the seed does not become the central image of their migrant experiences. For example, Antiguan American Jamaica Kincaid, who is of Caribbean, Scottish and African descent, deeply questions the origins of seeds and plants, especially those that exist in her native land, Antigua. Kincaid's interest in plants began when she studied botany as a youth in her Antiguan school. In her writings, Kincaid repeatedly expresses distaste for daffodils because they remind her of her transplanted and colonized state as a former resident in Antigua. In her gardening column in *The New Yorker*, Kincaid acknowledges that "race and politics" have existed "in the garden" for ages.[2] The garden, like Antigua or other so-called paradisiacal regions,[3] "is not a place of rest and repose" (Kincaid, "Sowers" 45), but rather is a homeland that refuses to release its lethal grip on its natural and adopted

descendants. Nevertheless, Kincaid, like Antigua and her garden, refuses to let go of her flowers, regardless of their origin, and even plants daffodils in her own Vermont garden.[4]

Alice Walker, who seems to represent Kincaid's transplanted migrant many generations later, writes, specifically in relation to her fellow African American mothers and daughters, "And so our mothers and grandmothers have, more often than not anonymously, handed on the creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see; or like a sealed letter they could not plainly read."[5] Although migrants such as Li-Young Lee resist colonial implications and ethnic classifications[6] and do not face the same tribulations as have African Americans—though many migrants also could not read, write, express or fulfill their wishes as in the case of Walker's mothers and grandmothers—in many cases the migrant's story or "creative spark" must be preserved in its early stages for future generations to grow and harvest.

Critics, too, have expounded on these migrants' use of flowers and plants in their writings. In "'Flowers of Evil,' Flowers of Empire: Roses and Daffodils in the Work of Jamaica Kincaid, Olive Senior and Lorna Goodison," Helen Tiffin explores Kincaid's uses of flowers to reinforce the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.[7] In her discussion of how gardens are literally sites of work and reflection that respond to a world still dominated by men, Naomi Ellen Guttman discusses Kincaid's postcolonial implications of gardening images.[8] Critic Nancy Leigh Chick explores how multicultural writers such as Toni Morrison, Hong Kingston, Judith Ortiz Cofer, and Louise Erdrich respond to and revise the exclusion of their race, class, gender identity, and culture by appropriating the metaphor of the flower to redefine womanhood.[9] However, the seed has long been used in such migrant narratives, though its importance often is underestimated. And so here I wish to focus exclusively on the representations and destinies of seeds, as opposed to plants and flowers which often are examined in a cultural or postcolonial context,[10] specifically, in Lee's nonfictional migrant account, *The Winged Seed: A Remembrance*.

What is the seed's destiny? Why are references to seeds and reproduction significant in migrant narratives such as Lee's *The Winged Seed: A Remembrance*? How do these references, which seem randomly thrown to the reader much as one would scatter a pile of pages or seeds to the wind, demonstrate Lee's perspectives on his stance as an Asian American and on his own destiny as a husband, father, migrant and writer?

Lee's narrative is a mixture of seemingly incoherent, jumbled passages about seeds, destiny and reproduction, and yet his work also focuses on the history of the Lee family, before and after their migration from places such as Jakarta on the island of Java, Indonesia to Hong Kong to Japan to Pennsylvania to Chicago. Critic Yibing Huang explains, "The structure of the book is rather loose and often drifts into long paragraphs on the author's spiritual quests and metaphysical meditations. This creates an impression of fragmentation."[11] As a result, the reader may become bogged down in Lee's variety of misordered passages. Lee himself says, in reference to *The Winged Seed: A Remembrance*, "There were a lot of contradictory things I was working with, so I felt, in a way, ripped apart."[12] These "ripped apart" sequences lead one critic, Orrin Judd, to say in his blog, "Huh? ... [The] story is told in such obfuscating prose that it's almost impossible to know for sure" what happens in the text.[13] Lee's choice of non-sequential passages underscores the complexity of and confusion about the migrant experience. He challenges the Chinese saying, *luodi shenggen*, which means "where the root falls, it shall grow."[14] As a result, Lee's "obfuscating" references serve to indicate deliberately the difficulty of discovering his destiny in each of his determined roles as migrant/writer or husband/father, and readers will need to carefully collect his references in order to understand the creation—the "morning glory"[15] flower—he wants readers to see.

In a nutshell, the seed in Lee's text represents the reproduction of the self literally and figuratively, though in a deconstructionist age and in a time in which reproductive methods frequently can be controlled by science, this quest is troubled by questions of identity and often leads to fissured representations of the migrant self. In one scene of *The Winged Seed: A Remembrance* (hereon *Winged*), Lee shares the seed's encounter with a knife. The knife threatens to kill the seed, and upon one occasion, "The seed shudder[s] and a very thin layer of skin slough[s] off" (*Winged* 47). This seed surely knows its destiny to germinate and grow, but its profound questioning of the reasons for its process indicates a wavering in the Lacanian sense. The seed has recognized itself in the mirror—perhaps in its reflection of itself on the knife's blade, and now it must determine its migrant destiny. Immediately prior to that same scene in which the seed sheds a bit of skin, it encounters a mirror that "declare[s] nothing the seed recognize[s]," though in the aftermath of this glance, the seed begins to question its existence, its fertility (47). The above examples suggest that Lee does not limit his references to seeds to metaphors of germination

and reproduction. He continually looks in the mirror and fears his own ability to survive. As a result, his references to seeds via images of reproductive or sexual encounters, carriers such as the human hand and germinating conditions such as night, allow him to explore repeatedly the significance of predestination and the migrant self's role in that destiny, whether predetermined or not.

Although Lee's words are not as intense as Kincaid's, he surely presents a strong feeling of wonder mixed with hesitation in *The Winged Seed: A Remembrance*, and this uncertainty may reflect the feelings a migrant might feel when he or she is borne to a new country and transplanted. Lee hesitates to discover the seed's destiny, and yet he doggedly pursues the answer throughout the entire book. For example, in his opening pages, he expresses his hesitation when he writes,'"O, how may I touch you across this chasm of flown things? What won't the night overthrow, the wind unwrite?" (13-14) These words suggest his initial and consistent hesitation to explore the destiny of the seed, or perhaps his own destiny, since he knows that eventually wind and night will wear down any object that he cultivates. Will the seed—or the writer's seed, both in his writing and in his sexual reproduction—fail to yield the desired results? Or should the seed / writer leave the worries to predetermination?

In *Freedom and Destiny*, author Rollo May discusses the predetermination of objects, using billiard balls which cannot control their own actions as an example,[16] and Lee follows the same pattern by using seeds as an example to question whether objects follow a predetermined rote that is chosen for them or whether they actively choose that destiny. Does the seed only respond as a victim to its destiny as billiard balls react only when they are hit, or must the seed fight relentlessly to fulfill its destiny? As the seed-author, Lee often questions his path. Is it directed or not? Or is he choosing his own actions? In one section, the narrator says, "my mother and my night are deciding which portion of my fate they'll keep," and he seems resigned to this prearranged destiny, but a few lines later, he rebels, noting that he's "hidden [his] fate inside a peach" (16, 17). Needless to say, the peach hides a seed,[17] and so in this paradoxical section, Lee simultaneously considers and challenges the idea of predetermination.

Lee's concern about predetermination is mired within his own reflections and fears about his ability to reproduce sexually and otherwise. Since this work is, in part, a historical account of Lee's family's migrant experiences, he becomes perplexed because he must consider the past and the future simultaneously. In *The Winged Seed: A Remembrance*, Lee

recounts the experiences of his parents who are Chinese. His parents' experiences, in turn, influence their family members' migrations. For example, Lee describes the house and gardens of "Old President, Yuan Shih-k'ai," his "mother's grandfather" (18). He shares the story of the demolition of a heavy "paper pavilion," on the property, borne away by the wind and discusses the later destruction of the whole property by "student revolutionaries" (20, 30). Lee's ability to reproduce is then burdened by his Chinese ancestral past. He asks, "Will I be free of my great-grandfather's three thousand descendants?" (32) These descendants and their customs,[18] as Lee suggests in the same passage, perhaps prolong his germination/hibernation period. He does not want to dwell in this period—in the past—for too long, for fear of not fulfilling his destiny to reproduce. He recognizes his father's efforts to pull him into the future; as Lee and his family migrate to Macau, his father builds a miniature paper house (37-38). The house, however, remains unfinished—in a later passage Lee vaguely states, "an unfinished house stands"—and this passage perhaps is a reference to the miniature house, suggesting that Lee must complete the project (50). Lee must leave behind these "three thousand ancestors" and their Asian heritage and build his own house if he wants to survive and to propagate in a new United States homeland, thereby fulfilling his destiny.

Lee slowly develops the transition period in which he begins to build his own house after he reflects on his adaptation to the United States. As he shares how his family began to mingle with other Chinese American children and adults in the United States, he reflects suddenly, "How narrow the road into the seed. How vast the house inside" (135). Although he has not mentioned his father's paper house for quite some time, this scene seems to indicate that the seed has been carried successfully across cultures and oceans and must now blossom into a house. The first step in the destiny of the migrant has been completed—the migrant has successfully been borne from his first homeland. In an interview with Tod Marshall, Lee explains that one can only look "forward... through constant remembrance that all of this [*gestures around the room*] is past... All of this is going away; this is not what we're working toward" ("Witness" 134). This quote underscores the realization that at this juncture in *The Winged Seed: A Remembrance*, Lee has recognized that the past must not hold one entirely in that frame.

The transition or transplantation of the migrant/seed is not just represented through references to ancestral houses and heritages in *The*

Winged Seed: A Remembrance, thereby grounding the realization that Lee's concerns about seeds continuously relate to his more recent migrant experiences and his questions about his predetermination. In the section in which he mentions the "house inside" the seed, Lee suddenly bears the reader on the wings of the seed from his Indonesian hut where servants told tales about "households who had been harried by ghosts ...and... visited benevolent spirits" to a revival Christian camp in the United States in which Lee and his siblings are painfully aware of "awkwardnesses that came from saying English with a Chinese mouth" (*Winged* 127, 132). Lee's non-metaphorical reflections on his migrant experiences clearly show his embarrassment of being blatantly Chinese in a foreign country and reveal his wonder at how he can survive.

As an adult, he continually resists classifications of himself as an "Asian-American writer," insisting in his interview with Marshall, "Culture made that up—Asian-American, African-American, whatever. I have no interest in that" ("Witness" 132). In another interview with Matthew Fluharty, Lee shares further reflections on the difficulty of this transition from one homeland to the next as an adult:

> I couldn't get used to the idea that I owned anything; it seemed very strange to me. It felt wrong. I kept telling [my wife], "I don't recognize this life; I don't like it. I don't want to live this life." We had a lot of difficulties. It wasn't like I believed in not owning anything, like I was a socialist. It didn't feel comfortable to me to know I owned a couch or a house. It was a new experience ... My parents were always very poor, and we were always living in other people's homes, like refugees. Catholic Relief Services had programs that would house people, and the Presbyterian Church had organizations all over the world where people would volunteer to house refugees. So we were always guests. I feel eternally that I am a guest and a stranger.[19]

Lee must weld his simultaneous feelings of being a "guest" and a "stranger." His philosophical sections, which are submerged in metaphors and questions, seem to reflect the intellectual struggles a migrant must go through in order to emerge as someone who can survive in a new homeland. In a more lucid moment, Lee explains that the young migrant will deny his or her heritage, but then "we find our kind again and love them. If we're lucky" (*Winged* 131). These scenes demonstrate that the migrant's transition from one homeland to the next is not linear, but exponential.[20] In other words, Lee does not just move from island to island

or from country to country physically. His mind continually returns to the present or the past, reflecting on how he can adapt to various cultures without entirely rejecting his Chinese heritage. In this vein, as critic Huang notes, Lee's work "carries double significance: the fate of forced (and traumatic) exile and the active search for healing freedom" (191). And so even after the migrant safely has been borne across lands and oceans to the new homeland, the migrant must continually question and rethink his destination, his habits and his purpose.

At other times, Lee's references to his need to rethink, recreate or reproduce are blunt rather than metaphorical or descriptive. His reflections on his past and his current status as a migrant sometimes are interrupted by nighttime sexual moments, perhaps demonstrating how his meta-consciousness of his migrant status is still controlled by his destiny. In one scene, a philosophical moment about the seed's destiny is interrupted with the words, "Does my hand move over your body to precede me home, and do I therefore, by its continual departure, arrive?" (*Winged* 35). The reader is transported from an abstract moment to an intimate scene with sexual overtones, as demonstrated in the words "departure" and "arrival," which could signify a coital moment. In another passage in which he and his wife, Donna, lie together, Lee's significance is less cloaked: "Awake, my love, don't sleep... a seed is on its way, a winged seed. It travels all night to bring you the news: morning glory" (91-92). During these moments—of copulation or of its effects, including children—Lee, who has two sons, appears more at peace. He has built the house his father did not finish. He largely has grappled with his ancestral heritage, although he still endeavors to reconcile his migrant identities. He started growing roots as a child in Asia, and yet he has developed other roots in the United States as a husband, father and writer. He cannot sever his roots from either homeland completely. These divided roots create a multifarious personality. He must alter his behavior in order to communicate with each person or group with whom he identifies. In his interview with Fluharty, Lee says, "I don't feel at home anywhere. I went back to China and I got stared at as much as I get stared at here" (Fluharty). In essence, he still struggles with his migrant identities. He is "one of those seeds [his] father kept in the pocket of his suit" (*Winged* 56). Like the seeds in his father's pocket, Lee is constantly being transported to new areas. In each of these new areas, he is scrutinized by others and himself. Yet by recognizing his shifting identities—even if he is not wholly comfortable with these sundry identities—Lee has made progress as a

carrier of the seed or as a carrier of the "creative spark."

Lee also explores required conditions for the seed, namely carriers such as the wind, birds, hands or night. Lee allows his readers to examine how these carriers influence the seed's growth process. For example, many seeds need the cover of night to grow; hardy cyclamen seeds need to be kept in total darkness during germination.[21] However, too much hibernation and nurturing can prove fatal and can destroy the growth process. In the case of Lee's particular seed, night, which is essential for growth and protection to an extent, threatens the seed. His seed may not be aware that sometimes division (as threatened by the knife) after the dark period can propel propagation. During its dark germination period, Lee's seed must reflect on its identity, as seen in the mirror scene discussed earlier, but too much self-recognition could prove fatal to the seed.

Many of these above-mentioned carriers also serve as carriers that might nourish or harm a human being's growth. In Lee's case, these carriers reflect one's predestination as a child of Asian parents. Hence readers should recognize the importance of his long debates on "what is night?" and on the hand (*Winged* 13). In his earliest reference to night, he wonders, "Is a man thinking in the night the night?"(13). In essence, he is reflecting: Does thinking lead to successful germination? How does one think in order for germination to exist? Although Lee's references to the thinking process / night may not appear clear upon a first reading, his words in the conclusion clarify his strong need for night. In his closing paragraphs in which he discusses a myth that involves a hand and a wren among other things, he writes, "Children, I know you wonder how a hand may enter a place so narrow as a seed. The answer is the hand must die" (205). If the hand which, at first glance, might parallel the safekeeper-womb since it protects the seed from dangerous elements, it must remove itself—decay and die—so that the seed can grow in the ground. Likewise any carrier of the seed—whether a wren, a hand or the wind—must release the seed, as opposed to delaying or prolonging the night or the germination period. The night / germination period must end.

Interestingly, in Lee's text, in another scene that eerily parallels the knife and mirror's meeting with the seed, the narrator says,

> my mother and my night are deciding which portion of my fate they'll keep, she in a jar with her celeries and bitters, he in a coat pocket, next to his liver and other vestigial organs. Either she'll divide me with a kitchen knife, or he'll filter me through his teeth. (Lee 16-17).

The mother (knife) or night (mirror) could kill the seed in its quest for propagation. This passage, which reveals the mother as the more threatening image, demonstrates how Oedipal roles seem to reverse themselves in homoerotic fashion in Lee's text. Here, the father, or the hand, is not as threatening to the seed's quest though here night is a "he."[22] The mother is the one who must be murdered or ignored in order for the seed to propagate itself. Both night and mother should nurture, encouraging safety and growth, and mother should protect the seed from night when necessary, but in this case, night and mother plot together to destroy (castrate) the seed.

The above scene demonstrates that the hand is not just a metaphorical womb-safekeeper; it is also the hand of Lee's father. In Lee's text, the seed is terrified that it will fail in its quest to propagate due to demands placed by its predecessors. As seen in his references to his father and in the earlier passage in which the seed considers its mother's influence in "keeping its fate," Lee often explores those sometimes threatening forebears, also carriers, which might predetermine or squelch one's destiny. A seed or a writer can hardly change its parents and heritage. Few can choose their own racial or cultural features, designer babies notwithstanding. A child might blame his or her parents for failed abilities at a career or parenthood, for example. More specifically, the seed's frustrating and frightening encounters represent the reactions of an Asian American who struggles with his obligations to respect his Chinese parents and heritage, all the while adapting to another culture. Lee expresses these fears through the seed, which is terrified that it will fail in its quest to propagate, as seen in the scenes with the mirror and the knife. Huang, too, recognizes this threat. In a less metaphorical manner, Huang indicates the significance of the above scenes: Lee's text demonstrates the "typical ... Asian American experience, of how tradition and the parents' generation are always, in consciousness, or the unconscious, linked with pain and burden" (190). In his reflection on Lee's relationship to his father, Huang also writes,'"the father figure's haunting presence is wholly determined by what the relationship with the father means to the son" (190). In this case, the son must release himself from his father's grasp. He must'"escape the tyranny of the past embodied in the father," and, I might add, in the mother (190).

The parental hand must release the writer as well. There is a book inside the seed, which is discovered by a thief (*Winged* 205). The thief is the writer who discovers or steals the ideas from the hand. Lee's closing

words are: "all one hundred rooms of the house of the seed echoed with the sound of a hand reading" (205). And as one reads this passage, one cannot help but notice the presence of one's own hands on the page, a theme discussed by Toni Morrison in *Jazz* and by Yannis Ritsos in "The Meaning of Simplicity." In *Jazz*, Morrison concludes: "look, look. Look where your hands are. Now."[23] And so the reader is driven to self-consciousness of how his or her hands taint the narrator's words. Likewise, Yannis Ritsos declares, "I hide behind simple things so you'll find me; / if you don't find me, you'll find the things, / you'll touch what my hand has touched, / our hand-prints will merge."[24] And in all three cases, the reader's hand-prints merge with those of the writers. In Lee's case, the handprints of his father,[25] of Lee as the thief / writer and of the reader, also as potential thief / writer, merge. In other words, Lee recognizes his close ties to his father and to his Asian heritage. Just as his father could not release his grasp on his Chinese heritage for his family, Lee cannot release his grasp on his Chinese heritage for his writing. And the hand, as a carrier of seed—just as Lee's father consciously and consistently carries seeds in his coat pocket—must carry and cultivate the seed of an idea, a story. And although the hand (of the father) must eventually die in order to become fertilizing dirt for the son / writer, the carrying of this message across lands, oceans and generations becomes particularly urgent to the migrant.

The migrant artist, as Walker demonstrates in her earlier passage, is burdened with the responsibility of ensuring that the "seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see" safely arrives at the new homeland. As a writer, Lee ponders the question of the seed and suggests that the seed is his destiny; he must ensure that this artist's destiny flourishes, but sometimes the seed seems to represent a root to the past rather than a fruit for the future, as discussed, and Lee's narrator remains puzzled by this paradox. Therefore, this process of transplantation, even of a seed, becomes labored and frustrating. Lee knows that as an artist, he must carry on his father's heritage, but he cannot do so while his father's hand maintains its tight grip on the seed carried from the past. However Lee's repeated reflections of the night and parents demonstrate the significance of one's heritage on one's ability to write. As Huang explains, "The 'I' can never become a singular and independent self, free from the parasitic presence of the father" (190). At the same time, "the son has to continue carrying the father, or the past, or the history, or all the pain, inside with him as his own life proceeds" (190). Without a root to the past, the fruit

cannot flourish. The narrator in *The Winged Seed: A Remembrance* states, "I remember, as long as I knew him, my father carried at all times in his right suit-pocket a scarce handful of seeds. *Remembrance*, was his sole answer when I asked him why" (33, Lee's emphasis). The narrator repeatedly expresses puzzlement, even frustration, at why this carrying of seeds is so important to his father. This scene demonstrates how Lee remains meta-conscious of his stance as an Asian and as an American, who must fulfill his cross-hatched destiny not only as a son and a father, but also as a writer. In this early scene, Lee does not quite yet understand that the seed may signify "*remembrance*" but that the propagator-artist must cultivate that "*remembrance*" from its early beginnings into a fruit-story.

Metaphors and parents aside, Lee becomes frustrated literally as a writer also with the length of the night—he sometimes remains in bed and lets his thoughts wander, and this demonstrates the need of the artist to work with the "creative spark." At times, the reader may experience difficulty understanding how such thoughts relate to the seed context:

> But if a seed is a house, it is a finished house, or the house unfinished? Is it my father's house? No. My grandfather's house? No. Has the clock in the hallway stopped? Will I have to get out of bed soon and wind it? Or have I, between two crests of the swinging pendulum, fallen asleep? What is night? Is it a ladder? Do we double the night who sit inside it? Or does night pass through us on its way to fruit and other immensities? Does night own a hammer? Or does night build without equal? Are there more than two nights, yours and mine? Is that my father ... ? (36-37)

Here the narrator jumps from night to seed to reflection to reality to houses to his father in a seemingly reckless way, but these night thoughts prove important to the seed for the story just as the germination period in which the seed struggles to take root becomes essential for growth. Writers need time (but not too much time) for mental incubation, however frustrating. In this case, Lee's dream in the opening of *The Winged Seed: A Remembrance* of his father's journey after death awakens the writer-seed and so, finally, the seed takes root. The carrier has returned to dust; the hand has let go, and now the seed can finally flourish in its nourishing fertilizer. The narrator's father's death releases him from this germination holding stage and he can proceed as a writer.

During these night moments in which Lee seemingly bounces from idea to idea, he actually brings together myriad elements. He is collecting

the seeds of his destiny. These meta-conscious moments at first might appear to jar the introspective ramblings about seeds and germination. However, the night, in which he is compelled to write and to copulate with his wife, Donna, illuminates the writer's destiny, parallel to that of the seed upon which Lee ruminates. His different worlds, then, are able to converge. He recognizes the power and importance of this convergence in one particular passage in which he discusses carriers of the seed and the reproductive cycle for the human and the artist:

> I keep my hand moving over you [Donna], all the while knowing my hand may not move from glory to glory without it first moving from shore to shore, your rib to hipbone, . . . and the age beginning with the Yellow Emperor continues through me, whose history is in my face . . . whose future is a question forming between my thighs, while you keep, or spend, which is a further range of keeping, the answer to our sufficiency, bed for seed. (95)

Lee, as a husband and artist, must move "from shore to shore" or migrate before he can fulfill his destiny. He must migrate, not just as a carrier of his ancestral heritage and future, but also as an artist who must convey the myriad struggles of the migrant. Only with this conveyance can the "morning glory" flourish.

Notes

1 Yen Mah authored *Falling Leaves: The True Story of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter*; Hong Kingston, *Woman Warrior*, *China Men* and *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*; Geok-lin Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces* and *Joss and Gold* and various poems and nonfictional pieces; Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*; and Jen, *Typical American* and *Mona in the Promised Land*. This list is not exhaustive; I have listed only a few recent works namely by women, and I have excluded other Asian American writers who are not of Chinese descent. Also, unlike Lee, many of these women (such as Tan) are not first-generation migrants, meaning that they did not migrate to the United States during their lifetimes.

2 Jamaica Kincaid, "Sowers and Reapers: The Unquiet World of a Flower Bed," *The New Yorker*, In the Garden section, (22 January 2001): 41. Subsequent citations appear parenthetically in the text.

3 See Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 98 for a discussion of how a "tropical" region "becomes an imaginative construct that says more about the European fantasy than the actual location in which it finds its setting."

4 See the Kincaid chapter in Pauline T. Newton's *Transcultural Women of Late Twentieth-*

Century U.S. American Literature: First-Generation Migrants from Islands and Peninsulas (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, in press, 2005) for a brief discussion of Kincaid's use of plants and flowers to convey her feelings about (post)colonialism. I mention, among other things, an interview with Margaria Fichtner, in which Kincaid points out a peony named Ezra Pound "whose neck I broke. Nasty, fascist plant.... When I broke his neck I thought, 'You see? You shouldn't grow anything named after an anti-Semite.' HO! He came back better than ever..." (Margaria Fichtner, "Author Jamaica Kincaid Contemplates Gardening and Life," *The San Diego Tribune* [5 December 1999]: Real Estate section, H-23). Lucy, of Kincaid's *Lucy*, too, admits, "it was a mystery to me why I wanted to kill them [the daffodils]. Just like that. I wanted to kill them" (Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy* [New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990], 29). Kincaid also cannot resist transplanting seeds herself: "I went to China and collected seeds and brought them back, and it was a very strange experience . . ." (Fichtner, "Kincaid" H-23).

5 Alice Walker, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," in *Patterns for College Writing: A Rhetorical Reader and Guide*, ed. Laurie G. Kirszner and Stephen R. Mandell (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), 664.

6 See my p. 7-8 for details on how Lee resists being classified as an "Asian American."

7 Helen Tiffin, "'Flowers of Evil,' Flowers of Empire: Roses and Daffodils in the Work of Jamaica Kincaid, Olive Senior and Lorna Goodison," *Span* 46 (April 1998): 58-71.

8 See Naomi Ellen Guttman, "Women Writing Gardens: Nature, Spirituality and Politics in Women's Garden Writing," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1999).

9 See Nancy Leigh Chick, "Becoming Flower: Gender and Culture in Contemporary Ethnic American Women's Literatures" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Georgia, 1998).

10 For details on Lee's intentions to transcend cultural limitations to create the highest form of art (rather than to create a cultural dialogue with society), see Lee, "Witness," 131 and the rest of the interview.

11 Huang, Yibing, *"The Winged Seed: A Remembrance*. By Li-Young Lee," *Amerasia Journal* 24:2 (Summer 1998): 189. Subsequent citations appear parenthetically in the text.

12 Li-Young Lee, "To Witness the Invisible: A Talk with Li-Young Lee," interview by Tod Marshall, *The Kenyon Review* 22:1 (Winter 2000): 142. Subsequent citations appear parenthetically in the text.

13 Orrin Judd, *"The Winged Seed: A Remembrance*: The Hungry Mind Review's 100 Best 20th Century Books," Brothers Judd, 13 December 2004 <http://www.brothersjudd.com/index.cfm/fuseaction/reviews.detail/book_id/253/Winged%20Seed.htm>.

14 This expression was used as a theme for a Chinese diaspora conference in San Francisco in 1992. See "The Luckman Presents Asian American Jazz 2002 in Los Angeles." 15 January 2005. <http://www.luckmanfineartscomplex.org/pop_up/AsianAmericanJazz02.htm>. In *Falling Leaves*, Yen Mah also plays with another similar expression, *luoye guigen*, which means "fallen leaves must return to their roots." For a brief discussion of both terms, see "Diaspora: Chinese Americans and Global China: 'Roots and the Changing Identity of the Chinese in the United States.'" 16 January 2005 <http://64.233.161.104/search?q=cache:NRk5gvnHT2AJ:www.indianafamily.com/~pvoci/lessonsChinaIntro/12-04.ppt+%22luodi+shenggen%22&hl=en>.

15 Li-Young Lee, *The Winged Seed: A Remembrance* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 33. Subsequent citations appear parenthetically in the text.

16 Rollo May, *Freedom and Destiny* (New York: Delta, 1981), 86.

17 This reference reminds me of the Japanese legend about Momotaro, a boy who jumped out of a peach pit to become the son and guardian of a childless couple. See Keigo Seki, ed., *Folktales of Japan* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 40-43. In his introduction to this section, Seki states, "the peach is supposed to have originated in China where it is an emblem of marriage and the symbol of immortality and springtime" (Seki, ed. 40).

18 Lee also talks about his father's history and duration in prison and refers to his role as Mao's physician. For example, see Lee, *Winged*, 161-167 and 45.

19 Li-Young Lee, "An Interview with Li-Young Lee," interview by Matthew Fluharty, *The Missouri Review* 23:1 (2000), 10 December 2004 <http://www.missourireview.org/index.php?genre=Interviews&title=An+Interview+with+Li-Young+Lee>. Subsequent citations appear parenthetically in the text.

20 Kathleen Hugley-Cook uses the terms, linear and exponential, in a different context. See Kathleen Hugley-Cook, "Mentor's Touch: Enriching the Results—and Value—of Education," in *Criteria 2004-05: A Journal of First-Year Writing*, ed. Lee Gibson and Kelly T. Smith (Dallas: The Rhetoric Program, Southern Methodist University Department of English, 2004), 92.

21 "Back Yard Gardener," 10 October 2003 <http://www.backyardgardener.com/tm.html>.

22 A later passage sheds an interesting light on this portrayal, demonstrating that Oedipal roles are sometimes contradictory. Lee writes, in reference to his father and his gaze, "*I* would penetrate *him*," suggesting a reversal of the role of the sperm penetrating the egg or of the man penetrating the woman (Lee, *Winged* 60, Lee's emphasis).

23 Toni Morrison, *Jazz* (New York: Plume, 1993), 229.

24 Yannis Ritsos, "The Meaning of Simplicity," in *This Same Sky: A Collection of Poems from Around the World*, ed. Naomi Nye (New York: Aladdin, 1996), 11.

25 In another passage toward the end, Lee writes, "It's my father hand moving over a page of his drawing book, making me disappear in order that I might finally arrive at what I am. . ." (Lee, *Winged* 184).

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