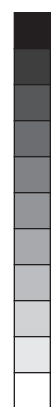




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JOY KOGAWA
ESSAYS ON HER WORKS



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JOY KOGAWA
ESSAYS ON HER WORKS

EDITED BY SHEENA WILSON



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Sheena Wilson

Introduction

The multiple voices of poiesis and praxis – the work of Joy Kogawa

SHEENA WILSON

When I first met with Joy Kogawa to conduct the interview to be included in this collection, I was curious to find out if she had ever felt resentful of the fact that her many literary works had been overshadowed by the popular and critical attention focused on her award-winning first novel, *Obasan* (1981). She was quick to express only appreciation: “I am just grateful really that it is there. That it became whatever it has become. I mean, that book opens doors for me. I’m grateful for that.” Two thousand eleven marks thirty years since the book’s first publication. Over the last two decades, literary critics such as Guy Beauregard, Scott McFarlane, Roy Miki, Heather Zwicker, and others – reflecting on the first ten years of criticism as well as much that has come after – have argued that the enormous amount of literary criticism surrounding *Obasan* has been both a benefit and a detriment

to the reception of Kogawa's larger body of work, to the reception of other Japanese Canadian writers and their work, and, in general, to the narration of Japanese Canadian history and identity. In fact, my motivation to create a collection of critical essays on Kogawa's poetry and prose came, in large part, from a desire to draw attention to and inspire further study of her literary contributions beyond *Obasan*: her poetry, her children's literature, and her other novels. The contributors to this collection have added significantly and have given nuance to the criticism currently available on Kogawa's body of work, including *Obasan*. Most importantly, however, this collection gives critical attention to Kogawa's other published material while placing the works in their proper social contexts. We can only hope that this collection will inspire future scholarship on Joy Kogawa's multi-dimensional literary accomplishments.

Obasan's success

Obasan makes recourse to a multitude of poetic devices as it traces Naomi Nakane's remembering: a project of memory and the reconstruction of the Kato-Nakane family history that revolves around both the Japanese Canadian

West Coast *evacuation*¹ and the atomic bombing of Nagasaki (August 9, 1945), from the narrative vantage point of the year 1972. *Obasan*'s literary and commercial success has been attributed in part to its timely ethno-cultural story of racism and human rights abuses, to the role it was therefore able to play in the redress movement, to its overall adaptability and universality, and, of course, to the sheer aesthetic mastery of the narrative. *Obasan* was the first Japanese Canadian novel to represent the Second World War experiences of the evacuation from the West Coast, and it does so through a sophisticated polyphonic narrative that well fits Linda Hutcheon's definition of metafiction: The narrative acknowledges its inherent fallibility as a textual representation of history and makes blatant the imperative need to understand the heterogeneity of Japanese Canadians, their experiences, and their reactions to those experiences, in order to imagine a diversity of Japanese Canadian identities.

The amount of social dialogue and academic discourse generated by this text has been monumental in comparison to that sparked by any one Japanese Canadian novel or any other Canadian novel that discusses the nation's racist history, but also notably in contrast to the scholarship generated by Kogawa's other poetry and prose.

By the late-1980s, *Obasan* was being read and studied in secondary schools and universities across Canada. According to critic Paul William Martin's 2002 doctoral thesis "Re: Producing Culture(s)," *Obasan* was the seventh most popular text taught in English and Comparative Literature courses on the literatures of Canada, at the postsecondary level, from a list of approximately 409 commonly taught Canadian literature texts.² By the mid-1990s, *Obasan* had come to represent *the* Japanese Canadian voice.

There have been many positive outcomes from the novel's popularity: most significantly, *Obasan* focused attention on the historical injustices of the evacuation and helped narrate a specific Japanese Canadian identity, which contributed to the redress campaign. In fact, *Obasan* and the redress movement share a symbiotic relationship. As Roy Miki has pointed out, "The redress movement probably helped *Obasan* more than *Obasan* helped the redress movement – but they do go hand in hand" (qtd. in Wong). Likewise, the widely-acknowledged political relationship between redress and *Obasan* turned *Obasan* into one of the most frequently read and studied Canadian novels in the twenty years following its publication. *Obasan* continues to generate significant critical interest: it is the primary subject of hundreds of dissertations, academic articles, book



chapters, and books, and this does not include the numerous conference presentations made every year or the numerous publications on Asian American literature, internment, ethno-cultural literary studies, and other related subjects that also reference the novel. Critical debates about *Obasan* have arisen from several different academic disciplines, from various theoretical perspectives, and in a variety of regions: Japan, the United States, Canada, and numerous European countries. However, the positive critical reception of *Obasan* has also allowed for the cannibalization and regurgitation of the novel and its messages.

The polemics of success

When a text that deals with displacement becomes a cultural icon, its context is aestheticized for the reader, and the text itself, therefore, risks becoming a purely formal artifact. The polemics of *Obasan*-criticism in Canada – which are an entity all their own and separate from the novel – are multifaceted. The criticism, when considered as a whole, has dissected, deconstructed, and re-constituted *Obasan* until *Obasan*-criticism has become so far removed from the actual text that Kogawa's narrative motifs of family/community secrets, silence,

memory, and differing views and reactions to the evacuation have become engulfed by a body of scholarship that ironically makes Naomi's voice and, by proxy, Kogawa's own voice, the monolithic discourse on the Japanese Canadian evacuation experience and Japanese Canadian identity. The novel's critical reception means that this one narrative of Japanese Canadian history is privileged over all others. The impact is a homogenizing effect and an easy recuperation of the Japanese Canadian identity by the dominant discourse(s) that operate counter to Kogawa's polyphonic narrative intention.

Additionally, *Obasan*'s popular success has made it the representative voice not only for Japanese Canadians, but for a multiplicity of Canadian ethnic minority groups. Martin notes that, due to time constraints, Canadian literature courses often use *Obasan* as the representative text for *all* ethno-cultural literature:

Obasan frequently serves in these [Canadian literature] courses to represent the entirety of literature by writers of colour in Canada. One response to my [Martin's] question about representing various cultural groups that I received from a professor with no such writers represented on his survey course supports this notion even further: "I probably don't feel that [pressure] as much as I should . . . [T]here is some pressure to do that so I should be teaching Kogawa and . . . who else?" (205)

Another result of invoking *Obasan*'s narrator as the representative voice is a disempowerment of Japanese Canadians – and by association other ethnic minorities – through infantilization, since much of the novel is written from the perspective of Naomi as a child. As Scott McFarlane notes in his 1995 article “Covering *Obasan* and the Narrative of Internment,” the act of demanding redress, which had “challenged and disrupted the discourse or the ‘child-like, vulnerable Japanese Canadian,’” was recuperated by the official discourse when *Obasan* was quoted by both Ed Broadbent and Gerry Weiner during the announcement of the redress settlement in Parliament, in 1988 (409). However well intentioned the quotations from the novel were, the result of invoking Naomi Nakane's voice at the moment of redress was the association of a child-like identity with Japanese Canadians just as their challenge to the state was met (409).

Obasan has also been incorporated into the critical paradigm of Asian American (women's) writing by critics such as Gayle K. Fujita, Shirley Geok-lin Lim, King-Kok Cheung, Donald C. Goellnicht, and Manina Jones, all of whom have done “comparative poetics” between Kogawa's *Obasan* and other “Asian American” writers.³

Miki problematizes this academic appropriation of *Obasan*, which obliterates national boundaries and ignores the impact of Canadian politics and legislation specific to the Japanese Canadian experience. In an Asian American paradigm, *Obasan* “tends to become another version of the ‘Asian American’ example” which dislocates Naomi’s particular silence in relation to the Canadian nation (*Broken Entries* 155). The incorporation of *Obasan* into the larger framework of Asian American literature/identity also functions in tandem with the precepts of state multiculturalism. Removing Kogawa’s work from its context within ongoing Canadian political and cultural debate, in order to absorb it into courses and criticism on Asian American literature, bears “an uncanny resemblance to official multiculturalism’s own homogenizing pluralism” (Zwicker 149).

Canadian context

In *Broken Entries: Race, Subjectivity, Writing: Essays*, Miki asks the pointed question: “But whose interest does literary theory and criticism serve?” (136). The praxis of criticism as an extension of Canada’s government-funded universities has historically situated the ethno-cul-

tural narrative in relationship to the national narrative in such a manner that the myth of national identity through state multiculturalism can be sustained. The maintenance of power requires that the status quo be safeguarded. In the years after redress was achieved, it became apparent that the success of the campaign that signalled its end did not signify the elimination of the need to construct new and changing Japanese Canadian identities. Once Japanese Canadians were cleared of the Second World War allegations that had contributed to the racist formulation of identity imposed upon them, they again risked having their identities recuperated. The redress settlement and apology in Parliament allowed for the Japanese Canadian internment to be absorbed into the Canadian narration of itself as a multicultural nation; suddenly, the internment was reclassified as a historical transgression that had been addressed and rectified as part of a new multicultural Canadian reality. Japanese Canadians were absorbed into the official narrative as a model-minority group.

Beauregard, in "After *Obasan*: Kogawa Criticism and its Futures," identifies another issue that, at the level of literary criticism, explains in part the scholarship on *Obasan* as a by-product of Canadian politics. During the redress cam-

paign, a Japanese Canadian historiography was strategically formulated by certain Japanese Canadian intellectuals and leaders. This narrative began with the uprooting and internment, and these events came to be accepted as atypical occurrences in Canada's normally benevolent political culture: this construction erased the racist histories of anti-Asian sentiment and a desire for a "White Canada" (Ward) that both predated the Second World War and continued to be reflected afterwards, through cultural and legislative practices. The narrative created during the redress movement successfully served its purpose: redress was achieved. However, in many cases this formulation of Japanese Canadian history has been uncritically adopted by literary scholars to the extent that internment has come to be understood as an aberration of the Canadian state-multiculturalism paradigm (12). Critical constructions, appropriate and useful in one instance, were unquestioningly transposed. I would claim that the discourse of aberration found in literary criticism is a manifestation of the dominant Canadian discourse that has long narrated the nation through its contrition for historical occasions of racism and human rights violations: abuses of Aboriginal peoples (colonization, the reserve system, the residential school system and the child welfare system, to

name a few historical instances); the Chinese Head Tax, and the death of so many Chinese men in the building of the railroad; the Komagata Maru incident, when a boat of Indian migrants were denied entry to Canada at Vancouver's harbour in 1914; the internment of other ethno-cultural groups (Austro-Hungarian Canadians in the First World War, and German Canadians and Italian Canadians during the Second World War); and the turning away of the Saint Louis ship of Jewish refugees in 1939. All of these events were made possible by racist policies on immigration, franchise, employment, and citizenship. Kogawa's *Obasan* acknowledges the complex relationship of ethno-cultural communities to the dominant anglophone culture and associated discourses, notably when Naomi has to face the pitying expressions of white Canadians who identify her as a foreigner and an Other:

Ah, here we go again. "Our Indians." "Our Japanese." "A terrible business." It's like being offered a pair of crutches while I'm striding down the street. The comments are so incessant and always so well-intentioned. "How long have you been in this country? Do you like our country? You speak such good English. Do you run a café? My daughter has a darling Japanese friend. Have you ever been back to Japan?"

Back?

Does it so much matter that these questions are always asked? Particularly by strangers? These are icebreaker questions that create an awareness of ice. (225)

Ironically, while the novel illustrates the ongoing issues of prejudice and racism in Canada, the discourse of aberration in the literary criticism that surrounds the text allows for a recuperation of the narrative, which ultimately supports the maintenance of the dominant power discourses. An awareness of the polemics of Kogawa criticism to date is necessary in order to rise to the challenges that Kogawa presents in *Obasan* itself. Arnold Davidson's 1993 book, *Writing Against the Silence: Joy Kogawa's Obasan*, declares *Obasan* one of the most significant Canadian books, socially, artistically, and culturally, to have been written in recent decades: "[T]hanks to the very art with which it addresses large social questions, it claims a special place for the ethnic writer in the ostensibly bicultural context of Canada and thereby encourages us to rethink our paradigms for Canadian culture and literature" (13). By 1998, Miki was already calling for responsibility on the part of readers and critics to avoid erasure of race, and to avoid universalizing the character of Naomi, thereby making her into the authority on Japanese Cana-

dianness. For contemporary critics to avoid these pitfalls more than a decade later, *Obasan* needs to be understood, once again, within its historical context (just as the first quarter-century of criticism surrounding the text needs to be contextualized). Beyond that, the novel then must be re-read from a contemporary vantage point, and in relationship to other issues and literary texts. *Obasan* is, I would argue, the palimpsest over which all Japanese Canadian texts – literary, cinematic, and otherwise – are articulated, and this novel continues to be relevant in its intertextual relationships to what has followed. Kogawa can be considered the “literary foremother” of Japanese Canadian narrative. However, taking the steps to meet the challenges that Kogawa presents in that first novel means moving the focus of literary criticism beyond *Obasan* to pursue meaningful investigation of Kogawa’s entire body of work and the cultural products of other Japanese Canadians, who are constantly negotiating and narrating other Japanese Canadian realities that, when combined, contribute to rich and heterogeneous identities. This collection takes action toward that ultimate goal by addressing Kogawa’s poetry, children’s literature, and other novels, and in so doing, reveals other realities beyond internment.

Contributing to Kogawa-criticism

The contributors to this collection are well aware of the complexities of Kogawa-criticism and of the necessity to both nuance the criticism surrounding *Obasan* and to move beyond it. However, it is hardly possible to discuss Kogawa's literary contributions without referencing *Obasan*. All of the articles that comprise this collection are recent – never before published elsewhere – and several analyze *Obasan* in relationship to both contemporary political issues and to Kogawa's other texts: her poetry, her children's novel *Naomi's Road*, and her more recent novels, *Itsuka*, *The Rain Ascends*, and *Emily Kato*.

In the interview, Kogawa herself notes an unfortunate lack of critical attention paid, to date, to her latest novel *Emily Kato*: a reimagining of the earlier story of *Itsuka*. Two chapters in this collection enter into a critical discourse on *Emily Kato* in a post-September 11, 2001 political context, and in its relationship to both *Obasan* and *Itsuka*: the first is Glenn Deer's chapter, entitled "Revising the Activist Figure in the Novels of Joy Kogawa," and the second is Julie McGonegal's "The Politics of Redress in Post-9/11 Canada."

“Revising the Activist Figure in the Novels of Joy Kogawa” addresses activism in Kogawa’s writing. Kogawa has dedicated an impressive amount of time and energy at different periods of her life to various causes close to her heart: most notably the Japanese Canadian redress campaign, the Toronto Dollar (the currency project used to fund various charitable programs, explained in detail in the Turnbull chapter), and the Historic Joy Kogawa House. As Kogawa has always written what she knows best, and as all of her novels can be considered autobiographical to various degrees, it follows suit that the figure of the activist has played an important role in her writing. Glenn Deer analyzes the intertextual relationships of *Obasan* and *Itsuka* and then explores the added complexities introduced with the publication of *Emily Kato*. Deer argues that the split between activism and passivism, paralleled with issues of language and silence, which are so blatant in *Obasan*, is subverted in the two sequels: *Itsuka* (1992) and *Emily Kato* (2005). Memories in *Itsuka* and *Emily Kato* are altered from how they appear in *Obasan*; as a result, events, relationships, and communities are re-envisioned. In *Itsuka*, for example, the author provides greater detail about the family’s spiritual life than she offered in *Obasan*. *Itsuka* also explores other

Christian faiths and expresses anger at the Anglican diocese that sold the church that Japanese Canadian Anglicans had toiled to build. None of the profits of the sale were used to help Japanese Canadian congregants. Deer gives a detailed analysis of Kogawa's fictional construction of Aunt Emily, both in terms of how Kogawa created her based on the real-life Muriel Kitagawa, and how her character changes and develops through the various novels. In *Itsuka*, for example, she is given greater dimension through more complex descriptions of her emotions and motivations. In *Emily Kato*, there is further revision to the issues of language and silence, the characters are transformed, and activism is reconsidered in a new context – a post- 9/11 world; this novel also introduces the hypocrisy of religious leaders who sexually abuse powerless youth, in this case Japanese Canadian girls. Kogawa's revision to her poetry also reveals a greater sense of active agency – an increasing desire to participate socially – which marks the emergence of the voice of the activist in her poetry. Deer points out that Kogawa's three novels are a “record of [her own] textual revision that exemplifies her commitment to self- reappraisals and the pursuit of new knowledge.” Literary critics have, historically, virtually ignored the variations between the three novels,

especially the latter two. Deer's scholarship, therefore, provides a necessary analysis of Kogawa's poetry and adult fiction as a record of her social, political, and spiritual development as a female ethno-cultural Canadian writer.

While Deer's chapter begins an academic discussion about Kogawa's philosophical shifts in the years and novels following *Obasan*, Julie McGonegal investigates, in depth, the post-9/11 perspective of *Emily Kato*. "The Politics of Redress in Post-9/11 Canada" is a comparison of the two novels *Itsuka* and *Emily Kato*. McGonegal indicates that one of the most significant changes between the first and second versions of that story is the addition of the final chapter, "Forty-Three," in *Emily Kato*, which she identifies as a coda. Therein, Kogawa identifies the parallels between September 1988, when Japanese Canadians achieved redress, and September 11, 2001, when the attack on the World Trade Centre unfurled a revisitation of racial prejudice, this time against Muslim Canadians and Muslim Americans instead of Japanese Canadians and Japanese Americans, as was the case after Pearl Harbor. Kogawa's coda explores the potential for redress in a world that is configured by differences in race, religion, politics, and culture. McGonegal's chapter enters into a dialogue with Kogawa, as McGonegal reflects



upon the significances, implications, and potentialities for the politics of redress within contemporary neo-conservative Canadian politics of citizenship that signify a disturbing resurgence of white nationalism – a phenomenon that can be observed around the world. Similar political practices, prefaced by readings of a “clash of civilizations,” are also taking place in Europe (specifically Italy and Holland), the United States, Australia, and elsewhere. McGonegal’s examination of *Itsuka* and *Emily Kato* through a post-9/11 theoretical lens – referencing a time of revenge and heightened racism – explores questions about the praxis of redress: in what ways, if any, is redress a valuable form of activism? Has Japanese Canadian redress been transformative and/or does it have that potential? McGonegal proposes that Kogawa’s practice of post-humanist politics and aesthetics can offer her readers a new vision of the potentials of redress while still addressing the challenges of the current socio-political climate:

Reread in the context of current debates about national identity and citizenship, *Emily Kato*, as well as *Obasan* and *Itsuka*, have the potential to powerfully inform our ideas about democracy, justice, and the future at a time when such concepts are endangered and abused by the reductive language of fundamentalism.

McGonegal has identified the value in revisiting Kogawa's writing for the perspectives it has to inform and engage political ideologies.

Tim Nieguth, in his chapter, "An awfully unwieldy business': State territoriality, power and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*," also revisits Kogawa's writing through the lens of political ideology, specifically addressing issues of democracy, justice, and human rights abuses in *Obasan*. Nieguth points out that the internment, dispossession, and relocation of Japanese Canadians during and after the Second World War raises serious questions about the viability of democracy and the rights of citizenship in Canada during the twentieth century. He asks, "Why, then, did the Canadian government embark on a project of this nature?" It is a question that other critics have asked before him, and, while they have identified relevant issues such as racism, economics, and both individual and collective politics, Nieguth proposes that state territoriality be considered as another factor in the dynamics that culminated in the Japanese Canadian evacuation. In order to contextualize his argument, Nieguth provides an explanation of the politics of state territoriality and a brief history of the Japanese Canadian evacuation from his ideological perspective and as it is relevant to his argument. In brief, Nieguth iterates that state

territoriality is the political presumption that a state's territory is the property of a specific group that is typically defined by culture, ethnicity, or race. In turn, the state, controlled by a specific group, defines the composition of the population by controlling immigration policies and/or by defining where certain ethnic groups are permitted to settle. During the Second World War, Canada – British Columbia in particular – defined itself as a homogeneous country of white people founding “White Canada” (Ward), irrespective of the statistical realities of the population's composition. The political sphere was controlled by white English Canadians, and they were able to pursue their vision for Canada at the expense of Other ethnic communities, including but not exclusive to Japanese Canadians. The political and legislative residues of that era had a lasting impact on the potential for Japanese Canadians to ascertain co-ownership over Canadian territory. Likewise, the ramifications of state territoriality and the early to mid-twentieth-century Canadian legislations enacted to create a homogeneously white country are still evident in the limitations of state multiculturalism identified by other chapters in this collection.

Jonathan Hart's chapter, “The Poetics of Moment, Exception, and Indirection in Joy



Kogawa's Lyric Poetry," analyzes Kogawa's poetry and poetics as part of what Hart identifies as the "mythology of making and the making of mythology through indirection and image" that is "key to an understanding of poetics." Hart analyzes a selection of poems spanning Kogawa's literary career in order to examine and exemplify the techniques she uses to create and convey meaning. Many of the poems Hart analyzes conjure a poetics of what he calls "reach beyond grasp," a poetics of fleetingness, a poetics of liminality, and the creation of a world of betwixt and between where the reader is left to question whether this world is a reflection of reality or a dream. Contrasting ideas add to the mystery and ephemerality of Kogawa's poetics: she juxtaposes notions of peace and violence; silence and language; the fairy tale and the biblical; mental and physical; the natural and the supernatural; human and animal; and the present and the past to evoke nostalgia or remembrance. Drawing on select poems from *Jericho Road* (1977), Hart illustrates Kogawa's aptitude for creating tension between the hectic realities of the quotidian and the quietude that hints at something outside the realm of duty and ideology, which he identifies as the "calm of words and verbal refraction of a hard world." Like Irene Sywenky in her chapter on fairy tale

motifs, Hart identifies Kogawa's talent for employing fairy tales in a way that conjures a metaphorical and allegorical world where humans are at one with animals and nature; several of her poems also suggest a poetics of the environment. In the two "Wedlocked" poems and "She Learned" – poems on marriage and relationships that illustrate Kogawa's feminist perspective – Hart explores Kogawa's ability to evoke symbolic and mythical dimensions and produce a creative exploration of that which cannot be spoken. Hart goes on to examine an aesthetic of quiet beauty interjected with politics and religion in poems from *A Choice of Dreams* (1974) that seem to be an attempt to better understand the poet's ancestors and their land of origin: Japan. The poems from *Woman in the Woods* (1985) and *A Garden of Anchors: Selected Poems* (2003), which Hart analyzes for their aesthetic value, also hint at Kogawa's biography: the racism she experienced as a child, her relationships with her brother and her children, her life as a sensual being, her encounters with the mental illness of others, her concern for the environment, and her grappling with religion and ethics. Finally, Hart praises Kogawa's poetic accomplishments and her ability to create lyric moments.

From Kogawa's early published writings in

her 1968 poetry collection, *The Splintered Moon*, right through to her later prose writing, as in *The Rain Ascends*, she uses the themes, tropes, and images of fairy tales. Irene Sywenky's chapter, "Displacement, Trauma, and the Use of Fairy Tale Motifs in Joy Kogawa's Poetry and Prose," takes up an examination of Kogawa's poetry, as well as several of her prose works, for their use of fairy tale topoi. Sywenky argues that the fairy-tale discourse constitutes a distinct language and functions as a coping mechanism used to communicate collective and individual trauma. Kogawa's early writings reveal a subversive use of fairy-tale imagery and a reformulation of the original fairy tales, in order to convey Kogawa's feminist interests and to represent the taboo subject of female sexuality. In *Obasan*, Western and Japanese fairy tales are juxtaposed to represent the cultural navigations that Naomi is forced to manoeuvre as she learns where she belongs and from where she is excluded. As a reflection of her feelings of marginalization, she does not identify with the Western female protagonists. In *Itsuka*, the story of Cinderella is used as an allegory for Naomi's desire to explore her traumatized and repressed sexuality. Again, in *The Rain Ascends*, fairy tales are used to help the character of Jeffrey, Millicent's son, cope with the childhood trauma of

incest and sexual abuse. Overall, this chapter provides a thorough examination of how Kogawa uses fairy tales across genres as a literary device to discuss and cope with taboo subjects.

Rocío G. Davis's chapter, "Joy Kogawa's Versions of *Naomi's Road*: Rewriting the Autobiographical Story of the Japanese Canadian Uprooting for Children," explores Kogawa's two versions of *Naomi's Road*: the first one published in 1986 and an expanded version published almost twenty years later, in 2005. Davis undertakes a comparative analysis of the two versions of the novel within the larger context of other novels of the same genre: ethnic autobiography for children and, more specifically, Asian Canadian and Asian American autobiographies reimagined as children's stories. Davis identifies the value of ethnic literature for children in Canada, both as a didactic tool that can help children from ethnic backgrounds to self-identify, as well as a means to negotiate what they will accept or reject from their inherited culture(s) respectively. This represents a trend in recent Canadian literature to move away from the idea of a pure heritage identity by placing emphasis, instead, on the value of cross-cultural contact. This genre of literature both reflects and generates culture: the extraliterary socio-historic events and issues discussed in the texts



demonstrate the impact culture has on literature, while these autobiographical textual productions impact the psychic and moral awareness of young readers. This genre of literature can function as a legitimating process for ethnic writers and readers, who have had to negotiate the discrepancies between personal reality and an official version of history that either contrasts or erases lived experiences. This chapter explores the strategies of narrative transformation used by Kogawa and other writers to rearticulate adult novels as children's stories. Davis clearly articulates that this is not a process of simplification but of reinvention: different metaphors are used, and thematic and narrative shifts take place. As Davis points out, *Naomi's Road*, like other texts of its genre, challenges official versions of history simply by writing the ethnic child into that experience: "This autobiographical exercise, ultimately, presents a child actively negotiating her own history, part of a creative adaptation and manipulation of a dynamic network of concepts and feelings that transforms her into the protagonist of her own life and of Canada's narrative of its own history."

The last two more socially focused chapters in the book are written by Barbara Turnbull and Ann-Marie Metten, who are themselves professional writers and friends of Joy Kogawa. From

them, the reader gleans added insight into Kogawa's community contributions, her writing, her attitudes about justice, truth, and life, and her reactions to personal adversity. Furthermore, the information that these two chapters provide about Kogawa's personal history, in relationship to her social activism and writing, complements the interview chapter and the biography that follow them sequentially. In "Toronto Dollar: Currency Backed by Caring," the *Toronto Star* journalist Barbara Turnbull explores Kogawa's lifelong commitment to activism with a central focus on the Toronto Dollar project: a community currency for which ten cents of every (Toronto) dollar spent is donated to charity. Starting in 1998, Kogawa was intensely involved with this project for over a decade. Turnbull also discusses Kogawa's earlier activist work as part of the Japanese Canadian redress movement and draws links between Kogawa's activism in general and the content of her novels. The chapter starts by providing some background on the history of community currencies, as well as the contemporary philosophies for their current usages in various cities such as Ithaca and Vancouver. From information gathered through (unpublished) interviews with Kogawa, Turnbull gives insights into Kogawa's motivations for starting the Toronto Dollar, as well as her intensive and

continued support of the project despite its tenuous success. But, as Turnbull points out, Kogawa's life has always been focused around her activism and her writing. In her childhood, as the daughter of an Anglican minister, Kogawa's life revolved around church and community; that life was interrupted by the internment, but the value of her family's community involvement was intensified as they worked to send out letters and information to keep connections alive. During all of these childhood years and events, Kogawa remembers writing, and *Obasan* was the artistic product of those specific community experiences. It was the publication and success of *Obasan* that then propelled Kogawa into more serious community work – namely the redress campaign of the 1980s which spawned *Nikkei Voice*, the Japanese Canadian newspaper. Those community activities then inspired further literary work: *Itsuka* and *Emily Kato*. Although *The Rain Ascends* is not, at first glance, related to Kogawa's life of activism, Turnbull argues that the character of Eleanor pushes for action, for change, and, like Aunt Emily, is driven to correct the official version of history; however, in Eleanor's case it is the family history that is at stake. In the novel, Eleanor pushes Millicent to address the "truth" about her father's pedophilia and incest, and the

ramifications that his actions have had on unknown numbers of boys. According to Kogawa, as conveyed in Turnbull's chapter, it was *The Rain Ascends* that inspired the Toronto Dollar. Turnbull's chapter ends by delving into the specifics of the Toronto Dollar: how the currency program functions, how the money raised by the currency program is donated, and the program's successes since its inception in 1998. Although Kogawa has concerns about the project's future, she remains convinced of its social relevance and value.

The following chapter, "The Little House that Joy Saved," is written by Ann-Marie Metten, Executive Director of the Historic Joy Kogawa House. Metten recounts the project's history: how Joy Kogawa came to discover that her childhood Vancouver home was for sale; how Metten herself came to be involved in the movement to save the house; how this project attracted an eclectic group of supporters all focused on the same vision; how Kogawa has faced some personal obstacles and opposition because of the struggle to save the house; and how victory was ultimately achieved. Since the fall of 2006, the house has served as a place for cultural and intellectual exchange: it currently hosts numerous musical, literary, and other cultural events that are helping raise funds for a

future Writers in Residence program. The Historic Joy Kogawa House is a symbol of the valuable contributions that Kogawa has made to Canadian literature and to Canadian history.

Finally, near the end of the collection, Kogawa speaks for herself through the interview. At the outset, she discusses her latest children's book, *Naomi's Tree* (2008). Throughout the interview, which touches on almost all of her children's and adult fiction, and some of her collections of poetry, Kogawa makes reference to her work in progress, *Gently to Nagasaki*, through which she plans to expand the story that she started to tell in *The Rain Ascends*.

Kogawa converses extensively about her writing and the different phases of her life that inspired the various texts as well as her forays into various genres. She describes the similarities between herself and the many female characters in her novels, and between events in the novels and those in her own life. She boldly exposes the struggles she faced as a young wife and mother in the 1960s, a period that inspired much of her poetry. Kogawa could not find happiness in her marriage: She found it extremely stressful to spend most of her time at home with two small children, few visitors, and no social life to speak of. To deal with her stress, Kogawa developed sophisticated coping mechanisms. She escaped

into her imagination by either writing or by living in a complex narrative world. She recounts how she eventually broke the fantasy through direct and painful confrontation with reality.

Kogawa also speaks at length about the novel *The Rain Ascends*. As Sywenky points out in her chapter, Kogawa has, until now, publicly maintained that this was a fictional story. Members of certain communities knew, however, that this was not the case. In this interview, Kogawa officially reveals to her readers that the character of Charles Shelby is actually based on her father, an Anglican minister. Since some, but not all, of Kogawa's writing has been classified by scholars as semi-autobiographical or as community autobiography (Blodgett), the revelations she shares here suggest a necessary rereading of her poetry and prose.

This collection gives needed critical attention to Joy Kogawa's impressive volume of writing. Combined, the chapters and the interview address almost her entire body of work: select poetry, *Obasan*, *Naomi's Road* (both editions), *Itsuka*, *The Rain Ascends*, *Emily Kato*, and *Naomi's Tree*. The interview also creates expectancy around the upcoming *Gently to Nagasaki*, as does the preview at the end of the collection. The contributors have approached



Kogawa's various texts from a plurality of perspectives and with different ideological, philosophical, and disciplinary foci. These range in scope from the politics reflected in her literature, to the use of the fairy tale to expose trauma, to the poetics and aesthetics of her writing, to her texts as cultural sites that both reflect and create identity. Many of the chapters identify themes common to much of Kogawa's writing: power and its abuse, victim and victimizer, justice, truth, friendship, love, courage, mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation – to name a few. Kogawa weaves painfully beautiful stories and poems that can ultimately offer insight into human nature and its infinite potential for both weakness and strength, evil and good, selfishness and generosity, destruction and compassion, vengeance and mercy.

Notes

1. In this introduction, and in this collection's biography of Joy Kogawa, I use the term *evacuation* to refer to the entirety of the Japanese Canadian wartime experience: relocation to road camps and farms in the interior of the country, internment in various locations, dispossession, and, eventually, legislated deportation and dispersal. *Evacuation* is a complex term that was first coined by the Canadian government during the Second World War. Roy Miki, in his book, *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice*, explains the nuances of this word: "Evacuation," the euphemism coined by the government, became the term used to describe the internment of Japanese Canadians. It took root so deeply that to this day many Japanese Canadians

invoke the term, not merely to denote the event itself, but also to identify the weight of all its phases – dispossession, deportation, dispersal and assimilation. “Evacuation” in its singularity has taken on the proportions of myth for them, embodying that circumscribed period when each person of “the Japanese race” was subject to the violation of rights without recourse to protective mechanisms. “Evacuation” has come to exemplify the whole Japanese Canadian experience of the 1940s, from the moment of uprooting following Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 to the final lifting of restrictions on April 1, 1949. “Evacuation” strikes the chord of shared “exile” from the coast. (50)

2. It was preceded only by *As for Me and My House*, *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, *Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* (1 vol.), *Wacousta*, *Green Grass Running Water*, and *Roughing it in the Bush* (Martin 253). Even Margaret Atwood only appears on this list for the first time in 17th place with her book *The Handmaid’s Tale*, despite the fact that, according to Martin’s study, she is the most frequently taught author, when all instances of her texts having been taught are combined.
3. Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, Hisaye Yamamoto’s *Seventeen Syllables*, John Okada’s *No-No Boy*, and others.

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Revising the Activist Figure in the Novels of Joy Kogawa

GLENN DEER

This essay examines the shifting representations of the activist figure in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981), *Itsuka* (1992), and *Emily Kato* (2005) and links Kogawa's revised views of the cultural activist to her evolving literary representations of the importance of the activist's role in social life. *Obasan* illustrates how the Japanese Canadian community is split along the lines of first-generation *Issei* silence and passive acceptance of internment versus second-generation *Nisei* vocal resistance and activist engagement. Yet the novel initially represents Naomi's own discomfort with the activist Aunt Emily Kato, who is characterized as an anti-social and communally disruptive force. In *Obasan*, the merits of *Issei* modesty and stoic silence are contrasted to the acerbic vocal activism of the *Nisei* Aunt Emily Kato. This explicit split between silence and language is superseded by Kogawa's *Itsuka* (1992)

and *Emily Kato* (2005), two works which embrace the necessity for community activism; yet the scholarly engagements with Kogawa's work have mainly ignored these post-*Obasan* novels and have not considered Kogawa's overall development as an explorer of activism and her own record of textual revision that exemplify her commitment to self-reappraisal and the pursuit of new knowledge.

Since 1981, *Obasan* has been the subject of intense critical attention that reads and situates the text in relatively formalist, thematic, and non-intertextual ways. It has been placed in the critical multicultural canon of symbolic liberation myths (see Erika Gottlieb; Lynne Magnusson; Mason Harris), or in an Asian American discourse that ignores the specificities of its Canadian regional inflections and appropriates its poetic power (Sau-ling Wong), or its "articulate silences" (King-Kok Cheung). More recent readings by Frank Davey, Smaro Kamboureli, Roy Miki, and Guy Beauregard have wrestled with some of the contradictory politics of the novel or the critical tendencies to see the conclusion as an unqualified resolution of conflict. None of these approaches, however, has addressed the intertextual relationship of *Obasan* to the sequel *Itsuka*, nor have recent critics thought more deeply about the changing

role of the activist in Kogawa's body of work and the complications presented by the more recent publication of *Emily Kato*.

Kogawa's two novelistic sequels to *Obasan* intervene in the constructions of the political and religious communities established in the first work by challenging and even revising the memory of events, characters, and relationships. *Itsuka*, for example, not only provides a more detailed account of the family's spiritual life in Vancouver and Granton than *Obasan*, but also explores the competing religious beliefs of the fundamentalist and liberal Christian denominations, and also injects a new rage against the complicity of the Anglican church for not resisting the internment of Japanese Canadians who were members of Anglican congregations, and who "sacrificed and toiled" to build a church in Vancouver that was later sold by the Anglican diocese. As Aunt Emily angrily declares in *Itsuka*: "[T]he Anglican Church took that building and they sold it and not a penny from the sale came to us, or to help us in any way" (68). *Itsuka* also endows Aunt Emily with a greater range of emotions and shows how deeply she envied the beauty of her sister, Naomi's mother (67), the accomplishments of her sister's children, especially Stephen, and how she was stung by not being able to adopt the children of

her sister: “Back in 1941, Aunt Emily said, what hurt her the most was that she wasn’t given charge of her sister’s children” (67). These additions add a deeper humanity and vulnerability to the strident and seemingly unflappable persona of the activist aunt.

Emily Kato (2005), Kogawa’s recent rescripting of *Itsuka*, is a further significant revision of the language, characterizations, and activist elements of the predecessor. The split between language and silence, the ceaseless return to the site of trauma, and the elegiac tone are replaced by an explicit intertwining of activism and witnessing, and a complex layering of what cultural theorist Svetlana Boym would call “reflective nostalgia,” a longing for the past that is self-conscious of the ruins of the past home and produces a narrative that is “ironic, inconclusive and fragmentary” (50). *Emily Kato* also presents a fiercer condemnation of the sexual abuse against Japanese Canadian girls perpetrated by leaders of the fundamentalist Christian community represented by the characters Pastor Jim, his schizophrenic son Jimmy Junior, and Brother Leroy (*Emily Kato* 56-61). While sexual abuse perpetrated by a Vancouver neighbour in the form of Old Man Gower, who molests Naomi, is a part of *Obasan*, Kogawa’s revisions in *Emily Kato* show that the betrayal of

the congregational youth by the religious leaders was even more heinous, widespread, and hypocritical, and this also occurred in the southern Alberta settings.

The 2005 publication of *Emily Kato*, which is both a revival and a reworking of *Itsuka*, is itself an important activist response to the critics who have confined Kogawa's literary reputation to the limited space of the internment novel, and they have circled the "ground zero" of *Obasan* obsessively while ignoring how Kogawa's writing has progressed to a new level of understanding and an embracing of activism. One of these critics, Stan Persky, wrote such a harshly condemnatory review of *Itsuka* in 1992, published in *The Globe and Mail*, that Kogawa's confidence as a writer was shaken for years. As Kogawa confessed in an interview with Michael Posner, "when *Itsuka* came out in hardcover . . . I was killed by a single review in *The Globe and Mail*. He said it was unpublishable, full of pages and pages of painfully embarrassing writing. It killed me as a writer for years. I took it to heart, even though I didn't know what was embarrassing about it." As Posner points out, even though there were other positive reviews, Kogawa took this single review seriously and subsequently "spent years thinking about how to rewrite it" (Posner R3).

Persky's extraordinarily hostile review lamented the absence of the crone figure of *Obasan* and "her luminous silences," and he was unable to see that the novel was not just a continuation of the discourse of *Obasan*, but an important stage in the personal and psychological growth of Joy Kogawa. Persky's myopic dismissal of *Itsuka* ignored two related existential goals of the novel: to show the growth of Naomi and her participation in a political community, and to allow the author Kogawa to move beyond the site of victimization. In effect, Persky participated in the same kind of silencing of Kogawa as those childish voices in the classroom at Cecil Consolidated in *Obasan* who declared that "Naomi Nah Cane is a pain" (6).

Though Kogawa thought about revising *Itsuka* for many years, it is important to note that she had already revised her other works of fiction and poetry to reflect her shifting aesthetic and social vision. Thus, we should regard Kogawa's writing as a textual body that has consistently been in flux and open to authorial review, play, and re-visioning. For example, there are extant variants of *Obasan* itself. While the 1981 novel emphasizes the tension between the silence of Obasan and the articulation of Aunt Emily, a condensed earlier (1978) short fiction version contains no references to the figure



of Emily and even endows Obasan with two daughters who are represented by a description of self-exile that is later assigned to the self-loathing Stephen Nakane in the 1981 canonical version. The 1978 version refers to how “[h]er daughters, unable to rescue her or bear the silent rebuke of her suffering, have long since fled to the ends of the earth. Each has lived a life in perpetual flight from the density of her inner retreat” (Bennett and Brown 738). This earlier version emphasizes the role of Obasan as the universal female elder who collects the artifacts and documents of the past, and it invents the description of Obasan that will be retained in the novelistic version: “She is all old women in every hamlet in the world . . . the true and rightful owner of the earth, the bearer of love’s keys to unknown doorways, to a network of astonishing tunnels, the possessor of life’s infinite personal details” (Bennett and Brown 739).

In another example of Kogawa’s revisionism, she adds a greater sense of active agency to the poem “Where There’s a Wall,” originally published in the 1985 collection *Woman in the Woods*, and revised for the selected poems edition *A Garden of Anchors* in 2003. The original poem begins with the following description of the symbolic entry points through a constrictive wall:

Where there's a wall
 there's a way through a
 gate or door. There's even
 a ladder perhaps and a
 sentinel who sometimes sleeps.

(*Woman in the Woods* 15)

The subsequent revised version begins with a series of prepositional variants (“around, over, or through”) that increase the possibilities of thwarting the confines of the symbolically restrictive wall:

where there's a wall
 there's a way
 around, over, or through
 there's a gate
 maybe a ladder
 a door
 a sentinel who
 sometimes sleeps.

(*A Garden of Anchors* 42)

The concluding stanzas of the two poems are also dramatically different. The original 1985 version inverts the syntax and emphasizes the irretrievable voice that is captive behind the depths of the wall. Despite the imagined alternatives, the wall continues to confine the voice of the captive:

Where there's a wall there are
 words to whisper by loose bricks,

wailing prayers to utter, birds
 to carry messages taped to their feet.
 There are letters to be written –
 poems even.
 Faint as in a dream
 is the voice that calls
 from the belly
 of the wall.

(*Woman in the Woods* 15)

In the revised conclusion to the poem, “secret codes” are added and the “poems” are replaced by “novels,” the genre which Kogawa is now more prominently associated with; moreover, the inverted syntax is replaced by active verb phrases and an identifiable narrator whose acts of “standing,” “hearing,” and “inclining” lend greater active agency to the poet’s presence that was originally rendered invisible and passive:

where there’s a wall
 there are words
 to whisper by a loose brick
 wailing prayers to utter
 special codes to tap
 birds to carry messages
 taped to their feet
 there are letters to be written
 novels even
 on this side of the wall
 i am standing staring at the top
 lost in clouds
 i hear every sound you make
 but cannot see you

i incline in the wrong direction
 a voice cries faint as in a dream
 from the belly
 of the wall.

(*A Garden of Anchors* 42-43)

By juxtaposing the different versions of *Obasan* and versions of the poem “Where There’s a Wall,” we can see that Kogawa has often engaged in revisions that foreground the agency of the narrator. It is this search for an enhanced and meaningful agency, or the will to participate intentionally in social existence, despite social constraints, that marks the emergence of the character of the activist in Kogawa’s work. At the same time, Kogawa struggles with reconciling the poetic suggestiveness of her own lyric impulses and the vatic utterances of the *Issei* elders with the strong civic arguments of Aunt Emily: she wrestles with the problem of reconciling the poetic and the political in the language of the novels.

In the activism embodied in the character of Emily Kato in Kogawa’s *Obasan* (1981), *Itsuka* (1980), and *Emily Kato* (2005), the reconciliation of the aesthetic and the political cannot easily be undertaken by one body, and Kogawa strategically reserves the poetic lyricism for her implied focal narrator, Naomi, and assigns Aunt Emily the strident legalistic arguments of the



activist rather than a poetic discourse of resonating complexities. However, Kogawa's revisions of the history of Japanese Canadian internment and redress in her work indicate a serious search for an appropriate voice for narrating the work of activism and a search for an adequate means of representing the multiple lives of the activist so that Emily Kato is more than a one-dimensional purveyor of tracts and abstract positions, and can be regarded as a person with a deeper psychological life.

The two extreme poles of *Nisei* activism and *Issei* passivity are both painted as distasteful, abnormal, even anti-social extremes by the introverted and socially awkward Naomi Nakane in *Obasan*. In fact, the first reference to Aunt Emily in *Obasan* by Naomi arises in the context of an embarrassing classroom discussion about Naomi and Emily's "spinster" status:

Spinster? Old Maid? Bachelor Lady? The terms certainly apply. At thirty-six [confesses Naomi] I'm no bargain in the marriage market. But Aunt Emily in Toronto, still single at fifty-six, is even more old-maidish that I am and yet she refuses the label. She says if we laundered the term properly, she'd put it on, but it's too covered with cultural accretions for comfort. (8)



In the same scene, the woman who shares the supposed “crone-prone syndrome” with Naomi is humorously imagined as the subject of a proposed research study to discover the cause of their single status, “but she would be too busy, rushing around Toronto, rushing off to conferences. She never stays still long enough to hear the sound of her own voice” (8). The persona of the activist, here, is ironically portrayed as wholly self-obsessed and dysfunctionally anti-social despite her apparent academic social mobility.

In the domestic sphere, Aunt Emily, who eats the fabled family stone bread with a slab of raw onion (37), and pesters Naomi to remember the past and glue her tongue back on (38), is judged un-ladylike by the heteronormative assessment of the conservative Uncle Isamu. In one scene in *Obasan*, he points out that it is too late for Aunt Emily to have children, as if she has missed her most important opportunity for a valuable social contribution (36). What is significant here is that Aunt Emily is not respected for her energy, but caricatured in the mind of Naomi and other family members as an irritatingly loose cannon with few powers of empathy. And while Obasan confines herself in her senior years to the cramped quarters of a home stuffed with col-

lected clutter, Aunt Emily the activist is hardly seen as a superior role model:

She was on her way home to Toronto from a conference in California called “The Asian Experience in North America,” and from the moment we met, I was caught in the rush-hour traffic jam of her non-stop conference talk.

How different my two aunts are. One lives in sound, the other in stone. Obasan’s language remains deeply underground but Aunt Emily, BA, MA, is a word warrior. She’s a crusader, a little old grey-haired Mighty Mouse, a Bachelor of Advanced Activists and General practitioner of Just Causes... Clutching her brief case and her small-brimmed hat, she lowered her head like a bull against the wind. She’s about the same height as I am, 5’1 or so, but much chunkier and with “daicon ashi” as we used to say – legs as shapely as Japanese radishes. A small tank of a woman with a Winston Churchill stoop. Apart from a deeper puffiness under her eyes and more grey hair, she seemed unchanged from her visit the year before. With her mind and her hair leaping wildly in the gusts, she was Stephen Leacock’s horseman riding off in all directions at once. (33)

The physically strong and stocky Aunt Emily is represented as scattered in her attentions, gruff in her exchanges, unmannerly invasive in her provocations, and her language is compared to the techniques of a relentless surgeon who both cuts at Naomi’s scalp and pulls at her stomach (194). The discourse of the activist is framed as a series of discomfiting imperatives – command-



ments to resist silence, to remember the dead, recuperate repressed feelings, and dramatically disgorge the pent-up pain:

“You have to remember,” Aunt Emily said. “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. Look at you, Naomi, shuffling back and forth between Cecil and Granton, unable to either to go or to stay in the world with even a semblance of grace or ease.” (50)

Critics such as King-Kok Cheung, in her book *Articulate Silences*, have pointed out that Aunt Emily’s hectoring and often patronizing attitude compels resentment and resistance in the audience. As Cheung observes: “Emily’s thundering for justice will not solve any problem until people genuinely care. By heeding the poetry in the narratives, by witnessing the quiet strength of *Issei* such as Obasan, the reader may well experience [a] change of heart” (167). Cheung is correct, I believe, in identifying the transformative and persuasive power of the lyrical silences and compressed utterances of Obasan. However, I would point out that Kogawa’s deliberate shaping of Aunt Emily as the blustery, rambunctious, and prickly bulldog persona is a strategic revision of the elegant writer she is based on: Muriel Kitagawa.

Possibly the most important and dramatic section of *Obasan* is the journal record that Aunt Emily composes for her sister, who is visiting her grandmother in Japan. Emily's journal provides a detailed chronological account of family life and the deepening political crisis, loss of citizenship rights, violent coercions, and humiliating internment that occurred between the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December of 1941 and the removal of Aunt Emily to Toronto, separated from other family members sent to the British Columbia interior on May 22, 1942. These journal entries, that dramatically record the miserable conditions at Hastings Park and the brutality of the RCMP, originate from the personal letters, government correspondence, and essays of Muriel Kitagawa. What is fascinating about the historical prototype for Aunt Emily, Muriel Kitagawa, and the dynamics of Kogawa's refashioning, is how rhetorically gifted, versatile, and eloquent Kitagawa was in her actual writing.

Muriel Kitagawa was born in Vancouver in 1912, the daughter of a Japanese Canadian dentist, and even while in high school she displayed her skills as an essayist (Miki 23). She later was a regular contributor to the Japanese Canadian community publication, *The New Canadian*. She married Ed Kitagawa – a former member of the renowned Vancouver Asahi Baseball team – in

1933 and was the mother of four children (Miki 20-23). She wrote lively and funny personal letters to her brother Wes Fujiwara in Toronto, newsletter columns for *The New Canadian*, and razor sharp indictments of unjust Government appropriations of Japanese Canadian property. Her own discourse, in fact, is more syntactically varied and rhetorically diverse than the discourse provided for Aunt Emily in *Obasan*, and this is evident from a close reading of Roy Miki's edited selection of her work in *This is My Own: Letters to Wes and Other Writings on Japanese Canadians, 1941-1948* (1985). The selections in *This is My Own* include the carefully argued "Three Letters on the Property Issue" (182) which represent her vigorous objections in July 1943 to the government's seizure and proposed sale of their household property at 2751 Pender Street East, a property that provided the family with a subsistence rental income during their uprooting. In a related manuscript that combines patient reasoning, lyricism, and passion, entitled "I Stand Here Tonight" (Miki 226-232), we can hear Kitagawa three years after the internment thinking about the effects of property loss on her children, and she is already forming a language of reparation nearly thirty years before the movement for redress would be galvanized into action:



But more than the return of lost property, reparation is the outward symbol acknowledging the loss of our rights. Time heals the details, but time cannot heal the fundamental wrong. My children will not remember the first violence of feeling, the intense bitterness I felt, but they will know that a house was lost through injustice. As long as restitution is not made, that knowledge will last throughout the generations to come . . . that a house, a home, was lost through injustice. It is important for you to remember that the loss of this property spelled the last indignity for a people deprived of the right to move freely, to live where they choose, to be what they can be best, deprived of participation in the life and events of their country, native or adopted, and deprived most of all of their integrity.

(Miki, *This Is My Own* 229)

Where do some of the subtle tonalities of Muriel Kitagawa persist in the fictionalized version of her in the persona of Aunt Emily? Some vestiges of Kitagawa's deep concern for the children are captured in those chapters of Kogawa's novel that feature Aunt Emily's journal, especially in Naomi's reading of the sisterly address that she sees in the journal's "Dearest Nesan" addressee form. Here, Naomi is placed in two readerly positions: that of her absent mother, addressed as a sister, and that of herself reading about events that she was too young to understand. She reads about her own fearful reactions to the blackouts and a storm (86-87) through the con-

cerned exposition of Aunt Emily. When we compare the discourses, personalities, and relationships of Aunt Emily and Muriel Kitagawa, it becomes clear that Kogawa simplified the rhetorical and lyrical complexity of the prototype of Kitagawa in order to create a stronger antithesis to Obasan and also emphasize Aunt Emily's independence from family feelings. This leads critics like King-Kok Cheung to see Aunt Emily as "thundering for justice" (167) but lacking poetry, a poetry that the original Muriel Kitagawa did display in some of her manuscripts. However, when Kogawa concludes the book with Naomi's symbolic clothing of herself in the warm jacket of Aunt Emily for a return pilgrimage to Uncle Isamu's favourite spot in the coulee, we can anticipate a greater politicization of Naomi. In retrospect, of course, this "redressing" of Naomi in the garment of the activist uncannily prefigures the "redress" activism that would preoccupy Japanese Canadian political life in the period after the 1981 publication of *Obasan*, and redress, of course, is the historic and dramatic core of the sequel to *Obasan*, the 1992 *Itsuka*.

Itsuka traces the rebirth of Naomi through her friendship with an Anglican priest, Father Cedric, and her involvement with the political process of redress. The novel associates a fresh

form of mobility with Naomi as she travels to Toronto, Japan, and Hawaii with Aunt Emily. She also accepts the division between herself and her brother Stephen, who continues to reject his connections to Japanese Canadian cultural life, and Naomi witnesses the drama of the political collisions between the conservative and more activist branches of the Japanese Canadian community as they battle to create a consensus and lobby for the terms of individual redress.

Itsuka, however, is not just a sequel to *Obasan*, but intertextually tries to *revise* some of the history covered in the earlier book, especially the evolving factions of the Granton Christian community. Aunt Emily is not a part of the Granton sections which bluntly critique the evangelical Christianity of Pastor Jim and expose the conflicts between the conservative fundamentalists and liberal Christians.

Itsuka is less lyrical than *Obasan*, and is not framed with a poetic and mystically resonant prologue, though it does contain similar scenes of surreal dreaming. The sexual abuse of Naomi, experienced in *Obasan*, initially thwarts Cedric's attempts to develop a closer relationship with her in *Itsuka*, though his kindness allows her to heal and develop a mutually respectful sexual relationship for the first time in her life. Aunt Emily as an activist in *Itsuka* is more complex,

revealed as even emotionally and physically vulnerable: she regrets more vocally that she was not able to rescue Naomi and Stephen from the BC interior and take them to Toronto; she faces political challenges from the Japanese Canadian community who see her as too radical; and she faces surgery and complications for cancer. The descriptions of the power struggles and debates over political strategies and democratic procedures are unlike any of the diasporically situated and domestically focused events narrated in *Obasan*. While the prosaic, legalistic, and policy-driven nature of *Itsuka* makes parts of it less aesthetically energized and visionary, some critics have seen this combination as politically important in resolving particular problems of safe space for Naomi. For example, Julie Tharp contends that Cedric “steps in for the missing mother and provides the stories and the safety Naomi has lacked all those years” (222), and he “gives Naomi the space in which to wrestle with her lifelong illness” (223):

Although it takes two complete novels to create this safe space, Kogawa accomplishes it through a variety of narrative strategies ranging from intensely personal, poetic passages to political discourse. The fragmentation of styles in the first novel eventually merges into one more wholistic narrative by the end of *Itsuka*. (Tharp 224)

Although Tharp and other critics have praised the positive resolution of trauma and the healing that is offered through a narrative of triumphant redress, Kogawa's most recent revision of *Itsuka*, republished under the title *Emily Kato*, foregrounds even further the spirit of the activist and contains alterations that intensify the dramatic effects of the events that led to redress.

The revised and re-titled *Emily Kato* restores some of the concise lyricism of *Obasan*, revises some of the traits of key characters, and seriously attempts to connect itself to more recent issues of the abuse of children by church leaders. The new novel also tries to weave in relevant links to other cultural examples of genocide, Canadian hybridity, and even the events of 9/11. For example, in *Itsuka*, Father Cedric's ethnicity is English, French, East European (paternal side), and Metis/Ojibway on his mother's side (114); but in *Emily Kato*, Father Cedric is Armenian and one quarter Japanese, and he frequently refers to his family connections to the Armenian genocide. In *Itsuka*, Naomi is stalked by an anonymous sexual predator while she works in the beet fields (28); but in *Emily Kato*, this sexual abuse is perpetrated by a known religious leader, the fundamentalist preacher Brother Leroy, on the character Anna (59), and this abuse is linked to other instances of abuse

within the families of religious leaders such as Pastor Jim, whose son Jimmy Junior abuses young girls (56). In *Itsuka*, Naomi keeps a cricket as a pet, but in *Emily Kato*, even the young Naomi experiments with the drowning of crickets and the torture of a colony of ants (28), illustrating how patterns of scapegoating are even experienced by Naomi as a perpetrator. In the transformation of *Itsuka* into *Emily Kato*, the activist Morty Makai, a protégé of Aunt Emily, is transformed from a hard-nosed political spokesman into a more vulnerable character who “just want[s] to be liked” (*Emily Kato* 142). In the original *Itsuka*, the undemocratic actions of Nikki Kagami (who betrays the older members of the National Association of Japanese Canadians) are initially opposed, but the opposition is not successful. In the revised *Emily Kato*, a young man from Vancouver (he is apparently a fictional representation of the scholar, poet, and activist Roy Miki) (176), is successful in calling for an accountable National Council that would be a democratic check against Nikki Kagami’s underhanded dealings. Overall, the sections on the intra-community divisions are more compact and less detailed in the revised *Emily Kato*. All of these revisions endow redress with a more dramatically intense narrative drive than in the preceding *Itsuka*.



Along with the much harsher condemnations of the sexual abuse of children by fundamentalist ministers, *Emily Kato* also reaches across the eight-year divide between 1993 and 2001 by commenting on the events of 9/11 and the consequences of the War on Terror. While *Itsuka* concludes with the “sound of the underground stream” and the “breath of life” from the opening of *Obasan*, *Emily Kato*, in a more globally conscious manner, does not situate Japanese Canadian redress as the conclusion of the drive for social justice, but one event that must give way to work on other global crises, especially the War on Terror sparked by 9/11:

Sixteen Septembers have passed since that wonderful day [of redress]. Twice sixteen years since Uncle died. The world has been turned inside out by catastrophic events that make our story of redress seem as insignificant as a snail trail on the morning sidewalk. . . . Following a more visible September event known as 9/11, or the “new Pearl Harbor,” both President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Jean Chrétien stated that government interventions in the past against Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians must not be revisited on Muslim citizens today. Aunt Emily and Dan would have noted these comments with satisfaction, had they been alive. For them, the great cry, “Never again” meant specifically that other communities must not undergo the traumas we suffered. Although the uprooting and displacement of Muslim communities in North America has not occurred, the new “war on terror” makes victims of

our own loyal citizens. Families are taunted. Places of worship are targeted. On the basis of appearance alone, people are relegated to the company of the despised and viewed with suspicion and fear – on sidewalks, in elevators, at border crossings and airports, and in school playgrounds. Many Canadian Muslim children may never recover their self-confidence.

When I think of the wounds inflicted in the childhood of the niseis, I am grateful that so many joined in the effort to “right the wrong” . . . (272-73)

Kogawa’s most recent work, a revision of the activist life of Aunt Emily and Naomi, is worth reading for its renewed urgency in the wake of 9/11 and as a casebook for the inspired guidance of other oppressed groups. Kogawa herself during the last two years has been supportive of Chinese Canadian lobby efforts for Head Tax redress, and Chinese Canadian activists such as Todd Wong have in turn been significant supporters of the campaign to save Kogawa’s childhood home and transform the site into a sanctuary for writers in exile and a possible museum space (Deer).

The activist figure, Emily Kato, is both a revivification of the political spirit of Muriel Kitagawa and a literary fiction that has influenced the course of subsequent activist history. An uncanny example of the “rebound” effect and re-circulation of the spirit of Muriel Kita-

gawa through Kogawa's *Obasan* is described in Roy Miki's seminal 2004 history of Japanese Canadian activism, *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice*. In *Redress*, Miki describes how in 1983 the eminent Toronto pediatrician Wes Fujiwara was told by his patient about Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, and that Kogawa had "drawn on several letters written by Wes's sister Muriel. Soon after, Kogawa herself dropped off a copy of the novel at his home, and then Fujiwara read, in this first fictional account of the mass uprooting, many of the letters that his sister had sent him in Toronto during the period from December 1941 to May 1942 (201).

As Miki writes, "a series of remarkable 'callings' pulled Fujiwara from the sidelines into the crucible, where he emerged as a leader and vocal redress advocate, not just for Toronto but for the national movement" (*Redress* 200). One of these remarkable "callings," of course, was Kogawa's literary version of Wes Fujiwara's sister, a novelistic translation of Muriel Kitagawa into the activist figure of Emily Kato, who would have an extended and complex fictional life in *Obasan*, *Itsuka*, and *Emily Kato*. Indeed, Wes Fujiwara had devoted little attention to the topic of Japanese Canadian redress before the fall of 1983 (Miki, *Redress* 200), and it seems that

Obasan was a vital catalyst in sparking his interest in the redress movement and in compelling his personal contact with Joy Kogawa, who had so skillfully rendered a fictionalized version of his sister's letters about the internment experience.

The evolving representation of the activist figure – one that has touched and transformed so many of her readers, like Wes Fujiwara – is a fascinating index of Kogawa's attempt to reconcile poetics and politics, contemplation and action, and silence and speech. The revised title of the earlier *Itsuka* to *Emily Kato* certainly signals the centrality of Aunt Emily's continuing relevance for Kogawa. In recomposing the contemporary relevance of the character Emily Kato at the conclusion of the new novel, Kogawa assembles a poignant call for continued humanitarian aid to meet the next wave of global crises:

[A]s the world is convulsed by wars, by the cataclysmic event of the tsunami in Southeast Asia, the plague of AIDS in Africa, global warming, genocides, pollution, the disappearance of species, and grief without end, I think of Aunt Emily saying that indifference was the deadliest fire of all . . . Perhaps each little action of love unleashed by catastrophe will transform our indifference to other devastations. (*Emily Kato* 275)

Joy Kogawa's textual revisions of the activist

figure of Emily Kato reflect her own vigorous resistance to indifference, her own commitment to a strenuous self-reappraisal process, and the critical view that our lives can only be enriched by revising our understanding while acquiring new knowledge. Her evolving representations of the activist figure of Emily Kato have been central to her development as a writer. Like Emily Kato, Joy Kogawa has never wavered in her remarkable idealism and her visionary goal of social justice for all of humanity.

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The Politics of Redress in Post-9/11 Canada

JULIE MCGONEGAL

One of the most relevant and provocative features of Joy Kogawa's recently published *Emily Kato* consists of a coda dedicated to contesting the oppression of Muslim Canadians in post-9/11 Canada.¹ Dismayed by the stark and senseless contrast between two very different Septembers – one in 1988 when Japanese Canadians formally achieved political redress for their internment during the Second World War, and the other in 2001 when the 9/11 catastrophe unleashed, among other things, profoundly racist sentiments towards Muslim Canadians, Kogawa meditates on the impact and meaning of the politics of redress in a 21st-century world characterized by heightened animosity and aggression. As a retrospective reconsideration of the Japanese-Canadian redress achievement from the standpoint of this changed political atmosphere, the coda represents a dramatic shift

in the tone of the text as a whole, from one of sheer jubilation and delight in recounting “that wonderful day” of apology and restitution, to one of “unspeakable grief” in reflecting on the state of a world that “has been turned inside out by catastrophic events” (272). With this shift, Kogawa invites us to rethink the politics of redress in light of the larger geopolitical shifts that have transformed global politics since 9/11, and to ask along with her what, if any, significance the redress achievement bears in a world in which, as Edward Said observed, “the notion that disparate cultures can harmoniously and productively coexist has come to seem like little more than a quaint fiction.”²

In this highly charged context of global unrest, the parallels between the oppression of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War and of Muslim Canadians after 9/11 are as uncanny as the differences between the just cause of redress and the profoundly unjust War on Terror, as it is called, are stark. Although Muslim Canadians were not physically interned as Japanese Canadians were, they have experienced what Raja Khouri of the Canadian Arab Federation has characterized as “psychological internment,” a general experience of exclusion and marginalization from Canadian society as Canadian identity is increasingly defined in

terms of racialized myths of the white European settler (qtd. in Arat-Koc 37). Immediately following the 9/11 attacks both US President George Bush and Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien claimed, as Kogawa recalls, that the internment experience must not be historically reenacted in the present. And yet Muslim Americans and Canadians have been subjected to wholesale racialization and victimization throughout the post-9/11 period as part of a growing discourse of anti-terrorism. Lamenting this renewal and rearticulation of white nationalism, Kogawa reflects upon its serious implications for these communities, in forms that range from the persecution of targeted individuals to the defamation of religious places of worship:

Although the uprooting and displacement of Muslim Canadians in North America has not occurred, the new “war on terror” makes victims of our own loyal citizens. Families are taunted. Places of worship are targeted. On the basis of appearance alone, people are relegated to the company of the despised and viewed with suspicion and fear—on sidewalks, in elevators, at border crossings and airports, and in school playgrounds. Many Canadian Muslim children may never recover their self-confidence. (272-73)

Indeed, in the post-9/11 period, Canadian identity has been increasingly defined in terms of

“race” and “civilization” as part of a larger reconfiguration of the boundaries of Canadian national belonging. This reconfiguration, which has led to the increasing marginalization of non-white minorities in Canada, represents a new phase in a period of heightened racism that has dominated Canadian discourses on immigration and refugee policy since the 1990s (see Arat-Koc). For despite officially challenging US hegemony in the post-9/11 period, particularly regarding the war in Iraq, Canada has contributed to national and transnational racist discourses of the other, not only by participating in regimes of war in Afghanistan and elsewhere, but also by enacting legislation aimed at enhancing “national security.”

In the aftermath of 9/11, the Canadian state implemented a series of legislative changes – in the form of the Anti-Terrorism Act, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, and the Public Safety Act – that increased its ability to police borders, immigrants, asylum seekers, Internet and cell phone communication, and political resistance.³ Such augmented state powers have had profoundly dire consequences for Muslim Canadians, whose political citizenship and basic civil liberties have been under assault as a result of a renewal of racist and nationalist discourses. Perhaps most worrisome

has been the systematic surveillance, profiling, arrest, and detention of Arabs and Muslims, including those who are citizens, immigrants, and asylum seekers.

In this context of shifting discourses of racism, signifiers such as skin colour, religion, and education have assumed heightened symbolic meaning. Muslim citizens with strong religious convictions have been targeted for surveillance, policing, and incarceration; the typical terrorist profile has been broadened from the poor and uneducated to include the well-educated and professional man; and in the popular imagination the figure of the Muslim has been collapsed to include the racial “other” more generally (see Dua, Razack, and Warner). Although alternative voices have been raised, with many Canadians engaging a discourse of community dialogue and mutual respect across ethno-religious lines, Canadian identity has been undeniably redefined in the post-9/11 period along racial and civilizational lines.⁴

If internally this redefinition of Canadian identity has led to a re-whitening of Canadian identity and the concomitant marginalization of Muslim and Arab Canadians, internationally it situates Canada as an unconditional partner of the United States and as part of “the West” generally. Indeed, certain conservative political par-



ties within Canada have been empowered through the events of 9/11 to define Canadian identity as unquestionably and unambiguously part of “the West.” The campaign to limit the boundaries of Canadian identity to a form of white national belonging and identity emerges out of transnational discourse of “us” versus “them” that is vaguely based on Samuel Huntington’s deplorable and reductive thesis that the post-Cold War era would be defined by a “clash” of radically opposed civilizations. This hegemonic form of “nationalism” – a white nationalism that validates some Canadians as belonging in “Western civilization” while excluding and marginalizing others – has, as Sedef Arat-Koc asserts, dire implications for Canadian society generally, and for non-white Canadians especially, many of whom invested hopes in the possibilities of multiculturalism. However, whether the redefinition of Canadian identity represents the end of multiculturalism itself, or merely reveals preexisting tensions and contradictions within the policy of Canadian multiculturalism, is open to debate.

What is perhaps more certain is that Kogawa’s coda resists and challenges uncritical analyses of Canadian multiculturalism, including those that focus specifically on her own work, by representing the project of democracy as perpet-

ually unfinished and unfulfilled. Conventionally, Kogawa criticism has functioned as a containment strategy that disconnects Canada's racist past from its putatively tolerant and harmonious present. In this way, Kogawa's most popular novel, *Obasan*, has been consistently situated in a developmental nationalist narrative which presents the story of the Japanese Canadian internment as a happy-ever-after tale of national reconciliation and unity. This teleological interpretation converges all too neatly, as critics such as Amoko A. Apollo and Guy Beauregard have demonstrated, with the narrative produced and disseminated via Canadian cultural and political institutions of multiculturalism. Such collusion of textual scholarship with official multiculturalism exposes – as did, albeit in a different way, the catastrophe of 9/11 – the inherent limits and contradictions of multiculturalism-as-ideology. I have argued elsewhere that Kogawa's narratives of redress challenge this ideology by engaging thoughtfully with questions of forgiveness, memory, time, and the nation.⁵

In what follows here I wish to suggest that Kogawa's corpus invites a timely discussion of the limits and possibilities of the politics of redress in a post-9/11 world. Reread in the context of current debates about national identity and citizenship, *Emily Kato*, as well as *Obasan*


and *Itsuka*, have the potential to powerfully inform our ideas about democracy, justice, and the future at a time when such concepts are endangered and abused by the reductive language of fundamentalism.

As an alternative to apocalyptic fundamentalist discourses of catastrophe and terrorism, Kogawa promotes a post-humanist politics of hope that opens up the possibilities of redress without blindly eliding the challenges of our historical condition. I describe her politics as “post-humanist” as a way of simultaneously registering both her skepticism towards liberal humanism *and* her awareness that the language of humanism may, after all, be the only language available for promoting justice.⁶ Kogawa’s post-humanism responds to Edward Said’s call in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* for a more democratic, transformative, and emancipatory form of humanism as a rejoinder to the insidious “clash of civilizations” thesis expounded by Samuel Huntington and articulated in a different forum by George W. Bush through an emphasis on the distinction between good and evil, us and them, civilization and barbarism.

In response to James Clifford’s famous denunciation of *Orientalism* for its putatively contradictory incorporation of humanist and poststructuralist schools of thought, Said argues

that it is indeed “possible to be critical of humanism in the name of humanism and that, schooled in its abuses by the experience of Eurocentrism and empire, one could fashion a different kind of humanism that was cosmopolitan” (11). Thus resisting the anti-humanist politics that inform much postcolonial and critical race work, Said reconceptualizes humanism in post-Enlightenment terms as hermeneutic and interrogatory: “It is not,” he insists, “a way of consolidating and affirming what ‘we’ have always known and felt, but rather a means of questioning, upsetting, and reformulating so much of what is presented to us as commodified, packaged, uncontroversial, and uncritically codified certainties” (28). In ways that invoke Said’s notion of critical humanism, Kogawa advocates a humanist politics of solidarity and empowerment rooted in a measure of “healthy doubt,” or what she refers to as “that which prevents us from succumbing to the demonic power of an unthinking trust” (“Just Cause” 20).

In its resistance to complexity and heterogeneity, the critical reception to Kogawa’s work is reminiscent of the famous debates that have swirled around Said’s internationally acclaimed writings. Like Said’s, her writing has been at the centre of vigorous and sometimes fractious debates by literary critics insistent on viewing



her humanism as precluding the possibility of critical ambivalence, skepticism, or uncertainty. I have questioned before the notion that the post-modern techniques and perspectives at work in her writing inherently contradict her sympathy with the humanist project of redress. Specifically, I have argued against the idea that her reluctance to endorse any kind of grand concluding narrative is fundamentally at odds with her aspiration to develop what Paul Ricoeur has called a “culture of just memory” (11).

Without revisiting the details of my argument here, let me suggest merely that Kogawa’s reflections on the ontological nature of memory in *Obasan* radically throw into question epistemological claims about the certainty of truth, without ultimately surrendering to the radical postmodern position that past events are inaccessible *tout court*. “All our ordinary stories are changed in time,” Naomi observes in an oft-quoted reflection, “altered as much by the present as the present is shaped by the past” (25). While this statement demands that we consider what it means for the politics of redress when memory is capricious and unpredictable, Kogawa does not accede to the view that the past remains trapped in its pastness, which would essentially amount to endorsing forgetfulness. Rather, the representation of the impar-

tiality of memory in her texts is conjoined with an awareness of just how imperative are the tasks of remembering, mourning, and recovery to subjective and social change.

Thus redress is not a vehicle for forgetting or eliding the past; nor is it a means for repressing or resolving Canada's legacy of racist injustice in a naïve search for closure. Rather, it is a tool for strategically reconstructing and renarrating the past as part of a complex and potentially endless process of signifying differently, in a way that "gives memory a future."

The notion of remembering strategically, as a means of intervening on the side of history's victims and in the interests of future justice, is profoundly instructive in light of the exclusionary tendencies of post-9/11 rituals of commemoration. While the last quarter-century was characterized by what might be called a "memory boom" – a growing collective recognition around the world of the potential value of the work of mourning human atrocity and violence – the routines of commemoration generated by the destruction of 9/11 have been undeniably hegemonic in discursively framing the event in terms that evoke forms of racial identification and exclusion. Such routines function, as David Simpson asserts in his book *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration*, in order to "assimilate intense

and particular beliefs into received, broader realms rather than the merely personal. They exist to mediate and accommodate the unbearably dissonant agonies of the survivors into a larger picture that can be metaphysical or national-political” (2).

As rituals of memorialization have translated the intense emotions of 9/11 into a broader national-political representation of American culture, what has emerged is a racialized picture that depicts monocultural civilizational identities rather than diverse political subjectivities and groups. Witness the glaring absence of meaningful reaction to events affecting far larger groups of people in parts of the world other than the United States. Or the mad time of revenge that has emerged alongside the time of memory and commemoration: as most of the world knows, those now being punished for the 9/11 tragedy are not the original aggressors.

Given the blatant strategies of political manipulation that have emerged out of the attacks, Gilbert Achcar has argued that the intense affect generated by the pain and destruction of the attacks constitutes a form of “narcissistic” compassion rather than simply a general display of humanity. By this he means that post-9/11 public expressions of compassion evoked identification in terms of race, class, and citizen-



ship status, in a process of collective mourning that shored up national and international support for American imperial hegemony. “We are all Americans now” – a phrase frequently invoked in Canada after 9/11 – exemplifies the hegemonic demands of identification. Being “all Americans now,” at least according to popular media representations, means identification with and support for American foreign policy. The implicit focus on “people like us” not only functions to potentially foreclose or shut down potential sites of resistance, it also effectively excludes those from outside the US from feelings of intense grief, as well as the many people of colour and undocumented workers who perished in the twin towers.

This resurrection of rhetorically declared oppositions, us and them, has placed an inordinate burden on the humanist project of encouraging sympathy for others by way of shared feeling. Many scholars, including Paul Gilroy, Edward Said, and David Simpson, are asking if humanist values and principles are irrelevant utopian fantasies in this time of political upheaval, or on the contrary more urgent now than ever before. Without discounting the relevance of the humanist project by any means, Simpson suggests that it has come under scrutiny for good reason: “The pursuit of a war against innocent people and

the apparent tolerance of avoidable deaths (our own and those of others) suggest that we have *not* after all learned to suffer with others by way of a common sensing of the vulnerable body. Not yet.” It is the *not yet* rather than the *not* that we ought to privilege in this statement: we have *not yet* after all learned to mourn the sufferings of others, much less struggle to prevent those sufferings in the first place. It is precisely this *not yet* that Kogawa judiciously emphasizes, with each of her various writings on Japanese Canadian redress – her latest novel in particular – illuminating the value and the necessity of a concept of time that imagines a more democratic future without engaging in blissful naïveté about the challenges of modernity.

Specifically, Kogawa takes up the call for a democratic humanism in a time of global war and strife by situating the quest for social and political justice within the temporal frame of what I have referred to elsewhere as the “future anterior.”⁷ By this I mean, on one level, that she constructs the project of democracy in Derrida’s terms as an event-to-come: perpetually deferred, always in process, and thus profoundly impossible. On another, I mean that she conceives democratic projects such as redress movements as creating an afterlife for memory – that is, as struggling toward the possibility of future justice



while simultaneously retaining the memory of injustice. In this way, redress can be thought of as operating through the past and yet anticipating the future: that is, as recollecting and renarrating the past in order to redirect the future, interrupt its trajectories, and open up new possibilities. In Kogawa's writings, the teleology of redress "is not unlike determinism, but is dispersed rather than operationalized through linear causality. The future inhabits the present, yet it has not yet come" (Fortun 196).

The not-yet-ness of democracy is not a nihilistic statement of political despair, paradoxically, but a utopian pronouncement that emerges out of the legacy of a liberatory politics of hope. Democratic movements such as the Japanese Canadian redress movement, the contemporary anti-globalization protests, and the demonstrations against the war on Iraq anteriorize the future positively by redirecting history as opposed to merely reiterating it – by drawing their fullness of meaning from what will unfold in the future and intervening positively in historical trajectories already in motion.

In all of Kogawa's texts, this concept of time pivots around the symbolic word "itsuka" – a Japanese term that roughly translates "someday" and that Uncle chants in an almost incantatory fashion toward the end of *Obasan*. As a term

that Naomi reinvokes in the context of the redress achievement, “itsuka” gestures toward possibilities that have not yet come but can only ever be glimpsed on the horizon – suggesting once again that the politics of redress is never definitively achieved but always *not quite* or *in process*. Indeed, the very term connotes the logic of perpetual deferral that structures the project of redress generally. And although Naomi describes the so-called redress “achievement” in the final pages of *Itsuka* and *Emily Kato* in an excited discourse of fulfillment and completion – as “a promise fulfilled, a vision realized” (275, 268), ultimately she represents it in anti-transcendent terms as “a distant star, an asterisk in space to guide us through the nights that yet must come” (274, 267). In imagining redress as an ongoing relational process, Kogawa conceives its politics in ways similar to Roy Miki, who in contesting the recuperation of the story of redress into a grand national story of reconciliation, has, quoting Gayatri Spivak, argued that for “a collective struggle *supplemented* by the impossibility of full ethical engagement . . . the future is always around the corner” (qtd. in *Broken Entries* 199; emphasis in the original).⁸

Perhaps it is the futurity of justice that must be kept fervently in mind as the world struggles to fathom the racial violence and animosity that

has overtaken the beginning of the 21st century. In Kogawa's latest novel, futurity is symbolically figured through the eponymous Emily Kato, whose indefatigable commitment to bring about justice for Japanese Canadians affirms the value of struggling for change in a world of escalating global unrest. If Obasan and Uncle are the absent presences in *Itsuka* – “the dead [who] stand with their feet in doorways, asking not to be forgotten” (149) – it is the ghost of Aunt Emily that haunts Kogawa's latest work. Although Emily is alive throughout the narrative, she becomes seriously ill in the course of it, a living ghost whose figurative absent-presence draws attention to the principle of responsibility that girds the project of redress. By the time the coda is written – sixteen years later – Emily is “increasingly frail” and fighting for her life as she encounters “new struggles with disease and depression” that Naomi describes as “more arduous than her political battles” (275). It is her spirit that animates, if not the book as a whole, the coda in particular, enabling, as spirits do, “respect for justice concerning those who are not yet there, those who are no longer or who are not yet *present and living*” (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* xix).

The coda pays tribute to her humanist faith and hope in the context of an increasingly glob-

alized world in which, as Naomi recalls Emily herself saying, “everything was more porous than it had seemed before – the walls between countries, between people, the known and the unknown, the past, the present, the living, the dead” (262). As a liminal figure that ontologically straddles, in the time of the coda, the very threshold between the past and present, life and death, Emily’s spectral presence symbolically evokes the intimate boundedness of time and space. It is her recognition of the profound interconnectedness of humanity in the era of globalization – her belief, which becomes Naomi’s, “that everything, however great or insignificant, is connected” (272) – that prompts us as readers to consider the continuities between the Japanese Canadian redress and the contemporary international order of global warfare. For if indeed “the implications of redress have taken on an even greater significance in the context of escalating global unrest” (*Redress* xi), as Roy Miki asserts, then we need to ask what those implications are as well as what kind of response they invite.

Surely it is impossible to comprehend the impact of the politics of redress without situating it within the larger international picture of a global order plagued by perpetual war. In this setting, where the discourse of fear, insecurity, and terrorism prevails, it would be tempting to dismiss redress as nothing more than a

symptom of the continuation of historical processes of racialization, colonialism, imperialism, Eurocentrism, and, more recently, globalization. After all, the Japanese Canadian redress movement emerged as an outcome of forces of globalization, which, as Miki explains, produced government initiatives designed to strengthen national identity as a means of mediating the neoliberal agenda of global capitalism (*Redress* 325).

More generally, one must keep in mind that, much as redress and restitution inspire hope in the possibility of an ethical imperative in national and international politics, they function as social causes only in so far as injustice and violence continue to exist (see Barkan). Indeed the only sense in which it “makes sense” to discuss the politics of redress after 9/11 is by acknowledging the urgent demands that threaten to hijack the project of democracy – and with it the humanist subject – in our current global state of war. Given the challenges of this tautology, it might indeed seem hopelessly naïve or fantastically utopian to claim any kind of productive role for redress in the daunting quest to create models of peaceful coexistence as alternatives to the normalized discourses of war and the “clash of civilizations.”

And yet rather than succumb to the political cynicism of those who would deny the power or relevance of redress in the 21st century, Kogawa

invests faith in its potential to intervene positively in a world devastated by war. While conceding that “[t]he world has been turned inside out by catastrophic events that make our story of redress seem as significant as a snail trail on the morning sidewalk” (272), she professes her continued belief in the organic interconnectedness of human processes and forces. Without referring explicitly to the influence of the Japanese Canadian redress movement in mobilizing struggles for redress among other ethno-religious communities within Canada, she intimates its critical role in promoting cross-cultural dialogue and political engagement. For despite the heightened animosity to which the so-called war against terrorism has given rise, “Far more than they fight,” as Said observes, “cultures coexist and interact fruitfully with each other” (xvi).

Witness, for example, the participation of many individual Canadians in antiwar demonstrations: the incredible diversity of groups that opposed the war “meant that,” as Arat-Koc observes, “rather than clashing as expected, as essentialized ‘civilizational’ subjects, participants had learned from each other . . . developing new political subjectivities” (44). Or consider the Canadian government’s recent formal apology and compensation to Chinese Canadians for having imposed a racist Head Tax in the late 19th

and early 20th century; the decision to hold a public inquiry into the bombing of the Air India flight in the mid 1980s; and the public inquiry into the deportation of Canadian Muslim Maher Arar. The porousness of boundaries in an era of globalization certainly enables new opportunities for anti-racist struggles, new possibilities for forming coalitions and mobilizing across communities. The potential created by global flows of information and diasporic routes of communication is highlighted in *Emily Kato* by an additional narrative detail: Cedric's Armenian heritage and his search for justice for the genocide of his community, which he parallels not only to the Japanese Canadian redress struggle but also to the struggle for justice being undertaken by indigenous and colonized peoples the world over.

But arguably it is the activist-figure of Emily that most cogently articulates the meaning of redress in a world in which the narrative of genocide and racism pervades virtually every inch and corner. In advocating the kind of "humanism as useable praxis" (6) that Said argued is necessary for connecting democratic principles to the everyday practice of citizenship, she insists that redress fulfills the vital function of laying bare the myths of official public discourse. Aunt Emily boldly pronounces this in both *Itsuka* and *Emily Kato*:

The lie is alive in the world. It was there in Nazi Germany. It's in South Africa. In Latin America. In every country in the world. This is why redress matters. Because there are people intent on defending the oppressor's rights no matter what the truth, and they are in places of power. Not one of us, not a single one of us was ever found guilty of a disloyal act against Canada. But the accusation remains. (*Itsuka* 222; *Emily Kato* 229)

Rather than dogmatically lay claim, however, to a singular historical master-narrative, Aunt Emily speaks a critical humanism that allows for multiple interpretations: "There are as many stories [of redress]," she concedes, "as there are individuals" (*Itsuka* 239). From this perspective, redress matters – even more so after 9/11 – not so much because it speaks the "truth" as because it provides oppressed communities with the opportunity to "tak[e] control of the *production* of truth" (Hardt and Negri 156).⁹ Redress constitutes a potentially revolutionary practice at the level of production, where it enables the marginalized to control the narrative, to seize hold of the story in a transformative or liberating way. In the aftermath of 9/11, the power of redress to give the lie to the mythmaking of dominant powers offers a beacon of hope as alternative voices seek to debunk the excuses that have been fabricated in the search to legitimize the war on Iraq.

For Kogawa, however, this urgent dictum to produce truth as a counternarrative of resistance is inextricably bound up in the imperative to love thy neighbour – a figure that is all the more proximate given the conditions of globalization. Whereas Said privileges a secular humanism that interprets history through the principles of rationalism, Kogawa incorporates into this tradition strands of Christian liberal humanist ethics. Drawing on Biblical narratives of suffering and redemption, she connects the notion of the profound interconnectedness of humanity with the larger project of human solidarity. For it is by way of human intimacy that Kogawa suggests we can chart the possibility of building a collective future of justice out of catastrophe. Invoking the exceptional and extraordinary language of human love as a way of reclaiming the hopeful possibility that the work of anti-racist struggle is not in vain, she affirms the value of the politics of redress in the context of escalating racial conflict: “I continue to believe Aunt Emily’s gospel,” the coda to *Emily Kato* reads. “The heart’s power is greater than any power known. Hatred continues. Racism remains. But the work of love is deeper, brighter, better. Love endures. And the snail’s trail is still discernable to the observant eye” (272). Despite witnessing the inhumanity all around, Kogawa concludes with

the thought that love can move people to acts of insuperable courage and resistance. If love is not only “the unconditional acceptance of the otherness of the other, but also ‘*consent to a mystery of the other*’” (168), as Zygmunt Bauman reflects, then it is also the very foundation of an ethics of solidarity.

The seduction of the word itself – love – is that it is surrounded by, indeed immersed in, the banalities of approval, uncontroversial eulogizing, sentimental endorsement. The international media uncritically and unquestioningly produce and disseminate such banalities to vast audiences for whom love and peace, like hatred and war, are spectacles for immediate delectation and consumption. Yet Kogawa advocates undertaking the hard work of dissolving words like “love” into their elements, recovering what has been left out of international proposals for “resolution” or “redistribution.” Reflecting on the spirit of love that surrounds Aunt Emily as she descends into illness and ultimately death, she discerns the possibilities for future justice in prosaic acts of humanity, which for her, as for Emily, are the very antithesis of political indifference and apathy to the suffering of the human body:

These days, as the world is convulsed by wars, by the cataclysmic event of the tsunami in Southeast Asia,

the plague of AIDS in Africa, global warming, genocides, pollution, the disappearance of species, and grief without end, I think of Aunt Emily saying that indifference was the deadliest fire of all. Perhaps the planetary outpouring of aid for tsunami victims is a checkmark in the sky through which the light shimmers and dances towards us. Perhaps each little action of love unleashed by catastrophe will transform our indifference to other devastations. (275)

Kogawa seems acutely aware of the precariousness of love and its potential insufficiency as the site for redemption in times as bleak as ours. Given the radical pressure that threatens to defeat the humanist project of encouraging sympathy for others, she knows that her call for an ethics of love will offend our sense of the depth of the present challenge to the human condition. And yet still – out of a belief in the power and responsibility of the ethical imperative to love the other unconditionally – she puts forth the call: “Although this planet is less than a speck of lint on a lapel, still I know that each untold story is valuable beyond all measure. I know too that one tiny thought from one human heart, one tiny action of love coming out of the ravaging fires of indifference, unleashes more power and affects the cosmos in more ways than we can imagine” (276). Having counted the risks and chances, she offers love as the tentative answer to the dilemma of human despair, suggesting

that it is what ultimately binds us to an ethics of responsibility. If the task of the artist is, as Said writes of the intellectual, to “first grasp the difficulty of what cannot be grasped and then go forth to try anyway” (144), we might conclude that she lives up to the arduous demands of her role.

Notes

1. Properly speaking, what I am referring to as a coda is the final chapter of Kogawa's book. I prefer the term “coda” because this particular section of the text is not written as part of the overall narrative, but rather constitutes a discrete space of reflection and composition on events relating to (but not of) the novel's overriding concerns.
2. I borrow this convenient phrasing from the book flap of the hard cover edition of Said's *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia UP, 2005). Said's principal objective in this, his last book-length publication, is to reclaim a role for humanism – or what he refers to in one instance as non-humanist humanism – at a time in history when “the idea of humanism as sharing and coexistence” is being thrown into crisis by a militaristic discourse and practice predicated upon the divisive and irresponsible labels of “the West” and “Islam.” Movements for redress and restitution are inherently rooted in the concepts and principles of Enlightenment humanism, particularly the idea that individuals and collectivities are fundamentally entitled to human rights. So the question then becomes: if humanism is under siege as never before, what becomes of these movements that held out such profound hope for the possibility of an ethical imperative in the realm of politics?
3. My overview of Canada's implication in post-9/11 discourses of race draws upon the work of Enaskshi Dua, Narda Razack, and Jody Nyasha Warner, whose introduction to a special issue of the journal *Social Justice* provides an illuminating and informative account of the legislative changes introduced by the Canadian state in response to US hegemony. See their article, “Race, Racism, and Empire: Reflections on Canada.” *Social Justice* 32 (2005): 1-10.
4. Despite an emergent anti-terrorist discourse of fear and insecurity, Canada has also constituted the site for a renewed discourse of productive cross-cultural interaction and mutual trust. In a method-

ological study that incorporates media content analysis and interviews with Canadian Muslims, Paul Nesbitt-Larking, for instance, perceives “powerful demands for community dialogue and political engagement” (“Canadian Muslims: Discourses of Citizenship and Political Entitlement,” ISA Convention, San Diego, 25 Mar. 2006). His claims shore up Said’s argument that the labels “West” and “Islam” are deceptive and ultimately unhelpful unless they are “deconstructed analytically and critically” (xvi).

5. See my book-length study *Imagining Justice: The Politics of Postcolonial Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP, 2009). Portions of the manuscript were previously published as “Redress Matters: The Politics of Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Redress in Kogawa’s *Obasan* and *Itsuka*” in *Studies in Canadian Literature* 30 (2005): 55-78.
6. I borrow this term from Samuel Durrant, who deploys it as a way of describing “an agonistic position” that is nevertheless the “only tenable ethical position available” (457). To be a posthumanist humanist, according to Durrant’s definition, is to hold two apparently contradictory attitudes toward liberal humanism simultaneously: that is, to be suspicious of its historical implication in processes of racism and Eurocentrism while also recognizing that it may offer the only critical tool for resisting acts of injustice. Said uses the term “non-humanist humanist” to describe this “dialectically fraught” role – he calls it the “destiny” of the American humanist – of perpetually deconstructing one’s own position (77). See Samuel Durrant, “Bearing Witness to Apartheid: J.M. Coetzee’s Inconsolable Works of Mourning,” *Contemporary Literature* 40.3 (1999): 430-463.
7. See 5.
8. Ibid.
9. Writing of the postmodernist assault on the master-narratives of “the Enlightenment,” Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri turn to the various truth commissions established in the last half of the 20th century in order to make the point that making public the truth about the past is “a powerful and necessary form of resistance” (155) for those who have been the victims of dictatorial and apartheid regimes. In countering those who would critique the notion of truth, they argue that truth matters at “the level of *production*.” While truth will not liberate people in and of itself, “taking control of the production of truth will” (156).

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“An awfully unwieldy business”

*State territoriality, power, and Joy
Kogawa’s Obasan*

TIM NIEGUTH

Joy Kogawa’s novel *Obasan* is, in many ways, fundamentally concerned with time. The politics of memory and remembrance play a central part in the encounter of Naomi Nakane, the novel’s protagonist, with the problematic past of her family, and Canada’s treatment of the Japanese Canadian community during and after the Second World War. At the same time, *Obasan* is profoundly marked by a sense of space. This is evident in the importance it attaches to place in discussing individual identity, as well as in its keen awareness of personal space (Grice). It is also evident in the novel’s engagement with the racialization of space and resistance to this process. Early in the novel, Naomi relates her experience of a dinner conversation she shares with the widowed father of one of her students: “‘Where do you come from?’ he asked, as we sat

down at a small table in a corner. That's the one sure-fire question I always get from strangers. People assume when they meet me that I'm a foreigner" (7). Aunt Emily, one of the main characters in *Obasan*, resists this inscription of race onto Canadian space by forcefully asserting the Canadian identity of Japanese Canadians and their claims to Canada as their homeland (see, for example, 39-42).

The focus of this chapter is on the internment, dispersal and (in some cases) "repatriation" of Japanese Canadians at the hands of the Canadian state, as refracted in Kogawa's novel. As Aunt Emily observes, the internment of Japanese Canadians in the Second World War was "an awfully unwieldy business" that engendered a fair amount of resistance from members of the Japanese Canadian community (*Obasan* 97). In addition, the internment, dispossession, and dispersal of Japanese Canadians raised serious questions about the state of democracy, citizenship, and human rights in mid-twentieth-century Canada. Why, then, did the Canadian government embark on a project of this nature? The existing literature has highlighted the interplay of racism, economic motives, and political expediency in answering this question (Adachi; Roy, *Triumph*; Ward, *White*). This chapter aims to add to this literature by suggesting that part of



the answer can be found in state territoriality. It will begin by outlining the concept of state territoriality as the articulation of a specific form of political authority with a specific form of territory. Building on socio-political approaches to human territoriality, neo-institutionalism, and discourse theory, the chapter then examines the role of state territoriality as a factor contributing to the treatment of Japanese Canadians by the Canadian state during and after the Second World War. In doing so, it draws on the portrayal of spatialized strategies of control and identity production in *Obasan*.

State territoriality in historical perspective

Sovereignty and territory are two hallmarks of the modern society of states. Sovereignty refers to the idea that the state is the ultimate locus of legitimate and unfettered authority in a given society. It has two aspects: external sovereignty entails the prohibition of interference in a state's domestic affairs by other states, while internal sovereignty implies that the political authority vested in the state is undivided, covers all policy areas, and is not subject to or bound by rival power centres within society. A state's territory is seen as clearly bounded, but also as internally



homogeneous (Grosby), continuous, and contiguous (Elkins). The extent of a state's sovereignty is marked by the extent of its territory: in the modern state system, political authority is exercised over a geographical area with clearly delineated borders. At least conceptually, all individuals resident or otherwise present in a state's territory are subject to that state's authority, but the state's reach ends at its border with neighbouring states. Put differently, sovereignty posits a stark distinction between an inside (which is subject to a state's authority) and outside (which is not). That distinction is taken to be relatively unproblematic and is defined geographically through territorial boundaries.

This chapter refers to the articulation of sovereignty and this particular view of territory as state territoriality. Conceptually, state territoriality has become so deeply entrenched that it is typically taken for granted in contemporary political and academic discourses about the organization of authority (Ruggie). In practice, of course, state territoriality is neither unproblematic nor unchallenged. It is frequently difficult, at best, to determine whether a political issue is "domestic" and thus supposedly off-limits to other states. In any event, states intervene regularly in the "domestic" affairs of other states. Moreover, the exercise of state authority



does not always respect territorial boundaries. In many cases, expatriates are still subject to (at least some of) the laws of their countries of origin. Conversely, states do not exercise ultimate authority over all individuals located in their boundaries: the personnel of other states' embassies is a case in point.

In addition, it is worth bearing in mind that state territoriality is a relatively recent historical innovation. The concept of sovereignty only began to emerge in the sixteenth century. Jean Bodin's 1576 *Six Books of the Commonwealth* are typically seen as the first articulation of sovereignty in its modern form. The particular concept of territory that underpins the modern state system is likewise of relatively recent historical vintage. To focus on European historical experience, the great empires of antiquity had no clearly demarcated boundaries establishing an "inside" and "outside," as Susan Mattern observes of Rome:

Though the empire came to have certain fixed psychological boundaries, nevertheless there were always tribute-paying tribes and "client-kings" of ambiguous status beyond its borders. Conversely, the Romans thought of provincial revolts like those in Dalmatia and Pannonia in AD 6, or in Judaea in AD 69, as foreign wars. (4-5)

Similarly, the sense of territory that character-



ized European feudalism several centuries later was much more diffuse than today's view of territory, and feudal boundaries were considerably more porous. The Valois rulers of fifteenth-century Burgundy, for example, held titles and fiefs both in France and the German empire (Vaughan). Moreover, feudalism was a system of divided, partial, and overlapping authority: unlike the modern state system, political authority was vested in several competing power centres. In addition, feudal lords often owed allegiance to several overlords at the same time, rather than being located in a pyramidal hierarchy of political authority. Finally, the authority of a feudal lord in a given geographical area was often not universal, but limited to the exercise of certain clearly enumerated rights.

Approaching state territoriality

Given the relatively recent nature of state territoriality, what is its significance for social relations? In approaching this question, this chapter combines insights from three different theoretical perspectives: studies of human territoriality, neo-institutionalism, and discourse theory. Regarding the first perspective, socio-biologists such as Robert Ardrey see territoriality as an



intrinsic part of human nature. In this view, human beings are genetically programmed to acquire and defend territory. However, most contemporary students of human territoriality subscribe to a different view. Edward Soja, for example, emphasizes the historically malleable nature of space and territory. Robert Sack, one of the most influential analysts of human territoriality, similarly underlines that “territoriality is imbedded in social relations. Territoriality is always socially constructed” (26). Sack interprets territoriality as “the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area” (19; original emphasis deleted). In Foucauldian terminology, the key element of territoriality according to Sack is the exercise of repressive power.

A second approach that can shed some light on the social significance of state territoriality is neo-institutionalism. While neo-institutionalists (unsurprisingly) agree that institutions matter in society and politics, there is a great deal of disagreement concerning how and why they do matter. However, it is possible to distinguish between two broad schools of thought within neo-institutionalism: rational choice and sociological. The former is useful for the purposes of



this chapter because it emphasizes “that institutions are congealed power relationships” (Atkinson 30). In this view, institutions matter essentially because they constrain or enable certain forms of action. In contrast, sociological neo-institutionalism emphasizes the role of institutions in shaping the identities, preferences, objectives, and strategies of social actors. From this vantage point, institutions matter as much for their productive properties as for the constraints they impose on individual and group behaviour.

To the extent that territoriality can be understood as one of the foundational institutions of the modern state system (Holsti), both variants of neo-institutionalism highlight the implication of territoriality in social power relations. As an institution, state territoriality matters both because it is based on specific power relations, and because it influences the production of social actors. In consequence, we can expect state territoriality to further certain social goals and interests over others; to orientate, shape, and limit the actions and goals pursued by groups; and to affect the symbolic and material resources at the disposal of different groups.

A third theoretically fruitful angle in the exploration of state territoriality is provided by discourse theory in the vein of Ernesto Laclau



and Chantal Mouffe (for an overview of Laclau and Mouffe's body of work, see especially Smith). The term "discourse" has had a rather checkered history in the social sciences over the last three decades. It is often understood to refer specifically to the linguistic order of society. Laclau and Mouffe's usage of the term is broader than this. In their view, social reality as a whole is constituted by and through discourse. This is not to suggest that material reality does not exist, but that human beings always apprehend material reality through discourse. In Mouffe's words, discourse is "composed of practices, institutions, discourse [*sic*]; it is something that is very material" (qtd. in Worsham and Olson 200). The meaning of different moments that make up a given discourse – say, a discourse about national identity – depends on their position in that discourse and their articulation with other moments of the same discourse.

For the purposes of this chapter, this approach highlights the productive side of state territoriality. As part of hegemonic discourses about political authority and identity, it is inescapably steeped in power relations. Further, reading state territoriality through Laclau and Mouffe allows one to emphasize the contingent, malleable, and dynamic nature of state territoriality. Far from possessing fixed meaning, the



concept and significance of state territoriality is in flux and constantly contested. As noted above, political authority can be and has been conceived in forms that do not link it to state territoriality, at least not in its contemporary sense. Finally, if state territoriality is conceived as one moment in a broader discourse of political authority and spatiality, this underscores the importance of analyzing its implications for different social groups and interests.

The Second World War and the treatment of Japanese Canadians

This section will briefly recapitulate the treatment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. In the next section, the chapter will draw on the insights offered by the theoretical approaches discussed above to explore some of the ways in which state territoriality contributed to this treatment. Canada had been home to several thousand Japanese and Japanese Canadians since the nineteenth century. At the onset of the Second World War, Canadian residents of Japanese descent numbered roughly 23,000. The vast majority, about 22,000, lived in British Columbia (mostly in the coastal areas), and many of them were employed in the fisheries



sector. After the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the Royal Canadian Navy, on orders issued by the Canadian government, seized 1,200 boats owned and operated by persons of Japanese descent. By Order-in-Council, nearly the entire fleet was sold to non-Japanese individuals several months later, at prices well below their market value. Kogawa's "Found Poem" succinctly and matter-of-factly describes this process:

Uazusu Shoji
who was twice wounded
while fighting with the Princess Pats
in World War I
had purchased nineteen acres of land
under the Soldiers Settlement Act
and established a chicken farm.
His nineteen acres
a two-storied house
four chicken houses
an electric incubator
and 2,500 fowl
were sold for \$1,492.59.
After certain deductions
for taxes and sundries were made
Mr. Shoji received a cheque
for \$39.32.

(Woman 65)

Likewise in December 1941, all persons of Japanese descent (including those who were Canadian citizens) were required to register with

the Registrar of Enemy Aliens, to guarantee “good behaviour,” and to “obtain permission for any movement from one locality to another” (Adachi 200).

In January 1942, Canada’s federal government took the additional step of issuing Order-in-Council P.C. 365, which permitted the Minister of National Defense “to declare any area in Canada a ‘protected area’ from which enemy aliens could be excluded.”

The government also announced that it intended to remove from the protected areas, soon to be defined in British Columbia, all Japanese aliens of military age and to create a Japanese civilian corps to work on projects deemed to be of national interest (Kelley and Trebilcock 293).

This was followed by Order-in-Council P.C. 1486, in February of the same year, which empowered the Minister of Justice to, among other things, remove anyone – regardless of citizenship status – from a protected area; to prevent them from entering or exiting a protected area; to place limits on anyone’s employment, movements, associations, and communications in a protected area; and to detain, “in such place and under such conditions as he may from time to time direct, ... any or all persons ordinarily resident or actually present in [a] protected



area” (qtd. in Adachi 424). This order was subsequently used to “evacuate” almost the entire population of Japanese descent from the Pacific coast, and to relocate them to a variety of controlled spaces – such as internment camps, work camps, and prisoner of war camps.

The “evacuation” of all persons of Japanese origin from the coast was announced on February 26, 1942, and the British Columbia Security Commission was established in March of the same year by Order-in-Council P.C. 1665 to organize and control the process. Kogawa’s *Obasan* vividly recounts subsequent events by way of Aunt Emily’s wartime journal. In an entry dated March 2, 1942, Aunt Emily notes the considerable emotional, social, and material upheaval caused by this process. “[T]he great shock,” according to this entry, “is this: we are all being forced to leave. All of us. Not a single person of the Japanese race who lives in the ‘protected area’ will escape” (85). As this entry indicates, the government’s “evacuation” order applied equally to all persons of Japanese descent, regardless of citizenship status. In particular, Canadian citizens of Japanese descent were not exempt from this measure. Likewise, the “evacuation” order was not based on individual threat assessments, but rather affected all members of the community regardless of cir-

cumstances. In effect, the removal of the Japanese Canadian community from the coast was effected without regard for citizenship rights and well-established standards of legal procedure.

Order-in-Council P.C. 1665 also determined that any property evacuees were unable to remove from the protected area was to be placed under the control of the Custodian of Alien Property (Adachi 217-218). Placing these assets in custody ostensibly served protective purposes, but the Custodian began to sell part of the assets a few months later. In January 1943, Canada's government gave the Custodian "the power to dispose of properties and belongings in his care without the owners' consent" (A. Miki, *Democracy* 111). Property held by the Custodian was sold at rates considerably below market value. Proceeds generated from those sales were used to pay for the cost created by the internment of Japanese Canadians (in contrast, the US government did not hold Japanese Americans responsible for the cost of their internment).

After the Second World War, the Canadian government implemented a two-pronged policy of deportation and dispersal, aimed respectively at reducing the presence of individuals of Japanese ancestry in Canada overall, and at preventing their concentration in British Columbia.

The government's preferred strategy for dealing with the "Japanese problem" was – at least initially – the removal of Japanese Canadians and Japanese nationals to Japan. Leading federal politicians from British Columbia, including Ian Mackenzie at the Cabinet level, had been pushing for this strategy early during the war. In 1943, the Department of External Affairs began to examine the possibility of achieving "the voluntary return of Japanese aliens to Japan after the war, along with the removal of Japanese Canadians and aliens who were deemed disloyal to Canada" (Kelley and Trebilcock 298). This approach was to underpin Canadian policy in subsequent years. Thus, the Canadian government's preference for removal was reflected in a policy statement by Prime Minister Mackenzie King, issued in the House of Commons in the summer of 1944. According to King, the government planned to remove those Japanese or Japanese Canadian residents deemed "disloyal" to Canada to Japan, and to discourage the remainder of the Japanese and Japanese Canadian community from staying in Canada.

In aid of this goal, all persons of Japanese ancestry over the age of 16 were required to inform the government whether they planned to stay in Canada or wished to be relocated to Japan. As Makabe points out, "it cannot be

overemphasized that Japanese Canadians were actively urged by the government to ‘return’ to Japan” (24). The government provided a number of incentives to encourage all members of the Japanese community in Canada to opt for removal, regardless of their citizenship status or their country of birth. These incentives included coverage of expenses for relocating to Japan, relief benefits for those who were waiting to be relocated to Japan, provision of funds in Japan of equal value to properties held in Canada, and financial assistance to aid those without property to settle in Japan. Simultaneously, the government sought to actively discourage the Japanese from staying in Canada. For example, internees choosing to remain in Canada were to be transferred to a camp in Kelso, BC. They were to remain there until the government had located employment opportunities for them – outside British Columbia. In a similar vein, resettlement allowances for those deciding to stay in Canada were less than 25 percent of the allowance granted “returnees” to Japan (Kelley and Trebilcock 298-299).

Under these circumstances, about 7,000 males of Japanese ancestry chose relocation to Japan. Once their wives and dependent children were added, the total number rose to roughly 10,500 – close to half the community. However,

the government's removal policy quickly encountered resistance from a number of quarters. Many members of the Japanese community itself objected to the policy and challenged it in court. Most of those who had initially signed a request for relocation to Japan later withdrew that request. In addition, several groups in the broader Canadian society opposed the policy. Finally, the Supreme Allied Command in Japan feared that relocation of several thousand individuals to Japan would exacerbate difficult postwar conditions in Japan. Ultimately, about 4,000 of the approximately 23,000 Japanese Canadians and Japanese citizens residing in Canada were relocated to Japan (A. Miki, *Democracy* 108; Nishiguchi 3).

In the face of resistance to the outright removal of Japanese and Japanese Canadians from Canadian soil, the Canadian government changed its emphasis from deportation to dispersal. It sought to encourage the relocation of residents of Japanese origin remaining in Canada to the Prairies and Ontario. It did so by providing a number of incentives for relocating to the east, such as an increased resettlement allowance and assistance with the resettlement process. Naomi, the protagonist of Kogawa's *Obasan*, sums up the consequences of this policy as follows: "The fact is that families already frac-

tured and separated were permanently destroyed. The choice to go east of the Rockies or to Japan was presented without time for consultation with separated parents and children” (183). The policy of dispersal thus further undermined the cohesion of the Japanese Canadian community in Canada. In doing so, it effectively attempted to erase this community from view, reinforcing notions of Canada as a white country.

Simultaneously, wartime policies aimed at preventing or discouraging the return of members of the Japanese community to British Columbia (for instance, restrictions on mobility, ownership, and employment) continued to be in effect for several years after the end of the war; they were only lifted in 1949. As Aunt Emily notes, this was in stark contrast to developments in the US, where restrictions on the mobility of Japanese Americans were lifted after the end of the war: “We weren’t allowed to return to the West Coast like that. We’ve never recovered from the dispersal policy. But of course that was the government’s whole idea – to make sure we’d never be visible again” (*Obasan* 34).

The state policies enacted during the 1940s had a lasting impact on the Japanese Canadian community. This is perhaps most immediately evident when mapping the location of Japanese

Canadians in Canada. By the time settlement restrictions were removed in the late 1940s, Japanese Canadian settlement patterns had been fundamentally altered. Up to the Second World War, the Japanese Canadian community had been concentrated almost exclusively in British Columbia. After the Second World War, it was dispersed throughout the country. In 1941, 95.5 percent of Japanese Canadians lived in British Columbia. This share had dropped to 33.1 percent in 1951. In the same year, 39.6 percent of Japanese Canadians lived in Ontario and 21.8 percent in the Prairie provinces. This new pattern remained relatively stable for most of the remaining twentieth century. In 1971, 36.5 percent of Japanese Canadians lived in British Columbia, 41.9 percent in Ontario, and 16.4 percent in the Prairie provinces (Adachi 413; Ward, *Japanese* 7). As of 2001, 44.6 percent of Japanese Canadians lived in British Columbia, 34.0 percent in Ontario, and 16.4 percent in the Prairies.

It was only after another four decades and persistent pressure from Japanese Canadians that the federal government issued an apology for the treatment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. In addition to the 1988 apology, the government committed a total of 300 million dollars to compensatory payments, a

Japanese Canadian community fund, and funding for a race relations foundation (on the Japanese redress campaign and settlement see, *inter alia*, R. Miki, *Redress*).

The Second World War treatment of Japanese Canadians and state territoriality

The “evacuation” of Japanese Canadians from the Pacific coast was justified by the Canadian government as a necessary security measure. The Pacific coast was described as a potential target for Japanese invasion, and individuals of Japanese origin were painted as potential collaborators. In December 1941, Aunt Emily’s wartime journal notes just such an attempt at fear-mongering within her community:

A couple of Sundays ago, the National President of the Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire, who obviously doesn’t know the first thing about us, made a deliberate attempt to create fear and ill-will among her dominion-wide members. Said we were all spies and saboteurs, and that in 1931 there were 55,000 of us and that number has doubled in the last ten years. A biological absurdity.

(*Obasan* 82)

This sort of argumentation was not new. In 1938, for instance, former Prime Minister R.B.

Bennett supported tougher restrictions on Japanese immigration to Canada and “warned rather obliquely that Canada had to be prudent in protecting its own coast and remember that its residents of Japanese descent were knowledgeable about that coastline, its ports and harbours, and other resources of British Columbia” (Kelley and Trebilcock 289).

In fact, the security threat posed by Japanese residents to Canada was non-existent. Senior RCMP, military, navy, and civil service personnel had been insisting years before the Second World War that a Japanese invasion of the West Coast was unlikely, and that Japanese Canadians did not represent a significant threat to Canadian security. They reiterated that position soon after the outbreak of the war (see, *inter alia*, A. Miki, *Democracy* 109; Kelley and Trebilcock 290- 292). Overall, it seems clear that the rationale behind the “evacuation” was based on racial prejudice rather than security concerns (Makabe 25) – a point made forcefully by Aunt Emily: “Why in a time of war with Germany and Japan would our government seize the property and homes of Canadian-born Canadians but not the homes of German-born Germans?” she asked angrily. ‘Racism,’ she answered herself.” (*Obasan* 38). In this context, it may be worth emphasizing that several hundred members of

Canada's German and Italian communities were, in fact, interned during the Second World War. However, the German and Italian communities were not targeted for internment and relocation in their entirety (see, *inter alia*, Iacovetta, Perin, and Principe).

The widespread concerns about security and their use to justify the internment, dispossession, and relocation of Japanese Canadians are instructive for understanding the implications of state territoriality for the treatment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. The conceptual reliance of state territoriality on clear territorial borders marks border areas as particularly vulnerable spaces, and thus contributes to a heightened concern for their protection against (real or imagined) threats. In addition, state territoriality has fundamental implications for the demographic composition of political space, for majority and minority relations within that space, and for the ethnic, national, cultural, racial, or linguistic conception of said space.

To illustrate this last point, the discourse of state territoriality has historically articulated with other discourses, including discourses of race and nation, in ways that have had significant implications for the character of state territories and social power relations. In particular, a



state's territory is often cast as the property of a specific ethnic or racial group. This clearly applies in the context of mid-twentieth-century Canada. As Peter Ward points out, most white British Columbians were deeply invested in the idea of a "White Canada":

White British Columbians yearned for a racially homogeneous society. They feared that heterogeneity would destroy their capacity to perpetuate their values and traditions, their laws and institutions – indeed, all those elements of their culture embraced by the White Canada symbol.

(*White* 169)

The extent of anti-Japanese racial prejudice in British Columbia was evident in routine appeals by British Columbian politicians to racist sentiments, as well as several discriminatory measures taken by the province's legislature and government against residents of Japanese ancestry well before the Second World War (Adachi; Sunahara; Roy, *Oriental*).

The prevalence of anti-Japanese attitudes also explains the King government's deportation and dispersal policies. As King remarked in his previously mentioned 1944 policy speech, the federal government's position was this:

[I]t would be unwise and undesirable... to allow the Japanese population to be concentrated in that

province [British Columbia] after the war... The sound policy and the best policy for the Japanese Canadians themselves is to distribute their members as widely as possible throughout the country where they will not create feelings of racial hostility.

(Quoted in Adachi 431 and 433)

Aside from reducing “racial hostility,” dispersal was also seen as a means to encourage assimilation, a goal that was widely accepted and supported in Canadian society at the time.

State territoriality also has an impact on the constitution of ethnic and racial groups – for example, on their self-identity and their level of cohesion. The clearest way in which state territoriality affects the constitution of groups has already been alluded to, that is, the control it gives the state (and groups that can effectively control particular states) over the composition of the population resident in a given area. States have rarely hesitated to deny entry to ethnic, national, or racial classes of individuals they considered undesirable, or to encourage the immigration of groups they deemed desirable on the basis of those criteria. For example, Canada’s immigration policy was based on explicitly racial criteria until the late 1960s. Likewise, states have used their control over territory to determine whether specific groups would be allowed to settle in specific geographical areas or not; the

Canadian injunction against Japanese settlement on the west coast during and after the Second World War is a case in point.

Finally, the treatment of Japanese Canadians in the Second World War also illustrates that state territoriality provides the framework for the “authoritative allocation of goods” (to borrow a term from political systems theory), as well as the authoritative mobilization of resources. Typically, ethnic and national groups will have differential access to the policy-making process involving these two aspects. One of the mediating factors in determining the degree of access is the articulation of state territoriality with discourses of race, nation, and ethnicity. Organizing political space on the basis of territory was one of the factors that left whites in a position of power and control over a racialized Japanese Canadian community occupying the same political space. Japanese residents in Canada had less access to material political resources (the disenfranchisement of Canadian citizens of Japanese origin is a case in point) and political decision-makers. State territoriality promoted the interests of whites and afforded them greater means of enforcing their vision of space – in particular, the vision of a racially homogeneous, White Canada. In other words, it placed whites in a position of privileged access

to material and symbolic political resources, and enabled them to pursue their group interests at the expense of Japanese Canadians.

Conclusion

State territoriality has had a profound impact on Canadian state policies aimed at controlling minority populations. As the preceding discussion of the treatment of Japanese Canadians in the Second World War has shown, that impact can be observed in some of the ways the Canadian state has historically produced political space and national groups. Thus, the idea of state territoriality articulated with notions of race and nation in ways that constituted Canada as a white space and marginalized groups that did not fit this description. Ethnic diversity, the heterogeneous quality of Canadian political (territorial) space, was not seen as cause for celebration, but as cause for concern.

State territoriality also had a significant and unequal effect on the opportunities available to Japanese Canadians and white Canadians, the symbolic and material resources at their disposal, and their ability to enforce particular visions of space. Similarly, state territoriality played a role in creating a pattern of white



majorities and non-white minorities, in constituting particular ethnic, national, or racial groups as dominant or subordinate, and in orientating the political aspirations, identities, and behaviour of Japanese Canadians as well as white Canadians. Since it locked different population groups into a common, territorially defined political space over which they could exercise differential degrees of control, state territoriality effectively contributed to the exclusion of Japanese Canadians from the political decision-making process. By extension, state territoriality had a profound effect on the ability of Japanese Canadians to claim co-ownership of Canada's territory.

To end with a disclaimer, none of this is to suggest that state territoriality should be regarded as the central factor driving Canadian policies towards Japanese Canadians during and after the Second World War. Rather, state territoriality should be understood as one of several factors in a complex matrix that conditioned the construction of a specific geographical area (held to belong to the Canadian state) as "white"; the production of Japanese Canadians as a racialized "Other"; the political ideas and objectives of different ethnic groups; and the social, political, and economic resources available to these groups for implementing their ideas and aspira-

tions. The treatment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War emerged out of this complex matrix.

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The Poetics of Moment, Exception, and Indirection in Joy Kogawa's Lyric Poetry

JONATHAN HART

The difference between world and word, ideology and mythology, actuality and dream may, theoretically, be difficult to prove. In all this, in the press of time and in a world that presses in on rest, contemplation, and peace, poetry and poetics find themselves, at least in their lyric moment, hard of breath and subject to scepticism about whether they exist or not. Poetry is the ancient centre of literature and drama, and in a utilitarian world, the difference between literature and other fields is both remarked on and erased. Poetry is something useless and not readily applicable, at least on first blush. Practically, we can see the difference between a poem and a bill of sale, but in the sweep of discourse, the word-breakers, like iconoclasts, would like to make all verbal expression equivalent and equal. This view was a corrective to the reifica-



tion and deification of poetry, but it can go too far. Poetry is in part a postulate in which to think about the order of words and feel and play in that verbal universe. The poetic also suggests more than itself in a world that might like to explain it or categorize it in ways that would tame or diminish it.

Criticism makes poetry social because the critic speaks to the reader about the poet. The act of writing is a private moment and so too is reading unless it is aloud to others. Mythology and the Bible provide a background for many of the poets and other literary writers, who displace these myths and rework them in a dance between their own times and other periods. Readers will still read these poems after the poet is gone. Poets often tell stories or fragments of narratives built on metaphor, which often connects the animate and the inanimate, against a usual logic. By doing so, the poet returns to the beginnings of human language and thought – the primitive imagination – with its animism and vital urges and associations. Perhaps through poetry, poets, readers, and critics come together to understand the stories we tell each other. In this way, we may come to comprehend the importance of the body of these myths (mythology) in the face of ideology. The ideological constitutes the arguments we as individ-

uals and as a society make to ourselves to justify our ways to ourselves. Is the poet speaking directly to the reader or is he or she overheard in a kind of indirection? Can poetry or at least moments in lyric poetry be disinterested? If poetry affirms nothing, as Philip Sidney famously suggested, does criticism assert too much and obscure the moments of do-nothingness or disinterest? Criticism or literary theory, especially close reading, comes from literature or is in response to it, but it also maintains a distance. Induction and deduction work together and in tension in the interpretation of poetry. A tension also occurs between the individual experience of reading a poem and a more general critique or theory of poetry or literature. Close reading mediates between systematic theory or criticism and the immediate reading of a poem (which for most readers is not a professional one or intended to form a review or essay for publication). What is mythical and what is real are in constant play as one writes and reads a poem: word and world, story and actuality vie. In life we tell stories, so how can we make sense without the narrative or the poetic, without myth and metaphor? Absorption and detachment are constant pulls for the reader, a kind of cross between Aristotelian mimesis and Brechtian estrangement.



Poetry plays with words, drawing the reader in, giving pleasure and creating beauty. Nothing set out here would surprise Aristotle or Plato, because they said as much. The hypothetical or possible world of poetry has its own forms, as music does. And the lyric has its own movement, rhythm, and associations. As we read, we try to find what is beyond time in the poem, but also admit that we are not at the time of the writing and, in a changing world, that means the reading brings to it a new context. Even the reader or critic dwells in that tension between poetry as transhistorical expression or momentary eternity and the poem as a speaking of its time and place. The reader tries to enter the poem while realizing that she or he can only seem to do that for a moment. Poetics and rhetoric contend within poems, so that lyric poetry tries to escape the world but is made up of everyday language or a language that comes from the same dictionary, phrases, and usages, no matter how elevated, turned, or re-invented. Form and content lie broken, but, if only for a moment, the reader may feel an animistic urge to unite them – a moment in which the *ur* of myth and the atonement of metaphor actually happens. But the world is always with us, and this moment cannot long be sustained. Only this aspect of poetry in general might be said to attest for its sustenance and endurance.

Perhaps, as Northrop Frye suggested in *The Educated Imagination* (1963), the imagination defeats time through literature by creating a universe possessed by humans. Although we cannot believe in this world, the vision of such an imaginative place keeps alive what may be most important to us (31-33). We dwell between anxiety and desire (wish-fulfillment). Words – poems – survive the ravages of history like ghosts and traces. Lyrics are like mathematics, something beyond the politics of this world, although in this some would be sceptical. Those who see all language as rhetorical would be doubtful of this claim. Myth and metaphor collapse time and space, if only for a brief time or even a moment. The brain stem and the conscious mind live in tension. If even a moment makes believe that rhetoric and ideology are not all, then perhaps that helps to provide a critique against them. Lyric words suggest, then, a way the world might have been and might be. Poetry is a matter of identity. The beauty of myth is a quality of lyric poetry.

Joy Kogawa's lyric poetry is a good instance of some of the qualities of moment, exception, and indirection that I have been setting out here (on other Canadian women writers, see Hart, 2006 ch. 3). The mythology of making and the making of mythology through indirection and



image are key to an understanding of poetics. Kogawa, who is known most for *Obasan*, a novel that represents the treatment of Japanese Canadians in the Second World War, is a poet whose poetics deserves more attention (on her life and work, see Davidson; comparative poetics, Merivale; fiction in a comparison, Cheung; the historical context, Thompson). Her use of poetic technique and images to convey effect and meaning in her poems is something I wish to explore here. Even though politics, religion, and social and domestic issues put pressure on the moments of reflective poetry, these glimpses gesture to a quiet, a rest in a hectic world of then and now and suggest something beyond the swirl of demands and ideologies. How fleeting that suggestion or the brief momentary respite might be is an aspect of my exploration of Kogawa's poetics.

A tension exists, then, between content and form, world and word. Even in moments of beautiful description of the natural world, where precision and beauty coincide, the threat of violence or disruption occurs in Kogawa's poetry. Some key poems in *Jericho Road* (1977) are compositions of suggestiveness and economy that illustrate the pull between the calm of words and the verbal refraction of a hard world. The title of this collection refers to Jericho,



which God promised to Joshua, but the road was that of the Good Samaritan. There is no one set interpretation of this road, and Kogawa presents her own array of poems to fill it out. This Jericho Road has a typology of then and now, here and there, the realm of the Biblical allusion and the world of the poet. This is a natural and supernatural road in which strangers turn out to be friends and the unexpected happens. Perhaps this choice has something to do with the sections Kogawa sets out within this book. The first three poems examined here come under the section “Poems for My Enemies.” In “Like Spearing a Butterfly,” the first line is the same as the title and begins *in medias res* with a simile, the violence of the present participle “spearing” hanging between similitude and the delicacy of a butterfly, the object of the action (21). The second line, “me in my dream,” ties itself to the “like” and action in the first line by beginning with the word “me.” This line is ambiguous, perhaps like a dream itself. Does the “me” spear or is “me” being speared? The third line, “dead with a sword in my belly,” seems to suggest that the speaker is like the butterfly, her belly ending this line as butterfly did the first, but it is possible that both are dead and split. The villagers who scatter in the fourth and final line of the first stanza may be doing so in response to the



violence they have perpetrated or as a result of witnessing violent acts. The poem does not say. In the second stanza, perhaps still as in a dream, the night falls, not in the usual way but as in drops, not of water, but of flesh, not as any dusk but “from a/ rotting sun.” The precise description, as evocative as it is, brings with it an image of putrescence. And a multitude of what might be her hair, “leap[s] from her skull” as “spider legs.” The female figure herself may be “skeletal as wind,” although the punctuation and grammar are ambiguous. Without a word, “her eyes grow fat.” And so the poem ends, its syntax depending on short lines without punctuation. The mystery, despite the sharpness of the violence, is who is doing what, and who is the figure and what is her relation to the reader. Is she watching her eyes grow fat as an outside of body experience or after she watches in her silence do her eyes grow fat? Either way, the image is striking and the poem leaves off, as it began, with a suggestiveness worthy of poetics. Here is peace and violence, silence and word living in tension.

A similar gnomic utterance, a mystery, occurs, quite appropriately, given the title, in “Sphinx.” What I have tried to do is to find this kind of poetry amid more discursive and explanatory modes in Kogawa’s poems. It may



be that I am seeking in her a poetics of exception. These are the moments that speak to me most as a poet, reader, and critic. The first line shows a fine balance and an evocation: “blood appeared on the dark sphinx brow.” The blood is here, but there is no explanation why. It courses, so it is not a drop or a trickle, and ends on the ground. The speaker talks about an “hour,” time for “several illusions.” The day ends in the poem as “sunset” is a single word that constitutes a line that sits above and on “the earth has bled onto the horizon.” The brow and the sun exist above ground or earth, and perhaps in a gesture to the “illusions,” in the last line “sand dunes creep closer” (31). The bleeding descends from the brow of the sphinx until the earth bleeds into the vanishing point and the ground becomes earth and then sand in a poem of appearance and illusion. The two strongest lines in the poem are the ones that feature “blood” and “bled.” Although these lines are things of beauty, they are also about bleeding, both in terms of violence or sacrifice and a blurring – another sense of the word “bled.” The illusions may be this sunset and the moving of the dunes. This poetry is about dreaming and the recognition of its own illusion. It is hard to separate seeing from seeming.

Kogawa has a talent for description, but it



can be in the service of satire and fairy tale as much as in more noumenal pursuits. In the first lines of “Office Toads,” Kogawa establishes the physical presence of the toads, that are metaphorical in a sense as they are in an office, not in a pond: “fat, hop-heavy/ and bulbous-eyed/ we watch for one.” After describing a kiss with a “swift/ amphibious prince” with “lasso lips” and “glue-tipped tongue,” the speaker gives the poem a turn, like the volta in a sonnet, and says, as a means of ending the poem: “toads, yes/ but not for kissing” (33). There is no transformation of a prince or princess here. The leading up to the kiss leads away from it, and a kind of animal-human world coexists as its own physical world and allegory.

In “Snowdrift,” the last of “Poems for My Enemies,” the sun and moon are part of this shape of snow. The technique is elegant as the first three lines show “how the sun defines it/ the snow blowing up/ thin as a shadow.” The “how” is the first word of the first line, “snow blowing” the second and third of the second line, and “shadow” the last word of the third line, so a movement of sound, of rhyme and half-rhyme suggests the sun, snow, and shadow forming the drift. The beautiful details build up the daylight snowscape: “tiny rockets of glare dust/ forming a sharp drift bank/ the wind carving a knife of



sun drops.” Sun and wind help to form the snowdrift and, after the gap between the first and second (and last) stanza, a shift occurs to a world “behind our half-closed eyes.” This is an in-between state, not of waking or sleep, not of day or night, but of eyes not completely shut, where “the moon turns slowly/ gathering the shape” (67). What is external and internal is not certain. The poem ends in such a way that the moon takes up the contours of the drift or even the eyes behind which it turns, as if sun, wind, moon, wind, eyes are part of an interpenetrable world, a poetic realm in which subject and object are identified metaphorically, as if in an animistic place where there is no alienation between human and nature, word and world. Is the moon reflecting and reflected from the world or is it a dream? How much of this is a dream with half-closed eyes?

In the second section of this book, “The Wedlocked,” two poems are especially evocative and embody this poetics of suggestion. Perhaps the speakers are married or caught in marriage, “wedlocked” that is. Possibly, wedlocked is a play on deadlocked. This implied theme from the title of the section creates an expectation of a frame. The poem “Fear” builds up through a repetition of the word “fear” in the first two lines, and then in the first line of the second

(penultimate) stanza, which repeats the second line of the first stanza. The flower of the third line of the first stanza becomes amplified in the fourth and final line of the second stanza – “flower to flower.” This is a poem about water:

the
flower in the flood
drowned in the
river of rain.

(85)

The speaker fears an unspecified “you” in the first line of the poem in a comparison played out in the first line of the second stanza, “as I fear” what turns out to be an apparent food-chain of fly, fish and “man/ with his fishing net” (85). The flower is in the flood, and flowers provide a place for the fly to leap with the fish in pursuit. But why does the speaker fear the “you,” “flower,” “water-skiing fly,” “fish pursuing,” and the man with his net? Who is the fisher of men here? Does the fear come from the power of nature and the chain of pursuit? How Biblical is the flood? The poem builds up an atmosphere of physical description but leaves the readers to sense a symbolic and mythical dimension that they pursue in another poem that ends without a period.

In “She Learned,” there is a “he” and “she”

that may well define a kind of taming through marriage or a relationship. The first stanza gains its power from its literal equivalency: “he took her wild protests/ for wild protests.” A wild protest is itself and not some bold metaphor or conceit. It may well be a conceit of not being a conceit, a literal equivalent of the topos of inexpressibility in which the speaker says he or she cannot express but has just expressed. The first line of the second stanza of five two-line stanzas picks up on “wild” and begins with enfolding it into the first word of that stanza – “bewilderment” – which the speaker personifies as it watches “a naked hunter/ burying his catch” and one that lies “ravenous/ in its grave.” Why is the hunter naked? Is he primitive, prelapsarian, or some type of sexual force? This hunting scene is a kind of anthropomorphism, but it may well be a brief inset between the first and last stanzas about him and her. Perhaps these middle three stanzas suggest, through indirection and allegory, a world of hunting in which males, whether naked to the world or not, subdue the hunted, animal and woman. The last stanza moves from her taming or learning her lesson from wildness and protest to something new: “she learned/to protest less” (95). The last stanza begins with a line that is the same as the title. Whereas the title asks a question without a ques-

tion mark, the last line, after the “she learned” is repeated, answers “to protest less.” The first stanza ends both lines with the phrase “wild protests,” and the third use of the cognate is the “protest” of the last line. None the less, she learned not to stop protesting, but “to protest less.” The “less” has a certain irony to it because “he” does not have complete dominion or has not convinced her entirely, or the personified story does not teach a categorical lesson. These poems inhabit a frame of “wedlocked” in which a marriage seems to dissolve, but they also have their own poetic logic as individual poems. They are roads both taken and not.

In *A Garden of Anchors: Selected Poems* (2003), including poetry from 1967 to 2000, other examples of this noumenal poetics occur. Although this selection includes poems from *Jericho Road*, I will concentrate on poetry from Kogawa’s other books that are brought together in this volume. There are poems in this selection that also represent a quiet beauty, although with moments in which politics and religion break in on meditation and suggestion. The poetics I will discuss, then, is the brief and tight aesthetic that Kogawa creates in poems, almost like the Japanese haiku she heard in her poem of that name. Some of the poems selected from *A Choice of Dreams* (1974), which appear in the

first section of the selected poems, called “Cedar Incense,” seem to be about a Japanese Canadian discovering the land, culture, and poetry of her ancestors.

In “Ancestors’ Graves in Jurakawa,” the speaker follows her “father’s boyhood backwards.” The opening line of the poem combines a pursuit in English and the completion in Japanese: “down down across the open seas to shikoku.” The speaker edges her “faint beginnings with shades” in a scene of muteness and melting. This liminal world of the past and present, the living and the dead is tantalizing for the speaker: “the hiddenness stretches beyond my reach/ strange dew drops through cedar incense.” And she greets the dead and gives them pebbles, as an offering, but ones “that melt through my eyes” (3). Once more, the interior and exterior blend as if in a dream, perhaps a possibility, a choice the poet and the speaker make among many selections. The hidden and the strange are part of this quest for peace and harmony in a world that questions identity itself and breaks in on the quiet of devotion and contemplation.

“Zen Graveyard” is set in “thick night mist,” which constitutes the first line. As in “Ancestors’ Graves in Jurakawa,” the graves rise into the trees, but here the speaker concentrates on the

“strange familiarity” of the setting, so much so that these two words expressing an oxymoron make up the entire fourth line. Memory is also important in this poem, as it was in the description of the ancestors’ graves and the journey back to retrace her father’s childhood. The remembrance is partly about a “small girl once upon a time,” who appears to be the speaker herself as a child. The indefiniteness is explicit in this storytelling: “not here perhaps but somewhere/ a wild boar perhaps, perhaps not.” The waterfall makes “a sound not unlike a violin,” so the speaker attempts to liken and make sense of her situation by aligning the worlds of nature and culture, sound and music. Something similar occurs in the phrase, “bell tone of insect.” Despite being surrounded by “stone ghosts” and an imaginative plethora of wild boar and similitudes of sounds, insects and snails, the speaker faces the infinitive in solitude: “to have to stand alone here/ in this almost place when/ once upon a time, perhaps –” (5). Here is a topos that is “almost,” and the speaker returns to an end that combines the asymptotic with the premises of a story in the standard phrase that begin bedtime stories to children. The poem is liminal and its threshold is between the not quite there and the suggestion of possibility. The reader’s eye leaves off on a hyphen, another sign of in-betweenness.



In “On Hearing Japanese Haiku,” written about the poetry of the poet’s ancestors, the speaker combines once more English and Japanese words (although transliterated into English). The poem begins with “throat blossoms to sounds.” This poem has a “throat blossoming” and evokes a beautiful image in the third line, “stirrings in the sandy fibre of my flesh.” Flesh and sand combine, and the ancient fingers of the speaker are “gardening” (6). The poem blurs the line between the human and natural worlds. And the poet connects the body of the speaker metaphorically and imagistically to nature. The body is a garden that blossoms in sand and gardens at the same time. In this conflation, the garden and the gardener are one and the same.

There are pressures on this poetics of peace and atonement with nature. “Flower Arranger” begins with an urban landscape: “among the weedy steel structures/ and frenetic blossoming of factories/ i found a blind flower arranger.” The first three lines play with form. The use of “weedy” and “blossoming” lead up to the “flower,” and the ends of the lines “structures,” “factories,” and “arranger” are all nouns of design and organization, although the last is a person not a thing. The second and third lines repeat the initial alliterative pattern of fbf, “fre-

netic” becoming “found,” “blossoming” turning to “blind,” and “factories” to “flower.” A certain peace seems to arise with the coming of the blind flower arranger, his precision, care and delicacy reflected in the next few lines and in the final lines of the poem. Here, “with his fingertips/ he placed gentleness in the air.” This is in counterpoint to the “frenetic blossoming” of the factories. The last four lines of the poem amplify this delicate touch in a wasteland: “and everywhere among the blowing weeds/ he moved with his outstretched hands/ touching the air/ with his transient dew” (26). He lives “in a sketch of a room” and dips water drops “onto an opening petal” and on a tiny bud that had not quite flowered. His abode is fragile before the weedy steel and growth of factories, and the water of his life “transient” and perhaps endangered in a cityscape not given to flowering but choked with weeds and mass production. It is possible that such poems are Edenic and nostalgic and even against industrialization as William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* existed typologically with *Songs of Experience*. In terms of ecology, or a poetics of environment, the poem is a reminder of the apparently simultaneous gentleness and violence of humans to nature.

The next section of *A Garden of Anchors* is “Forest Creatures,” which contains “When I Was

a Little Girl,” originally from *A Choice of Dreams*. This poem is about a brother and a sister walking: the children of a clergyman, the brother telling his sister to pray “until the big white boys/ had kicked on past.” Here is a domestic moment of childhood with some of the usual tension in stories about childhood. Here, an external force, big and racially different, an assertion and perhaps even a menace of white boys, a dominant force in a society of European settlers in which the small children are minorities. The phrase “kicked on” suggests energy and possibly a power that could be unleashed at any time in ways that a small girl with her brother, who wears glasses, might not wish to experience. But the poem returns to a more idyllic scene, the boys having passed: “later we’d climb the bluffs/ overhanging the ghost town.” Once more, ghosts haunt Kogawa’s poetry, and she presents more twists. On the bluffs, the two children would “pick the small white lilies/ and fling them like bombers/ over slokan” (48). This poem ends with the children disturbing nature, picking and picking on lilies that are small and white, and this from a poem that begins with the line that is the same as the title, except that the “when” and “i” are not capitalized in the opening words. The children, who seemed vulnerable and thinking of prayer, now “fling”



these flowers “like bombers.” This simile is one of war and marks the violence that potentially and actually has made up children’s games. And “over slocan” most likely is Slocan, British Columbia, in keeping with Kogawa’s practice of using lower case letters for capitals. The poem has autobiographical elements, as Kogawa was as a child interned because of her Japanese Canadian heritage: first, her family was relocated to Slocan, and then to Coaldale in Alberta. Thus, the white boys and the war images take on another dimension when viewed in the context of world and Canadian history, and the poet’s life. The word “slocan” is sometimes said to come from a Native word meaning to strike or pierce on the head, part of a practice of harpooning salmon (*Village of Slocan*). Perhaps even unintentionally, there is violence in the name of what was once a notorious boomtown with mines that became, for a time, a ghost town. Whatever the vista, a tension occurs even in the realm of the potential between peace and disturbance. The world of play is one that embodies and explores this tension.

“For David,” which was originally from *Woman in the Woods* (1985), explores an unintentional discovery that guides life. This is a poem of indirection that uses its syntax to express the unplanned paths people take. It



begins: “not as we dreamed or planned/ did life fling us.” The “not” indicates negative definition, and neither dreams nor plans govern the “we,” but life flings them, and not the other way around. There is no agency here. The process of defining matters by what they are not begins in the next two lines: “nor by thought’s search/ did we find our way.” The initial “nor” echoes the initial “not” of the first line. This heuristics is not intellectual if it is heuristic at all, in the sense that they “find” their path in a physical act: “but by walking/ were our limbs discovered/ and the pathway formed.” The finding or discovery is perambulatory and not by mental effort: the body recognizes what the mind cannot. The last three lines of the poem follow these and amplify this lack of choice: “chance and change/ not of our choosing/ uncovered what we decided” (64). Walking, chance, and change lead to the recognition that choices and decisions in life are “not of our choosing.” The initial “not” here in the penultimate line picks up on the “not” that begins the first line and the “nor” at the start of the fourth verse. The line before this second last verse links “chance,” “change,” and “choosing” through alliteration, which reinforces that choices are not fixed or under human control. In the last line, “uncovered” connects with the negative words already mentioned and with “dis-

covered,” the last word of the sixth line (about half-way in a ten-line poem). The uncovering is more an act of coming across something than of setting out to find it. The “find” and “discovered” lead to “uncovering” in this poem. And “fling” moves to “walking” and a “choosing” not for the “we” of the poem. The other words that chime are “dreamed,” “planned,” “discovered,” “formed,” and “decided,” the last word of the poem. Except for “dreamed,” these words end the first, sixth, seventh, and tenth lines. The “choosing” and “decided” that end the last two lines of the poem respectively make it seem that there is choice and decision for the “we” expressed in “For David,” but the “not” and “uncovered” and the framework of negative definition for the poem as a whole provide a context that denies this and says that any such “deciding” came by walking. Paradoxically, however, the recognition that the speaker sets forth in the poem comes from physical exercise, but it takes a mind to assert that it was “not by thought’s search.” Perhaps walking, like reading, has mental and physical parts that allow both to be so key to discovery or recognition.

There is a lyricism, especially at the end of “Grief Poem,” which also first appeared in *Woman in the Woods*. In the first half of this poem, the speaker says that thought cannot



break “the mind’s cold spell,” that the chilled bones have lost their language, that weather uses “f[r]esh silence” to hide “all/ odours of decay.” And so “by freezing time,” the speaker travels “through/ this numb day.” But it is what comes next, despite the numbness of the day, the hardness of the world, or perhaps because of it, that provides a break from it. It then moves to a song to and of beauty: “look look/ my small/ my beautiful child.” This invocation to see then becomes more specific: “the icicle here/ how it shimmers/ in the blue sun.” Kogawa uses repetition to create her effect after the lovely touch of “the blue sun.” She ends the poem with a stanza that expands to four lines (all the rest have three):

my small
my beautiful child
look once more
into the shimmering.

(72)

The repetition occurs, but with an inversion of the small, beautiful child (“look” comes after “here,” and instead of “look, look” the line is “look once more”). The “shimmers” of the penultimate stanza become “shimmering,” the last word of the poem. As if the sun turned blue when viewed through the blue ice of an icicle, the poem is a refraction of light on a cold then freezing day, “this numb day.” It may be one of

the hardest days of the speaker's life – it has found beauty in grief – as the title reminds us. Still, out of this suffering, the speaker, as a gift from the poet, finds a moment of striking beauty, a light, blue but full of remembrance.

Another kind of simplicity characterizes “Note to a Gentleman,” another poem originally from *Woman in the Woods* that was selected for *A Garden of Anchors*. The irony of the title is apparent after reading the first stanza: “the time/ to talk about your wife/ is before.” The middle stanza in this brief poem sets out its lesson in a way that is a little ambiguous: “it is the difference/ between a shield/ and a sword.” In these lines, given the preceding stanza, the reader might infer that in telling the speaker about his wife, the “gentleman” would be using his wife as a shield to protect himself and not as a sword to harm the speaker, perhaps, unwittingly cast as the other woman. The military language intensifies in the third stanza, perhaps because gentlemen in Europe at least were often from the warrior class, and perhaps because this has become part of the battle of the sexes: “and if you want the battle/ to be fought without arms/ bring her with you” (100). The end of this apparently simple and direct poem involves a twist. The battle may not be fought without arms if he were to bring his wife, but would

another conflict arise, or would the women turn on the unlucky man for his deceit? It is still a battle the speaker envisions, perhaps over this hapless and concealing man, and is most unlikely a pretext for a *ménage à trois*.

Three more poems selected from *Woman in the Woods* for *A Garden of Anchors* provide examples of the lyricism and the poetics I have been emphasizing here, showing that perhaps the 1970s, in which Kogawa wrote *Jericho Road* and *Woman in the Woods*, was a time in which she most exemplified the qualities I have been exploring. “Wind Poem” begins “when the window is open/ and the night enters” and tells the effects of the wind on the blinds, branches, a candle, but the lyric moment happens in the middle of the three stanzas: “we pull the blanket higher/ our hungry fingertips/ pick berries in the moonlight.” The last stanza states that there are no mosquitoes or blackflies, as the final line says, “because the wind is blowing” (121). This is a tribute and paean to the wind, while being a description of it. This scene is quite everyday, as accurate as might be. That is, except for the last two lines and especially the last line of the middle stanza. The picking berries in the moonlight is evocative and graceful and perhaps even sexual as the blankets are pulled up, but it is not quotidian or overt or too direct. If this poem



were made up of more such lines, that would be greater still, but perhaps the very commonness, almost the worn-out-ness, of the surrounding language and situation make its surprise and elegance even the more. Perhaps the everyday world comes in on both sides, and a luminous moment occurs briefly in such a context. Perhaps fleetingness is all that can be achieved in this or any poetics.

The second stanza of “The Morning She Leaves” is another example of a quality in Kogawa’s poetry that is suggestive and a poetics gesturing beyond itself. The sky “the colour/ of charcoal blue pigeons” is evocative enough in the first stanza, but it is the second and last stanza that achieves a remarkable poetic expression:

the morning she leaves
the sky is thrashing
with dark pigeon wings
and dead branches
are gathered like hay.


(123)

The “thrashing” of the sky is like that of haying, the life of the motion of pigeon wings and the dead branches ready to be gathered. In this scene, it is important not to forget the first lines of the two stanzas that comprise the poem: “the morning she leaves.” Part of the mystery is that



although the poem is built up around her departure, the reader hears nothing else about her. The only thing about her is the natural world the poet uses to create atmosphere. The first stanza describes a scene of charcoal blue and winter trees, and, in the second, the pigeons are thrashing with life while the dead branches are, in a passive, “gathered like hay.” This harvest and her departure seem to be identified in the poem.

There is in “Water Song,” the last poem in *A Garden of Anchors*, a religious allusion amidst a moveable word order or syntax. The lines themselves give a sense of this syntactical play: “that once/ on water walked/ on water still/ walks he.” This appears to allude to Christ in a typology of then and now: he once walked on water but does still. The inversion of the syntax from regularities of contemporary speech stresses “once” and “he,” but also, through repetition, emphasizes “on water” and shifts from “walked” to “still,” which is a prelude to the present “walks,” which moves from and builds on the past (“walked”). This presence also leads to the “he.” The second stanza appeals to the dense atmosphere of “miracle,” which is “so dense” that “we here find fins/ for flying” (164). Besides the alliteration, there is, in this water imagery, in which Christ walks on a surface that is impossible for others



and must therefore be a miracle, an exuberance that makes the “we” of the poem become flying fish as to leap over the water that would sink them as mere mortals trying to walk its surface. And so this selection of Kogawa’s poetry ends with the word “flying.” This song of the water lifts off beyond itself. This is a poetics of reach beyond grasp, something poetry such as this does before the world.

In poetry, mythos and music are intertwined with politics and history – with the world – but are not identical to them. In Kogawa’s lyrics there is a drama of worldliness and otherworldiness, a scene in which myth and metaphor give pause in a world of care, an attempt at peace and beauty in a place of ugly violence and war. Her poetry is full of turns and imagination that feel the pressures of expectation, social pressure, and ideology. Some of her poetic moments are a rescue from cliché and commonplace that have worked their way, unwittingly or not, into Kogawa’s language. This was particularly true of “Wind Poem” but is something that occurs throughout her oeuvre. The momentary, the exceptional, and the indirect allow for an alternative to the world as it is, or as the state, businesses, social clubs, and others say it is. It is a difficult thing to manage to achieve lyric moments for any poet, so the ones I have culled

in Kogawa's work as examples mean that her poetry attains one of the highest functions it can. The tension between the creative and uncreative, peace and conflict, occurs in this great act of the imagination. As a poet, reader, and critic, I have chosen close reading as a way, partly because it is so longstanding in our culture, to explore poetics and the case of Kogawa, at a time when the politics and sociology of literature and the concern with ideology is so widespread, so that we might pause at another possibility, poetry as a fragile refuge, so vulnerable yet so strong, so ignored by power yet so challenging to it. Paying attention to the writing and reading of poetry, especially the brief and delicate lyric, can lead to moments and by-ways so exceptional that their importance cannot be overstated, except perhaps in a poem that indirectly shows the limits of overstatement and all rhetoric including its own.

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Displacement, Trauma, and the Use of Fairy Tale Motifs in Joy Kogawa's Poetry and Prose

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Joy Kogawa's *oeuvre* establishes several themes that contribute to the inherent sense of unity characterizing her creative work. Along with an exploration of the spaces of silence and speech, self and other, and the persistent metaphors of stone and bread, the fairy tale motifs and tropes are among the literary strategies that continually resurface in Kogawa's work, both poetic and prosaic. This essay will focus on the use of the fairy tale topoi in Kogawa's poetry and prose in the context of her exploration of subjectivity and displacement – more specifically, displacement through the childhood trauma, loss/reclamation of cultural identity, and negotiation of gender space. I will argue that the discourse of fairy tale constitutes a distinct language, coping mechanism, and interpretive tool that are used to explore and articulate historical/collective and individual trauma.



The theme of displacement – both in terms of the historical collective dislocation of the Japanese Canadian community in the context of the Second World War and in terms of the sense of personal displacement and destabilized identity – begins to dominate Kogawa’s writing with her first published collection of poetry, *The Splintered Moon* (1968). This first serious experimentation with the poetic word yielded twenty-one poems that offer a glimpse into a world of emotional intensity and spiritual longing underscored by Kogawa’s characteristic minimalism. Despite a certain lack of continuity, a reader familiar with the body of Kogawa’s creative work undoubtedly recognizes an early interest in the themes and tropes that will find their way into her later writing, including her exploration of the fairy tale discourse as a space of resistance and production of meaning.

In this early collection, Kogawa’s disarmingly intimate and intense lyric voice constitutes particular appeal through her exploration of love and womanhood. Her reflections on the themes of loneliness, desire, and emotional loss are counterbalanced by her need of freedom and search for identity that defies the limitations of a traditional male-female dichotomy and struggles for self-referentiality and a definition on its own terms:



I'm lost.
I don't know where I am.
And this is how. I thought I was eaten by love
But there was unreality.
There was hope
But hope was eaten.

("I Know Who I Am" 2)

Similarly, a strong sense of disorientation and uncertainty permeates other poems:

I trusted the moon to glow for a spell
and show me
the living waters
but there is only a rippling
and the moon is a splintered shell.

("No Worms on My Hook" 3)

It is in this collection that the persistent motif of the fairy tale is established as a symbolical code for signifying a distance between self and other and a desire to disassociate from the immediacy of reality through the mediation of a secondary narrative, which will become particularly significant in Kogawa's later prose writing.

It is commonly agreed that our perception of the tales of wonder is dominated by the fact that "the folktale world goes well beyond experience-able reality" and by "the differences between a rational reality and the folktale's 'wonders'" (Röhrich 6-7). Although it may be tempting to approach the interpretation of imaginary space as



escapist and virtually limitless, it is more productive to see it in the light of what some refer to as “bounded imagination” (Röhrich 3), i.e. as a locus of tension between the freedom of imagination and the limitations imposed by specific social codes, expectations, and models of behaviour in terms of the structures of class, gender, and race. It is characteristic that Kogawa resorts almost exclusively to Western folk and fairy tale topoi (with the exception of a Japanese tale to be discussed below).

In her implicit dialogue with the fairy tale tradition, Kogawa subverts and rewrites it ironically in the context of the impossibility of wish fulfillment and the inevitable frustration of desire. The space of the fairy tale provides her lyrical persona with a framework for probing her identity and articulating a highly ironic sense of reality. In one of the poems of the collection, Kogawa evokes traditional fairy tale imagery (“Princess and the pea”) by engaging in an ambivalent role-playing; the opening hesitant line “I think I am that fabled princess” creates both a parodic intertext and a self-conscious desire to belong in the imaginary space (in the poem of the same title, 4).

In the context of Kogawa’s writing, both poetry and fiction, references to the female heroines of traditional tales (who are often

“princesses”) are riddled with unsaid anxieties, which not only implicate uncertainty about one’s womanhood, but also the fear of not fitting the cultural norms in terms of gender expectations (particularly in the context of the Western canon she references). If in the classical tale the heroine’s awareness of the presence of a minute object in her bed proves that the maiden is dainty and refined enough to be of royal blood (but also, and more importantly, fits the socially accepted and cultivated norms of femininity), in the poem the heroine cannot sleep “[b]ecause of that one hard pea beneath” (4), which metaphorically transforms into issues far removed from the context of the canonical tale.

Giving it a feminist revisionist reading, Kogawa refocuses the context of the original tale on the issues of identity and female autonomy. The original test of ultimate femininity no longer matters, and the real test concerns the “prince” of the tale. As it may be expected, the heroine’s expectations are reversed at the end, and she wonders whether the luxuriously laid bed she has been imagining is in fact a “bed of nails.” The ironic distance created in the poem is also enhanced by the lyrical heroine’s awareness of the impossibility of replicating the happy ending of the tale and the unspoken negation of the opening line.



An implicit fairy tale motif continues in “Pity My Dress” of the same collection, where writing the subtexts of sexuality and sinfulness is centred around the image of a dress, an object culturally associated with normative femininity. The dress, in a psychologically disturbing red colour, becomes the vehicle of the heroine’s displaced expression of her emotional distress over the impossibility of fulfillment through love, where it is the dress (not herself) that is disrespected, mistreated, and damaged:

the blue
Contempt of your touch
And lies shredded
On the floor.

(7)

The repetition of the title line with its emphasis on regret and disillusionment directed at the dress serves as a metonymic trope of substitution where the lyrical voice cannot – or would not – speak directly of herself. Similarly, the theme of love as an aggressive and threatening act of consumption that is inevitably riddled with disenchantment appears again in an openly revisionist rereading of the tale of Nutcracker in the poem by the same title. Not only does the famous metamorphosis into a handsome prince not take place, but the male character displays the



mechanical functionality of an actual domestic tool with an overtone of a cliché horror situation: “you broke my shell/ To devour me” (5). The mechanical act of fragmentation and “devouring” is juxtaposed to the lyrical persona’s expectation of what she describes as an organic fusion:

I waited
To course through your blood stream
Swish up through your heart
Trickle into your brain.

(5)

Her resulting lack of fulfillment and loss of dignity is emphasized by the opposition of the poetic style of the above quote versus the exaggeratedly banal resolution of the romance: “Your teeth crunched through me./ Expectantly, I entered a cavity/ And then you spat me out.” Although the author reflects on her feelings of being objectified in a relationship, the playful aspects of such a revisionist rereading are not to be overlooked. Kogawa is as conscious of a parodic re-working of the well-known fairy tale scenarios as she is of writing a self-parody – of her own play with some of the expectations created by such scenarios.

In the prose that follows in the 1980s, Kogawa becomes more concerned with histor-

ical trauma and the articulation of the long-term psychological – individual and collective – effects of a historical displacement on the processes of identity formation. Both her semi-autobiographical novel *Obasan* and its sequel *Itsuka* allowed her to explore the complex space of cultural memory and historical injustice in the context of the plight of Japanese Canadian citizens in the 1940s. Already displaced by the very factor of their physical de-territorialization, Japanese immigrants had faced segregation early in the history of their settlement (when, for example, in 1895 they were denied the right to vote in British Columbia). Their later internment, forced exile, and confinement to field labour was a secondary displacement within the space they had already recognized as their home. It was not only a physical dislocation (i.e. having to abandon one's lifelong possessions) but a symbolic displacement within the Canadian cultural and political space and social hierarchy, where they were radically marginalized and their identities rewritten.

The recent literature on the study of trauma emphasizes several important aspects of the process of articulation of traumatic experiences: the relationship between the actual trauma and its discursive representation, the common temporal gap and interpretive distance between the



actual experience and the narrative that re-creates it, the issue of language and reality, and the problem of subjectivity (Di Prete; Farrell; Garloff; Ibsch; Kaplan; LaCapra; Tal; Vickroy to name a few). The story of trauma is, commonly, a “belated” narrative that “attests to its endless impact on a life” and is “inescapably bound to a referential return” (Caruth 7). The referential nature of this re-visitation – which may take place countless times in memory – reflects a complex process of articulating and narrativizing of what has been distilled, shaped, edited, censored, and rethought through the mediating positioning of the subject between the actual event, its memory, and its consequent ongoing re-interpretation.

An individual is traumatized by a life-threatening event that displaces his or her preconceived notions about the world. Trauma is enacted in a liminal state, outside of the bounds of “normal” human experience, and the subject is radically ungrounded. Textual representations – literary, visual, oral – are mediated by language and do not have the impact of the traumatic experience (Tal 15).

Although Tal justly points to the fact that a discursive re-presentation cannot have the impact of the actual experience, it is exactly the impossibility of such a recreation and re-living of



the event and the hermeneutic impetus of a story-telling act that constitute the potential healing moment inherent in the narrative mode. It has been noted that the problems of form and the symbolic code acquire particular significance in the discursive recreation of trauma: “Traumatic events are written and rewritten until they become codified and narrative form gradually replaces content as the focus of attention” (Tal 6). In this shift of emphasis from the actual experience to a specific narrative form as a meaning-generating structure and an interpretive tool, the phenomenon of a symbolic displacement of trauma onto other genres as a mode of coping becomes common (LaCapra; Santner). The genre of the fairy tale – which is the focus of our discussion here – posits particularly rich hermeneutic possibilities owing to the symbolic conventions of the genre and its formulaic nature.

Although it is generally agreed that fairy tales constitute an important space for construction and communication of meaning in and about the world – both for children and adults (cf. Bettelheim; Zipes), it is the potential therapeutic value of fairy tales that has come into the focus of the academic inquiry in the last couple of decades. The elucidation of the fairy tale trope as a coping tool is seen as particularly productive in



the context of the female (both oral and literary) authorship and/or audience (see Tatar 27; Warner 309; Rowe; Harries). The very process of writing and using one's creativity and imagination is often constructed as therapeutic; more importantly, it becomes a hermeneutic tool that mediates an interpretation of actual reality and the process of coping and survival.¹ Fairy tale as a narrative form and a highly conventionalized type of a fictional world inherently re-presents the memory of the actual trauma, i.e. creates several layers of deferral: ontological (in terms of a spatial removal of the experienced events to an undefined imaginary location/world); temporal (not only in terms of the usual "belatedness" of the trauma narrative, but also in terms of the universal temporal displacement of "Once upon a time..."); and discursive (a referential gap between reality and language). Donald Haase, a prominent theorist of fairy tales, argues that "children who have been *displaced* by violence may perceive an affinity between their traumatic experience and utopian projections, on the one hand, and the landscape of the fairy tale, on the other" (*Lion Unicorn* 362; emphasis in the original). Proceeding from Haase's discussion of the genre, I will use the concept of the fairy tale landscape in a slightly broader context of a space comprised not only by the physical

geographicity of the surroundings, but also by the various symbolic topoi and codes of the genre as constitutive of the entire environment of the fictional world of fairy tale.

In *Obasan*, Kogawa adopts a double narrative perspective: that of the first-person adult narrator, Naomi, remembering her childhood during the years of the Japanese internment in Canada and her later life, and that of Naomi the child's perception of some of the historical events, often in the context of an imaginative space of fairy tale. Thus, inevitably, there is a moment of the adult narrator's interpretive intrusion – even if at the level of a conscious conceptualization of these tales as hermeneutic tools. Although fairy tales, in various ways, are always connected to the idea of home or symbolical homecoming (Zipes 176; Haase, *Lion Unicorn* 361), in Kogawa this symbolical matrix is radically redefined. It is through the alternative worlds of magic that young Naomi finds it possible to express her emotional distress and conceptualize her fears about the fundamental absence of home both in terms of the physical environment and in terms of her identity. There is only one tale in *Obasan* that is connected to the space of home – a traditional Japanese tale of “Momotaro.” It is significant that, with Naomi's displaced selfhood between the Japanese and

Western/Canadian identities, it is the Japanese tale that anchors her childhood memories of love, comfort, security, and belonging.

The “Momotaro” story, which used to be told to Naomi many times by her mother in a quiet, chant-like voice, holds the central place in the mythopoeic design of the novel. The tale of Momotaro constitutes one of the true “home” spaces in Naomi’s memory of her childhood. What Naomi remembers is not only the repetitive, ritualistic nature of the act of story-telling and the proximity and security of the maternal space – “[t]he rhythm of the words and the comfort and closeness” (58) – but also the sense of familial and cultural belonging: “Each night from the very beginning, before I could talk, there were the same stories, the voices of my mother or my father or Obasan or Grandma Kato, soft through the filter of my sleepiness, carrying me away to a shadowy ancestry” (58).

The story starts with a formulaic element typical of many folk tales – a miraculous birth of a child to a couple (often elderly) who cannot have children of their own. In “Momotaro,” a boy born out of a peach is a gift that brings endless joy to his parents; similarly, Naomi the child is surrounded by love and happiness and savours “the delicious moment” of storytelling. “Momotaro” mirrors her own thrill with childhood

when “[s]imply by existing a child is delight” (59). As Momotaro grows up, he leaves his parents and sets off on a journey of battles and conquest. He wins the battle and returns home to the old man and woman as a hero.

As some note, the story betrays an uncanny parallelism between its plot and Naomi’s own future predicaments (cf. Cheung 157-58) – separation from her parents, departure on a journey, and, by inversion, herself becoming an object of a conquest and discriminatory treatment. There is more than one departure and separation (those of Naomi’s Mother and Grandmother Kato, her Father, and her other grandparents among others), but unlike in the tale, Naomi’s childhood does not have a happy ending and does not culminate in a homecoming.

The “Momotaro” tale, in all its beautiful simplicity and anticipated happy ending, serves as a sombre foreboding for a strangely reversed development of real events in Naomi’s life, full of separation and losses. The story also reads along the lines of Naomi’s cultural in-betweenness and represents a bridge between the child’s two heritages – Japanese and Canadian. The beautiful, poetic retelling of “Momotaro” is rich in the representation of the traditional Japanese nature and culture – both in the child’s imagina-



tion and the multiple retellings of the story – from the misty mountains with waterfalls and grey-green woods with tree spirits to the details of the scene of farewell and departure, wrapped in silence, with an offering of rice balls for the journey: “The time comes when Momotaro must go and silence falls like feathers of snow all over the rice-paper hut... There are no tears and no touch” (60). Just like in “Momotaro,” there will never be any tears in Naomi’s own separations and departures; there will be only silence and deeply hidden sorrow. The necessity to endure in silence imprints on the child’s understanding of what constitutes culturally acceptable honourable behaviour. The silence/speech dichotomy becomes definitive of the two most important modalities of the post-trauma survival and coping both in the context of individual and collective strategies (cf. Obasan’s insistence on the language of “stone” silence versus Aunt Emily’s need to articulate historical injustice and to make her voice heard through a public discourse).

On another level, the Japanese tale, transferred to Canadian soil, becomes part of what constitutes Canadian culture. In Aunt Emily’s words, Naomi was “fed on milk [Canadian/Western attribute] and Momotaro [Japanese traditional culture]” and is thus a product of both


(61). To Aunt Emily, who got never tired from proudly declaring and reasserting her Canadianness, “Momotaro is a Canadian story. We’re Canadian, aren’t we? Everything a Canadian does is Canadian” (61). This essential statement of multiculturalism (still to be conceptualized and formulated in the narrator’s reality of 1972), which brings diverse heritage groups together to form a unique cultural community of Canada, acquires a distinct bitter tang in the context of *Obasan*. It would be a long journey for the community of Japanese Canadians represented by Naomi and her family before they could rightfully reclaim both their ethnic heritage and their Canadianness.

If Japanese “Momotaro” comes to signify home and belonging, Western fairy tale topoi demarcate the symbolical space of displacement, loss of identity, and trauma. The dichotomy of Japanese versus Western spaces represents the deep rift of uncertainty about Naomi’s and her family’s ambivalent status in the context of the war. When Naomi’s father reassures her that they are Canadian, but her brother, Stephen, is told by one of his classmates that “[a]ll the Jap kids at school are going to be sent away and they’re bad and [he is] a Jap,” Naomi is puzzled by the paradox of being “both the enemy and not the enemy” (76). Naomi responds to the loss

of her parents, home, and familiar surroundings by transferring her anxieties onto the imaginative space of familiar Western tales.

Commenting on the fact that many fairy tales use spatial symbolism to construct the hero's alienation and exile, Haase argues that "under certain conditions the fairy-tale landscape has the potential to become a template for the actual experience of human displacement and the perception of a defamiliarized geography" (*Lion Unicorn* 363). He also maintains that while children may transfer the destruction of familiar places and dislocations such as exile and imprisonment onto the physical space of the fairy tale, at the same time, "within that imaginative space, they transform their physical surroundings into a hopeful, utopian space as a psychological defense and means of emotional survival" (*Lion Unicorn* 362).²

The proposition of the utopian transformation, however, does not always hold true. Kogawa's use of Western fairy tale topoi is deliberately subversive and defiant of the culturally imposed modes of reading – primarily because her reading is necessarily determined by her gender, race, and the socio-political status of her community. The pointed misreading of the classical tales is also indicative of her identity crisis, where certain normative interpretations become



impossibilities. It has been noted that the use of fairy tale in women's autobiographic writing is often associated with this type of subversive re-appropriation. Thus, Harries claims that women's life writing "often suggest[s] more oblique and complex responses to the tales that supposedly govern our lives" and that some writers "show that fairy tales have symbolic resonances that work against, or even contradict, the dominant models" (101). Kogawa's rethinking of her own childhood experiences through the semi-autobiographical account utilizes fairy tale topoi to render meaning to the events that escape meaningful reading through the prism of a child's perception.

The radical disruption of Naomi's childhood parallels the exile motif common to many fairy tales. When their property is repossessed, Naomi, her brother, and their grandparents are forced to relocate to the ghost town of Slocan in interior British Columbia. The major defamiliarizing shift occurs not only through the separation from her parents, but also with the change of the physical "landscape" – from the well-to-do urban space of Vancouver to an abandoned decrepit hut in the middle of the woods. Naomi's distress is implicated in her appropriation of some well-known topoi from children's tales that help her to establish a frame of refer-



ence for conceptualizing her anxieties. Thus, the hut in Slocan, with its broken gate, rickety porch, low ceiling, and all-permeating greyness – “[e]verything is grey – the newspapered walls, the raw grey planks on the floor, the two windows meshed by twigs and stems and stalks of tall grasses seeking a way in” (130) – becomes the house of the seven dwarves. Although in the context of the original tale the topos of the hut may be attributed with many positive connotations – it is a haven, a place where the heroine finds a home away from home (also cf. the Disney interpretation).³

Naomi’s reading of this signifier focuses primarily on the subconscious and irrational – the space of the hut is strange, frightening, and somewhat threatening (“tall grasses seeking a way in”); with its pervasive smell of mould and “[g]reyness seep[ing] through the walls,” it becomes an unfamiliar and hostile entity that takes her over, changing her from inside out and bringing fundamental uncertainty to her life. Unlike in the familiar tale, there is no hope for a happy outcome, only the stoical and calm prayers of Obasan and Sensei: “while we breathe, we have gratitude...” (131).

The first hardships and experiences of living in Slocan make Naomi associate her life with the story of Goldilocks. Although the story is a clas-



sical cautionary tale that also emphasizes a spirit of adventure, curiosity, and suspense so captivating to the young audience, for Naomi it becomes a mirror narrative of her own experience of trauma:

a story of a child with long golden ringlets called Goldilocks who one day comes to a quaint house in the woods lived in by a family of bears. Clearly, we are that bear family in this strange house in the middle of the woods. I am Baby Bear, whose chair Goldilocks breaks, whose porridge Goldilocks eats, whose bed Goldilocks sleeps in.

(126)

The first line is deliberately misleading as it refers to a (defenseless) child alone in the woods encountering (predictably dangerous) bears, thus leading us to a normative empathetic response to Goldilocks. It is, however – “clearly” – Naomi’s family that becomes the story’s family of bears and she herself, Baby Bear. It is highly significant that, being a female child, Naomi refuses to identify with the tale’s protagonist, Goldilocks. Naomi does not belong to the “primarily Anglo-Saxon audience for which the story is intended” (Cheung 156), and it does not escape her that the absence of “long golden ringlets” places her in a different category; her reading of the tale is at least partially informed by the context of racial difference.⁴

Although Naomi seems to know the story well, she further distances herself from it by identifying the book as belonging to her brother. In more traditional interpretations of this canonical Western tale, it is Goldilocks who receives the reader's sympathy as a result of her encounter with the unknown and frightening "other"; Naomi's traumatized and victimized mind, however, identifies primarily with Baby Bear, the real victim of the tale, where Goldilocks becomes an abusive, impertinent, and uncaring violator. The implied allegory of an unlawful intrusion and conquest is clear. More importantly, within the dichotomy of civilization (pretty, blonde, well-dressed and well-cared for Goldilocks living outside the woods) versus the unruly and wild "otherness" of the bears (belonging inside the forest), Naomi places herself with the latter. The desire for a happy ending, however, cannot be suppressed: "Or perhaps this is not true and I am really Goldilocks after all. In the morning, will I not find my way out of the forest and back to my room where the picture bird sings above my bed and the real bird sings in the real peach tree by my open bedroom window . . .?" The reality, however, does not change: "No matter how I wish it, we do not go home" (136). Naomi's hermeneutic dialogue with the story of

Goldilocks has a bearing on her growing understanding of reality and imagination and the construction of her own meaning within complex social narratives.

The process of displacement and fragmentation of Naomi's world is parallel to the disintegration of her brother's, Stephen's, identity. Stephen is older, and therefore his perception of the events of internment is much more sober and rationalistic; he is aware of the racial prejudice against his community and his own status of social inferiority. Stephen's gradual breakdown and his struggle with his identity become obvious during the family's forced abandonment of their Vancouver home and "evacuation" into exile. While on the train, Obasan offers Stephen a traditional rice ball, but he, scowling, rejects it: "Not that kind of food" (123). To Naomi – and the reader – this is reminiscent of the ritualistic offering of rice balls to Momotaro before his departure from home. Everything, however, is oddly reversed here: there is no glory in Naomi's and Stephen's leaving their home, there won't be a homecoming, and the offering of rice balls is becoming not only meaningless, but also shameful to Stephen, who is trying to demarcate himself from everything Japanese.

Although younger Naomi cannot fully grasp the complexity of Stephen's inner struggle, she

intuitively senses that her brother is “broken”: he, being “half in and half out of his shell, is Humpty Dumpty – cracked and surly and unable to move” (123). Naomi’s references to broken Humpty Dumpty are significant in the context of Stephen’s future restricted physical mobility (while he will be fighting tuberculosis), as well as his growing spiritual handicap (rejection of everything Japanese). As Naomi repeats the lines of the Humpty Dumpty rhyme, she ponders the changes in her brother and remembers how Obasan would use single grains of rice to seal envelopes or parcels: “If I could take all the cooked rice in all the rice pots in the world, dump them into a heap and tromp all the bits to glue with my feet, there would be enough to stick anything, even Humpty Dumpty, together again” (124).

To Naomi, the humble rice and the mysterious ancestral Japanese spirit of Momotaro and Obasan contain both universal magic healing power and the material, physical reassuring that homecomings are possible and the broken world can be put together again. Such a moment of temporary restoration of equilibrium happens when Naomi’s father returns to Slocan: “I am Minnie and Winnie in a sea shell, resting on a calm sea-shore. I am Goldilocks, I am Momotaro returning. I am leaf in the wind, restored to

its branch, child of my father come home. The world is safe once more and Chicken Little is wrong. The sky is not falling down after all” (186). In a brief moment of happiness and security Naomi is able to rethink her self-identification in the context of these tales.

Although the novel’s plot does not exactly mirror the homecoming of “Momotaro,” the narrative of *Obasan* follows the traditional symbolical return (a closure of the quest) of folk and fairy tales by incorporating a double-tiered circular structure.⁵ The parallelism is particularly true of the tales featuring children as protagonists. In many ways, Naomi’s “homecoming” consists in bringing to rest the questions about her mother, in acquiring a voice, and in realizing the necessity of the communal movement of redress. The first circular movement takes place between the reminiscence of an eighteen-year-old Naomi and her uncle visiting the coulee in the beginning of the first chapter and the older Naomi, Naomi the narrator, performing the same ritual on her own after her uncle’s death in the last chapter. As opposed to the opening scene, which is full of unanswered questions and ambivalence, the final trip to the coulee is an act of closure. For Naomi it is meaningful because it symbolizes coming back to the beginning, completing the circle and becoming one with the

ancestral past: “my relatives, my ancestors, we have come to the forest tonight, to the place where the colors all meet... We have turned and returned to your arms as you turn to earth” (270). Naomi is conscious of the ritual character of this trip, and this awareness signifies her coming to terms with her identity and her roots. The second circular structure – the novel’s outer frame – involves the second epigraph, “There is a silence that cannot speak” (which does not appear to be a traditional epigraph but rather part of the narrative), and the documentary excerpt placed at the end of the novel. The documentary ending of the novel has a striking emotional impact in its juxtaposition of the lyrical, meditative, and very introverted tone of the beginning of the novel and the stark factual “post-script” (placed outside of the chapter division and thus forming a structural circle with the second epigraph). The documentary excerpt was taken from the memorandum sent by the Co-operative Committee on Japanese Canadians to the House and the Senate of Canada in April 1946. It condemned the internment of Japanese Canadians as a violation of the rights and liberties of Canadian citizens and it demanded an official recognition of this fact from the government. The bringing together of a very personal, lyrical voice of the second epigraph and the col-

lective, official voice of the memorandum demonstrates a movement of a “cultural-political inquiry... back and forth between the effects of trauma upon individual survivors and the manner in which that trauma is reflected and revised in the larger, collective political and cultural world” (Tal 5). In the dichotomy of silence and speech in *Obasan*, this document – the concluding “voice” in the novel – is in direct contrast to the poetic and very personal attempt at “speaking” at the beginning of the narrative. The very articulation of the experiences of thousands of people in a context of an official document also reflects Naomi’s long personal progression towards understanding the necessity of public voice and of the recognition of history. For Kogawa, language/speech and discursive structures directly affect and shape the socio-political reality, and are an important part of the public image of the redress movement. In a later essay “Is There a Just Cause?” presented to the Canadian Caucus on Human Rights in 1983, Kogawa emphasizes the importance of the public word and public recognition of the past injustices. In this sense, articulating and rewriting the history “[i]n this our not-yet-completed storytelling time” and “naming of our public friends and our public enemies” becomes an integral part of recovering the past and rebuilding lost identities.

The circularity of the narrative structure of *Obasan* and Naomi's symbolic homecoming echoes the fulfillment of the promise of "Momotaro."

The discourse of fairy tale and the politics of language occupy an important place in the mediation of the silence-speech continuum throughout the novel. From Naomi's displaced linguistic consciousness (situated between English and Japanese) to the rhetoric and ideology of language use in the discourse of journalistic writing and government documents, language is a tool of manipulation, of assigning place, of objectification. Ideology of Orientalism permeates the shaping of the image of the Japanese Canadian community since its coming into existence: "None of us... escaped the naming. We were defined and identified by the way we were seen" (126). Naomi's way of "naming" things and mediating the reality through her re-reading of familiar fairy tale topoi constitutes an important alternative "voice" and allows her to exercise agency through imagination in the historical context where her community was denied voice. Her displacement of reality onto the ontological realm of magic tales becomes an interpretive tool by which the dominant social narratives are questioned and her own meaning and relationship with the world is constructed.

Naomi represents a multiply displaced identity: through her simultaneous desire and inability to bridge her Canadianness and Japanese-ness, through her displaced past and childhood, and through her female body. One of the focal points in both *Obasan* and *Itsuka* is the formation of the female subject at the intersection of the cultural, political, and historical practices. In the very title of *Obasan* there is an implicit allusion to the significance of the female space and the sense of belonging with all the women of the family. This unity and interconnectedness signifies both familial and universal female space. Naomi, however, both belongs and does not belong in it. Her refusal or inability to identify with the female protagonists in traditional tales and her insistence on reversing the normative readings reflect the suppressed anxieties of a victimized person. Naomi's earliest memories are of those of being one with her mother, of a womb-like comfort and belonging: "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... Her blood is whispering through my veins. The shaft of her leg is the shaft of my body and I am her thoughts" (69). The same feeling of oneness belongs to the memory of Naomi's mother telling her the Momotaro story. The delight the old childless



couple feels at the miraculous appearance of a boy out of a peach – so wonderfully described by her mother – is also her own delight at being a loved child. The process of growing distanced from her mother begins with Naomi being sexually abused by her neighbour – the secret that creates a wall around her. Later, forceful separation from the maternal space constitutes some of Naomi's more painful and traumatic memories enhanced by the persistent silence surrounding her mother's disappearance and the seeming impossibility of closure. Both Naomi's and Stephen's questions about their mother's fate are never answered to spare them emotionally, and this silence constitutes one of the more important realms in *Obasan*, dominated by the absence of speech.

Naomi is conscious of the fact that she is different from her mother in more than one way. She is not beautiful and elegant like her mother – “a fragile presence,” with her face “oval as an egg and delicate,” “a long string of pearls” – in her mind, a symbol of the eternal feminine (20). She is also not married and does not have children, which is still viewed as a social failure in the conservative early 1970s. Aunt Emily, although also unmarried, proudly embraces her status as a single woman and openly defies the label of the spinster: “[I]f we laundered the term

properly she'd put it on, but it's too covered with cultural accretions for comfort" (8). Naomi is not confident enough to brush away the social conventions; moreover, in *Itsuka*, she discovers she cannot form and maintain a relationship with a man, the problem being rooted in her younger years. This painful inadequacy leads her to go deeper into her psyche to face the existence of all the forgotten traumas: "[I] attempt to ride the tide, my mind reeling backwards as it does in its efforts to find the source, the cause, the spark... Who knows what the psychogenesis of an illness may be? There are so many mysteries in the past – so many unknown and forbidden rooms" (112). Her "whole body has been a foot binding all [her] life" (138); it is her worst enemy that holds her hostage. In her fear of the growing closeness with Father Cedric and her inability to face it, Naomi is "looking for a story in which to belong" (139). The story – a fairy tale story, to be sure – is, however, a disorderly pastiche, rather than a coherent narrative; it is a composite, mosaic-like landscape, thrown together in an act of an unconscious bricolage. Naomi feels like Alice in Wonderland "following a white rabbit as it disappears . . . Down at the bottom of the tunnel is Cedric-land, a place of mystery" (45). During the "fairy tale afternoon" of her walk through the woods with Cedric, she

is conscious of being out of place and of “opening the book of an untimely tale” (135). The scene in the woods – an interweaving of a description of the real walk with Cedric and a horror-inspired surreal dream – is a replay of a Cinderella drama complete with the inventory of the “ballroom gown,” “prince’s ball,” and “slippers.” Lost in the “midnight transportation” and panicking as it progresses deeper in the woods, she hears an inner voice urging to “get back to [her] old safe story” (136). Naomi’s Cinderella is a tortured and victimized soul haunted by nightmarish visions and trapped in the dark forest of her own fears; there is no magical agent to help her, only the real-life Cedric, who, to Naomi, assumes the role of the fairy godmother and orders her to kill the wicked stepmother – presumably residing in Naomi herself. The Cinderella dream becomes particularly lucid at the “post-midnight” moment when the heroine is “not in charge” and lost, “standing alone in some something road” (136). Although Naomi’s feeling of entrapment and her inability to resolve her psychological problems can be traced back to the complex network of the painful memories and traumas from her childhood and later years, her inability to bring a closure to her personal traumas can also be seen as related to the lack of closure in the narrative of the historical injustice



done to her people. Naomi's "looking for a story" may certainly be read in the broader context of a search for a social narrative of reparation and belonging. Kogawa's examination of the interrelatedness of the personal and social, private and public, emphasizes the necessity of the fulfillment and integration of both domains to achieve the "wholeness" of the human being.

The act of story-telling as an engendering act is symbolic of creating another history, another reality, and the theme of history and writing of collective trauma constitutes one of the more important aspects of both *Obasan* and *Itsuka*: "To be without history is to be unlived crystal, unused flesh; is to live the life of the unborn" (*Itsuka* 271). Echoing Foucauldian assumptions, Kogawa emphasizes that the social institution of history is a narrative, a discursive construct, and as such is created through multiple subjectivities, readings, and interpretations that can be manipulated and used to different ideological ends. The uni-perspectival history of the officially sanctioned discourse in Kogawa's novels is counterbalanced by alternative private stories, including those of fairy tales and the child's subjectivity. Both *Obasan* and *Itsuka* represent an example of Bakhtinian polyglossia: multivoicedness and multiple perspectives are woven into the very core of these narratives. Kogawa achieves her unique style through a mix

of lyrical, intensely intimate stories and journalistic, documentary pieces, through blending private and public discourses, through telling personal histories and the collective history of Japanese Canadians. Breaking down the demarcation line between truth and lie, fact and fiction, Kogawa subverts the dichotomy of the official (hence true) versus private (hence subjective and potentially fictitious) and asserts the validity of the personal memory. One of the better examples of such divergent (hi-)stories in *Obasan* describes Naomi's discovery among Aunt Emily's documents of a newspaper article about the second-stage internment of Japanese Canadians and their relocation to work camps after the war. The article dealt with the evacuees in Alberta: "Japanese evacuees from British Columbia supplied the labour for 65% of Alberta's sugar beet acreage last year . . ." (213). It featured a picture of a smiling family gathered around a pile of beets with the caption "Grinning and Happy." The matter-of-fact language of the article and its complete disregard for the lives of thousands of people ruined in the postwar labour camps enrages Naomi:

Facts about evacuees in Alberta? The fact is I never got used to it and cannot... bear the memory. There are some nightmares from which there is no waking, only deeper and deeper sleep... Do I mind? Yes, I

mind... It's the chicken coop 'house' we live in that I mind... It's standing in the beet field under the maddening sun... I mind growing ugly... I mind the harvest time and the hands and the wrists bound in rags to keep the wrists from breaking open... Down the miles we are obedient as machines...

(214-17)

Juxtaposition of the two discourses introduces an alternative version of the official "truth" and questions the validity of the officially sanctioned narrative. Writing historical trauma in *Obasan* through breaking the silence and through an actively engaged word gives voice to those dispossessed, marginalized, and forgotten who were removed from the making of the narrative of history. Similarly, *Itsuka* displays pervasive competing of alternative discourses. In this sense, Kogawa's novels are an apt representation of what Linda Hutcheon conceptualizes as "historiographic metafiction," which betrays self-awareness as both history and fiction and where history – just as fiction – becomes a legitimate field of play, and fiction, a means of contesting official truth.

The death of Obasan becomes a significant moment in the process of Naomi's awakening. Listening to the language of silence and communing with her dying aunt, Naomi feels part of the intergenerational connection: "[W]e are there together, our hands speaking of the

kitchen queendom and the past. Our language is gestures, the nodding and shaking of hands, the shrugging of shoulders” (71). Naomi’s world begins to open when she moves to Toronto and goes on a trip to Japan and Hawaii with its Japanese diasporic community. Later, getting to know many people in the Japanese Canadian community and the redress movement – due to Aunt Emily’s efforts – makes Naomi reexamine her aunt’s activism and gradually develop an active political position. Aunt Emily’s influence on Naomi’s dormant consciousness was crucial. Naomi recollects in *Itsuka*: “Over the years I have learned to understand some of [her] sources of anger. And back in Granton and Cecil, in the years following Uncle’s death, I was discovering my own capacity for that unpleasant emotion.” Just as crucial was Emily’s impact on getting Naomi involved in political activism.

Naomi’s search as a Japanese, a Canadian, a human being, and a woman closely parallels Kogawa’s own quest for identity:

[I]n the very first years I was publishing I was like the other people of my generation – I had virtually no consciousness, except in a negative sense, of Japaneseness. I would see myself as white. I wrote as a white person. I wrote, in fact, in a male voice initially. In that sense I was a mimic, I read and I wrote what I read.

(Koh 20)

The ultimate closure – *itsuka*, “someday,” coming true – was the event of September 22, 1988, when the key members of the redress movement were invited to the Parliament Hill to be present at the official speech of apology and the signing of the settlement between the government and the Japanese Canadian community. The Prime Minister’s speech was a “feast of words,” both sad and joyful. The ceremony becomes the beginning of a new life for Naomi and thousands like her: “I laugh. I am whole. I am as complete as when I was a very young child... Reconciliation. Liberation. Belongingness. Home” (*Itsuka* 276-77). After the official ceremony is over, Naomi meditates on the hill over the Ottawa River, the scene being reminiscent of her earlier ritual trips with her uncle to the coulee near Granton. Naomi’s silent communion with her uncle and her ability to say that his hopes of “someday” have finally come true close the circle; it becomes both an end and a new beginning.

In 1995, Kogawa published her third novel *The Rain Ascends*. According to her own concession, she had been trying to get away from the semi-autobiographical mode of writing and to stay true to “the feeling and not the situation. Not the facts as such but the facts of one’s feel-

ings” (Williamson 156). *The Rain Ascends* at the same time revisits some of the familiar concerns of her earlier works: words and silence, truth and memory. The novel presents an account of a history of sexual abuse by an Anglican priest in a small town in Alberta and explores the complex moral etiology of the breach of trust and the ambivalence of justice.

The novel’s plot develops around the story of the Shelby family as narrated by Millicent, the only daughter of the town rector. The Shelbys, residents of the Anglican rectory, were the most respectable family in town and “clearly at the top of the . . . social heap” (*Rain Ascends* 41). The beginning of the narrative finds the patriarch of the family, Reverend Dr. Charles Barnabas Shelby, in his mid-eighties. The narrator’s journey through her memory starts as a painful process of dealing with the fact that her father was guilty of abusing an unspecified number of boys, including his own grandson (Millicent’s son). Millicent’s tragedy lies in the impossibility of reconciling the memory of her father as she has known him all her life with the idea of a new and unfamiliar father, a complete stranger who can never be known and understood:

The wonder of your father has always existed – the warmth, the tenderness. He was a god. In the beginning was the one who could do no wrong, the maker

and the keeper of all laws. With the wave of his hand he formed the land. The clinging mist that surrounded the house could not extinguish the light, the bravely flickering light. Now, in his old age, it continues to glow through the mist. You move towards it. You trust it still.

(17)

Millicent's sister-in-law Eleanor, who, in her rebellious spirit and uncompromisingly straightforward character, is strongly reminiscent of Aunt Emily from *Obasan* and *Itsuka*, is the one who condemns Millicent's complacent position and forces her to accept the necessity of the truth: "If there's just one thing that history teaches us . . . it's that bystanders and perpetrators are both on the same side" (11).

The main tension explored in the novel is the tenuous line between truth and fiction, good and evil. During her journey through memory, Millicent is forced to reevaluate her life as a continuum of many fictions: "We construct our lives out of the tales we tell ourselves, our myths and legends, the grids of understanding that chart the paths of good and evil, right and wrong" (86). From the unreality of her first high-school romantic involvement (which existed entirely in her imagination) to a different "unreality" in her relationship with Jonathan Steele and the out-of-wedlock birth of her son, there are many fictions in Millicent's life. Reminiscing on her child-

hood, the narrator realizes that the happy, picture-perfect family scenes stored deep in her memory are just fictional representations of what in fact was a “house of lies” (87). The constructedness of Millicent’s world and its fictionality is further accentuated through the organization of the narrative, which has at least two important layers. The outer frame consists of the narrator’s self-reflexive lyrical meditations on the “pen-holding moment” (2) and on the significance of the very act of writing, which is both personal and public. The narrative framework also incorporates the story of Abraham and Isaac with the clear implication that the Biblical story of the sacrifice of one’s own child bears directly on various characters in Millicent’s story – primarily her father and herself.

Throughout the meditative and self-reflexive first-person narrative, Millicent often writes herself into her journal by creating fairy tale ontologies. The inclusion of the fairy tale narrative conventions foregrounds Millicent’s rhetorical means of negotiating reality and meaning: her desire to distance herself from the truth and her need to create a coping strategy through the “safety” of a fictitious discourse. On another level, resorting to formulaic elements of the fairy tale genre (e.g., persistent inclusion of “Once upon a time” as a framing device for embedded

narratives and memory flashbacks) helps the narrator to create an ironic distance through which she reconceptualizes her family's past. One of the more important embedded narratives within the main narrative frame is a stylized tale about Millicent and her son Jeffrey, which facilitates the process of acknowledging the fact of her son's abuse:

In the far-away island of Dr. Moreau, the years went by and the years went by and the king's daughter spent her time by the silent stream... She drifted more and more into sleep, into a world of dream and shadow where her father was once again upright, unblemished, lordly and good. But beyond the silent stream was another world of courtiers and minstrels, a forest dripping with gossip and whisperings.

(123)

The "silent stream" (the magic water of oblivion) and "the world of dream" represent Millicent's earlier ignorance and her fear of facing the reality at the moment of writing. If in her earlier fiction Kogawa's resort to fairy tale topoi becomes an important vehicle of the character's conceptualizing of and coping with the past trauma, in *The Rain Ascends* she brushes aside the oblique allusions of imaginative writing in favour of the truth. Millicent's path to finding peace lies, in her own words, through "slay[ing] the fiction" (86). By breaking the space of

silence, leaving behind inadequate fictions, and finding words to articulate the unspeakable, the narrator “earn[s] [her] passage” (215).

The process of breaking away from fictions and finding the coveted truth, however, may just be another level of fiction or, at the very least, an ambiguous realm of multiple truths. As usual, Kogawa refuses to posit an unequivocal resolution of the novel’s problematic; in her exploration of the complex mechanism of human pathogenesis (real or constructed) she withdraws from the dichotomized world of black and white, good and evil. The demarcation line between them remains blurry, and although the ethical implications of the story are clear, the narrator’s journey of hesitation and struggle in her act of public speaking/writing is never simple. The dialogue between the fairy tale’s conventionally unambivalent moral dichotomy and the complex problems of Millicent’s reality remains inconclusive; there is no triumph of truth and good because both become contested sites. Thus, the reader sympathizes with the narrator’s internal struggles as she hesitates about making her father’s secret public. There is certainly nothing simplistic about Reverend Shelby’s persona: erudite, charismatic, and generous, he had an indisputably positive impact on the life of his community. One of the alternative

perspectives on the reverend's pedophilia belongs to Eleanor's nephew, Martin, himself abused by Shelby as a boy. Martin is homosexual and therefore can relate to being marginalized by society: "You're jealous of our freedom. All through history it's been good people like you who stone people. You drown them. You burn them at the stake. You think you have the right to decide who the deviants are and then you sacrifice them. Now that's what I call abuse. It's abuse of power" (115). Martin conceptualizes social condemnation and persecution of marginal sexual practices as a cultural phenomenon akin to burning of witches. His refusal to be victimized, however, is not entirely convincing as he is revealed later as a deeply troubled person who tried to commit suicide twice. The novel is remarkably open-ended. As Millicent ponders the events that reshaped her life and made her reexamine her most sacred values, she realizes that her speaking out for the victims of abuse was at the same time an ultimate act of love for her father. She comes to accept Eleanor's earlier argument that love and truth "belong together in responsibility" and that to "deny [her father] his responsibility" is to "deny [him] his dignity" (11). Although Millicent does not achieve the knowledge she may have sought and is "no closer to understanding [her father] or the ways



of the universe” (215), her act of speaking through personal writing is an act of absolution.

Kogawa’s examination of trauma and displacement bears on the workings of the individual and collective memory and the processes of generation and articulation of meaning as part of the healing and (self-)reconciliatory process. The phenomenon of the psychic trauma, explored by Kogawa, cannot be situated “exclusively within the domain of the cultural/historical or the private and personal, but rather at the crossroads between these realms” (Di Prete 2). Every personal trauma necessarily constitutes part of a larger network of ideological practices, and, thus, engages representational strategies involved in reading and interpretation. As one of such strategies, Kogawa’s resort to the fairy tale conventions becomes an important symbolic code and a mediating space between the realms of private memory and public discourse, which is used to subvert normative readings of texts and cultural spaces and practices, question dominant social narratives, and serve as a hermeneutic tool of construction of individual meaning.

Notes

1. It is important to note that some scholars in trauma studies disagree with the therapeutic potential of the process of displacement of trauma onto other genres. For example, to Santner such genre displacement represents a form of “narrative fetishism” where human beings “restore the regime of the pleasure principle in the wake of trauma or loss” without addressing the “working through” (146-47, qtd. in Di Prete 4; also see LaCapra).
2. To be precise, Haase recognizes that the functioning of fairy-tale landscape can be rather ambivalent. The settings of fairy tales may assume different symbolic value depending on whether they offer characters comfort and security, or threaten them with exile and danger. Commonly, “[t]owers, forests, rooms, cages, ovens, huts, and enchanted castles are typical locations that threaten characters with isolation, danger, and violence, including imprisonment and death. Even familiar locations – including home – can become defamiliarized and threatening” (363-64). The same place, however, can signal both the dislocation and endangerment that characters experience and their return to safety and security. Referring to the case of “Hansel and Gretel,” a canonical tale of children in exile, Haase points out that home itself becomes an ambiguous location, symbolizing both the potential for violence and the promise of ultimate security.
3. The Brothers Grimm’s version of Snow White emphasizes the forest as a threat, while the hut, translated by M. Tatar as “cottage,” is impeccably clean, homey, and welcoming, with its laid out table and comfortable beds (Tatar 84). Although – in the introductory scene – Disney’s version makes the dwarves’ hut particularly messy, thus facilitating a construction of a domesticated heroine and refocusing the attention towards gender issues, it still retains its welcoming characteristics.
4. In the context of the same scene in the novel it becomes obvious that Naomi is highly aware of her racial visibility and difference. Thus, commenting on the lyrics of one of her mother’s favourite songs, she says, “[W]e do not have silver threads among the gold” (i.e. grey hair among blonde; 135). Another example involves Naomi’s Japanese doll, a gift from her mother and her favourite toy, which she loses during their move to Slocan. One of the reasons Naomi felt close to her toy was their similarity in physical appearance: “Its hair, like mine, is a stiff black frame” (123). The Japanese doll – and Naomi’s later memories of it – creates another space of belonging and cultural nostalgia.

5. Also, see Davidson 74-82 and Goellnicht 1989 for a more in-depth discussion of the narrative structure of *Obasan*.

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Joy Kogawa's Versions of *Naomi's Road*

Rewriting the Autobiographical Story of the Japanese Canadian Uprooting for Children

ROCÍO G. DAVIS

An Asian Canadian writer who writes autobiographically for children gestures towards a necessary nuancing of the implications of life writing within the context of identity formation. Children's texts are culturally formative – educationally, intellectually, and socially. Ethnic children's literature highlights the meaning or value that society attributes to ethnic differences and intercultural relationships, and how each group occupies or influences the place they are in and the community they form. For the children of minority groups in Canada today, the issue of how to integrate the past with the present, how to appreciate heritage and establish bonds by

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forming peer communities, is essential to the questions about identity that face all youth – about defining self and other, and about the values they inherit from their families, those they accept and those they reject. More importantly, as Carole Carpenter argues, the most successful children’s books reject the assumption that children are merely receivers of culture and present them as “creative manipulators of a dynamic network of concepts, actions, feelings and products that mirror and mould their experience as children” (57). Though children’s existence and experience as cultural beings must be negotiated critically by readers, meaning in effective literary texts lies, at least in part, through the traditions and experience of collective children’s culture which each child experiences individually (Carpenter 56). By addressing children generally, the narratives also admit reflection on multiple claims on identity that many young Canadians encounter. Meaning arises, therefore, from the text’s involvement with the nature of childhood, more than simply with accounts of history or the experience of ethnicity. When a constitutive part of that network of concepts involves ethnic or historical appreciation and understanding, the autobiographical text plays a more operative role in articulating the context within which children

can engage in a significant process of self-awareness and self-formation.

The evolution of ethnic autobiography for children has been toward historical realism, and towards intercultural narratives that emphasize the varied cultural influences a child growing up in Canada experiences, rather than on acquiring a pure heritage identity. In Canada, contemporary ethnic literature for children tends to highlight ways of affirming and celebrating difference as they simultaneously seek ways to cooperate and collaborate across different ethnic boundaries. Mitzi Myers outlines the function of this new historicism in children's literature:

[It helps to] integrate text and socio-historic context, demonstrating on the one hand how extra-literary cultural formations shape literary discourse and on the other how literary practices are actions that make things happen – by shaping the psychic and moral consciousness of young readers but also by performing many more diverse kinds of cultural work, from satisfying authorial fantasies to legitimating or subverting dominant class and gender ideologies.

(42)

By incorporating historical information in autobiographies, writers not only present the events of history in ways that encourage identification and understanding, but offer children perspectives on the past. The potent issue of authen-

ticity in life writing therefore endorses “the didactic imperatives both embedded in the texts and imposed contextually by adult arbiters” (Smith 6).

In this paper, I explore Joy Kogawa’s versions of *Naomi’s Road* – the first one written in 1986 and the expanded edition published in 2005, highlighting two important aspects in this book’s history: first, the fact that this book is a rewriting – even, I argue, a reimagining – of *Obasan* (1981), arguably the most important (and certainly the most critically studied) Asian Canadian text published. *Obasan* has been marketed as a novel, and criticism generally speaks of it as such. Nonetheless, we accept that most of the events in the story are based on Kogawa’s own life and that characters were drawn from family and friends. *Naomi’s Road*, interestingly, reveals more details of Kogawa’s life, particularly the existence of a friend called Mitzi, as Kogawa explains in an interview (see Davis, *Interview*). In this essay, I will refer to the texts as autobiographical, attending to the poetic and experiential truths that Kogawa herself has said she wants to convey. Thus, I discuss Kogawa’s text, briefly contextualizing it in the tradition of other Asian North American autobiographical rewritings, to examine why Kogawa rewrote *Obasan* and, more importantly, how the translations of the novel into children’s literature



were enacted. Apart from Kogawa's personal creative project, specific political events – particularly the Japanese Canadian redress movement – made a text like *Naomi's Road* valuable as a didactic tool for children and a cultural artifact. Second, I will compare the two existing editions of *Naomi's Road* and analyze two specific points: the variations in the text, such as the heightened political and cultural content in the second version, and in the illustrations. Another version of *Naomi's Road*, which I cannot discuss here for reasons of length, is the critically-acclaimed musical version (by composer Ramona Leungen, librettist Ann Hodges, and music director Leslie Uyeda), produced by the Vancouver Opera in 2005, and designed for Vancouver Opera in Schools Program.

After the success of *Obasan*, a novel that positively influenced the Japanese Canadian redress movement, leading to the Canadian government's apology on behalf of all Canadians for the loss of liberty and property that Japanese Canadians had suffered during the evacuation, Kogawa was invited by Oxford University Press to produce a children's version of the book, which was published in 1986. The tradition of rewriting successful novels for children stems, in part, as an economic opportunity: books that may have been important for adults, particularly those that focus on history or culture, also serve

younger audiences. Adults involved in education – parents, teachers, and librarians – support the circulation of children’s books that they have considered important. Several writers of the Asian diaspora to North America, like Younghill Kang, Adeline Yen Mah, Yoshiko Uchida, and Da Chen, have produced versions for children of their previously published autobiographies, the first three of them converting more comprehensive accounts of their lives into autobiographies of childhood, concluding the narratives at an earlier chronological point than in the adult version (see Davis, *Begin Here*, for a discussion of some of the characteristics of Asian North American autobiographies of childhood).

Nonetheless, the impulse to rewrite many Asian North American texts stems from more than economic reasons. I argue that these literary decisions were enacted precisely because of the authors’ consciousness of the effective cultural work that children’s texts execute. By addressing a young readership, these autobiographical narratives formulate widened patterns of experience for Asian North American readers. Precisely because their texts were successful among adult audiences and became part of the network of cultural narratives that aided the creation of a historically and socially conscious readership, there existed an imperative to offer



these narratives to young readers. Moreover, the actual rewriting of the text implied more than just “simplifying” the content or vocabulary of the original autobiography. In each of these cases, the writer positively reimagined the story’s formulation and incorporated new metaphors, images, and specific experiences in order to make the story resonate more effectively with the implied child reader.

Some of the strategies of rewriting have involved a more in-depth engagement with heritage culture, a revision of traditional metaphors or mythical figures, a centering on the period of childhood to heighten symbolic meaning, or emphasis on issues pertinent to children’s culture as they intersect with questions of ethnic identification and belonging. Clearly, the didactic weight of a children’s literary text invites writers to use them to explain to ethnic or mainstream North Americans the meaning of culture and the existence of particular ethnic communities. The use of the child protagonist, in general, serves as a persuasive tool that allows the child reader to identify with that character, making the process of cultural explanation more effective.

Adeline Yen Mah’s autobiography *Falling Leaves* was transformed into a children’s book renamed *Chinese Cinderella*, which recounts her



experiences until the age of fourteen, rather than to her adulthood, as in the original version. In this story of herself as an unwanted child, set in China, Mah appropriates a fairy tale character, Cinderella, as a structuring device and operative metaphor. She uses the text to educate her implied readers – (Asian) American children – about China’s language, history, and culture. Specifically, she explains the metaphor of “Cinderella” in cultural terms, arguing that Ye Xian, a character in a story collected by Duan Cheng-shi in the ninth century, is the “original Chinese Cinderella” (199). She thus relocates the origin of this beloved children’s story to introduce the richness of Chinese culture to North American readers, promoting appreciation of cultural legacies.

Da Chen’s autobiography about his life in communist-ruled China, *Colors of the Mountain* (2001), was also rewritten as *China’s Son: Growing Up in the Cultural Revolution* (2001). Chen’s rewriting strategy consists mostly of highlighting many humorous events of his childhood and stressing interpersonal relationships with his peers. His new title stresses his fierce loyalty to the true China as the story mourns the destruction wrought by the abuse of power. By calling himself “China’s Son,” he symbolically foregrounds his perception of himself. Yoshiko Uchida, one of the most prolific Asian

American writers for children, had written on the theme of the Nisei in the internment camps in both her fiction and autobiography. In 1982, after decades of successful writing for children, she published her autobiography *Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese-American Family* (1989) to help Japanese Americans find a “sense of continuity with their past... But [she says] I wrote it as well for all Americans, with the hope that through knowledge of the past, they will never allow another group of people in America to be sent into a desert exile again” (*Desert Exile* 154). This explains her motivation to rewrite the memoir for children, as *The Invisible Thread* (1991), a title that stresses her feeling of connection with Japan. Chen’s and Uchida’s texts, therefore, emphasize connection with a heritage land, as they teach child readers about the history of communities of Asians in North America.

These rewritings of autobiographies for children locate Kogawa’s project in a context that encourages sharing particular experiences with child readers. The influence of *Obasan* on Asian Canadian historical revisioning and current cultural politics has been potent and arguably unrivalled. As the first novel on the Japanese Canadian exile and dispersion, *Obasan* helped correct “official” versions of history by breaking the silence about the events from 1942 to 1945

and its aftermath for the community, revive an important part of Canadian heritage, and generally set the record straight, as critical studies by Kong-Kok Cheung, Cheng Lok Chua, Mason Harris, Julie McGonegal, or Patricia Merivale, among others, have shown. Considering the cultural and historical possibilities of such a germinal text, educators logically supported its wider dissemination. Further, creatively interpreting history has proven crucial to the process of legitimation by ethnic writers. For many ethnic writers, engaging history is critical to their strategy for staking a claim in the country they feel themselves a part of but which had often rejected them in its official version of itself. The writing of history becomes particularly important for the ethnic writer who has to deal with official and non-official versions of events and the danger of obliteration from mainstream memory. Ethnic children's writers often "work consciously to respond to prejudiced narratives of ethnicity through signification, allusion and confrontation. Texts recoup lost heroes, fill the gaps of historical memory, subvert ethnic stereotypes, and advance revisionary versions of cultural identity" (Smith 6). For Asian Canadians, literary incursions into their role in the development of the country provide more than mere insight into a concealed past. As these writers

struggle to inscribe the truth about their historical situations, trying to do justice to Asian Canadian history, they do justice to Canadian history.

Making Asian Canadian history the subtext for children's writing is part of the process of decoding past collective experiences and reimagining possibilities for the future. These historically informed texts highlight the sense of collective identity that the protagonists of the stories share, and provide a critical source of knowledge and meaning within the Canadian experience. As Katharine Capshaw Smith points out, "Because works often narrate and explain details of a traumatic past, like the internment of Japanese Americans or the enslavement of African Americans, to an audience innocent of historical knowledge, the stakes are high: adult mediators recognize the gravity of their role as gatekeepers to history and arbiters of ethnic identity" (4). A number of Asian Canadian writers for children have engaged diverse moments and aspects of the history of the Asian presence in Canada, foregrounding stories of immigration, heritage culture, and problems with racism and acculturation. Paul Yee's *Tales from Gold Mountain* (1989) and *Ghost Train* (1996) for example, centre on the lives of early Chinese immigrants; Yee's *Teach Me to Fly, Sky-fighter! and Other Stories* (1983) and Sing Lim's

West Coast Chinese Boy (1971) describe the lives of children in Vancouver's Chinatown. More specifically, because of the nature of the Japanese North American relocation and internment experience, numerous juvenile texts, including Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar* (1976), Sichan Takashima's *A Child in Prison Camp* (1971), and Uchida's *Journey to Topaz* (1985) and the autobiography *An Invisible Thread*, among others, may be read, as Fu-jen Chen and Su-lin Yu argue, "as an insistent desire to verbalize or visualize an *impossible* relation toward the traumatic *Thing*, a relation both internal and external, individual and national, structural and accidental, domestic and social" (113). A proactive concern that all Canadian children learn the lessons of history impels much of this writing.

Naomi's Road dialogues with these traditions in many ways. In the first place, Kogawa, as did the other writers, changed her title, stressing a shift in the book's central focus. The Japanese word *obasan* means "aunt" or "adult woman" in general which indicates the book's central concern: the protagonist Naomi Nakane's negotiation with the maternal presences in her life – specifically the loss of her mother and her dealings with the two very different aunts who help raise her. Matrilineage and forms of maternity

are examined in this lyrical and cyclical text that moves from a narrative present in 1972 back to memories of the period of relocation and after. Though the central events of the story remain unchanged, Kogawa's choice of title for the children's book reflects her shift in concern and intention: rather than a novel about memory and motherhood, *Naomi's Road* is the story of a girl's journey of discovery and of friendship during wartime. By focusing on a specific child's "road" or experience, the author aims to educate all Canadian children about the history of the Japanese in Canada. In the "Letter from the Author" that prefaces the book, Kogawa explains the history of the Japanese in Canada, stressing the difficulties they experienced during the war. She then describes her protagonist, Naomi Nakane, as a "Canadian child . . . [with] black hair and Japanese eyes and a face like a valentine . . . who had to be ashamed to be Japanese" and explains that "it is hard to understand, but Japanese Canadians were treated as enemies at home, even though we were good Canadians. Not one Japanese Canadian was ever found to be a traitor to our country." By including herself in the story, she gives her narrative added authenticity. She notes that many Japanese Canadians built roads during their internment but explains that this book is about



“a different kind of road. It is the path of her life.” She then invites the readers to walk with Naomi for a while so that, perhaps, they too “will find the name of a very important road.” Indeed, as in *Obasan*, the book is narrated in first person, to facilitate the child reader’s identification with the protagonist. *Naomi’s Road* is imagined, thus, as a forward-looking text that, though it also emphasizes family relationships, stresses interpersonal relationships and inter-ethnic experiences.

A brief explanation of the book’s publishing history is necessary at this point. After the first Canadian publication of *Naomi’s Road*, a Japanese press asked Kogawa for permission to print a Japanese translation of the book but requested that she expand the existing version. (Interestingly, the first edition of *Naomi’s Road* is dedicated to “my new sister Michiko Asami,” who later produced the Japanese translation). The author recounts in an interview that the book grew longer and longer “as the Japanese editor kept asking for more and more of *Obasan*. Actually, I think they wanted *Obasan* but without Aunt Emily in it. So it’s not really a translation, but a book for junior high school age children” (Davis, *Interview* 100). Published in 1988, *Naomi-No-Michi* was translated into English in 2005 and released as the second edition

of *Naomi's Road*, with new illustrations. This new version, therefore, is significantly longer than the first one and much more complex on several levels.

Kogawa's rewriting of *Obasan* involved, primarily, simplifying the storyline, limiting the narrative perspective to that of the child (rather than including numerous voices and intertexts), presenting the plot chronologically, substituting the narration of the most painful events – the deaths of Naomi's parents – with a symbolic dream, and introducing a new character – the white Canadian girl Mitzi – who becomes Naomi's friend in Slocan and who opens up the possibility of her road for her. The essential particulars – both positive and negative – of *Obasan* remain, though articulated in a way more fitting for young children: the harmony in the Nakane's family life, expressed also by their love for music; the racism that Japanese Canadians experience leading to the loss of their home, and their forced uprooting; separation from and the death of Naomi's parents; and the deep Christian faith, which sustains them and influences Kogawa's narrative style. Some episodes have been rewritten for children, such as Rough Lock Bill's saving Naomi from drowning in Slocan, while other details are omitted entirely, notably the character Aunt Emily and Naomi's experi-

ence of sexual abuse by Old Man Gower. Importantly, by concluding the narrative when Naomi is only nine, Kogawa manages to evoke the suffering brought by war while avoiding the most painful moments of *Obasan*, such as the persistence of unexplained maternal loss and details of her mother's death. Because a traditional happy ending is not possible, the book concludes with Naomi "realizing that the adults speak in riddles, and revealing her determination to work out her own codes to communicate with her best friend" (Gibert).

Naomi's Road opens with a family scene of music, laughter, and a bedtime story – Momotaro, the peach boy – after the evening bath. The narrator uses Japanese terms to refer to aspects of their home life – her nemaki (nightie) and her mother's voice that is "yasashi – soft and tender" (1986: 1, 3). The child emphasizes a feeling of safety with her family: "Everything's safe where Mama is. I sit close to her, the safest place in the world" (1986: 8). This affirmation, in a sense, foreshadows the destruction that follows when her mother has to leave for Japan to care for her own mother. The young girl channels her deepest feelings through her Japanese doll who articulates Naomi's frustration over the war by proclaiming that "War is stupid" (1986: 13) – or her longing for her mother: "I wish Mama was

here,' the doll says. "Then we would be safe as bunnies'" (1986: 15). The Japanese Canadian uprooting is described as an uncomfortable train ride, where Naomi witnesses how other women attend to a young mother and her newborn baby. Her feelings continue to be channeled through her toy: "my doll feels afraid" (1986: 17).

The central part of the story is set in Slocan, the small town where the children and Obasan settle. Naomi loses her Japanese doll during the trip, signaling the loss of an important part of her childhood. One day she and her brother Stephen meet Mitzi, a white Canadian girl who refuses to play with her at first. This is Naomi's first experience of the kind of racism that led to their exile: Mitzi tells them that they're not Canadian – that Canada is "not your country" (1986: 39), that the Union Jack is "not your flag" and that they will "lose the war" (1986: 40). Eventually, the girls become good friends. This is Kogawa's most significant departure from the original story and what makes the new version function effectively as a story for children about a Japanese Canadian girl growing up. By focusing on a developing friendship between two little girls who have been told they are different from each other, Kogawa privileges one of the classic themes of children's literature. This gesture therefore locates this text within the tra-

dition of children's culture, rather than merely in a dialogue with issues of ethnic understanding.

Mitzi eventually invites Naomi to play with her, and their relationship develops as a typical girlhood story – they play with Mitzi's bunnies and dolls, have tea parties, giggle for hours, and, importantly, decide to become “blood sisters,” a bond that “is forever” (1986: 74). By focusing on this friendship, Kogawa gives readers a positive angle through which to deal with the losses implicit in the story. Naomi, who has lost family and home, gains a friend. The penultimate chapter of *Naomi's Road* recounts the girl's dream of both her parents singing to her and a vision of a wild rose burning – a symbolic representation of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In spite of this negative vision, a sense of her parents' permanence beside her remains, which allows her to deal with her feeling of loss.

The book concludes with a conversation Naomi has with her Uncle and the Minister, who tell her: “Everyone has some treasures and our road goes to where our treasures are. The names of our roads are the names of our treasures” (1986: 81). Naomi understands then that, though adults often speak in riddles, the treasure they refer to is friendship, and that Mitzi will

help her move on towards the future. This idea of moving on shapes *Naomi's Road*. Towards the end of the novel, Naomi notes: "I remember I used to pretend that my Japanese doll could talk. I don't play like that anymore" (1986: 69), signaling her awareness of her own maturity and the need to face her problems. By stressing the idea of friendship, Kogawa uses the figures of Naomi and Mitzi to signal all Canadians' need to connect with each other on a personal level, implying that honest fellowship can overcome differences and help the victims overcome the cruelty of war.

The most problematic aspect in the reimagining of *Obasan* into *Naomi's Road* lies, in my opinion, in the loss of the original text's poetic element. By trying to pare down a long and meditative novel, Kogawa unwittingly sacrificed much of the beauty of her prose, producing a rather dry and straightforward narrative, with occasional poetic moments. The 2005 edition, in a sense, recovers much of the poetry of *Obasan* – many of the scenes are more clearly reminiscent of the original – and some of the complexity of the Japanese Canadians' historical positions. This expanded version – with four additional chapters and more details added to many of the events – allows for a more effective contextualization of both the family's inner

dynamics and their place in the community. Also, Kogawa replaces the prefatory letter from the author with a historical note at the end of the text, briefly explaining the history of Japanese Canadians and including details of her efforts to preserve her old home in Vancouver from being demolished. (Indeed, through the concerted efforts of many poets, writers, and activists, the house was purchased in 2006 by The Land Conservancy of British Columbia, which will maintain it as a cultural landmark). This evidences a more sophisticated approach to the text as the additional details categorically locate the text historically and culturally.

The most notable narrative variation in this *Naomi's Road* is the shift from the first person of the 1986 edition to the third person. The first person in the original certainly strengthens the autobiographical feel of the text, but the third person narrative gives the author a critical distance that permits her to include details that might prove problematic in a first-person children's story: Kogawa is more explicit about racism, suffering, and death, for example. Importantly, by shifting to third person, she makes Naomi and Stephen represent all the Japanese Canadian children who were uprooted from their homes. Kogawa's new version, I argue, not only tells the story of a child but also

unveils the psychological pain in the history of the Japanese Canadian journey towards acceptance and the acknowledgement of the injustice perpetrated upon an entire community of loyal Canadian citizens.

Other important changes executed in the new edition are Kogawa's added emphasis on the Nakane's family life. This version mentions all Naomi's grandparents and her Aunt Emily, and tells of an outing that includes taking a family picture and a picnic at Stanley Park in Vancouver. The family's love of music and the guidance they receive from their deep Christian faith are also stressed. These two elements, along with references to Japanese culture, characterize them as a Japanese *Canadian* family. Stressing the family's Christian faith might serve to make them appear more Canadian, yet it also attends to a reality in Japanese Canadian life, as many immigrants and their families had converted to Christianity and felt themselves part of very strong religious and cultural communities. Indeed, Kogawa's father was an Anglican minister and many families in Vancouver shared their faith. The image of the road, in this version, appears first as a legacy for the future that the parents open up for the children, giving the symbol more potency throughout the text. Their father tells them in the first chapter that

“everyone has a special road. You do, Stephen. And so do you, Naomi” (2005: 12), and their mother adds that “we all learn what our road is some day” (2005: 13).

By emphasizing the peace, harmony, and happiness of the family home, the story of war resonates more cruelly: “There is a strange new unkindness in the street,” Naomi notes (2005: 27). Importantly, Kogawa makes more specific references to Vancouver as the family’s real home and to the ethnic component of the war. Unlike in the first edition, here she introduces and very pointedly deploys the expression “Japanese Canadian” on many occasions to refer to the family and the community. This politically significant term clearly demonstrates not only a change in attitude towards the history of this community, but also an increased awareness of the need to identify them as a group, in order to break the silence about past injustices. It introduces child readers to the construction of potentially liberating or enslaving rhetoric in shifting historical or cultural contexts.

There is richer detail, as well, in the cultural details that make up the imagination and life of a Japanese Canadian child. On the one hand, Naomi’s father encourages the children to follow the example of Ninomiya Sontoku, a great Japanese scholar, and her mother tells her



the story of Momotaro, the peach boy, here recounted in detail. On the other hand, Naomi's favourite picture books include the stories of Gulliver and Little Orphan Annie, connecting her experience and creative imagination to that of all children growing up in Canada, irrespective of heritage. The evacuation is described in more detail, as though to present the readers with the reality of the event. Naomi's repeated references to the house and the life they left behind – "just like her house in Vancouver" (2005: 48); "hot as the sawdust furnace in the basement in Vancouver (2005: 50); she "wishes she could go back to be with Mama and Daddy once more in their real house in Vancouver" (2005: 51) – emphasize the human loss behind a racist decision.

The Stanley Park picnic scene shows the children playing like all other children, although Stephen and Naomi will soon be told that "[a]ll the Jap kids are going to be sent away and they're bad and you're a Jap" (2005: 30). Their father's definition of war is also extended in this edition. Mr. Nakane describes war in the first edition as "the worst and saddest thing in the world. People get hurt and learn to be afraid" (1986: 13), a formulation repeated in the second edition but with an addendum: "It turns friends into enemies. In Canada some people think

Japanese Canadians are enemies” (2005: 29). And Naomi’s brother articulates the ultimate irony of this particular war: “‘It’s a riddle,’ Stephen says. ‘We’re both the enemy and not the enemy’” (2005: 30). They realize that they have been placed between one country and the other, and that they have to prove that they are not Japanese in order to be Canadian. This dilemma, along with the contradiction between their perspectives on themselves and Canadian society’s prejudice, are among the central themes of the story. Here, Kogawa’s use of the term “Japanese Canadian” becomes rhetorically significant: the formulation tells the children – and reminds the reader – where the characters stand. Indeed, the author includes specific manifestations of the Japanese Canadians’ loyalty to Canada and their sense of belonging to the country. Naomi’s father explains their mother’s inability to return by saying: “*We’re* at war with Japan” (2005: 28, emphasis added), signaling that the Nakanes’ loyalties are to Canada. At one point, Stephen trades all his marbles for a Union Jack that he brings home and nails to a long pole planted in the garden. He salutes it and the children sing “Land of Hope and Glory” and “O Canada” (2005: 71).

Significantly, the scene where the children meet Mitzi changes in one small but vital detail: Mitzi's mother apologizes explicitly for her daughter's rude behaviour, telling them, "Of course it is your flag. And it is our flag too. We have come over to say we are sorry for being unkind, haven't we, Mitzi?" (2005: 74). Considering that the expanded edition was prepared after the Canadian government's 1988 official acknowledgment of the wrongful actions against Japanese Canadians, we may consider the character Mitzi not only a useful literary device that introduces aspects of children's culture and friendship into the plot, but also as a symbol of the Canadian people who had rejected the Canadians of Japanese ancestry and later apologized, offering them a monetary compensation for their losses. Thus, though Naomi remains the story's protagonist and the Japanese Canadian experience the central context, Kogawa's added emphasis on Mitzi highlights the other side of the story: Canada's process of facing its actions against its own citizens. With these literary manipulations, Kogawa transforms the 2005 version of *Naomi's Road* into both a more comprehensive history of the Japanese Canadians – covering the period of uprooting and dispersal, the struggle for redress, and the process of healing – and an account of Canada's developing

awareness of and regret for its prejudiced actions.

The new concluding chapter of *Naomi's Road* takes up the idea of sorrow and the need for reparation. Here, Naomi and Mitzi, already old women, visit the Nakanes' old house in Vancouver and find that it is for sale. Standing in the garden, Naomi imagines her mother coming to meet her and Mitzi there: "*You see, she can hear Mama say. I have come to you on Friendship Road. Welcome home, my special N*" (2005: 113). This image implies that Naomi has indeed found her path, through friendship and the task of preserving the memory of the past. This novel concludes, therefore, with a recovery of the stolen past – her old Vancouver home – together with the friend of her childhood, Mitzi, the symbol of interethnic understanding. The image of their old cherry tree – symbolically described as "scarred and wounded. A bandage is on one branch. Two ropes tie the wounded branch to the trunk. Rusty sap and clear sap seeps through the wounds" (2005: 113) – suggests that the past can and should be reclaimed in order to foster tolerance and mutual appreciation in the present. This conclusion resounds deeply with Kogawa's own position as a writer who understands that "the deepest questions within me are spiritual questions," such that her "basic disci-



pline of the pen has to do with the deepest truths” that she wants to consider, those she calls “spiritual questions... about suffering and truth and belief” (Davis, *Interview* 98). The faith central to her writerly project inspires her to foreground the redemptive power of forgiveness and the struggle for mutual understanding. Ultimately, then, the narrative ends positively, with Naomi and Mitzi learning about themselves and the complex world they live in and, importantly, about how to overcome the wounds of the past through benevolent actions in the present.

The illustrations in the books add to the aesthetic experience of *Naomi's Road*. Matt Gould prepared the drawings for the 1986 edition, whose cover features a young child, drawn from the back, looking out on a landscape that has a train cutting through it. The dark earth colours of the cover – primarily brown and ochre, painted with broad brushstrokes, give the scene a harsh and unfriendly tone. The little girl is drawn in geometric forms: a triangle for her head of black hair, a rectangle for her white skirt, and a shapeless dark brown blouse. The black and white bold drawings within the book are abstract, generally disproportional, and often quite unattractive. Nonetheless, we may read these hard-featured drawings as symbols of the difficulties the child experienced. The



unpleasantness Kogawa avoids in the text is conveyed through the severity of the illustrations, making the drawings supplementary, rather than complementary, to the text. However, though the text is aimed at a young audience, the drawings appear to contrast with the vocabulary level of the text and with the occasional lyrical prose, producing, in my opinion, an unsightly volume.

On the contrary, Ruth Ohi's art for the 2005 edition (which the Canadian Children's Book Centre named as an *Our Choice* Selection in 2006) – pencil drawings with specific detail over the entire page – capture realistically the different emotions that the characters experience. The elements in her full colour cover are identical to Gould's in organization but radically different in style and colour. Her cover displays muted colours in elegant strokes: we see the green and brown blades of grass, shades of blue in the sky, strands of the little girl's dark hair, the form of her orange sweater. The only important difference in the composition of the cover lies in her attitude towards the doll she holds: in the first edition, it hangs to the side as she holds it by an arm; in the second, the girl hugs the doll to herself, and its Japanese face looks over the girl's shoulder at the reader. The new cover suggests that Naomi symbolically embraces not only her childhood, represented by her doll, but also her connection to



Japanese culture. The doll, a Japanese artifact, looks at the audience, interrogating it and claiming a place for itself on Canadian soil.

As a whole, I would argue, the aesthetic experience of the 2005 edition is more satisfactory than that of the earlier version. Ohi's black and white shaded drawings – with their masterfully depicted facial expressions – capture the essence of memory, elegantly conveying a variety of emotions: the children's mischievous joy as they play with their grandfather; Naomi's tension as she holds on to Obasan's coat at the train station; the girl's fear as she jumps into the water; her peaceful happiness as she hugs her father after he has come home; and her concern for Stephen's frustration over not having musical instruments to play. Indeed, the longer version of *Naomi's Road*, by providing more personal, historical, and cultural detail illustrated by warm drawings that dialogue suggestively with the text, is arguably a more worthy successor to *Obasan*, as it reflects more thoughtfully the poetic core behind a painful historical event.

The unique achievement of Kogawa's text, nonetheless, lies in the manner in which it demonstrates an awareness of the role that Asian Canadian children's literature plays in the construction of meaning or value that

society places on questions and attitudes about ethnic difference and intercultural relationships. Developing culturally committed writing for children enhances personal, communal, and cultural significance in the context of Asian Canadian self-representation. As a text that engages questions of liminality and turns to storytelling as a source of agency and empowerment, *Naomi's Road* also widens the sources of meaning within contemporary narratives for children. This autobiographical exercise, ultimately, presents a child actively negotiating her own history, part of a creative adaptation and manipulation of a dynamic network of concepts and feelings that transforms her into the protagonist of her own life and of Canada's narrative of its own history.

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Toronto Dollar

Currency Backed by Caring

BARBARA TURNBULL

Certainly the activist life I know has the two engines – one in front, one behind. Love and anger. Push, pull. Both going in the same direction if the train is to get up the hill.

Joy Kogawa

Joy Kogawa freely admits to being an idealist. In fact, of seven definitions listed in the *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, each perfectly describes her quest to ease the suffering around her, including “a visionary or impractical person” and “a person who represents things as they might or should be, rather than as they are.” Such is the central theme of the Toronto Dollar community currency program she inspired, helped create, and then almost single-handedly steered for ten years. During its first decade, about \$110,000 was raised and distributed in ways that benefitted a broad spectrum of organizations, individuals, and programs: the money was used to



lend support to several homeless initiatives, church groups, school nutrition programs, women's shelters, youth services, and young mothers, and to provide furniture to new immigrants. Its goal was to help staunch the scarcity Kogawa cannot help but see all around her.

Community currency systems are community organized and managed methods of exchanging goods and services, using an interest-free currency, with circulation limited for the most part to a particular geographic area. Communities have issued, managed, and circulated their own currencies for the past 6,000 years, as a way to meet the needs of people in the community and offer some protection from the economic instability around them. Over history, as economic systems developed into what we have today, the community-based currencies themselves have also changed to suit new realities, never losing the essence of currency as something that is designed, issued, and managed by the community members themselves (DeMeulenaere). Kogawa believes "that the mindset that attends money and the bottom line of profit first constricts our hearts and does not enable us to be at one with one another." (Personal interview) Reflecting on her motivations for starting Toronto Dollar, Kogawa said the following:



I wondered whether the community currency movement, with its emphasis on connection and strengthening communities, could be one way to look at money. It would at least be one of the countless ways to be engaged in the work of justice. People who would be drawn to participate would be building a system of cooperation rather than competition, of “we-ness” rather than “me first.” Bernard Lietaer says that community currencies create a bias toward local sustainability. The work is deeper than just the mechanics of the community currency system. I wanted to keep on, until I found a key or keys to a mindset of abundance and gifting.

Since national currencies have dominated world economies for these last few centuries, the power of the community currency has diminished. However, as a response to the monetary crises seen around the world, community currency systems have been established in thirty-five countries worldwide within the last twenty years, with plans for many more underway. These currencies are designed to both critique and contrast the dominant, debt-based economy, where money is owned by the bank system, issued as debt to governments, and kept in scarce supply, in order to maintain its value. As this currency circulates outside national borders, a contradiction arises: the currency must be scarce to maintain its value on foreign markets, but there must be enough in the country to facilitate exchange. In times of economic crisis, this con-

tradition can reach disastrous proportions. Therefore, community currencies can fill an important role, helping to hold the domestic economy together (DeMeulenaere).

Kogawa began a search for mercy and abundance after finishing her novel *The Rain Ascends* – what she considers her most important work – in 1995. “I had really experienced the writing of that book as a scream for the presence of mercy,” she says. “Since that book I’ve learned that mercy and abundance must be together. You don’t have one without the other. If you don’t have an abundant life, you don’t have the strength to be merciful. And without mercy, there is no abundance. Without mercy, the planet is dead. We have to have it.” After the release of *The Rain Ascends*, she spent more than a year researching community currencies around the world.


One of the systems which caught the attention of the people with whom Kogawa had discussions in Toronto was the Ithaca HOUR. This is local tender, rather than legal tender, backed by real people, labour, skills, and tools, in Ithaca, New York. The city, in central New York State, is best known as the home of Cornell University and the vegetarian collective Moosewood Restaurant. Each HOUR is Ithaca’s ten dollar bill, based on the average hourly wage in the



area. These HOUR notes, in five denominations, purchase thousands of goods and services, including plumbing, carpentry, electrical work, nursing, child care, car and bike repair, eyeglasses, and onwards. Their credit union accepts them for mortgage and loan fees. People use them to pay rent, dine at the best restaurants in town, see movies, and shop at two locally-owned grocery stores, farmers' market vendors, and more than three hundred other businesses (Glover).

The community money is basically used to reach an agreement and as a means of interaction, as well as for exchange. Each HOUR (as the printed currency is called) enables the member to acquire goods or services that would cost ten dollars – even to exchange for real money. Naturally, professionals with complex skills earn more than one HOUR per working hour. Notes of different denominations depict community values, privileging children, natural resources, and respect for minorities. The social justice convictions behind the project are reinforced by the association's law that 10 percent of HOURS be issued to community members involved in social activity.

Another example, with success in thirty-nine countries, is LETS: the Local Exchange Trading System. It was developed by Michael Linton, a



man from Vancouver Island who had worked in the computer field in the 1970s and built an accounting database. The system was introduced in 1982, as a mutual credit community currency system. Whereas many community currencies developed as a natural response to economic crises in a dominant economy, the LETS developed as an intentional response to a critique of the conventional economy, designed to contrast it (DeMeulenaere).

LETS is basically a parallel economy, where goods and services are exchanged without printed money. One person might mow a lawn and clean out eaves troughs in exchange for a second-hand cell phone and some unused time. Someone else may do some cooking and freezing for a week's worth of meals. Transactions are recorded in a central location open to all members, as debit and credit. An account with credit belongs to a member who has provided more than he or she has received. With no currency being issued or controlled in any way, the system is interest-free. This is possible because the system simply records the transactions and keeps the accounts, facilitating each member to be responsible for his or her own use of the system. Some LETS groups place a maximum debit limit to keep members' accounts in check and encourage those with rapidly or excessively

accumulating debit to take appropriate steps and reduce the level.

Kogawa invited Linton to meet with various friends and interested persons, and Vancouver's LETS was started in the mid-'90s. Then, moving back to Toronto, she and her former partner, John Flanders, participated in Toronto LETS until it folded. She also met two business people, David Walsh and Susan Bellan, who worked in her neighbourhood and had similar dreams of a more egalitarian society. These four were among about a dozen other neighbourhood people who spent about two years studying and brainstorming ideas and plans – one of which was Flanders' development of a community organization called St. Lawrence Works, which acted as an umbrella organization for the Toronto Dollar.

At that point, activism came naturally to Kogawa. This was long after *Obasan* had publicly thrust her into the middle of the Japanese redress movement of the 1980s. But community involvement was something she was born into. Raised as a child to an activist life in the internment centre of Slocan, Kogawa has memories of putting homemade boiled-rice glue onto the backs of sheets of addresses. They would then dry them, cut them out, moisten and press them as labels onto the folded and stapled mimeographed news-sheets printed with shoe-polish



ink. These went out to thousands of Japanese Canadians in internment camps and across the country. From infancy, Kogawa's home was a place of community connection. One of her earliest memories is of going around to each person sitting in a large circle in their house in Marpole, bowing and greeting the guests.

After the war the Kogawa family moved to Coaldale, Alberta, where this work continued. Joy would gather friends to come to Sunday school, creating events, concerts, musicals, skits, and games nights. She was deeply involved in people and community. But somewhere along the line, everything changed. She became quiet, withdrawn, timid, and sickly.

She now thinks of the community action during the Japanese Canadian Redress movement in the early '80s in part as a return to personal and communal health. Apart from organizing the first public meeting on redress in Toronto at the Church of the Holy Trinity with her young friend, Kerri Sakamoto, one of the more important actions was a gathering of a few key Japanese Canadians – Roger Obata, Tom Shoyama, and Wes Fujiwara – at the hotel where Tom Shoyama was staying. Together, funds were pledged to begin a new Japanese Canadian national paper, which became *Nikkei Voice*, the only national newspaper for Japanese Canadians

that continues today. The work of keeping that paper afloat consumed many hours of stuffing envelopes and participating in work bees.

The redress work was arduous. “The work of the beet fields,” Kogawa says. They picked up one name after the other, after the other, out of phone books and church lists, to create a master list of Japanese Canadians in Toronto; they gathered community organizations. Kogawa communicated with NDP politicians such as Dan Heap, Lynn McDonald, and David Crombie, who at one point was Minister of Multiculturalism. She went with Ken Adachi, *The Toronto Star*’s book reviewer and author of the groundbreaking history of Japanese Canadians, *Enemy That Never Was*, to see Crombie on one occasion. “What I wanted was process,” she recalls. “I wanted the democratic body of Japanese Canadians, the National Association of Japanese Canadians, to be recognized. This took years. So painful.”

Although none of her fictional characters are as publicly active as Kogawa herself, she has layered her experiences into her characters’ complexities. She wrote about the pain of the redress experience in *Itsuka*. She also wrote about it in *Emily Kato*, though it was a somewhat watered down version, after feeling the pain diminish over time. The most “activist” character in *Obasan* and *Emily Kato* is Naomi’s Aunt Emily.



Eleanor is the character in *The Rain Ascends* who most pushes for action. They are both driven by a rage for truth, for justice, for getting the kinks out of the record, for making “the truth,” as they know it, visible. In Emily’s case, she wants this done publicly. Eleanor’s sphere remains closer to home. As Kogawa notes, it is the character Millicent who in fact does the necessary deed of truth telling in *The Rain Ascends*. “She is transformed from ‘woman in denial’ to ‘woman who acts,’” she says. “Through this movement, she enters a new arena of freedom. One might see this as typical of the human journey, from unawareness, through action, to greater consciousness and increasing freedom.”

Kogawa insists that on one level she had serious doubts about what she was really doing in her role as an activist, both with the redress chapter in her life and later in the work of the Toronto Dollar:

In redress, I knew we were doing the work of justice and truth telling, yet I was just going along with the people that were going along. I frankly did not think, after such intense work for so long, that the government was ever going to hear the cries of a pipsqueak minority group. One of the journalists I knew and respected said that special interest groups like ours subverted the democratic process. But then miraculously the American government listened to Japanese Americans and, very soon afterwards, the Canadian government followed, and that chapter in my life

was successfully concluded with the attainment of redress – an acknowledgment that the government had acted wrongly towards us, plus some compensation.

My next novel, *The Rain Ascends*, changed my life more deeply than the two previous novels. I was sickly before the novel, and after I was not. I was released, I was free. I was rid of hypocrisy. I came out from an inner war and felt as though I had shot all the bullets into the air and that there were no more bullets.

With the personal purge giving her new energy and purpose, along with her clearer convictions about mercy and abundance, she broadened her sights to the greater community around her.

Kogawa's new focus was also an escape from ethnicity into identification with her neighbour. "We've got the person who has been wounded at the side of the road all around us," she says, referring to the story of the Good Samaritan with its question, "Who is my neighbour?" "In the work of the Toronto Dollar, I have been holding the dream of neighbourhood and neighbourliness, of abundance and mercy, of friendship and community."

With much fanfare, the Toronto Dollar was launched in 1998 as a registered, non-profit corporation. From the start it has been intended partly as



a symbol of caring and kindness, an attempt to build a more just and compassionate city. Its purpose, as with other community currencies, is to encourage healthier economic relationships among people from the community, business, and government sectors – most importantly among those with the greatest economic need.

Kogawa and other community-minded people started the project in her new backyard, the St. Lawrence Market neighbourhood of Toronto, the historic heart of the original Town of York. One of the strongest communities within Canada's largest city, St. Lawrence, with the two centuries-old Farmers' Market at its hub, is known around the world for its mix of high-density and low-rise buildings and a mix of people ranging from executives pulling in seven-figure incomes to people on social assistance. Jorge Carvalho, supervisor of the St. Lawrence Market and a loyal, long-term supporter of the Toronto Dollar, initially signed on almost all of the merchants of the market and gave the program its base of business support. At Toronto Dollar's height, more than two hundred stores, restaurants, and services accepted the currency.

Toronto Dollar has had its challenges: it has remained labour-intensive, requiring many people to sell the dollars, count the paper money, and

keep in touch with the merchants who accept them. The project has been run almost exclusively by volunteers, except for staff who were hired for two years with a grant. The hope was that the program would become self-sustaining.

With everything Kogawa had learned about community currencies, along with countless hours of conversation and planning with her cofounders, the group came up with a unique twist: the Toronto Dollars would have the equivalent value, dollar for dollar, as Canadian currency. Consumers then spend the money exactly as they would Canadian dollars, at participating businesses. It offers a 10 percent solution – for each Toronto Dollar purchased, 90 cents is deposited in a reserve fund, with the remaining 10 cents going to the Toronto Dollar Community Projects Fund. For users, it is essentially an opportunity to make a financial donation without actually spending any money. The first grant of 1,000 Toronto Dollars went to the Out Of the Cold program at the Metropolitan United Church. Twelve thousand dollars went to the St. Lawrence Community Recreation Centre to send children to camp. Dance classes and after school programs were given a boost. Some of the money was used to employ low-income residents (many of them living in shelters) to beautify the neighbourhood: decorate for Christmas, plant



flowers in the spring, and perform clean-up after the area's many annual festivals. Organizers made a concerted effort to recognize the talent and struggle for artistic excellence among people with poverty issues, through the creation of the Frankly Bob awards, named for Frankly Bob Lowthian, the first mayor of Street City, an innovative housing project. Other awards were created for young mothers and people involved in peace and social justice initiatives. The greatest focus for the group involved the homeless and low-income populations.

The colourful paper money is legally a gift certificate and taxable, if it is received as payment for employment. The first batch of 300,000 Toronto Dollars was printed by The Canadian Bank Note Company, the same company that prints regular Canadian bills. The company even uses anti-counterfeiting measures for Toronto Dollars that are similar to those used for Canadian money. Start-up costs were provided by donations from Kogawa, Walsh, and others who shared the vision of friendship, community, connections, and abundance for all.

The biggest commitment comes from participating merchants, who pay a registration fee of 25 dollars and forfeit the community fund's 10 cents for each dollar they redeem. Should they choose to keep the money in circulation, by pur-

chasing services or products from other participating businesses or hiring part-time staff, they lose nothing, as each dollar continues to be worth that of its Canadian counterpart.

When it first started, the group had high hopes for the currency's possibilities. One of the founders, Susan Bellan, noted at the time that, if just four percent of Torontonians bought and used 100 dollars of the currency each month, it would generate 15 million dollars in extra revenue each year for the city. The group's goal was a city wide program, involving local government, which would accept part payment of property taxes and other government expenses in the currency. There was some government interest, particularly by the city councillor responsible for the area that includes the St. Lawrence Market neighbourhood, Pam McConnell, who even printed brochures. However, those lofty goals were never met. There were supportive appearances by Toronto mayor Mel Lastman and his successor, David Miller, the country's Governor General, Adrienne Clarkson, and many members of the literary community, such as internationally-renowned author Margaret Atwood, and Anton Kuerti, Canada's pre-eminent concert pianist. But the government lip-service never translated into the kind of action that is needed to allow for the currency's success.



During the program's first ten years, David Walsh, Susan Bellan, and John Flanders all formally stepped away from the organization's operation. Kogawa too tried to focus on other projects, only to watch the Toronto Dollar slide into near-demise three times. Despite a calling to write a book and despite family pressures, she has stepped in to rescue the project each time it has been headed for ruin.

Can it be called a success? That depends on how success is defined. "With only an average of \$10,000 a year raised for community work, I certainly don't measure its success in monetary terms," she says. Still, there are committed volunteers. Businesses and community organizations continue to participate. The currency remains in circulation, and the vision is not extinguished. For all its accomplishments, the program survives but has failed to thrive, never managing to catch the public's imagination or passion. Kogawa never viewed the program through rose-coloured glasses. She has professed at times to have no notion about its real efficacy, or even its point. She could certainly never explain why she put so much time and effort into it.

She just had a notion that the world needs this kind of thing. "A tool for the future, perhaps," she says. "With global warming and the



huge problems of climate change already here, I feel there's a need, if there's still time, to experiment with different models for community action and local sustainability." Some members of Kogawa's inner circle, friends in whose opinions she placed great value, were some of its biggest detractors. Privately, to her, they scorned the notion as, at best, quirky, at worst, a waste of her time and talent. These people fueled a constant questioning in her mind about her efforts. Kogawa expresses her mixed feelings about the project and its success:

I live with doubt, but, as in writing, I just keep on anyway. Why write? Why breathe? We just do what we do. The Toronto Dollar is a bit like that for me. I've been engaged with it without knowing exactly how or why. I trust [my friends], but I trust something else as well. I know it's okay to be a fool, it's okay to be wrong, but it's not okay to stop trying or to stop trusting. I think that success is not required of us. It's not in our hands to have that, but our effort is and so we're supposed to try and that's enough, that's success enough. At least those of us who try can say "I tried, I didn't sit there." I think that the best that we've got so far in the human condition is our capacity for love. If I trust that more completely and live it more fully, then the fear will fade and when the fear fades the love increases and the peace grows. All of that is a direction in life.

And though Kogawa recognizes that there has not been a great shift in the minds of the mer-



chants accepting the currency or the people using it, she still hopes it might make or be making a difference somewhere, somehow. “One thing I’ve learned through these years is that the keys to the abundant way are within,” she says. “When doubts, anxieties, [and] my need to fix the world and other grandiose notions are on the back burner, and when my trust is on the front burner, then peace and some inexplicable joy and sense of miracle surrounds me. And friendship abounds. This is my experience of the abundant way in the journey this far.” Translating her inner reality to the external sphere, she believes that the work of justice is the public face of love in action, and whether through writing or activism, she holds to her deepest trust: that love underlies reality.

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The Little House that Joy Saved

ANN-MARIE METTEN

We call it Historic Joy Kogawa House – the Vancouver home of the Canadian author Joy Kogawa (born 1935), where she lived until age six. It stands as a cultural and historical reminder of the evacuation and then expropriation of property that all Japanese Canadians experienced after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941. Between 2003 and 2006, a grassroots committee fundraised in a well-publicized national campaign, and worked with the help of The Land Conservancy of British Columbia, a non-profit land trust, in a hard-fought effort to purchase the house.

The many individuals who came together to preserve the tiny bungalow at 1450 West 64th Avenue in Vancouver were inspired to help Joy realize a long-cherished dream to reclaim the house. On August 27, 2003, Joy had visited Vancouver from her home in Toronto and discovered that the house in which she and her family had lived was still standing and available for sale,

with a For Sale sign out front. Joy, her brother Tim, and her parents had been forcibly evicted from the house in 1942 and, along with nearly 22,000 others, had been moved away from the West Coast. Like many other Japanese Canadians, the Kogawa family was placed in an internment camp.

Like many Japanese Canadians, Joy's family never recovered from the loss of their home. It was always Joy's desire to return to the house in Vancouver. As a teenager in the 1950s, Joy sent letters to the family's former residence from her new home in Coaldale, in southern Alberta, but the letters were never answered. "I wrote to the people who live there and they never replied. I don't know their names. I don't know what they've done to the house," she wrote in *Obasan* (2003: 52). Joy told Rod Mickleburgh in an interview for a *Globe and Mail* article in April 2008 that her parents felt the same way: they yearned to go back. On September 23, 1988, the day after Brian Mulroney apologized in Parliament for the unjust imprisonment of 22,000 Japanese Canadians during the Second World War, Joy's father, Reverend Gordon Nakayama, reminded a staff reporter for *The Province* that his home had been confiscated when he and his family were interned. Then eighty-eight years of age, he was photographed in his home at 845



Semlin Street holding an earlier photograph of himself resting against the stone wall outside the home at West 64th Avenue. Joy remembers her father receiving a small sum from the BC Security Commission for the sale of the confiscated property following the war, and he would also have received the tax-free lump sum of \$21,000 paid to each surviving internee in 1988. Joy's mother also dreamed of moving back. "I would have done anything to get it for her," Joy told *The Vancouver Sun's* Mia Stainsby in 1992, "but I couldn't. It's so tragic when I think about my mother's life. She clung to an entirely spiritual life but there was such an underlying sadness."

When Joy discovered the house for sale in late August 2003, together with fellow poets Roy Miki and Daphne Marlatt, she requested the help of a willing real estate agent, Lucy Meyer, to open the house for a public reading. Joy would read from *Obasan*, reclaiming the space orally if not physically, and the group assembled would gather signatures for a petition to protect the house as a heritage site. They would also create a videotaped record of the prescient historical occasion. Those people who would participate in the effort to reclaim the house – the Kogawa Homestead Committee – were already starting to gather that day. The event was well advertised, and I read about the

poetry reading in the community events listings in that Thursday's *Georgia Straight* entertainment weekly and made sure I had the Saturday afternoon free to attend.

Some years before, a neighbour, Billie Boyd, had told me that this was the house that Joy wrote about in *Obasan*. Billie had read the description and thought it must be that house. With this knowledge, I often walked past, thinking that 1450 West 64th Avenue was a place of significance in the neighbourhood. Here was the childhood home of my favourite author located just around the corner, reminding me of my own childhood in a sugar-beet farming community in southern Alberta. My father had served as a lay minister for the United Church of Canada for three years from 1963 to 1966 in Vauxhall, Alberta, not far from Coaldale, and the majority of my friends were of Japanese descent. I missed them when my family moved to the next pastoral charge at Waskateneau, near Edmonton, and we lost touch. Joy's childhood home allowed me to reconnect in a small way, and indeed has helped me reconcile the injustices I perceived when my mother, who had lost a brother in the Pacific war, refused to allow my friends into the house. Instead I played always at their homes, where the furniture was often enclosed in plastic covers to protect it, and soy



crackers were often served as the snack. I had read *Obasan* within its first year of publication to help understand the tarpaper-shack existence of many of the Japanese Canadians in southern Alberta, the life that Joy has described as a “one-room shack ‘with no water, no heat, no toilet, no electricity, surrounded by gumbo’” (qtd. in Twigg 1). I was keen to remind others about their experience during the Second World War. In fact when the local elementary school organized its 75th anniversary in 1996, I wrote to Joy’s publisher to invite her to attend as a school alumnus. When no reply came through, instead I ensured that a display related to the evacuation of Japanese Canadians from the Marpole area be included in the decade rooms that were part of the event. The For Sale sign had gone up at 1450 West 64th Avenue in the spring of 2003, and I often walked past the property, commenting to my husband Andy that the house really should be saved. The opportunity several years later to find out more about the house of *Obasan* could not be ignored, and I was thrilled to attend the poetry reading Joy and her friends had planned for Saturday, September 27.

More than one hundred people crowded into the tiny bungalow to hear Joy read from her novel *Obasan*. Friends and supporters crammed the sun-filled living and dining rooms, as Joy



clearly expressed the emotion of a writer reunited with her home, and those who witnessed the event heard Joy speak of her recollections of the house: the piano was here, the goldfish bowl was there. The crowd was dense, and as was my temperament at the time, I preferred to hang back from the densest part of the crowd and found myself standing next to an equally reticent elderly gentleman. He turned out to be David Kogawa, Joy's ex-husband, a man who strongly supports Joy's professional and personal efforts despite their separate lives. Like David and many others who attended the reading, I signed a petition to the mayor and council of the City of Vancouver to preserve the house as a literary landmark.

Concerned that the momentum not be lost I called Roy Miki and asked to attend a meeting he had arranged at City Hall with heritage planner Terry Brunette. In early October 2003, Roy Miki, Diane Switzer of the Vancouver Heritage Foundation, Steve Turnbull from the Japanese Canadian National Museum, and I, as well as a representative from the Marpole Historical Society, joined Terry Brunette to gather information about how to purchase and preserve the house. Eventually the Vancouver Heritage Commission formed a subcommittee to establish ways to preserve the house, but the house sold

well before the Kogawa Homestead Committee could gather the necessary funds.

With the house unattainable and out of reach, focus turned to the cherry tree in the backyard. While visiting the house in the fall of 2003, Joy had strongly identified with the wounded tree as a symbol of her family experience. Its bandaged limb, propped up with a crutch to support its weight, grew vigorously beyond the wound – surviving against all odds. Whenever Joy was in town, she visited the tree and found strength in its energy. Focusing on the tree allowed her to retain a connection with the house, and she and others, including David Kogawa, began to develop strategies to preserve the *Obasan* connection to the site by saving the cherry tree and obtaining heritage designation for it. David convened a gathering to save the cherry tree at Kogawa House in July 2004, where City of Vancouver arbourist Paul Montpellier, City of Vancouver councillor Jim Green, Joy Kogawa, City of Vancouver heritage planner Gerry McGeough, real estate agent Lucy Meyer, and neighbours Winnie Lee, a columnist for the Vancouver edition of *Sing Tao*, and I met to assess the health of the tree and consider options for its preservation.

As David wrote in the call to meeting, “The cherry tree which was full of blossoms and cher-



ries two years ago was damaged by [the new owner with] severe pruning and now [appears to be] nearing the end of its life cycle.” Earlier that winter, David and I had begun to work with horticulturist Derry Walsh, who I knew as a fruit tree expert through our work together with the Master Gardener Association of BC. After David approached me as a neighbour of the house, developed contact with me, and introduced me to Joy, I was pleased to help Derry take cuttings in February 2004, despite my dog yapping and intruding into what was then private property. Derry carefully transported the cuttings home in a cooler and grafted them onto mazzard root-stock, growing on twenty small trees at her property in Langley.

When Councillor Green managed to have November 6, 2004 proclaimed as Joy Kogawa Day in Vancouver, the trees were only beginning to graft. But a year later, on November 1, 2005, when Green successfully brought forward a new motion to plant on the great lawn at City Hall a cherry tree, propagated from one growing in the backyard of the former Kogawa home, the *Obasan* cherry grafts were ready to plant. Led by then-mayor Larry Campbell; Councillor Jim Green; NPA candidate for councillor, Suzanne Anton (for a municipal election was scheduled to fall in the middle of our fundraising campaign, in



late November 2005); as well as Josef Wosk, from the board of the Vancouver Museum; Paul Whitney, Vancouver Public Library's head librarian; and James W. Wright, General Director of Vancouver Opera, a tiny tree was planted at City Hall and later moved to its current site in a concrete planter on the plaza to the west of the East Wing – protected from winter snow clearing that might have mowed down the tiny tree.

Despite its redirected focus to attaining national heritage status for the cherry tree rather than the house itself, the Kogawa Homestead Committee, led in Toronto by filmmaker and social activist Anton Wagner and lawyer Chris Kurata, continued to administer a website (www.kogawahomestead.com) that it had established to promote the project and gain support from people who posted comments on a visitors' blog. The website attracted the interest of Todd Wong, a Vancouver arts promoter who keenly promotes Asian Canadian culture and literature. In January 2005, he posted a comment stating that *Obasan* should be selected as the Vancouver Public Library's annual One Book, One Vancouver selection for 2005 and encouraging support from like-minded people. I responded with a letter to the Vancouver Public Library, as did many others, and later that year the Library voted in favour of *Obasan* as their One Book,

One Vancouver choice. The increased public awareness engendered by this selection further enriched publicity for the Kogawa Homestead Committee's campaign to preserve Joy's childhood home.

At about the same time, Vancouver Opera began taking Joy's story to schools around the province through the opera based on her children's novel, *Naomi's Road*. Vancouver Opera executive director James Wright had read Joy's novels *Obasan* and *Naomi's Road* in 2001 as a way of learning more about Vancouver, his new city of residence, and he thought the story of the removal of its people of Japanese descent during an important chapter in their history would make a terrific opera for young audiences in BC. He asked Ramona Luengen, director of Vancouver's Phoenix Chamber Choir, to attend Joy's September 27, 2003 reading at the house, and Ramona was inspired when, at the close of that gathering, Joy sang a traditional Japanese farewell song. That melody became central to the music of the operetta *Naomi's Road*, which in 2005 toured schools and concert halls throughout BC and was performed in Seattle in January 2006, at the University of Lethbridge in March 2006, and, with the financial help of patron Yoshiko Karasawa, at the War Memorial Museum in Ottawa on November 11, 2006.

At the end of September 2005, what was then still called the Save Kogawa House Committee began to work diligently to rescue the house when Hugh MacLean, a City of Vancouver heritage planner, contacted us with information that the new owner had inquired about a demolition permit for the house. That information launched a nationwide campaign among writers' associations, academics, and historians to raise awareness of the impending loss of this literary landmark. All, including the National Association of Japanese Canadians, wrote letters of support to city council, asking that the house be saved. On November 3, 2005, with the help of Heritage planner Gerry McGeough, the committee, aided by Diane Switzer of the Vancouver Heritage Foundation, went before mayor and council to request an unprecedented 120-day moratorium on the granting of a demolition permit. The Writers' Union of Canada representative Marion Quednau spoke passionately about the desire of writers across the country to preserve the house as a writing centre. She pointed out the irony that, in the year Joy's novel *Obasan* had been selected as the Vancouver Public Library's One Book, One Vancouver choice, the home she describes in the novel should be lost as a literary landmark.

The moratorium was granted, but the Committee had only until April 30, 2006 to raise the purchase price of the house, estimated then to be \$650,000. Switzer made a fruitful connection with TLC, The Land Conservancy of British Columbia, a province-wide organization with a track record of assisting community groups in the preservation of historically important sites. The Land Conservancy agreed to assist with fundraising and publicity, and led a well-organized PR campaign with Heather Skydt, who managed to secure an interview by Kathryn Gretzinger with Joy and me, as a neighbour of the house. The interview was broadcast on CBC Radio One's "Sounds Like Canada" on Boxing Day morning, 2005, raising awareness across Canada. The Land Conservancy of BC also negotiated the purchase agreement on the house and, by January 2006, the Committee was well on its way to reaching its goal. Energy put into publicity, fundraising events, and persuasive lunches over the next few months turned into about \$225,000 – when what the group really needed was the \$700,000 that The Land Conservancy's executive director Bill Turner negotiated with the owner. That amount had to be in hand by the April 30, 2006 deadline for the purchase agreement. In late April, The Land Conservancy of British Columbia announced,

“While we still need to raise more funds to purchase and operate the house, our ‘option to purchase’ expires this weekend.” TLC Executive Director Bill Turner explained, “We are out of time. So TLC has decided to step forward, and take out a mortgage if necessary, to make sure that this important piece of our country’s heritage will not be lost.”

When it looked like the fundraising goal would not be met, a then anonymous patron, now revealed to be Senator Nancy Ruth (Jackmon), offered to donate the nearly \$500,000 needed to purchase the house. Joy had met Nancy Ruth through her impressive social network in the literary and political worlds in Toronto. Senator Ruth is benefactor to Nancy’s Very Own Foundation, and she has founded several women’s organizations in Canada, including the Women’s Legal Education and Action Fund, the Canadian Women’s Foundation and a women’s studies chair at Mount Saint Vincent University. Sharing similar interests in social justice and advancing the rights of women, she and Joy became friends. Nancy Ruth assisted Joy’s project, the Toronto Dollar, which sells an alternate currency to be used in the St. Lawrence neighbourhood and market; the proceeds fund community projects. When the senator learned of the movement to preserve Joy’s former home in Vancouver, she generously donated the

remainder of the negotiated price, making purchase of the property possible.

With Senator Nancy Ruth's initially anonymous financial assistance, the Historic Joy Kogawa House was purchased by TLC, The Land Conservancy of British Columbia, in May 2006. Joy named Nancy Ruth in the dedication of a children's picture book entitled *Naomi's Tree*, about the importance of the cherry tree and the Vancouver house, published in March 2008 by Fitzhenry & Whiteside. Joy officially paid tribute to Nancy Ruth in a Land Conservancy press release at the time:

I believe Senator Nancy Ruth's action was more than one of generosity or friendship. It was an act of faith – a faith that all who laboured to save this house have shared. The world can be a kinder place. What winds blew us all together – The Land Conservancy, Nancy Ruth, Save Kogawa House Committee, school children, and people great and small – I do not know. But it is more astonishing to me than words can say. I dream that the ways of reconciliation can radiate forth from this little house that survives.

The April 25, 2008 press release "outed" Nancy Ruth as the anonymous donor, and her generosity was acknowledged in a ceremony at the house on the same day.

The property has undergone the process of being preserved as a Canadian cultural and lit-



erary landmark. In February 2007, The Land Conservancy and the Save Kogawa House Committee received a 2007 City of Vancouver Heritage Award for their outstanding advocacy efforts in saving the Historic Joy Kogawa House; this effort to preserve an important part of Vancouver's cultural heritage brought municipal, provincial, national, and international attention to the project, with its theme of hope, healing, and reconciliation.

In the fall of 2007, the Historic Joy Kogawa House Society was founded as a provincially registered society under the Societies Act of BC. The purposes of the Society are as follows:

1. To operate and preserve the former Joy Kogawa family home at 1450 West 64th Avenue in Vancouver as a heritage and cultural centre and as a site of healing and reconciliation.
2. To establish in the former Joy Kogawa family home a centre for writers in which they can reflect on issues of conscience and reconciliation and write about their own personal experiences or the experiences of others, past or present.
3. To promote and negotiate the raising of funds for the pursuit of the Society's purposes.
4. To encourage in the former Joy Kogawa family home educational programming along themes of social justice and social history, and to provide docent services for such programming.
5. To advocate on behalf of the continuing operation of the house in the public interest consistent with the above purposes. (*Bylaws*)



The Kogawa House is governed by members of the literary, educational, and Japanese Canadian communities across Canada to represent diverse interests but also to work toward a single goal: to preserve the childhood home of author Joy Kogawa and bring writers to live and work there.¹ Together with Joy Kogawa, the various groups involved in the protection and preservation of this literary landmark decided that the wisest and best use of the property would be to establish it as a place where writers could live and work. In the spring of 2008, the Society applied to the Canada Council for its first Writer in Residency funding grant. Poet John Mikhael Asfour was the first writer hosted in the house, beginning in March 2009, followed by Nancy Lee in 2010 and Susan Crean in 2011. In 2012, Deborah Willis will be in residence from January to March. In the meantime, we continue to host fundraising events: readings by local poets, musical evenings, and even a workshop on memoir by Sharon Butala. All proceeds go towards the monthly honorarium that is paid to the writers who live and work in Historic Joy Kogawa House. Following the models of the Writer in Residence programs in place at the Berton House Writers' Retreat in Dawson City, Yukon, and Roderick Haig-Brown House in



Campbell River, BC, among other Writer in Residence programs housed in the former homes of celebrated Canadian authors, the Historic Joy Kogawa House Writers in Residence program brings well-regarded professional writers in touch with a local community of writers, readers, editors, publishers, booksellers, and librarians. While in residence, the writer works to enrich the literary community around him or her and foster an appreciation for Canadian writing through programs that involve students, other established and emerging writers, and members of the general public.

Our success in preserving Joy's former Vancouver home and establishing it as a writers' centre is made especially poignant by the struggles we have faced. These are highlighted by support shown by retired Vancouver-Langara MLA Val Anderson during our fundraising and awareness campaign in 2005-06. One day in early December 2005, I answered the phone to find Anderson on the other end of the line. He had read about our campaign in the *Courier* newspaper, where Sandra Thomas often reported on our progress. "Could he help?" he asked, adding "and we should do it soon" as he was going into hospital for tests. Val had served the Japanese Canadian United Church on Victoria Drive as a Sunday supply minister for two

years beginning in 1966. While serving as minister of the United Church in Marpole and as one of the founders of the local historical society – the archives were kept in the church attic – he had accumulated historical documents related to the Japanese Canadian community in Marpole. It was at the church that I had dug out photos of early classrooms at David Lloyd George Elementary for the school's anniversary in 1996. In that same year, Val had gathered Japanese Canadians who had formerly lived in Marpole. In our phone call he told me he wanted to share them with me. Included in the documents was a videotape of Joy's father, made as part of the project to bring the community together. He wanted to give the tape to Joy and he invited us to his Kitsilano home to view it. It was the first time I had seen the man and his gentle manner. In the tape, Reverend Nakayama reflected on his accomplishments and confessed nothing of the pain he had brought to his community. At this time, I knew only of Joy's father's reputation as a charismatic Anglican priest and community leader. Later, more troubling aspects of his personal history would come to light.

Several months passed, and letters from a former internee denigrating Joy's work and labelling Joy's former house as the "home of a pedophile" became more frequent. Lunches with

and phone calls to other members of Vancouver's Japanese Canadian community brought the sins of Joy's father more into focus. Finally in February, I called Val Anderson for advice on what to do to move forward in the face of the obstacles presented by factions of the Japanese Canadian community relating to Reverend Nakayama's personal history. Anderson invited me again to his home, this time on February 14. The importance of the meeting became apparent when soon into our conversation he opened a file drawer and began sharing specific documents: files with names and phone numbers of Japanese Canadians who had lived in the Marpole neighbourhood before the Second World War, a map hand drawn by Tosh Seki showing where each Japanese Canadian home and business had been situated before internment and expropriation during the War, and, eventually, the phone number of a Marpole resident who confirmed what Joy had first alluded to in her novel *The Rain Ascends* – that her father had hurt others, as far as I could understand mainly young boys of Japanese descent – and few Japanese Canadians who were aware of the Reverend's past would support our project. Anderson offered me some insight into the situation by explaining that the trauma of the evacuation had a profound effect on Japanese

Canadians, that redress had brought further division, and that Japanese Canadians often remain divided today; his insights helped me understand the challenges our committee faced. Of course, there are exceptions. Joan Shigeko Young, of the Yokota family of Kelowna, remained supportive of the project and continues to involve herself and her family in the board and activities at Kogawa House. We are also grateful that Ellen Crowe-Swords (of the Kimoto family of Ucluelet) is a member of the committee. And we trust others will join us.

Some time after the house was saved, when Joy was considering airing the subject of her father's abuse and the hurt he brought to the Japanese Canadian community, she asked how I had dealt with the confrontations from people who denigrated Kogawa House as the home of a pedophile. I told her that what hurt most was that people thought I didn't know the realities of Reverend Nakayama's harm to his community and that I was blindly supporting the project – that I was naïve – when in truth I know, I comprehend, and yet I continue to stand with the project. “To have a friend stand with you is more than anyone could ask,” Joy said. “Even Jesus didn't have that.” Like the other members of the Historic Joy Kogawa House Society, I continue to support Joy and her vision for the house with

many volunteer hours fundraising for the writers' residency program. Supporting Joy does not invalidate the suffering of her father's victims, but those issues are separate from Joy's own accomplishments as one of the first Asian Canadian women to be published in a major way in Canada, and as a writer who brought to mainstream Canadians the story of the Japanese Canadian experience during and after the Second World War. In March 2009, when we began welcoming writers in residence to live and work at Historic Joy Kogawa House, we expected these and other stories to emerge. Slowly, the story of the house itself is growing. We look forward to seeing through to fruition Joy's vision of a place where the work of other writers can blossom like the Kogawa cherry tree.

Notes

1. Members of the Society include Joy Kogawa – author, poet, and activist – as an honorary board member. Vancouver members past and present include David Kogawa, retired consultant on health and child welfare matters for the Assembly of First Nations, and former husband of Joy Kogawa; myself, Ann-Marie Metten, freelance editor and writer, neighbour of the house, and secretary of the West Coast Book Prize Society and of the Asian-Canadian Writers' Workshop; Todd Wong, an arts activist, Vancouver Public Library employee, co-president of the Asian-Canadian Writers' Workshop, and creator of Gung Haggis Fat Choy special events and the weblog www.gunghaggisfatchoy.com; Richard Hopkins, retired professor of the School of Library, Archival, and Information Studies at the University of British Columbia, book collector, and archivist; Joan

Young, retired school teacher; Ellen Crowe-Swords, retired school counsellor who experienced internment during the Second World War; Deb Martin, arts administrator; Sabina Harpe, retired school principal and community activist; Donna Green, granddaughter of the MP Howard Green (her involvement is an act of reconciliation for her grandfather's public record of anti-Asian statements; Lenore Rowntree, lawyer, writer and playwright; and Tariq Malik, author. Toronto members include Anton Wagner, filmmaker, cultural historian, and associate professor at York University; and Chris Kurata, a writer and lawyer.

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Interstitiality, Integrity, and the Work of the Author

A Conversation

SHEENA WILSON

Kogawa's Apartment, Vancouver

Joy Kogawa's writings and various narratives deal primarily with memory, which is not a solid constituent. Memories exist in a dynamic state of flux: they change as we revisit them and transform depending on the events in our lives at the time that the memories are evoked. Joy's writing, whether it be poetry or prose, fiction or non-fiction, has largely been an attempt to capture or to revisit memory. Though it is well known that Kogawa's writing has autobiographical resonances, the sheer extent to which her poetry and fiction are a creative expression of her feelings and an artistic interpretation of the events of her own life became more evident over the course of our interview.



Joy Kogawa's life has been fraught with tribulations because of the complexity of her family history. As an interviewer, my aim has been to learn about as many facets of her life and her writing as possible, in order to determine where the two intersect. Our conversation spanned nearly every element and era of her life and career. Topics ranged from her childhood in Vancouver to the events of the Second World War; to her life as a student and later as a teacher; to her complex emotions surrounding early marriage and motherhood; to matters of mental and physical health; to her difficult family history; to her philosophical and spiritual understanding of life; and to her work as an activist during the redress movement and, later, as one of the founders of the Toronto Dollar project. Kogawa's reflections moved between her writings and her life: discussion of an actual event would trigger a memory of one of her poems, or a question about her life would take us to a discussion about how she had represented that event in one of her novels.

During this interview, it was her prerogative as an artist to narrate a particular version of her life story: one that she was ready to discuss at this particular juncture. Speaking in her own words is an act of authenticity that transcends critical attempts to mould her life according to



the confines of particular theoretical constructs. The idea of recording Kogawa's voice, therefore, is part of the act of witnessing her story, which is of value beyond the limits of any one critic's interpretation. Kogawa has a definite Christian viewpoint, which is nevertheless a point of departure because it is one of a number of potential social identities that an individual can adopt throughout the course of his or her life. It is only through an understanding of her reconstitution of memories, her responsibility in such recountings, and her personal beliefs, that one can formulate a critical basis of interpretation with which to approach the analysis of her works. As this emerges, the boundaries between fiction, biography, narrative, identity constructions, etc., are made more evident and can be integrated in critical formulations: thus, my choice as interviewer to let the interviewee speak as freely as possible with minimal guiding intervention.

The positive outcome of this approach is that Kogawa fully engaged in her own reveries about her life and explored them orally in similar and different ways to the stories and revelations she has shared in her past writings, which allowed her to get as close as possible to those dynamic spaces of information that we investigate as critics, and to be as authentic about her own

identity as possible. Through conversation, Kogawa presents her version of her personal history. This element of self-reflexivity gives us yet another version of her autobiography that can be used as a resource in the study of her fiction as semi-autobiographical, precisely to see how malleable the parameters between fiction, autobiography, and factual narrative are at times, and how they intersect in a writer's world. Freed of critical expectations, this conversation reveals that Kogawa's voice integrates a number of aspects and moods of the moment, and at times demonstrates an awareness of the fallibility of memory. It is up to critics to interpret this narrative in relationship to all the others that she has produced.

The overwhelming attention bestowed on *Obasan* has historically eclipsed Kogawa's other notable works of poetry and fiction. This has resulted in a distorted collocation of Kogawa's importance in the Canadian literary world and perhaps stultified critical understanding of her narrative range by consigning her to the role of *Obasan*'s author. The following conversation will be of value for an understanding of Joy Kogawa's literary range and as a reflection on her multiple narratives, spanning five decades.

Most notably, Kogawa publicly discusses for the first time the autobiographical nature of *The*



Rain Ascends, which she believes is her most important work.¹ That novel, first published in 1995, revolves around the narrator's struggle to come to terms with the sexual practices of her aging Anglican-clergyman father. Kogawa speaks in detail about the novel's personal significance and reveals that she identifies closely with the narrator, Millicent, as well as Millicent's sister-in-law Eleanor.

Kogawa also speaks in detail about her work in progress – tentatively entitled *Gently to Nagasaki*.² According to Kogawa, this novel-in-progress is a continuation of *The Rain Ascends* through which she intends to explore in greater depth the lives of her parents and the search for mercy that she sees as part of her journey and that of the planet.

Sheena Wilson: *Could we start by discussing your inspiration for your most recently published book, the children's tale Naomi's Tree?*

Joy Kogawa: *Naomi's Tree* is a very, very simple story of love, separation, and return. I think of it, whimsically, as an inter-species love story. Basically, it is my story. I had thought it needed to parallel *Naomi's Road* so that there would be consistency. But there's one signifi-

cant difference. In *Naomi's Road*, Naomi returns to her house with a friend, which is what happened in real life. In *Naomi's Tree*, Naomi returns with her brother Stephen. That was a good suggestion made by the editor, Ann Featherstone – brother and sister returning. At first I thought, “Hmm, what are kids going to think when they know from *Naomi's Road* that it was a friend and not Stephen that returned to the house, and here it is different?” In any case, that is how it is now, and I think it is a better story for it. In real life, I hardly ever see my brother. But I know there is a deep love there. Fiction as consolation and wish.

The idea of what is real and what is imagined is interesting. What is real about the cherry tree? There was a real peach tree at the side of the real house, and it's mentioned in *Obasan*, although I located it, fictionally, near Naomi's bedroom. And contrary to what some people think, a cherry tree does not, in fact, appear in *Obasan*. But having discovered a real cherry tree in the backyard of my childhood home, lo, here is *Naomi's Tree*. The story tells you very slightly about how the tree came to be there from Japan. It was a descendant of a particularly beautiful tree: the friendship tree. She loves the tree,



and then they separate. She has to leave. She goes away. She eventually forgets the tree, but the tree never forgets her, and there is a song of the tree, and its longing for her to return, so one day she does return. It's that simple. And she meets again the voice of her mother at the tree, and the tree's song and the mother's song fill the air like cherry blossoms.

SW: *The idea of return seems very important to you: the return to places and to the mother. Does this reflect on your own life?*

JK: Well, no, because she was always there. So it is not that, but I guess it is one of those stories that is in the world: that we are born, we grow up, we leave, and we return. So, I guess, well, in *Naomi's Tree*, the essence of the tree and the reason for its existence is the establishment of friendship on this planet. The idea that somehow that is what we are born for. That is what this planet is for. It is for the experience of friendship. Although we are born into it and we have connection with one another, nevertheless, for some reason, we experience separation and departure, like amoebas do. You know, they divide, they separate, and that seems to be what we do. We individuate. We become "I" somehow, and we lose the sense of all and connectedness.



But that “I”, that separateness, it seems to me, is an aspect of friendship, that need for the other, so we return to the I, we return to that togetherness after we have experienced being separate. I think that’s the journey. And in a simple form that is Naomi’s tree’s journey. And it’s of all of friendship. I think we get so – in this planet anyway – we get so caught up with the need for separation and separateness and boundaries and so on that we forget that we are only doing this in order to know that we love one another, I think.

You know the Jacob story of leaving home? When he finally returns to Esau, the twin brother he has cheated, he says: “Looking upon your face is like looking upon the face of God.” But I think that the longing for reconciliation has always been there in me, just because, when I was a child, we were separated out. The whole community was separated out. And later on, through knowing the pain of separation and the joy of reconciliation, I have become more acutely aware of this human journey. Probably more so, perhaps, now, since writing *The Rain Ascends*. In the first edition, the black book, the last line reads, “The journey will lead into the abundant way.” I have been for the longest time now trying to understand that:

the meaning of the abundance and the abundant way. And I do think now that it is about friendship. It is about reconciliation. It is the most wonderful thing to experience after one has gone through forgetting that one is at one.

SW: *What reconciliations have you experienced?*

JK: Well, there are some that have been experienced; there are others that are still being experienced; there are others that are still to be experienced. The first thing that came to mind when you asked that question was the experience of redress. The experience of the Japanese Canadian community, their effort, our effort to belong to the country, and to know that we belong, and to establish that in a political sense. We did that. We established our right to belong. Next then comes a new paradigm, a new responsibility in which we say, "All right, we have gone through the cross-over point." There is that *very* important cross-over point, and when we don't make that, when we don't imbibe the reality of our belonging and we continue in that separateness, then we are in danger – in grave danger – of repeating some of the horrors of separation to which racism belongs. And former victims can become perpetrators.

SW: *This makes me want to ask you two ques-*



tions. First, what was your role in redress? I know that you were there on that September day in 1988 in Parliament when redress was achieved – and that Obasan was quoted – but what was your role? Second, when talking about reconciliation and separation, you used the phrase, “The horrors of separations.” Could you explain what you mean by that phrase?

JK: Well, during that phase when we need to individuate, either individually, personally in your family, or within culture, within societies, we see that same pattern going on. In the extreme, when that is going on, there is genocide. There is the destruction of the Other. The need to separate out to that extent, to me, that is the horror of it. And sometimes, when you feel you have to leave your family, and when that rift becomes so deep that you cannot return to the embrace of that family, and to the extended family, and to the larger family – but when you just go off to the edge of the world and then drop off and never see them again, that to me is another horror of it. Because I think the point of that journey out is the return. So, the return is so important. When you become very old, surely you would want to establish those returns – any that have not been com-



pleted, you know. And there are so many in the world that are still in the process of separating, and separating because they have not come to that recognition that we do belong.

People sometimes say to me, “Well, what about Hitler? I can belong to humanity, but Hitler belongs on a different planet.” I think they are missing the point of the journey. Hitler was human, and every single person out there, whatever their kind of horrors – murderers or whatever – they are part of who we are. So we need to embrace the worst among us, and I think the day that we come to embrace Hitler, we will have come towards the completion of a journey that we need to do. We don’t do that yet. We still separate Hitler out. We separate out the Other to the point of killing them.

SW: *However, communities – like Muslim Canadians, for example – continue to be separated out. In Emily Kato, you draw the link between post-9/11 constructions of Muslim identity and Japanese Canadian experiences of prejudice related to the Second World War. Could you comment on those parallels?*

JK: I certainly feel a responsibility of awareness because of my personal history, and there is identification with those who are suffering on the basis of being somehow associated



with “the enemy.” I think that Otherness is constructed so easily [...] Our minds work by developing stereotypes. We can only tell what *is* by telling what is *not*: we learn through discerning difference. I think that the forms of racism that we have are probably as constant and as pervasive and as everywhere as the air that we breathe. When you meet somebody and you feel a certain anxiety or a fear, when you are aware of that, there is an obligation then, I think, to address that in oneself: Why do I feel this? And to go into that [...] I mean, I do think that this is one of the best countries in the world, if not *the* best, and whether because we have all kinds of ways of mixing in schools and in neighbourhoods, people are able to be mixed, especially in the urban centres, this creates a breaking down of barriers of fear. I think that the more of that we have, the better we get.

SW: *Earlier, we were talking about friendship. I happen to believe that if a person can make just one friend from an Other community, the people from that community will never again be Other [for that person].*

JK: That is right! That is exactly right, I think, and I think that the one thought that precedes the making of that one friend is the important thing. Because our thoughts create



pathways that we walk on. So just that very questioning of the thought that we have that was fearful, and moving beyond that, and then moving out beyond that, and then making a friend of somebody, and then of another and then of another, that's the way to world peace, you know? I think!

SW: That is why youth exchange programs and things of that nature are vital. They provide youth from all over the world an opportunity to meet and become friends, which works to undermine narrative constructions of the Other: those people and those countries. News reports on television about other places and human rights issues, for example, take on new signification, if events are connected to a friend's welfare.

Now, if you don't mind, I'd like to learn a bit more about your biography.

*JK: Well, okay. I was born in Vancouver, and the first house that I remember is the one on Marpole: 1450 West 64th Avenue and then the war, all of that stuff, and Slocan. But the longing to come back to Vancouver was so strong. We didn't, you know. And so we went from Slocan to Coaldale, and I *hated* Coaldale. Well, I loved the people, but I hated the bleakness of it, the lack of trees. I longed to return to the interior of BC because I loved*

the mountains. But anyway, there were other things about Coaldale that I did love, which is the multiculturalism, which I felt there. But the harshness of the weather was really hard to take. But then there were other good things – the Mennonite influence was really interesting. So anyway, I went away from Coaldale. I went for a year to teacher training in Calgary. But then [...] what I had really wanted to do was to go to UBC and study journalism, but that was not to be. I had a grant for one year of teacher training, which I did. And I taught in Coaldale and did not enjoy that. I wanted to be writing, actually, but I had taken this horrible course. *[laughs]* It was an English course by correspondence, and my first essay, I think, I barely passed it. I look back on that, and I think, how can that be? It was a good essay. *[laughs]* But the comments were severe. And that was enough for me. I thought, if I can't make it in a correspondence course, I can't make it. So I quit. But I still thought I could write. During high school I had written an essay for *The New Canadian*, which is the Japanese Canadian paper, and I won second prize [...] So there I was teaching in Coaldale. I did it for one year, and then I went to the Anglican Women's Training College in Toronto. That



would have been in 1955 or '56, and I studied theology. That was on St. George, and I also studied piano. I had never had a piano teacher who played and showed me what a piece was supposed to sound like. So it was like learning French from reading a book: never hearing the sound. But anyway, I went to the Royal Conservatory of Music. I got through, and just as I was on the verge of finishing my ARCT [diploma], I moved back to Alberta. And then I went to Vancouver where my boyfriend was: my first boyfriend, who was David.³ Or, no, he was my second boyfriend, but my first real boyfriend.

And I got a job teaching kindergarten in Vancouver. And here is something: I mean, I was the first Japanese Canadian teacher in the school system after the war. So they were taking a chance on getting me. I taught kindergarten in the West End, at King Edward School, and I used to just tell the kids stories [...] This is something that I found really hard to admit, but I was fired at the end of that year. I don't think I deserved to be fired. But the parents, I think, were suspicious of me because I was [...] I think it was racism now that I look back on it. At the time, I only felt that I must have been a poor teacher [...] But I was able to spontaneously



tell children's stories, *new* stories every day. And I loved the children. I remember them. Anyway, I was fired and so ashamed, and I couldn't admit it for the longest time. That was in May, that I was told, and I didn't finish off the term. I just couldn't cope, so I quit. And I remember the little children that used to walk by my house where I lived waiting to see me. Ah, it knocked me out. Anyway!

It turned out also that I was pregnant. And I got married because I was pregnant, and that was also a great embarrassment. And the baby came too soon. I tried to hide the baby. And we lived in a slum: a horrible slummy thing on 2nd Avenue. It was a horrible place. And my husband and I acted as caretakers of this place. So there I had my little baby boy in November of 1957. I got married in May, and there was all the shame: getting fired, being very poor, living in this slummy thing, and having a baby too soon, being such an embarrassment to my parents, and etc. etc. All this stuff [...] I remember how we were counting our pennies for even an ice-cream cone, which was five cents. Anyway, so, what happened after that? [...] Then we moved around a lot. Oh, so much! David went to university and he took social work and for his first job as a social worker we packed our

worldly goods in a little trailer that we pulled behind our car and moved to Grand Forks, BC, where my daughter was born.

Oh, I forgot, I had tried to separate, then discovered I was pregnant again and went back. I was so unhappy when we were in Grand Forks. Really unhappy. That was probably the unhappiest time of my life. Then David got a bursary from Saskatchewan, and off we went back to Vancouver where he got his Masters at UBC; and then we went to Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. That is when the important things in my life happened.

SW: *Is that 1964? You mentioned earlier that 1964 was the most important year of your life.*

JK: Yes.

SW: *Can I ask why you found Grand Forks so upsetting? I am curious from a woman's perspective. I know there has always been a lot of focus on Obasan, but you have also written poetry and prose about being a woman. Was it difficult being married and having babies and dealing with everything that came with that?*

JK: It was. There I was, with two babies, you know, two years apart, living in a little one room house. No, it wasn't a one room house. It was a one bedroom house. It was the tiniest



place, beside the train tracks, and too far away to walk into town. I started to write at that point. There was nothing else to do. I am a person that really hungers for people, and I like to have a lot of people in my life, but there I was: the most isolated I've ever been and depressed because I was isolated, attending a fundamentalist church and feeling constricted. I wrote religious poetry, seeking a way out of my nightmare. I had a friend who was a missionary, Margaret Ridgway. I asked her permission, basically, to separate, and she did not grant it. Nobody was going to permit me. I needed permission to do things. That was part of my upbringing as Japanese, I think. You don't act on your own. You act in consensus or with others. I did not have the approval that I was seeking. But I had started to write in Grand Forks, and I remember sending stories out in the mail and getting little comments back. If I got a sentence, it was a great day [...]

Anyway, when we were in Moose Jaw in 1964, my life began: my inner life. I could tell you about that. I was going through an emotional, intellectual, spiritual, moral crisis. Emotionally, I was unhappy in marriage. Spiritually, I believed that love was what was required of me, and no matter how hard I



tried, I was a failure. Intellectually, I could not make any sense of the problem of evil. How could there be a good God in the face of the Holocaust, and other unspeakable evils. In my day to day life I was writing. My daughter was quite young, but she went to kindergarten, and that was the real beginning of my writing life. I published a short story, my first short story. It was "Are There Any Shoes in Heaven?" which was in *The Western Producer*. I think. And there was another one about a salamander.

I had some amazing dreams, but I was cracking up really because I was living in a fantasy about a boy that I used to know in Coaldale. My mind had cracked, I think. In *The Rain Ascends* Millicent's mind cracks when she learns the unthinkable. That happened to me. As a teenager in Coaldale [when I found out about what my dad had done] my mind cracked. I was as delusional as Millicent. So, there I was in Moose Jaw, in 1964, and realizing that in order to cope with my unhappiness, I had [again] created an alternate reality. Any time that I was unhappy I would go into that reality. Now, I knew that I was supposed to live and love in reality, and my fantasy had to be broken – or realized. I didn't know how to go about that. I talked to



a psychiatrist who advised me to get in touch with the fantasy person. That would break the fantasy and I would have reality. And, I thought, what a dangerous thing to do. What if I fall in love? But, nevertheless, I thought, okay, I'll do that. And so I wrote letters and waited and no response. And I thought, well, that's reality. That's the way to break the fantasy. But then a letter came back. And we began a correspondence and I got more and more into it. I asked the psychiatrist what to do and she said I should meet him. Then, I'll really know, I thought. The fantasy will be broken.

Either the fantasy will be broken or I'll fall in love. So then I told my husband what I was going to do and my mom came to take care of my kids and I got on the bus. And on the way to meet him I thought, what am I doing? It was so nuts: so not me. I am not a person who has affairs. I am a person who is truthful. I am a person who is honourable. I strive to do what is right. I don't do this. That's what broke the fantasy: that realization on the way to meet him. And a poem I wrote on the bus goes like this:

God keeps giving us nets for falling
Nets for falling
Nets for falling

God keeps giving us nets for falling
Till we fall into God.

And that was that! I got there and I thought, well I'm here. I'll talk to him. So, I phoned. And we met. And I said, I've had to do this, I'm glad to have met you, etc. etc., but this is it. So, he went off and I thought, no, no, I can't let go of this. This is my fantasy.

I was quite berserk. I went to the bus station and got on the bus to Vancouver. I wrote constantly. I just wrote and wrote and wrote. I got to Vancouver and I thought, I am falling apart. I don't have my fantasy now and yet that is how I have lived up till now. And so I was nuts. And I went to my friend – Margaret. She was like a second mother to me. She was the mother I needed, I wanted. I can hardly remember now how painful my relationship was with my mother. There was a nightmare I had during the time of my divorce, and a poem which came out of it which I called "Night mother":

For you, nightmother
These murderings
This offering of bloodied babies
For your feasting
I have murdered the world for you
Why are you still so thin – etc. etc.



At some level, I went through the pain of divorce in obedience to some demand that I have no other loyalty except to her [my mother], and was shocked to discover that this action did not satisfy her. I had given my all. It wasn't enough. I needed a mother who would allow me to live apart from her. As a young child I was sickly. And being sick in bed, that's when I experienced being taken care of and loved. She didn't permit me to go out and play like other children. I longed to be with them. As a young mother I used to be sickly, especially if I went to Coaldale. Being near my mother meant being in prison. I was quite conscious that I needed re-mothering. Writing *Obasan* was an attempt at coming to terms with her. I remember that initial short story "Obasan" was driven by anger. At any rate, in Vancouver I went to see Margaret Ridgway, a woman of faith like my mother, whom I trusted.

I said, "I am here. I am falling apart. You have to take care of me, because I am falling apart." And she said, "Okay, fine. You can stay here. I'm going off to a meeting." And off she went. And I thought, how can this be, how can you leave me? I'm, you know, so nuts. But then, part of me said, "She doesn't think that I am going to kill myself, or whatever. Or else



she wouldn't go." That was how I interpreted it. But then, I went around from friend to friend in this very weird state, trying to figure out – okay, what do I believe? I had been struggling with the question of the problem of evil. It was huge in my mind, the Holocaust and all of that stuff. How could there be a good God in this reality? It didn't compute. It didn't fit. It didn't work. So there was that intellectual thing, and then there was the moral thing, and there was my personal thing, and it was all one conundrum. And, while I was writing away and walking around and being crazy and thinking, how can I go back and be a mother? And so on. Then, what came to me in a flash was that I did not have to know the answers to any of these questions. I didn't have to do anything at all.

The only thing that was left to me was a confidence that love was real. God was love. That is all I had to know: nothing else. And that would be on the front-burner. Everything else would be on the back-burner. And I said, okay, and I was released, and I clung to that, and that has been my one point ever since. My entire life is that. That is the only thing I have, and it has been the most *wonderful* thing to have. So what I have is my one word, which is trust. "I trust." "I trust that."



“I trust that love is all.” And I don’t have to know any other thing about anything. So, that was the beginning and the ending of my life. And of everything I have ever done, really, that is the basic thing. It is the conviction that love is all. It underlies reality. It is everything. It is towards us. So I feel that whatever unbelievable nightmares and horrors are in the past and ahead of us on the planet, it’s okay. It’s going to be okay. We will have to go through all these things, but it is part of the dance and the dance seems unbelievably horrible at times, but it is okay. Underneath it, there is an amazing love that is even greater than the worst horrors we can imagine, so it must be just spectacular: beyond belief.

SW: *After your stay with Margaret in Vancouver, were you eventually able to go home to Moose Jaw?*

JK: I went home after that. I went home, and the conditions at home and my problems did not cease, but underneath them, there was something else. Depression did not cease either. Anxiety did not cease. Illness did not cease. All kinds of things did not cease. Divorce happened. But we’ve maintained a good friendship [...] All kinds of things have happened since then, and are still happening.

SW: *But it makes it bearable? Perhaps more than bearable? Joyful?*

JK: It has all become a gift now, and it took a long time. For me, of course, the most important book was not *Obasan* but *The Rain Ascends*, because that was the thing that brought me through to health. You know, I was sickly before that. I'd been sickly ever since I was a child, really. I think there is a word for it, a kind of hysteria, a conversion in the body. What I can't cope with gets into the stomach. Something would trigger a kind of panic, and it would express itself in the body in nausea and vomiting and diarrhea, and it would all happen at the same time, and I would be flaked out on the floor, or wherever I was.

But after writing *The Rain Ascends* the illness was gone! Yes, just totally gone. It is this miraculous thing. I was cured of my lifelong thing. I used to think, I can't endure this. I can't go through this again. It is so horrible. I'd rather die. I used to think that. It would be intense, and then it would be gone, but it was so horrible when it was happening. After *The Rain Ascends*, after I wrote that, I was so released [from] the hypocrisy of having to hide something. I mean, not being able to come forward. You know, I had been writing



confessional poetry in the '60s, because I had believed that the worst thing that my dad did was hiding. If he could have admitted the truth, and if people could have thrown their stones at him, I could have loved him, stood by him, honoured him, and accepted him as a deviant and perverted human being. I've tried to understand, but I don't. His behaviour was compulsive, and I don't understand it. I know he was abused in his boyhood, but – Millicent faced the argument from Eleanor – not all abused boys become abusers.

I can't say that I understand Japanese culture, and don't have an intellectual framework for it, but it seems to me that for the Japanese, sanity on the outside matters more than insanity on the inside, because through safeguarding the outside you safeguard society. It's a small island. There's a strategy for getting along. You keep the volcanic unacceptable parts of yourself contained and thereby save society from yourself. Harmony first. Harmony above all. But I was raised with Western stories, Christian stories. Truth first, truth above all. So although I am deeply Japanese, I am deeply Western. I don't know which is deeper, but I now think I understand something of what my dad was struggling under. It came from the Eastern culture in a Western



world. In a way, Jekyll and Hyde survive by having a big, big barrier between the one and the other life, and maybe the barrier is our denial in our Jekyll and Hyde world. I know that I was in denial. I obliterated from my consciousness the Mr. Hyde that was inside my beloved Dr. Jekyll. I imagine that we, in the developed world, live in denial about the unimaginable horrors we perpetrate on the third world, by the way of life we hold to. Anyway, while writing *The Rain Ascends*, I penetrated the barrier of denial.⁴

SW: *The Shelbys are a white family. Was this to displace the fact that The Rain Ascends is the story of your father and your struggles to come to terms with his actions?*

JK: Well, I remember [...] struggling for years and years with this, about how to write this thing. I knew I had to write this. I didn't know how. And [my friend] Mary Jo Leddy had told me that I needed to write it as truth. And I struggled with that. It was one time when I was walking along Charles Street, and I said, "Okay, his name is Charles." I don't know where names come from [in my novels]. I don't know where Millicent came from, or Meredith, or Eleanor, or Charlie, but they came. So why he became a white man? I don't know that either. Anyway, I



wrote it. And then, after I wrote it, I wanted to add something to the book that would declare the truth of it. And I wrote that, and Cynthia Good, who was a publisher, wanted that – really wanted that. She said, “This is what I want.” But a member of my family could not abide that. So I held back and added five fictional chapters instead, which are now out there in the brown cover version. The black cover version ends with the sentence, “The journey will lead into the abundant way.” And it did.

Health came to me, and freedom. It was miraculous to me. I felt okay inside. I mean, I thought, I can face anything. But there was a part of me that felt that if the stones arrive I will die. But the stones didn’t arrive, at that point. And I felt freedom. I thought, I have told the truth. I am well. I am at home. It is amazing. I can sit at this dinner table. I don’t have to get up and run away. I don’t have to be in constant flight. I don’t have to be perpetually nervous. I still am nervous and uncomfortable about a lot of things but *a lot fewer things*. So that is why that book is the most important book for me. It changed my life! And then “the journey... into the abundant way” turned into the dream of community currency [the Toronto Dollar].



I stayed with it so long. I wanted to know more and more about the abundant life. And – maybe not because of, but in spite of, the Toronto Dollar – I have the abundant life in a way that I could not have imagined. It was an intuited direction and I still think that it has something to do with society, with where we may be headed. It has to do with community building, with neighbourhoods, with engagement with people. I think we need all the tools we can get to create connections among people, especially in a rapidly spreading virtual world where people can be lost in virtual space and not know what the touch on their face can feel like.

SW: *How have people responded to The Rain Ascends?*

JK: There are certain people in the Japanese Canadian community that are insulted that I wrote it as fiction. I attended a meeting – when? I’ve lost track of time. 2006? It was ostensibly to talk about my dad and the need for healing, but I felt it was really about the anger towards me for having the audacity to stand up for the house of my childhood, which some people were saying was not my house, but my father’s house.⁵

One woman wanted to know why I wrote *The Rain Ascends* as fiction, and by the end of



the evening, I had agreed to write “the truth,” using real names, and publicize it in the Japanese Canadian press. However, a number of others advised me against doing this. And there was another time when a Japanese Canadian woman whose face was filled with hatred towards me pointed at me in a seminar and said to the thunderstruck students and teachers, “Did you know that her father was a pedophile?” I was thinking, if this had happened to me at the beginning, when *The Rain Ascends* first came out, I don’t know what would have happened. But now, I am so much stronger. I am concerned for the family but I no longer believe, after these experiences, that keeping silent about my father will protect them. Those who practise *Sippenhaft* – that is, the punishing of whole families for crimes committed by one member – are continuing a Nazi practice. Japanese Canadians were punished because we were related to a war mongering country. But we were innocent.

And my family and I are innocent of my father’s crimes. However, I do think we each have a responsibility to live with as much integrity as we are able. Integrity is not the same for everyone. A baby chick that is not ready to come out of its shell lives with



integrity in the silence and the darkness and safety. It's wrong to peck at the shell and to demand that it be in the daylight. The question I face is, how do I speak without harming anyone? I remained silent for a long time, because I didn't have an answer. Then, when I could no longer bear it, I wrote fiction. And I speak now with a continuing and underlying trust in the Love that is towards us. I think that the anger and outrage that has been directed at me has come about because of the house, because of the profile of the house, and because there are people in the community who were so incensed that I had the gall to stand up for the house, which they saw as my father's house.

That is why it is called the [Historic] Joy Kogawa House. It is not about my father, it is about *Obasan*. What I am trying to write these days, and trying and trying and trying to write is – well, who knows what it is? But I have a title: *Gently to Nagasaki*. I have had it in my mind for the longest time. So the title will remain. First, I tried to write it as an ongoing story of Millicent. Then I thought I will have it as Millicent and Naomi together. Then I decided that was too contrived. I've made other efforts. I don't know if you have seen that article, "Three Deities"? It is from a

speech I made in Stockholm on August 9, 2002. In it, I have the essence of what I want to say in *Gently to Nagasaki*. It's a continuation of the journey in *The Rain Ascends*, with its statement: "The Goddess of Mercy is the Goddess of Abundance." To me, that is what is underlying *The Rain Ascends*, and it's also in this book: that statement, and the Abraham story, and the story of Dr. Nagai, a Christian who was in Nagasaki when the bomb fell. He was the most amazing man and [he] lived out a reality of mercy in his life, after the bomb fell, and as he was dying, and as he wrote his books. I had thought, at first, that I could fictionalize this by having Naomi's mother, who was in Nagasaki when the bomb fell, have her know him and have that as the story, but I realized I don't have the smells or the tastes of the reality of that life or that experience to draw on. So I dismissed that. Then, I thought, well, Millicent's story does not have the power of the Nagasaki story. It has only her story of her father. The thing that made me want to write memoir is that the things that are actually happening in my life now are beyond fiction. You know, it would be hard to write them as fiction.⁶ There are too many strange quirky things that have happened: the way that the



house was saved, for example. You know? But there are real life constraints, constraints of privacy, so I can't do that. I have no idea how this is going to work out. I'm trying. Because I think the Nagasaki story is so important, and the Abraham story is so important in the world today. These days I feel myself being lifted from out of some of the weighty aspects of Christianity by something else, something eastern and Buddhistic, perhaps. It's an expansion, it feels like.

SW: *There is that sense in Emily Kato: that the novel is going beyond one particular religion, even in the way you make reference to the different religions. The transformation is evident when compared to Obasan.*

JK: Nice.

SW: *You said earlier that, of the three novels – Obasan, Emily Kato, and The Rain Ascends, the latter is the one that impacted you the most. How were you able to encompass other members of your family and their reactions within the narrative of The Rain Ascends?*

JK: Well [...] he [my brother] carries the family name, and I don't. And his connection to Japanese culture is much stronger than mine. His sense of identification with the family is much stronger: if the family is shamed then we are shamed. I feel more Western about it.



I am not my father. I have done what I had to do. It was horrible: outing him and telling the authorities. Nobody else did it. I took upon myself the Judas cloak and betrayed him. Not when I was young. Fourteen? Fifteen? But very young in terms of life experience.⁷ My mind just broke. I didn't know how to deal with it. I went into denial, and I basically lived my whole life in denial. One man told me that he didn't read *The Rain Ascends* but he heard it was a defense of my father and that I was on my father's side. What a horror! Any effort to justify his vile crimes or to diminish the harm he caused could only add to the suffering of his victims. I know that I longed to have my father redeemed, but it wasn't my job. I'm not God. I think most of his liaisons were with young men or contemporaries, but there were also boys. I have heard one unspeakable story.

I don't know how my mother survived. I'm increasingly learning what an amazing woman she was. I think she was our salvation. She had such tenderness and fortitude. But I didn't appreciate her when she was alive. I realize that we come to things sometimes when it is too late. My mother had been put in an orphanage when she was four and she suffered from terrible loneliness. She

was so intelligent. She was wonderful. To the very end. She honoured him. Throughout the long ordeal. What that must have been like for my mom.

SW: *Did the events when you were older – and when your father was much older – transpire in much the same way as those events are represented in the novel?*

JK: There was a period of time that I *had* to know and I began to ask all over the place. I found a handful of people who were willing to talk to me and most of them said that there wasn't much to it really. There was part of me that was in utter revolt. Another part of me that knew that if I wanted the truth, I had to be very careful. I could not go screamingly mad. I just had to find out, so I was containing myself and my revulsion through all of this. So, since what most people told me was relatively mild, I thought, it can't be that bad, you know? That is what I thought [...] I have since learned, through one searing conversation with one person, that it was not just nothing. I don't know what to do with it. I mean, for me to know that this is part of my family[...] Sometimes I wonder how it's possible that I can walk about in civilized society. Ah, it makes me think of that movie, *The Music Box*. It is about a woman who becomes

aware. She is defending her father until she realizes that he was a Nazi collaborator and she, in the end, turns him in and turns from him. I didn't do that, really. Although, I did. I did. I did turn him in. I didn't turn from him. I went to talk to the bishop.

My dad would have been ninety-three, ninety-four [at the time]. He died in October 1995 of a stroke. He was almost ninety-five. I wonder if I killed him. I loved him and I loathed him. They say that children live out the unlived lives of their parents. In many ways, we want to be the opposite of who our parents are. And often we will choose the opposite values. Maybe we become the Other, in order to fill the void that was created by our parents being a certain way. Most of my life, I identified with my dad and wanted to be like him, but something was driving me to "tell all." I know I don't want the hypocrisy of his life. In that sense I want to be the opposite of my dad.

SW: *Are your activist works the opposite swing of the pendulum? And your writing? How do you see the relationship between these two aspects of your life's work, your activism and your writing?*

JK: Well, I think that was the way we were raised. As in *The Rain Ascends*, life was full,



the house was full, there was activity going on. During the Slocan years and the Coaldale years, there was also a massive communication-thing going on and so I just grew up with that. And so, part of who I am involves having life, people, events... Activism, activity is the life I have known. Isolation and quietude feel imprisoning: you know, the very private life, which just revolves around the family, and that is it. I just can't be contained in that, and sometimes feel judged and condemned: "Oh, this ego-driven person who is greedy for the world stage and who is therefore not content with family." I do value family, of course, and feel it is the most precious thing. But how can one ignore the suffering of others?

Anyway, the writing... Where does the writing come from? What I wonder, is it? Are we born that way? Because I think when we were in Slocan, I was writing. I wanted to write. When I was in high school, I had an English teacher that assigned us one essay a year, and it just wasn't enough for me, so I would write anyway and bring her these things which didn't mean anything to her. But I wanted to write and then just really fell into it when I was so depressed and had these babies in Grand Forks.

SW: *All of your writing is somewhat autobiographical. You are often associated with Naomi, but I also see you as Emily Kato at different phases in your life, and maybe even Stephen. And all of the characters, really, have something of you, do they not?*

JK: Yes, well particularly, I think, most Millicent and Eleanor. I think I started off life as Naomi and I became more like Emily as time went by. And [I'm like] the Obasan character too. I mean, she really is more like my mother but I think you are right. Something about the analysis of dreams is that we take every character in our dreams and we are part of all of that: that is who we are – everybody. I think that is true of the human condition. We are everybody that is human, in a way.

SW: *Your novel, Emily Kato, includes several different abuse scenes. The situation with the priest who rapes the little girl and Pastor Jim's son who...*

JK: Oh yes. Fiction. Much of that is made up. Well, what I heard, when I was in Moose Jaw, when my husband was a social worker at the psychiatric wing of the hospital, was that they had a lot of people from fundamentalist backgrounds. So from that, I understood that the constraints of fundamentalism can destroy

lives. So I had Pastor Jim's son as one of those, and I think that is not an unlikely thing. And the visiting minister, Brother Leroy, with the fishy lips [...] I can imagine him as a reality too. I mean, he's fictional, but slightly based on someone in Coaldale. A shopkeeper. I can remember the evangelists – the one-night-stand evangelists – they would come in and they would have horror stories to tell, scaring kids out of their wits, with all this stuff about the evils of sex. I remember those. So although these things never happened exactly as described, I had heard enough things and could imagine that they would have [...] Brother Leroy is out there. Pastor Jim is out there. Pastor Jim's son is out there. And Annabelle, that friend of Naomi's that got involved with Hank, she is out there too. They are real enough in my mind.

SW: *Another issue that got my attention in Emily Kato was the cry of "never again," in relationship to post-9/11 events.*

JK: You know that "never again" cry? That is such a powerful cry, and yet so many people who say "never again" are in fact only saying, "Never again will this happen to *me*. Never again will this happen to *mine*, to *my* people, *my* community, *my*, *my*, *my*." You know, I think there really has been a missing of the



meaning of that cry. Because “never again” is cancelled out so long as we are saying, “I’m what matters. My community matters, not yours.” So, “never again” is an incomplete statement, and we will continue to repeat the crimes of the past unless we can include other categories of human beings that are oppressed: oh, there are so many categories. Mostly these days what I am aware of is the rich-poor divide.

SW: *And it is getting wider here in Canada. In Emily Kato, you write the scene in Parliament, representing the day in September 1988 when Japanese Canadians achieved redress. I asked you this earlier but we got distracted. What was your role in redress?*

JK: I worked hard: very, very hard. I have things in my notebooks about the amount of stuff we did. Lots of people were doing lots of things and lots of people were falling by the wayside during that time, who had tremendous initiative and energy but whose way of doing things was not being accepted by the people who were in control. So they fell aside. I didn’t. The vision I had for the community was – and what was driving me, really, was – not the monetary aspect of it at all. I didn’t even think about that. I was thinking about just the whole drive to be able



to stand up again, to be able to face what had happened, to be able to announce it, to be part of a homecoming, a gathering together again. That was the dream for me. And I was drawn to some of the people I met, some of the young lawyers, their articulateness and their passion. I became part of the whole movement, and I wanted to support those in the community that had a democratic vision [...] The wish for those who were scattered all over the place to be able to be heard and not for it just to be controlled by a few people. So, one thing that pulled me in initially, [was] feeling the shock of the will to control versus the will to expand. And I was on the side of those who wanted to expand it. For it not to be just some kind of quickie little money thing that a few people would have their hands on and do good things with, no doubt, but it would not reach those who were not seen. Those that are not seen are those who really draw me [...] It is those that are not seen, that are sitting at home every day not connected and suffering and not knowing. I care about that more than the people who make it onto the stage and have the applause [...] They didn't need the movement. It is those who were isolated who needed it.



I worked with a small group, Sodan Kai, that were not part of the organizational structure initially, but that wanted to be part of it. They were being kept out. I thought, how can the heart be so small that it keeps out this energy? How can you do that? Sodan Kai supported the structure of The National Association of Japanese Canadians. We wanted that organization to be the one that [the] government talked to, not a sub-committee in Toronto. I worked hard to support the national structure. It had some outstanding leadership. Gordon Hirabayashi was a sociologist in Edmonton who had come from the States. And he was a prophetic voice. He had worked to move the Japanese Canadian Citizens Association from being a social organization into being the National Association of Japanese Canadians, a political organization. After *Obasan* was published, I was called to Chicago to speak at a Japanese American event. At that time, I was very politically naïve. The group that invited me was more radical than the mainstream body. At any rate, when I returned to Toronto, three young lawyers came to see me and said that they were trying to find out more about what was happening, so I got involved with them and went to a meeting and was quite

shocked by the closed-ness of the group that we went to visit. They were not particularly interested in having other people join them. I understand that better now but at the time it shocked me. I joined the lawyers and invited every Japanese Canadian I could think of, and they invited others, and the group called itself Sodan Kai. And so there were meetings: lots and lots of meetings to discuss the whole issue of redress and how to be more involved. At the same time, a counterpart group was meeting in Vancouver, doing studies, finding out what was going on in the States and so on. And somehow in the midst of all of this we learned via the national press that a person in Toronto was talking with the Minister of Multiculturalism and they were bringing the whole thing to a final close.⁸ I've written about that in *Itsuka* and *Emily Kato*. Things became very emotional. I was so unused to public attack, and so here was Sodan Kai getting attacked, and it just knocked me out. It was a long long long process, and I ended up getting tougher. It was daily work. Kerri Sakamoto and I organized the first public meeting about redress in Toronto, which we held at the Church of the Holy Trinity, the church that I went to. [It] was a very socially active congregation. Some

members of the Church of the Holy Trinity formed an ad hoc group of powerful people. One, Dan Heap, was a member of parliament. They raised funds, they ran an ad that went across the country in *The Globe and Mail*, they organized public meetings, and [they wrote] press releases. Oh, there was so much work that we did. A lot of it being done through Dan's office, which was just down the street from where I lived, and neighbours in the community that were close by coming to meetings at my house, and then there were meetings at different people's places, people's houses. Some of those people that we worked with, I am still friends with. Some have gone off to other things. But it was an exhilarating time. There was the building of the mailing list. The mailing out of stuff. All that kind of thing which I had been so used to in my life, because we had done it throughout the war years. So all of that was going on. Roy [Miki], who lives in Vancouver, has written the official story.⁹ A Toronto perspective has been written by a group in Toronto.¹⁰ Maryka Omatsu has written her book, and there was my thing and others.¹¹ And all of these tell parts of the stories. Throughout the country there were other things going on. There were very many really exciting things that hap-



pened: like the time when the government wanted to conclude it all – ah, it was so exciting! It was so nerve racking. But then in the meantime my personal life was such a mess. But, anyways... I have good friends.

SW: *Through the process of editing this collection, I've discovered that your friends are all very supportive and they share the sentiment that you deserve acknowledgement for your hard work.*

JK: Well, it feels kind of surreal to me. Like the George Woodcock Award.¹² I think: "How could that be?" I don't know. *Obasan* has taken on a life of its own. I guess it was a fluke of history.

SW: *Well, it is brilliant writing at a very well timed moment. Have you ever felt that there has been too much focus on Obasan? Have you ever wanted there to be more focus on other things? You yourself have expressed concern about whether people will read Emily Kato, but there is no concern about Obasan.*

JK: Yes, I see *Emily Kato* as nowhere. I mean, [there is] not one review that I have seen. It has made me wonder, is it that bad, as a book? I really have wondered that, and I am glad to think that you think not, but I don't know how common that is. I don't know



who has read it. I have not seen it anywhere.
Not in any bookstore, anywhere.

SW: *Probably because it has been marketed as Ituska retitled. Perhaps, people don't even really realize that it is a new book.*

JK: It is *Itsuka* revisited. It is not *Itsuka*. But, if it ever makes it to a second printing, I'll be amazed. I know that *The Rain Ascends* has made it to a second printing, whereas *Obasan* is over forty. And *Obasan* seems like it is just going to go on.

SW: *And about Obasan, have you ever felt that it has unfairly overshadowed your other writing?*

JK: Well, I hadn't really thought about that that much, you know, but I just know that somehow *Obasan* marches on. As for *Obasan* and its being the overshadowing book, I am just grateful really that it is there. That it became whatever it has become. I mean, that book opens doors for me. I am grateful for that.

But I've become aware recently of an inaccuracy in *Obasan* – of my having cast a negative slant on the RCMP, which I ought not to have done. One of my heroes is Cyril Powles, an Anglican priest now almost ninety years old and, in a conversation with him regarding the story of what happened to the Japanese

Canadian Anglican churches (that's an appalling story, by the way),¹³ Cyril described the difference between the virulent racism on the West Coast and the more benign attitude in Ontario. During the dispersal of Japanese Canadians following World War II, Cyril was going across the country trying to find towns and cities that would welcome us, or at least allow us in. He described going up and down the Niagara Peninsula. I asked him what he thought made the difference between western and eastern Canada, and he felt it was that the easterners believed him when he informed them of the RCMP position. The RCMP had declared that Japanese Canadians were not a threat.

This reminded me of a comment made by Muriel Kitagawa in her letters I found in the Public Archives, saying that the RCMP were our friends. I used Muriel's letters almost verbatim in one chapter of *Obasan*, ascribing them to the fictional Aunt Emily who was writing to her sister in Japan. Muriel was in fact writing letters to her brother Wes Fujiwara in Toronto. I ought to have noted her positive comment about the RCMP. Instead, I added a fictional incident of a stern officer marching up and down. I regret that now. Someone said that the book was written

during a time when the RCMP was being criticized; however that's no excuse.

SW: *A chance comment brought you to an awareness of an inaccuracy. Are there any other inaccuracies you've been able to note?*

JK: I continue to hear about a certain woman who believes that the incident described in *Obasan*, when Naomi as a child is sexually molested by a neighbour, is actually a depiction of me, the author, being molested by my father. I've told her that this is not true. I was never molested by my father. But I was molested by the neighbour, who is named. The woman insists that the molester was my father, that I have learned to be deeply deceptive, that my childhood was robbed, that I am to be pitied, and that the book is not about Japanese Canadians but arises from my being sexually molested by my father. It's astonishing how tenaciously she continues to believe this falsehood.

SW: *Obasan does allow you to accomplish a lot of things, and I think that in some ways it helped the redress movement, as well. On an individual scale it opened Canadians' eyes and allowed them to reassess what had taken place in the nation's domestic sphere during the Second World War. Readers were, and still are, able to revisit whatever might have hap-*

pened or whatever they might have thought was happening, with the buffer of time and the perspective of history. As for *The Rain Ascends*...

JK: It is funny how *The Rain Ascends* was received. There were a couple of reviews in which people were disturbed that Shelby didn't get his comeuppance. They wanted anger, outrage, a feeling of justice being done, and, I think, the sweet taste of vengeance. One of the things that really bothers me in movies is that sweet taste of revenge. Such an addictive sugar high. "Ah! He's got his due. It feels so great. We're so satisfied." If we don't get that we feel disappointed, you know? And the story of sweet vengeance is not the story that is going to save the planet. That is what I want to write in this thing [referring to the upcoming book *Gently to Nagasaki*]. Mercy is better than vengeance.

At one point, while trying to write *Gently to Nagasaki*, I wanted to tell the story of my parents, and I might or might not do that. It's in flux. It was going to be a story of mercy. I can't say that it's all that clear, but sometimes I wonder, I mean, I don't know what it is that is making it so hard to write. Maybe because I know what I'm trying to say and things get



boring when you know. But when I was writing *Obasan*, I knew the material. I knew it was a story of the evacuation. It was book-ended by the Prairies [...] When I started it, I knew that it would be Vancouver, Slocan, Coaldale. That's all I knew. But I didn't know what had happened to the mother [...] *Gently to Nagasaki* has Dr. Nagai as one touchstone. He is somewhere at the heart of that story, and so is the search for mercy. I mean, *The Rain Ascends* was a scream for mercy. *Gently to Nagasaki* is more, I think, like a howl.

SW: *You mentioned to me previously that some people in the Japanese Canadian community are clamouring for you to write your memoir. Could you please elaborate?*

JK: Well, there are those who are angry that there was a movement to save the house. I mean, there was flak coming at me because of the house. Some of the most hurtful words, unbelievable, horrific things, were said over the phone by a person I've never met, who is not Japanese Canadian, but said she was speaking for the victims – not that she knew any. And one good friend went on and on about her perfect, perfect father implying... Oh! There's so much I could tell you about the revulsion I'm getting, mostly second hand, that my family, which had someone in



it who was so dysfunctional, so horrible, should have had *his* house saved and made somehow representative. A place that housed a horrible person should not be saved nor should that family be honoured or become a symbol of the community. The community was pure. There are families far more worthy. Their places should be saved, and I should say so, and back out, and tell the truth about my father. That's the sentiment. And I bow to that. And so why has the house been saved? God knows. I didn't do it. I did not fight for it. I gave up but others did not. And for me, it feels miraculous. My dream now is that the work of truth and reconciliation can happen there with a full acknowledgment of the shadow. That writers of conscience can be there. That the demons and the angels who are intertwined can be embraced together by the light. I have the "ubuntu" dream. As Desmond Tutu says, we all all all belong. Even someone like my dad. That's mercy's way.

SW: You also mentioned that you're uncomfortable about A Song of Lilith. However, in that book, I feel you are speaking to women and to women's issues. Do you have a message to other women? You told me about the part of your life in which you struggled with being a

mother and being a wife. Do you think that the poetic message of A Song of Lilith came out of those experiences?

JK: I don't know. The parts of *A Song of Lilith* that I do like are a few phrases here and there, and the story of the temptations. And the parts that I don't like are the big words, the big abstract words, without enough to anchor them [...] As for the story of Lilith, the idea of an original woman being equal, [and then] being demonized, is intriguing. I think there is a deep yearning for mutuality and respect and companionship in our relationships. Whether we are thinking of our dependent little babies or the aged, I think we long for love's great balancing act in which we find freedom, and maybe the story of Lilith speaks to that. As for Eve, I wouldn't scorn her. I think she's short changed in the book because it's about Lilith. Some cultures have values that are more Eve-like. The servant is the sovereign in more ways than we realize. I think that the humble person who takes the role of the servant is often one of great inner power and wisdom, an unrecognized but more effective leader than one who commands and directs. I think that has been a secret that Woman has known but when she does not know that and experiences herself



only as the dominated one, of course, the response to that is anger – which is a sign of weakness. And so, if her anger is causing a reversal now, where some males are learning the secret power of being rulers in disguise, then I think that is okay. The wheels of the bus do go round and round. I think it could be a genuine loss for women, if we turn away from the wisdom of humility and simply become exultant dominators. There is a certain moment in *A Song of Lilith* that I want to inhabit. It's that same moment in 1964 when I recognized that I needed to know nothing except that I trusted that God was good; that moment that Isaac looked upon Esau's face, recognized forgiveness, and experienced it as looking on the face of God; that resurrection moment when Mary Magdalene turned her head, heard the voice of Love and cried out with recognition. That is the moment of utter bliss and joy. And I believe that is eternity's moment. That is what we come home to. If I had been able to live in that moment when I was young, it would have made all the difference. I would have been stronger. Maybe I could have sustained a relationship. Maybe I'd still be married.

SW: *Speaking of marriage, your married name is Kogawa, but your husband's name was dif-*

ferent and then it changed to Kogawa, at some point, didn't it?

JK: Oh yes, that's right. His name was Kohashigawa. And we took out the "hashi." Someone told me Kogawa was not a real Japanese name. But another person told me it was. It was rare, but real. So I don't know. The name that sounds closest to it is Kagawa. There was a famous poet: a Christian in Japan called Kagawa, Dr. Kagawa. And then there is Ogawa. Those are recognizable Japanese names: Kagawa or Ogawa.

SW: *Why was the name changed? Were you already married when it was shortened?*

JK: It was so long. We shortened it to make it easier to say and spell. A lot of Japanese Canadians have shortened their names. Some have anglicized them. I wanted to shorten it to Koga, because Koga is a real name, but he didn't want to do that.

SW: *"Hashi" means "bridge," doesn't it?*

JK: Yes, "hashi" means bridge. It was "little bridge over the river": Ko hashi gawa. Gawa is river. We took out the bridge.

SW: *Was it several years after you were married? Was it due to the postwar . . . ?*

JK: It was very shortly after we were married. Eventually the rest of the family followed the march of being slightly other than who we



were. So there are now several Kogawas in Calgary.

SW: *So, in relation to your writing, when you talk about doing memoir – when you say you are going to turn Gently to Nagasaki into a memoir – is it going to be a fictional memoir or creative non-fiction?*

JK: I really don't know. I've been trying to write it for so long. Maybe I won't be able to in the end. Maybe it is going to be fiction and the character will be trying to write a memoir, but whether she actually writes my memoir or not, I'm not at all sure. She'll likely struggle with it all. What I feel in practically everything I have written is that the fiction and the fact are so closely woven it would be hard to cut the sinew from the bone. It is all connected somehow. And that is how I think this [*Gently to Nagasaki*] is going to be, if it gets written. I am wondering how much of the factual stuff matters. Maybe history is full of things that are not true.

SW: *"Truth" is malleable, and it depends who tells the story.*

JK: We want facts, and they somehow anchor, but how does that affect how we live? [...] I think that when we get to the place where we say, "A ha! This is what matters in this story," then we know what is valuable. In the

Momotaro story, what is important is the love that the old couple have for the peach boy, and Peach Boy's courage, and his return brings them honour. The details don't matter. The facts don't matter. It didn't matter whether he went out and killed an ogre, or saved a monkey or an ox. It matters that we live our lives with love and courage and honour.

SW: *You yourself once said in an interview with Karlyn Koh that you wondered how long it has been that we have mistakenly used the words "fact" and "truth" as synonymous. You said, and I paraphrase here, "Truth is more than the facts."¹⁴ And you questioned the idea of fact, in general. The themes of literature are the kernels of truth – beyond the facts – that we can take with us. When people read the story of Millicent, what is important is the way that her story touches them and the way it humanizes all sorts of people. It complicates the easy conviction of "that person" in society and I don't mean convict in the legal sense: I mean moral judgment. You have already conceptualized this in *The Rain Ascends through Hitler and Hitler's cat*: your thoughts on society's need to conceive of Hitler as human. It seems that *Gently to Nagasaki* will add to your ideas on the com-*

plexity of people as a site where good and evil intermingle.

JK: After I wrote *The Rain Ascends*, for example, there were great shifts in who I was. One of the most surprising things to me was that after finishing it I felt differently about Hitler. That astonished me. Because, you know, Hitler was not of this world before, and then afterwards, he was. He was part of the world and the demon that took Hitler out of the planet was gone and a person was left. Somehow, whoever he was, there was the capacity to see some pathos in it, you know? Hitler's cat: What did that mean to me? Hitler's cat would have had one perspective on Hitler. Hitler provided the milk. That is all the cat would ever know. So as a child, I was Hitler's cat. I saw nothing else [in my father] except the one who gave me some milk, the one who was so wonderful, and I loved and adored, worshipped. And he was everything for me. He was the one person I loved. So I was Hitler's cat. And then to become somebody else required a transformation. I was going to call it [*The Rain Ascends*] "Hitler's Cat" at one point. Another title I had was "Down the Noonday Street" from the sentence: "She could just as soon have asked me to run naked down the

noonday street.”¹⁵ Somebody else suggested “Father: A Novel.”

SW: *Where did the title The Rain Ascends come from? I think it is a beautiful title.*

JK: Well, that came from the line, “through the prism of prayer the rain ascends.”

SW: *At another historical moment your father’s situation would not have been discussed, but at this particular historical moment – similar to the situation with Obasan – the issues you explore in the novel are being brought out in the media. The novel came out in 1995, and it was about that time too that a lot of victims started becoming vocal and making claims against various church leaders.*

JK: Yes. It is interesting about that. I remember when I was writing about it. People were saying, “Oh, nobody wants to hear about that. It has reached its peak of interest.” But I don’t think that is the case. We’re still trying to understand these things. But I am not all that political. A person who is very political gets really into what is in the newspaper, in what is in the news: following current events and becoming passionately involved in the causes of the day. I’m not there in the way that a lot of my political friends are. They have a real awareness of how something impacts, and all kinds of acuteness about pol-



itics that I just don't have. I think that if there is an area that I would say is a place of acute interest for me it would be in questions of morality and mythology and how we make sense out of our lives. But I have almost no formal education. I'm caught up with how relationships happen and work and so on [...] I was going to call *Obasan* "Read the Forest Braille." It's as if I don't get what I get out of books so much as out of reading life, people. I know I ought to read because there's a lot of wealth and wisdom in books. But I seem to learn more viscerally out of felt experience, and I get that through the fingertips, so to speak. I get it out of what I sense between people and the little bits of stories that I had in my childhood, that I got from my parents – the Japanese fairytales and the Biblical stories which are very dense and rich. Whatever I have, I think, comes from that and very little else. And the educated heart matters to me. When people are kind or when people are unkind or when I realize I have been unkind. Those are the places that I read and ponder and wake with and worry about and struggle with. Some people have read so much of what's there and they have seen many, many systems, grids through which to look. I don't have those. And if I did have,

then I think that I could say that I was politically aware.

I have the luxury of time. Most of the time I feel great to be able to wake up and lie there. I am grateful for that every morning, just to be able to lie there and let the thoughts sift. It is a wonderful gift.

Notes

1. While certain details of Kogawa's father's past have perhaps been known in certain community circles, it is not information that has necessarily been available to a wider audience of readers and critics. In fact, quoting Janice Williamson's interview with Kogawa, for example, critic Irene Sywenky correctly identifies Kogawa's earlier lack of acknowledgement about the autobiographical nature of her novel *The Rain Ascends*. Sywenky writes: "In 1995, Kogawa published her third novel *The Rain Ascends*. According to her own concession, she has been trying to get away from the semi-autobiographical mode of writing and to stay true to 'the feeling and not the situation. Not the facts as such but the facts of one's feelings.'" In the interview with Williamson, Kogawa directly states that she was "trying to make the current novel [*The Rain Ascends*] less autobiographical and more imaginary" (156). In the years since the publication of the novel, her position has shifted.
2. At the time of the original interview, *Gently to Nagasaki* was in its formative stages. In the interim, however, in addition to the excerpt from Chapter Fourteen pre-published at the end of this collection, one full chapter of the *Nagasaki* manuscript has been published online in *Discover Nikkei: Japanese Migrants and their Descendants* (Jan 2011), as well as in *The Asian American Literary Review* (April 2011), under the title "From Gently to Nagasaki."
3. She eventually married David Kohashigawa. Later in the interview the name-change from Kohashigawa to Kogawa is explained.
4. In penetrating what Kogawa terms the "barrier of denial," she, in fact, incorporates the monstrous into human nature instead of extracting the monstrous as inhuman. Positioning human actions on a spectrum of acceptable and unacceptable conduct – all the while still



- human, adds nuance to conceptions of human behaviour as opposed to declaring specific exploits to be outside the realm of humanity and therefore beyond the constituency of average people.
5. For more details see Ann-Marie Metten's chapter, "The Little House that Joy Saved," in which Metten recounts the struggle to save the house and some of the controversy that arose in relationship to Kogawa's father.
 6. Kogawa's mode of writing anticipates theories of interstitiality.
 7. To clarify the chronology of events, Joy Kogawa found out about her father's pedophilia as a teenager, but she could not reconcile herself to the facts. It was not until much later, when her father was in his nineties, that she began to question him and everyone else about this aspect of his life. That questioning is what led to *The Rain Ascends*.
 8. According to Roy Miki's book *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice* (2004), George Imai from The National Redress Committee had been negotiating an agreement with the then Minister of State for Multiculturalism, the Hon. Jim Fleming, without the democratic input of Japanese Canadians. This all came to a climax in September 1983, when Imai submitted his resignation after heated debate, in what is now referred to as The Prince Hotel Crisis (154).
 9. Miki, Roy. *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice*. Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2004.
 10. Ad Hoc Committee for Japanese Redress, *Japanese Canadian Redress: The Toronto Story*, HpF Press Toronto, 2000.
 11. Kogawa is referring to the following book: Omatsu, Maryka. *Bittersweet Passage: Redress and the Japanese Canadian Experience*. Toronto: Between The Lines, 1992. There were, however, many other publications on the events of the redress movement that are not specifically mentioned in this interview.
 12. Joy Kogawa became the fourteenth recipient of the George Woodcock Lifetime Achievement Award in 2008. The award was presented to her at the Joy Kogawa House on April 25, 2008.
 13. For more information, please consult Gregory R. Tatchell's Masters thesis entitled "The Disposition of Japanese Canadian Anglican Churches and Funds: 1942-1949." Diss. Vancouver School of Theology, 2009.
 14. The original quote reads, "truth is much more than fact, I think. And fact itself, I mean, who knows?" (34), in "Joy Kogawa Talks to Karlyn Koh: The Heart-of-the-Matter Questions." *The Other Woman: Women of Colour in Contemporary Canadian Literature*. Ed. Makeda Silvera. Toronto: Black Women and Women of Colour Press, 1995. 19-41.

15. Here, she is referring to a scene early in the novel when Eleanor is pushing Millicent to report her father to the Bishop by writing a letter. Millicent thinks to herself that Eleanor “could more reasonably have suggested I take off my clothes and run naked down the noonday street” (2003: 12).

Biography

*A narrative of life through words
and actions*

SHEENA WILSON

On June 1, 2006 The Land Conservancy of BC bought a character home at 1450 West 64th Avenue in Vancouver, to be preserved as a historical site and cultural centre that hosts, among other cultural activities, a Writers in Residence program. The house was purchased with the help of the Save Joy Kogawa House Committee, whose members had vigourously campaigned to save this historically significant residence. It had actually been Joy Kogawa's childhood home until the age of six, when her family was displaced from the West Coast during the Second World War. It is also the Vancouver home of the fictional character Naomi Nakane in *Obasan* and it is featured in Kogawa's children's book *Naomi's Tree*. While Joy Kogawa does not personally own the Historic Joy Kogawa House, the fact that it has been saved because of her and in

her name makes it a symbolic reclamation of what was lost by Japanese Canadians during and after the Second World War. Its purchase and establishment as a writing centre further validates Japanese Canadians and their integral role in British Columbian and Canadian history.

Joy Kogawa was born Joy Nozomi Nakayama in Vancouver, British Columbia on June 6, 1935. She is the daughter of Japanese immigrants to Canada. Her father was an Anglican minister, and her mother was a kindergarten teacher. Joy herself has two grown children – a daughter and a son – and two grandchildren and she enjoys a friendship with her children’s father, David Kogawa, to whom she was married from 1957 to 1968. Professionally, Joy Kogawa is a poet, a children’s fiction writer, a novelist, and a community activist. At a personal level, Kogawa is a woman, a daughter, a sister, a mother, a feminist, a Christian, a Japanese Canadian, a *Nisei*, a former internee of the Second World War, a Canadian, and, perhaps most importantly, a humanitarian. All of these aspects of her life inform her writing and her activism, which often work synchronously.

For her many accomplishments, Kogawa has been bestowed with numerous literary awards and honorary degrees, and several lifetime achievement awards for both her written work

and her political activism.¹ She is a Member of the Order of Canada and a Member of the Order of British Columbia. Over the course of the Save Joy Kogawa House campaign, Kogawa was twice honoured by the City of Vancouver. In 2004, Vancouver declared November 6 “Joy Kogawa Day.” On that day, on the grounds of City Hall, a symbolic cherry tree was planted. This sapling was a grafted clipping from the backyard tree of Joy’s childhood Vancouver home. In 2005, November 1 was declared “Obasan Cherry Tree Day.”

Joy Kogawa’s name is most famously associated with her first novel *Obasan*, a semi-autobiographical work chronicling the Japanese Canadian experiences of the Second World War – the *evacuation*² of Japanese Canadians from the West Coast and the atomic bombing of Japan – as narrated by the protagonist Naomi Nakane. While Kogawa’s renown was established by the immediate success of *Obasan*, she has produced many other valuable contributions to Canadian literature, and a new generation of readers and literary critics is discovering and analyzing her poetry and prose. Before *Obasan* was published in 1981, Kogawa had already written an abundance of poetry, including the published collections *The Splintered Moon* (1967), *A Choice of Dreams* (1974), *Jericho Road* (1977), and *Six*

Poems (1980). After the success of *Obasan*, she has continued to write and publish poetry: *Woman in the Woods* (1985), *A Song of Lilith* (2000), and *A Garden of Anchors: Selected Poems* (2003).

Kogawa has also written children's fiction. She adapted *Obasan* for a younger audience and called it *Naomi's Road* (1986). In 1988, *Naomi's Road* was translated into Japanese; however, Kogawa worked with the translator to expand the content of the original story to meet the demands of the Japanese publishing house, and the new version of the story was released as *Naomi-no-Michi*. In 2005, Fitzhenry & Whiteside released an expanded English-language version of the original *Naomi's Road*. This children's story was also the inspiration for both a Dora Award-winning stage adaptation in the mid-1990s and a Vancouver Opera adaptation of the same name that premiered and toured in 2005.

Naomi's Tree (2008) is Kogawa's second children's book. This story is a fictionalized account of Kogawa's emotional experience of returning to her childhood home. The focus of *Noami's Tree*, in an abstract sense, is the notion of recovery of the past, and in the more tangible sense it is the physical reclamation of the past through the cherry tree in the backyard of her



childhood home in Vancouver – now the Historic Joy Kogawa House. By the time her former home was finally purchased, the original cherry tree of Kogawa’s childhood was beyond salvage, but since then, a younger cherry tree has grown up from a cutting of the old tree. In the story, the tree is called the Friendship Tree and it symbolizes the lasting power of love and its capacity to heal: the brother and sister who are young at the beginning of the story return in their old age to the visit the house and the tree of their childhood. Through the tree, that remembers them, they are able to communicate with their dead mother. The tree and Mama sing the two grown children a song about how the world is a safe and kind place, and, having finally managed to return home after a lifetime of thwarted attempts to get there, the characters learn that the world has always been their home. The final line of the book tells the reader: “Throughout the world, the songs of the Friendship Trees and the songs of those who love us forever fill the air like cherry blossoms in spring.”

The actual reclamation of the Joy Kogawa House is significant because few Japanese Canadians have been able to recover what they were dispossessed of as a result of wartime policies. The parallel fictional account of the return to the childhood home and tree in *Naomi’s Tree* is



significant because, while the characters are able to return to their childhood home, they learn that all people are at home when surrounded by their loved ones, no matter where they are located physically: an important universal theme, in this case, which addresses the historical realities faced by many Japanese Canadians who were unable to return home after the war. For those unable to reclaim their property as a key to the past, the story thematically encourages reclamation of personal history, inextricable from Canadian history, in a way that transcends tangible manifestation.

Since *Obasan*, Kogawa has also written three more adult novels: *Itsuka* (1992), *The Rain Ascends* (1995), and *Emily Kato* (2005). *Itsuka*, the sequel to *Obasan*, follows the main characters as they struggle for and finally achieve a redress settlement. Like *Obasan*, this too is a semi-autobiographical novel. As a child, and even into her adult life, Kogawa shared many biographical events and character traits with Naomi Nakane, who loses her home and her community to the internment, struggles with the secrets of her family, and later becomes a school-teacher. However, Kogawa matured into a woman with a strong sense of justice that she has been willing to defend, much like the character of Emily Kato who appears with varying degrees

of importance in *Obasan*, *Itsuka*, and *Emily Kato*.

Kogawa was very active in the struggle for redress, and the fictional account of events in *Itsuka* and *Emily Kato* reveals her own intimate knowledge of the various obstacles that threatened the eventual success of the redress campaign: impediments both from the Canadian political sphere and from within the Japanese Canadian community. Kogawa herself, however, is arguably more diplomatic than the feisty Emily. Published thirteen years after *Itsuka*, *Emily Kato* has been critically and commercially overlooked because some readers assume that it is *Itsuka* renamed, when in fact it is *Itsuka* reimagined. *Emily Kato* is especially important in its retelling of the story of *Itsuka* from a post-9/11 perspective. It emphasizes the continued vigilance necessary to ensure that no group of Canadians ever be targeted as were Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. In *Emily Kato*, Naomi observes the similarities between mid-century and post-9/11 Canadian attitudes:

Although the uprooting and displacement of Muslim communities in North America has not occurred, the new “war on terror” makes victims of our own loyal citizens. Families are taunted. Places of worship are targeted. On the basis of appearance alone, people are relegated to the company of the despised and

viewed with suspicion and fear – on sidewalks, in elevators, at border crossings and airports, and in school playgrounds. Many Canadian Muslim children may never recover their self-confidence.

(272-73)

Here, Kogawa makes clear the similarities, in both social attitude and government legislation, between mid-century and contemporary Canadian politics. In between the release of the two novels that focus on redress – *Ituska* and *Emily Kato* – Kogawa wrote her third novel, *The Rain Ascends*. While the story is a departure from redress, the novel still deals with issues of trauma and victimization, this time at an individual and intimately personal level.

While literary critics have considered *Obasan* to be Kogawa's most important literary contribution, Kogawa personally considers *The Rain Ascends* to be her most important work. This novel centres on the lives of the Shelby family, as they are impacted by the fact that their patriarch, the Anglican Minister Shelby, is exposed as a sexual predator who has victimized young boys in his congregation and members of his own family, including his grandson. Until the interview that is published in this collection, Kogawa has, out of a desire to protect her family, refused to acknowledge publicly that, like *Obasan* and her other novels, *The Rain Ascends* is also semi-

autobiographical fiction. Kogawa personally identifies as Charles Shelby's daughter, Millicent, who adores her father and cares for him in his old age but is equally repelled by the awareness that he has horribly abused his position of power as a church leader. Despite Kogawa's strong affinity with Millicent, she also identifies with Millicent's sister-in-law, Eleanor, the character in the novel most driven to reveal the "truth" of the family's secrets. Millicent is compelled, both by her sister-in-law and by her own conscience and sense of social responsibility, to expose her father to the Anglican Church leaders.

In the lived experience of that story, Kogawa reacted to her father's past in different ways at various junctures in her life. At times – namely, in her teenage years but to varying degrees at other times, as well – Kogawa sought refuge in denial, as did Millicent. Yet there were other moments when – like Eleanor – Kogawa was driven by a mad desire to uncover and expose the "truth." Kogawa's father has long since passed away, and she now finds herself negotiating a life somewhere between these two extremes. She acknowledges that her father hurt young men and boys who may now be old themselves, but she does not know the details or the consequences of her father's actions, whether

measured in numbers of victims or degree of suffering. Nevertheless, the compulsion to uncover has disappeared – it seems – to be replaced with the desire to be open about her father’s story. His story has become, for better or worse, part of her own story.

While it seems unfair, according to standards of secular justice, that she be held publicly accountable for the sins of her father, Kogawa understands the value of truth-telling and the freedom from hypocrisy that can be achieved by living an open life, just as she understands the victims’ need for acknowledgement, because she too has fought a similar battle for recognition. For Japanese Canadians, the redress settlement was not simply important due to its monetary value, but also because of the emotional significance of the government’s 1988 apology, in Parliament, for the relocation, dispossession, internment, dispersal, and repatriation committed against them during and after the Second World War. As a thinker and a deeply empathetic person, Kogawa struggles with her father’s transgressions and the ideas of good and evil; as a writer and an activist, she has sought to reconcile them for herself and to try to deal with what his actions mean to her as his daughter – someone who shares his DNA and who loved him for all his positive qualities.

At this juncture in her life, pressured by some individuals in her community to admit publicly that the character of Charles Shelby is based on her father, Kogawa wrestles with the story and how to tell it more fully as her own. Sharing it with readers in the interview published in this collection is one part of that process. Her work in progress – tentatively titled *Gently to Nagasaki* – is another.

Kogawa is a thoughtful and complex person, and her own life and her personal struggles at a political, philosophical, spiritual, and even physiological level have provided the inspiration for her poetry and prose. She is a woman of wisdom who has withstood personal, family, and community trauma and through it all has managed to maintain a clarity of vision that allows her to reclaim her past both literally and figuratively. She shares what she has learned through her storytelling and, from this, readers can glean certain “truths” about life from her perspective. Kogawa feels the rewards are abundant at this time in her life. Her days are full of friends, family, and purpose, and they are spent dedicated to activist causes and projects, to public speaking engagements, and to her writing. Ultimately, she is guided by a profound faith that “love underlies reality.” In that, she finds solace and inspiration.




Notes

1. For a more complete list of awards and honours, please see "Awards and Honours Garnered for *Obasan* and for a Lifetime of Literary Work and Community Activism."
2. As in the introduction, the term *evacuation* in this biography refers to the entirety of the Japanese Canadian experience during and directly following the Second World War: relocation to road camps and farms in the interior of the country, internment in various locations, dispossession, deportation, dispersal, and assimilation. For more details, please see the first footnote in the introduction.

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Awards and Honours Garnered for *Obasan* and for a Lifetime of Literary Work and Community Activism

SHEENA WILSON

Joy Kogawa's first novel *Obasan* has earned her significant recognition since its publication in 1981. The novel's immediate success could be measured by the incredibly positive reader response, and the high volume of critical material since produced about the text: evidence of its enduring relevance. This novel is a literary masterpiece that rouses all the senses through its poetic prose. *Obasan* was the first Canadian fiction narrative of the Japanese Canadian evacuation authored by someone who had lived the experience. In that respect, it was a narrative of resistance. It broke a long-term silence and exposed a history of racism that has called into question Canada's narration of itself as a young, multicultural, democratic nation, innocent of the historical transgressions that are naively con-

sidered the sole territory of older countries. And it accomplished all of this while addressing relationships between family members, generations, and communities of different faiths and politics.

The novel's resounding critical and commercial success is reflected, in part, by the notable awards and honours that it has garnered – some more than twenty years after its first publication. It won the Books in Canada First Novel Award (1981), the Canadian Authors Association Book of the Year Award (1981), the Periodical Distributors of Canada Best Paperback Fiction Award, and the American Book Award (Before Columbus Foundation) (1983), and was an American Library Association's Notable Book (1982). *Obasan* also won the One Book One Community Award in Medicine Hat, Alberta (2004) and the One Book One Vancouver Award in 2005. That same year, November 1 was declared "Obasan Cherry Tree Day" in Vancouver.

Kogawa has also garnered a significant number of other honours and awards beyond the recognition that she has received for *Obasan*. She became a Member of the Order of Canada in 1986 and, twenty years later, a Member of the Order of British Columbia. She has been awarded honorary Doctor of Laws degrees from the University of Lethbridge (1991), Simon Fraser University (1993), Queen's

University (2003), and the University of Windsor (2003). She holds honorary Doctor of Letters degrees from the University of Guelph (1992) and the University of British Columbia (2001). She is also recognized as an honorary Doctor of Divinity at Knox College, University of Toronto (1999). In 1991, she became a fellow of Ryerson University, and in 1995 she was the Grace MacInnis Visiting Scholar at Simon Fraser University. In 1994, she was recognized for her positive impact on race relations with the Urban Alliance Race Relations Award. She has won such lifetime achievement awards as the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Association of Asian American Studies (2001), the NAJC National Award from the National Association of Japanese Canadians (2001), the George Woodcock Lifetime Achievement Award (2008), the BC BookWorld and Vancouver Public Library Plaque (2008), and the BC Author Achievement Day Proclamation (2008). And as of 2004, November 6 is Joy Kogawa Day in Vancouver – the city of Kogawa's birth.

Excerpt from Chapter Fourteen of
Gently to Nagasaki

(A work in progress)

JOY KOGAWA

This is not a gentle walk to Nagasaki. I did not know when I set out that I would be meeting Minnie Vautrin here in this moment, in her apartment. I am scraping the walls of my mind looking for some way, a toe-hold, a tiny squiggle of meaning, anything, anything. Crawling away from the edge of the quicksand, grabbing at tree roots, I hear her crying out “Mie jing! Mie jing!” begging for a rope as she sinks inexorably in the weight. If I could I would lasso her absent God and her unanswered prayers. For a moment, before the gas moves into her lungs, could we find a space, a pause. Is there still choice, Minnie? Or is it that humans are sometimes without agency, as prey to storms within as we are to storms without and that the forces of violence sometimes rush untrammelled through us. Of such moments, could we not say, “It was beyond our control.” Could we not say, as you



stand there, that a gigantic force has been let loose from the inaccessible deep vault of magma that lies buried beneath consciousness. And could we not imagine that an unstoppable tsunami, a volcanic eruption, a devouring dwarf star, a storm like no other befell Nanking and that you, who rescued so many, were also in the end, swept away? Just suppose, that we could look on Nanking, on Nagasaki, on Auschwitz, on other human catastrophes in somewhat the same way that we look at other great natural catastrophes. Are we not also beings of nature with our vast unfeeling and unknowing and our capacity to inflict suffering?

The long march to disaster begins long before it begins. We hardly know what is happening until it becomes a cataclysm and we find ourselves trapped as caged animals. We understand so little that we fail and fail to heed warning signs. The elephants know better. They feel the rumbling. Deep deep down. Still far enough away. Rush now, rush, to higher ground.

What if, dear Goddess of Nanking, we were to respond to the seething magma within the human condition as we do to the violence in nature, plunge as you did into the rescuing, get cell phones to the people living on the shore to alert them that the tsunami is on its way, watch for the signs in society that signal steps on the



march to genocide – the singling out of others into the undesirable “them,” the finger-pointing, the slow dehumanizing that begins so subtly that we hardly know the tectonic plates are starting to shift. “Oh, did you smell those people? Who ARE they?” We are upgrading the buildings of the cities along the western coast to make them safer in the earthquake to come. Evacuation plans are moving into place. We watch for the signs of a looming pandemic. We do not curse the virus. We do not war with the sea. Before the contagion arrives we allocate resources to unmask and name its mysteries. Once it is upon us we move to quarantine the diseased. We apply our vast energies, our microscopes, our minds, in collaborative labour to contain the danger, to recognize earlier and earlier warning signs. What if we were to do less of what does not work, less torturing of prisoners, less of “an eye for an eye,” and move instead to create global laws to intervene, to protect a populace facing slaughter. We have yet to prevent governments and demagogues from devouring their own people. But some day, Minnie, some day.

[...] My futile pleading, my piece of rope frays as you sink in the quicksand. It does not hold. Still, I will toss these bits of straw your way and suggest that we return the task of judging what is good and what is evil, at least in this



moment, to the Judge and source of judgment. I leave you now, although you do not leave me, and tiptoe on down the road toward the house of a pedophile and to the mountain where lava erupts. I will look to the Maker to carry the burden of evil. And as I think this thought, I am surprised by an insect moving along the wall.

Goddess of Nanking, trust is the only safety zone I know. Whether in the quicksand or in your apartment, I am not released from the task as assigned. I will keep trusting. And I must be on my way to Nagasaki.



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