Université de Montréal

Differing Bodies, Defying Subjects, Deferring Texts: Gender, Sexuality, and Transgression in Chinese Canadian Women's Writing

par

Bennett Yu-Hsiang Fu

Département d'études anglaises

Faculté des arts et des sciences

Thèse présentée à la Faculté des études supérieures
en vue de l'obtention du grade de
Philosophiae Doctor (Ph.D.)
en études anglaises

avril 2004

Université de Montréal
Faculé des études supérieures

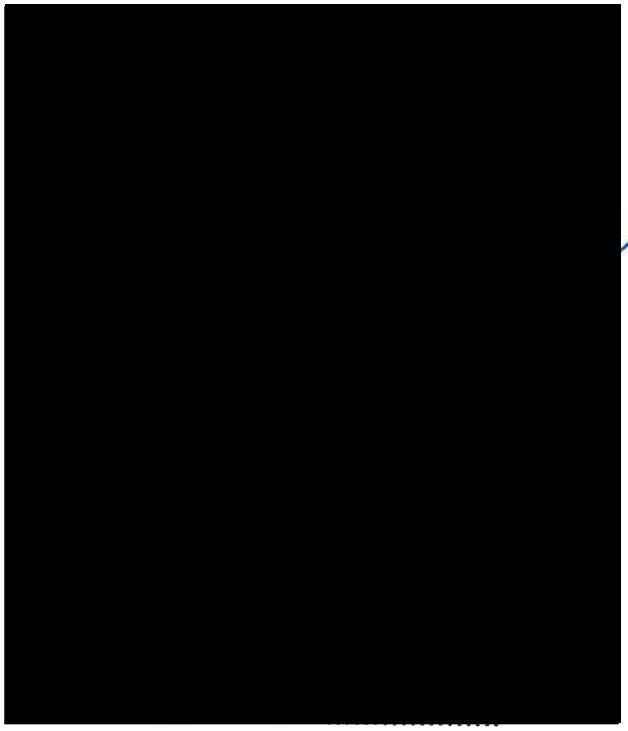
Cette thèse intitulée :

Differing Bodies, Defying Subjects, Deferring Texts: Gender, Sexuality, and Transgression in Chinese Canadian Women's Writing

présentée par

Bennett Yu-Hsiang Fu

a été évaluée par un jury composé des personnes suivantes :



représentant du doyen de la FES

Thèse acceptée le .....

Résumé

La sexualité des femmes chinoises canadiennes a une longue histoire comme une fantaisie structurée par des stéréotypes conflictuels, mais encore coexistants, et d'images déformées. Ce travail de thèse étudie diverses représentations transgressives dans les écrits de femmes chinoises canadiennes pour démystifier les modèles dociles et dangereux qui ont défini les femmes chinoises canadiennes, leurs rôles de genre et leur sexualité. On y démontre que la femme de lettre chinoise canadienne moderne ni ne tente de parler pour une identité collective, ni n'y donne sa voix. Plutôt, elles participent dans un engagement transgressif à amoindrir la normalité sexuelle établit depuis longtemps et jamais questionnée. Elles écrivent comme des sujets résistants à la rhétorique du métier pour leurs propres positions dans des trajectoires historiques canadiennes et chinoises. Ces textes d'auteures explorent le jeu entre le corps féminin, la construction du genre, la production textuelle et les représentations sexuelles. Ces auteurs et les sujets féminins dans leurs discours engendrent leur propre discours, lequel affirme l'agence et l'épistémologie du corps.

Ce travail de thèse embrasse quatre champs d'étude: les théories féministes du corps, les études de la sexualité et du genre, la littérature féminine et les études chinoises canadiennes. L'introduction examine les chemins dans lesquels la subjectivité féminine est ancrée dans les formes du discours de l'histoire, de l'ethnicité et de la sexualité. Le premier chapitre commence avec Sui Sin Far (1865-1914) et examine dans *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912) l'identité bi-culturelle et l'identification au travers de transgressions sexuelles intériorisées. Le deuxième chapitre analyse *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (1990) de Sky Lee et observe comment les sexualités « ethnicisée » re-imaginent leur relation particulière à de multiples sites familiaux et nationaux et comment les paramètres de la diaspora interviennent dans l'ethnicisation et la sexualisation de l'espace. Le troisième

chapitre contextualise le discours du désir lesbien et l'icône de femme fatale-renarde dans la mythologie chinoise pour situer la voix féminine dans les ruptures culturelles de *When Fox Is a Thousand* (1995) par Larissa Lai. Cette auteure transgresse et démantèle les oppositions Est-Ouest, présent-passé, fiction-réalité et introduit une nouvelle voix féminine au discours subversif. Poursuivant le leitmotiv lesbien, le quatrième chapitre analyse *This Place Called Absence* (2000) de Lydia Kwa à travers la lentille de l'abjection, arguant que l'abjection surgit comme une représentation transgressive dans laquelle l'exil, la généalogie et la langue sont des couches intercallées avec l'homosexualité pour engendrer une subjectivité perverse. Le cinquième chapitre discute de la sexualité déviante de Evelyn Lau dans *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid* (1989) et *Inside Out: Reflections on a Life So Far* (2001). La position déviante de Madame Lau d'une prostituée fugueuse toxicomane découvre un autre terrain transgressif et provoque différence et défiance dans une nouvelle direction. La conclusion développe la nécessité d'établir des modèles critiques en littérature chinoise canadienne et de commencer avec une généalogie des corps sexuels et textuels de femmes chinoises jouant sur la scène canadienne.

En écrivant une nouvelle définition de la féminité, les cinq auteures examinées avec minutie font circuler une forme de leur réintégration dans le discours de la création à la fois comme « sujet à » et comme « sujet de ». Elles défient le rôle traditionnel de genre comme le « bon sujet » et transgressent les conventions normatives pour reconstruire un site sexuel utopique dans des productions textuelles. Chaque corps différent ouvre des espaces pour d'autres corps défiant pour engendrer de nouveaux discours dans des textes déférents. En recouvrant une lacune occultée dans l'histoire des femmes de lettres chinoises au Canada, cette thèse pose à la fois la première pierre du développement de la

littérature chinoise canadienne de langue anglaise et aussi celle de la dissémination et la re-inscription de la sexualité féminine dans l'histoire chinoise canadienne.

Mots clés : écrits des femmes chinoises canadiennes, sexualité féminine, genre, transgression

Abstract

Chinese Canadian women's sexuality has a long history as a fantasy structured by conflicting, yet coexisting, stereotypes and distorted images. This dissertation investigates various transgressive representations in Chinese Canadian women's writing to demystify the docile or dangerous models that have come to stand for Chinese Canadian women, their gender roles, and their sexualities. The work argues that modern Chinese Canadian women writers neither attempt to speak for, nor give voice to, a collective identity. Rather, they participate in a transgressive commitment to undermine the long established, but unquestioned sexual normality; they write as resisting subjects to craft rhetoric for their own positions in Canadian and Chinese historical trajectories. These writers' texts explore the interplay between the female body, gender construction, textual production and sexual representations. These writers and the female subjects in their narratives engender their own discourse, which affirms the body's agency and epistemology.

This dissertation brings together four fields of study: feminist theories of the body, gender and sexuality studies, women's writing, and Chinese Canadian Studies. The introduction examines the ways in which female subjectivity is embedded in the discursive formations of history, ethnicity, and sexuality. Chapter One starts with Sui Sin Far (1865-1914) and examines in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912) the author's biracial identity and identification through internalized sexual transgressions. Chapter Two analyzes SKY Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (1990) and scrutinizes how "racialized" sexualities reimag(in)e their particular relation to multiple familial and national sites and how diasporic parameters intervene in the racialized and sexualized space. Chapter Three contextualizes the discourse of lesbian desire and the fox-*femme fatale* motif in Chinese mythology to situate the female voice in cultural disruptions in Larissa Lai's *When Fox Is*

a Thousand (1995). Lai's narrative transgresses and dismantles the binarisms of East-West, present-past, fiction-reality and introduces a new female voice to the discourse of boundary-crossing. Continuing the lesbian leitmotif, Chapter Four analyzes Lydia Kwa's *This Place Called Absence* (2000) through the lens of abjection, arguing that abjection looms as a transgressive representation in which exile, genealogy, and language are layered with queerness to engender perverse subjectivity. Chapter Five discusses deviant sexuality in Evelyn Lau's *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid* (1989) and *Inside Out: Reflections on a Life So Far* (2001). Lau's deviant positioning as prostitute/runaway/drug addict unfolds another transgressive terrain and provokes difference and defiance in a new direction. The conclusion points toward the necessity of establishing critical models in Chinese Canadian literature and begins with a genealogy of Chinese female sexual and textual bodies performing on the Canadian stage.

By inscribing a new definition of femininity, the five writers under scrutiny circulate a form of their reintegration into the discourse of the creation as "subject to" as well as "subject of." They defy the traditional gender role as the "good subject" and transgress normative conventions to reconstruct a sexual utopic site in textual productions. Each differing body opens up spaces for other defying bodies to engender new discourses in the deferring texts. By recovering a hidden lacuna in the history of Chinese women's writing in Canada, this dissertation offers a stepping stone for the development of Chinese Canadian literature in English as well as for the dissemination and re-inscription of female sexuality in Chinese Canadian history.

Keywords: Chinese Canadian women's writing, female sexuality, gender, transgression

Acknowledgements

A Chinese proverb often repeated to me by my parents is, "When you drink water, think of its source." The source of this dissertation flows from the following people. I cannot thank them enough for their contributions to the completion of this dissertation, which has been a long time in the making.

I am heavily indebted to my two supervisors, Lianne Moyes and Livia Monnet, whose encouragement, patience, and generosity over the course of many years have made my doctoral study at the Université de Montréal a memorable, rewarding experience. Their insights, strictures, and suggestions have been invaluable with regard to the dissertation as a whole and to individual chapters. I would like to thank Robert Martin for introducing me to sexuality studies and Amaryll Chanady for leading me to broader theoretical avenues. Harriet Gold has been an unfailing first reader, who has read the entire dissertation with care and has considerably assisted me to develop a style. The Département d'études anglaises has generously provided me with valuable teaching opportunities. I appreciate Johanne Simard and Michelle Hamelin-Braun for providing crucial administrative assistance. I owe thanks to Michael Eberle-Sinatra for getting me various bursaries, among which are Bourse de fin d'études doctorales, Bourse de l'entente, Bourse de la Fondation J.A. DeSève Concours 2003-2004, Bourses de la Faculté des études supérieures, and travel grants for presenting papers. The subsidies have allowed me to concentrate on writing and completing the project. I extend my gratitude to other professors, colleagues, and friends, who have made the completion possible: Donald Goellnicht, Heike Harting, Nathalie Cooke, Michel Limoges, Pengfei

Wu, Robert Brewer, Marie-Eve Blanc, Chamika Kalupahana, Mariam Pirbhai, Ronaldo Garcia, Alan Cranshaw, Master Liu, and the list continues.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my main source of inspiration and motivation: my parents and three lovely sisters Terry, Judy, and Rhea. I am more grateful than I can say for their unconditional support and strong confidence in me that have made my academic endeavor a valuable pursuit.

Table of Contents

Prologue

i. The Differing Body: Major Topics of the Dissertation

The poststructuralist construction of the body all too often reduces it to the solidarity between logocentrism and phallocentrism. I begin my dissertation by disputing this essentialist view. The materiality of the body, particularly in its female form, has been a fertile ground for post-Cartesian and feminist understandings that focus on the female body as intrinsically "unpredictable, leaky, and disruptive" (Shildrick and Price 2). However, the theoretical methods of Western feminist theorists, Kristeva and Irigaray for example, remain uncomfortably essentialist and ahistoricized. Although the female body may provide the primary point of interest, it is vital to problematize the irreducible interplay of the female body with marginalized bodily representations determined by a clear accretion in conditions of difference. The differing bodies and defying subjects in the title explore the interplay between the female body, textual production, and sexual representation; such correlations particularly implicate and complicate Chinese Canadian women's bodies, both literally and figuratively, as neither dangerous nor docile. Michel Foucault (1978) makes it clear that sexuality, in post-Enlightenment thought, becomes a charged focus of the discursive strategies of power and knowledge. Foucault, however, reduces the woman's sex-saturated body to an unmediated monolith. Despite Foucault's negative comments on, and exclusion of, female sexuality, the transgressive approach in his argument provides a fruitful point of departure for me to contest the unquestioned homogeneity of bodily construction and to throw light on the "politics of silence" inherent in the representations of sexual difference and defiance.

Chinese Canadian women's sexuality has a long history of representation as a fantasy structured by conflicting, yet coexisting, stereotypical images such as Shy Lotus Blossom or Dangerous Dragon Lady. The imposed production of silence and the removal of any alternatives to such production reflect the deployment of power against these "subaltern" subjects, "wherein those who could speak did not want to and those who did want to speak were prevented from doing so" (JanMohamed 105). It is this deployment of power at both individual and cultural levels that has to be historicized, but what we need is a methodology that allows scholars and critical readers to contest, not to recycle, the problematic paradigm that has defined the terrain of Chinese Canadian women's sexuality. This dissertation investigates various bodily representations of sexuality in Chinese Canadian women's writing in order to demystify the docile or dangerous models, which have come to stand for Chinese Canadian women and their sexual representations.

A host of questions emerges from the central contention above. How do Chinese Canadian women make themselves heard within canonical Anglophone and Francophone Canadian literary discourse? How do they articulate their sexualities and subjectivities given the historical silence of their communities on these issues? Moreover, how do these women writers demonstrate their strategic allegiance against the reductive Orientalist tendency to represent the East Asian woman as an exoticized, eroticized body? To what degree has it become possible to speak of diverse, heterogeneous, or alternative sexualities within Chinese Canadian culture? My dissertation argues that Chinese Canadian women writers in the twentieth century (and the new millennium) do not attempt to speak for, or to give voice to, a collective Chinese Canadian identity. Rather,

their writing carves out a distinctive space for articulating distinct and diverse notions of femaleness, body, and sexuality.

Having been long ignored by mainstream discourses, including those of Western feminists and of Asian North American critics, these women writers under study use the female body and sexuality as a prime vehicle of narrative signification to reinterpret traditional source materials for the writing of sexual and textual history. My analysis examines the plural, shifting, fluid imaginary of Chinese Canadian women's writing in Anglophone Canadian literature – a discursive space where eroticization and exoticization come into play for various purposes of critique. I also trace the workings of Chinese ethnic identity in these texts while insisting that an unmediated access to Chinese culture or Canadian culture for "Chinese(-)Canadian" writers is not possible.

Although my discussion emphasizes the ethno-racial specificity in Chinese Canadian women's writing, I do not intend to argue that this textual production constitutes a distinct "minority discourse" that is separate from these writers' "marginalized" positionality, such as lesbian women writers of color outside mainstream white Canadian culture and literature. On the contrary, I hope to provide a new reading of these writers' struggle to inscribe their textual and sexual experiences in historically and discursively established representational modes. While making for certain specificities or a set of recurring traits in Chinese Canadian women's writing, I am also aware that such an inquiry calls for intertextual dialogue between old and new voices. In other words, I am interested in the contingency on which these women writers of different generations construct a new literary tradition called Chinese Canadian (women's) literature.

I contend in this dissertation that the work of twentieth-century Chinese Canadian women writers is not only fully cognizant of the historical conjunctions and disjunctions that define its positionality, but also intervened by the contradictions in Canadian immigration policies and laws towards Chinese women. Employing various literary strategies and exposing different sexual tropes, these women's texts are replete with defiant characters embodying the "bad subject" as envisioned by Vietnamese American critic Viet Thanh Nguyen.[1] The five Chinese Canadian women writers I propose to study here often translate their personal experiences into textual production that articulates the heroines' sexual desires, fantasies, and practices in an explicit manner. In other words, they participate in the discursive formations of history, ethnicity, and sexuality. More precisely, in an attempt to highlight the "bad subject," they engage with the notion of transgressive sexualities.

I begin with fin-de-siècle Eurasian Sui Sin Far (Edith Maud Eaton), whose short stories in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912) promulgate the writer's double ethnic identities through the gaze of the Western Other and through internalized sexual transgression to repudiate the constraints of nineteenth-century domesticity and to place herself at the forefront of self-representation for women of color. SKY Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (1990) depicts the sexuality constructed by Canadian legislative laws and defined by diasporic parameters. Larissa Lai's *When Fox Is a Thousand* (1995) further complicates bodily significations in both sexual and textual productions; the text articulates modern Chinese Canadian women's subjectivity as located in the conflation of history, mythology, and sexuality. Lydia Kwa's *This Place Called Absence* (2000) has the distinction of being one of the first texts in Chinese Canadian literature that explicitly

addresses lesbian sexuality.[2] Evelyn Lau, the most controversial among the five, introduces a missing discourse of another minor(ity) sexuality: adolescent prostitution. Lau's autobiographical *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid* (1989) and *Inside Out: Reflections on a Life So Far* (2001) unfold another transgressive terrain, where sexuality is mediated through the runaway/prostitute subject. This often condemned deviant sexuality participates in a new form of transgression and provokes difference and defiance in a new direction.

These texts, I argue, critique and deconstruct the Orientalist image of the "demure, diminutive and deferential woman" as Shy Lotus Blossom, or the portrayal of Dangerous Dragon Lady (Ling, *Between Worlds* 10). Their emerging visibility both challenges and explodes these stereotypical representations, thereby redefining the changing identity of Chinese Canadian history. A spectrum of sexualities[3] is explored throughout this dissertation, and it is this "transgressive heterogeneity," I argue, that foregrounds the evolving nature of female sexuality in modern Chinese Canadian women's writing.

ii. The Defying Body: An Overview and Critique of the Field

Not long after embarking on this project, I discovered that among the plethora of research in Asian American Studies, there was no book-length study of Chinese Canadian women's sexuality. In this prologue, I will provide an overview of existing scholarship on gender and sexuality in Asian American Studies. The field tends to bifurcate in two directions: on the one hand, we find examinations of sexual representations in the

tradition of "Asian American" literature, which includes Asian Canadian; on the other hand, we find rather reductive analyses of racialization in the recently "canonized" Chinese (subcategorized under East Asian) Canadian scholarship. After reviewing the two current scholarly foci, I will analyze the methodological impasses in the critical works.

First, Asian American Studies on gender and sexuality all too often inscribe (transgressive) sexualities in the American context, which includes Canada. The pivotal essays by Russell Leong (1995) and Sau-ling C. Wong & Jeffrey Santa Ana (1999) chronicle a comprehensive study of the issues of alternative sexualities in Asian American literature. In his groundbreaking work, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (2001), David L. Eng raises insightful questions of Asian American male sexuality tied to psychoanalytic parameters. Eng posits his reading within a solely psychoanalytic formation of racial (dis)identification and essentially homogenizes (and homosexualizes) the Chinese American male body. Complementing the applicability of psychoanalysis to Asian male sexual subjectivity in Eng's argument, Anne Anlin Cheng's *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (2001) espouses an understanding of subjectivity, melancholia and displacement. Melancholia, linked explicitly to racial subjection, allows Cheng to map racial fantasy into identification as that which combines the individual psyche with the social ideological state apparatus (164-168). It also provides a vocabulary for the Asian American experience of racial grief beyond the polemics of grievance. Karin Aguilar-San Juan's essay (1993) first points out that the lesbian subtext in SKY Lee's novel, *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, could serve as a launch pad for Asian American feminist

writers to develop their "lesbian venues, where being lesbian is neither secret nor taboo, and where [they] can freely explore [their] own experience" (939). In spite of their illuminating conceptualization, these works, however, partake of larger historical and institutional legacies in the unquestioned "American" context.

In another direction, scholars and anthologists in Canada have launched Asian Canadian Studies. The birth of Chinese Canadian literature was marked by the publication of *Inalienable Rice: A Chinese and Japanese Canadian Anthology* (1979). Following this milestone, *Many-Mouthed Birds: Contemporary Writing by Chinese Canadians* (1991), the second anthology of poems and stories by Chinese Canadians, has made Chinese Canadian writing a recognized discursive field. In the "Introduction" of *Many-Mouthed Birds*, Bennett Lee traces the history of Chinese Canadian writing, which started mostly after the postwar era as the wave of Chinese immigrants into Canada shifted the demographics of Chinese Canadian from predominantly native-born to a present majority of second- and third-generations (2-3). The new generations start to use English to gain a voice in Canadian society, and as "many-mouthed birds," the writers now are speaking out, now coming out to a mainstream Canadian readership. *Jin Guo: Voices of Chinese Canadian Women*, a landmark work published by the Chinese Canadian National Council in 1992, documents the lives of the generations of Chinese Canadian women in a *testimonio*-like narrative, but the project does not pursue a further theoretical inquiry.

Only in the late-1990s did Asian Canadianists start to differentiate Asian Canadian literature from the totalizing Asian American literature; these critics have questioned the interchangeability of the two literatures. Donald C. Goellnicht, a pioneer

scholar in this burgeoning field, argues that Asian Canadian literature, always homogenized under the panoply of Asian American Studies, has "languished in the wilderness [and taken] so long to find an academic home" ("A Long Labour" 3). Taking up Goellnicht's urgent call to discern Asian Canadian from Asian American, Guy Beauregard, in both his recently completed dissertation and several critical essays, substantiates his arguments and establishes comparative analyses between Asian American and Asian Canadian literatures. In a similar theoretical vein throughout *Broken Entries: Race, Subjectivity, Writing* (1998), Japanese Canadian critic Roy Miki emphasizes racial mediation and "asiancy" in the Asian Canadian psyche. In 1995, *Beyond Silence: Chinese Canadian Literature in English*, the seminal work on the literary criticism of Chinese Canadian writing, was produced by Lien Chao, whose book, for the first time in Asian American Studies, traces Chinese Canadian (literary) history and places the focus on the collective identity of Chinese Canadians.

In spite of the many instrumental theoretical avenues, the impasses I will examine in the two fields have, to a certain extent, prevented either Asian Americanists of queer/feminist studies or Asian Canadian scholars working on racial issues from approaching the complexity of sexuality in a constructive way. The major problematics of the bifurcating criticisms are quite simple. First, in the majority of cases in Asian American Studies, the Asian Americans refer to the United States. Secondly, critical investigations into Chinese Canadian culture accentuate either collective identity (Chao 1995) or the Orientalist reproduction of these writers' self-exoticization (Ng 1999; Miki 1998). In the dearth of existing Chinese Canadian scholarship, critics take a great interest either in the earlier bachelor societies and prostitutes or in racial exclusion and

multiculturalism.[4] Discussions of female gender, sexuality, and transgression in Chinese Canadian literature remain under explored and under theorized.

iii. Impasse 1: "Is Canada America?" or "Is Chinese Canadian Asian American?"

The generic and totalizing rubric of "Asian American" as a category was coined in the Asian American Movement of the mid-1960s "to promote political solidarity and cultural nationalism" (Cheung, "Re-viewing Asian American Literary Studies" 2). "Asian American panethnicity," or "pan-Asianism" as E. San Juan, Jr. calls it, conceals the "ethnic chauvinism and class cleavages, and conflicts generated by the operation of U.S. racializing politics or inherited from imperial divide-and-rule policies" (13). The transformation of its literary production has created a highly stratified, uneven and heterogeneous formation that cannot easily be contained within the models of essentialized or pluralized ethnic identity suggested by the rubric of Asian American literature.

Since the 1990s, critics of Asian American Studies have challenged the idea of a unifying Asian American sensibility and have underlined the need to take into account "heterogeneity," "diaspora," and "sexuality" when reading Asian American literature.[5] Shirley Geok-lin Lim, a prolific Asian American scholar and fiction writer, indicates that Asian American, as if a homogeneous chunk, has usually been assessed by reviewers and critics from the single perspective of race: "the literature is read as centered on the identity position of Americans of Asian descent and within the contexts of Asian American immigration histories and legislative struggles against unjust policies and racial

violences" (19). Typically, writers such as Joy Kogawa and Sui Sin Far are included in the outstretched North American literary body because scholars feel that Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981), for example, "so exemplary in its integration of political understanding and literary artistry, is simply too good to pass up" (Wong, *Reading Asian American Literature* 16). Out of convenience, "Asian Canadian" has been subsumed under "Asian American" in a strategic alliance, a political coalition. After all, the Asian American (U.S.A.) corpus has to date been more substantial than the Asian Canadian, and its critical study more established.

Over the last decade, voluminous research on Asian American sexuality and gender politics has been produced to offer a new dimension for scholarly analysis. However, these critics essentially inscribe gender issues in a monolithic American continent/context, which includes Canada. Given the slightly different immigration policies resulting in distinctive identities and nationalisms, Asian Canadians cannot be equated with Asian Americans without further probing the Chinese Canadian immigration history and cultural specificities. As a result of the early immigration policies in the two countries, what marks out the main difference between Asian America and Asian Canada is the "size of the Asian origin population" (Goellnicht, "A Long Labour" 4) and the institutionalized study of the discipline of Asian Canadian/American culture and literature (Beauregard, "The Emergence" 55).

Furthermore, in spite of the growing body of Asian American literary works on queerness, queer writing is still canonized in a dominant "minority" discourse: white male homosexuality. Although queer writing resists and frequently subverts a "white patriarchal political economy that regulates gender, sexual, and racial identities" (Wong

& Santa Ana 203), the established queer study has essentially excluded "lesbians of color," or more precisely, lesbians of Asian descent. The topic of non-heteronormative female sexuality in Asian American Studies, as Dana Y. Takagi observes, "is often treated in whispers, if mentioned at all" (27). Exposing these two impasses also points towards the urgent necessity of theorizing sexuality in Chinese Canadian women's writing.

Sharing the same concern with Goellnicht (2004), who, in a recent essay, also problematizes the precision of the term "Chinese Canadian literature," I do not intend to trace the designation "used and abused in the U.S. context in order to see whether we in Canada can learn any valuable lessons from that use/abuse" ("A Long Labour" 3). My justification for differentiating Chinese Canadian writing from canonized Asian American literature is the need to historicize textual production and theorize strategic resistances to identity politics. At the same time, such work divulges various meanings of transgressions, divergences, contradictions and anomalies that challenge the essentialist peculiarities under the rubric of "Chinese Canadian women's writing."

iv. Impasse 2: The Exclusiveness of Racialization and Collectivity

The second impasse I want to invoke is the categorical approach of ascribing the racial absolutism to the "body politics" in Chinese Canadian literature. On the one hand, white scholars of sexuality or feminists downplay the significance of race complicated by the intersection of gender and sexuality. On the other hand, highlighting the racialization absent from Eurocentric criticism, Asian American literature in general has been assessed

by reviewers and critics from the single perspective of race as if "race" were a mere qualifier not only to specify sexual orientations but also to theorize difference. Racialization becomes a means of raising questions in order to mark out a different set of relations and to demand a different mapping.

Within and around the academic debates on Asian American identities, particularly in women's writing, racial and sexual alterity has become a heated debate, or a "hot commodity," that has claimed Chinese North American women as its principal othered signifier. As a Chinese Canadian male scholar, I am bewildered by the "alterity" that is perpetually thrust upon Chinese Canadian women (as well as men) being produced as an infinitely deconstructable "othered" matter. In *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992), bell hooks calls the contemporary version of this preoccupation with alterity "the commodification of Otherness" or "eating the Other," as she writes that "[w]ithin commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (21). I share with hooks the feeling of being "commodified," but the question is: Why are Chinese Canadian women essentially already and always Other? Can they claim their subjectivity devoid of the intervention or reinvention of the racialized Other? The problematic in the existing Chinese Canadian criticism resides in the inability of thinking beyond "racialization." When advocating a racialized discourse that overlooks the desires, identifications, and experiences of Chinese Canadian women, most critics assume whiteness or non-whiteness to be fundamentally constitutive of female subjectivity, and from this assumption they attempt to deconstruct the essentialist notion of femininity or heterosexuality. What has been missing from current polemics on the flourishing Asian Canadian Studies is an analysis

of complex ways in which sexuality mediates notions of both national belonging and diasporic experience.

I do not intend to deconstruct any binary ascriptions to the Oriental image in order to establish "a" subjectivity for Chinese women in Canada. Nevertheless, Chinese Canadian women's subjectivity cannot be posited only in racial absolutism. As Beauregard has insightfully indicated, the constituencies of "ethnic absolutism" should be analyzed in conjunction with the contingencies of sexual politics and immigration history ("What Is at Stake" 228-231). *Jin Guo*'s focus on women's historical hardships leaves out theoretical explorations, and Lien Chao's reductionist interest in ethnic representations and exclusion has not gone "beyond silence." Recycling the unproductive dogma and cliché, most Asian Canadian critics, with their concern of mapping racialization in identity formation, simply eschew and downplay the complicated, conspicuous sexual politics inherent in Chinese Canadian women's writing, thus failing to locate the new "bad subject" in any sexual configurations.

v. The Differing and Defying Body: Differences from Existing Scholarship

Taking the aforementioned cul-de-sacs into consideration and integrating insights from these issues raised in Chinese Canadian scholarship, I aim to herald a distinctive Chinese Canadian criticism on female sexualities, which will fill a theoretical gap in Chinese North American literature. I will unearth some of the "absent" voices that have been either assimilated into "Asian American" literature (i.e., Sui Sin Far), or simply unrecognized yet by canonical "Canadian" literature (i.e., Lydia Kwa). The attempt of

this dissertation is thus twofold: to excavate hidden female voices and to explore the unhyphenated gendered and sexualized space between the two terms, "Chinese" and "Canadian," where history, sexuality, and writing of the two poles are interlocked. The issue of racism is not directly addressed in this project, but it is nonetheless implicated in many of the novels where the discursive constructions of race, sex and sometimes class are intricately linked. Since I am less interested in tracking how a singular female sexuality or a collective gendered subjectivity evolves over the five women writers spanning a century, I will pay particular attention to the diverse genealogical and sexual tropes in the authorial representations in the changing historical and diasporic dimensions, where their individual narratives are set. These composite narratives also lay out a Foucauldian *Chinese Canadian* history of *female* sexuality (my emphasis) in the sense that the forging narratives of female embodiment challenge canonical Canadian studies. Furthermore, their bold gestures of speaking of this usually forbidden subject, I would argue, function as a "counter-narrative" that promulgates a new epistemology.

With a particular interest in the conflated thematic of sexuality and textuality operating in relationship to racialization, this dissertation reevaluates the significance of Chinese Canadian women's struggle against the Law of Father and the Orientalist imposition. Moreover, I suggest that all writers participate in a transgressive commitment to undermine the long established, but unquestioned sexual normality. I contend that Chinese Canadian writers, women writers alone, should not be situated in, nor do they contribute to, a cohesive and united tradition. Rather, these writers' heterogeneous, hybrid representations of women's sexualities help to overturn the archetypal burden of the stereotypes of "inscrutability," "asexuality," or "hyper-

femininity" ascribed to them for centuries. To sum up, instead of complying with and reenacting these stereotypes, these women writers open up spaces for their sisters and daughters to generate new discourses.

vi. The Sexualized Body: Theoretical Parameters of Women's Sexuality

Sexuality, the corollary of desire and fantasy, has always been an unspoken component of the female image in the Asian American literary body. This work examines one pervasive figuration of women's gender and sexuality that markets ethnic and national betrayal. Sexuality, in its (con)figuration, is pivotal because sexual desire and representations mediate between progress and tradition, modern Canada and the "old world" China. In its own intervention, sexuality becomes a gauge of progress, a gauge that informs the interface between westernization, modernization and orientalization. In my analysis, I argue that Chinese Canadian women's writing not only mediates sexual construction as a determinant of loyalty but also manipulates that construction as a tool of cultural persuasion by re-conceptualizing "disloyalty" as resistance to repressive authority. Along this trajectory, I see Chinese Canadian women not as "native" cultural informants, who write to affirm a pre-established sociological reality of ethnic experience, but as agents who craft rhetoric for their own positions in Canadian and Chinese historical trajectories (Bow 11).

As Wong and Santa Ana (1999) have argued, it is impossible to talk about any subjectivity or position without delineating its statuses in different historical periods. The ahistoricity and decontextualization for the integrity of the complex intents and

operations of each author and each work could result from too steady a gaze on isolated aspects of content. Therefore, the intertextual and genealogical investigation I propose links sexuality with historical adjacencies, thereby conceptualizing the basis for establishing a Chinese Canadian critical tradition. I argue that intertextuality as well as female genealogical reconnections operate in contradictory ways, both inviting scrutiny and foreclosing it. Building on the theoretical insights of some North American and Western European feminist theoreticians as well as on the disciplinary concerns of several Asian American critics, this dissertation interrelates and interrogates their assumptions and generates new theoretical outlooks.

Since Foucault, the discourse of sexuality, historically structured through exclusions and regulations, has destabilized its certitudes and conceptual boundaries. When gender and ethnicity are examined along this historical axis, synchronizing these boundaries offers a fertile ground. Is it possible to write about the sexuality of history? My principal argument draws on Foucauldian deployments of alliance and sexuality; however, I am also cognizant of the pitfall of Foucault's discursive formation, which reduces female sexuality to a sex-saturated body and excludes female subjectivity.

Although employing Chinese Canadian women's sexuality as a counter-discursivity of power/knowledge,[6] I do not want to dislodge other discourses in play. Foucault's focus on regulatory power in the emergence of modern Western societies can be equally useful in the understanding of how those societies map their domination of others. Taking up Foucault's concepts as a starting point, I implement theories of corporeality and female sexuality by Western feminists such as Elizabeth Grosz and Julia Kristeva. As well, I re-appropriate Asian American theories such as Rey Chow's diaspora

theory of the legacies of imperialism and colonialism, Lisa Low's notion of hybridized spaces in relation to identity formation, and Sau-ling Cynthia Wong's critical investigation of gender and sexuality in Asian American literature. In the same vein, I reevaluate some groundbreaking texts by Asian American and Canadian critics such as David Eng, Donald Goellnicht, and Leslie Bow to articulate how home(land) and (homo)sexuality are intertwined in the complicated Chinese Canadian women's psyche.

In my critical and interpretive practice, feminist theory is appropriated, critiqued, and reassessed as a valuable tool for questioning the hegemony of Western discourse in Chinese Canadian Studies. It is by no means my intention to deconstruct the hegemony of patriarchal discourse through feminism; rather, I expound the question of the "bad subject" of feminism to the field of queer/minority studies, with other inevitably deep-rooted discursive formations (i.e., ethnicity, sexuality, and gender) embedded in rather complicated Westernized Chinese women writers, who attempt to represent their subjectivity in contradictions. As Chow (1991) notes, in a Western Chinese (or just born "Western"?) woman writer, "her subsequent rejection of the West and her submission to Chinese culture, then her 'Chinese' female identity is much more complex than one that is readily conceivable within the paradigms of nationalism" (163).

Kristeva's book *About Chinese Woman* (1986) has been taken as a critique of Western (patriarchal) discourse, and in her analysis, China and Chinese women are sexualized: China is counterpoised to the West not only because it is different but also because it is feminine, and Chinese women are essentialized as infantilized and primitivized beings unrepresentable to the West. I find Kristeva's critique problematic

because she sees China and Chinese women in a "sympathetic" way. Chow also points out Kristeva's rather ahistoricized, culturally-blind reduction:

> What [Kristeva] proposes is not so much learning a lesson from a different culture as a different method of reading from within the West. For, what is claimed to be 'unique' to China is simply understood as the 'negative' or 'repressed' side of Western discourse. In thus othering and feminizing China, is Kristeva not repeating the metaphysics she wants to challenge? (*Woman and Chinese Modernity* 7)

However, I see Kristeva's problematic conceptualization as a fertile ground for necessary interventions and contextualizations. Elizabeth Grosz's theories on corporeality as an instrumental supplement (i.e., on the correlations between body and space, and on bodily re-inscription) inform the theoretical matrix of my work. As Grosz argues, the corporeal map that links cultural, historical and sexual components is produced by the constant flow of women's desires: a circuit of exchange established by their bodies' knowing. The bodies function as "the agents of knowledge, [...] an intensely energetic locus for all cultural production" (*Volatile Bodies* 147). Furthermore, these crisscrossing relationships of history, gender, race, and sexuality mark the Chinese Canadian women's bodies not just as a cultural product but as "the cultural product" (Grosz 23).

This dissertation is also very much inspired by Leslie Bow's *Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion: Feminism, Sexual Politics, Asian American Women's Literature* (2001), in which Bow endeavors to theorize the complex negotiation of Asian American women "between feminine accommodation and feminist resistance to question any naturalized connection between oppositionality and marginality and to look at the ideological constructs that govern women's alliances" (35). Therefore, out of the scarcity of Chinese Canadian literature, this dissertation aims to offer what Robyn Wiegman calls

"a methodological propulsion toward increasingly territorialized interpretations of social and subjective being" (130) and to situate Chinese Canadian women's subjectivity within the complex interactions and intersections of race and gender inscribed in literary production. The subjectivity inherent in sexuality serves as the resolution to a crisis of individual and communal identity.

vii. The Feminine Corpus: Five Authors under Scrutiny

My discussion begins with Sui Sin Far, whose work marks the emergence of Chinese Canadian women's writing at the turn of the twentieth century, and ends with an examination of Evelyn Lau's memoir in Vancouver in 2001. Organized in a loose chronology, the study focuses on the representative work of each writer that illustrates the thematic consistency in Chinese Canadian women's writing within the centennial span. Each chapter concentrates on an individual author and makes roughly the same argument: while the women writers may participate in the creation of a collective Chinese Canadian identity, their writings promote culturally heterogeneous, racially hybrid, and historically and geographically inclusive visions of a feminine utopic site. I would not totalize such an imagined community as a "queer nation"; rather, the utopic site commingles the pervasive motifs: lesbian intertextuality, female bonding, and a synchronized maternal genealogy. The five writers locate Chinese Canadian womanhood, particularly women's sexuality in various forms, as central to their works of cultural reunification and transgressive subjectivity.

In Chapter One, I propose a new reading of Sui Sin Far's short stories that challenge the gender imperatives of keeping women either invisible or contained within traditionally defined roles. This Eurasian New Woman redefines women's roles and writes against the stereotypical images imposed upon Chinese women in North America. Furthermore, by advocating interracial marriage, which counters the then anti-miscegenation discourse, Far portrays Chinese women as desiring and resisting subjects who seek control of their lives. Most importantly, she deploys transgressive sexual politics and poetics articulated in cross-dressing, border-crossing, and female homosociality and lesbianism in different stories in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*. In setting out to transgress socio-cultural conventions, Far creates prophetic, if not wholly unproblematic, feminist textual/sexual (re)presentations.

In Chapter Two, the notion of transgression is analyzed in conjunction with different spatial locations to scrutinize how the defined and confined spaces intervene in alternative sexualities in SKY Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe*. Lee is probably the first Chinese Canadian woman writer to inscribe an alternative feminist genealogy through the narration of how four generations of women negotiate in the isolated, misogynistic Chinatown in Canada. I introduce the concept of "spatial dialectics" to locate these women's struggle between fixation and mobility to mold their subjectivity. Moreover, following the step of Sui Sin Far's inquiry into interracial, cross-ethnic relations, Lee elaborates on the pathological eugenic-based discourse inscribed in Chinese Canadian women's body and critiques miscegenation to resist white racism and the imperative to extend the patriarchal line. Demystifying racial purity and authenticity, Lee allows her heroines, Kae and Hermia in particular, to reach beyond the boundaries of the nation-

state through temporal, spatial, and sexual traveling. Rather than simply recovering the heterosexual norms, the heroines re-signify and centralize women's affiliations and alliances with each other.

Chapter Three examines the trope of transgression in sexual and (inter)textual productions. Larissa Lai's *When Fox is a Thousand* inscribes not only three female narrators' textual and sexual experiences in historically defined representational modes, but beyond transgressing normality, the author allows her heroines, who subvert the dominant laws, to create a women-identified utopic site and subjectivity. This chapter elaborates on the prefix "trans-" as a major transgressive trope of boundary-crossing, in which migrancy and metamorphosis resist a restricted binary reading of borders. In this regard, "trans-" as such a movement functions to establish that neither side of the binary can be torn free of the other and instead can establish a feminine space. More precisely, transgression is deployed through various intertexts and multiple cultural discourses – among them, ethnic difference, narrative forms, bicultural subjectivity, and queer sexuality – rendering the novel a historical conjuncture that presents both intertextual and transgressive practices and productions.

Chapter Four internalizes the boundaries – ethnic in Sui Sin Far, spatial/diasporic in SKY Lee, and morphological in Larissa Lai – and posits women's sexuality (lesbianism) within a psychoanalytical landscape. Foregrounding Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, this chapter analyzes the heroines' subjectivity with the doubles of absence-abjection and abjection-objection. It traces Wu Lan's lesbian identity in relation to her mother's desire for familial lineage and her matrilineal connection with two prostitutes at the turn of the nineteenth century. The chapter also examines the perverse, "bad

subjects," the lesbian and the prostitute, as a counter-discourse and defines perverse sexuality as a site of transformative cultural practices, where the heroines construct the inside/outside reversibility between the enfleshed wound and the wounded body to produce more complicated power relations in the schema of abjection. Developing the thematic of synchronized maternal genealogy, the chapter further pursues the polyphonic "dialectic" among the four heroines, whose voices inscribe the repressed and unspeakable in language and history. Taking the thematic thread of the "utopic site" in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and the "isomorphic zone" in *When Fox is a Thousand*, I weave it into the "yin space" in *This Place Called Absence*. This space, I argue, opens up possibilities for various forms of change.

Chapter Five zooms in on the representations of deviance and disavowal in Evelyn Lau's *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid* and *Inside Out: Reflections on a Life So Far*. As an "outsider" (male) analyzing Lau's text and as an "insider" (Chinese Canadian) evaluating the ethnic implications within sexual representations, I attempt to inform the reader of the complex issues in such intersectionality. When we talk about Asian American/Canadian sexuality, as Leong reminds us, "the model minority view simply denies diversity as an issue" (3). It is contestable that the model minority does have complex sexualities, especially when the complexity is compounded by, and contextualized with, familial, societal and cultural conformity. Sexuality in such multiple cultural contexts is invoked and endlessly modulated by Chinese Canadian women writers to enact a number of conflicts between private tendencies and social influences. Lau's *Runaway* counteracts images of Asian American women as the asexual (or desexualized) model minority by defiantly breaking grounds to have a new voice. In both

Runaway and *Inside Out*, Lau stages selves in which writing, sexuality, age and class combine to produce the "bad girl" image, which deliberately flaunts the discourse of the model minority. By so doing, the image also delineates dysfunctional heterosexual relations which stand in danger of re-inscribing (or being conscripted into) ethnic stereotypes of an even more pernicious nature.

The conclusion points to the powers of the differing bodies and defying female subjects and their convergence in genealogical referentiality, accompanying a new kind of agency and mobility in the textual operation to generate new discourses. As Chinese women cannot establish links with their men given the cultural and sexual constraints, they seek the bonding with one another. Motivated by the sense that there exist few adequate portrayals of women of Chinese ancestry, these Chinese Canadian women writers have been attempting, on the one hand, to depict the uniqueness and diversity of their experience as an integral part of the Chinese tradition, and on the other hand, to defy that totalizing tradition. In their textual production, which specifically addresses the forbidden topic of sexuality, they shatter myths and stereotypes through self-representation to reject the dominant ideology in the Canadian literary imaginary. Wong and Santa Ana have argued that "[a]ttempts to develop a comprehensive understanding of the roles that gender and sexuality play in the creation of American [*Canadian* in this dissertation] national identity must include historicized critical analyses of Asian American gender and sexuality" (172).

The thematic analysis of women's sexuality in the centennial Chinese Canadian history points to a trajectory of cultural specificities, a trajectory along which other (following) women writers will keep re-defining their belongings to "out here" and "over

there" (Eng 204). These differing female bodies embodied as defying subjects in the deferring texts will develop the same construction into "a point of resistance and a starting point for opposing strategies" (*History of Sexuality* 101), to use Foucault's terms about the double nature of discourse.[7] Chinese Canadian women writers have constructed a *yin* space – a space of empowerment and resistance and of equal power as its male *yang* counterpart. The relationships of the female bodies also suggest that the "body is not only anterior to language," but has the ability to register its own "knowing" (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 6). These women writers and the resisting subjects in their deferred texts have engendered their own discourse, which affirms the pluralized body's agency and epistemology. They are now speaking as "many-mouthed birds," singing with the same tongue but with different voices while fluttering their full-fledged plumage.

Notes

1. In *Race and Resistance: Literature and Policies in Asian America*, Nguyen argues that Asian American intellectuals have to confront the problematic that Asian Americans are "implicated in the problem of commodification" (24). Nguyen proposes that as opposed to the "model minority," the "bad subject" resists "dominant society's interpellation into a race- and class- stratified society" (150). I read Chinese Canadian women's writing for its representations of the body because this bodily re-signification putatively constitutes the most consistent form of resistance, a discourse of the bad subject. In a way, this bad subject acts as the Foucauldian counter-discursivity of power/knowledge.

2. The issue of Chinese Canadian lesbianism, before Kwa's 2000 novel, is also addressed in Kwa's *The Colours of Heroines* (1994), Larissa Lai's *When Fox Is a Thousand* (1995), and the two special issues of the feminist journal *Fireweed* (30 [1990] and 43 [1994]), which have pieces dealing with lesbian desire.

3. The spectrum of sexualities reveals the transgressive representations of (homo)sexuality, but I do not exclude "healthy" heterosexuality, which also pervades the works of other Chinese Canadian women writers absent from my analysis, writers such as Judy Fong Bates, Denise Chong, Madeleine Thien, and Ying Chen.

4. See Beauregard's detailed analysis in "What Is at Stake in Comparative Analyses of Asian Canadian and Asian American Literary Studies?"

5. In his comprehensive survey on the emergence of Asian Canadian Literature, Donald Goellnicht clearly claims that "Asian Canadian literature has clearly been born" ("A Long Labour" 29). However, according to Goellnicht, it is urgent that the term "Asian Canadian" be re-signed and that the term be reclaimed through a refocusing on interventionist projects dealing with global restructuring. Aligning with other Asian American critics, such as Lisa Lowe and Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Goellnicht attempts to deconstruct the Pan-Asian identity and calls for the attention to heterogeneity. I use the term *Chinese Canadian* instead of *Asian Canadian* not to create another essentialist compartmentalization, but to emphasize the ethnographic differences within the subdivided term "Asian Canadian." For the differentiation between Asian Canadian and Chinese Canadian, see Goellnicht's analysis in "'Forays into Acts of Transformation': Queering Chinese Canadian Diasporic Fictions."

6. See Note 1.

7. Both Western and Asian traditions code the female body as negative and threatening, a body so excessive in its functions and sexuality that it must be controlled. The transgressive sexuality from its bodily representation, I argue, is an extension of the excessive female body and therefore the ultimate threat to the dominant order. The role of this defying and differing body in the traditional narrative is to incite conflict, for the old narrative's structure aims, often violently, to contain the woman and the female body.

Chapter One

Sui Sin Far and *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*

My first chapter begins with the first Chinese Canadian writer, Edith Maude Eaton (1865-1914), who, writing under the *nom de plume* Sui Sin Far, founded a tradition of Chinese North American literature at the turn of the twentieth century. I place Far (the name I will use consistently throughout this chapter) at the forefront of this dissertation for several significant reasons. First, in spite of her initial literary career developed in Montreal before she emigrated to the United States, Far's Canadian background is glossed over in favor of her later years in the States, and even her Canadian identity is dismissed by Canadian literary history.[1] Secondly, Far's stories explore notions concerning ethnicity, gender, and sexuality of the Chinese Canadian women within their very small community in fin-de-siècle North America. In addition, Far, a Victorian woman, who affiliated herself with contemporary New Women writers,[2] endeavored to forge a new Chinese North American female subjectivity. Thirdly, Far and her sister, Winnifred Eaton, who employed a Japanese pseudonym Onoto Watanna, were the pioneers in adapting Asian subject matter to fiction.[3] Their positive portrayal of Asian Americans reverses the omnipresent devalued images such as Dr. Fu Manchu and Fah Lo Suee in North American literary imagination.[4] Most importantly, Far is the first *Chinese Canadian* (my emphasis) woman writer to probe the conflation of ethnic hybridity and transgressive sexuality and to challenge conventional nineteenth-century conceptions of gender and culture. Heralding these critical notions, which have become so heatedly debated a century later, Far positioned herself as a biracial celibate woman writer within her contemporary white male-dominated literary culture. This positioning epitomizes the transgression and subversion of stereotyped Chinese women as silenced victims of racial discrimination, patriarchal domination, and sexual misrepresentation.

This chapter first examines the historical context and then analyzes the roles and transgressive representations of Chinese women in the major short stories in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912) and in other pieces written particularly during Far's Montreal period (1890-1896), a period where the writer began to use the pen name Sui Sin Far for the stories she published in different periodicals.[5] I trace Far's acute perception of the problematics of sexuality, subjectivity, and ethnicity, which remain crucial to contemporary Chinese Canadian literature. In an attempt to generate new debates and possibilities for Chinese/Asian Canadian Studies in the new millennium, I propose a new reading of the confluence of race, gender, and sexuality in the work of the first Chinese Canadian woman writer at the turn of the twentieth century.

1.1 *Place d'Armes* or *Sui Sin Far*?: Sui Sin Far's Montreal Period

To understand the writer's gesture and the characters' worlds in her stories, it is essential to delineate some (auto)biographical vignettes as well as the socio-historical background of Chinese Canadian women's status in fin-de-siècle North America, particularly in Montreal.[6] Sui Sin Far, born Edith Maude Eaton, was the first biracial person of Chinese and British parentage in North America to publish fiction about her ethnic identity. In that sense, she has been considered the first Asian American writer. Born in Macclesfield, England, as the oldest of sixteen children, Far emigrated at age nine with her family first to the United States and then to Montreal, Canada. In Shanghai Far's British father met her Chinese mother, who was adopted by an English missionary couple that gave her an English education. An outsider to Chinatown, Far was raised in

an Anglophone household and was unfamiliar with the Chinese language. Therefore, several questions arise about her complicated background. To what extent can it be presupposed that Far identified as half-Chinese given that her family maintained a public image as Anglophone Canadian? What led this Eurasian writer to assume a Chinese-identified voice? To what degree did she speak as a "native informant" to disseminate the limited insider's knowledge? What did the portrayal and betrayal of Chinese women signify at the time? These issues will be examined in the first section of this chapter prior to an in-depth analysis of transgressive representations in her stories.

Far's early career as journalist in Montreal should not be dismissed because Montreal, a culturally hybrid and politically polemical locale, provided this young writer with rich source materials for writing and ensured her literary career. In Montreal, Far received her education, and in the 1880s she worked as stenographer, typesetter journalist, and storywriter. In addition, Far taught English at a Sunday school: a profession that allowed her "to affirm the stigmatized half of her racial heritage by helping integrate Chinese immigrants into her own larger community" (Ferens 49). The initial writings dating from 1888 were published in *Dominion Illustrated*, Montreal's new monthly dedicated to the promotion of Canada. The events described in her writings record the turn-of-the-century literary environment of eastern Canada, and Far's journalistic stories present Canadian characters, settings, and subject matter and focus mainly on gender or family relations.[7] Her eight early pieces in *Dominion Illustrated*, all signed "Edith Eaton," as White-Parks observes, should not be trivialized in the writer's early apprenticeship (69-70). Therefore, I consider her Montreal writing to be an important indicator of the early voice as a writer, who later self-consciously chose to

change her name and her concern from the English to the Chinese side of her heritage. Far's entry into the literary circle at the time raises several significant notions pertaining to the role and position of women, especially minority women, in the emerging Canadian national formation and ethnic visibility.

When the Eatons first settled in Montreal, the family resided in the French industrial suburb on the east side of St. Laurent Boulevard, Montreal's recognized line demarcating the English and the French communities.[8] Living in a segregated community, as both Anglophone and Chinese, Far most likely experienced difficulty finding a cultural niche. In tracing Far's early struggles within a bicultural and bilingual milieu, White-Parks notices that "as a native-born English [and Chinese] woman living in a French Canadian neighborhood and as a newswoman, Far certainly would have encountered, both personally and professionally, the national and ethnic conflicts involved" (*SSF* 64). "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian" describes her initial exclusion from and discrimination by both Anglophone and Francophone communities: the English-speaking kids label the Eaton children as "Chinky, Chinky, Chinaman, yellow-face, pig-tail, rat-eater" (219) whereas the Québécois villagers gibe at "the little black heads" murmuring, "Les pauvres enfants…Chinoise, Chinoise" (220). The ingrained awareness of her difference, instead of allowing her to assimilate into the white communities, prompted the protagonist to proudly declare her Chinese identity: "Behold, how great and glorious and noble are the Chinese people" ("Leaves" 228). The hostile environment in which she grew up taught Far to arm herself for "many pitched battles" ("Leaves" 220). As she was exposed to Chinese subjects functioning as compelling cultural sources, Far gradually engaged herself in the struggle to defy

dominant definitions of identity and subjectivity. Far's journalism in Montreal was important because it provided an entrée for her to explore the Chinese culture of her mother's ancestry, which always fascinated and inspired her. In terms of her career, the Chinese reportage opened doors to the Chinese subject matter, which gained a growing readership as the century reached its conclusion.

To place turn-of-the-century Montreal within a broader historical context specifies Far's thematic concerns about ethnicity and gender. The peak of Far's professional life in Montreal was also the decade of the vexed "Chinese question," [9] a recurring remark in news articles, editorials, and letters to editors during the time of the annexation of Hawaii and the Philippines and the Spanish-American wars. As North American interest in Orientals increased, China and Chinese Canadians became part of Montreal's daily news in Far's era. The growing Chinese Canadian community in Montreal through the 1880s and 1890s would provide rich source materials for any reporter inclined invoke polemical political topics, and by doing "Chinese reporting," Far stepped into a new inter-cultural context, wherein she would locate her fiction's primary subject matter and begin to establish her literary voice. For a woman of half-Chinese descent, these materials would offer a depth far beyond professional interest.[10]

1.2 Chinoise(rie): The Ambivalence of Chinese Women in the Gaze of the West

It is pivotal to locate Far's self-presentation as a woman within the historical frame, where Chinese women in North America (collectively) experienced powerlessness and muting in the face of internalized negative definition. At the turn of the century,

Chinese women in both Canada and the United States were a rarity; at the time, they were "such an exotic curiosity that money could be made by simply putting them on display" (Ling, *Between Worlds* 9). In the United States, the first Chinese woman immigrant was Marie Seise, who arrived as a slave in San Francisco in February 1848. The second Chinese woman immigrating to the U.S.A. was Ah Choi, who debarked in 1848 in San Francisco, where she worked as a prostitute and later ran a brothel in the Bay Area.[11] However, Chinese women landed in Canada much later in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the history of the Chinese Canadians is a chronicle of institutionalized racism. Starting with the head taxes of $50 for entry in 1885, Canadian legislation increased the fee to $500 by 1904. From 1923 to 1943, the Exclusion Act prohibited Chinese immigration and made it impossible for Chinese workers to bring their families over (*Jin Guo* 17). The Chinese Exclusion Act was only repealed in 1943, and naturalized citizenship for Asians was permitted in 1954.

The first Chinese woman arriving in Victoria was Mrs. Kwong Lee, the wife of a wealthy merchant from San Francisco, and many of the early Chinese women came to Canada from 1885 onward.[12] Those who entered Canada in the company of men were listed as their wives, but many of these women were concubines, or house servants for the men, since it was socially acceptable for a man to have more than one wife in late-nineteenth-century China. *The British Colonist*, Victoria's newspaper, propagated the distorted image of the exotic evils of the Chinese community: "the few women who came to Canada during the nineteenth century were often viewed as 'prostitutes' by the larger Canadian society" (qtd. in *Jin Guo* 19). As Amy Ling points out, "these first two Chinese women to immigrate to the U.S.A. – the servant and the prostitute – neatly fit the

stereotypes of the Chinese (or East Asian) woman as demure, diminutive, and deferential" (*BW* 10). These stereotypes are strongly sexualized.

Viewed within such a historically ambivalent context, the late nineteenth century was not only a time of anti-Chinese sentiment, but also a time of growing interest in chinoiserie. It was within this ambivalent attitude that Far's work was received by her contemporaries. Therefore, Far's positioning is noteworthy because her stories, on the one hand, reveal the lives of individual women of Chinese ancestry, and on the other hand, reflect a portion of Canadian cultural history and the negotiations between two cultures. As Chinese women during the era of Chinese Exclusion in Canada (1885-1943) did not "speak" for themselves in many published English texts, most of their stories were mediated/distorted by other white Anglophone writers, who created stereotypical images of Chinese women as one-dimensional beings – a monolithic sexualized racial Other ubiquitous in most North American literary works. The exotic/erotic construction was to lend spice to other more "representative" characters' narratives, and the familiar stereotypes were imbued with Orientalist sexual connotations such as Shy Lotus Blossom or Dangerous Dragon Lady. But as Ling and White-Parks both point out, "we must remember, however, that being half English, educated entirely in English and English Canadian schools, and growing to maturity among English and French Canadians, Sui Sin Far – as Edith Eaton – could not help but imbibe some of the Orientalist notions and terms of her place and time" ("Introduction" 5). Consequently, Far explored the Chinese Canadian experience and sensibility when most women writers were struggling to seek a voice in the public sphere. Like Virginia Woolf, this Eurasian New Woman redefined women's roles and self-representations.

1.3 Chinese Narcissus: Self-Representations of a New Woman

Since female voices did not have a clear and secure place in most literary productions, early women writers engaged in the struggle for self-representation and for the establishment of a new literary tradition. For early women writers, self-representation itself was a pearl of great price, made hard to attain by ideologies of gender and the realities they described and legitimated. However, such a voice certainly did not operate in a vacuum. Voice is not merely a question of giving voice to or taking voice by the silenced; it is also a question of what identity ma(r)kers shall count in constituting what can be said and how one can separate such markers given the multivalent subject (Myrsiades 7). Self-representations for early women writers challenged gender imperatives that would have otherwise kept these women invisible or contained within traditionally defined images, and in many cases, exposed the social mechanisms of exclusion. It should be noted that many women writers were under the demands of a socially coercive or exploitative sexuality within an institutionalized patriarchy. The act of writing signaled women writers' defiance and required that they transgress their assigned role constituted by phallocentrism. Women's writing becomes a form of resistance to imposed sexuality, a political response to the conditions of patriarchal sexual politics. Elizabeth Meese (1986) provides an insightful analysis that situates early women writers' gender and sexuality within the phallocentric writing trajectory:

> Perhaps it is for similar reasons that so many of the better known women writers have defied sociosexual codes, and have been lesbian, single, and/or childless. Tillie Olsen illustrates this point in her litany of distinguished women writers who remained childless, such as Willa Cather, Ellen Glasgow, Gertrude Stein, [just to name a few]... Of course, not only are these writers childless, some of them –

> Welty, O'Connor, and Glasgow, for example – never married. Others among them are lesbians: Willa Cather, Gertrude Stein, Lillian Smith, and May Sarton. In any case, we could say that they all struggled to possess their own bodies in order to possess themselves as writers, as thinking/speaking subjects. (121)

Far's background and relationship to contemporary (white) women writers are key to understanding the conflated issues in her writing: gender roles, sexual representations, and biracial identity. In addition, Far boldly asserted her Chinese identity and her subversive choice as a spinster. Acknowledging that single women were mocked during the Victorian time, she remained unmarried, channeling her energy into the care of her siblings and other Chinese people. To be able to write, Far, eschewed domesticity and carved a career for herself. Speaking as a New Woman, in Smith-Rosenberg's words, Far "reject[ed] conventional female roles and assert[ed] their right to a career, to a public voice, to visible power, laid claim to the rights and privileges customarily accorded bourgeois men" (qtd. in Ammons, *Conflicting Stories* 7). Extending the angel-in-the-house image of feminine self-censorship that Virginia Woolf and other New Women writers have identified, Far silhouettes, through autobiographical accounts, a biracial woman's life in a white men's world. Sean McCann further argues that Far, in invoking evolutionist ideas, was out of step with the major women writers of her generation: Wharton, Stein, Cather, Glasgow and so forth.

> Though rarely progressives themselves, those writers [mentioned above] tended to share attitudes and intellectual presumptions with the leading thinkers of the era. Casting themselves as reform-oriented literary geniuses, they frequently invoked evolutionist ideas of racial progress and national destiny in order to repudiate the constrains of nineteenth-century domesticity, and placing themselves at the forefront of cultural development, they often trumpeted their own emancipation by contrasting the public achievements of authorship to the limits of femininity. (78)

Writing from within a sinophobic, imperialist, and misogynistic climate, as a pioneering feminist different from her white female "comrades" who had to strive only for gender equality, Far had to battle with relentless social, racial, and sexual animosities. Therefore, for an adopted Eurasian woman to write and publish a book in English, she must have been a rebel against two cultures, for writing, an act of rebellion and self-assertion, runs counter to Confucian values.[13] In Chinese culture, a woman's assigned roles of materially preserving the family and upholding traditional ways pose multiple problems in her efforts to claim an individualized voice and agency. In addition to the limitations of her social status and her different ethnicity, her gender as a woman is another vital factor significant to the experience of immigrants and minority groups in North America. Ling writes that "the female sex itself is a liability in any patriarchy, and the ethnic minority female is triply vulnerable: as Chinese in a Euro-American world, as a woman in a Chinese man's world, and as a Chinese woman in a white man's world" (*BW* 15). Writing, a kind of self-representation against the defined roles, becomes an act of defiance and rebellion (Chu 5).

Moreover, Far took the Chinese name of a flower popular in Chinese and symbolic in English (*Sui Sin Far* 水仙花 designates narcissus in Chinese). Edith Eaton, acquainted with the Western connotations of narcissus, chose this pseudonym with a strong sense of self-representation. Edith Eaton is her English name, but Sui Sin Far is her literary construct; this fabricated "Chinese" name is not a conventional one in Chinese culture, but narcissus in Western mythology symbolizes "self-contemplative, introverted, and self-sufficient attitude" (Cirlot 216). Self-representation is inscribed within Far's stories, with which the writer hoped to effect a change by means of her pen,

to be the pioneer in bridging the Occident and the Orient. When Far writes as an agent from her complex subject positioning, she cannot separate the strands of gender, ethnicity, individual and collective identity, where one element could fluidly shift to the foreground as another could fade to the rear ground of inscription. To situate her voice within these complexities, Far uses what Gloria T. Hull calls "tricky positionality" (155) to produce self-affirming subjects, subjects that make legible their marginalization in dominant discourses. As well, she turns the stereotypes held against her around to give voice to the subaltern: the underprivileged Chinese immigrant women.

My arguments throughout the remaining part of this chapter address Far's endeavor to write against and respond to the stereotypical female representations created by the Anglo-Saxon male writers. My discussion accentuates Chinese Canadian women's subjectivity engendered from unsettling the two mutually, often problematically, constitutive aspects of race (Asian-Caucasian), gender (male-female), and sexuality (heterosexuality-homosexuality). Rather than highlight the "dual personality" model which renders the subject neurotic by the incommensurability of her cultural and ethnic halves, Far crosses various lines to destabilize conventional binary categories. Adopting the ambivalent "tricky positionality," Far transgresses these identificatory practices in the terms of ethnicity (racial hybridity), gender (transvestism) and sexuality (female-female desire).

1.4 A Hybridized Body: Racial Crossing, Miscegenation, and Eurasian Identity

I will first analyze the two racial halves connected organically through the Eurasian subject(ivity) in "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of a Eurasian." Following the analysis, I will explore the tricky positionality articulated in the dialectic between miscegenation and anti-miscegenation in the two stories "Her Chinese Husband" and "The Story of One White Woman Who Married a Chinese."

In "Leaves" Far speaks for the first time as a Eurasian. This autobiographical essay focuses on the relations of education and race of a Eurasian in Caucasian-dominated societies, and the story reveals the pain endured by a person considered socially unacceptable on two counts: her race and her celibacy. The protagonist describes, through personal anecdotes, the growing awareness of her biracial identity, her sensitivity to the curiosity and hostility of others, and the development of her racial pride.

Raised in bohemian poverty in Canada, isolated from her paternal Victorian past and her maternal Chinese antiquity, the narrator describes herself as a hybrid subject. That unusual background leads her to "a career-long fascination with liminality – an obsession with border states and indefinite conditions that appear in nearly all her stories – and it inspired her distrust of every invocation of collective identity" (McCann 75). It is interesting to note that only a few years before the publication of *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, W.E.B. Dubois published the first edition of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), in which he describes a similar stance for African Americans as he writes of a "double-consciousness" through which "one ever feels his two-ness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (3).

Caught in what Ling calls "the between-worlds condition," the narrator lives in a condition akin to what Homi Bhabha terms "cultural ambivalence."[14] Given her dual condition inherent in the split between the two regions of her parents, she consciously recognizes this difference and attempts to construct a subjectivity from such cultural ambivalence.

The narrator recalls she first learned at age four that she was "something different and apart from other children" (218). Seeing her difference as strength, the narrator announces her pride to other children: "I'd rather be Chinese than anything else in the world" (219). Far reconciles all the conflicts by asserting a subjectivity engendered from different border-crossings. In her most explicit statement on subjectivity and identity, Far describes herself as a "crosser" with "no nationality" and "not anxious to claim any":

> So I roam backward and forward across the continent. When I am East, my heart is West. When I am West, my heart is East. Before long I hope to be in China. As my life began in my father's country it may end in my mother's. After all I have no nationality and I am not anxious to claim any. Individuality is more than nationality. 'You are you and I am I,' says Confucius. I give my right hand to the Occidentals and my left to the Orientals, hoping that between them they will not utterly destroy the insignificant 'connecting link.' And that's all. ("Leaves" 230)

In "Leaves," Eurasian children's "peculiar cast" calls forth the "mocking cries of 'Chinese' 'Chinese'" (222). However, Far is positive and proud to promote her Eurasian identity: "I believe that some day a great part of the world will be Eurasian. I cheer myself with the thought that I am but a pioneer. A pioneer should glory in suffering" (224). Situating her new self-affirming hybrid identity within the discursive interpellation of history, gender and nation, Far strategically adopts border-crossing to unsettle rigid oppositions such as East-West or woman-man, rendering the binarism volatile. "Leaves"

can serve as a point of departure for discussing the conflation of Far's political stance and sexual/racial differences central to her writing; this intersection can best be measured by the norms she transgresses on several levels: crossing races (miscegenation), crossing national borders (smuggling and emigrating), and crossing genders (transvestism).

In the interracial stories of *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, Far uses gender strategies to reverse the stereotypical White-father/Asian-mother to Chinese-father/White-mother and to critique the discourse of miscegenation. Before I proceed to examine racial crossing, it is necessary to know how miscegenation at the turn of the century was officially legislated for white societies to maintain their "racial purity" by prohibiting interracial marriage in North America. The fact that 90 percent of early Chinese immigrants were male, combined with anti-miscegenation laws and laws prohibiting Chinese laborers' wives from entering Canada, forced these immigrants to congregate in the bachelor communities in various Chinatowns.[15] The anti-miscegenation laws denying Asians both a proper sexuality and human subjectivity constitute in themselves an exclusion of non-white sexuality and race. A 1933 article in the *California Law Review* quotes a popular claim that miscegenation results in "'unnatural amalgamations productive of sickly and effeminate offspring'" (W.I.C. 117). Chinese Canadian historian Anthony B. Chan also points out that interracial, sexual contact at the beginning of the twentieth century was a taboo "unless it involved white men and Chinese women" (80). As for the sexual relations between white women and Chinese men, "it was the Chinese men who were accused of 'violating' white women" (Chan 80). Miscegenation thus antagonizes the attempt to maintain the purity of white society.[16]

At the core of the discourse of anti-miscegenation lie both misogyny and xenophobia that defy (racial) effeminacy as a disease. As North American societies gradually accepted more Chinese women to enter the continent, Chinese women became more visible. However, within the anti-miscegenation discourse, these women (and men), in conjunction with a longstanding Orientalist tradition that cast the Asian in the role of the silent and passive Other, have been reduced to degraded sexual representations (Cheung, "The Woman Warrior vs. the Chinaman Pacific" 309). In SKY Lee's novel, the recurrent motif of *métissage* linked to racial and legislative exclusion is also salient; the second chapter of my dissertation will develop a further analysis of the interconnectedness of miscegenation and sexuality pervasive in Chinese Canadian writing before the Exclusion Era.

In contrast to contemporary (white male) writers, such as Frank Norris and Francis Bret Harte, who intensify the threat of miscegenation (i.e., the "yellow peril" in their fictions) through relations with debased Asians,[17] Far uses the same theme to foreground the correlation of race and gender. However, in her stories on interracial marriage (usually Chinese husbands with Caucasian wives), Far creates characters who are morally and spiritually superior to their white counterparts. Her stories thus function as pleas for racial acceptance and as critiques of Western patriarchy; the stories also demonstrate the emerging cultural crisis of Victorian society – an ambivalence towards masculine striving and aggressiveness. Far's response to this crisis takes the form of Victorian sentimentalism, with which she brings an idealization of the femininity and the Oriental (gender and race) in mustering her criticisms of racial intolerance and patriarchal dominance.

In "The Story of One White Woman Who Married a Chinese" and "Her Chinese Husband: Sequel to the Story of the White Woman Who Married a Chinese," Far celebrates interracial marriage; the Eurasian identity from miscegenation reverses the stereotypical representations of gender roles. As the interracial marriage usually pairs a Chinese father/husband with a white mother/wife, Far presents the Chinese man as a man of sensibility, a positive image countering the then common image of the degraded "feminized" object. In the two stories, Liu Kanghi, the Chinese husband of Minnie, an American woman, is portrayed as a "simple and sincere" man whereas James Carson, Minnie's first white husband, though "much more of an ardent lover than ever had been Liu Kanghi," is a man of "cold anger and contempt" ("HCH" 78). The reversed gender dynamic forms an important gesture for contemporary readers to redefine gender-race identities. As Jinhua Emma Teng has argued, Far's "concerns in the 'Chinese husband' stories are much in line with Tennyson's ideas about the feminization of the gentleman: aggression, achievement, Philistinism, and predatory sexuality are criticized; tenderness, nurturing, gentility, and withdrawal from striving are praised" (101).

Tennyson's attempts to move beyond the fixed gender roles towards an ideal of androgyny are articulated in Far's ideas of multiple masculinities and femininities. Influenced by Chinese culture but at the same time edified by Victorian values, Far held a double vision in writing. Far could also have been quite influenced by Tennyson because her mother read Tennyson's "Idylls of the King" to the children who would act out the characters. Far, probably taking up the Tennysonian idealization of feminine identification, "plays with the idea of the man who is 'like' woman, and the woman who is 'like' man" (Teng 101). As Teng argues, "The Chinese man is allied with the white

woman in these narratives: not only do they share 'feminine' sensibilities and characteristics, they are also both victims of the domination of white men" (108).

Far's interracial marriage stories imply that if miscegenation is read as a symptom of the degeneration of Western civilization, it is the excesses of patriarchal masculinity that are to blame. By reversing the conventionally defined roles and advocating interracial marriage, Far critiques both racism and the patriarchal suppression of women. By constructing the positive Eurasian subject through interracial marriage, Far portrays Chinese women as desiring subjects who seek control of their lives. The Chinese women in the stories could have been Far's and her mother's mouthpiece. Far's Chinese mother, Grace A. Trefusis Eaton, who conventionally would have remained homebound while awaiting an arranged marriage, was radical and independent enough to travel and choose her own husband – another clear stance of a New Woman's rebellion against patriarchal society at the time. Far's mother exerted a profound influence over Far since her childhood. In many of Far's works, not only does she eulogize the New Woman image, but she attempts to construct a new female subjectivity – the Eurasian female subject that transgresses various boundaries.

1.5 Boy-Girl-Boy versus Girl-Boy-Girl: Tricksterism and Transvestism

Far's tradition-breaking audacity expressed in her literary transgression, I argue, is articulated in trickster discourse, or the aforementioned "tricky positionality." As White-Parks points out, the trickster figure appears in two postures: the author as fiction-maker, shape-shifter, and rewriter of cultural scripts ("'We Wear the Mask'" 2-3). The

trickster is a figure who crosses the boundary between male and female, living and dead, clean and dirty; it is the mythic embodiment of ambiguity and ambivalence, contradiction and paradox. Ammons also argues that the concept of the trickster figure's highly disruptive nature "offers a way of thinking about the turn of the century that brings into view authors, texts, and traditions ignored until very recently or, if mentioned, denigrated, dismissed, or misunderstood" ("Introduction" 1). Furthermore, I suggest that tricksterism, in the form of cross-dressing here, destabilizes the dominant system by adopting various conflicting identities to open up possibilities for creative rebellion and re-imagination. In this regard, Far is not only the first biracial fiction writer bringing up Chinese Canadian experiences, but also a pioneer woman writer employing tricksterism to challenge stereotypical representations of women's roles and sexuality at the turn of the century.

I would like to suggest that the trickster as a literary figure bypasses outmoded mythic structures and deconstructs essentialist representations of gender. I will foreground tricksterism in my reading of Far's transgressive sexual politics and poetics. In particular, cross-dressing as a frequent motif in Far's work may be regarded as a form of tricksterism that functions to complicate issues of gender, sexuality, and race, and eventually to subvert the reader's expectation. In "Trickster Discourse: Comic Holotropes and Language Games," Gerald Vizenor coins a postmodern trickster discourse that interrogates sanctioned roles, celebrates sexual ambiguity, and signals a cultural revolution. In Far's writing, the trickster stance that reveals complex mechanisms functions as an important trope for reading culture and gender. To survive in an oppressive, restrictive, racist world, Far and her female characters have to transgress

certain norms; to transgress but at the same time to survive, Far adopts the (literary) strategy of cross-dressing and cross-gendering to reinvent multiple identities. Ammons points out the significance of such transgression:

> Perhaps most fascinating, however, are *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*'s images of female cross-dressing, rebellion, and secret, subversive writing that invite us to reflect on Sui Sin Far's own story as the first woman of Chinese heritage in the United States to publicly and successfully make writing about Chinese American experiences her own life's work. (*Conflicting Stories* 116)

To survive depends on adaptation to one's environment, and camouflage (cross-dressing) is not only a legitimate strategy but also a clever and critical one (Ling, "Creating One Self" 311). Survival for many women characters in their worlds often depends on metamorphosis, or the transformation of socially and culturally formulated realities. Female cross-dressing, more than just "survival," I argue, subverts gender norms by transgressing accepted cultural codes for both gender and sexuality: the garments. Larissa Lai, the third Chinese Canadian writer under study, uses the theme of metamorphosis in more complicated mechanizations to rewrite cultural, historical, and sexual identities. In *When Fox Is a Thousand*, where Chinese legends and contemporary Chinese Canadian life are interwoven, cross-dressing is not merely an Ovidian metamorphosis that the characters undergo, but Lai draws the reader's attention to costumes/clothing/dressing, which signifies identity reinvention. Moreover, cross-dressing practices undermine one-sided representations of a person's identity. The thematic significance of cross-dressing/transformation will be discussed in depth in Chapter Three.

In this section, I expound tricksterism enacted in cross-dressing in the two stories: "The Chinese Boy-Girl" and "The Smuggling of Tie Co." Tricksterism's overriding presence reinforces Far's transgressive stance to demonstrate cultural disruptions wherein Far manages to transcribe her political message into a frivolous representation.

In "The Chinese Boy-Girl," Ku Yum, a young Chinese boy dressed as a girl, attends a girls' school run by the Caucasian missionary teacher, Miss Mason. The schoolteacher has obtained a court order to ask Ku Yum's father to have the boy "put into a home for Chinese girls," because unlike other "demure little maidens," Ku Yum is "running around with the boys" ("CGB" 156). The boy's father, Ten Suie, explains why he has disguised his son as a girl "attired in blue cotton garments, and wearing her long, shining hair in a braid interwoven with silks of many colors" ("CGB" 155) to chase away the evil spirits he believes to have killed his other four sons. Ostensibly, the story is about the forcible assimilation of the immigrants' offspring: Miss Mason acts as "the agent for assimilation" (White-Parks, *SSF* 129) and produces uniformity and conformity for the pupils to comply with ("CBG" 156). However, Far's tricksterism turns the story into an identity farce that challenges both assimilation and gender.

Cross-dressing in this story should be inscribed within a specific cultural context, in which transvestism is not necessarily charged with Western concepts of gender and sexual ambiguity. However, under the Victorian assumptions at work, when the story was written, the disguised boy in North American society might have been endowed with a gender concern. When Ten Suie forces Miss Mason to acknowledge her faulty perceptions of the Chinese American students and the abuse of power in her court order, the schoolteacher's "missionary" vision of life is mocked and proven false. By exposing

Miss Mason's incapability to decode the culture of the Other, Far creates a counter-perspective reversal. Structural oppositions reveal the difference between how Ku Yum as a girl should be constructed by white society and how Ku Yum as a boy is actually educated in his Chinese family. The reader is trapped along with Miss Mason into misperceiving reality because of the gender-and-culture-bound expectations for a Chinese American "girl." The crossing of gender and dress from boy to girl and finally from girl back to boy, "stages a transfer of gender that undermines the process whereby gender and race are substantialized, codified, and rigidified through the name" (Cutter 143). Through tricksteric manipulation, Far constructs a border-crossing subject (either the Eurasian in "Leaves" or the girl-boy in this story) who inhabits several categories but who simultaneously unsettles these categories. This story creates a site where gender and race collide, rendering such site permeable and mutable.

In "The Smuggling of Tie Co," another cross-dressing story, Far further complicates gender construction and cultural hegemony with added questions of homoerotic ambiguity. Here, tricksterism is used metaphorically in a gendered, sexualized context. This story reveals the ambiguity inherent in transvestism that evokes the performative exchange of desire in the scenes of erotic and narrative seduction. In the story, a Chinese woman disguised as a man dies rather than betray the European-American man, who helps her illegally enter the United States from Canada. The title character Tie Co is believed to be a man until the customs officers drag "her" body out of St. Lawrence River, where Tie Co jumps to save the life of the smuggler Jack Fabian. Before the reader knows Tie Co's true identity, Far presents a feminized Oriental "boy" in contrast with the virile white man. At first glance, the reader might find in Far's

contrivance nothing original: exposing the Oriental-feminization and Occidental-masculinization dichotomy and constructing the white man as the insider in the center and the Chinese woman as the outsider on the periphery.

From the outset, Jack Fabian is portrayed as hyper-masculine: "uncommonly strong in person, tall and well built, with fine features and a pair of keen, steady blue eyes, gifted with a sort of rough eloquence and of much personal fascination" ("STC" 104). Tie Co, an illegal resident in Canada, is introduced as a "nice-looking young Chinaman [...] dressed in citizen's clothes" ("STC" 106). Paying Fabian, "the boldest man" "who engage[s] in contrabanding Chinese from Canada into the United States," ("STC" 104) Tie Co is assisted by the smuggler to cross the border. As Martha Cutter argues, "Sui Sin Far's texts about gender crossing often involve smuggling: the illicit crossing of a body into a forbidden space (a 'boy' smuggles into a classroom for Chinese girls, a 'girl' smuggles out of the country in her Chinese father's clothes, a man smuggles 'Chinese' bodies across 'American' borders)" (147). But the story is more than just national border crossing, in which smuggling represents a process "whereby a hidden knowledge insinuates its way into a binary opposition, and in so doing begins to dismantle it" (Cutter 147). Literally, border-crossing obscures the boundaries to separate their individual subjectivities from each other, and textually, "it blurs the differences between man and woman, heterosexual and homosexual, life and death, as it blurs the distinction between two nations already uncomfortably similar in history and language" (Song 318).

Diverging from most interpretations that the story reinforces negative stereotypes about the submissive, feminized Oriental (wo)man and his/her inferiority to the white

man, my intention is to propose that Far critiques Fabian's rigid Western masculinity, the way she critiques the masculinized West by advocating interracial marriage. However, the text's essentialist, dichotomized racial and gender politics should not be dismissed: Fabian's lofty sense of self in contrast to Tie Co's self-effacement and the white man's hyper- masculinity vis-à-vis the Asian (wo)man's effeminacy. Song argues that Far uses this contrapuntal dichotomy "to weave a tale of gendered Orientalism – a tale that presents the potential undermining of a white heterosexual masculine identity and its presumed right to lead as it comes into contact with alterity, before narratively ensuring its safety once more" (318). The text, however, unsettles the dichotomy and creates an ambivalence about Tie Co's death that remains a "mystery" for Jack Fabian.

The story's pronounced statement on gender ambiguity and mutable sexual identity is located in the final lines, where Tie Co's suicide does not shut down the racial possibilities that this transgressive, transracial, transgendered body has rendered. In death, her/his body escapes the anxious process of definition and delimitation that remains mysterious. Far's potentially disruptive trickster strategy remains unstated by leaving an Oriental ambiguity enigmatic to Western readers. Tie Co's death and sacrifice can be seen as a tribute to the sanctity of romantic devotion and as a white man's fantasy about the willing subservience of the racialized Other. A similar theme is echoed in the intrigue of *M. Butterfly* (1989), where Chinese (fe)male opera singer Song Liling employs orientalism and sexuality over the French diplomat. The playwright David Henry Hwang, Far's literary great grandson by three-quarters of a century, inscribes the same longstanding Orientalist discourse in this play. Hwang's transvestite functions as "other kinds of border-crossing, like acting and spying, both of which are appropriations

of alternative and socially constructed subject positions for cultural and political ends" (Garber 239). The overlapping message could be summarized in Min Song's contention:

> If Orientalism is partly the imaginative typification of the East and its subjects as a highly exoticized and subtly treacherous woman, one who tempts the 'White Man' from his civilized but enervating way of life, the East's male subjects must also appear effeminate, their representations carrying connotations of both allure and danger. This opens up a whole constellation of sexual possibilities that depend upon the powerful connections between effeminization, repulsion, desire, and same-sex longing. (310-11)

Disguised as man, Tie Co, Far's (intentional?) exoticized/eroticized invention, could represent, in Butlerian terms, the performative quality of gender and the absence of a "natural" gender. In the interplay of identities (Chinese, white, male, female, homosexual, heterosexual, and so forth), transvestism offers the reader a participatory exchange of cross-cultural and cross-sexual identification, imagination, and political agencies. In fact, Far's transvestite figure is not innovative in fin-de-siècle Canadian literature. As Peter Dickinson has argued, there is a "narrative transvestism" inherent in many twentieth-century Canadian texts, in which the dialectic of display and concealment "open[s] up a cross-gender space of liminal minority gay [I would say any 'sexual'] identification" (18). The thematic crossings in gender and sexuality also pervade the writings by other Chinese Canadian women writers.

Cross-dressing and cross-gendering certainly transgress normative constructions of gender and sexuality. The disguised male as female in "Chinese Boy-Girl" and female as male in "The Smuggling of Tie Co" have put their own gender and sexual identities in flux. Furthermore, the homoerotic implications inherent in cross-dressing in Far's stories do not simply place the binary constructions of gender and sexuality under erasure, but

such transgressive desire/desiring also challenges the heterosexual system. Tie Co, orientalized through the gaze of Fabian, seems "so different from the others," and when the young lad confesses to Fabian that (s)he loves him, Fabian silently acknowledges his sentiment: "I don't care for your fifty dollars.... Instead of buying you a ticket for the city of New York I shall take train with you for Toronto" ("STC" 107). It could be speculated that since Fabian's potential queer leaning was unspeakable at the time, he could have manifested homoeroticism through the unspoken action. For Tie Co, cross-dressing is a strategy for survival to cover up her vulnerable position as a "colored" woman in North America, but for Fabian, the camouflaged lad with his gender ambiguity stalks his (sexual) fantasy: "Fabian looked at the lad protectingly, wondering in a careless way why this Chinaman seemed to him so different from the others" ("STC" 107). After Tie Co's confession, Fabian comforts the Chinese "more heartily than he felt" ("STC" 107). Because no one can explain the "mystery" of Tie Co and her/his death, the text therefore suggests the radical possibility of a desire that is both miscegenating and homosexual. At this juncture, it is clear to see Far's transgressive approach as upsetting the then normative sexual construction: she strategically resolves Tie Co's conflicts by using another transgression (same-sex desire and desiring) to create a literary vision antithetical to the reader of the time.

1.6 A Nosegay of Chinese Lilies: Female Bonding and Female-Female Desire

In a time when (female) homosexuality was still a pathological, unspeakable term, cross-dressing was not the only camouflage, or covert expression, of same-sex desire;

sisterhood or camaraderie was another. Female bonding in some of Far's stories clearly manifests a more acceptable form of female-female desire. Although the lesbian (in today's term) identification in these stories has autobiographical connotations, it does not mean that their author is lesbian[18]. Nevertheless, the descriptions of the characters could be suggestive of the author's personal life. Throughout her entire life, Far remained celibate and referred to herself as "a very serious and sober-minded spinster" ("Leaves" 226). She was the only one of nine daughters who never married. She found her happiness not in a husband and family circle, but rather in the satisfaction of a successful writing career and in helping other underprivileged Chinese women. It is through female camaraderie that Far attempted to defy norms and break stereotypes, and it is also in this vein, I argue, that her following literary granddaughters weave their (femme)eroticism and maternal connection into the fabric of Chinese Canadian women's writing.

Most critics have either eschewed or downplayed the lesbian subtext in Far's stories. Amy Ling is the only one who briefly evokes Far's "lesbian sensibility" (*BW* 49), without, however, developing an inquiry into the subject. Three stories in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* stage what might be called a lesbian inclination. In "The Chinese Lily," Sin Far, the heroine (the name alludes clearly to the author herself) devotes herself to another woman; in "Spring Impressions," the passage is tinged with unknown (lesbian) melancholia; and in "The Heart's Desire," Far glorifies female-female relationship. Several stories in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* are concerned with friendship between women, but the most pronounced statement on female bonding appears in "The Chinese Lily": "The woman must be the friend of the woman, and the man the friend of man" (103). In these stories, as Ling argues, "we find not only the woman-bonding theme, but the ideal

of self-sacrifice, or martyrdom, as the ultimate expression of love" (*BW* 47). I contend that Far's explicit manifestation of sacrifice for other women implies sapphism.

From this vantage, I want to draw on the perception of relationships between women during the Victorian era and in late-imperial Chinese history. In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), Eve K. Sedgwick argues that "male" homosocial bonding in late-nineteenth-century literature maintained and transmitted patriarchal power, and that male-male bonds provided a better opportunity "to explore the ways in which the shapes of sexuality, and what counts as sexuality, both depend on and affect historical power relationships" (2). Sedgwick's use of the term "homosociality" conveys the extent to which such relationships inspire passions that displace heterosexual desires. Nevertheless, Sedgwick's argument, fairly similar to the Foucauldian assumption, excludes female bonding from (male) discourses of homosociality. It could be speculated that female bonding at that time was also of the unspeakable sort because women's relationships were constantly undermined by the compulsory heterosexuality of Victorian norms.

However, throughout Chinese culture and history, this rigid exclusion seems less conspicuous. In her book-length study of the traditions of homosocial and homoerotic relationships between women in late-imperial China (ca. 1600-1911), Tze-lan D. Sang traces Chinese women's same-sex desire, discussed formerly in terms of friendship and sisterhood, and its deferral and denunciation in Chinese history. Sang argues that in late-imperial male-authored literature on female sexuality, "female-female affection enjoys legitimacy as sisterhood, and female-female intercourse is viewed as a secondary, substitutive practice that does not exclude conventional marriage or cross-sex activity"

(21). And because "sex between women was probably considered a natural product of the culture of separate male (outer) and female (inner) spheres" (Sang 46), mutual longings and pleasures among women were not punitive or prohibitive.

Far as journalist doing "Chinese reportage" must have been informed of the political upheavals in the late Qing Dynasty and was thus aware of these gender and sexual implications between women in late-imperial China. Trapped between conflicting values concerning sexuality but more identified with the Chinese tradition, Far might have chosen the Chinese "naturalized" sisterhood as a guise for female same-sex desire. In Far's fiction, women as the vital members and participants of Chinatown communities perform leadership roles in ways that belie their small numbers. The key concern in most of her stories is with women who emerge from the shadows of patriarchal societies and demand visibility and female solidarity. If we read between the lines, these stories reveal the ambivalent female same-sex desire.

In "The Chinese Lily," Mermei, a cripple locked in her "Chinatown dwelling," has to depend on her brother Lin John for everything. One day, a young girl, whose name is Sin Far (this name could be the persona of Edith Eaton), comes to Mermei's door and extends to her "a blossom from a Chinese lily plant" (102). Their friendship soon creates a special bond absent from the world of men. Sin Far affirms to Mermei this special relationship: "The woman must be the friend of the woman, and the man the friend of the man. Is it not so in the country that Heaven loves?" (103). Mermei understands the meaning of the offered lily, and after accepting it, she beckons for her visitor to follow her into her room. As Cutter contends, because flowers are associated with eroticism and the body of women in Far's fiction, "one way of reading this exchange is that Sin Far

offers herself, her body, her flower, as an object of desire, as a replacement for the bodies of the gaily dressed women that Mermei desires, the bodies of the Chinese women who are entering the heterosexual marriage plot" (158).

The author seems to reject a heterosexual possibility. First, Sin Far's confession reveals her tormenting desire for Mermei:

> In the evening, when the day's duties are done, I am alone. Several times, hearing that you were sick, I ventured to your door; but failed to knock, because always when I drew near, I heard the voice of him whom they call your brother. Tonight, as I returned from an errand for my sister, I heard only the sound of weeping – so I hastened to my room and plucked the lily for you. ("CL" 103)

After Mermei's brother falls in love with Sin Far, a fire breaks out in the house, which forces Lin John to choose which woman to rescue. Sin Far urges that he rescue his sister, and thus Sin Far sacrifices her life for her love. The story, ending with a less "mysterious" tragedy than that in "The Smuggling of Tie Co," reveals an acknowledged lesbian love. Lin John, probably knowing the queer implication between Sin Far and his sister, consoles Mermei after Sin Far's death: "But you loved Sin Far better – and she loved you…and I did my duty with her approval, aye, at her bidding" ("CL" 104). It is possible that Sin Far refuses the heterosexual marriage plot and chooses death without her beloved Mermei.

Extending the female-female desire/desiring to a wider analysis, I want to pause for a moment and go back to Tie Co's story, in which Far brushes "the love that dare not speak its name," in Lee Edelman's words, although the reader finds it surprising that the homoerotic longing turns out to be a heterosexual mystery at the very end, where the sexual possibilities remain unsolved. Song offers an insightful interpretation of Tie Co's

suicide: "Metaphorically, Tie Co's sacrifice and the resulting recovery of a nameless body stands in appropriately both for the desire to commit a 'crime without a name' and for an inability to name that desire, an inability to enunciate 'the love that dare not speak its name'" (317). In "The Chinese Lily," Far creates the crossings between the fictive and real women: "the crossings of identities, the crossings that finally, if but for a moment, allow an almost unsightable/unciteable desire to emerge" (Cutter 159). Moreover, Far re-inscribes female same-sex desire into discourse as a melancholic refusal to mourn. Because of "the love that dare not speak its name," Sui Sin Far's pessimistic and melancholic views toward impossible (female) same-sex relations seem to be manifested in the tragic endings and somber passages of the three stories: "The Smuggling of Tie Co," "Chinese Lily," and "Spring Impressions."

In her early essay "Spring Impressions," Far announces her chosen career, for "the communicativeness of our nature will no longer be repressed" (185). The rhetorical declaration in the following passage suggests what Ling calls a "lesbian sensibility."

> We can suffer with those who have suffered wrongs, perchance beyond the righting; we can weep for those whose hearts unnoticed broke amidst this world's great traffic; we can mourn for those whom the grave hath robbed of all that was dear to them, and can sympathize with those remorse-tortured ones, who, gifted with utmost divine wisdom, yet, willfully turned from the guiding light and with eyes that saw all the horror and shame before them walked into the arms of sin. ("SI" 185)

Ling conjectures, without further explaining, Far's repressed lesbianism through her empathy and melancholy with roots in a deep sense of guilt over what she may have perceived as her own sexual deviance (*BW* 48). Ling, nevertheless, provides an interesting clue to the relationship between melancholy and queerness.

How melancholia is suggestive of any homosexual implication can be read in a Freudian way to locate sexuality and femininity within a psychological structure. Concerning (homosexual) melancholia, Judith Butler (1990) writes:

> Consider that the refusal of the homosexual cathexis, desire and aim together, a refusal both compelled by social taboo and appropriated through development stages, results in a melancholic structure which effectively encloses that aim and object within the corporeal space of 'crypt' established throughout an abiding denial. (69)

Far's inability of naming that unspeakable desire, I speculate, may have been due to the social denial of homosexuality in the Victorian era, in which "the author herself would not have approved and would have striven to repress" (Ling, *BW* 48). Far, however, transcends her repressed, cryptic lesbianism and sublimates melancholia to a eulogized female bonding or to a private space exclusively for women. In this utopian space, it is possible that women live happily together and serve each other as confidantes and lovers, revealing angles of perception to which men have no access. This room reserved only for women is appropriated by other Chinese Canadian women writers to pursue a utopic site. This utopic site, or feminine space, will be further analyzed in the following chapters.

In "The Heart's Desire," a children's fairy tale with a utopian plot, the poor girl Kum Yum and Princess Li Chung O'Yam live in "a sad, beautiful old palace surrounded by a sad, beautiful old garden" (151). Princess O'Yam has all the material advantages of wealth but is still unhappy. Finally, O'Yam sends a note to poor Kum Yum, who comes to the palace, and their relationship eventually helps the princess find her "own heart's ease" ("HD" 151). The female-female tale is a parody of the straight story of Cinderella: Ku Yum moves into the palace, and O'Yam is finally content with her life. Far probably suggests that female solidarity could transform melancholia to eternal happiness. The end

confirms the author's utopian vision (a queer nation?): "And forever after O'Yam and Ku Yum lived happily together in a glad beautiful old palace, surrounded by a glad, beautiful garden, on a charming little island in the middle of a lake" ("HD" 151). It is noteworthy that "sad" at the beginning is changed into "glad" (interchangeable with "gay"?) in the final lines.

In the stories analyzed above, the portrayals of these women, who risk everything to assume agency and seek their voice, subvert the stereotype of Chinese women as victims. Moreover, the marginalized women transcend the oppressiveness of their relentless circumstances. We see the same statement of female solidarity, sometimes in the form of lesbianism, made by the other women writers in their works. In SKY Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, Hermia Chow declares to Kae Ying Woo that "[w]omen's strength is in the bonds they form with each other. Say that you'll love me forever! The bond between true sisters can't be broken by time or distance apart" (39). In Lydia Kwa's *This Place Called Absence*, the two prostitutes, Lee Ah Choi and Chow Chat Mui, flee from China to work in Singapore and find solace in each other's arms and secure a space for women only. In *When Fox Is a Thousand*, the three heroines (Artemis Wong, Fox, and Yu Hsuan-Chi) construct their textual feminine space to "dream through what nobody's records could tell us" (231). The transgressive potential is carried over by female solidarity, a way to defy the phallocentric, heterosexual law.

In Far's stories, the sexual politics, gender construction, and minority subjectivity prefigure crucial issues in contemporary literary theory as well as in cultural, feminist, and ethnic studies. Most scholars of Chinese Canadian/American literature, preferring a historical reading along the ethnographic axis, tend to leave out the issue of women's

sexuality, or any transgressive gesture altogether. Contemporary North American and Western European queer theorists, on the other hand, usually downplay the significance of how ethnicity intervenes in and conflates with sexuality. The bifurcating criticisms seem to miss the rather obvious fact that the subversions of dominant gender norms and practices and of the Law of Father are not a novelty. The racial, sexual, and anti-racist revolutions in the late twentieth century were already heralded in Sui Sin Far's turn-of-the-century stories. In the various stories produced prior to these revolutions, Far sets out to transgress sociocultural conventions and sociosexual codes to create prophetic feminist textual and sexual (re)presentations.

Notes

1. In his essay "Sui Sin Far and Onoto Watanna: Two Early Chinese-Canadian Authors," Canadian critic James Doyle emphasizes the two writers' Canadian background that is usually dismissed by most Asian *American* critics (my emphasis). Doyle also argues that the most significant of Eaton's affinities is not with American authors, but with another Canadian, Pauline Johnson (1861-1913). Throughout the entire essay, Doyle legitimates Eaton sisters' contributions to Canadian literary history.

2. I use the term "New Women" in accordance with Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's definition: "the New Women, rejecting conventional female roles and asserting their right to a career, to a public voice, to visible power, laid claim to the rights and privileges customarily accorded bourgeois men" (qtd. in Ammons, *Conflicting Stories* 7). Sui Sin Far's self-image as a New Woman – educated, worldly, career-oriented – defies the traditional middle-class role as wife and mother and eschews domesticity to strive for artistic creation.

3. Sui Sin Far's sister, Winnifred Eaton, employing a Japanese pseudonym Onoto Watanna, is not examined in my analysis mainly because her body of popular fictions is set in Japan or concerns the Japanese in America. In fact, the Japanese-sounding "Onoto Watanna," which does not exist in the Japanese language, is a fancy japonaiserie invention. Both Sui Sin Far and Onoto Watanna utilize ethnographic self-invention to deflect the gaze of the West, and both sisters deploy textual strategies to produce oblique critiques of North American racial and gender orders.

4. Around the 1920s and 1930s, the popular and pulp fiction novels that portrayed Chinese characters became an explosive hit with readers in America. Figures such as Dr. Fu Manchu, Charlie Chan, and Fah Lo Suee, one of the first prominent characterizations of an Asian woman in fiction, were some of the first Chinese characters in this genre of fiction. Invented by Sax Rohmer, Fu Manchu made his first appearance in 1913 in England. Rohmer eventually brought Fu Manchu to New York in the late 1920s, where he became an instant hit with the American readership. Dr. Fu Manchu became the archetypal Asian villain who personified the Asian threat to America. Fu Manchu's popularity in modern fiction created a wave of Manchu-style villains that certainly outweighed the Chinese heroes, such as Charlie Chan, in pulp fiction. With the success of Fu Manchu, Sax Rohmer invented Fah Lo Suee, Fu Manchu's daughter, to carry on the evils of her father as the leader of the "yellow peril" against the white race. In Fah Lo Suee, Rohmer embodies a devious nature and exotic sensuality, a heightened sexual prowess toward white men. She becomes the exotic and the evil entwined in one being.

5. All the short stories I quote in this chapter are from *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings: Sui Sin Far* (1995) edited by Amy Ling and Annette White-

Parks. The following abbreviations will be used for works frequently cited in this chapter: "Leaves," "CL," "STC," "SOW," "HCH," "CBG," "HD," and "SI" for Far's short stories "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian," "The Chinese Lily," "The Smuggling of Tie Co," "The Story of One White Woman Who Married a Chinese," "Her Chinese Husband," "A Chinese Boy-Girl," "The Heart's Desire," and "Spring Impressions." *SSF* stands for Annette White-Parks' *Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude Eaton: A Literary Biography*, and *BW* for Amy Ling's *Between Worlds: Women Writes of Chinese Ancestry*; the two authors' encompassing study of Sui Sin Far's biography and work has considerably facilitated my research.

6. The subtitle of this section *Place d'Armes* has strong political implications. In 1992 the Chinese Canadian community in Montreal was inspired by the discovery of Sui Sin Far as a nineteenth-century Chinese Canadian heroine. (Montreal *Gazette* September 5, 1992). This group, most young Chinese Canadians, held a fundraising concert in September 1992 to honor Edith Eaton. Their proposals included changing the name of the Chinatown metro station from "Place d'Armes" to "Sui Sin Far" and naming a ballroom in her honor at the Chinatown Holiday Inn. Sui Sin Far is buried in Mont Royal Cemetery in Côte-des-Neiges, Montreal. Thus, Montreal can be said to be the birthplace, the *place d'armes* (a garrison), of Asian American literature.

7. White-Parks has conducted a detailed research on Sui Sin Far's writing during the Montreal period; I am excerpting the information from White-Park's research. All the stories appeared in Montreal's *Dominion Illustrated* by Edith Eaton: "A Trip in a Horse Car," *Dominion Illust*rated 1 (13 October 1888); "Misunderstood: The Story of a Young Man," *Dominion Illustrated* 1; "A Fatal Tug of War," *Dominion Illustrated* 1, "The Origin of a Broken Nose; " *Dominion Illustrated* 2; "Robin," *Dominion Illustrated* 2; "Albermarle's Secret," *Dominion Illustrated* 3; "Spring Impressions: A Medley of Poetry and Prose," *Dominion Illustrated* 4; "In Fairyland," *Dominion Illustrated* 5 (18 October 1890): 270.

8. As is pointed out in *From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada*, toward the turn of the century, Montreal had a few Chinese inhabitants before the completion of the CPR. As late as 1881 there were no more than seven Chinese in all of Quebec, probably all in Montreal. By 1912, the first year of the establishment of the Republic of China following the last dynasty of Qing, the Montreal Chinese community had reached a size of 1,000. "Montreal also served as both a departure point and a supply base for emigrants to the Maritimes, who were not numerous enough to establish Chinatowns of their own and hence continued to draw on Montreal for supplies and news of China and Chinese affairs" (91-92).

9. The "Chinese question," according to local newspapers in Montreal, implies the sinophobic trends in North America. Seeing the increasing Chinese migrations to the United States since the California Gold Rush of 1849 and to Canada since the

Fraser River Gold Rush of 1858, North Americans feared the perils the Chinese would bring: their "innate passion for gambling" and for opium. See Annette White-Parks's *Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude Eaton: A Literary Biography*, 73-76.

10. Conventional journalists of the time were more likely to observe the Chinese from the outside or to interview Caucasian authorities. Far adopted the missionaries' style of investigation, yet she absorbed the latter's ideology selectively. By specializing in Chinatown reporting, Far found a way to "assert a marketable difference," a strategy particularly useful to an ambitious, self-educated woman in the male-dominated journalism industry. Far was active in exposing racial discrimination, which took such forms as head taxes, travel and immigration restrictions (border crossing), miscegenation, and random harassment by government officials. It is apparent that her journalism addresses immediate social and political concerns of both Chinese Canadians and Anglophone Montrealers and works against the volatile anti-Chinese sentiment. For details, see Dominika Ferens's book-length analysis.

11. For the historical accounts of Chinese women in America, see Amy Ling's *Between Worlds* and Annette White-Parks's *Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude Eaton: A Literary Biography*.

12. Victoria was called Gum San (金山), literally meaning "Gold Mountain" by the new Chinese immigrants. Gum San referred originally to California but soon to British Columbia. With the gold rush attracting new immigrants to North America at the turn of the century, stories circulated in China that the streets of San Francisco were paved with gold. For Chinese women's history in Canada, see *Jin Guo: Voices of Chinese Canadian Women.*

13. In Chinese tradition, under the code Three Obediences and Four Virtues (三從四德), a woman has to obey her father before marriage, her husband after marriage, and her eldest son after her husband's death. Within the Confucian value system based on male supremacy, women are expendable from the day of their birth. See Amy's Ling's *Between Worlds* and Anthony Chan's *Gold Mountain* for a full discussion of how the Chinese patriarchal system has strictly defined a woman's domestic roles.

14. According to Bhabha, the migrant culture of the minority "in-between" position dramatizes the activity of culture's untranslatability, which is what Far attempts to cross the in-between border conditions: Canadian and Chinese identities. Bhabha claims that "in so doing, it moves the question of culture's appropriation beyond the assimilationist's dream, or the racist's nightmare, of a 'full transmissal of subject-matter" (224). Bhabha continues to indicate that such strategy is moved "towards an encounter with the ambivalent process of splitting and hybridity that marks the identification with culture's difference" (*The Location of Culture* 224).

15. As Anthony Chan has pointed out, bachelor workers, many with wives, children, and relatives to support in China, economized in every aspect of life in Canada. Lien Chao also states that the negative stereotypes of Chinatown and its inhabitants isolated Chinese from the rest of Canadian society when they first arrived in Canada. "For many decades almost all Chinese immigrants, transient laborers, and married-bachelors were confined to Chinatowns. Here they could find a place to stay, find their food, and seek friendship and support in place of the families they lacked" (*Beyond Silence* 13).

16. A similar argument in the British context is articulated in Barnor Hesse's "White Governmentality: Urbanism, Nationalism, Racism," where Hesse points out that "the emergence of 'white society' is a discursive attempt to represent the nation as a closed system of differences" (97).

17. Some of the earliest American fictions about Chinese immigrants were written in the 1860s and 1870s and set primarily in California. Writers such as Frank Norris, Francis Bret Harte, Joaquin Miller, Ambrose Pierce and Margaret Hosmer are some of the early famous authors on Chinese Americans. These authors portray the Chinese as quaint, passive and servile creatures with mysterious customs. In one of the most popular writings of Francis Bret Harte, "Plain Language from Truthful James" (1870), more commonly known as "The Heathen Chinee," he writes a poem about how two white men try to cheat Ah Sin, but instead Ah Sin cheats them. The poem ridicules class resentment at precisely this point: the economic threat the Chinese posed to the Irish underclass in California. "For ways that are dark" and "tricks that are vain, / The heathen Chinee is peculiar," Truthful James insists. Ah Sin turns the tables on the Irishmen and beats them at their own game, however, by concealing cards in his sleeves and marking them with wax. The poem was read by many xenophobic readers as satire not of the Irish card-sharks but of Ah Sin and the "yellow peril" he seemed to represent. For Ah Sin and Harte's literary representations, see Scharnhorst.

18. In using the term throughout the thesis, I take the word *lesbianism* to be the equivalent of female-female desire and homoeroticism. Moreover, posited in a more extended context not only confined to a woman's sexual attraction to another woman, lesbianism converges with lesbian translation, lesbian intertextuality, lesbian utopia, and women's solidarity.

Chapter Two

SKY Lee and *Disappearing Moon Cafe*

Since Sui Sin Far's debut on the Canadian literary stage at the turn of the twentieth century until the mid-1950s, voices from Chinese Canadians remained unheard or silenced in dominant Canadian literature.[1] Given their short history in the Canadian literary mainstream due to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923 (already discussed in the previous chapter), most Chinese Canadian writers in English started entering the literary scene after the 1950s – the postwar era when a new generation of Canadian-born Chinese seized the opportunity for literary pursuits and thus rendered their new voices heard.[2] One of the central issues addressed by the second- and third-generation native-born writers, as Chinese Canadian writer Bennett Lee points out, is "the question of identity, which in turn leads to an inquiry into the past, both private and collective" ("Introduction" 3).

A prominent theme pervasive in most Chinese Canadian women's literature seems indeed to be that of identity – identity as filtered through gender, race, sexuality, and (neo)colonial politics. One of the most frequently cited writers in the context of the examination of hyphenated bicultural identity is SKY Lee. A second-generation Chinese Canadian, Lee was born in Port Alberni, B.C., in 1952 and received a B.A. in Fine Arts and later a degree in Nursing from the University of British Columbia. Since graduating, she has worked as a nurse and as an activist under the pseudonym SKY Lee, short for Sharon Kun Yung Lee. Lee's work attempts to give a voice to the subaltern and marginalized characters, to invest them with passions, and to empower the heroines to "open up a world with its own colour, textures, weight, and drama" (Bennett Lee, "Introduction" 4). In many ways, Lee's work explores the concerns still nascent in Sui Sin Far's stories. This chapter examines how Lee's debut novel, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (1990), undoes the alliance of female silence in its transgressive manner and how

the celebration of women's sexuality tacitly contributes to a literary legacy for contemporary Chinese Canadian women writers.

2.1 New Moon: Different Spaces and New Voices

Disappearing Moon Cafe traces the histories of four generations of the Wong family in Vancouver. This multi-generational family saga illuminates the hidden history of the Chinese in Canada from 1892 to 1986, and the narrative chronicles the growth of Vancouver's Chinatown with both historical facts and elements of literary magic realism. The plots center around the Wong women, "whose infatuations, marriages, and illicit affairs transform the simple principle of a direct line of inheritance into something more resembling Chinese boxes" (Kich 198). Receiving the City of Vancouver Book Award and short-listed for the Governor General's Award, *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, the first Chinese Canadian novel by a now nationally recognized writer, acknowledges the historical oppression, subordination, and subalternity of Chinese women while powerfully asserting the potential of female agency and female bonding. Another collection of short stories, *Bellydancer Stories* (1994), introduces the mesmerizing figure of Seni and leads the reader to revisit "Pompeii," a story told by a woman named Dance of the Eternal Spirit.[3] The belly-dancing stories call forth the imperative of the legendary foremothers and women who choose to define themselves through reclaiming their eroticism. In both *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *Bellydancer Stories*, the central concern is women's struggle for ownership of their own body, the escape from patriarchy, and their erotic identification and bonding. As Lee has described herself as a radical

separatist, either a "Chinese-Canadian separatist" or a "lesbian separatist," she consciously translates her sexual politics and political beliefs into her writing: "Don't get sucked into [dominant literary culture's] bureaucracy, don't get literally sucked into writing what they want, write what you need to write, what we need to write...and I bet you anything, they'll come to us" ("Is there a mind without media any more?" 400).

Critical investigations either acclaim *Disappearing Moon Cafe* as a political paradigm of Chinese Canadian collective identity (Chao 88-89) or denounce it as an Orientalist reproduction of the writer's self-exoticization (Ng 163). Such readings, however, not only bestow on the novel an essentialist, homogenizing view of Chinese Canadian identity, history, and culture which it does not advocate, but they also erase Lee's gender and sexual politics from her writing agenda. One of the most important themes in the novel deals with intersubjective connections among the female characters that render visible those subjects at the limits of the narrative consciousness. Karin Aguilar-San Juan's essay "Landmarks in Literature by Asian American Lesbians" (1993) indicates that the lesbian subtext in SKY Lee's novel could serve as a point of departure for Asian American feminist writers to develop their "lesbian venues, where being lesbian is neither secret nor taboo, and where [they] can freely explore [their] own experience" (939).

Female bonding, a recurring theme in Sui Sin Far's stories, has become an omnipresent motif in most Chinese Canadian women writers' works. Lee picks up Far's threads and weaves them into the erotic fabric of writing, and I consider this bonding to be women's intersubjective claim to their new subjectivity. A gendered reading would be inevitable in examining the intersubjectivity among women in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*.

In *Bellydancer*, Lee describes a young woman who learns the art of belly-dancing from an older woman and depicts how women are abused by men, but find love, eroticism, and healing in the company of women. Both *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and the stories in *Bellydancer* highlight the writer's major interest in women's solidarity and female-female desire.

Diverging from most critical interpretations on the historical construction of Chinese-ness in this novel, this chapter focuses on how "racialized" sexualities reimag(in)e their particular relation to multiple familial and national sites and on how the racialized and sexualized space is (re)defined by parameters of displacement in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (abbreviated as *DMC* henceforward). The underscored sexual discourse in *DMC* brings carefully alternative sexualities into dialogue in the form of "spatial dialectics," a term I will elaborate later in this chapter. Given that Chinese Canadian women's sexuality is complicated by crisscrossing factors such as gender, class, citizenship and home(less)ness, defining their sexuality is highly complex. The migrant or diasporic practice imbedded in the transgressive sexual discourse in *DMC*, I argue, challenges the Western construction of homogenized Chinese-ness and of stereotyped Chinese womanhood.

I examine in this chapter the significance of the migrant female body as it performs in various locations; the chapter also scrutinizes how the defined and confined spaces intervene in alternative sexualities. Lee's novel holds out the promise of a critical synthesis among issues of migrancy, ethnicity, nationality and sexuality; moreover, it extends the parameters of displacement beyond a consideration of literary discourse. Lee creates a genealogy of female characters who transgress normality; particularly, the

female bodies in Lee's novel traverse the hyphenated space by subverting established patriarchal laws to claim their subjectivity. These women re-appropriate their location in racialized and gendered representations within a specific urban space, Vancouver's Chinatown, and in their "displacement" abroad. However, I am not suggesting that Lee uses different female voices to "function as a regulated transgression given prominence precisely in order to re-inscribe the putative 'openness' of Canada's 'multicultural' identity" (Beauregard, "The Emergence" 59). Instead, I contend that the combat and convergence of their stories, like those in *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, as internalized transgression in the gendered, racialized space, demand a critical redefinition of Chinese Canadian female subjectivity.

Although the existing scholarship on collective Chinese Canadian identity accommodates the general issues of identity formation, I argue that this identity is constructed as monolithic and race-determined.[4] Furthermore, given my major interest in how the differing and defying body functions as a discursive site, I want to both counter and complicate the notion of a "collective" body by appealing to various discourses on sexuality and ethnicity. Throughout this chapter and my dissertation, I argue that transgression as a trope activates a feminist, activist agenda and maps out a new female subjectivity in Chinese Canadian women's writing of the new millennium.

In *DMC*, geographical and sexual border-crossing, the subtext of transgression, is multiplied in the multiple consciousness of many characters such as Kae and Suzie, whose composite subjectivity is defined within the (un)hyphenated Chinese(-)Canadian space as well as within their ancestral ethnic hybridity and their sexual "abnormalities" (i.e., incest and lesbianism). I want to further suggest that transgression steps beyond the

liminal space and contests implicitly ethnocentric (especially in sexual terms), androcentric or exclusionary claims.

DMC thematically dramatizes the heroine's efforts to write an anti-racist genealogy, to document attitudes toward the Chinese in Canada, and to rethink her relationship with a woman friend and potential lover. Along the historical trajectory of the Wong family, the central character Kae Ying Woo settles on a specific starting point, where she attempts to disentangle "all the important events such as the births and the deaths, the intricate complexities of a family with Chinese [sic] roots" (19). The geographical and historical specificities are set in Vancouver's Chinatown in 1924: "The story began, I guess, with my great-grandmother, Lee Mui Lan, sometime in June 1924, as she stood behind the cash register at the front of the even-now famous Disappearing Moon Cafe, 50 East Pender Street, Vancouver, British Columbia" (23). I will pause here and come back to the significance of this specified spatio-temporal setting.

DMC particularly inscribes an alternative feminist genealogy through its narration of how four generations of Wong women negotiate in a "woman-hating world" (145). Situating the female characters within the intersubjective framework, Lee produces a narrative from familial conflicts and sexual apparatuses that reveal what Foucault calls "ruptural effects of conflict and struggle" (qtd. in Bow 76). The story starts with Kae's transgression of unearthing the family secret boxed in the "four walls" (*DMC* 23): the past of the four-generation Wong family. Excavating the family scandals (or in the narrator's word "truth"), Kae has already transgressed certain norms by violating the secret code:

> I wonder. Maybe this is a chinese-in-Canada trait, a part of the great wall of silence and invisibility we have built around us. I have a misgiving that the telling of our history is forbidden. I have violated a secret code. There is power in silence, as this is the way we have always maintained strict control against the more disturbing aspects in our human nature. But what about speaking out for a change, despite its unpredictable impact! The power of language is that it can be manipulated beyond our control, towards misunderstanding. But then again, the power of language is also in its simple honesty. (180)

Kae decodes the secret and exposes an embroidery of versions of family misdemeanors: incest, suicide, murder and so forth. She undertakes the process of production of meaning through the re-inscription of the historical, cultural, and sexual traces of a matrilineal past.

2.2 Gendering Chinatown: The Exotic/Erotic Spatial Construction of Chinatown

Before proceeding to my major argument, I want to raise a crucial question here: What norms do Lee's heroines transgress and what kind of dialectics is (en)gendered in their discursive bodies? Coded with and as different signs, the female bodies (represented by four generations of Wong women) function as the surface of discursive inscription, aligning a lived interiority (the immobility within the confines of Chinatown) with a sociopolitical exteriority (the mobility outside Chinatown and overseas). In other words, the migratory-ethnic-sexualized subjects in Lee's novel negotiate among various locations to re-member and dis-member identities, and the female subjectivity is dispersed across bodies and space. Throughout Lee's novel, this dispersion acquires a distinct vocabulary called "spatial dialectics," a spatial dialogue between fixation and mobility and between "there" and "here." As Goellnicht (2004) insightfully argues,

viewed in the inter-national and inter-ethnic frame, "home" that turns "there" to "here" (and vice versa) is a discursive site for diasporic (Chinese) subjects to negotiate between "home" and "un-home."[5] Within the parameters of spatial dialectics that maps out alternative sexualities, Lee allows her heroines to (re)construct their hybrid identities. Taking up the Foucauldian notion of the ruptural effects of transgression in (en)gendering sexual politics and political problematics, I will situate transgression within this dialectics by examining the spatial construction of Disappearing Moon Cafe in Chinatown.

Chinese Canadian "identity" has to be first examined within a geographical milieu since Chinese Canadian writers' self-representation is implicated in and defined by race, space, and sexuality. Space is one of the crucial factors in the social production of (sexed) corporeality: the built environment provides the context and coordinates for contemporary forms of the body. Space such as Chinatown imbued with historical meanings provides the order and organization that automatically link otherwise unrelated bodies. As Grosz (1995) argues, space is the condition and milieu in which corporeality is socially, sexually, and discursively produced (104).

In *DMC*, Vancouver's Chinatown reifies the racialized and gendered marking of subjects within the Wong family and reveals the interrelationships of spatio-temporality (the milieu in its evolution) and Chinese females' alternative sexualities;[6] the female physical and discursive bodies demonstrate transgressive embodiments. Alison Calder points out that Vancouver's Chinatown has been historically constructed by spatial practices that "sanctioned the performance of 'Chinese-ness' only in a particular geographic area" (7). The café itself, a microcosm of Vancouver's Chinatown, epitomizes an exoticized locale of orientalism that both the Chinese and the Caucasians construct:

> On the walls, long silk scrolls of calligraphy sang out to those patrons who could read them. It was a nostalgic replica of an old-fashioned chinese teahouse, which accounted for its popularity not only amongst its homesick chinese clientele but also outsiders who came looking for oriental exotica... And except for the customers, [Choy Fuk's] mother, and perhaps the cacti, there was nothing chinese about it. (32)

This space immediately demarcates Self and Other and questions the notion of authenticity. Lisa Lowe warns us that in the case of orientalism, the misapprehension and unquestioning of uniformity prohibit a consideration of the plural and inconstant referents of both terms, Occident (Self) and Orient (Other); Lowe proposes "heterotopic spaces" from which "new practices are generated at the intersections of unevenly produced categories of otherness, in the junctions, overlaps, and confluences of incommensurable apparatuses which are not primarily linguistic but practical and material" ("Heterogeneity, Hybridity, and Multiplicity" 24).

Accordingly, Disappearing Moon Cafe in Vancouver's Chinatown becomes not so much a geographical location, but more of a cultural/sexual "heterotopic space" based on a series of mixtures, languages, and communities of people. Furthermore, Lee uses self-exoticization to critique the utopian promise Canada failed to fulfill her new immigrants. In this new dystopic land Canada, the Wong (wo)men, both Chinese born and Canadian born, become the victims of both Chinese patriarchal clan culture and Canadian hegemonic exclusion. In the marginalized space designated as Chinatown, "these overseas Chinese were like derelicts, neither here nor there, not tolerated anywhere" (77). The dystopic implication counterpoints Northrop Frye's well-known statement that Canada is characterized by a "garrison mentality," that is, by an image of a beleaguered space. However, this garrison in Canada is a "white" space, defined as much

by absences of (in)visible minorities. As white patriarchal gender constructions have been instrumental in denying colored women's access to the "garrison," the displaced women, placed in the dystopic garrison within the utopic garrison, have created new subject positions and alternatives from which to recreate their identity and identification.

Canada's utopic vision becomes a dystopic nightmare for all Wong women. Mui Lan lands in the Gold Mountains, "full of warmth and hope," but her "fervent hope turn[s] into the worst nightmare" (26). Mui Lan's frustration stems from Fong Mei's inability to produce a boy "who [should come] from her son, who came from her husband, who also came lineally from that golden chain of male to male" (31). Both Chinese clan culture and Canadian Exclusion Act and Anti-Miscegenation Law put Mui Lan in a nightmarish situation of fearing the end of the family lineage and the "Tang people in extinction" (82).

For Fong Mei, the paper bride, Canada is but a foreign land "which had done nothing except disqualify her" (164) since without a male offspring, she can only be a voiceless daughter unaccredited with a position in the family (57). In the alien(ated) land, Fong Mei laments her predicament as a woman without essence: "There I was in Chinatown, a lovely young female with a body that hungered beyond my control, surrounded by the restless ocean of male virility lapping at my fertile shores.... How I hated my woman's body; encasing it in so much disgust, I went around blind, deaf, senseless, unable to touch or feel" (188). Even for Canadian-born Beatrice, Fong Mei's daughter, racial prejudice in Canada has disconnected her "from the larger community outside of Chinatown" (164). In *DMC*, these female characters are "ungrounded women, living with displaced chinamen, and everyone trapped by circumstances" (145).

With the women trapped by circumstances, Vancouver's Chinatown is constructed as a gendered, racialized space imprisoning the early immigrants. This discursive space fraught with hegemonic regulations is articulated in the discourse of miscegenation from the outset of the novel. Lily Cho argues that the anti-Chinese sentiments in turn-of-the-century public discourse "have often been located in the desire of the white Canadian population to maintain Canada as a white man's country" (63). The discourse of miscegenation in the Chinese Canadian history in Vancouver reveals "colonialism's cultures" that pronounce cultural domination by race and sexuality (Thomas 1994). In the colonialism's cultures in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Canada, racism often drew on gendered meanings. Chinatown as a discursive space, for example, addresses the denaturalized Chinese race crosscut by gendered misrepresentation. Starting from the turn of the century, a period of intense immigration, both Canada and the United States considered these newcomers members of more "primitive" races and cultures, incompatible with American/Canadian Caucasians, and encouraged legislation not only to restrict their entry but also to prevent miscegenation from contaminating the racial purity of White Anglo-Saxon North Americans. In the preceding chapter, I have indicated that Sui Sin Far uses anti-miscegenation discourse to foreground the correlation of race and gender in her work. Almost a century later, SKY Lee inherits the interracial relationship to present a narrative exposé of the interconnectedness of miscegenation and sexuality.

Given that Vancouver's Chinatown was created as a spatialized locale where the Chinese were segregated from white communities, the Janet Smith murder in the novel highlights the gendered awareness of the discursive processes at work in Canadian

nation-building and exposes the colonialism of white-male supremacy over the Other. As I mentioned earlier, the spatio-temporal setting is highly significant. Lee's choice of the year 1924 and the murder in Chinatown reveals white Canada's political imperialism towards the Chinese immigrants during the Chinese Exclusion Era. The narrator's comment ironically renounces the result of racial exclusion by cultural colonialism: "Since 1923 the Chinese Exclusion Act had taken its heavy toll. The rapidly-diminishing chinese-canadian community had withdrawn into itself, ripe for incest" (147). As Anderson argues, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923 was "a racialized and gendered aesthetic that interconnected the spaces of nation and body. 'Canada' appears scripted in official texts as a pure space, one that if impregnated by the flow of alien material would become contaminated and offer up inferior 'stock'" ("Engendering Race Research" 202).

The murder happening in Chinatown right after 1923 intensifies the submerged violence. Lee inserts in the narrative the historical fact of Janet Smith's murder, a case in which the United Council of Scottish Societies argued that 22-year-old Janet Smith had in fact been murdered by the Chinese houseboy.[7] The message exposes the troubling relations between Chinese men and Caucasian women during the Exclusion Era, in which "White women – passive at the hands of the inscrutable Oriental – are induced to commit 'amoralities'" (Anderson 207). In the narrator's words, "Those white who hated yellow people never needed an excuse to spit on chinese. So the idea of a young, lone, yellow-skinned male standing over the inert body of a white-skinned female would send them into a bloodthirsty frenzy" (70). Proximity of "races" within the private sphere, Chinatown, could thus be construed as "perilous." The implications of "the yellow peril" of interracial liaisons are evident to Lee's characters. Morgan Wong decries:

> 'The "murder" itself was a simple, though unsolved "hole in the head" story, but it told a lot about Vancouver then. The intrigues and plots, the coverups and scandal, which flourished as a result of a young white female body, clearly revealed the seething hysteria that, up till then, had successfully remained the suppressed sexual undertones of Vancouver's church-goers. The story had something for every kind of righteousness. For those who hated chinese and thought they were depraved and drug-infested. And for those who hated the rich and thought they were depraved and drug-infested...And Chinatown in 1924.... only one thing missing – women!' (68)

Morgan's last remark as a political renunciation criticizes the fact that Canadian legislative law such as Head Tax and Anti-Miscegenation has created the disruption of Chinese families. The novel concentrates on the murder's effect on the Chinese community. As Tanis MacDonald argues, "the Janet Smith case galvanized racial, sexual, and class tensions in Vancouver, and the public outcry that followed her death precipitated more than one attempt to insulate the city's population from moral turpitude and miscegenation" (36). The result of this disruption due to both parties' obsession with racial purity has produced insidious effects: bachelor society, incestuous illegitimacy, intergenerational conflicts, and same-sex relations. However, in contrast to most critics who over-emphasize the ethnographic denaturalization of the Chinese, I contend that SKY Lee, instead of blatantly critiquing the White cultural hegemony of miscegenation, celebrates racial hybridity and sexual promiscuity. This strategy resonates with what Foucault (1978) calls "reverse discourse" – in demanding legitimacy "in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was [culturally and historically] disqualified" (101).

I will extend my argument by suggesting that Lee's strategy contests the very idea of racial purity that both Caucasians and Chinese attempt to maintain; the deconstruction

of "authentic" Chineseness underrates Lee's transgressive agenda of mapping race and sexuality outside the defined and confined space such as Chinatown. According to Leslie Bow, the transgressions of social boundaries are defined by gender, race, and class: "Gwei Chang falls in love with someone of the 'wrong' race, Fong Mei of the 'wrong' class, Morgan of the 'w(r)ong lineage, and, finally, Kae of the 'wrong' gender [and sexuality]" (102). From the transgression discourse imbedded in Chinese Canadian history, Lee questions the "authenticity" of pure Chineseness by creating a destabilized hybrid subject, in Goellnicht's words, "a displaced and discontinuous identity, always in a state of flux, always becoming, especially in the diasporic state" ("Of Bones and Suicide" 313).

2.3 *Qui est pure laine?*: Interracial and Incestral Hybridity

The story starts with Wong Gwei Chang, the first member of the Wong family in Canada, who transgresses the established racial construction with the First Nations. The theme of transgression, first embodied in miscegenation (already expounded in the first chapter), opens up a space to resist white racism and the imperatives to extend the patriarchal line. Wong Gwei Chang breaks the law by initiating a sexual relationship with Kelora Chen. Kelora's racial ambiguity, half-Native or half-Chinese, is significant as Lee leaves open the questions of whether Chen or the white trapper is her father. The reader knows from the onset that the "golden chain" of the Wong family is already amalgamated. Furthermore, their illegitimate son, Ting An, also transgresses the norm by begetting "impure" offspring with a French Canadian woman and with Fong Mei, who cannot

produce legitimate descendants with infertile Wong Choy Fuk. The metaphorical contamination spreads to the collective bodies of the intricate Chinese-Caucasian, Chinese-Chinese, and Chinese-Indian relationships. Within early Vancouver's colonial discourse, the interracial relationship, especially between a Chinese man and a white woman, was seen as the most threatening violation of all.[8]

Ironically, the Chinese oppressed by Canadian laws and codes reenact that oppression on their clan and perform the exclusion of the Other (Native Indian Kelora and the nameless French Canadian). The sexual liaison between Gwei Chang-Kelora and between Ting An-French Canadian can be read as the ultimate political transgression and moral violation. The existence of Morgan, the "mixed-blooded" descendant of Ting An and the French Canadian, points to the potential and realized transgression of boundaries and the "neither-nor" identity; in Gwei Chang's words, "the outlaws would always live outside of it" (221). But with the characters transgressing mores and disrupting the order, *DMC* results in a broader definition beyond bicultural ambivalence.

After the illegitimate interracial encounter with Kelora, Gwei Chang's betrayal of the First Nations woman in favor of an "authentic" Chinese wife directly from China results in a series of family tragedies; it seems to Lee that the impulse of maintaining racial purity only leads to "unproductive" consequences. Goellnicht insightfully points out that the sense of racial purity overlooked by Fong Mei and white Canadians are "two sides of the same coin: both are grounded in a false, essentialist notion of race as based on biological purity or cultural authenticity that enables the building of binary oppositions between Self and Other" ("Of Bones and Suicide" 307). Ironically, when Fong Mei adamantly claims that "[h]ere we are living with Barbarians, we [Tang people]

stick together"(61), she is unaware that the Wong family is already contaminated with incest and miscegenation.

On the other hand, when first-generation Mui Lan is summoned from China to carry on the family name, she suffers a nightmare of loneliness, which makes her become "bodiless" or "soulless," existing only as a paper wife without "substance" (26). Racial impurity undermines Mui Lan's firm belief in the family's natural and "ecological purity" (31). But as she later becomes the tyrant in charge of many people's lives (31), Mui Lan's persecution of Fong Mei for her failure to produce a grandchild shows her obsession with genealogical continuity. In their endeavor to produce the "golden chain" obsessed by Chinese clan culture, both Mui Lan and Fong Mei's sexuality is only equated with procreation. Within the eugenics-based discourse, the bodies of the first- and second-generation women in Chinatown are either reduced to a reproductive function or represented as the loci for particular desires and fears.

Questioning the pathological eugenic-based discourse, Lee further challenges her reader with the extreme form of purity: incest. The threat of unintentional incest and genetic malady hangs over each character, and the ancestral apparitions haunt the cursed offspring whose sexual involvements occur offstage. The pathological discourse of incest could be summarized in Goellnicht's contention:

> Incest, the ultimate turning of the family and community in upon itself, a non-violent form of self-destruction, is literalized in the sexual relationship between the third-generation Suzanne Wong and her half-brother Morgan Wong, who, because their family suppressed information, do not know that they share the same biological father until after Suzanne becomes pregnant as a teenager. With full-blown, melodramatic irony, the last Wong male child turns out to be the 'illegitimate' offspring of this incestuous relationship, a baby who dies at birth, thus signaling the end of the patrilinear family line and the collapse of the community from with. ("Of Bones and Suicide" 315-16)

Lee contests the very idea of racial authenticity in terms of strict racial and legal demarcations. In the racial-crossing, "these Chinese Canadians are gradually assimilated into a sort of racial melting pot, with Native American and French Canadian bloodlines mixing in" (Kich 199). Gwei Chang's adherence to the "real wife from China" narrative resulting in familial tragedies is contrasted incongruously with his interracial relationship with Kelora Chen, "presented as sensually, spiritually, and emotionally ideal" (Goellnicht 314). None of the third- or fourth-generation offspring is racially pure: Ting An (Chinese-Native), Morgan (Chinese-Native-Québécoise), Beatrice (illegitimate Chinese-Native), Kae (Chinese-Native), and Suzie (Chinese-Native), who dies "with the final irony – the last male Wong child" (*DMC* 146). Gwei Chang constructs a Chinese "home" in Canadian territory, but ironically, nobody belongs "here": "These overseas chinese were like derelicts, neither here nor there, not tolerated anywhere" (77). The speculations on "Where is here?" – Northrop Frye's provocative query – complicate the issue of a politics of location, ethnicity and sexuality with regard to Lee's work.

Frye's "Where is Here" is echoed in Eng's "Out Here and Over There" that overseas Chinese remain permanently disenfranchised from home, "relegated to a nostalgic sense of its loss or to an optative sense of its unattainability" (*Racial Castration* 204) and suspended "between origin and destination and private and public space" (205). Eng's argument centers particularly on queer Asian identity in dialogue with its entitlements to home and nation-state. Hermia Chow, a minor character usually neglected in the analysis of *DMC*, probably attests to the literal ejection of queers from their homes – coupled with the marginalization by pervasive structures of normativity. As another marginalized character "abroad" (over there) outside of the White Canadian land (out

here), Hermia epitomizes not only the impure racial production but also the spatial dialectics between here and there. Hermia, "a misplaced bastard daughter of a gangster and his moll" (41), defies the collective pure Chinese identity; she "has no idea how many half-brothers or sisters she had or would have" (39) and constantly migrates among Switzerland, Beijing, and Hong Kong. Hermia's mobility and neither-nor positioning represent both displacement and hybridity, blurring any borders and racial purity. Hermia warns Kae, as Aunt Emily admonishes Naomi in Kogawa's *Obasan*, of the danger of claiming a collective identity:

> 'Do you mean that individuals must gather their identity from all the generations that touch them – past and future, no matter how slightly? Do you mean that an individual is not an individual at all, but a series of individuals – some of whom come before her, some after her? Do you mean that this story isn't a story of several generations, but of one individual thinking collectively?' (189)

On the one hand, cultural hybridity and a plurality of terrains can serve as an example of the multiply inscribed identity of overseas Chinese (Ong 745); on the other hand, sexuality liberated from Said's "decentered consciousness" intervened by diasporic mobility calls into question the Pan-Asian identity defined in the longstanding masculinist and heterosexual parameters within which women become the victims of multiple oppression. The transgressive heroines in *DMC* participate in the multiple axes of difference to redefine past, present, and future history and to obfuscate the "here and there" dichotomy.

2.4 Home/Homeland/Homing/Homo: Migrancy and Alternative Sexualities

After the discussion of the sexually and racially discursive space of Chinatown, where the women characters "fall into the same holes over and over again" (146), I want to suggest that migrancy or mobility for the third- and fourth-generations allows them to shake off family obligations and to put a distance between the daughters and their patriarchal fathers and immobile mothers. In other words, *DMC* puts home/homeland/homing/homo in a permanently dialogical redefinition. As Mary Conde has noticed, the name of Disappearing Moon Cafe represents "the double unreality of the nostalgic recreation of 'Old China' for homesick Chinese, and the invention of the Oriental Exotic for outsiders" (96). The characters who reside, die, and leave this locale engage constantly in dialogical reconstitution of identity. In this sense, locating sexualities along the trajectory of displacement is inevitable because for Lee, multiplicity and mobility of subject positionings specify an essential strategy to carve out a new, alternative subjectivity for the characters. Japanese Canadian critic Roy Miki has argued that Asian Canadian writers employ the act of deterritorialization through writing as "a viable method for resisting assimilation, for exploring variations in form that undermine aesthetic norms, for challenging homogenizing political systems, and for articulating subjectivities that emerge from beleaguered communities" (118). I am using the term *deterritorialization* here to suggest that the characters as well as Lee's text participate in the minority writing that dismantles notions of value and canon and "travels and moves between centers and margins" (Kaplan 358). Lee empowers her heroine Kae, who

recounts different generations' stories inside and outside Chinatown, to negotiate and circumnavigate a succession of place (belonging) and displacement (being marginalized).

In this section, I focus on the fourth-generation Wong daughter Kae Ying Woo, the major narrator, whose migrancy and silence-breaking have illuminated a new acculturation process that spans her worldviews. Performing an act of re-inscribing herself outside of the two "homes" and creating for herself a fresh mode of relation between the past and the future with another woman, Kae has articulated a new sense of subjectivity in the diasporic narrative. Paul Gilroy, in his revision of Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities, sees the diaspora framework as "an alternative to the different varieties of absolutism which would confine culture in racial, ethnic, or national essences" (155). To re-conceptualize Gilroy's alternative variety of diaspora, I want to add the notions of sexuality inherent in the migrant/diasporic context. The spatial dialectics – the female characters' deterritorialization between China and Canada, between here and there, between inside and outside, and between private and public – and sexuality defined by the dialectics of mobility and immobility hold a dual symbolic significance of revolt against the singular nation-state and against any fixture of locations.

For Kae, the migrant experience of returning to the "motherland" challenges the vision and promises of the New World. Deeply inscribed in the immigrant literature is a re-adjustment "from an old world defined as a dystopia of exhausted possibilities and tragic narrative outcomes to the utopia new world, where opportunity and happy endings beckon" (Chu 147). The returns to China and Hong Kong as a promising resolution for enlightenment lead to an epistemological awakening for both Kae and Beatrice, who "became illuminated in Hong Kong" (145). Their enlightenment of returning to the

motherland reverses the dystopia (old world China)-utopia (new world Canada) promise; their immobile mothers otherwise are imprisoned in the nightmarish "woman-hating world" in the dystopic Chinatown. In contrast with Kae's migratory mobility, Suzie, described as Kae's "double," has also been trapped in the dystopic space that leads her to the ultimate self-annihilation.

SKY Lee suggests in her writing that women writers and characters must both escape. The notion of escape is echoed in Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of becoming imperceptible and transforming oneself into a "nomadic war machine." The Deleuzian assertion, emphasizing the deterritorialization of identity, "politicizes our understanding of the concept of 'anonymous territory' which women flee to (or create) in attempt to escape the rigid frame which defines the image of Woman" (qtd. in Goldman 142). I would like to tie Kae's dislocation to the sexual politics and the revolutionary political struggles that Lee invests in the novel.

First, Kae's initial trip to China and her later plan to meet Hermia in Hong Kong can be read critically as escape/flight against a series of modalities – time, age, space, language, family, and so forth. Unlike her grandmothers trapped in their "four walls" (23), Kae resists and subverts the filial codes and rigid constructs of Chinese clan culture. In the dialectics of motherland/tongue and the migratory meanings of (dis)placement and identity, Kae interrogates different ideological structures of locations and eventually frees herself through an erotic connection with Hermia. The first transcultural experience in China is Kae's initiation into a consciousness of various external and internal migrations; her encounter with Hermia at the Peking Language Institute opens up possibilities and explorations of many meanings of "at-home" and "not-at-home." To look for more

"loyalty" and "purity," Kae returns to China, where "the traditional values had been turned inside-out in search of radical truths" (40), whereas Hermia returns to the motherland "not to learn the language surely," but to discover her (il)legitimate "family connections" (41). The two "impure," disobedient daughters break the filial codes by transgressing the familial imperatives. The irony is that the two racially impure overseas Chinese return to China to seek their legitimate and authentic root. Kae thinks that Hermia, feeling "guilty of something," returns to the motherland to find the "legitimate, traditional and conventional" adjectives to feel less "illegitimate" (41). Kae herself, refusing to be like her grandmother "of no substance," returns to her racial origin, China, to "cling to the ground, pebbly and jagged" (41). Ironically, Kae's own "defective identity," no different from Hermia's, illegitimatizes her as well (41). Both their escape and connection destabilize traditional models of conceiving identity as unified, masculine, and heterosexual.

In addition to demystifying racial authenticity, Lee empowers her heroines to disengage themselves from traditional female roles by aligning them with the process of sexual "becomings." Only in this remote motherland far away from home, the Deleuzian "anonymous territory," can the two "amatory girls" walk "linking arms and snuggling tightly against each other in their space" (40). Kae's self-search as a process of entering "unfamiliar pathways" echoes the process of becomings – "these are processes which systematically break down binary oppositions constructed by State-thought" (Goldman 145). In their space of being both "home" (homo?) and "un-home," Kae and Hermia's defiance runs counters to certain norms called "loyalty" named by Chinese Communist Comrade Zhou: "Being young and strong, Hermia and I both got something out of our re-

education-through-labour program, although I'm quite sure it wasn't more loyalty" (139). Through their sexual liberation, a migrant experience registers both Kae and Hermia into a redefinition of home, the imaginary Chinese homeland "over there" and the Canadian home "out here," where "the ungrounded Wong women, living with displaced Chinamen, are trapped by their confined/defined circumstances" (Goldman 145).

In many ways, *DMC* articulates a geographic and cultural relocation and a re-mapping of Kae's transgressive and disjunctive experiences. Mapping the spatial and ancestral trajectories corresponds to what Fredric Jameson (1984) calls an "aesthetic of cognitive mapping"; Jameson posits in the cognitive mapping what he calls "disalienation" – a convergence involving "the practical reconquest of a sense of place, and the construction or reconstruction of an articulated ensemble which can be retained in memory and which the individual subject can map and remap along the moments of mobile, alternative trajectories" (89). In retelling the stories of the Wong women, Kae reproduces heritage/identity discourses worked out and articulated along with gender and identity issues.

In probing the histories of different generations of women, a wider space is identified: the confines of Kae's (grand)mother's house are deliberately transgressed and so her world expands. Lee situates her mothers and daughters at domestic-familial sites, which are complicated by race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and social-economic issues. Disappearing Moon Cafe, in this sense, is also a cultural, familial locale to analyze the ways Chinese Canadian mothers and daughters construct and reconstruct their understandings of the conflicted self in relation to multiple homeplaces and borderlands.

Dialogues between the contemporary daughter narrators and their dead Gold Mountain female ancestors, as Lien Chao argues, become a predominant literary trope for the contemporary subjects to "reclaim the denied community history and relocate their own worthy, double culture identity" (12). For example, in the section "Feeding the Dead" in *DMC*, the chorus of different female voices is orchestrated in spatial and sexual dialectics. In addition, one of the main threads running through the book is the spatial dialectics between the remote motherland China and the Canadian homeland; it reveals Lee's particular interest in Chinese Canadian women's experience and subculture in the often denied community history. Through dialogues and dialectics, temporal and spatial displacement is replaced by generational continuity; by joining the voices of their female ancestors, the contemporary daughters find their place in the community and continuity of women's spirits (Ghymn 16).

Furthermore, within this ethnically hybridized space, migrant experiences are re-examined and relocated with historical links to Chinese-ness and China through other female characters. Female sexuality in diasporic interventions (in its identification with dispersed collectivity linked by a distant motherland and the new homeland) thematizes sexual transgression as a cognitive (re)mapping of Chinese Canadian women's subjectivity. The elder women in Kae's storytelling, as Carole Boyce Davies has argued, are crucial in the spatial meaning-expansion of home since their "presence or absence evokes a very specific identification and redefinition of the meaning of home" (127). The Wong women, from the first to the third generation, create for Kae specifically gendered ancestral links in terms of remembering and re-membering of the past.[9]

The journeys to China and Hong Kong for the third and fourth generations born in Canada may inspire romantic visions of homecoming, but ironically, this homeland is unlikely to be accessed by a journey through space, but rather by a journey through the parents' narrative of migration that fictionalizes and romanticizes their motherland. Kae's mother Beatrice feels for the first time more or less on her own in Hong Kong far away from "her overbearing mother and grandmother" (143). As well in Hong Kong, Beatrice realizes the home she is destined to escape to, and the home she wants to escape from – "a home where two incredibly strong-willed women had fought over her since the day she was conceived" (144-45). As for Hermia and Kae, the "motherland" becomes a utopic space without maternal and matrimonial surveillance.

Lee's choice of Hong Kong is symbolic since Hong Kong in 1986, still under British colonization but about to revert to Mainland Chinese rule in 1997, stands at an ambiguous convergence of colonial discourses. Located at the confluence of British and Chinese ideologies, Hong Kong becomes a liminal space for possible cultural and sexual alternatives. As Beauregard has noticed, "[t]he possibility of 'return' or 'realignment' in the face of the insecure political future of Hong Kong in the late 1980s makes the utopian aspects of the implied narrative action highly provisional and far from 'settled'" ("The Emergence" 66). Throughout the entire narrative, Lee implicitly juxtaposes the two liminal spaces, Hong Kong and Chinese Canada: as the Chinese Canadians are "here" but do not belong to Canadian mainstream culture, so are the Hong Kong Chinese normalized as an overseas population that is in but not of the British Empire. The partial citizenship of Hong Kong Chinese rests on differences "of territoriality, coloniality, and (unmentioned) non-British origins" (Ong 748).

Kae's trips to Hong Kong to meet Hermia, however, confirm the possible resolution to be achieved through the migratory erotic connection. The metaphoric journey, the (dis)location, creates an agonistic space for alternative sexualities that resist both white racism and Chinese imperatives to extend the patriarchal line. As Chinatown is the continual reminder of Canada's repressed history of economic exploitation, racism, and indifference toward the Chinese, earlier Chinese women in Chinatown could not escape or deny the legacy that "intimately haunt[ed] their subjectivity and their collective and political identity" (Ho 74). Lee challenges the cannibalizing and abstracted representations of Chinatown and gives the daughter-narrator(s) the freedom to flee from the confines. The peregrinations allow the daughters to create distinct spaces within multiple patriarchal structures and to enact various strategies for creative resistance. Wendy Ho indicates that the new generation of Chinese (North) American women found alternative ways to construct more hybrid identities as their lives were influenced by the revolutionary political transformation in China and Canada/U.S.A. (82). Kae and Hermia's erotic connection thus articulates a more complex and transformative theorization on identity formations and on social-cultural and geopolitical changes in the postwar era.

Caught between Canadian racism and Chinese filial claims, as Ong has observed, migrant Chinese, such as Kae and Hermia, "seek a flexible position among the myriad possibilities (and problems) found in the global sphere" (752). Kae and Hermia's borderless "flexible citizenship" also calls for the modern subjectivity for overseas Chinese. As Kae explains her sense of (privileged) flexible citizenship, "And that was how the Hong Kong market opened up for me. Hermia set me up. I could have been a

senior partner in a matter of a few years. I could have become an overseas consultant, cavorting about, in and out of Asia" (124). In and out of Asia, both Kae and Hermia also create a borderless queer nation for themselves.

2.5 Between Dystopia and Utopia: The Resolution of Spatial Dialectics

Kae and Hermia's defiance and difference, activated by migrant mobility, extend the nation-state through temporal, spatial, and sexual journey. The narrative in *DMC* aims to secure a space beyond phallocentric prioritizations of masculinity and heterosexual exchange. *DMC* seems to lead to the conclusion that home/homeland/homing/homo must perpetually exist in a dialectical space, which resonates loosely with what Thomas Waugh calls "homoscape"(a combination of home-escape and homo-escape?). Waugh defines the term: "[s]hifting the notion's application from the ethnic diasporas to that of the queer diasporas or the queer global village, the homoscape is the transnational scene of sexual spaces, commodities, communications, and identity performance" (68).[10] This space held essentially by lesbian desire articulated in Kae and Hermia's relationship, is a "utopic site," a term Annamarie Jagose uses to locate lesbianism. The implications of the utopic site pervade the works of Larissa Lai and Lydia Kwa, who further extend the appropriated feminine space to lesbian intertextuality and maternal genealogy.

> The characteristics of this utopic site – its excess of cultural legislation, its alterity and exteriority – are frequently credited to the category 'lesbian.' The transgressive potential of this category proceeds logically from its alleged location beyond culture and discourse; its triumphant excess of prohibitive laws.... The spaces of alterity that mark utopic figurations of 'lesbian' are various – the space beyond representation, patriarchal nomination, heterosexual exchange, binary – yet, given the utopic site's disavowed dependency on those very economies from

> which it distinguishes itself, all these spaces converge in the impossible dream of exteriority. (*Lesbian Utopics* 2)

This transgressive discourse is pronounced affirmatively by Hermia, the woman warrior, who illuminates Kae and encourages her to "LIVE A GREAT NOVEL" (216). The letter from Hermia is crucial for Kae's breaking silence to unearth the family secret and seek their utopic site beyond representation.

> 'Think of love as something free of remorse and restraints,' advised Hermia after they left. 'No ulterior motives. Try harder, Kae! Imagine, nothing to explain; no need to justify! Genitalia coming together because it feels good. If you think real hard about it, how could something that quintessential have gotten so screwed up in people's minds?'.... 'Anyway, I'm telling you this for your own good, sweetie. So you won't go on and on about it. I'd hate for people to think you're boring.' (187)

The transgression and transformation of Kae's actual life underpin "the real resolution to this story" (210) that "[a]fter three generations of struggle, the daughters are free" (209). At the end of the novel, Lee proposes a positive lesbian alternative that could reconcile the disruptions of racial, heterosexual, and patriarchal oppression: "an alternative feminist genealogy precisely in its lesbian resolution" (Bow 101). Kae in Canada will join Hermia in Hong Kong to live in their utopic space – the "liberation" proposed in Kae's letter to Hermia in 1987:

> How many people realize how we stagger about in life? Either emotionally overdoing, or emotionally half-baked. Shrinking from things or expanding: Like love makes us expand in our relationship to life, and to each other. An extreme case of how we shrink would be suicide. Let's face it, Suzie went splat in a big way! But the young make beautifully tragic corpses. (215)

The dual denouement in two timeframes carries symbolic possibilities: Kae flees from Canada and leaves her husband and son to live with Hermia, and Gwei Chang declares his eternal love for Kelora Chen in the Epilogue. Taking up Lisa Lowe's concept of the heterogeneous Asian American identity, Goellnicht sees the dual ending as the multiple possibilities for Chinese Canadian identity, "which can be feminist, diasporic, lesbian, and socialist, as well as immigrant, heterosexual, racially mixed, patriarchal, and capitalist" ("Of Bones and Suicide" 315). The ending points to Lee's suggestion that in the era of globalization, transgressing the essentialist norms and breaking the "secret codes" seem to carve out a new Asian North American sensibility. Dislocation and disidentification will allow the women to survive in their hybrid, heterogeneous identities. The hybrid identity receives a positive reclamation by Kae in her dialogue with Seto Chi, another crossbred Chinese Canadian.

> 'It seems,' [Chi] began, 'that both your father and I come from rather dubious parentage....'One born out of infidelity, the other of mercenary intrigue; as for myself, I was tainted with incest. And listen, I got away easy! I prefer Chi's version of the story. With Chi, there is no discussion; reality is what it is. Very imperfect, like our perception of it. (132)

The ending, therefore, conceptualizes a new Chinese Canadian sexual, racial subjectivity: its "heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity." [11]

Furthermore, the dual ending, as Goellnicht suggests, might be read either as an optimistic vision of women's liberation into a lesbian relationship between Kae and Hermia or as a heterosexual triumph over a homosexual possibility with the intimate reunion between Gwei Chang and Kelora ("Of Bones and Suicide" 322). However, I

would like to emphasize the writer's activist gender politics transcribed either in the final possible lesbian relationship or in the interracial reconnection. Both interpretations demonstrate Lee's contestation of homogenizing and authenticating Chinese Canadian-ness (or Canadian Chinese-ness) within a patriarchal, heterosexual definition, and both scenarios adumbrate an escape from the dystopic space. As Goellnicht suggests, the interracial harmony in the Epilogue exists only in a "surrealistic," freeing space: "[n]udging and pressing against the stars, he soaring, she soaring" (*DMC* 236). Only with Kelora, Gwei Chang melts into her "like molten gold, like sunset" leaving "other fires tended by other women [his family?] glowed and murmured in the distance" (*DMC* 236). Although the final surrealistic ending embraces a dialogical fusion of the two concepts (Gwei Chang's Chinese and Kelora's Indian ethnicity), the magic realism brings the reader beyond a physical, empirically-perceived experience. The celebratory interracial hybridity, however, is not pursued in a materialized manner.

On the contrary, the other interpretation of the narrator's lesbian manifestation in Hermia's final telegram to Kae that "STOP WE COULD LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER TOGETHER" probably points to Lee's tangible, realistic lesbian utopic site outside of dystopic Canada. Kae and Hermia re-signify and centralize women's affiliations and alliances with each other rather than simply recovering the heterosexual relationships and identities that are constructed within patriarchal and imperialist frames of reference. This lesbian utopic site is further explored in other Chinese Canadian women writers, whose writing attempts to search for more radical liberation from the constraints of family and clan. The sexualities in their "asiancy" mediated through different discourses have registered queerness into Chinese Canadian literary history.[12]

Through the spatial dialectics, SKY Lee places Chinese Canadian women's sexuality and subjectivity in conjunction with multiple global and local sites and hybrid identities. Their sexuality as agency works to dislodge any smooth alignment of a singular home. This displacement also becomes a rethinking of home/homing/homeland/homo across multiple identity formations and a renegotiation of numerous locations "out here, over there" or "out there, over here" in other Chinese Canadian women's writing.

Notes

1. In *Making it Real: The Canonization of English-Canadian Literature*, Canadian literature scholar Robert Lecker comprehensively examines the canonization of Canadian literature from the anthologized stories and authors (1922-1992). Since the first anthology published by Watson and Pierce in 1922, as the database has shown in Lecker's statistical analysis, no Chinese Canadian writers are singled out. The only Asian Canadian writer represented in only 2 of the 65 anthologies is Japanese Canadian writer Joy Kogawa. For the detailed statistics, see the appendices in the book (p.p. 142-153).

2. The birth of Chinese Canadian literature was marked by the publication of *Inalienable Rice: A Chinese and Japanese Canadian Anthology* (1979). Following this milestone, *Many-Mouthed Birds: Contemporary Writing by Chinese Canadians* (1991), the second anthology of poems and stories by Chinese Canadians, offers an established discursive practice for Chinese Canadian writing. In the "Introduction" of *Many-Mouthed Birds*, Bennett Lee traces the history of Chinese Canadian writing starting mostly after the postwar era as the wave of Chinese immigrants into Canada shifted the demographics of Chinese Canadian from predominantly Chinese-born to a present majority of second- and third-generations. The new generations have started to use English to gain a voice in Canadian society, and as the "many-mouthed birds," they now are speaking out, now coming out.

3. Even though the stories in *Bellydancer* deal with the interest in women's solidarity and female-female desire, it is largely unconnected with racialization and is thus not analyzed in this chapter.

4. Throughout *Beyond Silence: Chinese Canadian Literature in English*, the first book-length study and criticism of Chinese Canadian literature, Lien Chao argues that contemporary Chinese Canadian literature is community based. However, this essentialist assumption has reduced the possibility for any interpretations outside of the community-based context. Such reductions contribute to the aestheticizing commodification of Chinese Canadian cultural differences. Chinese Canadian discussions of familial or community-based cultures are far from uniform or consistent; as with other immigrant groups in Canada, the Chinese-origin collectivity (immigrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Mainland China apparently hold different cultural views and speak different dialects) is unstable and changeable, with its cohesion complicated by degrees of identification with their "homeland." See the analyses in Lien Chao's "As Agents and as Perspective: Female Characters in *Disappearing Moon Café*"; Mary Conde's "Marketing Ethnicity: Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe*"; and Maria Noelle Ng's "Representing Chinatown: Dr. Fu-Manchu at the *Disappearing Moon Cafe*."

5. I am particularly grateful for Donald Goellnicht's generosity in sending me his forthcoming essay "'Forays into Acts of Transformation': Queering Chinese Canadian Diasporic Fictions," in which he examines the queer desire in Larissa Lai's and Lydia Kwa's novels.

6. In her book *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* and her essay "Engendering Race Research: Unsettling the self-Other dichotomy," Kay Anderson uses various discourses to conceptualize Vancouver's Chinatown as a racialized and gendered space. Within this space historically "denaturalized" by Canadian white culture, the interplay of race and sexuality has also constructed the Chinese men as sexual aberrant and Chinese women as the hyper-feminine China doll. This universal prototype has been contested by new writers using sexuality as a counter discourse to fabricate a new subjectivity. For the gendered analysis of space, see other collected essays in *Body Space: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality* edited by Nancy Duncan.

7. Based on the historical fact of the murder of Janet Smith in 1924, the narrative inserts this event to intensify the racial exclusion and sexual aberration of the Chinese men in Chinatown. Alison Calder summarizes the murder as follows: On July 26, 1924, the body of 22-year-old Janet Smith was discovered in the ironing room of the wealthy Shaughnessy area home where she worked as a nursemaid. She had been shot in the head, and a gun was found nearby. The United Council of Scottish Societies argued that in fact Smith had been killed by the Chinese houseboy, Wong Foon Sing. As a result, the legislated Janet Smith Bill in Canada was intended to prevent Chinese-owned business from employing white and Native women.

8. For the discourse of miscegenation, see my analysis in Chapter One and MacDonald's "'Dead Girl-Bad': The Janet Smith Case as Contaminant in Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café.*"

9. Carole Boyce Davies argues that Caribbean women writers, by identifying a female ancestor, create sources of reidentification of the meaning of home and homeland. I see similar strategies of using migration/diaspora and the re-negotiation of identities in most Asian American women writers, such as Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Larissa Lai.

10. Richard Fung, a Chinese Canadian video artist, critic and activist, has produced a plethora of films, in which he explores questions of queer identity and navigates complex debates on sexuality, diaspora, race, and representation. In interpreting one of Fung's videos, *Steam Clean* (1990), Thomas Waugh uses the sauna, for example, in the video as a "homoscape" that moves across national and sexual boundaries. The homoscape is inhabited by the coded rituals and within the homoscape, the hybrid shifting space of the migrant is always anchored in a strong sense of locality and rootedness. I appropriate this term in that homoscape articulates rootedness in the metropolitan, dynamic places not only of hybridity but also of coalition and intervention.

11. See Lisa Lowe's essay on "heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity" to construct new Asian American subjectivity. At an interview, SKY Lee herself also points out that Chinese Canadian identity can not be singular and its complexity can not be defined in a simplistic manner since all Chinese Canadians are new immigrants "sucked in by these colonial in-group versus out-group values" (*Gin Guo* 97).

12. Japanese Canadian critic Roy Miki notices that the new works and theories emerging from the formerly excluded groups have opened a network of articulations that not only undermine assimilationist pressures but also allow for provisional spaces "where writers of colour can navigate diversity within the specificity of histories, languages, and subjectivities" (107). Writers such as Joy Kogawa and SKY Lee have used English, their former colonizer's language as a vehicle of power, to speak out of the finitude of their subjectivities. Miki calls this agency "asiancy," an empowering process and opportunity for exchange in the textuality of many Asian Canadian writers.

Chapter Three

Larissa Lai and *When Fox Is a Thousand*

Two recurring themes permeate the work produced by most Chinese Canadian women writers: boundary crossing in various representational forms and different strategies of rewriting (her)story through women's sexual and textual solidarity. Boundary-crossing and female identification in Sui Sin Far's stories are more internalized due to her ambivalent identity as Eurasian in a time of prevailing sinophobic sentiments. SKY Lee, taking a step further in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, creates an alternative feminist genealogy through the narration of how four generations of Chinese women negotiate in the white, patriarchal, misogynistic world. Lee allows her heroines to transgress normality through their close bonding; the women traverse the in-between space by subverting established patriarchal laws to claim their subjectivity. In the first two chapters, I have examined female solidarity and female-female desire in Far's and Lee's works. This chapter analyzes how Larissa Lai revivifies Chinese and Western histories and constructs an exclusively female/feminine space to accommodate more complicated issues of diaspora, history, hyphenation, and sexuality.

Larissa Lai, the third writer under analysis in this dissertation, attempts to "foster the germination of a culture of women identified with women of Chinese descent living in the West" ("Interview with Ashok Mathur"). Moreover, with an activist agenda, Lai's writing animates the "anti-racist impulses" into "fictive constructions of Asian women's histories to fill gaps in the current record" ("Interview with A. M."). Lai is a promising young Chinese Canadian woman writer who has been acclaimed in Canadian literary circles. Born in 1967 in La Jolla, California, she grew up in Newfoundland and is currently pursuing doctoral work in Creative Writing at the University of Calgary. Her first novel, *When Fox Is a Thousand* (1995), was awarded an Astraea Foundation

Emerging Writers Award on the basis of the novel in draft form and nominated for the Chapters/Books in Canada First Novel Awards in 1996. Shortly after Lai published her second novel *Salt Fish Girl* (2002), the novel was short-listed for the City of Calgary W.O. Mitchell Prize in 2003. These distinguished achievements mark this Chinese Canadian writer's successful entry into mainstream Canadian literature. In this chapter I examine various boundary crossings that both map and delimit the production and reception of Lai's debut novel, *When Fox Is a Thousand.*

This novel consists of three narrative points of view, each introduced by a small visual icon. The first tale is narrated by the fox spirit. Fox, represented by a fox silhouette, sojourns across centuries and continents while preparing for her millennial birthday, when she will attain immortality. The second tale recounts the story of the ninth-century Chinese poetess Yu Hsuan-Chi (魚玄機), signified by the image of a woman in a drooping ancient robe. Both nun and courtesan known for her talent for verse and licentious life, Yu is sentenced to death for allegedly murdering her maidservant. The third tale, whose omnipresent and omniscient narrator is identified by a cedar whose "roots trammelled the ground above" (199), speaks of contemporary twentieth-century life, particularly the life of Artemis Wong, a young Chinese Canadian woman who reconstructs her identity through her friends, lovers, and her community.

The three stories initially appear to exist in three separate and clearly demarcated territories that seem to have very little to do with one another: mythology, history, geography, and reality. These three alternating stories, however, become progressively interwoven and converge at the book's conclusion; through this convergence, Lai reterritorializes these boundaries, (trans)forming, (trans)posing, (trans)gendering the

minority narrative of subjectivity into an array of cross-cultural, -racial, -sexual, -gender identifications. As Brian Massumi stresses, boundaries, only produced in the process of passage, "do not so much define the route of passages: it is movement that defines and constitutes boundaries" (qtd. in Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion* 131). To highlight boundaries would be to expose the porous nature of the boundary of the inside and the outside: Self and Other.

Focusing on different transgressive devices, I will elaborate on the prefix "trans-" as a governing trope of boundary-crossing, in which migrancy and metamorphosis resist a restricted binary reading of borders.[1] In this regard, "trans-" as such a movement functions to establish that neither side of the binary can be torn free of the other and instead can establish a utopic site. As a prefix, "trans-" designates "across, to or on the farther side of, beyond, over" (*OED*). In the light of this denotation, it is apparent that Lai develops a practice of crossing lines and moving beyond definitions. The deployment of transgression, already discussed in the previous two chapters, is further explored and accentuated in Lai's novel. Resembling Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, *When Fox Is a Thousand* adopts various intertexts and entwines multiple cultural discourses – among them, ethnic difference, narrative forms, bicultural subjectivity, and queer sexuality – rendering the novel a historical conjuncture that presents both intertextual practices and transgressive productions.

3.1 Foxy Woman: Trickster Play and Metamorphosis

The central figure that manipulates the narrative is the fox spirit, an enthralling trickster who inhabits the bodies and minds of women and who sojourns across centuries and continents. Fox, gendered as female in the novel, can voluntarily shift her shape, animate and inhabit women's bodies. In Fox's words, "The word, I believe, is animate, although I much prefer inhabit. In this act I cease to be a mere animal. Nor am I a parasite. To inhabit a body is to create mass out of darkness, to give weight and motion to that which otherwise would be cold. And I, too, become warm inside an envelope of human flesh, less nervous and hungry" (17). Now nine hundred and ninety nine years of age, Fox, setting foot in Vancouver, after "emigrat[ing] to the west coast of Canada" (5), is preparing for her one thousandth birthday, when she will transcend her animal form and achieve immortality.

In traditional Chinese fox tales, foxes vary from acting vicious to causing a human's ultimate decline and demise. In *Hsuan-Chung-Chi* (玄中記), a small work on supernatural phenomena of uncertain authorship but apparently dating from the early Tang Dynasty, the fox is mythologized as follows:

> When a fox is fifty years old, it acquires the ability to change itself into a woman. At a hundred it can assume the shape of a beautiful girl, or that of a sorcerer...At that age the fox knows what is happening at a distance of a thousand miles, it can derange the human mind and reduce a person to an imbecile. When the fox is a thousand years old, it is in communication with Heaven, and is then called Heavenly Fox, t'ien-hu [天狐]. (qtd. in Lai, *When Fox Is a Thousand* 88).

Fox-lore has a long history in Chinese (light) literature. Sinologist R.H. van Gulik's (高羅佩) canvassing study of the sexual life in ancient China indicates that the

motif of the fox-woman benefiting or harming her lover has been popular in Chinese "light" literature (210). Lai's novel draws heavily on *Strange Tales of Liaozhai* (聊齋誌異) by Pu Songling (蒲松齡), in which a fox, from its simple origins to becoming a shape shifter and to ascending into a celestial fox, inhabits the borderline between (wo)man and beast.[2] The transforming fox could refine itself, through sexual encounters with humans, murder, mayhem, to become immortal. Dorothea Hayward Scott's *Chinese Popular Literature and the Child* points out the fox's symbolic representations that "[f]oxes had the power of transformation either into a man or a woman, but most frequently turned into a young and pretty woman whose influence would be evil" (35). The belief in foxes acting as incubi and debauching men and women has remained so until the present day, especially in North China (*Sexual Life in China* 211). Lai, however, revitalizes the fox spirit, animating it/her into life and text. As Fox wends her mischievous peregrinations through time and space, from China to Canada, migrating for a millennium, inhabiting different "hollows of the body" (17), she uncovers the silent history (and the stories) of women and their desires. A figure of Chinese mythology, Fox is deep-seated in the culture, yet subject to change; at the age of one thousand, Fox can "change at will into any shape [she] could imagine" (223). Such transformation breaks the human-animal boundaries and transgresses gender norms. Lai's use of Fox as a metaphorical figure for ethnic and sexual subjectivity is an affirmation of both difference and resistance.

Fox, a marginalized figure, claims her difference from other foxes and roams alone in her own liminal territory. As she says, "When I wrote about the thrill of new life that comes from animating the bodies of the dead, they swept their bushy tails in the dirt in disgust and said they didn't want anything more to do with me. And that is how it

happened that I live alone" (6). When Fox is chastised by other foxes for haunting women, the peers blame her for being "different": "Don't you know your actions reflect on us all? If you keep making these visitations, other fox families will talk about us. They will criticize us for not having raised you properly" (17). Here, "other fox families" can be read as "other straight families" who will chastise Fox for "haunting women," – in other words, for being a lesbian – and for transgressing heteronormativity.

Fox resembles Artemis in her neither-nor liminality: other foxes chastise her for her "unorthodox methods" and "human history books make no room for foxes" (5). According to Lai, writing Fox, who is denied by official history, is "to re-introduce and re-vitalize a very ancient story that has not been circulated much in the West" ("Interview with Ashok Mathur"). Lynne van Luven also points out that Fox in Lai's novel "functions as the go-between, as it were, between the two worlds and eras, attempting to give Artemis some connection to her past" (270). Fox arises out of a need to bridge the gap between contemporary Artemis and the ninth-century poetess/priestess, Yu Hsuan-Chi.

Fox's ability to transform herself through animating women could be a metaphor of the Other attempting to breathe into an assimilated Self. Extending the Self-Other to ethnographic implications, in Lai's words, "Fox breathing into the bodies of the dead is like an Asian woman trying to breathe life into the assimilated almost-white self required by the social pressures of liberalism" ("Political Animals and the Body of History" 152). I further suggest that Fox's shifty character embodies a broader transgressive typology. More precisely, Fox, a trickster figure, articulates the acts of resistance within Western hegemonic modes of cultural production.

Fox's intertextual and intersexual travels articulate the disruption of the strictly defined genre/gender construction, as this trickster figure embodies the kind of fluidity that we see as a prerequisite for understanding the liminality explored by other Chinese Canadian women writers. The trickster, according to Elizabeth Ammons, "seeks to cross cultural boundaries without relying on dominant culture maps" ("Introduction" x). This border-crossing echoes Levi-Strauss's argument that the trickster reflects "a more logically sophisticated level of culture that can create a mediating character in response to the perception of contradictions in a belief system" (Ammons, "Introduction" x). In representing that community, these women writers seek the image that can speak to a myth(ology) accommodating ethnicity, sexuality, and marginality. Fox's physical as well as psychic transformation reveals such generic and gendered fluidity.

The metamorphosing fox is Lai's most successful use of the animal in order to describe all the characters' mercurial, unstable, and fluid physical and psychological development in dealing with alienation. This fluidity as "intermedium" accounts for Lai's transgressive agenda.[3] It is important to know that Fox's volatile body becomes an intermedium to help women. According to Chinese mythology, a fox spirit transformed into a human female to subvert and surmount a woman's destiny is a fantastic idea (Sang 89). Lai's awareness of female solidarity is encapsulated in Fox's shape-shifting "inhabiting," "breathing into life," and "haunting" different female characters throughout the narrative.

An early episode exemplifies Fox's forays into acts of transformation by breathing into life. Fox intervenes in the affairs of a married woman in ninth-century China; Fox counsels the wife in how to win her husband back by occupying her body to

smite the husband (4-5). Fox, having inhabited Yu Hsuan-Chi's body for more than nine hundred years (17), guides the Poetess and intervenes in her relationship with Younger Li and Lu Ch'iao. Fox also haunts Artemis, ostensibly not only to help her understand why Ming was killed, but also to solve the parallel mystery of the Poetess, who was executed for the murder of her maidservant/lover, Lu Ch'iao. The intertextual parallelism serves as a kind of intermedium of the three heroines in different timeframes.

The trickster's intermedium – the methods of animating and occupying the women and intervening in their history – is Fox's strategies and tricks. Fox could be personified as the poetess, or the authoress, who combines the stories to breathe, like writing, to move and sustain life. The trickster and the inhabited female bodies delineate cultural survival in a world that threatens their existence as an individual. Within the hegemonic culture in Lai's novel, women are both patriarchal and heterosexual victims: Yu as a talented poetess in male-dominated ancient China and Artemis as a colored lesbian in homophobic white society. In other words, as Ammons insightfully argues, "Because trickster won't be contained, trickster strategies and tales provide a way of pulling together conflicting world views and sets of values into coherent, new identity. This identity is turbulent, shape-changing, contradictory, 'bad,' culturally central, liminal, powerful, power-interrogating" ("Introduction" xi). The trickster twists of Fox's tales further fuse gender fantasies and cultural encounters.

3.2 In the Name of the Mother: Naming and Cross-Naming

Fox's body as intermedium or agency deployed in other female forms also articulates an erotic engagement in that the agency constitutes a sort of alternative subjectivity. Lai extends the trope of metamorphosis to various transformational complications, including religious conversion, gender subversion, and sexual (dis)orientation – all inherent in subjectivity formation. The notion of changing identity, such as Fox's own shape-shifting, needs to be examined first in the signification of naming. Because the name designates a person's identity and identification, naming and changing names in the novel play a crucial part in (de/re)constructing identity. Names in the novel are so symbolic that the text reads in part like a fable or an allegory.[4] Lai draws on Judeo-Christian texts and Hellenic mythology and establishes an allegorical tie between naming and name changing.

The names of the major characters – Artemis, Diane, Mercy, Saint, Eden, Lena – are either coded with Biblical allusion or with mythological association. Adopted by Caucasian parents, the father an Asian Studies professor and the mother a museum curator, Artemis Wong, negotiates between identities and roots her identification in an in-betweenness. Fox's comments on Artemis's name point to this Chinese Canadian woman's liminality:

> Her friends call her Art, or sometimes Artless, depending upon the degree of guile she is capable of in any particular situation. You say: A funny name for a Chinese girl. I will correct you. Chinese-Canadian. Make no mistake, because her name is a name that marks a generation of immigrant children whose parents loved the idea of the Enlightenment and thought they would find it blooming in the full heat of its rational fragrance here in North America. So here she is, with a good

> mouthful of a first name to go with the short, crisp monosyllable last – Artemis, the virgin huntress. It's Greek. (10)

A name, says Fox, is a bridge between "the past and the future" and "needs roots to tap the water deep below the surface of the earth, to prevent the soul from being swept away by any old tide that happens to wash in" (231). Artemis's floating identity severs her from any prefabricated tradition. The storyline of Artemis and Mercy starts in the Western Civilization class, where Artemis and Mercy identify themselves within the Western historical trajectory – "the idea of the Enlightenment" (10). Artemis's life is fraught with contradictions: an adopted Asian woman who has been assimilated into Western culture to the extent that she chooses to study Western Classical History in university. But when Diane first questions Artemis's cultural heritage and racial "authenticity," Artemis starts to beware of her neither-nor liminality and of herself as the objectified "artifact" of her "Orientalist" father and curator mother's collections (39). It is at this point that Artemis registers herself in a concatenation of transformations.

Named after the Greek goddess, Artemis seems forever in pursuit of some single defining moment, but she is unsure of what she is after. Her life, as her name suggests, is a series of seemingly random encounters with friends, lovers and acquaintances who embrace a broad spectrum of experiences. Since Artemis does not think about her roots, her story evolves from the people she knows (96-97). An adopted child, as signified by the rootless tree icon, Artemis transforms and reconstructs her personality depending on her surroundings. Her transformations mirror Fox's, but unlike Fox's deliberate machinations, Artemis's actions seem neither voluntary nor purposeful: "I am no less who I am for where I've ended up" (97). Trapped at the convergence of several in-

between worlds – Canadian and Chinese, heterosexual and homosexual, mainstream and marginalized – and uncertain of her role in any of them, Artemis negotiates and transforms within cultural uncertainty and sexual disorientation.

Names in the novel signify more than "just a thin covering, a disguise to get [people] through a few doors" (231). The significance of names/naming needs to be analyzed to explain the instability of identity. Mercy Lee, a name directly linked to Biblical allusion signifying apocalypse or redemption, appears as a pious Christian in Chapter One of the novel. In the same chapter, Mercy and Artemis's resentment toward each other – the "intimacy swung between them like the pendulum of a clock" – gradually drifts them apart (132). In Chapter Three, when Mercy reappears, she has changed her name into Ming. When she returns to Vancouver from Hong Kong via Seattle, Artemis unexpectedly encounters Mercy on the bus, but Mercy has totally changed her name, clothing, and religion.

Mercy, now called Ming, meaning "shimmering" or "bright," wears a "black leather jacket, worn soft at the elbows," and her "black hair was shaved down to within a millimetre of her scalp" (132). Lai's choice of the name Ming (明) is significant as the Chinese character combines two components: 日 Sun (masculine, yang) and 月 Moon (feminine, yin), thereby an androgynous coexistence of two genders/sexes. At the Canada-U.S.A. border, Ming now atheist, caught carrying "a ziplock bag stuffed with fresh tobacco" (135) is no longer the religious Christian she used to be. Mercy's cross-naming allows her to shuttle between different doors, betray the prefabricated covering, and reconstruct her floating identity. Furthermore, as she has transgressed her gender role, the customs officer examines her knapsack "with an annoyed look on his face as

though she were subjecting him to some kind of unreasonable farce" (134). Here, Mercy/Ming well articulates the transformation/transgression in religious, sexual and gender terms. Ming's physical transformation also landmarks the reinvention of her gender/sexual identity:

> There were tattoos on her arms, tattoos that revealed her road to her reinvention of herself-a dragon and phoenix, a yin-yang symbol, a lotus flower in full colour, delicate pink and yellow....Ming's body was long and thin except for the belly, which bulged out in a low curve, as though there were a cantaloupe weighing in the bottom, like the bodies of courtesans in pornographic Ming dynasty paintings. (139)

Mercy/Ming's cross-naming herself suggests that she is deliberately crossing boundaries and that her name allows her to cross over or pass. As Susanne Hilf points out, "By constructing her identity, by re-inventing herself, Mercy/Ming fights against determining constraints imposed on her from the outside" (132). I want to further complicate the "deliberate" attempt to re-invent identity through the mechanisms of another transformatory representation: the discourse of transvestism invested in Lai's identity politics.

3.3 In the Skin of a Fox: Cross-Dressing and Passing

Lai maneuvers to draw the reader's attention to costumes/clothing/dressing, which, in a way, like naming/cross-naming, signifies self-representation. Marjorie Garber's study of how dressing/cross-dressing produces cultural anxiety and fluidity of gender representation could facilitate a further exploration of the "*trans-*" trope through dress codes and performativity. As Garber asserts in *Vested Interests*, "class, gender,

sexuality, and even race and ethnicity…are themselves brought to crisis in dress codes and sumptuary regulation" (28). Dress codes, in this sense, produce discursive interpretations and categorical disruptions. Furthermore, the preoccupation with clothing/cross-dressing in several characters, through performativity, challenges what we perceive as the conventional boundaries of gender, ethnicity and authenticity. Numerous characters participate in seemingly trite transformatory activities such as putting on makeup (14, 23), dyeing hair (103), masking and disguising (74). These practices, however, undermine the one-sided, reductionist representations of a person's identity.

The recurring theme of cross-dressing in the story sketches out the disruptions of gender norms, sexual identity, and further complicates categorical transgression. As Hilf suggests, "In the case of Fox this gender switching is carried to extremes; it becomes a temporary sex-change, since Fox is able to transcend biological and physical limitations as easily as temporal and spatial barriers, slipping into male and female bodies alike" (130). In gender switching, dress codes further render gender construction more fluid. Fox's game of dressing underscores the motif of transvestism in the story. Instead of visiting "male scholars" as other foxes do, Fox focuses on courtesans and nuns, who are "puzzled by [her] lean, squarish jaw and plain dark robes that betrayed nothing but [her] amusement with the game of dressing. What seemed to relieve and reassure them was the sight of [her] feet, their phallic length. And then it was 'Tea, elder brother'" (104).

Fox's tricksteric play and crossover well articulates the haunting figure traversing the third space. This space of third-ness is simultaneously demarcated, filled, and emptied out by Fox's free-floating spirit that calls into question categories of male and female, human and animal, East and West, gay and straight, and so forth. Apart from Fox, other

characters also engage in cross-dressing praxes. Artemis's fascination with costumes and makeup "[n]ot for the sake of beauty, but for the disguise and outrage" is to "investigate the possibilities of what she could become" (19). Lai probably uses dress codes as a powerful agent of destabilization and change – "the sign of the ungroundedness of identities on which social structures and hierarchies depend" (Garber 223). Hence, clothing/dressing opens up possibilities of performing Artemis's floating identities.

To draw cross-dressing to a more theoretical complication on identity and identification through its performative nature, it is necessary to re-evaluate the notion of passing. Judith Butler's essay "Passing/Queering" in *Bodies that Matter* (1993), a reading of Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929), situates passing as a theme and an act that contests notions of free will and agency. Through dress codes, passing is a threshold topic in this argument, mediating the difference between acting and being. Theories of passing have proven instrumental in recent debates about deconstruction and essentialism. The interrogation of identity categories, through the passing theme, is often accompanied by a celebration of fragmentation and division. Passing implicitly valorizes racial and sexual categories even as it defies them, and as epistemology, "passing remains a demonstrative instance of falseness rather than a viable means of comprehension" (Lockard 204). Passing, along with other identitarian themes such as cross-dressing, allows the characters to explore the problematic of materiality in relation to performativity.

"Crossing" or "passing" are loaded terms in understanding Lai's transgressive suggestions. Trying to "pass" to enter a gay bar, Artemis, accompanied by Eden who "fixes her up," is dressed as a man for "passing": "They cut a sheet into strips and flattened her small breasts against her chest. He slicked her hair back and tucked it under

a skull cap. Loose jeans, baggy T-shirt, and men's shoes her size he had picked up at some fancy vintage clothing store" (99). Eden's comment on Artemis's cross-dressing practice also satirizes the conflation of gender, race and sexuality that misrepresents and stereotypes Asian males as effeminized sexual beings: "Lots of Oriental boys are very slender. They won't bat an eyelash.... Bet you anything some rice queen tries to pick you up" (99). In the interplay of identities (Chinese, Canadian, male, female, masculine, feminine, heterosexual, homosexual), transvestism offers the reader a participatory exchange of cross-cultural and cross-sexual identification, imagination, and political agencies.

The moment of identification enabled by masquerade allows Artemis to construct her gender and sexual interchangeability as the means through which to imagine alternative identifications and multiple loyalties. In crossing/passing gender norms, Artemis closes her eyes to "imagine her body as boyish as she could and hoped her hips wouldn't give her away," and when she opens her eyes, "there was a man staring right into them" (100). The episode punctuates the ambiguity inherent in transvestism that evokes the performative exchange of desire in the scenes of erotic and narrative seduction. Artemis's gender crossing invites the beholder as well as the beheld into an ontological participation in the interchangeability of gender and sexuality: "She couldn't read his eyes. Was he amused, or was he angry that she had invaded a territory not meant for her and wanted to see her get her comeuppance?" (100). The Butlerian passing is an instance of the way in which race, sex, and sexuality have been constructed, in opposition to gender, as regulatory norms that cite the body's materiality. Here, passing troubles at least an ostensible singleness of purpose and coherency of political aim. Ming/Mercy's

cross-dressing further imbricates gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. In "passing" the US-Canada border, Ming's tomboyish behavior and dress codes after her radical change of appearance receive the white customs officer's "annoyed look" (134). Through the discourse of the feminized-Oriental-male, the scene dramatizes the gendered rhetoric of Orientalism. Ming's being and acting represent "some kind of unreasonable farce" (134).

This episode should be read side by side with Yu's encountering, inviting, approaching Lu, in which the networking of gender travesty and homoerotic fantasy is mobilized.

> I suggested he might like a warm bath. He suddenly grew shy. His clothes were dripping, leaving murky puddles on the floor. I felt something like generosity well up inside me, and offered to bathe him myself. He agreed, but made me promise that whatever I saw, I would not hate him. I laughed, somewhat surprised at what I assumed to be a vulgar reference. I promised. When the water was hot, he went into the alcove alone and drew the screen. I watched his shadow undress. A long back emerged, a little crook where the waist went in and a hip flared out. There was something about the shape. Then, he stepped into the tub and called to me. I went behind the screen. Slightly distorted by the water in which it was immersed was the body of the woman with the lantern. (55)

In this (homo)erotic contact, the pronoun shifts from "he" to "the woman" and the *rencontre* clarifies their connection. Only now the aura of encounter is inflected with lesbian eroticism. The episode here recalls Sui Sin Far's Co Tie story; the gender travesty and homoerotic fantasy between Yu and Lu are echoed in the amatory ambivalence between Co Tie and Fabian before Co Tie's identity as woman is revealed. The adjacency of erotic desire and gender crossover evokes a further inquiry into "the complex interplay, slippage, and parodic recontextualization of gender markers and gender categories that characterize transvestic fantasy" (Garber 134). The cross-dressers in the narratives (Ming, Artemis, Lu Ch'iao, Fox) keep their desire and identification in

play by deploying the rhetoric of clothing, naming, and performativity. This parodic contextualization will be discussed in a later section.

3.4 The Animal Within: Doubles and Doubling

A more subtle task to facilitate another reading of the conflation of dressing-gender-sexuality entails querying and exploring the nature of some Gothic elements in the novel. The interplay of gender-sexuality and doubling could find a congenial home within the Gothic context: transvestism encoded as the figure of erotic and generic transgression (Garber 218). It is, however, not my intention to elaborate on well-established Gothic conventions, but the implication of Gothic doubling might help generate another reading of transgression. The intertwined doublings, I suggest, serve to transgress beyond Gothic modal frames. In her groundbreaking book in Asian American Studies, *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance* (1993), Sau-ling Cynthia Wong first elaborates on the formation of the Asian American double.[5] Wong reformulates the Anglo-American Gothic double/doubling and maps the double as a trope within marginalized literatures.

The occurrence of the double, in relation to a more tangible representation such as Fox's cohabitation in other women, helps clarify the re-conceptualization of the erotic encounters of different characters through temporal alternation and spatial coexistence. According to Wong, the double in Asian American literature, which has been insufficiently articulated with the scholarship on Otherness, should be contextualized with the "expedient tactic of survival" of Asian Americans in a racist society (77).

Wong's insight serves as a useful point of departure to further argue doubling as an alternative modification in the novel: "the halves of the ambivalent self are distributed not in two visibly different races but in two unequally assimilated characters of the same race" (Wong, *Reading Asian American Literature* 92). The multiple overlapping doublings that complicate the composite narrative textuality include: the housewife and the concubine (3); Yu and the woman with a lantern (27, 55); Yu, Younger Li, and Lu Ch'iao (68-73); Yu imagining spirits (191); Mercy and Artemis; Artemis and Eden; Diane and Artemis; Fox and Yu; Fox and Artemis. By deploying doubling as a multivalent representation, Lai illuminates a plethora of possibilities of multidimensional construction of subjectivity.

In conjunction with the theme of transgression, I will situate Wong's racialized doubling in sexual terms. The most evident example is the relationship between Eden and Artemis, the two "highly assimilated" Canada-born Chinese troubled by a version of himself/herself as a reminder of disowned homosexual Asian descent. "They had been sleeping like this, side by side for months, but Eden never touched her while they lay there, although he took her for candlelight dinners and invited her to sleep over night after night" (73). Both Eden and Artemis's homosexual proclivity cedes their relationship to a "game." In the game of role playing, Eden's caresses turn into moments of Artemis's fantasy and desire with other women:

> In bed at night, the bed to which he had invited her, he lay beside her coolly, careful not to let a hand or knee brush accidentally against her taut skin. He lay closed and tight, turned away from her, snug up against the cool white wall as though it were an infinitely more desirable lover. She was conscious of it as a game now. The smell of Diane's hair burned in her nostrils. (73-74)

Eden can be Artemis's double (Eden the *yang* of Artemis, and Artemis the *yin* of Eden) in that the two "assimilated" characters but incomplete "halves" of the ambivalent self struggle within racist, homophobic society.

The doubling of Eden and Artemis mirrors that of Yu and Lu Ch'iao and Younger Li, whose uncanny resemblance obscures but at the same time animates Yu̇'s sexual identification. The erotic ambivalence and identification in the uncanny doubling of Lu and Li opens up several interpretations. In the Poetess's narrative on the potential *ménage-à-trois* relationship, Yu looks into Lu Ch'iao's eyes and in them the husband Li gazes back. At that moment of gazing and being gazed upon, Lu reaches out and brushes her warm fingers against the poetess's cheek; Yu "feels the edges of the deep whorls of her fingertips, rough as sack, particular to her and only her" (69). This passage articulates the ambivalent effects produced by doubling between Lu-Yu, Lu-Li, Li-Yu and mobilizes various readings of erotic identifications and possibilities.

> He reached for me. I closed my eyes and imagined her face tilting toward mine. This was bearable for a moment, but then there were his hands. His hands were smooth, smoother than hers, smoother than any hands I had ever known, and cold.....His touch was flaccid, without substance. No warmth came to it even as the hours wore on. I thought of her lying in the next room, only a thin wall away.... Pleasure and distress. (68)

Fox's cohabitation with other female characters (Yu, Artemis, the young wife, and so on) can be interpreted as another form of doubling, which, in its uncanniness, is mapped within a multidimensional landscape. In this regard, doubling activates the inter-referentiality in the narrative. In reading double as a trope in various psychological and sociopolitical encounters, Clifford Hallam observes, "In the broadest scene of the idea, 'double' can mean almost any *dual*, and in some cases even multiple, structure in a text"

(5). The complex identifications and various doublings proliferate the relationship between "incomplete self," represented by all the female characters, and integrated personality in the interpretive act.

The theme of cohabitation, apart from being read in a Gothic mode and in a form of doubling, can extend its configurations to the intertextuality of women in creating a synchronic community. The interpretive act, I argue, is reified in the form of maternal genealogy or lesbian intertextuality taken as a legacy by most Chinese Canadian women writers. In these relations, the doublings that occur in *When Fox Is a Thousand* are linkages of a related but unique term. Lai creates a female intersubjective paradigm that the doubling of female characters, through multireferentiality and multiple intertextual relations, as in SKY Lee's work, refuses to be tied to the binary model. Lai explains in her essay "Corrupted Lineage: Narrative in the Gap of History" how the corrupted body-double comes into intertextual engagement:

> I do not belong to the linear trajectory of history that Canadian schools feed to children.... But those of us who are so often accused of always looking alike might perhaps be more inclined to embrace these as a mirror image of our mirror life. There is no direct linear trajectory from one narrative fragment, one historical project to the next, and yet when laid side by side, there is a spark between them, the brief connection of synapses necessary to make the impossible connection between body-doubles. (49)

Engaging in the transgression through shape-shifting, name-changing, gender-crossing, cross-dressing, passing, and doubling, the heroines assume multiple identities in order to straddle different spheres and disrupt the sense of reality and complacency of those worlds. In crossing the boundaries, either through physical metamorphosis or through psychic transformation, there is always an element of deceit involved in how

trickster discourse operates, for it is at once playful and duplicitous in raising havoc (Matsukawa 107). The morphing body is articulated as "a historical idea" rather than "a natural species."[6] Within the trickster operation, the kaleidoscopic forms of metamorphosis and layers of border-crossing present the body as proliferated, fluid constructions.

3.5 The Crack between Two Lips: The Porous Textual Transposition

After examining how the body is ramified in various exterior transformations, I would like to complicate the morphology of the body in textual production aligned with historical intervention. It should be noted that in the novel the transformations center on female corporeality and on the interacting and intervening between female characters through their erotic encounters. In other words, the corporeal transformation inscribes the narrative plot and counterplot, text and con/text. As "writing" in the novel through the body and across bodies is a celebratory and liberating act that releases luminous torrents and different forms, the material (that is, transforming, acting, sexing) body cannot be separated from a textual exploration. The constructions and transformations of the body in the novel would be slight without textual investigations into the union between the corporeal form and textual production. In this sense, Irigaray's concept of morphology may serve as a close link between sex and text to facilitate my analysis of transposition within the morphological context.

Furthermore, Irigaray's "isomorphic" bodies – sharing the same shape (or doubling) – can be further elaborated from Fox's physical cohabitation within different

women to various women's intertextual celebration.[7] Having analyzed how the physical and psychic trans-formations (the non-discursive or "real" corporeal) open up multiple identities and identifications among the characters, I find the metaphoric strategy of shape-shifting and proliferated doubling a powerful launch pad into a more "active, creative coding or inscription" that reveals a "polymorphous fluidity" inserted into synchronic forms of sexuality/textuality (Grosz, *Sexual Subversions* 117). Therefore, Irigaray's metaphor of two lips allows for an alternative "mechanics" capable of characterizing female sexuality.

However, I read the fluidity of Irigaray's two lips (sexual labia) as a form of linguistic bilabial utterance of not claiming one identity, one location, one organ or one culture. In other words, the symbolic sexual/textual two lips in Lai's work are a plenitude, a complex intervention of two languages rendering (inter)textual slippage transparent. The textual transparency in the novel, according to Japanese Canadian critic Roy Miki, exposes "the effect of offering to readers simultaneously an exotic instance of alterity in their midst (of Canada, in this sense) and a narrative that mollifies (or otherwise muffles) the very racialization of Asian [sic] identities that continues to mark the boundaries of what is readable and what is not" ("Can Asian Adian?" 66). In the mollified racialized narrative, Lai's re-appropriation of Chinese texts inscribed in the Western linguistic paradigm frames the trans-textual mobilization, concurrently contributing to the transformation and translation of women's experience.

The trans-textual practice exposes the transparent splitting between the original and the reproduced materiality, at the same time, creating a synchronic genealogy of the heroines. *When Fox is a Thousand* relies heavily on transposing Chinese and Western

intertexts as well as on contemporary cultural productions. To run a short list: (1) The fox spirit is taken from the sixteenth-century writer Pu Songling's *Strange Tales of Liaozhai*; (2) The gift of the Chinese princess is from the traditional story of "Prince of Persia" (98); (3) "The Cat Mother" (221) derives from another Chinese story "Father and the Fox"; (4) the Poetess's story relies on R.H. van Gulik's *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.* (中國古代房內考); (5) The story of the female student and the painter is a parodic rewriting of *Alice in the Wonderland* (197-198); (6) "The Nun" (205) is a variation of *Little Red Riding Hood*; (7) "The Peacock Hen" (33-50) echoes the story in Ridley Scott's movie *Blade Runner* (15, 100).

Lai's re-appropriation of Chinese tales from the translated English texts evokes the debate of "authenticity" in its textual transposition: How is the third-hand reinscription legitimate? The making of Lai's Canadian text is thus achieved by filling in the fractures between source materials, and the work becomes a transparent, porous production of cultural and linguistic slippage. The questioning of authenticity brings up the ongoing contested notion of re-inventing history – a crucial concern endemic to the reproduction of historicity in all Chinese North American literature.[8] Critical reflection upon the remediation and conceptual fusions of two cultures is essential to the exploitation of the gaps within two cultures. This reflection forces us to re-evaluate the question of authenticity, which pervades Asian American literary production and the longstanding debate concerning the "essence" of Chinese North American identity.

Returning to the issue of re-appropriation, I do not intend to add another reductionist assumption, but to offer an alternative interpretation in textual analysis. As

the second-generation who is not well versed in the Chinese language, Lai revivifies Chinese mythology, but her rewriting of the Chinese stories problematizes cultural and historical authenticity. In this "contaminated" space, Lai's work, on the one hand, attempts to represent Chinese Canadian experiences by drawing upon source materials foreign to Anglophone readers, and, on the other hand, eradicates the foreign linguistic features in those intertexts by producing a fluent style of narrative in transposing the translated texts. If we think of culture as a text constituted by many intertexts – commensurate or incommensurate – then Yu, Fox, Artemis could be the incommensurate intertexts. When they are transposed to Lai's text, this antithesis is carried over, and anyone informed of the intertextuality will always read the literary production with a double vision (Huang 154-160).

The intertextual strategy can be called "transposition," a term suggested by Julia Kristeva, indicating that "the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation" (qtd. in Huang 68). Because the writer interweaves the fragments of women's experiences, the transposition through intertextual revisions could be the "contact zone" of women in different historical moments. In *Imperial Eyes: Travel and Transculturation* (1992), Mary Louise Pratt defines the "contact zone" as "the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (6). I am not, however, using the term in a colonial or postcolonial context. This term is appropriated here in the sense that Lai creates a contact zone as the convergence of three female narrative voices in three symbolically historical and geographical zones.

Within the contact zone, the synchronic connections of women's bodies and texts frame transposition and intertextuality as erotic activities. As Québécois lesbian writer Nicole Brossard has emphasized, intertextuality allows women to make themselves visible, to impose their gaze, and in short, to enter history through "inter-stories" (Moyes, "Nothing Sacred" 31). Aligning with other Chinese Canadian (lesbian) writers, Lai introduces further issues to the dynamic of lesbian intertextuality. The transposition of authentic historical and folkloric accounts evokes Lai's literary strategies in relation to resistances to mainstream politics. Lai's strategy of translation or transliteration makes trans-textuality a figure of dramatic indeterminacy. In other words, I see Lai's re-writing and inscription of Chinese-Western intertexts as a mimetic mode of representation of texts that are not composed outside of history but subject to certain enabling and destabilizing constraints.

3.6 "What are you bringing your mother?": Parody and Intertextuality

Intertextuality, which includes canonical and non-canonical inset elements, is used to highlight the porous interface between official and unofficial (hi)stories; this rupture serves to illuminate the blind spots in textuality and expose the contradictions and problematics inherent in the binary model. The transparent slippage between the Chinese-Western intertexts makes the porous interface palpable; the linguistic and conceptual fractures underscore the questionable "constructedness" of meaning itself. Traveling in the porous space, the trickster figure Fox uses sexual relations with different women, and the tricky improvisations produce a parody that exposes and destabilizes any kind of

constructedness. In her study of parody, Linda Hutcheon (1989) names "transcontextualization" as the method by which a parody registers its critical distance from the original utterance or work ("Modern" 91). By placing the reference to the original in a different context, parody refracts the original.

The parodic effects in the novel re-site/re-cite another history: a Chinese women's history. Daniel Coleman writes that "[b]y targeting a pre-existing discourse and resituating it in a subsequent context, parody's double voice contains (a version of) a discourse's genealogy" (57). In linking parody and female intertextuality, Hutcheon argues that "[p]arody – or intertextuality in general – plays an important role in much women's fiction today, as it seeks a feminine literary space while still acknowledging (however grudgingly) the power of the (male/'universal') space in which it cannot avoid, to some extent, operating" (*The Canadian Postmodern* 110). Parody is today one of the most popular feminist "modalities": the ex-centrics outside the "mainstream" (white, Anglo/Franco, heterosexual). It is one of the ways of investigating the position of women (of color) *within* the tradition, as a way of discovering possible positions *outside* that tradition.

The narrative in the novel finds parodic effects in Fox's fluid identity and tricksteric acts. Fox in the narrative, different from traditional stories of the fox spirit possessing men, is transformed into a lesbian, and Fox becomes an immigrant herself, "emigrating to the West coast" with her fox family" (5). Toward the end of the novel, Fox, in the guise of a young woman, meets Artemis on her way to visit her birth mother. Fox's familiar questions "What are you bringing your mother?" and "What route do you plan to take?" (205) recall the famous lines in "Little Red Riding Hood." Shortly after

this episode, Fox reassumes her animal form and tells Artemis the story of "The Nun," in which Little Red Riding Hood becomes a Buddhist nun, taking food to her sick sisters in the temple (208-9).

This scenario is contextualized parodically with one facet of Yu's life as a Taoist nun. One of the major sources upon which the story of Yu Hsuan-Chi draws is R.H. van Gulik's *Sexual Life in Ancient China.* In his research on the Poetess's life in the nunnery, after breaking off with the husband Li, van Gulik indicates that many Buddhist and Taoist nunneries in the Tang Dynasty "were a haven of refuge not only for pious girls but also for widows and divorced women who had no family to return to, and at the same time for loose women who wished to lead a free life, without registering officially as prostitutes" (175). The parodic appropriation, in combination with the insistence on intertextuality, produces the disruption of the ability to make clear-cut distinctions between fact and fiction, between authenticity and imitation.

Moreover, parody suggests a form of transgression. In her essay "Performativity, Parody, Politics," Moya Lloyd argues that "parody may be transgressive from the perspective of the specific linear history of practices that constitute a particular individuated subject (exposing the fact that their doing of gender is always contingent)" (208). The episode of Fox's inquiry into Yu's mysterious murder of Lu Ch'iao to "rescue" this event reveals many ambivalent and multivoiced interpretations of History being perceived as singular and authoritative. In another episode, Fox changes into a woman in the library to find "real justification for [the Poetess's] execution" (225). In juxtaposing various documents or allowing Fox to search for "truth" from the documents, Lai leaves a new space for interpreting Yu's murder of the maidservant.

These translated documents challenge the historical definition and authenticity of Yu's lasciviousness and immorality. As Lai's account of the Poetess's life is consciously fictional, with abundant source materials "translated" by Western sinologists,[9] the collage of various representational translated documents on Yu's life illustrates a new constellation of historical and mythological ambiguity and fluidity. The collage thus problematizes a singular Historical interpretation of Yu's felony. Does Yu commit the crime or does Artemis kill Ming? The mystery remains unanswered. The parodic interreferentiality of Yu's murder of Lu Ch'iao, Ming's unsolved murder, and Fox's intervention of inquiring about the murders highlights the interrelated leitmotifs of history, interpretation, and gender politics.

3.7 Whose History?: The Denied (Hi)stories

It should be noted that the three heroines' stories are marginalized from the mainstream historical trajectory: the fox tales are always taken as "light" literature in canonical Chinese literary tradition.[10] The supposedly sizeable body of poetry by the talented Poetess is absent from anthologies of male-authored Chinese poetry; Artemis, a lesbian Asian woman, appears as a visible minority (but an invisible body) in the heterosexual white society. In other words, their (hi)stories are denied by official History. Fox knows that "Human history books make no room for foxes" (5). Yu Hsuan-Chi represents one of many historical women long excluded from the cultural mainstream, i.e., from surveys of literary history and anthologies (Hilf 127). The librarian's response to Fox's inquiry for clarification shows the woman's (hi)story ignored by historians:

"Nobody's really taken an interest in that kind of thing for thousands of years" (225). It is through Fox, the third-space persona, that Lai inserts her historical consciousness in the fractured, corrupted lineage; Fox's free floating spirit problematizes History as a linear, singular, patriarchal, imperial construction.

In her essay "Political Animals and the Body of History," Lai herself indicates that Fox, representing the diasporized, marginalized type, is created as a woman warrior, as "a new trope of lesbian representation, or, if that term and its history reeks too much of its western origins, then as a trope of Asian women's community and power" (151). An outsider now given a voice, Fox, feeling humiliated to be "so much forgotten" (80-81) is aware of her attempt to register herself into human history but at the same time, of her difference from other foxes, who "don't know how history gathers like a reservoir deep below the ground, clear water distilled from events of ages past, collecting sharp and biting in sunless pools" (18). Fox's consciousness of history is not only linked to the past but also rooted in the future: "It is history I'm interested in. History, and, I suppose, the future. If I'm to receive a birthday gift, I think that's what I'd like. The ability to read from the air who has breathed it in the past, and who will in the future. The accumulated emotions of any point in space" (187). The notion of how history and stories are constructed within the privileged white patriarchal context has been challenged strategically by the writer, who shifts the terms of oppression from domination to hegemony.

By scripting an element of consent into the narrative, like Kae in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* endeavoring to create women's affiliations and alliances, Lai also constructs a space "from which to dissent: to resist white racism and the imperatives to extend the

patriarchal line" (Beauregard, "The Emergence" 65). Witnessing the barbarous actions of the Chinese government in Tiananmen Square, Artemis nonchalantly comments on Western imperialism in creating a totalizing voice: "They only tell the story in a way that gives Canada the moral high ground it can use to pressure for things that benefit Canada, and not the Chinese at all. Not Canada even, but white Canadian men of a particular class and occupation" (86). In resisting the monolithic, imperial construction of "facts," the author claims that her strategy of presenting the confusion, disjuncture, and discontinuity of "histories" is "to make a project of constructing a consciously artificial history for [herself] and others like [her] – a history with women identified women of Chinese descent living in the West at its centre" (Lai, "Political Body" 149). In Marlene Goldman's words, "In the hands of women writers, this confusion becomes a tactic for subversion because, by problematizing the nature of 'fact,' the texts strategically call into question the supposedly historical and factual discourses that have defined what it means to be female" (7). The intertwined and intertextualized female narratives deconstruct the phallocentric sense of history and re-vision history as unstable transformations and as fluid and permeable systems: "The order of nature is never fixed/The west is moving, the east cannot be still" (105). The orchestration of intertexts thus serves as Lai's "historical launch pad for hybrid flowers" ("Interview with Ashok"), and the rewriting of these ancient texts points to the writer's deliberate transgression in creating a kind of "third-space" women's subjectivity.[11]

3.8 Con/Text and Con/Test: Maternal Genealogy and Lesbian Intertextuality

The translated and reproduced historical and mythological texts render authenticity problematic. The third-space through the transposing act in Lai's novel, to a certain extent, engages in lesbian translation and intertextuality. In her essay on lesbian translation, Alice Parker uses "the related concepts of translation and passing...to de-sign a space of lesbian subjectivity" (322). Parker claims that she translates her quotidian materiality and experience into an "alien code, a code that is already phallic and patriarchal," and the only way for her to speak and write, or to de/sign a subjectivity is "by passing as an-other" (322). Here, taking lesbian as a broader definition, I situate lesbian translation and intertextuality within women's solidarity – "in the economy of substitution, transliteration, translation, where women circulate, (some)things are always lost as well as gained" (Meese 131). From the "two lips" articulated in Irigaray's isomorphic zone, I suggest that the isomorphic zone be read as the abovementioned contact zone, where intertextuality converges with a carnality of women's close bond (connection) in which women, breaking temporal, spatial, and cultural barriers, support each other, and commingle a sense of community.

In both essays "Corrupted Lineage" and "Political Animals and the Body of History," Lai emphasizes the anti-racist, feminist agenda and queer politics that she endeavors to inscribe into her fiction in order to create an artificial history, both freeing and destructive, for the silenced women. The silenced Canadian women of Chinese ancestry, imposed upon by both Western racism and Confucian codes of honor, need to betray to claim their subjectivity. The betrayal of family secrets and a deliberate

transgression, usually through their "liberated" sexuality, underline the body of work of the five Chinese Canadian women writers under scrutiny: Sui Sin Far, SKY Lee, Larissa Lai, Evelyn Lau, and Lydia Kwa. Lai, interested in the stories of the rooting "of a lineage broken by language and travel" ("Corrupted Lineage" 50), attempts to construct a fictive "home" to accommodate other female mythological figures (Fox, Nu Wa, Lady White Snake) and at the same time, other female compatriots of her time.

The engagement of Lai's constructing a consciously artificial historical aims to write a genealogy of women. The heroines suggest that the work done in the context of their bonding be best understood as the creation of a "female genealogy," or a "female symbolic." Teresa de Lauretis defines this term: "Each woman of each pair validates and valorizes the other within a frame of reference no longer patriarchal or male-designed, but made up of perceptions, knowledges, attitudes, values, and modes of relating historically expressed by women for women – the frame of reference" (qtd. in Goldman 107). However, it is in the "corrupted lineage," in Lai's own words, that the author creates a utopia synchronically accommodating women in different historical moments and locations. Grosz's reading of Irigaray may foreground a further interpretation of synchronic intertextuality. According to Irigaray, the project of (re)-creating a lost past does not simply consist in excavating those women "forgotten in history," but it also entails "new kinds of language, new systems of nomenclature" (qtd. in Grosz, *Sexual Subversions* 119). A genealogical exploration of women's histories and interconnections through different generations gives the silenced women their own room. Advocating that the two women take on an active subject-to-subject relation, Irigaray explores a fusion with the differentiations from the mother defying patriarchal logic, and announces the

new relation in which the mother-daughter identities defy the binary patriarchal polarizations and oppositions and the separation between one woman and another (*Sexual Subversion* 119-125).

In this female intersubjective frame, the Poetess weaves the maternal thread with other women: "My mother's blood thundered in my ears and in my heart, which still beat in sympathy with hers. It skipped out of mine the moment the promise was made, then fell back again into perfect synchronicity. My unfinished body did a somersault in the womb" (25). The maternal genealogical link is also reified through the act of "instruction" between Fox and her cousin (supposedly female). The inculcation connects Fox's being and acting with her relationship with other female senior foxes: Fox's cousin instructs her "to climb onto the woman's bed with her and blow cool air into her nostrils" and coaches her "through the strange sounds of the magic words" (82). In order not to be "so much forgotten" and to learn "a well-orchestrated haunting" (81), Fox has to return to her maternal tradition and learn Mother's skills.

Either Yu's "synchronicity" or Fox's "instruction" engages in a kind of female intertextuality. Taking up Elizabeth Meese's suggestion of defining *lesbian* as a broader term, I also posit lesbianism in a more extended context not only confined to a woman's sexual attraction to another woman. Elaborating on Meese's argument, Moyes points out that "intertextuality has proven to be crucial to lesbian writing – not as an essential, defining feature of that writing but rather as a textual process that has been (and continues to be) mobilized toward specific aesthetic and political ends" ("Composing in the Scent of Wood and Roses" 207). Unlike the traditional Chinese fox spirit haunting and seducing men, Fox is interested in women; "the trickster as presented by Lai is

lesbian, just like the author herself, and is therefore rejected and looked down upon by the society of Foxes" (Hilf 122). Fox says, "In my tradition we've generally gone for scholars and priests on account of their vivid imaginations and propensities for *solitude* (my emphasis). Priests or other holy people – in my case nuns, which is slightly unusual, but hardly unheard of" (127). By inhabiting different female forms, Fox creates a kind of lesbian "solidarity" as opposed to "solitude."

The symbolic cohabitation highlights the ways in which femininity (or lesbianism) enables women to claim other forms of community beyond the national. Inhabiting the Poetess, Fox discovers "that she had a greater capacity for mischief, or, rather, my own was greatly increased with her as my disguise" (89). Inside Artemis's body, Fox feels Artemis's "breath com[ing] from a warm place inside the earth" and together they "fly close to the ground and let the thunder come back" (123). Fox explains how (hi)stories are directly related to the textual memory and sexual affiliation:

> There are stories told by lovers. Sometimes they are instructional. Sometimes the stories are not told with the mouth, but with the whole body, arcing across skin, shooting history into veins. Stories set into motion the moment they spill, stories that cannot be turned back and started over. They can be told and told again, but with each telling an older rhythm reasserts itself and there is never any taking the story back. (160)

In another interview, Lai says that "[t]he Fox makes all kinds of connections amongst all kinds of aspects" (qtd. in Levitt). This intertextual bonding is activated by women's "return to the memory through different doors, in fragments, through 'here and there a moment of pain'" (228). As the three narratives converge toward the end, female solidarity is made explicit from the connections between women forged through the recognition of their mutual marginalization. "The Judge of the Underworld" story (215-

218) reveals the exclusion or execution of five innocent women murdered by the white, sexist, heterosexual, patriarchal, privileged Law; the women represent respectively the victims of racism, sexism, homophobia, patriarchy, and class supremacy. The only way for them to get out of the underworld is "to find another country to take [them]" (218). "Another country" points to the writer's home-making that belongs to "the realm of the feminine" ("Political Animals" 153), and this queer home resonates with the "lesbian utopic site" I have already discussed in the chapter on SKY Lee. In Lai's novel, the utopic site is a "feminine space, a racialized space, a ying space" ("Corrupted Lineage" 48). To construct the utopic site, the writer enters the ungraspable trajectory of history through travel, change, and interaction with other women compatriots and ancestors.

For Lai, the effect of coming to the consciousness of creating a synchronic community, of finding "another country" for the silenced women, is salutary. The symbolic collaborative act is suggested in Fox and Artemis's poem dedicated to Yu "to dream through what nobody's records could tell us. Poems that turn into tales that fall back on themselves the way night falls into day" (231). The celebration in the closing lines produces the idea of transnational femininity: "Sometimes between the act and the memory there is a longing that builds up, quietly feeding on the soul, a longing almost like the longing for home" (228). The novel thus provides the link between the mainstream literary production and a progressive agenda: a link which is represented in crossing various levels of borders.

The transcultural migration seemingly produces many instances of anachronism and contradiction, but towards the end, the narrative trajectory is ultimately progressive. The thematic progression affirms that the liberated subject reaches "immortality" and that

"the constellations have shifted from their original positions in the black bowl of the sky" (236). Larissa Lai inscribes the three representational voices as agency; this agency re-mediates an authorial practice of textual manipulation and transgression not to privilege intentionality, but to situate marginalized women as agents of ultimately political acts, "acts that in turn exhibit awareness of how women have too often been positioned as mere objects of history" (Bow 170). For Lai, rewriting her past embedded in the remote Chinese history is articulated in the complicated multiple narratives. The "nodes of resonance, recurrence, reincarnation" ("Corrupted Lineage" 49) open up a textual territory – an imaginary homeland – that accommodates the author's circumvention of the marginalization inherent in being a minority woman writer in the West. The author uses sexualized and textualized bodies as vital signs of intersubjective location to break down imposed dualisms: essentialist and constructionist, active and latent, and physical and textual. The transgression thus foregrounds Larissa Lai's compunction toward home-making of articulating a body, a form through the collaboration and celebration of other women's voices and stories.

Notes

1. The notion of "trans-ing" also echoes the texts of another Chinese Canadian writer Fred Wah, texts that transcend various time levels, oscillate between past and past, and create a multiplicity of voices. In *Faking It: Poetics and Hybridity Critical Writing 1984-1999*, Wah fabricates the term "trans=geo=ethno=poetics," in which he argues that the tilt towards translation and transcreation seems always necessary within the Canadian poetics (41). According to Wah, the paradigm of *trans* poetics – "methods of translation, transference, transition, transposition" – situates (Canadian) writers "in an aperture (to extend Bhabha's metaphor of 'negative transparency') that offers a greater depth of field, a wide-angle lens that permits distortion at the edges" (*Faking It* 91).

2. See Lai's Source Notes at the end of the novel. The collage of references concerning Yu's life includes *San-Shui Hsiao-Tu* translated by Jeanne Kelly, *100 Celebrated Chinese Women* translated by Kate Foster, *Women Poets of China* translated by Kenneth Rexroth and Ling Chung, *Sexual Life in Ancient China* by R.H. van Gulik, and *Poets and Murder* by van Gulik (*When Fox is a Thousand* 226-227).

3. In her essay "Towards the feminine sublime, or the story of 'a twinkling monad, shape-shifting across dimension': intermediality, fantasy and special effects in cyberpunk film and animation," Livia Monnet draws on the notion of intermediality, contextualized with fantastical, feminist hermeneutics, to analyze the transfers, transformations and fusions in cyberpunk films and animations. Monnet's concepts are instrumental in that Fox's shape-shifting and metamorphosis to construct a "third-space" subjectivity recall the remediation and interferences in cyberpunk and science fiction texts. In Monnet's words, "Intermediality designates the interactions, mutual refashioning or remediation, and the conceptual fusions occurring between various media in a given cultural production or between several media elements, forms and techniques in a single medium" (225). However, because Lai's text does not engage directly in the process of transfer and mutual interaction between visual, print, electronic and other media, I have slightly modified the term as "intermedium" in the sense that Lai embodies Fox as a medium/agent among different discursive bodies.

4. As Lianne Moyes remarks in "Nothing Sacred," Alice Parker makes a similar observation about another lesbian text, Nicole Brossard's *Baroque at Dawn*, where Brossard uses names in a symbolic way. I take a clue from the symbolic naming for a further reading.

5. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, in conducting a brief survey of this motif in Asian American literature, proposes the idea of *double* to differentiate from the interchangeably used terms such as *doppelganger*, *shadow*, *second self*, *alter ego*. In assuming the term *double,* as implied by the coincidence of critical analysis,

she raises a challenging question: "What enables critics to recognize, in a contemporary work of Asian American literature, a leitmotif usually associated with nineteenth-century Gothic fiction?" Through many variations in definitional stringency and emphasis, Wong elaborates double as a trope in the overlapping approaches: the psychogenic, the taxonomic, and the diachronic (78-99).

6. This concept of the body as an historical idea is compounded by Judith Butler in reading Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theories of human embodiment. According to Merleau-Ponty, the body is not only an historical idea but also a set of "possibilities to be continually realized." The phenomenological assumption maintains that the body be the embodiment of possibilities conditioned by historical conventions and cultural materiality. Taking up this insight, I expand the body (historically intervened and culturally conditioned) to textual production and intertextual performance.

7. I take the definitions of "isomorphic" and "morphology" from Elizabeth Grosz's reading of three French feminist texts. In *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (1989), Grosz defines *morphology* and *isomorphic* as follows:

> This is a term used by Irigaray to refer to the ways in which the body and anatomy of each sex is lived by the subject and represented in culture. A psycho-social and significatory concept, it replaces the biologism and essentialism of notions of 'anatomical destiny' pervasive in psychoanalysis. For Irigaray, it is not women's anatomies but the psychical and social meanings of women's bodies within patriarchy that is seen as castrated. Morphologies are the effects of the psychological meanings of the developing child's sexual zones and pleasures, meanings communicated through the hierarchical structures of the nuclear family; they are also the effect of a socio-symbolic inscription of the body, producing bodies as discursive effects. In this sense, patriarchal discourses and phallic/castrated bodies are isomorphic, sharing the same shape. If discourses and representations give the body its form and meaning, then feminist struggles must direct themselves to the representational or symbolic order which shapes women's bodies only in the (inverted) image of men's. (Glossary xix)

8. The notion of the authenticity thesis, according to Patricia Chu, is ubiquitous in most Asian American literature. These authors, who cater to white perceptions of Asian Americans as fundamentally foreign and their culture as kinky and exotic, are guilty of "faking" Asian culture. Among the Asian American critics and writers, Frank Chin is the most severe one lambasting Maxine Hong Kingston, David Henry Hwang, Daniel Okimoto, and Amy Tan for fabricating accounts of Chinese culture and subjectivity. The examples to define Asian American reality in Frank Chin's "Come All Ye Asian American Writers, the Real and the Fake" are all variants of offering traditional Chinese culture and literature as in any way representative of Chinese American consciousness (Chu 64-71).

9. See Note 1 and Source Notes in the novel.

10. Considered as "light" literature in Chinese literary tradition, *Strange Tales of Liaozhai* records woman's difference. Some stories in *Liaozhai* localize defiant female same-sex desire, disfigure it, and eventually exorcise it – the strange – from the human community. According to Tze-lan Sang, "the inscrutability and alterity of the other species (such as the fox), which are conventional in the zhiguai (lit. 'recording the strange') literary tradition, are here reinscribed with a particular significance" (88).

11. This third space is also indicated by Lai in the interview with Ashok Mathur, where Lai criticizes the sum of the identities the society wants to pin on her as a kind of "born-again liberalism that denies the very struggles of marginalized people in this country." For Lai, there should be a "third place" between confrontational politics and liberalism.

Chapter Four

Lydia Kwa and *This Place Called Absence*

In previous chapters, I have discussed some of the ways in which *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *When Fox Is a Thousand* engage with the notion of transgressive sexuality, particularly lesbian sensibility. Aligning theoretical analysis with various historical trajectories, the preceding chapters elaborate on sexualized textual productions within ethnic (Sui Sin Far), spatial/diasporic (SKY Lee), and morphological (Larissa Lai) parameters. This chapter internalizes the "boundaries" and posits lesbianism within a psychoanalytical landscape.

In spite of the growing body of Asian American literary works on queerness, queer writing is still canonized in a dominant "minority" discourse: white male homosexuality. Although queer writing resists and frequently subverts a "white patriarchal political economy that regulates gender, sexual, and racial identities" (Wong & Santa Ana 203), the established queer canon has essentially excluded "lesbians of color," or more precisely, lesbians of Asian descent. The topic of lesbianism in Asian American Studies, as Dana Y. Takagi points out, "is often treated in whispers, if mentioned at all" (27). Given that the role of sexuality in the construction of Chinese Canadian women's subjectivity is a central concern in this dissertation, theorizing corporeality (the body) with reference to psychoanalytic cultural theory can offer a new insight into subjectivity formation. Elizabeth Grosz (1989) argues that female sexuality (heterosexual or queer) still conforms to "the logic of male identity, as analogue of male sexuality, as its opposite or complement" (*Sexual Subversion* 115). In asking "Where is female sexuality to be located?" Grosz indicates that the question is a "speculation, debate and controversy" already positing women in male terms (116). But if we ask, "Where is Asian lesbian sexuality to be located?" the question invites multiple

speculations, debates and controversies. To rephrase Rey Chow's question in *Writing Diaspora*, my specific concern is: How can we articulate the diasporic Asian lesbians' difference without turning that difference into a strategy of cultural marginalization of these women vis-à-vis the West and with respect to the dominant masculinist positions in the field of Chinese (Canadian) Studies? [1]

Given that psychoanalytic cultural theories have proven effective for a discussion of the Asian American psyche (Wong and Santa Ana 1999; Cheng 2001; Eng 2001), as I have discussed in the Prologue, this chapter examines principally the notion of abject(ion), a boundary to be traversed by bodily zones and sensations; abjection both places and displaces the heroines' subjectivity defined along familial and historical praxes. Before elaborating on the applications of Kristevan abjection, I will briefly sketch out Lydia Kwa's background, discuss the four voices in the novel, and then employ the theoretical approach to punctuate the intricate narrative interrelations.

Lydia Kwa, unlike the other four second- and third-generation Chinese Canadian writers under study, was born in Singapore, and she emigrated to Canada in 1980. As a new immigrant, after receiving her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Queen's University, Kwa practices as a clinical psychologist in Vancouver and writes as a professional writer. Her first volume of poetry, *The Colours of Heroines*, was published in 1994, and her short stories and poetry have appeared in journals and anthologies. Her debut novel, *This Place Called Absence* (2000), has captured public attention because the novel, for the first time in Chinese Canadian literature, explicitly addresses the issue of lesbian sexuality and ties female-female desire to displacement. The novel's polyphonic

narrative renders the text a historical and cultural conjuncture that accentuates the author's concern about women's sexuality.

This Place Called Absence (abbreviated as *PCA* henceforward) interweaves four lives separated by centennial years of history (from colonial Singapore of the early 1900s to contemporary Vancouver), and it explores the struggles of four narrators living with forbidden sexuality and within cultural ruptures. The central narrator in 1994, Dr. Wu Lan, resides in Canada as a clinical psychologist (Wu Lan could be the persona of Lydia Kwa). Because her lesbianism is condemned as "an anomaly" in Singapore, Wu Lan chooses escape as "the solution – a flight into exile which resulted in internal fissures in the psyche" (*PCA* 123). The novel starts with Wu's leave of absence from work for her father's funeral. Troubled by his suicide and haunted by his ghost, she returns to Singapore, where she looks into "that total and infinite absence, the abyss, unable to turn back, unable to jump" (*PCA* 7). Wu Lan searches for clues to her father's suicide, and her search leads her to conjecture the plight of *ah kus* (prostitutes) in fin-de-siècle Singapore.[2] Parallels emerge between Wu's search for sexual liberation and the sexual escape of two *ah kus*, Lee Ah Choi and Chow Chat Mui, who flee from China to work in Singapore and find solace in each other's arms. Whether the two prostitutes are real or fictional, Wu Lan feels "compelled to imagine them, Ah Choi and Chat Mui, together" (*PCA* 163). The two indentured prostitutes' predicament echoes Wu Lan's internal struggles with the forbidden sexuality. The fourth intervening voice is that of Mahmee, Wu Lan's mother. Kwa states that Mahmee's voice serves as "a kind of disturbance, a subversive linguistic and psychological foil to Wu Lan's tendencies to intellectualize her experiences" (qtd. in Leung 260). Mahmee's positioning and rooting in old Singaporean

culture provide a counterpoint to the expatriate daughter's response to isolation and identity redefinition.

In what follows, I will read Kwa's text through the lens of abjection, arguing that abjection looms as another transgressive representation in which exile, genealogy, and language are layered with queerness to engender lesbian subjectivity in the novel. Paying particular attention to different apparatuses of abjection in internalized and externalized forms, I will posit abjection in dialogue with historical maternal voices.

In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1992), Julia Kristeva defines the abject as that which does not fit, and she associates abjection with threshold substances that are neither inside nor outside, with things or states that lack clear conceptual boundaries. According to Kristeva, being excluded by History (Law of Father), the female subject identifies herself from the very abjection on her own. The quintessential experiences of abjection are decidedly rooted in the body, and this body does not have a stable status of object. As Karen Shimakawa explains, "the term [is] often used to describe the position of (racially and sexually) disenfranchised groups in analyses of the politics of representation" (*National Abjection* 3). Because of its instability, the abject is what threatens to cross the boundary; it threatens such borders and highlights the fragility of the symbolic order. The central heroine is lesbian and the novel is, in some ways, her discovery, struggle, and acceptance of that ontological identity. Sex(uality) for the heroine is a place where certain energies of debasement and delight are released and where her worst fears about herself are somehow confirmed.

Female desires in Kwa's novel operate in double displacement: first by separation from the mother, and, according to the incest prohibition, by separation from the father

(Iwama 97). The principal narrator Wu Lan's sense of abjection is deeply embedded in these two axes: alienation from the paternal sphere, transposed in the metaphoric patricide, and desire for maternal connection, textually intertwined with other female bodies. It is precisely this combination of separation from paternal economy and longing for maternal presence that pronounces Wu Lan's sense of abjection of Self and Other. The proliferations from the doubly displaced liminality will be further analyzed and aligned with the doubles of absence-abjection and abjection-objection in subjectivity formation.

As a psychotherapist for others as well as for herself, Wu Lan reveals the darkness within sexuality and unsettles sexual weakness and self-abandonment. She unearths the hidden stories of her family, and in so doing, she also discloses a quest for the M/other and an understanding of herself through repudiation and reconstruction. In other words, by interrogating the oppressive forces internal and external to the individual, the speaking voice articulates abjection, which Kristeva defines as both "a state and a process – the condition/position of that which is deemed loathsome and the process by which that appraisal is made" (*Power* 2). In appropriating abjection, I do not intend to use Kristeva's ahistoricized theory as a sole explanation of the transhistorical construction of subjectivity or to import the simplistic psychoanalytical apparatus into the sexual psyche. The term is utilized to posit a new way of extending the migrant, genealogical, and linguistic dimensions of queer sexuality inherent in Kwa's novel. Abjection, analogous to the way diaspora functions as a kind of externalized exile, becomes an internalized exile that has abstracted geographical specificity in that it is categorically unrecognized by either the law or a mainstream society. Along this

trajectory, Kwa's story follows the critical tradition, already established by other Chinese Canadian women writers, that views lesbianism, women's bonding and intertextuality as a way of rejecting patriarchal components in heterosexual models of subjectivity. Furthermore, the narrative historicizes "abjection" through the four historical voices; the text can be therefore read as a history of abjection, or an abject history.

In foregrounding abjection in Asian American theatricality, Shimakawa argues that in the intersection of history, gender, and sexuality, "abjection evolves as a process of exclusion specific to the 'threat of contamination' posed by a given non-normative group/identity formation" (161). The polyphonic voices evoke responses specific to the particular historical brands of abjection of concern to each of them; beneath the surface of the stories between Self and M/Other lies a maternal/feminine dialectic. It is from this vantage that I wish to contextualize the displaced lesbian subjectivity with dialogical, historical voices.

The four alternating voices, seemingly existent in demarcated territories, are strategically interwoven "in the cleaving of memory from memory" (*PCA* 123), and this ruptured space, painful yet hopeful, is open to the narrator's transformative power. Wu Lan broods over her parents' relationship with each other, her mother's desire for familial lineage, her own lesbianism, and her matrilineal connection with two prostitutes in the past. All these mediating conjunctures orchestrate with other major interlocutors: Mahmee, Ah Choi and Chat Mui. Delving into the abject in memory and history, the therapist, Wu Lan the healer, as her name suggests, plays a significant role in psychotherapy – an act of looking inwards and remembering. Re-membering becomes crucial to the process of deconstructing and reconstructing the "internal fissures"; the

strategic oxymoron, the visible absence of these heroines, constitutes the abject subjecthood in the novel. The dialectic of homosexuality is filtered through both the neuroses of the family and the displaced in-between psyche. Subjectivity, in this sense, involves issues of pain and resistance: re-membering and articulating fissures within the female matrix.

4.1 Cage aux folles: Displacement and Abjection

To conceptualize the depth to which Wu Lan has traveled within the psyche of other maternal figures, it is necessary to encapsulate the deployments of abjection: how these intrapsychic fissures are created, and how they are interconnected. The abject comes into play when boundaries cannot be maintained, when the separation from the maternal cannot take place, and when meaning collapses. The sphere of Kristevan abjection is the in-between, the ambiguous, that which does not respect borders, rules, and systems. In this regard, an analysis of displacement, whether exilic or psychological, can gauge abjection into a more entrenched subjectivity formation

In *A Space of Anxiety* (1999), Anne Fuchs, elaborating on the correlation between dislocation and abjection, writes that "abjection is a terrifying borderline state which estranges the individual from all social relations" (4). Displacement, exile, and diaspora all involve a loss of connection with what one might call the "space," or home, putatively considered the locus of identity. The sense of disorientation corresponds strikingly to abjection: according to Kristeva, to be abject is to be misplaced, astray and without identity. Fuchs further argues that "without a sense of orientation, the abject character

glides through a space of anxiety where the boundaries between inner and outer world are constantly threatened by the invasion of the abject and where no true objects of desire can exit" (6). Posited in such liminality, the abject is thus "the terrifying abyss into which the subject may fall when language and the symbolic sphere fail" (*Power* 6), or, in Wu Lan's words, "the abyss where the ground of language gives away" (*PCA* 207). Here is Wu Lan's liminal dilemma: leaving the father's cage signifies facing that "total and infinite absence, the abyss" (*PCA* 7), but returning to Singapore means plunging into another abyss "gazing back at her" (*PCA* 7). The abject's sexuality has been designated as an absence from her familial, cultural, and historical names and as "an anomaly," or the black sheep in the herd.

Choosing to escape patriarchal and heterosexual impositions, Wu Lan leaves Singapore after coming out as lesbian to her parents and brother in a joint letter. The heroine's distancing and transgression, in her brother's words, is to "separate from the herd" (*PCA* 20). How does Wu Lan's resistance coalesce abject sexuality with displacement? Bonnie Zimmerman's "Exiting from Patriarchy" helps to illuminate such correlation. Zimmerman locates "exiting" (as Wu Lan and *ah kus* "exit" their patriarchal domination) into a sustained metaphor of the journey that classic Western trope whereby various stages of displacement represent gradual attainment of knowledge and truth (245). Drawing parallels with the geographic journey, Zimmerman reactivates the metaphor of the journey, arguing that "the provinces in the lesbian novel of development can be interpreted as the territory of patriarchy, and the journey/quest undertaken by the lesbian protagonist is toward the new world of lesbianism" (245).

In spite of the utopian thrust in her somewhat simplistic, homogeneous argument, I find Zimmerman's view profitable for elaborations on "exiting." In a way, Wu Lan and the *ah kus'* escape signifies more than the rite of passage through which the lesbian establishes and affirms herself; the claims of displacement to liberation through the repeated articulation of sexual truths are "thoroughly coterminous with that system of control whose major mechanism is the 'transformation of sex into discourse'" (Jagose, *Lesbian Utopics* 9). Inherent in patriarchal, heterosexual constraints, lesbianism has long been pathologized, denaturalized in heteronormativity. In other words, by de-centering the inside-outside logic, Kwa uses queerness "constructed as counteridentity" (Godard 235), another representation of abjection, as a strategic tool to exit, to create a space beyond the phallocentric order.

Contrary to Wu Lan's and the two prostitutes' betrayal and subversion, Mahmee's counterpoint antagonizes their transgressive acts and re-inscribes the phallocentric order. Kristeva revises the Freudian and Lacanian assumption that the mother is the source of abjection; she aims to prove that the problem arises in the transformation of drives into the manifest order and disorder. On one level, Mahmee is portrayed as a traditional Chinese woman who has been socialized into her role as transmitter of the "traditional ways" of her Chinese culture; in Mahmee's words, "a girl had to learn how to clean, to cook, that's how she learn to be good wife" (*PCA* 82). As a symbolic and public representation of society, Mahmee is empowered as a guardian of male descent kinship lines. Adhering to the Law of Father, which obliges her as a silent woman to swallow bitterness (*PCA* 198), Mahmee attempts to pass her knowledge and experience to Wu Lan as part of a shared notion of traditional, heterosexual identity, despite the inequitable

circumstances of herself within the patriarchal structure. For Mahmee, preserving the remnants of Chinese social and cultural traditions is a means of reinforcing family-community loyalties and socioeconomic survival: "That's why I say to Lan-Lan, help others and they will like you. They grateful and never forget you and your family. They will tell their friends and family, and your good name will continue" (*PCA* 119-20). Disobeying Chinese filial piety, Wu Lan portrays her inability with her mother's efforts at transmitting the remnants of the cultural legacy. The consequences of the daughter's defying the Law can mean isolation, insanity, or death (Ho 123). On the one hand, Mahmee's discourse reminds Wu Lan of the boundaries and obstacles, and it affects her psychological and emotional life as a lesbian. The weighty internalized legacy of Mahmee's legislative imposition and re-inscription of the Law of Father traumatically inhabits Wu Lan, and it intervenes with the daughter's endeavor to produce her new identity. On the other hand, the author alienates the heroines from the paternal sphere and empowers these women to subvert the Law.

The prologue of the novel starts with the funeral of Wu Lan's father, which symbolically turns paternal surveillance into severance from the patriarch. The epilogue ends with Chow Mui's murder of the pimp Ah Sek – a confirmatory act of defying prohibitive patriarchal legislation. Rejecting Lacanian insistence on the phallus, the patricide at the onset (literally and figuratively) indicates a (de)liberate gesture of exiting. As the narrator confesses, "Father's death has served as a kind of earthquake that has exposed a part of me I don't relish seeing: a raw and ugly sore that reeks of an increasing resentment, an intolerance for the suffering of others" (*PCA* 98). Wu Lan's exile parallels the two prostitutes' emancipation from the Law: "A slave for nearly nine years, and now

I'm fleeing. Without thought, without care" (*PCA* 187). To awaken to her true identity, to be completely transformed into her lesbian self, the lesbian heroine (Wu Lan and Chow Choi Mui in particular) must discursively construct herself through the narrative of evading the "indecipherable" paternal "shadow" (*PCA* 6) to reconstruct a lesbian utopic site. The utopic site devoid of the masculinist, patriarchal, heterosexual law reminds us of the homoscape in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and the feminine space in *When Fox Is a Thousand.*

4.2 Dirty Bag: Perverse Prostitutes and Lesbians

To thoroughly grasp the plight of the abject, a brief look at Kwa's source material is necessary in that the author draws heavily on historian James Francis Warren's two books: *Ah Ku and Karayuki-San: Prostitution in Singapore 1870-1940* and *Rickshaw Coolie: A People's History of Singapore 1880-1940.* Warren's research, especially the former, carves out the phenomena of prostitution, migration, and diseases in the colonial, patriarchal turn-of-the-century Singaporean history. The crucial point made in Warren's research about the flourishing business of prostitution is directly linked to patriarchy and the fin-de-siècle mass migration in Southeast Asia.

> Patriarchy in traditional Chinese and Japanese culture was responsible for the exploitation of women financially, physically, sexually and emotionally. Prostitution in Singapore was directly linked to the economic, social, and personal problems experienced in traditional family life due to a "male" ideology that asserted that there could be no such thing as equality for women. The family systems of China and Japan were organized around the kinship and lineage of men. The patrilineal principle, the worship of the male ancestral line in a lineage hall, has been instrumental in controlling women, their social roles and sexuality....The historian of society must emphasize patriarchy as much as

> agrarian poverty as a basic cause of prostitution in Singapore, and the status and condition of Chinese and Japanese women as migrants and prostitutes. The history of the *ah ku* and *karayuki-san* in this context, which is deeply embedded in the moral and legal framework of traditional patriarchal families, is also the history of Chinese and Japanese men – of their attitudes, schemes, and manipulation. (*Ah Ku and Karayuki-San* 29)

Warren also observes that the history of the *ah ku* and *karayuki-san*'s encounter with infectious diseases chronicles the urban growth and migration and colonial exclusion of the sex workers (345). The diseased and violent lives of the sex trade workers illuminate the stories of individuals conventionally denied a place and voice in history.

According to Kristeva, "decay, infection, disease, corpse, stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death" (*Power* 71). This is why "[d]efilement is what is jettisoned from the 'symbolic system'...what escapes that social rationality, that logical order on which a social aggregate is based" (*Power* 65). The *Ah Ku*'s defiled, diseased bodies, "the polluting filth," the "private parts burn[ing] with pain and itching, swell[ing] and weep[ing] with pus!" (*PCA* 52) circulate impurity and "unsettle the deceptive neatness of the binary inside/outside" (Kamboureli 200). These heroines (either prostitutes or lesbians) figure in the body and history as the "contaminated, condemned" abject: the script of that history is marked by "the fading away of all meaning and all humanity" (*Power* 18). Trapped in an existence in which the future is blocked, the *ah kus* negotiate a life world with anxiety: "Seething within, a turmoil that churns, muddy in the intestines, film of vomit at the throat, the language of secret desires" (*PCA* 58). Coded with its exclusion and perversion, the abject's corruption, "the socialized appearance," disturbs borders, disrupts identities, and blurs boundaries between bodies.

Even though the abject that "appears as a rite of defilement and pollution" (*Power* 17) is always excluded from the center, the abject remains undeniably central to the social order, particularly to the paternal order: always outside and yet constantly threatening the integrity of that system. In an interview, Lydia Kwa points out the linkage between Wu Lan and the two prostitutes: "The two sex trade workers – Lee Ah Choi and Chow Chat Mui – are like two non-identical twins. I mean that in a symbolic sense, not literally of course. They are two aspects of Wu Lan's psyche: there is a self desirous of being rescued, because she is helpless and victimized; then there is a self who finds a way to escape and does not remain a victim" (Leung 259-60). Like the corrupted, defiled prostitute body, the lesbian's perverse desire, I argue, is also equated with abjection. The accounts in Kristeva's manifesto validate my premise.

> The abject is related to perversion. The sense of abjection that I experience is anchored in the superego. The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns when aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them. It kills in the name of life – a progressive despot; it lives at the behest of death – an operator in genetic experimentations; it curbs the other's suffering for its own profit – a cynic (and a psychoanalyst); it establishes narcissistic power while pretending to reveal the abyss – an artist who practices his art as a 'business.' Corruption is its most common, most obvious appearance. That is the socialized appearance of the abject. (*Power* 16)

As an abject lesbian who defies patriarchal cultural systems, Wu Lan leaves Singapore to seek and produce a new identity. Chow Chat Mui, regarded as "a dirt rag" tired of "living like a captured animal, slaughtered nightly without bloodshed," (*PCA* 25) runs away from home to live outside her father's cage (12). For both of them, the escape to a new world, marked by the persistent psychological scars of abjection, is not only liberating but also debilitating: "Here I've been in this country [Canada] two decades, with the unsaid and

the unsayable still swirling inside of me. Once I had been Lan-lan, my mother's precious orchid. Lan-Lan stayed close to home, homing in on her parents' need. But who is Wu Lan?" (*PCA* 123). Wu Lan's questioning of selfhood locates subjectivity in perverse desire embedded in abjection. If abjection produces or circumscribes a certain kind of lesbian subjectivity as perverse, transgressive desire, it is important to note that Kwa raises the possibility for transgression within the hegemonic system: for those relegated to that position of abjection, "the task is to refigure this necessary 'outside' as a future horizon, one in which the violence of exclusion is perpetually in the process of being overcome" (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 6). How might that be done?

The Place Called Absence critically reterritorializes the position of the "abject" (turn-of-the-century prostitutes and the contemporary lesbian) on two levels: breaking the paternal law to seek their freedom and breaking temporal and spatial barriers to establish women's solidarity, a close bond in which mothers, lovers, and daughters support each other and commingle a sense of community. On the level of narration, the novel foregrounds both the fictionality of the clear boundaries and divisions between the proper and improper, the normal and abnormal defined by prohibitive legislation. The escape (the theme of runaway/escape will be further examined in Chapter Five on Evelyn Lau's *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid*) externalizes and maps out both the lesbian's and prostitutes' sense of abjection. In escape/displacement, Wu Lan and two *ah kus* challenge the rules and boundaries of the symbolic sphere to the extent that they have to be expelled from the working order and signifying practices. Because the transgressive potential of dislocating and defying the prohibitive law is carried over by the category "lesbian," their

escape aims to secure a space beyond phallocentric prioritizations of masculinity and heterosexuality.

On another level, the novel is a reiteration of making visible the desires between women ignored in the past due to patriarchy's "triple edict of taboo, nonexistence and silence" (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 5). Not only is Wu Lan a trespasser of languages and territories who never stops demarcating the fluid confines of her identity, but she inscribes herself into a more pronounced coming-out discourse to highlight the abject subjectivity. For a "lesbian" "writer" in the distinctively defined Chinese family structure, coming out (of sexuality and language) means to subvert the patrilineal structure by failing to procreate and by challenging the male-centered authorship. Given that the figuration of "lesbian" outside of the mechanisms of power articulates its exteriority to cultural legislation, the ostensible coming-out (of the father's cage) can be further examined in "the epistemology of the closet" already elaborated by Eve K. Sedgwick (1990). A more subtle task to facilitate another reading of the conflation of abjection, escape, and transgression entails exploring the discourse of the closet.

Following Foucault, Sedgwick explicates the interrelation between sexual knowledge, closet(ing) discourse, and outing from the closet. The closet's intervention, in the history of sexuality, is invested with a peculiar energy fraught with contradictions; it attempts to force a disclosure of the inner truth or identity it protects, as the narrator names it "the horrible secret" (*PCA* 34). The closet, or the symbolic "cubicle" for the *ah kus*, is the site where the already fraught cultural production of definitions of homosexuality and heterosexuality inter-inflect. Transposed to abjection, the power of horror wielded by the coming-out-of-the-closet heroine allows her to traverse and

energize "the line of demarcation between named and unnamed, explicit and inexplicit" (Jagose 74). Coming out (*sortir*), a form of escape as Zimmerman's "exiting," functions to conceal and reveal, to speak the unspeakable. "How to speak the unspeakable? This desire for her. Without language to name it, it is not fixed like the window frame. Free like the wind, not a willow rooted to the ground, dependent on earth for its fate. This is my secret and my power" (*PCA* 55-56). Although the unspeakables are never totally decoded, Wu Lan, like SKY Lee's Kae Ying Wu, speaks out the "secret desires," which are presented to the reader with an embroidery of versions of epistemology dangling between history, fact, and self-conscious invention.

Kwa's audacious transgression of naming the unnamable is a denunciation against her Chinese heritage; similarly, Maxine Hong Kingston refers to the unspeakable as the unnamed of traditional Chinese discourse.[3] Moreover, Wu Lan's "outing" is an attempt to escape her father's haunting spirit, "the ghosting" of heterosexuality. By turning the inside out, Kwa strategically reverses "the figure of the homosexual as specter and phantom, as spirit and revenant, as abject and undead" into an outing subject (Fuss 2). The central narrator re-figures lesbianism as a transgressive desire, a provocation to heretofore unspeakable connections and affiliations. The sexual transgression within the diasporic landscape produces more complicated power relations in the schema of the abject. Wu Lan, the autobiographical figure of the writer, uses resistance articulated in writing to defy prohibitive legislation; this articulation of both externalizing escape and internalizing abjection thus "builds a logic" (Kristeva, *Power of Horror* 12). By juxtaposing the silenced prostitutes with the coming-out lesbian in parallel narrative frames, Kwa exposes the wounds of sexuality as a site of transformative cultural

practices, and by constructing the inside/outside reversibility between the enfleshed wound and the wounded body, the author allows the heroines to transgress, to produce more complicated power relations in the schema of abjection.

4.3 From Chora to Chorus

To substantiate my argument of placing abjection along the maternal trajectory of psychoanalytical discourse, Kristeva's manifestation in "Oscillation between Power and Denial" (1980) may foreground Kwa's text precisely within psychoanalytical operation. Kristeva writes that "in women's writing [I am not reducing 'women' to an essentialist, totalizing term here], language seems to be seen from a foreign land; is it seen from the point of view of an asymbolic, spastic body?" (166). Kristeva's "foreign land" crops up in an interview in which she discusses the notion of "feminine writing" to trace in the texts of the literary avant-garde the force of negativity (this place called absence?) unleased by heterogeneity, which renovates and infinitizes signification. The voices of mother, daughter, and *ah kus* merge and mingle in the narrative, but they neither dominate nor assimilate the other; instead, they enter into dialogue, seeking identity through mutual difference, through the heterogeneity and hybridity of multiple, shifting subject positions (Goellnicht, "Blurring Boundaries" 356). In situating abjection in feminine writing, Makiko Minow-Pinkney further argues:

> Modern writing is thus bound up from the start with the very question of feminine writing as a challenge to the dominant phallic position of the speaking subject. The dialectic between the heterogeneous modalities of semiotic and symbolic, this dynamism which constantly pushes to and beyond the limit, which constantly shatters and establishes and again brings forth synthesis, is, I think, the crux of

> Kristeva's theorization of signifying process and of her new notion of subjectivity.... The emphasis on dialectic is especially important to the question of feminine writing: how to hold a position against the "phallic" position, how to inscribe the repressed and unspeakable in language, without simply collapsing into silence or even psychosis. (158)

In a similar vein, Kwa evokes a polyphonic "dialectic" among four women, whose voices inscribe the repressed and unspeakable in language, or in semiotic representation. Moreover, by engaging in the maternal dialectic, these heroines construct a "yin space," which I will elaborate in a later section. Wu Lan's isolated self is continually challenged, as the individual accounts are repeatedly mirrored, contrasting and complementing other maternal stories: Mahmee's constant anxiety and two sex workers' oppression.

Although the Kristevan abjection that derives from the mother is mostly applicable in Western texts, I want to point out that the matrilineal textual connection, be it lesbian intertextuality or maternal dialectic, pervades most Chinese Canadian women's writing.[4] Before I proceed to the maternal dialectic and lesbian affiliation, it is important to chart and review the mother-daughter relationship in the Chinese North American literary body. Central to the mother-daughter narrative is usually a daughter narrator, who, I believe, functions to mediate her desire to understand and pay tribute to the mother(s); this narrative not only creates a genealogy and constant dialogues with the ancestors, but it also reconstructs the conflicted self in relation to multiple home places and homelands – the domestic-familial sites complicated by dislocation and sexuality.

Similar to Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, *This Place Called Absence* breaks the imposed silences and speaks the grievances. As Asian American critic Wendy Ho argues, "To claim multiple positions as a woman, writer, and individual in society, Kingston [Lydia Kwa here] critiques, rejects, [and transforms] her mother[s'] stories, eventually

learning to speak and write a new language of self-in-community that is intimately linked to the life and stories of her mother[s]" (123). Wu Lan, inheriting multiple legacies from the mothers, tells their stories and gives voice to the silenced M/other unable to reveal the forbidden desire. The reciprocity of the four bodies – Mahmee, Lee Ah Choi, Chow Chat Mui, and Wu Lan – shows their discourses to be at once constative and performative in that they do what they say and say what they do. Here "saying" denotes a discourse of physicality that expresses the libidinal energies connecting these bodies to each other. Wu Lan says:

> I wish I could be under their skins, to know what it was like. Did some begin in a hopeful spirit? Were others disillusioned from the very start? I already had begun to imagine details about the *ah ku* after reading that article, but now here were photographs, images that compel me, spur me on. I look at the portrait again, waiting for inspiration. (47-48)

Amy Ling's *Between Worlds*, although not focusing explicitly on the ideal of matrilineage, is an inaugural study outlining the literary tradition of Chinese American women; Ling's effort is inspired by Alice Walker's "search for our mothers' gardens." This connection between memory and matrilineage is insinuated in Kwa's attempt to inherit such a tradition of delving into memory "to remember [her] maternal grandparents' garden" in Singapore (*PCA* 8). In a similar vein, in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976), Adrienne Rich further asserts that "the cathexis between mother and daughter – essential, distorted, misused – is the great unwritten story… The materials are here for the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement" (235). Kwa enunciates a message all these texts expound to varying degrees: not a retreat to the master narrative, which masquerades the vested interest as a

universal truth, but a call for as many texts as possible to come into being. Out of the dialogue of voices, the disruptive excess of heteroglossia may emerge some form of harmonious tension. This disruptive orchestration of maternal voices, as Rocío G. Davis observes, is "intimately linked to the historical, social, and cultural contexts that inform Asian American narratives" (80). The multiple presences and ambivalent stories in dialogue within the intricate sexual, cultural and historical spheres find textual completion through the non-lineal, fragmented narrative within a matrilineal trajectory in Kwa's novel.

How is abject(ion), then, articulated from the mother-daughter psychic bonding to lesbian affiliation? I argue that agency is the key determinant. The dialogues between the two sex trade workers are lensed through Wu Lan, who re-addresses the exploitation in the sex/slave industry in turn-of-the-century Singapore and speaks about the forbidden desire between them. In so doing, the protagonist re-transcribes the historical body into the present: "Squeeze history until it aches, until nothing separates me from it" (*PCA* 140). The women who loved other women in the past faced incredible invisibility, which shaped how they conceptualized their voiceless identity and struggle to change their positions. In the novel, the corporeal map that links them is produced by the constant flow of these women's desires, a circuit of exchange established by their bodies' knowing. These bodies function as "the agents of knowledge… an intensely energetic locus for all cultural production" (Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* 147). Abjection, in this sense, is an operation of the psyche through which subjectivity is constituted by excluding anything that threatens one's own borders. There is, however, an abjectifying trajectory

in the writing: from the excluded to subject(s) making that process legible through exploiting/exposing its abject characters.

The main threat to the fledgling subject is the dependence upon the maternal. Here, I take "maternal" as a broader discursive definition, which posits the maternal body within a narrative contextualized with other maternal voices (i.e., the *ah kus'* and Mahmee's). Being a lesbian, as Wu Lan confesses, means disavowing the maternal function of mothering: "But I am childless, and uninterested in breeding. I will not have a direct descendant to survive me" (*PCA* 80). Beneath the disavowal from the maternal, however, lies a paradoxically strategic return to the female body reified in lesbian identification with other maternal figures.

Kristeva's view of the maternal body as prediscursive chora or "pre-paternal causality" is "fundamentally inverted."[5] Butler (1992) interprets the notion that "the discursive production of the maternal body as prediscursive is a tactic in the self-amplification and concealment of those specific power relations by which the trope of the maternal body is produced" (92). That is, the fantasy of the maternal body would be the effect of "a system of sexuality in which the female body is required to assume maternity as the essence of itself and the law of its desire" (*Power* 2). This separation from maternal chora is insinuated in Ah Choi's words:

> My mother, I remember the quiet forbearance of the one who sheltered me in her body. The hole that I left in her when I emerged into the world, how quickly it was filled with other pains, other babies. I can't blame her, she couldn't have stopped my father anyway....My mother's blood must end here. And my father's, his blood disappears from my body when he sold me. (*PCA* 136)

The emerging subject needs to free itself from the mother's body, which, in this process, becomes abject. The abject is thus the space of struggle against the mother: "the earliest attempts to release the hold of maternal entity even before ex-isting outside of her" (*Power* 13). At the same time, the symbolic and semiotic returning exposes a desperate attempt to be her, to blur the divisions between the child's identity and the mother's. In Grosz's words, "[t]he semiotic, the maternal chora and the abject are all placed on the side of the feminine and the maternal, in opposition to a paternal, rule-governed symbolic" (*Sexual Subversions* 78). The maternal genealogical link is activated through the mother-daughter relationship to the "discovery" or "reinvention" of the lives of the two sex traders. Departing from the maternal chora and activating the maternal dialectic, Wu Lan further constructs a place called absence, which I term the "yin space."

4.4 The Yin Space: This Place Called Absence

The maternal dialectic draws the heroines out of the Kristevan *chora* – "a self-contemplative, conservative, self sufficient" (*Power* 14) shared by mother and child in the mirror-stage. Wu Lan's connection with the two lesbian prostitutes (the reader eventually realizes that Chat Mui is Wu Lan's grandmother) further allows her to conceive of a yin space, similar to the "utopic site" in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and the "isomorphic zone" in *When Fox Is a Thousand. Yin* (陰) in Chinese, coded with the concepts of absent, negative, genital, dark, underground, feminine, melancholic, shadowy, maternal, articulates well the thematic contradictions of the abject, deject, object, absent, subject in the novel.[6] This imaginary textual and psychic space, I argue,

charts not only the heroines' individual anxieties and traumas, but also the legislative underside of the symbolic order that tries to demarcate its boundaries through apparatuses of exclusion.

Wu Lan's erotic longing for, and identification with, other anonymous *yin* figures (Francisca, *ah kus*, women she cruises in the library and on the street, old women in the shower room) is an attempt to secure a space beyond phallocentric prioritizations of masculinity and heterosexual exchange: "I gaze at their bodies in shy snatches as I take off my swimsuit, as if I'm not supposed to look at the folds of flesh, the greying pubic hair, the bulging varicose veins, the floppy breasts. The realities of women my mother's age, the reality of my own body changing and moving towards theirs" (*PCA* 211). Similarly, Chat Mui's desire for a place for Ah Choi and herself probably points to the writer's home-making that belongs to the realm of the feminine:

> Office for the protection of our virtue! But then the place can give us soiled women only temporary refuge. ..If only Ah Choi and I could run away together. There's a rumour that some women have started their own private brothel in another part of town...what if we went there, start saving the money we make, instead of this continual pawning of our bodies. (*PCA* 92)

As one of the pioneer lesbian writers of Chinese descent in Canada, Lydia Kwa uses absence as a site for critical thinking of coalescing sexuality, ethnicity, class, and gender roles. The word and concept, absence (*yin*), in the narrative can be further understood as Kristevan "neurotic or psychotic, articulated by negation and its modalities, transgression, denial, and repudiation" (*Power* 6). This "absence," a negativity and unthinkability, recalls Kristeva's or Lacan's concept of female desire as a "lack."[7] In the

yin space, Lydia Kwa or Wu Lan traces the negated presence and disavows the persistent reliance on "purity" or "authenticity" of her identity.

In another essay, Lydia Kwa explicitly declares her agenda of creating a room (or a closet?) for women: "To write, to make room with words, is to de-colonize, to let the woman-child out of the closet where she has been hiding for lack of tongues. I will write her opening doors" ("Father/mother/tongue" 15). The narrative in *This Place Called Absence* itself is contained by a patriarchal, heterosexual spectral frame that reveals itself at critical junctures in the text. These disruptions within the narrative gesture toward a disturbing subtext of familial discontent. Like the shadow in Plato's cave, the novel, as the title itself suggests, seems to write against the heterosexual specter and to de-colonize patriarchal apparition.[8] Such an interpretation resonates with Barthesian death of the author, but the emphasis on absence signals the erasure of an authoritarian, "indecipherable shadow" (*PCA* 6) through displacement and overlapping absences in the re-imagined historical events as well as multiple maternal voices.

Kwa strategically inscribes the paradoxical absent subjectivity, the *yin*, into the narrative space. On the one hand, Wu Lan emphasizes the existence of specific remnants of subjectivity. Absence, on the other hand, constitutes the chief determinant of the narrator's abject positionality. Lydia Kwa explains the symbolic significance of the emptiness/absence conveyed in the novel: "Absence becomes transformed into a metaphor for possibility. There are many ways of looking at an empty chair. What does a person see when she or he looks at that image? Lack or a possibility for something new?" (qtd. in Leung 258). In this light, if absence gives way to textual multiplicity in the face

of absence at the origin, then by the end of the text, absence multiplies in the direction of several possibilities.

The four narrators in their different oral and written stories signal, in a way, their consciousness of ontological certainties and the presence of rupture; this anachronic movement is both propitiated by and set against the text's insistence on its absence: "Deep within my imagination, her skin under my hand. Under my desire. If only I could reach her across the absence, touch with a gentleness that could reassure her, that could soothe those scars. Her body lives in my cells, the unseen and unspoken wounds" (*PCA* 154). In the ruptured, scarred space of painful yet hopeful difference, the dialectic with other imagined maternal voices, with its fluid, organic form, is constantly open to the speaker's embellishment and transformative power, and becomes a way of telling and enacting stories to stretch and re-imagine the hidden history.

Reminiscent of Larissa Lai's three alternating voices in *When Fox Is a Thousand*, the four voices, in the de-centered structure of Kwa's novel, undo the spatio-temporal dimensions of the text, freeing it to engage in a different *chronotope*, which conceives not only of simultaneity of present and past, but also of time and history running backwards.[9] The individual voices that mediate on the mothers' and the daughter's multilayered selves are inseparable with each other, coalescing to enact a maternal, possibly lesbian, genealogy. The process of unearthing maternal stories also achieves a narrative completion. The paternal death at the beginning is metaphorically reincarnated into the "vibrant energy" of a *girl* (emphasis added) child at play, and the bereavement transformed into "that sweet space in time when the woman's and the child's eyes meet in a dance of mutual delight" (*PCA* 212). This textual completion within the maternal

recognition delineates reworkings of the notions of subjectivity and historical knowledge with the author's conscious attempt at constructing an artificial history, which is most significant to Chinese women writers because historically it has been rare for women to have control over the means of recording and dissemination.[10] Kwa's strategies of interweaving four voices between the past and the present, between East and West, and between generations create spaces that acknowledge the long ignored and prohibited female desires.

4.5 WU LAN: Womanhood Unified in LANguage

The textual journey to Wu's Lan's maternal connection performs a pivotal function in bringing to closure the broader pattern of female bonding in the narrative; female solidarity is made explicit with the connections between women forged through their mutual marginalization in the constructed *yin* space. Kwa writes about the struggle of women situated in constantly negotiated domestic and familial spaces deeply affiliated to the primary homeplace (China/Singapore). The *Ah kus'* story enkindles Wu Lan's imagination, and the language empowers her to be the subaltern's mouthpiece and storyteller (*PCA* 54).

Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" poses a question central to Kwa's work that seeks to imagine the four fictional voices to figures who, in some way, represent the experiences of their ancestors. Wu Lan, the daughter narrator, tells the silenced and traumatic stories in the family while she attempts to speak out and work out her emotional and social tensions and relationship. The daughter narrator's role as the

mediator/medium signified in her name, profession, and power of language allows her to construct the yin space through several discourses. This ability to articulate is precisely her "secret and power" to "speak the unspeakable" (55-56). Wu Lan's name (巫蘭) in Chinese denotes and connotes her multiple positionality: mediating (巫), negating (無), performing (舞), and displacing (誤):

> In Mandarin, a sound can have many meanings, depending on its tone. In first tone, "Wu" can be a medium or shaman. In second tone, it can mean "without." The third tone can refer to dancing, and in the fourth tone, it can mean "mistake." Four dimensions. And the fifth? The silence in which the word falls, the echo of meaning resounding somewhere in space. Music matters. The falling of rocks into the abyss. How would my life have changed if my name was sounded differently, if the tone of it could draw on a different realm in the universe for significance? If only I could ingest my own name the way I consume food, swallow its various possibilities, assimilate their meanings into my blood. (123-124)

Wu Lan's name embodies her role as the mediator among various discourses. As Kwa explains, "[Naming] is the way [Wu Lan] connects to her personal and cultural history, while feeling alienated from her family" (qtd. in Leung 261). Wu in Chinese signifies "Someone Who Helps Others" (*PCA* 62) or a clairvoyant/exorcist who "can see things [and who is] visited by spirits from other worlds" (*PCA* 63). Mahmee gives the name in the hopes that people "will tell their friends and family" and that her good name will continue: "That is what most important about my daughter's name. I say to her, never mind about Mah-Mah's ideas. Mah-Mah said some people can see demons and even cast them out of sick person" (*PCA* 120). Furthermore, Wu Lan, a modern Wu Shi (exorcist), who "chase[s] demons out from the sick man" (*PCA* 63), professes in real life as a clinical psychiatrist, a calling that symbolically confirms the process of de-demonization and psychic discovery. Both the therapist's own journey of self discovery

and the psychotherapeutic process go through the three psychic negation-recognition-reconciliation stages: the negation by her family, the recognition of her lesbian identity, and a broader reconciliation with "the sum of which is greater than its parts" (PCA 207). By imagining the lives of the *ah kus*, Wu Lan "mov[es] away from her usual self-absorption into a wilder, unknown domain" (Leung 262).

The power of M/other tongues sets the psychological and imaginary journey en route. As a code decipher, Wu Lan, in a way, liberates herself from the shih (詩) she receives at the Buddhist temple: "Maybe this shih was not merely about people expressing their powerlessness as victims. It could have been a way people spoke to each other in code, to spur themselves and others toward rebellion. Let all those in authority attend to their proper conduct. A warning to their oppressors?" (*PCA* 66). Shih, as a libratory medium, is the power of the Kristevan "poetic language" – the multivalent verbal message that "symbolize[s] the 'beginning'" and "name[s] the other facet of taboo: pleasure, pain" (*Power* 61-62). In articulating the m/others' stories through the "voice announc[ing] sailing schedules in several languages" (*PCA* 210), Wu Lan becomes the sum of commensurate and incommensurate desires: "the sum of which is greater than its parts. She is neither Ah Choi nor Chat Mui, although they are parts of her. An image seeks itself, the particular truths" (*PCA* 207). Una Chaudhuri asserts that inherent in the medium is an awareness of the abject, "a whole hidden poetics of alterity": "consciousness of otherness," she writes, "is tightly woven into the fabric of the dramatic medium which – for all its vaunted commitment to liveness and presence – is always also projected into the future, into other times and places of its potential reincarnation" (202). Liberated from the power of language, like Kae Ying Wu in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*,

Wu Lan, the mediator and performer, uses (m)other tongues as agency to emphasize the process of self-discovery, to unearth the hidden stories of the mothers, and eventually to allow their struggles to traverse language.

The mediator works to recover the absent community of women, hence this place called absence, by privileging the presence of these silenced women in a textual celebration:

> I am Wu Lan, an exorcist of hidden demons.
> I am the discoverer of secrets.
> I stir fire into the bones of the dead.
> I prepare the dead for release.
> Bending into the porcelain whiteness of the bathtub, I lean very close to his embalmed body and whisper one last time.
> Goodbye, Father. (208)

The centrality of reclaiming the four emblematic female characters leads to important interrogations about the epistemology of women within the context of feminine writing, or rather, maternal rewriting.

4.6 Conclusion: Present Imperfect

The protagonist begins the story by interrogating the absence of her name, roots, and father, and she exposes the presence of such absences. But she finally reclaims a maternal genealogy in which she finds her place in the present absence:

> I'm returning to this place called absence, where in front of me, a stranger talks. Stringing words together. Two strangers who sit across from each other in a small, soundproofed room. Face to face. Truths or lies? A torrent of words, like a seasonal monsoon, underneath which lies the deepest pain. Aren't all stories true? To intuit the meanings of what is left unsaid. (*PCA* 208)

Absence, displacement, deferral, desire and the disfiguration of the maternal body – literally or figuratively – are at the center of Wu Lan's story. To what extent does abject(ion) disrupt and destabilize the oppositions? As I mentioned in Chapter Two that displacement becomes a rethinking of home/homing/homeland/homo across multiple identity formations and a renegotiation of numerous locations "out here, over there" or "out there, over here," Wu Lan's traumatic displacement (in both external and internal terms) reframes Chinese Canadian lesbianism outside of Asian and Western heterosexual and domestic familial configurations. This reconfiguration is a material consequence of the combination of inside and outside or here and there that Kwa strives to institute, investigate and resolve. The dialectics of inside and outside, object and subject, speech and silence, forms the correlates of Wu's subjecthood. The relationship of the abject and the subject is similar to that of the inside and the outside, only in that the abject is not the subject, and indeed that it may hold a contradictory or even confrontational relationship. As Kristeva argues, abjection, "lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter's rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master [the center]" (*Power* 2).[11] Wu Lan does not align herself with either of the two sides in these binary constructions, but she locates herself in the boundaries between them.

Beneath the seemingly nonlinear, fluid, and fragmented textuality lies a narrative cycle from interrogatory "Who is Wu Lan?" and "Where is Wu Lan?" to confirmatory "Who Wu Lan is." Literally, Wu Lan's return "to this place called absence" is a new

articulation of self-discovery, a thematic resonance with what Davis calls "story cycle" in Asian American (women's) writing:

> Cycles emphasize breaks, beginnings and rebeginnings, episodic structuring of lives and selves, inviting the reader to fill in the gaps, to find whole meanings from the fragments of the lives retained in the memory and on the page. The story cycle reflects the narrator's process of memory as nonlineal, associative, nontemporal, fragmented, and incomplete, making structure and content mutually reinforcing. (164)

Behind the textual destabilization, Lydia Kwa re-articulates the contradictions of absence and presence, abject and subject, to illuminate a wider space (*PCA* 200). At the end of the novel, Wu Lan rethinks the idea of lesbianism in the new millennium: "One hundred years ago, the light was dimmer, and could only illuminate a small space…One hundred years ago, the choices were different, yet still the same – whether one wants to live, and how. I wish they hadn't died in such despair, in their cubicles, taking their own lives" (*PCA* 202). *This Place Called Absence* exposes the unlimited possibilities of mediation to construct alternative paths out of absence and abjection in different parameters. In the process of creating lesbian subjectivity, a process that necessarily involves practices of negation, Lydia Kwa weaves the abject into Chinese Canadian women's imagination, thereby pointing the way to new modes of existence and new ways of understanding. The alternative agenda opens up possibilities for various forms of change.

Notes

1. In *Writing Diaspora*, Rey Chow addresses the issues of how "Chinese women" are constructed as a minority discourse and how the discursive politics is tied to a (post)colonial space. Here, eschewing recent postcolonial debates, I use Chow's thematic concern as a convenient launch pad for my analysis. Positing Chinese women within the Western, patriarchal, and heterosexual hegemony, Chow argues that their multiply ghettoized positionality allows contemporary intellectuals to explore politics of difference and generate discourses of the Other: "The clarified relation between 'nation' and 'class' in twentieth-century China allows one to ask: How do women intervene? How can we articulate women's *difference* without having that difference turned into a cultural ghettoization of women while the enemy remains intact? How can women 'speak'?" (107).

2. See Kwa's source notes at the end of the novel. Although the novel is fictional, the novelist constructs the story relying heavily on the historical events in fin-de-siècle Singapore. The major inspiration, as the author claims, derives from historian James Francis Warren's book: *Ah Ku and Karayuki-San: Prostitution in Singapore 1870-1940*. According to Warren, the phenomenon of prostitutes of turn-of-the-century Singapore is the result of "mass migration, cheap labour, colonial expansion" (141). Warren recounts the important history of colonial prostitution in England's Straits Settlements, the capital of which was Singapore. Chinese women and girls (*ah ku*) and their Japanese counterparts (*karayuki-san*) were transited down to colonial Southeast Asia in junks and in tramp steamers, and many lived in debt and often poverty, never returning to the lands of their birth.

3. Kingston, as a rebellious daughter-writer, breaks the suffocating silence to assert her identity against the institutions that seek her erasure, marginalization, and confinement as a Chinese American woman. In *The Woman Warrior*, she writes: "If we had to depend on being told, we'd have no religion, no babies, no menstruation (sex, of course, unspeakable), no death" (216).

4. The tradition of writing mother-daughter relationships in Asian North American women's literature has been established by writers such as Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston, Fae Myenne Ng, SKY Lee, Joy Kogawa, just to name a few. However, most studies center on the daughter narrator's attempt to recover the neglected stories of her (grand)mothers or on her response to the mainstream feminist call to reclaim women's voices. Few critics pay particular attention to the correlation or fluid interchangeability between sexuality and textuality in psychoanalytical terms.

5. According to Kristeva (1980, 1992), the semiotic is not only a stage or phase surpassed in later integrations, but she emphasizes that the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic. Kristeva uses the Platonic term, *chora*, to clarify the

various processes anterior to sign and syntax. The notion of the *chora* also helps us to consider the genesis of psychic pain, suffering, sadness, and melancholia. She specifies the *chora* as the place where the subject is both generated and negated, where the unity of the subject is fragmented by the changes and stases that produce it. Kristeva stresses the importance of the subject's desire to return to the resistant archaic mother and the way in which the analyst's attentiveness to the desire opens up a space for the unnamable.

6. I am aware that the appeal to "yin" comes dangerously close to constituting a retreat to a type of gender essentialism. In Chinese philosophy, yin-yang, however, is not perceived as rigidly binary because both elements coexist in each subject in a fluid, harmonious way. I come up with the Chinese connotations of *yin* here to generate multifarious dimensions for productive interpretations.

7. Kaja Silverman writes that "semiotics, which obliges the female voice to signify the female body, and the female body to signify lack, isolates the female subject from effective political action, prevents her from making investments in a new social order, and guarantees that she will remain in the same place" (1990, 321).

8. In an interview with another Singaporean writer, Fiona Lam, Kwa explains the significance of the empty chair on the cover of the book: "[The chair] shows how people can absent themselves from their own lives. For example, the father character was there in body but not in spirit. The absent can have more hold on us than the living. It can be seen as a symbol of being haunted, not being free of oppression and outside forces" ("Process and Inspiration" online).

9. In the two essays, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel" (1981) and "The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the History of Realism" (1986), Mikhail Bakhtin develops the concept of *chronotope* in terms of its special sense of space (understood as social) and time (understood as historical). Different genres imagine the relation of social context, history, individual agency to develop along "form-shaping ideologies." Bakhtin discusses the chronotopes of numerous genres throughout literary history. In the novel, both the individual and society undergo real becoming, and each kind of becoming impinges on the other in an open dialogue. However, in my analysis I use chronotope in a rather simplistic manner; chronotope (literally "time-space") works intrinsically to bridge the hiatus in the textual sequentiality and narrative interreferentiality between four heroines in different temporal and spatial locations.

10. The idea of creating a space is claimed explicitly by Chinese Canadian writer Larissa Lai, whose writing agenda has been "to make a project of constructing a consciously artificial history for [herself] and others like [her] – a history with women identified women of Chinese descent living in the West at its centre." ("Political Animals and the Body of History" 149).

11. Diana Fuss further elaborates on the mediation of the sexually liminal character, "the figure of the homosexual as specter and phantom, as spirit and revenant, as abject and undead" (3) that renders the inside-outside binarism rather unstable. Fuss writes:

> Those inhabiting, the inside...can only comprehend the outside through the incorporation of a negative image. This process of negative interiorization involves turning homosexuality inside out, exposing not the homosexual's abjected insides but the homosexual as the abject, as the contaminated and expurgated insides of the heterosexual subject. Homosexual production emerges under these inhospitable conditions as a kind of ghost-writing, a writing which is at once a recognition and a refusal of the cultural representation of "the homosexual" as phantom Other. ("Inside/Out" 3-4)

To a certain degree, the spectral writing in *This Place Called Absence* corresponds to Fuss's argument in that the three heroines struggle not only to escape the paternal/heterosexual specter, but also to produce a new identity, to move beyond the logic of Self and Other altogether.

Chapter Five

Evelyn Lau's *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid* & *Inside Out: Reflections on a Life So Far*

From Sui Sin Far, the first Eurasian woman writer in North America, to the immigrant writer Lydia Kwa of the new millennium, I have discussed a wide spectrum of transgressive representations of female sexuality spanning centennial years. Sexuality, the corollary of desire, has always been an unspoken component of the female image in the Asian American literary body. Recent academic discussions of female sexuality have largely excluded adolescent, subcultural desire; critical challenges to hegemonic cultures from women or other marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities or queer communities, usually exclude deviant adolescent subjectivities in conflict in subcultural contexts. To supplement the missing discourse of another minor(ity) sexuality, the final chapter introduces a new discourse of sexuality.

This chapter focuses on the representations of deviance, precisely the adolescent runaway/prostitute subjectivity imbedded in age-and-sexuality based marginalizations. Analyzing Evelyn Lau's autobiographical *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid* (1989) in comparison to the vignettes in her confessional memoir *Inside Out: Reflections on a Life So Far* (2001), this chapter explores deviance inherent in subcultural discourses (i.e., drug addiction and prostitution) that articulate female sexuality at various discursive levels. I am particularly interested in the deviant body in Lau's narrative as a terrain where adolescent sexuality is incarnated, mediated, and lensed through the runaway/prostitute subject in her incessant escape. As an outlaw engaging in various modes of deviant behavior, the heroine in the narrative becomes a "street nomad who simultaneously transforms social transgressions into psychic ones" (Georgelos 17). The runaway motif, in the sense of both narrative remapping and geographical dislocation, engages in a feminist, subversive appropriation of mapping and explorations to effect the

deterritorialization of systems plotted by established, patriarchal discourses. Prostitution, another interrelated motif in the narrative, serves to counter the patriarchal discourse inscribed onto the heroine's body. The two deviant representations will be contextualized with body politics intrinsic to Foucauldian deployments. Furthermore, I will ascribe deviance to a psychoanalytical figuration; deviance, akin to abjection already discussed in the preceding chapter, disturbs the very identity, system and order it seeks to found by establishing a ridge between the inside and outside, rendering the "I" to a multiple, contradictory, and discontinuous subjectivity.

I place Lau in the last chapter for several reasons. Given that the writer (as well as the autobiographical voice in the narrative) participates in forms of transgression or disavowal different from those examined in the other chapters, it is perhaps this "transgressive heterogeneity" that points to the evolving nature of female sexuality in modern Chinese Canadian women's writing. First, the writer, in almost every interview, disengages herself from any prefabricated identities and shows her uneasy position within Chinese Canadian letters ("the Asian woman who sold out"). Secondly, her stories revolve around scandalous, controversial topics that "indicate the degree of fetishization and commodification at work" (Koh 19). Canadian critic Misao Dean points out that Lau's poems and stories are fraught with "border crossings, encounters between two worlds that most people consider very separate – the worlds of ordinary women and of prostitutes" (22). However, Dean does not acknowledge the heterogeneity in Lau's sexual representations in productive ways. Lau's "alternative" transgression pushes me to the edges of the field I have explored and points to a new direction of de-essentializing "transgression" in Chinese Canadian women's writing. Thirdly, Lau uses an insider's

knowledge to circumvent the disguise of the stereotype, the "Orientalist" camouflage to sell out to mainstream Canadian readership.[1] It is thus difficult to locate or oversimplify Lau's positionality in terms of its capacity to both maintain and disrupt loyalties because she does not align her writing with any minority discourse, nor does she bring to light the very terms of collective identifications or racial belonging. Before arguing that Lau's writing is likely in tune with circulating discourses concerning deviant sexuality, I want to bring up the controversial debates on the writer and her writing in Canadian literary reception.

5.1 Who Is that Girl?: Evelyn Lau's Background

Evelyn Yee-Fun Lau was born in 1971 to first-generation Chinese immigrants in Vancouver. Perhaps the most recognized, yet controversial, Chinese Canadian woman writer analyzed in the dissertation, Lau is a prolific author of seven book-length works. Her debut work is the autobiographically-based *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid*, which records the then-fledgling-writer's experience as a teenage prostitute. The book has been translated into a number of languages, and in 1994, *Runaway* was made into a 97-minute feature film by CBC entitled "The Diary of Evelyn Lau," which is an abbreviated version of the book. At age twenty-one, the youngest poet ever nominated, Lau was short-listed for the Governor General's Award (for *Oedipal Dreams* 1992); the achievement is regarded as a public stamp of approval. Lau's subsequent book-length works have gained public appraisal and have thus confirmed her status in the Canadian literary canon: *Fresh Girls and Other Stories* (1993), *In the House of Slaves* (1994), *Other Women* (1995), and

Choose Me (1999). Lau's poetry has also appeared in journals and magazines, as well as in *Best American Poetry* and the definitive Canadian anthology *Breathing Fire*. Her most recent book, *Inside Out*: *Reflections on a Life So Far* (2001), a collection of personal essays, establishes Evelyn Lau as an accomplished fiction writer.

As an acclaimed young writer, Evelyn Lau has not only created an enigma but also invited critical debates concerning her authorial identity and ethnic (dis)identification. Lau's poetry and short stories explore an overtly heterosexual underworld of prostitution and drug addiction, and the themes have been seen as deliberately avoiding any hint of a racialized perspective, in relationship to which she supposedly has an "insider's knowledge" (Gunew). Although critics such as Dean might find Lau's stories imbued with "heterosexual love with prostitution and sado-masochistic sex" (Dean 22), such simplistic reading erases complicated sexuality issues with a perfunctory survey of its subject matter. Moreover, from the author's standpoint, Lau rejects critics' labeling her as a writer of erotica:

> I do not see myself as a writer of erotica, at all, at all. Because to me, erotica is about desire. If I read something that's erotic, the person in it is wanting something sexual and it is genuine and heartfelt, and the writing is beautiful and reflective. In my work these women aren't wanting what is happening to be happening to them. (qtd. in Dean 24)

Even though Chinese Canadian critic Lien Chao inscribes Lau's sexual relationships in the essentialist power-control interplay (*Beyond Silence* 184), Lau, I contend, uses erotica as an inconspicuous strategy of contextualizing the power play in sexual encounters or scandals not only to "sell out," but also to circumvent the disguise of her Chinese Canadian identity. The latter assumption is often eschewed or ignored by most critics.

It is thus critical to pinpoint Lau's own position of refusing to be categorized as a woman writer of color. She avoids her identification with the Chinese Canadian community and obviates the writing through race (Dean 26). Elaine Chang writes that "[t]hroughout *Runaway*, Lau identifies herself as Chinese only when her ethnicity signifies a measure of difference, and not sameness or 'belonging'" (114). One of the major themes in Lau's writing centers on the question of betrayal and acts of subversion. But unlike other Chinese Canadian women writers unearthing family secrets and revealing the corrupted lineage. Lau inserts a strong personal voice to defy any imposed systems on self-construction. As Roxanne Rimstead points out, "Lau's testimony constructs a unified self despite mental breakdowns by focusing steadily on her interior world and her goal to become a writer" (242). However, Rimstead eschews the complicated identity politics in Lau's work that engages in discursive intersectionality. Before proceeding to the intricate implications of deviance, I will encapsulate the two texts under scrutiny.

Runaway is the diary of a talented 14-year-old's turbulent experience of living "outside," from the age of fourteen to sixteen; the diary chronicles Lau's years on the streets of Vancouver from March 22, 1986, to January 20, 1988. Defying her parents' injunctions against her poetry and journals, Lau severs her relationship with her parents at the age of fourteen and begins a tumultuous search for a home among the drug and prostitute-filled streets of Vancouver. For two years, she finds freedom at the end of a joint, in a line of cocaine, or a bottle of valium. Different locations in her runaway/escape constitute the structure of this autobiographical writing: from Vancouver to Toronto, from Canada to the United States, from home to the streets, and to psychiatric wards. In

her diary Lau records the physical and emotional struggles of an adolescent girl living in an underworld imbued with drugs, prostitution, mental anguish, and attempted suicide.

Twelve years after the publication of *Runaway*, Evelyn Lau releases another autobiographical memoir *Inside Out: Reflections on a Life So Far*, in which she moves through past and present while revisiting her life as a prostitute and exploring the extent to which it continues to distort her perceptions of both herself and others. She considers her life as a writer and reveals the importance she has come to place in her writing. Both texts, with their strong autobiographical accounts, expose how the internal fissures, stemming from autobiography's marginality vis-à-vis literature and life, affirm, displace, and problematize the creation of deviant subjectivity.

5.2 Auto-er/xotic: The Deviant and Defiant Subject

In *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation* (1994), Leigh Gilmore analyzes non-canonical women's texts of self-representation and argues for a counter practice of autobiographics that would emphasize the writing of multiple and contradictory identities as a means to locate the autobiographical account as a "point of resistance" (84). I believe that both Lau's diary and memoir, exposing strong autobiographical elements, are an important site of inquiry into the construction of deviant subjectivity because of its multilayered re(inter)presentation of realities that appear on and beneath its surface. Lau circumscribes the truths, realities, and lived experiences in the pseudo-autobiographical accounts of countless incidents of rape, domestic violence and sexual harassment. The blurring of inside-outside and fiction-truth

thematizes the two texts: in *Runaway*, Lau writes from the inside out, whereas in *Inside Out*, she's on the outside looking in. The blurring positioning obfuscates the inside-outside demarcation and the private-public binarism in the name of writing.

Lau's writing to date has focused on the lives of "deviant" women, (or "Other Women," as one of the titles of her books suggests), who exist outside of the dominant institutions of language and law. In the two texts, the protagonist's positionality of displacing from "inside" to "outside" and looking into inside from outside reiterates the very construction of adolescent female subjectivity in a splintering liminality between generations, social groups, and gender roles. It is from the vantage of inside-outside reversibility and boundary-crossing that I will manifest the border theory through an examination of deviance as a borderland, a liminal space, in which Lau highlights freakiness, a deviant representation, as a power that is both liberatory and destructive throughout the narrative. The relationship of such a constructed space to Chinese Canadian female sexuality (despite Lau's personal ethnic disavowal) is critical. Lau's diary suggests that deviance may be a means of re-imagining a diverse and dynamic liminal space as well as presenting adolescence as a state of tension, characterized by the marginalized teenager's self-exposure to uncertainty and by her vulnerability and strength in survival.

Lau's awareness of deviance excluded from the patriarchal signifying system corresponds to Grosz's description of the way in which power functions directly on bodies by means of disciplinary practices, social supervision, and self-regulation ("Inscriptions" 64). According to Grosz, "the subject is named by being tagged or branded on its surface"; the codes inscribed to the body "bear the marks of a particular

social law and organization" (65). In this sense, Lau's deviant subjectivity can be located within the context of the operations of a power-knowledge dynamic, or within the normalcy-deviance structure. To be precise, Lau's rebellion and deviance serve to subvert established social expectations. She refuses to conform to society's confining and damaging normative ideals: excelling in class, "as the first step [for a] pre-planned career as a doctor or lawyer" (*Runaway* 1) and being a model daughter – "never going out, having no boyfriend and few friends, bringing home good grades, never experimenting with alcohol or drugs" (*Runaway* 4-5). The heroine runs away from Chinese familial tradition and Canadian social expectation not to "fit in any group" (155) while she expresses explicitly that she does "want to be a street kid…to be anonymous… and to be without thoughts" (140). The narrator strategically employs her position as a deviant subject, "a fifteen-year-old slut" (*Runaway* 239) and "a drug addict, a failure" (*Runaway* 241) to illuminate the slippery inscription of the subject through various discursive structures.

Rather than relying solely on the notion of borders as geographical or national, I will delve into the notion of border through an examination of adolescent deviance as a physical borderland between childhood and adulthood. The adolescent in Lau's narrative appears not only as emblem of a subjectivity in crisis, but also as a means to display psychic fissure. This narrative borderland is constantly "moved through" and "crossed over" by the "subject-in-process."[2] As Lau's confessional voice attempts to situate itself somewhere between past and present, or between inside and outside, the narrator's own presence – as a subject multiply determined by gender, race, class, and age – is rendered ambiguous in her constant deterritorialization of running away and crossing borders. As

Chang argues, the teenage runaway may be a relational subject that "oscillates between childhood and adulthood, dependence and independence, anonymity and visibility, social pity and contempt, home and homelessness" (173). The border crossing facilitates the ultimate reorganization of psychic space in the time before an ideally postulated maturity.

In the process of reaching a stable sense of self, Lau introduces a largely underrepresented "runaway subject" to discourses of feminism and postmodernism and their preoccupations with the borders between life experience and text (Chang 171). Furthermore, the runaway subject mobilizes border crossing, rendering the subject a discursive conjuncture. However, I am aware of the pitfalls of equating feminism with postmodernism and grounding the borders within such a theoretical equation. To avoid the reductive maneuver involved in conflating the theories under the headings of either postmodernism or feminism, I draw on specific writings by theorists that posit crucial links between subjectivity and border-crossing. Deleuze and Guattari (1987), in particular, offer a fruitful poststructuralist model that Lau's runaway subject virtually demands. Deleuze and Guattari claim that the material flow, suggested in Lau's occupation with different locations in networks of power and subordination, is the endless flux of a signifying chain. Lau begins the process of psychic deterritorialization while she is still home, and once on the street, she enters another pre-Oedipal libido which intensifies the fluidity she takes refuge in at (group) home.

In *Diary*, Lau refuses to "fit in": "without masking myself, I couldn't fit in at all.... I can't fit in anywhere. I allow a lot of people into my life and open up to them, but after this initial intimacy I withdraw" (280). In *Inside Out*, Lau sets herself in the free-flowing crossing over: "You step over one line then another, and soon you're

someplace else entirely where no one can reach or follow you" (196). Lau's running de-familiarizes normative ideologies of home. In other words, that Lau escapes from her parents' house but returns to different homes participates in designing production, cuts into this flow, and redirects it.

The Deleuzian model of the material flow is particularly important to postmodernist concepts because it displays an interest in viewing "difference" outside the binary structure, the inside-outside logic, in which what is different "can be understood only as a variation or negation of identity" (Grosz, "A Thousand Tiny Sexes" 8). That is, the subject, with the tendencies and capacities to transgress, must be understood "as a series of flows, energies, movements linked together in ways other than those which congeal it to an identity" ("A Thousand Tiny Sexes" 12). The runaway subject activated by the "flows, energies, movements" recalls the postmodern "ex-centricity" characterized by plurality and provisionality proposed by Linda Hutcheon (1988): "The ex-centric, the off-center, ineluctably identified with the center it desires but is denied. This is the paradox of the postmodern and its images are often as deviant as this language of decentering might suggest" (60-61). Lau's writing reiterates a rhetoric of asserting subjectivity through ex-centricity: the difference and specificity pervasive in postmodern thought.

Moreover, the runaway subject, in the postmodern sense, attempts to cross boundaries and negotiate the space between centers and margins in ways that acknowledge difference and challenge any monolithic concept (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 113, 198). Lau is quite conscious of such difference to delimit any prefabricated identities attributed to her: "I think it might have been healthier for me to

run, and emphasize my differences" (*Runaway* 144). The difference is to defamiliarize the sameness and to circulate the plurality.

The postmodern sense of fluid structures of domination can be further examined in the outside/outlaw subject. Caren Kaplan argues that minor(ity) writing "dismantles notions of value, genre, canon," and throughout the diary, Lau's writing/body "travels and moves between centers and margins" ("Deterritorializations" 358). But I contend that Lau even steps beyond the defined center-margin matrices where her deviance and split subjectivity are articulated in the self-denied identity as teenager-hooker-writer, who transgresses normative regulations and looks for self-recognition. Aware of her rejection from the model youth – "talented, motivated, up and coming young adults" (*Runaway* 155), the narrator runs not to fit in any group. Choosing to eschew the imposed "models," Lau herself claims that "[a]t least with prostitution I was able to identify myself as belonging to some group for the first time in my life. I can seldom identify myself as a writer without being humored or laughed at, because I am sixteen" (334).

Lau gradually learns to use writing as a way to circumnavigate a succession of places (belonging) and displacements (being marginalized). The diary's narrator oscillates between a strong desire to be a mainstream writer and her constant retreats into self-denial motivated by prostitution and drug addiction. I mentioned earlier Gilmore's non-canonical autobiography, and this kind of postmodern autobiography that confronts the writer and reader with a paradox, "does not entirely deconstruct the autobiographical project of self-discovery, but merely leads to a new emphasis on the multidimensionality of the autobiographical act" (Lonnecke 39). In her own feminist narratology,[3] Lau coalesces multiple voices that sustain the oscillation. The self-inventing and self-directed

subject is recuperated in an incoherent form: the first-person "I" is juxtaposed with, and concurrently differentiated and split from, the third-person "she" or Evelyn throughout the narrative.

The protagonist's subjectivity is paradoxically built on the borderland of separation and fragmentation of the real and imaginary selves: between "wanting to be someone else" (*Runaway* 308) and being never quite another person; between the narrator and the little girl before leaving home – "the hidden-away Chinese girl whom the other kids in school had ridiculed and put down mercilessly, who had been beaten by her parents in hopes of giving her a better life" (308). The narrator constantly negotiates between two poles of placing herself in a dialogical process:

> I threw it back to mock the little girl, to try and kill her, oh to so desperately try and kill her forever. Without realizing her beauty, without realizing that she is in her loneliness, ugliness and despair had given birth to my writing. With the drugs and the prostitution I had quickly covered her up, but the veneer was so thin that many times her face showed through it and other people did see her. I had tried to lead a violently different life to prove that she was not real, did not exist and never had existed, but she was always there, she was myself. (*Runaway* 308)

Lau uses the unstable running subject "I" or "she" to represent a series of fluid and shifting selves in her candid confessions, and the author employs the narrative of personal or individual crisis to reflect the adolescent's understanding of social injustice. In constructions of adolescent sexuality within the socio-spatial context, adolescent girls stereotypically represent a missing discourse of desire because they are neither taught nor encouraged to express feelings of desire and agency with regard to their emergent sexual selves. Reduced to being at the receiving end of masculine desire, teenage girls have to operate within a framework of passivity and immobility. Lau, however, uses the love

object and the essentially amorous imaginary, an adolescent imaginary susceptible to loss, to conceptualize a discourse, which is not "empty," but through which she disobeys the law.

Lau maneuvers the runaway subject to defy and transgress dominant social norms by becoming involved in a youth subculture permeated by drug addiction and sexual promiscuity. This liminality can be liberating, allowing the freedom to experiment with alternative identities or to oppose and outmaneuver monolithic cultural codes. However, it can also be debilitating in that it forces the recognition that identity is illusory or that mobility is the effect of a continual displacement.

5.3 Down and Out: Outlaw and Subculture

As analyzed above, Lau's runaway narrative reiterates Caren Kaplan's (1992) "out-law genre," a transgressive and untraditional form of autobiographic practice that is disinterested in continuing mythologies of individualism or celebrating national, canonical, collective ideas. The outlaw and the runaway advocate a shared thematic concern with delinquency and reprobation. With self-consciousness in and through writing, the narrator unsettles the value-laden tension between the two specific modalities of being home and not being home. Lau's running, as Chang indicates, "defamiliarizes 'home' and normative ideologies of family and community" (181). By renouncing her parents and dismissing her racial minority community, Lau cuts her bond with them and redefines the complication of home(less)(ness). The "home and un-home" in Lau's

writing extends to another dimension of the diasporic "not here, over there" in Lee's, Lai's, and Kwa's novels.

In her autobiographical narrative, deviance/defiance has reversed the terms of mainstream culture's normative discourses by wholly embracing the outlaw culture: prostitution, running away, and drug addiction. It also illuminates the freakishness and brutality of the "real" world. In this sense, the challenge is echoed in the out-law genre that aims to destabilize genre categories and traditional epistemologies. In Kaplan's argument, the coalition of (sub)cultural and personal survival "fuels the narrative engines of out-law genres" ("Resisting Autobiography" 132). Drawing on Kaplan's assertion that "staying alive" entails the linking of individual experience and communal collectivity, I further contend that Lau's writing not only deconstructs the characteristic individualism in traditional Western autobiography, but also renders the out-law autobiographical genre a mode of subcultural survival.

From the outset of the diary, the narrator claims that the diary recorded from age fourteen to sixteen, is "a story of survival" (5) and that "writing means life, [which] gives her the feeling that she still belongs inside herself" (61). In other words, writing is the salvific enterprise necessary for her survival (*Runaway* 230), and words on the page redeem and justify her existence (*Inside Out* 95). Lau clearly addresses the preoccupations with obstacles to survival in writing or writing for survival: "I'm going to deal with my problems [like other outlaws] alone and return healed, like those Indian youths who go into the forest to fast and consult the holy spirits. Well, the spirits are inside me and I have to unearth them" (*Runaway* 90). Writing from the subcultural margin thus redeems her.

Subculture, like the out-law genre, is a mythical antithesis to traditionally defined "culture" because it is desperate, anti-authoritarian, and involved in the defense of symbolic territory outside the home. The emphasis on difference of the marginalized liberates the outsiders to explore another kind of identity (Brake 190-91). In this context, writing (within) subculture becomes a meaningful statement about the existential position of the marginalized; the subcultural space provides these outlaws with an alternative script against social authority: "I think writing even beats drugs; it's necessary for my survival" (230). Lau's experience on the streets is emphasized by her "differences" – her rejection of/by hegemonic institutions and her resistance to all panoptic forms of social and parental authorities: psychiatric wards, group homes, food banks, her parents, and social workers. Lau explicitly declares:

> It is too easy to give up fighting against barriers (real or imaginary) and to do fuck-all but lie on the couch watching TV, going out at night. It's called being a teenager, I guess. Then what? A repeat performance, going on welfare after a few abortions or a few unwanted kids, dying of something like a car accident if not a drug overdose? Waking up hungover in the morning, blitzed out on drugs. I think it might have been healthier for me to run [away from authorities], and emphasize my differences. (*Runaway* 143-144)

This ex-centricity affects her ability to identify with otherness and to cross differences through writing the composite discourse of mind/body/text. Body and writing for her become interchangeable for survival. In the diary, she capitalizes these maneuvers: "EVELYN DOES KNOW HOW TO SURVIVE IN THIS WORLD. SHE DOES, IF NOT WITH HER WRITING, THEN WITH HER BODY" (291). The writer's teenage perspective imbues her depictions of sexual and emotional activity with an engaging simplicity and straightforwardness; she is aware that her "writing is immature

and self-absorbed, and that alone is enough to depress anyone" (151). Her constant depression and immaturity both facilitate and counter the writing subject's self-development; her plural marginalized positions in the subcultural structure enable her to mediate among identifications that resist integration into a unified whole, and at the same time to inscribe herself into her own chaotic text, complying with and escaping from these identifications. (Chang 173-182).

Lau's transgressive writing entails an inquiry with a feminist theoretical coloring. Returning to my initial argument of the conflation of postmodernism and feminism intrinsic to Lau's runaway subject, I will take a thread of feminism, precisely third-wave feminism, to foreground the analysis of prostitution later in this chapter. The multiple forms of Lau's resistance recall the manifesto of the "third-wave feminists."[4] Also known as "postfeminists," the third-wave feminists acknowledge and make use of pleasure and danger to redefine power structures in a media-saturated global economy and multicultural contexts. Lau's liberating sexuality responds to the third-wave feminist goal of developing "modes of thinking that can come to terms with the multiple, constantly shifting bases of oppression in relation to the multiple, interpenetrating axes of identity, and the creation of a coalition politics" (Heywood and Drake 3). In granting new and emphatic values to the notion of life experience, Lau's body as a subject/agent of third-wave feminism is articulated in prostitution, another deviant representation pervasive in her work.

5.4 The Echo Chamber: Writing the Prostitute Body

Lau sees her chosen sexuality as conventionally deviant and inverted, but, potentially, with a magic aspect: the deviant subject as an evolving, "sliding" signifier of agency that unfolds possibilities. In *Runaway*, prostitution perpetuates two premises in the discourses of deviance: that of sexual deviance and that of deviant work. A comprehensive analysis of prostitution as sexual deviance is made by sociologist E. Lemert, who classifies prostitution as a form of sexual deviance similar to homosexuality and psychopathic sexual behavior (i.e., exhibitionism and sexual sadism) based on the fact that prostitution violates the norms regarding sexual relations (237-238). Prostitution, positioned as deviant work for women because of its sexual nature, is strategically employed by Lau to circulate the free-floating identity. In this regard, prostitution is important to feminism, especially the third-wave feminism mentioned earlier, because the prostitute body is a terrain on which feminists contest and contextualize sexuality, desire, and power.

Moreover, Lau stages the scandalous performing body to construct a distinct subjectivity from a multiply underprivileged and marginalized positionality: a dropout-runaway-teenager-prostitute-drug addict. In her own autobiographical agenda, Lau articulates the semantically generative spaces between the different worlds she inhabits in a discourse of category breaking and genre crossing. In other words, the heroine's multiple marginalized positionalities lead to an activity of constant deconstruction and schizophrenic self questing as a street girl:

> I realize now that a large part of why I am still working the street is that that is where I am recognized as a somebody. That's the last thing I would have expected, since I used to feel that the johns treated me like a piece of meat, but as it turns out the street is the only place where I am actually appreciated. Otherwise, I'm nobody. A young, struggling writer – and a prostitute. A prostitute who can make money, satisfy customers and be praised. Finally people are giving me total approval. That is the response I would like with my writing, but it hasn't happened yet, maybe never will happen. (*Runaway* 300)

The narrative voice and her body here also function as a resistant utterance and backlash against the authoritarian patriarchal system. Corresponding to the pleasure and danger used by the third-wave feminists to redefine power structures, Lau's liberating sexuality develops the multiple and shifting bases of oppression. In *Runaway*, prostituting exemplifies a self-destructive behavior, a replay of past abuse and helplessness, or, in Lau's confession, "a reaction to that fear [of being forced back home]..." (317). The act of performing the body itself at the same time reconstitutes the unattainability of being recognized and the denial from her parents since childhood: "By giving blow jobs that resulted in orgasms, I had fulfilled somebody, which I couldn't do as a child with my parents. It hadn't mattered that it had only been a trick, a customer, a john. It was somebody" (*Runaway* 261). In hindsight, Lau reflects on her life as a prostitute – empowered and victimized – "difficult, inflammatory, undebatable" (*Inside Out* 9).

At the heart of the discourse of prostitution lies the prostitute body in the dichotomization of empowerment and victimization. As Lau writes, twelve years after her street life, "Does one speak the language of the victim, who sees prostitution as abuse by men, or of the empowered woman who claims it to be an economic choice without any psychological ramifications?" (*Inside Out* 9). Her stigmatized role as a street girl excluded from and denied by hegemonic practices and institutions produces a counter-

hegemonic discourse. Lau resists the dichotomization of the prostitute body into an abused but empowered body, and in so doing, a broader binary division of women into feminist/mother/good girl and slut/male-identified/bad girl is destabilized (Bell 99, 137). Both texts inscribe experiences of prostitution that give rise to different and controversial constructions of subjectivity: a site of work and abuse, power, sex, addiction, confusion, and even pleasure.

On the one hand, Lau posits prostitution as objectification of the split self in writing because writing (the self), like prostitution, entails an act of seduction that submits the writer to the open-ended circulation among readers just as the girl's body and attire are openly offered to the gaze of the spectators. Knowing "what has always been [her] destiny: success as a writer" (*Runaway* 274), Lau portrays "the adolescent girl 'in circulation' as a desirable object of others' gazes and as a subject of resisting men's possession" (Hewitt 117).[5] Just as the prostitute makes herself "available" to others, so is it for the writer, who, as an echo chamber, is "passed through." For Lau, the defying body and writing complement each other in producing a struggle for a subjectivity "that prostitution would become a substitute for writing" (330).

On the other hand, Lau sees prostitution, like subculture, as a contested terrain that challenges the practices and institutions of dominant cultures. Lau's prostitute body seeks to empower her by liberating the "I" from a prostitute identity to that of a writer. She confesses: "Being a hooker, I would be shameless, and they [classmates] would be afraid of my power. They would be envious of the money and the adoration. I would be somebody they could never dare talk back to" (*Runaway* 312). The young girl acquires a certain power from the sexual exchange, which acts as a weapon of resisting man's

possession; for Lau, her teenage female body becomes "a kind of power and control over the johns themselves, that they would have to pay for sex, that they would find me attractive enough to pull bills out of their wallets before pulling down their zippers" (*Runaway* 237).

The heroine's ambivalent status as both subject and object of the sexual cont(r)act disrupts the dichotomization because she is both a victim of a dysfunctional family and a psychological victim of patriarchy, but at the same time a resisting agent in control of her own life and choice. The runaway subject of these inconsistencies crosses beyond this dichotomization. Therefore, the writer's subjectivity is (re)formulated by a productive paradox of empowering herself to utter/write from her victimized position; paradoxically, only by opening herself to the split selves and the problematic positionality within/out discourses can she construct herself by/from deconstructing herself. Lau writes that "I have a life to fill, without rules, borders, or conscience. So this is what happens when you tear yourself from your restraints" (*Runaway* 62), but "sometimes I question the purpose of construction when it will be destroyed anyway – maybe not through nuclear war, but through any multitude of self-destructive schemes humankind will cook up along the way" (*Runaway* 63). Lau strategically employs her dissident sexuality to destabilize sexual dichotomies of good and bad, normal and abnormal, natural and unnatural, and so forth. The inscriptions of the body in the power structure will be further elaborated in the following discussion on Foucauldian body politics.

5.5 Running Away and Homecoming: Body Politics in Lau's Narrative

I coalesce in this section the prostitute body with body politics to situate Lau's deviant body within a broader Foucauldian discursive formation of subjectivity. With regard to body politics, Susan Bordo describes the body as "a site of struggle," a locus of control, and "a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed" (13, 28). The deviant body represented as a teenage runaway-prostitute outside the trajectory of regulation and normalization, functions as a strategic terrain of contact, conflict, and combat inside and outside the trajectory. Grosz's contention of inscribing the body onto the power structure facilitates my analysis.

> [I]f the body is the strategic target of systems of codification, supervision and constraint, it is also because the body and its energies and capacities exert an uncontrollable, unpredictable threat to a regular, systematic mode of social organisation. As well as being the site of knowledge-power, the body is thus also a site of resistance, for it exerts a recalcitrance, and always entails the possibility of a counterstrategic reinscription, for it is capable of being self-marked, self-represented in alternative ways. ("Inscriptions" 64)

Taking the deviant representations as the "alternative ways" suggested by Grosz, I will re-evaluate the Foucauldian paradigm of deployment and press it into service.

A further analysis of modern subjectivity formation through sexuality would not be encompassing without (re)examining Foucauldian discourses. Foucault (1975) writes that docile bodies are created not only by external power but also by self-imposed tactics of surveillance. In this vein, the forms of subjectivity in *Runaway* may be located at the nexus of two Foucauldian technologies of power: the deployment of alliance and the

deployment of sexuality. Foucault (1978) argues that the deployment of alliance predominates in the West: the "mechanisms of constraint" that operate through "a system of marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission of names and possessions" (106). The second technology of power, the deployment of sexuality, superimposed on the deployment of alliance, functions by "proliferating, innovating, annexing, creating, and penetrating bodies in an increasing detailed way, and in controlling populations in an increasingly comprehensive way" (107). The expulsion of the runaway/prostitute body from the deployments of alliance and sexuality renders complex reterritorializations, precipitated, in some part, by the subject's desire to be de-framed within rejected spheres.

In *Runaway*, the deployment of alliance is associated with Lau's Chinese heritage and the deployment of sexuality with both patriarchal Chinese and Western cultures of reducing images of Oriental female sexuality to "exotic, alluring sex objects, depraved prostitutes, or victims of Asian patriarchy" (Wong and Santa Ana 185). With strong cultural impositions on their daughter's "success," Lau's Chinese parents forbid her any playtime and disapprove of her interest in writing. Lien Chao points out that the reason for Lau's parents' behavior "could be their inappropriate Chinese cultural baggage" (*Beyond Silence* 163). Both *Runaway* and *Inside Out* expose a discourse of resistance to the subjectification of the daughter within the family dynamic. Paramount among the difficulties is that, in trying to push away from the constraints of alliance's patriarchal law, the heroine severs her ties with the family. As a runaway and as a prostitute, Lau's transgressive subject is doubly rejected by mainstream cultures: both by the dominant Canadian legislative law that silences the Other as well as by the "minority" Chinese

patriarchal culture that dislodges women's sexuality outside of the family. At the same time, she uses her body as resistance against Western and Chinese patriarchy. In writing the text/body, the narrator explores different selves inside and outside the panoptic surveillance.

In *Runaway*, the deployment of sexuality operates through and within the family, Emergency Services, the psychiatric ward, hospitals, group homes, and the male characters and clients.[6] In Lau's observation, "Sometimes I wonder isn't there a single guy in the world who is willing to be a friend without eventually wanting something sexual in return?" (*Runaway* 148). These (patriarchal) institutions and representations also form a panoptical surveillance normalizing her "deviance." But Lau herself criticizes the hypocrisy of the interchange of these two systems of deployment: "It is ironic that some of the people we have been taught to respect, the teachers and the businessmen and the 'authority figures,' are the same men who cruise the streets looking for young girls to affirm their manhood, their desirability. Refusing to believe that it is an act, and that somewhere inside they know it" (*Runaway* 299).

The diary challenges the ways in which the deployments of alliance and sexuality function, in Foucault's words, "to turn real lives into writing." In opposition to claims for a unified and coherent subjectivity, Lau's narrative accentuates the conflicts and confusions of identity that constitute the discursive "I" in the apparatuses of Foucauldian deployment. Lau's "I" repeatedly emphasizes her determination to "make a name for [her]self from [her] writing" (160) and her strong ego to become "one of the top writers in Canada" (230). Lau's breaking new ground to act as a deviant and to circulate her sexuality also signifies cutting off her tie with the family/home. Choosing the writing

"that both her parents denied" (311), Lau rejects the role as an obedient Chinese daughter, and she "determine[s] to be a writer worthy of respect" (Rita Wong 124). Such an undeniable individual voice searching for recognition is constantly highlighted by the narrator: "Who am I if not a writer? It's all I have – this pile of crumpled paper that follows me everywhere in my backpack, words breathing life, my existence" (*Runaway* 146). In the long process of situating herself "somewhere," writer Evelyn Lau did receive recognition for her writing, an ultimate justification for her survival. When first published in 1989, the book became a national bestseller, and at the same time, the then-teenager Lau immediately turned into the youngest and the most controversial Chinese Canadian writer because, in her own way, Lau worked both in and out of the imposed cultural constructs.[7] The deployments of alliance and sexuality, in a similar vein, operate through and within the Asian family. The imperative of deployments also pervades SKY Lee's and Lydia Kwa's stories already discussed in previous chapters.

The autographical voice – real or fictive, sexual or textual – reiterates a discourse of resistance, fraught with difficulties, to the subjectification of the imposed "model daughter" or "model youth" within the two systems of power deployment invested historically and culturally in the dominant Chinese (-) Canadian ideologies. With her own body politics, Evelyn Lau defies and transgresses such imposed ideologies, and it is the defiance that calls for a new Chinese Canadian female subjectivity.

5.6 Outside In: Deviance and Abjection

Although the prostitute body and the runaway subject in this chapter may seem irrelevant to abjection discussed in the previous chapter, I find that both deviance and abjection, mapped in the textual landscape and central to my major argument, circulate the consonant discourse of displacement and marginalization. In this section, rather than superimposing the ex-centricity or outlawing boundaries, the discussion correlates the abject with the deviant in body politics to which the narrator is subjected. Lau's work, implicitly or explicitly drawing on the Freudian family romance, needs to be further examined from the street as a subversive space imbued with regulations to a psycho-sexual landscape. Within the embrace of the archetypal father-lover and repulsion from the mother, Lau's work participates in the dialogues between psychoanalysis and sexuality. Karlyn Koh sees in Lau's work that "[t]he borders of normative sexuality are stabilized through the threat of psychosis and psychic unlivability – the life of the abject and hence 'unreal'" (20). The prognosis in Lau's subject matter reveals the importance of locating psychoanalysis as a discourse which presumes it knows what counts as normal in order that deviance may be not only prescribed but also inscribed. In mapping abjection within the psychoanalytical framework, Judith Butler (1993) writes that "the notion of abjection designates a degraded or cast out status within the terms of sociality. Indeed, what is foreclosed or repudiated within psychoanalytic terms is precisely what may not reenter the field of the social without threatening psychosis, that is, the dissolution of the subject itself" (243). I dwell on the perception of abjection to foreground deviance in psychoanalytical parameters. Lau re-inscribes the deviant/abject at the heart of her

runaway narrative; through the constant running away and disclaiming any singular identity, Lau upholds difference as the prime factor in sociocultural, familial, sexual ordering.

Throughout *Runaway*, Lau repudiates her "horrible and ugly" body (166), or in *Inside Out*, she sees herself as an objectified "it": "a conduit for a constant stream of ugliness that had to pass through in order for me to stay pure" (82). However, Lau's "ugly" deviant/abject identity remains undeniably central to the praxes of normative deployment: always outside and yet constantly threatening the integrity of that system. In Lau's "shrunken and ugly" references to her unhappy childhood (*Inside Out* 183), the physical demands of the split linguistic subject, in both texts, are manifested by the insistent emphasis on orality, represented as a pre-oedipal dysfunction; the references to fellatio (*Runaway* 46, 199, 261, 294) and bulimia (*Runaway* 159, *Inside* 198) emerge as a result of the lack of alignment with the mother. Because abjection evolves as a process of exclusion specific to the defilement of her body in a given non-normative identity formation, Lau's deviant body appears as an inscribed form of defilement and disavowal throughout the narrative: "I want to disown this body now, cast it forever into the winds. It is too gross to be mine, it will always be scrawled with oozing white semen" (*Runaway* 260). The deviant, expelled from normalcy, resembles the abject character that "glides through a space of anxiety where the boundaries between inner and outer world are constantly threatened by the invasion of the abject and where no true objects of desire can exit" (Fuchs 6). Always excluded from the center, the abject, like the deviant, "appears as a rite of defilement and pollution" (Kristeva 17).

The abject's sense of repulsion and separation from the mother can be traced to the mother-daughter ritual in her childhood: "As a child I had been both aroused and repulsed; I learned to associate genitals, especially female genitals, with something dirty. I still don't want to know that my vagina exists, casting it away as something horrible and ugly" (*Runaway* 294). She traces her self-loathing associated with sexuality to her mother, seen as Other: "how dangerous and frightening her face had looked, the terrible power she had of taking everything away" (*Inside Out* 191). Living under the maternal specter, Lau cultivates self-hatred: "my thoughts would repeat themselves obsessively; I would become compulsive in my behaviour; I would avoid other women because I was afraid they would try to control me like my mother had..." (*Inside Out* 80). This repulsion is tracked down to the narrator's fundamental division from her mother, and furthermore, the repudiation of the mother is transposed to the imaginary of othering the mother: "I am flat chested and asexual. The next thing that will go will be my vagina, because of their probing fingers. But maybe it has never been mine, maybe it has always been my mother's – Dr. Hightower and I wonder about that, if when I am on the street, I subconsciously wish it were my mother's body the customers are defiling" (*Runaway* 319). In retrospection, Lau traces the perverse m/othering in pre-oedipal dysfunction.

> Where I hunched tensely over my poetry in my bedroom, leaping in fear when my mother stealthily opened the door and snuck up behind me to ensure I was doing homework and not writing. Where she exploded my naked body as critically as though it were her own, tugging and poking at my adolescent flesh while I detached in my mind. Later, in prostitution, it sometimes seemed that what was being done was only an echo of those moments with my mother – my body simply belonged to whoever was manhandling it at the time, while in my mind I drifted elsewhere. (*Inside Out* 16-17)

The abject implication in Lau's narrative is an effect of the child's corporeal boundaries being set through the circulation of horror and disgust (*Inside Out* 80-82). It testifies to the precarious grasp of the subject on its own identity, "an assertion that the subject may slide back into the impure chaos out of which it was formed" (Grosz, "The Body of Significance" 90). Given that abjection designates both a division (between the subject and its body or between the child and mother) and a merging, it is through this space, both repulsive and enthralling, that the abject defines the contradictory self-conception.

Abjection in the symbolic matrix, as Georgelos points out, "safeguards the territory of the state and territorializes the subject through the prohibition of incest" (24). In the memoir, as Lau confesses, "Sometimes my desire for a family, for a father, is so great that it consumes me. When I try to wrench a man I perceive to be a father figure away from his family, and he doesn't comply – of course, if he did comply, he would quickly stop seeming suitable as a surrogate father – I plummet into a cauldron of self-loathing" (*Inside Out* 198). In establishing the triangular relationship of language, abjection, and deterritorialization in Lau's narrative, Georgelos insightfully concludes:

> Lau knots languages, abjection, and the fragmentation of her body together into one and the same dynamic of deterritorialization. The textualization of her body subverts subjectivity by fragmenting the body, scattering its pieces "forever into the winds." This writing of the body shatters its totality into a multiplicity of partial objects, each of which becomes part of an infinitely complex series of signifying chains. (25-26)

The abject, akin to the deviant, is a sliding signifier in liminal ambiguity that defies the hegemonic codes, the closure of border/boundary and spaces. This liminality is similar to what Vietnamese critic Trinh T. Minh-ha calls "the interval": "a space in which meaning remains fascinated by what escapes and exceeds it…displacing and emptying

out the establishment of totality" ("Documentary Is/Not A Name" 96). Furthermore, the escape externalizes the deviant's sense of abjection in that the runaway creates the illusion of solidity (and thereby the illusion of "borders" to "transgress") where no such clear distinction exists. The deviant/abject challenges the rules and boundaries of the symbolic sphere to the extent that she has to be expelled from the working order and signifying practices. Thus, by framing the triangulation which informs Lau's writing, I conclude that the friction attends to issues of desire and identity, which speak from the deviant margins rather than a normalizing center and celebrate the "abnormal" via the concept of symbolic identification.[8]

The split subject exposes a plurality of contradictory selves and practices of deviance and pronounces a multiply fissured, paradoxical sense of subjectivity. The "fragmentation of the body" carves out Lau's sense of multiple selfhood. In a similar vein, Trinh writes that "the 'I' is not a unified subject, a fixed identity, or that solid mass covered with layers of superficiality one has gradually to peel off before one can see its true face. 'I' is, itself, infinite layers" ("She, the Inappropriate/d Other" 27). Lau articulates in her narrative such fragmented, contradictory nature of self-construction:

> I am like one of those Russian dolls. They are a womanly shape, wooden, with painted features. A line slices them in half. You take their two halves apart and inside is another doll, with the exact same features, only smaller. You peel them away, one by one, and there is always another one underneath – until you reach the core, the solid wooden woman, its features by now blurred. I am always surprised and disappointed that there are not more and yet more, multiplying, neverending, until the last one is so tiny it is microscopic. (*Runaway* 311)

The author inscribes realities from both "inside" and "outside," but the writing subject, like the Russian dolls to which she compares herself, endlessly searches for her

subjectivity by peeling her selves away only to find a tiny core of blurred features beneath.

In the two texts, the writer/narrator challenges the assumptions about the singular and stable self, and she refuses to represent a sense of collective consciousness in most minority literature. Her writing defies the Asian American cultural politics that "relies on the construction of sameness and the exclusion of differences" (Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* 68). The "I" proliferates into a multiple identity and resists hegemonic cultural discourses imposed by both patriarchal Chinese and Canadian imperatives. Lau's insistence on her racial disidentification forms a break with the prismatic writing of female subjectivity. Through multifarious sets of sexual and racial injunctions, Lau's work allows us to engage in "a serious consideration of the validity and politics of 'disidentification'" (Koh 22). Her writing of split selves into subjectivity re-conceptualizes experience and identity without abandoning the (un)conscious psychological and discursive engagement. The teenage girl's exemplary voice as she experiences the problems and conflicts of her runaway's life is lensed and mediated through various deviant and abject representations: as a runaway, a prostitute, a drug addict, and so forth. The position of the deviant/abject serves as a complement to the categories of subject and object, and of inside and outside. For Lau, writing from and about difference is the difference that makes the difference, and such difference defamiliarizes the notion of collectivity. Contesting the collective identity, the young writer's positioning of writing blurs the notion of home-homelessness, inside-outside, and here-there. Both texts, in various transgressive modes, question the normative deployments of epistemology and produce a new differing body and defying subject.

Notes

1. Canadian critic Sneja Gunew brings up the issue of how cultural translation and visual performance intervene with corporeal representations in print or in media. She argues that Evelyn Lau markets her "visible minority" face, constructed as exotic and erotic, as a way to promote self-representation and that Lau uses her racialized or sexualized difference as an "orientalist" camouflage to enter the mainstream culture. Gunew supports this premise with culturalist critics (i.e., Ali Rattansi, Homi Bhabha, Slavoj Zizek) to argue for Lau's attempt to be "visible" by circulating Zizek's discourse: "What do others want from me? What do they see in me? What am I for others?" (qtd. in Gunew). According to Gunew, this discourse remains productive for minority writers to use their "normative privileging of the visibly raced body" to sell out.

2. In *Technologies of Gender: Feminism, Film, and Fiction* (1987), Teresa de Lauretis suggests that there is no one monolithic ideology of gender, and it is important to re-conceptualize experience and identity without abandoning the continuous engagement of a self in social reality. She calls such reconceptualization the "subject of feminism":

   > By the phrase "the subject of feminism" I mean a conception or an understanding of the (fe)male subject as not only distinct from Woman with the capital letter...but also distinct from women, the real historical beings and social subjects who are defined by the technology of gender and actually engendered in social relations. The subject of feminism I have in mind is one not so defined, one whose definition or conception is in progress. (9-10)

   The subject of feminism should be read contextually with the Kristevan "subject-in-process," which struggles against the web of differences that has previously defined it. A woman in such a position not only challenges being an object of representation but can critique the very notion of representation and subjectivity.

3. Susan Knutson, elaborating on Mieke Bal's theory of narratology, argues that "feminist" narratology, which identifies gender-determined forms and analyzes feminist revision of narrative grammar, "may help correct the ethnocentrism of narratology itself by clarifying that a certain dominant sense of story is culturally determined" (10). I am appropriating the term rather to implicate and complicate Lau's narrative form of using a transgressive female figure, as a subject who dares to act, to "become an obstacle to the stability of a patriarchal institution" (Knutson 10).

4. In their discussion, Heywood and Drake observe that first wave feminists work(ed) for abolition, voting rights, and temperance causes; second wave

feminists concentrate(d) on wage equity, develop(ed) gender and sexism as key categories of analysis; the two waves demanded the same rights as men and critiqued patriarchy without simultaneously demanding commensurate changes to the system. The third wave feminists, often labeled "postfeminists," characterize "a group of young, conservative feminists who explicitly define themselves against and criticize feminists of the second wave" ("Introduction" 1).

5. The girl "in circulation" is inspired by Leah Hewitt's analysis of Marguerite Duras's *The Lover*. Hewitt asserts that the heroine in *The Lover* renders herself a desirable object of others' gazes, recalling "Levi-Strauss's structuralist understanding of society as organized around the exchange of women (by men)" (117). According to Hewitt, when publication is involved, writing, like prostitution, also includes a monetary exchange. The comparison between Lau's writing and Duras's is not at hazard. The acknowledgement of Lau's 1995 fiction *Other Women* published by Vintage Canada, compares her writing with Marguerite Duras's classic *The Lover*.

6. Foucault demonstrates that in women in particular, one of the primary axes of the deployment of sexuality is the process of "hysterization of women," which involves "a thorough medicalization of their bodies and their sex...carried out in the name of the responsibility they owed to the health of their children, the solidity of the family institution, and the safeguarding of society" (1980, 146-147).

7. Rita Wong, in her analysis of three Asian Canadian authors, argues that Lau as an individual sets her own standard for writing in and out of the white standards. Wong borrows this cultural construct from Sneja Gunew: "Both women and migrants internalize the process whereby the culture constructs them, and it requires a great deal of self-conscious analysis before they are able to step (and only ever in part) outside these constructs" (qtd. in Wong 124)

8. Other critics (Koh 1996; Chao 1997; Hodgson-Blackburn 1999) have already done an in-depth psychoanalysis of Lau's work. Taking up a psychoanalytical thread, I further argue that Lau uses a rather strong authorial voice and stance, either as a constructed "street kid" on the run or as a marketed "fresh girl" to sell out, to carve out a new "subject-in-process" in Chinese Canadian women's writing.

Epilogue

Until the mid-twentieth century, immigration was used to regulate Chinese Canadians' and other ethnic groups' sexualities: the bachelor society, abnormal female ratio, anti-miscegenation laws, and early prostitution denaturalized not only racial formation but also certain desires, which were culturally and historically unintelligible or intelligible. It is difficult for contemporary critics and readers to imagine Sui Sin Far's internalized pain transformed into some transgressive acts inherent in her writing. The discriminatory legislation, which started in 1875 and ended after the end of World War Two, denied most Chinese Canadian women's entry into mainstream Canadian culture. Since the 1960s, globalization or flexible citizenship has changed their gender and sexuality formations. The final words in Lydia Kwa's novel *This Place Called Absence*, written in the new millennium, point to such difference and transition: "One hundred years ago, the light was dimmer and could only illuminate a small space. True enough, but it was a light that was not taken for granted. It was a light that became more precious by its contrast to the surrounding dark" (202). These women writers have struggled a long way, undergoing the dark surroundings and transgressing different normalities, to "illuminate a wider space."

Goellnicht's proposition of thinking of hybrid positions or sexuality as "a web of multiply intersecting and shifting strands in which the precise location of the subject is extremely difficult to map" ("Blurring Boundaries" 340) serves as an important landmark for redefining gender politics and sexual alternatives. The five texts I have examined here reveal such complexity in various transgressive forms, which, in Goellnicht's phrases, "can be feminist, diasporic, lesbian, and socialist, as well as immigrant, heterosexual, racially mixed, patriarchal, and capitalist" ("Of Bones and Suicide" 315). In

their own way, Chinese Canadian women writers theorize sexuality as a site that challenges Foucauldian deployments of alliance and sexuality to define their traditional role as the "good subject." Defying that good subject, they transgress the normativities to reconstruct a sexual utopic site through their textual productions. I have argued throughout this dissertation that the women writers participate in a different level of engagement between heterosexual and lesbian women and between contemporary writers and historical voices; such engagement serves as the basis for the development of a new feminist praxis that articulates the ways in which (in)visibility, otherness, bonding, and stigma are (re)produced on Chinese Canadian women's bodies. The differing and defying female body, in both a biological and a metaphorical sense, "opens up" other bodies and spaces for writers and critics to generate discourse(s).

I have untangled the threads of transgressive sexuality that come to bind these texts together in a new form called Chinese Canadian women's writing. Sui Sin Far builds a prophetic narrative to create and defer the subjectivity of Chinese women in North America. Her North American experience defines the historical significance and meaning of an important body of work and a heretofore unwritten chapter in the history of Chinese Canadian women's writing: the history of women's transgressive sexuality. Such thematic writing has, however, become a generic yet hybrid annex to history, autobiography, and other literary forms adopted by other Chinese Canadian women writers for self-expression. If Sui Sin Far uses female self-representation as a transgression read and witnessed by a primarily white male audience, she does open up a critical space – conceptual, representational, and feminine – in which her successors address their voices to other women. If SKY Lee picks up Far's threads and weaves them

into the fabric of desire, the erotic evocation and invocation open up another broader yin space for her contemporary writers to explore and contextualize sexual politics and fantasy of one's own room, now called "Chinese Canadian women's writing." By authorizing women to speak their desires often denied in the patriarchal system, literary productions with sexual and racial thematics textually open their desires to the common reader's gaze to justify "femininity." By inscribing the new definition of feminine sexuality, the writers circulate a form of their reintegration into the discourse of the creation as "subject to" as well as "subject of." The powers of convergence in genealogical referentiality accompany a new kind of agency and mobility in the textual operation of these women writers to engender new discourses.

The completion of this dissertation in the twenty-first century is symbolic of a new historical moment for new possibilities and directions. Standing on the threshold of the new millennium, I hope that my work will serve as an "isomorphic zone," which encompasses strategies for differently located Chinese Canadian women or Asian American women, through sexual representations, to shape interventions that embody their separate and common political interests and historical perspectives because the emergence, representation, and transformation of sexuality are always tied to historical conditions. After the "protracted birth" of Chinese Canadian women's literature, I also hope that my work will play a significant role not only in nurturing the emerging filed of criticism on Chinese Canadian women's writing, but also in fostering the study of gender and sexuality in the contexts of Canadian and diasporic literary studies. Sharing with these writers their political affiliations and feminine alliance, I have stressed the resisting subjects as an authorial practice of textual manipulation not to privilege intentionality,

but rather to situate Chinese Canadian women writers as agents and to exhibit awareness of how women have been positioned as mere objects in Chinese (and) Canadian history. These bodies, subjects and texts claim their subjectivity mediated through their transgressive, subversive sexualities of ultimately political acts (Bow 170). By emphasizing the dissemination and re-inscription of female sexualities in Chinese Canadian history, future generations of critics and scholars will be able to establish critical models in Chinese Canadian literature that begin with a genealogy of the defying, differing sexual and textual bodies on the Canadian literary stage.

Contributing to an ongoing conversation about alternative sexual representations in a new era, this work offers a new perspective on a large, significant, but usually neglected, body and connection of material written by Chinese Canadian women. It allows us to overhear the voices of the "many-mouthed birds" in their heterogeneity, carried in a new genre that is a remarkable listening post by virtue of its defying, deferring, and differing form. Venturing into the yin space, this dissertation recovers a hidden lacuna in the history of Chinese women's writing in Canada and offers a stepping stone for future studies in related fields.

Works Cited and Consulted

Primary Texts

Chu, Garrick et al., eds. *Inalienable Rice: A Chinese & Japanese Canadian Anthology.* Vancouver: Intermedia Press, 1979.

Kwa, Lydia. "Father/mother/tongue." *West Coast Line* 28:13-14 (Spring-Fall 1994): 15.

---. *The Colours of Heroines*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1994.

---. *This Place Called Absence*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 2000.

Lai, Larissa. "Corrupted Lineage: Narrative in the Gaps of History." *West Coast Line* 33/34:3 (Winter 2001): 40-53.

---. "Interview with Ashok Mathur. July 1998." 20 April 2003. <http://www.eciad.bc.ca/~amathur/larissa/larissa.html>

---. "Political Animals and the Body of History." *Canadian Literature* 163 (Winter 1999): 145-154.

---. *Salt Fish Girl*. Toronto: Thomas Allen Publishers, 2002.

---. *When Fox Is a Thousand*. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1995.

Lau, Evelyn. *In the House of Slaves*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1994.

---. *Inside Out*: *Reflections on a Life So Far*. Canada: Anchor Canada, 2001.

---. *Oedipal Dreams*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1994.

---. *Other Women*. Toronto: Random House, 1995.

---. *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid*. Toronto: HarperCollins, 1989.

---.*You Are Not Who You Claim*. Victoria: Porcpic Books, 1990.

Lee, Bennett and Jim Wong-Chu, eds. *Many-Mouthed Birds: Contemporary Writing by Chinese Canadians*. Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre; Seattle: U of Washington P, 1991.

Lee, SKY. *Bellydancer Stories*. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1994.

---. *Disappearing Moon Cafe*. Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre: 1990.

---. "*Disappearing Moon Cafe* and the Cultural Politics of Writing in Canada." *Millennium Messages*. Ed. Kenda G. Gee and Wei Wong. Edmonton: Asian Canadian Writers Workshop Society of Edmonton, 1997. 10-13.

---. "Is there a mind without media any more?" Interview with C. Allyson Lee. *The Other Woman: Women of Colour in Contemporary Literature*. Ed. Makeda Silvera. Toronto: Sister Vision, 1995. 382-403.

---. "Sharon Lee." *Jin Guo: Voices of Chinese Canadian Women*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1992. 91-98.

Far, Sui Sin (Edith Maude Eaton). *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*. 1900. Chicago: McGlurg, 1912.

---. *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings*. Ed. Amy Ling and Annette White-Parks. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1995.

Secondary Texts

Aguilar-San Juan, Karin. "Landmarks in Literature by Asian American Lesbians." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 19:4 (1993): 934-943.

Aiken, Rebecca. *Montreal Chinese Property Ownership and Occupational Changes, 1881-1981*. New York: AMS, 1989.

Ammons, Elizabeth. "Audacious Words: Sui Sin Far's Mrs. Spring Fragrance." *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford UP, 1991. 105-20.

---. "Introduction." *Tricksterism in Turn-of-the-Century American Literature*. Ed. Elizabeth Ammons and Annette White-Parks. Hanover: University of New England, Tufts University, 1994. vii-xiii.

Anderson, Kay. "Engendering Race Research: Unsettling the self-Other dichotomy." *Body Space: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*. Ed. Nancy Duncan. London/N.Y: Routledge, 1996. 197-211.

---. *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980*. Montreal: McGill Queens University Press, 1990

Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. Ed Michael Hoquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: Texas University Press, 1981. 84-254

---. "The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the History of Realism." *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Ed. C. Emerson and M. Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1986. 10-59.

Beauregard, Guy. "The Emergence of 'Asian Canadian Literature': Can Lit's Obscene Supplement?" *Essays on Canadian Writing 67* (Spring 1999): 53-75.

---. "Reclaiming Sui Sin Far." Re/Collecting Early Asian America: Readings in Cultural History. Ed. Josephine Lee et al. *Asian American History and Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1999.

---. "What Is at Stake in Comparative Analyses of Asian Canadian and Asian American Literary Studies?" *Essays on Canadian Writing* 75 (2002): 217-39.

Bell, Shannon. *Reading, Writing, and Rewriting the Prostitute Body*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London/N.Y.: Routledge, 1994.

Bordo, Susan R. "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity: A Feminist Appropriation of Foucault." *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstruction of Being and Knowing.* Ed. Alison M Jaggar and Susan Rordo. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP, 1989. 13-33.

Bow, Leslie. *Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion: Feminism, Sexual Politics, Asian American Women's Literature.* Princeton/Oxford: Princeton UP, 2001.

Brake, Michael. *Comparative Youth Culture: The Sociology of Youth Cultures and Youth Subcultures in America, Britain and Canada.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge, 1993.

---. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative.* New York/London: Routledge, 1997.

---. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* N.Y./London: Routledge, 1990.

---. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Threatre.* Ed. Sue-Ellen Case. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990. 270-282.

Calder, Alison. "Paper Families and Blonde Demonesses: The Haunting of History in SKY Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe.*" *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 31:4 (October 2000): 7-21.

Chaudhuri, Una. "The Future of the Hyphen: Interculturalism, Textuality, and the Difference Within." *Interculturalism and Performance.* Ed. Bonnie Marranca and Gautam Dasgupta. New York: Performing Arts Journals Publications, 1991. 197-207.

Chan, Anthony B. *Gold Mountain: The Chinese in the New World.* Vancouver: New Star Book, 1983.

Chang, Elaine. "Run through the Borders: Feminism, Postmodernism, and Runaway Subjectivity." *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics.* Ed. Scott Michaelsen & David E. Johnson. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997. 169-94.

Chao, Lien. "As Agents and as Perspective: Female Characters in *Disappearing Moon Cafe.*" *Intersexions: Issues of Race and Gender in Canadian Women's Writing.* Ed. Coomi S. Vervania and Barbara Godard. New Delhi: Creative, 1996. 219-30.

---. *Beyond Silence: Chinese Canadian Literature in English.* Toronto: TSAR, 1997.

Chen, Anne Anlin. *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief.* New York: Oxford UP, 2001.

Cheung, King-Kok. *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamanoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa.* Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP, 1993.

---. "The Woman Warrior vs. the Chinaman Pacific." *Asian American Studies: A Reader.* Ed. Jean Yu-wen Shen Wu and Min Song. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2000. 307-323.

---. "Re-Viewing Asian American Literary Studies." *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature.* Ed. King-Kok Cheung. N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 1-36

Chinese Canadian National Council, Women's Book Committee. *Jin Guo: Voices of Chinese Canadian Women.* Toronto: Toronto Women's Press, 1992.

Cho, Lily. "Rereading Chinese Head Tax Reclaim: Redress, Stereotypes, and Antiracist Critical Practice." *Essays in Canadian Writing* 75 (2002 winter): 62-84.

Chow, Rey. *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

---. *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.

Cirlot, J.E. *A Dictionary of Symbols.* Trans. Jack Sage. Taipei: Booksman, 1962.

Coleman, Daniel. *Masculine Migrations: Reading the Postcolonial Male in "New Canadian" Narratives.* Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 1998.

Conde, Mary. "Marketing Ethnicity: Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe.*" *Tricks with a Glass: Writing Ethnicity in Canada.* Ed. Rosalia Baena. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi, 2000.

---. "Visible Immigrants in Three Canadian Women's Fictions of the Nineties." *Etudes Canadiennes Canadian Studies: Revue des études canadiennes en France (ECCS)* 34 (1993): 91-100

Chu, Patricia. *Assimilating Asians: Gendered Strategies of Authorship in Asian America.* Durham and London: Duke UP, 2000.

Cutter, Martha. "Smuggling across the Borders of Race, Gender and Sexuality: Sui Sin Far's *Mrs. Spring Fragrance.*" *Essays on Mixed-Race Literature.* Ed. Jonathan Brennan. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002. 137-164.

Darias-Beautell, Eva. *Graphies and Grafts: (Con)Texts & (Inter)Texts in the Fiction of Four Contemporary Canadian Women*. Bruxelles: P.I.E. (Peter Lang), 2001.

Davies, Carole Boyce. *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject.* London/N.Y.: Routledge, 1994.

Davis, Rocío G. *Transcultural Reinventions: Asian American and Asian Canadian Short-story Cycles*. Toronto: TSAR, 2001.

de Lauretis, Teresa. *Technologies of Gender: Feminism, Film, and Fiction.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987.

Dean, Misao. "Reading Evelyn Right: The Literary Layers of Evelyn Lau." *The Canadian Forum* March (1995): 22-26.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.* Trans. & fwd. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987.

Dickinson, Peter. *Here is Queer: Nationalisms, Sexualities, and Literatures of Canada.* Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1999.

Doyle, James. "Sui Sin Far and Onoto Watanna: Two Early Chinese-Canadian Authors." *Canadian Literature* 140 (Spring 1994): 50-58.

Dong, Lorraine and Marlon K. Hom. "Defiance or Perpetuation: An Analysis of Characters Mrs. Spring Fragrance." *Chinese America: History and Perspectives*. Ed. Him Mark Lai, Ruthanne Lum McCunn, and Judy Yung. San Francisco: Chinese Historical Society of America, 1987. 139-68.

Dubois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folks*. Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus-Thomson Organization, 1973 [1903].

Eng, David. *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America*. Durham: Duke UP, 2001

Eng, David L., and Alice Y. Hom, eds. *Q & A: Queer in Asian America*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998.

Edelman, Lee. *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Ferens, Dominika. *Edith and Winnifred Eaton: Chinatown Missions and Japanese Romances*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002.

Fireweed: A Feminist Quarterly 30 (Winter 1990). Special Issue on Asian Canadian Women.

Fireweed: A Feminist Quarterly 43 (Spring 1994). Rice Papers: Writing and Artwork by East and Southeast Asian Women in Canada.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction.* 1978. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1990.

---. "Body/Power" (1975). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977.* Ed. Colin Gordon. Trans. Colin Gordon et al. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980. 55-62.

Frye, Northrop. *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination.* Toronto: Anansi, 1971.

Fuchs, Anne. *A Space of Anxiety: Dislocation and Abjection in Modern German-Jewish Literature.* Amsterdam & Atlanta: Rosopi B.V, 1999.

Fung, Richard. "Center the Margins." *Moving the Image: Independent Asian Pacific American Media Arts.* Ed. Russell Leong and Linda Mabalot. LA: UCLA Asian American Studies Center and Visual Communications, 1991. 64-70.

---. "Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn." *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay and Lesbian Experience.* New York: Routledge, 1996. 181-198.

Fuss, Diana. "Inside/Out." *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories.* Ed. Diana Fuss. London/New York: Routledge, 1991. 1-10.

Garber, Marjorie. *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety.* New York: Routledge, 1991.

Georgelos, Peter. "Deterritorialization in Evelyn Lau's *Runaway.*" *Open Letter* 9: 4 (Fall 1995): 15-31.

Ghymn, Ester Mikyung ed. *Asian American Studies: Identity, Images, Issues Past and Present.* New York: P. Lang, 2000.

Gilmore, Leigh. *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self Representation.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.

Gilroy, Paul. *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack.* London: Hutchinson, 1987.

Godard, Barbara. "Notes from the Cultural Field: Canadian Literature from Identity to Hybridity." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 72 (Winter 2000): 209-247.

Goellnicht, Donald C. "A Long Labour: The Protracted Birth of Asian Canadian Literature." *Essays on Canadian Writing 72* (Winter 2002): 1-41.

---. "Blurring Boundaries: Asian American Literature as Theory." *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*. Ed. King-Kok Cheung. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997. 338-365.

---. "'Forays into Acts of Transformation': Queering Chinese Canadian Diasporic Fictions." *Culture, Identity, Commodity: Diasporic Chinese Literatures in English*. Ed. Kam Louie and Tseen Khoo. Hong Kong UP, 2004 forthcoming.

---. "Of Bones and Suicide: Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone*." *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies (MFS)* 46: 2 (Summer 2000): 300-330.

Goldman, Marlene. *Paths of Desire: Images of Exploration and Mapping in Canadian Women's Writing*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1997.

Grosz, Elizabeth. "A Thousand Tiny Sexes: Feminism and Rhizomatics." Unpublished paper presented at the Deleuze and Guattari Conference at Trent University, 15-17 May 1992.

---. *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space*. Boston: MIT Press, 2001.

---. "Inscriptions and Body-Maps: Representations and the Corporeal." F*eminine Masculine and Representation*. Ed. Terry Threadgold and Ann Granny-Francis. North Sydney, Australia: Allen, 1990. 62-74.

---. *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989.

---. *Space, Time, and Perversion*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1995.

---. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indianan UP, 1994.

Gunew, Sneja. "Operatic Karaoke and the Pitfalls of Identity Politics: A Translated Performance." Sep.2000. Dept. of English, University of British Columbia. 30 Sep. 2003 <http://www.english.ubc.ca/~sgunew/Lau.htm>

Hallam, Clifford. "The Double as Incomplete Self: Toward a Definition of Doppelganger." *Fearful Symmetry: Doubles and Doubling in Literature and Film*. Ed. Eugene J. Crook. Tallahassee: U of Florida P, 1980. 1-31.

Hesse, Barnor. "White Governmentality: Urbanism, Nationalism, Racism." *Imagining*

Cities: Scripts, Signs, Memories. Ed. Sallie Westwood and John Williams. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.

Hewitt, Leah D. *Autobiographical Tightropes*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1990.

Heywood, Leslie and Jennifer Drake. "Introduction" *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminism, Doing Feminism*. Ed. Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Hilf, Susanne. *Writing the Hyphen: The Articulation of Interculturalism in Contemporary Chinese-Canadian Literature*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000.

Ho, Wendy. *In Her Mother's House: The Politics of Asian American Mother-Daughter Writing*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1999.

Hom, Alice Y., and Ming-Yuen Ma. "Premature Gestures: A Speculative Dialogue on Asian Pacific Islander Lesbian and Gay Writing." *Journal of Homosexuality* 26:2-3 (1993): 21-51.

hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1992.

Huang, Yunte. *Transpacific Displacement: Ethnography, Translation, and Intertextual Travel in Twentieth-Century American Literature*. Berkeley/L.A.: University of California Press, 2002.

Huggan, Graham. "The Latitudes of Romance: Representations of Chinese Canada in Bowering's *To All Appearances a Lady* and Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe*." *Canadian Literature* 140 (1994): 34-48.

Hull, Gloria. "Living on the Line: Audre Lorde and Our Dead Behind Us." *Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory, and Writing the Black Women*. Ed. Cheryl A. Wall. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1989. 155-160.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York & London: Routledge, 1988.

---. *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English Canadian Fiction.* Toronto: Oxford UP, 1988.

---. "Modern Parody and Bakhtin." *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenge.* Ed. Gary Saul Morson & Caryl Emerson. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1989. 87-103.

---. *Splitting Images: Contemporary Canadian Ironies*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1991.

Hwang, David Henry. *M. Butterfly*. New York: Plume, 1989.

Iwama, Marilyn. "Transgressive Sexualities in the Reconstruction of Japanese Canadian Communities." *Canadian Literature* 159 (Winter 1998): 91-110

Jagose, Annamarie. *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2002.

---. *Lesbian Utopics*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 53-92.

JanMohamed, Abdul R. "Sexuality on/of the Racial Border: Foucault, Wright, and the Articulation of Racialized Sexuality." *Discourses of Sexuality: From Aristotle to AIDS*. Ed. Domna Stanton. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1992. 94-116.

Juan, E. San. Jr. "The Limits of Ethnicity and the Horizon of Historical Materialism." *Asian American Studies: Identity, Images, Issues Past and Present*. Ed. Esther Mikyung Ghymn. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2000. 9-33.

Kaplan, Caren. "Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse." *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse*. Ed. Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd. N.Y./Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990. 357-368.

---. "Resisting Autobiography Out-Law Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects." *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*. Ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1992. 115-138.

Kamboureli, Smaro. *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.

Kingston, Maxine Hong. *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*. New York: Vintage, 1977.

Koh, Karlyn. "Speculations and (Dis)identification: Notes on Asian Canadian Women Writers." *New Scholars—New Visions in Canadian Studies* 1:1 (Summer 1996): 1-30.

Kogawa, Joy. *Obasan*. Markham, Toronto: Penguin Books, 1981.

Knutson, Susan. "For Feminist Narratology." *Tessera* 7 (Fall 1989): 10-14.

Kich, Martin. "SKY Lee (1952-)" *Asian American Novelists: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*. Ed. Emmanuel Nelson. Westport: Greenwood, 2000.

Kristeva, Julia. *About Chinese Women*. Trans. Anita Barrows. London/N.Y: Marion Boyars, 1986.

---. *Desires in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Ed. Leon Rodiez. Trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon Rodiez. Oxford: Blackwell, 1980.

---. "Oscillation between Power and Denial." *New French Feminisms*. Ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron. Trans. Marilyn August. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1980. 165-167.

---. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1992.

---. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Trans. Margaret Waller. NY: Columbia UP, 1984.

Lam, Fiona. "Process and Inspiration." *Ricepaper* 2002. 4 Aug. 2003. <http://www.ricepaperonline.com/vol6no2/artsnculture/books/books2.html>

Lecker, Robert. *Making it Real: The Canonization of English-Canadian Literature*. Toronto: Anansi Press Ltd., 1995.

Lee, Bennett. "Introduction." *Many-Mouthed Birds: Contemporary Writing by Chinese Canadians*. Ed. Bennett Lee and Jim Wong-Chu. Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre; Seattle: U of Washington P, 1991. 1-9.

Lee, Rachel. *The Americas of Asian American Literature: Gendered Fictions of Nation and Transnation*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999.

Lee, Robert. "Imagined Cities of China." *Wasafiri: Journal of Caribbean, African, Asian- and Associated Literatures and Film* 22 (Autumn 1995): 25-30.

---. "Imagined Cities of China: Timothy Mo's London, Sky Lee's Vancouver, Fae Mynenne Ng's San Francisco and Gish Gen's New York." *Hitting Critical Mass: A Journal of Asian American Cultural Criticism* 4:1 (Fall 1996): 103-19.

Lemert, E. *Social Pathology*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1951.

Leong, Russell. "Introduction: Home Bodies and the Body Politic." *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay & Lesbian Experience*. Ed. Russell Leong. New York: Routledge, 1996. 1-18.

Leung, Yiu-Nam. "From Singapore to Canada, from Psychology to Writing, from Poetry to Fiction: Conversations with Lydia Kwa." *Tamkang Review* 38:3-4 (Spring-Summer 2002): 251-65.

Levitt, Marni. "A Hunger for the Fox: Writing Asian-Canadian Lesbian Identity and History." *The McGill Daily* (March 28-April 30 1996): 7.

Li, Peter S. *The Chinese in Canada. Studies in Canadian Sociology.* Toronto: Oxford UP, 1988.

Lim, Shirley Geok-lin. "Asian American Literature: Leavening the Mosaic." *Contemporary U.S. Literature: Multicultural Perspectives (U.S. Society &Values. Electronic Journals of the U.S. Department of State)* 2000, 5(1): 18-22.

Ling, Amy. *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry.* N.Y: Pergamon, 1990.

---. "Creating One Self: The Eaton Sisters." *Reading the Literature of Asian America.* Ed. Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Amy Ling. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1992.

---. "Edith Eaton: Pioneer Chinamerican Writer and Feminist." *American Literary Realism* 16 (autumn 1983): 287-298.

---. "I'm Here: An Asian American Woman's Response." *New Literary History* 19 (1987-89): 152.

---. "Reading Her/stories against His/stories in Early Chinese American Literature." *American Realism and the Canon.* Ed. Tom Quirk and Gary Scharnhorst. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994. 69-86.

---. "Writers with a Cause: Sui Sin Far and Han Suyin." *Women's Studies International Forum* 9 (1986): 411-419.

Ling, Amy and Annette White-Parks. "Introduction." *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings.* Ed. Amy Ling and Annette White-Parks. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995. 1-8.

Lloyd, Moya. "Performativity, Parody, Politics." *Theory, Culture and Society: Performativity and Belonging* 16:2 (April 1999): 195-213.

Lockard, Joe. "Passing Away, or Narrative Transvestism as Social Metaphor in Multiethnic Societies." *Literary Studies East and West Vol. 16.* Ed. Cynthia Franklin and Ruth Hsu. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000. 202-208.

Lonnecke, Annette. "Postmodern Canadian Autobiography: Daphne Marlatt's *How Hug a Stone* and Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family.*" *The Guises of Canadian Diversity: New European Perspectives.* Ed. Serge Jaumain & Marc Maufort. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995. 39-46.

Lowe, Lisa. *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1991.

---. "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, and Multiplicity: Making Asian American Difference." *Diaspora* 1:1 (1991): 24-44.

---. *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1996.

MacDonald, Tanis. "'Dead Girl-Bad': The Janet Smith Case as Contaminant in Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café*." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 27:1 (2002): 32-46.

McCann, Sean. "Connecting Links: The Anti-Progressivism of Sui Sin Far." *Yale Journal of Progressivism* 12:1 (1999): 73-78.

Martin, Robert K. "'It Must Have Been the Umbrella': Forster's Queer Begetting." *Queer Forster*. Ed. Robert K. Martin and George Piggford. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago P, 1997. 255-273.

Means, Laurel. "Remembering, Re-Inventing, and Re-Writing the Diaspora in SKY Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe*." *Asian America: Journal of Culture and the Acts* 2 (1993): 10-22.

Meese, Elizabeth A. *Crossing the Double-Cross: The Practice of Feminist Criticism*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1986.

---. *(Sem)Erotics: Theorizing Lesbian: Writing*. New York: New York UP, 1992.

Miki, Roy. "Can Asian Adian?: Reading the Scenes of 'Asian Canadian.'" *West Coast Line: Writing · Images · Criticism* 33-34: 3 (Winter 2001): 56-77.

---. *Broken Entries: Race, Subjectivity, Writing*. Toronto: The Mercury P, 1998.

Minow-Pinkney, Makiko."Virginia Woolf: 'Seen from a Foreign Land.'" *Abjection, Melancholia, and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva*. Ed. John Fletcher and Andrew Benjamin. London/N.Y.: Routledge, 1990. 157-176.

Monnet, Livia. "Towards the feminine sublime, or the story of 'a twinkling monad, shape-shifting across dimension': intermediality, fantasy and special effects in cyberpunk film and animation." *Japanese Forum: The International Journal of Japanese Studies* 14:2 (2002): 225-268.

Moyes, Lianne. "Composing in the Scent of Wood and Roses: Nicole Brossard's Intertextual Encounters with Djuna Barnes and Gertrude Stein." *English Studies in Canada* 21: 2 (1995): 206-25.

---. "Nothing Sacred: Nicole Brossard's *Baroque at Dawn* at the Limits of Lesbian Feminist Discourses of Sexuality." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 70 (Spring 2000): 28-63.

Munt, Sally. "The Lesbian Flaneur." *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*. Ed. David. Bell and Gill Valentine. London/New York: Routledge, 1995.114-125.

Myrsiades, Linda. "Introduction: Race-ing Representation: Voice, History, Sexuality." *Race-ing Representation: Voice, History, Sexuality*. Ed. Kostas Myrsiades and Linda Myrsiades. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998. 1-14.

Ng, Maria Noelle. "Representing Chinatown: Dr. Fu-Manchu at the *Disappearing Moon Cafe*." *Canadian Literature* 163 (Winter 1999):157-75

Nguyen, Viet Thanh. *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America*. Oxford/New York: Oxford UP, 2002.

Ong, Aihwa. "On the Edge of Empires: Flexible Citizenship among Chinese in Diaspora." *positions: east asia cultures critiques* 1:3 (Winter 1993): 745-778.

Parker, Alice. "Under the Covers: A Synethesia of Desire (Lesbian Translation)." *Sexual Practice/Textual Theory: Lesbian Cultural Criticism*. Ed. Susan J. Wolfe and Julia Penelope. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993. 322-39.

Peepre, Mari. "Resistance and the Demon Mother in Diaspora Literature: Sky Lee and Denise Chong Speak Back to the Mother/Land." *International Journal of Canadian Studies Revue Internationale d'Etudes Canadiennes* 18 (Fall 1998): 79-92.

Porter, Dennis. *Haunted Journey: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing*. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1991.

Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Quinby, Lee. "The Subject of Memoirs: The Woman Warrior's Technology of Ideographic Selfhood." *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*. Ed. Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1992. 297-320.

Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: Norton, 1976.

Rimstead, Roxanne. *Remnants of Nation: On Poverty Narratives by Women*. Toronto: U of Toronto Press. 2001.

Sang, Tze-lan D. *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China.* Chicago/London: U of Chicago P, 2003.

Scharnhorst, Gary. "'Ways That Are Dark': Appropriations of Bret Harte's 'Plain Language from Truthful James.'" 11 December 2002. <http://www.ucpress.edu/scan/ncl-e/513/articles/scharnhorst.art513.html>

Scott, Dorothea Hayward. *Chinese Popular Literature and the Child.* Chicago: American Library Association, 1980.

Sedgwick, Eve K. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

---. *Epistemology of the Closet.* Berkeley: U of California Press, 1990.

Shildrick, Margrit and Janet Price. "Openings on the Body: A Critical Introduction." *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader.* Ed. Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick. New York: Routledge, 1999. 1-14.

Shimakawa, Karen. *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage.* Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2002.

Silverman, Kaja. "Dis-Embodying the Female Voice." *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism.* Ed. Patricia Evens. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990. 309-29.

Smith, Sidonie. *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993.

Solberg, S.E. "Sui Sin Far/Edith Eaton: The First Chinese-American Fictionist." *MELUS* 8 (Spring 1981): 27-39.

---. "Sui, the Storyteller: Sui Sin Far (Edith Eaton), 1867-1914." *Turning Shadows into Light: Art and Culture of the Northwest's Early Asian American Pacific Community.* Ed. Mayumi Tsutakawa and Alan Chong Lau. Seattle: Young Pine Press, 1981. 85-90.

Song, Min. "The Unknowable and Sui Sin Far: The Epistemological Limits of 'Oriental' Sexuality." *Q & A: Queer in Asian America.* Ed. David Eng and Alice Y. Hom. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998. 304-322.

Takagi, Dana. "Maiden Voyage: Excursion into Sexuality and Identity Politics in Asian America." *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay and Lesbian Experience.* Ed. R. Leong. New York: Routledge, 1996. 20-35.

Teng, Jinhua Emma. "Miscegenation and the Critique of Patriarchy in Turn-of-the Century Fiction." *Asian American Studies: A Reader*. Ed. Jean Yu-wen Shen Wu and Min Song. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2000. 95-110.

Thomas, N. *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*. Melbourne: Melbourne UP, 1994.

Trinh, T. Minh-ha. "Documentary Is/Not A Name." *October* 52 (Summer 1990):76-98.

---. "She, the Inappropriate/d Other." *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 8 (Fall-Winter 1986-7): 21-35.

van Gulik, R.H. *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.* Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1961.

van Luven, Lynne. "Voices from the Past Echo through the Present: Choy's *The Jade Peony* and Lai's *When Fox is a Thousand.*" *Canadian Culture and Literature & a Taiwan Perspective*. Ed. Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek and Yiu-nam Leung. Edmonton: Research Institute for Comparative Literature, U of Alberta and Hsinchu: Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, National Tsing Hua U, 1998. 263-72.

Vizenor, Gerald. "Trickster Discourse: Comic Holotropes and Language Games." *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Literatures*. Ed. Gerald Vizenor. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1989. 187-211

Wah, Fred. *Faking It: Poetics and Hybridity*. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 2000.

Warren, James Francis. *Ah Ku and Karayuki-San: A History of Prostitution in Singapore 1870-1940.* Singapore: Oxford UP, 1993.

---. *Rickshaw Coolie. A People's History of Singapore 1880-1940*. Singapore: Oxford UP, 1986.

Waugh, Thomas. "Fung: Home and Homescape." *Like Mangoes in July: The Work of Richard Fung*. Ed. Helen Lee and Kerri Sakamoto. Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2002.

White-Parks, Annette. "A Reversal of American Concepts of 'Otherness' in the Fiction of Sui Sin Far." *MELUS* 20:1 (1995): 17-34.

---. "Naming as Identity." *A Gathering of Voices on the Asian-American Experience*. Ed. Annette White-Parks et al. Fort Atkinson, Wis.: Highsmith Press, 1996.

---. *Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude Eaton: A Literary Biography*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1995.

---. "Sui Sin Far: Writer on the Chinese-Anglo Borders of North America" Ph.D. diss., Washington State University, 1991

.

---. "'We Wear the Mask': Sui Sin Far as One Example of Trickster Authorship." *Tricksterism in Turn-of-the-Century American Literature: A Multicultural Perspective*. Ed. Elizabeth Ammons and Annette White-Parks. Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England. 1994. 1-20.

W.I.C. "Marriage Miscegenation." *California Law Review* 22 (November 1933): 116-17.

Wickberg, Edgar. et. al. *From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada*. Toronto: McClelland and Steward, 1982.

Wiegman, Robyn. *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender*. Durham. N.C.: Duke U P, 1995.

Wong, Rita. "Jumping on hyphens—a bricolage receiving 'genealogy/gap,' 'goods,''east asian canadian,' 'translation' and 'laughter.'" *The Other Woman: Women of Colour in Contemporary Canadian Literature*. Ed. Makeda Silvera. Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1995. 117-153.

Wong, Sau-ling Cynthia. "Ethnicizing Gender: An Exploration of Sexuality as Sign in Chinese Immigrant Literature." *Reading the Literatures of Asian America*. Ed. Shirley Geok-lin Lim & Amy Ling. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1992. 111-129

---. *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993.

---. "What's in a Name? Defining Chinese American Literature of the Immigrant Generation." *Frontiers of Asian American Studies*. Ed. Gail M. Normura et al. Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1989.

Wong, Sau-ling and Jeffrey J. Santa Ana. "Gender and Sexuality in Asian American Literature." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 25:1 (1999): 171-226.

Wu, William F. *The Yellow Peril: Chinese Americans in American Fiction, 1850-1940*. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1982.

Yin, Xiao-Huang. "Between the East and West: Sui Sin Far—the First Chinese American Woman Writer." *Arizona Quarterly* 47 (Winter 1991): 49-84.

---. *Chinese American Literature Since the 1850s*. Urbana/Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2000.

Zimmerman, Bonnie. "Exiting from Patriarchy: The Lesbian Novel of Development." *The Voyage In: Female Narrative of Development*. Ed. Elizabeth Abel, et al. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1983. 244-257.