(RE)MEMBERING THE SUBJECT: THE POLITICS OF HISTORY, MEMORY, AND IDENTITY IN MARIA CAMPBELL, JOY KOGAWA, AND LARISSA LAI

by

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Abstract

Encompassing autobiography, autobiographical fiction, fiction, memoir, biography, letters, and testimonials life writing is marked as a genre by its attention to history in the narrative of an individual life. It is my argument that the life writing of women marginalized by racism, sexism, homophobia, and poverty has the potential to establish a dialectic relationship between readers and writers that attempts to resolve the conflicts of difference. The evocation of empathy that is provoked by their life writing develops solidarity between women separated by race, class, sexuality, and age. Through this relationship emerges an opportunity for both writer and reader to engage productively with the historical antecedents that have produced this situation of difference as an insurmountable obstacle to equality and solidarity.

Minority life writing is particularly useful for the development of cross - cultural solidarity as it pointedly engages the reader in the historical specificities of the marginalized subject. The life writing text of the minority subject can potentially operate as a subversive challenge to the normative function of historical discourse, opening up popular and public understandings of historical event to the realities of the marginalized. To illustrate the potential of life writing to provoke self knowledge in the reader, to encourage cross cultural relationships, and to re-examine the way history is narrated, I have chosen three examples of life writing: the 1973 autobiography Half-breed, by the Métis writer Maria Campbell, the 1981 fictional autobiography Obasan, by the Japanese - Canadian writer Joy Kogawa, and the 1995 novel When Fox Is A Thousand, by the Chinese - Canadian writer Larissa Lai.

The ability of these writers to evoke empathy and pathos in the reader is a commentary on the poignancy of their work and the success of their 'critical fictions'. All three authors have achieved this empathetic relationship between reader and writer while simultaneously destabilizing oppressive stereotypes about Métis people, Japanese Canadians, and Asian lesbians living in the west. Their attention to history throughout their texts has prompted not only a

personal engagement with their life stories but has also expanded the reading process for me into a critical evaluation of how history is narrated.

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Introduction

> But it is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions. A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed; locked in mortal combat, like the cop and the criminal, both reduced to a common denominator of violence. ... All reaction is limited by, and dependent on what it is reacting against. ... At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once, and , at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes. (Anzaldua in Emberley 151)

Gloria Anzaldua's insightful analysis of the obstacles plaguing cross cultural relations within women's movements echoes the complex relationship that emerges between reader and writer in the study of the life writing of marginalized women. Anzaldua's critique of the 'counterstance that locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed' articulates the binary understanding of 'difference' as that which separates women of different ages, ethnic groups, sexual preferences, and class positions. This understanding of difference as something that separates women creates obstacles to the attainment of the solidarity and equality that Anzaldua alludes to and from which women's movements can struggle for change. It is my argument that the life writing of women marginalized by racism, sexism, homophobia, and poverty has the potential to establish a dialectic relationship between readers and writers that attempts to resolve the conflict of difference. The evocation of empathy that is provoked by their life writing develops solidarity between women separated by race, class, sexuality, and age. Through this relationship emerges an opportunity for both writer and reader to engage productively with the historical antecedents that have produced this situation of difference as an insurmountable obstacle to equality and solidarity.

Encompassing autobiography, autobiographical fiction, fiction, memoir, biography, letters, and testimonials, life writing is marked as a genre by its attention to history in the narrative of an individual life. As a critical practice, according to Marlene Kadar, life writing "encourages a) the reader to develop and foster his/her own self - consciousness in order to b) humanize and make

less abstract the self-in-writing" (12). This attention to the effect of the life writing text on the reader's own development of self is particularly useful to my own argument as it implicates both writer and reader in the project of moving beyond difference-as-obstacle. The ability of the text to engage the reader with her own consciousness as a precursor to understanding an(other) marks the opportunity for reader and writer to stand on both shores at once, and, "at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes" (Anzaldua in Emberley 151). What is ultimately important about Kadar's definition of life writing is the reciprocal relationship between reader and writer that emerges from the reading process. The ability of the writer to provoke this relationship of reciprocity denotes the potential of the text to productively engage the reader with her own self- knowledge, as well as that of the self in the text.

Minority life writing is particularly useful for the development of cross - cultural solidarity as it pointedly engages the reader in the historical specificities of the marginalized subject. The life writing text of the minority subject can potentially operate as a subversive challenge to the normative function of historical discourse, opening up popular and public understandings of historical events to the realities of the marginalized. Traditional history, as David Palumbo Liu points out, is an important starting point for the decolonization of the minority subject as it represents "the dominant discourse assigning significance and order to things" (212). As Palumbo-Liu argues, the production of historical discourse includes both "formal and informal, official and unofficial articulations that affirm and confirm what is to be the natural understanding of events and their significance" (212). Furthermore, the life writing texts of the marginalized subject excluded from this powerful signifying discourse have the potential to fundamentally challenge the "coherence and power of exclusive historiography" (Damm, "Dispelling" 100).

The effects of marginalization have wide-ranging implications not only for the minority writer, but also for the reader's preconceived assumptions of the minority subject. These implications entangle reader and writer in the politics of representation as both are forced to mediate numerous representations of the minority subject. To this end the individual and collective memories of the marginalized subject excluded from the dominant historical discourse surface in the life writing text to operate as a form of subversive, 'unofficial history' aimed at the deconstruction of popular (mis)understandings of the historical past. These (mis)understandings produce faulty 'readings' of the minority subject as

evidenced in the creation and perpetuation of racist, sexist, classist, and homophobic stereotypes. Through their respective stories, the minority writers' texts expose the cultural violence that has been perpetrated/perpetuated on their respective communities as a result of exclusionary constructions of the historical past. By placing the individual and collective 'counter - memories' of the marginalized subject alongside those that compose the 'public' or 'popular' memory of Canadian culture, the minority writer is able to begin the process of emancipating her subject.

The ability of the writer to engage the reader in the realities of the minority subject pointedly echoes bel hooks' vision of a 'critical fiction' in which the text requires the reader to "shift her paradigms and practice empathy as a conscious gesture of solidarity with the work" (57). The relationship that ideally emerges between reader and writer from this paradigmatic shift not only undermines the "difference-as-obstacle" discourse, but encourages the reader to participate in the transformation of history towards a more inclusive historiography. The life writing of the marginalized subject provides a "cultural location for the construction of alternative readings of history, told from the perspective of the oppressed, the disinherited, or those who are open to seeing the world from this perspective" (hooks "Narratives" 59). This is not to say that all texts produced by minority writers necessarily operate as critical texts. As hooks points out, the writer of critical fiction "makes the conscious decision to locate her work in the realm of oppositional cultural production: but cautions that "even though a writer may perceive a work to be oppositional, in the end reader response will determine the power of the text to challenge and transform" (58).

To illustrate the potential of life writing to provoke self knowledge in the reader, to encourage relationships between others and, in doing so, to transform history, I have chosen three examples of life writing: the autobiography Half-breed, by the Mètis writer, Maria Campbell, the fictional autobiography Obasan, by the Japanese-Canadian writer, Joy Kogawa, and the novel When Fox Is A Thousand, by the Chinese - Canadian writer, Larissa Lai. I initially began my investigations into these texts by attempting to identify their intended audience in an effort to theorize the effect of these texts on the life writers' communities. I quickly realized that, as a reader, my own experiences of the text are equally important in assessing the ability of the text to provoke alternative ways of knowing the past, present, and future. And so I directed my investigations back to my own experiences of these texts. It is these

experiences I hope to capture in the individual chapters of this thesis project.

Chapter 1
Half-Breed: Maria Campbell and the Autobiographical Act

In an effort of recovery and creation, Maria Campbell enters the genre of autobiography to reclaim cultural and historical authority over her self-representation and that of Métis peoples in Canada. The end result is Halfbreed, a life writing that transforms an androcentric genre by fundamentally challenging ideologies of race, class, and gender. Campbell expands the autobiographical act beyond the development of the self to include the development of an historical and cultural subjectivity. In doing so she transforms the autobiographical process from a reproduction of the patrilineal to a powerful critique of the patriarchal and imperialist order. The impact of this critique on the reading process has the potential to embroil the reader in her own examination of these ideologies. The ability of the text to turn the reader back on herself marks a reconfiguration of the autobiographical act from a narrative of an individual to one that promotes greater empathy and understanding of both the self-in-writing and the reading self .

When I first picked up the 1983 edition of Halfbreed, I stared at the cover, at the proud face, the black curling hair, the buckskin (looking) jacket and the turquoise jewelry. When I finished reading the text I, again, stared at the cover. This time I saw the defiant face of a survivor whose story must have been as difficult in the telling as it was in the living. The process of reading that shifted my response to her image will form the basis of my investigations into Campbell's text. Reading her life narrative raised many pressing questions for me as a reader about the relationship between history, memory, and cultural representation, the binary construction of difference within this representation, and the dialectic and dynamic relationship between readers and writers that ideally emerges from the reading process.

Traditional autobiography, according to Sidonie Smith in her book, The Poetics of Women's Autobiography, demands a public representation of self within a language and a discourse that promotes male selfhood (50). In an ideological environment that has traditionally maintained women's cultural and literary silence, this public representation of self is fraught with obstacles for women. The ideology of gender predominant in patriarchal culture, and promoted by the autobiographical contract, essentializes male and female difference in such a way as to maintain the patriarchal authority to name the world, itself, and others (Smith 49). This power to name is located in the male figure by "mythologies of gender [that] conflate human and male figures of

selfhood, aligning male selfhood with culturally valued stories" (Smith 50) Thus both the female self and the female narrative are marginalized to the borders of cultural values. Women, however, are increasingly challenging this marginalization by writing (and publishing) their own life stories, in their own voice, and on their own terms.

In a similar act of marginalization, ideologies of white supremacy, imperialism, and technological 'progress' prevalent in the dominant cultural discourse of Canadian society privilege white, western culture and construct minority cultures as inferior and other. Lacking the cultural authority to represent themselves, women and other marginalized groups are subject to interpretation and representation by the other. As native writer Kateri Damm argues, " 'Who we are' has been constructed and defined by Others to the extent that at times we too no longer know who we are" ('Says Who' 11). Discursively silenced by these ideologies of gender and race, women often stand on the margins of the historical process. The privileging of the written text and the English language over minority languages and orality in the dominant historical discourse is exclusionary towards non-English speakers and Métis oral traditions. Those who do claim authority over their own representation and construct written narratives of their lives, are often overlooked by literary critics for their lack of generic convention. Alternatively, as Larissa Lai argues, they are 'fetishized' by critics, academics, or the general public as examples of native reportage. Lai argues, "the suggestion is, of course, that we are not creative agents capable of constructing nuanced fictions which address historical situations, but rather mere native informants reconstructing, as accurately as our second -rate minds allow, what actually happened" (148). The absence of women writers like native writer Pauline Johnson from the traditional Canadian literary canon demonstrates the reality of this exclusion. Her tokenized presence on reading lists of survey English courses demonstrates the reality of this fetishization.

In Halfbreed, Campbell uses the life writing process as a medium to intervene in the construction of both her self and her community. Creating what bel hooks describes as a "narrative of struggle".Campbell subverts privileged narratives of history -- what "the history books say" (6) -- by giving voice to the excluded experiences of her family and her Métis community. Writing her autobiography becomes a practical form of resistance for Campbell and this voice of resistance is very audible in Halfbreed. By writing her life story,

Campbell effectively takes control over her own life and the definition of her self. By telling this story in the context of aboriginal oppression in Canada, she moves towards an historical subjectivity traditionally denied first nations people.

Campbell's critical use of the autobiographical form to construct an historical narrative of her self operates to compliment the oral tradition of her Métis culture. Subverting the conventions of male, western autobiography, Campbell does not tell the complete story of her life, nor does she write, as Gusdorf suggests of male writers, to "acquire a sort of literary and pedagogical immortality" (31). Her narrative outlines the web of relationships and connections between her self, her community, and the dominant culture that have shaped and defined her life and that of the Métis community. Thus, her narrative serves to disrupt the androcentric and individualist conventions of western autobiography that privileges the lives and discourse of white men and upper class white women. Her task reaches beyond the enrichment of the "common cultural heritage" (Gusdorf 31) to a fundamental critique of the construction of this 'heritage' that has rendered her culturally invisible and discursively marginalized.

The critical nature of Campbell's life writing deliberately challenges popular representations of Métis people, marking a defiant reclamation of cultural authority. The title itself marks a reclamation of the derogatory term Half-breed, used by treaty natives and white people to degrade the Métis people as inferior and impure. Campbell reclaims the term in the title of her life narrative as a starting point for the redefinition, for herself and for her reader, of what it means to be a Métis woman in Canada. By reclaiming this term, Campbell begins the process of liberating herself from the oppressive stereotypes and misrepresentations that have shaped her own sense of self and that of her community. Her narrative represents a form of resistance that fundamentally challenges the patriarchal authority to name and represent women and Métis people. This challenge to white, patriarchal authority marks an expansion of the autobiographical act from a mere development of self (as Gusdorf describes it) to the recuperation and development of an historical and cultural subjectivity traditionally denied Métis people in Canada.

Campbell traces the effects of what bel hooks describes as the "colonization of the mind" (56) as she explores the stereotypes that inform Métis subjectivity. For Métis people in Canada, as for many other minority groups, the

inability to represent themselves in popular culture and the internalization of oppressive stereotypes works to induce a kind of cultural shame that maintains their marginality. Campbell charts the progression of this loss of representation throughout her narrative connecting it with the domination of both her self and her culture. Citing anecdotes of racism, sexism, and class discrimination, Campbell provides the reader with the vital history of Métis colonization by imperial settlers that is often absent from an analysis of the contemporary "condition" of Métis people. She starts her story with the Red River Rebellion and describes the impact of Canada's historically famous 'pioneers' on the Métis way of life. Driven from Ontario and Manitoba by the prejudice of the white Protestant settlers and the fear that their rights would not be protected by the Canadian government, the Métis fled to Saskatchewan "to escape the prejudice and hate that comes with the opening of a new land" (3). Threatened again by the encroaching settlers and discriminatory homestead laws, they took up arms and, with Riel and Dumont as their leaders, mounted a rebellion against the federal government. Dumont seized Fort Carlton and the Battle of Duck Lake became a brief victory for the Métis. After Duck Lake, the government hastily formed a committee to examine the Métis' concerns, at the same time as they marshaled "eight thousand troops, five hundred NWMP and white volunteers from throughout the territories, plus a Gatling gun ... to stop Riel, Dumont, and one hundred and fifty Halfbreeds"(6). Following this betrayal/defeat at Batoche in 1884, Campbell speaks of an axiomatic loss of dignity and pride among the forefathers of her community. The events proceeding from the failed Riel Rebellion become a turning point for Campbell's people,

> So began a miserable life of poverty which held no hope for the future. That generation of my people was completely beaten. Their fathers had failed during the rebellion to make a dream come true; they failed as farmers; now here was nothing left. Their way of life was a part of Canada's past and they saw no place for themselves in the world around them, for they believed they had nothing to offer. They felt shame and with shame the loss of pride and the strength to live each day. (8)

Dispossession, the prolonged experience of poverty, and the destruction of their traditional way of life compose the dynamics of the colonial process for the Métis people. The use of alcohol and drugs to alleviate the pain caused by this loss of pride becomes a demonstrated symptom of colonialist oppression.

Demystifying the Métis experience, Campbell "advances the understanding that what happened to her and her people did not happen through choice or some cultural defect" (Damm "Dispelling" 104). The breakup of communities that followed the dispossession of Métis people disrupted the traditional oral form of transmitting history from one generation to another. This cultural dispersal, in conjunction with the implementation of residential schools for Métis children, left generations of Métis people vulnerable to the internalization of stereotypical representations of Métis people evoked in the historical narratives of the colonizer and reinforced in the curriculum of educational institutions. In starting her narrative with the historical antecedents of the Métis' dispossession, she creates "a cultural location for the construction of alternative readings of history [told] from the standpoint of the oppressed, the disinherited..." (hooks 59). She also elevates the memory of the Métis people to history - making status by juxtaposing their experience of this historically famous pioneer movement with the reportage of the white settlers that is transcribed in what 'the history books say'. Thus, Campbell's attention to the narratives of history in the opening chapter mark her text as part of a larger strategy of Métis resistance to the historical specificities of the experience of colonization. As Barbara Godard argues,

> Narrative is a way of exploring history and questioning historical narratives of the colonizer which have violently interposed themselves in place of the history of the colonized. [...] [Métis writing becomes] a radical questioning of the historiographical versions of the past as developed in the "master narratives", in order to rewrite the historical ending. (Godard in Lundgren 144)

It is the "historical ending" that maintains Campbell's focus as she uses her own life narrative to demonstrate the impact of these "narratives of the colonizer" on both the collective development of her people and on the development of her individual self. Constructing an "AlterNative" reading of the colonial past, Campbell's story becomes an act of cultural redefinition as she develops a "new relationship to the past" (Singh et al 19). It is this new relationship that holds the promise of a new "historical ending", or rather, a re-defined cultural subjectivity. bel hooks explains that the process of becoming subjects "emerges as one comes to understand how structures of domination work in one's own life, as one develops critical thinking and critical consciousness, as one invents new,

alternative, habits of being" (hooks in Shah 154).

Memory and the Autobiographical Act

The individual and collective memories of Campbell and her Métis community that are excluded from the dominant historical discourse ("what the history books say") surface in her life writing text and operate as a form of subversive "unofficial history" aimed at deconstructing popular (mis)understandings of the historical past. For the native subject it is important to remember "that which they have been socialized to want to forget" (Damm 'Dispelling' 96). bel hooks articulates the importance of memory - both individual memory and the collective memory of a culture – to the resistance against colonial powers: "resistance is [...] a 'struggle of memory against forgetting.' Remembering makes us subjects in history, it is dangerous to forget" (54). The many ways in which the minority memory is undermined and suppressed by colonialist strategies forms the backdrop of Maria's life and characterizes her own struggle for political and individual self-recovery and self-determination. Dispossession and the prolonged experience of poverty combined with a culturally traumatic adolescence colour Maria's remembrances. Memory is often deflected by the body and, as Kogawa's protagonist Naomi attests, its reconstitution is often painful and murky. While some of Maria's memories appear vivid and detailed, others are vague. Her brief experience at Residential School, for example, seems to elude remembrance, "I can recall little from that part of my life besides feeling lonely and frightened when I was left with the Sisters at the school " (47). Enduring hard physical labour and frightening punishments for speaking her native tongue, this period of her life, arguably one of the worst for Métis children, is decribed in a mere paragraph. Her inability to remember this painful period demonstrates the extent to which the colonial experience can render this dangerous forgetfulness. The current movement of Métis people who are speaking out against the abuses suffered at Residential schools and the resistance they face from both the Federal Government and the religious organizations responsible for operating these schools is indicative of how effective the Métis memory can be in liberating Métis people from the margins of their own history. The impact of this forgetting -- willful or otherwise -- on the resistance of a people is more fully explored in the Joy Kogawa's novel Obasan

as she charts one woman's progress through the minefield of her own memory.

The act of remembering becomes the impetus for Campbell's telling of her life story. Returning to the place of her childhood in the preface to her narrative, Campbell recognizes that memory and the reconnection to her past are not to be found in the physical home that she has left. Like many minority writers before her, the physical journey home proves an incomplete one,

> Going home after so long, I thought I might find again the happiness and beauty I had known as a child. But as I walked down the dirt road, poked through the broken old buildings and thought back over the years, I realized I could never find that here. Like me the land had changed, my people were gone, and if I was going to find peace I would have to search within myself. (2)

Avoiding the pitfalls of reifying a nostalgic 'home' that can be 'recovered' Campbell recognizes that her sense of self is not connected to this 'place'. The narrative that follows reflects her inward journey through memory. Evoking connected vignettes, anecdotes, and oral resonances, the search for herself becomes an act of remembering that fundamentally connects the autobiographical act with the recovery of her own sense of self as a Métis woman. Remembering the many vibrant people that comprised the Métis Community in Spring River, Campbell is able to recover the image of her people as a warm and happy community, plagued by poverty, but hard working and nonetheless happy. Her recollections go a long way towards deconstructing the stereotype of Métis people as drunk and lazy for both the reader and herself. Memory and the autobiographical act, therefore, serve a dual purpose in Campbell's text, that of recovery and creation: recovery of a self-determined conception of her own identity as a Métis woman , and the creation of an historical understanding of the development of Métis people today. Memory operates as the repository for cultural history in oral cultures and the act of remembering becomes a vital act of cultural transmission. The fusion of individual memory and historical narrative by a subject traditionally excluded from this discourse, marks Campbell's text as a discursive act of decolonization and a validation of the marginalized memory as it relates to the production of history.

As Dehay argues, "all histories are products of selective remembering and narrative ordering from a specific perspective.." (37). When these

narratives are constructed from the memories of white men, the perspective that is evoked is decidedly patriarchal and Eurocentric. When these patriarchal and Eurocentric narratives are privileged over those of the cultural minorities in Canada, ideologies of white supremacy and colonialism are supported. Dehay argues the importance of undermining the colonial and patriarchal narratives that have interposed themselves in place of the history of the colonized, "if marginalized cultures accept the dominant cultures narratives as normative, they will be powerless to resist domination. If, instead, they denaturalize these narratives at the same time recuperating their own collective (recessive) memories, they can provide alternative 'collective authorities'" (Dehay 30) that affirm, as opposed to efface, their intuited understanding of themselves; understandings that may not coincide with the perception of "what it is to be a Halfbreed woman in our country" (2). Campbell's use of the autobiographical act and her process of remembering inherent in this act, work to denaturalize these narratives of the colonizer and to replace them with an understanding of the collective development of the Métis, within a prolonged experience of colonization, that provides the necessary context to understand the contemporary "condition" of Métis people today. The revisioning of an authority, collective or otherwise, is crucial for understanding the self, as well as for motivating alternative modes of resistance as it creates the author(ity) necessary to confront pervasive stereotypes of Métis people as drunk, drug abused, lazy, and promiscuous. By weaving the memories of her Cheechum into and through her own memories, Campbell defines her relationship to her people through her relationship to her Cheechum, thereby authorizing her text with a decidedly matrilineal contract. In doing so she undermines the traditionally androcentric nature of the autobiographical genre and transforms the autobiographical process from a reproduction of the patrilineal to a powerful critique of the patriarchal and imperialist order.

Throughout her text, the wisdom of her Cheechum guides Campbell and frames her narrative. A woman of fierce strength and strong cultural identity, her Cheechum becomes the backbone of Campbell's own search for a social and cultural subjectivity. She assumes a mentor position within the narrative and her specifically female voice, reaffirming both Métis strength and female power, haunts Campbell's text. Rejecting the charity of the white people, her Cheechum refuses to give up her Métis way of life. Her strength in the face of colonial oppression and her determination and pride in Métis traditions become

symbolic of the power inherent in the matriarchs of Métis communities. "Cheechum never accepted defeat at Batoche, and she would always say, 'Because they killed Riel they think they have killed us too, but some day, my girl, it will be different'" (11). It is this belief in Métis strength that Maria draws upon in times of crisis and exploitation. When she is at her lowest, addicted to drugs and living in a flop house with an abusive partner, it is the voice of her Cheechum that inspires her to take control of her life and get off the streets, "one night I found myself thinking of Cheechum and my childhood. I remembered her saying, "You can have anything you want if you want it bad enough." I got up and went for a walk and suddenly it was all clear" (144). Throughout Campbell's text, the voice of her Cheechum becomes a source of strength and empowerment, giving authority to her text and affirming her self- representation. Maria's attention to the voice of her Cheechum reflects the role of orality in Métis cultures to transmit cultural knowledge. This orality becomes fused with, and yet ultimately changes, the autobiographical act. As Campbell negotiates the very difficult ground between oral culture and textual form, she creates a narrative that relies on anecdote, memory, and voice to communicate the complexity of Maria's struggles to come to terms with her self as a woman, as a Métis, and as a poor person.

The Remembered Anecdote

Dr. Samuel Johnson described the traditional use of the anecdote as the embodiment of "unpublished" and "unofficial" local knowledge (Janetta 'Anecdotal' 64). In contrast to this traditional use, Campbell uses the anecdote to "define a space for subversive humour and introduce to discourse the dialogical dimension of laughter" (Janetta, 'Anecdotal' 64). Contradicting the image of the stoic and tragic Métis, her introduction of the comic anecdote represents her determination to deconstruct the autonomous, unitary, and individual self that is prevalent in traditional autobiography. "Allowing 'white' eavesdropping, the anecdote's playful, subversive epistemologies, along with its orality, depicts the various ways in which the Métis, as a distinct ethnic group, encounter and portray both the Indian and the white Other" (Janetta, 'Anecdotal' 63-64).Through anecdote, she offers a vision of the Métis self as multiply constructed in a dialectic relationship between the individual and her community. Very much like Gertude Stein's conception of a "continuous

present" Campbell's use of anecdote operates to create a "form that denies a consistent continuity of self, that transcends time instead of traversing it and that insists that the relationships between people are more important than individuals in isolation" (Stein in Buss162). The non linearity of the anecdotes she tells undermines the emphasis on chronology that is prevalent in the western tradition of autobiography and history, and replaces it with a vision of the past that is more conducive to Métis perceptions of the dialectic nature of time. The informality of the anecdotes encourages the reader to enter her world, and the world of her community. As Janetta argues "it is the most 'authentic' medium to relate the experience of traditional Métis (semi-) nomadism with its succession of brief encounters and random experiences as well as modern enforced rootlessness" (Janetta, 'Anecdotal' 64).

The fore-grounding of memory in the telling of these anecdotes demonstrates the complex relationship between history, identity, and community that emerges for a subject driven away from her community by degrees of institutionalized cultural shame and living with the subjective aftermath. This complex relationship is comparable to the contested relationship with the Japanese-Canadian community that both Kogawa and her protagonist Naomi experience and similar to the ambiguous relationship to the Chinese-Canadian community that Lai's protagonist Artemis experiences. The knowledge that Campbell seeks to transmit, however, is not the ancient knowledge of her culture, but the contemporary knowledge of the colonial experience that she has learned through her own process of self reflection and memory. The journey into memory thus becomes a journey of self-healing, exploration, and discovery for Campbell.

Narrative and Identity

Throughout her narrative, Campbell works to come to terms with the complexity of her representations in order to free herself from them. Campbell's own conception of self emerges rhetorically from her engagement with the many fictive stories of Métis selfhood that have littered her consciousness. She challenges the many stereotypes of Métis women by presenting the reader with memories of the women in her family: her Cheechum, strong and fiercely loyal to her Métis culture, her mother, resourceful and strong; the cement that holds her family together, and the many women in her community who endure

poverty, abuse, and cultural alienation, only to emerge as "survivors of the oppressive colonial regime and abusive relationships, as well as systematic racism and sexism" (Acoose 141). Maria's childhood reflects the legacy of these strong and powerful women, as she overcomes the inauspiciousness of her entry into the world; "At last I arrived, a daughter, much to Dad's disappointment" (16). Despite her father's disappointment with his new daughter, Maria learns to "set traps, shoot a rifle, and fight like a boy" (16). Gender, however, becomes a variable of abuse in the Métis community as the oppressive racism and colonialism experienced by Métis people causes Métis men to erupt in violence towards Métis women. Campbell recalls this dynamic of abuse as a child when the men of her community would return to their camps after an evening drinking in the town,

> The men would get happy -drunk at first and as the evening progressed white men would come by. They all danced and sang together, then all too soon, one of the white men would bother the women. Our men would become angry, but instead of fighting the white men they beat their wives. They ripped clothes off the women, hit them with fists or whips, knocked them down and kicked them until they were senseless.
>
> When that was over they fought each other in the same way. Meanwhile the white men stood together in a group laughing and drinking, sometimes dragging a woman away (38).

The intersection of race and gender in Métis women's oppression is delineated in this memory. As native writer Janice Acoose argues, "colonized people turning on their own people is symptomatic of the colonial disease" (149). Campbell is careful not to over-construct the impact of gender, however, as this 'disease' traverses gender lines and "little by little the women started to drink as well" (38).

Campbell constructs "an intricate web of social, political, geographic, economic, and personal circumstances" (Damm "Dispelling" 104) that undermine the "cause and effect" approach to native issues. An integral part of this "web of circumstances" that Campbell explores is the poverty and isolation endured by Maria's family. These circumstances are revealed to the reader as some of the most effective tools of the colonial project to subjugate, dominate, and exploit the native people (Damm, "Dispelling" 104). The legislated poverty

that lies at the root of many Métis 'problems' is obscured by the absence of the Métis voice from the more prolific narratives of the colonial experience. As a result, oppressive stereotypes of Métis people as lazy, drunk, and sexually promiscuous evolve and proliferate in response to their poverty, and have become the justifying factors for their disadvantaged position in society. When Maria takes a job cleaning for a white woman near by to help support her family she comes face to face with this stereotype:

> She [her employer] didn't like Indians and talked in front of me as if I were deaf. She would tell her visitors that we were good for only two things - working and fucking, if someone could get us to do it. She made jokes about hot bucks and hot squaws and talked like we were animals in the barnyard. I despised that woman, but because I needed the money, I kept my mouth shut and pretended it didn't bother me (108).

The brutality of the racism Maria and her community endure does not, however, construct "victims" of a colonial oppression. Contextualizing this oppression so that it is evident that her people are "more than their pain" (hooks 59), Campbell provides a glimpse of a "proud and happy people" (9). Summer days spent gathering roots and berries with her family and their community and evenings listening to stories all provide the reader with a framework to understand the Métis culture outside of its experience of oppression. Careful to balance her representation of both her own life and that of her community, these anecdotes are punctuated with memories of racism and violence when her family eventually made their way into town to sell their goods,

> They [her people] were happy and proud until we drove into town, then everyone became quiet and looked different. The men walked in front, looking straight ahead, their wives behind, and I can never forget this, they had their heads down and never looked up, We kids trailed behind our grannies in much the same manner" (37).

The racist insults and taunts from the white towns people endured by her family echo the stereotypes of Métis people that have evolved in response to their difference and their poverty. The proliferation of these stereotypes becomes a central concern for Campbell as she begins to explore their

power in the symbolic economy of Canadian society.

The Historical Stereotype

The oppressive stereotypes that emerge from the narratives of the colonizer gain currency through the many ways in which "history" is disseminated. As David Palumbo-Liu is careful to point out in his definition of history, historical understandings, and the distortions and stereotypes that accompany them, are "transmitted and reaffirmed in a number of representational fields" (212). For Campbell, these stereotypes are communicated in films, through the relationship between her family and the surrounding white community, in traditional 'history books', and in her experiences in educational institutions (residential schools, and local, integrated schools). Native writer Marilyn Dumont affirms the connection between representation and domination, articulating the effect of these stereotypes on her own cultural and individual identity. She says, "the misrepresentation of me makes me doubt my experience, devalue my reality and tempts me to collude in an image which, in the end, disempowers me" (48). The power of these distorted images to effect individual and collective identity effects the extent to which native people are able to participate both in Canadian society and in their own cultural development. As filmmaker Pratihba Parmar states, "images play a crucial role in defining and controlling political and social power to which both individuals and marginalized groups have access. The deeply ideological nature of imagery determines not only how other people think about us, but how we think about ourselves" (Parmar in Dumont 48).

The proliferation of stereotypes within the popularized narratives of the past not only cut off the Métis subject from an accurate depiction of Métis culture and people but effectively displaces their own understandings of themselves. As Ben Xu argues, stories and narratives that tell about the past both shape and convey a sense of self (262). Thus, narratives of history that misrepresent (or do not represent at all) the Métis subject are heavily implicated in the formation of individual and cultural identity for Métis people and all people marginalized within these narratives.

Campbell speaks directly to this devalued sense of self gleaned from oppressive images of the Métis subject when she recalls a film she saw

when she was a child,

> One show I remember was about the Northwest Rebellion. People came from miles around and the theatre was packed. They were sitting in the aisles and on the floor. Riel and Dumont were our heroes. The movie was a comedy and it was awful; the Halfbreeds were made to look like such fools that it left you wondering how they ever organized a rebellion. Gabriel Dumont was filthy and gross. In one scene his suspenders broke and his pants fell down, and he went galloping away on a scabby horse in his long red underwear. Louis Riel was portrayed as a real lunatic who believed he was god, and his followers were the real 'three stooges' types. Of course the NWMP did all the heroic things. Everyone was laughing hysterically, including the Halfbreeds but Cheechum walked out in disgust. (111)

Campbell articulates the connection between this portrayal of the Métis' participation during the Riel Rebellion and the current state of Métis cultural identity: "Many years later I saw the film again and it made me realize why my people are so fucked up" (111). The reaction of the Métis in the audience demonstrates the extent to which their struggle to achieve justice and self-determination during the battle at Duck Lake and at Batoche has been distorted and internalized by the Métis as an example of their ineptitude, savagery, and defeat. The audience member's laughter demonstrates the collusion that Dumont alludes to and the end result, as Campbell concludes, results in a disempowerment of the Métis subject. The reaction of her Cheechum, however, indicates that, despite the widespread collusion in this disempowering representation, not all Métis unquestionably consumed the images of Métis people that were fed to them by white people. Campbell's memory of her Cheechum's radical refusal to accept these images of her people resonates and informs her own project.

The repercussions of this derogatory stereotype on the cohesiveness of the Métis cultural identity, however, are apparent when Campbell describes their impact on her own developing sense of self. As a young child, living on the road allowances in rural Saskatchewan, Maria and her siblings are forced to attend school with their white neighbours. It is here that Maria comes face to face with their poverty and their difference. Faced with the taunts of the white children in her school about the substance of their daily lunches, the Métis children fight back with their fists, "They would tease [us] and call, 'Gophers,

gophers, Road Allowance people eat gophers'. We fought back of course but we were terribly hurt and above all ashamed." (50). Seeing the distorted reflection of the Métis subject in the eyes of the white children, Maria rails against it. With the root causes of Métis poverty, marginalization, and racist discrimination obscured within her community, she attributes the attacks of the white children to her Métisness,

> I remember coming home and saying ugly things to Mom. She took me in her arms and tried to hold me but I kicked her and said that I hated her, Daddy, and "all you no good Half-breeds". She turned away and went outside and a few minutes Daddy came in and tried to talk to me. When I said the same things to him he just sat there while I cried and shouted that the other kids had oranges, apples, cakes, and nice clothes, and that all we had were gophers, moose meat, ugly dresses, and patchy pants. (50)

Speaking of a painful memory of cultural shame, Campbell reveals the subtleties of Métis oppression, acknowledging the insidiousness of its sublimation. In a culture that constantly reifies difference as a negative repository for that which excludes one from the dominant community, the rejection, denial, or anger at this source of difference - her Métisness- is revealed to facilitate the colonial project.

The identification of shame as a strategy of cultural domination is articulated by Campbell's Cheechum, who provides, again, the missing [suppressed] narrative of the Métis colonial experience,

> Many years ago, she said, when she was only a little girl, the Halfbreeds came west. They left good homes behind in their search for a place where they could live as they wished. Later a leader arose from these people who said that if they worked hard and fought for what they believed, they would win against all odds. Despite hardships, they gave all they had for this one desperate chance of being free, but because some of them said, "I want good clothes and horses and you no-good Halfbreeds are ruining it for me," they lost their dream. She continued: "they fought each other just as you are fighting your mother and father today. The white man saw that was a more powerful weapon than anything else with which to beat the Halfbreeds, and he used it and still does today. Already they are using it on you. They try to make you hate your people." (51)

Her Cheechum's lesson on the importance of Métis pride resonates in the memory of Campbell. The dialogue she engages in with her Cheechum mirrors the oral transmission of cultural knowledge that characterizes traditional Métis storytelling.

> Nothing more was ever said about clothes or food. My first real lesson had been learnt. I always tried to keep my head up and defend my friends and cousins in front of those white kids, even when I knew we were wrong. Sometimes it was very hard to control my disappointment and frustration, and many hours were spent with Cheechum telling her how I felt, and she in turn would try to make me understand. (51)

While acknowledging the difficulty of negotiating Métis pride in a society that so pervasively devalues the Métis subject, Campbell articulates the complexity of the colonial experience. In many cases, the derogatory image of the Métis becomes part of the historical subjectivity of the Métis subject, and an integral part of their cultural landscape. Further, these derogatory images inform the non-Métis conception of Métis people, in much the same way as they inform the Métis subject. In effect, the stereotype is bolstered by a symbolic and political economy and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy for the Métis subject, a prophecy that Campbell seeks to derail for herself and for her readers. She does this by reflecting back on the ways in which she herself internalized these stereotypes and how her Cheechum was able to connect, for her, this internalization with the position of the Métis people today. Memory, therefore, becomes vital to articulating and understanding the 'structures of domination' at work in her own life. It is here, as bel hooks has suggested, that the opportunity exists for investing new and alterMétis habits of being.

The Relationship

As if the task of transforming her own conceptions of Métis selfhood is not daunting enough, Campbell moves beyond this task to critically intervene in the public perception of Métis people by non-Métis readers. When I initially began my investigations into her text I began to think of her motivations for writing (publishing) such a painful life, for its recollection must have been as difficult as its living. I wondered aloud, to whom is she speaking?

On the title page of the original 1973 edition of Half-breed are inscribed

the words, "this is for our babies. Maria Campbell". In the dedication of the paperback edition of the same year she writes, "this book is dedicated to my Cheechum's children." Is she speaking only to Métis communities? To her " brothers and sisters, all over the country" that can identify with her "joys, sorrows, the oppressing poverty, the frustrations and the dreams" (2). Most definitely, I conclude, she is speaking to Métis communities in Canada. But wait- - is my participation in this text therefore simply that of cultural observer, of simply taking in the realities of her existence outside of the context of my own? No... it can't be. It was painful for me.

> I am writing for this for all of you, to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country. ... I only want to say: this is what it was like; this is what it is still like. I know that poverty is not ours alone. Your people have it too...(2,9)

Campbell's story prompts a personal engagement with her text; I am included in the audience. I know this because I experienced the same critical transformation in my own 'habits of being' by reading her text. The result is a paradigmatic shift in my thinking that not only reveals hitherto unconsidered issues of racism in my own past, but the racism and classism involved in the exclusion of the Métis experience from the dominant historical discourse. My pain is revealed to be an unease with this paradigmatic shift as it shakes the foundations of my own understandings of the Métis and native communities and dramatically subverts the ability of the historical discourse that I have been taught in the public school system, to define and order the present. More importantly, however, and the most political of acts in my opinion, is the ability of Campbell's texts to evoke empathy in myself as a reader. My pain stems from the emotions evoked during the reading process. The ability of the writer to provoke this journey into self on behalf of the reader denotes the potential of the text to engage the reader with her own self-knowledge, as well as that of the self in the text. My own meditations and forays into the politics of both Campbell's representations and my own have problematized the reading process for me and have provoked several questions for me as a reader surrounding the relationship between non-native reader and Métis writer that emerges in the life writing genre.

Campbell moves beyond the humanization of the "self-in-writing" and propels the reader to develop her own self consciousness through the use of

empathy. I have entered her world and been given a glimpse of what it is like to be a Métis woman in Canada. And it's full of injustice. This use of empathy pointedly echoes bel hooks' vision of a "critical fiction" in which the text requires the reader to "shift her paradigms and practice empathy as a conscious gesture of solidarity with the work" (57). Campbell's use of memory, anecdote, and vignette to communicate her life experiences served to provoke empathy in myself as a reader, and has encouraged me to examine my own privilege as a white, middle class woman in Canada. The use of empathy transforms the reading process for me, moving my participation in the text beyond that of cultural observer towards a position of real (or imagined) solidarity (as hooks argues it should). I agree with Langness and Frank when they argue that: "the act of empathy that arises in attempting to understand the reality of people sometimes very different from ourselves can be a transformative process. Such acts of empathy [..] help us to break down the barriers of ego and identity that give us the illusion of somehow standing separate and apart [. . .]" (Janetta 'Métis' 178). Half-breed has begun this process of transformation for me and has operated as a starting point for dismantling these barriers of difference between Campbell and myself. The invocation of empathy to provoke this paradigmatic shift focuses on the importance of relationship and understanding between Métis writer and non-native reader if the project of moving beyond difference to a constructive point of solidarity is to be successful. The result is a dialectic relationship between myself as reader and Campbell as writer in which I have learned as much about my own conception/construction of self as I have of Campbell's. It is this deeper understanding of relationship, as a process of coming to know the other in relation to the self, that works to highlight notions of connection and relation over notions of difference (Janetta 'Métis' 66). [But Campbell does not know me. While I argue that the reading process has created a relationship between Campbell and me, it is confined within the reading process and operates as a one way street -- Campbell to me.]

Campbell is conscious of a binary understanding of difference that separates women of different ages, ethnic groups, sexual preferences, and class positions by deflecting the commonalties of women's experiences. Arguing, for example, that all Canadians have a viable stake in the amelioration of the "social problems" that plague Métis people in Canada, Campbell points out, "I know that poverty is not ours alone. Your people have it too..." (9). By de-contextualizing the issue of poverty as a specifically "Métis" problem, Campbell

moves it into the realm of "human" problems, encouraging all human subjects to relate to this issue as not something that springs from the "Métis condition" but from the "human condition". At the same time, however, Campbell is careful to draw the thread of colonialist persecution throughout her narrative and is acutely aware of the importance her 'difference" has played in the development of her self. While she recognizes the communality of poverty, she is careful to acknowledge the differences inherent in this experience;

> Your people have it [poverty] too, but in those earlier days you at least had dreams, you had a tomorrow. My parents and I never shared any aspirations for future. I never saw my father talk back to a white man unless he was drunk. I never saw him or any of our men walk with their heads held high before white people (9).

The assertion of commonality in the experience of poverty, and the simultaneous articulation of the differences within this experience, encourage the reader to recognize both points of relation and of difference, creating a balance that "breaks down the oppressive barriers that create 'object' and 'subject', that deny agency and construct power" (McFarlane, 402). This balance moves the reader and the writer to a third space beyond the white/other paradigm and the "obstacles" of difference are broken down through understanding and empathy.

Identifying the prohibitive power relationship that emerges from the binary construction of difference, Campbell articulates a position of mutuality, respect, and recognition that is facilitated by the establishment of a dialectic relationship between others;

> The change has to come from respect. ... It means sharing. Being able to be honest with each other and say, 'Well there are some things in our culture that are not always good'. But the way we change that is to have a dialogue that's meaningful; and honest. You know the kind of oppression many immigrants fled from isn't that different. Their oppression isn't worse than my oppression. But if you sit across the table from me and you say, "you poor thing, you've been oppressed. You live under colonization," and everything else. What you do is cop out from what your people came from. And we're no longer equals sitting across the table from each other. What happens then is I become the poor oppressed person, and you have power over me. But if both of us acknowledge that our grandfathers and grandmothers came through great struggles then we

> can talk to one another. Then you can appreciate and value what I have to say, and I can appreciate and value what you have to say. And there's a place to start from. (Campbell in Lutz 56,59-60)

Campbell's insistence on mutuality and honest dialogue between others is predicated on the willingness of the reader to critically engage with her own history. This would require a fundamental re-evaluation of memory and its relation to history in the dominant historical discourse. Campbell expresses her frustration with the predominant approach to Canadian history by non-native writers,

> They [non-native people] don't really look at their history. They look at it, but it's the history of the pioneer. They don't ever really think about it or feel. ... I believe in memory, and reaching back, and touching. They could do that and if they did that, then you would have a new voice emerging. People would start to understand each other maybe. (Campbell in Lutz 59)

This 'new voice' echoes Gloria Anzaldua's vision of both sides of the difference debate moving beyond the binary / dualist approach to difference. Her metaphor of a river highlights the obstacles to solidarity and change that plague the difference debate.,

> It is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions. A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed; locked in mortal combat, like the cop and the criminal, both reduced to a common denominator of violence. ... All reaction is limited by, and dependent on what it is reacting against. ... At some point on our way to a new consciousness we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shore at once, and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes. (Emberley 151)

This 'new consciousness' that Anzaldua alludes to echoes Campbell's call for a greater understanding of the other in order to move beyond restrictive binaries that confine the difference debate. To further this project, Campbell critically reconfigures the autobiographical act from a narrative of the individual to a

narrative that promotes greater empathy and understanding of both the self-in-writing and the reading self.

Conclusion

Campbell does intend to move her readers (what writer doesn't?); she counts on this invocation of pathos and empathy to facilitate the communication process. Simultaneously, she is able to destabilize non-native preconceptions about the Métis Other, diffusing the power of oppressive racial stereotypes that have shaped her conception of self. In doing so she creates a model for cross-cultural interaction that both facilitates communication between native writers and non-native readers, at the same time as she attends to her own healing process. Her text inserts both her own story and that of other Métis people into the public debate, opening the door to other Métis people, particularly but not specifically Métis women, to start telling their own stories. Further, her attention to memory and history within her narrative transform the life writing act from a reproduction of the patrilineal to a powerful critique of the patriarchal and imperialist order.

Campbell's life writing narrative employs memory as both a narrative tool to evoke empathy in the reader and as a critique of the patriarchal and ethnocentric construction of historical discourse. Joy Kogawa, in her fictional autobiography, Obasan, widens the discussion to include the debate about whether or not the minority history based on individual memory can be told at all. The journey of Naomi Nakane through the memories and experiences of her internment during the Second World War embroils the reader in more complex questions than Campbell's text provokes. Poetic and lyrical, Kogawa charts the emotional legacy of the internment and dispersal experience and its impact on the Japanese - Canadian community.

Chapter 2
The Politics of Remembering History in Joy Kogawa's Obasan.

On the cover of Joy Kogawa's novel, Obasan, (Penguin Books, 1981) the title is underscored with the sentence, "A moving novel of a time and a suffering we have tried to forget". The 'we' is presumably white Canadians who colluded in the internment and dispersal policies adopted by the federal government after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour. There is also the implication that this wrong has been compounded by omitting it from our national history. But what if you did not know that there was anything to forget? So deeply has this painful period of Canadian history been buried that it was not until I read this moving novel that I HEARD that Canadians agreed to the imprisonment of their own citizens purely because of their Japanese heritage. Having completed enriched high school history classes and one year of university I had never been exposed to this well kept secret in the province that I have always called my home. My reading experience (as one can imagine) was one of shock and horror. Where Campbell's text provoked a journey into my own self, alongside that of Campbell's, Kogawa's text has moved me beyond myself, to a questioning of history.

Kogawa's text is not a political treatise, but a lyrical and, at times, poetic movement through the healing process and an empathetic engagement with the narrator Naomi Nakane. This is not to say that it is not overtly ideological; Kogawa breathes life into the 'facts' of the internment and dispersal policies, changing both Naomi's and my own relationship to the history they construct. This embodied fact also develops the relationship that potentially emerges between the reader and writer in an effort to move beyond the pain of this history, to a point of healing and reconciliation. Kogawa, in her article "Just Cause", comments that "what draws us together is not sermon, but story. Who are you? Who am I? What is your Cause? What is mine" (21). The story of Obasan facilitates this coming together in much the same way as Campbell's text facilitates a greater understanding of the Métis subject. But here I felt much more at home in the reading audience then I did with Campbell's text. The more sophisticated narrative and, more importantly, the narrative distance between author and story that the genre provides enabled me to be drawn into the story in a much more comfortable way then did Campbell's text.

Unlike Campbell's text, I am not reading the story of a real woman's life. This is a fictional autobiography, a story that combines many true experiences to create a greater understanding of a true event. The result is what Russell Rose describes as the "rhetoric of fiction" in which Kogawa "attempts to enact

historical experience, to bring the internment to life through imagined characters and invented story" (Russell Rose "Rhetoric" 218). The fictionalized life of Naomi Nakane is based on the internment experiences of Joy Kogawa and of Muriel Kitigawa and offers more than an alternative historical perspective. The fictional quality of Kogawa's text allowed me as a reader to move more easily beyond my own feelings of guilt and responsibility to a productive position of solidarity than did Campbell's raw and powerful narrative. As Kogawa points out, there is less sermon and more story and, as a result, we are more easily drawn together. I did not doubt my inclusion in Kogawa's audience in the same way that I did with Campbell's text. Kogawa starts from the premise of a shared humanity, an understanding that Campbell works hard to achieve for herself and other Métis people. With this shared humanity in mind, she does not bombard the reader with the stark facts of her internment (although they are certainly there -- in all their horror), but slowly and poetically leads the reader through the internment experience, culminating in the horror of the nuclear attack on Nagasaki. Her telling combines the stark realism and frank truth of Campbell's text with the emotional impact of a well-written story. It is a much more rhetorically seductive telling.

Obasan follows the consciousness of Naomi Nakane as she copes with the death of her Uncle, painfully remembers and tries to come to terms with the loss of her mother, and reluctantly recalls her experience of internment. The narrative itself is non-linear and achronological, and the discursive movement back and forth in time, as well as in and out of waking reality and unconscious dreams, blurs the boundaries between the past and the present, personal memory and collective history. The memories emerge associatively as Kogawa leads the reader through three days of narrative time. She explores the emotional impact of a silent history on the relationship between a mother and a daughter separated by war (Russell Rose "Rhetoric" 220).

Risking History

The past and the present begin their 'courtly dance' towards each other when Naomi returns to Granton, Alberta to care for her aging Aunt (Obasan) Ayako and to attend to the funeral arrangements of her Uncle Isamu. Memories of past injustice, physical hardship, and the loss of her mother are jettisoned into the present when Naomi is presented with an extensive collection of

documents, letters, newspaper clippings, photographs, and diary entries about the internment and dispersal experience. Sent by her "crusading" Aunt Emily in an effort to galvanise Naomi around the issues of redress for the victims of internment, Naomi's conscious and subconscious response to the package of documents structures the narrative of the novel. Yet this is an involuntary reckoning and the memories that the documents provoke become what Dorrit Cohn describes as a "pre-condition for recreating the past through narration" (Cohn, 146). Naomi, Ayako, and Isamu have survived the hardship of internment by enveloping themselves in a veil of silence surrounding their experiences during this painful period. Emily's repeated insistence that she unearth these painful memories despite the comfort and protection they have afforded her makes Naomi a reluctant historian and narrator. (Russell Rose "Rhetoric" 220)

Unlike her niece, Emily's life has been consumed with the need to speak out about the Nisei experience. Her campaign for redress from the Federal Government evolves from this need and she prefaces her collection of research with the biblical injunction to "Write the vision and make it plain. Habakkuk 2:2" (31). Naomi recognizes the quotation as a plea to "carry on the fight" for redress and greets it with dubiety,

> Write the vision and make it plain? For her the vision is the truth as she lives it. When she is called like Habakkuk to the witness stand, her testimony is to the light that shines in the lives of the Nisei, in their desperation to prove themselves Canadian, in their tough and gentle spirit. The truth for me is more murky, shadowy, and grey. But on my lap, her papers are wind and fuel, nudging my early morning thoughts to flame (32).

For Naomi, the notion of "writing the vision" and "making it plain" emerge as two monumentally distinct tasks , each with their own set of political and emotional risks.

To "write the vision" of the Nisei experience would entail the breaking of a carefully constructed protective edifice of silence that surrounds the internment and dispersal experience in the name of an elusive social justice. Conscious of her own reluctance to remember the experiences of internment, the idea of unearthing the memories of this painful period emerges as a task fraught with psychological danger and with no promise of absolution. Emily's

very definitive approach to a history/past that, in Naomi's memory, is "more murky, shadowy and grey" (32) belies her discomfort with memory and its ability to communicate the "truth" about the Nisei experience. For Emily "the possibilities of truth are intimately tied to memory, that mental activity which might produce alternative truths and histories that have been glossed over by the dominant discourse. Just as it focuses on the idea of truth as a possibility, the text addresses the possibilities of memory to be truth" (Palumbo-Liu "Politics" 215). The injunction to "make it plain" provokes Naomi to examine the ability of memory, mediated by a will to forget, to achieve the "truth" that redress and social justice demand[1]. Naomi's discomfort stems from what Russell Rose describes as an implication "that if there can be no confirmation of subjective visions of truth, there can be no faith in historical versions of truth" ("Intertext" 291). Here Kogawa complicates the debate about the accuracy of modern historiography that Campbell has begun, by illustrating what Palumbo-Liu describes as a 'double dilemma' for the ethnic narrator. This dilemma stems from the need to destabilize the dominant history; to carve out an area for revision while consciously laying claim to a firmer epistemology than that claimed by the dominant history ("Politics" 211). The question that Palumbo-Liu poses is the same question that Naomi struggles with, namely, " how can one deconstruct the dominant history on the basis of its ideologically suspect nature, and not admit that one's revision is also over-determined?" ("Politics" 211) The mutability of her own memory, coupled with her own distrust of any notion of historical 'truth' leads Naomi to a deep resistance to anything historical. She argues with Emily, "Life is so short, ... , the past is so long. Shouldn't we turn the page and move on?" (42) only to be sharply rebuked by Emily that "the past is the future" (42).

Wary of Emily's fervent demands to speak out about her internment experiences as a method of expiating old and deep psychological wounds, Naomi views these demands to be a wanton disregard for the values of silence. For both herself and her family (with the exception of Aunt Emily) the horrors of the internment and dispersal years have been shrouded in a protective veil of silence that has operated as a coping strategy of grief, loss, and injustice. To break the silence that surrounds the internment experience under the auspices of attempting to get a measure of justice for the Nisei represents, for Naomi, a

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[1] I do not wish to imply here that social justice and redress are synonymous.

lack of understanding of these multiple values of silence, both inside and outside the Nisei community. At the same time, however, Naomi recognizes that at the centre of this paradigm of silence lies the "living word" (proem) -- the utterance that will end the impenetrable and unendurable silence that has surrounded her mother's disappearance and tell of her mother's fate.

Separated from her mother and her father during the war Naomi is thrust into the care of her Aunt Ayako and Uncle Isamu and the entire family is interned in various shanty towns throughout the interior of British Columbia before being rooted in Granton, Alberta as labourers on a beet farm. Her mother is caught in Japan visiting ailing relatives when the war breaks out and is barred from reentering Canada because of her Japanese heritage. They are never re-united, and despite Naomi's repeated inquiries to Ayako and Isamu, their separation remains a pervasive mystery in Naomi's life. In seeking the truth about her mother's fate, Naomi must reconcile the multiple values of silence within her family and the Nisei community, with a recognition of her own deep desire to break this silence and understand what happened to her mother. Recognizing that the only way to break this silence is through the act of remembering, Naomi must also reconcile her yearning to learn the truth about her mother's fate with a deep distrust in the ability of memory to produce a coherent truth about the past. The reluctant exploration of her own memories, dreams, and emotions surrounding the disappearance of her mother and the internment experience in the following pages of the novel, engage the reader in these very difficult negotiations of silence and telling, truth and memory. These negotiations become an integral part of the healing process and ultimately move Naomi towards a greater understanding of the central, unanswered question in her life - "Why did my mother not return?" (26).

Weaving the stories of the Nisei around the many official documents and newspaper accounts, Emily's collection of research is permeated with her attempts to revise the history of internment by grounding this history in the stories of the Nisei themselves. Just as Campbell begins her own story with the Métis version of events at the Battle of Duck Lake and the Battle at Batoche, Emily focuses her attention on the internees' experiences and responses to the internment orders. Her collection of government documents includes the Orders-In-Council that deprived the Nisei of their property rights, announced the seizure of their assets, revoked their citizenship, and, for many, ordered their deportation. Naomi comments on the extent to which they are riddled with

Emily's language of protest, "Wherever the words "Japanese Race" appeared, Aunt Emily had crossed them out and written "Canadian Citizen" (33). Interspersed with diary entries and personal letters, Emily's collection fuses the personal and the political into a compelling demand for justice. Blurring the boundaries between personal memory and collective history, Emily's highly personal protest serves to displace the understanding of history as linear and chronological and emerging from 'official' sources. Just as Campbell wants to tell her reader "what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country" (2), Emily's prolific and fervent writing reflects her great desire to "make knowable the treacherous yellow peril that exists in the minds of the racially prejudiced" (40). The correlation between the language of representation and the experience of persecution has provoked both Campbell and Emily to fight back with words. The reclamation of the derogatory name Half-Breed in the title of Campbell's text exemplifies this protest. During the war the rhetoric of the white majority in British Columbia focussed on the construction of racist stereotypes of the Japanese-Canadian subject in an effort to gain support for their internment. Emily connects this rhetoric with the "success" of the internment policy arguing, "No one escaped the naming, we were defined and identified by the way we were seen. A newspaper in B.C. headlined, 'They are a stench in the nostrils of the people of Canada'. We were therefore relegated to the cesspools" (118). Campbell makes a similar connection between the representation of Métis people and their position in society today. After watching a film about the Northwest Rebellion in which the Métis were depicted as savage and inept, Campbell comments, "... it made me realize why my people are so fucked up" (111).

For Naomi, however, this focus on representation as somehow responsible for the hatred expressed against the Nisei obscures the larger picture of the deteriorating human condition. Emily's attempt to ameliorate this condition are met with cynicism by Naomi,

> What is done, Aunt Emily, is done is it not? And no doubt it will happen again, over and over with different faces and names, variations on the same theme. 'Nothing but the lowest motives of greed, selfishness, and hatred have been brought forward to defend these disgraceful orders', the Globe and Mail noted. Greed, selfishness, and hatred remain as constant as the human condition do they not? Or are you thinking that through lobbying and

> legislation, speech-making and story-telling, we can extricate ourselves from our foolish ways? Is there evidence for optimism? (199)

Emily's protest assumes the presence of an empathy and a humanity within the federal government and the white majority which Naomi argues does not exist, "Like Cupid, she aimed for the heart. But the heart was not there" (40). The constancy of human emotions like greed, selfishness, and hatred promote the inevitability of racial persecution and Emily's attempts to seek redress from a government and a people who have succumbed to these emotions becomes a futile attempt to restore a humanity beyond redemption. Reading some of the many form letters Emily received in response to her tireless inquiries, Naomi, herself, looks for the mark of human feeling in their content. As Palumbo Liu comments, "part of this attempt on Naomi's part is attached to the idea that to understand history one must seek the human being who is responsible for writing it. To inject the human dimension into the facts may bring out a corollary movement toward finding one's own humanity" ("Politics" 223). Bereft of emotional understanding, the formulaic responses from government departments in Emily's collection of documents do little to endear Naomi to a prolonged struggle with an indifferent bureaucracy for a justice she feels is beyond the reach of the federal government to bestow. This elusive quality of justice is illustrated ironically to Naomi by the sheer volume and weight of Emily's documents of protest. The inability of Emily's words to "become flesh" -- to materialize into an embodied truth that can heal the deep sores of racial persecution prompt Naomi to ask, "If Aunt Emily with her billions of letters and articles and speeches, her tears and her rage, her friends and her committees -- if all that couldn't bring contentment, what is the point?" (42). Emily's words become 'pock marks on the earth' (proem) and an exercise in futility. For Naomi, the deep wounds of racial persecution fester much deeper than any governmental edict could assuaged an exercise in futility.

> Restrictions against us are removed April Fools Day, 1949. But the old sores remain. In time the wounds will close and the scabs drop off the healing skin. Till then, I can read these newspaper clippings, I can tell myself the facts since Aunt Emily insists that I must and release the flood gates one by one. (198).

Questioning whether this flood of memory will hasten the healing process, she

rails against Emily's imperatives to remember. While Emily embarks on her protest with the conviction of an unjustly treated citizen of Canada, Naomi regards her crusading as an unwelcome violation of a tenuous peace,

> She's the one with the vision. She believes in the Nisei, seeing them as networks and streamers of light dotting the country. For my part, I can only see a dark field with Aunt Emily beaming her flashlight to where the rest of us crouch and hide, our eyes downcast as we seek the safety of invisibility (32).

The will to forget emerges as a source of relief from the painful memories that have embedded themselves in the Nakane family consciousness. During the period of internment and dispersal, the message communicated to the Japanese Canadian community by the white majority was to disappear, and visibility became dangerous. The dispersal orders were aimed at dismantling whole families - whole communities - first under the spurious rationale of the widespread presence of "enemies of the state" among the Japanese - Canadian community and then, years later when the war was over, as a method of "protecting" the Nisei from the hostile white majority in British Columbia. Silence and invisibility became an ironic tool of self-preservation as "the message to disappear worked its way deep into the Nisei heart and into the bone marrow" (184). Citing the deeply negotiated peace that arises from their silence, Naomi also refutes Emily's imperative to tell all as an unfruitful, and thus an unnecessary, reliving of their traumatic past,

> Some memories, too, might better be forgotten. Didn't Obasan once say, "It is better to forget"? What purpose is served by hauling forth the jar of inedible food? If it is not seen it does not horrify. What is past recall is past pain. Questions from all these papers, questions referring to turbulence in the past, are an unnecessary upheaval in the delicate ecology of this numb day. (45)

Yet, for Naomi, the act of remembering is complicated by more than an unwilling mind. When Naomi attempts to remember her childhood home before the internment orders were handed down, her memory is dammed by the body, and she tells her aunt that "the body will not tell" (196). Echoing Foucault's observation that "the body manifests the stigmata of past experiences..." (148), Naomi's history has marked her body to the extent that it has prefigured a relationship to the past that is characterized by physical and emotional pain. As Foucault comments, "the body is molded by a great many distinct regimes; it is

broken down by the rhythms of work, rest, play, and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values through eating habits or moral laws; it constructs resistances" (153). Thus, when faced with the act of remembering, it is the body, as much as the mind, that resists the telling. Locating a relationship between the past and the present in the physical body is very real for Emily as well. She importunes Naomi to remember, citing the importance of this remembrance to her future survival. An act of expiation and reconciliation with the past, Emily urges Naomi, " 'You have to remember,' [...] 'You are your history. If you cut any of it off you're an amputee. Don't deny the past. Remember everything. If you're bitter, be bitter. Cry it out! Scream! Denial is gangrene'" (49). The consequences of unspoken grief on the body take the shape of a festering infection that consumes all of those who dare not remember.

Remembering History

For Emily, the embodiment of history, of one's relationship to the past, is activated through the memory process and remembering becomes a necessity of physical and psychological health. That the past remains a viable and real presence becomes the prerequisite for ensuring that the more hateful parts of history do not repeat themselves. Moreover, for Naomi the damming of memory, according to Aunt Emily, is an act of denial that becomes an insidious threat to Naomi's sense of place in the world, "Look at you, Nomi, shuffling back and forth between Cecil and Granton, unable either to go or to stay in the world with even a semblance of grace or ease" (49). Emily's connection between the act of remembering and a sense of place and comfort within the world demonstrates the importance of a clear and lucid understanding of history as intrinsically tied to a greater understanding of both oneself and the world around them. "We have to deal with all this while we remember it. If we don't we'll pass our anger down in our genes. Its the children who'll suffer,'" (36). A definitive understanding about the past, produced by mutually recognized 'facts' that are revealed in the memory process, becomes the foundation for any reconciliation for Emily. Campbell's own determination to 'set the record straight' belies a similar understanding of historical 'truth' as the foundation for true reconciliation. For Campbell, mutuality is an important factor in any cross-

cultural interaction, as it demands respect and honest dialogue. Her text attempts this mutuality through an honest reckoning with her own past and, as Campbell has indicated in her interview with Hartmut Lutz, this is the key to true reconciliation. She argues that non-native people need to start looking at the history of Canada more emotionally if this mutuality is to be achieved. She says, "They don't ever really think about it or feel. ... I believe in memory, and reaching back, and touching. They [non-natives] could do that and if they did that, then you would have a new voice emerging. People would start to understand each other maybe.' (Campbell in Lutz, 59). Naomi, however, doubts the ability of memory to reveal truth at all and asks the question, "what does it all matter in the end?" (183).

For Naomi the process of remembering is not tied to the recovery of the 'facts' that will facilitate reconciliation. Unsure that memory can produce truth (let alone fact), the act of remembering becomes a painful excavation, a lancing of barely healed wounds. The pain of recall is activated when Naomi comes across a newspaper clipping among Emily's papers. Clipped together under the title "Facts about Evacuees in Alberta", the article describes the record crop of beets that was harvested, largely through the forced labour of Japanese Canadians evacuated from coastal British Columbia during the dispersal period. Over the caption "Grinning and Happy" stands a photograph of a smiling family standing around a pile of beets. Naomi's reaction to the photograph is a flood of painful memories of the hardship she experienced during her time on the beet farm as a child, " The fact is that I never got used to it and I cannot, I cannot bear the memory. There are some nightmares from which there is no waking, only deeper and deeper sleep" (194). Tormented by these memories, Naomi equates their remembrance with the painful removal of a malignant growth and decries her Aunt's insistence that she remember despite the pain,

> Aunt Emily are you a surgeon cutting at my scalp with your folders and your filing cards and your insistence on knowing all? The memory drains down the side of my face, but it isn't enough is it? Its your hands in my abdomen, pulling the growth from the lining of my walls, but bring back the anesthetist turn on the ether clamp down the gas mask bring on the chloroform when will this operation be over Aunt Em?" (194).

Once the "floodgates" are released, memories flow like blood; a life force

draining away. The act of remembering as a method of revealing truth is a regarded with skepticism by Naomi who is very aware that memory is mediated by both a will to forget and an unwilling body. This 'truth' is complicated further by a cultural idiom of silence when it comes to sharing one's pain.

The act of speaking about one's pain becomes problematic for many Nisei, including Ayako and Naomi's mother, as silence is regarded as an important element of personal integrity. Naomi learns at a very young age that silence, and the restrained emotion that is associated with it, is not only an effective strategy of protection, but is an example of respect and consideration for others. To share one's pain is to unnecessarily burden others with it. For Ayako, silence does more than protect her from painful memories, it is an example of a "yasashi kokoro" - a kind and thoughtful heart. As a young child, Naomi learns from Ayako that "We must always honour the wishes of others before our own. We will make the way smooth by restraining emotion. ... To try to meet one's own needs in spite of the wishes of others is to be "wagamama" - selfish and inconsiderate" (128). With this ethos in mind, silence for Ayako, Isamu, and (we learn later in the novel) their mother, has been a strategy to protect Naomi and Steven from the horror of their mother's fate. It has become the foundation on which their relationship as step-parent and child has been built. Yet Naomi is also a product of her western environment and the perennial absence of her mother provokes an unending demand to know what happened to her mother. Her repeated questions to Ayako, Isamu, and Emily about the fate of her mother are met with a "silence that cannot speak ... that will not speak" (proem). When Naomi comes across the 'slippery blue pages' that detail her mother's fate in Emily's papers, she presses Ayako to translate the letter for her, but Ayako resists the telling, "the greater my urgency to know, the thicker her silences have always been. No prodding will elicit clues" (45). Instead of translating the letter for Naomi, Ayako shuffles from the room only to return with a familiar photograph of Naomi as a child, clinging to the leg of her young mother. Placing the photo in Naomi's hands, she urges, "Here is the best letter. This is the best time. These are the best memories" (46). When Naomi turns the photo over to look for an explanatory date or phrase, there is none. Ayako's reference to the photograph in response to Naomi's request for a literal translation signals her own unease with the "burst of telling" that Emily demands of the Nisei. Yet, her reference to the "best times" and the "best memories" reflects her desire to remind Naomi that the Nisei are more than survivors of

racial persecution. Unlike her sister, Ayako has not allowed her life to become consumed with the painful experiences of internment. Her determination to remember only the "best times" speaks to a desire to move beyond the identity of victim and illustrates the extent to which she has found comfort in her perennial silence.

As Naomi has suggested, and Ayako implied, remembrance followed by a public telling runs the risk of re-victimization - of reestablishing the connection between the image of the victim and the individual identities of the Nisei by obscuring the aspects of Nisei identities that have not been forged in the context of racial persecution (hooks 59). As Russell Rose comments,

> it is clear that the 'freeing word' in Obasan is historical speech; that which creates a past in and through the present. Because her own experience is representative of a communal, racially shared past, Naomi's words about it, when she is freed into speech will be Bardic in the sense of giving voice to the experience of an entire people ("Politics" 219).

This is precisely what Naomi does not want. The fear that the politicization of the victim position within the campaign for redress could inextricably fuse the identities of the Nisei with the identity of the victim is very real for Naomi and Ayako. The creation of what bel hooks describes as "a chronicle of pain"[2] (hooks, 59) becomes a growing concern and Naomi begins to realize that if she is to achieve some closure surrounding her mother's fate, she must reconcile this risk of re-victimization with Emily's imperative to tell all.

Yet while Naomi respects Ayako's desire to resist both the memories and the telling of this painful time, she recognizes that silence is often a negative indicator of psychological health. Amidst one of Emily's diatribes about the injustices suffered by the Nisei, Naomi articulates both her discomfort with Emily's relentless crusade to break the silence, and the nagging thought that silence is merely a facade for deeper psychological pain,

> People who talk a lot about their victimization make me uncomfortable. It's as if they use their suffering as weapons or badges of some kind. From my years of teaching I know it's the children who say nothing who are in trouble more than the ones who complain. (34)

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[2] See hooks' definition of "chronicle of pain" in "Narratives of Struggle".

Again, Naomi speaks to her aunt's lack of understanding of how silence operates within their family. Emily's view of silence as something to be eradicated in the name of political and psychological health does not take into account that silence is often an indicator of deeply withheld emotion as a result of physical, psychological, and political trauma. Her discomfort with Emily's campaign to tell the story of the Nisei, however, is coupled with the weight of this unexpressed passion. Feeling the burden of this withholding, Naomi yearns for the "freeing word",

> ...I am tired, I suppose, because I want to get away from all this, From the past and all these papers, from the present, from the memories from the deaths from Aunt Emily and her heap of words. I want to break free from the heavy identity, the evidence of rejection, the unexpressed passion, the misunderstood politeness. I am tired of living between deaths and funerals, weighted with decorum, unable to shout or sing or dance, unable to scream or swear, unable to laugh, unable to breath out loud. (183)

As she has grown older the comfort of silence has diminished and the questions of the past have remained ever - present. Frustrated by the inescapable quality of the past, Naomi recognizes that, despite their deep desire to forget their past, both Ayako and herself are plagued by their memories,

> But we're trapped, Obasan and I , by our memories of the dead- all our dead - those who refuse to bury themselves. Like threads of old spider webs, still sticky and hovering, the past waits for us to submit, or depart. When I least expect it, a memory comes skittering out of the dark, spinning and netting the air, ready to snap me up and ensnare me in old and complex puzzles. Just a glimpse of a worn-out patchwork quilt and the old question comes thudding out of the night again like a giant moth. (26).

The past becomes a "sticky" trap that cannot be ignored and to deny it is to be "consumed" by it and "devoured alive"; it is to be suspended in time and space like a fly in a spider's web (Grewal 151). Campbell experienced the same frustrated relationship with her past and, like Naomi, recognized that "if I am to know peace I would have to search within myself" (2). There is a recognition on behalf of Campbell, Kogawa, and her narrator, Naomi, that the healing process has been stalled as a result of silence. The lack of telling has meant a lack of closure and healing. But does this act of remembrance demand the violation of

this protective silence? Or does it demand that Naomi attend these silences - both her own and that of her family - in order to reach the "freeing word" that will tell her the truth about her mother's fate and move the healing process forward. Caught between the silence of Ayako and the speech of Emily, Naomi begins to probe the silence of Ayako and Isamu for the 'freeing word' that Emily promotes. In order to do this, however, she must come to terms with her own relationship to silence and her own reluctance to remember.

Silence and Telling

Throughout the novel, the act of remembering is characterized by Naomi as a "flood", a "burst of telling", whose repercussions can spiral out of her control. Her apprehension to (re)collect her memories into a coherent "herstory" suggests a certain fear of relinquishing power over her own story. Once the telling is complete and the knowing is public, there is no possibility of retraction and " no place to hide". (60) That memory cannot be bounded, that it comes as an uncontrollable flood that leads to a widespread 'knowing' lends a daunting attribute to the act of remembering that Naomi must come to terms with. This fear of a widespread "knowing" that has orchestrated her silence begins before the internment and dispersal orders are decreed, in the silenced world of a violated childhood.

This part of the narrative emerges associatively as Naomi recalls her life in Vancouver before her mother disappears and the internment policies are implemented. It is a vision of a safe and happy time, characterized by the reassuring presence of her young mother. Her recollection moves seamlessly from this evocative sense of security to the violation she suffers at the hands of an elderly neighbour. As a young child, Naomi is sexually abused by Old Man Gower and instilled with the imperative to keep a vigilant silence about her abuse, "Every time he carries me away, he tells me I must not tell my mother. He asks me questions as he holds me but I do not answer" (61). Silence for the four-year-old Naomi becomes a strategy of safety, "I do not respond. If I am still, I will be safe" (62). Yet the adult Naomi, remembering the abuse, recognizes the disjunction between safety and silence and asks herself, "Is this where the terror begins?" (62). Shame prevents the young Naomi from calling out to her brother for help when Gower is abusing her and speech and telling become associated with an uncontrollable "knowing" and an inexorable shame, "I am ashamed. If

Stephen comes he will see my shame. He will know what I feel and the knowing will flood the landscape. There will be nowhere to hide" (64). The abuse at the hands of Old Man Gower becomes the only silence between Naomi and her mother and marks the beginning of their separation in her young mind. The photograph of herself clinging to the leg of her mother, handed to her by Obasan as an example of familial peace and happiness, is irrevocably altered by the memory of this abuse,

> I am clinging to my mother's leg, a flesh shaft that grows from the ground, a tree trunk of which I am an offshoot - a young branch attached by right of blood. ... But here in Mr. Gower's hands I become other - a parasite on her body, no longer of her mind. ... If I tell my mother about Mr. Gower, the alarm will send a tremor through our bodies and I will be torn from her. But the secret has already separated us. (64)

Naomi's memories of her mother and her childhood self are characterized by a purity and perfection that is compromised by her own violation. Shortly after the abuse begins, Naomi's mother "disappears" and her shame becomes directed not at the violation itself, but at her false desire to seek this violation, "The secret is this: I go to seek Old Man Gower in his hideaway. I clamber unbidden onto his lap. His hands are frightening and pleasurable. In the centre of my body is a rift" (65). Like many victims of abuse, the young Naomi imbues these desires with guilt and a sense of responsibility for what Gower does to her.

For the young Naomi, the 'secret' culminates in her mother's absence and the rift that she feels in her body as a result of the abuse grows to a chasm that separates her from her mother, " In my childhood dreams, the mountain yawns apart as the chasm spreads. My mother is on one side of the rift. I am on the other. We cannot reach each other. My legs are being sawn in half" (65). It is in the memory of this incident that the adult Naomi begins to reassess her strained relationship to the past. The tactic of silence does not protect her from Gower's repeated attacks and the incidents recur, "over and over again, not just Old Man Gower - but years later there is Percy in Slocan, pressing me against the cave wall during hide-and-seek, warning me against crying out" (61). Even the young Naomi is conscious of the inability of silence to protect her from Gower's attack, " To be whole and safe I must hide in the foliage, odourless as a newborn fawn. But already the lie grows like a horn, an unfurled fiddlehead fist, through the soft fontanelle of my four-year-old mind" (63). The perception of

silence to protect and heal diminishes with Naomi's remembrance of Gower's abuse and her own impotent power to stop it.

The feelings of helplessness and terror that characterize these incidents of abuse rocket into the present for Naomi in the form of vivid, recurring dreams that encompass terror, flight, and pursuit. Naomi dreams of three beautiful oriental women lying naked on a muddy road surrounded by soldiers. "The only way to be saved from harm was to be seductive" (61). One of the women makes a "simpering coy gesture" and the soldiers respond with rifle shots aimed at their toes and feet. The woman who makes the gesture is brutally wounded and the feelings of helplessness and terror spread through them, " It was too late. There was no hope. The soldiers could not be won. Dread and a deathly loathing cut through the women" (62). The powerful image of violation and brutality juxtaposed with an impotent sexual power communicates the dynamic of sexual abuse, occurring at a time in her life that is also pervaded by racial persecution. Like the women in her dream, Naomi is sexually violated and betrayed, albeit not as brutally as the women in her dream. Her family is similarly victimized by what Russell Rose describes as 'political rape" ("Rhetoric" 222) when they are targeted, along with other families of Japanese descent, with a prolonged and brutal internment that culminates in their complete removal from the province that they called home. Russell Rose comments that Kogawa treats the internment experience as political rape- with the corresponding feelings of shame and guilt, "the central metaphor of the novel is the concept of rape- that crime which the victim inevitably feels shame and suspects her own complicity that she indeed 'invited' the attack" ("Rhetoric" 222). The feelings of helplessness mixed with desire and terror that characterize her experiences during this time correspond with the women's feelings of "abject longing, wretchedness, fear and utter helplessness" (62). These traumatic emotions hover quietly below the surface of Naomi's psyche, blocked by the mind and the body, and emerging in these chaotic and terrifying dreams. The remembrances of abuse at the hands of Gower in concert with the emergence of these sublimated, traumatic emotions prompts Naomi to reevaluate the role she played in her mother's disappearance.

Illuminating the false connection between Gower's abuse and the absence of her mother that she had formulated as a young child and, consciously or not, carried into her adult life, Naomi becomes aware of the mutability of both memory and the past. Arguing the tenuous connection

between memory and truth, Naomi questions the possibility of memory to be truth, "All our ordinary stories are changed in time, altered as much by the past as the present is shaped by the past" (25). Indicative of the dialectical tension between past and present, memory and truth, that exist throughout the novel, Naomi remarks on the mercurial nature of her own remembrances, describing them as "barely real", "drowned in a whirlpool of protective silence" (21), "fragments of fragments... Segments of stories" (53), "dream images" (112). Acutely aware that her own ability to remember is mediated by a will to forget and that many of the more traumatic events of her past elude conscious remembrance because of their traumatic nature Naomi questions whether or not the discontinuity of memory can convey a coherent account of the experience of internment that would stand up to the scrutiny that a "mutual recognition of the facts" would demand. The rape metaphor is particularly apt in this instance as Naomi's distrust of her own memories, as a result of her trauma, not only protects the perpetrators of this violence but inhibits her own healing process.

While Naomi may be uncomfortable with Emily's use of memory to revise the history of internment because of its mutable nature, it is in this mercurial state of memory and dream that Naomi finds a connection to her absent mother and to her past. Her mother's absence is a persistent, and obscure presence that haunts her conscious and unconscious life, developing into a 'stillness' that envelopes her young mind,

> After a while, the stillness is so much with me that it takes the form of a shadow which grows and surrounds me like air. Time solidifies, ossifies the waiting into molecules of stone, dark microscopic planets that swirl through the universe of my body waiting for light and the morning (66).

Her deep desire to understand her mother's silence is reflected in dreams that are haunted by her mother's nebulous presence. As a young child, living in an internment camp in the interior of British Columbia and separated from her mother, Naomi feels the presence of her absent mother in the space between sleep and wakefulness,

> She is here. She is not here. She is reaching out to me with a touch deceptive as down, with hands and fingers that wave like grass around my feet, and her hair falls and falls and falls from her head like streamers of paper rain. She is the maypole woman to

> whose apron-string streamers I cling and around whose skirts I dance. She is a ship leaving the harbour, tied to me by coloured paper streamers that break and fall into a swirling wake. The wake is a thin black pencil-line that deepens and widens and fills with a greyness that reaches out with tentacles to embrace me. I leap and awake. (167)

The obscure presence and non-presence of her mother coupled with a thwarted effort to touch and embrace is juxtaposed with an ever extending connection between herself and her mother. They move farther and farther apart, both in physical space as the ship carries her mother away, and in time and emotional distance as her absence grows from days, into weeks, and eventually, into years. Yet they remain connected, the colourful paper streamers that marked their original separation [3] becomes symbolic of the unbreakable bond between mother and daughter that neither time nor distance can sever.

This elusive but ubiquitous connection to her mother emerges in yet another dream that is haunted by her mother's ambiguous presence and marked by a frustrated communication between herself and her mother. In it, a flower ceremony is taking place and her mother holds a deep heart-red rose in her mouth, its stem is now knotted "like the twine and string of Obasan's ball in the pantry" (227). Slowly she draws the flower closer and closer, knot by knot, towards her mouth. The movement of the heart and love, represented by the rose, towards her mother's mouth illustrates the connection that Naomi has made, consciously or not, between the act of telling and her mother's love. All of her family is present at the ceremony, as well as the ubiquitous presence of soldiers, "Always I dream of soldiers, eager for murder, their weapons ready. We die again and again. In my dreams we are never safe enough" (227). The dream shifts into a nightmare when a dark and formless cloud descends and takes the shape of the Grand Inquisitor, prying open her mother's mouth and her own eyes (228). Startled awake by the violence of the dream Naomi meditates on the figure of her mother dancing the flower ceremony and the descent of the Grand Inquisitor, "The dance ceremony of the dead was a slow courtly telling, the heart declaring a long thread knotted to Obasan's twine, knotted to Aunt Emily's package. Why I wonder as she danced her love should I find myself unable to breathe?" (228). The Grand Inquisitor disrupts this dance

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[3] When Naomi's mother is leaving on the ship, each held one end of a long paper streamer until the ship carried her mother out of sight.

of love with questions and demands to know. Unlike Emily, the "crusader", a "grey haired Mighty Mouse", and the "Bachelor of Advanced Activists and General Practitioner of Just Causes", with her many questions and her demands to know justified by a lifetime of listening, campaigning, and protesting, Naomi relates her own questions and demands to know to the accusations of the Grand Inquisitor. The Grand Inquisitor's demand to know is both a "judgment and a refusal to hear" (228) and his questions only serve to deepen her mother's silence,

> How the Grand Inquisitor gnaws at my bones. At the age of questioning my mother disappeared. Why, have I asked ever since, did she not write? Why, I ask now, must I know? Did I doubt her love? Am I her accuser? ... Her tale is a rose with a tangled stem. All this questioning, this clawing at her grave, is an unseemly thing. Let the inquisition rest tonight. In the week of Uncle's departure, let there be peace" (229).

It is here that Naomi comes to the realization that, like Emily, her own demands to know are borne of a disrespect for the values of silence. She, like the Grand Inquisitor, must learn that "the avenues to speech are the avenues of silence" (228) and she must not allow her unanswered questions to drown out her mother's speech. Her perennial questioning becomes a judgement of her mother's abandonment and a refusal to attend her mother's presence in her silence. To assume that silence grew out of abandonment was to doubt her mother's love and to tangle the bond between them. The image of a thwarted and tangled connection between Naomi and her mother is depicted in the knotted stem of the rose, the streamers of the Maypole, and the streamer Naomi held in her hand, connecting herself to her mother as she left Canada on a ship bound for Japan. Yet, at the same time, her own unwillingness to remember the painful details of her mother's separation has inhibited her own understanding of these events, of this history.

Naomi's 'unseemly' questioning reminds us of Foucault's description of the historical 'will to knowledge' whose injustice is felt by those who seek comfort in their ignorance (162). According to Foucault, the historical consciousness that emerges from this will to knowledge does so at the price of social justice, for " all knowledge rests upon injustice (there is no right, not even in the act of knowing, to truth or a foundation for truth) and that the instinct for knowledge is malicious" (Foucault 162). Kogawa connects Naomi's will to know

her mother's fate to Emily's will to know (and have known) the Nisei experience of internment. She deftly dramatizes Palumbo-Liu's assertion that any deconstruction of the dominant history on the basis of its ideologically suspect nature must also demand an analysis of the motivations for this new revision. Moreover, she illustrates an understanding that any revision may be over-determined by the injustice of this "will to knowledge". Campbell, at the end of her text, offers a similar observation when she muses on the potential of any future Métis movements. She comments, "I realize that an armed revolution of Métis people will never come about; even if such a thing were possible what would we achieve? We would only end up oppressing someone else" (184). Thus the character of Naomi as a reluctant historian, constructed by Kogawa, reveals a cautious approach to the project of speaking about the internment experience and an even more cautious approach to the project of revising history generally.

Naomi's mother's fate is eventually revealed in the collection of documents that Emily leaves for her. The "slippery blue pages" that Ayako had previously avoided translating for her are, in fact, a letter from Grandma Kato, her maternal grandmother, and are eventually translated by the family Reverend in the company of Ayako, Emily, Naomi and her brother Stephen. Grandma Kato writes from Nagasaki after the nuclear attack by Allied Forces and, in an outpouring of grief, she describes the horrors of their survival. It is a chaotic telling that provides a human face to the atomic atrocity. This very personal telling serves to expand the dominant American/Canadian (mis)understanding of what happened at Nagasaki.

> She and my mother, she writes, were unable to talk of all the things that happened. The horror would surely die sooner, they felt, if they refused to speak. But the silence and the constancy of the nightmare had become unbearable for Grandma and she hoped that by sharing them with her husband, she could be helped to extricate herself from the grip of the past.
>
> "If these matters are sent away in this letter, perhaps they will depart a little from our souls, " she writes. "For the burden of these words, forgive me."
>
> Mother, for her part continued her vigil of silence. She spoke with no one about her torment. She specifically requested that Stephen and I be spared the truth. (236)

The sudden knowledge of her mother's horrific fate, coupled with her request for a vigilant silence in the face of these horrors, moves Naomi to a greater

understanding of her mother's indistinct presence throughout her life. Through her silence she had attempted not to abandon Naomi and Stephen but to protect them from the unending horror that the truth would provide. Naomi, respectful of her mother's intentions yet having suffered under the silence, reflects on the horror of her mother's fate with mild reproach. Just as she herself has underestimated the strength of her mother's love and presence in her life, so has her mother underestimated the strength of her own love and presence,

> Martyr Mother, you pilot your powerful voicelessness over the ocean and across the mountain, straight as a missile to our hut on the edge of the sugar-beet field. You wish to protect us with lies, but the camouflage does not hide your cries. Beneath the hiding I am there with you. Silent Mother, lost in the abandoning, you do not share the horror. At first, stumbling and unaware of pain, you open your eyes in the red mist and sheltering a dead child, you flee through the flames. Young Mother at Nagasaki, am I not also there? (242)

The idea that silence can protect is irrevocably destroyed. Like Naomi's own ineffective attempts to use silence as a method to protect herself from her painful past, her mother's strategy has been equally unsuccessful. In fact, it has done more harm than good and Naomi describes the silence as creating a "double wound" (243) that instead of ameliorating the pain of separation and racial persecution, has fostered and maintained it. Like her mother, she has been unable to speak and afraid to tell what has happened to her, "Gentle Mother, we were lost together in our silences. Our wordlessness was our mutual destruction" (243). Naomi's silence surrounding her abuse at the hands of Gower and then others later in her life and her mother's silence surrounding the horror of the holocaust have not protected them.

Conclusion

This final, long-awaited telling, painful as it is, becomes cathartic for Naomi as it marks the emergence of the "freeing word" (proem), the utterance that will allow the healing process to move forward. Recognizing that silence has stagnated her own healing, Naomi realizes the importance of embracing the painful memories of grief, injustice, and pain in order to move through the healing process. Yet, despite this movement towards healing it is clear that there can never be complete forgiveness. The telling that Emily so fervently

only go so far towards ameliorating the injustice, pain, and grief that Naomi feels and she does not, ultimately, take up her Aunt's injunction to carry on the fight for compensation for the victims of internment. Her memories produce a very personal and private knowing that avoids the politicization of the victim position that could arise from the very public campaign for redress. Still mistrustful of the human capacity for empathy and true human feeling, Naomi remains skeptical that the history of the internees can be told in any public way at all. And yet, this is one of the central ironies in the text, for the narrative itself has operated as a public telling and has been instrumental in achieving a measure of redress for the Internees[4].

Kogawa is able to provoke in the reader an empathetic engagement with the victims of the holocaust; both those who experienced the atomic blast and those who lost loved ones in it. In the end it is this ability to move the reader that marks the success of her text. Scott McFarlane has questioned the rhetorical impact of her novel, arguing that Obasan "has played and continues to play, a significant role in the way the internment experience is understood" (402). For McFarlane this understanding has meant the (mis)representation of Japanese Canadians as a " community repeatedly described as lacking any agency, as naive pawns in the Canadian government's 'yellow peril' game" (403). His comparison to the many well-researched and rhetorically persuasive non-fictional accounts of the interment negates the very personal and empathetic engagement that Kogawa's novel creates between reader and text. McFarlane disparages the rhetorical impact of this invocation of pathos as contributing to the conflation of the essential spirit of Japanese Canadians with the pathos of universal love (405). The reader, he argues, is made to feel sorry for Japanese - Canadians. If McFarlane's analysis is to be taken at face value then Naomi and Ayako's worst fears -- that the identities of Japanese - Canadians will become fused with the identity of victim have come true. I think there needs to be room here for Kogawa's poetic narrative of a young child's experience without the conflation of this portrayal with the "essential spirit of Japanese-Canadians" (McFarlane, 405).

While I agree that this is a compelling and powerful telling, my reading experience was that of an empathetic engagement with one person's experience, memory, and history. In her article, "Is there a Just Cause", Kogawa speaks to this need to engage the reader in an empathetic relationship that allows for the

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[4] Scott McFarlane writes, " Obasan played a significant role in the redress movement as evidenced by its being quoted by both Ed Broadbent and Gerry Weiner during the announcement of the settlement with the government" (402)

experience, memory, and history. In her article, "Is there a Just Cause", Kogawa speaks to this need to engage the reader in an empathetic relationship that allows for the identification of suffering, "I believe that it is the identification of and with suffering at every level, in every condition, that magnetizes the compass of justice and points us to home" (21). Similar to Campbell's argument for mutuality, respect, and recognition between natives and non-natives, Kogawa stresses the importance of mutual vulnerability to move beyond the difference debate to a point of constructive solidarity,

> ...I believe we need to remember the paradoxical power in mutual vulnerability. Where there is doubt, the authority of certainty is put aside, but the capacity to hear is heightened. ... if we cannot risk ever being weak, if we are unable to seek to understand an opposing position, we must admit our blindness to that other's reality. And a cause born in such blindness cannot be just. (Just Cause, 20)

The recognition of this 'mutual vulnerability' has encouraged me as a reader to revisit my own understanding of Canadian history and of Canada as a society today. That Kogawa gives voice to the reservations of some of the Nisei to publicly tell their stories is indicative of her own struggles inside and outside of the Nisei community for open dialogue. The success of this telling in achieving a measure of redress for the internees demonstrates the rhetorical success of fiction. Larissa Lai, in her novel, When Fox Is A Thousand, builds on this success as she imaginatively constructs a consciously artificial history where none exists in an effort to ground a new culture and a new identity for the Asian lesbian community.

Chapter 3
When Fox Is A Thousand: Larissa Lai and Mythic History.

The multi-voiced narrative that Larissa Lai constructs in her novel, When Fox is a Thousand, approaches issues of history and identity in a radically different way from both Campbell and Kogawa. These authors seek to reclaim and revise their respective histories, in an effort to understand the colonization of their individual and cultural identities. In doing so, they engage the reader in the act of decolonizing the Métis and Japanese-Canadian subject as they evoke a cross cultural interaction between reader and writer that challenges the reader to critically examine the consequences of the dominant culture's construction of history. Lai's strategy has been not to revise or reclaim a history but to "make a project of constructing a consciously artificial history for myself and others like me- a history with women-identified women[5] of Chinese descent living in the West at its centre" ("Political Animals" 149). It must be artificial, she argues, because their "history is so disparate and because it has been so historically rare for women to have control over the means of recording and dissemination" ("Political Animals" 149). The result is a history grounded in Chinese myth, borrowed from Chinese folk tale, and rife with fiction. The various settings of the novel, from ancient China to modern day Vancouver to modern day Hong Kong represent the diasporic sources of this 'history'. Where Campbell and Kogawa have struggled to unearth their own historical perspectives / experiences from the miasma of colonialist interpretations of Canada's past, Lai has discarded this past all together. Instead, she has created her own past -- not of a nation, but of a diverse and vibrant community that has no national borders. In an effort to ground a new culture and a new identity for Asian women-identified women to draw community and empowerment from Lai speaks to a desire for a history where none exists.

Imagining a History

Drawing on the myths and folk tales of the mythical Chinese Fox figure, and the life of a ninth century woman poet in China, Lai attempts to break free from the 'bind of binarism' that characterizes what she describes as the

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[5] Lai eschews the term 'lesbian' because of its eurocentric roots, and because it does not necessarily connote community or social interdependence" (Political Animals, 149). I have retained the use of the term 'women-identified women' because I think it more accurately describes the relationships that occurred between women in the time before homosexuality was considered an identity as opposed to a behaviour.

'racialized space' she inhabits. According to bel hooks "In a racially imperialist nation such as ours, it is the dominant race that reserves for itself the luxury of dismissing racial identity while the oppressed is made daily aware of their racial identity. It is the dominant race that can make it seem that their experience is representative" ("Ain't I" 138). While she endeavors to foster a new culture and a new identity for Asian women-identified women outside of this racialized position that Canadian society has assigned all people of colour, she is conscious of the fact that to ignore this racialization is to collude in its perpetuation. It is here that race and sexuality intersect, as the treatment of lesbian women and homosexual men is strikingly similar to the treatment of people of colour in Canadian society. Sexuality becomes fused with identity and only heterosexuals are given the luxury of divorcing their sexuality from their identity. In Fox, Lai attempts to create a space where this racialization and 'sexualization' does not exist. While she is successful at times, she demonstrates that racism and homophobia are not easy to escape, even in the fictionalized world of Artemis, the Fox, and the Poetess. My own reading experience reflects this racialization and sexualization because, despite Lai's attempts to divorce race and sexuality from identity issues, I found myself trying to determine the gender of the Fox and waiting for Artemis to 'come out'. That Lai did not meet these reading 'expectations' provoked me to question these expectations and the way they have been informed by history and by popular culture. Her text, for me, provoked a different kind of re-visioning -- one that is premised on the imagination and conjures up new images of female sexuality and gender identity outside of any discourse, historical or otherwise, that prescribes the expression of female desire. Bel hooks describes the imagination as a site of critical resistance in her definition of a 'critical fiction'. She argues, 'In oppressive settings the ability to construct images imaginatively of a reality not present to the senses or perceived may be the only means to hope" ("Narratives" 55). Lai builds on this argument that, "to imagine ... [is] to begin the process of transforming reality" (hooks "Narratives" 55) as she builds an imaginative/artificial/fictional history with women identified women at its centre. The Fox is a metaphor for the transformative power of the imagination for, on her one thousandth birthday; she achieves the power to transform into any woman that she can imagine.

In constructing this zany 'history' Lai, like Campbell and Kogawa, also problematizes the use of history and memory as tools in the search for

individual and cultural identity. She raises questions about historical truth and evidence that undermine the traditional production of history with its emphasis on testimony, eye-witness accounts, official documentation, and oral history. Instead, Lai blends fact and fiction in such a way as to leave me, as a reader, unable to delineate between the two. After reading the novel I read her source notes, themselves a blend of fiction and non-fiction. Upon reading the novel again I still found myself unable to distinguish between imaginative fiction and documented fact. It is just this confusion that Lai hopes to create, I think, as it demonstrates that all history is the product of numerous stories -- some are true, some feel like they should be true, and others don't even attempt truth. In the end, Lai demonstrates that the perception of truth, among other things, depends on the motivation of the teller and the interpretation of the listener.

The narrative of When Fox is a Thousand is composed of three voices: the mythical Fox figure, the Poetess, and an unnamed narrator speaking about contemporary twentieth - century life. Most of the Fox's anecdotes are borrowed from the Chinese writer Pu Songling and his collection of Strange Tales - an opus of folk tales from 1640-1715. Turning to the realm of the mysterious, the fantastic and the supernatural, Pu Songling used his tales to subversively comment on the indignities suffered by the common people as a result of an unwieldy feudal power, unequal gender roles, and the benightedness of the monarchy. Lai uses this subversive technique in a similar fashion, weaving the fantastic stories of the Fox throughout the novel in ways designed to illustrate and comment on the marginalized position of women's desire throughout history and, in fact, the production of history itself. The use of the supernatural and the fantastic are markers of Lai's imaginative resistance as she employs the figure of the Fox, and her many exploits, to envision a normative position for her ambiguous sexuality. She comments on the political potential of the Fox figure in her article, 'Political Animals and the Body of History", describing the Fox as a "creature of darkness, death, germination, and sexuality" (151). Ultimately, the Fox's power is one of seduction and this raises, for Lai , many politically compelling questions about women's sexual representation generally and lesbian representation in particular, both in contemporary society and in historical discourse (151). The character of the Fox that Lai creates is a mischievous and powerful female character driven by her need to possess women's bodies. Her animations of the bodies of young women, dead before their time, are often sensual and sexual experiences that place women's desire,

particularly women's desire for other women, into the centre of her narrative.

The character of the Poetess raises similar questions about the position of women's desire throughout history. Lai created the figure of the Poetess based on two non-fictional accounts of the life of the ninth century Poet and Courtesan, Yu Hsuan Chi: "One described her as a woman with many lovers, hence lascivious, hence immoral, hence capable of murder. The second suggested she might have been framed for the murder of a young maidservant by an official who did not like her strong ideas about the role of women in Chinese society" ("Political Animals" 150). Both offering radically different perspectives of Yu Hsuan Chi's character, Lai combines the two accounts to create the figure of the Poetess. In doing so she creates yet another, equally tenable, description of the Poet. Whether or not Yu Hsuan Chi was guilty of the crime for which she was executed remains a mystery and Lai uses this historical ambiguity to her advantage, raising questions about the role of fiction in the production of history.

Yu Hsuan Chi's life is rich with repressed and thwarted sexual desire and her story is a notable footnote in the history of patriarchy and heterosexism in ancient China. Kept largely illiterate and isolated from the company of men, the only freedom afforded to women was in the roles of courtesan, prostitute, or Taoist nun. Only these women could associate freely and were permitted literacy so that they might make better entertainment for men (Rexroth, Chung 145). Many of these women wrote poetry about love and loneliness but few were ever recorded or published for posterity. Yu Hsuan Chi was one of the few women poets who left behind any substantial poetical oeuvre. Lai's Poetess is an intelligent and independent woman who seeks the love of other women while maintaining her economic independence as a courtesan. Her character is a creative blend of fact and fiction -- a feat of Lai's imagination that is given the status of historical figure in her fictional 'history'.

The life of the Poetess is juxtaposed with the contemporary life of Artemis Wong. Born to Chinese immigrants and put up for adoption when she is six months old, Artemis is raised by white parents in urban Vancouver. Removed from the Chinese culture at a young age, Artemis regards her ethnic heritage with ambiguity: she appears to have no interest in her birth parents, she declines a trip to China with her adoptive parents and she avoids the few mementos left to her by her birth mother. Even her name, of Greek origin, does not seem ground her in any ethnic community, but to cement her rootlessness in

Canadian culture. Her story, told by the unnamed, contemporary narrator is a litany of failed relationships with both men and women as she struggles to come to terms with her own sexual and cultural identity. Her character exemplifies the feelings of rootlessness and disconnection experienced by some children of immigrant parents in Canada. Their experiences in the Canadian culture are not reflected in the history of their parents or in the history of Canada. Her story operates outside of the traditional Canadian historical experience of the pioneer and on the margins of the Chinese historical experience. The Poetess' is the only body that the Fox has been able to inhabit repeatedly for the last nine hundred years, and Artemis is the Fox's most recent haunt. As the Fox moves in an out of their lives, both struggle to form meaningful and fulfilling relationships with women in a climate of distrust, betrayal, heterosexism, and a good dose of Fox meddling.

History and Racialization

By placing these women at the centre of her narrative, Lai works towards her goal of consciously creating a new history from which women like the Poetess and Artemis can draw strength and community. In doing so, Lai speaks to the need for a diasporic lesbian history, even where one does not exist. Nayan Shah describes the dilemma of the woman-identified woman living in a heterosexist culture that does not recognize her desire nor validate her existence, " How does one justify one's own existence when one can't summon the history or utter a name that describes one's identity?" (45) This struggle for representation, according to Shah has repeatedly enlisted history to attain visibility and voice (142). This is evident in the texts of both Campbell and Kogawa as both writers plumb personal, political, and social history to reclaim and revise the historical specificities of their marginalization. For Campbell, this means providing the vital history of the dispossession and colonization of Métis people by imperial settlers that is often absent from an analysis of the contemporary 'condition' of Métis people in Canada. Her autobiography demystifies the Métis experience and "advances the understanding that what happened to her and her people did not happen through choice or some cultural defect" (Damm 104). For Kogawa, the struggle for representation has meant a reluctant reckoning with a painful past in order to understand the insidious effects of the internment experience on the individual and cultural

identity of her protagonist, Naomi Nakane. While itself fictional, Kogawa's telling of Naomi's life story is premised on her own experiences and the writings of Muriel Kitigawa and succeeds in fusing the political with the personal in a compelling demand for justice for the Nisei.

Lai's own struggle for representation is far more visionary. Instead of reclaiming or revising the current history of women-identified women of Chinese descent[6] living in the West, Lai simply creates a new, albeit fictional, history and with it, a new representation. This fictionalization stems, in part, from the lack of historical materials on Chinese lesbians. She chalks this lack of recorded history up to two suspicions: "[1.] For a long time sexual practice was not considered a focal point for identity and [2.] That the absence of such texts could be ascribed to the fact that women's lives were not deemed important enough to write about, or if worthy of writing, were not deemed worthy of translation" ("Political Animals" 152). Moreover, fiction, she contends, reaches people ("Political Animals" 148). But When Fox is a Thousand is more than an artificial history to obtain visibility and voice for lesbians of Asian descent living in Canada. Rather, Lai strives to create a history that can work towards the creation of a 'homespace' from which diasporicized women-identified women from Asia can find empowerment and a sense of community ("Political Animals" 149). Her artificial history creates a location from which identity can be developed -- a location (read existence) that has traditional been denied and that has been instrumental in maintaining the invisibility of the lesbian community generally and the Asian lesbian community particularly. Even this location, this fictionalized history, however, lies on contested ground and Lai struggles with the dilemma of claiming this space on behalf of women like her without falling into what she describes as the 'box' that allows only two possibilities: "to understand and work from this racialized position that society allots to the likes of us, or to work from a 'color-blind' liberal position which actively denies the way we have been racialized even as it perpetuates the very racial interests it claims not to see" ("Political Animals" 146). Arguing that claiming this racialized space can be empowering because it demands the acknowledgement of a history of racism, Lai agrees with Anzaldua's argument that, while this position may be empowering, it is an oppositional approach and "all reaction is limited to what it is reacting against, (151). Moving beyond these

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[6] I would argue that her text reaches beyond women of Chinese descent and opens up new possibilities for living for women identified women across race and class.

deeply entrenched binarisms requires a feat of the imagination that, I argue, Lai achieves in When Fox is A Thousand. Arguing that there are "entire knowledge systems and ways of living that pre-date white racist modes of identification and their reclamations" (Pol. Animals, 153), Lai plumbs the politically mischievous folk tales about the mythical Fox for a character that transcends this racialization and sexualization as she crosses time, continents, and species.[7] She attempts to break down this oppressive binarism by placing the experience of women of Chinese descent living in Canada at the centre of her narrative. In doing so she 'denaturalizes' their marginalized position in Canadian history. At the same time, however, she weaves the experience of racism throughout her story, and the result is a portrayal of women of colour that breaks free from their 'racialized' position while acknowledging its existence in Canadian culture.

Breaking down the gay/straight binarism requires a similar sleight of hand as Lai attempts to move women-identified women out of the margins of historical production in Canada by inhabiting the historical narrative. Her argument is persuasive to me as she asks "what is history, after all, but narrative? And she who inhabits that narrative truly has ground to stand on. That grounding is necessary when her belonging to the land she lives on is so contested" ("Political Animals" 149). The powerfully feminine figure of the Fox, confident in her sexuality and her desire for immortality serves to unearth the history of women identified women as she aids and abets women to undermine and subvert the repression of their lesbian sexuality. When the Fox begins counseling a young housewife who is repelled by her husband's cold touch, the housewife ends up running off with the concubine that she has purchased to relieve herself of her 'wifely' duties. Lai's portrayal of the unselfconscious desire of the Fox goes far to 'normalize' desire between women and to break down the gay/straight binarism.

The normalization of heterosexuality in Canadian culture was starkly evident on my initial reading of the novel. Reading the stories of the Fox I found myself assuming that the Fox was male. It wasn't until half way through the novel that I began to suspect that the Fox might be female. The ambiguous nature of the Fox's gender, and my own confusion, is a clever commentary on the extent to which heterosexuality is privileged in Canadian history and culture.

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[7] Lai does contemporize this character when her desire to animate the dead bodies of women eventually leads to the alienation from her Fox family--it is suggestively similar to the alienation many women feel from their families when the come out as lesbians.

Lai is, consciously or not, tricking the reader into examining her own assumptions about gender and sexuality and their representative positions in Canadian culture.

Lai's depiction of the Poetess explores the impact of historical heterosexism on women's lives. The fictionalized version of Yu Hsuan Chi's life represents a dramatic reconception of the Poet's life. The non-fictional accounts of Yu Hsuan Chi that Lai references in her source notes describe an extremely beautiful, intelligent, and talented women who is ultimately destroyed by her subjection to, and desire for, men (Rexroth and Chung, Van Gulik). The character of the Poetess that Lai envisions, however, is sexually ambivalent towards men. Her relations with men are purely for economic reasons and, in the end, enable her to live independently with her lover Lu Ch'iao. The Poetess comments, "we used to be reluctant to admit we enjoyed the company of men. It was a living. ... A casual observer would say that we care for each other, although we amuse ourselves with men and quarreling" (229). Yet, in the end, it is this economic dependence on men that becomes their downfall. The competition for male business eventually leads to the tragic death of Lu Ch'iao at the hands of the Poetess in a jealous quarrel over a mutual client. Despite their attempts to live outside of society, somewhat isolated in the Poetess' temple, they are unable to escape the pressures of heterosexuality that dictate a women's worth through her affiliation with men.

The Poetess's fate becomes sealed when she is betrayed by yet another young lover, the butcher's eldest daughter who seeks refuge in her temple after she is raped by a local official of taxation. The young woman and her newborn child live with the Poetess for a year until her father summons her home. The Poetess begs her to stay, claiming she will kill herself if she leaves. The young woman concedes to stay and then slips out in the middle of the night. When the Poetess is on trial for Lu Ch'iao's death, it is the butcher's daughter and the official of taxation who step forward as witnesses to her crime. Lai portrays a woman who is persecuted as much for her desire for other women as she is for the murder of her lover. That the Fox is able to inhabit the Poetess' body repeatedly after her death is an ironic comment on her execution -- punished for her desire for other women, the Fox uses her body to seduce other women for the next nine hundred years.

Lai does more than revise the history of Yu Hsuan Chi in the character of the Poetess, she imagines the historical gaps in her life and creates a woman

centred history that contributes to the visibility of women's desire throughout history. The courtesan, traditionally viewed as submissive and obedient, is transformed into a passionate woman with her own ideas about how to live her life. Her removal to the Taoist temple was not the result of her waning sexual attractions, or her rampant lasciviousness, as many of the non-fictional accounts of her life (Van Gulik, Rexroth and Chung) would lead one to believe. Instead, she removes herself from the Tea House to be economically independent and to live with other women in sexual freedom.

History and Identity

The fictional history-making that Lai engages in with her stories of the Fox, the Poetess, and Artemis radically departs from both Campbell and Kogawa's narrative efforts to achieve a self determined identity. Unlike Campbell and Kogawa, there is no cathartic realization at the end of the novel for Artemis. When she begins to unconsciously search for her identity by tracing her racial origins (I say unconscious because the only direct narrative comment about her trip is made by the Fox) she takes a job in Hong Kong for the summer. The reader is not told why Artemis has the sudden urge to go to China other than that she needs to get away from her life in Canada, complicated as is it is by betrayal and misplaced love. [8]The Fox, however, perceives a deeper intent in her travels and observes her moving through the bustling streets of Hong Kong. Feeling out of place with her stilted accent and unfamiliarity with the Chinese culture, Artemis searches for a degree of recognition; a moment of understanding that she can use to know her self. The Fox comments on this fruitless search,

> Is she trying to prove to herself how quaint and archaic these people are. Even the ones who have managed to disguise themselves in three piece suits and well-cut dresses? Or is she merely looking for shadows of herself, glimpses of a truth beyond the dull surface mirage of twentieth century life in any city? She does not know that beneath every mirage is another mirage. (118)

Unlike Campbell and Kogawa who trace the history of their communities and their families in their efforts to reclaim their historical and cultural subjectivities,

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[8] Artemis doesn't, in fact go to China, but to the British controlled territory of Hong Kong, an anglicized version of China.

Lai is critical of this search for recognition in this nostalgic 'homeland'. The Fox's musings reflect the illusory nature of this search. She does, however, understand the search for belonging that often results in the reification of a 'homeland' that does not exist. She comments,

> In everyday discussions of politically active people of colour, lesbian, gay, or straight, I hear this nostalgic referring back to a homeland that no longer exists, indeed one that never did. I don't think this practice originates so much with naivete as with a burning desire for that past: that it should have form, that it should have a body. Sometimes I feel our very survival in this country depends on the articulation of this form, the construction and affirmation of this body. ("Political Animals", 150)

This desire for a past in the articulation of an identity is an understandable starting point. Nyan Shah describes identity as being about belonging, "at its most basic level, identity marks what we have in common with some people and what differentiates us from others" (142). The search for racial origins is about the need to foster this sense of belonging.

Artemis does not feel any sense of belonging in the Hong Kong culture. The sense of 'Chineseness' that she is searching for is outdated and irrelevant to contemporary life in Hong Kong. Campbell learns a similar lesson when she returns to her childhood home after many years to find it in ruins. Like Artemis, there is no recognition here, and Campbell realizes that if she is to achieve peace with her past she must look within herself. For Campbell this search begins with a patent deconstruction of the stereotypes of Métis people in Canada and the ways these stereotypes have negatively transfigured her own identity as a Métis woman in Canada. Lai is also critical about the ways in which the Chinese culture has been reified in the Canadian cultural landscape. She demonstrates the ways in which stereotypes of Canadians of Chinese descent are insidiously consumed by Artemis and inhibit any sense of belonging she might feel within the Chinese community in Canada. She demonstrates the many ways in which Artemis has become complicit in her own disconnection, both from the Chinese culture and the Chinese Canadian community in Canada. JeeYeun Lee, in discussion of her own conception of her Korean homeland, describes the ways in which she has become complicit in the (mis)representation of Korea,

> There is no space of marginality in which we stand outside of complicity. Thus the 'Korea' in my Korean American identity is shaped partly in and through hegemonic U.S. representations of Korea as an exotic oriental tourist destination, as the land of irrational violent protest, as the site of unstable nuclear confrontation; these representations are equally constitutive of my Korea as are such arguably more first -hand sites of knowledge as my parent's ideas about Korea and my own experiences there. (202)

Immersed in the Chinese landscape, Artemis does not recognize any shadow of herself among these strange people and finds herself "wishing she could forget that she is Chinese too" (120). The extent to which negative stereotypes of Chinese people and Chinese culture have been internalized by Artemis shapes her experience of Hong Kong and her reaction is one of discomfort and unease. Her desire to escape her racial identity all together speaks to Lai's desire to break free from the racialized position of all people of colour in Canada. Similarly, Kogawa's protagonist, Naomi Nakane, expresses her fatigue at having to deal with her own racialization at every turn. At one point in Obasan she decries this constant reification of her Japanese heritage. When Mr. Barker, the owner of the beet field her family worked on under horrendous conditions, comes to visit her Obasan after the death of her uncle, Mr. Barker offers his own 'regrets' at the treatment of the Japanese Canadians. Naomi's reaction sums up the frustration that Lai alludes to,

> 'It was a terrible business what we did to our Japanese,' Mr. Barker says.
>
> Ah, here we go again. 'Our Indians'. 'Our Japanese'. 'A terrible business'. It's like being offered a pair of crutches as I stride down the street. The comments are so incessant and always so well intentioned. ... These are icebreaker questions that create an awareness of ice. (225)

Artemis, like Naomi, cannot escape her racial identity as easily as she would like. Her narrative is peppered with experiences of racism that firmly entrench her racialized position in Canadian society, despite her lack of connection to any 'ethnic' culture. When she returns from Hong Kong and attends a party at her friend Eden's house she is confronted by this racialized position when a white woman assumes that, because she looks Chinese, that she cannot speak English. Later, when she is looking for an apartment to rent she is again

reminded of her racial identity by her future landlord who concedes, "since you are Chinese I will let you have it for five hundred dollars instead of five hundred and fifty" (154). Her feelings of alienation from the Chinese culture in Hong Kong are compounded by feelings of alienation from the Canadian culture in Vancouver. Lee sums up Artemis' experience, " the... homeland that is longed for is neither recovered nor found. ... contestation and home can be located in a simultaneous emergence -- that is to say, the contested and the contesting terrain is home. Home in this sense neither is nor ever can be a settled space" (191).

The relationships between identities and histories, according to Nyan Shah, are fluid and constantly shifting. The past cannot secure or fix an identity for eternity (148) -- nothing can. Similar to Gertrude Stein's conception of the 'continuous present' that denies a consistent continuity of self that can traverse time Lai looks towards a more dynamic understanding of the self that is composed, not of the continuities in our lives but in the "discontinuities that cross us" (Foucault 162). Artemis herself has an intuited understanding of this shifting and fluid identity. When her lover Diane makes the assumption that her adoption has somehow left her without the care and protection that only her birth family can provide, Artemis protests,

> "Don't you wonder about where you came from, who your ... people were?
> " I know who my people are. My mother and father Eden, you, and my friend Mercy, even though she drives me crazy sometimes."
> "I mean the people who know your history, the people who will care about you even though they don't know you."
> I don't know, I really don't think about it .... Things move and change from generation to generation. I am no less who I am for where I've ended up." (96-97)

Diane articulates the need for an epistemological 'stronghold' that can be found by tapping into the collective memory of a cultural history. Artemis, rather, sees her own identity to be a compilation of the past she has lived, as opposed to that which she has never known. She is acutely uneasy with this notion of disconnectedness; of being removed from a culture that holds the key to her well being and her sense of place in the world. Unlike Campbell and Kogawa's protagonist, Naomi Nakane, who experienced the decline of their cultures, Artemis has never known her culture and refutes an essentialist inscription that she must discover in order to understand and care for herself. Her trip to Hong

Kong serves to test Diane's theory and, in the end, she proves to herself that she is no less whom she is for where she's ended up. Lai articulates an understanding of a self constantly in flux; a self that is predicated on an experienced present in a culture that is without constants. Through the character of Artemis, Lai questions some of the conventional modes of achieving identity -- history and the family. As the title of her second chapter indicates, she throws into question all of the "Familiar Shape(s)" of identity, illustrating identity as an amorphous thing that can transform itself as quickly as the Fox.

Much like the alternative treatments of history that Campbell and Kogawa have constructed, Lai eschews the chronological and progressive modes of telling. The multiple narratives of the Fox, the Poetess, and the contemporary narrator all exist at different points in time and are woven together to create a meta-narrative that dismantles any distinctions between the past and the present. The immortality of the Fox, for example, acts as a metaphor for this non-linear conception of time for once immortality has been achieved, time has no meaning. Freed from the linearity of time, history takes on new forms and new meanings. The Fox describes an alternative conception of history, as an ever-changing constellation comprised of collected myth,

> Those foxes don't know how history gathers like a reservoir deep below the ground, clear water distilled from events of ages past, collecting sharp and biting in sunless pools. How stars dream like sleeping fish at the bottom, waiting to be washed out into the bowl of the sky some time in the distant future when enough myths have collected to warrant new constellations. (18)

The Fox's version of history, as comprised of collected myth and story, that gathers in the 'reservoir' of memory elevates the role of myth and memory to history-making status. The role of memory in this version of history becomes important in the relationship between history and meaning. As Ben Xu argues, "memory is not just narrative, it is more importantly an experiential relationship between past and present, projecting a future as well" (265). As the Fox's metaphor demonstrates, the larger meaning that is derived from history is distilled in the memory. The narrative or history that emerges from this memory will be coloured by the present space and time, creating a shifting and reflexive relationship between the present and the past. As Kogawa's Naomi points out, the meaning of the past is "altered as much by the present as the present is

shaped by the past. " (Kogawa, 25). Part of the Fox's desire for immortality is to see these 'new meanings' come to pass as they "open up new possibilities for living here that might not otherwise exist" (Lai "Political Animals" 153). The role of myth in the Fox's conception of history suggests an element of fiction and fantasy in all historical discourse. The introduction of fiction and myth as a valid historical resource undermines traditional understandings of historical evidence, suggesting, as Kogawa's Naomi has that the mutability of both memory and 'facts' belie any historical claims to 'truth'. Even the Fox recognizes that "memory is a sneaky thing, so easily coloured by emotions, by illusions of beauty and power" (231).

History and Perspective

The subversive potential of this dismantling of linear time and the introduction of myth as historical evidence is the opportunity to view the past from a completely different perspective. The outcome for the reader is the knowledge that there are many stories for the same events (Lebowitz 1). The introduction of perspective is liberating for any person, man, or woman, who has lived outside the dominant culture and has been subject to its narrow vision of the past. The two conflicting historical accounts of Yu Hsuan Chi's death that Lai has based the character of the Poetess on, for example, evoke two entirely different meanings for the life of the Poet. In the end, both her novel and her history are a collection of stories, told from different perspectives and with varying interpretations. Lai recognizes the important role that story plays in the production of history and, more importantly, how the relationship between teller and listener shapes the way the story will be repeated. Haunted by the Poetess, the Fox scrambles for stories to appease her ghost but finds that her stories "always end up different from how I intended" (160). The Fox comments on the various uses of stories,

> There are stories for beginnings and there are stories for endings. There are stories meant for healing and stories meant to cause harm. There are stories meant for explaining, meant to talk away the things that cannot be healed over. There are stories meant for company when a pebble soul calls out into the empty, owlless night. There are stories meant to quench the thirst of the heart. There are stories told by parents to children. There are stories told by children to parents. Family stories are especially strange

> because the louder they are told the less they are heard, because then the gap in interpretation between teller and listener is often so wide as to be insurmountable. There are stories told by lovers. Sometimes they are instructional. Sometimes the stories are not told with the mouth, but with the whole body, arcing across skin, shooting history into veins. Stories set into motion the moment they spill, stories that cannot be turned back and started over. They can be told and told again, but with each telling an older rhythm reasserts itself and there is never any taking the story back (160).

The shifting meaning of story and the relationship between teller and listener that shapes the interpretation of the story is akin to the shifting meaning of history. History, like Lai's own artificial/fictional history, is merely a collection of stories that are repeated to serve a specific purpose -- to heal, to explain, to comfort, and to instruct. Each will offer a different perspective depending on the interpretation of the listener and the motivations of the teller. Lai demonstrates that to start a 'history' in motion she need only start, as she has done in the novel, to tell a story. By creating a collection of stories, with women identified women of Chinese descent at the centre, she inserts herself, and others like her, into the realm of historical production. In the end her collection of stories has the potential to start the discussion that can begin the work of achieving visibility, voice , and community for Asian women- identified- women living in the West. But she has no illusions of power in this task. Lai is acutely aware that once a story is set into motion, it is beyond control. Like the Fox, whose stories "always end up different from how I intended" (160), Lai recognizes that there are risks to setting these stories in motion. Kogawa's protagonist, Naomi, even as a young child, understands the risks of setting a story into motion when Old Man Gower is abusing her. Urged by Gower not to tell her mother, she concedes willingly, for to tell her mother would be to 'flood the landscape" with "knowing" and "there will be nowhere to hide" (64). That her story will be beyond her control from the point of telling onward echoes the Fox/Lai's assertion that there is "never any taking the story back" (160) and once that story is in the public realm is it is subject to the interpretation of the listener and the motivations of the teller.

The death of Artemis' friend Mercy/Ming is a prime example of how this interpretative power can be used against people of colour once a story enters the public realm. Found in Stanley Park with a gunshot wound to her head, the

Fox takes it upon herself to visit the mythical Court of the Underworld to ascertain what happened to her for Artemis. The reader is presented with five plausible stories to explain Ming/Mercy's death-- all include some combination of racism and homophobia. The plausibility of the five stories and the eventual and arbitrary adoption of one of these stories is a commentary on the subjective and arbitrary nature of history itself. This is particularly true when race and sexuality are factors in the event as reportage often adheres to popularized stereotypes where marginalized people are concerned. In the end Ming/Mercy's death is attributed in the local media to Asian gang affiliation and drug dealing.

> The newspapers insisted on drugs. It was the only way they could explain the tattoos. They devised an extensive map of meaning that led to high-flying Triad members based in New York. A local television station ran a two-hour special on Asian gangs at large in North American Cities. For them, Ming's change of name and appearance was a willful attempt at deceit, to hide illicit activity. Her friends were not so sure. (235)

The conclusions of the local media vary greatly from the five stories that were put forth as possible explanations of Mercy/Ming's death in the court of the Underworld. Instead, her Asian heritage and her many tattoos are assumed to be examples of Asian gang affiliation. The stereotype of young Asian people in Vancouver as either incredibly wealthy and/or affiliated with organized crime inform the local reportage and ignore the circumstances that would rule out such a conclusion. Where Campbell and Kogawa seek to deconstruct these historically entrenched stereotypes, Lai merely illustrates the dynamics of these stereotypes in popular culture, effectively demonstrating how they become bred into the larger historical discourse. By showing how these stereotypes manifest themselves in the media she raises questions about truth and evidence that challenge the reader to look critically at how stereotypes negatively inform and are insidiously bred into historical discourse. The motivations of the teller, in this case the reporter's need to sell newspapers, colours the story that is told and shapes the portrayal of Asian Canadians in the public realm.

While Lai is conscious of the risks inherent in setting forth new stories about Asian women identified women living in the West into the public realm; she also recognizes many politically promising aspects of this interpretive power. Lai imagines the historical gaps traditional history has left in the recording of women's lives, particularly that of Yu Hsuan Chi, and uses this

opportunity to transform the reader's understanding of her fate. After achieving her immortality the Fox sets out for Library of the Western Heavens to find out whether or not the Poetess is guilty of the murder of her companion. Once she reaches the Library she is informed by one of the Librarians that very few records on women were kept, if any at all. She is eventually presented with five accounts of the Poetess death- all taken from non-fictional and fictional accounts of the Poet Yu Hsuan Chi's life that formed Lai's own researches. Like the scenarios offered for Ming's death to the Court of the Underworld, they offer conflicting and vague accounts of the crime for which she was put to death. The blending of fact and fiction in the Fox's findings demonstrates Lai's own misgivings about the accuracy of historical evidence-- given as it is to subjective interpretation and fictionalizing. The various sources are followed in the novel by the Poetess telling, in her own voice, what happened between her and Lu Ch'iao. The gap between 'truth' and 'history' is revealed when she admits to beating Lu Ch'iao in a jealous rage. Yet, where the historical accounts depict her as a heartless woman who flogged an innocent maid to death, Lai imagines the murder to be a crime of passion and transforms the innocent maid into an unfaithful lover. This crime raises the profile of women's desire for other women throughout history and the effects of historical heterosexism on the actualization of this desire.

Conclusion

The blending of fact and fiction in the When Fox Is A Thousand demonstrates that all history is a blending of these seemingly disparate views of the world. Lai's point, I think, is that history itself is ambiguous, never complete, and often only selectively true. With this in mind the relationship that emerges between reader and writer is akin to the relationship between listener and teller and will have a dramatic impact on the meaning that is given to the history/story that is presented. Her effort to construct an artificial and fictional history with women-identified-women living in the West at its centre takes advantage of the inherent ambiguity in historical discourse to throw into question historical truth and evidence that has traditionally denied them a place in history. Her insertion of myth and imagination into her narrative operate to reveal the politically promising potential of the minority imagination to transform and challenge their marginalized position in Canadian culture. Her demonstration of the risks involved in placing a story or narrative into the public domain allows her to claim a space for women like her on the Canadian cultural and historical landscape. At the same time she acknowledges the systematic racism and homophobia that characterizes their existence in Canadian society. The multi - voiced narrative of When Fox Is A Thousand left me, as a reader, questioning the 'truth' of all narrative in much the same way as Kogawa's character Naomi Nakane questions the truth of memory. The effective, and at times seamless, blending of fact and fiction left me unable to delineate between the two and effectively demonstrated to me the interpretive power available to historians in their presentation of the past.

Conclusion

> Beyond doubt and confusion lies our capacity to recognize what suffering is and where health lies and to identify with both. I believe that it is the identification of and with suffering at every level, in every condition and in every person that magnetizes the compass of justice and points us to home. (Kogawa, "Is There A Just Cause?" 21).

Joy Kogawa's moving words form a beautiful conclusion to Gloria Anzaldua's insightful anaylsis that started this thesis project. I have taken Anzaldua's analysis of the obstacles that plague cross-cultural relationships in women's movements and attempted to apply it to the relationship between readers and writers that emerges from the life writing process. Kogawa's evocation of the need for empathy among women and among Others if we are to ever "leave the opposite bank" and "stand on both shores at once", as Anzaldua has argued we must, effectively sums up my own reading experience of these three texts. All three of these authors have successfully aroused empathy in myself as a reader which has, in the end, caused me to turn back on myself and examine the many ways in which I have been complicit in this. As Marlene Kadar has suggested, they have all successfully humanized the self-in-writing and encouraged me, as a reader, to develop and foster my own self - consciousness. (Kadar, 12).

This invocation of empathy and pathos is both a commentary on the poignancy of their work and the success of their 'critical fictions'. All three authors have achieved this empathetic relationship between reader and writer while simultaneously destabilizing oppressive stereotypes about Métis people, Japanese Canadians, and Asian lesbians living in the west. Their attention to history throughout their texts has prompted not only a personal enagagement with their life stories but has also expanded the reading process for me into a critical evaluation of all historical narrative.

Reading Campbell's autobiography, Half-breed, was certainly the most painful for me and yet, at times, the most uplifting. Her raw and gritty recounting of a life lived in poverty and on the margins of Canadian culture (and literally on the margins of the Saskatchewan roadways) was balanced with a vision of a proud and happy people. This image of the happy and productive Métis community has been virtually eradicated from the Canadian popular consciousness as stereotypes of Métis people as drunken, drug-addicted and dysfunctional have proliferated. Her deconstuction of the traditional history of

the pioneer and her assertion of the Métis experience of colonization during this pivotal period in Canadian history has opened up the historical discourse to the realities of the marginalized. Much like Kogawa's deconstruction of the history of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War, Campbell has provided as 'alterNative' perspective on Canada's past that has effectively demonstrated that there are, in fact, many stories for the same events.

Kogawa expands this historical discussion in Obasan as she questions the efficacy of searching for truth in historical discourse, arguing that the use of personal memory to construct historical narrative is suspect in itself for memory is never unmuddied and never unbiased. She effectively addresses the question of the possibility of memory to be truth, posed by David Palumbo-Liu in his study of ethnic literature. Her conclusion is one of caution for, in the end, her story will be subject to the motivations of the teller and the interpretations of the listener. Reading her story was a moving and informative experience that left me questioning my own historical understandings of Canada's past. There was much less pain in my reading experience than with Campbell's text -- a reflection of the rhetorical impact of her poetic narrative style. The tragic moments of the internment experience emerged more subtly as Kogawa led me through the consciousness of Naomi as she tries to cope with the death of her uncle and painfully comes to terms with the loss of her mother. Her telling combines the stark realism and frank truth of Campbell's text with the emotional impact of a well - written story.

Larissa Lai's novel, When Fox Is A Thousand similarly address notions of truth in historical discourse albeit in a radically different way. Her construction of a purely artificial and largely fictional history of women identified women living in the west at its centre undermines the pretense to truth of traditional historical narrative by introducing myth and fiction as valid historical sources. Her multi-voiced narrative weaves in and out of historical fact and imaginative creation, demonstrating that history, as narrative, is never complete and only selectively true. Lai effectively combines this ambiguity with the transformative power of the imagination to create a 'homespace' -- a location from which Asian women-identified-women living in the West can develop their own representation and, consequently, their own community. Reading Lai's text left me hopeful and invigorated. Her imaginative forays into the life of the Poetess and the exploits of the Fox, juxtaposed with the life of Artemis Wong re-introduced the political potential of myth in both the historical narrative and the contemporary world.

Moreover, her text effectively normalized the unselfconscious expression of women's desire, sexual and otherwise, in a climate and culture of entrenched heterosexuality.

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