ZINC: Perspectives of Identity in Asian – Australian Literature

Michelle Bakar

Thesis submitted for the award of Doctor of Philosophy.
University of Technology, Sydney 2007

Certificate

I certify that this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being submitted as part of a candidature for any other degree.

I also certify that this thesis has been written by me and that any help that I have received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

Production Note:
Signature removed prior to publication.

Michelle Bakar

Acknowledgements

This novel and the accompanying exegesis were undertaken for personal reasons; to understand my authorial identity, why I write and why I am unable to write what I feel is 'expected'. The journey of researching and contrasting, of encountering new writing and theories has instilled a significant and ever-present confidence within me; which will ensure that I will never write what is expected.

I would like to thank Debra Adelaide for her patience, kindness and supervision. I would also like to thank Katrina Schlunke for her guidance, mentoring and encouragement. I would like to thank Debra Madsen, Tom Cho, Paul Ashton, Martin Harrison, Glenda Adams, Olivia Khoo, Cassi Plate, Cathy Cole, John Daniel and Fiona Allon for encouraging and guiding me, sometimes without realising. I am deeply indebted to Shirley Tucker and Ken Staples for allowing me to use their unpublished PhDs, Kam Louis for his advice and friendship and Tseen Khoo for clarifying my questions over email. Thank you too, to Pat Skinner, Bill Ashcroft, Annette Hughes and Rosemary Creswell and all those people and publishers who decided to give me a chance.

I would like to thank all those who are members of the Asian–Australian discussion list and the Asian–Australian community for their insight and advice. Also to the Australia–China Council which allowed me to visit and reside in Hong Kong for much of the research for several chapters, and the Gallery 4A literature board, which allowed me to gain mentorship from writer Michelle Moo.

I would most like to thank Vicki Karaminas, who is the only reason I felt encouraged to attempt a PhD in the first place. I have loved this experience because I have love in my life.

Table of Contents

List of illustrations 6

List of Publications 7

Abstract 8

VOLUME I ZINC: A Novel in Six Acts 9

Act One: Made in China 11

Act Two: The Gentleman's Outpost 31

Act Three: Chinese Whispers 50

Act Four: Island Sacrifice 68

Act Five: Not That Fucking Old Thing Again: On Being Mistaken As Chinese 90

Act Six: The Oriental Express 104

VOLUME II ZINC: Perspectives of Identity in Asian – Australian Literature 122

Preface: To Begin With, Who Cares Where I Come From? 123

Introduction: Me, Myself and I 137

Unpicking the Label 150

Speaking for the Other 157

On Writing Australasian 165

On Being Woman 171

On Being an English Writer 180

When One Means All 186

Position Un, Deux, Trois: Not the Missionary Position 195

What Narrative? 198

Exile, Space and Freedom 205

Death and Disinheritance 209

Questions of Belonging 215

Asian Woman: Deviant, Passive or Neurotic? 221

The Futility of Cross-Cultural Love Affairs 233

Desire and the Fascination with Whiteness 238

The Butterfly Effect: Murder by Orientalism 249

A Conclusion that has no Conclusion 259

BIBLIOGRAPHY 264

List of Illustrations

Figure 1: Miss Saigon : The American Dream 2003 130

Figure 2: Simon and Me 1979 131

Figure 3: Wahoos Softball Team 1941 138

Figure 4: Coffee Bakar 1941 138

Figure 5: My Mother and her Sisters 1950s 210

Figure 6: My Grandfather's Mother 1910 226

Figure 7: My Aunt Vera and her Boyfriend 1960s 235

Figure 8: My Mother and Friends 1950s 241

List of Publications

Bakar, M. 2007 'Chinese Whispers' *Yuan Yang: A Journal of Hong Kong and International Writing,* HK University Press, Hong Kong *

Bakar, M. 2006 'The Oriental Express' *EAPSU Journal of Critical and Creative Work,* English Association of Pennsylvania State Universities, Kim Long (ed) Volume 3, http://www.eapsu.org/

Bakar, M. 2006 'The Oriental Express' *Southerly Literary Magazine*, Vol. 66, Number 2, Brandl and Schlesinger, Australia.

Bakar, M 2006 'Island Sacrifice' in *Antipodes, North American Journal of Australian Literary Studies,* Special Issue: The Sacred in Australian Literature, Bill Ashcroft (ed) December, United States of America.

Bakar, M 2006 'Chinese Whispers' in *Timbuktu*, Vol.1, No. 2, Wales.

Bakar, M 2006 'Oriental Express' in, *Postcolonial Text*, Vol 2, No. 2, University of British Columbia.

Bakar, M 2004 'Not That Old Thing Again: On Being Mistaken as Chinese', in *Graduate Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*, Border and Boundary Crossing, Vol. 2, No. 2, Auckland University, New Zealand.

PLEASE NOTE: The above journal publications are chapters from the creative component of this doctoral exegesis.

Abstract

ZINC: Perspectives of Asian-Australian Literature is made up of two parts. The first, called "ZINC: A Novel in Six Acts" is a collection of stories concerned with the cultural and political landscapes produced by migration and multiculturalism. The collection explores how contemporary processes of social, historical and political change dramatically impact on the identities of first and second-generational Australians of Hong Kong Chinese descent and records the ways certain characters lead their lives and how each character understands home as a place or a form of belonging in Hong Kong and Australia. What has resulted is a collection of stories that attempts to describe a series of interlinking journeys, or 'acts'. Each story takes the reader through both real and imagined terrains which are contemporary and historical; Imperial China, colonial Hong Kong, the city of Melbourne and suburban and metropolitan Sydney; simultaneously engaging with the cultural changes and social relations that are reconfigured by larger experiences and patterns in the characters' lives.

The second part, an exegesis called "ZINC: Perspectives of Asian-Australian Literature", explores the impact of selected authors on the creative pieces and contextualises the literary landscape and subjectivities of the author within the framework of Asian–Australian literature. This exegesis aims to identify thematic references within the chosen literary works and explore issues within the uniqueness albeit categorisation of what is termed 'Asian–Australian writing.' Keeping this in mind, this exegesis will also examine if or how Asian–Australian writers represent their racial differences and whether or not these representations appear to 'imitate' a non-minority English-writing author. Importantly, this dissertation hopes to offer the reader a way of understanding and redefining the fluid multiplicities that are Asian–Australian identities living in Australia today and how they are envisioned and experienced, showing the diverse and distinct cultures that are scattered over as many places as there are people. This dissertation is about breaking, altering and rewriting dominant myths and narratives about Asian–Australian sensibilities by calling attention to the continuities and discontinuities of people's lives.

VOLUME I

ZINC: A NOVEL IN SIX ACTS

"Much later when I have lived in other cities, when I have gone away and come back and come back and gone away so that my memory of places is an ill-spliced screening of coming and going, I will think of this time like a scene in a favourite novel, remembered but no longer read."

Beth Yahp
Crocodile Fury

Act One:
Made in China

Once upon time, when China had only the wisdom of fear, strong men ruled each province around a mountain called Qui Zhou.

Near the base of the mountain where the secluded land was fertile and the lakes full of fish, there was a small village. A mist rested heavily on it, like the scent of jasmine and it was often missed entirely by invaders. The villagers prayed in thanks for their invisibility; sacrificing crates of fruit and incense to the spirit of the mountain and water.

One night, Huang Chai twisted on her wooden platform. She felt pain from a wound in her left forearm and fought against sleep in case it propelled her to another world for which she was unprepared. She realised an evil spirit had touched her; something had clutched at the centre of her body, where once her heart was and shifted it so that her pulse throbbed in time with this one pain.

She looked down toward her large feet, wriggled her toes and tried to comfort herself with sweet melodies she'd heard the servants singing in the kitchen. Her mind drifted to the thought of children and she became distressed knowing she would never have any of her own.

"I wish for a child," she prayed into the darkness, "I wish for a girl. Not a boy. A girl."

She finally sat up and looked out of the window, peeking from under the bamboo awning and onto the grey street. Thoughts clustered within her head. The events of the past few days emerged once more and though she struggled to keep herself from returning to the same memories, the wound, the songs and the blood in her veins made them inevitable.

The village was ruled by a Warlord called Min-Kung Hua who was in the rice fields one morning shouting at his generals about a battle in which he had lost his deputy. "Failure brings strength to one's enemies. Don't you think?" he said.

They could not reply.

Mistress was bent toward the ground, curious about a grasshopper that was trying to tell her something. Her radiance and laughter sailed over the field and she shone like a thin lily.

Min-Kung's generals brightened and they encouraged him to go to her. "A woman is the only honourable distraction from war," they said.

She stood up when he approached and stared at him boldly. It was her purity that cemented his decision. She had been brought up by his wisest and eldest servant, Huang Chai. Insolence was her reputation. He informed her father that she would be his bride.

The village staged an elaborate wedding ceremony beside the river. After the proceedings, Min-Kung's ears did not burn as they were supposed to and because of the omen, rumours started, which reached Huang Chai in the palace. People said the marriage would be fraught with problems. "He married beneath him," some said, whilst others believed he'd married a water spirit, which would bring bad luck.

"He has married her to break her," some said, whilst others said, "He does not realise what is in store."

For good luck, thousands of small trigram-shaped mirrors were placed around the house and countryside where the newlyweds might walk. There was much discussion about the direction of good energy, the influence and effect of the universe. There were many arguments about the effectiveness of will power, spirituality and science. There were offerings of fruit, yarrow and tortoiseshell in the village Hall of Prayer. The

peacocks and peahens cried beyond the cheering and celebratory dragon boats and pontoons swept across the water.

When they were carried away speedily in separately boxed carriages, Huang Chai felt anxiety panic her. She could hear Min-Kung's voice booming orders to his servants, and saw very clearly his impulsive habit of placing his hand quickly upon his sword. Everyone could see the scars on his neck from past burns, an attempted garrotting, and poison scratches. She wondered who had caused them.

Huang Chai taught Mistress about male hunger on the fourth day of the lunar month. "Lie still," she instructed, as Mistress lay bored on the bed. Huang opened her palm flat and splayed two of her fingers apart. "Like this. You are getting married today. It is very lucky. And tonight, you will be a woman."

"I don't care. I want my cat," the girl replied. Her brocade sleeves unfolded and a small, long cat popped out onto the pillow book beside her. She took a small piece of chicken from her robe and threw it on the floor, so the cat could jump down and eat.

"Your cat will not help your wits tonight."

The cat walked steadily to a painted vase in the corner of the room and arched its back. Through the window stretched a gentle breeze. The cat lifted its tail and waited for Mistress to smile. It reached up for one last stretch, against the Cantonese symbols of life and finally crumpled into a ball with its eyes shut.

"You will help me, lotus mother," Mistress resolved and stroked Huang Chai so that she burped.

"I can't help you, small willow," she answered, "you will have to help yourself. 'Learning without thought is labour lost. Thought without learning is dangerous.'"

"Yes, you will help me. You will come and save me from him tonight or else I'll do something drastic."

Huang Chai hoped none of the servants were near enough to hear them. "He has many rules," she whispered, "He will try and tame you like he tames his tigers. He will not kill a tiger that obeys him."

After his wedding ceremony, Min-Kung was called upon very suddenly to defend his village from attack. As his people rushed into their houses, as the peacocks scuttled underneath the willows at the edge of the stream, he leapt from his carriage and ordered his servants to fetch his armour.

He used his tigers and lions as weapons and the cunning of his ancestors to give him strength. In only a short while, twenty heads were impaled upon pikes around the village walls. They looked strange next to bamboo poles that displayed wedding flowers and by sunset, the leader of the bandits had his head divided into quarters and the liquid from his throat mixed with the wedding flowers in the river.

At dawn, staggering into the entrance hall, Min-Kung removed his tabard of metal and unclasped the weapons from his waist. Drunk with rice wine, he let his sword fall to the ground and stood in his undergarments with a dagger attached to a thin belt at his hips.

The tigers hadn't yet been returned to their large iron cages. Instead, they crouched beside him, yawning as he did; angry and lustful after battle. They snarled at the servants who picked up his clothes and lurched forward until he pulled them back with their chain ropes in his hands.

Mistress stepped forward and bowed to greet her new husband. She peered beneath her lashes at his bare feet and suppressed a giggle when she compared him in his undergarments with the tigers.

Huang Chai also watched for Min-Kung to return. Hiding quickly just outside the entrance, Huang squeezed herself next to one of the two entrance statues, nodding her head to Mistress in reassurance.

The statue was a stone lion, with its enormous paw resting on a red ball. Min-Kung wanted it like that to remember his ancestors and to bring majesty and power to his house. On the other side was the statue of a happy old man with a long white beard holding a peach. It was chosen for its symbolism of longevity and peace. Huang gazed at them both from her hiding place. She hoped the Warlord would gather Mistress into his arms and express a desire to consummate. He had not had great luck and his marriage seemed to bring fortune into the house. She could imagine them laughing and making

their way to the bedroom. She could almost see the face of their first-born, sweet and proud like the peach.

Instead, Huang heard Min-Kung shout, "What are you doing here? Get to my room and make yourself ready."

He repeated himself and asked if Mistress was deaf; each command more angry than the last. Huang peeked into the hall and saw the tigers straining. Mistress knelt on the ground quietly, frowning. Her beautiful hair splashed onto her shoulders. Her robes flowed around her thin legs.

Huang Chai watched Min-Kung lose patience and accidentally gasped louder than intended.

Min-Kung heard and with instincts sharpened from combat he left his wife in an instant. He leapt at Huang Chai, sailing through the air, the dagger from his waist poised in his hand. His shadow danced on the walls; he moved at a speed she could hardly tell was real and he clutched her throat in a second. He used one leg to pin her to the doorframe. She could feel his fingers thick and short so that her chin felt as if it were already dislocated and quiet on the cold floor. "You have made an error in judgment," he whispered quietly.

"I am her guardian," Huang Chai whispered back, "I am still looking after her." She glanced upward at the stone statue of the happy man, her breath slowing. She fell from his grip to the floor and knew that he considered her a danger to him now. Looking up, she saw that his eyes warned of speaking without speaking and knowing all thoughts that filled the air. He was suspicious of her, drawing something out of her with his expression, with his fists that clenched at his sides until the sounds of cymbals rang through her ears. The tigers simpered, though their chains were loose. She bent over and held her hands to her temples.

With a fast movement, Min-Kung raised the dagger and pulled her upward. After deliberating, he decided against killing her. He ,pulled the. left sleeve of her coat up instead, then raised his knife and cut off a block of flesh below the elbow.

Huang Chai screamed and Mistress remained very still, only flinching slightly when he threw the flesh to the tigers. The tigers did nothing until he gave them a signal with his eyes. "Eat," he must have directed. They pounced, hungry and competing.

Huang Chai did not move, but looked behind her at the forehead of her Mistress, who wore an expression of furiousness. Keeping her eyes fixed on it, she used all of her energy to obstruct the pain. She imagined herself as a small girl sitting within long grass beside a river where her family fished. She was determined not to show signs of weakness.

Min-Kung released her, closing his eyes and saying something in Ancient Chinese. The words flowed over her and into the creases of her skin like oil. He placed his hands upon her coat, the mandarin collar pulling. His palms warmed her shoulders until a sharp shock ran through her, making her teeth chatter. He was half-healing her, she realised. Behind her, somewhere, she could hear Mistress whispering. Her ears were filled with the soft murmurs.

Huang Chai felt dizzy when the sounds stopped. The pain in her arm remained, but was dull. He had disabled her like one of his animals, who could perform only menial duties.

She managed to lean heavily against the wall, watching him move once more towards Mistress, who stared at the floor. He gathered the chains attached to the tigers' necks and before they disappeared through a concealed door, a fraction of light shone briefly from Mistress' face and their eyes met. It was a look of strategy that Huang Chai had never seen before. The girl had spirit and she hoped that it would not be beaten into dullness.

The creaking bamboo and maple wood of her bed woke her and Huang Chai thought of Mistress again; always hobbling on stilted wooden shoes, past the waterfalls of the palace gardens and over the walkways that separated the cranes' nests and the willows. Mistress would now be sprawled on her bed, having spent all day there, with nothing but oils on her body.

As she listened to the shrill song of a chanting monk, Huang Chai questioned the notion of harmony between nature and the body, and of harmony within society and family. Nothing external seemed to matter to anyone, only obedience, patience, acceptance of repetition and the knowledge of passing phases. She felt as if she belonged to another time, another realm. She felt as if there was too much tradition in her life,

which weighed down her ability to rationalise her instincts, as if there were a guardian spirit from a religion she didn't believe in that looked over her shoulder and dictated how she should behave.

The sound of someone wailing made its way into her room. She couldn't discern whether it was from man, woman, cat or prayer. Huang Chai listened carefully for singing from the bamboo bed. She heard a thump from the wooden pillow. There was a small whimper and then another cry.

The cat entered quietly and padded to her bed. It sat in front of her, and she felt pulling within her arm, a tugging from the inside. The animal sat in a shaft of thin moonlight. "I am here, lotus mother," it said. Its tiny body inclined toward her, "Do not be afraid of paper tigers."

"But then don't tread on a tiger's tail," Huang Chai whispered back. Her skin was tingling. A prickling feeling raced up and down the length of her wound and she rubbed it slowly.

"I am here, lotus mother," it repeated and moved to the corner.

"And I am also," she spoke into the darkness, "She is part of him now and I am his servant too and he is powerful and can kill us both with his magic and his swords. We must be careful."

After a few moments she squinted. There was no sound. Not the cat scratching, nor the rustle of the trees outside the window, or the angry flame in the sentinels or the distant water hurtling over the rocks in the river.

"Are you there?"

A shadow moved across the moonlight and her room was plunged momentarily into blackness. She saw the cat's silhouette rapidly growing in size and changing to that of a man's. Once complete, the man placed his hands on his belt and towered over the bed. Breathing rapidly, Huang Chai watched the transformation as if it had always been part of the creation of the world. The shadow came closer and with it, the faint whiff of tea, rice wine, beard and earth. A thick, low growl shook her. "You'll do well to stay here. You are not self-creating, nor will you slight heaven or me with your hesitation. I will kill you, woman. You will perish if you ever dare to use judgment against me again."

The silhouette shifted towards the window, letting moonlight flood once more like milk over her and letting the trees throw the shadows of their leaves in her eyes. Huang Chai lay back, frozen and blank in her bed, vowing to slaughter Mistress' cat the next day. Hours later she heard a final cry. She closed her eyes tightly until her ears rang and couldn't hear anything for the remainder of the night.

The next day she massaged her arm in the healing waters of the Qui Huan River which ran from inside the Qui Zhou Mountain and wound millions of leagues across the land. Often messages from a relative might be floating against a reed or a piece of willow. Sometimes there would be a flower from a remorseful scholar, using the river to carry his thoughts away. But she didn't see anything today. She thought of seeking the Warlord's own physician, but decided against it to avoid unnecessary questions and rumours. Her story would be well known by now.

Huang Chai returned to the house by afternoon and found everyone asleep or busy in other quarters. Mistress was still in bed, so that the seed of the Warlord could begin the journey from her womb to her organs, her body tissues and her very origin. There, it would mix with her life spirit, her fate and her *qi* until the beginning of a child was formed, who would be groomed into becoming the heir of the village. She hoped Mistress was relaxed and finally asleep.

Huang knew that Mistress would now have to treat herself with utmost care to preserve the direction of Min-Kung's seed. She would only be allowed to eat vegetables so that a son would have every chance of entering the world. Huang worked it out via numbers: Start with forty-nine then add the number of the month which is three and minus Mistress' age, which is eleven. She came to forty-one; an odd number. The baby would be a boy for certain.

"A pity," thought Huang. "Girls have so much intuitive leadership. Girls are better equipped for tolerance and strategy."

Mistress would need to divide her own life into that of the five elements so that she might not be served heated food, food of fire or comfort, but rather the food of water force, salt and shine, such as oil. She would have to take pains to walk slower than

before, so that she didn't damage herself or let her mind wander off where the playful spirits such as the blue-eyed crane or the river turtle might deform the baby.

Huang Chai decided to seek help for her arm. When all was silent and nothing needed, she crept to the village limits and traversed the outer dwellings. There were guards there whom she hadn't been able to slip beyond before, but she eluded them now, taking advantage of the evening breeze and early twilight.

She walked several more miles to the secluded hillside and found the Frog Army Village, made up of small houses, most of which she believed were now occupied by servants and frog people. She realised she had been there once before many years ago with her own father. She ventured further in, to the smaller houses. In one of them, she knew she would find the great man, as old as her own father, who studied ancient medicine and who gave sage advice as well as remedies. She recognised some of the river women walking past her as she approached his house. She called out to them, but they disappeared, looking behind them as if they'd lost something.

She stepped softly into an open doorway of a cramped room and pulled her padded coat around her shoulders. The room was full from floor to ceiling of old, marked cabinets of wood. Smaller ones had leaves poking from between the planks and others had dried animal skin hanging from their half-closed drawers. In the corner, next to another entrance was a large rusted cage, within which was a strange collection of animals: Three birds stood behind two tiny dogs. In front of the dogs were writhing snakes. Snails moved in front of them. None of the animals seemed concerned about each other or were aware of having been captured.

"The dogs protect the birds from the snakes," a smiling, familiar voice spoke behind her, "The birds watch for intruders. I feed them snails from the garden. The snakes are there for effect."

She turned around to face Pien-Sun Mei, the hillside doctor, the only Mongolian not driven from the group of Mountain villages. She observed his beard, as long and gruff as she remembered. His moustache was thinly wired and symmetrical, just short of the rest of his beard. His fingernails were short, except the smallest fingernail, which was long, probably to pick his nose with when he thought nobody was watching. He saw her

look at his hands and he laughed. She hoped that he did not practise thought language all the time.

"Welcome dear daughter of my old friend!" he said, "You are bold to venture here when your village fears the Frog Army and your Warlord is in disgrace."

He was older than when she last knew him, and although his hair was still black and he was able to walk without stooping, she could tell that age was reclaiming him to the world within the clouds as it did her own father. "One day," she thought, "one of the field workers will send secret word that he died on the very floor that I am standing on."

He laughed again, standing straighter. "But you're injured?"

"Yes," she said.

"But not so injured as to be bleeding, I see." He pushed her sleeve up gently.

The cut was blackened and charred. Pien-Sun Mei looked surprised that Min-Kung Hua managed to almost heal it. "Healing is not normally such a hidden gift," he murmured. As he examined it, he marvelled at the brilliance of Min-Kung's ability to cover such a deep cut with the magic of blood coagulation. "This is very good, though clumsy," he said, then hesitated, in case the spirits were listening.

Huang Chai searched for any signs of allegiance to the Warlord within the dark eyes of the Mongolian. She hadn't known him for a long time. It wouldn't do for her trust to be used indiscreetly. She might be harmed further, perhaps even killed. And then where would Mistress be? Who would take care of the child when it was born? Who would help dress and feed the child if she were dead?

Huang heard laughter a third time and resolved quickly to get what she had come for. "I'm not in very bad pain," she said, "but the wound still hurts greatly. I fear that something has embedded itself into my body."

The old man gestured for her to sit on a box full of forest leaves. He crossed the room to a cabinet clogged with bottles of fragrant essences. He sniffed at a few of them before selecting one, which contained yellow, pungent oil. Opening drawers, he found sprigs of dark herbs and wet them with spit until they formed a paste. There were wolfberries, stinging nettles and dandelion seeds. He told her that the red berries had restorative properties and reassured her that she would quickly recover. He then went to

the cage, drew out a bird, and sliced its wing off very quickly, whispering into its ear so that it felt nothing.

She flinched as he held her wrist so tightly that it burned. She almost tried to stop him when he placed the paste onto the wound, and pressed it in. Then he gave her the wing of the bird in three pieces and told her to put them one by one in her mouth as he chanted. With the first piece, she bit down hard as her arm began to sting. The bird wing crunched and dissolved down her throat. The second piece wasn't so bad and she let it sit between her teeth, as the Mongolian continued to press and thumb at her wound. The third sat calmly on her tongue and she watched with interest as he sweated and rolled the paste off and threw it away.

"There is still something there, but there is always going to be something there."

"Am I going to die from it?"

"No, you have something of his now; some of his soul. In placing his curse on you he gave it up willingly. You will take him with you, for the rest of this existence. If he dies, you will feel his death. And if you die, you will affect him, if his heart hurts or if he feels pain in his chest, if he is eating his dinner and feels tightness in his stomach. He will be half a soul then and will go to the next life as an animal instead of another man."

"But he has killed before."

"Not an innocent victim. Kwan Kung, the God of War, can see. And like Yin and Yang, the White Lady also sees and rewards goodness with compassion and threatens power with emptiness."

Huang Chai took silver from her coat and placed it onto one of the cabinets. She wondered how much of Min-Kung's spirit was within her, whether or not it was a disease that grew inside her, or was it like a shared life force? Could she harm him if she harmed herself?

Clutching her wound with her palm, Huang Chai felt better and quietly made the trek back.

The village looked almost peaceful when she returned. Embedded in the ground amongst light green trees and orange shrubs, it looked like a resting rice bowl. She could see the bamboo poles she used to weave in and out of as a child. Mistress did the same only last

year, tottering and screaming as Huang Chai chased her and tried to get her to dress and act like a lady. Mistress would stand still behind a thin pole, her eyes would be slits from laughter, her fingers in front of her mouth and her shoulders hunched. When they were both exhausted and when all the chasing had ended, Mistress would lie with her head on Huang's lap in the middle of the walkway, contemplating the garden.

"Sit cross-legged like Buddha," Mistress said one day. It was strange, because Huang didn't know who Buddha was. It was not the first time she became suspicious of the child's otherworld powers. "Tell me the story of my life again."

"All right then. You have always refused to wear traditional clothes. What else is there to tell?"

"Tell me everything. And don't skip the animals."

"All right then. When you were born, nobody expected it. Your mother suddenly knelt on the river stones so that you would come painlessly."

"Yes."

"Your father ran away as if a fierce wind were chasing him. It is bad luck for men to see women's business."

"Yes, I know that. What happened then?"

"Then your mother entered the water to wash herself and without realising, pulled you in also. A long goldfish nudged against her legs and told her you were under the water for four minutes before she knew what had happened."

"And what then?"

"Then? Then a nearby blue-eyed crane flew down and helped her pull you from the depths. The crane snipped your life cord and flapped its wings in your face, but you were thought to be dead. Your mother said she heard a chorus of wind and rain spirits then, but it was a herd of horned animals in the woods, which had come to the river for their drink. She rushed away and went back to the house, where she cried all night to grieve for your soul. In the morning daughter number eight woke her with a scream."

"Yes. Go on. To the part where she's glad she had me."

"Because you were not dead. The bears and the wood animals and the night spirits set you back in her room. And you didn't utter a sound for three weeks."

"They say I learnt the language of the animals."

"You spoke to the blue-eyed crane one night from the window as if it were your own mother. Some people say that when you were born, the blue-eyed crane saved you from the mountain spirits under the condition that you marry one of them when you were older. Your mother denied it, but people will say what they think. In any case, your fame spread through to the palace. Even the Emperor had heard of you."

Huang remembered the girl laughing then, and curling up against the folds of her pants.

Huang's arm felt better as she passed beyond the bamboo poles and the yellow and red banners of her village. Their flowers were now wilted. She climbed the steps that led to the stone lion with its paw upon the red sphere and the happy old man with his longevity peach. She walked through the entrance hall, expecting tigers to leap from a hiding place and kill her.

As she made her way to the kitchen, Mistress suddenly appeared from a concealed doorway, carrying a satchel and a cloth full of food. They stopped and stared at each other in surprise and Huang spoke at the last moment, frowning. "Mistress, it's late. You need assistance?" Mistress looked different now that she was a woman. In such a short time she had aged.

"There is a small hut on the outskirts of the village where I was raised, beyond the hillside, into the valley," Mistress said softly. "The sixty-year cycle has come. And the twelve earthly branches fall to me, the tzu rat in spring. I can't let you follow me. I can't let you come with me. I will have to trust that you won't tell anyone that you saw me."

"Mistress, are you going to live with someone else? Are you going to live in concealment for the rest of your life?" As the words tumbled out, she felt a sharp stinging where the doctor had pressed the herbal paste.

"Finally, I don't need your help, Lotus Mother," the girl said.

Huang watched as the girl moved away, her plaits swinging wildly against her back and her belongings weighing heavily against her waist. So fast and hard on her legs did she walk that Huang believed it was possible she had unbound her feet. She watched her for a long distance. Every now and again, she imagined Mistress turning around. Her expression seemed eerie, silent and spectral, and it reflected the rising, cold moon. Huang

gripped her arm as it began to throb once more and watched Mistress make her way toward the boundaries. There she ducked behind the guards, stopped for a moment, and then continued until she was nothing but a small child holding a sturdy bag. She seemed to lift off the ground with her palms together.

Huang ran to her room and leaned against the frame on her bed. Her thoughts were like whirlpools between the land, the sea and the afterlife. She looked at a clepsydras water clock beside the red vase, near her praying altar. She wondered what she might do when Warlord found that Mistress had left.

Huang heard scuffling coming from Mistress' quarters and thought her nerves might shatter. She jolted upright where she had fallen asleep on her bed when the sound of footsteps and voices both deep and high emerged through the silence. Quick steps came to her door. She held her breath, letting the air suck right into her heart until she thought she would choke.

"Quick!" It was one of the guards from the other night, "Get out of bed, old woman."

"What?" she asked.

"Get up. Haven't you heard everyone rushing around?"

"No. No, I haven't."

"The Warlord is dead!"

"The Warlord?"

"Min-Kung Hua is dead in his wife's bedroom!"

Huang unfolded her legs and stood up carefully. "China is the centre of the universe, as they say. But is it?" she frowned. A deep thudding came from her elbow, and she was slow to find her feet.

The soldier looked at her. "You stupid woman, the Warlord is dead and you stand here making conjecture. Are you crazy?"

He looked at her for a while before scuttling out. Huang then gathered her things into her bed cloth and tied the small lump around her waist. Running outside, she saw the guard with other officers, who eyed her as she hurried past. "Do you know what happened here, old woman?" one of them called to her.

She turned on her heel slowly. "It is the blue-eyed crane who has come back to claim its daughter."

They laughed and she thought she remembered the laugh from Min-Kung the same night that her arm was pierced. She continued running and found herself once more in the direction of Pien-Sun's house.

Fear made her weary, as did the incredible, searing pain in her arm. A scent came to her in the form of clumps of ginger discarded or accidentally thrown on the ground in her path. Her hunger made her weak. She ripped at it with her teeth until she felt energy flow through her body. When she came to the house, she found the doorway closed with a wooden gate. She knocked on the wall four times and heard the shuffling of feet and many low voices before pain overtook her senses and she swooned to the ground.

Somebody gently shook her awake and to Huang, it seemed like late afternoon. She was outside and the sun bathed the ground in pools of yellow light. She looked into the face of the doctor's wife, Chen Fong, who was older than she, and shrivelled from years of helping her husband write intricate formulae and labels.

Huang knew she could barely see through the dark blue cataracts that blocked everything but the light. The woman's wrinkles were like a map of the mountains, rivers and gorges. Chen Fong leaned over Huang and placed a hand on her arm. "You have pain here, don't you?" she smiled, feeling her way along Huang's skin.

"Yes, thank you, Miss."

"My husband has fixed you once and he has fixed you again. You have been here for a long time and we have taken good care of you."

Huang sat up slowly. Her body felt as if it had been dormant for years. Her bones were stiff and her back cracked. The skin on her face felt thinner and her lips felt stretched over her teeth.

The room was a small gazebo, bleached white from the sun. The walls were thin, the straw roof had enormous holes and she guessed she had recovered here, to soak in the elements of nature. Through a window, she could see rocks, and knew she was far away from her village. Further even, from Pien-Sun and Chen Fong's village. She could hear water trickling and a splashing sound, like pouring wine. She could see the Qui River

flowing past and it somehow relieved her. She looked at Chen and squeezed her hand. "I think you have saved me from something terrible."

"I think you have saved yourself."

Huang saw something strange when she sat up. The river looked fuller. The grass surrounding the embankment and the willow trees seemed longer and greener. The sun was stronger and she could see a myriad of colours vibrantly shining far along the hillside from houses newly built there. Chen patted Huang delicately on the arm. She threw her head back, laughing, and Huang envied for a moment the freedom this woman had in order to be able to live so happily.

"You have been asleep for a long time," Chen said and helped Huang stand so that she could get a better look at all of the changes, "there is a new Warlord now, who looks over our villages, the hillside and half of the mountain valleys. His name is Li Zen. He is benevolent and everyone is happy and prosperous. He is very young yet. He has saved the Emperor from bandits and from suicide. He has made us a whole city."

"How long have I been ill?"

"Ten months," Chen said gently.

Huang looked out onto the landscape which was once leafy and botanical and which now showed signs of progress. There were pens full of pigs and chickens and small gardens containing vegetables which Huang had only seen once before in another province. Over to one side was a small hut. Outside was a tree upon which someone had draped newly washed clothes. The clothes were positioned in almost a mathematical frequency that Huang admired, and she realised that many changes had occurred since the night she knocked hopefully on the doctor's door.

"Ten months."

"Yes. A lot has happened since you came to us. My husband made you numb because you had continuous fits. He put needles into your temples and into the tops of your ears and in your shoulders so that you would stop fretting. And when you had a fever, we made you tell us your dreams so that we could cheat madness, the brother of death."

"What did I dream of?"

"You dreamt of cows, spiders and standing alone without a mouth. But most of the time you slept. Especially after the festival of celestial winds, you talked less in your sleep and let me rest. You fell into a deep coma and we could do nothing except pray that you could find your way to another life or return to this one with all of your memories."

"Soon after they burnt Min-Kung Hua's house, and mourned the death of his Mistress and her cat, they began building a new house. Emperor of the Golden Sun gave half of the Qui Zhou mountain to the new Warlord in exchange for irrigation. New merchants started travelling in and out. Some came with cloth materials, others arrived with different types of tea and a substance harvested from plants which my husband used to anaesthetise you. There were large pictures that we could look at, showing life on the other side of Qui Zhou. We saw boats larger than the rafts we use here for fishing in deep water. These boats could hold more than two people and together they could travel across the water's surface until they reached the part of the river where the trout swim in shoals. The women of the village could buy new clothing. They started reading from paper full of strange stories about journeys and terrible battles. They showed us how to join our scrolls together so that one long piece of information could be carried safely, protected from rain and sun."

"They were a different kind of Chinese people. They had no sense of worry and in some way, it was not hard to invite them initially into our homes. They brought with them different ways of positioning lights within our houses so that light became the centre of each room. And they insisted on there being no darkness."

Huang stared at the pieces of washing. She remained quiet; but remembered Mistress with her satchel in the entrance hall. It was an unreliable memory. Perhaps all she saw that day was a water spirit in the shape of Mistress.

Chen looked at Huang with grey eyes. "But then, when we brought you out here yesterday to get fresh air into your lungs, we saw Mistress walking toward your village. She must have been kidnapped. She is unable to speak."

Huang stared at her.

"She had her child with her, a newborn. They're now in Li Zen's house. The new Warlord is keeping her there from respect and waits for word from the Emperor to decide what to do with her."

Over the next few days, Huang Chai thought of nothing else except the small girl she had called 'Mistress.' Chen helped her walk and move her arms in clockwise motions. She helped her stand underneath the trees and move slowly in a meditative manner; like a self-hypnosis, moving her hands across her face and thinking of the language of the wind and the posture of animals so that in the end, she almost became one. She was fed soft soups, soya and rice to get her blood flowing, get the energy that had centred on her neck and the base of her spine moving up and down her body and into the very tips of her grateful fingers.

Chen called to her on an afternoon twenty days later, when Huang had finished washing. "Go. She knows you are coming," she said, "Emperor has sent word to Li Zen. She is to be punished for her absence."

After leaving Chen and Pien Sun, Huang found it difficult to find her way about her village. Everything had been completely rebuilt. There was a large quadrangle now, in the middle of which sat a flat square of soil where she saw apple, pear, cherry and date trees, sycamore and even mung beans dotted in formations on the ground. Gone were the lion and the red ball, the happy man and his peach. She asked one of the servants in the terrace where Mistress was and the servant went quiet, merely pointing to a small house at the end of a hedge. It was tucked behind another house, darkened by its shadow.

She approached the door and found that it was a simple curtain. She stepped inside and found herself standing in a dark space with one figure sitting just out of the afternoon sun. The figure clasped a baby to her. Huang saw that the child was so tightly covered in swaddling clothes that she wondered how it was able to breathe.

"Lotus mother?"

"I'm here, Mistress," Huang said. Mistress was like her own child after all.

"I knew you'd come. I called for you when I came back but they didn't understand me. They said you were dead."

"I am here and won't ever leave you, I promise," Huang said.

"I know," came the weary reply.

Huang saw the blade, but by the time she rushed to Mistress' side, the girl had already begun to slump in her chair, a knife in her hand and blood rushing from a self-

inflicted wound at her throat. Huang knelt on the floor and caught the baby as Mistress began to fall forward. In horror, she watched Mistress curl into the same position on the floor as on those days where they told each other stories in front of the bamboo trees. She was smiling.

Huang could feel the baby's heartbeat against her chest. She hugged it closely and ran out into the sunlight. She saw that blood had fallen onto the cloth, soaking the baby's face in red so she stopped for a moment and lifted the fabric.

The child was a girl, but none like Huang had ever seen. The child's nose was so thin that it seemed as if there were no nostrils at all, except for two parallel slits. Its lips were thin too, as if it had been trampled upon and left by forest deer. It's hair was white, white and transparent like clouds. But the most frightening thing was the colour of the child's eyes. One was deep brown. But the other eye was as blue as the sky. It was like a clear whirlpool created for a moment by the swirling trout in the river. Huang imagined that this is what dragons would look like if one ever decided to gaze into her face until she turned into stone.

Huang gazed at the child until she knew what she should do. Slowly, she picked the child up and walked back to the gazebo that she had woken in almost a month before. She took the blanket she found there, a cup and a book of manuscript paper that she had read during her time of recuperation. She made her way slowly back to the river and gazed at it for a while as the child started to splutter with noises of contentment, before remembering the blue-eyed crane that nested along its shores. She thought about the cat that Mistress had owned which came into her room long ago, and wondered whether Mistress had always been a spirit, created by her own mother's promise to the blue-eyed crane, or if she'd been overcome by one when she became a wife.

There were no answers that came into her mind. Not even instinct to rely on, even if for a moment, an initial suspicion. Yet without looking behind her, she carried the child across the bridge and paused when she saw the city centre. She continued to the other side and started down the hill to the very deepest valley at the base of the mountain, toward the hut that Mistress had long ago spoken of.

When she arrived, she saw that Mistress had lived there in very good comfort. A goat and a pig were tethered outside. Further on, there was a chicken coop and a small

well. Inside, there was a chalice and basin in the corner for washing and a large wooden container for storing cheese. One of Mistress' cloths hung across a small flat bed that looked like it was made for a child and there was fragrant flower-scented tea sitting on one of many storage boxes.

It was a place that Huang had always wanted the experience of living in. And as she settled down with the sleeping child at her chest, surrounded by comfort and things that she knew she would come to love, she wondered if replacing her life with that of her Mistress, was, in fact, her destiny or if it was she herself who had shaped it.

Act Two:
The Gentleman's Outpost

MELVILLE NEWTON WINCED as soon as he followed Alfred into the dark, smoky room. Heavy bandages around his head pressed an abrasion on his brow and he could see nothing except for a small light which made him unbalanced. Shadows shifted about and emitted strange, muffled noises like dry grass rubbing. He recalled vast fields being burned for the season; the smoke remaining embedded in his clothes and hair for days.

A different odour rose to him. He inclined his head as it became stronger and took a few steps sideways.

At that moment, he heard Alfred laughing and pictured the man before turning around. His mind conjured a cartoon image from the British newspapers of a slant-eyed, smiling foreigner with buckteeth and a swishing pigtail. This is how white men saw the Chinese. Newton turned and smiled to see him gesturing at several people. Alfred was rich and Newton couldn't help thinking his slant eyes were from laughing and his swishing pigtail was a parenthesis of his presence. Newton had never seen such a comfortable foreigner who seemed proudly … foreign.

Newton could tell he stood in an opium den. There were large chests in one corner on which was stamped the East India Company logo; a symbol of territorial expansion on the Indian subcontinent. There was also a long row of makeshift beds that supported dozens of etherised British men. He squinted his eyes and sighed, letting a warm feeling of opportunity gradually wash over him. The Chinaman laughed again and Newton felt an inspired grin play about his own lips.

His eyesight adjusted further and he noticed reclining bodies everywhere. They were inhaling and exhaling. Then, with a shudder and a sigh, they disconnected from their smoky emissions and groped desperately for a thin circulation of fresh air which played about in a whirlpool on the floor. They looked like sailors thrown from a sinking vessel, drowning and gasping on a seabed and scrambling for the water's membrane and the air above. "They might be in a hospital," he thought.

Newton saw coolies crouched beside each person, at the ready with smoking pipes and pins in their bony hands. Each coolie had dark-brown skin and wore a simple loin garment. He watched them dip the pins into tin trays at their feet, until a dark, burning substance hung onto the end of each pin. They then poked the substance into a hole in each pipe. After this swift, mechanical process, they lifted the pipe to each man's lips. The whole procedure was over in a moment, after which each coolie beamed and dipped the pin in again, even before the body on the bed could recover.

At the end of several beds were Chinese women holding fans, who were patiently watching each coolie and presently, Newton himself. They looked attractive as their fluttering movements churned the smoky air. Newton wondered how a woman could wait so tolerantly beside a man who did not recognise her. He decided to wait until he could see better, to assess whether he could get a woman for himself.

They loved it, the reclining British. Newton glimpsed the face of a young marine, whom he believed he might have encountered recently. The marine was now lolling in a state of bliss, laughing and playing with the hair of a Chinese woman who sat on his bed with her hand on his thigh.

"Timing is mean nothing to these person Mr Newton," Alfred said jovially.

"You speak English well, I notice," Newton said.

"Of course," said Alfred, "I speak eight languages. You speak English well too."

Newton watched the remarkable man pick his way down the centre of the room, nod positively to the more conscious of patrons and help them take occasional draughts of brackish water from smutty coffers beside their beds. He was envious of these sprawled lords. Each man effectively had a servant and a woman who waited on him. It was the epitome of luck, even if none of them appeared to have a considerable income. He quickly realised that this scene of enjoyment was the result of thousands of opium chests he had helped direct into Canton over the past three months. His suspicions of the opium's addictive qualities were turning into something of an opportunity; he wondered why he had never considered taking the medicine himself, but was nevertheless pleasantly surprised to find that the drug was welcomed and in better use than what the French newsletters claimed.

"Come, Mr Newton."

Alfred waddled away and Newton could see that his unmistakeable eye patch concealed almost half of his circular face. Alfred leaned precariously over an empty bed, pushing a blonde man over onto the floor and watching him rise disgruntled and stagger away. He then turned around and beckoned Newton to lie in the man's place.

Newton felt woozy from the smoke, but removed his jacket and with groggy movements, loosened his shirt and lay down.

"I tell you Chinese story," Alfred said and busily poked the pin into the small hole at the end of a pipe. He pressed the hooch into Newton's mouth like a devoted mother and waited. "Lovely?"

It tasted sticky, though not unpleasant. The end of the pipe was chewed and Newton felt queasy for a moment. Yet there was a familiarity within him, which was soothing, much like a rogue who feels relief in the company of peers. He inhaled until the vapour curled into his lungs.

"Lovely?" Alfred repeated.

Newton held the smoke in his lungs and waited. He had shared tobacco many times with school friends and older brothers back in India and mastered the art of inhalation, but he was disappointed when nothing happened. "It's not working," he said and removed the pipe from his mouth.

Alfred frowned and raised his eye patch to see more clearly.

The very action surprised Newton, who had never suspected that it covered a perfectly working eye.

"God man, what do you wear that patch for if you don't need it?"

"I show you," Alfred chuckled and moved into the shaft of light.

Newton peered as hard as he could, his head bandages feeling heavier. Alfred leaned back until his face shone under the full stream of sunlight and lifted the patch slowly.

Newton exclaimed when he saw an ice-blue eye staring at him, like a rabbit's eye or a clear gem. At that moment, the opium hit him more brutally than he could ever have imagined.

Newton felt as if he were drowning, but managed to bring himself to wakefulness so he could witness one last time, the odd match of the dark and pale eyes of the man before him. Fascinated, he fell into a stupor. The last thing he saw was the shadow of his knees rising before him into darkness as Alfred began to speak.

"This is story from chronicles of history," the man explained. "You not think it common. You not tell me: 'I have heard this before Alfred.' You not tell me 'this like Chinese silkscreen and cheong sam – so typical.' You understand meaning behind it and be careful."

"I will," Newton said, though he had no idea what the man meant.

Alfred told a mythical story of a young woman, barely twelve years old, who was betrothed to a brutal Warlord. It was only her faithful servant who witnessed her misery and Alfred narrated it with a serious, unwavering voice. On the morning after the marriage, the Warlord was murdered and nine months later, the girl gave birth to a child, which may have in fact been fathered by a river crane, because of its marking of

a blue eye. Eventually, the girl killed herself and the servant went into exile, taking the child with her.

Because of the drug, Newton could only listen in silence. The story left him intrigued and fascinated. He remembered his own mother telling him gentle fables of frogs and foxes and wondered about the result of integrating such myths into 'civilised' society. He pictured his colleagues perceiving a lack of moral and reason. If they were listening now, they would be aghast at Alfred's story of violence and aggression, its inclusions of old fashioned weaponry and its exactness in describing to the last detail, each wound. "It is absurd in its fiction," he pictured someone saying. "It is an unsuitable fairy tale which cannot be categorised into anything digestible. The warlord character is an imbecile, bereft of commonsense, albeit one might excuse him for accidentally forcing his new wife to do his bidding." Newton felt defiant and slightly angry. He decided that he liked the story and listened closely so that he might repeat it to his family.

Alfred proved an excellent storyteller and explained that he was a descendant of royalty and that the blue eye was its evidence. Newton drifted in and out of consciousness.

"This is my ancestor," Alfred insisted, "the blue-eyed crane. You believe I tell the truth."

"Absolutely," Newton said.

A wave of nausea hit him and he gazed about as if only beginning to recognise the place. His head ached again and directly behind his eyes was a throbbing which he wasn't sure came from the drug or his thoughts. His stomach gurgled and he swallowed hard helplessly.

"Don't fret, Mr Newton."

"I am feeling ill."

Newton lifted his hand in objection but watched as the man collected the long pin and pushed an enormous lump of burning opium into the pipe.

"It hurts first time. But I go and you enjoy by yourself," Alfred said.

Newton drew in a long breath and blearily hunted through his own memories, which lingered upon him and made him relive each one in awful, stupid detail.

He glimpsed briefly, as one might look through a kaleidoscope, his own idyllic childhood. His earliest memory was when he peered from white cotton swaddling and floated on a palanquin carried by two bearers. From his peripheral vision he could see the fragranced breast of his brown-faced mother, a sight and smell that would stay with him forever.

A multitude of servants walked on one side, in white, with clean hands. He remembered marvelling at their kindness, their readiness, the order that they kept. Like him, they hung on her every word.

His mother's voice echoed against his ear, her chest a humming cavern. He remembered the face of his father, a moustachioed and robust man striding next to the palanquin on the other side, whispering things to make his mother laugh. There was a small monkey that Newton's father kept as a pet. The monkey scurried next to his father on the ground, yelping now and then and pulling his father's boots.

"Shhh, Melville!" his mother said, "you're very hot still, but you'll get better."

"The doctor said he'd be all right if we don't subject him to your attentions," his father said.

His parents smiled at each other and he felt his mother clasp him nearer.

Newton's vision changed to another time.

He saw his sisters and brothers beckoning him from the landing of their home. There were ten of them and they scattered themselves across the English garden, running toward him as he made his way up the path. He was a little older but not yet a man and his feet caused him to stumble awkwardly. When he arrived at the house, he stopped to see a banquet in the dining hall. In the middle of the table sat a farewell cake which had a message to his brother on it.

"You're going to be very successful," he heard his father tell the oldest brother. "This is for you, for your journey. Go now, into the Western world and make this family proud."

His brother was supposed to be happy, Newton remembered thinking, but instead there were tears. "I don't want to leave you," he said, "why can't I stay and work here?"

"Stop putting pressure on the poor boy," his mother said. His father kissed her cheek and handed his brother a commemorative hunting gun.

Newton's memories flashed to a yet later image, when he was older. His family had made a cake for him with the same message, smiling and reassuring him that he would always live in comfort once he found his destiny. His father worked for the East India Company and, through connections, had procured him employment that promised travel.

"You'll go to Hong Kong village."

"Yes Father."

"It will one day be a great port. You can show the British how they should run a new land. You will make me proud, but most of all, gain self-respect like a true Indian."

It was a sensible choice for Newton. His parents resolved that office work was right for such a fragile child. He knew he would make something of himself. Their expectations of him were great.

He thought of his father before he left, calling on Zarathustra and wishing him well, "God will provide open doors which He will minister to the Parsee." His father's arm was draped around Newton's mother as he spoke, "You must go, Indra," he said, calling Newton by his real name, "Go and walk amongst the British bravely and bring healing and deliverance. For goodness sakes, help these people who call themselves 'civilised' to achieve God."

Newton's memories changed once more.

The ship that he had boarded to Hong Kong Island village anchored in the port. Everybody travelling, businessmen, traders and families were determined to disembark as quickly as possible. He remembered the waves slapping against each other on the beach as he alighted. The sound reminded him of his mother's cooking; shallots, curried vegetables, oiled bread, her rope of black hair twitching as she chopped. Carried on the sea breeze were tiny grains of salt, which grazed his cheeks. He recalled standing upwind, mouth open and eyes closed, letting his senses guide him in this new land with its different tastes and customs. He prayed he would make his family proud. He prayed the British would not change him too much.

Lonely, helpless hours in his hut beside a godown tea warehouse typified his evenings. He lacked sufficient income in order to send money home as his brothers did, though his parents didn't need any. It was the sheer bloody show of it to prove he was a gentleman. Newton added a flourish to his letters home and boasted on British parchment that he was a Viscount; a well-respected, widely feared fellow, which he was sure, made his father happy and his brothers envious, though it made him sick. He let them believe he would return home a wealthy conqueror, displaying his intellect and generosity as a true son of his father's and a suitable husband for Parsee women everywhere.

Newton was forced to admit to himself that he was a Professional British conduit; a secretary to perform minor duties in the name of Her Majesty Queen Victoria. He was also an unsalaried comprador for the Chinese and he, in fact, executed tasks so menial that nobody believed employing someone was required for such a job.

He started to travel to and from the Delta, and made illegal opium deliveries expedient into Hong Kong Village. The silver currency was calculated for four Mexican dollars per Sterling, which, though the Portuguese guides agreed with, the Chinese merchants did not accept. Trade, according to the Chinese, was a privilege for the Europeans. It was quite reasonable that he kept the levies for himself. It was not dishonesty so much as foresight. He reasoned that the times had changed since his older brothers' days. One could not simply advance in the world without a helping hand.

"Here," Newton called aloud, the opium now bearing down upon him like a steam train. A coolie picked his way over and offered another smoke. "Thank you," Newton said and lay back once again. He dreamed of the day before, with a precision that almost hurt.

The villagers listened carefully to the water sucking the earth from the shore, ebbing, flowing and lulling. It made a difference to the types of fish they caught and determined their positions along the shoreline. The coming dawn was not yet an interruption. They could smell seaweed, coral and wet pebbles. The women rocked their babies to the sea's rhythms. Servants clicked their chopsticks against their bowls in synchronicity. Builders and carpenters, working on nearby roads, calculated the time from the sensual creaking of ropes that bound small boats to wooden pikes.

An hour later, the sea was an explosion of activity. The Lea Private Trader ship anchored uncomfortably, ready for its opium to be delivered into a nearby warehouse. The Lea's legitimate cargo was carried to Canton's Huangpu docks, the East India's in particular, having come through the channel of the Pearl River Delta, The Bogue, with a pilot boarding the ship to guide it upstream.

Everyone on board was anxious, from the mate to the cook, whose earnings depended upon the smooth processing of their cargo. They bustled and bumped, swaying with the tide and the pressure of delivering six hundred chests to a man they feared, in a village they were unfamiliar with.

Once at the dock, an official Hong merchant in cooperation with the British, and Newton, whose title was Warehouse Tax Clerk, boarded the vessel with an interpreter and a comprador. All the official procedures such as paper signing, quantity counts, payments and logs were then followed.

The Hong merchant arrived with a good measure of pomp. He delighted in the touchy respect given by the ship's traders but failed to realise that the silence was from anticipation of what would happen once his documents were under his arm and he was making his way carefully to shore. He did not know they waited anxiously for

Newton; did not realise that a hidden quantity of opium chests were in the base of the ship, amongst the supplies, which were also British and Chinese approved. It is these chests that made those on board edgy, and created a thriving black-market trade.

Hours later, Chinese merchant boats would acquire the additional opium without notice from the watchful eye of the local police establishment, which followed neither British law nor Emperor decree. It was a conscious 'enhancement' of a commodity growing in demand, in which Newton could not be uninvolved, given his aspiration for wealth.

Newton met the ship's captain once a morning after seeing to the needs of the Hong merchant and after collecting the warehouse taxes. It was a matter of lingering. He was employed by the British consul, but also assisted in the smooth completion of the deliveries. The Chinese believed he was on their side, since he created employment and furnished them with more opium. The British considered him on their side, since he assisted in the efficient passage from ship to warehouse and collected the entry taxes. The French who created the opium, and who provided much of the ship's crew, thought he was on their side, since he bought more opium. But in fact, Newton enjoyed loyalty to himself. He was, he believed, truly liberated.

And on the other side of dawn, when all could see the swaying coattails of the Hong picking his careful way to a local teahouse, the real commerce began. Levies were raised at every possible turn, by the ship's captain, the dock master, the port commander, the cutter skipper and the handling-fee clerk. Pressure mounted as the various currencies were translated into odd calculations. Silver was the most accepted yet the least available. As usual, when Newton added everything in his head to negotiate a better cost for the additional chests, he made deliberate adjustments according to the political climate.

This was the first of twenty-four ships that would land during the day. A riot had broken out at the permit collection point at Macao, where an approaching vessel was almost refused passage. And then another broke out as a second vessel emerged on the Island of Lintin at the mouth of the Pearl River, and a further fight occurred during the offload on the floating shores.

Then suddenly Newton himself was attacked and two dozen chests were stolen. And by the time he came to, with piss on his trousers and a growing purple welt on his forehead, it was too late and not a soul had seen anything. Nobody knew anything. Except a young marine who had asked how the weather was and who'd hit him on the head when he wasn't looking.

As he collapsed onto the platform and felt nimble fingers search through his pockets, he glimpsed his own childhood on the palanquin once more, with his beautiful mother.

Reporting it or forcing double payment from the captain would be pointless, so Newton merely bore the cost himself. He did, however, miss collecting the warehouse tax for the British government, a mistake that he knew would result in severe punishment.

"I am here when I am needed, and here when I am not needed. And when I am not here, I am on time, and when I am here, I am never on time," he said. It was a saying his father warned him with and which Newton had never understood until now.

At this recollection, Newton rocked forward and keeled over to the floor, where he felt himself pressing his cheek to it. The air was cool. His swollen tongue languished before he succumbed to a measure of liquid from the bucket next to the bed. He raised his head, and righted himself; too weak to stand up and release himself from this nightmare. A woman appeared in front of him. She was beautiful to Newton, though it was dark. Her fan provided a rhythmic comfort. She bade him lie back with a wave of her small hand while she fanned a breeze over his body.

"At last," he spoke, with a crack in his voice, "a woman."

He closed his eyes, whereupon the scene returned to his most immediate nightmare.

Each Hong merchant and interpreter provided by the British office grinned when he appeared at last. It was mid-morning and he'd arrived with a bandaged head. He was

late, slept in, rushed into his shirt and stockings and scuttled in amidst the stifling humidity.

The consul stood when he entered the great room. There seemed no way for it but to accept punishment. An awful succession of possibilities danced before him. The silence, too, pressed into him. No one had bothered to place a courtesy newspaper on his desk. There was no greeting for him, no tea left on the trolley, no cakes.

"A Cutter," one of the men said, "A bloody Cutter amongst ships and maritime traders. Call yourself a Sassoon?" They had discovered his operation.

"Get off it," he replied defiantly and looked at his desk, "you've ripped the dickens through my documents and bankbooks. What the devil are you running here?"

There was a scuffle, punches and name-calling, with Newton's strong arm pounding someone's shoulder so that the man went into a coughing fit. One of the policemen guarding the building's safe stepped forth to restrain him, suppressing laughter as he did so. The policeman was Chinese, of course, and had enjoyed many a pipe with Newton at the local lounge.

Newton made a last lunge for Watson, the customs officer, and shouted, "I resign, I resign. I'll have no more of these capers, these manners and double standards."

In annoyance and with everyone staring, he strode through the large mahogany double doors towards a set of stairs and felt the doorframe loom above him, recede far behind him and thus propel him towards the exit.

At this moment, the memory slowed to detail.

He knew it was the last time he would ever walk upon the carpet, the last time he would ever wear the East India Company work attire. The thought made him exhilarated but sick, especially when thinking of what his father might say and he mopped his brow with a shaking wrist. He was aware of the velvety pile underfoot, the way the strands parted beautifully. He recalled once upon a time when he had helped organise the laying of those very strands.

He glanced quickly at the light and airy wallpaper on his way out. It was the colour of a freshly ironed handkerchief belonging to a careless lover. With one hand, he reached out and trailed his dirty fingers along it.

Newton felt the prickling sensation of people ogling and smiled faintly. The customs officer, the revenue collector and the chief secretary envied him. They marvelled at his boldness in one of the most progressive firms in the world. "They all wish for individuality," he thought. Their hands rested flat on their desks. Their waistcoats and fobs were adjusted perfectly. Their monocles made them appear arch. "You dare never attempt this," he shouted.

As he made his way down the stairs, he imagined them lying back in their expensive wooden chairs, discussing the day he began at the offices representing the East Indian Company alongside other traders and foreign merchants in Hong Kong. He was employed as a valuable asset in bringing opium into China, a younger version of his mighty father, a powerful East India Company executive. He was educated at home in all sorts of fine arts. His mother was a lady. "What a pity we've lost such an outstanding gentleman," he imagined them now muttering. "Damned shame."

Halfway down the stairs was a grand door to a meeting hall. He raised his eyes to the lintel and winced when he saw the words '*In caelo quies.*' It was a lofty promise: *There is rest in heaven.* He spoke Latin very well, and thought perhaps something more appropriate should apply, like *calumnior. To accuse falsely.* Or *in latito*, which meant *lying hidden.* There was a stained-glass window above it, which, when the sun was in a particular position, glorified a stately picture of Queen Victoria. The frame surrounding her was of brightly coloured diamonds. And there was an intricate pattern of squares, circles and rectangles dancing around the outside. He'd often looked at that image, especially when he first moved here four months before. Now it made him shiver to think of the wretchedness and cultural contradiction. Her small crown made him feel claustrophobic; he was ashamed of it now, though he had once worked so hard to belong to it. The insignia from the glass followed him, chased him. Queen Victoria's round face glared at him. And the light threw the colours down the stairs.

As he stepped onto the street he realised he'd been clutching a wad of papers against his chest, with the blackened and sweaty shirtsleeve of one arm. The documents contained conditions of employment and permission to discharge. They were signed and sealed with eight different signatures. They had the great seal of the East India Company on them.

The ink from a flapping page seeped from one of the parchments where one could read the words, 'Miscreant, for wrongdoings against the Queen and the Empire.' He delivered opium, yes, but he possessed the additional audacity to commit extortion. He'd laughed when his colleagues gave him the documents.

And yet, these crimes were irreversible and unredeemable. Newton might never be allowed to show his face in British company again. And what of dispatching himself home? What would he tell his family? What money would he display for his limited time in this village? What women of his father's social standing would so much as consider him calling upon them?

He looked toward the sun and his face felt burnished. The yellow dust on the road, dampened from sudden warm rains, looked too bright. Workmen laid cement from heavy carts and raised street poles with the help of sweating horses. They shouted words of familiarity to each other as if they belonged and he didn't. There were men walking busily past in navy uniforms. They perused the new shops, looking for food, for souvenirs, for something to do. Some of them hooked arms with each other and laughed at the Chinese natives who were short and who wore what the visitors called 'dresses.' Other newcomers chatted to Chinese women; one couple in particular looked in the midst of courting. Still more of them lazed on street corners reading papers and smoking pipes.

He gazed from left to right, wondering what to do and felt a sudden sense of self-consciousness. It was an inflamed feeling that began at his collarbones and rose to his ears. He became aware of each sinew, each vein in his body and his blushing neck.

Newton stood on the side of the road and looked at his black shoes on the black rocky ground. He examined his white socks, black trousers and white shirt, blackened by dirt. It was difficult to evaluate which material, black or white, was the dirtier. At

least, perhaps, there was an acceptable port breeze, except for a whiff of plague in the air; a bitter joke one played on oneself during such times.

He walked quickly along the harbour before stopping at the only establishment with an awning and hoped the proprietor sold boiled eggs to stave off his growing hunger. Wiping his brow, he moved inside, examining for any officials or for anyone British.

The shop was diminutive. There were small tables, set against smoke-stained, tiled walls. The roof was low, and there were square holes in the wall for windows. Each table offered a series of bamboo trays holding bread, a loaf or a twisted shape of dough. There were steamed cakes of sticky glutinous rice, smacked with pink dye to looks like hundreds of open mouths. Newton made a face at one he thought might be days old. He fingered his pocket, which contained a few coins of differing currency.

"Ahem," he cleared his throat and at once, four coolies emerged as if from the very walls and stood still, patiently.

Newton was fascinated by coolies. In India, they were considered lower than servants and they were extremely different from the servants he'd experienced while growing up. Once, in Calcutta, when his parents saw one, Mrs Newton immediately took the young Melville by the hand and ushered him to the other side of the road.

"Look. They don't seem to have whites in their eyes," she said.

"Good heavens," he said loudly, as he pressed his back against the wall.

They pushed and shoved and he felt panic travel rapidly from his stomach to the backs of his eyes. He was not able to tell between the men in front of him and the British marine he remembered from the morning, who had made quick work of rifling through his pockets.

The coolies offered themselves as sedan-bearers, "Take you to shore once more Sir?" until a small Chinese man came between them and waved them away.

The man recognised Newton and an enormous smile broke out all over his face. "My, my," he exclaimed.

He had a four-inch patch of black material on his eye which was badly made and which shifted upward when he grinned. "Mr Newton, what pleasure! How is Honourable East India Company this day?" He shifted across the floor and glanced at Newton's bandage.

"Terrible," Newton answered, "A quarter of a million chests from America alone and I have a headache to rival all the pain in Calcutta."

"Sit down, drink tea!"

Two stools were produced from under one of the tables. The man shouted something towards a door at the rear in Cantonese.

Newton heard an immense shoving and whispering, the sound of people rushing about in deliberate silence.

"Mr Newton how you like it here? It's good for you?"

"It's decent, thank you," he replied.

Newton didn't consider himself a man of false judgement except in recognising class differences wherever he went. His foray into the world made him see for himself the enormity of what his parents had always taught him against the reality of his actual environment.

"Being light-skinned is good," his father instructed, "Look at you. You're like smooth, milky coffee. The darker a person is, the lower they are."

"No," Newton's mother protested, "how can they help it? It is unfair to say things like that. It is the way they are brought up by their parents. If they come from a good family, if they have a good education, then why not have everything they wish for?"

"You are right. Once again, you are right. Nevertheless, it is better to look down from above."

The Chinese man wore a blue cotton top, with a fabric rope tied around his waist to keep his wide-legged pants up. He resembled one of the tea warehouse workers who passed chests of tea to each other in a godown beside the treasury. Newton had trouble working out whether he was Westernised or not.

"Do you work here all the time?" Newton said, noticing dust on the man's shoes and kaolin clay sticking to his hems. There was a dusty abacus on a table and large rolls of muslin against the wall.

"Yes," the man said.

The bakery smell was a good distraction. The man laughed and his bald head, save for a single long plait of black hair tied with string, caught the mid-morning sun. He raised his hands and Newton saw long fingernails.

"What, may I ask, is your name?"

"Tak Chu, Mr Newton."

"Buddha," Newton thought, "is everywhere after all ... Tak Chu, well, that's not as difficult as some. I tell you I deal with Ming Wahs and Yip Koo-Kwans and Dong Lis and Chun Ngos. It's very hard in my line of work."

"Ahah! You white man in brown skin," the man said.

Newton sat back into the hard wooden chair and sipped his tea. He could think of nothing more than the events of that morning that had led to his resignation. His mind drifted and he wondered whether the Chinese man was up for a listen. What would the harm be to trust a stranger? Wasn't everyone in South China a stranger? Wasn't he estranged from his Parsee family back home? Was it not the most ill-made decision to stand in his superior's office and agree to travel all the way to South China, to Hong Kong Village, the rockiest of barren places and try to make a career for himself as a nobody?

"Do you mind at all if I call you Alfred?" he said.

"Not at all Mr Newton," the man said, "We Chinese have many name. I am son of Ping Chu, or maternal nephew of Mariam Yu. I am also Golden Son or Fourth Generation Chu. Sometime even just Chinaman!"

"Yes, yes, I'm tense, Alfred." Newton loosened the cravat of his white shirt and pulled up his sleeves. He slouched in his chair, defeated and tired. "I came here with the loftiest expectations, the highest hopes of adventure for myself. Good thoughts, good

words, good deeds and where did it take me?" He indicated the settlement with a wave of his teacup. "Nowhere, that's where, bloody nowhere. I don't know what I'm going to do now. It seems to me that it was all a waste of time."

"Waste time?" Alfred leaned forward.

"It was a *bloody* waste of time Alfred. You see me? I have light skin. I have ambition in my blood and naiveté. I came here to seek my fortune and maybe meet a nice woman to marry and take her home to India. But do you see any women here, Alfred? Do you see any good women? One of the officers stationed in Huanpu told me the only women here are prostitutes and bastards. Otherwise they'll soon be convicts sent from England and escapees who have jumped ship on an anchor point. A society of criminals, I've realised. This is what I have got myself into. God, how bloody awful. My father will be bitterly disappointed."

Alfred patted him. "Many women here. Nice Chinese ones, not stupid British ones. You look for them."

"Pardon? Oh I see, well they're hiding."

Alfred laughed, "You follow me, Mr Newton."

He rose from his seat and Newton stared at the dust clouding at his footsteps.

"Come," Alfred said.

Newton placed the tea down carefully and rose from his seat. He straightened his shirt and followed Alfred through the door into another room, which contained a table against one side of the wall. On the table sat papers and inkpots. It was dark and he almost failed to notice a hidden staircase at the rear of the room, spiralling downward to a dimly lit area below.

Newton woke with a headache he thought might cleave his head in two. He lay in the same position and was more than upset by a murderous stinging at the back of his eyes and a severe ache in his back, where his resignation documents were wedged. He dared not even begin to try and calculate how long he'd been there for. His legs took

on an apnoea of their own and his body seemed anchored to the bed. He sat up slowly and waited until his eyes became accustomed to the figures surrounding him. They looked like dirty sea buoys stranded on the cargo platforms of foreign traders and as they sat up, their faces reminded him of stories of Caesar and Titus Andronicus.

"Mr Newton?" It was Alfred.

"Christ man, my head hurts incredibly. What are you trying to do? What sort of caper are you running?" Newton shouted at him and thrashed his hands about, upsetting the burner and letting a quantity of powder escape.

In fact, he was whispering hoarsely. The vapours played in his throat and he gripped Alfred's top and rose to his feet in groggy stupefaction.

"Help me, why don't you."

"Mr Newton, my apologies if this was bad experience," the man said, and put Newton's arm around his shoulders. "I hope you forgot troubles for a while. This my purpose to bringing you here."

Newton tried to stand and stared at Alfred's eye patch. It didn't look so effective now. In fact, the flimsy material looked pathetic, the longer Newton lingered upon it. He wondered whether everything he cloaked in his own life seemed less obvious at the outset.

In silence, Newton let the man take him up the stairs, into the shop and onto the same seat in front of the window. "How long have I been down there?" he asked. He wanted very badly to rip up the documents and throw them at the stained-glass windows of the British office.

"Not long Mr Newton," The Chinaman said, "Not long now."

Act Three: Chinese Whispers

THE HOSPITAL WAS WHITE, the colour of heaven and cleansing and Adia rested her right hand over her left as she had been taught. She whispered something from one of her Grimms fairytale books. Or was it from Kipling? She couldn't remember. She raised her eyes to look directly at her grandmother then glanced at her sisters who obediently faced the floor. "Christmas won't be Christmas without presents," she muttered, and suppressed a yawn. It was a line from a book she was reading; another quote that would pass the time away. She would think of Browning, Yeats, Shakespeare and Johnson and even daydream over a few Bronte characters before the hour.

Adia examined the old woman's face for as long as she could without staring. Grandma had a shipwrecked look about her, as if she were already dead. Her eyelids had deflated like furled sails, her cheeks stretched thinly. She was dilapidated and possessed numerous patches on her skin previously unnoticed; brown spots and freckles that were green in colour, and then, alarmingly, yellow and red. They stretched in constellations across the bridge of her nose as if someone had carelessly thrown them at her. Her hair was thin and greasy, pushed back to her temples. It wasn't altogether different from her appearance when she lived.

Rising from Grandma's neck were two wiry sinews that worked like pistons whenever she moved her head. She had pronounced buckteeth, which peeked from her mouth and a tongue like a much-used piece of soap. She could never shut it, her mouth. She could be compared to a bantering puppet; an image the servants always conjured after she spoke down to them. Adia's Mother always agreed with them behind Grandma's back.

It was too soon to have to think about death, decay and the afterlife, Adia's father said, but Grandma was very demanding and accused Father of having no spine. She said she wanted to leave the world as if she was taking her family with her. Everything would be perfect in the afterlife and what could not be here on earth, would get it right when she was dead. The family made an enormous show of respect. Embossed white cards were issued and the response was overwhelming.

Adia gazed at the offerings surrounding the bed. The paper ones had fancy statements on the outside, "Have a fortunate journey" or, "Here is a prayer of peace." Some were bad translations from English to Chinese, back to English, "Play in the garden!" or "We will have sandwiches now." There were numerous poems about eternal happiness, which had colourful dragons and merry little Chinese girls skipping amongst the words. All of them came folded in white packaging, which caused the dancing words to look darker. There were other offerings too; bouquets of white roses, lilies stacked to the ceiling and boxes of paper fruits that would burn easily when it came to sending them to heaven. Delicate, intricate patterns were embroidered on some of the box edges. Still others displayed tissue animals in light pastels, galloping into yellow suns and pale green horizons.

The unimaginative relatives sent bewildered daughters who were ushered into the room and told to recite how honourable Grandma was. Everyone knew Grandma hated girls unless they obeyed her. She hated beautiful ones, and ones who showed intelligence and independence. The strong-willed ones were especially burnt by the fire of her jealousy and became the targets of her wrath. She called them "Eighth women" meaning that no men would ever take them up to the seventh wife; a great insult in anyone's terms. Or she said the girls "shot their mouths off" which gave them a reputation and disallowed them from ever speaking their mind in her presence unless they were protected by noble

or wealthy parents to which Grandma was indebted. In these latter cases, her hatred was called upon to be more cunning, more planned. No girl ever escaped Grandma's fury, though the embittered ones made it some way in.

On the other hand, boys were Grandma's fixation and she strongly believed that most boys were the answer to happiness and empire. She doted upon them and placed pictures of her male descendants thickly around her lounge room amongst photos of herself playing netball during the 20s in Hong Kong. The only boys who didn't make it to Grandma's kindness were those she had a gripe with, such as ugly ones, and ones who spoke their mind. She was like a cat that killed its deformed kittens, but kept the strong ones for their likelihood to survive. All of these boys, upon whom she fawned, didn't in fact care whether she was alive or dead.

Adia hadn't wanted to make an offering, not just because Grandma was her least favourite person on earth but because she thought the whole idea was ridiculous. To mourn before death was bad luck. It made no sense that a dead person who was not him or herself burnt, would then be able to collect burnt offerings in the afterlife. And Grandma hadn't even made a confession. Hadn't the school taught Adia that the Bible spoke against desecrating the human body in death? Perhaps the old dowager would burn in hell for it.

Adia smiled.

Adia wore a white sailor-styled uniform. Her socks and leather shoes were white too. The Amah had searched all over Nathan Road until they were found and bought. Adia had laughed to imagine the woman with her hunched back, crouching over dozens of shoes with an outline of Adia's foot on a piece of paper. The shoes fit perfectly, of course. And then Amah had bought socks for her at Stanley Markets, by choosing a pair and then wrapping it around Adia's fist. It wrapped just so, and then fit as well as the shoes. And lastly, there was the shirt itself, which was held against Adia's back with the seams lined up against her armpits.

Across the bed stood Adia's sisters, Farida, the eldest, and Vera, who was younger than Adia. Standing away from the bed stood Marianne, younger than Vera and

then Alex, the boy and future heir. Behind them was a pew dragged in by the hospital staff, in which all of them could sit at regular intervals.

Farida was annoyingly renowned as the prettiest child and singled out to wear adult clothes. The clothes, taken from her mother's wardrobe, suited her figure and made her appear glamorous. She was often taken alone on visiting trips so that Grandma's friends could admire and compliment Grandma on her siring of such a stunning girl. It was Farida's prerogative as the eldest child too, to have first choice of the best clothes. She wore a white woollen circle skirt and an ivory cashmere sweater. She had chosen a brooch that Adia thought looked irresponsible, a white beret and a bolero jacket, all of which were items that any relatives or friends might think disrespectful.

Vera was influenced by Farida, out of jealousy because Vera's skin was much darker than the rest of the family's. She had chosen to wear a white pinafore with a shirt that had leg-o-mutton sleeves. Underneath the pinafore was a pair of thick white stockings and on her hands were snow-white gloves. It looked silly, and all at once it also looked regal, to be standing in solemnity, in her mother's mourning clothes.

"All we need now is snow," Adia muttered.

To the right of Little Alex was Marianne, who was fat and a diabetic, but also the baby girl of the family and immune to Grandma's wrath simply because she resembled the old woman and was ill. Beside Marianne was Adia's father, Alexander (what was his real name?), who stood still, with his arms crossed, intensely studying his shoes. Adia looked at them, at their shininess, their strength on such a day. She remembered how carefully he had shone them in the morning, how he had even caressed the jar of *koy-fung-yow*, white flower oil, before dipping in the cloth. Nobody spoke to him in case he snapped and gave a random beating. His fingers were white and he'd tucked his fists almost under his arms to avoid appearing aggressive. He looked cold. Her mother, Elizabeth, took her father's hand and held it for a moment before he purposefully moved away. He would not be comforted in front of his children. Her mother glanced around, in case anyone had seen. He scowled at her and moved closer to Marianne and Alex, who were aloof. Adia realised her mother stood alone at the benches.

Adia wasn't sure how long they were supposed to wait. It was four days and death was descending over Grandma's body until she gasped beneath its weight. It was

creeping up inside her skin and bones, so that she might lift off the bed with it and levitate above them. Adia knew that she must not move a muscle, that she was supposed to be still, focusing not on what her sisters were wearing, or what she was going to eat, or had just eaten. She was supposed to take this time to help Grandma pass over and pray for her sins, as her school had taught her, or pray for a peaceful journey, as her grandmother's religion, Buddhism, had taught her, or pray for Allah, her grandfather's religion, to welcome her, as Muslim doctrine taught. She was to recognise the world Grandma was leaving and stand by, watching her enter fearlessly into another place. They were all told very clearly that they were to be quiet and not complain. Amah would bring food every two hours and they would keep vigil until Grandma stopped breathing. All except Alex, who was allowed to come and go as he pleased.

Alex spoke as his father moved near him. "Father?"

"What is it?"

"I'm tired. I want to go home."

The older man's face softened gradually as he looked at the boy. Father whispered to Mother and Adia guessed he was considering, for a moment, the health and comfort of the son who took his image, his ambition to be a jewellery-maker, and his surname.

Mrs Lang immediately ushered Farida and Marianne toward her. As usual, her speech emulated the Queen's English, though she was kinder when out of the presence of Grandma than in it. "Marianne, take Alex's hand. We are going home to refresh ourselves and take tea. Farida, you will come too, as your father requires someone tall to carry his case. Vera, you will stay here with Adia. I do not want to see that either of you have moved a muscle until we get back. Do you understand?"

Adia's sisters crowded around Little Alex. Farida winked, which made Adia think she had whispered into Alex's ears to influence him. "He is too young for this to be happening," she thought. He gazed at Farida, adoring and terrified. He was only five. He would one day realise that although he was a male, he could not stand up to four older sisters who were, each one, more tactical and vicious than the other. He clasped Marianne's hand and walked out, with Adia's parents following and Farida smirking behind.

Finally, it was just Vera and Adia in the room, with nothing but the sound of Grandma puffing. Adia moved closer to the left side of the bed and placed her fingers on Grandma's pulse.

"Don't do that. Stop it," said Vera.

"It feels strange. You should try it."

"What are you doing? You'll get into trouble."

"It's the only time I'll ever get to feel a dying person's pulse." Adia was thinking of her book heroines, Florence Nightingale in particular. "What other chance could a person ever have to experience something like this?"

The pulse beat erratically. Adia wasn't sure if she'd placed her fingers correctly on Grandma's wrist, or if she was imagining it. She'd been taught so many times by Amah at home, and she'd seen the nurses do it at the hospital. She was almost certain she was correct.

Vera panicked and ran to the door, in case anyone should walk by and see the two girls disrespecting an Elder. "This is Grandma, you know. Stop it. You're not even supposed to touch her."

"Relax. She's virtually dead."

Vera sucked in. "This was not as we have been taught at home."

The pulse beat less frequently. It was like Amah's chopsticks on the wok at home, beating the vegetables and noodles into each other and slowing down to let the juice settle and the flavours integrate. Amah would let the chopsticks tap on the side of the wok out of habit. Adia could almost see Amah sighing and leaning back in the family's small kitchen, wiping her face with the back of her hand. She removed her fingers from Grandma's wrist and glared. "There, I've stopped now. Calm down."

The girls kept vigil, Adia every so often scratching the back of her knees where her stockings itched, and Vera leaning in almost rudely, but frightened, to look for any signs of death. They occasionally looked at each other and raised their eyebrows. On one occasion they burst into fits of laughter.

Almost twenty minutes went by. "She's so old," Vera finally said.

"You're such a dumbo."

Grandma heaved then. A soft, continuous breath left her mouth and she raised her back so that she was almost sitting up. Adia was frightened and then realised that the old lady might be recovering as if from a deep sleep. The old woman sat upright at last and opened her eyes. She looked about her calmly, searching for something.

"Alexander?" she asked and glanced, bewildered, at Adia.

"Grandma?" Vera whispered in terror.

The old woman was startled, as if waking from sleepwalking. She saw the needles protrude from her arms, the white shroud that lay folded on the end of the bed and the extra chairs in the room. She panicked and began thrashing about, shouting words in Cantonese and causing Vera to scuttle and cringe into the seats.

Adia placed both hands on Grandma's forearm. "He's not here, Grandma," she said, "He's not here."

"Where is he?" The old woman looked into the corners of the room.

"He went home."

Grandma lay back into the sheets, disappointed, and stared at the ceiling before closing her eyes and resuming her steady breathing. Adia placed her fingers on the woman's pulse. The beats were fainter now, and further apart. Now they sounded like father's heels at the cement playground in the Victoria Peak as he left his daughters to themselves.

After a long time, the beats stopped and Adia stared at her grandmother. The gasps also stopped and left a phantom echo in the room. "This is how a human dies," Adia thought.

Vera hadn't noticed it yet.

"Vera! Pay attention."

Vera looked at the woman lying quietly. Realisation spread over her face. "Oh how sad," she said and bent down to put her head on Grandma's hand.

"It's not sad," Adia said, "We're the last ones to see her die. There has to be something lucky in that."

"You're an idiot."

"I'm serious. She asked for Father, and he wasn't here."

"She died unhappy. Father is going to be really angry. You should have lied so she'd be happy."

"What could I do? Say he was in the next room?"

"I'm scared of what he'll do if he finds out," Vera whispered.

Adia took Grandma's hands and placed them across her chest. Joan of Arc would have looked like that. She looked pious and gentle.

"Then we won't tell him."

"What do you mean we won't tell him? He'll want to know what happened. He'll pray for forgiveness because he left before she died. There'll be ceremonies about this."

Adia walked deliberately around the bed and made her sister sit down on the pew. "This is why we won't tell him." Adia watched Vera wring her hands and twist her skirt. The girl's hair was as black as a crepe rose, each curl, painstakingly wound into rags at night by Amah. The curls sweated at the ends from the subtropical weather. At their school, St Joseph's, the nuns favoured Vera. They praised her for conforming. They spoke French to her, and without speaking it herself, she understood what they meant.

Adia couldn't see the problem. As long as there was integrity, what else mattered? She could see only that Grandma was dead. Father did not need to know what his own mother had said, what she had actually thought.

"He'll be sad. So we won't tell him, you understand?"

"How is she?" Mr Lang hurried into the room. He had washed, changed and run grease through his hair. Somehow he'd also re-shone his shoes and Adia saw the hurried wax swirls in them like small eyes. She'd felt those shoes, many times in her ribs, on her backside and on her cat Mordecai, who hid whenever he was near. Vera gave him a glance of helplessness. He realised and threw himself at his mother's side, his head on her stomach, sobbing silently in front of his uncomfortable children.

Mrs Lang marched to Adia and took her aside. "What happened?"

Adia looked at Vera, "She woke, and didn't recognise us."

Her mother placed her hands on Adia's shoulders, clenching her fingers. "She didn't recognise you?"

"No, she didn't see us."

"Did she say anything else?"

Father stopped sobbing and listened whilst the others crowded into the room.

"Yes, she said for me to tell you that she loved her favourite son, and that she would pass over now ... if nobody minded."

It was not what Grandma would have said. She wouldn't have used those words, and she definitely wouldn't have asked permission like that to do whatever she wanted. Mr Lang frowned at Adia and looked back at the face of his mother.

"Why?" he cried in a guttural wail.

Adia realised she had said something terribly wrong.

Mr Lang lifted his mother's hands, placed them against his cheeks and sobbed noisily into their palms. He looked at her expectantly, waiting for her to wake and say something, apologise, perhaps, for leaving him. Insult him even. He wanted her to explain this one last odd statement. He stared for a long time, and then wept. For a moment Adia thought he'd collapsed.

Mrs Lang ushered the children to the back of the room where they waited and fidgeted. The light on the bed made the whiteness look yellow.

A nurse hurried to the doorway, made a sign of respect and left. She would give the family the customary three hours if they wanted, until later, when she'd bring the orderlies to remove the body.

Adia felt awkward when she saw her father caress Grandma as carefully as she'd once seen him privately caress her mother. The abandonment and sorrow made her guilty. She glanced at Vera who stared determinedly at the floor.

"She didn't say anything else?" Mother asked under her breath.

"No."

"Did she really say that she loved her *favourite* son?"

Adia looked at her mother quickly. The desired answer was difficult to assess. Mother's expression was not favouring either word. Adia might end up telling a lie upon a lie, which could take any direction. She saw her mother's worry on her lips, which were pulled into a straight line. Her mother had beady eyes that watched her father often with such scrutiny that she would rub her eyes in order to concentrate. They watched the children too, the household, the servants and the Amah. There was a

mixture of fear in them, and uncertainty. Her mother was always going to live like this, and age like this.

"No," Adia confessed.

Mrs Lang clenched her fingers into a fist, the third knuckle slightly out from the rest and gave her daughter a hard stab in the arm.

Adia bleated for a second but didn't move.

Mrs Lang did the same to Vera. "You stupid, stupid girls," she hissed.

Vera whimpered, leaning against Farida on her other side, who pushed her back roughly.

Adia realised she had damaged her father with something extremely important, which would result in enormous punishment if found out. If they were in a village in China, she would be driven from home. She would be cast out and forced to wander away and work as hired help for the rest of her life.

Adia considered a story her father always told:

There was a wealthy girl and boy who lied to their father. The boy was sent to the rice fields where he harvested rice for the rest of his days and the girl was put into a relative's home as an Amah to her own cousins. Even though they protested, swore and fell to their knees, they couldn't change their fate.

"The moral of the story is that I am omnipotent," Mr Lang told his children, "You must do as I tell you because I gave you life and I can take it away."

Adia reflected on the truth she'd just told to cover up a lie she'd originally told. She felt another pain in her arm and looked hurtfully at her mother. It was true that Grandma never once told her son she loved him. Adia watched her father rock back and forth over the body on the bed.

Grandma's face was gaunt now and slightly green. It was odd how quickly the skin could lose pallor in such a short time. She looked at the hands, which were bony at the wrist. Each thin finger had a pale ring around it. The rings had been given to father and Alex. Adia saw a line of paler skin at the wrist, which was once where a large bracelet hung, when Grandma had strength to wear one. The bracelet now hung on a rope of gold, around Farida's neck. It was handed to her, when Grandma felt angry with the hospital.

"The television isn't right," she'd said. "Why are you putting me here in this dump, Alexander? Can't you do anything right? The food and the service is garbage."

She'd taken off her bracelet and handed it to Farida. "Take this, girl," she'd said, "I'm giving it to you with this necklace. The staff are bound to steal it if I don't."

Of course Grandma would never have said she loved her favourite son. To do so now was tantamount to insult. It was the most stupid lie Adia had ever told.

The family walked home in silence, amidst hawkers, street sweepers and large marble shop fronts. Various people nodded as they passed. A few men tipped their hats and several ladies put their gloved palms together in an offer of prayer. It was as if someone had run ahead and told everybody in Happy Valley that the greatest lady in Hong Kong had died.

Mrs Lang said nothing to her husband. Adia watched her mother's face carefully. "Favourite son. You stupid girl," her mother whispered.

Adia remembered the family history as if it was taught to her from one of her long-forgotten history books. Grandma never mentioned her "favourite son," and never once gave Mr Lang her complete attention. She only provided him with a dowry to marry and a servant. She had another son, her sister's own child, whom she called "favourite son." It was Chinese custom to treat the children of your relatives better than your own because they were not expected to be loyal, so this boy had everything. Mr Lang complained, teased and begged for praise from her. But she never gave him any loving words. She said that she missed her *favourite* son. Not her *only* son. Adia's father would not have been able to clarify the discrepancy. He would have taken offence instead and would undoubtedly hold the fact forever. It was such a silly mistake.

Grandma's last sentence was a slap in the face then. The situation was pathetic. It was such a big deal about nothing. If the Carmelite nuns at her school told Adia she was a slanty-eyed sloth, which they frequently did, she would be forced to forget it as they surely would by the time the next lesson came around.

The information dragged Mr Lang along the road and put a nervous jump into his steps, especially when the president of the Hong Kong Jockey Club shook his hand. He gathered Little Alex into his arms and carried him for the length of Green Lane. The child

clutched him at the neck and squeezed the soft skin, near his throat. It made Mr Lang pensive, and Adia watched him gaze at his son until they arrived at the large twin doors at the entrance of the apartment complex.

Mrs Lang took out a large set of keys and twisted them in the lock. Adia waited and stole looks at Vera. She scrunched her nose and whispered that they should stick to the story she'd first told mother. Vera understood and nodded. Somehow, the children all knew what was going on. Farida took Marianne's hand and chatted loudly about how honourable Grandma was. Mrs Lang sighed and pushed the doors open with her shoulder.

Adia let herself be swept across the square with the rest of her family. She looked into the windows of other people's apartments and noticed Mrs Chan fixing her husband Hugo (what was his real name?) his afternoon supper; a plate of dumplings and a cup of tea. Mrs Chan nodded to her, holding the large teapot, and instead of putting her hands together in prayer, she made a toast without realising. Adia suppressed the urge to laugh and held her hand over her mouth.

In another apartment, the silhouette of a young man appeared. He was thin and had bad posture. He came to the window and Adia saw his pale blue eyes, half-covered by a jet-black fringe. His face was small and childlike with a neat chin and smooth cheeks. His shoulders were skinny and his arms were white and long. She stopped for a moment and observed his hands, which clasped the sill like a landed bird. He saw her and smiled shyly.

The children followed carefully behind their parents into the living room where the Amah appeared crying from the kitchen with one of the cooks.

Mordecai, the cat, wove himself between everyone's ankles and the Amah beckoned Mr and Mrs Lang to sit down, shooing the cook into the kitchen to make chrysanthemum tea. The Amah had only seen two deaths in the family before, of which Granddad was the first, dying of tuberculosis after the war, and her own son, who threw himself from a balcony in winter after a fit of madness. She was a quiet lady, although she was especially strict with the apartment staff. She saw to it that the girls hurried to their bedroom with instructions to get into day clothes. Alex was ordered into the kitchen to eat and the cleaner was directed to fetch father's slippers.

Farida watched her parents sitting upright on the brown couches of the living room. She boldly handed her father a handkerchief, upon which was embroidered symbols of long life and the name “Lang”. “Don’t cry, Daddy,” she said, and hoisted herself next to him. She could see he was tired; he placed both hands evenly on his thighs to steady himself and he stared straight ahead.

Adia peered at him through the crack of the bedroom door. She pulled off her dress and threw it on the bed.

“Don’t spy like that,” Vera said from somewhere near the wardrobe.

“They can’t see me, stupid.”

“They will. It’s not polite to spy on them. If mummy sees you, you’ll get the crow’s peck again.”

“It’s Mother, not Mummy. Grow up, for heaven’s sakes. I’m only doing it for a minute. I want to see the cleaner make eyes at Father.”

“You needn’t bother spying. She does it a lot.” Vera was directly behind Adia, handing her a housecoat. She moved from side to side to get a better view as they watched the cleaner return with the slippers in one hand and father’s pipe in the other. They went quiet when they watched their father’s eyes get moist and lustful and their mother’s face stare at the pipe in the girl’s hand. It was a nice touch, one supposed, for a servant to anticipate such a desire.

“Do not employ handsome servants,” Adia whispered, remembering an old Chinese proverb.

The cleaner knelt on the floor to put Father’s slippers on him. “Get up, for heaven’s sakes,” Father commanded, and checked nervously on his wife.

Adia and Vera watched their mother pick the cat up from the floor and play with it. She pretended not to notice how Father and the cleaner were behaving. Marianne crept behind her sisters and watched silently, chewing on a chocolate.

The cleaner rose abruptly and dropped the slippers rudely at Father’s feet. Her tiny hands were clenched into fists.

“How quickly we forget ourselves,” Adia whispered.

The children watched his temper rise as the cleaner glared at him. Farida, who sat on his right, glared back until the cleaner let a few tears of frustration escape the corners of her eyes and quickly left.

"Are they an item? Or do you think she's our sister?" Adia said.

Vera was horrified at the thought. She ran to the bed that she and Adia shared and dived on top of the duvet. She grabbed her own plaits roughly and pulled them down, as if they were ears, "You filthy storyteller," she said.

Marianne sat on the edge of her own bed and reached for more chocolate. She was bewildered by her sisters and looked from one to the other. To Marianne, Adia was not as important as Farida, though she did rank higher than Vera. But then Vera, as Marianne was slowly beginning to realise in her short but astute life, was more cunning than the three of them.

Vera was thoroughly good at what she did. Marianne could follow someone like Vera, and remain talking to her parents. She could be proud of the Lang name and worship her father and everything he commanded. There were benefits to this worship like toys and extra things that Father would remember. There was leniency in all mishaps, which were only ever shouldered by the four girls (an error by one, is an error by all). There were certain freedoms of thought in expressing opinion and action. There was respect from the secretary, the cleaners and cooks, and all the household staff. There was more tolerance from Mother. There was individuality of sorts and smiles from visitors.

And then the problem with being like Vera was that Father's expectations moved as suddenly and as rapidly as the minutes of a conversation. Then he would become impatient and yell obscenities at the nearest person. He would fire at Vera, slap her perhaps, or pick on her. He'd become sick and pale and Vera would have to be the one to bring him gruel and spiced cabbage. And repent, somewhat, for misdeeds she'd never committed.

Marianne could form herself into the image of Adia, who was quiet yet very often insensitive and blunt. Adia was the overly tall of the group and had big feet. She towered above even Farida, who was, in comparison, petite and restrained. Adia was boyish, instigating father to make a comment about putting her into the Hong Kong military

police once she turned seventeen. Father and Mother were unafraid of Vera and Farida. They were even unafraid of Marianne herself and of Alex the Wonder Boy. But they somehow looked at Adia with intrigue.

"Adia is not a storyteller," Marianne said sternly to the crumpled figure of Vera on the bed.

Perhaps for today, she would go with whichever sister was the stronger.

"They're spying on you, Father," Marianne shouted suddenly.

Father stood up quickly and violently. The blood rose to his eyes whilst Vera and Adia moved like a small shoal of fish to the corner right bed and squashed themselves onto it. Mother was still playing with the cat. Father started shouting at Farida, who cringed into the couch, and then he directed a finger at Mother who calmly rose and marched into the kitchen. He strode to the girls' bedroom, where he threw open the door to find Vera, Adia and Marianne huddling. His smacks rained on them at random; on their legs, Adia's rump, Vera's nose, the crown of Marianne's head, on their arms and shoulders and backs. Since she was the eldest, Adia took the blows the hardest and shielded the others. For possibly the hundredth time, she realised that in retreating as far away from Father as possible, she'd boxed herself into the most vulnerable position in the apartment.

Finally, after ten minutes, Amah entered the girls' room, and moved deliberately in front of Father, scrunching her face when she heard the small squeaks of terror.

"Move!" Father shouted. He'd reached a momentum and the blows exhilarated him. Adrenalin showed in his face and he looked unable to stop.

Amah pushed him roughly, her long fingernails, despite thorough housework, digging into his shoulder. "Stop it, Alexander," she commanded.

Father slowed down sulkily. Though Amah was a servant, she was the best, most revered servant. One wouldn't even use the word, except that sometimes Adia called her for what she was. She was also an Elder and had nursed even Father when he was a child. She was an heirloom in the family and almost more important than Mother to him. "Leave them alone and take your anger out on something else," she said.

"Get out of my way or you'll get hurt." Father had no intention of hitting Amah. She'd tickled him once when he was a boy sleeping on a rattan chair. She'd bent over and

tickled the sole of his bare foot and he'd kicked out and hit her on the head. In astonishment, she'd thrashed him hard. He never forgot it, and wailed for days. "I'm serious."

"You stop it," Amah said, and slid across to the door with the children behind her.

"Don't protect them," Father said. "You can't protect them forever, old woman."

"Why not? I protected you."

"Thank you, Amah," Adia said and the girls scattered in all directions out of the room. Vera sped into the lounge room where she wedged herself between a great doll's house and the wall. Marianne zoomed into the kitchen, a safe female place, and Adia ran directly to the large oak door, pried it open with all the strength she could gather and mounted the stairs to the roof two by two.

By now the sky was covered with thin, dirty clouds. Adia breathed through her mouth and felt a sharp wind in her throat. Her dress wouldn't be enough, she considered, to keep her warm. She was immediately exhilarated.

She loved going to the roof by herself. She had paced every square piece of concrete paving and loved each of the cement flowerboxes, the corner of the area where her family and neighbours held barbecues into the night. There was a hothouse there too, where herbs and cumquats were grown and there were various clothes lines, which, when full, reminded her of the flapping robes of the Buddhist monks at the Man Fat temple, all of whom were gentle and smelled warm and safe and peaceful.

She could see the young man standing on the very edge of the roof, looking down onto people's balconies and into the windows of adjoining buildings. He was gazing at a pair of sugar-coloured dogs in someone's apartment, that barked madly when they saw him. They disappeared when their owner's faint voice told them to come away from the window. "Hello,"' she called out and made her way toward him, "I'm Adia."

He turned around and smiled, "Hello."

He wore a pair of beige trousers, a white shirt and a purl-knitted cricket vest. It made his skin look paler, instead of making it look darker, as it did in the photos of her father as a sportsman. She stood beside him, against the thick concrete fence and peered at the dogs. "Where do you play?" she asked casually, eyeing him off.

He looked down at other apartments. "At the park."

"At the park?" His eyes were paler than milk, but a most extraordinary blue. Adia imagined their children.

"The Greenhill Park."

"Where are your parents?"

"They died in Typhoon Alice."

"Oh. That's unfortunate." Adia picked the leaves from the potted plants that lined the fence and gazed at the clotheslines, which swayed softly.

Someone's Amah made her way quietly to one of the lines. She tugged a small bundle of linen with her and a bag of clips. She spied the two of them and nodded suspiciously, turning her back and picking the clothes out one by one.

Adia scraped a twig from the plant against the fence. She wondered if she leaned towards him far enough, would he suck her into another world that she couldn't return from. "Do you live by yourself?"

"No, I live with my aunt and uncle." He explained that he attended a Catholic school run by English teachers, whereas the Lang sisters attended St Paul's, run by Carmelites. He knew all about Adia. "My aunt and uncle are friends with your father. They're the Bells, Richard and May Bell."

Adia laughed. Her father called Richard, "Dick Bee Eleven." He had the silliest names for his friends. "So what's your name?"

"Barney."

"... Barney."

"After my father."

"Where are you from then Barney?"

"I'm from Canada. I'm going to Australia to visit relatives at the end of this week."

"Australia ... what a wonderful ..."

"And you?"

"My mother came from China, Shanghai, in a boat, wearing pants, to Hong Kong."

"Wearing pants?"

"Yes. She started a girls' school of decorum and lived through the war by housing soldiers. She met my father when playing baseball. He was interned by the Japanese at Stanley. She was a Red Cross worker and brought him food all through the war until the Japanese surrendered."

"Oh. That's lovely."

Barney watched the Amah finish hanging her washing and noticed the sun getting darker. "You're beautiful," he said to Adia quickly.

"Thank you," she said and waited.

"I see you all the time, walking to school and then to the Peak. I've wanted to say hello but I'm embarrassed in front of your family."

"They're all right," Adia said and leaned over so he could kiss her.

Barney didn't kiss her, but started walking away towards the door to the stairway down. "I wish you were coming with me, Adia," he said. "Australia is a wonderful place. You could come you know. And then perhaps you could come to Canada."

Adia balked at the outrageous suggestion. He was practically asking her to marry him.

But then her mind started planning. She imagined a life beyond her own and then wondered how she would cope in a new country by herself, without her sisters. How would her children cope in a new country, whose ancestors belonged firmly to another place? Perhaps she could stay in Hong Kong and send them to Australia instead?

Adia smiled, "Wait," she called, "Wait just a moment."

Act Four:
Island Sacrifice

In the window's dirty reflection my body looks suspended in water. Or perhaps I resemble a still life; alive, but hollow and pale. My collarbones meet at my throat and my neck is long; stretching to the shady escarpment of my chin. My shoulders glisten and my head feels dislocated.

Outside is a grass running track. There are pitiful regulars; stumbling and sweating like drunks in the rain. I trust them and feel part of them. They are pathetic and miserable. Often a pleasant group of meditating elders will exercise near the street on the far right section of the track. When they sweep the ground with their hands I feel my posture straighten.

My eyes close in half sleep and my chin lifts. I feel my head ache and I breathe in. But I keep watching the runners, by themselves or with their loping dogs behind them. I am their peripheral distraction when I wash the dishes. I see them glance at me before looking away quickly in apology. They must wonder who I am, why I watch them at night with steam in my hair, whether I am seeking attention or whether I am in fact, going mad. I have practised looking out onto the track whilst doing the dishes. I do not move when I take the plates, dip them, wipe, rinse and pile them against one another. I

am very good at it. No one hears my clatter. They leave me free to my longing, observing each one of them in their cocoons of privacy like a jealous voyeur.

Sometimes I continue watching after I have finished the dishes. I feel like I know each one intimately. I know an unfit person will eventually release his stomach, shuffle slightly and hunch his shoulders. My husband, for instance, cannot hold his stomach in when he fumbles for the bathroom in the middle of the night.

"People look different when they are too exhausted to care," I say aloud.

Pairs will cease talking, dogs no longer strain. It doesn't take long before each one surrenders. I admire them then. Their control drains into clumsiness and the good intention of fitness melts inexorably into tiredness and routine.

I sometimes open the window and imagine people breathing on me. Of course, the strength of the image depends on the amount of tablets I've taken. I imagine that the air that steals the moisture from my face is due to an exhalation from one of them. The strands of hair around my jaw move from the breeze. My sweat dries. My lips open and I blink very slowly.

My husband sometimes breaks the moment, creeping behind me, trying to be funny, my hard shoulder upon which he puts his chin. "Let me dry. You cooked," he says.

Nearly always his eyes follow mine out to the oval but he cannot comprehend what I see, "I can't understand why anyone would want to be exercising on a Tuesday night."

"They're not there for long."

"There are better things."

Tonight he lifts my dress, ignoring my moment of introspection. He pulls at his trousers and manoeuvres me. Sex is always very strange, and as he pushes me forward, I feel him press against me, into me and I pretend that the smell that envelops me is of wet grass. He has inevitable demands and I try and avoid him. I hate people breathing near my face.

"That was good," I say, as if I am answering him.

"Great," he says.

He warms my breastbone in the width of his palm and places the soft flat of his wrist on my chest. I turn around and we pause, staring at each other like children. After nineteen years of marriage he trusts that my nature is constant, that our decision to choose one another and begin nineteen years without knowing the meaning of single solitary existence has been a triumph of self-discovery. Perhaps. He makes me imagine the sound of piano notes, of someone practising for themselves. As he clutches me once again, with the stillness in me anchoring his movements, I feel like the axis of a pendulum, and I could say, I suppose, that it is a moment which perfectly describes the happiness one achieves through the happiness of others.

I decide to kiss him and watch his eyes squeeze shut. He seems too young to have alcohol on his breath. He's only forty-eight.

"Kiss me again," he says.

My dress is pulled taut and we go again, with freer movements and a sort of subtle hunger. I have always been surprised that he never feels awkward the way I do.

"I hear a car," I say.

"It's almost over."

My husband cannot speak and move, like the people in the park. Whilst he has the capacity to hurl himself into forgetfulness, he makes no sound and gives over to a fantasy or to something beautiful, which nobody else sees.

"David ..."

"One sec."

"Could you imagine ...?"

I can smell David's cologne, which he has worn since the night we met. He was studying to be a doctor and was lamenting a leg wound which rendered him inactive. I was very young and new to Australia and I comforted him by plying him with affection and drinks, both of which would become his demons. We married because I was instantly attracted to his beautiful, handsome face. He loved protecting me, I think.

When he finishes, David remorsefully pats me and disappears, leaving me conscious of nothing except my own two hands on the sink. I watch him make his way outside, down a set of concrete stairs and around underneath the house. I hear him crack

his refrigerator open, the fluorescent tube inside twitching and waking. He lingers over his selections of cool wine and beer each time, though he will open all the bottles eventually. I know my husband will drink and laugh until he is miserable.

I hear a neighbour's car door slamming outside and the sound of children's shoes on the cement. I have come to believe that with running shoes there is always an adult voice cautioning. I hear voices from the car even before they have parked and I think of my children, Leo and William. I picture them ensconced in their boarding schools, away from their crazy mother. Sent by their father who was raised to believe that distance builds strength. I wonder suddenly whether being away from my home has made me any stronger.

My husband is now singing. His voice is cracked and distant, like an old phonograph recording. He will do that tonight; compromise himself and later, more drunk than ever, make the only noise in the house. His mouth is contorted in different shapes. His eyes are dark from what he calls, "surrender" and "lethargy." He sometimes cries.

My dislocation stays with me as I run my fingers along the kitchen benches. My hands, I tell myself, are the very ones that have taken money from my parents in order to board a plane to come to Australia. These hands are always there to hold my head when my husband announces he has slept with somebody else. Their blue veins look disturbed, heated with activity and almost bursting. I hold them out and see their machinery of muscles. The window needs closing and the last wind of the day blows against me gently.

Something makes me look at the park. A figure lies there, crumpled on the smooth grass. It is a man clutching his stomach, his face is shiny with fever. "David!" I whisper, though I don't expect David to hear. The man searches for something to focus on. His eyes dart everywhere, to the ground, the trees, the light of my kitchen and me. I don't move as he writhes or when he becomes very still, wheezing. He keeps looking at me, as if he hopes that because I have seen him, I have thrown him a lifejacket.

Eventually his gasping slows and I watch him rise and stagger towards the trees where otherwise, the healthy would stretch and thank the heavens they were alive and could breathe. He reminds me of David. Maybe elements of my father too. He has the same frame, the same grimace. The same look of anger. The same drunken stagger. My

father was more deliberate and purposeful. I think of Hong Kong as I stare at him. I think of my father.

In the mid-darkness, the bumping wakes me. David sits facing the wall from the bed. He leans heavily on his shaking wrist and the smell of bile assaults the stillness.

"How long have you been up?" I ask.

"I need to find the right position."

He walks silently to the bathroom and sits in front of the cool toilet, purging the evening once again in vomited liquid.

Like all other nights, I listen carefully, in case he needs companionship. I'm very wary not to give him a backrub. He will not under any circumstances be touched when he is drunk. I pat the sheets down instead and think of the runner. Perhaps he stopped, having another attack, clutching and doubling whilst his guts wracked him. Could I have left my shoes off and hurried out onto the field, taking hold of his arms and helping him inside?

Everything is still. They say that even at freezing temperature objects continue to pulse. I bury myself into the blanket, the enclosure of scented linen, and let the night air permeate my skin. I study the chipped paint of the ceiling. There is peace in the room and I think of the runner again, in the sphere of my half-life. He seems tranquil. I am tranquil. My reactions are delayed; summoned after lateral sense removes self-consciousness. Too late for my runner, I reach for a bottle of tablets under the bed and whisper, "I'm sorry."

My husband returns from the bathroom. "Move please," he says.

I shift and leave him my warmth like a footprint. In irritation, he sleeps propped onto his elbow, and I make myself a fragment on the edge of the bed's other side.

In the early morning, I stumble to the kitchen, take the bottle of tablets from under the sink and swallow four of them with water. Then I walk through the house, imagining sweet music and soft velvet. I picture fingers on my body, which make my skin sizzle. My body becomes a bottle with its label removed and I discover that I am made of ripples and bubbles and bitter minerals. Then I see my runner in the window, hollow and old and beyond him, myself like an officer waiting for my husband to give me approval because I was always under the impression that life must be obeyed.

David's friends, who are therapists, say that in resolution to nightmares a patient must achieve closure by visualising the ending of their choice. Say if you have been attacked, or if you have been in an accident, or something worse, which become bad memories and then bad dreams. You can stop them by simply inventing an end for them and instructing your subconscious mind to avoid that feeling of dissatisfaction when you wake up after a nightmare. You can face your attacker, or become a hero or a redeemer or whatever. It is supposed to help you resolve the unresolved and change your memory.

"Hey. Wake up!" David's hand grips my shoulder.

I dreamt I was Pegasus, with two forelegs splitting my chest open and huge emerging white wings slicing my back. There was pain in this dream, before a feeling of freedom. I tried to achieve closure by creating an ending for myself. Making the freedom worth it, making the wings pure and light and beautiful. I was left with something disturbing and hostile.

"I saw a runner."

"Yes?"

"Outside. He was hurt and I didn't help him."

"But you're safe now. The runner can't get you."

"No. That's not it."

I am tired now. I have pulled him over and stared at his face, with the only light coming from the street. His hair is greasy from being sick and his lips have tiny lines in their corners. David is confident like our sons, who share the same sense of infallibility. He places his head on my chest and I can tell he's thinking.

"Are you comfortable?" he asks.

"Yes thank you."

"Has the runner gone?"

"Tonight I imagined him, but he was there when you went downstairs. He was an actual person on the field, hurt or something."

"Why didn't you call me? Was he hurt badly?"

"I can't say. You were drinking. He got up and walked away."

I know David is frowning. I stretch my legs waiting. He thinks before he replies. "I am coherent, you know."

"Yes. I didn't want to disturb you."

I know he is still frowning. He moves quickly from the bed towards the bathroom and I know he has forgotten everything except how we can't discuss things any more.

I sometimes like to think of Leo and William talking and calling to me. I can picture them being buoyed by their community of students or staying at a girl's house whose parents remind them of us. I miss them, but I am glad I agreed to send them away. I don't want them to experience what I experienced when I first came to Australia; shop owners throwing my change on the floor, nobody getting up for me when I was pregnant, people not wanting to get too close to me. I went to a British school in Hong Kong where my teachers spoke the Queen's English. Yet even now people still shout at me. They gesture with their hands, they open their eyes too wide. They act as if I can't hear them.

I was raised to feel superior to Australians. My father said that Australia was a poor cousin to the British. He said that Australians in Hong Kong should learn from England and in turn, we can learn Australian humour with our own Asian ingredient of self-deprecation added on top.

My sisters are still in Hong Kong, married to Englishmen. They make fun of the Australian way of life; the countrified manners. They talk about boat people and don't understand both sides of the argument. I don't speak to them, though perhaps I was too hasty.

I once explained that Australia is a young, fun-loving larrikin, full of Vegemite, kangaroos and people who laugh with radiance. I promoted the idea of a utopian Australian culture; the honesty and freedom from etiquette.

But now I am shocked when Australians call me "Chinky," "ABC," "Asian Slut" and "Chinadoll Barbie." It is torture where I can see my reflection in a mirror that is held to my face, but I am not allowed to look away.

I nearly died when I first realised that nobody saw me as British at all. In fact, the Australians I met hated "refinement" and all things English. Yet they saw I was linked to David and could speak Australian, which is English with an Australian accent. It was a double racism. Those memories shame me and they embarrass David. He was never

ashamed of me until he started listening to the reactions of others. I am frightened of being different in this country.

"Learn to blend with Australians," I keep telling my sons, "make this country proud because it is a beautiful country and we are lucky, lucky to be here and we should be grateful always."

Leo streaks into people's affection whilst William, like me, is confessional and private. David has given them both a sharp ability to answer back when necessary. He doesn't want them to go through what I experience. In the darkness, while my husband vomits again, I indulge in the image of my children bounding in like acrobats; their revelations monumental. I smile though I feel like my time with them has been eroded. They are on a horizon somewhere, intersected between memory and immortality, frozen in a hallway. Leo is on a temporary Paris study scholarship, and William is in a Melbourne boarding school. I am satisfied that I have made a good decision. I keep telling myself this.

I'm not sure they like it where they are. William complains of arguments that aren't his fault. He gets tired, he says, of looking different, of being different.
"Kids," David says to me, "they'll always see division."

Will says he'll wait for a next life, where he'll stand out not physically but because he has the confidence and gumption of any boy who has a cohesive home life and the courage to be alone. Meanwhile, he says, he walks through life as if in a perpetual apology. He used those words, "perpetual apology."

I hate it when he says that. I think sometimes he is ungrateful for what I have done for him, for both of them. I hate it because it is my own complaint.

Leo has friends who tell him to wait a generation until Asians become trendy. He says that Asians will experience a trend focus, like the Greeks and the Italians in the fifties, who were shunned and who now, have become more or less "accepted."

David and I laugh and tell him that there are far more arguments than this simple premise. "Be content," David tells him, "you know that because you are Eurasian that you are beautiful."

The morning air triggers an awkward dash into the bathroom where David has gnawed the hand towel and left it lumped underneath the sink. The withdrawal from the tablets hurts. I feel like my head will combust. I step straight into the shower and wash the previous night down the drain.

"I'm sorry," he says, through the steam.

Much later, I create a small omelette with bacon, cheese and chives next to thick bread and coffee, which David regards and cradles before eating.

"Aren't you having some?"

I shake my head.

"Well are you going to eat anything at all?"

Mornings after make him belligerent. I wash the dishes slowly and then complete my tasks; to get his ironed shirts, polished shoes, handkerchiefs and wallet. His morning is measured. I make myself as pleasant as possible. It is when David finally stands at the door, patting his pockets, his diary balanced on top of his briefcase that he smiles muddily and leaves.

Then I am left alone, happy, energised and mysterious. I go to the sink again and swallow a handful of tablets. I pretend I am a small girl with my sisters in our house in Hong Kong. I am peeking behind the door at my parents who are sitting on a beautiful lounge. They call me and pretend they don't know I'm hiding.

Once I took five tablets and David came back into the house just as they activated. "You look pathetic," he said and shrugged.

I remember ogling him as if looking through a deep tunnel. He saw the bottle on the sink and rolled his eyes, "You are killing yourself," he said, "and what's more is you're hurting me."

I swallow them without water and close my eyes until they work. Then I look out of the window and find nothing extraordinary. I am left to my own world of prominence and my own care. There are no mirrors in the house, except for the one in the bathroom that my husband uses to shave. I run into the bedroom and open the wardrobe where my dresses are hanging. I take them down, and put one over my head, pretending I am plump and juicy and ripe. I run into the kitchen, take out the wax paper and crush handfuls into

my bra so I'll look bigger, pieces grazing my skin, the same as I did on the first night I ever spent with David.

I put on a pair of sandals that I bought last year on a trip to Bali with the children. The sounds of them echo in the hallway. Their buckles clink and the straps slap against my ankles. I skip from one end of the hall to the other until my mouth is dry and I am panting with what seems like the entire upper half of my body.

In the kitchen I drink a jug of water and take two more tablets, burning gloriously in heaven. I hold my head in both hands, looking out onto the field, expecting simple footprints in the dew. But then suddenly I see the runner looking straight at me as if he'd been there for a long time. He shuts his eyes and I'm not sure whether he sees me or not. But I am staring intensely at the shape of him, trying to memorise what he looks like so that I can recall it later. My breath is caught and I study him for too long, he half smiles and opens his eyes, walking out of view.

I stumble, forced by curiosity toward the back door. What if he lures me into the bushes and kills me? What if he is a robber? A rapist? I open the door and run after him, my sandals crunching on the buffalo grass. "Stop!" I call, as he continues walking. "Wait. Wait please!"

I feel like I have suddenly been given a strong purpose. Redemption is twenty metres away, though I'm not quite sure what sort I am hoping to achieve. For a moment, I forget my appearance and it exhilarates me. The wax paper draws blood on my chest but I remove it, hold it crumpled in my hand. and start galloping toward this man. I round the trees to find that he has stopped. Before him, like a great flock of synchronised birds, are the Elders absorbed in suspending time. He stares, fascinated but casual. His sleeves are rolled and his elbows are pale. He uncrosses his arms and as I approach, I face the people and watch them with him.

"Excuse me."

His shirt collar is stiffened to reveal his chest. His skin there is soft. "Yes?" he asks, impatiently.

His height diminishes when I walk closer. His fringe covers his eyes, which reminds me of the brown bracken in the fireplace downstairs. I feel ugly in front of him, in my dress, clutching blood-spotted fists of paper. "I wanted to ask you."

"Mmm?"

"Last night you fell."

"Yes ..."

"You ... I ... my kitchen is just there. I wanted to see how you were."

"I'm fine. Thank you for asking."

"Were you very hurt?"

He pauses, "I was."

"I saw you." My legs feel bare and my arms uncovered. I am ashamed to chase this man, like an unmarried teenager. I am amazed I have abandoned the protective world of my kitchen to behave like this. I think of what my husband would say.

What would David say? I watch the Elders stir the air. Their muscles are well-timed; they smile at one another. "Be bold," David tells me, "and recognise your own mediocrity." His message is clouded, but well meant. I instantly remember him helping to deliver my children and giving them names I chose, William for his father and Leo for his brother.

My runner is looking squarely at blankness. I am thinking of making more time for my sons when he interrupts my thoughts.

"Saw me where?"

"Pardon?"

"Where. Saw me where?"

"Here. There, on the ground. You were sort of suffering. I came out to see but you'd already left."

"I had cramp, but thank you," he says and walks away.

I stay for a moment, disappointed. The Elders spread out, dotting the green with their curved bodies. My runner walks to the edge of the field and turns at the last moment, smiling at me, winking. I'm glad he is all right, I think. I return to the house and step into the bedroom, put my sandals in the box, throw away the paper and fold my dress. I have added another memory to it.

I feel discomfited moving through the rooms, finding fault in particles of dust on the furniture. The housedress I slip over my head is like an iron maiden and I burst into tears, thinking how I will have nowhere to go if David leaves me. I wonder why I am

paranoid that he will. I wonder if he really is cruel and cold, or if it is my imagination. I ask myself if our relationship has eroded because I feel upset from being excluded by him more so than being betrayed; being bereft of talking to someone, or knowing that I am no longer his first choice. I feel like I am someone's paper doll with no history and nothing but a face, which is drained of colour. My shoes pinch where they haven't before and I snatch my bag and run out of the front door.

The fronts of all the houses smile as I step onto the street. They are membranes stretched over fractures that now seem invalid. I make my way toward a row of merry shops and decide to get potatoes, red onions, radishes, carrots, pumpkin and cheese. I choose fish, eggs, meat, milk and sugar, for David's coffee. The salesman has a blank expression and speaks to me sharply.

"Hi. Is this for a restaurant? Do you peel?"

"Yes, though my husband doesn't like them peeled."

"Good. You should never peel. You eat the skin as well as the meat."

"But I thought they were dirty like that?"

"No. The vitamins are in the skin. You're depriving your body."

I'm depriving my body. I clutch the vegetables while he takes them one by one and places them into a green plastic bag. It rustles and I move impatiently. There is a calendar behind his register, showing a picture of Charon sailing over a sunny Lethe, sailing in June, when it should be cold. Charon has olivine skin. His boat is ruby brown. "Where did you get that?" I point at it to pass the time.

"You are depriving your body," someone says behind me. The salesman has finished and I take the bags before paying.

"Here," the runner hands his card over. He smiles small, etherising me and looks towards the street. His eyes laugh, showing prominent lines and his lips are thin.

"Never trust a man with thin lips," my mother's servant once warned.

"Never trust anyone with thin lips," my father corrected. "They are illiterate."

"I'm Adia."

"Cafard … It's my last name," he says and takes the receipt from the salesman. We step from the shop, waiting for words as one waits for the mail. "Wow. You changed since."

"I was hot."

"Fair enough. Great neighbourhood hey."

"Please let me pay."

"Don't you think about it."

"I really should."

"Just say thank you."

I pause. "Okay. Thank you for paying."

"Fine. Here, give me some of those."

We walk the length of a row of shops, past the videos, delicatessen and people waiting inside to buy spices, haircuts, clothes, and flora. A small child dashes past sweetly humming.

Feelings churn inside me and I feel numb. I feel the morning's pills moving inside my brain and I shake my head to move them around. If Cafard saw the projections of my imagination, I think, he would witness reproduced images of his lips, his chest, hips, hands and eyes. Projected on the wall would be a modern hotel, the only hotel I have ever been in. He would gaze out the window, overlooking a green oval, his skin warming the room.

We sit in a café and sugary caffeine sticks on my tongue. The runner talks about himself to make me laugh and I kick the bags under the chair. His name is Peter Cafard. Cafard, he says, means melancholy. He is an exporter of furniture and he lives in East Sydney.

"I run in the Inner West parks to get away from myself," he says, "to understand the decisions I make. You know, to make sense of the lessons I teach myself." He sips his coffee like a European. "I like change, don't you?"

"Yes." The coffee begins its journey from my throat and I drink it down in enormous gulps. My skin feels spongy, brittle and I look at my matchwood wrists. My pills have worn off and I don't feel so daring. I make the sudden decision to end this. "Speaking of change, I must get home. Thank you for an interesting talk and thank you again for these." The chair moves roughly.

Peter rises and throws a note and coin on the table. Is it wrong wishing for greatness? As we leave, I stare at the gold coin blinking. I feel small and cramped.

"No. Thank *you*," Peter reassures. Outside, he looks at the sky. "I would like to do this again. Next week … do you?"

I want to be good, to be a good woman. My head starts to ache. My mother said that I am an "e" type personality. Trying to be Everything to Everyone, erring, preferring to compromise my own comfort in the forage for approval. "Yes ... What time?"

"I guess the same time if you like."

We don't shake hands. He walks away once I am at the edge of the oval. I stand there watching him, thinking of the vegetables in my bag, with my eyes half closed. My head is going to explode and I focus on the sleeping birds in the trees and the restful Elders breathing with the same mouth.

My father said that what's done can never be undone. He was the sort of man who made hurried convictions. David said he was like a poor man's Confucius. When David and I buried him last year in a Hong Kong cemetery, my mother beneath him, I opened his will and let the solicitor remind us of how tyrannical he was. I couldn't ever deny that my childhood was turbulent. My father was unsparing and reigning. He always had a threatening air about him. He never hesitated to use coercion to persuade my mother, the servants and the whole family to do whatever he wanted them to do. He hated inconsistency, and yet was absolute in his lack of direction. And he had such a hang-up about yardsticks, about benchmarks and other annoying, unreachable memories that were in fact legends that nobody could live up to.

I was nine or ten. My father's lover, a cleaning lady, was crying over something I had said and I was shocked because I realised she also had feelings despite everything that she was. Her wavering voice sobbed into the slippers she brought him to wear. He permitted her no liberties, my father. I suppose that when I told her unequivocally that she would never be my mother, and caused her to sob and sob, I was also freeing her from his rule.

"What's done can never be undone," he told her.

I place the duster back in its bridle and polish the feet of the lounge-room furniture with Silvo and paper, all the time indulging in the anarchist adventure I've just had at the shops, the beautiful Haberfield shops that I have never given more than slim regard to before. I think on it and decide that maybe I do love living here.

I set the table not for my husband, but for the runner, who has propelled me into a separate public reality. The clock on the stove makes me hurry I chop the vegetables and place them carefully in a tin.

David opens the door, heading straight to the bedroom to remove his clothes, wash his face and absorb his personal life before sitting at the table to absorb mine. He takes a bottle of gin from a paper bag and pours it neatly into a tumbler with tired hands. "Hard day," he sighs, after a long draught," You?"

"Oh ... you?"

"I had a patient rushed from a ballet performance with metapheseal exostosis of the upper left tibia. Bone there, that wasn't supposed to be there, a growth on her leg that calcified. She did a *développé* and her tendon snapped."

"Was she all right?"

"She screamed but finished the act. They're incredible, these dancers. Her leg swelled to the size of a balloon, she ran offstage and collapsed in pain. Poor thing scratched the stitches out in recovery. She's a brave, brave girl."

The plate of vegetables is finished. I refill.

Since I have devoted attention to my runner, I begin payment firstly by comparing my husband and myself. If I am able to harbour illicit thoughts about someone, I am thinking, could he? David falls silent, "Infallible!" he mutters and swaps his meal for gin.

"Stop drinking that."

"I will," he replies. He rises and sweeps the glass and bottle up with one hand and retreats to the lounge.

I turn my feet out like a dancer, tucking my pelvis under and slightly arching my back to feel my shoulders and neck lengthen. The hot water steams up my face. I let the water fill the basin and dip my hands in, feeling the soft water. Outside it begins to sprinkle rain and the runners segment off towards their homes, clearing the oval for another night of repair.

Once again, I am smiling, because I feel the runner affecting me like strong sun. His words, the sentiment of him, like harmonies, make sense to me. I imagine myself walking out of my body, pursuing happiness like a trawler. Perhaps he is nothing, sent for me to do what can't be undone. I am splitting open and sand rushes out of me into the crevices of the floor.

The last runners walk their way to the street, resigning to the rain that by now is coming down in pearly drops. I run to the door and push my way out into emptiness. I let the drops fall into my mouth, onto my chest and my throat. My hands are outstretched and my emotions feel superior to my history. I run toward the trees, past them to the east side where the tanbark that surrounds the climbing-frame is sodden. Thrashing about, I am smiling, unsound and exuberant in the cool rain. I don't need tablets for this.

Water streams down my breasts, wraps around my thighs. My ears are filled, my eyes can't see and if I shouted, I know I wouldn't be heard. So, in the spirit of all of this, I suck in an enormous breath and laugh, like a child clapping fearlessly at the circus. I think to myself, I want to learn new languages, read more books, walk on different paths and be someone else to feel this joy always. Out here in this empty field, my voice is heard the loudest and nothing matters to me but my own interpretation and volume of rejoicing.

I wait within this womb for a gentle ten minutes. The rain has soaked into me only after I give myself totally, running down the seams of my ears and pooling into the small hollows of my shoulders. I ponder Sydney weather, its subtropical moodiness, its ability to deliver pieces of sun and splash people's faces with freckles, or throb with sheets of water, swelling the Hawkesbury, the Nepean, rolling and turning over to engulf entire towns. The oval is drenched, dirty rain covers my toes and I rub my eyes to see my way back to the kitchen door.

My husband waits holding his glass as I tug my skirt away from my skin. His mouth is thin, unproductive and discouraging.

"That was childish."

"Childlike." I put my wet arms around his neck, leaving trails on his shirt. "It felt good."

"I have to wear this tomorrow."

My arms drop to my sides and we face each other like actors told to stay within the camera frame. My hair has matted and clings to my cheeks. "You have others."

My husband walks to the sink, places his glass on it and brushes back past me to the bedroom. I sniff; my wet clothes making me shiver, and I stare jealously at the empty bottle in the bin. The glass will stay on the basin, perhaps for re-using. I will lie awake tonight, wondering what made him start drinking. Is it work? Is it me? Does he feel trapped like I do?

I peel my clothes off and leave them on a kitchen chair. I dry myself with a towel from the linen cupboard and walk naked to the room, keeping to the edge of the bed, listening. It is particularly bad tonight. From measurement and experience, his voice thickens, his heaviness and candid sarcasm is worse when it rains. He behaves badly and teases me. "I treat you well," he says from the bathroom. The pipes create ambience, "not because I should, or that others are treated well, but because I want to." I can tell his forehead is hot and his teeth are furry.

David struggles from his shirt, which he throws on the floor. His shoes that I polished are kicked under the bed. His belt will hang on the door handle and his handkerchief will be tucked under the pillow in its nightly vigil for an emergency.

I wonder when he'll apologise.

David's body shakes the bed when he can't sleep. I have often woken suddenly. His breathing is inaudible, yet the presence of him is irregular. I wonder what would happen if I got up and left.

I remember the day Leo was conceived. David and I covered each other in kisses like bullets, and caught a taxi to Glebe where we spent the afternoon buying books, drinking coffee and touching each other. The markets across the road prompted a thousand conversations. I bought something for myself, I can't remember. David bought old medical books from the fifties, a brutal wooden figurine, an Indian leather wallet and home-grown honey and then we went home to bed without dinner and made love all night.

My mind projects memories at random. David features in most of them; naming Leo, bringing home a set of encyclopaedias, buying a stereo, talking to his dying mother.

"Move," he says, through my thoughts.

I am again staring at the ceiling. When did this happen? When was I fastened to a rock? I would never have thought my utopia would transform. "I miss Leontine," I whisper. "I miss William."

He sits up carefully and in stages like an unfolding staircase. "Ring him then," he sighs. The mention tries his patience, his mouth hurts and he has a raw nose from blowing it so often, acid coursing through his nostrils and down the back of his throat.

"Will you?"

"For god's sakes. You."

Without arguing further, I get up and walk to the phone. My sons are dignified. I would die for either of them.

"William?"

"Do you know what time it is?"

"It's mummy."

"I know that."

From the kitchen where the phone hangs on the wall next to the oven, I hear David step out of bed, pad to the sink before I answer, and pick up the glass. "I'm good, darling. How's school?"

David walks to the kitchen door, opens it and makes his way to the wine cellar.

"Good."

I hold the receiver, gesturing for my husband to stop, "David, it's William. Do you want to say something?" David continues walking as if he doesn't hear me, doesn't see me standing there naked.

"How is school then?"

"Good. I just said it was good. Mum, are you okay? Have you been into dad's drink?"

Behind William's voice I hear laughter.

"Who is that? Have I disturbed you? Is that a girl?"

William laughs, "No one special."

"I'll get your father. He wants to say something to you." I wonder in panic if my son will stay on the line long enough. "Will you hold?"

"Okay."

The phone balances on the holder, the swaying cord beating in time to my footsteps running toward the door. My son, my sweet son, waits for a word with his father. My feet slap the concrete steps and I enter my husband's dark cellar.

It is empty. Bewildered, I recall him picking up the glass, walking past me, supposedly to come here and refill. Where else could he go? I switch on the light.
"David?" I speak into the stillness, "David?"

I hear nothing except damp drips, and the gutter choking with rainwater. "David?"

I have been here before, receiving no response except a man staggering toward me. His absence is not terrifying. I switch the light off and run upstairs into the kitchen and to William. The phone is dead.

Disappointed, I pad back to bed, listening to the rhythm of the clock and the buzz of the kitchen light outside. Loneliness forces introspection, inward fantasy, maybe madness and it makes me calm. I reach over to the side where my tablets are. I find the bottle gone and can't remember whether I threw them out or whether I moved them. I lie on the bed and stare at the ceiling, think about where my pills are, wondering where my husband is.

I tuck my arms close within the concaves of my waist. My sleep patterns come uneasily. Although David is frequently absent, without his breathing I feel unable to regulate my own. I drift dominated by thick dreams of blankets and the opiate smell of goose-down.

When I hear or read about death in sleep, it has always been with puzzlement, without realising that the functions of the body lie dormant and that the mind's messages rest sedated. Transduction, the mind's report transmission from reception to relevance, occurs in a sort of harmony with restfulness. I see my husband enter the room and lightly grasp the handle of the wardrobe, his chin in silhouette. His movements are fast, he is throwing clothes, shoes, bathroom objects into a suitcase.

"I'm tired of it," he says, though I'm not sure if he said "it" or "you." "I'm tired of fighting something I can't see."

My body is subject to inertia. Inhibited and deactivated. I watch him numbly make his sweeping movements, fasten the suitcase and bend to kiss me. He is a shadow

puppet, an earth spirit, and a dream on sleep's periphery. "Sweet thing ..." he whispers, but doesn't finish his sentence.

I reply "Good night."

I open my eyes very slowly. There is fog outside and pale mist yawns in the chilly air outside the bedroom window. My body is stretched, I have thrown the covers off during the night and the cold apex of my hip forces me to cling to the warm sheets. I reach my hand out to touch the empty space beside me, hoping that David has only newly risen. It is cold. The clock radio switches on with a click and a flood of women's laughter encouraging listeners to call, fax, e-mail and respond. I slide out onto the cold carpet, straighten the bed, fluff the pillows and draw the curtains to see nothing but fog. There are droplets so that it looks like a colourless stained glass window. I clear my throat and wonder why my son couldn't have more patience and wait for his father.

I touch the glass with my fingertips, its cool hard surface pressing the pads of pink. I sigh. My mother said that the morning was the fate of nights before, that mist was the guilty tears of sorry clouds jealous and blinded from the sun. I know it without looking around, without flinching. I remember everything about yesterday.

My husband has left me.

I walk to the bathroom. His toothbrush is gone. I take mine and brush mechanically. The shower seems larger and the space wider. Even the kitchen is bigger. The phone off the hook seems nothing out of the ordinary. I place it back in its cradle like a robot.

I make porridge, pouring the dry oats into a small cup, adding water and stirring. We have fought before. David called me from a conference in Brisbane. He was staying at a resort hotel, paid for by a drug company that made laxatives, fibre optic cable, plastics, depressants and anti-depressants. His voice was resigned, tired from falseness. "They're bribing me," he sighed. "If I write a script for twenty-five people, I get a calendar. If I write fifty, I get a barbecue. Seventy-five, a gym membership, a hundred, a department-store gift voucher. It was their one true shot at humanity and they fucked us."

"Hmmm."

"If I write two hundred, I get a golf set. Three hundred, a Vespa motor scooter. Five hundred, a car."

"What then?"

"Then I'm creating better leisure for myself."

"And a nation of addicts."

"But they need help anyway. I wouldn't be prescribing to people who don't need uppers; I would be prescribing the same upper to those who needed it. You see, Adia? It's not about prevention, it's about avoidance."

Our conversation stopped for a moment. David was once a "cupbearer" to the medical profession, he was now what I called the "butler" and, as he explained to me, the twin snakes on his briefcase adopted mythical definition. "Lex talionis," was what I called it, a viper in his bosom.

"David, that's unethical."

"Ethics?" he asked me. "Ethics is for universities and psychologists. The medical profession stops at morality." He paused and said quietly, "You are so naïve."

It wasn't my role to exhaust him further, make him feel unsupported. Yet I protested and he eventually called me his "pistol", his appendix, implying that I was out of order, lacking in loyalty. "Loyalty to me," he insisted, "Don't go *natural* on me. None of your *alternative denial*."

We argued on the phone for an hour before he hung up on me. I tried hard to explain the immorality of marketing and sales. He slammed the phone down and I didn't hear from him for two days, in which I worried, cried, felt wounded and hurt. The conference ended and he flew back to Sydney. His coldness confused me, as it always confused me, like trying to discern whether the noise of rustling trees was, in fact, rain.

I wash the bowl and place it on the rack to drip dry. Then picking up the tea towel, I decide to dry it myself and put it away, so that if he returns, the kitchen, which is perhaps, my domain, is spotless.

I remember wanting to apologise for disagreeing, for not taking the matter into context and leaving open the opportunity of small accomplishments to my husband. We didn't speak of it again and six months later he brought home a golf set. Two hundred people were prescribed anti-depressants; perhaps they needed it, perhaps not. Two hundred people couldn't walk outside into the fresh air and find peace in a smile, a flower or a good meal. I was silently aghast. It wasn't a bad thing to be depressed. My mother

always maintained that one must experience lows to experience the highs, wasn't that true? Nobody takes downers because they feel they are too happy. My husband told two hundred people that they were not supposed to be as depressed as they were. We never discussed it again.

I worry about his love for me. I could once bask in his company all day, think of his happy mood, attributed to something I have done. But in defiance, I don't behave in accordance. "Alternative avoidance," he calls it. My memory of those initial days has been stained and ground, washed and doubted.

I find the bottle of tablets under the sink and in shame, take the rest of them with water. I'm not frightened that there are fifty now, swimming in the depths of my stomach. I sit down fingers entwined, forehead tipped toward the door in hope that something will happen. Around me there is pointlessness. There is an emotional loss that rises from my womb, soars up from under my rib cage and pulls my brow down, stings the cartilage in my nose, my ears, and my blood. And I am sad, completely sad. "Where are you?" I speak aloud.

An hour goes past and I am brought down, out of my consciousness like a dog on forepaws in heavy hopes. I wait and wait, and make occasional bitter comments. The door will open and hopefully he will stumble in with the suitcase half open. His drunken mouth will be wiped on my apron and he will ask forgiveness. Solitude and introspection force my imagination into finding fault with myself. After all, he would be home now if I was someone different.

I steer a block of meat from the freezer and place it onto a tray on the sink to thaw. I'll stab holes in it later and push rosemary into it. But I will firstly sit at the kitchen table with my thoughts having erased all sense of time, waiting for the drugs to work.

Act Five:
Not That Fucking Old Thing Again:
On Being Mistaken as Chinese

YOU WERE BORN AND RAISED ON THE MORNINGTON PENINSULA and after year twelve, moved to St Kilda, on Fitzgerald Street behind the Route 66 building. It was off Chapel Street, which was renowned as one of the swankiest shopping strips in Victoria. All the clothes; the tee shirts and plastic belts were "Made In China." The customers talked about it. "In China, everything is cheap," they said, though none of them had actually been there. "It's because of the sweatshops." You were embarrassed and felt a sense of frustration which you were unable to articulate; a small, personal sensitivity that rendered you dormant and incapable; the feeling of being trapped by words and labels like a layer of cheap clothing. Fucking with your head.

"There are sweatshops in Italy," you remember saying out aloud, in the shower that night. You were not yet capable of initiating change and your own ambivalence did not yet make you schizophrenic. "There are sweatshops in Paris, in Berlin and in New York. And as for the materials, well yes, materials are cheap in abundance. Do people think that because something is 'Made in England' or the US that it has been passed using stricter quality controls? Could it have in fact, been made by Chinese people working in sweatshops *there* or in sweatshops full of Europeans?" You let the feeling pass, not because you were passive, but because you hadn't been to China either and the fight was

not yours, though it wounded as if it was supposed to be. The anger stayed inside you like a chip, a victim, a wound. You thought you may have taken it too personally. You argued for imperialism and globalisation instead of answering back. So you let it go without cultivating an opinion and bought heaps of stuff that was *Made in China*.

Your flat was modest, with orange, stained carpet and boiled wool-covered furniture. Living with you was Antonio, an Italian make-up artist who loved it when you threw him onto the couch and fucked his brains out. One day he made you look like a white man's post-war pin-up girl. He applied make-up to you; false eyelashes and bright blue eye shadow right up to your brow bone. He clucked and fussed, which could have been flattering, but was self-conscious and false. With Vaseline smeared on his camera lens, he smiled when the photos came back blurry and smutty.

"Sweetheart, you could be a young boy from Thailand," he said, "or a Filipino girl, or someone from Nigeria or Brazil."

"Shut up," you said.

"My mail-order fuck," he said, and you both laughed.

You drove to Sydney together and found a tiny flat in Centennial Park in the East. You went on the dole and spent all your money on drugs, dance parties, a Broadway Gym membership and five-dollar lunch specials. In the apartment above lived two girls who were Antonio's friends. One was Spanish and the other was Puerto Rican. The Spanish one preferred to be called Roxy, after the lead singer of the band Roxette. She resembled her too, though Roxy was dirtier. She never washed anything unless she had to wear it the next day. For you, this was hilarious. "You filthy Spaniard," you told her once, "I've never seen anyone so messy."

"You dirty Asian," she replied, "My bathroom could be your restaurant."

A few weeks afterward, Antonio started hanging out with Roxy and disappearing. Sylvie gave three weeks' notice and moved to Paddington and you took a job in a clothing store on Oxford Street where you met Nicole.

Nicole had blonde hair, a hard, petite body and a tiny clover of a mouth. She had assumed you were new to Sydney, new to the country even. When she said it, a feeling rose inside

you like an uncurling, sick ghost or like oil in water or an emerging drowned cadaver. It was as if you were walking around in your own house without anybody recognising you or understanding that you were flesh and blood.

"Just letting you know that I have a broader Australian accent than you," you said, and then felt pissed off because you'd vowed never to get into a pathetic justification of being Australian.

She said she had a *thing* about geishas to you several times and explained that geishas were highly paid artists who were also skilled professionals.

"They are there to conquer," she said, "They have an expression of mockery sometimes, as if they're mocking the men they are there to serve." Her eyes were blue-grey and you remember thinking how sharp she was, how sharp everything on her was and how you wanted to slam her with a homogenous western fucking stereotype as much as she was slamming an Asian one on you. She was including you in the nicest way she knew how, you realised, though the tokenism, the separatist assumptions were maddening.

"Don't instruct me," you wanted to tell her, "and I won't instruct you."

Nicole wanted to be a folk singer and invited you to the launch of her single at Café Iguana in Kellett Street, King's Cross. The room was packed and there was a link-up video of her singing the song over and over again. Her energy, confidence and gumption transfixed everyone. You watched as her golden hair filled the screen one minute and the blank stare of her dressed as a geisha filled it the next. "How exotic," people said. "Blondes might never leave your head," you said quietly to yourself. "You will never be like them and you will never be accepted in an equal way. Chinese/unacceptable/one dimension of attractiveness. Blondes/have more fun/more open doors/the unattainable." You knew that Nicole could be the geisha, but the geisha could never be Nicole. There were Chinese couples there, dancing. The idea of their presence made a noise that filled your head as much as the loop from the screen. You hated all of them and they made you throw up in a back alleyway.

That night, you stood in the corner of Nicole's flat in Elizabeth Bay, terrified, because you'd never slept with a woman. She took off her clothes and switched off the light. You lay naked beside her, arms stiff, your head very still. Some time later, she climbed on top of you and gave you tiny kisses all the way down. You remember it being sexy and endless, and something of a revelation that only two shapes of the same size in the darkness and unfamiliarity could bring. She took your hands and placed them on her, all over her. Here it was; the drowning, you thought. She insisted you put your fingers inside her and instructed you on what to do. You moved, suspended above her and kissed her all the way down. The hair there was soft. She tasted sticky, and then further in, like apples.

She said "I love you," and it worried you.

In the morning, you had breakfast at a café on Victoria Street Darlinghurst.

"So. What do you want me to do?" she said.

"Pardon?"

"You're my owner now," she said and rose to go to the bathroom.

On another evening you talked about your parents. She made dinner while you looked through her CD collection, her Nightmare game and her set of Greek myth tarot cards.

"Do you believe in the tarot?" she said, as you sat on her pullout bed eating off plates on your laps.

"Not really," you said, "my mother picked runes sometimes."

"There's one called The Devil, with the Devil in front of a man and a woman. I think that's you. The card, I mean."

You said you weren't really sure what she meant, though you were certain she was speaking for you, not to you.

"The man and the woman represent dual identity. The devil, Hades, is into indulgence, or self-gratification. When you get the card in a spread, it means that you need to do something to explore this side of yourself."

She put both your meals aside and grabbed your hands. "Stand up," she said.

You stood and she led you part way to her wall, which was full of hidden doors. She pulled one of the cupboards open and revealed a closet full of dark instruments and objects. In it was a paddle with studs on it, whips, chains, an air-conditioning hose, a wooden clotheshorse and cuffs. There was Glad Wrap, rope, and what you would later learn to be a harness, a D-ring, a sling and a collar. Your mouth fell open and you backed away toward the kitchen bench. She laughed.

"It's not so bad," she said, "It's a way you can explore the dark side of yourself. Who knows but you might be good at it. It's pushing your boundaries a bit."

She pulled you towards her and kissed you gently. She told you that the only person who "owned" her before was a Chinese boy called Todd Andrews who was long gone and living in Adelaide.

"I don't want to *own* you," you said. She was mistaking you for somebody else.

"I'm not asking you to conquer me, for God's sakes. We'll start small."

You remember trying to focus on the moment, thinking that you should appreciate the experience for what it was even though someone, somewhere, was missing the point. One day you might find it meaningful, even if it was a fleeting moment where you felt a sense of belonging to a culture. You were eighteen and tried to memorise everything she said to you, everything she told you to do. Starting small meant smacking her, or pushing her roughly against the wall, or lifting her up during sex, or squeezing your hands around her neck before she came. She begged you to wear all of her leather things and kissed it more than she kissed your skin. She gave you talcum powder to whiten your face with and red and brown wigs. You remember thinking you should lay the outfit on the bed and leave her alone with it. She became obsessed with the geisha theme and had pictures of them all over the walls. You told her and she laughed and told you she loved you just the way you are.

She started watching the news and quoted everything that happened to "Asians"; the US argument with South Korea, the gas deal with China, some Asian criminal from Hong Kong who had recruits at Randwick Boys' High School. Every so often she'd say, "Did you hear about those rapists in Cabramatta? The police said it was a group of men of

Asian appearance. Anyone you know?" or otherwise she'd say, "You're my little China girl, aren't you?" and pat you affectionately like one does to a dog.

Not to get it wrong of course. It would be a grave mistake to think that you wanted desperately to be white instead of 'yellow'. In fact, you considered yourself whiter than "white": you didn't make postulations, you were comfortable, you were unthreatened. You felt it, though you were not allowed to live the "white" life. And everyone seemed to accuse you of being yellow, or even a *banana*, though even that was not a life you had ever lived. It was about a controlled exchange, about recognising and acknowledging the balance of power in the relationship and in your respective identities. It was about exploring and exploding boundaries and walking on the edge where you were at ease and where Nicole became sullen and defensive. But who could get any of this across?

It became finally about having the opportunity to spank the fuck out of her because she wanted it and because every other patronising and dominating western asshole who thought they knew what life you had led deserved it.

You noticed that the media never quoted "Caucasian appearance" when it came to groups of rapists. There were rioters at Schoolies week in Queensland and the papers said, "Catholic school headmasters are sorry and will disallow boys responsible to graduate. Boys say they will be sorry for the rest of their lives." Had there been an Asian appearance involved, the headlines would have said: "Muslim Headmaster promises to charge boys responsible. Boys refuse to answer questions. Chief Commissioner discusses gang violence. Prime Minister expresses regret at lack of parental intervention. Immigration Minister proposes revised border protection policy. Other news: French Prime Minister bans headwear in schools."

Your relationship went downhill after that. Nicole started getting cynical and sarcastic, making comments if you looked at someone or telling you to stay still whilst she went somewhere else to talk to her friends. You thought this was because you flourished in the subculture and began creating a history you could relate to. It made her uncomfortable. Irritated. Defensive and antagonistic. She suddenly announced that geishas were prostitutes and used her pictures as folded aeroplanes, which she threw across Elizabeth Bay. You were forced to be creative in the evenings, instead of passionately imagining

great acts. The Master and Slave began to blur and once the roles had been created, they could not easily be undone and reconditioned. You started smoking cigars, which she hated.

The last time you saw Nicole, you tied her, naked, wrists and ankles to a bottomless chair and forced a lit cigar into her mouth. Then, knowing she couldn't spit it out without dropping raw embers into her lap, you placed $200 on the bench from your earnings at the clothing store, gathered your stuff and went downstairs to the car.

"You cunning bitch," she growled after you.

A week after your nineteenth birthday, a customer at the clothing store where you worked handed you her number and glanced at the changing rooms.

"Don't have time, but later," you told her. Later on, you called the woman, who said she lived in Coogee, right near the beach. You got into your car that evening and drove over.

She was wealthy and lived in a block of four art deco units up the road from the Coogee Bay Hotel. You could hear the sound of backpackers making their groggy way onto the sand and the locals lining the pavements to get their fish and chips. The night air was steaming and it was as if nakedness wouldn't be enough to cool down. The unit itself was amazing. You could tell she was into "exotic" art. She had dark wooden floorboards, teakwood furniture and deco-styled tiles everywhere.

"This is really gothic," you said and then felt stupid.

She led you to her room and you noticed her blank expression, like a mannequin with a tall nose and glossy, white skin.

"How much for how long?" she said.

You didn't really know what to think of this. But then, the money was right in front of you. There was nothing to lose except an argument she was unaware of.

"A hundred per hour," you said, but only because the phrase "hundred kilometres per hour," was already in your head, which was the highway speed limit in NSW.

"Here's three," she said and handed you the notes.

You put them in your back pocket and thought of Nicole's folded aeroplanes and a vision of Chinese women in sweatshops. You walked over to her, pushed her backward and told her to close her eyes. She had a nice body, which was lean and tapered. Her shoulders were narrow and there was a half-moon hollow in her pelvis.

There were toys too, next to the bed in a drawer that she'd opened before sitting down. You peered in and saw the usual devices. Nicole called these parts of "vanilla sex". She had a strap-on that you used, thinking, "Why not? Why the hell not?" And you got into a steady pulse for what seemed like forty-five minutes. She started moaning and running her hands up and down your back. You remember pretending to be a vampire and actually bit her enough to leave a deep mark. She gulped and clutched at you. Her fingernails dug in enough for you to yelp. To pass the time, you looked around the room, at her mirror that had doors over it on the wall, at her wide-screen TV on a Chinese dresser, at various huge, grotesque masks that she'd obviously collected from travel overseas. Some of them were Kabuki masks, some from Bali, some from India and others from a Chinese opera. You wondered whether she could tell the difference or whether the difference, in fact, mattered to her. You remember wondering if it might be bad luck that she bought so many, or that she didn't know what they were for. Imagine if they were gods of fury, or if two masks were rivalling gods. Imagine if late at night, they came alive and throttled her in her sleep and the police came the next morning and said some terrible gang had killed her; some terrible gang violence that was gripping Sydney.

You gave her three hours before looking at the clock on the Chinese dresser. When you finally stood up, you were drenched in her. It would have been easier to tie her to the posts and spank her than all the positions you got into.

"This is it," you said and put your clothes back on. She said you shouldn't mark the time like that.

"You're a saucy bugger," she said, "You're like this Swedish boy I had in Thailand."

The image pissed you off and made you want to smash her masks all over her room. You heard an audible click inside you and as she smiled and held her hand out like a princess, you imagined rewinding the scene and standing outside your own body,

watching a strong person with jet-black hair and smooth olive skin tell a tall, brunette to go and fuck herself.

"Can I see you next week?" she said.

"No."

The distance remained and everything was internalised, introspective. I was used to being judged and homogenised and constructed. I did the drug thing because it was the way everybody around me had a good time. I found a group of girls who danced near the speakers at Gilligan's on Oxford Street. I paid for ten lines of cocaine and eight lines of cheap speed cut with washing powder. All I could remember was a DJ smiling at me and telling me to keep dancing. Then I went to the toilets with a boy at Sirens on Enmore Street in Newtown and shot cocaine into my vein before passing out and vowing never to do it again. I snorted Special K at the Exchange Hotel, where I listened to the best DJs. I did ecstasy at the Hordern, the laser breaking off its hinges and going straight into my eye. I did Supermen, Calvin Kleins, Red Books, Blue Doves. I snorted amyl nitrate and inhaled crack, I smoked joints at Milk Bar, and freebased at Arq. I shot heroin into my foot and put ecstasy up my behind. I hashed it with some people from a North Sydney advertising company in Club 77 on William Street and pashed a rock star who was purported to be straight, at Alice's off Bourke. I did some heavy trips at the new Sirens in Newtown and laughed my head off, jumping on the coloured squares on the dance floor. I got drunk heaps of nights at any classic cocktail bar that popped up and then closed down. Each time I'd drive home in my unregistered, uninsured car, rolling home toward any landmark I could recognize, like the Sydney Centrepoint Tower, beckoning me like the Eiffel or Liberty, or Cleopatra's needle.

It was not escapism, don't get it wrong. Or teenage angst. I was not trying to erase an unbalanced expectation and begin from the beginning. It was a tool of schizophrenia to make me equal to but not blending in with my Anglo white community. I hated to keep proving how "white" I was, or how "Asian" or labelled. None of it was powerful or poignant or complex. It was fuelled by anger and frustration. It was about exploring and exploiting my surroundings.

It was merely about having fun and messing around.

When her drug days were at their peak, Cherry started a job as a small-time electrician and went to a house owned by the Hathaways in Wolseley Road, Double Bay. She knocked on the door and a guy with dark hair opened up and leaned against the doorframe.

"Hi," she said, "I'm here to look at the electrical fault," and indicated the toolbox in her hands.

"Hi. I'm Andrew."

He had freaky blue eyes, which seemed to emit spiky rays of intense light. Cherry was extremely high at the time and everything was exaggerated and made beautiful.

He led her down to the basement where she hoisted herself onto a ladder and opened up the metal box. She peered in for a few moments and noticed some of the wires had worn away and needed changing. She remembers him standing right below, at the bottom of the ladder. It made her nervous.

"You right, matey?" she said in her broadest Australian accent.

"You want an orange juice?"

"Okay."

He walked off through a door leading to the house. She remembers looking around the room and seeing well-organised shelves of tools, a car underneath a tarpaulin and boxes of papers. He took so long that she'd already changed the wires and waited for ages at the bottom of the ladder. Finally Cherry decided to walk through the same door he'd left and made her way into the house.

It was all sandstone with thick white curtains and white furniture. There were paintings of calm people and sculptures in bronze. She remembers thinking those paintings were probably real, rather than copies. She walked past a piano where she thought the kitchen was and saw a photo of someone that she figured was his grandfather, posing in a uniform. She didn't want to lean too close. People didn't trust tradespeople

and she didn't want Andrew to catch her scrutinising his belongings. She walked to the kitchen and found that he wasn't in there. It was stark and clean and pure.

"I'm sorry," he said, as he walked into the room, "I had to take a phone call upstairs."

He got her the orange juice, which she didn't feel like having, and they sat outside in white chairs overlooking his pool.

"So where are you from?" he said.

"Melbourne, Victoria," she said and put the orange juice down.

"No, I mean originally," he said.

"Oh," she said, "from Hong Kong," though it was her parents who were from Hong Kong, and she'd only been there twice when she was little.

"Me too, from Singapore," he said, though this confused her. She guessed he meant as a merchant.

"You speak English really well," he said.

"That's because I'm Australian," she said and thanked God she had taken so many drugs.

"Australian Born Chinese," he said.

He looked straight into Cherry's eyes and she remembers pausing, thinking that it wasn't like Oxford Street, or Kings Cross where you could just get up and fuck someone if you thought they wanted it.

"I'm not Chinese, you idiot," she wanted to say. "I've never been to China, I don't give a shit about China, though I respect it more than the country I'm supposed to belong to. I don't even know anything about that mystical, oriental, mythical, *Shangri-La* place." She stared at him in stupor and he waited for her answer. "I was never meant to be allowed in this country," she thought, and recalled the pictures of men in uniform in the lounge room. "And I am atrophied in the middle, the inherited and the disinherited. I am being disowned whilst I distance myself. It has all been a very big mistake."

She walked groggily over to where he sat, put her hands out suddenly and unbuttoned his shirt. He pushed her back and stared, incredulous, for a long time before becoming fascinated, as if watching a dangerous, moving animal. He stood up and wrapped his arms around her.

"Okay, so play it like that then," he said.

He led Cherry over to a tree beside the pool and undressed her in the shade. He gazed at her body a long time. She was tired of feeling self-conscious. "You girls are so small," he said, "It's amazing how small you are. I know you're small inside too."

He searched over her. She had a birthmark on her back, which was like a daub of paint. He traced it with his finger. She never thought about it until then, that from when she was born she had this mark on her skin. "Painted lady," he said and licked it.

She remembered staring at a couple of identical ants making their way over the blades of grass. He bit her all over and she imagined them biting her, getting inside her and under her skin. He slid his hands underneath the small of her back as she faced him, took all of her clothes off and then all of his. "Faster," she said.

"Slower," he said. He sucked on her collarbone and said he'd teach her refinement. He trailed her arms with his fingers and kissed her for the next half an hour, starting off with small ones and building up to a deep thrashing and grinding so that she thought she was going to die without anybody knowing where she was.

Finally he lay on top of her and she felt the afternoon heat throw sunlight onto them, but it was too late to move, so she let him lie there. His dark hair shaded her and flopped into her face. He sat up abruptly. "Pose for me," he said.

"What?" she said.

He took her hair and put it to the front, so that it covered her chest. He beckoned her to kneel on the ground where she was, tilt her head to one side and shoot him a look out of a porn magazine. He said she looked like a model from an Asian calendar. "You are so goddamned sexy," he said.

He grabbed Cherry and pushed her onto her back. As he pumped himself in and out of her, she could hear him grunting. Then after a while, after feeling absolutely nothing, she

sat up suddenly, knelt between his legs and lifted them up over her shoulders. Then she leaned forward to face him and with her whole weight forcing his knees towards his shoulders, pushed her fingers inside him. He freaked and looked at her in revulsion, but she kept in and out until he gave in. She could tell he'd never done anything like that before. She remembered shoving her fingers in almost to her hands and him going red and straining. She felt like her life depended on it and she wondered when the next fucker would make an assumption and get irritated by her passivity or accuse her of reverse racism or stereotype her or place her into a box called "known and studied species" and trap her.

He finally drifted off and let his head loll back, panting and gasping. He came all over himself, which was funny, since she'd never touched him upfront, not once. It suited her fine though and she relaxed in her drugged haze, tired in the hot Australian sun, lying on her back, looking sideways at the trail of clothes that led to the orange juice.

After that, she decided to start seeing him, meeting his friends who said she looked like Joan Chen from *Twin Peaks*. His father loved Cherry the most. He'd give her a secret smile and call her Khe Sanh after the Cold Chisel song and put his hands on her shoulders to feel if she had a bra strap. She remembers wondering what he would do if she tied him to the bed and put Glad Wrap around his face, sticking the exhaust hose into his mouth so that he could only just breathe. Cherry smiled back and he winked at her.

When she was twenty-one, Cherry got a tattoo of a dragon. She did it because she felt like she'd travelled the world, even though she'd never left Australia. She felt like she'd lived unfinished lives, surrounded by no land and no culture, but the dragon tattoo was to take back a symbol that everyone else called a cliché. She was cauterised. She lived in Bronte and saw families sharing barbecues near the beach. She saw groups of old men and women getting major sun damage outside the women's toilets. She saw dogs and children and sandwiches and people over in Tamarama, oiling up and lounging all over each other. She saw the vast headland winding its way across her vision in fiery blue and red colours in the sky. She listened to her flatmate talking about the thousands of Aborigines who died in this place and the fibre-optic cables that Telecom buried beneath

the ground's surface. She breathed in the salty air and went to work in a North Sydney advertising agency. On weekends, she'd get dressed in the skimpiest dress she could find, or the harshest leather outfit and run around Oxford Street, panting until her lungs hurt. Then once in a while she'd walk past a mirror, see her reflection and gasp as if she'd only just remembered what she looked like. "Not that fucking old thing again," she'd say out loud.

Act Six:
The Oriental Express

TOBY LUNCH, WANNA-BE ACTOR, WANNA-BE SOMEONE FAMOUS, stood with his legs clamped together on the middle rung of the ladder. He had a pleasurable thought about falling off and cracking his skull open, just to see what everyone would do. It went through his mind in slow motion. He added sound effects like women screaming, men looking baffled and children hiding their eyes. His imagination automatically reproduced it in black and white. He shifted position by relaxing his back, leaning over a bit and letting his arms hang loose, like the figurehead on a ship's prow.

Yes. He was a large ship wading through murky waters, about to crash on deep, sharp rocks, about to steer itself into legend and men's conversations. He leaned further forward and closed his eyes.

All the people below, all the heads that bobbed past divided around him to avoid the ladder. He opened his eyes and watched them for a while and soon they all looked the same, with their white collars and their dark suits. The fantasy faded. He looked down at his own clothing, which involved a yellow Aussie Lifesavers parka his mother got as a Purchase With Purchase at a perfume counter from her friend Mrs Hempline, and an apron over a pair of stonewashed Jeans West jeans. The sign above him, which his father

had hung carefully over-twenty-years-ago: *"The Oriental Express"* creaked like the door of a haunted house, and Toby climbed the ladder to the top and applied WD40 to its hinges.

"That'll shut that bastard up," he said.

"Toby, get down before you hurt yourself," Eng Chor said. Eng waited patiently at the bottom of the ladder and noticed his son losing focus. He was worried for Toby, because the child was growing up and letting go of his manners. The child was now sixteen and was spending more and more time in the bathroom, coming home at unacceptable times and making friends with Undesirables. Toby was Number One Son. He was a gift. He would one day pass on the family name and Eng was considerably proud of the fact that Toby retained all of the fine, delicate features of the family …

1. fine, wispy hair
2. thin nose
3. coffee-coloured skin
4. non-slitty eyes
5. significant height
6. large hands

… right back to Bi Mi Shen (whom Toby called "the ole Dowager") who was the first woman to wear pants and do her hair up like a tool box.

"I'm fine, for Chrissakes Dad," Toby said.

He climbed down and Eng watched him stride off, but then stop, come back and sullenly help fold the ladder.

"How many times do I have to tell you? You must never leave things lying around," Eng said slowly. He pointed his finger out as his father did to him and his father to him. It was a challenge at every turn to educate and instil values into his son. The boy would one day be too old and it would be Too Late To Show Him The Ways.

And who knew The Ways? Teaching his son to follow the rudimentary values of hygiene, personal pride, competition without dishonour and obedience to elders was getting to be a task and a half. It was only yesterday when Eng was burping the boy and

reading him Enid Blyton, whom the child used to call Gnid because of the way the author wrote her signature.

Eng glared at the boy. "Please for Allah's sakes, fix your hair and tuck in your shirt. Why does this happen to me?"

Toby came home one day last year, face stained with crying because Simon McPhee, whose skin was perfect had teased him for the acne on his face. Yes, he did have bad skin, Eng admitted. In fact, the doctor had said he had toxic lesions and should be on a course of antibiotics with a referral to the dermatologist.

"This is common in Asian skin," the doctor said, "and he should go on Vibramycin or Retin-A. The boy should go on Roaccutane specifically, but not if he suffers from depression, and not if he's irresponsibly, sexually active."

Eng had exploded with laughter in the consulting room. "No!" he said proudly, "My son is not having sex with anyone."

He couldn't imagine the boy without trousers and a girl nearby. He couldn't imagine that Toby would be taking sex with any of the Undesirables he went out with. And when would he have time? He only ever went to concerts, which Eng or one of the other parents like his good friend David Hemphill drove them to.

The doctor looked at Toby and Toby, after a short while, nodded.

"Yes," Toby had said, to stunned silence. "Yes, well, I am."

Eng asked many questions in the Cortina on the drive home to Springvale. "My Allah do the others do this? Does that Addo, Stevo, whatso make you do this from peer press? Why didn't you say something? Do you know what to do with a woman? Is she going to take your money and use you like all loose white women? Is this where your head is? Is this your new headset?" Eng was going to start the migrant story (I came here with not two cents to rub together and worked my back to the bone and met your mother and worked her back to the bone and started a family business which I had hoped one day to leave you once I died not without first making our life comfortable in this lucky country because I didn't want you to ever go through what I had to go through with nobody to talk to and nobody to help me and my family far away and THIS IS THE THANKS I GET ...) but decided instead to pursue the details, "Well? Is it?"

Toby was quiet and Eng watched him flick on the radio and twist his fringe through his fingers. Eng noticed his son had bleached it so badly, that a few strands were orange. He thought of his grandmother, Bi Mi Shen's beautiful black knot upon which was sprinkled sesame oil. "I hope it's not that girl with the purple hair," he said, comparing the pale white girl to Bi Mi Shen's cheeks, which were dabbed with beetroot during the war to make her more attractive.

He imagined a photo of Bi in a white shirt and a pair of trousers that had cuffs at their hems, retouched with ink and muted with soft lighting. He did not mention that one of his friends did some research and found that she was actually Jewish, from one of the Russian Pogroms that migrated to Shanghai at the beginning of the century. Toby was technically Jewish, but nobody was allowed to talk about that now.

"Especially, please Allah Almighty, especially not the pale-skinned, blue-eyed hussy with too many eyelashes."

All of the white girls looked the same. They were hard to tell apart. This was why they all changed their hair colour. Asian people did not have the same problems. Why couldn't Toby be a normal Chinese boy who studied like a madman and had glasses and therefore no chance with superficial women? Why was he hell bent on making "buddies" and staring at magazines, staring at himself, obsessing over appearances?

"Calm down Dad," Toby had said.

But Eng felt ashamed and bewildered. He was not angry because his son had sown his seed and not told him, he was angry because it was a *white* girl who had skin so thin it was almost like boiled duck. Eng just knew it was a white girl, and white girls meant trouble. There would be more surprises where this came from.

Eng watched his son carry the ladder back into the restaurant and jam it inside the cupboard, which was once for an ironing board when they first lived on the premises.

A young man of about twenty-five entered the front door and started set-up. He was strong and took the chairs down from the tabletops with a strength and agility that Eng couldn't now manage himself. The man was a friend of a friend of Eng's wife Nancy. He had a thick brown mullet and a broad, flat nose. He wore a sleeveless shirt and Eng could see the peep of a dragon tattoo protruding from his shoulder.

"Hello Tintin," Eng called and waved.

The man didn't hear him and instead made his way to the far end of the restaurant where he started on the chairs.

Eng shrugged and turned his attention back to his son. The boy was growing up too quickly. In one year he was now tall and thin and had knobbly elbows. He tied ropes and a pole to full soft drink crates and used them as weights. He was fixated on building his muscles and looking good. He complained about not having to shave, a blessing to anyone else. He defaced all of his precious schoolbooks that Eng and Nancy worked so hard to purchase. He came home smelling of smoke and alcohol, neither of which Eng himself ever kept in the house. He threw things that Eng and Nancy had given him on the floor, which Eng promptly retrieved. He listened to bands who swore, one of whom was accused of inciting violence. He went to the beach and did nothing but surf or rode up and down the street in cars driven by older boys.

Eng sighed once more. The day he learnt his son was sexually active, was now a fond memory. Toby was now seeing a girl called Moaning, who would, in fact, moan now that Eng was forced to let her spend time with Toby in his room. It was better than Toby being out on the street or Allah forbid, in the girl's own house with her irresponsible parents. "How is Moaning?" he asked.

"Mona, Dad," Toby said, and walked off toward the tables.

The Oriental Express was listed in 1993 as one of Melbourne's best Cheap Eats. The newspaper article, prominently displayed, had yellowed and worn down so that over time, the words read "Cheap Fats." Nevertheless, Eng was very proud. His business had been steady since 1971 and such esteem and recognition was because of years of hard work and service, not to mention countless arguments with relatives whose wages were not always the same every week.

Right now he watched his son drift in and out between the tables, muttering the odd word to Tintin, folding the pink serviettes into flowers and placing them next to the chopsticks and on top of the nylon tablecloths. From his son's ear flowed a thin mobile phone wire to his pocket. Toby was talking animatedly and Eng had the fleeting image of one of his own ancestors, whose son went mad and started talking to himself. He started worrying about Toby once more and decided to venture into the kitchen to make sure the

cooks were preparing everything on time. There they were: Tintin's brother Tan up to his elbows in bean shoots and rice noodles, Mrs Hemphill's neighbour, Eugene and another fierce-looking new youngster called Cecil Kawasaki. Suddenly Eng noticed that all of them had the dragon tattoo and he was amazed at the state society had been reduced to where people couldn't even cultivate an individual sign of rebellion.

"Cecil, you're very thin to have such an enormous tattoo. It has very nice colours, but perhaps your mother wondered why you wasted such a lot of skin."

The young man stopped and gazed at Eng. The others sniggered and he began to laugh, shaking the wok he was holding so that the bok choy flipped like green goldfish. Eng noticed he had no teeth.

Once upon a time, Eng remembered, Toby brought a strange girl who called herself "Alley" to the restaurant and Nancy put chicken feet with black bean sauce in front of her. The girl immediately covered her face with her hand and started crying and Eng did not know why she was so rude. Nancy was completely insulted. If it were he, Eng would have gratefully taken the nearest piece and swallowed it, even as a sign of respect to the parents. That was what it was, a test of respect to the parents. But there she was, this Irish girl with fluffy red plaits, a shameful name, and freaky, green eyes running to the toilets and then out of the door, never to be seen again.

Mrs Lunch was making dim sum with her hands and chatting to one of the non-English-speaking dish-washers, Eugene, who was telling her all about his dreams of working on a Kibbutz in Israel. Her bare arms were caked with flour and some got stuck in her hair; she had wearily wiped her brow more than once. Eng watched her create a square from a drop of dough and flatten it with the heel of her palm. She then scooped up a mixture of minced ginger, pork, pork fat, soya and vinegar sauces and dolloped a tiny ball into the square. Cupping her hand, she folded the square over the ball and twisted the end deftly, placing it onto a bamboo tray and dusting it with more flour. She would make a thousand of those a day, Eng thought. What a woman, my wife.

"What babe?" Toby was talking on the phone, peering around, wondering whether he'd accidentally missed anyone's serviette. Those things were thin on the ground when it came to his father's restaurant. Many a time was there a filthy look at a patron who just

helped themselves to a serviette from another table. According to his father, a missing serviette was to ruin the whole evening. People were extravagant about them. Every extra serviette was money. But everything looked okay. He stared at the ceiling, which was a piece of art. It was made to resemble a ballroom, with mirrors surrounded by gold filigree and bronze ornaments. Even the walls, which had a roll of red velvet down the sides, had picture rails with a decent-looking lick of sandy paint to them.

Unfortunately, the tables themselves were made of chipboard and the chairs so old that they were almost trendy retro and there were amber cigarette trays and a red patterned carpet which if one was on acid, which Toby had often been, one might get paranoid looking at.

Toby wanted to get out of there quickly. There was a movie on at Moorabbin drive-in, a rerun of *Star Wars* and it was sufficiently gooey enough to make Mona want to cry and cuddle, but interesting enough to keep Toby from yawning. He loved science fiction. He loved Fantasy. He loved the books; *Ender's Game*, *Speaker for the Dead* and the *Mistress of the Empire* series. He loved *The Dark Crystal*, *The Neverending Story* and *Legend*. Most of these stories were about genocide and colonialism. They were in fact, a metaphor of colonialism, of real life, and Toby loved the old plot of indigenous peoples being civilised before someone realised that there was a poignant and necessarily equitable exchange between cultures. Everyone was an anthropologist to Toby. Sometimes he could see science fiction in everything.

Toby and Mona had had a very exciting relationship thus far. Mona was a cracker and like Toby, she harboured a great desire to be an actor and had joined an extras agency to find her work. She got all the mute parts that called for a suburban barmaid and Toby got asked to play activist mathematicians or herbal doctors. All of those only ever required stilted Chinese accents which Toby felt embarrassed to do. Mona wouldn't take shit from nobody and she had a really nice way of draping her legs over Toby's at any given moment in time. She was a beauty therapist and was the one who bleached his fringe, though she did it with benzyl peroxide from his pimple cream because her salon wouldn't let her take home a bleaching kit. She had a cute face and a round, pink tongue and referred to him as her "Ass-iarn" while she called herself his "Whitey cunt," which he always found amusing. Mona was also very spiritual and painted stark images of

Hindus in dance positions on her bedroom wall and bought a large soap stone laughing Buddha for her lounge room on top of her television. She loved champagne and had a severe image problem with her weight. She understood where Toby was coming from and loved him and hated herself at the same time and she was so riddled with issues that Toby fell in love with her within two weeks of them going out with each other. Mona bought him a thousand-dollar gold ring, from when she won money at the pokies which he had to hide from his father in case Eng thought something serious was going to happen. For all her blondness and her tallness and her insecurities, he believed she had more problems than he did with identity.

"Can you pick up some rice rolls for me?"

"Huh?"

"Rice rolls. No carrots. And no onions if you want kissing."

"They're Vietnamese gorge. We're a Chinese restaurant remember, Chinoiserie."

"Oh yeah," she said, "I forgot. Get them from the take-away."

Toby hung up. He loved the almost symbiotic communication he had with Mona. Sometimes they didn't even have to speak at all. Yes, everything looked fine. He took his apron off, threw it behind the register, thought twice, then went and picked it up and hung it on one of the pegs. Outside, he waited until it was certain that his father couldn't see him from the kitchen window. Then he went next door to Yang's and told them to hurry up with his order.

"That boy's going to break my ball," Eng said. He saw the puff of his son's jacket come out of Yang's, a white take-away bag in his hand. Just through the bag, he could see a plastic container full of rice rolls. Did the boy not realise they spat in those things?

There was a protection racket going on in Springvale. Nobody said the word "triad" but it was clear the Chinese version of the mafia was controlling half the suburb and the Vietnamese or Koreans or even the Australian police force controlled the other half. It was a turf war. Eng wasn't too worried about it. He had cousins who were married to the mob, and an aunt, twice removed, called Cherry who was in jail. He paid his weekly five hundred dollars in a little Lycee red packet to the Gods outside the back door and had had no trouble since.

Eng saw his son cross the road, take a packet of cigarettes out from his pants pocket, remove one, light it as if he'd done it his whole life and inhale a long, loving draught even before he got to the other side. "He's going to break my ball," Eng said.

Nancy looked up from the dumplings and Eng knew she hadn't understood anything he'd said. She'd recently been to the hairdresser in Chinatown and re-permed her hair into a mass of tight curls, "Make it like black people," she always told them, so the flaps beside her ears were hard to hear through.

"What now?" she said.

"Hrrmph," he replied and stared at his son's skinny bum.

"At least it's not drugs."

A courier came to the door and Eng turned from his thoughts back to business.. The courier held a large sack full of Italian bread and said, "Mr Egg Chor Lung?"

"Eng Chor Lunch," Nancy corrected.

"Call me Frank," Eng said. He became excited. These bread rolls were the very same offered by the Hotel Intercontinental. They came from Sydney and his patrons went crazy over them. They were good for congee, for between courses and looked great on the lazy susans in the middle of the tables. Everyone was impressed with the new item on the menu and he could charge a good five dollars for them.

Eng paid the man in flour-covered Australian bank notes from a jar on the counter before waving him away. He had to look carefully at the numbers in the corners of them first. Eng had burst in one morning telling Nancy about how the currency had changed, how Australia was the first country in the world to have waterproof, polymer bank notes and the most colourful bank notes in the history of bank notes. "Look, Nancy!" he said, dipping them in the dirty dishwater. He forgot that she was colour-blind. "Aren't they just another amazing thing about this country!"

Eng remembered the day he stood at Melbourne Town Hall in a small but highly emotional ceremony, pledging allegiance to Australia and receiving his certificate of citizenship. That was the day he changed his name from Lung to Lunch and the week he opened the restaurant. It was a very sentimental memory. He'd eaten a Four'n Twenty pie afterward. He looked to the wall just to the right of the industrial stove. There it was, the

certificate, next to the framed issue of proprietorship and his son's old Year Ten swimming award. That was a proud moment in their lives.

There were many proud moments, though there were also some translation issues too. When Toby was five, they took him to the nearest demonstration school and signed him up under his real name, "Chee Beng Lunch."

"You can't use that name," the school administrator told them, "nobody will be able to pronounce it. How about Toby?"

So they changed it to Toby. Then when they had to return to Hong Kong to visit Nancy's great-aunt and her cousins, the Fowlers, imagine their surprise when applying for Toby's passport, they found that "Toby" was not recognised as Chee Beng's legal name. The poor boy was stunned when he realised nobody had a record of his new name and that the world insisted on calling him by his old name. And in fact, they'd spelled Chee Beng Lunch incorrectly in the first place. They'd spelled it Chee Beng Lunk because of the way Eng pronounced it back then. The poor boy walked around for days, troubled because he had no proper name. Eng paid a fortune to get all of his documents changed. Eng even asked Nancy if she wanted a new name, just for the hell of it. "May as well," he said, "think of it as going undercover for the rest of your life."

He heard a knock on the door again and Eng's good friend Bill Ballymore came in with a bag of new Arborio rice, which Eng had added to the menu to service his Japanese customers.

Bill was not a fit man. Eng observed his green skivvy, which had a collar too cumbersome for his short neck. His belly and nipples protruded from the thin material and he thought he was doing a good thing by sporting a jade-coloured, beaded bracelet and a gold Seiko watch (fake). Bill had been a very good friend of Eng's ever since the day they bumped into each other in the Oriental Express restrooms. Bill had been spending the entire evening staring at a Foster's beer while his new wife, Shirley Mendoza, whom he'd met on the internet sat next to him, facing the same direction. She couldn't speak a word of English and he couldn't speak a word of whatever language she spoke. All Bill knew was that he loved her immensely. He would later tell Eng that she represented everything he ever fought for in the Korean War: freedom, liberation and victory. She was Korean and he was an ex-pat, though a re-pat now that he moved back

to the homeland and brought this new, stunning-looking lady with him. The Ballymores made a go of it, agreeing in nods and handshakes and even some hot, steamy sex and here they were, both making an enormous effort to make communications.

Eventually, sex went a bit off because it was evident that Bill had a low sperm count and for all intents and purposes, it looked like Mail Order had married a dud. Bill felt terribly awkward and told Eng about it. Bill's wife could be stoic at times though there was still something so delicate about her, which reminded him of huts on fire and families crouched in dark corners. She had a temper on her too, this sheila, he'd said. If Bill put a foot wrong like mess the lounge or stick his feet in her direction, there was a slap to be had.

It was Toby who rescued him that very night. Toby came out of nowhere, asked Bill how he was, patted him on the back and told him that he'd married a Philippino. "Don't worry Bill, Philippinos are an antsy race. I've got a friend who's a cheerleader for the All Blacks in New Zealand. Asian Barbie my friend. But shy as a new kitten."

It was very meaningful for Bill, who thanked Toby and then Eng (Frank), who said that Toby got his opinions from his father. Bill realised that he had a different piece of history in his hands that Toby said would eventually involve paw-paw whitening soap and garlic-infused peas. He went back to the table and said a few words including "Philippines" with Eng behind him for backup. Her face lit up.

"I ruv you Biw," she said. Bill nearly started crying.

"Put them over there, Bill, and get yourself a Clayton's from the fridge," Eng said, though he noticed his friend was looking out of sorts and agitated.

Once Bill unloaded the sack of rice, the two friends wandered out into the sea of tables and pink serviettes. Tintin was just laying the forks next to the chopsticks on china holders of coolies with their bums in the air. He nodded at Eng and disappeared to the kitchen.

"So how're you doing Bill?"

Eng waited for his friend to sit down before seating himself, holding his breath in case Bill disturbed the serviettes. He could tell something was wrong in the way that Bill immediately slumped his big shoulders and let his thick chin fall to his chest. Bill leaned

over and Eng was reminded of a family dinner at a Japanese Restaurant in Sydney called Pearl Harbor where his own grandfather had had a mild heart attack. "My Allah Bill, are you okay? Bill should I call the ambulance? Bill?"

But Bill emitted a huge sob, sat up and took one of the serviettes.

"You know," he started, "people ask me how I cope after the war. How I do things after such violence, how I go about my life." He looked into his drink. "It's about the quality of survival. I live near other Vets and it's about the way we relate to each other. It's about survival with honour, with dignity. I haven't been this miserable since the pigs ate my little sister."

Eng wasn't sure what the last sentence meant.

"It's Shirley, Frank," Bill said.

"Tell me, Bill. Let's get you some tissues. Don't use those."

"It's Shirley!" Bill wailed, "She wants a divorce."

Toby knocked on the door which had a huge bronze plaque with "MACINTYRE" printed on it. He remembered his father asking why anyone would want to invite intruders into the house by having their name printed on their door. Nobody could answer him.

Stuart opened it and slapped Toby on the back. "Toy boy!" he said, and Toby felt his face go red.

"Hello Detective MacIntyre," he said and looked down. Mona's father was sometimes a bit energetic.

"Call me Stuart sonny," the man said, "We're not at work! Anyone who's a friend of Mona's is a friend of her Dad's. How's your father?"

"Good thanks."

Toby followed the man into the lounge room, which was beige and full of objects the family was forbidden to touch. He recalled many a time when the MacIntyres had flown to their relatives in Townsville or gone up the Coast in a Maui van and he and Mona had lain on that very carpet, in the nude, smoking what she called "marijabooby."

"Mona!" Mr MacIntyre shouted. Toby could hear stomping from upstairs and saw Mona's twin sisters pelt down and rush toward him.

They were beautiful creatures, Mona's sisters. They were tighter versions of Mona and had buds for breasts and translucent, powdery skin. They stumbled over each other to get a look at him and Toby once again, felt embarrassed at their friendliness.

"Hi Toby. Hi Toby," they said and found something hysterical.

"Hi girls," he said and watched as they looked at each other and collapsed into a blur of bare shoulders and lipstick.

Thankfully Mona came down the stairs holding the rail and shooed them away. "Stop staring at his dick for God's sakes ... Hi babe," she said, "Did you get the rice rolls?"

"Yep," he said and handed them over.

Mr MacIntyre smiled distractedly and hurried off in the direction of the backyard. Toby moved so he could see where he was going and saw Mr MacIntyre greet a Chinese woman who had too much make-up on.

"It was nobody," he heard Mr Macintyre tell her.

Toby saw the woman sigh with relief and recognised her as Bill's wife, Shirley Ballymore, and wondered what she would be doing in the MacIntyre's backyard. Suddenly he saw her clamp her hands around Mr MacIntyre's neck and give him a violent tongue pash.

"Christ, man," Toby said. He imagined his father standing beside him, shaking his head and pointing his finger. Mrs MacIntyre was always overseas. The MacIntyre grandparents were in a home and when Toby told Eng about the differences between the families, it shocked and terrified him.

"Cool," Mona interrupted his thoughts. "Let's go. You drive and I'll navigate."

The drive wasn't very far. Mona put her feet up on the dash and at certain intersections the inertia pushed her forward. Toby could see her underwear beneath her miniskirt and it made his foot heavy on the pedal. They stopped at Red Rooster on the way and then a sweet shop where Mona bought a marble-cake without thinking about how to cut it. Their friends were already waiting outside, most holding popcorn, Twisties and Coke.

"Remind me I've had rice rolls," Mona whispered.

Toby's friends consisted of Robbo (Shaun Robinson) McPhee (Simon McPhee), Addo (Andy Taylor) and Stevo (Toby never knew his real name). Everyone called Toby, Tobes or Tuck, for Tuck Lunch, and then Tuckwell for Tuck, which would be endearing when he was about fifty years old but not now that he was eighteen. They called Mona, Moans or Mons Venus and they each had girlfriends whom they called by shortened names. His father had shaken his head when Toby told him his various nicknames.

"Why do you always have to shorten everything? Can't you just call each other by your first names?"

But friends didn't do that. Nobody the entire world over did it in the X generation. Their girlfriends were called Vetski, for Yvette, Fi, Tons for Antonia and Rad for a Russian girl called Rhada Hempline whose mother insisted she wear red and whose father took it in turns with the other fathers to drive them.

"Let's go, buddy!" Robbo yelled. And they drove in procession to the back of the drive-in, on the other side of the kiosk so that nobody could see what they were doing should they wish not to watch the movie.

Toby watched Mona settle herself in the front seat by grabbing the bar below it and pulling upward. The seat shot backward and at the same time, she arched her back into a lying position so that she could stare at the roof of the car instead of the screen out front. She indicated for Toby to do the same and watched him struggle with the concept for a full ten minutes.

"Babe, do it gently and don't stress about it," she said.

"Yeah, yeah."

Toby knew Mona loved him though she couldn't work him out. She'd tell everyone who asked that he had a childlike, feminine quality but also this massive dose of innocence or maybe stupidity, which she referred to as The Black Hole.

"There goes the Black Hole again," she'd say. She'd tell him he was shithouse at reading maps and say "aren't you supposed to be second generation Australian?"

Mona loved his muscles. He had faint ridges underneath his sports tops and nice long thighs not to mention the natural tan through winter. He also gave nice body hugs, she said, which Mona never got from anyone else. It was a hug she'd pay for, which she called a "snuggle" and it made her feel safe and sleepy.

Mona reached over and put her hand on his thigh, smiling when Toby shifted, ignored the opening credits and stared fully at her. He looked past her head to Addo and Rhada in the next car and saw that they were already furiously pashing, steaming up the front window with their hot chips and roasted chicken. And then he looked onto Stevo and Tons in their Escort who by contrast looked dead straight ahead.

"I like you Toby," Mona said, a bit shy because the car made everything sound insulated.

Toby placed his hand on top and threaded his fingers through hers. "I like you too, Mons," he said.

Toby knew he would be a gentleman tonight. He wouldn't stab at her or hump her thigh at the love scene or push her head down in front of the others. He truly believed she was beautiful, genuinely beautiful with all of her fat stomach (she called it her fun bag) and stretch marks. He was the only guy who saw her naked in daylight. She could have Eurasian babies by him. She trusted him with her life. As if she knew what she was thinking, Mona smiled and moved his hand higher with her own.

"Nancy. Fi-di-lah! Get the boys going," Eng said.

Nancy frowned at him, but organised the young men into pairs so they could divide the Arborio rice into servings, sort out the washed crockery for an even flow for business and prepare dishes like hot almond dessert, fish for frying with shallots, and duck's tongues.

Eng stared at the lumps of flour in his wife's nails and between her fingers as she waved them around. He believed that she would have dirty nails until she was dead and mentioned the prediction several times. He harboured the fantasy that one day he would have his own cooking show and be as famous as Elizabeth Chong, whose father invented the Chiko Roll in Australia during the 60s. Eng wondered how he would start something like that if his wife was going to be so messy. He noticed the old oven, getting brown and burnt with use and the bamboo trays, faded with over steaming. These items would have to be renewed if a TV crew were to ever come in here. He could get Nancy to hold classes and teach neighbourhood wives how to make dim sum, chive omelettes and Singaporean chilli crab. She could talk to the camera, have everybody standing behind

her as she stirred, whisked and wokked. He could manage her and take commission. It could be a real money-maker.

Eng imagined himself standing in the background with his arms crossed as his wife played up to the television, calling her yum cha dishes "Tiny Delights" and "Chinese Surprises." He could have a holiday in Lake Eildon with the earnings, maybe take his friend Bill with him and sit on a porch somewhere talking about women.

"She's having an affair," Nancy declared, loud enough for him to hear through the double doors. Eng saw the expression on her face and knew she was at the thirty dim sum mark. The flour was hanging off her hands in stalactites.

"Be quiet, Nancy, can't you see the man is in pain?" Eng said. She'd once accused Eng and Bill of being old baboons together. She was getting on his goat. He turned to his friend.

"Tell me Bill, what did she say again when you asked for children?"

"I asked for IVF. You know, inverted fertilisation. It takes a lot for a man to ask for something like that. She turned around and asked for a divorce."

Bill described the scenario. "I want a divorce," she screamed and sobbed all the way to the bathroom where she slammed and locked the door.

"Jesus, Frank. I had no idea what to do. I was devo. I looked at all the photos of us on the fireplace and imagined all the kids we could've had. I wanted a footy team mate. I wanted my own State of Origin side. That would've been so bloody unreal all of us living in a big house full of kids and dogs and that."

Eng watched Bill scrunch his face up silently and pause before letting out a hiccup. He looked across to Nancy who mouthed again from the kitchen, "She's having an affair," before turning back to his friend and patting him on the back.

"Have something stronger than a Clayton's," he said.

"I just wanted a big English Sheepdog like on the Berger's Paints ad," Bill sobbed.

"Perhaps she's just needing space?" Eng asked. He liked to use Western notions of space. It was always welcomed with heavy nodding and sighs.

"Maybe she does ..." Bill said, before sniffing. "What do I do mate? Do we go and see somebody?"

"See somebody? Who?" Eng shrugged his shoulders and looked at the clock on the wall which said 6.00pm, time to open. "I have to open Bill. Come and sit down, but don't look depressed in front of the customers all right?"

He had Bill settle at a table for one and watched him stare morosely into a little bowl with shapes of tears at the bottom of it. Those bowls were Eng's latest purchase. The light shone through the rice shapes and they glowed blue. They reminded him of Bi Mi Shen, who used to tap her chopsticks on the table together before levering the food into her mouth with the precision of a slingshot.

"I love my wife," Bill suddenly wailed, "I love everything about her. We've had some unreal times. More than any of the wives I've had before."

Eng gestured frantically to Nancy, who quickly emerged from the kitchen with a saucepan full of hot and sour soup.

"She was my flower," Bill continued, "Her fingers and toes were as tiny as these chopsticks and by Jesus that woman could pack away the food like nobody's business."

Eng patted Bill on the shoulder and tried to change the subject, spooning the soup out into the bowl. "We don't eat shark's fin soup, Bill," he said cheerily, "they're extinct, sharks."

Bill sniffed and took the wide-lipped spoon from the side plate, which triggered a spasm of misery.

Everything had been eaten; the chicken, the rice rolls, the Twisties, the popcorn, all the marble-cake, which was consumed first and the Coke. And then just as Chewbacca and Harrison Ford noticed they would be better as friends, Toby felt a surge of lust for Mona. He reached across, held her face in both hands and kissed her slowly, tasting all five dishes at once. He felt her soft jaw against his neck and manoeuvred her so that she could face him squarely and let him gently push his leg between hers. She raised her backside in the air and Toby knew the whole world could see up her skirt. He stopped and twisted her around so that she sat on his lap instead.

"Um, maybe we should do this when we get home," he suggested.

"Maybe honey, but my dad will be up waiting for me. We can do it in the car on the street if you like?"

Toby was well aware that Mr MacIntyre questioned Mona about everything she did with him, where they went, what they did and who they did it with. Mr MacIntyre was almost obsessive and got down to the weirdest details about what people were wearing, how much money they had and what state their cars came from. Even to the point of what tattoo they had on their arms.

"Is he gonna ask what we did again?" Toby didn't relish the thought of Mona providing explicit details. The MacIntyres were unscrupulously honest with each other.

"Probably."

Some time later, Mona was asleep and it was just Toby watching men in white kill men in black.

After a while, Toby turned to Mona and examined her face. He gazed at her and wondered what his father would say if they married, if they had a kid called Bill and if Mona insisted on moving to Queensland where she could get more sun. His mind fast forwarded to images of himself surrounded by friends, eating nothing but hamburgers and with pictures of Eng and Nancy in a nursing home, long forgotten on a mantlepiece in a room they never went into. He foresaw gifts from his parents to him thrown all over the floor, and the dilapidated and creaking sign of "The Oriental Express" covered in cobwebs. He saw a picture of him and Mona with greying hair, in Jeans West jeans and Aussie parkas.

Toby waited until the credits rolled. Mona was snoring softly and he watched his friends wave at each other before pulling out of the drive-in, their girlfriends' heads lolling like bladders on the ends of sticks. "See ya!" he waved and waited until they'd all left. Then he turned to Mona, his beautiful girlfriend, and lowered his seat back carefully and quietly, so as not to shock her.

When everything was dark and there was barely a soul left in the place, he very carefully woke her up by tracing her cheek with his fingers. "Wake up," he said.

She woke with a smile. "What, Toby," she said.

"I wanna have sex right now," he said.

VOLUME II
Zinc: Exegesis

Preface:

To Begin With, Who Cares Where I Come From?

Let me get this straight: I am a white Australian. I was born, bred and 'cultured' in Australia and know nothing else except *to be* an Australian; by default, by instinct and by existence. The Australian upbringing I have had and therefore know as 'the definitive Australian upbringing,' is, albeit perhaps shallow, to be '*relaxed, jovial, sun-loving, sports-loving*' and, due to my teenage years being in the 80s, rather politically conservative. This is to claim what I am, rather than what I am perceived and *named* to be. My mother, on the other hand, is white British (even though she looks Chinese); British, according to her, being an inherited manner or set of beliefs that she believes to be superior to and richer than Australian conservatism and culture. She was raised in Hong Kong, which was, at the time of her upbringing until 1997, a British colony and separate region from China. She lived in an apartment with maids and servants and 'spoke the Queen's English'; a phrase of achievement, which, like the term 'Britishness,' is now largely defunct (quietly exiting from the Australian vernacular around 1960) but can be heard uttered in various expat clubs across Southeast Asia. By 'Queen's English' and 'Britishness', I mean the continuous scrutiny of any monarchist activity via word of mouth, radio or newspaper and not so much reproducing, but emulating the behaviour through the cultural ideal of 'Britishness' as it was upheld at the time. Not dissimilar, in fact, to the way Australians (like myself) model themselves on the cultural ideal of 'being Australian' by dressing honestly for an occasion, enjoying a joke at our own expense and getting up after being knocked down. The profit of nationhood is all about assimilation; 'If you can't beat 'em, join 'em.' I am aware that all the attributes and characteristics that I have mentioned above may appear as stereotyped myths of what constitutes *being* an

Australian or, *imagined*, whatever that may mean, but they were my truth. I am sure many Australians feel this sense of puzzlement about their country, their culture and themselves when asked to sum it up for themselves; to say what *they* are. But everybody's perspective is not what this dissertation is about.

My mother and I are similar. I have not only 'joined 'em', but I am a 'typical' Australian who has known no other culture. I have always been 'a member of 'em'. She has also 'beat 'em' by being a member of the Hong Kong British society, but considered herself more 'British' than 'The British', whoever those people are, because she exemplified the utmost in British values. In fact, she was born as a British subject, into a hybrid culture, which, Ken Staples argues in *Reading Hong Kong Chinese Culture: Hybridity or Eclecticism* (Staples: 2002), is one of the most unique features of Hong Kong culture: an entirely built, not colonised, culture where the Chinese government encouraged the 'harmonious co-existence' of both the Chinese and the British, and the people similarly followed suit by living alongside, at the outset, one another in this hybrid manner but in reality, creating a class system resulting in racist division and racist ideals (Staples, 2002). She, like me, knew nothing about such a state of being, not possessing any consciousness of her surroundings and has not had any interest in examining or justifying such an existence, nor did she feel the necessity to do so, until somebody else brought it up.

Colonialism seems to be her story, whereas postcolonialism seems to be mine.

After all, what more is there? Why must you think any deeper than the existence of being within your surroundings; as children do in the playground, as people who are the same become attracted to one another, the 'Aussie mates' I have, the British friends my mother entertains? Why should anyone care about where we came from? And most significantly, why have I been forced all my life, by others, to give a shit when I know nothing else? It seems the only people in the world who are colour-blind are my mother and me.

You can imagine how odd it seems, to be exploring a topic where I disclaim myself. By that I mean where I state how White I am and proceed to examine the Asianness within myself, which others have placed onto me. By 'disclaim,' I mean that in rejecting the notion of Otherness that has been placed onto me, I am clarifying my own Whiteness. *Claiming* my own Whiteness. Why am I not writing about Indigenous–Australian writing? Or African–American writing? Why complain about something that I am not and why ask questions about identity and subjectivity when I know full well who *I* am? My writing in this sense is haunted by narratives of subjectivity, and here questions of address return, albeit complicated by detours of various kinds. "To whom this writing then?" asks the narrator in J. M. Coetzee's, *The Age of Iron*. "The answer: to you but not to you; to me; to you in me:" (1990: 23).[1]

To You in me. To Me in me. To Me in my Mother. To You from Me and my Mother, wondering why I have to write to You at all.

This is where I blame my mother for bringing it up and for starting me on this journey. When the Chinese government, during the building of Hong Kong in the mid-1800s demarcated it as an administrative region outside China, the idealised culture of Britishness was created by establishments, which inevitably captured the 'British imaginary' along with its Orientalist yearnings. Australia's imaginary, from this perspective, is, in fact about Britain.

We are not bananas, my mother and I. We are not a people who are physically 'yellow' on the outside yet 'white' on the inside. I am Australian, she is British. My mother considers herself 'Truly British' and as much as there must be a Devil if there is a God in some religious circles, then there is a 'British imaginary' if there is an 'Asian imaginary' and my mother partook in it, without understanding the implications of either notion. Certain establishments in Hong Kong upheld and continue to uphold the 'British imaginary', such as the Hong Kong Jockey Club and Hong Kong University, which, to

[1] Set in apartheid-era South Africa, *Age of Iron* (1990) explores the insidious nature of complicity and reflects on the failure of language to maintain its authority in a complex postcolonial world.

this day, have separate ex-pat clubs and lounges to provide an escape from the daily pressures of Hong Kong life. These places and other general businesses, were faced with death in 1997 with the then Governor Chris Patten ceremoniously sailing back to England on the Royal Yacht *Britannia* to the strains of *Rule Britannia* and *Land of Hope and Glory,* although not without one last request for China to uphold the Queen Victoria treaty. The moment ended various traditions of 'ex-pat' grandeur including maids, nannies and chauffeurs, and caused thousands of British Chinese to flee to Canada and Australia in fear of a 'Chinese invasion', therefore dismantling valued cultural norms and disrupting what it meant to be part of a British nation.

Yet, all was not lost, because the investment in whiteness goes beyond soil.[2]

My mother came to Australia with the understanding that Australia was the 'poor cousin' of the British, as she had been informed by her father. She was genuinely shocked when she found herself pigeonholed by white Australia as a 'common Chinese person'. Such a mistake would be to mistake God for the Devil. Likewise, I carry the appearance of an Asian, though when I speak, my voice is harsh and strong and open vowels come through what seems to be a strangulated throat and letterbox mouth. This accent of mine is easily identifiable as broad Australian, the quintessential language of Australian mateship. I am obviously Australian, so why do I even need to state this silly sort of patriotic mumbo-jumbo? I appreciate but never found cause to be interested in the term *multiculturalism*, which to me denotes Australia's policy of having ethnicities live 'peacefully' alongside one another under the one banner of Australian patriotism (and there is good and bad in the term). In an interview with the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Hsu Ming Teo (2006) lamented that "these days it is harder to be different" in Australia.

> The term multiculturalism is an ideology advocating that society should consist of, or at least allow and include, distinct cultural groups, with equal status. The term multiculturalism is almost always applied to distinct cultures of immigrant groups in developed countries, not to the presence of indigenous peoples. Multiculturalism has its

[2] George Lipsitz writes: "not all white supremacists are white, and not all white people are white supremacists". Lipsitz, G. (1998) *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, Temple University Press, USA.

> supporters and critics alike. Its supporters often see it as a self-evident entitlement of cultural groups, as a form of civil rights grounded in equality of cultures. They often assume it will lead to interculturalism – beneficial cultural exchanges, where cultures learn about each other's literature, art and philosophy (high culture), and influence each other's music, fashion and cuisine. Its opponents often see it as something which has been imposed on them without their consent.

This happens sometimes. Words turn into lumps in my throat and I lose my train of thought. Thoughts become stones in my stomach. Regurgitation. But they're only words, aren't they?

It was the Australian public who brought up this whole idea. It was the shopkeeper who threw the change at my mother after he called her a 'slitty-eyed Chink', and the man on the train who told my mother she hoped her baby would abort because Australia didn't need more 'slope heads' taking their jobs. I blame these two people who were the first to speak to my mother after her arrival, and I also blame my mother for listening to them and putting all of this bullshit onto me.

In Ouyang Yu's *The Eastern Slope Chronicle*, the character scholar Wu reflects on his own ability to irritate people he works with at a restaurant, yet 'keep himself alive':

> He was convinced that his history would never get into the kind of history books that were ever written by those historians. In fact, their eye was always paying attention to the so-called big events, to the exclusion of people like him, who was only one of the billions of ants before that eye and constantly getting ignored. When they finally realised that history was just existing side by side with them and was turning their attention to him, he would be gone, becoming one of many hundreds of millions of ironies throughout human history (2002: 96).

I can smell manuscripts burning, never having found an audience for something that has been going on forever.

I appreciate the experiences of the first wave of Chinese migrants who moved to Australia in the Gold Rush era of the mid-nineteenth century, even though those experiences are not my own, nor do I identify with any aspect of their history. Similarly, I am in empathy to the reaction of *Other* Australians, who experience racism and who feel silenced. I subscribe to the literary devices of the postcolonial writers who answer back with humour, with a winning smile but who have the gumption to answer back to any white motherfucker who dares take *their* authority away; *my* authority too, after all, I have been here all my life, which is the mantra of all patriots (but not always accepted as proof of identity), is it not? This includes writers like Castro, who uses allegorical devices to illustrate issues surrounding the Other experience, and Ouyang Yu, whom I categorise as an 'angry, sardonic writer', yet who refuses to evade or assimilate. Other writers such as Hoa Pham, Hsu Ming Teo, Simone Lazaroo, and Lau Siew Mei articulate, to me, 'less' politically conscious voices in their writing but are no less symbolic in their interrogation of difference. Even still, other writers such as Tom Cho and Andy Quan, who explore sexual as well as ethnic identity, do so with specific intertextual devices; creating unique splintered ways in which one may read their narratives. At times, this exegesis may run the risk of being labelled as essentialist. But identity is not fixed; it is full of highways, freeways, cul de sacs and even dead ends. As an unstable category, identity is always turning in and out of itself, constantly redefining its boundaries. I remain in my white Australian authority but the recognition is fleeting.

I was born here, in this country called Australia. I have experienced being angry, hurt and pathetic. I don't know how to be serious when speaking of Asian–Australian politics, writing or cultural theories because one must be 'Asian' to enter this dialogue and I do not know what it is to be Asian; I don't even know where I am coming from let alone where I want to be. Let me remind you once again, that I am not Chinese, nor did I choose to be Asian. This was not my idea, nor my choice. It was all part of some grand nationalist plan. I had nothing to do with it.

Suddenly when I wrote, I became two, cleaved in half. I imagine the two bloody halves of myself meeting at a café where a reality show sort of afternoon is arranged. It begins in

awkward chatter, because both know what they have said behind the other's back. It moves to anger when politeness ceases and then a haughty silence over a second coffee. This manuscript is brought out. The white Michelle reads it and laughs heartily, staining the corners with chocolate from the cake she's eating. She is an Aussie after all and Aussies are self-deprecating and good-natured. The yellow Michelle resents it and resents that an entire PhD must be written about something that it is not. (This is the voice of paranoia speaking. Both halves are scared as hell about what the Asian–Australian and also the White (Anglo-Saxon) Australian community will say about anything within this thesis.) Why not bitch about being Scandinavian or Guatemalan? Why pretend you are something and interrogate it just because everyone around you tells you who you are? It's like Frances Farmer's autobiography *Will There Ever Really Be a Morning*?, when her mother has her wrongly committed for insanity. If you're not insane, why ponder about it at all? The afternoon ends in a conversation about how the best fake handbags are Made in China.

I am a performer then. A person who has two halves; one that observes while the other fulfils the White Australian dream, or the Asian–Australian dream, with neither able to reconcile. Like lungs underwater. Like drowning. Like China today, which operates as a shared Capitalist site, both frightening and desired. One understands the dream at the very moment that one ceases to exist.

Figure 1: This is me in the Cameron Mackintosh production of *Miss Saigon* Sydney 2003. This is me, AKA Marilyn Monroe; performing a song called "The American Dream."

In constructing this; my attempts at being a 'writer' of sorts, I have hit the wall and gotten stuck between writing what I want and writing what is expected of an Asian-looking-person, who has an Asian-looking-parent, but who considers herself to be White; at least with what my impression of Whiteness is. An example of this is the first story which starts with "This is a story of the Asian–Australian imaginary." Much the same may be said about Australian literary history; a literary history that prioritises writers composed predominantly of the writings of white, middle-class Anglo-Saxon males. I am here to discuss and explore the shame, anger and pride I possess in having written the fictional part of this dissertation, and also to forgive anyone who's ever told me to write like an Asian. Ultimately I will forgive my mother for pushing me violently into a white society by convincing me I am more white than white, but never explaining why I look different, by encouraging me to chase the friendship and company of Whites, and shun Others, with nobody around to explain anything to me except blank faces.

Figure 2: Here I am in 1979, with my brother Simon, smiling forcefully behind me. My mother has taken the photograph. You can tell because we're both disciplined and uncomfortable.

Apart from the obvious exploration and interrogation of self-identity and its reclamation, I wanted, within this exegesis, to explore identity in what I understand to be an Asian–Australian literary context. I also wanted to explore how issues of identity appear to have informed the work of selected Asian–Australian writers in Australia in comparison to my own work, some of whom may object to me labelling them as 'Asian–Australian'. These Asian–Australians might object to my including, accusing and applying my concepts to their work. Why is she so pernickety? they will no doubt ask. Some might object that I have taken everything they've written so personally and so pedantically. That girl's a vulture who only sees prey and not the surrounding mountains. So why have I entered into this seemingly contradictory contract, to question and discuss one of many circulatory, basic premises, where as a writer, I am possibly nothing, but as an Asian–Australian writer, I am highly published? Why examine and compare themes that indicate an Asian–Australian literary experience? What is this experience? Have I had it? If I am white, why am I comparing myself to Asian–Australian writers? Shouldn't I be *contrasting* myself against Australian writers in general?

Good point. I do compare myself with Australian writers since I am one, but not generally *thought of* as one by academics, agents or publishers. Likewise, I do compare myself to other Australians since I am one but not truly *recognised* as one by friends, colleagues or in fact, society in general (publishers, academics, work mates, suppliers, the woman at the milk bar, the men who wash my car etc.). An 'Asian–Australian' is defined as many things by various academics, such as Australasian, Asian-born-Chinese, Chinese-born-Australian, Asian-influenced-Australian etc. Most Asian–Australians question the necessity of categorisation at all, tossed around with the paradoxical process of identity critique which is a theory that has been valuable and empowering to me and yet appeared initially to me, to shoot itself in the foot ('I am an ethnic but don't call me one'). Yet, I was frustrated by the way that the Australian publishing industry (and the Australian literary canon) conceptualised Australian literature in terms of cultural difference or ethnic specificities; using categorical terms such as 'multicultural writing' to represent, or divide writers' experiences. Sneja Gunew says such terms have been "reserved for outsiders and the marginalised" (1992: xv); writers, who by default of

ethnicity do not fit into the dominant historical narrative. These writers "exist as boundary markers, token figures consigned to the margins and thus either to invisibility or to permanent opposition against the backdrop of a national literary canon" (Gunew 1992: xvi). Is this me all over? Yes, although a few years ago, I didn't even know who Sneja Gunew was.

The notion of ethnicity seems to create a messy psychological layer in a character. The presence of it, the absence of it; if the character is ethnic, then for a fictitious character, s/he must pointedly have been made to be so and the 'characteristic' must, to a reader such as myself, (the white part) contribute to her/his fate. Note that I do not speak for the Indigenous Other here; I notice many 'Australian' writers and academics are always very careful to include an Aboriginal presence or mention, perhaps to be sensitive to that extra layer of Australian identity that was once so ignored; always careful to say at book launches "Before we start, I'd like to acknowledge the Eora and Gaddigal people whose land we are standing on" in order to remain mindful and self-conscious. This statement always makes me cringe, after all, a national literary history exists to provide narratives of identity and destiny of a nation and these 'acknowledgements' seem to provide an illusory cohesiveness. We cannot speak for Indigenous people, for to do so will be to speak for another completely different set of experiences, as it would be to speak for any other ethnicity, or even another person. I notice too, that many people are careful to separate 'Indigenous' Australia from 'White' Australia. I don't see the speech translated into text. I'd like to see white authors who write about Asian identities saying "I'd like to thank the Chinese Australians who have been around since the gold rush and acknowledge that it was the Chinese who really discovered Australian long before Captain Cook."

The Ugly Australian Writing Experience

"Typically, writers acknowledging their Asian links constantly experience misinformed or stereotypical valuation of their work and themselves, and sometimes resistance from their own communities to their representations or sentiments" (Khoo, 2003: 11). This

valuation is something I have known intimately yet become accustomed to. I would hope that the writing I produce; the sense of 'knowing,' "not only legitimates their [my] point of view by adding to existing views of the world, but traces a path (which the reader will follow, avidly) showing how they [I] got to this position and what is at stake" (Muecke, 2002: 125).

The apparent dilemma faced by Asian–Australian writers is whether or not the hierarchies that made the previous canon are still in place. If so, how can any ensuing listing be better in terms of equity or representation? Other commentators claim multiculturalism and ethnicity as empowering and valuable classifications and identifications, albeit with some reservations about being able to control representations of themselves; as Ien Ang states "if I am inescapably Chinese by descent, I am only sometimes Chinese by consent" (Ang, 2003: 11).

To write as an Asian–Australian within the realm of Australian literature and to make sense of my own non-sense, is to situate myself precariously in what Franz Fanon describes as "otherness as a lived experience" (Fanon, 1991: 29). David Macey clarifies and warns; "To mistake a lived experience for a fact is to betray Fanon's text to such an extent as to make it almost incomprehensible" and further interprets Fanon's words with "The black man is not. Nor the white" and includes the meaning of *doxa* – 'they say', which is the application of the lived experience onto the Other by others, "we may have to be told who and what we are, that we may not know it 'naturally'." (Fanon, 1991: 30). Tracing the path and showing how I got to this position and my own sense of knowing is otherness as a lived experience, and my own interpretation of the world as it has been affected by what is at stake.

The place *to* which the writer travels has its own objective as well as imaginative reality. But there is also a place *from* which the writer travels, shuffling between here and there, inside and outside the word and the text. It is here, in this space, wedged between words and worlds, place and displacement, entries and exits that I, as writer, author and Other have lived. In other words, I am witness to the experience I am *supposed* to have.

So it is clear that appearance and language in this case limits the *Other* (me, and also not me; my two halves which are unequal) and in exploring this I realise that in the process of rewriting and reclaiming the category of identity, and collecting all of the themes I have noticed in my readings and experiences of being considered an Asian–Australian and pouring them into stories, I am creating a great Yellow mirage (rather than Fanon's Black mirage) in order to serve my purpose of exploring identity in the works of Asian–Australian writers whilst at the same time unpacking my own fictional writing. This means that I am knowingly acting as the 'dominant' in creating the lived experience of other Asian–Australian writers, both by calling them Asian–Australian and by making assumptions about their identity and work via reading positions. I feel strange in doing this; in pulling a bunch of novelists together by my side and subjecting an analysis of Other writing in my own theoretical context; the language and methodology of the Imperial centre, though not quite the centre, more like slightly off-centre. The paradox of being (appearing) Chinese by descent but not consent. The unfortunate consequence of not being blind. But also to identify myself with or from these 'Asian–Australian' writers, who may, like me, identify as 'Aussies,' or simply want to be considered as a writer.

Just a writer. Being able just to write.

To even consider that there is a person who consents to being called an Asian–Australian, who aligns with an experienced Asian–Australian culture is problematic, as the common threads that make up the lived experience of being Asian–Australian today would have to be "common to all migrant communities trying to get on with life in Australia" (Chek Ling, in Khoo, 2003: 154). In my schooldays in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, I remember the 'Chinky nerds' (as they were called) rejecting me because I couldn't speak Cantonese. We all seemed to be struggling against the past our parents told us about in order to live in the imagined present. The different experiences my mother and I have had are also an example of this. Neither of us understands the journey of the refugee or the early Chinese settlers in Australia's Victorian goldfields. Furthermore, as a loose and

homogenising descriptor, the term 'Asian' itself is problematic. Like 'Oriental', it is a Western construct with antecedents in eighteenth-century European imperialism. The term 'Asian' in Australia, argues Tseen Khoo, "thus tends to signify the foreign born, which erases the presence of Australian-born Asians, some of whose histories can be traced back through more that one hundred and fifty years of white occupation" (Khoo, 2003: 2). Within this context, Asian–Australian texts should not be read and understood as the voice of one community, but rather "as a dialogue between individual authors, their communities – cultural, social and/or artistic- and their surrounding frames for meaning" (Khoo, 2003: 4). I have knowingly categorised the Other in my analysis, which is perhaps, different from unknowingly and irresponsibly categorising the Other, as some publishers or readers do, including assumptions, racisms and celebrations on the basis of race.

So, here I am again, back to the beginning and the questions that became this exegesis. Why should I, as an 'occasionally', and by that I mean without preference, self-identified writer and woman, continue to engage with the imperial experience as both colonised and coloniser? Since, as a colonised society, Australia has achieved political independence from Britain, 'dismantled' the White Australia Policy[3] and produced a 'multicultural nation', why is the issue of colonialism still relevant at all? This question of *how*, as compared to why or who, is what this exegesis is concerned with through the interrogation of the literary production of Asian–Australian writing, its specificity of experience and its social and historical contexts.

This exegesis is about searching for words/worlds: a way of reading and writing that opens up a space where the voices and presence of the Self, silenced by the ruptures of dislocation, can be felt and heard.. In this sense, both the creative component and the exegesis of this thesis move beyond the limits of Western academic discourses hedged in

[3] The White Australia Policy was the term used to describe a collection of racist Australian policies, which restricted non-white immigration and promoted white, European immigration from 1880 to 1973 with related policies enduring as late as 1982. It was initially born out of the anti-Chinese racism during the gold rush, and labour union protests of the 1880s. In contemporary Australian public and academic discourse, the term 'White Australia Policy' is commonly used to refer to the conception of Australia in ethno-nationalistic terms.

by disciplinary conventions towards the multi-directional territory of ficto-critical inquiry where writing becomes a performance, a meta-discourse "in which the strategies in the telling are part of the point of the tale" (Gibb, 2004: 01). "Its effect [is the] collapsing of the 'detached' and all-knowing subject into the text, so that [my] performance as writer includes dealing with the problem all contemporary writers must face," says Muecke as he describes the problem of writing he calls "*How the hell did I get here?*" (Muecke, 2002: 125). In other words, to read this dissertation, and the creative fictional section, is to leap into the largely uncharted territory of the Self where one does not write for the other ... *One* does not write for the *Other.* And yet I am writing for the Asian–Australian.

Introduction: Me, Myself and I

I start with my own story by including photographs of my family which show the decidedly unavoidable truth of skin and the epileptic result of when Asianness and Whiteness are linked by an electromagnetic force called culture. My mother's great-grandmother migrated with the Jewish pogroms from Russia to Shanghai, China in the mid-nineteenth century. My family do not wish to discuss this detail and have discouraged further enquiries. Obediently, I did not make them. So now I have no history. My mother's grandfather Abbas was 'Indian Chinese' who moved his family to Hong Kong where he owned property. My mother's grandmother Cissy Law Abbas was therefore 'Eurasian.' Her daughter, my mother's mother, Beebun Abbas, who was 'Hong Kong Chinese,' was a nurse in the Second World War and then attended the Pitman Secretarial College in Hong Kong. She met my grandfather Alex Bakar, a 'Burmese Malaysian', at a match where she was playing softball and he cricket.

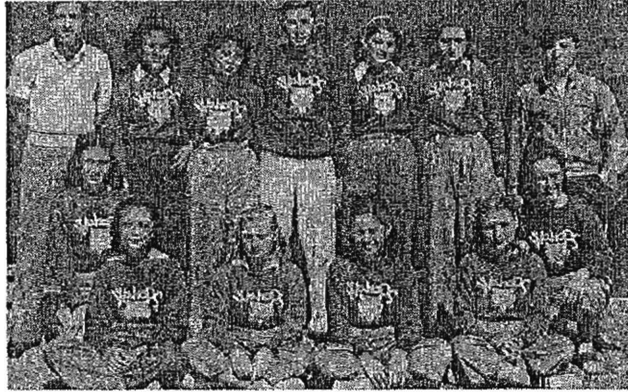

Figure 3: Granddad found Grandma to be exactly the calibre of woman he was looking for and they seemed only ever to play sports until the Sino-Japanese war. Here she is, front row left, in 1941 as a member of the Wahoos softball team.

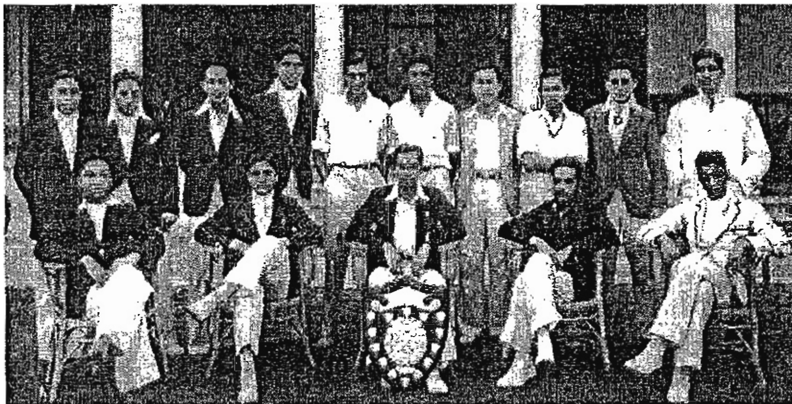

Figure 4: Here is Granddad with his cricket team back row fourth from left. His nickname at the time was "Coffee Baker" [sic] because he had 'lighter skin' than his team mates.

When Alex was interned in Stanley Camp on the Hong Kong peninsula by the Japanese forces during the Second World War, Beebun brought him food and lay it at the fence every day. He married her and they lived in Happy Valley in Hong Kong and had four girls: Vera who married an Englishman and moved to England, Farida who married an Englishman and moved to England, Diane, my mother, who married a Malaysian

Australian after moving to Australia and Marianne, who married an Australian after moving to Australia.

My mother eventually divorced my father after having two children: my brother and me. She eventually married an Englishman and currently resides in Victoria, Australia. My brother Simon and I were born in Victoria, Australia, which makes me uncomfortable about speaking for the migrant. I am therefore considered 'first generation', given that my mother migrated to Australia from Hong Kong, and given the fact that she herself is a migrant in the sense of being a British migrant rather than the usual definition of 'migrant Other'. The generation category also makes me uncomfortable. What does 'first generation' mean? Or second? Or third?

Homogenising, or Explaining Myself

Each of the women before me have 'transformed their identities', or 'had their identities transformed' in a similar direction, as 'Asians' and as women. My great-grandmother was 'Jewish Chinese'; she immersed herself into the practising British colonial identity by following dress customs, manners, food and the sport of good-naturedly deriding foreigners. Likewise, my grandmother wore trousers, played netball, mixed only with British Chinese, shopped only at European stores and asked for a knife and fork at restaurants. My mother migrated to Australia, divorced her 'Asian' husband, enrolled her children into exclusive Australian schools and married an Englishman. All three women can be said to have assimilated into colonialism; my great-grandmother, the Eurasian 'hybrid', my grandmother, the colonialist, and my mother, the good migrant. Does this mean that they divest themselves of the Chinese heritage? It seems that the Chinese heritage has been almost ornamental to their emerging white identities. Really they were white after all and Chineseness, including the history of the family, belonged as an addition to their daily lives and provided them with an alternative identity that they might like to choose but didn't have to. Chineseness, I thought, was an ornament to my identity. But actually, it is an ornament that fellow Australians have placed onto me. I cannot remove it like my grandmother could her colonial trousers.

My mother, in particular, recounted that Australians could not tell the difference between people from Hong Kong, Japan, Korea or Vietnam. She was clearly counting on this taxonomy, albeit at the time of the White Australia Policy and its resounding racial effects. Accordingly, she tried to 'shield' me by disallowing spoken Cantonese at home and sending me to a prestigious private girls' school along with the daughters of Australia's wealthy industrialists, retailers and hoteliers. She believed it was a strategic decision, that by integrating me with white, wealthy, privileged Australians, as she had been in British colonial Hong Kong, I would become 'accepted'. She was surprised then, that I experienced racism. "What could I do?" she says. She thought if I 'behaved' in the same way enough, I would be accepted into the world of the privileged, to which I should always have belonged, as she had in Hong Kong.

At the same time, my mother refused to deny her own Chinese cultural habits and it is her duality which often informs the humour and sometimes bitterness in my writing, the writing found within many of the Asian–Australian texts I have examined. I use this device to draw attention to and cope with the idea of difference/separateness and the existence of multiple identities. Apart from the Australianness, I still ate Asian dishes at meal times, I went to Yum Cha, listened to my mother's descriptions of lazy, indecorous Australians, and admired her view of the thin line between embarrassment and pride, over which she always prevaricated. Her complex advice was, "You are a different kind of Asian. You are Hong Kong Chinese [which meant British Chinese], not just Chinese," which enforced a division between myself and other 'Asians' at my school, despite the fact that I actually considered myself an Australian and that she continued to consider herself British. The idea of Britishness was as alien to me as the idea of Chineseness. The only thing I knew was Australianness and it was the only thing my mother had no idea of.

Instinctively I kept away from *them*, the 'Asians' at my school, because they were strange and they kept away from *me*. I felt I was better than them because I was a fully accepted ('integrated'?) member of Australian society and was better spoken, more literary and knew how to speak to dignitaries who visited the school. I was even lucky because I

didn't have 'slitty' eyes and dark skin; though I still had a flat nose and black hair and could never ever think of myself as attractive. Nevertheless, my mother's criticism of Australians also inevitably fractured my sense of ambition; was I trying in fact, to 'assimilate'? And was I trying to assimilate with the White Devil? How was the Devil supposed to engage with me?

Why do I write like this?

To enter into language is to enter into the social economy of exchange where needs, demands, desires and longings are negotiated according to a linguistic contract. But when the speaker encounters a language where there is no common currency, then the deal cannot be struck and the speaker is rendered 'incoherent'; lost in the perilous territory of translation; language's 'stock' exchange. Keeping this in mind, I wanted to locate a way of writing that grapples with the fissures between words/worlds, one that relied upon a narrative of competing and contesting textualities. In other words, I wanted to employ subversive strategies by reworking particular myths of Asian–Australian subjectivities with a view of restructuring Australian realities, not by reversing the hierarchical order, but by interrogating the philosophical and historical assumptions upon which that order is based. Much of this writing blends essay and fiction and what Brian Castro terms 'Auto/Fiction', or, the writing of the self in fictive and non-fictive narratives. This is not necessarily a confessional genre in any straightforward sense, but functions to orient, or more properly to produce a particular pragmatic and provide a model of narrative point.

In 2004, I sent one of my creative pieces ("Not That Fucking Old Thing Again: On Not Being Chinese") to the *Graduate Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* and received an interesting reader's report. The story was written partly in second person to impose the subject onto the reader and assimilate the reader into the skin of the protagonist. The reader's report seemed defensive, accusatory and angry; albeit still advising that it be published in a 'student magazine'. The reader wrote that I made him/her feel 'alienated'. S/he also said that I forced her/him into feeling something of which s/he had no experience. I think I liked it, but it also made me indignant, reminding me of white women academics in conferences I attended about gender and ethnicity, who like to argue

about the plight of minorities yet hate it when 'an ethnic' (me? not me?) seeks to stand apart from them. These may likely be the same people who argue that a white person can justifiably write an Orientalist narrative without need for criticism. White person, who does not appear Asian, that is. And who am I to argue with that? I wish I could write to that person and say "Buddy, I am WITH you. I don't GET the Asian dilemma. I don't GET why others force a point of view on me." I'll go to jail for that one.

The point of the story and even the entire creative component was to exchange skins, to have the reader feel what it is like to be contextualised against one's will. I was dismayed, but delighted that I was 'allowed' to be published. Pathetically, ironically and sadly, I also thanked heaven that the reader wasn't so offended as to advise against my work being published. I had pushed it far, but not too far so as to be considered 'unAustralian'. This is the space I live in; the unAustralian space.

Having said all of this, I also don't want to be known as 'an angry person'. I do have a kernel of the apologist inside which seeks to please the Australian literary establishment (my agent asked me to write something 'Asian' instead of writing about English subjects I assume, because Australia had English writers for that purpose, so I did. I did and had five stories published.). And I don't want to be disliked by the Asian–Australian or Asian or ethnic community either. The overarching question of this dissertation thus could be "Does an Asian–Australian writer need to write about Asian subjects in order to be published?" Another question could be "Must something always be at stake?" I myself want to be published. I *seek* to be published, and my agent's advice could easily be interpreted as 'write what you know' and hence provide rationale to my success in publishing a few stories. Still, I am often uncomfortable and suspicious of this small success, as if I have sold myself – well, a representation of myself – and my experiences to gain the end result; as if I have no widespread merit, to justify the existence of my writing; Is my writing successful because it is good writing, or because it is 'ethnic writing'? Will I ever be compared with writers like Peter Craven, Peter Carey or Frank Moorhouse, no matter how good or bad they are, or will I always sit in the category of Amy Tan or Jung Chang? Will I perhaps be identified with Beth Yahp, Tom Cho, Don

O'Kim and Hsu Ming Teo? I'd like the choice. I'd like to think I could be the 'standard' of the 'white' and 'ethnic' writers (whatever that standard is), but I do not feel that this will happen, unless I become John O'Grady. I do not want to enter yet, into an exploration of the white/ethnic power exchange, but just as I feel indignant about categorising myself and homogenising others, I find myself doing it in order to contextualise and locate my own identity.

I am thus prevented from feeling proud to be Australian or Asian and I envy the patriotism of white Australians and at the same time, the indignant Asian/Indigenous/Other to whom this country also belongs. The feelings I am left with are the result of being firmly placed on the periphery of No Identity (No Man as compared to Everyman) and exploring every possibility that results in locating myself, including the question of why patriotism matters at all until finally the noise of thinking becomes too loud.

All these issues; the issues of duality, have been explored in this dual-part dissertation and the cathartic process has proven beneficial in defining my place and subjectivity. Like Brian Castro, I have used allegory and the conscious voice of cultural awareness to present and subvert expected and traditional narratives. Like the writing of Tom Cho and to a certain extent, Ouyang Yu, I seek to 'reclaim' the loss of power – in the power exchange – of describing what it is to be Asian–Australian through the use of cynicism, humour and travesty. Like Beth Yahp, I have explored a fictitious place in which to situate the Chinese cultural landscape. Like Don O'Kim and Simone Lazaroo, I have purposely laboured the traditional illustration of Asian–Australian conflict in order that comment should arise from character driven writing and I have, in postcolonial style, like Hsu Ming Teo, drawn a utopian picture of the 'new wave' of Asian cultural identity; those characters drawn from 'modern' people, who feel equality but require society to catch up and which start out as stereotypical narratives but become complex and non-revealing.

I have chosen a selection of writing from a selection of authors who could be identified (but may not) as 'Asian–Australian' because of the necessity of controlling the scope of this work and also because of the self-association to themes of writing of the specific author. I could just as easily have chosen Michael Cunningham, Hanif Kureshi, or Monica Ali. Or, hey, Truman Capote. In selecting these writings, I have inevitably entered into a political dialogue, which I have imposed upon the authors as much as the literary establishment has. It is not ideal, as I have said, and I feel very uncomfortable assessing the political motivation, the 'Asianness' and even the voices of the authors in question. I am careful not to assume their writing represents their experiences, for instance, or that I am reading their writing correctly. The idea of being labelled an Asian–Australian author does not appeal to me, no matter how empowering the alignment of the two words has progressed since Asian/Australian and Australasian writing as part of postcolonial texts was first categorised.

On *Zinc: A Novel in Six Acts*

Instead of embracing the questions of identity and subjectivity with a purely theoretical response, I have chosen this method of combining a creative component made up of six interlinking short stories collectively titled *Zinc: A Novel in Six Acts* and an accompanying exegesis. *Zinc* is an ingredient used in sunscreen formulations, which absorbs UV broad-spectrum ultraviolet radiation. It provides protection against the sun by covering the skin. It is applied topically, primarily onto the face and protects the wearer against Australia's harsh sun. It is the main component for Zinc Cream, an iconic Australian product developed primarily for the Australian market. Here, *Zinc* acts as a metaphor for the embalming of all skins to a uniform whiteness. Being white, it represents the application of dominant white middle-class values, albeit only temporary. But Zinc also acts as a protectant, a physical blocker and metaphor, against the harshness of Australian racism and discrimination. *Zinc* is the perfect metaphor of the assimilated existence.

With this in mind, I wanted to examine the boundaries that are placed on representing Asianness, regardless of whether it is experimental writing or otherwise. Furthermore, I wanted to display and reinterpret examples of the 'genre'.

Initially, I wanted to represent six main literary stereotypes of Asianness and 'reclaim them' by considering a different kind of postcolonial angle. I wanted there to be the answering back without the assimilation; the humour, the 'taking the piss out of oneself' without being apologist or 'victim-like'. I wanted a new self-reflective voice that talked about a colonial time, and I wanted to dismantle mythical representations and Orientalist embraces of the depiction of Chinese life. This proved to be difficult, not just in finding the right format and narrative structure, but also because I myself was required to examine and extrapolate parts of my own history and purposely interpolate or ignore elements of my own judgements in order to write an effective story. I needed to think about the boundaries of the literary fictional form from a stylistic point of view and I also needed to consider the implications and dangers of subscribing to a Western (or rather an English reading) audience at the same time as airing my frustrations; rather like force-feeding. I also wanted, as Australian translator and publisher Mabel Lee said at a book launch, to "do a big shit", that is, to write it out, and to write. Just be a writer. Not to aim primarily for a writer's prize or an Asialink scholarship or an Australian Council grant. Just to be a writer. And a *good* writer at that.

As I began to divide my stories into six separate voices, with separate plots and narratives, I started feeling as if I was falling into the stereotypical structure that I was trying so hard to avoid. This had to do with that ugly side of my identity; of avoidance, dissociation and denial. Adopting the themes found in other Asian–Australian writing and then taking them in order to rewrite them seemed superficial and nonsensical.

One of my stories in particular, "The Gentleman's Outpost" started out as a colonial story of a selfish British–Asian who uses cunning and trickery to achieve his goal. It was, as Nury Vittachi, the editor of Hong Kong's literary journal *Dimsum,* put it "[about an] Asian subject who is self-reflective in a colonial context". I was shocked that my subtle

nuances were too subtle and felt it necessary to make changes so that eventually, it reflected my intention of capturing the characteristics of a male British–Asian identity and illuminating as main protagonist the oft-written Asian–Australian character of the go-between, who is rarely given a central voice. If this cameo did have a louder voice, what would their perspective be? What would their story be? Or would they always be relegated to the ranks of cameo and despised Other? After the changes I made, I liked the story a bit better. Similarly, my first story, "Made in China", which was a mythical narrative using representations of 'Asian subjects' from film, cartoon and pulp fiction, and which empowered the female protagonist, had identity imbalances. In the end, I wrote what I like to call a 'disclaimer' at the start of the story (as many Asian–Australian and as many writers do) which described the purpose of the piece; that of the British Chinese experience, the onset of modernity and Hong Kong against its pre-colonial background. "Lie still and let me tell you a story. A work of the Asian–Australian imaginary." It emulated the disclaimers written by writers who fear and suspect they may be appropriating identities, such as Lian Hearn in her Japanese-inspired *Tales of The Otori* series; "I hope I will be forgiven by purists for the liberties I have taken. My only excuse is that this is a work of the imagination" (2002: preface).

Using the quote immediately gave the story a different, postcolonial perspective rather than a colonial one. The entire experience overall, of writing the creative pieces and attempting to reinvent common Asian–Australian themes, was essential to my development as a writer and as a writer who must write for herself, but bear in mind, the reader who wants a good story, the conscious reader who will critique the writing and wonder if it has literary merit, the Asian–Australian academic and the Asian/Australian who may be offended by such devices. It also takes into account the publishing world where relevant. It is not just Asian–Australian writers who place different emphases on this last criterion. Nevertheless, it is those writers who place emphasis on getting published who seem to abuse the themes in the most homogenous manner.

Zinc is made up of two parts. The first is a collection of stories concerned with the cultural and political landscapes produced by migration and multiculturalism. The

collection explores how contemporary processes of social, historical and political change dramatically impact on the identities of first- and second-generational Australians of Hong Kong Chinese descent and records the ways certain characters lead their lives and how each character understands home as a place or a form of belonging in Hong Kong and Australia. The second part, this exegesis, explores the impact of selected authors on the creative pieces and contextualises the literary landscape and subjectivities of the author within the framework of Asian–Australian literature. This exegesis aims to identify thematic references within the chosen literary works and explore resolutions within the uniqueness albeit categorisation of what is termed 'Asian–Australian writing'.

Interestingly, the first three stories seem to have been written for a British–Asian audience, specifically because the narrative shares consciousness with the identities of Hong Kong British. "Made in China" reclaims the mythical, sexist and Confucian assumptions of Western popular culture. "The Gentleman's Outpost" shows the bad migrant story, which Asian–Australian writers have a choice in representing; mostly tackled fleetingly by minor characters who dabble with cunning activity in order to survive. The Australian audience may not relate to these first stories, as they deal with the fracturing of British identity which is distinctly different from the Australian identity. The white half of me definitely doesn't. The third piece too, "Chinese Whispers", is quite feudal, both in terms of British and Chinese culture, which I would describe as resembling feudal cultures. "The Oriental Express" is intended to illustrate the successful unity of fractured identities using a very casual Australian voice, which comprises self-deprecating humour, for the sake of patriotism. It's just as violent as the other stories but appears more digestible because it is humorous. This last story is written for a distinctly Australian audience, much like Hsu Ming Teo's *Behind the Moon*, which further illustrates the different audiences within the Australian literary establishment who more than occasionally, can dictate Asian–Australian literary content by promoting a national idea of how the country and its inhabitants are represented.

The identity and experience of Hong Kong Chinese subjectivity has changed dramatically throughout history, from the colonisation, or in fact, building of Hong Kong by the

British Empire through to its annexation back, or in fact, to China and the displacement of people through migration movements to Australia and other Commonwealth countries. Keeping this in mind, this dissertation, (both the creative component and exegesis) challenges what it means to be Asian–Australian as a given identity and draws attention to traditional notions of community and place and the commonalities and differences prevalent in Australia's diverse multicultural communities. Each narrative, each story, that makes up the creative component of this dissertation, offers avenues in which perceptions of heritage and home, language, history and culture are expressed through the day-to-day lived realities of Asian subjectivities. Rather than being situated in a place of the past, or moulded in a utopian future, the characters are enmeshed in the constraints and opportunities of the present. At the same time, the characters unravel historical chronicles of Australia's past and its link to Hong Kong China and question particular myths and representations.

The first story, which is set in a mythical world between the divine and human, and life and death where time is blurred, "Made in China" is intended to invoke the timeless vision of the mythical Chinese story, of perilous obstacles and dangerous adventures on the road of tests and trials. "The Gentleman's Outpost" concerns the influence of the British imperial process on the colonised identity as experienced and felt. Using postcolonial discourse as a point of departure, it examines the idea of 'empire' and the British colonial enterprise in an attempt to unpack how imperialism has affected colonised sensibilities. Similarly, "Chinese Whispers" looks at how language and gender are situated at the centre of the colonial Hong Kong Chinese predicament of identity. It looks at women's experience of public and private spaces and how orality becomes a marker of cultural difference and power imbalance, in terms of culture and even discourses of social mobility, gender, race and class. "Island Sacrifice" unpacks the experience of migration and its effects of dislocation and uprooting from habitual orientations of culture and social meaning. *Not That Old Fucking Thing Again: On Being Mistaken as Chinese*, contains a narrative which comments on fetishised representations of Asian identity and Asian–Australian cross-cultural relations and exchange. It critically evaluates how discourses of Orientalism continue to foreground representations of Asian

woman as available to 'white' men. And the sixth and last story, "The Oriental Express" challenges the notion of the 'good migrant' or the silenced and assimilated Other and how Asian identities are contained and managed in Australia through textual codes, laws and policies such as multiculturalism that are implicated in social, political and institutional contexts.

Keeping this in mind, this exegesis will also examine whether or how Asian–Australian writers deny their racial differences to 'imitate' a non-minority English writing author. But most importantly, this dissertation offers the reader a way of understanding and redefining the fluid multiplicities that are Asian–Australian identities living in Australia today and how they are envisioned and experienced. It does not imply a homogenous identity, but shows diverse and distinct cultures that are scattered over as many places as there are people. This dissertation is about breaking, altering and rewriting dominant myths and narratives about Asian–Australian sensibilities by calling attention to the continuities and discontinuities of people's lives, most especially my own.

Unpicking The Label

What do you get if you put a whole lot of Asian–Australians in one room? You get the Asian–Australian e-mail discussion list[4], which is helpful, supportive but also self-legitimising and sensitive. If you don't introduce yourself, you'll be asked. Everyone is friendly, but you will be asked. You'll need to reinforce your Asianness. I'll lie awake at night wishing I was academic enough or published or high-profile enough to have those on the list joyfully email responses to my postings. Mostly, my friendly ocker musings don't go anywhere. I think I'm a little oversensitive. I think I feel a little too different. I wish I could write something like "Hey, I won an award for being an honorary Asian–Australian today." You can imagine the respect I'd get. I am doomed forever to dis/locate myself.

Asian–Australian literature is arguably, like the literatures of writers whose ethnicity is *Other* than English, mostly relegated to a specific place in a 'national' literary canon populated by texts which all too frequently act as a touchstone of Australian identity. To be an Asian–Australian and to write about the experience of it, or even to write about Australia at all, appears incidental against the more common *understanding* of Australianness, albeit 'white-washed,' that continues to dominate literary and cultural

[4] http://www.geocities.com/tseen/aa-list.html.

production by authors with Anglo-Saxon surnames who possess 'authority,' (read power) and 'the last word' on the subject of the Australian experience. This cultural hegemony, asserts Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, "has been maintained through canonical assumptions about literary activity, and through postcolonial literatures which identify them as isolated off-shoots of literature, and which therefore regulate them to marginal and subordinate positions" (1989: 07). More recently, the range and strength of Asian–Australian writers has become recognisable and undeniable, in that such writing, or 'literary activity' is not so much about the Australian experience but a demonstration of the writing itself. Some of Castro's novels for instance, experiment with intertextual devices, which can take place in Paris, Berlin and which even in the Australian landscape, do not necessarily adopt the usual descriptives of Asian–Australian displacement. Similarly, Tom Cho's short stories, which centre largely around American popular culture (which has become part of Australia's popular culture through film, fiction and media) and personable responses to sexual identity are parodic and discursive, resulting in a significant shift from any reference to ethnic identity. A process of incorporation appears thus to have been present for quite some time, but only rarely perceived, in which Asian–Australian writers are reclaiming the contested terrain of literary production. The intermingling of cultures and languages has created a new physical and cultural landscape and Asian–Australian literature reflects some of these experiences because Asian–Australian writers are being acknowledged for their writing skills, which ironically, first became noticeable due to their marginalisation as Asian–Australian writers under categories of 'ethnicity' and, as in Brian Castro's, Simone Lazaroo's, Hsu Ming Teo's and Hoa Pham's case, winning literary awards because of it.

The white half (is it half? Isn't it whole?) of me seems ambivalent about this. The Asian part of me is angry that the reward for a 'good writer' is to pass the white filter.

Authors who are labelled as part of the Asian–Australian writing category are commonly contextualised, with their 'ethnic' backgrounds or academic qualifications explained in order that English language readers can situate them and evaluate the authenticity and authority in their writings, whether the writings are fictional or autobiographical (see

Tucker, in Ommundsen, 2002: 127). Compare this to other Australian authors like political writer Mungo McCallum or advertising executive Bryce Courtenay, whose novels are critiqued mainly for their literary merit rather than authenticity (no critic would ever have used the praise 'authentic' for white Australian writing), or novelist Lian Hearn, whose fascination with Japanese culture helped her create a Shogun-like fantasy called *The Otori Series* and who gave the series its 'authenticity' not just by in-depth research but also by changing her name from Gillian Rubenstein to Lian Hearn. Tseen Khoo articulates that the "specificity of experience and historical and social contexts should always be taken into consideration when studying aspects of literary production" (Khoo, 2004c) and although this mandate seems difficult to adhere to regarding the production of fiction as opposed to non-fiction, it is evident that 'minority writers' must somehow assert their place in the world once in a position of authority by preventing the perpetuation of grand narratives, although they may be easily persuaded when it comes to being a highly published voice of authenticity who feeds an audience who likes a specific genre. Australian writer Tom Cho believes in the author's prerogative and raises the issue of what Tseen Khoo also describes as difference presented as lack or limitation, "a certain power ... comes with self-identification. I like to believe that claiming a label myself is better than having others put a label on me ... there could be anthologies of Asian–Australian writers, and yet Asian–Australian writers could also appear in other books that don't focus specifically on ethnicity" (1996: 15). Similarly, having been labelled all his life, Andy Quan has come to realise that it is easier to subvert labels rather than resist them, or rather, to adopt a variety of labels. "Labels have purpose," he says, "in a grocery store, who would pick up an unlabelled can of food?" (Quan, 2004: 173).

The concept, the reality is tragic, but appears to be a necessary evil. I would prefer someone recognise me as a writer of varied genres. I'd hate someone to define and identify me because of where they think I'm from. And yet, I am from somewhere. If labels are a marketing device on covers, they should change with each book I write that is put on the shelf.

The silencing effect of labelling is to undoubtedly assume an experience without allowing the author the freedom of having an unencumbered authorial voice. On the other hand, as Quan illustrates, labels seem a natural and unavoidable occurrence in our everyday lives, such as purchasing a particular can of food; it is true that if the label were not there, then no one, no reader, as it were, would likely pick up the can. Surely that's why we can choose between fiction and non-fiction? It is important to note here that the context with which Quan identifies is both about being Asian–Australian (and also Canadian) and about the queer/gay male experience. Certain issues surrounding a gay Asian male are, he writes in *Calendar Boy*, about the struggle against being labelled by a white gay male community, and the inherent categorisation within the Asian gay male community itself. The question "who would pick up a can of unlabelled food?" brings a different connotation in that the notion of physical/sexual attractiveness as part of cultural acceptance is at stake here. Nevertheless, if in the purchasing context, (and one would hope that Asian–Australians are not relegated to the grocery store shelves, although they are if they are writers on bookshelves) then one must consider the sales (publishing) strategies of purchasing a can at the grocery store. So many marketing strategies are employed to help sell one can over another, such as shelf location; eye level for the more expensive brands, easy access for the supermarket's own-label cans and cap ends for the more popular labels. Sandra Lyne comments that book covers can focus,

> on the parts of Asian women that facilitate book sales: parts that tease, titillate and play along with Western fantasy, disconnected from any sense that individual personality is important. Suggestive of the remains of a cannibalistic feast, the visual display of alienation could appeal to one's sense of the surreal, but it highlights the utilitarian use that is made of Asian-ness, particularly female Asian-ness, in a consumerist global culture (2002).

The label, visual in this case, helps tell us what is in the can so we know what we're getting. It would be safe and reasonable, thus, to allow the fact that labels have a high level of necessity; albeit the elaboration of the label is what this exegesis interrogates; the quintessential Asian–Australian grand narrative as opposed to innovation and creativity.

My mum says it's a skill to sing out of tune.

Nevertheless, one must also question; why can't an Asian–Australian author write about the experience of the Australian outback without directly experiencing it her/himself? Why can't a 'white' author write about the Asian experience? The answer has often relied upon exposing one's conscious presence through one's writing to encompass Khoo's suggestion and overcome its difficulties, such as Castro's *Shanghai Dancing*, which he calls 'fictional autobiography,' which is the unfettering of the author to write whatever he wants to write about without the Asian–Australian writing community feeling silenced, and also without the readers, be they white or otherwise, feeling that they are reading the writing of a consciously categorised/labelled author.

Labels:

1. ethnicity
2. gender
3. genre
4. language

Self-identification seems problematic, however, as the writing ceases to be fictional and instead becomes auto or semi-autobiographical. One of the methods of fictional writing, although not always the way it is read, is to try and minimise all presence of the authorial voice, to assault the idea of the integral authorial voice (Barthes: 1978). Non-fiction seems to be a licence to write with complete subjectivity. However, the most meaningful post-modern point of fictional writing to me is that the authorial voice is exuberantly, politically, present. The argument that truth and fiction merge is also relevant because for an Asian–Australian writer, the truth is always under examination and self-identification assists in contextualisation, so that readers understand the Asian–Australian writer's intentions, rather than concluding the social direction of the fictional novel.

It is therefore apparent to the Asian–Australian author that there are various instances of being labelled, but also opportunities to subvert them as Castro has. The first is as an ethnic author by an English reading audience, and the second is as an ethnic author by

one's own ethnic community, including other writers of the same ethnicity. Either way, you're in trouble because somewhere, your 'freedom' to be a fictional author, where 'the voice is denied' is prevented or you are forced always to begin a piece of writing with a straightjacket on. Can one criticise Lillian Ng then, who appeared to have objectified the Asian sensibility in *Silver Sisters* or *Swallowing Clouds*, or Jung Chang who described/prescribed the first of hundreds (maybe thousands) of 'cruel Asian female genre' writing in *Wild Swans* and who takes out her grandmother's gold foot-binding slippers at every interview? Can one damn any other Asian writers who promote the 'Oriental lifestyle,' if they do not have the awareness of locating themselves within their own works of fiction? Or do they? It was only after discussing Simone Lazaroo's text *The Australian Fiancé* with other people in the Asian–Australian Discussion List and after reading reviews by academics and critics on the subject that I appreciated the namelessness of the narrator, which I initially took as a silencing mechanism, and then embraced the novel as a piece of writing that could 'represent' and 'speak' for me, as if such an act of identification is the goal of a writer, let alone an Asian–Australian one; the purpose of writing to represent and speak for its author, or for its author's ethnic community. Asian–Australian writing is often critiqued as a vehicle for this purpose, and often such a reaction must be acknowledged and considered as part of the writing process. Just as white authors rarely get praised for authenticity, it is rare that writing by an Asian–Australian writer is acknowledged as totally removed from the author's own state of existence.

Consequently, the 'lack' Khoo talks about is due to Asian–Australian writing being most often read *without* cultural theoretical contextualisation, such as the understanding of the consequences of the White Australia Policy or anything beyond the conflicting assumptions that the writer must be committed to innovation and must experience stereotypical culture shock, examine East/West customs comparisons and/or sexual and gender differences. Tseen Khoo explains that Asian–Australian women's writing falls between literature and multicultural studies, "reviews and readings are carried out against a backdrop of the Australian popular cultural perception of Asia as economic frontier, and Asian peoples as tourists or potential business partners, if not refugees" (Khoo,

2003a). It seems, as Cho illustrated earlier, that Asian–Australian fiction writing should fall under multicultural studies as well as literary studies if to situate an Asian–Australian author in a cultural context promotes understanding of her/his subjective positioning. As Tseen Khoo states, "This [de-contextualisation] and other forms of reading without critical national context leads to the continued marginalisation of Asian–Australian women's writing" (Khoo, 2003a). Furthermore, because ethnic cultural writings are traditionally provided by the dominant majority, the white middle-class educated writer who speaks for the *Other*, there is an obvious danger in homogenising the Other in the intention of supporting its voice. In this way, warns Benedict Anderson, "fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations" (1983: 36).

Speaking for the Other

As a reaction to marginalisation and representation by the hands of white critics, I, being situated in the categories of Other, am careful to ensure that I am not mistaken for representing or speaking for *all* Others in the category.

It makes sense that Asian–Australian academics take care to acknowledge their own differences and subjectivities with other Asian–Australians including members of their own specific ethnicity, although Asian–Australian writers (or even perhaps Asian writers such as British writer Jung Chang and American writer Adeline Yen Mah) may not yet possess or care about the 'theoretical knowledge' to become conscious of this state. Academic Chek Ling, reflecting in the literary journal *Meanjin* on the political culture of the Asian–Australian community, states that "... such images in the media tend to activate nineteenth century images of Chinese people that are lying dormant in some of the influential figures of our society."(Khoo, 2004: 152) Anna Yen, a writer and performer says "I can speak only for myself, not for the whole Chinese Australian community in all its diversity. Not even for the rest of my family" (cited by Lo, 2000a: 39). Similarly, Lillian Ng explains that she feels unable to write from anything other than

the Asian subjectivity, although she mentions that her daughter, who "mixes well with Australian people" will [be able to] write into the Australian character. "'I've got to get rid of my Chinese, the Chineseness in me,' she says. 'I won't be able to write about Australian characters, not Caucasians. Because I don't have that experience. No matter how hard I try, I can't without the experience'" (cited by Lo, 2000a: 39).

Despite this care from the side of the Other to pronounce individual works, it is rare to hear a Western writer claim that her or his writing is not a representation of what other Western writers experience in her or his culture with the amount of care and consciousness of her or his Asian writing counterpart. I have already quoted Lian Hearn who stated as honestly as possible, the disclaimer to 'purists' that her *Tales of the Otori* series is a work of her 'imagination'. I wonder if she would say that, were the work about South Australian families, or Sydney's gay community or French cuisine? One might laugh in fact, if Peter Carey or Kate Grenville made a point of delineating their experience from that of fellow Australians, as if offence might be taken or that the danger of homogenisation might occur. Most likely they are praised for capturing what happened. I can't see an Asian-Australian winning the Miles Franklin for portraying 'what actually happened'. An Asian-Australian might win a Commonwealth prize however, if her/his work is postcolonial. Maybe Castro can get through that barrier.

Although I have visited Hong Kong thirteen times and been the subject of many comments about my appearance and behaviour and experienced difference, I cannot yet say I have lived the experience of a migrant or a person of ethnic heritage. This is mainly because I identify as white Australian and my mother identifies as white British. Her own experiences, however, have left indelible marks, not because I feel less than the majority of fellow Australians, but also because the racism I have felt seems to pale in comparison to the racism experienced by my mother and her family; as if the fall is greater from British heights than it is from Antipodean. It sounds ridiculous.

"The Gentleman's Outpost" was written specifically to explore the more vague area of my grandfather's identity, from his cascading memories towards the English, Indian and

Chinese people and his stoic refusal to speak directly to me about his Indian–Malay background and his British-ness. "Children should be seen and not heard," he used to tell my mother. When writing the piece, I relied on imagination/imaginings which were crafted from the second-hand stories of my mother, who was guessing too but who demonstrated a desperate need to cling to traditional British values and in a pronounced way, for me to cling to them too. The main protagonist Melville Newton is a character posted by the East India Shipping Company from India to Hong Kong in the late 1800s. His character represents the layered and constructed identities of colonial India whose nationals were educated into British culture and domination and dispersed into British states in the early 1800s only to find that they had no hope of being respected/accepted on the same level as their colonisers.[5] This is not dissimilar to Adia from "Island Sacrifice", a few chapters later. Benedict Anderson describes the recollections of Bipin Chandra Pal who talked about the British educated Indian person's displacement from Macauleyist instruction to educate Indians into British culture and literature, "In mind and manners he [the British educated Indian] was as much an Englishman as any Englishman ... [yet] he was as much a stranger in his own native land as the European residents in the country" (1983: 92). From his comments on the subject, it seems that this perception of British Indians has not changed. Similarly, Glenn D'Cruz states that "Anglo Indians are probably the smallest, and possibly oddest minority group in India. They are the literal progeny of European colonisation, and are often stereotyped as being 'more British than the British' because they practise Christianity, speak English as their first language and generally adopt British social customs" (2004: 223). This concept was the inspiration for illustrating Newton's upbringing and his difficulty in adapting to the new colony which, being a port, was full of Chinese, Portuguese, British, and American merchants.

---

[5] In 1813, Parliament allocated 100,000 rupees a year to promote 'native' education, both 'Oriental' and 'Western,' at the same time that the East India Company's charter came up for renewal. Ten years later, a committee of public instruction was set up in Bengal and nine years after that, Thomas Babington Macauley became its president. Babington famously declared that 'a single shelf of a good European library is worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia,' and produced his 'minute [recommendations] on education which went into immediate effect. Such an English educational system would create, in Macaulay's own words, 'a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect.' Anderson comments that "from this point on, all over the expanding empire if at different speeds, Macauleyism was pursued" (Anderson, 1983: 90) See also Talib (2002: 11) who talks about English literary education in India, which, through the educational process, would readily accept British culture and domination.

Anderson elaborates further by stating that "no matter how anglicized a Pal became, he was always barred from movement outside its parameter, laterally, say, to the Gold Coast or Hong Kong, and vertically to the metropole." Completely estranged from the society of his own people ... he was under life sentence to serve among them ... Anglicization produced thousands of Pals all over the world. Nothing more sharply underscores the fundamental contradiction of English official nationalism i.e. the inner compatibility of empire and nation ..." (1983: 93).

Melville's character in the second story, "The Gentleman's Outpost", is comparable with Adia in "Island Sacrifice", who arrives in Australia from the British colony of Hong Kong only to find that she is never going to be considered British. I have sought to rearticulate the main character Melville Newton with the self-consciousness to question these ideals and pursuit of wealth. Ommundsen's comment describes the intent clearly when she talks about the colonised subject (2001: 28), "Wealth ... puts him in the same position as the Europeans and distinguishes him from the rest of his countrymen," whereas Adia, although imbued with a migrant's survival instinct to adapt and conform, chooses to sacrifice herself not through giving up, but from disgust and disappointment. In "The Gentleman's Outpost", Newton is instructed by his father;

> You'll go to Hong Kong village."
>
> "Yes Father."
>
> "It will one day be a great port. You can show the British how they should run a new land. You will make me proud, but most of all, gain self-respect like a true Indian."
>
> It was a sensible choice for Newton. His parents resolved that office work was right for such a fragile child. He knew he would make something of himself. Their expectations of him were great. His father's arm was draped around Newton's mother as he spoke, "You must go Indra," he said, calling Newton by his real name, "Go and walk amongst the British bravely and bring healing and deliverance. For goodness sakes, help these people who call themselves 'civilised' to achieve God."

It was clear to me that in "The Gentleman's Outpost", Newton should find work as a clerk or comprador. "... The colonial state, and, somewhat later, corporate capital, needed armies of clerks, who to be useful had to be bilingual, capable of mediating linguistically between the metropolitan nation and the colonised peoples" (Anderson, 1983: 115). Newton epitomises the apologetic unacknowledged presence of ethnic minorities in British history, made apparent in popular culture and interrogated in identity theory.

The experience of tokenism does not go uncharacterised in other Asian–Australian texts. In Lazaroo's *The Australian Fiancé,* for instance, "The Indian valet stands expressionlessly by the brass lion-emblazoned front door. He inclines his head towards us without looking at us" (2000a: 61). In this novel, in which the Eurasian protagonist is already the Other and brutally contested against other dominant Australian characters and the white Australian environment, an Indian valet is noted as being an underpowered character. Not to say that Lazaroo, in writing fiction, had an ethical responsibility of representing the Indian ethnicity, however, such representation can raise the question of hierarchies of Otherness in Asian–Australian texts and also confirms the lot of the Indian in this narrative, to provide the variation in levels of Otherness. The representation of the valet was disconcerting. Lazaroo presents an Indigenous Australian, servant character in a similar way, where 'the Eurasian character' learns that the 'Aboriginal servant' was forced to have sex (raped), by the Australian fiancé's father. The reader is made to compare the Eurasian with the Aboriginal servant and ultimately the Indian valet; a comparison which 'reduces' the Eurasian from lover/object to servant/object and finally, to 'no better than'. The white part of me says the representations are deliberate and poignant. The Asian part of me wonders if an average reader will not realise these stereotypes are being challenged.

In *Chinese Voices*, Chek Ling talks about politicians and community leaders who are in positions of power, but "who assist in conveying the servant-like usefulness of token ethnics, by not standing for anything ..." (2004: 153). The worst example of these, he says, is the token Chinaman, hand-picked by a patron for a public position as a 'yes-man'

or "a ventriloquist's smiling Buddha, the quintessential 'Chinese middleman,' a recreation of the comprador in nineteenth century extraterritorial China ... I think of them as kept specimens, caged by their own pretensions and obligations to their benefactors" (2004: 153). This very quote was my motivation for producing an entire narrative by a protagonist who remained the 'yes-man' but who was hopefully able to sustain the story by contextualising the East/West experience. Ling's issue is not with Westernised Asian–Australians per se, but with individuals who after being granted an opportunity to change or further Asian–Australian relationships, do not demonstrate accountability and integrity in Chinese–Australian community representation and conclusively kick the postcolonial movement out the door. Yet who can resist including a compradore character that represents that fascination of the West with the East; the contrast of cunning to clever, albeit risking misrepresentation?

In Hsu Ming Teo's *Love and Vertigo*, Mei Ling's son Donald Duck (the main protagonist Grace's grand uncle) is conveyed as a businessman who makes the most of his perceived submissiveness and clever/cunning, "Donald Duck first went into business ... during the war. When he was conscripted by the Japanese to work for them, he made himself useful by obtaining women, antiques, and rare food delicacies for his Japanese masters. He learnt to speak Japanese and became their interpreters ... he stole for them and kept a substantial commission for himself" (2000: 49).

In *After China*, Castro describes a resourceful twelve-year-old boy in Shanghai:

> In the summer he drags along the old Bund and learns the ways of the streets from black market hawkers and hustlers. He runs errands for the military ensconced in their barracks, once drinking their beer and topping the bottles with urine. They beat him with bamboo canes. In the winter he sells Mao Zedong caps modified with woollen ear flaps to Russian technicians. Most of the time he spends hanging around the boulevards marvelling at the buildings left behind by the foreigners and meditating on the cosmopolitan skyline (2003b: 14).

Interestingly, Castro's novel focuses on patriotism and betraying one's country and one's identity to nation, gender and race, in *Love and Vertigo*, the protagonist who resists

understanding her mother's identity, returns to Singapore and inevitably comes to appreciate it. Similarly, in Castro's spy novel *Stepper*, Yoshio Toso, a journalist for the Japanese Asahi Shimbun paper watches the slow demise of Stepper but inadvertently, describes the choices a migrant must make. As "Toso", Castro writes:

> ... understands how one could turn. In the beginning you had to get rid of nostalgia; disburden yourself of images; try not to be alone disport in the new; destroy old love letters; take on a new identity; try not to fall in love. This effectively turned you into a fallow field. A little bit of disillusion, a few purges, and you had a good communist spy. But a defector ... a defector was a different question. A defector answered to vanity and to weakness. A defector was willy-nilly committed to his weakness; and the weakness was almost always that of ambiguity (1997: 121).

The cunning nobody, Castro's 'defector,' is not necessarily unique to Asian–Australian writing but is unarguably an assumed representation of real life culture – the ambitious, self-serving go between – made of Asian Other highlighted and made prevalent in the texts mentioned above. The defector character itself is always at risk of being understood as a trope of ambivalence rather than ambiguity, where defection is weak and negative. This logic does not apply to my own story, in which my argument, although about disillusionment with one's own home, does not include a defection to another.

My mother's experience in Hong Kong, from which "Chinese Whispers" was produced, was to examine the unlikelihood of the perfectly blended dual identity where perceived English and Chinese custom is embraced and accepted together. According to Staples (2002: 13) the Hong Kong Chinese lived successfully in a dual-cultural environment, but this does not necessarily mean that their culture was hybridised. Staples quotes Lynn Pan's *Sons of the Yellow Emperor* (1990), saying that "the Hong Kong Chinese are neither anglicised British empire subjects, [Anglicised Hong Kong Chinese], nor traditional Chinese [which can be] interpreted as the Hong Kong Chinese possessing a unique culture of their own and that their engagement with British/Western culture is an event of separate personal selection for use as required, resulting in the status of Hong Kong Chinese culture being a condition of 'biculturalism' not 'hybridity' (Staples, 2003:

13). Ackbar Abbas states, not necessarily in concordance with Staples, that Hong Kong did not have a history before 1841, when it was ceded to the British, but that the history of Hong Kong was effectively "a history of colonialism" (1998: 2).

This makes the youthful Adia's "Chinese Whispers" experience and subsequently, the adult Adia's "Island Sacrifice" experience different from (but comparable to) the experience of characters in novels by authors like Teo and Lazaroo, whose protagonists are from Singapore but who adopt or possess an Australian identity. Such different colonial experiences, and the fact that I have not directly had these experiences only further complicates my authority to speak for my mother and, perhaps, appropriate her stories.

On Writing Australasian

In *The Yellow Lady*, Alison Broinowski points out that Victoria alone had 47,000 Chinese at the turn of the century and by 1947, due to migration laws set to 'protect' the gold-mining prospects of white Australians, there were only 6,000 Chinese people in the whole of Australia. Broinowski adds that if citizenship were to be an indicator of commitment to Australia, there have been more Chinese citizens than both the British and the Irish combined since Federation (1996: 145). I like to quote this when people ask me if I am an 'ABC,' a derogatory and objectifying term meaning Australian Born Chinese, a term which in my surroundings, is often used to express admiration for how well I am assimilated into Australian culture but very quickly diffused when I say "How inherently racist" with a smile. I use the quote when asked if I am a *minority* too, or if I am asked where I come from. Because I often get asked this mostly by people who have not yet heard me speak, I tend to become discouraged from writing. This, an effect of the White Australia Policy[6] and the legally enforced beginning of entrenched anti-Asian racism in

[6] Australia is a white colonial society founded on genocide. The Immigration Restriction Bill of 1901 (known as the White Australia Policy) was introduced with Federation in 1901, on the insistence of the Trade Union Movement and the fledgling Labor Party. The Bill is intimately tied to Australia's conception of itself as a 'white nation,' and effectively institutionalised and entrenched racism into the national imaginary (the Nation as a White Man's Nation). This thesis does not intend to cover the deeper racism entrenched in the treatment of indigenous peoples (such as genocide, refusal of citizenship, persecution, land appropriation), but this treatment is a further dimension in a racist national imaginary.

The policy was initially aimed at excluding Chinese labour, but rapidly became generalised to include 'non-white' persons of Southern European and Middle Eastern origin. Although persons of Southern European origin were

Australia, has had a direct effect on me. Although I am not 'colour blind,' I do not see the need to calculate the amount of time I have been in Australia in preparation for this sort of questioning. I do not understand the need to learn the history of Asians in Australia; although I now realise I must know it because I am inevitably part of it, though not in a way that I choose. My own mother was the first in our family to migrate to Australia in 1966, and because she was a British subject, was immediately part of the Commonwealth. Her initial reaction, as mentioned, was of confusion. She found herself being treated as a 'migrant'[7] by the Australian public rather than being recognised instantly as a British subject. Not so for my father who was a French-speaking Malaysian citizen and was only naturalised in the late 1970s.

As an Australian citizen, the author Sang Ye identifies as an Australian writer and Castro as an allegorist. I myself identify as an Australian, but now also an Asian–Australian because I feel at least welcomed by the Asian–Australian community (and I am therefore as reluctant as other members of a community who are either reticent to criticise each other's writings – or more confident than I in their position as creators and enforcers of that community – but also scared as hell lest any of them read this and think I'm a traitor or rubbish). I am now uncomfortable and slightly confused as to where I am supposed to stand and why I must make a choice where I must locate myself because how then will I

considered relatively 'whiter' than, for example, persons of Indigenous, Middle Eastern, Asian or African origin, and were thus given a relatively 'greater' preference in migrant selection processes, they were nonetheless perceived locally as 'non-white' and treated accordingly. Note that in the Australian case, 'whiteness' most often means 'British-ness' or persons from preferred countries in Northern and Western Europe. Consequently it is not inappropriate to use the term 'non-white' to refer to Italian, Greek and other such populations. In this context 'whiteness' means dominant Anglo-Saxon cultural power. (See, for example, Collins, J. (1988) *Migrant Hands in a Distant Land: Australia's Post-War Immigration*, Pluto Press, Sydney; Castles, S., Kalantzis, M., Cope, B. & Morrissey, M. (1988) *Mistaken Identity: Multiculturalism and the Demise of Nationalism in Australia*, Pluto Press, Sydney; Hage, G. (1998) *White Nation*, Pluto Press, Sydney; Hage, G. (1998) *White Nation. Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, Pluto Press, Australia.)

[7] Terms such as 'migrant,' 'ethnic' and 'NESB' (Non-English-Speaking Background) have become problematic and essentialising in that they are explicitly concerned with an essential difference, and that there is an essence explicit to categories of the abovementioned. Although their essential difference lies in their historical specificity – the particular conditions of their emergence and development through Post War migration and the era of multicultural politics of the 1980s – such terms are in opposition to the dominant and remain fixed and totalising. I wanted to move away from an essentialist/non-essentialist binary, partly because I want to remove terms from their assigned binary positions. (See Spivak, G. C. (1988) *In Other Worlds. Essays in Cultural Politics*, Routledge, USA; Spivak, C. C. (1988) 'Can the Subaltern Speak?,' in, Nelson, C. and Grossberg, L., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Macmillan, U.K; Spivak, C. C. (1989) 'A Response to the difference within: Feminism and Critical Theory,' in, Meese, E. and Parker, A. (eds) *The Difference within Feminism and Critical Theory*, John Benjamin's Publishing, Amsterdam/Philadelphia.)

be published? I am neither tied to China or anything 'Asian' other than the memories I possess of my mother, nor am I allowed to belong to 'Australia' and what it means to be 'Australian', which, at this stage, is as normal to me as existence.[8] Mind you, if someone categorises 'Asians', my bristles pop up; or 'Australians', my patriotism is riled.

Please note that the omission of my father is deliberate.

A major feature of postcolonial literature is the concern with self, place and displacement. In *The Empire Writes Back. Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin et al. call it the "recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place" (1989: 9). Because the self has been eroded by dislocation and cultural denigration, myths of identity and in-authenticity are a common feature; also common in the case of postcolonial Asian–Australian literatures. It becomes hence, a question of existence. To me, the word 'home' immediately connotes the private sphere of patriarchy, gendered self-identity, shelter, comfort and protection. But for the diasporic figure who travels between 'words, worlds and homes,' the experience of home is always a temporary arrangement, because to be at home denotes belonging, which is tied to the modernist concept of nation-building and belonging to nation.[9] Tom Cho describes the feeling in an e-mail to the Asian–Australian discussion list about his thoughts on what 'home' is:

---

[8] See Gunew, S (1988) 'Authenticity and the Writing Cure. Reading Some Migrant Women's Writing,' in, Sheridan, S. (ed.) *Grafts: Feminist Cultural Criticism*, Verso, Australia; Hatzimanolis, E. (1992) 'Speak as you Eat: Reading Migrant Writing, Naturally', in, Gunew, S. (ed.) *Striking Cords: Multicultural Literary Interpretations*, Allen and Unwin, Australia; Gunew, S. (1990) 'Denaturalizing Cultural Nationalism: Multicultural Readings of 'Australia,' in, Bhabha, H. (ed.) *Nation and Narration*, Routledge, London; Hodge, B. and Mishra, V. (1990) *Dark Side of the Dream. Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.

[9] See Papastergiadis, N. (1998) *Dialogues in the Diaspora, Essays and Conversations on Cultural Identity*, Rivers Oram Press, Australia; Chambers, I. (1998) 'A Stranger in the House', *Communal/Plural, Journal of Transnational and Crosscultural Studies, Vol. 6, No. 1, April*; Marangoly George, R. (1999) *The Politics of Home. Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction*, University of California Press, Los Angeles; Massey, D. (1994) 'Double Articulation: A Place in the World,' in, Bammer, A. (ed.) *Displacements. Cultural Identities in Questions*, Indiana University Press, Bloomingdale; Hage, G. (1997) 'At Home in the entrails of the West', in, *Home/World. Space, Community and Marginality in Sydney's West*, Pluto Press, Australia; Ahmed, S .(1999) *Home and Away. Narratives of Migration and Estrangement*, International Journal of Cultural Studies, Sage, CA; JanMohamed, A. R. (1992) 'Worldliness-Without-World, Homelessness-as-Home: Toward a Definition of the Specular Border Intellectual', in, Sprinkler, M. (ed.) *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell, USA.

> I think the lack of sense I have of 'China as home' is very much due to how I was raised. Particularly from my mum, I grew up with the sense that China was a place associated with trauma and hardship, and something not to be discussed. At one stage, earlier in my parents' marriage, my dad wanted to go to Hong Kong to work. My mum went with him but when she got pregnant with my oldest brother she apparently persuaded my dad to come home so that my brother would be born in Australia and be an Australian citizen.
>
> Because of stuff like this, I grew up believing that I was lucky to be born in Australia. So, growing up, it would have been a struggle for me to imagine China as home. China was – and to a large extent remains – an abstract entity in my mind (personal e-mail. With permission. 19/07/2006).

My thoughts are different in that my mother did not share the same perspective with Tom's mother about what China represented. To my mother, China may as well have been as "foreign" as the Mediterranean. I would say, nevertheless, that my mother's feelings of the need to assimilate are similar to those of Tom's mother, and probably many first-generation ethnics whose stories are written into the first generation characters by the writers who have been studied for this dissertation.

Despite their self-categorisations, both Castro and Sang are considered by me here as Asian–Australian writers for the sake of literary criticism. I could just as easily include my favourite author, Michael Cunningham, into the Asian–Australian category, as he writes about family, gender identity and inability to fit in. I haven't asked him and I didn't ask them either. In fact, although Cunningham is an American writer whose works include *The Hours* (2002), *Home at the End of the World* (2004) and *Flesh and Blood* (1995), he has held more influence over my writing than any of the Asian–Australian writers I have selected. I could perhaps also choose Chris Ware, the graphic artist who created *Jimmy Corrigan the Smartest Kid on Earth* (2000), whose depiction of the misfit, Jimmy, whose father and mother have separated from each other and himself from the world; is exactly the sort of narrative that informs my work as a writer of splintered subjects. Specifically, the fact that Ware's work is visual rather than literary is something

with which I identify. My writing is, as is Tom Cho's writing (although Cho's writing is mostly written in a dry comedic narrative voice, drawing from American pop culture mixed in with an Australian cultural context), rather cinematic and our images are often extracted from popular cultural themes. But notice I don't include Cunningham or Ware, because they do not write about Asian characters, nor do they appear to be Asian, or Australian, nor are they included in any Asian–Australian critique.

What if I did include Cunningham and Ware? If I did, then this exegesis would be less painful to me.

Tseen Khoo posits that the imposed visual stereotype that "all Asians look the same is conflated with cultural expectations that all Asian women necessarily write the same way" (2004c) and that the Australian and Western reading appetite tries to seduce, at least 'encourage,' an 'Asian' writer (or non-Asian writers, such as Lian Hearn) to produce narrative fictions of a specific genre. It's the old syllogism again. You look Asian, you write Asian so you have to write about geishas and butterflies. In examining the themes of Asian–Australian writing, questions of homogenisation are raised, including 'self-homogenisation', and care must be taken regarding the identification of the specific authors, which is largely unknown other than where their work has been published, critiqued or interviewed. In fact, the grand Orientalist narratives presented by Western writers are the yardsticks against which Asian writers are often "measured in the absence of cultural context". As Edward Said has asserted, "Imperialism has shaped our fictions of Asia as literature all too often merely feeds those we wish fed" (1995: 22). And similarly, Gayatri Spivak (1994) reminds us that it is not only who speaks, but who listens, which informs our literary production. No wonder that many Asian/ethnic writers and non-Asian/ethnic writers choose to ride the literary market for grand narratives.

Brian Castro similarly warns that "the most insidious thing for a writer is to think of readership" (2001: 75) which describes the purist imperative of any writer who should not feel shackled by the reading or literary establishment. The premise too, is ideal in a world where categories don't exist and cannot be made conscious (impossible) but

disallows contextualisation of one's work and removes the emphasis on a writer to possess a sense of social responsibility to his or her peers; a situation that seems important to Asian–Australian writers who are always careful to profess their unique stance within the community and a state of being which Castro himself shifts seamlessly in and out of. Castro also states that to situate oneself within Chinese diasporic writing is a question of "who's claiming whom" (2001: 77), a circular argument that cannot be resolved if Asian–Australian writers continue to demarcate themselves as not speaking for their entire communities. Clearly Castro meant that in literary terms, one must seek to write not for a reader, but for one's self, and if he exemplifies this practice, then (although he himself seeks to sell books like most authors) his literary awards and reputation are reward in itself. Nevertheless, for those of us who are directed by agents and publishers and provided with a positive reaction by a public hungry for certain narratives, and at the same time encouraged to make delineations of ethnicity about one's writing, the seduction becomes overwhelming.

On Being Woman

Regarding the persistence of expected narratives in the West, Castro comments that "predominately female Chinese writers have given the West some false impressions of exile and hybridity" (2001: 77). Male Asian writers have different gendered experiences of being born and raised in an 'Asian' country, which concerns issues surrounding psychology and behaviour, and also the separate albeit equally Orientalist experience of Asian men and women in Western countries, which can inform their writing. It may appear that Asian–Australian male writers such as Brian Castro, Ouyang Yu, Frank Chan Loh, William Yang (who is primarily known as a photographer), Andy Quan and Tom Cho are not faced with the expectations of producing such narratives in order to be accused of perpetuating them. It may also be that non-Chinese writers, such as Lian Hearn (*Otori Series*), Arthur Golden (*Memoirs of a Geisha*) etc., give the West some false impressions. The Asian male in the Orientalist canon is faced with 'criteria,' such as being feminine, cruelty, invisibility and so on, but somehow is not expected to perpetuate this into the literary genre. English reading audiences do not have an appetite for the cunning Asian male as they do the downtrodden Asian female. Is Castro implying that Asian–Australian male writers provide better/truer impressions of exile/hybridity within

their texts? With "The Gentleman's Outpost", I attempted to create a male protagonist to encapsulate expected narratives, but as I have done with the other stories, to reclaim and subvert them. Castro's accusation about Asian women writers requires explanation. I have not yet published "The Gentleman's Outpost".

Is there truth in such grand narratives; the submissive woman, the cunning go-between, the mean mother and culturally confused children? China's One Child Policy and the reactionary girl-child killing, as well as the effects of patriarchy and colonialism (not to mention war, famine and dislocation), have made impressions in the way Asian–Australian writers construct their narratives and this is the way they are read. When one considers the purpose of writing, to write for oneself, or to write for an audience who expects such narratives, one ironically risks being misunderstood. One could look at the characters of Stepper, Scholar Wu, Jonah Tay, Sonny, Melville Newton and any Chinese male character in the Asian–Australian novels I have selected and find homogenising similarities such as atrophy, invisibility and the struggle to assert authority. Mind you, you get these traits in Western novels too.

In the Asian women's writing genre, "these impressions are worth noting as they are a culmination of representations of Orientalist mythologies which include tropes of Asian–Australian women's writing, which in itself is a homogenous term [and is] generally framed by the autobiographical styled 'pain and suffering' of 'other' women" (Ommundsen 2001: 125). Castro's point is relevant and a sound warning against 'sacrificial' writing from women Asian–Australian, and/or Asian writers, but is also a difficult hurdle to negotiate if, to achieve altruism, one must first attempt to suspend oneself between author and authority and to understand the implications of speaking and negotiating territory allocated to the margin of Otherness. Funny how white writers are allowed to write as Asian by the 'white' community, but Asian writers who write about being Asian are highly scrutinised by the 'Asian' community.

Various women writers of Asian descent have rejected their exclusion from, and misrepresentation in a Western society. Once conscious of Orientalist mythologies, they

must also face a misinformed or stereotypical evaluation of their work and themselves, and sometimes resistance from their own communities to their representations or sentiments. Evelyn Lau, who writes about bold Asian prostitutes and marginalised women in *Fresh Girls and Other Stories* (1995) and Zhou Wei Hui, whose novel *Shanghai Baby* (2001) was banned in China, are the most obvious examples. Hoa Pham's *Vixen* (2000), about a Chinese woman who is in fact a magical/mythical Fox Fairy, is a more complex example, in which a mysterious Asian woman is represented, reclaimed and empowered; an effect which amongst other criteria, subsequently won Pham the Vogel/Australian Literary Award. (A specific and rare area of the Australian literary establishment which embraces resistance to expected grand narratives. One could successfully argue that it is not always best-sellers that win awards. The "grand narratives" I refer to here and to which Castro and Ommundsen refer are born of the establishment that generates those writers on the best-seller list and those publishers and book marketers that aim for the same.) Thus, although this sort of repression is hopefully breaking down, the sites from which these women write and the ways in which they place themselves suggest intriguing links and fissures in the formation of their identities. The risk in these women being valued against literary appetites for popular marketing fantasies, is often to be labelled 'angry,' a postcolonial situation that succeeds in alienating the writer and once again, relegating them to the margins of literary consideration. Angry writing, assimilative writing, apologist writing; colonial, postcolonial; these categories appear to exist for the Asian–Australian author and Other authors to be slotted into. For me, Castro's novels make him the only Asian–Australian author (albeit male) able to 'run faster than the devil,' and, although he wrote many years ago, Frank Chan Loh's novel *When Dining with Tigers* also resonates with me for the same reason. Both authors' intertextual devices and conscious/subconscious narratives defy categorisation and their apparent knowledge of literary as well as cultural theories ensures a post-national reading of their work. They shut up the literary establishment, the white reader and the Asian community, including the critics from both sides. I also think they are good writers.

The category to which most Asian–Australian women's writing is usually compared – the genre of confessional writing of Chinese women – is almost always read in terms of at

least partial autobiography. "A woman's knowledge is not traditionally valued," argues Khoo "for Asian–Australian women writers, this situation is doubly reinforced because of their gender and ethnicity and the very purpose of writing, for some Asian women is to make a political statement" (2004c: 13). To write can be a way of putting oneself into the world and, in the process, creating a version of the world as lived and viewed by Asian–Australian women. In this sense, from writing comes the liberation of texts that offer alternative versions of Australian society, which recast Asian–Australian women's writing as something other than novelty or tokenism for publishing. However, critics also look closely both at what is written and what it alters, appropriates, mediates, or contributes to current discourses about Asian women and Asian women's literature. Ouyang Yu's character points a sarcastic finger at this in *The Eastern Slope Chronicle.* As Dao's Australian student, Antoinette, listens to his stories after spending the night with him, Dao recalls his lecturer John Lawson telling him to write his experiences down. "People had become tired of fiction and fiction-making. What's the point of reading something that came out of the pure imagination of a sick man? Write autobiography, she was telling him now. The Wild Swans kind of stuff. The East Wind West Wind stuff. Sell yourself. Like a whore? He wondered to himself" (2002: 360).

What is it to write with a readership in mind, despite that the act of marketing a mass product may be 'insidious'? This question is difficult and daunting to answer especially given Castro's inference that Asian women writers may be more interested in the present audience than Asian men writers. A writer might initially write without thinking of an audience but as s/he begins editing, s/he must clarify what s/he is trying to say with the conscious preparation to translate her/his ideas to another reader, including editor, publisher and, perhaps, agent. The insidiousness that Castro speaks of lies in manipulating the narrative to guarantee a kind of contextualisation, and therefore readership, and to even think of disabusing the art of writing; the self-act of literary creation to become attuned to or cooperate with the marketing or consumption of writing in order to profit; be it for money, circulation or merely for the sake of being read. The insidiousness also lies in the limitations that one's own writing can achieve in manipulating a single message and representing a particular set of views. This is most

prevalent in literature about the experience of Otherness in English; which is to introduce a privileged set of cultural voices (those who can write or be translated into English) and risk these voices as becoming representative of all Others, like propaganda. Are women writers more interested in seeking to please the audience because it is the only way they can be published? Is it that these women have, in fact, interpreted their experiences using the colonial filter and, without realising, subjugated themselves?

Various Asian–Australian woman writers (such as Teo or Lazaroo) have been criticised by literary critics and by the Asian–Australian community for presenting 'false' impressions in their works of fiction – on subjects including exile and hybridity, as mentioned by Castro - and thereby abusing their 'authentic voices' and/or positions; betraying the Other by speaking wholly for the Other.

> "It is the 'Amy Tans' who have unwittingly played into the hands of host-nation chauvinists, because woman's position in China, particularly in the past, has been one of servitude and degradation, and modern realistic depictions of this reinforces the tableau of 'victim hood' which underlines the continuing female subject as sensual, oriental and pliant" (Ommundsen 2001: 77).

These unimaginative false impressions, or rather perpetuations of imagined mythological worlds, which submit to the Western colonial appetite are given impetus by mainstream readerships whose hunger and financial investment in the narrative manipulates its output. "It is precisely this central position taken by reviewers and cultural critics in relation to Asian–Australian women writers," states Shirley Tucker, that "depends on a construction of 'authority' and 'authenticity' that locates knowledge and truth in a certain kind of literature by a certain kind of writer. Failure to reproduce the desired 'knowledge' and 'truth' sought by critics often results in accusations of the writers' dereliction of duty towards Australian audiences eager for, and deserving of such truths" (1999: 156).

In her review of *Playing Madam Mao*, Tucker states positively that the author Lau Siew Mei, "avoids delivering the sort of autobiographical text that Australian audiences have come to expect from diasporic Asian women writers" (2000: 89). This audience by and

large, possesses what Tucker describes as "a market hungry for stories of Chinese women's oppressed lives – as long as they are told in culturally acceptable forms." (Ommundsen 2001: 129). Tseen Khoo similarly quotes a reviewer of Hsu Ming Teo's debut novel *Love and Vertigo* who inadvertently comments that "it is a pity that Grace [the main protagonist] sounds more like an articulate authorial voice ... and not a hesitant young immigrant with a smattering of singlish patois" (2003a: 56). Khoo reinforces this view by saying that as female, a woman's knowledge is seen as lacking value. Asian–Australian woman writers are doubly constrained because of their gender and ethnicity. Simone Lazaroo's *The Australian Fiancé* and Lau Siew Mei's *Playing Madame Mao* have been criticised in mainstream press as submitting to Orientalist narratives but once examined by critical theorists such as Tseen Khoo and Olivia Khoo, have proven more complex.

In my own stories, specifically "Island Sacrifice", the main protagonist is placed deliberately in a position of subservience: "I feel like I am someone's paper doll with no history and nothing but a face, which is drained of colour." Adia possesses a voice like the Eurasian character from Lazaroo's *The World Waiting to be Made*, or the Eurasian character from her novel *The Australian Fiancé*, which has a similar interior dialogue and where the Australian is (to borrow from Olivia Khoo) an ornament to her thoughts.

I am aware that popular narrative themes exist such as love, hope, depression and isolation and it from these universal empathies that aggrandising narratives are born. I include the voice of the victim deliberately in order to lull (but not trick) the reader:

> I find the bottle of tablets under the sink and in shame, take the rest of them with water. I'm not frightened that there are fifty now, swimming in the depths of my stomach. I sit down fingers entwined, forehead tipped toward the door in hope that something will happen. Around me there is pointlessness. There is an emotional loss that rises from my womb, soars up from under my rib cage and pulls my brow down, stings the cartilage in my nose, my ears, and my blood. And I am sad, completely sad. "Where are you?" I speak aloud.

I also include a voice that avoids anger, yet implies superiority due to Adia being from Hong Kong. The strategy initially infuriated me. I see why a Western reader and Asian–Australian critic would become annoyed at such narrative devices, such insidiousness. The story was published in *Antipodes: A North American Journal of Australian Literature*, edited by Bill Ashcroft. I was ecstatic.

> I don't want them [Adia's children] to experience what I experienced when I first came to Australia; shop owners throwing my change on the floor, nobody getting up for me when I was pregnant, people not wanting to get too close to me. I went to a British school in Hong Kong where my teachers spoke the Queen's English. Yet even now people still shout at me. They gesture with their hands, they open their eyes too wide. They act as if I can't hear them. I was raised to feel superior to Australians. My father said that Australia was a poor cousin to the British. He said that Australians in Hong Kong should learn from England and in turn, we can learn Australian humour with our own Asian ingredient of self-deprecation added on top. My sisters are still in Hong Kong, married to Englishmen. They make fun of the Australian way of life; the countrified manners. They talk about boat people and don't understand both sides of the argument. I don't speak to them, though perhaps I was too hasty.

One may read Lazaroo's *The Australian Fiancé*, and also perhaps "Island Sacrifice", with its romantic plotline of 'cross-cultural love' and the sacrificial Other (in the former, the Eurasian protagonist is eventually removed from the white man's world in which there is no place for the Other so in the latter, I tried to ensure the protagonist created a situation of choice for herself of choosing the sacrificial route or to leave her husband and children) as a story not just about Chinese–Australian boundaries but about a wider-reaching discourse that everyone, everyman (and the same sort of Everyman protagonist that Castro writes about in *After China*) can relate to. The critic Ann Skea begins her personal response to Lazaroo's narrative by saying that the story is "told from an unusual perspective and with genuine empathy for the attractions, strangeness, misunderstandings and pitfalls which can accompany cross-cultural love affairs." The perspective, she indicates, comes largely from the White Australia Policy and the 'historical displacement' from the isolated pearling town of Broome in Western Australia to

Singapore at the time of post-Japanese occupation.[10] "I was also interested by the young woman's perceptions of that early Australian society flavoured, as they are in her narrative, by her own experiences of poverty, hunger and wartime horror and by her cultural belief in a spirit world which is not unlike that of the Aboriginal servants her fiancé's family employ" (2000: 67). This opinion indicates Skea's own position of spectator looking in on a narrative voice which is distant from Skea's own cultural familiarity. Skea says that "in the end, however, this book seemed to me to be flawed by its one-sided perspective ... All in all, this novel seemed to me to be like the young woman's own adventure: an ambitious dream which sadly did not succeed" (2000: 67).

Interestingly, Skea's last comment refers to the failure of the young woman's dream, which, as suggested by Skea, is critical to the success of the novel and to whether or not Skea would have liked the novel. Should Lazaroo's novel end with happy marriage between the Eurasian and the Australian, it would be a very different critique. Ann Skea is not the first critic or reader to compare the Asian–Australian (or in this case, the 'beautiful Eurasian') protagonist's experiences to her own. Tseen Khoo quotes Helen Elliott's impatience with Lazaroo's "narratives that she's read a hundred times before" (2003a: 07). This occurs because, as I have mentioned in my comments about male Asian–Australian writers, often both the identity of the writer and the protagonist or characters of the novel are 'alien' to the Western experience and disallow the reader from 'relating' to one or the other. The mainstream English-speaking reader thus assumes that the protagonist and writer are one and the same, sharing the same experiences and political views. First-person narratives also support subjectivity. One expects that the main difference between mainstream and critical readership is objectivity, but these positions of reading obviously cross-over. In visually, verbally or literally (writing)

[10] I am concerned with the way that culture renders meaning to landscape and the particular conditions of its emergence in Australia from a colonial settler society; white and masculine to a multicultural society and how this has developed and shaped Asian–Australian diasporic subjectivity. It is the relationship between the landscape, Self/Other, that becomes part of and is implicit to the constructions of cultural narratives of space/place and belonging. (See, Carter, P. (1992) *The Sound in Between*, Endeavour Press, Australia; Johnson, L., Huggins, J. and Jacobs, J. (2000) *Place Bound: Australian Feminist Geographies*, Oxford, Melbourne; Jacobs, J. M. and Fincher, R. (ed.), (1998) *Cities of Difference*, Guilford Press, Australia; Fiske, J., Hodge, B. and Turner, G. (eds) (1987) *Myths of Oz. Reading Australian Popular Culture*, Allen and Unwin, Australia; Foss, P. (ed.) (1988) *Island in the Stream. Myths of Place in Australian Culture*, Southwood Press, Australia.

situating a writer, a genre, or the identity of a story's characters, the reader is thereby furnished with a path in which to relate to a narrative. The mainstream appetite is much different from the critical appetite and both are hard to persuade, if, that is, one assumes that the writer's aim is, ultimately, to be read by any number of people by being published or disseminated. Skea and Elliott would have been mightily pissed off when they first read *Romeo and Juliet* by Shakespeare. Now there's a story of a cross-cultural love affair that doesn't work out.

On Being an English Writer

An issue that arises in contextualising many Asian–Australian writers is that their works are written or translated into English and are, obviously, therefore read by an English-reading audience. English has been viewed as a potent force for the assertion of command and control in the Empire. What began as the spread of English literature later resulted in the growth of literature in the language, written by non-English writers and so "the teaching of English falls in line with the dubious civilising mission of colonialism" (Talib, 2002: 08).

The control over language is a main feature of imperial and colonial oppression. The dominant education system installs a 'standard' version of the metropolitan language as the norm and marginalises all variants as impurities. "Language has become a medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetrated and a medium through which conceptions of 'truth,' 'order,' and 'reality' become established." Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin argue that "... the crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing define itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonised space." The denying of the

privilege of English involves the rejection of power over the means of communication by refusing the categories of the imperial culture and thereby rejecting the correct usage of traditional and fixed meanings. By appropriating and reconstituting the language of the centre as a textual strategy, language is re-moulded to new usages and marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege.[11]

Author Mabel Lee comments on the lack of non-English readers in Australia and the necessity of authors to write in English: "Chinese writers in Australia have faced and will face the relocation problems faced by any migrant. However, as writers, their chosen artistic medium of expression is language. They have two choices, either to write and publish in English or to publish in Chinese abroad ..."[12] (1998: 89) Ouyang Yu and Sang Ye, however, have published and translated their initial works into Chinese, giving their writing more than its English access. The closing appendix in Ouyang Yu's *The Eastern Slope Chronicle* does not allow an English-reading audience the 'satisfaction of inclusion', as it is written solely in Mandarin characters. The Mandarin symbols deliberately exclude the English reader, who has taken the trouble to read the entire novel from the beginning, from understanding the ending. A character Dole says, "However to allow my Australian readers a chance to know what I am writing in the other language, normally referred to as Languages Other than English in this country, I shall translate excerpts from it from time to time as I go along" (2002: 254). Interestingly, when I emailed Ouyang and asked if a translation was available, he replied that the point of it was that a non-Mandarin reading audience would be excluded from it. In other words, Ouyang Yu was deploying a postcolonial writing strategy of excluding the dominant language in this case English, from the text, effectively reversing the power relationship between "oppressed" and "oppressor."[13]

---

[11] See Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. and Tiffin, H. (1989) *The Empire Writes Back. Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, Routledge, England, p. 64) The ways in which the English language (also extending to signs, symbols etc.) has been used/rejected by Ouyang Yu, is to establish a sense of difference and the rejection of hegemonic power.

[12] Lee excludes the People's Republic of China, Taiwanese and people from Hong Kong from the meaning of 'abroad' as they do not fall under the communist regime.

[13] See Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. and Tiffin, H. (1989) *The Empire Writes Back. Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, Routledge, England, for an analysis and critique of writing strategies employed by colonised people in the West.

> it's there deliberately as you can obviously see, never intended to be translated, just as you see a chinese person standing or sitting before you, refusing to be translated physically. hope this makes sense. Oy (personal e-mail 31/07/2006, without permission).

This response troubled the Asian side of me, because I am trying here to interrogate Asian–Australian writing and my own production of Otherness, albeit given my status of 'white Australian,' and have been relegated only to whiteness. Serves me right, I guess, as I can only speak and write in English. When I indicated that I am of Asian descent, Ouyang replied "Your surname doesn't sound Asian." The moment was poignant and rather ironic since the name I actually go by, Bakar, is actually my mother's maiden name.[14] Even surnames cannot be relied upon and further indicates the plight of Asian–Australian writers to continuously locate their ethnicities. One of *The Eastern Slope Chronicle*'s main protagonists, Dao, talks to one of his students. The student, Minnie, tells him she is writing a novel and he asks "Didn't you have a reader in your mind when you composed, I mean, made up those stories? And if you do, what nationalities are they?" Later, Dao directly addresses the reader,

> Even you, my dear reader, although I do not know you, although you may never even exist for me ... I hated the idea of a reader that I am supposed to respect. Each time when I write I want to say this to my readers: fuck you! and get away! I can't be bothered with you making judgements as if you were god or something. If I do that I reduce myself to the same level as the owner of a Macdonald shop whose only concern is to get more customers, thus bringing in more income (2002: 236).

Subsequently, I informed Ouyang Yu that the novel resonated with me. Soon after I received a catalogue in the post, of Ouyang's works, both poetry and fiction, and from where I could order them. It illustrated the plight of the writer who must be sold in order to continue, yet the refusal of Ouyang to conform to traditional narratives expected of Asian–Australian writers; his way of telling that reader and that institution to fuck off.

[14] Ironically, my father's surname is Lee, the name I was born with. I chose Bakar after my mother.

Similarly, Hsu Ming Teo's novel *Behind the Moon* seems written not just for an English-reading audience, but specifically, for an 'Australian' audience (and also, incidentally, for a French-reading audience, due to the various French terms used within the text and the presence of a Vietnamese glossary and, at the same time, the absence of a French glossary). Use of references to Australian celebrity Rose Hancock and Hansonism, as well as Noelene Danaher from the Australian television series *Sylvania Waters*, is not clarified for a wider English reading audience so that only an Australian audience would understand the references. The character Tien thinks of her friend's father, Bob Gibson "and channels him into her speech [to her mother] 'Fair dinkum? You look bloody ridiculous. You're not in Vietnam anymore, you know." [Linh, Tien's mother then answers back.] "You cannot speak to me like that. Do you not understand hieu thao?" "No, because I don't speak Vietnamese,' Tien said defiantly. "I'm Australian" (2005: 48–119). I can safely say that all-out patriotism to Australia whilst smoothing over and effectively denying Australia's treatment of the Other, is not common to the characters of Asian–Australian writers.

In Castro's *The Garden Book*, Swan's father Horace Tay asks her Australian husband Darcy, "Did they call you a white Devil? [when Darcy travelled to China]." Darcy replies "I don't know I suppose so." "Ah! You see how ignorance of language is a protection. It isn't so for me" (Castro, 2005: 79). The 'least insidious' kinds of writing, thus, are Asian–Australian and Asian–American texts that "do not assume a white audience but, instead, recognise the stereotypes and amalgamations of being part of diasporic Asian communities in North America and elsewhere" (Khoo, 1999: 89). Brian Castro, nevertheless, comments that "relatively few people have read my work and it is not mainstream – just ask the judges of the Miles Franklin [Literary Award] I'm afraid I'm just not 'Australian' enough, and I never will be in that sense. I'm against the grain. You see I just don't play the assimilationist game" (Castro, cited in, Ommundsen, 2001: 78).

Similarly, Don O'Kim's *My Name Is Tian* is written in English but refers to the protagonist as conversing in a language other than English, a device that perhaps bridges the gap *in focus*, between the English-reading audience, Other audiences or both. The

Nurse Kwan takes care of Tian in hospital after he is involved in a train crash on the way to Bia nam (Vietnam) "... she brought him magazines, mostly colourful American ones, and helped him with English words when she had free time" (1968: 25). Later, the nurse "sat on the grass beside the wheelchair and taught him how to read English, saying that it was the only language worth learning" (1968: 27).

In her novels, Arlene Chai uses foreign words to 'create flavour.' The reader doesn't always have to understand their meaning to understand what's going on in a scene, unlike Ouyang Yu's *The Eastern Slope Chronicle*; the end page, which must be read in Mandarin to understand the conclusion of the novel. Chai says, "I've always used foreign words [words other than English words] in a comprehensible context and so have never encountered any editorial resistance to them. Neither has my editor ever suggested using a glossary. I would however, consider the inclusion of a glossary if I had a substantial list of words that needed translating" (Ommundsen, 2001: 187). In *When Dining with Tigers,* Lo includes a complete glossary at the end of his novel to accommodate an English-reading audience. As mentioned, Teo's *Behind the Moon* also includes a glossary for Vietnamese terms but curiously, does not use one for French terms used within the book. Interestingly, Lillian Ng, after admitting that she finds it difficult to write about the Australian experience, explains that she reconciles writing in English by "thinking in Chinese. Then I sort of translate mentally into English ... Maybe that's why sometimes my text, my writing in English, comes out a little bit odd" (1997: 115). Furthermore, 'Asian-Australian' authors such as Brian Castro, Andy Quan, Beth Yahp and Hsu Ming Teo write in English due to the location of the narrative itself and the characters speak in English, even if they are not in 'typically Western' locations. Tom Cho does not necessarily locate his stories in Australian locations and does not speak or write in a language other than English. As for me, I have no choice but to write in English.

Autobiography vs. Fiction:
Writing or Erasing the Self

I am an identity thief. I have lived in disguise and dreamt, like Jean Genet, of a past that never happened to me, to prove a point and make my life sound more colourful. I have, like Genet, had a decent childhood but adopted the stories of others (like my mother) to explain myself. I don't even use my real name. And like Genet, I am a petty thief. I steal small things and give them to others; to the world. I refuse to speak the patois and only speak the superior language of the nation. Everyone keeps away from this parasite. I am the *Talented Mr Ripley.* I have murdered an identity in order to replace it and written stories about being someone and appropriating her histories. I am Helen Darville who has taken artistic licence and vilified someone (for her, Jews, for me, Asians) and in effect, silenced the people we sought to represent (for her, Ukrainians, for me, Asian Australians). Am I a freak? A sentimentalist? Am I the most evil kind of coloniser because I am clothed in Asian skin but know little about the culture? I am a built identity though I am not splintered. How can I be splintered when nothing is wasted? Everything is manufactured to suit my writing. Tomorrow I will be a French Algerian and the next day I will be part-Cherokee. In the end, like Jean-Baptiste the murderer in Patrick Susskind's *Perfume*, I will become an object; a suicide of my own creation by a frenzied public who doesn't even notice that in their consumption, they have helped me take my own life.

When One Means All

A controversial article within the Chinese community in Sydney called "Are They Happy Who Married Western Men?" was by a Chinese woman Shi Guo-ying and was published in January 1994 in Chinese. The article, subsequently examined by writer Yong Zhong, was accused of catering to colonial tastes (and disabusing cultural/social responsibility) by declaring primarily that "Asian men were not as sexually fulfilling as Western men" (Ommundsen 2001: 60). The perpetuation of such an Orientalist myth aroused little comment from White Australia (it was published in Chinese) but the author was blamed for 'betraying her own kind' and called a sexual deviant by angry members of the Asian community who felt silenced and homogenised, albeit that the author stated her case from her own experience 'and those of her close circle of female friends'.

Two issues arise here: that of the issue of 'social/community awareness and responsibility' as a limitation to Asian–Australian 'biographical' writing and that of an Asian–Australian author speaking for other Asian–Australians and hence other implied ethnicities, despite the fact that Shi Guo-ying said she spoke for herself. To be sure, Shi Guo-ying had a set of experiences which she noted and published and the audience was intended to be Chinese. She did not, unfortunately, interpolate the article with a clear

indication of her own perspective to avoid objectifying the Asian audience and perpetuate the Asian genre, as most Asian–Australian writers are wont to feel the responsibility of doing. Nor did she understand that postcolonial readings may have ensued. It's a sad day in the hell of otherness when writers such as Shi Guo-ying and Jung Chang create 'victim writing' in order to, as Quan described, get published or please a particular white audience without understanding the implications of the writing. At the same time, they should feel well within their rights as writers to have done so. Who knows but that Shi Guo-ying was actually commenting on the fact that Chinese women may be simply looking for a bigger dick? That would not be victim writing. I understand the cyclical argument which Quan has articulated and which Shi Guo-ying was unaware of. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em and get published. We've all heard of Shi Guo-ying and Jung Chang, after all. The answer lies not in the way it is written then. The responsibility lies in the way it is read.

Sang Ye also talks about the issue of Jung Chang showing people a tiny golden shoe when she does interviews "If it was me I would not have done so ... but she has the right to show it because much of the story centres around her grandparents. On the other hand, we should trust our readers [he says that Western audiences will understand the nuances of representation]. As a writer if you desire to put your books into airport bookshops, it is not all that bad" (Ommundsen 2001: 219). The author Lillian Ng discusses the same topic "You know the tiny little shoes that her grandmother used to wear. That's her trademark shock value. It's got nothing to do with the Cultural revolution. She's only crying to get attention and I think she has been taught to do so. She did the same thing all over again because I went to a few functions of hers" (Ng, cited in Ommundsen, 2001: 118). My view is that we would like to be in a position to trust our readers (and so can our publishers and marketers). We should, but so far we haven't. Interestingly, Shirley Tucker criticises Lillian Ng's *Swallowing Clouds* as doing the same thing. "A narrative of consuming passion is quite literally played out in this unorthodox 'love story' despite Ng's deliberate interweaving of familiar romantic tropes and a subtext of female oppression made popular by diasporic Chinese women writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston, Jung Chang, Amy Tan and Adeline Yen Mah" (Tucker, cited in Ommundsen,

2001: 125). Tucker comments that whilst this kind of genre has left space for local writers, "an unfortunate side effect is that these texts have left a defining mark on the Australian literary landscape."

I have to say that I personally worry about being mistaken for being an essentialist and an assimilationist writer myself. As a writer who has considered those themes I have discerned as common in selected Asian–Australian writing, and appropriating them in order to reclaim and subvert them, I worry about my effectiveness as a 'socially, community-conscious writer'. I worry about being mistaken, not just for being Chinese, but in being mistaken as an Occidentalist, or as a white Orientalist. Still, some writers choose to avoid/divest themselves of the argument of subjectivity and 'authorial responsibility' altogether. Brian Castro says that autobiographical writing allows for more fabrication (Shi Guo-ying's article, for example). Who wants to be scrutinised even before they've started being understood? Why not everywhere to outrun everyone? This is my strategy; to outperform the autobiographical. And write a good story.

Ommundsen articulates our discomfort in describing how Shi Guo-ying's article makes us feel that Shi Guo-Ying "made a strategic mistake by flaunting her hybridity which would naturally be perceived as a challenge to an underprivileged community, especially when she claimed to be superior" (2001: 60). In doing this, Shi Guo-ying became the authority, and undermined Chinese men's sexual competence, which was "already contaminated by Orientalism, setting up European men as the norm against which Chinese (and other Asian) men were presumed to be effeminate weaklings ... Shi Guo-Ying made a racial, categorised generalisation which was a stark manifesto of Western superiority and eastern inferiority" (Ommundsen, 2001: 61).

In comparison to Shi Guo-ying's article, which was published in 1994, writer Shen Yuan-Fang discusses the earliest Chinese–Australian autobiographers (such as the biographers of Quong Tart) who often contrasted representations of self and culture, migration and identity as well as pre-existing models for self-construction (Ommundsen 2001:2 3). "By writing the practice of their culture into the representations of the self," says Castro:

> ... the autobiographers effectively present themselves as models for the reader ... to emulate so as to preserve their culture in this strange land, and by implication to conquer, or subdue this land by their culture. Our culture, and our values, the autobiographer's seem to suggest, are not necessarily better than others in any absolute way, but we have no doubt that they are better for us and thus worth living by (in Ommundsen, 2001: 33).

This suggestion of where Shi Guo-ying was coming from describes the struggle for Asian–Australians to gain 'recognition' and cultural acceptance by submission and alignment; assimilation. To 'subdue this land' by presenting as a model citizen is obviously problematic but a strategy to rationalise the effects of Orientalism and Otherness; a separation anxiety which yet causes division and which allows Asian–Australian writers a voice. Perhaps Shi Guo-ying was not turning her back on her Asian community but rather, reclaiming the concept of Western "dominance" (in the bedroom); a situation I like to call and will delve into later called, 'The butterfly who chooses to be collected' and which my own story "Island Sacrifice" and other stories written by Asian–Australian writers such as Simone Lazaroo, fits into.

Similarly to Shi Guo-ying, Beth Yahp, Simone Lazaroo, Lau Siew Mei, and Hsu Ming Teo have received criticism for representing a particular cultural perception in their novels at the same time that Asian–Australian critics have themselves been criticised for condemning fictional writing that does not seem to reclaim colonial depictions of Asianness. Is it wrong to read a narrative in such a way as to assume that the stories reflect the opinion even the experiences of the author, despite the fact that Asian–Australian authors are categorised because they are Asian and therefore must write the same kinds of narratives and despite the fact that they are categorised as either fictional or non-fiction writers? Must anybody care and analyse so much the motives of an author if they say that their writing is 'fiction'? Nobody on the Asian–Australian discussion list replied when I e-mailed the question "Does anybody feel conscious of being scrutinised when producing a fictional or even an autobiographical piece of writing?" The question is probably too obvious. Of course they do. We are all born scrutinised. In late 2005, Melbourne-based writer, Hoa Pham, interviewed Hsu Ming Teo for the online Asian–

Australian Journal, *Peril* (www.asianaustralian.org/), as to whether she felt pigeonholed as an Asian–Australian writer and whether she had been asked about the representativeness of her work. Recalling her experience at the Shanghai Literary Festival (2005) when someone asked her whether she was an Australian writer, an Asian writer, or an Asian–Australian writer, Teo replied "If I were going to be geographically specific, then I was probably a multicultural, inner-western suburban writer." Quite. Me? I am not a 'banana,' (yellow on the outside/white on the inside). I am not a mirror, a chimera or a ghost. I seem to be a window, which reflects briefly, the persons passing by (my mother, my school friends, my colleagues) but is ultimately transparent, with a vague glimpse of something beyond. I cannot speak in terms of geography any more.

Andy Quan's fictional stories, as previously inferred, 'seem' highly autobiographical although one cannot, nor has the authority, to entirely assume. In interviews, the author identifies as being a gay Chinese man from Canada. In comparison, his fiction is narrated in the first person and most of his characters are gay Asian men in Australia, although this is by no means a definitive indication that Quan resembles his protagonists. Similarly, in Frank Chan Loh's *When Dining with Tigers*, Zhenzhu's letter to her husband Moby articulates the Asian–Australian experience "Do you realise that in your letters you write about nothing but the jarring experiences and the surprises, big and small, the country has meted out to you? It seems as though to you, Australia is one huge culture shock. Surely you must have some pleasant experience?" (2000: 151). The question appears to express the views of the author because the character seemed to possess the presence of the authorial voice, the wider knowledge of cultural positing and as if Loh anticipated the point of view of the reader, then interpolated the dialogue from one character to the other in a sort of postcolonial stichomythia. This kind of literary device describes the same consciousness Castro talks about regarding the 'insidiousness of a writer considering readership', but also when Castro refers to his own writing as 'auto-fiction.' Stories by Lazaroo, Yahp, O'Kim, Teo and Ouyang Yu and even me, who pose self-conscious and anticipatory questions of cultural purpose and then answers, in order to negate doubts of authenticity, objectivity and authorial responsibility in a critical audience including an *Asian–Australian* audience. The example from Chan Loh answers

the Western audience, or anticipates assumptions the mainstream Western audience may make of an Asian–Australian narrative, but it also rejoins the scrutiny of the same kind of audience who became angry with Shi Guo-ying's article about the sexual magnificence of Western men: the Asian–Australian community.

Another character, Dao, includes a disclaimer to the character's readers and to the readers when he declares that the view about Australians in his novel is not his own, but a *Chinese* view of Australians, or better still, it is the view of Australians by a Chinese character in his novel. "If that still doesn't make sense", he says, "I don't know what else does" (2002: 296). English-writing Asian–Australian authors seem consistently aware of the presence of the Western audience. Certain members of the Asian–Australian discussion list describe Ouyang Yu as 'an angry writer' because of the markers of postcolonial writing in his work and the method and use of cultural theory in his narratives. Is this why the anonymous reviewer of my chapter "Not That Fucking Old Thing Again" believed I was an 'alienating writer'? Maybe I should have used a disclaimer. Both Ouyang Yu and I, and even Shi Guo-ying have attempted to answer back to or anticipate the reader's reactions. In contrast to Guo-ying, however, Ouyang Yu and hopefully I, have not submitted to the modernist narrative of apology and deletion. We have ruined the delivery by being ficto-critical, one step before Castro's auto-fictive consciousness, *Shanghai Dancing*, which murders the possibility of all readings in the nicest, cleverest, writerly way possible.

Loh's *When Dining with Tigers* contains parallel stories, one of which is from the point of view of the scholar Wu, a mythical character in dialogue with Monkey, Pigsy, Priest and Sandy. Wu tells them stories both mythical and contemporary in order to complement the main story of contemporary China leading up to and during the Tiananmen Square massacre. The narrator/authorial voice of Wu in addressing his friends, implies an address to general readers, who are also part of his audience. Wu believes that a writer shouldn't lose sleep just because someone has discerned from his work a motif that he hadn't planned. "What should worry him more," he says, "is when people can't find any meaning at all in his work. That's when he should be concerned. As

for the meaning of my novel, I leave it to you, my reader, to decide what that is" (2000: 374). This gets back to the trust Sang Ye described as mentioned, where we place trust in our readers to glean the right message.

If it is the reader's fault that "grand narratives" exist, then should we place the responsibility elsewhere?

Brian Castro's *Double Wolf* includes a discussion about crossing the same territory as other Asian–Australian writers. Castro recognises the scrutiny that minority writing is placed under as a kind of autism; the autism of Chinese–Australian writing. His character Wespe discusses Professor Art Catacomb in Vienna.

> I'm a curiosity. A museum-piece. A displaced person. I don't fit in. Nobody acknowledges the fact that, without me, Freud would never have gained the recognition he did. Nobody notices my nomenclature, which they all take for granted as representing a passive terror of wolves, in fact signifies the Other, their own ravenous bellies, the open vault of their being. We carry around a frightening propensity for other people's deaths ... (1991: 71).

Later in the novel, in Katoomba, New South Wales, 1978, Art Catacomb reflects upon the life of the wolf man "Moving further eastward: in Chinese, to be in a crisis is to face both good and bad. It can go either forwards or backwards, into danger or opportunity, containing both destiny and fate. A double path, which eventually forks. You were in continual crisis. You straddled both" (1991: 83). Brian Castro's upbringing in Hong Kong, covering three different cultures (Castro, who now resides in Australia was born at sea between Macao and Hong Kong and his father descends from English, Spanish and Portuguese merchants), allowed him to see himself as a 'sort of spy' (Ommundsen 2001: 74). His novels are multi-layered and rich in metaphor. "Doubleness and doubling back are ... a kind of *mode d'emploi* in the writing of my novels and also in the key to their reading. This I suppose is the post-modern coming out, where what is written has already been vetted with an eye to its rereading" (Ommundsen 2001: 75). Borrowing from Trinh T Min Hah, Tseen Khoo also talks about the paradox of belonging and non-homogeneity, "If you are too ... assimilated, you are accused of abandoning your roots. To maintain

your community links, cultural history, and ethnic customs is to remove yourself further from being an 'Australian.' You are already visibly different; must you also be deliberately culturally different?"

Brian Castro talks to Ouyang Yu about his writing as a 'minor literature,' "The minor key ... is symptomatic of the melancholic allegorist, which is how I would like to see myself" (Ommundsen 2001: 78). In a sense, the melancholy Castro describes is the claustrophobic paradox that this thesis interrogates; the scrutiny experienced by an Asian–Australian writer who must consider herself present, conscious and equally a writer as well as a member of a particular community of voices. Nevertheless, Castro considers his unique position as having had "the unenviable ability to have an ear closer to the ground than many academics or politicians.[15] This is not to overestimate the writer's position. A writer carries no weight at all in such societies" (Ommundsen 2001: 79). Castro seems to straddle both audiences, particularly in *After China*, as Fen Liang puts it: "Western readers learn about the Chinese aspects of his dual character whereas Chinese readers learn about the modernity and postmodernism of the Western world from his other side" (Ommundsen 2001: 84).

In Castro's *Double Wolf* the character Wespe describes his frustration at being 'spoken on behalf of' by Art Catacomb. The piece below is also an 'allegory' as such, of the Asian–Australian experience and illustrates Castro's ability to consciously, yet unconsciously, or perhaps even subliminally, interpolate social meanings (the 'social' or even 'literary' responsibility I spoke of before) within the body of his texts, and via the internal and external dialogue of his characters;

> Take Catacomb ... Now he talks as if he knows me inside out ... everything he knows, he's read from journals and books. But the logic ... is that to stop myself from being the observed, the subject, the patient, I have only to come out into the open. To usurp the authority of the story. To legitimise myself what has for so long been the territory of others; to re-appropriate the ground. But there's an inverse to this logic: one can become the observer, without a sound, without the slightest

[15] Castro is talking about the political party 'One Nation' as being an articulation of Australia's existing view of multiculturalism.

> stirring of branches, by being folded back into the forest, without scent, without spoor, invisible, inertia being the last resort of instinct" (1991: 72).

In the end, truth and fiction are difficult to define as they apply to many authors; an argument which has been hotly debated for centuries, not least in Australia, which still talks about the Helen Darville Vogel and Miles Franklin Awards in 1993 as a landmark literary hoax case in Australian history.[16] Autobiography carries a freight of meaning such as true stories and family secrets. Autobiographies, according to Castro, are highly inventive acts of dissimulation that sometimes have real or unfortunate consequences. "I knew the public reaction to autobiography was one of overlooking its fabrication," he says, "then why not write a novel instead? A novel usually only risks one thing: its form, ultimately the work is more important than any one view point or statement" (Ommundsen 2001: 74).

[16] Helen Darville assumed the name Demidenko and purported to be of Ukranian descent as she launched her novel *The Hand That Signed The Paper* in Australia. After winning the Australian Miles Franklin Award and several other prestigious awards, her true identity was revealed. Because elements of the novel were deemed anti-Semitic, and other parts deemed as plagiarised, Darville was stripped of her award and has remained the subject of controversy ever since. The incident has remained as one of Australia's greatest known literary hoaxes.

Position Un, Deux, Trois: Not the Missionary Position

Having written the story "Not That Fucking Old Thing Again: On Being Mistaken as Chinese", I sent it to the *Graduate Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* (*GJAPS*). I underwent my first experience of being reviewed as part of a blind refereed process. 'Reviewer 22' said the following about the particular use of intertextual devices;

> ... the second person narrative voice, in being told that **I** did such things, made me feel even less convinced of ... the reality of the events ... I felt somewhat manipulated by being told that it was ME who was doing and thinking these things when these experiences and shrill thoughts are quite alien to me ... The switch in narrative voice from 2nd to 1st to 3rd person is very jarring ... I have read through the entire thing twice and feel completely confused about the narrator's identity. Again, this may be the point of the piece but as a reader, I didn't feel like I got much out of it ... the preoccupation of the piece with localising it, so that specific streets, districts etc are named, seemed to be at odds with using the second person narrative. If I am being told that I went to this place and that place and I have no knowledge of it, I start to question whether I can get involved or implicated in the piece. Reading this piece brought to mind Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, where an African American girl desperately wants to be white and hates her blackness. The last bit of Morrison's text is of a dialogue/monologue

> where the girl adopts 2 different identities and is talking to herself. This means of expressing how fractured her identity ... was very powerful." (*GJAPS* Reader's report 'Reader 22', 3/10/2004).

The actual inspiration for my use of second-person narrative was Gao Xingjian's 1990 novel *Soul Mountain*. The reaction indicated for me, a clear philosophical premise that literature by Asian–Australian writers and writers like myself who are relegated to an Other, marginalised space, have a powerful platform that works, as it did for Toni Morrison, upon which to 'erase' by choice, our histories and experiences and our imaginaries. I would have assumed that Reviewer 22 was non-ethnic, yet after sending the edited story to Asian–Australian writer Tom Cho, I received a similar reaction:

> Yes, it is an angry story. But it is a very interesting – and controlled and crafted – kind of anger/kind of story ... I would say the one thing that didn't work as much for me was the perspective changes (second person to first person to third person). That aside, you're obviously no slouch when it comes to the written word. I hope you don't mind that little mini-critique (Wed. 3/08/04, personal e-mail from Tom Cho to author, with permission).

Such a device works postcolonial wonders. In Brian Castro's *Birds of Passage*, the two main characters, 'Australian-born Chinese,' Seamus O'Young and Lo Yu Shan possess intertwining voices and in fact, lives; O'Young's from the 1980s and Shan's from the 1880s. Their voices shift from first to third person so much that they eventually merge, and Seamus begins narrating the story of Shan in third person (1983: 73). Present tense is also used to relay the urgency and immediacy of Shan's life in the Australian land. Castro uses the same method in *After China*, as described by Katherine England:

> As well as expanding and contracting time, Castro shifts between past and present tense, first and third person. Most of the narrative is told from the point of view of the Architect, his interior monologue setting what little scene there is in this book of disembodied voices, and framing the stories which generally he and the Writer tell although some tales are removed from their tellers to the extent that they are conveyed in the distinctive voice and style of their subjects ... (2003a: xiv).

Castro does not stop there, however. His novel *Shanghai Dancing* is narrative choreography; selected characters in fact, in all his novels possess voices that twist in and out of consciousness. Ommundsen, talking about writing as migration describes Castro's characters as fluid entities which experience "beyond the boundaries of the individual self. His narrative technique is always multi-vocal, using a shifting point of view to create multiple perspectives ... The distinction between 'inside and outside' collapses, like that between difference characters, and narration itself becomes difficult to 'locate'. It is as if [he] mocks the very idea of 'positionality' in writing ... which relates to the uprootedness of the architect in *After China*" (2003a: 142).

Point of view is thus extremely powerful in causing the comfortable reading pleasure or alienating treatment of a reader. In Beth Yahp's *Crocodile Fury* the protagonist never seems to talk in her point of view, but always sees the world filtered by the comments of others. Similarly, Olivia Khoo talks about the intertextual devices found in Simone Lazaroo's *The Australian Fiancé*: "The novel shifts from first person narrative, from the woman's point of view, to third person narration, so as to highlight the ambivalent representations both self-imposed and put upon by others. The woman's narrative thus has a 'say' and a status, in what is visible and what is left out ... she [the novel's central character] gives the Australian [and one could argue, the reader] what he wants to see."[17] A further example of this is in Mei's *Playing Madame Mao* reviewed by Shirley Tucker, "The movement between each first person point of view is mediated by third person narrative, and this enables a merging of history and legend, myth and fiction to create a world filled with uncertainty and change that is reflected in the character's lives" (Tucker, 2000: 197)

[17] Khoo, O. (2001) 'Whiteness and *The Australian Fiancé*: Framing the Ornamental Text,' *Hecate*, St Lucia, Volume 27, Issue 2, p. 68.

What Narrative?

In examining the early writings of Chinese Australians, Ommundsen looks at Confucian Chinese values, which are described as including temperamental harmony, cultural and socioeconomic compatibility and care of the elderly, and Western values, which include transient relationships and a high divorce rate, lack of responsibilities and paramount concern with seeking instant and exhaustive sexual pleasure and sensual stimulations – oral sex, anal sex, sadism and spouse swapping. (2001: 67) She noted that early Chinese autobiographers depicted Confucian ideals including "make a name for yourself, glorify your father and mother, shed lustre on your ancestors, and enrich your posterity, for diligence has its reward" (Ommundsen, 2001: 30) These were the traditional values in late imperial China, and thus dictated the content and development of Chinese–Australian narrative. Similarly, in fantasy genre, writers are expected by a reader and perhaps, the publishing establishment of fantasy novels; to produce everyman heroes living within 'otherworlds' rooted in political systems. Murasaki Shikibui's *Tales of Genji*, Raymond E. Feist and Janny Werts' The Empire Trilogy (*Mistress of the Empire, Daughter of the Empire and Servant of the Empire*) and even Lian Hearn's recent *Tales of the Otori* are

novels concerning epic journeys reminiscent of the Shogun themes of honour, betrayal, filial piety and warrior-like heroics.

Gillian Rubenstein changed her name to Lian Hearn to create an 'Asiatic' persona (clearly to persuade the readership of an established authenticity). The Lian *prénom* comes from Gillian, and the Hearn *surnom* resembles Heron, the theme upon which is common within the series itself. The series of four books, *Tales of the Otori*, was published from 2002. Described as a 'breathtaking epic of warfare and sacrifice, passionate revenge, treacherous betrayals and unconquerable love,' the series is set in an imaginary Japan and tells the story of Shigeko, who has extraordinary abilities to speak with animals, perform magic and tread the normally untreadable singing bamboo 'nightingale' floor of the enemy, therefore killing the enemy and saving the princess.

I was concerned when I read the piece because it seemed the result of one woman's fetishised East, albeit that Hearn became completely open about it. (Initially she wasn't. The news about her real identity broke because she was supported by an Asialink[18] fellowship and those who visited the website worked it out.) I became uncomfortable with the stereotypes depicted in the stories; even though I am not directly opposed to Western writers writing about Eastern or other cultural stories so long as they locate themselves and do not seek to appropriate the identity of the 'authentic writer'. The story irritated me because of this trickery and yet, in my own instance, my stories are not a

[18] "Modesty and the marketing machine." By Jane Sullivan. *The Age*, July 8 2002. Sullivan describes Lian Hearn's nom de plume, as 'the worst-kept secret in publishing.' Gillian Rubenstein features on the Asialink website as an author who "has a long-standing interest in Asia and returned to Japan in 1999 on a residency to work on a historical fantasy novel based on Japanese history and culture"'. Sullivan describes the Orientalist marketing machine: "There's even a little audio device for listening to the "nightingale floor"' of the title, which refers to a pleasantly squeaky set of floorboards the mediaeval Japanese warlords used when they slept to alert them to dangerous intruders. The Australian publishers, Hodder Headline, went into promotion overdrive. In keeping with the Oriental theme, they had a feng shui expert check out the most auspicious publication date (August 26) and on his advice added four pages to the book."

lived identity, though I would personally love to write under the pseudonym Michelle Bakar and win an Australia Whitelink Writing Scholarship for fascination with Westerners.

The Whitelink Writing Scholarship for people who would like a stipend in order to be able to live and study briefly (no more than three months) in a Western country to complete a piece of fiction or produce a cinematic production. Judged by a committee of ethnics, successful candidates can travel to areas where white people gather, such as Munchkin Country, Winkies Country, Quaddling Country and Gillikin Country (from the Wizard of Oz) or maybe they'd like to go to Fuddlecumjig Town in Quaddling Country whose inhabitants are amongst the most curious people in Oz.

In Asian–Australian fiction-writing, a wider readership can effectively influence publishers to sign books of a particular genre and writers are thus expected to produce fictive products only slightly imaginative, but similar to each other; the submissive servant, the good migrant, the angry Other, the assimilated joker. Most Asian–Australian writers are in front of this, by writing what may be expected (or not) with a conscious/suggestive narrative voice which often directly refers to the reader's assumptions within the text, as has been previously described by authors such as Lazaroo, Yahp, Yu, Chan Loh and O'Kim. In my own narratives, the conscious voice hopefully does not mark the story, yet succeeds in its purpose of subverting stereotypes and reversing exchanges of power.

For example, in "Chinese Whispers", the servant is described as being of more value than a family member: "Though Amah was a servant, she was the best, most revered servant. One wouldn't even use the word, except that sometimes Adia called her for what she was. She was also an Elder and had nursed even Father when he was a child. She was an heirloom in the family and almost more important than Mother to him."

In "Made in China", the subservient girl is given acumen and power even as she is mistreated by her husband:

> He gathered the chains attached to the tiger's necks and before they disappeared through a concealed door, a fraction of light shone briefly from Mistress' face and their eyes met. It was a look of strategy that Huang Chai had never seen before. The girl had spirit and she hoped that it would not be beaten into dullness." And "Huang watched as the girl moved away, her plaits swinging wildly against her back and her belongings weighing heavily against her waist. So fast and hard on her legs did she walk that Huang believed it was possible she had unbound her feet.

In "Made in China", Chinese medicine and the mystical idea of the East are parodied: "The dogs protect the birds from the snakes," a smiling, familiar voice spoke behind her, "The birds watch for intruders. I feed them snails from the garden. The snakes are there for effect."

And finally, in "Made in China", it is the Western featured face that is considered hideous and deformed, perhaps without the 'Western reader' noticing:

> The child was a girl, but none like Huang had ever seen. The child's nose was so thin, that it seemed as if there were no nostrils at all, except for two parallel slits. Its lips were thin too, as if it had been trampled upon and left by forest deer. Its hair was white, white and transparent like clouds. But the most frightening thing was the colour of the child's eyes. One was deep brown. But the other eye was as blue as the sky. It was like a clear whirlpool created for a moment by the swirling trout in the river. Huang imagined that this is what dragons would look like if one ever decided to gaze into her face until she turned into stone.

Katherine England refers to the layered narratives in Brian Castro's *After China*, some of which are deliberate subversions of 'expected Asian narratives'. "While many of the stories are direct accounts of personal experience", she says, "others are couched in metaphor, masquerading as Chinese traditional tales. Castro has commented that traditional Chinese stories have wonderful beginnings but always seem to go down the least interesting path – a phenomenon that has given him licence to graft on endings that are more exciting or more titillating, or simply better serve his purpose" (2003: x).

An example of where Castro uses the same device is in the novel *After China*, when the boy is in a dream/reality:

> Her toes had been bent back, elongated over the soles. They were very soft and smooth. After all, she had been soaking them in boiled monkey's bones for ten years. They gleamed. Curiously they excited him. She beckoned him closer, so that his secret parts were in contact with her divine deformity and then she said something even stranger – *The transition from ancient to modern can come at any time at all. Time itself is not of great importance, but the transition is dangerous. We have no experience of it.* He didn't understand, of course ... Modernity was a form of anticipation (2003a: 43).

"Made in China" began as a response to selected fictive narratives about the East (the least interesting path) that are sustained by the Western appetite. Like a fractured cinematic fairytale, "Made in China" seeks to parody myths which incorporate traditional Confucian beliefs and add postcolonial discourse and a self-conscious, postmodern bent therefore demanding a closer reading, but also to share a private 'joke' with an Asian–Australian reader because of its subversions. Its aim is to resemble, imitate and appear to be a Chinese myth except with empowered female protagonists and conscious knowledge of Orientalist values, and the interpolation of contemporary values, hence its first sentence which disclaims any criticism of stereotyping. The old woman, Huang Chai, becomes independent, the male, Min-Kung Hua, is made silent and murdered and the metamorphosis of modernity, for example, remains an imitation and nothing more. The risk of imitation versus subverting in the effort of reclaiming the stereotype is present throughout my entire creative dissertation. Whilst I have created a strategy to deconstruct the stereotype and reinscribe 'new' identities, I also wanted to separate the self-conscious Western reader, and empower the Other. I wanted to cause a kind of counter-alienation to the marginalised. As such, I wanted to use literary devices to challenge myself in imaginative and innovative writing and take the narrative beyond the stage of the Other. In other words, I wanted to be a good storyteller regardless of audience. 'Audience', meaning anyone. My ideal audience is anyone who enjoys my writing, anyone who reads it.

Reclaiming the misty mountains of heaven/hell, "Made In China" is set within a magical realist eco-system. Geographically, the place is impossible to locate. The setting is subsequently affected by the onset of industrial progress – a metaphor of Western colonialism, modernisation and the letting go of traditional values – and the mountainous countryside once tinged with the presence of magic becomes a bustling urban landscape in which humans harness the land for food, drying clothes and mundane everyday necessities. The language is deliberately elusive so that the reader perceives the story to be a tale, in the oral diasporic tradition. The language also invokes the Confucian authorial voice, a stereotype aimed at arresting the Western audience whilst entertaining the Eastern palate. In *When Dining with Tigers*, the scholar Wu quotes Lao Tzi, the founder of Taoism, when describing how long it took him to write his novel: "A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step" (Loh, 1999: 27). These sayings are meant to communicate an overarching philosophy, which sometimes becomes an ambiguous message whilst saying very few words. The philosophical implication is such that the language is designed to give the myth its 'authenticity' and 'textual authority.'

The use of mythical or fantastical histories in Asian–Australian literature seems to provide a metaphor by which a Western audience can understand the concept of difference and ethnicity, as children are told fables with morals, or provided with examples to illustrate meaning in order to translate this set of values. Most Asian–Australian authors (see Bakar, 2005, 2006; Castro 1983, 1994, 1997; Teo 2000, 2005; Pham 2000), have included the presence of Chinese myth or some form of Orientalist construction of exoticness and longing, whether it be parodied or grafted with endings which 'suit a better purpose'.

Beth Yahp's short story, "The Red Pearl", describes and almost parodies a 'mythical place' in which lives a vampire Asian woman.

> The brooding mountains that ring this particular harbour city give it its aura of perpetual anxiety, caught as it is between those jagged peaks so like the crusty claws of the dragons which are said to spawn there, and that ever encroaching other, the swirling, spirit infested sea ... sorcerers and wise women trade briskly at the marketplace alongside pirate-tape vendors and boys who sell car parts for a

> song. Here demons and other shadowy creatures share streetbeats with racketeers and petty criminals and, like them, have to be appeased (1990: 51).

When Dining with Tigers is narrated by the scholar Wu, a mythical character who mediates between heaven and earth and sits narrating his stories to traditional mythical characters the likes of Monkey, Pigsy and the Sea Monster. Even though the story that he actually narrates is set in China during the 1980s about the Tiananmen Square massacre, he integrates, within the chapters, other stories of myth, proverb and parable. He begins by addressing the reader: "I should have died earlier ... I must confess I do like the life I'm leading now. I love it so much that the four hundred or more years I've lived so far in Heaven don't seem long enough" (1999: 19), or, "Let me begin with a little story" (1999: 242). Brian Castro also utilises myth, proverb and parable in a similar fashion in his novel *After China* (2003), by the telling of stories, using proverbs and referencing Confucian values. Hsu Ming Teo also constructs stories in the method of diasporic traditions, such as the stereotypical old woman in *Love and Vertigo* (2000), who must encounter challenges before redemption. The character Por Por, Grace's great-grandmother, finds she is getting older and takes her granddaughters to temples to pray. "There were no more trips to the servant's club after that visit to the temple ... no more stories about Chinese princesses dressed as peasants who went on long journeys through the mountainous countryside to escape cruel stepmothers; who fell into the evil hands of lascivious warlords; who were rescued by princes – similarly in disguise on specific pilgrimages" (2000: 142).

Exile, Space and Freedom

I'll be frank. I myself have never been in exile. I have a fair sense of displacement and alienation though, and perhaps because of the way I've been expected to grow up, that sense has been marked over your average person's. In much Asian–Australian writing surrounding the idea of belonging, exclusion and the periphery, space is seen as a metaphor of freedom and liberty and is used visually and symbolically. In "Chinese Whispers", Adia, who epitomises a fractured British–Chinese identity (of my mother, I know) escapes to the rooftop in Hong Kong where unbeknownst to her family, a Westerner appears, who eventually propositions her and leads her to consider a life in Canada or Australia. Later, in "Island Sacrifice", the older Adia, who epitomises the migrant experience, runs out of the house in Sydney, where, in a drug-induced haze, she indulges in the space of the park outside, and momentary freedom from the constraints of her restrictive Australian home and marriage. Here, the rooftop and the park signify salvation; the fleeting satisfaction of conquering and reclaiming one's own place and

identity in the world; not unlike the same metaphors I've found, which are meaningful in various Asian–Australian writers' texts.

Wenche Ommundsen describes the building in Castro's *After China* as a principle of uprootedness which is built into the Chinese architect's postmodern design for his luxury hotel; a transitional object which is eventually destroyed for its bad design, and not without the architect's 'desire for demolition':

> He remembers his first exercise in design at a Shanghai University. He had nothing but a roof. In order to express pleasure, he had designed a roof which was linked with his first love. He remembers the building a few years before, remembers lying in bed one morning on the balcony gazing at the first blue sky of spring, dreaming of becoming a swallow. The night-shift worker no longer came. When he looked up, a girl, beautiful beyond belief, was smiling at him from the rooftop, her long sunlit hair hanging over the parapet (2003a: 21).

Frank Chan Loh, in *When Dining with Tigers*, uses space and the trope of climbing, conquering and overseeing the potential of an entire future as a metaphor of hope. The character Leah's relationship with her husband Jack is falling apart and the novel's narrator Scholar Wu comments, "Hope, my dear reader ... is the adrenalin that keeps optimists eternally active ... the Chinese have an old proverb which says, 'Man will always want to climb to the top of the mountain even while water is flowing down the sides. Hope keeps a man going ..." (2000: 138). Similarly, a Chinese character in Andy Quan's *Calendar Boy* reflects on his relationship with a white Australian, Kurt; an unfaithful lover, "In a big puffy cloud overhead, I see ridges on a mountain. Also, whispers of clouds in thin streams, like ropes, or claws. I'm a climber on these hills swinging from uncertain lines of safety to grasp at others: danger, excitement, stupidity. I giggle at my melodrama. Kurt stirs and I notice that he's falling asleep" (2001: 27). The movement from interior to exterior, confinement to space, restriction and letting go indicates a type of success; a satisfying yet momentary stage of conquest. Even in its drama, the image holds power.

In comparison, the use of suburban space is often used as a trope for restriction and claustrophobia and agoraphobia that Benedict Anderson says is part of the imagined parameters of nationalist boundaries. Tseen Khoo (2005) discusses Lillian Ng's *Swallowing Clouds* as signifying anti-suburbia; using connotations of suburbia to imply the negative migrant experience. This can also refer to "Island Sacrifice" where Adia is engulfed and alienated by her suburban prison and raises issues of the way suburbia is used to depict suffocation and remoteness. In contrast, one thinks of the remote migrant experience set in the vast Australian outback of Lazaroo's *Australian Fiancé*, or the mountains in Castro's *The Garden Book*. For this reason, my last story, "The Oriental Express", much like Teo's *Behind the Moon*, attempts to convey a comfortable, peripheral presence of suburban space, albeit comparable to the postcolonial writers who write about assimilation stories, yet empower Otherness by consciously acknowledging the contrasted preservation of Asianness.

Space, freedom, and the unshackling of cultural difference features heavily in several of the Asian–Australian texts that have been examined. In Castro's *Birds of Passage*, Lo Yun Shan observes the signs of the death of his mother. "It was a sort of claustrophobia, of wanting to be somewhere else; or more precisely, of wanting to be everywhere at once. It was an aching, breathless feeling, making me totally incapable of action" (1983: 11). Lazaroo's rootlessness in *The Australian Fiancé* is described as "suspended in the State Ship between my two lives. I do not know where on this ocean I am. It is like vertigo" (2000a: 74). Teo's *Love and Vertigo* (2000) is also a novel devoted to the subject of rootlessness and exile, which is set mostly in Malaysia and Singapore.

In Castro's *Garden Book*, Swan describes the possibility of sex with Jasper in one of his architectural creations. The situation compares with the earlier example of Ommundsen's comment about Castro's architect character in *After China*:

> He isn't idle. He writes Chinese. Inside this crown of his tower, this eye which dominates the Manhattan skyline in his drawings, he's sketched Chinese interiors. Bold characters carved into teak, hallways with lanterns, lush silks against which we brush, his hardness palpable as he pushes me into an elevator made of glass, exposes me to the weather as we ascend into cloud, pulling up my skirt as he works

> his hand into my lace, my legs apart, and after recognising my readiness, undoes himself, presses and pushes and works in his crown until the burgeoning sky unburdens itself, and when the elevator arrives, it snows as he had forecast. Jasper the weatherman (2005: 193).

The metaphor is mentioned again as Swan waits for word from Jasper once her relationship with her husband Darcy has disintegrated, "A heavy weight descended each morning into her chest. The relentless blue of the sky hurt her eyes" (2005: 220). Stepper, in Castro's novel of the same name *Stepper*, describes Katya: "He liked her distended stories, through which they would make slow, teasing love until the sun would come up weakly over the buildings, smoke from yet another night's fire lingering still, layers of it caking the rising city and now and again fresh flames jetting up ... the flowers of Edo" (1997: 12).[19]

Olivia Khoo links the concept of the ocean to vertigo within certain Asian–Australian texts, which take the mythology and recast its sublimity into a corresponding sensation of vertigo to reflect the more recent Southeast Asian encounters with, and claims over, space and regional capitalist processes. Khoo uses Lillian Ng's *Silver Sister* (1994) and Lazaroo's *The World Waiting To Be Made* (2000a) as well as Hsu Ming Teo's *Love and Vertigo* (2000) to illustrate the reinscription of the oceanic feeling. I would argue too, that vertigo "is caused by fear ... in relation to heights and space" (2001: 68) which Khoo delineates. The fear that she speaks of is caused by leaving a safe place such as home or home country and is also illustrated by many of the novels by characters seeking rooftops or spaces much higher than ground level. Eventually, in *Love and Vertigo* (2000), the narrator's mother succumbs to vertigo and throws herself off a balcony.

[19] Edo is what residents called the girls who wore no underpants as they jumped from the building in the great fires of Tokyo's Shirokiya department store in 1932 (Castro, 1997: 232).

Death and Disinheritance

In writing about identities and traversing the areas of fiction/autobiography, the Asian–Australian writer is arguably more so at risk of both disinheritance and betrayal than other writers. There is significant risk in speaking for others by becoming informants within an already homogenised category and subsequently perpetuating stereotypes, not to mention divulging discretionary, personal information which is protected by the traditional family sphere. Castro comments on the authorial threat of disinheritance: "I am being disinherited because I write. In order to write, you have to live with the constant threat of disinheritance. A writer inherits nothing from his family without having to steal it first" (1998: 04). He could be saying this about any writer but then goes on to say that "the desire to become the family; to look at it, reproduce it, blindly. But you see this even more often: the yearning to become the host, resulting in the metamorphosis of immigrants into native informants. People who reinforce their subaltern status by trying to change their skins" (1984: 04). I myself do not intend to show my mother the stories that make up the novel *Zinc*. I can see my mother asking if anyone else will see this thesis, and myself trying to reassure her. I am happy, however, to show her my stories

with the excuse that they are 'fictional', not unlike Beth Yahp's 'disclaimer' in her short story *The Photo, 1955*, "This story is written with thanks and apologies to my family. Some of this is fact. Some of it is fiction" (1994a: 142). And not unlike the beginning 'disclaimer' from Teo's *Love and Vertigo*, "These are the myths I tell about my family and, like all myths, they are both truths and lies, simultaneous buffers of love and betrayals of trust." (2000). I probably did a stupid thing by naming my characters after their real-life inspirations (excluding Adia and Melville.) I think I'll go to hell for that. I Don't get me wrong. My mother is not a demanding, aggressive woman. She's cold, passive aggressive and scathingly articulate. She won't hesitate to disinherit me.

Figure 5: Here is my mother far right in the 1950s with her sister Farida and her two younger sisters, Vera and Marianne. Source Family Archives.

Asian-Australian writers who write fiction or non-fiction, as with autobiographies, seem necessarily to suffer a 'death' each time they write about themselves or their family. The desire to share a lived experience, to craft a sentence, to indulge in the passion for words and to narcissistically see one's work in print is clearly, for an aspiring writer or for a person who has something to say, apparently worth the risk of losing a family member who is angry at being misinterpreted. One considers the plethora of writing globally by Asian female writers writing in English, about cruel mothers to understand both the public appetite for such a subject, once again, part of the Asian imaginary, and the production of writing itself by ethnic writers who 'succumb' or feed this demand. The

subject of parental treatment of children features as an important issue for most Asian–Australian writers (especially, arguably, women writers whom Brian Castro and Tseen Khoo have described), as it is the parent or the child who struggles to adapt with the new identity along with the struggle of a generational gap. The parental character is invariably well used to illustrate and provide a springboard for the struggle for acceptance by providing the self-conscious, questioning voice which challenges the offspring's decisions, values, and often, worth. In "The Gentleman's Outpost", Newton shows a great fear of displeasing his parents and bases his actions on impressing or hiding his actions from them. In "Chinese Whispers", the child Adia lies in order to please her father. In "The Oriental Express", Toby Lunch has a clear generational and cross-cultural gap with his father Eng. Similarly, many of the Asian–Australian writers who have been examined within this exegesis indicate this same kind of exchange between many characters and their parents and although examining parent–children relationships is not uncommon to any genre, it becomes a matter of duty to parents and parents' culture over simple adult role-modelling in Asian–Australian contexts.

In Teo's *Love and Vertigo*, Pandora is described as juggling her Eastern and Western habits: "Pandora led a schizophrenic life throughout her school years. She was a dutiful Chinese daughter at home and an absurd lampoon of an English schoolgirl outside" (2000: 62). Likewise, Castro's architect in *After China* indicates that his father represents the old skin, the old culture and that letting go of the father meant letting go of the culture:

> When my father died I had no reason to stay [in China]. I had a passport ... I knew that if I didn't leave I would turn into something else. Isolation, the kind of isolation China was heading into, confused the very basis of existence. You had nothing to measure yourself by, and what you thought was morally imperative became compromise and self-deceit of the worst kind. But if you left you could do nothing either. This has always been the Chinese dilemma (2003a: 69).

Inheritance of parent, country and nationhood permeates many of the stories by Asian–Australian writers. In Lazaroo's *The Australian Fiancé* (2000a: 08) the Eurasian begins her narrative, "I was thirteen and I thought I knew death well: the denials of it; the

shimmering ornamentation of it; the modest profits that can be made from it. Death, my inheritance." Lazaroo, in describing the heaviness (though not necessarily burden) of cultural knowledge passed down by the parent, also introduces the narrator's nickname given by her mother; a Pontianak, which is dually defined as 'death of a child' and a 'ghost', thus invoking images of lost innocence and deletion. The reader later learns that the narrator had produced a child born from rape, which divides her and her Australian Fiancé. Eventually the child dies. Ultimately, the narrator's inheritance and the sacrifice of the Other, the Eurasian, occurs and the reader hearkens back to the name Pontianak, which has become a fortuitous label.

Disinheritance also refers to the constant seeking of parental approval, due mainly to the Confucian value of filial piety congruous with duty to nation and the implications of disapproval if filial piety should not occur; not because of the breaking down of cultural norms, and thus deleting the culture, but also of submitting to the surrounding, seductive Western cultural norms, which once again feeds the Orientalist stereotype of the Asian Other as 'savage', the white culture as civilising and the Other as needing to be educated in order to be tamed. The predicament of the ethnic child, or the child with ethnic heritage is illustrated perfectly in situations where parental cultural norms seek to entrench an isolation onto the child and exacerbate her/his grapple with dual identities so that in the end, s/he must often make a 'choice.' In Chan Loh's *When Dining with Tigers*, Monkey talks about how Dustin and Natasha rebelled against their father and in doing so, illustrates the themes relevant to and used frequently by the Asian–Australian writer. "Kafka, now, there's someone who spent his whole life trying to rid himself of his father's influence. The themes in his fiction stem from his attempts to escape from his father's shadow ... it comes out in his fiction, his conflict with authority and at the same time, his need to seek its recognition" (2000: 165). Later, the character Dustin tells Leah about his brother, "[Qiaochu] and I ... had one thing in common: we both shared the same desire to seek our father's approval." Such duty is explained (2000: 267) by the priest who tells Monkey: "Of all the virtues a man should develop, filial piety's the greatest, the most important ... filial piety will never cease to move Heaven and Earth." Later, liberated by the white woman Leah, Dustin listens to her advice, "I want you to go

and tell your father you're giving up your medical studies to take up acting ... Listen to your heart. Do what it tells you to do" (2000: 262). [Dustin's brother Qiaochu hangs himself for the same dilemma.] Interestingly, Dustin then moves in with Leah, they have a child and Dustin gets a part in a telemovie "about Australian POWs during the Japanese occupation of Malaysia" (2000: 289). This implies that although disinheritance seems to be the plight of children the world over, the child of the Other faces a distinctly unique set of difficulties.

In *Love and Vertigo*, the children get revenge on their parents, which is ultimately, the triumph of assimilation. Grace and her brother Sonny take revenge on Madam Tay, Pandora's mother-in-law who treats Pandora, their mother, badly and fawns on Grace's father, whom Grace calls 'the Patriarch':

> But slowly, insidiously, the tables were turned. It began with the silent treatment we dealt her ... Sonny deliberately turned up his stereo so that Jimmy Barnes [Australian singer] screeched deafeningly that all the flame trees went by the weary driver, drowning out her scolding until she couldn't stand the sound of Cold Chisel" (2000: 207).

Then later, "The phone rang late one night and the Patriarch learned that Madam Tay had died of a heart attack shortly after returning to Malaysia. Neither Mum, Sonny nor I doubted that we killed her" (2000: 211).

In *The Australian Fiancé*, the Eurasian describes her Western husband's duty to his parents, "His parent's power is his vulnerability. It saps him of his finely tuned desire for me. It saps him of the will to overcome our difference. And I, I have made him temporarily susceptible, made his borders vulnerable and mutable. His tenderness for me was a brief foreignness that flooded him, only to be annexed by his parents and the higher authority they invoke. He was never mine" (2000a: 177). Eventually the Fiancé succumbs to his parents' expectations and uses the existence of the child to end the relationship with the narrator. Despite 'filial piety' being known as a Confucian value, it transgresses (or has always been part) of/into Western culture, as does bearing an illegitimate child out of wedlock. As a representation of Australia, so surmised because of his title 'The

Australian Fiancé', one thinks of the parents as England, and the Eurasian, the assimilate; the invading terrorist, who, through superficial beauty (for which the Australian is attracted/beguiled), breaks through Australia's protected borders, but ultimately fails, due to the strength of the Commonwealth.

But this is not just about noticing the theme of disinheritance and familial piety in Asian–Australian writing. This is also about being selfish and concluding my thoughts on the subject.

Questions of Belonging

It is difficult to define the Asian–Australian journey of the Other's experience, yet it is also difficult to avoid essentialising the journey and risk limiting it. Identity, for me, is fluid and changing; an occurrence that begins with self-experience affected by the presence of others or others' memories and in this case, should not be assumed as the writer's own journey. Included in this are writers like myself, who identify as White Australian and who constantly struggle with how the Asian–Australian genre is represented. Also included are authors such as Tom Cho, who are careful to understand the implications surrounding genre writing and who produce writing which encompasses the Other's experience without referring directly to it, and also authors who unabashedly reproduce narratives that fly to the wallets of the Orientalist market. Even authors such as Lian Hearn cannot and should not truly be categorised, albeit the issues raised concerning her use of authorial representation. Various writers describe identity via the characters in their novels as noise, as a curse or a physical dislocation from the self. There should be no such thing as 'Asian–Australian writing', despite the common themes I have pointed

out in this exegesis due to the limitations I have pointed out, yet at the same time, such writing assists in empowering the Other reader and perhaps the writer herself/ himself, if the purpose of the writing was in fact, to purge and exorcise one's own experiences in order to reclaim and understand them, as it is in my case. An illustration of the imposition of identity, and the inability of reconciling what is on and under the surface of skin, what Tseen Khoo phrases as the main protagonist reacting to the stimulus of Australian society, is found within Castro's *The Garden Book*. The character Swan says, "But I do not exist. Men stare at me and I do not exist, because I do not exist in myself. Reality can never bring forth how I see myself. Only how they see me: I am Chinese. I speak English" (2005: 117).

In my own story "Not That Fucking Old Thing Again", the narrator in second person notes,

> "Blondes might never leave your head," you said quietly to yourself. "You will never be like them and you will never be accepted in an equal way. Chinese/unacceptable/one dimension of attractiveness. Blondes/have more fun/more open doors/the unattainable." You knew that Nicole could be the geisha, but the geisha could never be Nicole. There were Chinese couples there, dancing. The idea of their presence made a noise that filled your head as much as the loop from the screen. You hated all of them and they made you throw up in a back alleyway.

In comparison, the Sydney photographer and writer William Yang reflects on his own childhood when, after being taunted with racist remarks at school, he discusses the realisation of being 'different' with his mother, "I knew in that instant that being Chinese was a terrible curse and I could not rely on my mother for help, or even my brother, who was four years older than me, and very much more experienced in the world" (1994: 68). Such realisation of difference is momentous and speaks to a reader who has experienced Otherness and understands her/his first moment of separateness; the loneliness, knowledge and damage that comes with being the object of superficiality and the hopeful, yet fleeting relief that comes with sharing the experience through reading about the lives

of others, albeit fictional, who understand and have become aware of strategies of Otherness; within the Asian–Australian context.

In Lazaroo's *The Australian Fiancé*, the 'young Eurasian' notes her loneliness when the 'handsome Australian' leaves to take his parents to afternoon tea with friends who own a cattle station out of town. "She knows the furniture well enough now, but it is clear to her on this afternoon that she does not belong here. She belongs at the back of a narrow shophouse, in a small plywood lean-to with mildew on the wall" (2000a: 111) Her panic and displacement are heightened because the Australian, her bridge to the alien society around her, is no longer within her immediate scope.

> The Eurasian woman is at the window when he returns from dropping his parents off. He doesn't ask why. She is glad. How could she answer? How could she explain how isolated she has been by her own image? How can she explain the loneliness she carries? As a habit she developed in the close press of kampongs and shophouses? What is out there ... Nothing. Mile and miles of it. How could she explain that she is looking for her future in that distance (2000a: 112).

One perspective of reading, which I referred to above and also call a 'strategy of Otherness', is the vicarious freedom experienced by the Other through use of the Western counterpart. As the Other is isolated and disempowered, s/he is contrasted with her/his Western location and the casual behaviour of the Western characters around them. The Other is thus disappointed and rendered helpless when that location or person, at first unfamiliar but now only somewhat familiar, is removed, leaving her/him worse off. The clinginess and cloying of new migrants thus becomes the problem of the Westerner who is faced with the choice of continuing to own, or disowning; either choice is ultimately damning for the migrant. In "Island Sacrifice", Adia waits at home until her husband David, who has become the only person she wishes to interact with in society other than her children, returns from work. In *The Australian Fiancé*, the Eurasian waits for her fiancé as he takes his parents away visiting. Because neither woman feels truly part of her partner's Australian life, or in fact, Australian society (in Adia's case, wishing not to be part of Australian society), their partners eventually tire of them. The Waiting Other is of significance here and is a circumstantial interpretation of disability, inability and

unconfidence; the foreigner's isolation. Such reliance upon acceptance by a wider community and emphasis on disempowerment opens up myriad plot opportunities. Interestingly, in this example, the Eurasian is half Western and half Asian. Likewise, Adia is half culturally British, half culturally Asian; one 'physically hybrid' and the other 'culturally hybrid,' illustrating the complexities of self-identity and the contrasting strategies within similar themed stories. Nevertheless Adia's and the Eurasian's stories of rootlessness are like that of the Chinese latecomers to Australia described by Shen Yuan-Fang in that they feel displacement through dreams, of being eternally terrified, eternally uncertain and on the run (2005: 137–143), a state of being that never leaves the Other.

In Ouyang Yu's *The Eastern Slope Chronicle*, Professor Zhong from China writes to Zane Dole about how migrants settle into new countries and questions using the usual conscious (though not self-conscious) poignant and sharp voice that threads through most of the characters in his novel,

> I have heard that multiculturalism has been a great success in your country. It would be great if you could give our students an idea of how it works because it would be very new to them all as currently in China people of other ethnic minority origins are still kept in their own terrains called 'self autonomous regions' instead of being given the opportunity to be mixed up with the mainstream Chinese society. It would be ... great ... to understand how people of so many ethnic backgrounds can live and mix in such harmony with the mainstream Australians while managing to keep their cultures alive (2002: 27–28).

Yu, in fact, grapples with the concepts of identity and displacement by using conscious messages relevant both to literary readers and cultural theorists, an apparent inclusion of postcolonial strategies throughout his writing (most amusingly, the self-autonomous regions of the previous example, which in fact occurs in every city; a play on the practically inclined Chinese town planning system', whether true or not, and a cheeky slap against Western cities, where migrants are encouraged to assimilate 'in harmony' but 'manage to keep their cultures alive').

The constant comparison with the two worlds, both home and new land which replaces home, is inevitable. Travellers or tourists, who are keen to learn everything they can about a new country, absorb and soak in the environment, unthreatened, because they will eventually return home. With new migrants, returning home is less or not possible and must be redefined and reallocated; attempting to resolve the problem of impossibility. Yu aligns Australian culture with that of Chinese culture and rather than create a wistful reminiscence of one or the other, satirically criticises them both. Dole's flatmate student Warne, a Chinese poet, comments "The Australian government is a bad as the Chinese government. If they don't want you to stay in Australia, they will invent a perfect China and talk you into going back to it" (2002: 32). In another example, the character Dao describes Australia as "a country that would stay unchanged even in a hundred years. Basically it was finished because it was developed, as developed as a finished product. Present perfect tense, whereas China was still in a kind of subjunctive mood, still engaged in the progressive tense" (2002: 296).

And yet another character, Minnie, writes to Dao about his novel, expressing tiredness with the negative views of migration, "I do feel from time to time that there should be a bit more optimism with the main protagonist and the reality should not be so bleak?" (2002: 337). Ultimately, the journey of Yu's novel is unresolved, culminating in Dao's ubiquitous comment: " ... wherever I go my heart just doesn't seem to find peace, whether it is in Australia or in China or anywhere else in the world. Once there was a home for it and it was called China. Now that I returned home, curiously, it was no longer there" (2002: 289).

Physical inaccessibility is always the beginning, such as that captured by Andy Quan in his first book of fiction, a collection of short stories, *Calendar Boy*, depicts a reaction to Australia's solitude: "People have died here for missing their old homes; a simple cough or fever escalated and suddenly they have crossed a bridge from endurance to despair. Who can blame them? Are we really happy in this new land? White devils treating us like village dogs. Work no easier than the old village but lacking the comfort of what is known" (2001: 183).

From physical difference comes everlasting displacement and the disabuse of the notion of home. As Adia dreams about being a bottle of sand that cracks open and spills out, one of Quan's characters, a young man who goes to university in a chapter called "Higher Learning" in *Calendar Boy* also describes how the changing landscape permeates his dreams and he becomes a metaphor for the land and cultural change; struggling to bear the weight of a new culture, no matter how liberating it is supposed to be (as is the presumption of the West; the Australian dream):

> Once I had a vivid nightmare about sand: dry waves passing over my body like the shapes visible at low tide left by ocean waves. Only these were set in motion. Each chink in an impenetrable wall shone one beam of light and at the same time made one grain of sand fall upon me. It was everywhere, locked into the curve of my eyelashes, pressed under my fingernails and toenails, in my saliva and my skin. I rose up to scream but the weight and density of the sand absorbed everything. No movement nor sound broke the stillness. I'd found freedom and it was suffocating me (2001: 30).

Teo similarly captures the notion of displacement in *Love and Vertigo*:

> I was determined not to belong, not to fit in, because I was Australian, and Mum ought to be Australian too. The tug of her roots, the blurring of her role from wife and mother to sister and aunt, angered and frightened me. Years later, sonny and I returned to visit the relatives by ourselves, to pay our respects to grandmothers and grandfathers and great aunts and uncles before they died. But Mum never returned to Singapore after that one visit. Not until she went back to die. When she returned, did she gaze uncomprehendingly around her and realise that this was no longer her home (2000: 3).

Here, the character Grace Tay reflects on the atrophied memories of the migrant Other, who ultimately suffers death of the memory and the beginning of the state of amnesia at the same time.

Asian Woman: Deviant, Passive or Neurotic?

I need to look at themes of gender and representation, given my perspective that women and men Asian–Australian writers are allocated different expectations, given Castro's and others' assertions of the narratives produced by women Asian–Australian writers and given my purpose to locate myself as a writer struggling with an allocated identity. I was obviously drawn to the treatment of women Asian characters, especially since for me, the representation of them becomes a political (or academic) activity and arouses a political reaction. Some people call it a chip. I call it a chip too.

The trope of the hysterical or whacky matriarch resonates with the West's traditional 'mother-in-law' humour which reproduces jokes about difference and parody. In this instance, it is the character of the old dowager and/or the eccentric elder who is 'out of touch' with the younger generation, which can also translate as 'the traditional' or 'Confucian' valued elder being out of touch with modernity. Beth Yahp's grandmother character in *Crocodile Fury* and Hsu Ming Teo's grandmother in *Love and Vertigo* both articulate the metaphor (perhaps cliché). I have included a quote from Confucius in "Made in China" which is spoken by Huang Chai, who acts as a grandmother figure to

Mistress. The quote: "Learning without thought is labour lost. Thought without learning is dangerous."[20] is half-nonsensical because it is presented quickly in the same manner as these sorts of 'Chinese quotes' are usually presented in popular Western culture; where little time or context is given to them. Those moments in classic Western humour occur when the 'Chinaman' says something metaphorical which doesn't mean anything at the time, but turns out to be wise afterward, adding to the West's notion that the East is mysterious and inscrutable. The male character Alfred in "The Gentleman's Outpost" is similarly wise and worldly and delivers similar idioms to a confused British–Indian protagonist, Melville Newton, in order to imply his message. In this instance, Alfred's sayings are used with the conscious reader in mind and refer to the previous story, "Made in China", which Newton is unaware of. The sayings also highlight the effects of translation of Asian customs and manners into Western dialogues; albeit that English (not all Western) manners are just as stoic and passive. It also highlights the stereotype of Asian courtesy to the point of 'overpoliteness', the speaking in circles and smiling even though the message has not been understood.

One of the representations of Asian woman relevant to me is the sexual deviant; hysterical, exoticised and glamourised. This category of character seems initially but not subsequently, to empower the position of Asian woman but actually implies barbarism, like a savage native who must be tamed. My own story, "Not That Fucking Old Thing Again: On Being Mistaken as Chinese", attempts to subvert and play with the category but also to remove the Asian woman as whore, as seductress of the West, and as Western plaything, by rearranging the central character's motives and ambitions. Orientalist fantasy lends itself to the seduction of the mysterious Other which, possessing mystical powers (of the East), intoxicates and beguiles the Western senses, leading white men into the danger of pollution and debasement. Grace describes her aunt in Teo's *Love and Vertigo*: "[My mother's] Eldest sister Lida, remained an exotic character in a melodramatic Chinese opera; a glamorous figure for whom the rules of respectability did not apply" (2000: 43). An extreme, almost parodic, gothic example is in Beth Yahp's

[20] Learning without thought is labour lost; thought without learning is perilous. Confucius *(551 BC–479 BC)*, Waley, A (1989) *The Analects of Confucius*, Vintage, UK

short story "The Red Pearl" "The sailor will feed her [the story's main character, an exotic dancer, who seems part human part animal/vampire] with hearts, gizzards and raw liver for energy, he'll scoop these from their soggy packages, he'll hold them to her mouth and stroke her graceful neck as she closes her eyes, as she leans to swallow them whole" (1990: 49). Within my own set of stories, the reader is introduced to Mistress in "Made in China" who is eleven years old; as young as I could make her, wild and as sexualised as possible in order to make this point. Mistress is represented as hybrid and other-worldly, having been the result of bestiality, conceived between a human mother and a blue-eyed crane. The character displays animalistic behaviour, murdering her new, brutal husband, wandering off and returning only to kill herself so that her child can survive in the hands of her maid. The image is empowered in order that the character is perceived as threatening, yet with a mysterious and exotic power yet not as gothic as Beth Yahp's example. Similarly, the main character Cherry, from "Not That Fucking Old Thing Again: On Being Mistaken as Chinese", resists sexual norms (that of acceptable gendered behaviour) and is a reclaimed commodification[21] in order to gain Western access and subvert the notion of Western acceptance.

Along with the inclusion of the hysterical matriarch character, there is often the presence, if not more so, of a submissive servant. The servant is present to signify and apply hierarchies of wealth, power and property; the ideal literary allegory for colonial possession, hence my use of the non-naming device, the title 'Mistress' and the deliberate naming of the servant Huang Chai in "Made in China". Asian servants within Asian–Australian writing, because they are 'not just house employees' but often intimates and generational familial participants, denote tradition and traditional cultures, not least in the British colonial system and also the Chinese system where servants are familial and, albeit sometimes actual family members, can be afforded an opinion upon a family's cultural direction. In Hsu Ming Teo's *Love and Vertigo*, the Singaporean Amah is a silent observer who helps pad the family ranks and whilst not a family member, is considered higher than a servant or a 'mere house employee'. In "Chinese Whispers", the cook is

---

[21] In her critique of *The World Waiting to be Made (2000b)*, Miriam Wei Wei Lo discusses Simone Lazaroo's use of the concept of commodity and uses this to answer back to the Western imaginary (Khoo, 2000).

barely mentioned and Adia in "Island Sacrifice" mourns the absence of familial servants after she migrates to Australia. "Migration to western countries has also robbed many Asian women of two pillars of support extended family and household staff that help relieve the burdens of child rearing and facilitate professional careers and aspirations" (Shun Wah, 2004: 48).

In *The Australian Fiancé*, the servants belong to the Australian's family in Broome and do not have the same status of 'family' as they would in an 'Asian family', but their presence is there for the reader to liken to the Eurasian girl herself and indicates the status the Australian and his family afford to the Other. They are objects, 'appliances,' to be used both as implement to clean and support the family in the day-to-day running of the house, and also as sexual outlets. They are never asked for or given the opportunity to converse with the Australian or his family but are made comfortable conversing with the Eurasian via a narrative that uses the relationship between them to indicate colonial oppression. Initially, the servants are suspicious of the Eurasian but remain silent. The fiancé indicates the servants' status as house employees by saying, "They are your servants. They will do as you ask" (2000a: 90). The Eurasian protagonist observes them; compares them to herself thereby immediately likening herself to them, "I cannot tell where the house maid is from. She is about my age, maybe younger. She looks aboriginal, except that her eyes have the long elegant line of Malay descent my mother's eyes have ... My mother's Nyul Nyul tribe; some of my father's people Indonesian Japanese" (2000a: 91). It is deliberate and powerful that Lazaroo purposefully differentiates the role of servant between cultures from Asian to Australian by directing communication between the servant characters and the Eurasian as opposed to that of the Australian. It is a comparison that symbolises the eventual status of the Other within the territory of the Australian and his family.

Melville Newton, the male protagonist in "The Gentleman's Outpost", is fascinated by the 'coolies' and expresses the fact that in India, his family considered them lower than the family servants he'd experienced growing up. "Once, in Calcutta, when his parents saw one, Mrs Newton immediately took the young Melville by the hand and ushered him

to the other side of the road. 'Look. They don't seem to have whites in their eyes,' she said." The instance situates the reader once again in the position of coloniser by the writer's device of sharing a confidence; of stating the stereotype in order to include the reader and lull them into believability. In a similar fashion to fantasy, which suspends and modifies belief, the Asian–Australian writer adopts strategies of inclusion/exclusion to bring the reader into the interior world of the character and if present, the conscious postcolonial messages of the text.

If most Asian–Australian writing is a mixture of East and West impressions, then this is brought about by the contrasts in ethnicities claimed and reclaimed between the Other and the Dominant characters and locations. In "Made in China", the old Chinese servant woman (amah, which is more than a servant; a family supporter) is exaggerated, empowered and strengthened as a Chinese matriarch. As mysterious, powerful and wise, it is purposeful that the servant character has the task of influencing the child; raising the child and being responsible for the child's growth into adulthood. I have therefore excluded the role of the mother altogether for this reason and given Huang Chai maternal words and thoughts and subsequently, upon the death of Mistress, the responsibility of looking after Mistress' own daughter. Nevertheless, as the amah, Huang Chai interprets the world; the reader is not furnished with conforming cultural motivations of either her or the young girl. The 'vulnerability' yet strength of both characters subverts the portrayal and representation of the 'accepting female role' in Chinese culture; where the female seems docile, even ambivalent and yet can also appear manipulative and 'cunning'. Similarly, the female dancer in Beth Yahp's short story "The Red Pearl" demonstrates power, albeit supernatural. These examples seem vastly different from the illegal Chinese immigrant character Syn in Lillian Ng's *Swallowing Clouds*, who embarks on a bizarre sexual relationship with her cruel and piggish Chinese boss in a butcher's shop.[22] In order to differentiate between a modern piece of writing and that of postmodern/postcolonial, and even attempt a mixture of both, I have attempted to empower Huang Chai's character dramatically. Rather than Huang Chai ebbing and

[22] For more information on this see "Selling Sexotica: Oriental Grunge and Suburbia in Lillian Ng's Swallowing Clouds." *Diaspora: Negotiating Asian-Australia* . Eds Gilbert, Khoo, and Lo, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2000, pp. 164–172.

flowing with the narrative, she makes deliberate choices. Rather than struggle or remain encapsulated by both cultural, gendered and narrative expectations, she makes strategic plans, breaks down rules and takes control. Rather than remain ignorant of the power imbalance between herself and Min-Kung Hua, Huang Chai becomes suspicious, clever and daring.

Figure 6: This is the oldest photo of my Grandfather's mother, wife Number Two. Taken in Malaysia, circa 1910.

Nevertheless, cruelty and violence are frequent to many narratives about Asians from Asians writing in English, both because of expected narratives, because the experience of the author may translate into such themes, and because the presence of barbarism concerns the construction of the 'civilised' West, and such a contrast indicating the struggle to understand one's own alien culture is irresistible. As the West is depicted as simple, ambivalent, dishonourable and intolerant, the East is equally depicted as violent, cruel and cunning.

From Jung Chang's autobiographical work *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (1989) to Adeline Yen Mah's *Falling Leaves: The Memoir of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter* (1999), the stereotypes cover mothers' mistreatment of daughters, men

mentally and physically abusing women (husbands mistreating wives in most instances without alcohol, which is oddly, yet another stereotype in Western culture; that of Asians possessing a low tolerance to alcohol and that of Westerners having an excuse to abuse women as a result of inebriation. Asian men who abuse women therefore 'do not have a legitimate excuse'.), households which abuse their servants and humans who mistreat animals and once again, perpetuate the criticism of China's One Child Policy. The literary strategy seems to lie in a thorough examination of the cultural implications of these textual devices and implications of them, and professing one's own unique perspective and consciousness within the text. Even this is problematic and restricts the liberation of an Asian–Australian writer's choices.

In Beth Yahp's *Crocodile Fury* (1996a), the schoolgirls are taught to avoid the ubiquitous crocodile, which represents the fury of Western prejudice. The young girl is, as common with colonial fiction, passive aggressive; keenly delineating and describing white dominance internally and yet outwardly remaining submissive and stoic. Similarly, in Simone Lazaroo's *The Australian Fiancé* (2000a), the main protagonist Eurasian romanticises the Western male as a liberator, a road to freedom and provides the reader with the realisation of the effects of colonialism at the same time as examining whether or not colonialism is what the Eurasian actually 'needs.' The character faithfully contrasts his gratuitous mistreatment of her and in the name of a better life as opposed to the 'cruel' life she could have had if he did not 'save her'. The cruelty in Lazaroo's novel is complex, as it is arguably a subtle, yet deliberate expression of defiance against the Western canon. As discussed earlier in attitudes towards the servants, Lazaroo's Australian fiancé character is portrayed as indifferent and aggressive. As cruel as the Asian traditions that bind the Eurasian to her culture, as cruel as the Japanese soldiers were to her during the war when she was forced into brothels, none of it seems as cruel as the Australian who fills her with promises and treats her 'no better' than his father treated the Aboriginal servant.

In "Made in China", the Mistress is treated cruelly by Min-Kung Hua, the hyper-masculine male who has at his disposal pet tigers and 'cunning' advisers. In the tradition

of Japanese shogun stories, out of which arise stereotypes about Eastern politics and social systems and of the West's expectations of Asian male attitudes towards females, Min-Kung is comical and obtuse. His courtship of Mistress and murder of her parents, the marrying off of her eleven sisters is deliberately exaggerated to farcical proportions, albeit not to scorn the traditional characters of mythical Chinese or Asian stories nor to feed the Western appetite for Orientalist longing. Likewise, in "Not That Fucking Old Thing Again", Cherry is propositioned by Andrew, a resident of Sydney's Double Bay suburb, with whom she deliberately sexually debases herself in order to please herself.

The strategy of the conscious Asian woman succeeds in reclaiming, owning and pre-empting the expected narrative of the Orientalist fetishist and manipulating the development of the characters' liberation from racial prejudices placed onto them by the reader. Beyond 'victim writing', which serves to evoke a purely emotional response (mainly colonial pity), and an agreed 'less than' implication of Asian stereotypes, commodification of the Asian succeeds in a postcolonial treatment of the Asian stereotype, the answering back to the Empire, of the Asian's role in society, particularly female; a distortion of expectations without concern for the reaction or comfort of the white English-speaking reader (Tucker, in Ommundsen, 2001: 150). In Tseen Khoo and Kam Louie's *Culture, Identity, Commodity. Diasporic Chinese Literatures in English*, Dorothy Wang talks about the unnamed main character in Simone Lazaroo's *The World Waiting to Be Made*. "By commodifying herself, she is simply doing what has long been done to her ..." (2005: 46). Sandra Lyne, in her examination of the marketing of Asian women's texts, illuminates this further and quotes Jane Miller, "Miller defines Asian women's value in commodified economies of desire: Their presence ... is as forms of coinage, exchange value offered or stolen or forbidden, tokens of men's power and wealth or lack of them" (1991: 118–122). Sandra Lyne (2002) notes that book covers assist in commodifying the Asian narrative by not always reflecting the content, except in the case of "the pearl-crunching skull on the cover of Lillian Ng's *Swallowing Clouds* [which] was an accurate indicator of the distorted, banal caricature of 'Asian' hyper-sexuality on the inside." It has been hotly debated that Lillian Ng's novel does not transgress the hyperfetishised female but instead lacks the conscious voice of authority

giving over to Western expectations of the sexual, deviant and cunning illegal immigrant female and sado-masochistic romance-less Chinese male.

How does one identify the conscious writer? After reading Lazaroo's *The World Waiting to Be Made*, and *The Australian Fiancé*, I was irritated by the sacrifice of the female, the unchanging, undeveloped and ambivalent Australian characters and the immovable, stagnancy of Australian society. I had a similar reaction reading Teo's *Love and Vertigo* and *Behind the Moon* (I intensely disliked *Swallowing Clouds*). A reader might make the same accusations about my writing too. Perhaps, to me, the perceived absence of the conscious postcolonial voice signifies the author's concordance with the types of colonial narratives that moved my mother. Lazaroo's and Teo's texts did not resonate with me as much as Castro's novels, Quan's, Chan Loh's, Ouyang Yu's and Yahp's writing, whose intertextual devices of wit, sarcasm, density and wordplay delighted me. This is because their writing was just preferable writing to me, although Lazaroo's and Teo's texts could also have been considered wonderful, experimental and strategic. I am embarrassed that my list includes more men writers than women. In comparison, Don O'Kim's *The Chinaman*, written in 1984, and *My Name is Tian*, written in 1968, are both exercises in newly created Asian–Australian reclamation writing. Nevertheless, after reading Lazaroo's novels again and again, I came to notice the careful editing, the disclaimers and clever sentence structure which meant that the messages were more subtle and gradual. Teo's *Love and Vertigo* also had the same effect. Oddly, the 'Asian' part of me did not respond well to Teo's novel *Behind the Moon*, because I felt it to be a utopian ideal where all characters from different cultures sit alongside one another and are unified in their patriotism and quest to be Australian nationals, to the white Australian larrikin culture. Interestingly, Teo herself wrote an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald,* titled "These Days its Harder to be Different"[23], about how multiculturalism has not worked in Australia because it does not allow cultures to be individual, but homogenises them into one culture, which, if that was her intention, this book also demonstrates.

---

[23] Teo, H-M. (2006) "These days it's harder to be different", *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 7, 2006.

Yahp's short story "The Red Pearl", like my own story "Not That Fucking Old Thing Again", illustrates how commodifying the Asian female can subvert notions of sexual compatibility. Such metaphorical mythmaking is designed to shock and pollute the reader, playing on the fear that Westerners possess of the metaphoric East; the presence of disease, plague and uncontrollable eroticism. "She will hold her sides and point, and fling up her arms and push back her tangled hair. The sailor will show his teeth. "Eat me," the lover will murmur, presenting her bared throat, her breasts. And perhaps the sailor will" (1990: 52).

In contrasting the bizarre and insatiate sexual appetite of the stereotypical Asian female who cannot get good sex from Asian man once tasted from Western man and henceforth needs constant liberation and romance by the gentlemanly Australian white male; so it is that the white Australian female is represented as virile and sexually comfortable. Mainly male Asian–Australian writers within this exegesis contrast Asian and white females using sexual compatibility or incompatibility as the base from which to examine East/West relationships, notably at the risk of being misogynistic; albeit that Asian–Australian female writers can also treat Asian male characters as mostly less than white Western male characters. In *The Eastern Slope Chronicle*, Zane Dole is fixated with a white Western woman:

> sexually she was quite demanding ... she liked it long and lasting but I preferred it to be short and sudden, often desiring her to play different roles, for example the role of an English-speaking lady. Which was a role that she detested ... For one thing she had this smell that was medically referred to as 'big sweat gland' but was commonly known as 'fox stink' in her armpits, which was as strong as almost all the foreigners from the West I had met. Imagine if she spoke English to me while making love and smelling of this Western fox stink! It would be a wonderful experience (2002: 12).

Although satirical in his delivery, Yu is not adverse to deliberate sexual stereotyping. The narrative skirts on offensive territory via the character Dao, who goes back to the Eastern Slope and hires a Chinese prostitute:

> … she was a pure stereotype, dressed in the perfectly acceptable fashion of the trade … I must confess here that stereotypes always turn me on while true blue feminists don't because they are boring, ideologically … the sucking felt good with the acute knowledge that she had a rotten pussy … the oral sex felt better than anything that I had ever dared to try in Australia, a country that normal Chinese would regard as saturated in AIDS … She came from Shanghai with the intention of making money by selling her sex. She was very clear about her objectives … The reason I told her to go and said I hoped her mouth was rejuvenated from my movement, an Australian movement. I said that in English and surprisingly, she understood it (2002: 76–77).

Yu ventures further to include within the narrative the perspective of white Australian males' fascination with Asian females: "I sort of have a feeling that normal virile Australian males generally have a weakness for those tiny sexy Asian females and tend to treat them well on the first occasion" (2002: 170). Castro's narratives are also not immune to the sexual comparison between white and Asian females, and incidentally, the stereotyped Asian male, which reverses the objectification the Western male has for white woman and white male ideals. In *After China* the architect character reminisces, "When I left China I had no idea how savage the West was. In New York every second girl had something you could catch. More than I bargained for. In New York all the males looked rubbery and aggressive. Maybe that's why women liked me. I was pure. Innocent" (2003a: 38).

Natasha, a character within Frank Chan Loh's *When Dining with Tigers*, attends a *Chinese Women's Positive Action Meeting* and takes Charlie and Moby with her. Illustrated is the difference prescribed internally and externally to the culture, of Asian male and female cultural expectations and how modernity has placed a certain measure of guilt upon Westernised Chinese males and played upon the imaginaries afforded by Western assumptions:

> I never liked playing with the other girls because I hated the gender role games they played … My mother didn't want me to play with my brothers and the other boys either. She wanted to make a proper lady out of me … the older I got, the

> more unruly I became. I was always on the lookout for ways to shock my parents (2000: 109).

Natasha later declares;

> We Chinese women are way behind our western sisters on that score [regarding equality with men] ... we've got to stop behaving like unpaid servants, all the time mindful of our master's comfort. Why should we suffer in silence? [Interestingly, the character Charlie feels as if she is addressing him.] (2000: 101).

The conscious voice thus implicates itself. If anywhere, the conscious narrator, perhaps here, could be said to reveal the attitudes of the writer most clearly.

The Futility of 'Cross-Cultural' Love Affairs

If Asian female characters have the burden of representing the entire Asian imaginary, then the white male character can be left to represent the entire white nationalist stereotype, being presented, in many cases, as ambivalent, uncomplex and incapable of understanding the migrant experience. In Yahp's story, "So We Walked Down Abercrombie Street", Lisa persuades her Australian friend Mark to:

> try a sticky syrupy fruit canned in her country and her flatmate brings him hot milky tea in a glass, and they watch to see the sorts of faces he'll make ... Lisa is sick in the middle of the night ... (someone told her that Asians are genetically allergic to alcohol and she's trying to build up a resistance) ... Mark is awake on the floor. 'There, there it can't be that bad,' he whispers, because last night she was homesick and he thinks she's been sad (1991b:219).

In Don O'Kim's *The Chinaman,* the reader learns that 'the Chinaman' is the name of a tropical coral reef fin fish, which, nowadays, it is prohibited to catch. Joe, also called The

Chinaman on the boat due to his ethnicity, is told by an Australian friend Dean not to worry about a fellow passenger, Vic's, racism. The following excerpt captures how the white Australian male character represents and rationalises the Orientalist beliefs of the white dominant by using the casual voice of the Aussie bloke who is ready to give everyone a 'fair go' but 'poke fun at his mates'. One senses the cultural 'conflicts' that arise here immediately when Joe is forced to conform to Western standards first of all, and accept racist remarks about himself as part of those standards;

> 'Racism is the nearest thing we've got to ourselves, biologically. You know how long it took for us to lose our tails? And we didn't lose them all at once you know. some kept them longer than others to balance themselves.'
> 'I don't find that funny, certainly not in my position.'
> 'Joe, I'd say that it's rather a question of how to take it than how not to take it. Health is not just keeping away from germs but keeping them under control.'
> 'But I don't have to put up with Vic. I want to go back to Sydney.'
> 'If you can't cope with it on Quovadis [the name of the boat] you can't cope with it in Sydney either.' (1984: 68).

Contrast this perception against a gentlemanly but no less aggressive white Western male, as in the case of *The Australian Fiancé*. Lyn Jacobs notes, "the mother reads her [the Eurasian protagonist] as a 'peril' while the father, with capitalist and racist arrogance, diagnoses her as 'available' and 'cheap' (2002: 1–13). The fiancé himself remains a gentleman until his parent's prejudices, lying dormant, rise to destroy his willingness to keep his promise to marry the Eurasian girl. In *Love and Vertigo*, Pandora finally becomes hysterical, speaking in tongues and following Christianity and, at the same time, falling in love with the outwardly gentlemanly evangelical pastor, Rodney Phillipe, who abandons her, disappoints her, reinforcing the notion that East–West 'cross-cultural' love affairs are ultimately futile. Not so, I hope, in the relationship between Toby and Mona in "The Oriental Express".

Figure 7: My Aunt Vera poses in Hong Kong with her then boyfriend, circa late 1960s. Source Family Archives.

In Lazaroo's *The Australian Fiancé*, the entire novel could be argued as being a narrative about the female Asian's submissive fascination with whiteness; akin to waiting to be conquered as she desires to assimilate and be colonised and seeks to set herself apart from her past, her family and her culture. In contrast, the Australian male is presented as naïve, generous, and 'bewildered' by her, "Your ... aloofness. It's not just with me then? ... I mean, are you like this with all men?'... She imagines the lightness of being able to pass herself over to someone like this, the giddy relief of it" (2001: 34) In Asian–Australian writing, the Asian protagonist is often in a situation where s/he must choose whether or not to emulate the white ideal and become pivotal in championing the struggle to defend or comprehend White and Yellow. Olivia Khoo (2001) examines *The Australian Fiancé* and places the Asian–Australian subject in the everyday rendering the dominant white male and whiteness as 'ornamentation'. Rather than the migrant being the 'other', s/he becomes the everyday. It is a perspective that supports Sang Ye's earlier notion of 'trust' in the reading audience in coming to the novel's essential message. An

example of ornamentation occurs when the Australian fiancé brings the main protagonists family to the exclusive restaurant Raffles, 'without thinking'. The Eurasian character uses the word 'they' to distance herself from her family. The moment indicates the silence of the assured but stupid white male using a romantic backdrop as a vehicle to appease and at the same time expose the white reader:

> As he watches my family [eating] there's the barest hint of perplexity about the Australian's forehead, the ripple that precedes the knot every now and then. Then it flattens ... these things happen in this country ... I don't know how to do it, this grand romance, this slim hope. The Australian watches me quizzically as I cross the floor: what is he to make of all this? My family. My embarrassment. My aunty and uncle whisper to each other before rising an almost inaudible thank you to the Australian, their eyes averted. I stand at the door with my family while he goes to pay (2000a: 64–66).

Despite Khoo's critique, such narrative above seems to feed the expected narrative; the wail of the Asian downtrodden and is too subtle an illustration of white ambivalence via descriptions of snobbery and wealth. Nevertheless, perhaps this controversy and debate was Lazaroo's purpose, so expressed in cultural theoretical terms earlier on in the novel with the utterance of the Eurasian who goes to bed one night after moving to Broome in Western Australia, "The yellow bed is high, irrefutable. It is the bed of the Empire. I lie on it" (2000a: 88). Eventually, after being rejected, sacrificed and with a deceased child, all the Eurasian gets out of her relationship with the Australian is a camera, which reminds her of her father; once again, a comment on the Western gaze upon the East (and gendered stereotypes) and the capturing of the Asian imaginary, the collectible object or the terrain that is traversed, explored, disposed of and returned from, like territory.

Still, in Castro's *Birds Of Passage*, the reader is made aware that the narrative must be confined to the narrative and not taken as reflection of the writer's own perspective. The art of writing is to show and not to tell, as it were. Mrs Anna Bernhard is interviewed by Seamus' doctor about her conversations with Seamus:

> [he would talk about] things that pertain to racism and sexism. He once said that the two were interrelated, having to do with attitudes of inferiority and

> superiority. Not a new idea, mind you. Sometimes he would talk for the two of us, assuming certain opinions to be mine. Needless to say, they did not resemble any of my opinions at all ... opinions that attraction between the sexes of different races stem from certain racist and sexist assumptions; that no satisfactory relationship can result unless these assumptions have been overturned (1983: 125).

Although Anna Bernhard does not agree with this assumption, and Seamus never makes any advances toward her, she leads him later on into a moment of sex.

Ouyang Yu deals with the issue by bringing a conscious, sharp narrative voice as Zane Dole describes his feelings about being left by his wife. The voice is funny, sarcastic, and cynical:

> She just disappeared like in one of those stories Australian writers liked to write fantasising about Asian women leaving their tyrannical husbands behind for the loving care of freedom-loving Australian men ... 'Chinaman's wife,' quite a title for your kind of Henry Lawson stuff huh? 'Drover's wife'(2002: 18).

Yet to identify with white Australia is to be able to be seen as being agreeable. It calms the white side of me. Hsu Ming Teo uses her suburban location in her interview by Hoa Pham to avoid stating whether or not she is Asian or Australian or both, such as at the launch of her book *Behind The Moon*, which was launched officially by Thomas Keneally at Gleebooks in Sydney. Teo aligned herself to writer Keneally, her friend, and in doing so, perpetuated the blurred identity she has carved for herself in her interviews over time, "Me and Tom Keneally were two westies that had a great time hanging around Hong Kong" (10/8/05).

Desire and the Fascination with Whiteness

A comparison between Asianness and Whiteness and their mutual fixation is frankly written from the 'fictional' gay male perspective of Canadian-born, Australian-based writer Andy Quan. I include these examples in this exegesis both because I consider Quan, within these pages, an Asian–Australian writer and because his work, though a different 'genre' from the 'usual' themes of Asian–Australian writers, (Ayres, Teo and Cho also include gay themes in some of their writing) describes whiteness and Asian fascinations, but without the shackles of gender; albeit arrested with a new set of identity issues. Several protagonists in *Calendar Boy* (2001) and in *Six Positions. Sex Writing by Andy Quan* (2005), mention the desiring of blonde men/Western men and contemplate the process of desire itself wanting to possess and sexually connect with whiteness, which is also contrasted with Asianness and the sense of difference.

A white male character, Morgan in the story "Something about Muscle", makes a comment to the Asian male protagonist who processes Morgan's Orientalist comments:

> You're big. I haven't seen an Asian with a cock like this." I would have taken it as misguided flattery but it wasn't ... So that was what was different. A muscular Asian boy, aggressive with a long cock. Who fucked him. Not a young, slight passive Asian boy who lives with his parents. (2005: 108 and 111).

One notes intertextually here that Morgan does not refer to the Asian character as a 'man', but an 'Asian', which connotes the feminised, paedophilic extremes of Western lust for Asian males. Ironically, the Asian character also, does not refer to himself as 'Man', but uses the term 'boy'. This indicates the 'whitewashing' of stereotypes from Western fascination upon Eastern self-references so that how the West sees us may be how we will eventually see ourselves; that is, as less than and, in this case, sexually objectified. In another example, where the Asian protagonist inherently understands the Western gaze and Asian Other being the object of desire, Quan describes an Asian male character who begins to understand why he frequents Asian clubs; thus observing his 'less than' status when cruising the white boyfriends of other Asian males:

> It's because in other clubs, I don't know if guys are looking right through me because they think I'm ugly, or because they wouldn't consider touching as Asian with a bargepole. And if someone comes up to me, I don't know if it's because of me, or because I'm Asian ... Whether I'm right or wrong in the end is irrelevant, but for now, what I smell is a gay man who *must* in some way be attracted to Asians (2001: 52)

Tony Ayres' *The Fat Boy*, writing from the perspective of a gay, Asian–Australian man also directly mentions this fixation and the plight of the Asian gay male who must continuously evaluate the acceptability of his ethnicity before every other physical feature that affects the way gay males view each other. Such objectivity is, in Ayres' example, subverted so that the Asian male appears to be the dominant who prefers 'types,' whilst the white man becomes the homogenised. Andy Quan writes a story of an experience with an Asiophile gay man called Rufo, "'You and your blond hunks' commented Brent, one of the few of my friends who'd met Rufo. With one fell swoop, he'd reduced all my tastes in men to one stereotype, and reduced Rufo to two words. I was bothered not by how wrong but how right he was" (2005: 62). Nevertheless, in

alerting a reader to the consciousness of the writer submitting to the 'grand narrative' of Asian males as less than white males, another of Quan's characters describes the complexity of Orientalism and Occidentalism; that it can never be compared as equally opposing platforms of racism. Quan concludes with the opinion of another character, "I know it's not a contradiction to like white boys, and like Asian boys but less, and to work towards gay men being less racist in bed. But it's not as neat a package as I'd like" (2005: 159).

In comparison, one of the main protagonists in Quan's *Calendar Boy* (2001: 10) volunteers for a bodybuilding competition and fixates upon the dominance yet desirability of the West so much that he does not realise that a Western man is trying to pick him up. What results is the character, who calls himself a "skinny Chinese kid", obviously harking back to name-calling experienced in the narrator's childhood; disallowing himself to consider himself attractive and realising that a blond, blue-eyed man actually wants him, "Then the man, [Jeremy] piercing blue eyes and short perfectly spiked platinum blond hair ... smiles at me. My knees buckle." (2001: 10). After he bounds off and is seen with another man, he manages to make Jeremy jealous "I think that anyone else would have known. But I didn't. While I was flirting with him, so obviously that it wasn't obvious to me, he was flirting with me, a skinny Chinese kid who never imagined that someone who looked like all his fantasies could ever be interested in him" (2001: 10).

The literary device of impossible narrative coincidences alerts us to the presence of the author and reminds us constantly of the presence of authorial deliberation. Tony Ayres articulates this feeling in the following way, "I've internalised Anglo-centric notions of what is considered desirable and undesirable. For instance I'm not attracted to other Asian men. We're not chasing each other; we're competing for the interest of the limited number of Caucasians who desire us" (Khoo and Louie, 2005: 73). Interestingly, Ayres comments that his desires have mainly been for 'whiteness' until the recent change in the (Sydney's) gay scene which sees an increased number of Asians who fit into the paradigm of those going to the gym, thus 'resembling whiteness'; going to dance parties

and possessing a desirable body. This would also include complete acceptance and desirability of the white gay community; where an Asian male is assimilated into the white body and becomes thus 'unattainable' and therefore 'better than', the Asian male. This means that the fascination attempts to go beyond whiteness because it has become possible for the ideal to be successfully imitated. Ayres states too, that this power and status attainment within the gay community through masculine constructs seems to reinforce the masculinity that excluded Asian men in the first place (Khoo and Louie, 2005: 162–163). In this way, an Asian is forced to accept that Asian cannot ever be as desired as whiteness, and that if whiteness is attained, that he must deny his own Asianness and remain on the periphery.

So what is it to resemble whiteness?

Figure 8: My mother second from right stands next to her friends and sister Farida in the early 1950s, all in dresses, patent leather shoes and 50s hair. Colonial perfection. Source: Family Archives.

For the Asian–Australian writing community, whiteness can be represented as coldness, like the ambivalence of Simone Lazaroo's Australian Fiancé, or blondeness, like Quan's Australian characters. The symbolism of physical difference spills into other

comparisons. Shen Yuan-Fang comments in concordance with this view and states that "if China wants to make further progress, it must embrace the 'blueness' and the ocean, which represents Western civilisation" (cited in Khoo and Louie, 2005: 130). This 'blueness' is an interesting trope within Asian–Australian writing and appears both visually and figuratively, as in Yuan-Fang's comment above, of the representation of whiteness and unattainable ideal. Ommundsen notes that the blueness Yuan-Fang refers to is the blue sky, being the first notable difference that migrants are used to seeing when they arrive in Australia:

> In the constant struggle for survival there is little engagement with Australian people or the Australian environment. One exception is a description of the visual shock felt by Chinese on arrival in Australia. The brilliant sunshine, high, blue sky (so different from the low-hung smog of Chinese cities) and broad vistas allow for a startling clarity of vision. In Sydney the visual effect is compounded by its undulating topography ... But the heroes of these stories [from the 1980s and 1990s] remain spectators rather than participants in the sweeping panorama of Australian life. And the blueness of eyes (along with the blondeness of hair) which encapsulates the epitome of Western appearance, and henceforth the capitalist illusion (2001: 197).

In Brian Castro's *Birds of Passage* the character Seamus is a 'hybrid', whose hybridity within the text separates him from being either Asian or Australian and yet links him to the Chinese migrant character of Lo Yun Shan, in whose life he is entangled. Seamus is described as possessing blue eyes in a 'very Chinese-looking face', but his cultural memory and patterns of behaviour do not add up to a neat sum of being part Chinese, part Anglo. Castro uses the blue eye as a device for illustrating and exploring a shifting sense of hybridity and the physical markers of stasis that the Other experiences. As Seamus has a part of him that is white, such as his blue eyes, which is the Western symbol, the whiteness renders him fragmented.

In Ouyang Yu's *The Eastern Slope Chronicle*, Dole speculates on a comment his wife made to him about moving to America and describes the addition of fragmented whiteness, which cripples and pollutes the purity of Asianness, "... once she went abroad

to America, her paradise, she would go for another man, preferably a white man with blue eyes with whom she could have a blue-eyed and perhaps black haired baby." (2002: 12) Interestingly, in Simone Lazaroo's *The Australian Fiancé* the blue eye and the colour blue represents physical handsomeness and a trope for Western superiority and recognition; the novel itself is about a girl's Freudian fixation on marrying an Australian man whom she feels may resemble and replace her father whom she has never met. Early on in the narrative, she examines a photograph of her father, about which her mother does not disclose information readily, thus adding to the mysterious unattainability of her father, and in fact, the West, "Was this my father? The grey photograph held its secrets close. Guess. His eyes might have been blue. His hair might have been dark gold. His face might have been handsome" (2000a: 14). Later, and throughout the book, Lazaroo details the Australian's appearance, frequently calling him 'the handsome Australian': "Up close his skin is the colour of new unvarnished rattan, pale gold, freckled here and there; the eyes a surprising, almost insolent blue against it" (2000a: 20). Her use of the colour extends to visual contrast; within narrative; strong colours will obviously stand out, "He has the side of his face resting on his hand, looking at me in the blue light cast by the setting moon." And again, "I dream of a man [when she is in Western Australia and feeling isolated] who can't remember his name. His eyes are cold-climate blue" (2000a: 53). "I look him in the eyes, his blue eyes still as surprising to me as the Australian sky ... I tell the handsome Australian that the child was not my sister; that she was my unwanted child" (2000a: 196). Her desire then, for whiteness (and blue-ness), and her persistence in reassuring the reader that the West is good, the East is bad, demonstrate a desire for hybridity and awareness of her own status as 'pollutant', for herself to dissolve into the whiteness, as she wishes the unwanted child dissolved, and ultimately failing in her attempt to assimilate because the contrast is too great.

Throughout *Zinc*, the eye too, signifies the inverted gaze yet attempts to show the blue eye as being a handicap to societal acceptance. In "Made in China", the blue-eyed crane is a mysterious, personified animal, a main character made peripheral, who has forged a deal with Mistress' mother to promise her child as its 'lover' in order to conceive a child. The child sports a blue eye, therefore rendering it offensive to the world which Huang

Chai inhabits. When the child is finally described within the narrative, I have deliberately sabotaged the traditional beauty of the blue-eyed Western ideal, and made it sound ugly, describing as unacceptable, what would usually be considered Caucasian features. My treatment of the blue eye is not new, though perhaps it is a little vicious. In other Asian–Australian writing where it is mentioned, the blue eye becomes alien. Like Castro's albino Aboriginal in *Drift*, the blue eye, the likes of which Alfred covers with an eye patch in my own story "The Gentleman's Outpost", is seen as offensive to society. The blue eye in both stories represents a physical location that pigment cannot reach; a handicap. In "Chinese Whispers", the boy with blue eyes represents Adia's seduction by the West. The character's name is the purposely unromantic Barney and he is described as skinny; opposing all traditional representations of Western masculinity and ruggedness, and in "Island Sacrifice", it is a blue-eyed husband and stranger who will destroy the main protagonist's sense of belonging, much like Lazaroo's 'handsome' Australian who has eyes of a 'cold-climate blue.' In "Not That Fucking Old Thing Again", the blue eye becomes once again, the fixation, the physical target of Cherry's anger and by the last story, "The Oriental Express", it is no longer a feature that matters.

The device of the blue eye is not the only obvious marker of difference used. Appearance itself and mirroring appearance is illustrated by using tropes such as mirrors, glass and dress. The mirror itself represents a truth to the face of the Other, who struggles against her/his own appearance for most of his/her/his life and also denotes the gaze of the Western eye, from which imaginaries are created, from which the Other scrutinises itself and represents the world which, if cracked, can splinter the Other subject into facets of its original self and from which the whole may never be known. The mirror confirms difference and becomes the vehicle of the mask; the banana and/or the hybrid and provides silent scrutiny from which one can never recover, since the mirror lets us obsess over certain specific facets of ourselves which others may not even see. Because of this, aware or unaware, Asian–Australian writers and Other writers use the mirror as an emblem for truths and distorted truths and are able to play with the symbol in a similar way to how they can play with the conscious, impossible narrative coincidence and the deliberate voice which talks to the reader, and in doing so, talks to itself.

In *Birds of Passage*, the character Seamus is fixated with the mirror. As an intertextual device, Castro layers his narratives so that Seamus' life is a mirror of his ancestor Lo Yun Shan's. Seamus accidentally cracks a mirror, behind which are wedged pieces of yellow paper, written on in Chinese by Lo Yun Shan, and so begins his journey of self-scrutiny: "Were the fragments I had discovered behind the mirror all that remained of Shan's journal? Was his life erased forever?" (Castro, 1983: 65). Shan's voice eventually merges into Seamus', and the narration turns into third person from Seamus' point of view. He looks into the mirror every morning and wonders where his blue eyes came from. At his first job packing cartons, he witnesses a fellow worker Anna misting up the mirror as she applies lipstick in the bathroom, which he can see from a hole in the wall, "I became almost uncontrollably excited by this movement of hers, this itinerant kissing of her own image" (Castro, 1983: 29).

When Seamus stays at his friend Edna's and re-discovers his physical appearance:

> I ... went to the mirror above the old dresser, saw myself in it, saw my flushed face, an elongated head, ears protruding. I had completely forgotten the way I looked. I was looking at another person. I could not believe that I was staring at myself, standing there in a checked shirt, my hair longish and curling under my ears ... Is this how others see me? I tilted the mirror. I straightened it. my features were definitely Asiatic (Castro, 1983: 52).

At a later stage in the novel, Seamus witnesses his new wife admiring herself in the mirror, as he did to Anna, his coworker. "I remembered her [Fatima his wife] saying that a body should not be conscious that it was being seen; that there should not even be the intention of seeing." He sees the act of voyeurism as "Battle lines ... drawn up between chastity and masturbation" (1983: 81) Later we learn that Seamus suffers from Hume's Syndrome, an inability to separate the past, present and future, which is a metaphorical mirroring of his internal self and the layering of identities, of history and cultural incongruity that permeate the life of the Asian-Australian.

In Castro's *The Garden Book,* Swan talks about her own fractured, even splintered existence after Darcy visits her father for the first time:

> These tiny mirrors I hang on trees. See how they catch the sunlight! They blind, but do not reflect the world; only slivers of colour; the blood on the morning of my release. Then when I put these tiny mirrors together I see myself: fragmented, but doubled. This doubling confirms the world. Girls at the college spoke behind their hands. Confirmation. I came first in French. Confirmation. A rumour doubled becomes a fact. Once is fate; twice destiny. They said it was because of race. Salacious races; honest white nations (1983: 97).

The character in William Yang's "The Man from the Caribbean" is splintered as Desiree/Peter the cross-dresser. Desiree grapples with the knowledge of maleness as she readies herself for sex with Carlos. "... she [Desiree] knew, at the moment of her triumph, that Peter would discard her and take all this pleasure for himself...her femininity was disappearing and her altar-ego, Peter was taking control ..." (1995: 73, 74). The narrator compares Desiree to Carlos, the illegal immigrant:

> They both knew they would go their separate ways. Yet there was a bond they would not lose. They were like some bird enthusiasts who had travelled a long way to see a rare bird at a distant mountain. The bird may not have been spectacular in any way, but it had meant something to each of them, an experience they would always keep, yet would find difficult to describe to others (1995: 75).

Bird collecting (butterfly collecting?) is the feeling of being objectified and being unified, reflected in each other, as one would be in a mirror; the splintering of Desiree/Peter the cross-dresser and the splintering of Carlos the illegal immigrant who is also the exoticised Other.

In Beth Yahp's, "So We Walked down Abercrombie Street" (1991b), Lisa is standing in front of the mirror, staring at her own reflection and realising the inevitability of physical appearances. The mirror is used as an uncomfortable Western truth, where the Western gaze becomes the authority of truth and the Other evaluates her/himself on the

acceptance, racism and the constant reinforcement of difference. It is like the mirror in Snow White, which foretold to the Wicked Queen who in the kingdom was 'the fairest of them all,' at the same time as denying the interior life of the Queen or in the case of the Other who possesses an interior life. Although she was the fairest of them all for a long time, even the Wicked Queen surely would not have recently become wicked:

> I'm standing in front of a mirror ... I've lost my accent, people don't talk down at me, yet there's always that initial reaction, the fundamental difference: my face. Often I remember this difference only in people's reactions: you are my mirror (you mannequins in shop windows, you pouting white women on magazine covers, you neighbours who whisper loudly that I'm Japanese and can't speak like you) and I'm thinking of the Thai boy ... And he said: I hate looking in mirrors. And: I hate my face. And: I'm so ugly, Asian ugly, nobody goes for me (his women friends say he's beautiful, they stroke his skin, accuse him of paranoia, and he hates this also – being a novelty" (Yahp, 1991b: 225).

Castro uses the mirror as a painful symbol of fleeting legitimacy and certainty in his German spy novel *Stepper*, whose protagonist of the same name is a first-rate spy and disguise artist. Stepper falls in love with Japan; ultimately brought down because of his love for a Japanese woman, Reiko, who is watched closely by the Japanese police. "Japan became his mirror. And did not a famous psychoanalyst once declare that the mirror-stage is the first totalised image of the body? The pro-self?" (1997: 155). What is important here is the mark of the mirror which provides the transition from unawareness to the identification of the single self. As with Yahp's character Lisa, the mirror represents the sudden undeniable separation from the state of unity/blissful ignorance, to the isolation of physical difference, the realisation of the migrant who is forced thereafter to rely on 'I' as opposed to 'we'. Consequently in *Stepper*, the Japanese police are watching Reiko present Stepper with a "... a cracked mirror which he discovered soon enough; broken glass from countless compacts shattered along the way ... himself in bits and pieces ..." (1997: 155), which comments on the fact that the mirror cannot be grasped when apprehended; it is illusory and also narcissistic (Castro's Freudian reference) and throws back images in which the voyeur can lose her/himself. The doubling self provided by the mirror symbol is for the Other, confirmation or de-authorising. As the mirror

applies to Stepper as his other self, later it is, for Reiko, an assault of voyeurism. On the way to Hiroshima, Reiko stays at a room in the Ginza, she likes the layout of the room, "but she didn't like the mirrors which ran full length along one side of the wall" (1997: 230).

Comparitively, in Teo's *Behind the Moon*, Tien's mother Linh comes to Australia and tries to assimilate: "When she stared at herself in the long mirrors that lined the salon she fancied that, apart from her eyes, she looked Korean or Japanese rather than Vietnamese" (Teo, 2005: 45). The mirror here becomes friend, the narcissistic gaze which absorbs and reflects imaginary worlds and appearances. In the same way that it can be used as a trope for isolation and separation, it is also frequently used to indicate possibilities and a doubling of identities.

In "Made in China", the mirror is used as a physical good-luck charm. The use implies that the West appropriates its superstitions from imagined Orientalist histories: "For good luck, thousands of small trigram-shaped mirrors were placed around the house and countryside where the newlyweds might walk. There was much discussion about the direction of good energy, the influence and affect of the universe", clearly and humorously making fun of the West's preoccupation with Feng Shui and the art of design and placement of objects to achieve harmony and harmonious flows of energy. Later, however, in "Island Sacrifice", Adia, whose experience describes that of my mother who is not at one with the nation – the pro-self – normally realised in childhood, becomes irreversibly aware that although she is British, her appearance restricts her from acceptance. "It is torture where I can see my reflection in a mirror that is held to my face, but I am not allowed to look away … " The mirror thus can also be confirmation of the inescapable reality of existence, the doubling described by Swan in Castro's *The Garden Book*. Finally, in "Island Sacrifice", Adia states, "There are no mirrors in the house, except for the one in the bathroom that my husband uses to shave."

The Butterfly Effect: Murder by Orientalism

Is the butterfly collected or does it choose to die? Must it be a butterfly, which is the epitome of beauty and temporariness rather than a moth, which is a scavenger and blindly attracted to yellow flame? Arguably the most frequently used Orientalist imaginary is that of Madame Butterfly; death of the Other and/by the saviour white male which is also indicative of colonial violence and the apologetic, self-sacrificial Asian female. The character Adia in "Island Sacrifice" was created to experience the act of writing such a device and attempting to subvert it to the empowered perspective of the 'victim', who eventually makes, using the postcolonial voice, the choice to die rather than be essentially murdered by Orientalism; the result of which although parodic, is my ideal butterfly's experience. Such device is hard to tell apart; is the character a victim of Orientalism or are s/he committing suicide by choice, thus rendering the white dominant, the victim? Most definitely, the grand narrative plays to the former because it appeals to the idea of the great white hunter who kills for sport; who is naïve/innocent, but ultimately, a character who makes the mistake of collecting. This is an interesting comparison to the

original drowned wife in Lillian Ng's *Swallowing Clouds*,[24] who is killed for adultery, contrasted further on by the novel's main protagonist, Syn, who seems complicit in her own sacrifice (thus suicide) of her identity and placement (she is also an illegal immigrant).

Having been a dancer and understudy for the Melbourne Theatre Company in David Henry Hwang's play *M. Butterfly* in 1992, I witnessed the audience's reaction to a white man's helpless seduction (the moth drawn to the yellow flame) by an exotic (read cunning, inscrutable) 'Oriental'. The play, using Puccini's Opera *Madame Butterfly* as its palimpsest, was apparently based on a true story and presents a Chinese man who pretends to be a woman, and who seduces a white Frenchman, subsequently providing him with a child to complete the façade. The audience is moved by the colonial character's innocence, or 'naiveté' and sympathises with the Chinese man who professes to love, and desires to provide, the white Frenchman Gallimard with everything he dreams of in an Asian woman. Eventually in court, the Chinese man appears in a suit, callously scorns his lover and everyone goes home wondering how Gallimard could have let an Asian man beguile him so. Subverted by the playwright David Henry Hwang, Gallimard eventually places himself in the role of Butterfly and commits suicide.

A spin-off of the Madame Butterfly concept is *Miss Saigon*, a Cameron Mackintosh musical by Alain and Boublil in which I was a performer from 1993–1996 in Australia. The version is Madame Butterfly in musical theatre form where Chris, an American GI has a relationship with the virginal Kim and after trying valiantly to find her during an evacuation of the Vietnam War, gives up and goes home to America. Three years later, Kim travels to Bangkok and lives in poverty with the son Chris doesn't realise he's had. As Chris learns of Kim's existence, Kim also learns that Chris has taken an American

---

[24] See critique where the character Syn kills her unborn child in Tucker, S. (2001) "Beyond Belief: Representation and Revolt in Lillian Ng's Swallowing Clouds", in, Ommundsen, W. and Yu, O. (eds) *Bastard Moon: Writing the Chinese Diaspora in Australia, Otherland Literary Journal, Issue 7*, Australia.

wife. Just as Chris and his wife Ellen find her, they hear her shoot herself, in order to makes way for her son to be raised in the West.[25]

The propagation of such imaginaries seems apparent in narratives like *The Australian Fiancé*, with the sacrificial death of the Eurasian's child; the 'love and sacrifice' theme, which has resonated with audiences and readers for centuries,

> I bump into the woman of bells in the grocer's one morning. She recognises me, asks if my sister [we find out that sister is actually the Eurasian character's child] is slightly retarded, because of the droning patternlessness of the tune [she hums] and the shape of her eyes ... I tell the woman of bells: It's just this thing that runs in the family ... What's your tune about? I ask the child later. Dying (Lazaroo, 2000a: 162).

The metaphorical sacrificing of the child and the removal of the Eurasian from the White man's life confirms the necessity of borders that surround white nationhood and the issues that occur when these borders are crossed. When the fiancé sends photos 30 years and one month later, the Eurasian character resigns herself, problematically, to the reality and the idea that their lives could never 'intertwine'. "Death is so clear. It is the greatest distance ... Still we go on gathering images in our separate countries, remembering those who have flown, preparing ourselves for flight still to come" (Lazaroo, 2000a: 210–11). Such romantic wistfulness of the impossibility of hybridity (where Asians become a silent minority) connotes contamination and the need for separateness in order to preserve the status quo between Eastern and Western culture. A danger of this is the unwitting promotion of racist notions stemming from border protection policies; the presentation of a skewed truth that the White Australian Policy was right and that Asians and Australians could never be expected to get along. Olivia Khoo says that in Lazaroo's *The Australian Fiancé*, the deaths of the mother and child are not given as much weight as the death of Whiteness. "The veneration of the dead white body, and the seemingly inconsequential deaths of non-white, mixed heritage bodies, also relate to a notion of racial purity.

[25] Alison Bronoiwski (1996) confirms that in Australia Madame Butterfly came to be popular in the early 1990s, followed by a spate of mimetic stories worldwide, including *M. Butterfly* (1992) Melbourne and *Miss Saigon*, Sydney, in 1993.

Whiteness works with heterosexuality in order to reproduce white bodies" (2001: 25). Lillian Ng's *Swallowing Clouds* (1997), whose main protagonist allows herself to be abused and consequently 'forgives' her abuser, seems also complicit in this propagation, and it is my greatest fear that the character Adia, in "Island Sacrifice", is not recognised as taking a different direction from this narrative.

In her book review article *Agent Butterfly*, Mari Yoshihara states that these works, which examine the discourse of Orientalism, "... consolidates the Western power in part by feminizing the Orient; the material practices of sexuality that affirm and enhance the military, political, socioeconomic imperatives of the Western powers in Asia; and the roles of white women and Western feminism in the gendered dynamics of East-West relations" (2003: 55). Yoshihara comments on the conspicuously missing voice of the Asian woman, such as Madame Butterfly herself.

"Island Sacrifice" is an interesting case study. One reads it and fits it into the suicide under-duress category. Adia is unhappy with her husband, she takes drugs she has learnt about because he is a doctor, she meets and contemplates an affair with a man she meets in a park, her husband leaves her (and the narrative is constructed with Adia calling David "my husband") and she finally takes an overdose, leaving the reader wondering whether she'll die from it or continue to make dinner. Hopefully the reader sees that the story is not about the migrant experience written by the categorised Asian–Australian writer, but an issue of gender, where the interior and exterior life of the main protagonist is made binary with the interior and exterior of the house she is trapped within, yet tempted by the runner who uses the park outside her house. Adia, who does not sacrifice her children, but rather adores and misses them, becomes dissatisfied with her Australian husband and although tempted by another Australian man, rejects the possibility of an affair in order to remain by choice, within her interior life. The story was published in *Antipodes: A North American Journal of Australian Literature*. Bill Ashcroft, with Frances Devlin-Glass and Lyn McCredden, wrote the foreword to the edition, which focussed specifically on "The Sacredness in Australian Literature". They quote Michael Taussig as defining sacredness as that which can be defaced and describes many of the

pieces within the issue as over-writing: "The sacred" itself may be a continual process of realisation, inscription, defacement, and re-inscription, but in contemporary Australia it is also a region of contestation, hybridisation and discovery" (2005: 125). The park outside Adia's kitchen window is the inscribed freedom of 'Westernism'; the wide expanse, the sweeping panoramic expanse of Shen Yuan-Fang's (as mentioned above) Australia and the blueness of the sky. Adia contemplates this exteriority compared to her unhappy domestic life and runs outside in order to deface the park, deface the expectations of her role as housewife, and as stereotypical homemaker. She thus defaces the Australian landscape but without needing the completion of the white husband and, in venturing to the local shops, seeks to take possession of the otherwise sacredness of Australian territory.

Sandra Lyne, in her article *Consuming Madame Chrysantheme* (2002: 03) looks at visual and literary forms of the construct of the exotic Asian woman, the subject of Asian woman fetishes, such as the butterfly, china doll and the exotic Asian. Lyne quotes Barthes saying that the fictive characters introduced into a story are assigned the form of the inanimate "whereas our whole art struggles to enforce the 'life,' the 'reality' of fictive beings, the very structure of Japanese restores or confines these beings to their quality as *products*, signs cut off from the alibi referential par excellence; that of the living." Lyne examines the fetishised Madame Butterfly character as inanimate invested with human qualities; an imaginary which has been given meaning over time and reified by repetition. The result of the Asian woman construct both visual and literary is thus that there is

> no distinction between women from Japan, China and South East Asia: physical attributes such as long dark hair, delicately-constructed bodies and skin that is not too dark have come to signify sexual availability, eagerness to please men and an exciting 'difference' to Western women (Lyne, 2002: 03).

Such a subject produced as the object of particular discourse reduces the Asian Other to the level of pawn, object and butterfly, which can be placed at will by a Western imaginary into an alien location divested of responsibility because of death or inanimation, rendering the subject useless and incapable of sustainable life. Lyne quotes

Rosemary Berger in *Myth and Stereotype* and confirms that to idealise women is also to dehumanise them. She says:

> writers of the butterfly story ... [are] able to create a construct that can be comfortably exploited, without the complications involved with European female/male relationships. Asian females become replicas, simulacra. Proper relationships are not possible with such an item; a commodity indistinguishable from the trinkets and fripperies of Japan's exotic merchandise. By rendering the women 'dolls,' he positions himself as the controller of the playroom, the subject to whom the 'dolls' must give diversion and pleasure. The 'dolls' of course, do not cry 'real' tears, their culture permits play: thus the 'owner' is freed from the complications of emotional entanglement and question of ethics (2002: 10).

She talks about Lazaroo's dolls in *The Australian Fiancé* (2000a) and points out that in the butterfly story,

> Cho-Cho san believes Pinkerton will return, in spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, and is too simple to perceive the double standards in Western attitudes regarding Asian women. Butterfly suffers [in silence] waits, cares for the child, and suicides ... Uncomfortable questions about the legitimacy of colonialist exploitation of indigenous women are deflected in contemplation of this sacrificial female, who redeems and transforms Pinkerton's careless mistreatment. Butterfly's death conveniently leaves the way clear for the real American marriage to proceed, and the Amerasian child is to be brought up in America, a land of golden opportunities (2002: 12).

Castro, in *Birds of Passage* (1983), describes the yellow notes that Seamus finds as "already worn to the thinness of butterfly wings", no doubt, alluding to the butterfly fantasy. Like the leaves that the character Swan in *The Garden Book* collects, like Victor Stepper's numerous post-it notes, which the Japanese Reiko ultimately uses to practise English (*Stepper*), the butterfly illustrates transience and metaphoric death, also implying a short existence, whose impact is seemingly fleeting. In *Birds of Passage*, Shan slowly goes crazy once he meets Mary Young. Seamus also goes crazy from thalassaemia in a parallel future in which he is seduced by his white co-worker Anna Bernhardt. The butterfly story is reinforced as what Lyne describes as the East being impaled on a pin.

In Teo's *Behind the Moon* (2005), Tien is talking to her cousins who tell her about her own mother, who 'abandoned her', sacrificed her own trip on the boat, in order for Tien's grandfather to take the boat to Australian shores, and where Tien could live a better life in Australia. In the story of Alain and Boublil's *Miss Saigon*, Chris's Black American GI friend John is pivotal in informing Chris of Kim's existence. In *Behind the Moon*, Linh takes the role of prostitute (a great comparison to William Holden's 1960s Suzy Wong character) but has a child by a Black American GI. Tiffany tells Tien, "She had many boyfriends in Saigon … Even black American ones. Like your father. They were not married when they had you, you know. Tien did not say anything, but she felt the stirrings of shame for her mother" (2005: 25). Later on, we learn that Bucky, the black American soldier, was killed in action and had actually meant to go back and marry Linh. Notably, not one of the white or Westernised people in Teo's book are portrayed as abnormal, cruel or 'weird', and for this reason, they do not seem to be as complex as the characters of ethnicity. Even the perpetrator who 'bashes' Justin is not clearly defined, whereas everyone else in the novel is clearly defined by their race. Tien talks to Linh, "He went missing in action shortly after he wrote to you and has never been seen or heard from since. He did love you mum … He wasn't just another Pinkerton to your cho-cho san … He was really going to marry you" (2005: 355). Ironically, Pinkerton and Pinkerton-type characters (as in the white Australians in the various Asian–Australian texts I have read here, including Chris and Gallimard of the stage shows above) are always presented as simple, but always valiant and caring, arguably using the romantic traditions of love and sacrifice and applying them to the Romeo and Juliet-esque East/West scenario. Pinkerton-type characters expose cultural strangeness, and ambivalence is what helps contrast them against the stereotypical Asian hysteria and overcomplication. Cultural theory realises he is a white coloniser, but Puccini did not. As Teo presents Bucky as a 'nice guy', so the comment from the character Tien creates an argument for the postcolonialist. After all, in every story, the Pinkerton character seemed like a truly nice guy …

In the same novel, Linh's baby daughter dies due to Linh rolling accidentally onto her and the Madame Butterfly story begins. "She knew from then on that suffering was her lot in life because she had killed her daughter" (2005: 247–252). Still later, Linh "clutched the crucifix [which Bucky gives her] around her neck and reminded herself that he was going to take her to meet his mother." Linh puts Tien on the boat, "I have to do this. I know the shame I brought on the family, the gossip and the loss of face you endured because of my actions. I need to do this now, for you and for the family, but most of all for myself. Let me regain a little self-respect and repay my debt to heaven" (2004: 266). Such narrative sits within the expectations of the Western audience who doesn't understand the concept of shame and familial piety, but who does understand the mythical respects Asians pay to Gods other than Christian gods (even if they are one and the same) and does not understand but knows the Asian concept of pride and inscrutability. Harking back to Ashcroft, Devlin-Glass and McCredden's foreword, it is the notion of Australian sacred space to which the narrative appeals, and the magical terrain within one's notion of identity which puts Linh in the category of deletion and defacement. She does not deface on purpose, but rather, in this case, commits self-sacrifice under duress.

Castro plays with the theme and the comparison of butterfly and moth in *Stepper* (1997: 118–119), whereby in Akusa Japan, Stepper purchases a record for his Japanese lover Reiko:

> This time it was Puccini's Madama Butterfly and he was trying to explain to Reiko the tragedy of Pinkerton's failed promise, but Reiko was unwilling to see it that way. It's silly, she was saying to him in the crowded shop, that she would kill herself just for him ... I think butterfly was really a moth, she said impulsively, and he burst out laughing ..." (1997: 146).

Nevertheless, Reiko is not immune to the butterfly characterisation when she falls pregnant to Stepper and realises that since he doesn't want the child, she must have an abortion. After the procedure, Reiko and Stepper go dancing and are observed by the Japanese police inspector Shimamura, who observes them and writes down "Dancing to the 'poor butterfly' (from a Western opera?)." In the same novel, Castro likens the

concept of butterfly to the Asian imaginary, as compared to the Asian female. Ishigo Isaku's father commits junshi, following the death of the emperor: "In the end he looked like a butterfly writhing on a needle, going into spasms, blood spreading on the snow" (1997: 208).

The butterfly concept also denotes transformation which cannot ever revert to an equal form. As the butterfly is transformed, civilised and begins a metamorphosis of liberation by the colonial Western figure, it kills itself because the East cannot truly function within or even alongside the West; the East cannot survive without true assimilation and acceptance granted to it by the West. Once it leaves its protective cocoon, it can never return and must die in the expanse of nature and what is 'natural'. The butterfly, once transformed by nature, by the assumption of natural transgression in spite of itself, experiences momentary beauty as the West Orientalises it and then dies, as the West becomes tired and refuses to 'allow' or 'acknowledge' the two equal co-existences. But it is also congruous that the West cannot seem to sustain the butterfly, which although achieving metamorphosis and 'rebirth', and feeding on nectar, remains subject to environmental predators and a conspicuous, but defenceless short life.

Benedict Anderson talks about the notion of political love and explains the attachments that people feel for the invented nations in their imaginations and why people are ready to die for these inventions (1997: 143). He describes how "nation-ness is assimilated to skin colour, gender, parentage and birth-era; all those things one cannot help. And in these 'natural ties' one senses what one might call 'the beauty of gemeinschaft'"[26], which refers to unity of family, community, nation or national identity. He also states that in everything natural, there is always something unchosen, and because such ties are not chosen, they have about them a halo of disinterestedness (1997: 144). The idea of the ultimate sacrifice comes only with an idea of purity through fatality. "Dying for one's country, which usually one does not choose, assumes a moral grandeur which dying for the Labor Party etc. cannot rival, for these are bodies one can join or leave at easy will."

[26] For a more detailed definition of *Gemeinschaft* see Ferdinand Tönnies (ed. Jose Harris), *Community and Civil Society*, Cambridge University Press (2001),

The Asian protagonists within these texts must therefore die because they cannot leave being Asian, and cannot leave being Other. Anderson also states that "The fact of the matter is that nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, while racism dreams of eternal contaminations, transmitted from the origins of time through an endless sequence of loathsome copulations: outside history" (1997: 149). The death of the Other occurs because of contamination (through racism and nationalism) and the need for the West to stay pure and unpolluted.

A Conclusion That Has No Conclusion

So who ends up being the victim? Is it the Asian protagonist who submits to white Australia and yearns to be conquered by it? Is it white Australia, which becomes an ornament to the Other within the novels of Asian–Australian writers? Is it the reader? The writer? The community? Lazaroo, Hearn, Teo, Quan, Cho, Yahp, Castro and any other writer who chooses to write about Asian subjects; should all be given the opportunity to interpret the world imaginatively via literature. If I've dreamt it, if it came from my head; if I never experienced it but could imagine and articulate how it might feel, why can't I write about it? If my grandmother truly bound her feet, if my mother never hugged me, if my family has resorted to cunning in order to get along, if it is all an Orientalist narrative, why can't it be part of my story?

So I have come to the end of this exegesis. Or have I?

I am so totally fine with this that I laugh when I hear a non-Asian writer lament about this dilemma. "I am non-Asian too," I tell them. The trouble with it is that because I look Asian, I am expected to write about experiences I never had. The victim is myself, but

not myself, because I cannot (and will not get published if I) write about a white Aussie family that has trials and tribulations and struggles to attain the Australian dream and the pride of nationhood like my Western writer friends. I am not allowed to write the 'pure Australian' novel without being questioned why there is no scrap of Asianness in it. I must locate myself as an Asian within the Australian backdrop. I must 'write what I know' even though I don't know. I must, which is what I have done my whole life until now, continue to perpetuate the performance of other identities. I must once again pretend to be someone I am not and ride the wave of sympathetic readers, who send messages to publishers, who have forced me into this witness protection programme.

But it is probably right to assume too, that readers of fiction, no matter how knowledgeable, create assumptions about truths within fictional narratives and the writer behind these truths. Especially if the media and literature reinforce these narratives constantly. Publishers are not really to blame because it would be a generally true assumption that people look for 'authenticity' in everything; from the way a person looks, to the experiences she's had. If you've been a migrant and been abused, tortured and mistreated, then if you want to be published, then you're not going to want to look like a healthy Anglo-Saxon, unless you've professed a 'sympathy' and 'empathy' for migrants, or you've established yourself as a writer who likes to experiment with different genres, in which case your inauthenticity is allowed so long as you 'locate' yourself. The downside to this, is that if you happen to be a beautiful Asian who implies a touch of the geisha about you, then your story about torture and suffering will be even more fascinating (maybe highly acclaimed?) because people love to read books by 'authentic authors' who confirm what they think is the 'authentic experience'. "Chinese food is bad for you," my Australian friends say, "because it's all fried." "That's because you don't order anything else," I reply.

Not all readers will be like this; make sweeping statements and create assumptions about the experience of themselves in contrast to Otherness. When the bestseller lists stopped evaluating 'most valued book experience' and simply measured highest book sales, the *Guinness Book of Records* came up consistently as the best-selling book week after week.

I don't have any friends who have read this book. I don't know anybody who reads this book or who even buys this book. I have never seen this book on the book stand under 'Highly recommended reading'. This indicates (to me) that the books most valued are not necessarily the best-sellers, and this must also mean that publishers have the dilemma of publishing what will be valued against what will be a bestseller. What will be valued, to me, is a book like Castro's *Shanghai Dancing*, which won numerous awards, but was also renowned for being a book that barely anybody read. What sold many more books than *Shanghai Dancing* was *Wild Swans*, which to me, was like fried Chinese food.

So here I am again, back to the detours, the highways. The dead ends. The stop signs.

I will not state which books of Asian–Australian literature I don't like, because I know that even fried food is still part of the Asian–Australian privilege. No matter what, it is a privilege to be published over the gamut of writers who produce a story that the wider reading audience want to hear; which is not usually about Asian–Australian experiences.

The 'victim', then, becomes the Asian–Australian community, and subsequently, writers like myself who must either conform to feed the appetite for such narratives, risk not being published, or risk being labelled as 'specifically academic and/or angry writers'. Or perhaps I might one day be the writer who cuts through it all and invents a neo-postcolonialism literature? I can't speak for others, but I can say that it is not due to bitterness about others appropriating what has been allocated to Asian–Australians as 'their genre', it is the share of voice that is of concern. It is not that the readers must be trusted when to or when not to like a book, it is that they should have the opportunity of choice and that readers/critics should understand the value of locating an author which should inform their critiques accordingly. Let us possess the faculty of articulating Otherness against the white backdrop of the Asian–Australian imaginary.

It is a significant debate as to how funding bodies like Asialink and the Australia Council for the Arts should provide grants; whether their manifestos should change or whether their decisions to fund the works of Australian writers fascinated with Eastern genres is

promoting or harming Australian writers' perceptions of Asian culture. Gillian Rubenstein (Lian Hearn), for instance, received an Asialink residency with which she could write her novel based on her fascination for Japanese culture. I don't have a problem with this, as I've stated, although I do understand it when Asian–Australian writers question the criteria of the Asialink judges in concluding that a non-Asian author 'strengthens and initiates Asia Australia's engagement' more so than an Asian–Australian writer who may promote just as good, if not better 'cross-cultural' relations. Asialink is not yet at risk of choosing solely non-Asian writers to represent the gamut of Asian–Australian genres. At this stage, I cannot think of any other government-funded body that specifically focuses on valuing the production of such specific literature.

Even though in a conclusion, one is not traditionally allowed to bring up new quotes or ideas, I felt that this was a good time to bring up Alison Bronoiwski's comment on behalf of the Australian reading community "Is it now the privilege of subaltern societies to define all white people as imperialist oppressors?" (1996: 2). Bronoiwski rejects the notion of modern Orientalism, but probably rightly asks when it will all end. I wonder where she thinks Asian–Australians fit in to those two categories? It was *always* the privilege of all white people to define a majority of non-white people as subaltern. I have not come across any Asian–Australian academics, or writers, who actually label 'all white people as imperialist oppressors' but I have come across dozens who question notions surrounding grand narratives; why they are continuously requested and re-hashed and why the issues of the exchange between Eastern and Western imaginaries have not evolved.

In the end, there is no conclusion because I haven't been able to find myself comfortable with being Asian or Australian. This exegesis is not tidy and self-fulfilling. It's not formulaic or totalising. I didn't expect it to be. I think I'd like to write the definitive *Australian* novel, to reconcile both warring parts of myself; my whiteness and that which my looks have allocated me. Most likely, undramatically and unromantically, I will never be heard of again. That book was written a long time ago.

It is the package of me that captures 'the authentic', and yet, my experiences are completely inauthentic, except for anything found within this exegesis. I would love to say that my looks capture the publisher's fantasy, so that on book covers I can get in somehow on my looks. I would love to say that I am so talented that I could write about anything and just *be* published. Be a voice of the Australian writing community. Be asked to be of the stable of writers that the publishers put out at every Sydney Writers' Festival. But I am not. Not acceptable, not unacceptable, not talented, not untalented, not Asian, not Australian. Not UnAustralian. Not UnAsian.

END

bibliography

Abbas, M, A (1997) *Hong Kong: Culture and Politics of Disappearance*, Minnesota Press, USA.

Aitken, A (ed), (1999) *Letters of Transit. Reflections of Exile, Identity, Language and Loss*, The New York Public Library, United States of America.

Anderson, B (1997) 'The Nation and the Origins of National Consciousness', in, Guibernau, M and Rex, J, (eds), *The Ethnicity Reader: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Migration*, Polity Press, United Kingdom.

Anderson, B (1983) Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of

Nationalism, Verso, London.

Anderson, K, J (1993) 'Otherness, Culture and Capital: Chinatown's Transformation under Australian Multiculturalism,' in Gordon, L, Clark, D, F and Francis, R (eds.) *Multiculturalisms, Difference and Postmodernism,* Longman, Cheshire, Melbourne, Australia.

Ang, I (2001) *On Not Speaking Chinese. Living Between Asia and the West,* Routledge,

London and New York.

Ang, I (2000) *Alter/Asians: Asian Australian Identities in Art, Media and Popular Culture*, Pluto, Australia.

Ang, I, Chalmers, S, Law, L and Thomas, M (eds.) (2000) *alter/asians. Asian-Australian*

Identities in Art, Media and Popular Culture, Pluto Press, Australia.

Ang, I (1996) 'Negotiating Cultural Boundaries: Africa/Asia/Australia', *Critical Arts: A Journal for Cultural Studies*, wwwmcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/CA/CA10.2int.html

Ang, I (1995) 'I'm a Feminist but ... 'Other' woman and postnational feminism, in, Cain, B and Pringle, R (eds) *Transitions. New Australian Feminisms*, Allen and Unwin, Australia.

Archer, B and Fedorowich, K (1996) 'The Women of Stanley: Internment in Hong Kong, 1942-45', in *Women's History Review,* Volume 5, Number 3, pp. 373-398.

Ashcroft, B (2001) *Post-Colonial Transformations*, Routledge, N.Y.

Ashcroft, B, Griffiths, G and Tiffin, H (1991) 'Post-Colonial Reconstructions: Literature, Meaning, Value', in, Walder, D (ed) *Literature in the Modern Word,* Oxford University Press, United States of America.

Ashcroft, B, Griffiths, G and Tiffin, H (1989) *The Empire Writes Back. Theory and Practice in Post – Colonial Literatures,* Routledge, England.

Ayres, T (2004) 'Uncle Joe', in *Meanjin:Australasian, Vol. 63, No. 2*, Australia.

Ayres, T (2000) *The Fat Boy,* Currency Press, Sydney, Australia.

Bakar, M (2003) 'The Army', in, *EnterText 2.3*, University of Brunel, U.K

Bakar, M (2004) 'Not that Fucking Old Thing Again: On Being Mistaken as Chinese', in, *Graduate Journal of Asia Pacific Studies,* Volume 2, Number 2.

Bakar, M (2005) 'Island Sacrifice', in, *Antipodes. A North American Journal of Australian Literature, Special Issue: The Sacred in Australian Literature*, December, Volume 19, Number, 2.

Bakar, M (2006a) 'The Oriental Express', in, *Postcolonial Text, Vol. 2, No. 2,* http://postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/issue/current

Bakar, M (2006b) 'Shanghai', in, *Making Tracks,* ABC Books, Sydney, Australia

Bakar, M (2007a) "Chinese Whispers" *Yuan Yang: A Journal of Hong Kong and International Writing*, HK University Press, Hong Kong, pp56-74

Bakar, M (2007b) "The Oriental Express" *EAPSU Journal of Critical and Creative Work English Association of Pennsylvania State Universities (ed) Kim Long*, Volume 3 (Fall 2006) http://www.eapsu.org/

Bakar, M (2008) "Vikram Seth" *Encyclopaedia of Asian American Literature,* Greenwood Press Fl, USA (forthcoming)

Barker, K (2002) 'The Artful Man: Theory and Authority in Brian Castro's Fiction,' in *Australian Literary Studies,* University of Queensland Press, Australia.

Barthes, R (1978) 'Death of the Author,' in *Image Music Text*, Hill and Wang, UK.

Bartkowski, F, (1995) *Travel as / is...., Travellers, Immigrants, Inmates. Essays in Estrangement*, University of Minnesotta Press, United States.

Bevan, D (ed) (1990) *Literature and Exile*, Rodopi, Atlanta, United States of America.

Bhabha, H (1996) 'Culture's In – Between', in, Hall, S and Du Gay, P, (eds) *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Sage, London.

Bhabha, H (1995) *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London.

Bhabha, H (1994) 'Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition, in, Williams, P and Chrisman, L (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Great Britain.

Bhabha, H, K (ed), *(1990) Nation and Narration*, Routledge, London.

Brah, A (1996) *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, Routledge, London and New York.

Braidotti, R (1994) *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, Columbia University Press, N.Y

Brenan, Y (1990) 'The National Longing for From', in, Bhabha, H, K (ed), *Nation and Narration*, Routledge, London.

Britain, I (ed.) (2004) *Meanjin: Australasian*. Vol 63. No 2, Australia.

Broinowski, A (1996) *The Yellow Lady. Australian Impressions of Asia*, Oxford

University Press, Melbourne.

Broinowski, A (2003) *About Face. Asian Accounts of Australia*, Scribe Publications,

Melbourne, Australia.

Caine, B (1995) 'Women's Studies, feminist traditions and the problem of History', in, Caine, B and Pringle, R, *Transitions. New Australian Feminisms*, Allen and Unwin, Australia.

Carter, D (2000) 'Critics, Writers, Intellectuals: Australian Literature and its Criticism', in, Webby, E, (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*, Cambridge University Press, Australia.

Carter, P (1992) *The Sound in Between*, Endeaver Press, Australia.

Castro, B (2005) *The Garden Book*, Giramondo, Sydney.

Castro, B (2004) 'Brian Castro: The Role of the Critic', *Australian Book Review*, http://home.vicnet.net.au/-abr/Nov97/castro.html, accessed 24/08/2004.

Castro, B (2003a) *After China*, Lythrum Press, Adelaide, Australia.

Castro, B (2003b) *Shanghai Dancing*, Giramondo, Australia.

Castro, B (2001) 'Writing Asia', in, *Australian Humanities Review*, http://lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-April-1996/Castro.html

Castro, B (1999) *Looking for Estrellita*, UQP, Australia.

Castro, B (1996) 'Arrivals', QUT Press, *Journal of Australian Studies*, June, pg98.

Castro, B (1998) 'Dangerous Dancing: Autobiography and Disinheritance,' *Australian Humanities Review*, http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-December-1998/castro.html.

Castro, B (1997) *Stepper*, Random House, Australia.

Castro, B (1995) *Writing Asia and Auto/biography. 2 Lectures*, UNSW Press, Sydney, Australia.

Castro, B (1994) *Drift*, William Heinemann, Australia.

Castro, B (1992) 'Necessary Idiocy and the Idea of Freedom,' in Gunew, S and O Longley, K (eds) *Striking Chords. Multicultural Literary Interpretations*, Allen and Unwin, Australia.

Castro, B (1991) *Double-Wolf*, Allen and Unwin, Australia.

Castro, B (1990) *Pommeroy,* Allen and Unwin, Sydney.

Castro, B (1983) *Birds of Passage*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, London, Boston.

Chambers, I (1990) *Border Dialogues: Journeys in Postmodernism*, Routledge, London and New York.

Chambers, I (1998) 'A Stranger in the House', *Communal Plural, Journal of Transnational and Crosscultural Studies, Volume 6, Number 1, April*, Carfax, U.K.

Chambers, I (1994) *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, Comedia Routledge, London

Chan, D (2004) 'Asian Games', in, *Meanjin Australasian, Vol. 63, No. 2*, Australia.

Chan Loh, F (2000) *When Dining With Tigers. Roads To Tiananmen,* Indra Publishing, Australia.

Chan, D (2000) 'The Poetics of Cultural Theory: On Hybridity and the New Hierarchies', in, *Journal of Australian Studies*, QUT Press, June, pg 52.

Chin, G (2004) 'Angry Ghosts: The Furious Power of the Marginalised Other in Beth Yahp's The Crocodile Fury,' *Outskirts, Feminisms Along the Edge,* Online Journal, http://www.chloe.uwa.edu.au/outskirts/archive/VOL4/article1.html.

Cho, N (2004) 'The Exorcist', in, *Meanjin Australasian, Vol. 63, No. 2,* Australia.

Cho, T (2005) '"*I was Born and Raised in a town called Rod Stewart": Writing Fiction, Exploring Popular Culture, Negotiating Identity*,' unpublished conference paper, Deakin University, Australia.

Chong, Weng-Ho (2004) 'Banana Republic', *in, Meanjin Australasian, Vol. 63, No. 2*, Australia.

Chow, R (ed.) (2000) *Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field*, Duke University Press, USA.

Chow, R (1994) 'Where have All The Natives Gone?', in, Bammer, A (ed) *Displacements. Cultural Identities in Question,* Indiana University Press, Indianapolis.

Chow, R (1993) Writing Diaspora : Tactics of Intervention in contemporary cultural Studies, Imprint, Bloomington : Indiana University Press, U.S.A.

Chow, R (1991) *Woman and Chinese Modernity: the Politics of Reading Between West and East,* Imprint Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, U.S.A

Clark, G, L, Forbes, D and Francis, R (ed) (1993) *Multiculturalism, Difference and Postmodernism*, Longman Cheshire, Australia.

Clark, S (ed), (1999) *Travel Writing and Empire,* Zed Books, London.

Clifford, J (1997a) 'Diasporas', in, Guibernau, M and Rex, J (eds) *The Ethnicity Reader. Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Migration,* Polity Press, United Kingdom.

Clifford, J (1997b) *Routes. Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Harvard University Press, Mass.

Collins, J (1988) *Migrant Hands in a Distant Land: Australia's Post-War Immigration*, Pluto Press, Australia.

Craven, I, Gray, M and Stoneham, G (ed) (1994) *Australian Popular Culture,* Cambridge University Press, Australia.

Cunningham, M (1995) *Flesh and Blood,* Hamish Hamilton, UK

Cunningham, M (2002) *The Hours*, Fourth Estate, UK

Cunningham, M (2004) *A Home at the End of the World,* Thorndike Press, USA

Davie, P (2000) 'Exceptional First Novel: Love and Vertigo by Hsu Ming-Teo' 9 August, online book review, http://www.dotlitqut.edu.au/reviews/vertigo.html.

Dear, M (1993) 'The Spaces of Postmodernism', in, Clark, G, L, Forbes, D and Francis, R (ed) *Multiculturalism, Difference and Postmodernism*, Longman Cheshire, Australia.

Diprose, R and Ferrell, R (ed), (1991) *Cartographies. Poststructuralism and the Mappings of Bodies and Spaces*, Allen and Unwin, Australia.

Drew, P (1994) *The Coast Dwellers. A Radical Reappraisal of Australian Identity*, Penguin, Australia.

Drewing, S (1990) Literature-Nationalism's Other? The Case for Revision', in, Bhabha, H, K (ed) *Nation and Narration*, Routledge, London.

Duncan, J and Gregory, D (eds) (1999) *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing*, Routledge, New York.

Dunn, A (2005) 'Friendship Rises Above the Challenges, Behind the Moon by Hsu Ming-Teo,' Book Review, *The Age*, October 1, pp. 7.

Durix, JP, (1998) *Mimesis, Genres and Post-Colonial Discourse. Deconstructing Magic Realism*, Macmillan, Great Britain.

Eagleton, M (ed) *Feminist Literary Theory*, Second Edition, Blackwell, London.

Fanon, F (1991) *The Wretched of the Earth*, Farrington, C (trans), Grove Weidenfeld,

Fanon, F (1967) *Black Skin, White Masks*, Markmann, C, L (trans), Grove Press, N.Y.

Ferber, S, Healy, C and McAuliffe, C (ed) (1994) *Beasts of Suburbia. Reinterpreting Cultures in Australian Suburbs*, Melbourne University Press, Australia.

Fiske, J, Hodge, B and Turner, G (ed) (1987) *Myths of Oz. Reading Australian Popular Culture*, Allen and Unwin, Australia.

Foss, P (ed) (1988) *Island in the Stream. Myths of Place in Australian Culture*, Southwood Press, Australia.

Geddes, P, (1982) *In the Mouth of the Dragon: Hong Kong, Past, Present and Future*, Century, London.

George Marangoly, R (1999) *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth - Century Fiction*, University of California Press, United States of America.

Giese, D (1997) *Astronauts, Lost Souls and Dragons: Voices of Today's Chinese Australians in Conversation with Diana Giese*, QUP, Australia.

Giese, D (1995) *Beyond Chinatown: Changing Perspectives of the Top End Chinese Experience,* National Library of Australia, Canberra.

Gilloch, G (1996) *Myth and Metropolis. Walter Benjamin and the City*, Polity Press, United Kingdom.

Gilroy, P (1997) 'Scales and eyes: 'race' making difference', in, Golding, S (ed) *The Eight Technologies of Otherness,* Routledge, London and New York.

Gunew, S (1994a) *Framing Marginality. Multicultural Literary Studies, Interpretations,*

Melbourne University Press, Victoria, Australia.

Gunew, S (1994b) *Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies*, Melbourne University Press, Australia.

Gunew, S and Rizvi, F (1994c) *Culture, Difference and the Arts*, Allen and Unwin, Australia.

Gunew, S and Yeatman, A (ed), (1993) *Feminism and the Politics of Difference*, Allen and Unwin, Australia.

Gunew, S and Longley, K (1992) *Multicultural Literary Interpretations*, Allen and Unwin, Australia.

Gunew, S (ed), (1991) *A Reader in Feminist Knowledge,* Routledge, London.

Gunew, S (ed) (1990) *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct,* Routledge, London.

Gunew, S (ed) (1987) *Displacements 2: Multicultural Story Tellers*, Deakin University, Australia.

Gunew, S and Couani, A (1988) *Telling Ways: Australian Women's Experimental Writing*, Australian Feminist Studies Publications, Adelaide.

Gunew, S and Mahyuddin, J (eds) (1988) *Beyond the Echo: Multicultural Women's Writing*, UQP, Australia.

Gunew, S (1984) 'Multicultural Writers: Where we are Writing from and Who we are Writing for?" in, *Writing in Multicultural Australia 1984: An Overview, Papers Presented at the Multicultural Writers Weekends in Sydney, 13 and 14 October 1984*, Australia Council, Australia.

Gunew, S (ed) (1982) *Displacements: Migrant Story Tellers*, Deakin University Press, Australia.

Gungwu, W (2003) *Anglo-Chinese Encounters Since 1800. War, Trade, Science and Governance*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Hage, G (1998a) 'Nation-Building Dwelling Being, *Communal Plural, Identity/Community/Change*, Volume 1, Research Centre in Intercommunal Studies, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Western Sydney, Australia.

Hage, G (1998b) White Nation. Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society, Pluto Press, Australia.

Hall, S (1992) 'The Question of Cultural Identity', in, *Modernity and its Futures*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

Hall, S (1991) 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in Rutherford, J, (ed) *Identity*, Lawrence and Wishart, London.

Hamilton, G (1999) *Cosmopolitan Capitalists: Hong Kong and the Chinese Diaspora at the end of the Twentieth Century*, University of Washington Press, Seattle.

Hatzimanolis, E (1994) "Timing Differences and Investing in Futures in Multicultural Women's Writing, in, Gunew, S and Yeatman, A (eds) *Feminism and the Politics of Difference*, Allen and Unwin, Australia.

Henderson, M (ed), (1995) *Borders, Boundaries and Frames. Essays in Cultural Criticism and Cultural Studies*, Routledge, New York, United States of America.

Hearn, L (2002) *Tales of the Otori. Across the Nightingale Floor*, Hodder, Australia

Hearn, L (2003) *Tales of the Otori. Grass For His Pillow*, Hodder, Australia

Hearn, L (2005) *Tales of the Otori. Brilliance of the Moon*, Hodder, Australia

Hearn, L (2006) *Tales of the Otori. The Harsh Cry of the Heron*, Hachette Livre, Australia

Highsmith, P (1992) *The Talented Mr Ripley*, Vintage, UK

Hodge, B and Mishra, V (1991) *Dark Side of the Dream. Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind*, Allen and Unwin, Australia.

Hoffman, E (1987) *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, Penguin, New York
Irwin-Zarecka, I (1994) *Frames of Remembrance. The Dynamics of Collective Memory*, Tranction Press, U.S.A and U.K.

Jacobs, J, M and and Fincher, R (1998) (eds), *Cities of Difference*, Guilford Press, Australia.

Jacobs, L (2002a) 'About Face: Asian-Australians at Home', in *Australian Literary Studies*, 20.3, pp. 201-214.

Jacobs, L (2002b) 'Remembering Forgetting: Love-Stories by Nicholas Jose, Simone Lazaroo and Hsu-Ming Teo', *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context*, Issue 8, October.

JanMohamed, A, R (1992) 'Worldliness – Without - World, Homelessness – as – Home: Towards a Definition of the Specular Border Intellectual, in, Sprinkler, M (ed) *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell, United States of America.

Johnson, L, Huggins, J and Jacobs, J (2000) *Place Bound: Australian Feminist Geographies*, Oxford Press, Melbourne.

Jose, N. (2005) *Original Face*, Giramondo Publishing, Sydney, Australia.

Kaplan, C (1996) *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*, Duke University Press, United States of America.

Kee, Poo Kong (1988) *Chinese Immigrants in Australia*, Melbourne, Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, Melbourne.

Khoo, O (2001) 'Whiteness and The Australian Fiancé: Framing the Ornamental Text,' *Hecate*, St Lucia, Volume 27, Issue 2, pp.68.

Khoo, O (1999) 'Anagrammatical Translations: Latex Performance and Asian Femininity Unbounded in Olivia Assayas' Irma Vep,' in *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, Volume 13, Number 3.

Khoo, T and Louie, K (eds) (2005) *Culture, Identity, Commodity. Diasporic Chinese Literatures in English*, Hong Kong University Press, HK.

Khoo, T (2004a) *Hobnobbing Terrestrials and Celestials: Public Representations and Community Negotiations for Chinese Australians*, unpublished conference paper, National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University, Victoria, Australia.

Khoo, T (2004b) 'The Contagion Within', *Borderlands* e-journal, Volume 3, Number 3. http://www.borderlandsejournal.adelaide.edu.au/vol3no3_2004/khoo

Khoo, T-L (2004c) *Someone's Private Zoo: Asian Australian Women's Writing* in http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/eduweb/engl392/492/zoo.html

Khoo, T, Kwok, J, T and Ling, C (2004d) 'Chinese Voices', in, *Meanjin: Australasian, Vol. 63, No. 2*, Australia.

Khoo, T (2003a) 'Commonplace and Pretentious: Directing Asian-Australian Women's Writing,' unpublished conference paper, Women's Studies Association, Australia.

Khoo, T-L (2003b) *Banana Bending Asian-Australian and Asian-Canadian Literatures,* McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal and Kingston, Ithaca.

Khoo, T (1999) 'Fetishising Flesh: Asian-Australian and Asian-Canadian Representation, Porno-Culinary Genres, and the Racially Marked Body,' in *Journal of Media and Culture*, Volume 2, Issue 3, May. http://www.journal.media-culture.org.au/9905/fetish.php

Khoo, T (1996) 'Who Are We Talking About? Asian-Australian Women Writers: An Overview,' *Hecate,* 22, 2, pp.11-27.

Kwok, J, T (2005) *The Strategic Utility of 'Chineseness' in the Political Cultures of Diasporic Communities: Some Preliminary Thoughts,* unpublished conference paper, University of Queensland, Australia.

Lazaroo, S (2000a) *The Australian Fiancé,* Picador, Australia.

Lazaroo, S (2000b) *The World Waiting to be Made,* Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Western Australia.

Lechte, J and Bottomley, G (1993) 'Difference, Postmodernity and Imagery in Multicultural Australia', in, Clark, G, L, Forbes, D and Francis, R (ed) *Multiculturalism, Difference and Postmodernism*, Longman Cheshire, Australia.

Lee, M (1998) 'Chinese Writers in Australia. New Voices in Australian Literature,' *Meanjin,* Volume 57, Issue 3.

Leong, G (2000) 'Remembering Chinese', in, *Journal of Australian Studies,* QUT Press, June, pg58.

Leslie, D, M (trans), *Theory and History of Literature, Volume 14,* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Lipsitz, G (1998) *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* Temple University Press, USA

Lo, J (ed) (2000a) *Writing Home. Chinese Australian Perspectives,* Centre for the Southern Chinese Diaspora, ANU Press, Canberra.

Lo, J, Gilbert, H and Khoo, T (2000b) *Diaspora. Negotiating Asian-Australia,* Creative Arts Review, University of Queensland Press, Australia.

Lo, J, Khoo, T and Gilbert, H (2000c) New Formations in Australian Cultural Politics, *Journal of Australian Studies*, QUT Press, June, pg1.

Lo, M, W, W (2000d) "'*Possible Only on Paper?*' Hybridity as Parody in Brian Castro's Drift", *Journal of Australian Studies*, QUT Press, June, p69.

Lo, J (1999) *Impossible Selves: Cultural Readings of Identity*, Imprint, Melbourne : Australian Scholarly Publishing .

Lyne, S (2002) 'Consuming Madame Chrysanthéme: Loti's 'Dolls' to Shanghai Baby,'

Intersections, Issue 8, http://wwwsshe.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/issue8/lyne.html

Manguel, A; Guadalup, G. (1999) The Dictionary of Imaginary Places: The Newly Updated and Expanded Classic, Harcourt, England

Martin, J (1984) 'Non-English Speaking Women: Production and Social Production', in, Bottomley, G and de Lepervache, M (ed) *Ethnicity, Class and Gender in Australia,* Allen and Unwin , Sydney.

Martin, J (1991) 'Multiculturalism and Feminism', in, Bottomley, G, de Lerpevache, M and Martin, J, *Intersexions: Gender, Class, Culture and Ethnicity*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.

Martin, H, C (2004) 'The Reception is Over', in, , *Meanjin Australasian, Vol. 63, No. 2,* Australia.

Massey, D (1994) 'Double Articulation: A Place in the World, in, Bammer, A (ed), *Displacements. Cultural Identities in Question*, Indianna University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis.

Massey, D (1997) *Spatial Disruptions*, in, Golding, S (ed) The Eight Technologies of Otherness, Routledge, New York and London.

Massey, D (1994) *Space, Place and Gender*, Polity, Cambridge.

Mathews, J (2002) 'Deconstructing the Visual: The Diasporic Hybridity of Asian and Eurasian Female Images', *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context*, Issue 8, October.

McClintock, A (1995) *Imperial Leather. Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*, Routledge, New York.

McGregor, C (1983) *Pop Goes the Culture*, Pluto Press, Australia.

Ming Mok, T (2004) 'Hereditary Fiction: The Mok Tapes', in, *Meanjin Australasian, Vol. 63, No. 2*, Australia.

Minh-ha, Trinh, T (1995) "No Master Territories", and "Writing Post-Coloniality and Feminism", in, Ashcroft, B, Griffiths, G and Tiffin, H (eds) *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, Routledge, London.

Minh-ha, T, T (1989) *Woman, Native, Other*, Indiana University Press, U.S.A

Mishra, V (ed) (1993) 'Migrations of Chineseness,' in *Diasporas, Journal of South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies,* Number 34-35.

Mishra, V and Hodge, B (1993) 'What is post(-)colonialism?', in, Morris, M and Frow, J (eds) *Australian Cultural Studies: A Reader*, Allen and Unwin, Australia.

Mitchell, P (2004) 'Paul Mitchell interviews Natasha Cho,' in *Cordite:* 10, http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/14234/20020528/cordite.org.au/10/mitchell,cho.html.

Moi, T (1985) *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, Methuen, London and N.Y.

Morris, J (1990) *Hong Kong: The End of an Empire*, Penguin, London.

Ng, L (1994) *Silver Sister,* Mandarin, Australia.

Ng, L (1997) *Swallowing Clouds*, Penguin, Australia.

O'Kim, D (1968) *My Name is Tian,* Angus and Robertson Ltd. Australia.

O' Kim, D (1974) *Password. A Political Intrigue,* Angus and Robertson, Australia.

O' Kim, D (1984) *The Chinaman,* Hale and Iremonger, Australia.

Ommundsen, W (1995) 'Writing as Migration: Brian Castro, Multiculturalism and the Politics of Identity, in, Van Torn, P and English, D (eds.) *Speaking Positions.*

Aboriginality, Gender and Ethnicity in Australian Cultural Studies, Victoria University of Technology, Australia.

Ommundsen, W (2000) 'Birds of Passage? The New Generation of Chinese Australian Writers, in, Ang, I, Chalmers, S, Law, L and Thomas, M (eds) *Alter/Asians: Asian/Australian Identities in Art, Media and Popular Culture*, Pluto, Sydney.

Ommundsen, W (ed) (2001) *Bastard Moon. Essays on Chinese-Australian Writing,*

Otherland Literary Journal, No. 7, Australia.

Ommundsen, W (2002a) 'Cultural Citizenship in Diaspora: A Study of Chinese Australia', in, Wong, S and Goh, R (eds.) *Asian Diasporas: Cultures, Identities, Representation,* Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong.

Ommundsen, W (2002b) 'From "Hello Freedom" to "Fuck You Australia". Recent Chinese-Australian Writing', in, Pons,X (ed) *Departures: How Australia Reinvent Itself,* Melbourne University Press, Australia.

Osborne, P and Sandford, S (eds) (2002) *Philosophies of Race and Ethnicity,* Continuum,

London, New York.

Ouyang, Yu (2002) *The Eastern Slope Chronicle*, Brandl and Schlesinger, Australia.

Ouyang, Yu (2004) 'Reality Dream: The Flight', in, , *Meanjin Australasian, Vol. 63, No. 2*, Australia.

Panich, C (1988), *Sanctuary? Remembering Post-war Immigration*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.

Papaellinas, G (ed) (1993) *Harbour. Stories by Australian Writers*, Picador, Australia.

Papastergiadis, N (1993) *Modernity as Exile. The Stranger in John Berger's Writing,* Manchester University Press, United Kingdom.

Papastergiadis, N (1998) *The Turbulance of Migration*, Polity Press, Australia.

Papastergiadis, N (2000) *Dialogues in the Diaspora, Essays and Conversations on Cultural Identity,* Rivers Oram Press, Australia.

Pe-Pua, R (1996) *Astronaut Families and Parachute Children: The Cycle of Migration between Hong Kong and Australia*, Australian Government Publishing, Canberra.

Pham, H (2000) *Vixen*, Sceptre, Australia.

Phillips, R (1999) 'Writing Travel and Mapping Sexuality: Richard Burton's Sotadic Zone', in, Duncan, J and Gregory, D (eds) *Writes of Passage. Reading Travel Writing*, Routledge, London.

Pringle, R and Caine, B (1995) *Transitions. New Australian Feminisms*, Allen and

Unwin, Australia.

Pugliese, J (1985) 'Assimilation, Unspeakable Traces and the Ontologies of Nation, in,

Perera, S (ed) *Asian and Pacific Inscriptions: Identities, Ethnicities, Nationalities*, Meridian, Melbourne.

Quan, A (2005) *Six Positions. Sex Writing by Andy Quan*, Green Candy Press, Australia.

Quan, A (2004) 'Found in Translation', *Meanjin Australasian, Vol. 63, No. 2, 2004*, Australia.

Quan, A (2001) *Calendar Boy*, Penguin, Sydney, Australia.

Renan, E (1990) 'What is a Nation', in, Bhabha, H, K, (ed) *Nation and Narration,* Routledge, London.

Robinson, N (2005) 'Two Tales of Home and Longing, Behind the Moon by Hsu Ming-Teo, Book Review,' *Sydney Morning Herald, Spectrum, Books and Ideas,* September 3-4, pp. 21.

Rushdie, S (1988) 'Minority Literatures in a Multi-cultural Society', in, *Displaced Persons*, Petersen, K.H and Rutherford, A, Dangaroo press, Sydney.

Ryan, J (1997) 'Chinese Australian History', in, Hudson, W and Bolton, G (eds.) *Creating Australia, Changing Australian History*, Allen and Unwin, Australia.

Ryan, J (2003) *Chinese Women and the Global Village: An Australian Site,* UQP, Australia.

Said, E, W (1995) *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Penguin, London.

Said, E (1991) 'The Discourse of the Orient', in, Walder, W (ed) *Literature in the Modern World,* Oxford University Press, USA.

Said, E (1984) 'The Mind of Winter: Reflections on Exile', *Granta,* London, Autumn, no 13.

Said, E (1984) *The Word, The Text, the Critic*, Faber, London.

Schama, S (1995) *Landscape and Memory*, Fontana, Great Britain.

Seidel, M (1986) *Exile and the Narrative Imagination*, Yale University Press, United States of America.

Shen, Y (2001) *Dragon Seed in the Antipodes: Chinese Australian Autobiographies,* Melbourne University Press, Australia.

Shen, Yuan-Fang (1999) 'Pioneers or Sojourners: Self Representations of Chinese Immigrants, in *Journal of Australian Studies*, QUT press, June, pg 47.

Shields, R (1991) *Places on the Margin,* Routledge, London.

Shohat, E (1992) 'Antinomies of Exile: Said at the Frontiers of National Narrations, in, Sprinkler, M (ed) *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell, United States of America.

Shun Wah, A (2004) 'The Stained Glass Ceiling',, *Meanjin Australasian, Vol. 63, No. 2*, Australia.

Skea, A (2000) 'The Australian Fiancé. Book Review,' *Eclectica Magazine,* Jan/Feb.

Spivak, G, C (1994) 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in, Williams, P and Chrisman, L, (eds) *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Great Britain.

Spivak, C, C (1990) *The Post-Colonial Critic*, Routledge, New York.

Spivak, C, C (1989) 'A Response to The Difference within: Feminism and Critical Theory, in, Meese, E and Parker, A (eds) *The Difference Within: Feminism and Critical Theory*, John Benjamins Publishing, Amsterdam/New York.

Spivak, G, C (1988) *In Other Worlds. Essays in Cultural Politics*, Routledge, U.S.A

Staples, K, C (2002) *Reading Hong Kong Chinese Culture: Hybridity or Eclecticism, A Matter of Contemporary Configuration,* unpublished PhD thesis, Edith Cowan University, Australia.

Steele, W and D' Cruz, J V (2003) *Australia's Ambivalence Towards Asia,* Monash Asia Institute, Monash University Press, Victoria.

Stoneham, G, *Australian Popular Culture*, Cambridge University Press, Australia.

Talib, S, I (2002) *The Language of Postcolonial Literatures. An Introduction,* Routledge, London and New York.

Teo, H-M (2000) *Love and Vertigo,* Allen and Unwin, Sydney.

Teo, H-M (2005) *Behind the Moon*, Allen and Unwin, Australia.

Teo, H-M (2006) "These days it's harder to be different," Sydney Morning Herald December 7, 2006

Thrift, N (1993) 'The Light Fantastic: Culture, Postmodernism and the Image', in, Clark, G, L, Forbes, D and Francis, R (ed) *Multiculturalism, Difference and Postmodernism*, Longman Cheshire, Australia.

Tucker, S (2001) 'Beyond Belief: Representation and Revolt in Lillian Ng's Swallowing Clouds', in, Ommundsen, W and Yu, O (eds.) *Bastard Moon: Writing the Chinese Diaspora in Australia, Otherland Literary Journal, Issue 7*, Australia.

Tucker, S (2000) *Life in a World of Mirrors*, Book Review, Playing Madam Mao by Lao Siew Mei Rose Bay NSW: Brandl and Shlessinger, 2000. http://www.emsah.uq.edu.au/awsr/recent/132/n.html

Tucker, S, D (1999) *Asian-Australian Women's Writing: Literary Re-Orientations*,

unpublished PhD thesis, University of Queensland, St Lucia, Australia.

Turner, G (1994) *Making it National. Nationalism and Australian Popular Culture*, Allen and Unwin, Australia.

Wang,D (2004) 'The Making of 'Australian' Self in Simone Lazaroo's The World Waiting to be Made', in, *Journal of Australian Studies*, QUT Press, June, pg 44.

Ware, C (2000) *Jimmy Corrigan; The Smartest Kid of Earth*, Pantheon, USA

Wassenaar, I (2005) 'Toccata and Fugue in a Postmodernist Key, The Garden Book, Book Review,' *The Weekend Australian*, August 20-21, pp. 12.

Webby, E (ed), (2000) *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*, Cambridge University Press, Australia.

White, B, S (1996) *Hong Kong: Somewhere Between Heaven and Earth*, Oxford

University Press, Oxford, New York.

White, E (1994) *Genet: A Biography*, Vintage, London.

Wilson, R and Dissanayake, W, (eds), (1996), *Global / Local: Cultural Production in the Transnational Imaginary*, Duke University Press, United States of America.

Wilson, R and Dirlick, A (eds), (1995), *Asia / Pacific as Space of Cultural Production*, Duke University Press, United States of America.

Wilton, Janis and Bosworth, R (1984) *Old Worlds and New Australia*, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia.

Wyndham, S (2005) 'Bush Ascetic, With Martini, an Interview with Brian Castro,' *The Sydney Morning Herald, Books and Ideas, Spectrum,* October 8-9, pp. 20.

Yahp, B (1989) 'Bone China', in Pascoe, B (ed.) *Australian Short Stories,* No 28, Pascoe Publishing, Australia.

Yahp, B (1990) 'The Red Pearl', in Yahp, B, Daly, M and Falconer, L (eds.) *My Looks, Caress. A Collection of Modern Romances,* LCP, Australia.

Yahp, B (1991a) 'Beth Yahp', in Papaellinas, G (ed.) *Homeland,* Allen and Unwin, Australia.

Yahp, B (1991b) 'So We Walked Down Abercrombie Street,' Dowrick, S and Parkin, J (eds.) *Speaking with the Sun. New Stories by Australian and New Zealand Writers,* Allen and Unwin, Australia.

Yahp, B (1992) *The Crocodile Fury*, Angus & Robertson, Pymble, Australia.

Yahp, B (ed), (1994a) *Family Pictures*, Angus and Robertson, Australia.

Yahp, B (1994b) 'The Photo, 1955', in Yahp, B (ed.) *Family Pictures,* Angus and Robertson, Australia.

Yahp, B, (1996a) *Crocodile Fury,* The Women's Press, London.

Yahp, B (1996b) 'Houses, Sisters, Cities', in Modjeska, D (ed.) *Sisters,* Flamingo, Australia.

Yang, W (1994) 'Snapshot' in Yahp, B (ed.) *Family Pictures,* Angus and Robertson, Sydney.

Yang, W (1995) 'The Man from the Carribean' in Ayres, T (ed.) *String of Pearls,* Allen and Unwin, Australia.

Yelin, L (1998) *From the Margins of Empire,* Cornell University, United States of America.

Yoshihara, M (2003) 'Agent Butterfly,' *American Quarterly, Volume 55, Number 1,* American Studies Association, USA.

Young, R J C (1995) *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, Routledge, London.

Yu, T (2004) 'How to Write a Chinese Poem', in, *Meanjin Australasian, Vol. 63, No. 2,* Australia.

Ziolkowski, T (1977) *Disenchanted Images. A Literary Iconology*, Princeton University Press, United States.

Zournazi, M (1998) *Foreign Dialogues. Memories, Translations, Conversations*, Pluto Press, Australia.