

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: ARTICULATING IDENTITIES: RHETORICAL
 READINGS OF ASIAN AMERICAN LITERACY
 NARRATIVES

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This dissertation examines how Asian American writers, through what I call *critical acts of literacy*, discursively (re)construct the self and make claims for alternative spaces in which to articulate their identities as legitimate national subjects. I argue that using literacy as an analytic for studying certain Asian American texts directs attention to the rhetorical features of those texts thereby illuminating how authors challenge hegemonic ideologies about literacy and national identity. Analyzing the audiences and situations of these texts enriches our understanding of Asian American identity formation and the social, cultural, and political functions that these literacy narratives serve for both the authors and readers of the texts.

The introduction lays the groundwork for my dissertation's arguments and method of analysis through a reading of Theresa Cha's *Dictée*. By situating readers in such a way that they are compelled to consider their own engagements with literacy and how discourses of literacy and citizenship function to reproduce dominant ideologies, *Dictée* advances a theoretical model for reading literacy narratives. In subsequent chapters I show how this methodology encourages a kind of reading practice that may

serve to transform readers' ideologies. Part I argues that reading the fictional autobiographies of Younghill Kang and Carlos Bulosan as literacy narratives illuminates the ways in which they simultaneously critique the contradiction between the myth of American democratic inclusion and the reality of exclusion while claiming Americanness through a demonstration of their own and their fictional alter egos' literacies. Part II argues for the *hyperliteracy* of Frank Chin's *The Chickencoop Chinaman* and Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker*. I posit that the narrator-protagonists' acts of hyperliteracy are performances of identity that mark and contest their indeterminacy as minority subjects. Finally, the conclusion investigates the debates surrounding Hawai'i author Lois-Ann Yamanaka's *Blu's Hanging* and the use of Pidgin as a resistant discourse in the text. I argue that examining literacy in the context of U.S. imperialism points to both the increasing need for and difficulty of using literacy as a theorizing framework for the study of Asian American literatures.

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LITERACY NARRATIVES

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2004

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For Mom and Dad,
with love

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are a number of people I would like to thank for their guidance and support as I worked to complete this dissertation. I am indebted to my director and advisor Kandice Chuh for her thorough readings and insightful commentary on multiple drafts, for always challenging me to think more critically, and for her mentorship and support for the past eight years. Professors Jeanne Fahnestock and Shirley Logan also read and commented upon chapter drafts, for which I am grateful. Collectively, their constructive feedback helped me to shape and sharpen my analysis into a more cohesive argument. I thank Professor Sangeeta Ray for her support throughout the years that I have been a graduate student at the University of Maryland. Professor Marylu McEwen I thank for serving as the Dean's Representative on my dissertation committee. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Morris Young, who assisted me in thinking through some ideas at the earliest stages of my writing, and whose insightful and thoughtful work on Asian American literacy narratives served as an inspiration for this dissertation.

Tracy Chung and Meryl Sirmans, my dear friends and colleagues at the University of Maryland whom I have known since college, have provided invaluable intellectual and moral support as I worked towards completing this degree. I thank Meryl for being a compassionate listener, for her sound advice, and for commiserating with me as we both struggled to reach our goals. I am forever indebted to Tracy for her time, keen eye for detail, insightful feedback on chapter drafts, and helping to keep my spirits up when things seemed to be falling apart. I cannot express enough my appreciation for her continuous support and sense of humor. I also thank my friends and colleagues Crystal

Parikh and Min Kim, who earlier graduated from the program at Maryland, for reviewing portions of my dissertation.

Scattered across the globe are my friends from the American School in Japan—Clara Barnett, Karen Cotter, Joy Fuyuno, Susan Coleman Olesek, Betsy Olson, Ayako Seki, and Jennifer Speri—who listened to my rants and raves throughout my years in graduate school, but more importantly have given me the gift of their friendship for so many years.

My husband's parents, Annie and Win Aung, along with my sister-in-law Maybelle and her husband Harry, have graciously welcomed me into their lives and have enthusiastically cheered me on as I took each step toward completing my degree. I am thankful for their encouragement, love and support. For reminding me how to play and for making me laugh, I thank Caroline and Matthew Jordan.

My dear husband Rob listened and responded to the excitement and fear that I expressed about this undertaking with patience, thoughtfulness, and wisdom, for which I am deeply grateful. I am thankful for his meticulous proofreading skills, his assumption of day-to-day household tasks, his faith that I would indeed someday finish, and above all his partnership, love and support.

My parents, Pam and Souk Hasegawa—to whom this work is dedicated—and my brother, Sergei, have sustained me in so many ways and never doubted my commitment or my ability to overcome the challenges I have faced. The inspiration for my dissertation topic emerged from my experience growing up in a bi-racial and bi-cultural family. My parents exposed me to diverse cultures throughout my childhood and adolescence, and taught me to respect and appreciate difference through their marriage

and in innumerable other ways. For my family's unbounded love, support, and confidence in me, I am and will always be grateful.

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Introduction: Reconfiguring Literacy and Subjectivity

In the sixth grade Mrs. Walker
slapped the back of my head
and made me stand in the corner
for not knowing the difference
between *persimmon* and *precision*.
How to choose

persimmons. This is precision.
Ripe ones are soft and brown-spotted.
Sniff the bottoms. The sweet one
will be fragrant. How to eat:
put the knife away, lay down the newspaper.
Peel the skin tenderly, not to tear the meat.
Chew on the skin, suck it,
and swallow. Now, eat
the meat of the fruit,
so sweet
all of it, to the heart ...

Other words
that got me into trouble were
fight and *fright*, *wren* and *yarn*.
Fight was what I did when I was frightened,
fright was what I felt when I was fighting.
Wrens are small, plain birds,
yarn is what one knits with.
Wrens are soft as yarn.
My mother made birds out of yarn.
I loved to watch her tie the stuff;
a bird, a rabbit, a wee man.

Mrs. Walker brought a persimmon to class
and cut it up
so everyone could taste
a *Chinese apple*. Knowing
it wasn't ripe or sweet, I didn't eat
but watched the other faces ...

—Li-Young Lee's "Persimmons"

I begin my discussion with Lee's poem because it resonates with the issues and queries with which this dissertation is principally engaged. Though the poem explicitly addresses issues relating to language, culture, and race, it also problematizes the relationships among these constructs as the teacher both asserts her authority as the arbiter of cultural citizenship and publicly installs the speaking subject as foreign. The speaker and the "Chinese apple," which Mrs. Walker brings in for her students to taste (possibly for the first time), are juxtaposed in such a way as to suggest that both are foreign and distasteful. The speaker tells us, "Knowing / it wasn't ripe or sweet, I didn't eat / but watched the other faces." The significance of the speaker refusing to participate lies in his refusal to conform to the narrative that has already placed him outside of the nation. By creating a speaker who challenges his teacher's and, by extension, dominant culture's systematic hierarchization of students based on their pronunciation and the value that American culture places on speaking English without an accent, Lee argues for his speaker's legitimacy as a participant in cultural criticism and illustrates the inadequacy of hegemonic standards of evaluation.¹ Mrs. Walker suggests that knowing the difference between the denotations of the two words is not as important as being able to recognize (and enunciate) the subtle nuances in how each word is pronounced. Lee then critiques this ideology by constructing Mrs. Walker as the one who displays a shallow understanding of the two words.

I use the excerpt from Lee's poem as a point of departure for the following analysis because it so poignantly illustrates the problematics I aim to address. Appropriately situated in the classroom where dominant ideologies are reproduced, Lee's speaker is being indoctrinated with the prevailing U.S. ideology that equates

Americanness with accentless speech and that conflates Asian accented speech with “foreignness” and undesirability. My goal in this dissertation is to contribute a critique of literacy as an analytic to the fields of Asian American literary studies and literacy studies in particular, and to American literary and cultural studies more broadly. I hope to demonstrate how an interdisciplinary study such as this can help shed light on both Asian Americans’ and non-Asian Americans’ engagements with, perceptions of, and stereotypes about literacy (in all its variegations) and race with the ultimate hope of persuading my academic and non-academic readers that more critical attention along these lines—both inside and outside the classroom—is necessary in order to bring about real social change.

This project draws upon traditions of rhetorical theory and criticism—specifically literacy studies—and Asian American cultural criticism. My aim is to conceptualize and identify the multiple ways in which Asian Americanness is rhetorically constructed by various writers and to ask how these constructions contribute to and interrogate current theoretical investigations of literacy, race, and citizenship.

Critics attending to the work of Asian American literary studies have long been concerned with examining the relationships between narrative constructions and representations of social and political categories such as language, race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation. By exploring the intersections of these constructs, one can better understand social structures and the processes of identity formation and thus begin the work of dismantling current ideologies that continue to subordinate, homogenize, or exclude people on the basis of difference.

This project is in conversation with Asian American cultural criticism, and yet it differs from much of that criticism by focusing on specific rhetorical strategies that certain authors use as well as the rhetorical effects of those strategies. My particular concerns are with literacy and the multiple ways in which literacy and the discourse of literacy are inextricably linked to the workings of power. Because literacy is not just about the ability to read and write, but about who can participate in cultural production and nation-building, literacy—as a way of gaining legitimacy or access to social and political power—becomes even more essential (and problematic) for those who are denied access on the basis of gender, race, national origin, class, etc. As Morris Young writes, “literacy often becomes the marker of citizenship and this assignment of legitimacy is often ‘required’ to enjoy the full benefits of citizenship or even of basic human rights” (6). Recognizing the power structures and social relations invested and embedded in the discourses of literacy and citizenship directs attention to the intersections of race, literacy and subjectivity and compels us to conceive of Asian American literature and the discursive constructions of identity in this literature as rhetoric.

Critics have examined certain Asian American literary and other cultural “texts” using rhetorical theory and criticism. The studies that pay particular attention to specific rhetorical strategies include King-kok Cheung’s *Articulate Silences*, Jinqi Ling’s *Narrating Nationalisms*, and Morris Young’s PhD dissertation, “Literacy, Legitimacy, and the Composing of Asian American Citizenship.” Though Lisa Lowe, in her indispensable work, *Immigrant Acts*, does not identify them as rhetorical strategies per se, her examination of the strategic identifications and disidentifications (between and

among Asians, Asian immigrants, Asian Americans, and non-Asian Americans) that help to reveal heterogeneities and contradictions in identificatory, culturalist, and nationalist practices are akin to what Kenneth Burke identifies as identification and consubstantiality, terms which I discuss at greater length below.

Additionally, scholars such as Patricia Chu, Rachel Lee and Leslie Bow have recently published studies that examine the rhetoric of “claiming America” as specifically gendered and sexualized acts, though their critical focus is more on the literary than the rhetorical function of these articulations. In *Assimilating Asians: Gendered Strategies of Authorship in Asian America*, Patricia Chu looks at novels of subject formation—*bildungsroman*—to determine why and in what ways Asian American male and female authors position themselves differently in their fictional narratives of assimilation. Rachel Lee’s *The Americas of Asian American Literature: Gendered Fictions of Nation and Transnation* contributes to the growing body of work in Asian American studies that challenges the traditional nationalist framework of America by arguing for a reconsideration of diasporic, postcolonial, and transnational identities for the ways in which they are shaped by gender and sexuality. In *Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion: Feminism, Sexual Politics, Asian American Women’s Literature*, Leslie Bow looks at the gendered and sexualized nature of the rhetorics of betrayal and allegiance in Asian American women’s literature. Her study is in conversation with current discussions of globalization and transnationalism as the “language of betrayal,” she argues, “signals the artifice of naturalized racial, ethnic, or national belonging” (11). Bow engages feminist, literary, postcolonial, and rhetorical theory by examining female strategic identifications (what she calls “alliances”), sometimes “enabled,” she claims, by

“disguise” or “masquerade,” in order to understand how these alliances and affiliations function as “tools of political persuasion” (34) and how “gender regulates group belonging” (177).

This study of Asian American literacy narratives examines arguments that Asian American writers make about literacy and how their narratives of literacy function with respect to audience. The analyses I offer here aim to contribute to the understanding of Asian American literary/cultural production and consumption through investigations of the rhetorical strategies that Asian American writers use to claim Americanness or to critique “America” within cultural, material, and historical contexts that are specific to Asian Americans. Combining literary analysis with rhetorical criticism and sociocultural approaches to literacy provides Asian Americanists (and others) another vantage point from which to explore and assess the texts’ social function and potential power to effect change.

I argue that examining what I call *critical acts of literacy* opens up possibilities for destabilizing power structures that discriminate, homogenize and oppress and also allows for alternative forms of and sites for articulation and expression. By challenging the dominant narrative through these articulations, writers and readers participate in cultural production and hence make claims for their own legitimacies as national subjects. Although literary and other kinds of critical analysis may lead to similar conclusions, the process of conducting a rhetorical analysis reveals features of narratives that can, I believe, illuminate the text in ways different from what might be revealed by other types of analysis; it prompts us to utilize a different vocabulary in our theorizations

and in doing so brings to surface other perspectives on how language is used, to borrow from Kenneth Burke, as “symbolic action.”

One of the basic tenets of rhetorical theory is that rhetoric is addressed—in other words, arguments evolve out of an understanding or interpretation of the rhetor’s audience. By its very nature, then, rhetorical analysis seeks to break down hierarchies and challenges authorial dominance. What this means is that there is a shift in focus from what the text says to who the text addresses, in what situation or context the text is addressed, and why and what elements of the text, audience and situation lead us to make these conclusions. Analyzing the audiences and situations of certain Asian American literary works enriches our understanding of Asian American identity formation and the social, cultural, and political functions that these literacy narratives serve for both the authors and readers of the texts. Moreover, by focusing on the rhetorical dimensions of the text, we can learn about the author’s conception of the audience, what the author may hope to achieve by writing to this audience, and what the author may be struggling with as she constructs arguments for her readers. Rhetorical analysis can thus help us better understand our roles as readers and also how authors make sense of their world to themselves through a process of self-deliberation (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 41).

Of critical importance to this study is also whether and how the authors and characters in the texts that I examine are in fact *perceived* as legitimate. In the context of this dissertation, “gaining legitimacy” signifies not only the acquisition of social, cultural and/or political power but also the acquisition of social, cultural, political and symbolic “capital” (Bourdieu). The key concept here, as in discourses of citizenship, is the idea of

recognition or the bestowal of recognition by another person, party, government, nation, or state that signifies one's acceptance as a member of the national community.²

In order to examine how writers use rhetoric and literacy to make these claims and critiques, it is important to assess these writers' conceptions of America. As my analysis will show, "America" is multiply determined—it is at once a democratic nation, a "land of opportunity," but it is also a nation that excludes people on the basis of race and/or limits opportunities for those who are marginalized because of race, gender, national origin, language, accent, religion, sexual orientation, class, etc. America is also an imperialist nation that exerts control over native populations (both within the U.S. and abroad) and problematizes the Asian immigrant subject's relationship to both Asia and America. As Lisa Lowe explains,

The material legacy of the repressed history of U.S. imperialism in Asia is borne out in the 'return' of Asian immigrants to the imperial center. In this sense, these Asian Americans are determined by the history of U.S. involvements in Asia and the historical racialization of Asians in the United States. (16)

Because of America's political and economic involvement with Asia, and yet despite the contributions that Asian immigrants made in the building of America, Asians are always seen as immigrants or "foreigners-within," even if they were born in the United States (Lowe 6). Thus, the conceptions and constructions of America and what it means to be American that we see in these texts are often contradictory and always complex. By invoking the terms "postcolonial" and "transnational," I acknowledge what Sau-ling Wong calls "denationalizing" trends in the field of Asian American cultural criticism;³

that is, I recognize the uneven histories of Asian Americans as well as the sometimes contradictory positions in which Asians find themselves in the U.S.

My reading of Asian American literacy narratives is informed by a number of scholars and critics including Mikhail Bakhtin, Kenneth Burke, Homi Bhabha, Paulo Freire and Morris Young, as well as ideas put forth by speech act theorists and fantasy theme analysts.⁴ In distinct and productive ways, each of these theorists and ideas contributes to an understanding of how literacy can be used as an analytic for reading these texts as rhetorical. They help us to see the multiple dimensions of rhetoric and literacy and assist us in theorizing why Asian Americans, as racialized liminal subjects, might choose the particular strategies that they do to challenge the dominant ideologies that construct them as Other.

To be clear, I do not mean to suggest that reading literacy narratives is unique or specific to Asian American literature; rather, the ideas and arguments articulated in this dissertation are also relevant to American studies and literary studies more broadly because so much of what it means to be American is entwined with the acquisition of English and the literacy practices in which we engage daily. However, these ideas are particularly significant for Asian American writers because, as marginalized writers, they are specifically marked as “foreign” and hence their literacies and legitimacies are always suspect. My project therefore also engages composition literacy theorists who are interested in assisting marginalized students in their negotiations with language and dominant culture through acts of reading and writing. Reading these Asian American texts as spaces in which authors articulate cultural difference and challenge readers’

ideologies about literacy, race, and U.S. citizenship contributes to a “critical multiculturalism”—it is this kind of counterreading or counterhegemonic reading practice that I argue for in this project and that I ultimately believe can bring about social change.

Reading Literacy Narratives

The aim of this study is to examine both the ways in which literacy functions as an analytic of citizenship and identity in Asian American literary works and the rhetorical dimensions of such works. The narratives I examine are rhetorical in the sense that they make specific arguments about their characters’, authors’ and readers’ literacies and legitimacies as national subjects, thereby challenging and disrupting our notions of what it means to be a “literate” “American.” My use of the term “literacy narratives” comes from Janet Carey Eldred and Peter Mortensen who define literacy narratives as “stories, like Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, that foreground issues of language acquisition and literacy ... that are structured by learned, internalized ‘literacy tropes’ ... by ‘prefigured’ ideas and images ... that sometimes include explicit images of schooling and teaching ... [and that] include texts that both challenge and affirm culturally scripted ideas about literacy” (513).

While literacy is defined in multiple ways and used in a myriad of contexts,⁵ the definition that resonates most with me and which is most relevant to my project is the one offered and utilized by New Literacy Studies scholars who view literacy as more than just mastery of written language. Literacy is also about learning how to speak and knowing the appropriate discourse and how to use that discourse in a particular *situation*. In other words, literacy practices are “dynamic,” “fluid,” and very much “context-bound”; they

are also hierarchically structured and “positioned in relation to the social institutions and power relations which sustain them” (Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanič 1).

James Paul Gee asserts an important paradigm shift in the study and discourse of literacy. He writes, “Paradoxically put: a person can speak a language grammatically, can use the language appropriately, and still get it ‘wrong’. This is so because what is important is not just *how* you say it ... but *who you are* and *what you’re doing* when you say it” (124). Literacy standards have been used in this country both during slavery and more recently in the debate over the use of Ebonics to subjugate blacks and to justify their treatment and categorization as subhuman. Similar standards have also been used since non-English speakers began immigrating to the U.S. as a means for maintaining a social and racial hierarchy.⁶ That race, gender, class, and national origin are inextricably tied to the discourse of literacy is obvious. What is not always obvious are the ways in which discrimination based on any of the above constructs is masked by linguistic discrimination. Literacy standards, much like the contradictory immigration and naturalization laws based on “race,” have thus been used to justify one’s legitimacy or illegitimacy as an able/unable, desirable/undesirable citizen or participant in the social, political, and economic life in the U.S.

By analyzing our culture’s conception of literacy, we gain greater insight into what our culture deems normative and, conversely, what our culture deems deviant or non-standard with respect to literacy practices. Furthermore, the ideology of literacy, embodied in the view that schooling, literacy, and economic success are interrelated, is deeply embedded in the ideology of American citizenship. President Theodore Roosevelt’s inter-agency commission codified this viewpoint on naturalization in 1905

when it proclaimed, “the proposition is incontrovertible that no man is a desirable citizen of the United States who does not know the English language” (qtd. in Leibowitz 34). The belief was that without the ability to speak English, let alone the ability to read and write, one could not understand American institutions. In his effort to “elevate the body politic,” President Roosevelt demanded an education requirement of those seeking immigration or naturalization. Moreover, with what might be perceived as a racist impulse, the Immigration Restriction League of 1894 devised a mandatory literacy test in an effort to restrict undesirable immigrants (Leibowitz 35-37).

Reading texts as literacy narratives thus illuminates the dynamics of the society and culture in which they are written. It further enables the social, cultural, or literary critic to examine the “literacy myth”—that is, that one can gain entry into the social, cultural, political, and economic spheres of America through the acquisition of “standard” English—and its function both within the particular text and for the audience to which it is addressed.⁷ Though the above quotations refer to turn-of-the-century immigration and naturalization requirements for non-citizens, the contradictions inherent in America’s democratic liberalism continue to play out in current ideologies of literacy, especially as they relate to race and national identity formation. A contemporary text that offers a compelling illustration of the ways in which specific rhetorical tools are employed to argue for a reconsideration/reconfiguration of literacy as it relates to subjectivity, nation and empire and that will serve to introduce my arguments and method of analysis, including terminology and critical framework, is Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictée*.

I begin my analysis with *Dictée* because it allows me to introduce many of the concepts and theories that I discuss in subsequent chapters, it provides the best illustration of how a writer might influence her audience to think differently about literacy and legitimacy, and it highlights the challenge of thinking through the term “postcolonial” as it relates to Asian Americans—a thread that runs through each of the other chapters.⁸ *Dictée* treats both Korea’s history as a colony of Japan and Korean immigration to the U.S. as conceptions of transnationalism.⁹ Reading *Dictée* as a “postcolonial” and “transnational” text therefore challenges us to consider it in relation to other Asian American texts and formulations of Asian American identity.

My approach to studying *Dictée* and the narratives anchoring the other chapters centers on how these texts foreground issues of language acquisition and linguistic practices as they relate to social, cultural, and political power. A more detailed summary of each chapter appears at the end of this introduction. Briefly, in chapters 1 and 2 I examine the immigrant autobiographies of Younghill Kang and Carlos Bulosan and discuss the ways in which their texts argue for their legitimacies as Americans and also serve to critique “America”; chapters 3 and 4 explore the literacy acts of contemporary writers Frank Chin and Chang-rae Lee and their respective narrator-protagonists in *The Chickencoop Chinaman* and *Native Speaker*; and the conclusion directs attention to the politics of language use in the context of Hawai`i through a reading of Lois-Ann Yamanaka’s *Blu’s Hanging* and the controversy surrounding her work. Reading these texts as narratives of literacy allows for a subversive critique of the ways in which dominant culture uses language and literacy to construct Asian Americans as Other, and of the ways in which Asian American writers, through their critical acts of literacy,

discursively (re)construct the self and make claims for alternative spaces in which to articulate their identities and to interrogate narratives that have placed them outside of the nation.

Dictée argues for a reading practice and understanding of what it means to be literate and legitimate in ways similar to but also very different from the other texts in my dissertation. As in Lois-Ann Yamanaka *Blu's Hanging*, the speaking subjects of *Dictée* are living in a society that was, and in many ways continues to be, deeply impacted by imperialist domination. The struggles that they endure while trying to negotiate nationalist and colonialist ideologies are reflected in their literacy practices and in the disjointed structure of the text. Though it shares much with Yamanaka's works in the way of critiquing the colonizer/colonized relationship, specifically with regard to language (i.e., the characters' negotiation of multiple literacy practices; schooling in the dominant language; the hierarchical relationship among languages as they connote specific colonial and linguistic histories; and the text's call for what Juliana Spahr calls a "decolonizing practice of reading"), *Dictée* presents a unique challenge to my study of literacy in that it is a text that, often, its audiences do not know how to read.¹⁰ In fact, any reader who is not proficient in English, French, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Latin, and Greek will not be able to read the text in its entirety because each of these languages is present in the text. Those who are proficient in all of these languages may be able to read every word in the text but still may have difficulty "reading," for example, the photographic images that are displayed intermittently throughout the text because they are not accompanied by captions or other contextual information.

Rather than arguing for its characters' and/or authors' literacies, and hence legitimacies, as the early immigrant narratives of Younghill Kang and Carlos Bulosan do, *Dictée* challenges our conceptions of what it means to be literate by forcing the reader into the role of a person with a compromised literacy.¹¹ Readers are confronted with so many forms of discourses, images, languages, and varying subject positions that it is extremely difficult to determine precisely what is going on throughout the text. The text is not only circular in form (there is no determinate beginning or end), but it is also intentionally elliptical and therefore extremely difficult to comprehend in its entirety. By demanding that its readers perform acts of literacy with which they may be unfamiliar, *Dictée* offers a methodology for a new kind of reading practice—one that not only encourages readers to interrogate structures of power in the context of colonialism, but also compels readers to read themselves.

Dictée illuminates my study of literacy narratives by calling into question not so much whether one can “master” a text or decipher the meaning behind Cha’s language, but more so what happens to the reading process when one encounters a foreign language or foreign structure in a text. Cha, through her amalgamation of voices, languages, and visual images, both interrogates the relationship between literacy and nation by representing various literacy practices within colonial contexts as well as demands that her readers participate in the performance of those practices. By forcing her readers to grapple with the complex form, fractured speech and syntax, and interweaving of multiple languages, Cha invokes the experiences of a (post)colonial immigrant subject thereby urging her readers to consider what it means to be a literate subject or citizen of a nation. As her narrator moves between multiple discursive worlds while struggling to

make utterances, so too do her readers struggle to translate, or understand the meaning behind those movements or utterances. This “decolonizing practice” of reading, as Juliana Spahr notes, serves as a reminder to readers that they do not have access to multiple “language patterns” and that language is neither “easily appropriated” nor “owned as sovereign territory” (32).

In addition to introducing the dissertation’s arguments, this introduction also serves as a model for the format of the subsequent chapters’ discussions. In each chapter, I provide autobiographical information about the author whose text is the focus of that chapter, historical context in which the text was written and published, and overviews of the critical reception of the text both to illustrate its social function and to provide exigence for my own study by demonstrating how specific attention to literacy and the rhetorical functions of the text are lacking. Following that, I provide my own reading of the text as a literacy narrative using various theories on audience and rhetoric as a framework for my analysis. I emphasize throughout this investigation that an analysis grounded in rhetorical theory and criticism offers us insight into our roles and responsibilities as readers (and writers) and further persuades us of the need for more critical analysis of the ways in which texts can engage readers in their own processes of reading and subject formation.

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and *Dictée*

Born in Pusan, South Korea in 1951 in the midst of the Korean War, Theresa Cha immigrated to the United States with her family at the age of ten. They moved first to Hawai`i and then settled in San Francisco in 1964, where Cha and her sister attended the

Convent of the Sacred Heart School. Cha went on to study ceramics, film theory, and comparative literature at the University of California, Berkeley. It was here that she began working as a performance artist, combining film, still images, recordings of her voice on tape, objects, her own bodily movements, and text-objects (Wolf 11). As Susan Wolf describes, one of Cha's most "outstanding" performances, *Reveill  dans la Brume*, involved "lap-dissolve projections, synchronous interaction with them by Cha, live voices and pre-recorded voice-overs, and a controlled distribution of light" (11). In this performance, in which Cha plays with light, darkness, words, movement, and multiple voices, Cha attempts to explore what she herself describes as a "specific, isolated time and space between two images when a dissolve occurs, and the perceptual and psychological effects of those processes on viewers" (qtd. in Wolf 11). Her interest in the effects that language has on its hearers (and viewers) and in language's "stratified" nature continued to manifest itself throughout her career and studies as a performance artist and later as a writer, as we see in her only full-length text *Dict e*.

In 1976 Cha moved to Paris for a year where she continued her studies in film and film theory with Christian Metz, Raymond Bellour, and Thierry Kuntzel at the Centre d'Etudes Am ricaine du Cin ma   Paris. Upon returning to Berkeley shortly thereafter, Cha received her M.A. and M.F.A. degrees in art and continued her work as a performance artist, writer, and filmmaker in the Bay Area. In 1980 she moved to New York to work as a writer and filmmaker, and on November 5, 1982, shortly after the publication of *Dict e*, Cha was murdered by a security guard in New York City.¹²

Though it is arguable where the text in fact begins and ends, one can say with certainty that the reader is at first confronted with a black and white cover image of what

appears to be rock formations on an otherwise flat plain of barren earth. The first page of text, the frontispiece, is another black and white image. Though Cha does not provide a citation for either photograph, scholars have determined that this frontispiece is a photograph of an inscription on the wall of a tunnel in Japan made by a Korean laborer either during or after the Japanese occupation of Korea.¹³ What follows, aside from an additional page with an apocryphal quotation by Sappho, consists of verse and prose primarily in English or French, typed and handwritten letters by unknown authors, quotations from various reference books, Chinese and Japanese characters, translations, dialogues, cinematic scripts, still images from film, photographs, a map of Korea, and anatomical diagrams, all organized into nine sections based on the names of the nine Greek muses.

The (Post)colonial context(s) of *Dictée*

By constructing a text that is primarily a series of dictations and translations, Cha engages questions of authority and ownership of language, for the very act of dictation assumes an originary speaker and a (more often than not) subservient transcriber whose job is to record accurately the speech and correct punctuation of the speaker. By creating a subject who records inaccurately or who records the pauses or emphases in the oral delivery by spelling out the punctuation (“Open paragraph It was the first day period She had come from a far period . . .” [1]), Cha illustrates the disjunction between speaker and writer and critiques the hierarchical structure of the practice of dictation. In a colonial context, this disjunction, expressed by the narrator’s unwillingness to conform to the “correct” procedures of dictation, represents the failure of the colonizer to wholly

colonize its subject. Rather than accepting her role as dictated colonial subject, Cha's narrator offers a critique of colonialism, nationalism, and patriarchy through her multiple literacy acts.

The colonial context that undergirds Cha's text is Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910 and its continued occupation until 1945. Japan's annexation was facilitated by the United States when, after the Japanese defeated the Russians in the Russo-Japanese War, the U.S. government stepped in and agreed to let Japan occupy Korea on the condition that Japan not interfere with the United States' interest in the Philippines. During the period of Japanese colonial rule, Koreans were forced to give up many of their rights. They were forbidden to speak their own language, to study Korean history, to celebrate Korean culture or to demonstrate any form of patriotism; instead, they were forced to take on Japanese names, to learn to speak the Japanese language, and to worship the Japanese nation. As a result, many Koreans fled their home country seeking refuge in places like Manchuria and the United States. Cha utilizes and references this history in her text in order to interrogate colonialist and nationalist practices (and projects), and to argue for a rewriting of history that acknowledges both the oppression of colonized Korean subjects and their resistance to this oppression.

Cha further questions the writing/recording of history and the Korean national subject's relation to history and language through her references to the Korean War. In the section "Melpomene/Tragedy," for example, she begins by offering her readers a map of North and South Korea with the DMZ (demilitarized zone) clearly marked. The narrative which follows, written in the form of a letter from Cha to her mother upon returning to South Korea eighteen years after the family immigrated to the U.S., speaks to

the suffering her family and other Koreans endured in the aftermath of World War II and the subsequent division of Korea at the 38th parallel. When Japan relinquished control over Korea after its defeat in 1945, the Soviet Union and the United States agreed to divide the peninsula into Soviet and American occupation zones. The result was an even greater divide between the northern radical nationalists (supported by the Soviets and later Communist China) and the southern moderates (supported by the U.S.). War broke out in 1950 when North Korean forces invaded the South, and while the war unofficially ended in 1953, relations between the North and South remain strained today.

Cha draws a connection between the forced division of Korea and the fractured experience of one who has been colonized/displaced. Writing to her mother from Seoul, she remarks, “There is no destination other than towards yet another refuge from yet another war” (80), suggesting that the subject, once colonized, is in a state of perpetual exile. Through the predominant use of English, as well as her depictions of the enforcement of the Japanese language and the language and dictates of French Catholicism (due to the presence of French Catholic missionaries in Korea beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century), Cha argues for the various ways in which language is used hegemonically to support imperial (in this case U.S. and Japanese), national (Japanese and Korean), and patriarchal (including imperial, national, and Christian) projects. Even though she is writing from the country of her birth and the fighting in Korea has ended, she “speak[s] in another tongue now, a second tongue a foreign tongue” (80). Her insistence on the use of English as her “second,” “foreign” language is particularly significant in light of the role the U.S. played in both the colonization and division of Korea. Paradoxically, the U.S. is both complicit in the family’s exile from

post-war Korea and yet it becomes the future country of residence for Cha and her family, along with thousands of other Korean immigrants.

Critical Reception

Though first published in 1982 by Tanam Press, *Dictée* was largely ignored until roughly a decade later. During the decade following Cha's death, *Dictée* received attention from a few small but "steady" groups of admirers of her art and a small group of Asian American scholars (Lin 36). Unfortunately, the only written responses or reflections on the text that seem to exist that give us any insight into how the book was first received are the one book review and the two chapters in book-length studies that were, significantly, all written by non-Asian American men. The first review of the book appeared in the *Japan Times* on July 23, 1983. The author, Donald Richie, calls the book "a remarkable achievement," a "massive tumulus which is the book itself, the extraordinary many-layered, multi-faceted written experience, dictated as though by Clio herself, muse of history" (10). In the same year, Michael Stevens described *Dictée* as a "recitative" (191), "a fiction, a prose, a daring and poetic work brilliantly original" (196). While both Richie and Stevens applauded the text, they did not provide any critical examination but simply offered summaries of the work and biographical information on Cha.

In *Open Form and the Feminine Imagination* (1988), Stephen-Paul Martin takes a more critical approach by arguing for the text's "feminine" qualities of language use and claims that because Cha is "searching for a true matriarchal voice, she must locate the kind of verbal resources that can penetrate the underworld" (191). Martin's discussion

offers little insight into the text and instead makes essentialist claims about masculine and feminine discourses and thought processes. For example, Martin argues that seeing things in “larger contexts ... combining apparently unrelated parts of our own lives and seeing them in a more significant light” is a “feminine process” (203). Martin’s reading of every aspect of Cha’s text (its fragmented structure, the invocation of the muses, the combined stories of Cha, her mother, Demeter, Persephone, St. Theresa, Jeanne d’Arc, and Yu Guan Soon, and every possible symbol) as a representation of the “feminine mode” (204) is not surprising given that it appears in a chapter in a book-length study of feminism and literary form.

Unlike the other critics of the 1982 edition, Susan Wolf saw hints of postmodernism and poststructuralism in Cha’s text. In her 1986 essay in *Afterimage*, Wolf acknowledges that Cha’s book “cannot be categorized” (13), and that Cha’s work aims to “identify and somehow embody unnameable experiences and to transcend purely objective experience” (12). Wolf’s analysis, though largely focused on Cha’s performance art, resembles the kind of analysis that we see much later in *Writing Self, Writing Nation*, though Wolf spends very little time actually discussing the content of *Dictée*.

It was not until ten years after its initial publication that *Dictée* began to gain currency within the fields of Asian American, postcolonial, film and feminist studies. In 1994, Third Woman Press founder Norma Alarcón offered to both reprint the text and publish it alongside a series of critical essays on *Dictée*. The collection, *Writing Self, Writing Nation*, features illustrations by artist Yong Soon Min and essays by Laura Hyun Yi Kang, Elaine H. Kim, Lisa Lowe, and Shelley Sunn Wong. Cha’s work continues to

challenge, engage, and excite scholars in a wide array of fields, as evidenced by the number and focus of articles and dissertations that have been published since the text's second printing.¹⁴ In September 2001, the Berkeley Art Museum paid tribute to Cha by exhibiting her works of film, video, mail art,¹⁵ and artists' books in *The Dream of the Audience*. The exhibition, now documented in a book of the same title, has traveled within the U.S. to New York, Illinois, and Seattle as well as internationally to Seoul and Vienna, and will be on display in Barcelona beginning in January of 2005.

Critics suggest a number of reasons why *Dictée* received little attention when it was first published in 1982, including the fact that the press was quite small and therefore had a limited audience; it was not easily understood and therefore ignored or rejected; and it did not conform to the identity politics of the Asian American literary community at that time. As Shelley Sunn Wong explains, the two main factors for determining the literary and political value of Asian American texts throughout the 1970s were how authentic and representative they were of the Asian American community; *Dictée*, she maintains, was clearly a text that refused to be representative or authentic ("Unnaming"103). Laura Hyun Yi Kang notes that before 1991, the year in which the Association for Asian American Studies presented a panel discussion solely on *Dictée*, only six literary scholars had examined or referenced the work although none of them "substantively" examined it in an Asian American literary, historical or cultural context.¹⁶ Kang further suggests that the lack of attention to the text might be attributed to its generic ambiguity since more critical attention in Asian American literary criticism has been paid to novels and autobiographies than other genre-ambiguous works. She adds that another reason could be that the book concerned itself primarily with Korean history

as opposed to Asian American history, and that its references to Greek mythology and French Catholicism may “exceed the geographical and cultural boundaries of a narrow Asian American identification” (34).

Kang is referring here to the social and political climate of the Asian American literary community during the 1970s and 1980s—a period in which critics debated and determined the “value” of certain works over others based in part on the degree to which the texts engaged in cultural nationalist discourse.¹⁷ A fragmented, elliptical text about the complex imperial history of Korea and the resulting conflicted and fragmented Korean American female immigrant subject did not fit in to the largely masculinist Asian American cultural nationalist project. As I discuss in chapters 1 and 2, texts such as Younghill Kang’s *East Goes West* and Carlos Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart* owe their positive initial reception by mainstream 1940s and 1950s readers to the fact that they are written in the traditional *bildungsroman* form. Though readers may not have been able to identify with the protagonists’ experiences as Asian immigrants, readers could (and in fact did) identify with the basic storyline of an immigrant and his seemingly successful acculturation into American society.

Asian American writers and critics continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s to consume and produce texts that conformed to the traditional realist narrative such as the autobiography and the *bildungsroman* for two very specific reasons, according to Wong—not only were these forms well received by mainstream readers, but they also provided writers a platform from which to contest what many of them perceived as “misrepresentations” of Asian Americans in literature and popular culture (129). Wong is referring here to what rhetorical theorist and critic Carolyn Miller calls “genre as social

action”; that is, the use of genre conventions as a way of eliciting or arguing for her readers to take a certain action. (I discuss this at length in chapters 1 and 2 in my examinations of Kang and Bulosan and their rhetorical decisions to write autobiographies in order to reach a wider audience.) While this form was useful for challenging misperceptions or misrepresentations of Asian Americans or the Asian American community, its status as the “genre of choice,” so to speak, meant that texts that did not fit the conventions of the *bildungsroman* or the autobiography were not given much critical attention.

The masculinist project of Asian American cultural nationalism that emerged in the 1960s, and which evolved out of the work of the male editors of *Aiiieeeee!* began to face criticism and opposition in the 1970s and 1980s, most notably from critics actively involved in the feminist movement. Charges against the editors of *Aiiieeeee!* included their lack of consideration or open-mindedness about differences in class, gender, or sexuality. However, it was not only the ever-increasing rift between feminists and Asian American cultural nationalists that signaled a major shift in the Asian American literary community, but other factors played a role as well. With the passage of the 1965 immigration laws, a large number of Asian immigrants from countries other than Japan, China, and the Philippines came to the United States.¹⁸ With the changing demographics of the Asian American community came the need to acknowledge the deficiencies in the cultural nationalist movement’s homogeneous model of Asian American identity. It was no longer possible to talk about “the” Asian American experience without conceding that Asian Americans had widely diverse histories, backgrounds, and experiences. Furthermore, such divergent experiences meant that the community could no longer band

together to fight oppositional politics. Another factor that played a role in the major shift that occurred around the time *Dictée* was published were the burgeoning social movements around certain issues such as gay rights and the environment. “With the advent of [these] movements,” Wong writes, “came the dispersal of political allegiances which called into question the effectiveness of an oppositional strategy founded on the basis of racial identification alone. Asian American identity politics and the nationalist form it took began to flounder in this welter of difference” (132). *Dictée* was published just as these changes were beginning to take place, and the fact that it received little attention indicates that it did not resonate with the Asian American literary community’s political agenda at the time. Readers were not prepared to take on the challenge that such a text presented, and so the text quickly went out of print.

Along with the various social movements of the 1980s came an increased awareness of and interest in postmodernism and the politics of difference. Feminists and postmodernists alike were arguing against any notion of a fixed or unified identity and instead saw identity as multiple, fragmented, and fluid. Given the current interest in many academic fields to subvert hegemonic forces, it was not surprising that contemporary critics found in *Dictée* a text that resisted multiple forms of domination. These contemporary critics, especially those interested in postmodernism and postcolonial theory, laud *Dictée* for addressing the interstices of Asian American subjectivity through its multiple locations, fragmentations, and contradictions. Kandice Chuh, for example, argues that in its “deliberate disruption” of any sense of linearity or wholeness of national identity, *Dictée* theorizes “transnationalist time.”¹⁹ Lisa Lowe examines the use of the metaphor of dictation as a way of critiquing cultural and

linguistic domination. Lowe argues that in her refusal to be “faithful to the original,” the speaking subject of *Dictée* refuses “the demand for uniform subjectivity” (“Unfaithful” 43). Other critics have drawn on the text’s thematics of dictation and translation as a means for analyzing the processes and difficulties of identification and representation for the colonized female subject.²⁰ In her essay, “The ‘Liberatory Voice’ of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictée*,” Laura Hyun Yi Kang focuses on the notions of “silence, language and action” and the “ideological assumptions, the grammatical rules, and often limiting prescriptions embedded in these terms” (75) as they are played out in *Dictée*. Kang is particularly interested in Cha’s process of “coming into an authorial voice” (77) (as represented by the speaking subjects of the text) and the implications of this process as regards her (multiple) positions as a colonized female immigrant subject.

Shelley Sunn Wong’s “Unnaming the Same: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictée*,” comes closest to a rhetorical analysis than any other essay in *Writing Self, Writing Nation*. In the first two pages, Wong underscores the importance of understanding *Dictée*’s reception history because, she insists, it helps us to see the shifts that have taken place within the Asian American community and the field of Asian American Studies, and it helps us to determine the potential value of a work not only for its thematic content or form but for its “social function” at any given point in history (104). In order to determine a text’s “social function,” one must have some understanding of the audience to which the text is addressed or, as I discuss in this next section, the audience that is invoked or constructed by the author.

Audience

Cha's background in film and film theory clearly influenced her later writings and performance art, as we see in her continuing interest in and interrogation of the relationship between spectator and spectacle, or the reader and his or her relationship to the text. In a January 17, 2002 article in UC Irvine's *Online World News* advertising the retrospective exhibition, "The Dream of the Audience," Cha's contemporary artist and friend, Yong Soon Min, made the following statement regarding the significance of the title of the exhibition: "The concept of the audience had such an important relationship in the making of any of [Cha's] work, whether book, art or video ... The performances were often characterized by audience members as 'dreamlike.' And she was involved in the film world and its dealings with dreams."²¹ Cha's insistence on the importance of the reciprocal or dialogic relationship between writer/reader, speaker/hearer, spectator/object is made clear in the following passage from her handmade book "Audience Distant Relative":

you are the audience

you are my distant audience

i address you

as i would a distant relative

seen only heard only through someone else's description

neither you nor i

are visible to each other

i can only assume that you can hear me

i can only hope that you hear me²²

In the following analysis, I show how Cha engages her audience and invites their participation in the construction of the text and in the potential (re)construction of their ideologies about literacy. The genius of the text lies not only in its innovative structure or success at interrogating multiple forms of domination but also in its ability to produce both textual and readerly agency.

Cha engages in a technique similar to the one described by Walter Ong in “The Writer’s Audience Is Always a Fiction” in which Hemingway casts his readers into the role of a “close companion of the writer” through his use of definite articles and the demonstrative pronoun “that.”²³ While Cha may appear to be distancing her non-Korean-speaking readers by presenting them first with an obscure photograph of Korean calligraphy, she immediately thereafter draws in her French-speaking and/or English-speaking readers through her use of the pronouns “elle” and “she.” The English version of the passage follows: “She had come from a far period tonight at dinner comma the families would ask comma open quotation marks How was the first day interrogation mark close quotation marks ...” (1). Cha’s readers take this cue that they ought to know who “she” is, who “the families” are, and to what the “first day” refers. Her Korean-speaking audience is also confronted with personal pronouns. As Shelley Sunn Wong explains, the inscription on the frontispiece translates as “Mother/I miss you/I am hungry/I want to go home” (107). By not providing any contextual information for this image/text, or in Grice’s terms, by violating the maxim of quantity,²⁴ Cha asks that her readers question this lack of context at the same time that she develops a connection with her readers by suggesting that they “share the author’s familiarity with

the subject matter” (Ong 13). In other words, her readers are cast into the roles of audience members who are already familiar with the subjects “Mother,” “I,” and “She.” Since no explanation is given, we must assume as readers that there is a reason for this lack of explanation, and that it is not because Cha is ignorant or intends to ignore or completely alienate her audience (if this were the case, her text would likely not have been published).²⁵ Thus Cha creates a potential set of readers who must interrogate these “voids” not only for what they might suggest thematically but also for what they suggest rhetorically. That is, her readers must grapple with their own reading process and their (in)ability to translate or make sense of these “voids” and other complexities of the text.

When Walter Ong asserted in 1975 that “The Writer’s Audience Is Always a Fiction,” he meant that because a writer’s audience is never present when the writing is actually taking place,²⁶ the writer must fictionalize the audience or assign the audience to a particular role while the audience must likewise “fictionalize itself” or take on the role in which the author has cast him or her. Critics Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford have argued that Ong’s theory oversimplifies the relationship between a writer and his or her audience. They argue that the writer must always take into consideration the fact that readers are coming to the text with very different experiences, values, beliefs, and expectations and that these will invariably impact their readings of the text. Ede and Lunsford further argue that audiences (or audience roles) may be invoked or addressed and that in any given rhetorical act or situation there are a host of potential roles audience members may play (165-66). My method of examining audience in this introduction and in the chapters that follow draws from Ong and Ede and Lunsford—that is, I see audiences as both existing extratextually and as being in some way constructed by the

author. My conception of the audience—and Cha’s, it seems—also resonates with both Burke and Bakhtin who seek to break down hierarchies and instead emphasize the cooperative effort that takes place between writer and reader. I am referring here to Burke’s view of persuasion as a process of identification and/or consubstantiality (“one in being”) and Bakhtin’s view of language as fluid and diverse, containing multiple world views and voices, and intersecting with other languages in unique and complex ways.

Incongruous Perspectives

Cha further engages her readers by asking them to question her use of different media—what Bakhtin calls “heteroglossia,” or the heterogeneity of languages. By combining media and removing them from the contexts in which they are usually considered, Cha prohibits her text from being read from a limited perspective (i.e., within the boundaries of, say, autobiographical writing). Instead, she forces readers to grapple with their own “terministic screens.” According to Burke, we use different terms, depending on our experiences and how we identify ourselves, to name and make sense of our world. These terms function as filters or screens, shaping our perspectives yet also limiting our views, or “blinding us” by constraining us to see through just one lens. Different terminologies direct attention differently and “shap[e] the range of observations implicit in the given terminology” (*On Symbols* 121). For example, one could argue that Stephen-Paul Martin’s exegesis of *Dictée* as a “feminine” text was a consequence of his reading literature through the terministic screen of feminism. Likewise, a student of history might only focus on Cha’s rendering of Korean history, while a Classics student might only focus on the function of mythology in *Dictée*. Cha shows us how meaning is

found in the in-between spaces, when we break down our terministic screens and see things from, as it were, the other side. As she writes in the section titled “Elitere/Lyric Poetry,”

Sustain a view. Upon
itself. Recurring upon itself without
the knowledge of
its absent view.
The other side. Must have. Must be.
Must have been a side. Aside from
What has one seen
This view what has one viewed
Finally. View. This view. What is it finally ... (125-26)

Cha acknowledges that we see the world through a certain lens and urges us to adopt other views so that we may perhaps see with greater clarity.

By taking speakers such as “Disease” (French word for “speaker” or “storyteller”), and discourses, such as the language of confession/Catholicism, and using them in contexts other than those with which they are generally associated, Cha destabilizes their authoritative positions, arguing for a new perspective through which to view them. For example, Cha introduces us to the character “Disease” within the first few pages of the text, and yet, as discussed earlier, by beginning her introduction with, “She mimicks the speaking. That might resemble speech” (3), she establishes the character (or speaking subject) as one with whom the reader is already familiar. However, at least for readers familiar with the term “Disease,” this speaking subject does

not take on the role traditionally assigned to her. Rather than acting as storyteller, Disease “mimicks the speaking.... She allows others. In place of her. Admits others to make full. Make swarm. All barren cavities to make swollen. The others each occupying her ...” (3-4). Disease is not figured (or written) here as an authorial speaking subject, the one who tells “the story,” but rather as one among many who share in the production or enunciation of this story. Disease is like Cha’s readers who, in the act of reading, must also “mimic the speaking” in order to hear/read the words so unfamiliarly phrased on the page. I know for myself that in order to process some of the more convoluted and awkwardly phrased sections of the text, I had to sound out the words and even then my mouth became tongue-tied. As Disease struggles with speech (“Inside is the pain of speech the pain to say. Larger still. Greater than is the pain not to say. To not say. Says nothing against the pain to speak” [3]), so too do her readers struggle to read and process the text.

In effect, Cha is creating what Burke calls “perspectives by incongruity”—that is, “taking a word usually applied to one setting and transferring its use to another setting” (*Permanence* 90). As Joseph Gusfield writes,

Perspective by incongruity is more than style in Burke. It is an exhortation to see the limited nature of any one cognitive framework. The terminologies in use are terministic screens that shield us from the multiplicity of possibilities.... A new taxonomy, a new vocabulary produces an additional angle from which to see reality. (26)

In other words, Burke aims to break down notions of fixed meaning and authorial perspective by arguing that people see things through different lenses, and that an

individual's perspective also shifts and changes depending on the situation or groups of people with whom the individual is identifying.

We see from the example above how a perspective by incongruity can be persuasive by forcing readers to see things from a different angle and, as well, how it can lead to what Burke's calls "identification" between the reader and the speaking subject. "Identification," a key term in Burke's theory of rhetoric, is a dialectical process in which the speaker draws on shared interests in order to "establish rapport between himself and his audience" (*On Symbols* 191). Insofar as speaker and audience remain different from one another yet identify with each other based on these shared interests, the two are consubstantial, "both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another" (*On Symbols* 180). Readers become consubstantial with Cha's speaking subjects—that is, they share the substance of words, of the text, and it is through this shared substance that readers are cast into the roles of audience members who must negotiate the process of a fragmented literacy.

Implicatures, Intentions, and Utterances

While speech act theory has most often been used to analyze verbal utterances *not* in the realm of literature, contemporary scholars (from the fields of literature, linguistics and semantics) have come to agree that the study of what people are doing when they perform various speech acts is just as important and revealing in literature as it is in other types of verbal exchanges. As Sue Lanser contends,

The separation of discourse from its performance is not merely artificial but impossible; it is tantamount to erasing or distorting the very meaning

of the utterance. The study of text-acts requires us to examine not only formal structures, but the performance situation in which these structures are realized. (75-76)

Just as rhetoric does, speech act theory relies in large part upon the context of the utterance. An illocutionary act, for example, will take on different meanings depending on the context in which it is uttered. As J.L. Austin explains, the proposition, “I will bring my dictionary tomorrow,” can be uttered and/or perceived as a prediction, an assertion, a promise or a threat.²⁷ Though one of Cha’s goals appears to be to produce new meanings or to subvert traditional conceptions of the ways in which we read, write, and critique literature, history and subjectivity through decontextualization, the utterances of her speaking subjects are still context-bound. In other words, choosing to say something in French as opposed to English or Japanese is contextualizing it within the framework of that language and the colonial history that that language represents.

Cha acknowledges that words and even certain languages or accents are infused with ideologies and she uses them precisely to dismantle or deconstruct those ideologies. As Bakhtin argues, due to the “stratifying forces of language”—that is, the differing world views that give meaning to language—there is no such thing as a “neutral” word. Each word carries with it some of the context or contexts in which it has “lived its socially charged life.” “All words and forms,” he claims, “are populated by intentions” (293). In the act of taking words and languages out of the contexts in which they are usually seen or heard, Cha makes these languages their own. For the colonized subject, this act is both liberating and subversive. Moreover, by involving the reader in the

production of her text Cha ensures that her readers will continue this process of reading as a “decolonization” of language.

The genius of Cha’s text is that whether or not her readers understand the text, she is successful in that she places the reader into the role of a person with a compromised literacy, so readers who have never felt or understood what it means to be an immigrant or colonized subject might have a better idea after reading/struggling with her text. This is not to say that Cha assumes her readers are ignorant; the very fact that it is so complex suggests that she relies on her readers’ ability to understand that she has constructed the text in a particular way in order to persuade her readers to question their own cultural and linguistic literacies as well as their own epistemologies and understandings of themselves in relation to their culture and society.

One of the ways Cha’s text effects this kind of reading is through implication. In other words, Cha’s text asks that we read the gaps and obscurities as intentional, for what they mean to imply or suggest. I argue that reading the speech acts of/in Cha’s text using Grice’s concepts of “implicature” and the Cooperative Principle illuminates Cha’s strategy of persuading her readers of their roles in the production of the text. Grice’s basic argument is that the meaning of a word (or symbol) is to be found in what the speaker means or implies by making the utterance in a given context or situation. We call this “reading between the lines” or “acknowledging, naming, and studying the ‘gaps’ in discourse—the unspoken assumptions and messages upon which meaning depends” (Lanser 77). The hearer makes conversational implicatures based on how “cooperative” the speaker is being; that is, to what degree the speaker is “mak[ing] [his/her] conversational contribution such as is required at the stage at which it occurs, by the

accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which [he/she] [is] engaged” (Grice 26) and to what degree the speaker is fulfilling Grice’s maxims of conversation:

Maxims of Quantity

1. Make your contribution as informative as required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Maxims of Quality

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Maxim of Relation

1. Be relevant.

Maxims of Manner

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
4. Be orderly. (26-27)

Although Grice’s maxims reflect principles in everyday conversation, they can also be applied to the study of dialogue or speech acts in literature. For example, in *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*, Mary Louise Pratt examines how the Cooperative Principle “works in narrative utterances, what special cooperation is required for fictional utterances, and how we handle and interpret deviance in display texts” (153). It is this “deviance” or “flouting” of the maxims with which I am most concerned as

Cha's text is largely built upon violations of Grice's maxims.²⁸ According to Grice, when a speaker or writer flouts a maxim, he is "blatantly fail[ing] to fulfill it":

On the assumption that the speaker is able to fulfill the maxim and to do so without violating another maxim (because of a clash), is not opting out, and is not, in view of the blatancy of his performance, trying to mislead, the hearer is faced with a minor problem: How can his saying what he did say be reconciled with the supposition that he is observing the overall Cooperative Principle? This situation is one that characteristically gives rise to a conversational implicature; and when a conversational implicature is generated in this way, I shall say that a maxim is being *exploited*. (30)

If, for example, a student asks a teacher if the homework is due the following day and the teacher replies with a forecast of the weather for the following day, that teacher might be said to be violating the maxim of relation, or the teacher might have meant one of two things: either she was implicating that the homework likely would not be due the following day due to an impending snow storm or that she was tired of answering that same question a dozen times. Because there would be no reason to believe the teacher would violate the maxim of relation—unless she were mentally unstable or trying to be funny—the students would have to deduce, based on the context in which the exchange took place, what the implication of the utterance was. To put it another way, when confronted with an utterance, readers or listeners cooperate in such a way as to make the utterance fulfill the maxim.

Although Grice identifies four different types of intentional violation, only

flouting does not put the Cooperative Principle in danger (Pratt, *Towards a Speech Act* 160). Pratt explains that in the case of flouting, the speaker is relying on the hearer, or reader, to successfully “read between the lines” to get at the hidden or deeper meaning behind the utterance. Pratt also underscores the fact that in a work of literature, the fictional speaker may perform any of these violations, but in all cases, the fictional speaker’s “failures” are considered to be the author’s intentional violation in the form of flouting (198). Readers must always assume this and read the text for the possible implicatures that the author is making in having his/her fictional subject fail to fulfill the Cooperative Principle and maxims.

In the context of *Dictée*, one could argue that Cha’s speaking subject violates the maxim of quantity, in that she does not always provide enough information for the reader to grasp the context of the situation, and that she violates the maxim of manner, in that her words are often obscure and ambiguous. The speaking subject thus fails to fully engage its readers and Cha implies that this is precisely what she wants her readers to feel, experience, and question. Pratt writes that in this way literary texts

can be used to challenge our views of the world as well as to corroborate them, to threaten our interpretive faculties as well as to validate them, to frustrate our expectations as well as to fulfill them, to shake our faith in the representative power of language as well as to affirm it. In the literary speech situation, in other words, rulebreaking can be the point of the utterance. (211)

Using speech act theory in an analysis of *Dictée* compels us to see more clearly the design behind Cha’s work and the particular attention and respect she pays to her

audience by creating a text that, on the surface, may seem to alienate, but in fact welcomes readers with varying degrees of literacy. Grice's theory of implicature further informs my reading of *Dictée* by encouraging us to consider the intended meaning and effects behind the speaking subjects' speech acts as well as the macro-speech act of the text itself. In its demand to be read and reread in a multitude of contexts, and in its construction as a collection of voices and images taken out of context, the text argues for readerly agency and challenges the structures of power that are bound up in all acts of reading and writing.

Reading Readerly Agency

I argue throughout this dissertation that reading certain texts as literacy narratives enables us to see how writers engage their readers such that they too become involved in the construction of the text. While each of the texts that I examine can be read as performances or spectacles, with readers serving as performers or spectators as they read, negotiate, and decipher the texts, *Dictée* best illustrates how this strategy operates. For example, when the speaking/writing subject of "Clio/History" asks that her listeners/readers "Ecrivez en francais" ("Write in French") and "Traduire en francais" ("Translate into French") (8), she invokes her readers' acts of literacy, demanding that they become participants in the writing and speaking of the text. Readers who are not fluent in both languages will struggle with what to do with these passages, and wonder how to make sense of a language they do not know. Either way, readers are placed in a position in which they may become complicit in the production of the text, and as such are forced to grapple with their own writing and reading practices.

Furthermore, we see in the “Erato/Love Poetry” section a woman who, like Cha’s readers, acts as both spectator and spectacle. In this section, a woman buys a ticket to a movie in which she is the performer. Readers are faced with text that reads like the directions for the production of a film: “Extreme Close Up shot of her face. Medium Long shot of two out of the five white columns from the street. She enters from the left side, and camera begins to pan on movement as she enters between the two columns, the camera stop at the door and she enters” (96). Cha constructs a text here that thematizes the act of doubling (in the figure of the woman who functions as both spectator and spectacle) (Cooley 125), and simultaneously enacts a form of doubling on the part of her readers. In the process of reading about this woman who watches herself perform in the film, Cha’s readers become the objects or performers to be read. Cha directly addresses her readers a few pages later, asking them to become a part of this visual and symbolic performance: “You are shown the house in which she lives, from the outside. Then you, as a viewer and guest, enter the house. It is you who are entering to see her” (98). Through these acts of doubling, Cha invites her readers to participate in the performance of the text at the same time that she asks them to question their participation and to read themselves reading the text. Moreover, by merging her reader’s identity with the woman’s identity in the film/text (“You are she, she speaks to you, you speak her, she cannot speak” [106]), Cha disrupts any notion of wholeness or stable identity and further asks that her readers question what it means to be a reading and/or speaking subject. As Cha makes clear through this interrogation, her (constructed) readers’ subject positions are as ambivalent and unstable as the speaking subjects of her text.

Other critics have addressed the role of the reader in not only the consumption but also the (re)production of the text. Laura Hyun Yi Kang, for example, points to the book as a “*process* of mutually active collaboration” (“The ‘Liberatory Voice’” 78). She writes that the shifting speaking subject demands “a flexibility on the part of the reader” (78) and encourages readers to examine their own “subjective positionings in relation to the text” (94). Nicole Cooley and Juliana Spahr similarly argue for the ways in which the text calls for a “decolonizing practice of reading” (Spahr) by “forc[ing] the reader into a position of participation in the text” (Cooley 137). Cooley examines the role of the reader from a postmodern perspective, providing textual examples of how Cha “forces” this participation while Spahr argues that “[b]y destabilizing reading practices that seek to conquer or master, a reader-centered work like *Dictée* calls attention to—rather than elides—all that is least assimilable about a reader’s connection to a work, making [that which is least assimilable] an integral part of what must be ‘read’” (24).²⁹ I argue what each of these scholars implicitly suggests in their readings—that critics need to be more attentive to the other factors involved in all acts of reading, speaking and writing, that is, in all acts of literacy. This approach requires critics to examine the relationships between and among the author, text, and context in which the literacy act takes place, thereby destabilizing any notions of authoritative discourse and demonstrating the fluid nature of texts, audiences and reading practices.

Mimicry, Ambivalence, Hybridization

The authors that I examine use literacy and rhetoric as a way of both participating in *and* interrogating dominant narratives that continue to marginalize and exclude them. I

argue that reading their texts as literacy narratives enables us to see more clearly how they serve to disrupt notions of fixed identity and of culture as a “homogenizing, unifying force” (Bhabha 37), and instead make claims for what Lisa Lowe describes as a cultural politics of “heterogeneity,” “hybridity,” and “multiplicity.”³⁰

Cha’s speaking subjects speak the “borderland Discourse”³¹—they occupy the space of the “in-between.” Bhabha describes this “space of splitting” as a “doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once that makes it impossible for the devalued, insatiable *évolué* to accept the colonizer’s invitation to identity” (44). In multiple and varying ways, the speaking subjects’ literacy practices illustrate their (as well as Cha’s) resistance to complying not only with the grammatical and syntactical rules and regulations of the colonizer’s language but also with the colonizer’s “invitation to identity.” Furthermore, Cha’s speaking subjects’ abilities, or inabilities, to speak and/or write fluently in English, French and Japanese serve as a powerful critique of colonial and imperial linguistic domination. The fragmented nature of the colonized subject is further emphasized by her speaking subjects’ movement from one language to another with, at times, apparent fluidity and, at other times, great difficulty. Additionally, the so-called “bastardization” of the English language in *Dictée* illustrates or mimics the challenges and problems that arise when one is faced with learning a second language. Cha provides an example of Pidgin English as a way of demonstrating to her readers the effect of the imposition of a foreign language on one’s native tongue: “*Being broken. Speaking broken. Saying broken. Talk broken. Say broken. Broken speech. Pidgin tongue. Broken word. Before speak. As being said. As spoken. To be said. To say.*”

Then speak” (161). Readers are thus forced to engage in a reading practice in order that they may be influenced by the experience of grappling with a fragmented literacy.

My use of the terms “in-between” and “ambivalent” to describe the identities of authors and the spaces in which they construct their narratives of literacy comes from Bhabha’s speculation that the colonial encounter produces ambivalent subjects as the colonizer and colonized struggle to negotiate difference.³² For Bhabha, the liminal space is the site in which cultures and subjects come together and interact (and often conflict), much like Mary Louise Pratt’s “contact zone” where “cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (“Arts” 34). Bhabha writes,

It is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. How are subjects formed ‘in-between,’ or in excess of, the sum of the ‘parts’ of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc.)? (2)

In other words, Bhabha argues that it is in the in-between spaces, or the contact between colonizer and colonized, that subjects, nations, culture (including languages/dialects) and communities are formed and defined. He also acknowledges, like Benedict Anderson, that this is an ongoing process and that such definitions and formations are indeterminate and unstable. Finally, Bhabha maintains that cultural differences are performed, not just reflected, in these liminal spaces: “Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively.... The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation” (2). For the

colonized/minority subject, occupying this position can be empowering because it makes available a space in which that very ambivalence may be critiqued or disrupted. In other words, it is this in-between or ambivalent space of identity that makes possible other articulations of identity. As Gloria Anzaldúa writes, “Living in a state of psychic unrest, in a Borderland, is what makes poets write and artists create” (73). Rhetorical analysis of Asian American literacy narratives illuminates this place of “psychic unrest” in which hybrid identities are formed and articulated and hybrid culture emerges as the location and expression of difference—the dimension that Bhabha describes as the “third space”:

It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew. (37)

Asian American literacy narratives, I contend, occupy this liminal “third space” as the writers challenge and reappropriate America’s constructions of them through their multiple and various literacy acts.

Through their appropriations of the languages of Catholicism, patriarchy, and Japanese imperialism, Cha’s speaking subjects mimic colonial authority and thus disrupt or undermine this authority. By focusing on these acts of literacy as rhetorical, that is, intended to move the audience to action, we see how Cha does not “desire to emerge as ‘authentic’ through mimicry,” which Bhabha claims is “the final irony of partial representation”(88); rather, she critiques colonial relations by constructing literacy acts that are blatantly inauthentic. For example, in the first chapter we listen to/read the narrator’s confession of her sins, and though she mimics the language of Catholicism, she

tells us directly that she is “making up the sins” (17). This repetition of the catechism is an act of mimicry—the narrator’s words are “almost the same, but not quite” as that of an “authentic confessional,” her “thought as visible as word as act” (*Dictée* 17):

Q. WHO MADE THEE?

A. God made me.

To conspire in God’s Tongue.

Q. WHERE IS GOD?

A. God is everywhere.

Accomplice in His Texts, the fabrication in His Own Image, the pleasure the desire of giving Image to the word in the mind of the confessor.

Q. GOD WHO HAS MADE YOU IN HIS OWN LIKENESS.

A. God who has made me in His own likeness. In His Own Image in His Own Resemblance, in His Own Copy, In His Own Counterfeit Presentment, in His Duplicate, in His Own Reproduction, in His Cast, in His Carbon, His Image and His Mirror. Pleasure in the image pleasure in the copy pleasure in the projection of likeness pleasure in the repetition ...
(17)

Bhabha writes that mimicry “*repeats* rather than *re-presents*,” and that it is through such repetitions that the unified colonial subject breaks down and emerges as a “partial presence.” The speaking subject informs her readers that hers is a “repetition” and mocks the very language that dictates her as a colonial subject. By creating a text that is unabashedly *not* representative nor a faithful reproduction of any of the languages or discourses it invokes, Cha acknowledges the rhetorical dimensions of mimicry. Her

appropriation of colonial or dominant languages is successful in that it delegitimizes the power of those languages by “disclosing” their ambivalence (Bhabha 88).

Bhabha’s investigation focuses on the colonialist desire to create “mimic men” as a way of maintaining control and dominance, and the way in which these mimic men disrupt colonialist authority by discursively turning it on its head through the act of doubling, or mimicking. He describes acts of mimicry as representations that appropriate the Other: “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (86). Mimic men, Bhabha argues, as “authorized versions of otherness,” and “part-objects of a metonymy of colonial desire,” end up emerging, in and through discursive processes, as “‘inappropriate’ colonial subjects” who disrupt or “shatter” colonialist identity and authority by “producing a partial vision of the colonizer’s presence” (88). While Bhabha suggests that these writers, in trying to maintain a sense of power, instead inadvertently subvert their power or sense of control through the construction of these mimic men, I suggest that Cha is fully aware of the power of mimicry and uses it strategically to deconstruct forces of domination.

Throughout Cha’s text we also see examples of what Bakhtin and Bhabha both refer to as hybridization. According to Bakhtin, hybridization is

a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different

linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor. (358)

Bakhtin identifies this kind of hybridization as it occurs in the novel as an intentional or deliberate hybridization that has as its goal to illuminate a language through the use of another (361). The use of hybrid languages is thus rhetorical in that it allows writers (and speakers) to comment on or critique, either directly or indirectly, ideological functions of other language use. The catechism passage above serves as an example of deliberate hybridization as the languages of Catholicism and colonialism are intertwined to create a parodic response to the catechism that, like colonialism, interpellates the speaker as just another “copy” or subject of an almighty being. Viewing the above quotation as an example of hybridization illuminates Cha’s strategy of argumentation—by interweaving the patriarchal discourses of French Catholicism and colonialism, she asks that her readers see and consider the inextricable link between the project of Christianity in Korea and the project of empire.

In “Calliope/Epic Poetry,” the chapter in which the speaking subject, in this case Cha, narrates her mother’s story through direct address (“Mother, you are eighteen years old. You were born in Yong Jung, Manchuria and this is where you now live...” [45]), Cha not only incorporates her mother’s voice, but she also acknowledges that her language is hybridized—it is a mixture of her own language as well as the language that her mother has been forbidden to speak:

You write. You write you speak voices hidden masked you plant words to the moon you send word through the wind. Through the passing of seasons. By sky and by water the words are given birth given discretion.

From one mouth to another, from one reading to the next the words are realized in their full meaning. The wind. The dawn or dusk the clay earth and traveling birds south bound birds are mouth pieces wear the ghost veil for the seed of message. Correspondence. To scatter the words. (48)

Though Cha is ostensibly addressing her mother (since the “you” in the rest of the chapter clearly refers to her), she creates ambiguity by suggesting that she could also be referring to herself and/or to her readers. In this passage, Cha suggests that hybridization can be a powerful tool for those who are oppressed because it allows other (perhaps silenced or “masked”) voices to be heard. This hybridized style is even more evident in the other passages in which Cha exposes colonialism’s hegemonic forces by recounting to her mother what the Japanese government required of its Korean subjects:

Still, you speak the tongue the mandatory language like the others. It is not your own. Even if it is not you know you must. You are Bi-lingual. You are Tri-lingual. The tongue that is forbidden is your own mother tongue.... To utter each word is a privilege you risk by death. Not only for you but for all. All of you who are one, who by law tongue tied forbidden of tongue ... (46)

In this retelling, Cha voices the history that has been silenced for so long. She is telling us “*another epic another history. From the missing narrative. From the multitude of narratives. Missing. From the chronicles. For another telling for other recitations*” (81). In the second half of this chapter, the same speaking subject exposes the contradiction of America’s rhetoric of equality and inclusion. Referring to her treatment upon her return to the U.S. from Korea, she states,

One day you raise the right hand and you are American. They give you American Pass port. The United States of America. Somewhere someone has taken my identity and replaced it with their photograph. The other one. Their signature their seals. Their own image....

You return and you are not one of them, they treat you with indifference. All the time you understand what they are saying. But the papers give you away. Every ten feet. They ask you identity. They comment upon your inability or ability to speak. Whether you are telling the truth or not about your nationality. They say you look other than you say. As if you didn't know who you were. (56-57)

By using a hybridized style of language, Cha is able to critique the languages and practices of imperial nations like Japan and the United States through the voices of her speaking subjects. Though the political authority of dominant languages remains, hybridization has the potential to strip these hegemonic languages of some of their social and cultural power thereby allowing other counterhegemonic articulations to be voiced and heard.

And yet Cha does not use hybridization as indirect discourse, as a means of concealing one's speech, but rather she uses it to illustrate how the colonized subject is dictated by multiple linguistic consciousnesses and world views. As she writes in the section "Clio/History," "The response [to colonization/victimization] is precoded to perform predictably however passively possible" (33). Bakhtin informs us that, on average, more than half of all of the words each human being utters on a daily basis are in fact someone else's words (339). Cha's text suggests that for the colonized subject, all of

the words he or she utters are hybrid constructions. This is not to say that the colonizer's language has retained its power but, on the contrary, that hybridity "reverses the effects of colonialist disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority—its rules of recognition" (Bhabha 114). Like mimicry, hybridity destabilizes colonialist power in that it effects only a "partial presence" of colonial identity.

The multiple and various literacy/speech acts in *Dictée* as well as the literacy/speech act of the text itself function in interconnecting ways: they persuade the audience(s) of the conflicting, contradictory, unstable, and fragmented nature of Korean American/immigrant subjectivity while they also persuade the reader to become an active participant in the construction of the text. Readers are thus not only engaging in (and being challenged by) their own literacy practices, but they are forced to continue their engagement with Cha's practice/methodology/critique of ambivalence and indeterminacy by resituating the text in different contexts. Rhetorical critic Michael McGee writes that texts are

simultaneously structures of fragments, finished texts, and fragments themselves to be accounted for in subsequent discourse, either (a) the audience/reader/critic's explanation of their power and meaning, or (b) the audience/reader/critic's rationalization for having taken their cue as an excuse for action. (279)

McGee's words resonate with Bakhtin's idea of hybridization, reinforcing my argument that *Dictée* is powerfully effective in its ability to move audiences to action and to

maintain its status as a nonrepresentative, heteroglossic text that refuses categorization and consistently deconstructs systems of domination.

As I hope to have shown through my reading of *Dictée*, by looking at texts through the lens of a rhetorical theorist or critic, and by using literacy as an analytic, we can see more clearly how an author might affect or move her audience to action by forcing them to become participants in the construction of the text and thus encouraging them to reevaluate their own acts and conceptualizations of literacy. As well, this reading seeks to illuminate what it means to be an ambivalent speaker and/or subject and the possibilities for change and justice that mimicry has the potential to enact.

By forcing her readers into the roles of those with the compromised literacies, Cha constructs her readers as objects to be read. If mimicry produces a “gaze of otherness,” a “process by which the look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and ‘partial’ representation rearticulates the whole notion of *identity* and alienates it from essence” (Bhabha 89), then it becomes evident how Cha’s appropriation of mimicry has the rhetorical effect of “turn[ing] the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power” (112). In other words, in the process of reading the text, the reader becomes the discriminated subject who falters with language, who “swallows with last efforts last wills against the pain that wishes it to speak” (*Dictée* 3). Occupying the analogous position of the “colonized,” the reader is at the same time both observer and object to be observed. However, unlike Bhabha’s colonizer who becomes the object to be read by others, Cha’s reader becomes the object to be read by him/herself. Cha’s mimicry is not something that is meant to be

concealed; on the contrary, this discourse is revealed on nearly every page of the text. What a rhetorical analysis helps to reveal are the potential effects that this discourse has on its audiences and encourages us as readers to carefully and critically consider the roles in which we are cast and how we respond to those roles in our acts of reading.

Dissertation Overview

The goal of this chapter has been to introduce my dissertation's arguments and method of analysis and to do so primarily by way of example. Theresa Cha's *Dictée*, to my mind, best illustrates how the critical literacy acts of the author, speaking subjects, readers, and text can be read as articulations of cultural difference that, through their very articulations, demonstrate cultural hybridity, break down hierarchies, and provide alternative sites for contesting and negotiating Asian American subjectivity. By situating readers in such a way that they are compelled to consider their own engagements with literacy and how discourses of literacy and citizenship function to reproduce dominant ideologies, *Dictée* advances a theoretical model for reading literacy narratives. In the chapters that follow, I aim to show how my methodology for reading *Dictée* encourages a kind of reading practice that directs attention to literacy as an analytic and the ways in which literacy narratives may function to transform readers' ideologies.

Part I, "Narratives of Literacy and Immigration," examines the ways in which two early Asian immigrant male writers simultaneously critique the myth of American democratic inclusion while arguing for their own and their fictional alter egos' legitimacies as Americans. Chapter 1 analyzes Younghill Kang's *East Goes West* (1937) and chapter 2 examines Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* (1946). My reading

thus helps to illustrate how the same text can rhetorically function as both assimilationist and subversive. I also look at the roles that gender and race play both in America's construction of Kang and Bulosan as Other and in the authors' responses to these constructions. I argue that these authors gain legitimacy through the literacy act of cultural criticism that their books perform, they help to empower those who were/are similarly marginalized and oppressed, and they provide readers and critics with an alternative conceptualization of what it means to be a "literate citizen" of the United States.

Part II, "Hyperliteracy, Hybridity and Disguise," continues the exploration of literacy and Asian American masculinity but shifts the focus from early immigrant autobiographies to a contemporary play and novel written, respectively, by second-generation writers Frank Chin and Chang-rae Lee. Chapter 3's discussion, anchored by Frank Chin's *The Chickencoop Chinaman*, elaborates on the previous section's account of the historical feminization and sexualization of Asian American men and explains how the gendered discourse of Asian American cultural nationalism developed, in part, as a response to these constructions. As a product of the 1960s and 1970s cultural nationalist movement, Chin's *Chickencoop* was written and performed in a social, cultural, and political climate that differed radically from that of the early immigrant narratives.³³ Because it was performed live and in the theatre, the play adds another dimension to my study as audience members are literally faced with the physicality of race—they both see and hear the Asian body on stage and are thus engaged with the characters in a manner more immediate and palpable than they would be through other mediums.

Written more than two decades after *Chickencoop* premiered, Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker* (1995)—the text that I examine in chapter 4—appeals to an audience that is perhaps more accustomed to multiculturalist discourses and ideologies than Chin's 1970s audiences, but that is also facing newfound anxieties over the increase in the immigrant population in the U.S. My analysis in these chapters thus calls attention to the changing perspectives and status of Asian Americans and theorizes how those changes might have impacted the authors' choice of genre. Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate how utilizing literacy as an analytic, in the particular contexts in which these works were written and received, helps to illuminate the ways in which *Chickencoop* and *Native Speaker* challenge or reify cultural and gendered assumptions about literacy while also demonstrating how their narrator-protagonists' ambivalent status shapes their acts of hyperliteracy.³⁴ Hyperliteracy here represents the “in-between” space of identity for both Tam and Henry—it is the space in which they have been forced to occupy as marginalized subjects but it is also the space in which they may subvert that very positioning.

The relationships among citizenship, literacy, legitimacy and Asian Americanness that I explore in each chapter are complicated further when we shift our focus to the context of Hawai'i. Lois-Ann Yamanaka's *Blu's Hanging*—the text that anchors the conclusion's discussion—and the controversy generated by her work demonstrate the need to be consistently aware and critical of the U.S. as empire and, in the Hawaiian context, of the “competing nationalisms” between indigenous Hawaiians and “locals” that are produced as a result. Both the text and the controversy, as I explain below, call attention to continuing debates about what it means to identify or be classified as “Asian

American,” what constitutes “Asian American” literature, and whose voices/literacies are being privileged in such conversations. Reading *Blu’s Hanging* and the ensuing controversy through the lenses of rhetorical theory and postcolonial studies encourages such a critique as it asks us to consider the various audiences and historical conditions/contexts of Yamanaka’s work. Attending to literacy contributes to this critique as Yamanaka, like Cha, juxtaposes dominant languages with subordinated ones in order to interrogate the project of imperialism. Specifically, Yamanaka challenges the discourse of U.S. citizenship and the dominant ideological construct of literacy that relies upon such a concept as “standard” English. Pidgin functions in Yamanaka’s work as a “borderland Discourse” that is used by both the author and her characters to make arguments about literacy, American citizenship versus “local” identity, and the ambivalent construction of Asian American subjectivity. The conclusion thus revisits some of the arguments and ideas expressed in this introduction and, by shifting the focus to Hawai`i, prompts us toward further examination of literacy in the context of U.S. imperialism.

Part I: Narratives of Literacy and Immigration

Chapter 1: Younghill Kang's *East Goes West*

Introduction

The majority of Asian immigrants who came to the United States during the great wave of immigration from 1849 to 1924 arrived as laborers for the building and maintenance of plantations, railroads, mines and fields. The migration of Asians included people from China, Japan and Korea, as well as the Philippines and India. Though the majority were laborers, there were also a fair number of students, merchants, farmers, government workers and domestic servants (Takaki 53).³⁵ These immigrants ranged from illiterate, unskilled laborers to highly skilled and educated workers. Though much neglected, written accounts of their experiences as immigrants, whether in English or their native languages, do exist and they offer valuable insight into the history of Asian immigration.³⁶ In her foundational work, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* (1982), Elaine Kim writes that most early accounts of Asian immigration were written by the much smaller population of students, scholars, and diplomats who were exempted from the exclusion laws because of their elite status (24).³⁷ She describes these writers as “ambassadors of goodwill” whose writing is “characterized by efforts to bridge the gap between East and West and plead for tolerance by making usually highly euphemistic observations about the West on the one hand while explaining Asia in idealized terms on the other” (24). According to Kim, these early immigrant works from the late 1800s to the middle of the twentieth century sometimes addressed Western misconceptions of Asians and made pleas for racial tolerance, but

more often they made apologies for their own country and/or countrymen and women and praised America for its democratic ideals. Any criticism of Americans or American society was muted so as not to seem impolite (29-31).

Given the relatively recent influence of feminism, postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, queer studies, diaspora studies, transnationalism and the like on literary criticism, it is not surprising that critics today view these early immigrant works in a very different light. For example, while traditionally an immigrant text like *America Is in the Heart* has been read as an example of the *bildungsroman* form, Lisa Lowe argues that it should be read as a text that resists the “unified aesthetic” or “canonical function” (44), and instead draws attention to the ways in which the text critiques that very function by exposing its manifold contradictions. Patricia Chu theorizes, as do others, that some of these early immigrant narratives were constructed as *bildungsroman* precisely because the form was familiar to their audiences and thus provided the authors an avenue through which to launch their critiques and reach their readers most effectively. Oscar Campomanes argues that because of the unique colonial and neo-colonial relationship that Filipinos and Filipino Americans have with the U.S., America is not “the promised land,” but rather a place of exile. He argues that Filipino writing in the U.S. should be considered a “literature of exile and emergence,” as opposed to a “literature of immigration and settlement” (“Filipinos” 51). Though he is referring specifically to Filipino American literature, Campomanes’ argument speaks to concerns expressed by and about other immigrant groups that are in the U.S. precisely because of U.S. imperialism, such as Hmong, Lao, Mien, and Vietnamese refugees who fled Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam during the Vietnam War. In a similar vein, Chung-

Hei Yun argues that Kang's autobiographical immigrant narrative, *East Goes West*, is not a novel about assimilation but rather a novel that details "the life of the displaced in the chiaroscuro of hope and despair, dream and disillusionment, the ideal and the real, life balanced between the weight of the past and that of the present" (94). Contemporary critics thus look beyond the reductive reading that Elaine Kim offers and instead challenge us to consider alternative readings of these works that allow for a more critical perspective on the widely divergent and complex histories and relationships that various Asian American groups have with the U.S.

The following two chapters examine early postcolonial, male immigrant writers whose works were well received but at the same time performed a subversive function through which the authors gained legitimacy as American writers. I focus my attention in these chapters on the autobiographical novels of Younghill Kang and Carlos Bulosan. While other critics have already examined the role of the naïve narrator-protagonist in both novels to illuminate the subversive aspects of the texts, I extend that analysis by focusing on the ways in which Kang and Bulosan use specific rhetorical strategies to make arguments for a reconceptualization of literacy and citizenship. I read these texts as literacy narratives because they foreground the issue of English language acquisition as it relates to U.S. citizenship and "American" identity. Studying the rhetorical features that enable this foregrounding illuminates contradictions in the texts and serves to legitimize both Kang and Bulosan as agents of cultural criticism as we look at the ways in which they influence their readers and how their readers respond to their texts.

I argue here and throughout this project that rhetorical analysis gives us insight into how texts can be effective in starkly different, and often oppositional, ways since the

rhetorical situation is contingent upon contexts and identities that are always shifting and unstable. This effectiveness holds particularly true for racialized Others such as Kang and Bulosan whose works can be read as both assimilationist as well as condemning of America. As subjects marked by race, these authors and their narrators speak and write from a liminal position whereby, through their very articulations of cultural difference, they gain agency for themselves as producers and critics of American culture. In *Masking Selves, Making Subjects*, Traise Yamamoto writes, “Agency for the self written about is not an *a priori* condition; rather, the ‘I’ self-reflexively confers that agency through the autobiographical act” (113). I would extend this claim by arguing that in writing about other marginalized peoples in the U.S., Kang and Bulosan also gain agency and legitimacy for themselves and they confer legitimacy on those who were/are similarly marginalized and oppressed.

In addition to examining the role that race plays in Kang’s and Bulosan’s literacy practices and in dominant culture’s ideology of literacy, I will look at the role that gender plays in shaping articulations of literacy. Historical studies of Asians in America are incomplete without an acknowledgment of how the racial formation of Asian Americans has been tied to gender. For example, under the Page Law of 1875 and later immigration laws, the wives of Chinese laborers who came to the United States were forbidden entry and those male immigrants who were unmarried were forbidden to marry white women, effectively eliminating any possibility for Chinese immigrants to start their own families. Furthermore, under the 1922 Cable Act, female U.S. citizens who married “aliens ineligible to citizenship” were forced to relinquish their citizenship (Chan 105-06). Due to a number of factors including the shortage of washerwomen of any ethnic origin in

California in the mid-1800s as well as the fact that other immigrant men were jealous of the Chinese for offering such cheap and effective labor, Chinese men were forced into “feminized” forms of work such as cooking, waiting tables, washing clothes, and working as house servants.³⁸ As David Eng comments, “Collectively, these low-wage, feminized jobs work to underscore the numerous ways in which gender is mapped as the social axis through which the legibility of a racialized Asian American male identity is constituted, determined, rendered coherent, and stabilized” (17).

As well as being denied paternity and forced to do “women’s work,” Asian American men were further feminized by mainstream America’s construction of Asians as weak and submissive and culturally non-productive. King-kok Cheung attributes this “feminization” to “cultural and political factors.” She explains that the stereotypes of Asians as passive and submissive result from Asian cultures that teach people to respect authority and to “exercise verbal restraint.” She argues that this cultural difference is “deepened by racist politics, insofar as Asians are granted limited acceptance as long as they refrain from ‘making waves’ in American society.” In terms of cultural production, she explains that before the cultural nationalist movement of the 1960s and 70s, Asian Americans had contributed little as far as music and literature were concerned, and especially as compared to African Americans, to such an extent that they stood out as an “absence” in American culture. She writes, “Where were the Asian jazz and blues, Langston Hughes and James Baldwin, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X? Because culture and political visibility has been a male prerogative traditionally, such absence casts yet another shadow on Asian American manhood” (“Of Men and Men” 175).

Acknowledging the intersections of race and gender in the construction of Asian American masculinity helps to illuminate how and why certain rhetorical strategies are used to articulate Asian American male subjectivity. For Younghill Kang, the process of discursively arguing for his legitimacy as an American is deeply tied to the ways in which America has constructed him as “queer” and “alien.” One way he responds to this construction is by identifying or aligning himself with other American (and other Western) male writers. Through strategies of identification, Kang creates rhetorical alliances with these male author figures to suggest to readers that he is like them and hence as “American” or as “Western” as they are. Moreover, both Kang’s and Bulosan’s fictional alter egos’ relationships with white women, which I discuss at greater length below, are further suggestive of their protagonists’ immigrant, and hence illegitimate, status, as it is only because of white women that they are able to produce their narratives of literacy.

My analysis of the relationship between literacy and legitimacy (as citizens of the U.S.) functions on two levels: on one level there is the narrator-protagonist’s literacy which I argue does not grant him legitimacy (as represented in the text)— this is precisely the critique constructed and argued by the author; on another level there is the author’s literacy which, through the act of writing, grants him legitimacy and, if not legal citizenship, then at least cultural citizenship as we see how he influences his readers through rhetoric.

Younghill Kang and His Literacy Narrative

Born in the northern Korean province of Hamkyung in 1903, Younghill Kang immigrated to the United States in 1921, just three years before the Immigration Exclusion Act of 1924 and eleven years after Korea was occupied by Japan. Kang's arrival in the U.S. was a direct result of Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910. Rather than choosing "death" or witnessing the death of his country under Japanese rule, Kang seeks refuge in the U.S. In the opening pages of the novel he writes, "I felt I was looking on death, the death of an ancient planet, a spiritual planet that had been my father's home.... In loathing of death, I hurtled forward ... out toward a foreign body.... Here I wandered on soil as strange as Mars, seeking roots, roots for an exile's soul" (4-5). Kang's arrival in the U.S. is marked by ambivalence—he comes not because of a fantasy that he has of America but because it is an alternative to death.

As a student and later professor of English literature and composition, Kang was well equipped with knowledge of American literature and the skills of a writer.³⁹ His first novel, *The Grass Roof* (1931), is an autobiographical account of his childhood and early adult life in northern Korea, Seoul, and Japan, ending just before his departure for the West. *East Goes West* (1937) continues the story, begun in *The Grass Roof*, of narrator Chungpa Han's (Kang's fictional alter ego) quest to find meaning and purpose in life. This autobiographical novel picks up the narrative just as Han arrives in New York at the age of eighteen. Han explains early in the narrative how the Japanese conquest of Korea during his childhood left him—"the individualist, demanding life and more life"—without hope for a future in his country:

Korea, a small, provincial, old-fashioned Confucian nation, hopelessly trapped by a larger, expanding one, was called to get off the earth. Death summoned. I could have renounced the scholar's dream forever ... and written my vengeance against Japan in martyr's blood.... Or I could take away my slip cut from the roots, and try to engraft my scholar inherited kingdom upon the world's thought. (8-9)

Instead of choosing to stay in Japanese-occupied Korea, where "death summoned," Kang seeks refuge in the U.S. with the hopes of making his literary contribution to the world.

Like several of Cha's speaking subjects in *Dictée*, Kang is both a postcolonial and Asian immigrant subject and as such, he arrives in the U.S. as one who already has been linguistically and politically colonized. While the U.S. played a role in Japan's annexation of Korea, Korea's liberation from Japan has been conceived of in dominant U.S. and Korean narratives as a "gift of the allied forces, especially of the U.S.A." (Choi 80). Only recently have critics begun to examine what Chungmoo Choi has called a "colonization of consciousness," by which she means the enforcement of American culture and ideologies on the postcolonized people of South Korea (79). Constructed in the popular imagination as South Korea's "liberator-benefactor" (Choi 83), the U.S. is, in Kang's pre-immigrant eyes, a democratic nation full of hope and opportunity.

Armed with an "Eastern scholarship in one hand," and a "Western [education] in the other" (9), Han sets out to find his spiritual home in America. He tells us, "The beginning of my new existence must be founded here" (5). Ironically, in his efforts to "Westernize," Han befriends two fellow Koreans: George Jum, a former Korean ambassador to Washington, D.C., who is a hopeless romantic and who now makes his

living as a cook; and To Wan Kim (from here on referred to simply as “Kim”), the rootless and exiled artist and scholar. Although praised by Han for being “Americanized,” both George and Kim represent the grim reality of what it means to be an exile in America. In George, Han sees a Korean who has become “Americanized” in his dress and talk. He tells Han, “I like to speak English. I myself know how to employ the idiom” (35). George is culturally literate in ways that Han is not, and to Han he represents “the real America at last” (37). At the novel’s end, however, we learn that George has settled in Hawai’i with a Korean American woman, his hopes of becoming a successful actor in Hollywood dashed. He tells Han in a post-script to his letter, “For the rest, I have not failed. I have only not succeeded” (367).

Kim’s “failure” and ultimate demise is felt more poignantly than George’s, perhaps because Han saw in Kim an image of what he too might become; likewise, Kim saw in Han his self of many years ago: Han muses, “As I looked at him, so he looked at me. Perhaps he saw in me his green and hopeful self of long ago” (87). At first, Han identifies with Kim’s background as a poet and scholar, but he soon realizes that what he must learn from Kim is not ancient Eastern scholarship but rather “the complexities of Western civilization” (155) on which Kim appears to be an expert. He tells Kim that it is through an American education that he will be able to “master American civilization, American culture” (160). Kim has become less idealistic and hopeful about such goals as he responds, “You think it is worth mastering?” (160).

Through Kim, readers get their first glimpse in the novel of a truly tragic man who has fought long and hard for acceptance by both the Western intellectual elite and the parents of his white American beloved, Helen. After months of not hearing from

Helen (her parents sent her off on a cruise in order to separate the interracial couple),
Kim soliloquizes in front of a mirror in his hallway:

What becomes of the dreams dreamt, the hopes hoped, unrealized?
Dreams are fools' night fancies. The product of the idler's imagination.
For no one has entered the cloud castle through the rainbow gates of
dreams. All are words, written on the fading memory book, where it
sticks on the eyes' visionary image, the mirror that lies. Everything,
everything in this West, is said to be 'hope so.'" (265)

Left penniless on a student passport with no home in Korea to return to and no Helen in
America with whom to share his life, Kim commits suicide.

Although they are both Korean exiles living in America, Kim in many ways
serves as a foil to Han's more optimistic view of the future. The construction of Kim as a
foil to Han can be viewed as a rhetorical strategy in that Han, in contrast to Kim, is
represented, at least on the surface, as an "Oriental" who succeeds in finding a place for
himself in America. Viewing this construction from a rhetorical perspective gives us
insight into the function of Kim's character and the effect his character has on readers.
As I will elaborate in more detail below, in order for Kang's voice to be heard he had to
tread carefully so as not to alienate or offend his 1930s and 1940s audience. To that end,
Kang created a naïve fictional alter ego to tell his story in an acceptable voice while
utilizing a collection of ancillary characters to voice his criticisms of American society.
Kim is one such character who, by comparison, makes Han seem more likely to succeed
because Han retains his hope in the American dream. As contemporaneous reviews
indicate, readers wanted to hear stories of "successful" immigration and assimilation as a

way of congratulating themselves for welcoming these “strangers from a different shore.”⁴⁰ In her 1937 *New Yorker* review, for example, Lady Hosie praised Kang for his “humor and charm” and described *East Goes West* as a “successful search for the formula that was to make [Younghill Kang] an ‘Oriental Yankee’” (74).

While Kim does not strongly denounce American society and culture, his fate and disillusionment serve as criticisms in themselves and they portend Han’s own failure to ever be legitimized as an American citizen. For example, through Kim, Kang offers a critique of the literacy myth as Kim realizes that his search for acceptance among Western intellectuals is futile. Kim exclaims to Han,

You and I came to the West to find a new beauty, a new life, a new religion. But is there any? Alas! We have come at the wrong time. It is too late. Too late to be saved by Dante’s Beatrice, too late to love like Shakespeare in the sonnets, too late to be with Shelley a Plato-republican, too late even to be a Browning individualist or a Tennysonian sentimentalist.

...tell me, what now is to be our fate? being [sic] unable to go back to that previous existence, being unable to label ourselves in this new world ... becoming lost within another lost world? (166)

Kim’s search for acceptance proves to be futile, for despite the solidarity he feels with these (male) Western writers, as demonstrated by his cultural literacy, his race prevents him from ever gaining legitimacy as a member of this literary group. Though he may identify with them through a rhetoric of belonging, the group that they represent (the “Western intellectual elite”) does not consider him a viable member of their collective

identity. Unlike Han, who remains optimistic, Kim becomes disillusioned and withdrawn, retreating to a life of isolation and loneliness. As Han explains, “[Kim] was perfectly willing to be a caged animal looking out on the world through the steel bars of his own isolation” (355). Although Kim has lost all hope in finding a place for himself in America, he remains slightly optimistic for Han, urging him to read and analyze everything written on the “Orient” from both a Western and Eastern point of view as a way of bridging the two worlds. He tells Han, “As a transplanted scholar, this is the only road I could point to, for your happy surviving” (257).

Through his experiences in trying to carve out a life for himself in America, Han receives his true “American education.” Such an education, he discovers, includes learning how to deal with racism and how to survive in the U.S. as an exile. At certain moments in the text, Kang allows Han to be mildly critical. While Han may be a naïve narrator, he is aware that America is not a utopia:

George wrote, congratulating me on having so good a job. He said he was glad I had the guts to go into big business, and he, too, wished he could get out of housework and place himself with a firm like mine where a man could climb. I wondered if George was right and I was wrong. Well, this must be the lesson I must learn, of American life. This *is* American life, I said stubbornly. All day long the moving multitudes of humanity, with busy legs, constantly darting false smiles to cover their depressed facial expression, the worn-out machine bodies turning round in the aisles of unmoving glass and china sets, slowly figuring with shaking hands—haste and moving too many things made them so.... But where were all the

enchantment and romance, the glorious vision, which I had seen in my dreams of America as a boy? (294-95)

Han's education and his acquired social literacy thus become his means of survival rather than acceptance into the economy, culture and society as constructed by mainstream white America. Like George and Kim, he is fully literate in "American ways" and American society, but because of his race he will always remain an outsider. At a small college in Canada, for example, Han is considered "queer and alien" (104) by his classmates: "For me there was always special favor, special kindness, special protection ... the white-man's-burden attitude toward dark colonies. Ralph's kindness ... Leslie's brutal cruelty ... I weighed them in my mind, and it seemed to me better to miss the kindness and not to have the cruelty" (118). The cruelty continues, however, along with exploitation at the hands of Mr. Lively—the *Universal Education* salesman—his customers, various employers, and Bonheure, a religious leader cheating his parishioners out of money. Gradually, Han learns that he must accept his fate as an "Oriental."

Han's awareness of his liminal status as Other is perhaps most evident in the conversation he has with his good friend, Senator Kirby. Kirby tells Han, "Now you must definitely make up your mind to *be* American. Don't say, 'I'm a Korean' when you're asked. Say 'I'm an American' I tell you, sir, you belong here. You should be one of us" (352). Han realizes that the senator does not understand Han's status in the U.S. as an Asian immigrant and replies, "But an Oriental has a hard time in America. He is not welcomed much" (352). Senator Kirby remains adamant in his belief that Han can find a place for himself here. "There shouldn't be any buts about it! Believe in America

with all your heart. Even if it's sometimes hard, believe in her" (352). Han simply replies, "But legally I am denied" (353).⁴¹

Like Kim, Han is just another "'adopted child' of the Western literary establishment" (E. Kim, *Asian American* 38). Han establishes himself throughout the novel as a Western scholar and skilled poet; however, we learn towards the end of the novel that although he is employed as a writer, his work is limited to writing about "Oriental news" (353). That Han gains legitimacy as a writer only when he writes about things "Oriental" further attests to dominant culture's systematic racialization and construction of Asian Americans as foreign, exotic, and untranslatable. Like Han, Kang's success as a writer is conditional—he is praised when he is viewed as the "native informant," "translating" Korea and Korean Americanness for his audience, yet censured when he speaks critically of Americans. Critics, as well as Kang's own publisher, saw the novel as nothing more than the story of an Oriental in the West suggesting that Kang, too, would always be "'an adopted child' of the Western literary establishment."

Furthermore, while by novel's end Han has established himself as a writer and editorial worker for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, his ultimate success seems to hinge upon his relationship with Trip. Like Allos, the narrator-protagonist and fictional alter ego of Bulosan's narrative, Han's entry into America and its literary establishment becomes possible through the figure of a white woman. When Han first meets Trip at her apartment in New York, he implores her to help him write his book. She asks, "You're interested in writing—in English?" to which he replies, "Oh, yes.... A best seller. I don't know English well yet. But I have all the ideas" (310). Several years later, upon hearing

the news of Kim's death, Han returns to New York in desperate search of Trip to save him from the same fate that befell Kim. Han narrates,

I had found Trip. Oh, I was safe! I was not to be the prisoner condemned without a hearing. I had a reprieve. This time, I swore, I would be, oh, so clever, Trip should never escape me again like that.... I would make her translate Oriental poems, I would get her interested in that. Or I would pose as 'material.' I would get her mind working with me. And that was a good book, she must see we had to write. (361)

Trip is thus constructed as the figure through whom Han gains legitimacy as an "Oriental Yankee." I reference this oxymoron to point out the very contradiction in the fact that Han's work cannot be legitimated without Trip's assistance and that this "work" is structured around Han's positioning of himself as an "Oriental" object. That Han's work can only be legitimized through Trip and that the novel leaves Han's relationship with Trip ambiguous is suggestive of Kang's critique that Han will never, in fact, be perceived by dominant culture as a fully legitimate participant in American cultural production or as a fully legitimate romantic partner for Trip.

Rachel Lee's analysis of Allos' relationship with white women, which I discuss at greater length in the following chapter, is applicable here as well. She maintains that all of the white women whom Allos hails as "the *America* I had wanted to find" (*America* 235) are depicted as nonsexual and hence they retain their official status as American citizens (32). Lee is referring here to the anti-miscegenation and naturalization laws of the early twentieth century that in some states not only forbade sexual relations or marriage among Asians and whites, but that in fact stripped female U.S. citizens of their

citizenship if they married an Asian immigrant. Leaving Han's relationship with Trip ambiguous and not having them marry enables Trip to maintain her citizenship status and allows for the more subversive critique that Han gains legitimacy as a writer only through his (nonsexual) association and collaboration with Trip.

As with the white women in *America Is in the Heart*, Trip represents Han's idealized view of America and becomes the conduit through which he establishes himself as an "American" writer. It is particularly significant that in both *East Goes West* and *America Is in the Heart* the white women Han and Allos are most drawn to are themselves readers and writers and are thus presumed to have access to the American literary establishment to which both Han and Allos so desperately want to belong. By contrast, as Patricia Chu, Elaine Kim, Rachel Lee and others have noted, Asian women in the men's texts often serve to represent the Asian homeland or to support the men in their quest for (or crisis of) identity.⁴² In *East Goes West*, Trip herself is a poet, and it is for this reason that Han is first drawn to her. As Chu notes, Han seems much less interested in Trip's white female body than he is in her mind (35). She writes, "For Han, Trip's appeal as a *writing* woman places her in a long line of literary heroines whose merits are linked to the presumption that a literary life signifies both domestic virtues and a complex interior life" (33). Han equates winning Trip's affection with securing a place for himself in America as a writer. Trip is such an important figure to Han because, to his mind, she is capable of helping him "father a literary offspring" or, at the very least, she could use him as material or text to study and to write about. In other words, Trip helps to alleviate Han's fear that he will go unnoticed as a scholar and writer, and she is also the kind of reader that Han both seeks and needs—one who will "read, translate, and value the

‘oriental poems’ that comprise his subjectivity” (Chu 35). Han/Kang’s act of literacy is thus deeply tied to his (Korean immigrant male) subjectivity. In fact, Han/Kang’s critical act of literacy is the textual embodiment of his subjectivity. Without an audience or an outlet for his literary aspirations, Han/Kang is doomed, like Kim, to a life that is simply not worth living.

Critical Reception

American reviews of Kang’s debut novel, *The Grass Roof*, illustrate the widespread misperception that ethnic writing is representative of the larger ethnic group and that the ethnic writer’s job is to serve as cultural insider or “native informant” for a particular ethnic community. From these reviews, we gain a clearer picture of the “pre-established rhetorical situation”⁴³ in which the novel was produced and consumed as well as Kang’s insight into his audience’s preconceptions of him as a racialized writer. For example, Isidor Schneider, writing in the *New Republic* (1931), asserted that, “as almost the only book to introduce us to a virtually unknown people, it has a high extrinsic importance” (qtd. in K. Lee 69); Thomas Wolfe suggested that the main value of *The Grass Roof* lay in its success in satisfying the American people’s curiosity about “a far-off world” (qtd. in K. Lee 69); and Lady Hosie, in her 1931 review, “A Voice from Korea,” wrote,

Koreans have the reputation of being a gentlemanly, easy-going race, and Mr. Kang’s story confirms this. His delightful family pictures bear the stamp of truth. His sidelights make a lover of the East smile in tender recollection, and explain scenes only half understood before, such as the

chronological groupings of the family even in play.... Mr. Kang is on sure ground when he gives us Korea and Koreans. His book is a real contribution to literature and to our understanding of his countrymen and women. (707)

In fact, Kang's perspective was in no way representative of Koreans at that time. As Elaine Kim points out, the *The Grass Roof* is not a book that describes Korea and Koreans but rather it is a book that explains why Kang left Japanese-occupied Korea (34).

Critics generally responded favorably to Kang's descriptions of Korea in *The Grass Roof* and his American experiences that affirmed (and confirmed) the myth of the American Dream in *East Goes West*. For example, in her October 17, 1937 review of the later novel for the *New York Times*, Katherine Woods writes that although narrator/protagonist Chungpa Han "saw and heard and lived through much ... he was coming to know the best of this country, too. And he loved it. He put his own roots into it" (11). According to Woods, Han was "successfully Americanized," a "poor boy who made good," who ultimately found in America "his home" (11). Ralph Thompson, in his 1937 *New York Times* review, identified Han as "the foreign intellectual" who "wanted above all" to "learn to know the true contemporary America," and who finally succeeded in making a place for himself here (L++17). And finally, critics viewed *East Goes West* as a model "success story" for minorities to emulate in dealing with American racism (E. Kim, *Asian American* 34).

While critics were quick to praise Kang's novels for their "realistic" portrayals of Korea and Koreans and their positive representations of America, they were not so fond

of his criticisms. Lady Hosie, for example, argues that Kang does not “give a fair account of American missionaries” in *The Grass Roof*, and that he should be grateful to those American missionaries “who first made the world aware of Japan’s former policy in Korea, now happily reversed” (“A Voice” 707). Even more critical was Maxwell Geismar’s 1937 review published in the *Nation*. Geismar argues that *East Goes West* is “less impressive” than *The Grass Roof* because it is not a novel of praise but rather a novel of protest. He writes,

Younghill Kang has survived a harsh apprenticeship, he has learned, with some fine comic flourishes, to sell himself to this Western society, but he has not yet learned to give his affections to it ... [he] has lost, for the moment at least, the distinguishing trait of his earlier period, a friendship at once discerning and indulgent for the land and the life around him.

(482)

It is not surprising that Geismar did not look kindly upon Kang’s satirical portrait of America. Kang was lauded as long as he appeared to be struggling for acceptance, but as soon as he becomes ironic or even angry, he is deemed unworthy of praise.

Though it is not surprising that a leftist journal such as the *Nation* would publish an article about a text that was critical of America, what is remarkable is that Geismar was alone in recognizing the novel as a critique rather than a tribute. As critics Kyhan Lee and Sunyoung Lee note, *East Goes West* has largely been misread and misunderstood since the time of its publication.⁴⁴ Both critics cite Katherine Woods’ *New York Times* review in which Woods states,

[Kang's] story attracts and holds the attention as if it were a novel.... But of course, *East Goes West* is not a novel. It is the candid record of 'the making of an Oriental Yankee' as its subtitle states; and its author has been so successfully Americanized as to become Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature in New York University and a member of the staff of the Department of Far Eastern Art at the Metropolitan Museum. (11)

Woods so mistakenly conflates Kang's "success" at realizing the American dream with Han's presumed success at Americanization that she is completely oblivious to the underlying critique that Geismar perspicaciously observed. This conflation is perhaps most evident in those reviews which read events from Kang's life into the novel where, in fact, they do not exist. As Sunyoung Lee notes, "the *Springfield Sunday Union & Republican* blithely reports that '[*East Goes West*] concludes with [Kang's] winning of an American wife and achieving the first rung of an intellectual career'—although it remains unclear whether or not the book's hero, Chungpa Han, ever does win over Trip, his elusive idealization of American womanhood (100)" (378-79). Lee is particularly concerned with this misreading because she believes it "indicates a presumption of artlessness in Kang's work" and "underestimates" Kang as a writer (379-380). She cites a 1937 review from the *Times Literary Supplement* that states, "[Kang's] autobiography is of great length, and yet it is told in an artless way that makes it rather fascinating" (805). Lee's argument is persuasive: "Kang the writer is replaced by Chungpa Han the character, and in the process, Kang becomes an early victim of the still-prevalent belief that the only contribution any writer of color could possibly have to make is the story of his or her own life" (379). Kang's editor, Maxwell Perkins of Scribner's, who also edited

Thomas Wolfe, Ernest Hemingway, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, among others, agreed with Kang's contemporary reviewers. In a letter to Kang explaining his suggestions for revision, Perkins wrote, "The principle I went on was that in the first place this was the story of a man, and in the second, of an Easterner in the West" (qtd. in S. Lee 380). He urged Kang to say more about Trip, particularly to show that he in fact married her, because that was "one of the principle points of the book" (qtd. in S. Lee 380)—that an Easterner could become a Westerner through his marriage to an "American" woman.

Perkins' urging of Kang to conclude the novel in this way points to a not uncommon tendency or strategy to fit a story into an already existing story grammar so that readers' expectations will be satisfactorily met. In his book, *The Mind's New Science: A History of the Cognitive Revolution*, Howard Gardner briefly summarizes Frederic Bartlett's research that determined that audience members' recollection of stories are greatly impacted by their stereotypes about the characters in the story. He cites the example of a group of listeners who, after hearing an Indian folk tale, were unable to recall the story with accuracy and instead "would regularly supply their own causal links, drop difficult-to-assimilate information, and revise the plot until it had come to resemble that of a standard Western tale" (115). Gardner's summary is applicable here because Perkins' urging of Kang to show that he married Trip in the novel is suggestive of the kind of stereotypical reading that occurred with the research group in Bartlett's study. Perkins was aware of readers' expectations about how stories of "successful" assimilation should unfold and wanted Kang to fulfill those expectations, presumably for marketing purposes. As the contemporaneous reviews indicate, readers and critics alike

interpreted the novel in ways that confirmed their own stereotypical views of Asians and idealistic notions of America.

Two Opposing Rhetorical Situations

Though Asians had been immigrating to the United States since the early 1800s, their presence a century later was still a source of tension for Euro-Americans. Because the majority of Asian immigrants at that time came to the United States to provide cheap labor, Euro-Americans felt threatened by this new group of workers, or “yellow peril” as they came to be known,⁴⁵ and consequently adopted a hostile attitude towards them. From the moment Asians first set foot on American soil, they have faced prejudice, economic discrimination, physical violence, anti-miscegenation and anti-naturalization laws, exclusion and incarceration (Chan 45).

That nearly all Asians were barred entry by the Immigration Act of 1924 attests to the anti-Asian sentiment prevalent at the time. Sucheng Chan explains that the laws to exclude Asians were enacted not only as a result of racism and nativism, but because Euro-Americans needed “scapegoats” for their financial problems (53). In addition to the various movements to rid America of these groups was the biologicistic and racist view that Asians, along with other nonwhites, were inherently inferior. Thus, while Asian immigrants faced many of the same challenges that every other immigrant group faced such as starting out with limited finances and material goods, their struggle was exacerbated by the laws that excluded them solely on the basis of race.

Given the status of Asians in America during the latter part of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth, it is not surprising that Younghill Kang crafted a

novel that was, on the surface, palatable to the American appetite for “ethnic autobiography,” but that also contained a subtext that was highly critical of America’s attitude towards minorities. Contemporary scholars such as Sunyoung Lee and Elaine Kim are critical of those who read *East Goes West* as an Asian American success story. Instead, we see in their reviews a reversal of the earlier readings such that Han is figured as an exile, a permanent wanderer in a world that refuses to acknowledge his legitimacy as an American citizen.

While many essays on *East Goes West* make some mention of Han’s desire to enter and be accepted into American life through literature, no one has critically examined the relationship between literacy and citizenship that operates throughout the text. In fact, contemporary critics, with the exception of Kyhan Lee, have all but overlooked Kang’s English literacy as an issue for his readers and reviewers in the 1930s and 40s. In addition to identifying Kang as a “native informant” or “cultural translator” of Korea and Koreans, early reviews of *The Grass Roof* also note Kang’s non-standard use of English, thereby attributing his degree of literacy to a condition of his race or “foreignness.” Isidor Schneider states, “Kang is so natural a writer that his occasional misuse of English words sometimes gives them a fresh meaning” (187), while Lady Hosie comments, “It is a tremendous achievement that he should have written this lengthy book in lucid English; and so excellently that a few unconscious jerks and jars of very modern American slang only add a naivety to the candor of his tale” (qtd. in Trudeau 193). Finally, in his essay, “Younghill Kang’s Unwritten Third Act” (1973), James Wade begins his “random observations, summaries, and judgments” about Kang’s two major works, after having read them again after fifteen years, by mentioning “as a

preliminary note” that “[Kang’s] English is by no means so perfect as memory suggested ... it does not escape mistakes, awkwardness, and foreignisms” (59). Wade assumes that Kang’s mistakes were left unedited in order to “enhance the exotic appeal of the writer”; however, he argues that the errors were so minor that they seemed “glaring” and therefore ineffectual for the purposes of making Kang seem “exotic” (59).

Wade’s and other early critics’ emphasis on Kang’s “misuse” of English juxtaposed with their claims that he has become “successfully Americanized” points to an important contradiction in the construction of Asian Americans by the dominant culture. For his contemporary readers and critics, Kang’s/Han’s “success” is measured by the degree to which he embraces and assimilates into American culture. For Kang, this acceptance is largely due to the fact that he “won” an American wife, fathered two children of legal U.S. citizenship status, and later became a Professor at New York University. For Han, it remains ambiguous whether or not he and Trip became romantically involved, and yet Han is considered “successful” because he achieves his dream of becoming a writer in the United States. While these readers and critics viewed Kang/Han as “successfully assimilating,” their emphasis on Kang’s “misuse” of English suggests the opposite. Just as his race marks him as “foreign,” so too does his questionable literacy in English.

Furthermore, as with the anonymous reviewer who described *East Goes West* as “artless,” these reviews, by highlighting Kang’s “misuse” of English, suggest that his first novel was not very “literary,” was substandard in some way, or was intentionally created with errors of speech solely for marketing purposes. Such reviews indicate that Kang was not taken very seriously as a writer at the time his first novel was published. In his

Guggenheim Foundation fellowship application, submitted in 1931, Kang articulates his intentions for his second novel, *East Goes West*. While *The Grass Roof* “treated of the Orient,” *East Goes West* (originally titled “Death of an Exile”) was going to

treat of Orientals in America, being the reflection through the hero’s eyes of this mechanical age, of American civilization, and of the literary and cultural époques he experiences here over a period of ten years; also a history of his spiritual evolutions and revolutions while love-sick, bread-sick, butter-sick, education-sick, he is lost and obliterated in the stone-and-steel jungles of New York City ... (65). (qtd. in S. Lee 380)

Clearly Younghill Kang had in mind to write more than just the story of “the making of an Oriental Yankee.” As is evident in his statement above and in the original title of his book, “Death of an Exile,” his novel offers a critique of American modernity, as well as philosophical insight into the mind of an exiled poet.⁴⁶ However, as Sunyoung Lee notes, this reading becomes possible only when *East Goes West* is viewed as a novel rather than autobiography. By separating the author from his narrator-protagonist, Kang is given greater liberties to write a critique (S. Lee 383).

To expand on Lee’s suggestion that we read this text as a novel rather than an autobiography, I argue that reading the text as a narrative of literacy reveals both the ways in which Kang critiques dominant culture’s use of language and literacy in its construction of him as Other and how he responds to these constructions through his critical acts of literacy.

Kang's Rhetorical Strategies

Readers and critics at the time of publication read *East Goes West* as an assimilationist narrative precisely because they viewed the character of Chungpa Han as the naïve narrator Kang constructed him to be. Kang's indictment of America could not come through his own character if he wished to be heard at all; rather, Kang cleverly couched his critique in the voices of other characters such as Mr. Lovejoy, Mr. and Mrs. Lively, Farmer Higgins, To Wan Kim, Mr. and Mrs. Schmitt, Lorenzo, Wagstaff, Senzar, and Elder Bonheure. Through Mr. and Mrs. Lively, for example, Kang communicates to his audience the idea that racial tolerance is qualified. After the Livelys have been introduced to Han's friend George—"a boy who smokes, drinks, swears" (149), they become anxious about the influence he may have on Han. Mrs. Lively overhears George talking about his experience with a woman, and she immediately assumes that Han is participating in similar activities. The Livelys' anxiety about Han's relationships with women, specifically white women, becomes evident when Mr. Lively cautions Han, "My dear boy, see here, I love you just as much as if you were my own boy. But you are getting wrong ideas. I don't want to see you marry an American girl. Neither would I want to see Elsie marrying an Oriental. And all decent people are like that. It is not as the Lord intended" (150). Han is accepted and loved by the Livelys but only insofar as he does not become romantically involved with their daughter, or with any white woman.

Han's response is telling. He says nothing to the Livelys but narrates, "I was very solemn and silent and unable to open my mouth to say anything" (150). By utilizing indirect discourse here, Kang avoids revealing Han's true feelings about what the Livelys

have said. Readers are made to feel sympathetic towards Han not because of how he is treated by the Livelys (though this would be the rhetorical effect today) but because he does not voice his complaints. Aware of his readers' expectations, prejudices and stereotypes, Kang knew that Han's silence, here and elsewhere in the book, was essential for the novel to be received favorably by his 1930s and 1940s audiences.

One of Kang's strategies is to distance himself from his narrator-protagonist and other characters through what Bakhtin calls "heteroglossia." According to Bakhtin, all national languages are stratified by a number of social groups, each of which has a language of its own reflecting the group's speech diversity and unique world view (270-72). Each utterance carries its own value and association depending on the speaker and context of the utterance and thus every utterance is in constant motion in its "socially charged life" (293). Language is thus always "ideologically saturated" (271), "alive and developing" (272), and "populated by intentions" (293).

One way for authors to "incorporate" or "organize" heteroglossia in the novel is through a narrator with a completely different view of the world and value system from the author's own. By creating such a narrator, the author achieves the distance necessary to shed light on the situation or "object of representation" in the novel; in this case, distancing himself from Han allows Kang to create a narrator whose "belief system" is more in accordance with the audience than the author's would be. Choosing the autobiographical form was indeed a strategic move on Kang's part. Playing off the assumption that Han was an accurate representation of himself enabled Kang to appeal to his readers' sensibilities. Had he written a completely non-autobiographical novel, voicing his critiques through the mouths of fictional characters, critics might have been

more observant of the subversive nature of the text, instead labeling it a novel of protest and therefore lessening the text's appeal. Written and marketed as an autobiography, however, the narrative positions Kang, via his alter ego Chungpa Han, as the "successfully Americanized" (i.e., assimilated) "Oriental" in the West.

Kang further denounces American racism through the voices of Lorenzo and Wagstaff, two educated black men whose professional lives are limited to the service industry because of their race. Lorenzo, a cook, says to Han, "Do you see me? I'se a college man. I'se been to Williams College, and to Washington, and then I come up here to go to Harvard.... Here I am chockfull of education.... But a niggerman's only good to cook and wait, that's all" (262), while Wagstaff, an elevator man, explains, "What room is there in America for an educated Negro? There is not much else but the 'yessuh' job. And either way, I shall hardly be assured of a decent living way" (273). Han muses, "Through Wagstaff I was having my first introduction to a crystallized caste system, comparable only to India, here in the greatest democratic country of the world" (273). While it is Han who utters this reflective statement, Lorenzo and Wagstaff are the ones who articulate the reality. As Sunyoung Lee notes, while the book's "harsh critiques" of American racism come from the mouths of other characters, "Han narrates from a seemingly inoffensive fly-on-the-wall perspective" (390). Adopting the role of "naïve Oriental" while criticizing America through the voices of other characters was a survival tactic, enabling Kang to satisfy his ambitions for the book while also sharing his thoughts about American society. By distancing himself from these characters and letting them articulate their own concerns and criticisms, readers continue to find Han an agreeable

and even sympathetic character for whom such observations appear to be just that—observations rather than indictments.

In his construction of a narrator who speaks from a “fly-on-the-wall perspective” Kang creates a novel full of what Bakhtin identifies as “nondirect speaking” in which the narrator’s speech or language “is always *another’s speech* (as regards the real or potential direct discourse of the author)” and hence a “refraction of authorial intentions” (313; emphasis original). According to Bakhtin, when authors wish to express points of view that differ from those of the narrator they often create a “second story” that “tells us how the narrator tells stories, and also tells us about the narrator himself.” He writes, “If one fails to sense this second level, the intentions and accents of the author himself, then one has failed to understand the work” (313-14). Bakhtin’s final statement here, that “one has failed to understand” a work if one does not make the distinction between characters’ voices and the voice of the author refracted through his or her characters, points precisely to the early reviewers’ conflation of the author with his narrator-protagonist.

Instead, Han’s and Kang’s voices are in “dialogic tension”—that is, they interact with one another along multiple axes in order that the author “might remain as it were neutral with regard to language, a third party in a quarrel between two people (although he might be a *biased* third party)” (Bakhtin 314). Such “dialogic tension” also occurs between author and characters and between narrator and characters because characters, too, have their own autonomous “belief systems”; thus, each character’s speech “may also refract authorial intentions and consequently may to a certain degree constitute a second language for the author” (Bakhtin 315).

An understanding of how heteroglossia is incorporated into the novel is critical to an understanding of how Kang's and his characters' literacy acts influence or affect his audiences. As I have discussed above, Kang used the categorization of his book as an autobiography in order to get the desired reaction from both his publisher and audience, and to enhance the text's marketability. Readers and critics did not read beyond the surface level until the novel appeared again nearly sixty years later.⁴⁷ By the 1990s, readers and critics were more interested in the subversive aspects of the text and began praising it not for what it affirmed about American society but for what it revealed in its subtext about the limits and contradictions of American democracy.

In her essay appearing in the 1997 Kaya edition of *East Goes West*, for example, Sunyoung Lee offers an insightful reading of what she calls Han's "pragmatic survivalism" (386) and Kang's "carefully constructed conceit" (389). Her argument focuses on the dinner party at Miss Churchill's (an elderly Quaker woman who entertains young people from foreign countries) in which a conflict arises between Senzar, an "Indo-Oxford product" studying engineering in the U.S., and Han. Senzar begins excoriating Han for his American education. He tells him, "Anybody who goes to an American university isn't educated.... You think you're educated. You don't know how to talk English!" (297). Han says that Senzar was "unconsciously parodying the English-felt superiority of the English university man" (297). The other guests looked on and listened in amusement until Senzar included them in his diatribe: "'Then, Americans are not sound,' Senzar kept on, and the Americans and English began to get very uncomfortable" (297). He continued, "Englishmen are hypocrites. Englishmen despise all others but themselves. They are the most conceited and boastful race" (298). When

an Englishman protests, Senzar lashes out against the colonial system and exclaims, “Soon we will drive you English out” (299). Han manages to deflect attention away from the other guests by interrupting Senzar to explain what the Japanese did in Korea. “You Hindus are better off under the English than we are under the Japanese” (299), he tells him. After the argument dies down, Han is “almost decorated for merit by the exhausted Westerners” (299) for intervening in the evening’s “social catastrophe.” Senzar is never invited back to Miss Churchill’s while Han became a regular guest.

Lee notes that it is ironic that Senzar’s statements are so similar to Han’s. She cites an example of Han’s criticism of colonization in which he says, “For me there was always special favor, special kindness . . . the white-man’s burden attitude toward the dark colonies” (118). Like Senzar, Han is also critical of the “disjointed, assembly-line instruction” that characterizes Western education, and both, Lee notes, “are aware of their own exiled status in the West” (388).

However, while Senzar is comfortable voicing his critiques in public, Han is keenly aware of the dangers of doing so. Han proves himself to be culturally literate in this scene, knowledgeable about social etiquette and aware of the social implications of disturbing Miss Churchill’s dinner party. Han’s “performance” is “opportunistic”—as the “hero” of the evening, Han ingratiates himself with the Westerners and is invited back to Miss Churchill’s every Wednesday, giving him “access to free food and the social connections that eventually lead him to his beloved Trip” (S. Lee 389). Han’s “pragmatic survivalism” as demonstrated in this scene is not unlike Kang’s strategy of voicing critiques through the characters other than his narrator. It is, as Lee notes, “a carefully

constructed conceit, with Younghill Kang as its master architect and principal beneficiary” (389).

Han’s “performance” at Miss Churchill’s secures a place for himself in this social circle in much the same way that Kang’s “performance” or critical act of literacy (the act of writing his novel) secures a place for himself in the “Western literary establishment.” Unlike the other characters in the book that openly criticize Western society, Han knows that in order to survive as an exile in America, he must act with decorum and poise. Similarly, Kang must tread carefully in order not to offend or alienate his audience.

Han further demonstrates his acquisition of both social and cultural literacy during his weekly visits to Miss Churchill’s. He not only engages Miss Churchill and her friend in conversation about the “latest books, plays, politics, [and] current events” (300), but also makes references and analogies to Western literature in his descriptions of his evening talks with Laura, a “Western girl of [Han’s] own age” (300) who is another guest of Miss Churchill’s. For example, Han imagines the college campus where Laura studied as being “just like the world of Tennyson’s *Princess*,” the “poetic landscape beyond the campus ... like nature in Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*,” and the students (her peers) “[l]ike the sexless beings of Hudson’s *Crystal Age*” (301). In drawing these comparisons, Han strengthens his ethos by proving to his audience that he is a scholar of Western literature and hence more *like* his readers than *unlike* them. “Such recitation,” writes David Palumbo-Liu, “serves as a marker of cultural capital, a sign of belonging to and identifying with universal culture” (*Asian/American* 126). By demonstrating his knowledge of Western literature Kang/Han establishes an identification between the reader and narrator-protagonist. By identifying with his readers based on their mutual

knowledge or awareness of these titles of Western literature, Han/Kang makes a claim for himself as a literate and hence legitimate American. Han even inserts a comment about English grammar here to prove his degree of literacy. In describing one of his conversations with Laura about her friends, he says, “Each name brought a nostalgic light to Laura’s eyes, and when she continued with ‘she,’ I might have thought she didn’t know her English grammar, just like Miyamori sometimes ...” (301).

Perhaps even more persuasive, however, is Han’s recollection and description of Senator Kirby. Here again Han/Kang uses his knowledge of American history and culture to prove to his readers that he is just as American as they. He writes,

I have always remembered Senator Kirby as a sort of historic American. That is, he reminds me of *The American* written by Henry James. Not the American of the seething new age where all is changing, but the American along more classic lines. He was wealthy, and most of his life had been spent in making money.... He was very fond of machinery, and at the slightest excuse would get into his khaki overalls and tinker around with that big car.... In his devotion to Wilson he had some of that missionary ideal of the classic American.... He was the product forever of American Jeffersonianism and American Puritanism blended, of American faith and American idealism, of all the Marlowesque stages of American industry ... (351-52)

Ironically, it is right after this description that we hear the dialogue between the senator and Han in which the senator urges Han to “*be American.*” Han has just shown himself

to be deeply knowledgeable about American society, quite possibly more so than his audience, and yet because of his race he is deemed unworthy of citizenship.

This passage is also an example of how Kang not only demonstrates his knowledge of other American male figures (including Senator Kirby, “the American” in James novel, Henry James himself, Woodrow Wilson, Thomas Jefferson, and Philip Marlowe) but rhetorically constructs an affiliation with them to persuade his audiences that he has more in common with these specifically American masculine figures than his readers might otherwise believe. Though he explains to Senator Kirby that, legally, he is ineligible for citizenship, the subtext in the passage above is that he is in fact citizenship-worthy because of this (albeit discursively constructed) bond.

Like his alter ego, Younghill Kang certainly knew more about American history and politics than some of his readers. However, despite numerous recommendations from publishers, university presidents, best-selling writers, philosophers, and politicians, Kang was never granted U.S. citizenship but instead remained officially classified as a “resident alien” of the United States. In fact, as with many Koreans at the time, Kang belonged to no country. When asked about his nationality in the 1931 Guggenheim Foundation fellowship application, he wrote, “In practice an American and permanently located here, but debarred by the United States Government from naturalization as an Oriental. I am not a citizen elsewhere, since the Korean government was dissolved [by Japan] in 1910” (qtd. in S. Lee 376).

While Kang never legally became an U.S. citizen, he fought hard in his writing to prove his worthiness as an American. In a 1941 article published in *Common Ground*, Kang expressed his appreciation for the United States and joy over being an “American”

husband and father, thus relying on his marriage to an American woman to help legitimize him. In the same article, he strategically positions himself as a political exile who believes in the future of America and in American democracy because, he says, “it teaches civil harmony.” He writes, “It is clear why I chose America. Not only because the country of my birth became the victim of a state preaching racial greed and oppression. But actually because liberty for growth is the one true religion for me. As an Asian immigrant I have escaped oppression in Asia ... I feel that America is my country.” By embracing democracy and liberty as one who was victimized by Japanese colonialism, Kang makes a claim for himself, if not as a legal citizen, then at least as a citizen of what he calls the “spiritual” America (62).

Kang also makes a claim for himself as citizenship-worthy through a demonstration of his own literacy. While he does not gain legal citizenship as a result of the publication of his books or petitions to the government, Kang gains legitimacy through the (literacy) act of cultural criticism that his book performs. Literacy in this sense is much more than the ability to construct a novel; in Paulo Freire’s conceptualization, Kang’s literacy act is the dialogue or conversation that he is having with the larger culture (Young 11). This act is rhetorical in that it serves as an attempt to effect change or to influence his readers to take action.

Freire’s work is especially useful in reconceptualizing literacy as it relates to dominance and oppression. In viewing literacy as dialogue or interaction rather than an instrument of oppression, literacy becomes the means for cultural practice and cultural work (Young 12). Such a conception of literacy also suggests that it is fluid, like language and culture, and not held to any standard or system of authority. If language is

stratified, so too is literacy. As Morris Young writes, “as part of the move toward making literacy an important element in self-determination, it must be understood in terms of being produced by culture (or better, cultures)” (12). This understanding involves the recognition of how knowledge is produced and how one can participate in this knowledge-production and construction of culture. Literacy, then, allows for an understanding of the self in relation to the larger community and culture (13). Thus in the act of writing his literacy narrative, Kang not only produces a text but he also engages in a dialogue with American culture, thereby participating in the construction of culture and the nation and claiming a space for himself as a legitimate participant in this process.

Chapter 2: Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart*

Introduction

Like Kang, Carlos Bulosan made claims for his legitimacy as an American through writing despite the laws that prohibited him from gaining legal citizenship.⁴⁸ In fact, Bulosan credited Kang in *America Is in the Heart* for giving him the encouragement and confidence to become an American writer: "I returned to the writers of my time for strength. And I found Younghill Kang.... [I]t was his indomitable courage that rekindled in me a fire of hope" (265).

Born on November 2, 1911 in Binalonan, Pangasinan, Carlos Bulosan grew up in a Philippines that had been subject to U.S. colonization since 1898 when the U.S. defeated Spain in the Spanish-American War. After nearly a half-century of Philippine resistance and three years of subjugation by the Japanese military, the Philippines gained its independence in 1946. The legacy of U.S. colonization, beginning with the Philippine-American War of 1898-1902, and its resulting class system of absentee-landlordism is addressed, albeit implicitly, in Part I of *America Is in the Heart*. To escape the oppression and poverty at home, tens of thousands of *pinoys*, or migrant workers, were essentially forced into permanent exile when they were recruited to work on Hawaiian plantations, at Alaskan canneries, and in American West Coast agribusinesses. As civilian rule superceded military rule in the Philippines in the first decade of the twentieth century, American teachers were brought to the colony to educate the "natives" in Western civilization under a policy of "benevolent assimilation" (Chan 17). The colonial education that Bulosan/Allos received under this policy instilled in him

illusions of America as a democratic nation where an individual could achieve success through hard work and perseverance.

However, reality set in almost immediately as Allos either witnessed or became victim to racial discrimination, violence and exploitation. Within days of arriving in Seattle from the Philippines, Allos' companions are robbed of all their money, he receives news of his friend's brother's death in the Philippines, and he is bought and sold by his fellow countrymen for five dollars to work at an Alaskan fish cannery (*America* 99-101). "It was the beginning of my life in America," he writes, "the beginning of a long flight that carried me down the years, fighting desperately to find peace in some corner of life" (101).

Like Kang and his fellow Korean exiles, Filipinos in America had no government to support them. As Carey McWilliams writes, "Their status was ambiguous. They were 'wards' or 'nationals' who could not be deported because they had not entered as immigrants, nor could they be excluded. Yet they were not eligible for citizenship.... In brief, they were neither fish nor fowl" (x). As non-citizens, they were prohibited from owning land and from working in the government, and as "Orientals" they were subject to anti-miscegenation laws and exploitation at the hands of Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, and even (in fact especially) other Filipino immigrants.

Bulosan, along with thousands of other Filipino American "nationals," immigrated in 1930 during the Great Depression.⁴⁹ In the two decades leading up to the Great Depression the population of Filipinos in California had increased from five to over 30,000 (Takaki 315).⁵⁰ After laboring in restaurants and farms for a few years, he became involved in union organizing as a result of his friendship with Chris Mensalvas of

the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA). In 1934, he became the editor of *The New Tide*, through which he met and befriended writers such as Richard Wright, William Saroyan, William Carlos Williams, Louis Adamic, and Carey McWilliams (San Juan, *On Becoming* 6). Shortly thereafter, in 1936, Bulosan was confined to a Los Angeles hospital for tuberculosis. His confinement sparked a voracious appetite for literature and it was here that he began writing about the working-class struggles in America as well as the U.S. colonization of the Philippines.

First Wave Reception History

When Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* was published in 1946, it was acclaimed as a narrative of success and assimilation. *Look* magazine, for instance, included *America Is in the Heart* in its list of the "Fifty Best Books" of 1946. Other reviews suggest that the book was valued primarily for its portrayal of "the Filipino American sensibility." For example, an anonymous reviewer for the *Christian Science Monitor* wrote that "after his appealing and beautifully written account of life on Luzon, [Bulosan] certainly persuades his reader that he is a sincere and truthful witness of the terrible events he portrays" (qtd. in Trudeau 1). This reviewer makes no distinction between Allos the narrator and Bulosan the author, calling Bulosan "an appealing little waif who would arouse the compassion of any good-hearted American" (qtd. in Trudeau 1). William Lynch's March 9, 1946 review, "Loyalty in Spite of All," appeared in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, praising the book for its candid portrait of racist America and for its insight into the mind of one of America's working-class immigrants:

To the vast and still growing stack of tracts on intercultural relations “America Is in the Heart” is a valuable addition ... it is a promise from one who by his unusual background in American letters should bring to us something lacking today in our literature. There is unquestionably a new vigor in the Orient. We need Carlos Bulosan to translate it for us and to help us assimilate the attitudes and persons it sends to our shores. (8)

While most reviews praised Allos/Bulosan for his assimilability and courage in the face of racism, violence, and utter despair, one review took a more critical approach. “The Darker Brothers,” a combined review of *My Africa* by Mbonu Ojike and *America Is in the Heart* by Bulosan appeared in the March 25, 1946 edition of the *New Republic*. In this review, Max Gissen writes,

These two books are part of the growing literature of protest coming from dark-skinned peoples all over the earth.... What he tells of those early years [in *America Is in the Heart*] will be a shock to any number of people who have always imagined a land of little, happy, brown brothers being helped towards independence by handsome Americans like Paul McNutt and Douglas MacArthur. (420-421)

Gissen’s critical outlook towards the U.S. (which is not surprising appearing as it did in the leftist publication the *New Republic*) foreshadows what today’s critics argue—that the book is primarily a critique of America rather than an immigrant success story.

I will return to a discussion of this critique shortly, but first I want to problematize the emphasis that many other reviewers placed on the text as social document. If *America Is in the Heart* only provides insight into the lives of Filipinos in the Philippines

and the U.S., as several of these reviews suggest, then Bulosan's function as an author is limited (as with Kang) to that of cultural translator or native informant. To quote Lynch again, "We need Carlos Bulosan to translate it for us and to help us assimilate the attitudes and persons it sends to our shores" (8). Contemporary critics Morris Young and Marilyn Alquizola also find this troubling. Constructing Bulosan as "translator," Young argues, only serves to reinforce the idea that his text is "foreign" and thus unreadable without a "translator," while Alquizola writes, "Implicit [in Lynch's review] was the notion that Filipinos, like other working-class immigrants, should be, first and foremost, assimilable in order to facilitate co-optation of their lives and their labor" (204). Instead of focusing on the critique offered by Bulosan, these reviews suggest that Bulosan's text merely teaches or informs his readers of Filipino life in the Philippines and America. Given that the novel was published shortly after World War II, in a climate of heightened racism against "Orientals," this response is perhaps to be expected. Mainstream white America would not have been accepting or even tolerant of any text by an Asian immigrant or an Asian American that did not in some way espouse the American Dream.

While such a construction is clearly problematic in perpetuating the perception of Asian Americans and Asian immigrants as foreign, Young asserts that Bulosan's status as "translator" can serve a more transgressive function if we view Allos, the narrator, as "cultural translator" of America as well (66). Despite his undying faith in America, Bulosan describes his brutal and horrific experiences as a Filipino migrant worker in the U.S., thereby "translating" Filipino life in the U.S. for his American readers. As I will discuss at greater length below, contemporary critics prefer to read Bulosan as

conducting an implicit critique or translation of America rather than constructing a narrative of hopeful assimilation.

Second Wave Reception History

The early 1970s marks the beginning of the Asian American literary movement as writers and scholars began revisiting texts that had gone out of print, such as *America Is in the Heart*, and acknowledging new voices in Asian American literature and cultural criticism. As a result of the growing interest in Asian American studies, *America Is in the Heart* was re-published by the University of Washington Press in 1973. As the more recent critical responses to Asian American literary texts suggest, critics and scholars began looking for the more subversive readings of texts as a way of challenging and interrogating dominant power structures.

When it was republished in 1973, the text faced a very different audience. Rather than reinforcing their beliefs in American democracy, the text was now seen as offering readers a subversive view of the American system. Appearing at a time of great crisis for the United States both domestically (the Civil Rights movement) and internationally (the war in Vietnam), the text fueled readers' anger and criticism towards American policies. For example, in his 1995 essay, "In Search of Filipino Writing," E. San Juan explains that after his success in 1944 with *The Laughter of My Father*, Bulosan was forgotten until 1973 when the University of Washington Press, convinced that *America Is in the Heart* would sell as a result of the activism of Filipino American groups protesting the "US-Marcos dictatorship" (227), reissued the novel. Regardless of Bulosan's intent, readers

and critics found his work to be polemical and interpreted it in a way that confirmed their own beliefs about the contradictions of American democracy.

Alquizola, for example, argues that Bulosan's text can be read as ironic and subversive when it is viewed as fiction rather than autobiography. In making this distinction, she writes, we can read Bulosan, the author, as "aware of [the] glaring contradictions between American ideals and racist American reality" and Allos as "express[ing] undying hope in an immigrant's American dream, the fulfillment of which is precluded by racism" (199). As Young notes, while reading the figure of Allos as a fictive character separate from the identity of Bulosan the author allows us to recognize greater artistic range and more subversive critiques in his writing, it also challenges the still widespread belief that every form of writing by a nonwhite American is autobiographical or confessional (66).⁵¹

Elaine Kim, one of the foundational scholars in the field of Asian American literary studies, has contributed to this misconception. She contends that early Asian immigrant writing was largely autobiographical due to the authors' awareness of "common misconceptions" among Westerners about Asia and Asians and their desire to befriend their readers by writing about Asian traditions (*Asian American* 25). She identifies such writers as "ambassadors of goodwill" who desire and seek "American acceptance" (57) and she includes both Younghill Kang and Carlos Bulosan in this category. Her reading of *America Is in the Heart* as an assimilationist narrative is limiting because it fails to consider the potential arguments about gender, sexuality, class, race, citizenship, nation, and identity that are offered by the text. E. San Juan is especially critical of such readings, claiming that, "What all these reappropriations of

Bulosan signify is the power and limits of the hegemonic consensus and its apparatuses to sustain its assimilative but ultimately apartheidlike project to absorb the Asian ‘Other’ into the fold of the unitary hierarchical racial order” (“In Search” 219). Such readings of Bulosan’s work elide the effects of the U.S. colonization of the Philippines and the resulting recruitment of laborers first to Hawai‘i and then to the “mainland,” and reduce Bulosan to an “Asian goodwill ambassador” who simply promotes pluralism while seeking American acceptance.

Carlos Bulosan’s Rhetorical Strategies

As contemporary critics have suggested, reading the fictional autobiography as a subversive narrative illuminates the contradictions between the myth of American democratic inclusion and the reality of exclusion. While an assimilationist reading of the literacy narrative would consider the ways in which the narrator seeks and gains entry into America through American literature and by becoming “literate” in the English language, a subversive reading considers the ways in which the narrator’s dreams of becoming a part of America are never realized, and it considers the author’s implicit or explicit critique of the “literacy myth,” that is, that one can gain entry into the social, cultural, and political spheres of America through the acquisition of “standard” English or the dominant discourse. I aim to illustrate in my analysis both how Bulosan critiques the “literacy myth” and also how my reading enables us to see how Bulosan’s text can function rhetorically as assimilationist *and* condemnatory.

For example, Bulosan’s construction of Allos can be viewed as a rhetorical strategy if we view him as a composite character rather than strictly as an

autobiographical figure.⁵² By drawing on several different (fictional and real) life experiences, Bulosan creates a character—a rhetorical persona, if you will—with whom many *pinoys* and others oppressed by the social, political, and economic systems of America can identify. By creating a composite character with whom other marginalized people in America can identify, Bulosan “establish[es] rapport between himself and his audience” (Burke, *On Symbols* 191). He and his audience are also consubstantial in that they remain distinct beings yet they are joined by their ideas, attitudes, and perhaps even actions (181). The act of writing is thus performative and persuasional for Bulosan—through writing he not only (re)constructs his rhetorical identity but he also establishes his legitimacy as a Filipino writer in America.

While there are numerous textual examples of Bulosan’s use of identification, one of the more powerful instances is Macario’s (Allos’ brother) “We Are America!” peroration that appears at the very end of Part II. At a gathering of a small group of Filipinos working together on a literary magazine, Allos and his brother begin to talk about the social struggles of Filipinos in California. In an impassioned speech, Macario tells them,

It is but fair to say that America is not a land of one race or one class of men. We are all Americans that have toiled and suffered and known oppression and defeat, from the first Indian that offered peace in Manhattan to the last Filipino pea pickers. America is not bound by geographical latitudes. America is not merely a land or an institution. America is in the hearts of men that died for freedom; it is also in the eyes of men that are building a new world. America is a prophecy of a new

society of men: of a system that knows no sorrow or strife or suffering. America is a warning to those who would try to falsify the ideals of freemen.

America is also the nameless foreigner, the homeless refugee, the hungry boy begging for a job and the black body dangling on a tree. America is the illiterate immigrant who is ashamed that the world of books and intellectual opportunities is closed to him. We are all that nameless foreigner, that homeless refugee, that hungry boy, that illiterate immigrant and that lynched black body. All of us, from the first Adams to the last Filipino, native born or alien, educated or illiterate—*We are America!*
(189)

In this speech, Macario persuades the group that they are all fighting for a similar cause—to bring justice to their fellow immigrant “brothers” and to make their voices heard through their publication. By identifying with others who have fought for democracy, Macario encourages them to feel justified in their pursuit for equality.

In addition, by using the pronoun “we,” and by referencing the plights of both Native Americans and blacks, Macario/Bulosan appeals to the identities of (male) Americans who share this common history. In effect, Bulosan makes the argument that he and, by extension, his characters are indeed just as American as his readers. Furthermore, Macario/Bulosan uses a rhetoric of patriotism to appeal to both the intratextual and extratextual audiences’ identities. Earlier in this speech, for example, Macario alludes to the democratic ideal of the self-made man and America as a land of opportunity: “In this we are the same; we must also fight for an America where a man

should be given unconditional opportunities to cultivate his potentialities and to restore him to his rightful dignity” (188-89). Macario’s exclusion of women in this national community also resonates with the founding documents of the United States that were written by and for men and which represent specifically American masculine ideals. Macario’s (male) audience as well as Bulosan’s (male) audience is thus consubstantial with Macario/Bulosan—they are joined in ideology yet they remain separate, individual beings.

In his “We Are America!” speech, Macario is performing what J.L. Austin calls a perlocutionary act; that is, in making this speech he is producing “certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons” (101). Macario’s speech has the effect of encouraging his “fellow countrymen” (the other characters in the novel) as well as other immigrant/marginalized readers (both his early and his more contemporary audiences) to continue fighting for their cause and reinforcing their beliefs in American democracy. On another level, the speech functions as Bulosan’s perlocutionary act to evoke sympathy, or pathos, and perhaps even guilt from his more mainstream readers. For his 1940s audiences, this would have been particularly effective considering that the situation he and his characters faced was an ongoing problem in the real world at that time. Contemporary readers might also feel sympathy and pathos for the characters but they would unlikely feel guilt as the situation is so far removed from their lives.

Dramatizing Communities

Identifying Macario's speech as a rhetorical vision enables us to see how Bulosan uses fantasy themes to persuade characters and readers of their social reality and to move both characters and readers to act. In the early 1970s under the work of Robert Bales (1950; 1970), Ernest Bormann developed fantasy theme analysis—a corresponding analytical tool to symbolic convergence theory. Bales' work concentrated on the dynamics and rhetorics of small group interaction. Among his findings, Bales identified that during moments of stress or anxiety some people in small group interactions would begin telling stories (or “dramatizing”) as a way of releasing tension. Through his research, Bormann claims, Bales provides an explanation for the use of dramatizing scenes, which he labeled “fantasy,” to create “social reality” for groups of people. He thus provides the critic a method for examining “messages for insights into the group's culture, motivation, emotional style, and cohesion” (396). As dramas or fantasies “chain[ed] out through the group,” Bales noted that members became “animated” and “boisterous” as they communicated, indicating that they were participating in the drama (397). The content of a fantasy chain, Bormann explains, “consists of characters, real or fictitious, playing out a dramatic situation in a setting removed in time and space from the here-and-now transactions of the group.” “Thus,” he continues, “a recollection of something that happened to the group in the *past* or a dream of what the group might do in the *future* could be considered a fantasy theme” (397). In certain events, particularly tragic ones, where an individual feels “lost or hopeless,” the individual might dream a fantasy to help provide that person a “sense of meaning and significance” (400). Allos could be seen as one such individual who dreams the fantasy of a democratic America as

a survival tactic or “coping mechanism” (400). As I will demonstrate below, this fantasy theme resonates throughout the novel, shedding light on the rhetorical situation that Bulosan constructed within the novel as well as the rhetorical dimensions of the novel’s production and consumption.

Bormann argues that these moments in which group members or individuals feel that they have been “transported” to a “new realm of reality,” as Bales describes it, happen “not only in individual reactions to works of art, or in a small group’s churning out a fantasy theme, but also in larger groups hearing a public speech.” Bulosan’s two sets of readers/reviewers thus might be regarded as participants in two distinct dramatizations as they made sense of the work in a way that resonated with their own preconceived views and attitudes. In this way Bormann’s research focuses on how small group dramatizations work their way into the mass media and public discourse to create a “symbolic reality” or “rhetorical vision” for the larger community (398). An analysis of the rhetorical visions of a particular community gives critics insight into what the community’s values and attitudes are and how the community constructs reality or makes sense out of what is happening around it.

Bormann uses the Puritan missionaries in the Massachusetts Bay Colony as an example to illustrate his theory that fantasy themes are used as a way for people to make sense of their situations. Due to their arduous and “backbreaking” lifestyle, he argues, the Puritans had to embrace an “internal fantasy life of mighty grandeur and complexity.” “They participated,” he continues, “in a rhetorical vision that saw the migration to the new world as a holy exodus of God’s chosen people” (402). This vision, he contends,

gave them a sense of importance and purpose both as individuals and as a group and helped them to justify their social and political actions.

Bormann's use of the Puritan missionaries to illustrate his point is especially significant in light of this discussion of Macario's "We Are America" speech. As Sacvan Bercovitch details so eloquently in *The Rights of Assent*, the myths of America and the "rhetoric of consensus" originated with the Puritans of New England. It was with the Puritans that the idea of America as "prophecy" began, and Macario alludes to this myth as a way of encouraging his brothers and friends to rally together to claim what is rightfully theirs. The symbols that Macario uses are so embedded in American history and culture that his speech could have come from the mouths of Puritans if not for the references to Manhattan and Filipino pea pickers. According to Bercovitch, the Puritans "bequeathed" to the culture their vision of America as a nation in progress using a "rhetoric of mission so broad in its implications, and so specifically American in its application, that it could facilitate the transitions from Puritan to Yankee, and from errand to manifest destiny and the dream" (35). By using the language or rhetoric of the Puritan missionaries and founding fathers, Macario and Bulosan become participants in the same rhetorical vision, thus claiming a space for themselves in the narrative of the nation.

An analysis of fantasy themes or rhetorical visions provides insight into, among other things, the members' motives for group interaction. When examining the function of fantasy themes in fiction, another element becomes especially relevant—that is, the author's role in creating characters who participate in the given rhetorical vision(s). In the case of Macario's speech (and in fact throughout the novel), we see the fantasy of America as a land of opportunity as well as the fantasy, among migrant workers, of an

America that believes in and practices equality and freedom for all. Like the Puritans, Allos and his fellow *pinoy*s participate in this rhetorical vision because it gives them hope for a better future and helps them to cope with the violence and discrimination that they face on a daily basis. Allos' individual fantasy theme that certain white women represent "the America that [he] had wanted to find" further supports his motive for maintaining hope in the American dream and working for social justice.

By examining the fantasy themes of the characters in the novel we gain insight into the culture of the community of immigrant migrant workers and their motives for seeking justice and equality. We also see how fantasy themes can function for marginalized peoples as a way of uniting the community in the fight for social and political rights. When we consider the role of Bulosan the author as the creator of these characters and rhetorical visions, we gain even greater insight into the politics and subversive functions of the novel. Allos' and his brothers' creation of fantasy themes as survival tactics or "coping mechanisms" is telling—had America lived up to its promises, such fantasies or visions would be unnecessary.⁵³

Bulosan's use of fantasy themes in his novel serves a dual purpose: the themes function rhetorically on his audience through a process of identification—readers identify with Allos' plight, anger, or social consciousness (or the symbols used in the rhetorical vision) and are moved to action, thus joining the fantasy theme; and they help to legitimize the author as critics examine the ways in which he moves his readers to action through rhetoric. As E. San Juan states, "In effect, writing becomes for the Filipino diaspora the transitional agency of self-recovery. It facilitates a mediation between the negated past of colonial dependency and a fantasied, even utopian, 'America' where

people of color exercise their right of self-determination and socialist justice prevails” (“In Search” 216-17). Bulosan’s knowledge of the fantasy themes with which his audience would most identify gives him authority and legitimates him as an American, even though legally he is still deemed “illegitimate.” Furthermore, his demonstration of his cultural literacy serves a rhetorical purpose by arguing for a more inclusive conceptualization of American citizenship.

That most critics and readers responded favorably to *America Is in the Heart* when it was first published attests to the effectiveness of Bulosan’s rhetoric. Aware of the high morale and pride among Americans at the end of World War II and sensitive to the negative attitude towards “Orientals,” Bulosan knew that a novel, which on the surface level affirmed the American dream, would be well received (Alquizola 202). Bulosan’s status fluctuated depending on America’s political agenda. As an American national, and because Filipinos were allied with the U.S. during World War II, Bulosan was treated kindly by his audience. Compared with Japanese Americans, who were “guilty by reason of race,” Filipinos were considered less of a threat to the American public at this time.⁵⁴ The war “marked the turning point” in America’s acceptance of Bulosan as a writer. He published two volumes of poetry in 1942 and in the same year was included in *Who’s Who in America* (Evangelista 14).

Bulosan’s rhetoric is effective for the time in which the novel was published because he relies so heavily on pathetic appeals yet does not exceed the audience’s limitations. Because he remains faithful to America despite his hardships, readers sympathize with Allos. Bulosan heightens the effect by building up the audience’s

expectation that Allos will become educated (and hence, “successful”), only to leave that dream unfulfilled.

Reading *America Is in the Heart* as a Narrative of Literacy

Reading *America Is in the Heart* as a literacy narrative illuminates contradictions and helps to legitimize Bulosan as a participant in cultural criticism as we examine the ways in which he controls his readers and how they respond to the text. Like James Phelan, I believe that reading is a recursive process and that rhetoric gives us the tools to examine the multiple layers and relationships between a text, an author, and a context. Given the social, political, and cultural conditions in the 1970s, it is not surprising that readers responded as they did—such a response attests to the rhetorical power of the text to inspire or move readers to take social and political action.

In the opening chapters of the book, Bulosan reveals how valuable literacy and education are to Allos and his family. They hope and believe that education will lead to freedom from working in the fields and the financial means to pay off loans from the moneylender. Education is established early in the novel as “something that belonged exclusively to the rulers and to some fortunate natives affluent enough to go to Europe” (14). Thus, when the “free and compulsory” American colonial education system is introduced in the Philippines at the turn of the twentieth century, every family makes a host of sacrifices in order to send their sons to school. However, the cost of schooling proves to be so great that Allos’ family eventually loses all of their land and Allos and his brothers, one by one, are forced to go to America seeking work and, hopefully, a better life. In the Philippines, Allos is imbued with American ideology through the newly

instituted free education system. Filipino youths who were being educated under this system in the Philippines read about the “home of the free and the brave,” saw pictures of Washington and Lincoln in their textbooks, and were familiar with the Declaration of Independence (Takaki 57). Allos holds on to this ideology when he emigrates, only to find that America is even more oppressive than his homeland. Thus Bulosan, from the very opening of the novel, begins his critique of educational institutions, the promises they hold, and the expectations they inevitably fail to meet.

For Allos, reading and writing—skills which he acquired in the Philippines under American colonial rule and later honed in the United States—open up “a whole new world” (70) for him when he arrives in America. Literacy in English gives him the language and power to understand his situation and to reveal to others the violence that has been inflicted on him and his people in America. He writes,

In later years I remembered this opportunity when I read that the American Negro writer, Richard Wright, had not been allowed to borrow books from his local library because of his color. I was beginning to understand what was going on around me, and the darkness that had covered my present life was lifting. (71)

While Allos does have access to books, he does not have access to a formal education in the U.S. and therefore educates himself through books that he acquires from friends. The promise of American education that Allos and his family dream about in the Philippines turns out to be just that—a pipe dream.

Like Chungpa Han, Allos establishes a rhetorical relationship with his audience through a process of identification and through his critical acts of literacy. By identifying

with other (male) American writers who were themselves critical of America, such as Richard Wright, Hart Crane, Theodore Dreiser, Jack London, Mark Twain, and William Saroyan (*America* 246), Allos persuades his early and contemporary audiences of his consubstantiality with them. This in turn persuades his audiences that he is like them and thus as legitimate as they, and it strengthens his ethos by demonstrating to his audiences that he is well-read (i.e., culturally literate) and thus authorized to speak about these American writers. Both strategies work towards persuading his readers of his literacy and hence his legitimacy as an American writer. Because most early readers did not interpret the text as a condemnation or critique of America, his identification, specifically with other writers who did criticize America, was likely not as effective as it has been since the text's second printing.

While Allos' engagement and identification with other American authors is crucial to his "project" of claiming an American identity, his own acts of writing are even more essential and in fact liberating. Upon recollecting his first conscious attempt to write a letter, Allos notes,

Then it came to me, like a revelation, that I could actually write understandable English. I was seized with happiness. I wrote slowly and boldly, drinking the wine when I stopped, laughing silently and crying. When the long letter was finished, a letter which was actually a story of my life, I jumped to my feet and shouted through my tears:

They can't silence me any more! I'll tell the world what they have done to me!" (180)

For Allos, writing serves not only as a means of articulating an identity but also as a vehicle for protest. The ability to communicate to the world the injustice he and his fellow countrymen face in America gives Allos a sense of power and self-worth, so much so that he accepts the literacy myth and believes that writing has put him on a path towards equality. Words and knowledge are artillery for him, “weapon[s]” with which to “fight the world” (224). The metaphor of war to describe Allos’ literacy act is particularly apt as his physical debilitation—a result of tuberculosis—prevented him from any form of physical protest. Now that he has access to the language of protest, Allos can speak for those who have been rendered speechless and who have been victimized physically, psychologically, and linguistically by both American and colonial institutions. By using the language of war, Bulosan achieves the rhetorical effect of persuading his readers of the violent nature of silencing. While literacy in English does not grant Allos the status of “American,” it gives him the language of protest to reveal the literacy myth and the contradictions between American democratic ideology and America’s racist reality.

As with Kang, it is through his writings and publications that Bulosan hopes to gain, if not legal citizenship, then at least cultural citizenship. The authority he assumes as insider to the mysterious and enigmatic America perhaps best illustrates his claim to cultural citizenship. While he is recovering from tuberculosis at a Los Angeles hospital, he befriends a young American boy who does not know how to write because, like Allos, he came from a poor family and worked most of his life. The boy, John Custer, asks Allos if he would write a letter to his mother in Arkansas. Allos recalls,

The words came effortlessly. I was no longer writing about this lonely sick boy, but about myself and my friends in America. I told her about the lean, lonely and miserable years. I mentioned places and names. I was not writing to an unknown mother any more. I was writing to my own mother plowing in the muddy fields of Mangusmana: it was the one letter I should have written before. I was telling her about America. Actually, I was writing to all the unhappy mothers whose sons left and did not return. (247)

Moments later Allos adopts the persona of one who truly “knows America” when he tells the boy, “Rediscover America . . . it’s only in giving the best we have that we can become a part of America” (248). Rachel Lee’s analysis provides further insight into this “symbolic” moment for Allos. She argues that the maternal figure in this passage serves as a means for Allos to “conceive of a fraternal community across racial lines (e.g., writing to a mother in Arkansas is writing to his own mother—hence the white boy in the hospital and Carlos are symbolic brothers)” (36). The interconnections among gender, race and literacy, which I discuss at further length below, are highlighted in this scene, as writing a letter to his own mother in the Philippines would prove futile because his parents were unable to read or write. As we see in Kang’s autobiography and here throughout Bulosan’s text, it is a white woman—though a passive participant in this case—who helps Allos gain legitimacy as a cultural critic of America. Moreover, the inverse of Lee’s statement holds true—if John Custer is Allos’ “symbolic brother,” then Custer’s mother becomes Allos’ “symbolic mother” and Allos is identified with a “legitimate” (white) American woman.

Allos is privileged in the above scene as “knowing America” and being “more American” than the young boy precisely because of his literacy. As the boy tells Allos in a letter years later, “Learning to read and write is knowing America, my country” (248). The reality, however, is that no degree of literacy will make Allos “more American” than his young white friend. They may identify with one another because they both grew up poor and are recovering together in a hospital, but John Custer’s race gives him a freedom and privilege that Allos will never know. The boy’s Americanness is juxtaposed against Allos’ and his Filipino friends’ non-citizen status when Macario comes to the hospital to tell Allos that he couldn’t get a visa (248). An assimilationist reading of this literacy narrative would elide the racialized subtext and allow for a positive critique of this scene, viewing Allos as privileged in his acquisition and use of literacy.

Reading and writing for Carlos are what Burke terms “symbolic actions.” For Burke, language *is* symbolic action, in that language and action always and necessarily go hand in hand in order for humans to define and create reality. As Joseph Gusfield writes, “For Burke ... language must be understood by what it does, by how it affects the situation, the audience, to which it is addressed. Words are not empty folders, hanging in the air. They move audiences to responses and move the speakers to define and redefine their contexts” (11). So even while Allos is bed-ridden and ill, he is still in fact performing social actions through his acts of reading and writing.

In a pivotal scene towards the end of the novel, Allos’ acquisition of literacy is emblemized in the publication of his first book of poetry:

When the bound copies of my first book of poems, *Letter From America*, arrived, I felt like shouting to the world. How long ago had it

been that I had drunk a bottle of wine because I had discovered that I could write English?

The book was a rush job and the binding was simple, but it was something that had grown out of my heart. I knew that I would not write the same way again. I had put certain things of myself in it: the days of pain and anguish, of starvation and fear, my hopes, desires, aspirations. All of myself in this little volume of poems—and I would never be like that self again. (320)

Allos marvels at his long and painful process of acquiring literacy. With the publication of his book, Allos feels legitimated, knowing that his words, his life, will be shared with others. The literacy Allos acquires, however, is far more than the ability to read and write in English; literacy also means being able to use these skills in the appropriate contexts in order to bring about social justice and change.

While the publication of his book is personally fulfilling for Allos, his hopes for any material benefits or political change are thwarted by the subsequent destruction of the volume. In a move that is both subversive and heartbreaking, Bulosan critiques the idea that literacy is a means for social, cultural and economic advancement. After Allos receives his book in the mail, he immediately seeks a companion with whom to share his happiness. He finds his brother Amado drinking beer with two girls when one of the girls, mistaking his book for a bottle of whiskey, grabs at it and begins laughing, “‘Ha-ha!’ ... ‘Poetry!’” She then proceeds to tear out the pages, destroying the volume in Allos’ face. Amado, furious with the girl, beats her with his fists and she cries to Allos, “‘I just felt bad. If you stay on in this lousy street you’ll be ruined. See what happened

to me? I wanted to be an actress. I came from a nice family, a nice family in Baltimore...” (321). Allos does not identify the girls’ nationalities but instead quotes one of them as saying she comes “from a nice family” in Baltimore, suggesting that they are in fact white and privileged.

Young’s critique of this passage is illuminating and insightful. He reads the girl’s anxiety about Allos’ “success” as indicative of “the expectation that her race and class standing will be enough to succeed.” He goes on to critique Amado’s reaction as “problematic” in that it “reproduces the oppression that has employed literacy in the creation of gender and race hierarchies.” In other words, by beating up the girl, Amado elevates Allos and his literacy above her and her (presumed) inability to succeed. The privileged status of literacy is thus reinforced by Amado’s violent reaction towards the girl (75).

Gender, Sexuality and Literacy

The above scene is in many ways representative of the complex relationships among gender, race, and literacy that operate throughout the text. Much critical work has already examined the role of white women in *America Is in the Heart*.⁵⁵ While critics note that it is primarily white women who introduce Allos to the world of literature, the implications of this racialized and gendered relationship as it relates to the discourse of literacy has not yet been discussed or analyzed.

In her analysis of *America Is in the Heart*, Rachel Lee examines the blatant exclusion of women in this “imagined” national community. She argues that although the novel “exposes” the myth of American democracy by highlighting the United States’

practices of exclusion and persecution of its racialized minorities, it “perpetuates a similar (gender-based) exclusion in its imagining of an alternate community.” She goes on to argue that the “masculinist bias” in the novel is not only apparent in the gendered language but also, and even more so, in the novel’s construction of male enterprise as work and in the erasure or omission of working women from Bulosan’s fictional world of laboring Americans. In his seemingly all-inclusive, all-embracing “We Are America!” proclamation, Bulosan’s “us” is limited to “the first Adams” through “the last Filipino.” Lee identifies the masculine declension here in the word “Filipino” as highly indicative of Bulosan’s masculinist bias. Laboring women, she writes, “are specifically not included in the “We” of working men who can claim national legitimacy” (34).

I reference Lee here because she identifies a notable contradiction in Bulosan’s construction of America and Americanness that has important implications for my examination of literacy and its relationship to citizenship and race. The contradiction is that the America that Allos imagines and seeks is an America of brothers, or working men, while working women (excepting Allos’ own mother and friend Marian) pose a threat to this brotherhood as they are often the cause of dissension among men. Only desexualized (i.e., “proper”) white women are part of the America that Allos seeks, and they are privileged as such solely because they function as vehicles through which the narrator believes he can form these brotherly bonds and become a part of America.⁵⁶

Similarly, these women are privileged because they have access to literature and therefore they have access, at least symbolically, to the world to which Allos so desperately wants to belong. By providing Allos with the literature of other male American writers who similarly struggled with race and class politics, these women

further contribute to Allos' sense of identification with his "author-brothers" and hence his identification as a legitimate American. However, they also function, like Trip in *East Goes West*, to undermine this very legitimacy as it is only through his friendships with desexualized white women that he gains legitimacy. For instance, in the Philippines, he meets the "American" librarian Miss Strandon who not only teaches him about Abraham Lincoln but also is the first person to introduce him to the world of American literature. Later in the novel and through his brother Macario, he meets Dora Travers who urges him to "write more poems" because she thinks he will be a "good *American* poet" (224; emphasis original). Of Alice Odell, the woman who writes to Allos because she likes his poems and because she wants his advice on her own manuscript, Allos writes, "She was directing my education ... and I read everything she sent me" (232). Alice's sister, Eileen, also assists in Allos' education. After Alice leaves California, Eileen begins to visit Allos in the hospital, bringing him books and "little bundles of roast meat, celery, tomatoes, and apples" (234). When she leaves his bedside, Allos becomes "restless," and starts writing to her every day. He narrates, "I began to cultivate a taste for words ... writing fumbling, vehement letters to Eileen was actually my course in English.... [Eileen] was undeniably the *America* I had wanted to find.... This America was human, good, and real" (235; emphasis original). By introducing Allos to literature, by functioning as the conduit through which he develops a fraternal bond with other American male writers, and by claiming his Americanness for him, as Dora Travers does, these women simultaneously confer legitimacy on Allos and expose his reliance on them for that legitimacy. These women have the power to confer

legitimacy upon him and to strip it from him, as the scene in the bar above so pointedly illustrates.

Like Kang, Bulosan feels a desperate need to, as Chu might say, author himself into being, for it is this very authorship, or what I am calling Bulosan's critical act of literacy, that argues most persuasively for his legitimacy as a participant in the "American literary establishment." Furthermore, as I discussed earlier in this chapter, Bulosan aligns himself with other American male writers as a way of both arguing for his legitimacy as an American and as a way of challenging America's construction of him as "foreign" and undesirable. Though her focus is on Chinese male immigrants, Jennifer Ting's investigation of bachelor societies and the construction of Asian American sexuality illuminate my reading of Bulosan's rhetoric. Ting examines the ways in which the bachelor society trope has constructed, and reduced, Asian American male sexuality to two types: "conjugal" and "non-conjugal" heterosexuality. Focusing on two historical studies of Chinese immigrants in America, Ting notes that despite the absence of Chinese women in the United States, both accounts construct male Chinese immigrant sexuality as exclusively heterosexual in nature ("Bachelor Society" 277). Ting makes it clear that she is not arguing over how accurate or inaccurate these accounts are, but rather she insists that heterosexuality is "determined by more than object choice...[it] is to say that not all heterosexualities will be equally privileged by heterosexism, precisely because sexualities are implicated in power relations and cultural logics" (277-78). She demonstrates how the writers of these historiographies were themselves influenced by a rhetoric of heteronormativity, such that the kind of heterosexuality that they saw as operating in the bachelor society "is working, at the level of representation, to develop,

secure, and reproduce certain cultural logics (such as those underpinning the racial and class meanings of Asians and Asian Americans or ideas of U.S. national identity)” (278).

I introduce Ting’s argument here because it illuminates Bulosan’s construction of his fictional alter ego’s sexuality and how it relates to his narrative of literacy and legitimacy. Though he is constructed as a member of a 1930s Filipino bachelor society, some of who are depicted as sexually promiscuous, Allos is constructed as sexually naïve and unthreatening to the women he encounters and befriends. I have already noted that his platonic relationships with white women are both necessary (because of the anti-miscegenation laws) and strategic, in that the women are thus able to retain their official status as national citizens and are therefore viable avenues through which Allos seeks legitimacy. What I have not yet suggested is that both the laws that forbade interracial couplings and Bulosan’s construction of a Filipino bachelor society replete with references to heterosexual encounters serve to “develop, secure, and reproduce” the logic of heteronormativity. “‘Normal’ heterosexuality,” Ting writes, “is not only a marker of assimilation achieved, it is itself a means to assimilation” (“Bachelor Society” 278).

Although critics have been attentive to gender issues in *America Is in the Heart*, particularly the role of women and the social, cultural, and historical significance of the Filipino bachelor society, few have examined the text from a queer perspective.⁵⁷ My aim here is not necessarily to advocate a queer reading of the text, but rather to argue that by shifting the focus from, say, class, race or ethnicity to sexuality we see how sexuality is related to race and racial formation and is therefore another useful construct through which to analyze rhetorics of literacy and legitimacy. For example, while it is arguable whether Allos is in fact heterosexual, homosexual, or asexual, the fact that reviewers and

critics of *America* respond to the depiction of Allos' relationships with white women and overlook entirely other possible readings of his sexual desire points to a heterosexual assumption. As Ting writes,

heteronormativity does far more than characterize 'normal' sexuality as 'opposite sex' object choice. It obscures the range of social practices categorized as sexual and makes its norms seem to affect the sexual realm of life alone.... The heterosexual assumption enables [the] implicit argument that race is the factor that determines the social and psychic acceptability of physical attraction and romantic love. ("The Power of Sexuality" 75)

The heterosexual assumption is beneficial to Bulosan in allowing him/Allos to be perceived as more "normal" and hence more "American," or at least more assimilable, than one whose heterosexual orientation was in question. I argue that Allos' sexuality is constructed as ambivalent because of the anti-miscegenation laws and America's construction of many Asian men as queer and Filipinos in particular as oversexed and threatening to white men.⁵⁸

As I illustrate in the passages that follow, we learn during the course of the novel that Allos loses his virginity shortly after his arrival in the U.S., that he adores and in fact "yearns" for white women, and that he becomes anxious in sexually charged situations. For example, though he does not name it as such, Allos describes in vivid detail the moment at which he loses his virginity:

I was backing to the door when Benigno and two other men grabbed me. I struggled desperately.... I trembled violently, because what I saw

was a naked Mexican woman waiting to receive me. The men pinned me down on the cot, face upward, while Benigno hurriedly fumbled for my belt.... Then, as though from far away, I felt the tempestuous flow of blood in my veins.

It was like spring in an unknown land. There were roses everywhere, opening to a kind sun. I heard the sudden beating of waves upon rocks, the gentle fall of rain among palm leaves. Was this eternity? Was this the source of creation?... I entered my tent, trembling with a nameless shame.

(159-60)

A compulsory heterosexual reading of this passage views Allos' initiation into the world of sex as "non-conjugal heterosexuality;" this form of heterosexuality serves to reinforce readers' preconceptions of heteronormativity and thus further persuades them of Allos' potential for assimilation. However, this passage can also be read as illustrative of Allos' sexual ambivalence or anxiety (he was fearful and "trembling" when he saw the Mexican prostitute) and even, as de Jesús suggests, as a scene depicting Allos' "'rape' at the hands of those who would 'make him a man,' an 'emasculat[i]on' through the validation of heterosex" (103). de Jesús reads this scene as suggestive of the other men's homosexual desire for Allos, "a desire," she writes, "which must be sublimated through heteronormativity—through the prostitute's body" (103). Kandice Chuh likewise notes that because the "eroticized violence" is enacted by other Filipino men, this passage can be read as a critique of heteronormative masculinity. As a novel that disrupts heterosexuality as a "natural, inherently romantic phenomenon," Chuh argues, *America* demands that we critically inquire into the ways in which power is used to resist

dominant and “discriminatory systems” (*Imagine Otherwise* 41). While I agree that the novel challenges heteronormative assumptions, I also see how it may reinforce readers’ views of heterosexuality. Despite Bulosan’s construction of a homosocial Filipino community, and regardless of how one interprets the above scene, Bulosan makes explicit Allos’ fear and anxiety (and awe) about the sexual act, depicting him as at once heterosexual, innocent and sexually unthreatening.

Allos’ adoration of white women comes across throughout the novel, but a particular “yearning” for Eileen argues most persuasively for his heterosexual desire:

I created for myself an illusion of understanding with Eileen, and in consequence, I yearned for her and the world she represented. The grass in the hospital yard spoke of her, and when it rained, the water rushed down the eaves calling her name. I told her these things in poems, and my mind became afire: could I get well for Eileen? Could I walk with her in the street without being ashamed of my race? Could I see her always without fear? (234)

This passage simultaneously speaks to Allos’ heterosexuality, the laws that forbid interracial couplings, and Allos’ view that white women, however unattainable, represent the America he had wanted to find.

We also see in both passages how articulations of sexual identity and desire are related to Allos’ acts of literacy and legitimacy as each description is followed by the use of poetic/literary devices such as simile, metaphor and personification. The use of these devices alongside implicit arguments about race and Allos’ heterosexuality and naïveté is a strategic move by Bulosan to further establish Allos’ self-identity as a member of the

American literary world. In his romantic musings, Allos articulates a specifically masculine subjectivity and at the same time argues for his legitimacy as a participant in literary production.

Because literacy is not just about “reading the word” but also about “reading the world” (Freire and Macedo), it seems appropriate to examine Allos’ readings, negotiations, and articulations of his sexual world since it is a part of the culture and society to which he wishes to gain access. We can read Allos’ articulations of heteronormativity as a response to America’s construction of Filipino men as hypersexual and therefore threatening to white “American” masculinity. That it is also possible to read Allos’ sexuality as ambivalent suggests that Bulosan himself may have been grappling with his own male (hetero/homo) sexual subjectivity and the discursive construction or articulation of that subjectivity as it relates to his racialized identity.

Conclusion

Campomanes and Gernes write that “[f]or Bulosan, the act of writing is, paradoxically, an act of violence for which ‘English is the best weapon,’ and an act of synthesis: ‘I sat at the bare table in the kitchen and began piecing together the mosaic of our lives in America. Full of loneliness and love, I began to write’ (67; 289)” (23). While Bulosan’s book, *America Is in the Heart*, remains intact, the destruction of the narrator’s volume of poetry functions symbolically as the shattering of this “mosaic” of Filipino lives in America into fragments, or “remnants” as Allos describes them (322). “And yet,” Young writes, “the remnants represent a fragmented life that holds much personal and social meaning” (75). Through this symbolic act, Bulosan critiques the

American dream and the belief that Allos' critical act of literacy will make him "legitimate."

Bulosan's "piecing together" the remnants into a so-called "collective biography" is an act of defiance and a tribute to his literacy. Traise Yamamoto writes that, "For subjects marked by race, or by gender and race, fragmentation is very often the condition in which they already find themselves by simple virtue of being situated in a culture that does not grant them subjecthood, or grants them only contingent subjectivity" (75). She goes on to say that marginalized people "need to move from already feeling fragmented to an embodied sense of coherence and agency" (77). While his book is arguably fragmented or, as Wong calls it, "unmappable," a "senseless jumble of brutalities" (*Reading* 134), I argue, like Young, that piecing together the collective experiences of Filipinos does, indeed, give Bulosan agency as he becomes, through the process of writing and critiquing America, a participant in the construction of American culture.

Like Kang, Bulosan was never granted U.S. citizenship, but his rhetoric and criticisms are testaments to his understanding of the politics of race and class in America. Bulosan makes his intentions clear: "What really compelled me to write was to try and understand this country [the United States], to find a place in it not only for myself but my people" (qtd. in San Juan, *On Becoming* 8). While he critiques the literacy myth through his naïve narrator-protagonist/alter ego Allos, he simultaneously argues for his own legitimacy as a functionally and culturally literate "American." Like Kang, Bulosan gains legitimacy through the (literacy) act of cultural criticism that his book performs and

makes available to readers and critics an alternative conceptualization of what it means to be a “literate citizen” of the United States.

My aim in Part I has been to examine the role of literacy as an analytic of citizenship and identity in the autobiographical works of two early immigrant writers. In Part II, I continue this examination with a slightly different critical focus and with more attention to genre as rhetoric. Though I build upon ideas expressed in the current and previous chapters, the next two chapters examine contemporary texts and engage more specifically the ways in which Asian American masculinity, sexuality and class shape articulations of literacy and citizenship.

Part II: Hyperliteracy, Hybridity and Disguise

Chapter 3: Frank Chin's *The Chickencoop Chinaman*

I was unable to disguise myself. Standing there in a polyester print shirt my mother had sewn together to save money, discount store bell-bottom blue jeans, and sneakers that were a knockoff of the popular brands, with straight black hair cut at home though not with a bowl, thick glasses, and buck teeth, I was repeatedly recognized as one of many ...

As I became older, I was given many masks to wear. I could be a laborer laying railroad tracks across the continent, with long hair in a queue to be pulled by pranksters; a gardener trimming the shrubs while secretly planting a bomb ... a kamikaze pilot donning his headband somberly, screaming "Banzai" on my way to my death ... a washerman in the basement laundry, removing stains using an ancient secret ... a child running with a body burning from napalm, captured in an unforgettable photo ... an orphan in the last airlift out of a collapsed capital, ready to be adopted into the good life; a black belt martial artist breaking cinderblocks with his head, in an advertisement for Ginsu brand knives with the slogan "but wait—there's more" as the commercial segued to show another free gift; a chef serving up dog stew, a trick on the unsuspecting diner; a bad driver swerving into the next lane, exactly as could be expected...an illegal alien crowded into the cargo hold of a smuggler's ship, defying death only to crowd into a New York City tenement and work as a slave in a sweatshop ...

I remain not only a stranger in a familiar land but also a sojourner through my own life.

—Frank Wu, *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White*

Through his catalogue of the various “masks” he could wear as an Asian American, Frank Wu argues persuasively in the opening pages of his nonfictional work for the concept of race as a social construct and, specifically, for America’s construction of Asians as non-citizens.⁵⁹ His list, which is roughly five times longer than what I have included here, identifies many of the stereotypes associated with different Asian (male) ethnic groups.⁶⁰ Wu critiques the homogenization of Asian Americans in the popular imagination by indicating that he is “given” them to wear and that he, as a Chinese American, could actually wear any one of them without question. In his opening chapter, he cites numerous recent examples of the way in which race in the U.S. is equated with citizenship. He recalls that, during the 1998 Winter Olympics, MS-NBC posted a headline on their website announcing Tara Lipinsky’s victory over Michelle Kwan in the quest for the gold medal for women’s figure skating. The website stated that “American beats out Kwan,” implying that Kwan was specifically *not* American. Wu notes that such a heading would never have been used to announce, say, the victory of Tonya Harding over Nancy Kerrigan, or the victory of Kwan over Lipinsky. A more recent example occurred in May 2001 when U.S. Representative David Wu arrived at the U.S. Department of Energy prepared to give a speech for Asian American Heritage Month only to be refused entry because the guards didn’t believe he was American. According

to Frank Wu, the guards “even rejected his congressional identification as possibly fake” (22).

In Part II, I analyze both racialized and gendered cultural representations of Asian American men, such as those described by Frank Wu, and conceptualize how these representations, in turn, impact the ways in which two contemporary male writers, Frank Chin and Chang-rae Lee, position themselves and their characters rhetorically as they construct fictional narratives of literacy. As contemporary texts published in 1981 and 1995, respectively, Chin’s *The Chickencoop Chinaman*⁶¹ and Lee’s *Native Speaker* were written with very different audiences in mind. My analysis sheds light on both the changing perspectives and status of Asian Americans and also adds the dimension of class as a construct through which to analyze the rhetorical function of *Native Speaker*. Moreover, by shifting my focus to different genres—a play and a work of fiction—I also show how genre choices can be rhetorical and how certain strategies can be effective across genres.

I argue here, as I do elsewhere, that the characters’ and authors’ status as ambivalent can be seen in the literacy practices that they use to persuade their respective audiences. Although Tam and Henry, the protagonists of Chin’s and Lee’s texts, are English-speaking and American-born, their audiences within the texts question the protagonists’ citizenship status as well as their literacy practices solely on the basis of their race. In addition to dealing with America’s racialization of Asian Americans as foreign and illiterate, Tam and Henry further struggle with America’s construction of them as passive, obedient, and effeminate. This chapter and the following chapter thus examine the ways in which *The Chickencoop Chinaman* and *Native Speaker* challenge or

reify cultural and gendered assumptions about literacy while also demonstrating how their narrator-protagonists' ambivalent status shapes what I am identifying as their acts of hyperliteracy. Tam is hyperliterate because he feels emasculated and culturally invisible while Henry is hyperliterate because dominant culture has constructed him as foreign and hence an "illegitimate" speaker of English. Viewing Tam's sometimes incoherent "babble" and Henry's impeccable English as evidence of their hyperliteracy focuses our attention on the way in which they have been constructed as Other and the effects that their literacy practices have on their audiences. Hyperliteracy here represents the in-between space of identity for both Tam and Henry—it is, as I state in the introduction, both the space in which they have been forced to occupy as marginalized subjects as well as the space in which they may subvert that very positioning. In other words, their acts of hyperliteracy are performances of identity that mark and contest their indeterminacy as minority subjects.

My aim in the previous two chapters was to show how the author-protagonists of Kang's and Bulosan's texts both reinforce their claims of Americanness while simultaneously critiquing "America" through their participation (via their literacy acts) in American cultural production. I argued that the use of the autobiographical form to make these claims and to mount their critiques was strategic given the attitudes towards Korean and Filipino (male) immigrants in the 1930s and 1940s. Pairing these two literacy narratives together in one section enabled me to compare and contrast the different types of rhetorical strategies each author used during roughly the same time period, thus illuminating concerns about U.S. citizenship particular to this demographic of Asian

immigrants. In this section, I continue my investigation of literacy and Asian American male subjectivity by looking at two very different and differing types of literacy narratives, both of which, I argue, evolve out of rhetorical situations that construct (some) Asian American men as passive, obedient, asexual or homosexual, and unassimilable.⁶² Though Kang and Bulosan also work against certain stereotypes in their novels, their main concern is with their citizenship status and subjectivity as American writers. By contrast, Chin and Lee are writing in the post-1965 immigration reform era as legalized U.S. citizens and thus are responding to different situations than Kang and Bulosan. Specifically, *The Chickencoop Chinaman* responds, in dramatic form, to cultural constructions of Asian American men as foreign, effeminate, “queer,” and speakers of accented English, while *Native Speaker* responds in novelistic form to the continued liminal status of Asian Americans (as a result of the conflation of “Asian” with “Asian American”) as well as the tensions caused by recent immigration policies.

Hybrid Subjects

Unlike the authors and narrator-protagonists of *East Goes West* and *America Is in the Heart*, Frank Chin and Tam Lum and Chang-rae Lee and Henry Park either learned English as their first language or began speaking it at a very young age.⁶³ Consequently, they are not faced with the same issues related to functional literacy or the acquisition of English as are the authors and protagonists of the immigrant literacy narratives discussed in Part I. These narratives do not focus on Tam’s and Henry’s acquisition of English, but instead on their struggles with language, culture, class, and identity as Asian American males. Moreover, Tam and Henry are United States citizens by birth, unlike Han and

Allos who were never even allowed to naturalize, but still they are racialized subjects and thus denied equality. In other words, despite their legal citizenship status, Tam and Henry are racialized as non-citizens.

Lisa Lowe argues that the United States is haunted by a national memory of its wars in Asia and that this memory has in turn constructed Asians as a threat to the national body such that all Asians, whether American-born or not, are viewed as immigrants or “foreigners-within” (5). Leti Volpp extends the immigrant analogy to elaborate on the multiple notions of citizenship. In her essay, “‘Obnoxious to Their Very Nature’: Asian Americans and Constitutional Citizenship,” Volpp writes that the racialization of Asian Americans is

constituted through the implication that Asians and Asian Americans are indistinguishable, creating the presumption that Asian Americans enter the republic with a continuing allegiance to their country of origin, rendering them subject to corruption and disloyalty, and foreclosing their ability to function as subjects. (65-66)

While she is referring here to the 1996 campaign finance scandal involving John Huang and Charlie Yah-lin Trie and the 1999 indictment of Wen Ho Lee,⁶⁴ her statement continues to hold true for presumptions about literacy and language ability. Media representations have bolstered the already widespread belief that Asian Americans are foreign and unable to speak English without an accent. There are numerous examples, but one in particular stands out. On April 4, 1995, U.S. Senator Alfonse D’Amato, on the Don Imus radio talk show, mocked Judge Lance Ito, who was presiding over the O.J. Simpson trial, using an exaggerated Asian accent. Needless to say, people were outraged

by this racist verbal attack and further insulted by what they felt was Senator D'Amato's "inadequate" apology. Two days after the show and as a result of the heightened criticism of his "apology," D'Amato issued a full, formal apology to the Senate. D'Amato's belief that his mockery was humorous and inoffensive points to how deeply embedded these stereotypes and misrepresentations are in American culture.

Volpp's statement that "One's Asianness seems to be the difference one must suppress in order to be a full citizen" (67) applies particularly well to characters such as Tam Lum and Henry Park who try to disguise or mask their "Asianness" through speech. Though Tam and Henry are both fully literate in English, they recognize how closely tied their literacy practices are to their identities as Asian Americans. Tam shifts between different accents and styles of speaking in order to show his audience that he has no language of his own—that, as a minority subject, he occupies a liminal space both culturally and linguistically—while Henry lives in fear of betraying himself through his voice. In starkly different ways, both texts use specific gendered and classed literacies that are marked by ambivalence through acts of hyperliteracy. Tam's and Henry's speech acts therefore persuade readers not that they are "master" speakers or rhetoricians but that America has made them into linguistic frauds.

While the protagonists of these two texts have very different language styles—Tam uses disruptive and often incoherent discourse while Henry speaks and writes "perfectly," as his wife Lelia tells him the first time they meet—both are depicted as linguistic frauds. Though they are literate in the basic sense that they can read and write in English, their subject positionings as racialized Others cause them to be hyperliterate. The underlying critique of these texts is not that Chin and Lee are arguing for their

protagonists' literacies and hence legitimacies but that the American democratic ideals in which their protagonists were raised to believe are in fact unattainable for them as Asian Americans.

Henry's and Tam's hyperliteracy is thus one effect that the ideology of literacy has on the minority subject. We know that the formal requirements for citizenship include being able to speak English and a demonstrated knowledge of the U.S. Constitution, the U.S. political system, and U.S. history; informal requirements, such as those learned in school and other social settings, include knowledge of U.S. culture (food, television, film, music, art, sports, etc.), what Hirsch has famously termed "cultural literacy."⁶⁵ As with the paradox of United States citizenship—that despite one's formal entitlement to this citizenship, one's race largely determines the extent to which that person is accepted as legitimately "American"—the paradox of literacy is that one may be functionally and culturally literate and yet still, because of race or accent, be deemed "foreign."

While for Kang and Bulosan the act of writing their fictional autobiographies is in itself a rhetorical tactic designed to demonstrate and argue for their literacies, Chin and Lee seem to have other objectives—by creating characters who are hyperliterate, they are responding to the ways in which American culture has constructed them and their characters as Other and, in doing so, they critique that very construction. Their characters' acts of hyperliteracy function as rhetorical strategies in that, through their characters' articulations of cultural difference, readers are forced to reckon with what Bhabha calls "hybrid national narratives" (167), narratives that, like the hybrid subject, disrupt histories, cultures, time, meaning and identity. And yet, through their own acts of

writing these critiques, Chin and Lee, like Kang and Bulosan, participate in cultural production and hence argue for their own legitimacies as Americans.

Asian American Masculinity

In the previous two chapters, I discussed briefly how the racialization of Asian American men is tied to gender and explained how the immigration and naturalization laws of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries effectively forced Asian American men into bachelor communities and jobs that traditionally were considered “women’s work.” Continuing that discussion, I examine here how the stereotypes and legacies that originated with the first wave of Asian immigrants have infiltrated forms of contemporary American popular culture such as the media, film industry, and literature. As Eng writes, “Popular stereotypes connecting past and present Asian American male laborers to [“feminized”] professions are succinct and compelling illustrations of the ways in which economically driven modes of feminization cling to bodies not only sexually but also racially” (17). One recent example is Abercrombie and Fitch’s racist representation of Chinese laundrymen on one of their t-shirts. The shirt depicts two Asian caricatures with slanted eyes wearing rice-paddy hats and the words “Wong Brothers Laundry Service—Two Wongs Can Make It White.”⁶⁶ The stereotypical representation on Abercrombie and Fitch’s t-shirt harks back to the days of Charlie Chan, a 1920s-30s Hollywood character known for his pseudo-Confucius sayings, fractured English, and dainty disposition. The fact that the t-shirts depicted caricatures of Asian Americans and ridiculed accented English illustrates that Asian Americans continue to be

marginalized by the dominant culture not only for their race but also for their presumed accented speech, a marker of their “foreignness.”

Equally popular about a decade before Charlie Chan was Arthur Sarsfield Ward’s Dr. Fu Manchu, the embodiment of the “yellow peril.”⁶⁷ Rohmer describes his character in *The Insidious Dr. Fu Manchu*:

Imagine a person tall, lean and feline, high shouldered, with a brow like Shakespeare, and a face like Satan, a close shaven skull and long magnetic eyes of true cat green. Invest him with all the cruel cunning of an entire eastern race, accumulated in one giant intellect, with all the resources ... of a wealthy government.... Imagine that awful being, and you have a mental picture of Dr. Fu Manchu, the yellow peril incarnate in one man.

(qtd. in R. Lee, *Orientalism* 113-14)

Robert Lee discusses how Dr. Fu Manchu’s struggles with his “Anglo-Saxon nemesis,” Nayland Smith, served as a “masculine tonic” for the anxieties produced around the struggle between Christendom and the “Orient” for racial survival. According to Lee, Fu Manchu’s “power to incite the fevered imagination lies in his ambiguous sexuality, which combines a masochistic vulnerability marked as feminine and a sadistic aggressiveness marked as masculine” (116). His sexual ambiguity is reflected in his ambiguous racial and cultural background: “[Fu Manchu’s] Chinese racial identification is decentered by the fact that much is made of his scientific Western education and his sophistication” (Lee 116). Fu Manchu is thus the quintessential “alien,” one who poses a threat by his continuing presence and foreign allegiance(s).⁶⁸ In *Chickencoop*, Tam acknowledges these cultural representations and responds to them with his heavily gendered and

ethnicized literacy practices. Whether intentional or not, Tam's hyperliteracy serves to critique America's construction of him as a racialized, homosexual, hybrid Other.⁶⁹

Frank Chin and *The Chickencoop Chinaman*

Frank Chin is a playwright, essayist, and short-fictionalist, yet he is perhaps best known among Asian American cultural critics for his polemical views on what constitutes an "authentic" Asian American identity or "sensibility." Chin distinguishes between "real" Asian American writers who are "American born and raised, who got their China and Japan from the radio, off the silver screen, from television, out of comic books, from the pushers of white American culture" (*Aiiieeeee!* xi-xii) and "Americanized" Asians who "set out to become American, in the white sense of the word, and succeeded in becoming 'Chinese American' in the stereotypical sense of the good, loyal, obedient, passive, law-abiding, cultured sense of the word.... Becoming white supremacist was part of their consciously and voluntarily becoming 'American'" (xv). Along with his co-editors Jeffrey Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong, Frank Chin argues in his prefatory and introductory remarks to *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers* and *The Big Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature*, that because Asian Americans have been excluded from participation in American culture, they have been forced to identify with Asian cultures even if they were born and raised in America. These American-born, English-speaking Asian Americans, Chin claims, have internalized the stereotypes or Orientalist views of Asia and of Asians created by mainstream white America. This internalization, he argues, has developed into self-contempt. Chin accuses those writers

who portray themselves and other Asian Americans in stereotypical and racist ways as “faking” Asian culture.

Moreover, Chin argues that Asian American men have been emasculated by American cultural representations of them as foreign, subservient, and effeminate. As Patricia Chu explains, Chin’s definition of “racist love” can be seen as a “forerunner of the current ‘model minority’ paradigm.” She writes, “Before the term *model minority* came into vogue, Chin identified the thinking of people who identify Asian Americans as Asian, oriental, and exotic, and hence as friendly, amenable, and submissive, as ‘racist love,’ a thinly disguised form of American orientalism” (65). According to Chin, Asian American writers who “fake” Asian culture by buying into white “racist love” have delegitimized their own culture and history as Asian Americans.

Critics have taken issue with Chin’s demarcation between “real” and “fake,” particularly as his focus shifted from separating writers based on their utilization of traditional Asian cultures to represent “Asian America” to separating writers based on the accuracy or authenticity of the traditional myths and customs represented in their works. Chin is especially critical of writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston, David Henry Hwang, and Amy Tan whom he argues misrepresent “the Chinese American sensibility” by rewriting or appropriating traditional Chinese myths for their own purposes. His key complaint with these writers is less that they appropriate or misrepresent *Chinese culture* for marketing or other personal reasons but that they misrepresent Chinese and Chinese American *men* by depicting them as “misogynistic,” “perverse,” “passive,” “anti-individualist,” “morally and ethically opposite to Western culture” and torn between their

dual identities as Asians and Americans (*The Big Aiiieeeee!* 9)—in other words, less than the “heroic” men whom he found and idealized in the Chinese “heroic tradition.”

I outline Chin’s arguments in such depth in order to help situate my analysis of his work in light of his cultural nationalist agenda as well as to contextualize his claims within the larger debate over representations of Asian and Asian American men in American popular culture. *The Chickencoop Chinaman* premiered in 1972 around the time when Asian American activists began protesting the Vietnam War and U.S. imperialist practices overseas while rallying for equal rights and an end to discrimination on a domestic level. As Asian Americans were becoming more and more aware of their status and treatment by mainstream America, they became more vocal in their protests against racial discrimination. It was during this period that Frank Chin and his cohort published *Aiiieeeee!* in an effort to give voice to struggling Asian American male writers. In their introductory essay, “Fifty Years of Our Whole Voice,” Chin et al. contend that it is through language that culture is expressed and maintained:

Language is the medium of culture and the people’s sensibility, including the style of manhood. Language coheres the people into a community by organizing and codifying the symbols of the people’s common experience. Stunt the tongue and you have lopped off the culture and sensibility. On the simplest level, a man in any culture speaks for himself. Without a language of his own, he no longer is a man. (*Aiiieeeee!* 37)

Their use of such heavily gendered language is indicative of their masculinist focus. Moreover, this masculinist impulse is inextricably tied to Chin’s own sense of emasculation and subsequent desire for remasculinization through language.

Chin's/Tam's use of racialized discourse, particularly black English, in *Chickencoop* is further suggestive of his motive to rally against racial discrimination. By identifying with blacks through language, Chin and Tam acknowledge the power behind cross-racial coalitions in the fight against oppression. But there is another, more significant function to this linguistic code-switching, or as Susan Gubar calls it, "racechange," as my analysis below will show.⁷⁰

The plot revolves around Tam Lum, a Chinese American filmmaker and writer who travels to Pittsburgh to interview a man he believes is the father of the famous black boxing champion Ovaltine Jack Dancer. In Pittsburgh, Tam stays at the home of his childhood friend, "Blackjap Kenji," where he meets Lee, Kenji's friend and roommate, and her mixed-race son Robbie. More than half of the play takes place in Kenji's home, where the three adults argue over issues relating to language use, racism, sexism, fatherhood, Asian American identity, American culture, and the emasculation of Asian American men by this culture. After meeting with Charley Popcorn, the man Tam believes is his boxing hero's father, and realizing that he is not Ovaltine's father, Tam decides to make a straightforward documentary about Ovaltine's career as a professional boxer. The play ends with a defeated Tam alone in the kitchen talking to his children (who are not actually present at the time) about how his grandfather worked as a slave laborer on the railroads.

Critical Reception

Written and first read in 1971, produced for the first time in 1972, and published in 1981 on the heels of the Civil Rights movement and the resulting cultural nationalist movements that formed among other minority groups in the early 1970s, *The Chickencoop Chinaman* deals explicitly with racial stereotypes and their effects on Asian American identity formation, particularly for males. The reader cannot help but feel Tam's frustration and anger over the ways that Asian American men have historically been treated and represented in American culture. Chin does not disguise his critique because his agenda is specifically to speak out against racial discrimination. His audiences (both real and invoked), though possibly critical of his vociferousness, are nonetheless accustomed to hearing racial minorities voice their protests.

Critics responded with mixed reviews of the 1972 production of *The Chickencoop Chinaman*.⁷¹ Clive Barnes, writing for the *New York Times* (1972), said that while he did not like the play, its "ethnic content" made it at least "interesting" (qtd. in McDonald xiv-xv); Edith Oliver, in her piece for the *New Yorker* (1972), admired Chin for his "moving, funny, pain-filled, sarcastic, bitter, ironic play ... which almost bursts its seams with passion and energy" (46); and Jack Kroll of *Newsweek* (1972) wrote that Chin "is a natural writer; his language has the beat and brass, the runs and rim-shots of jazz;" however, he continues, "the basic emotional tone of hysteria is too unmodulated, the action is too thin, an awkward structure wrenches the play in and out of fantasy. But there is real vitality, humor and pain on Chin's stage; I will remember Tam Lum long after I've forgotten most of this season's other plays" (55). Michael Feingold noted in the *Village Voice* (1972) that the play was "blossoming all over with good writing, well-

caught characters, and sharply noted situations,” but that when Tam delivered his monologues, “hot air, disguised as Poetry, flies in” (qtd. in McDonald xv). According to Dorothy Ritsuko McDonald, Julius Novick complained in the *New York Times* that Frank Chin was not a “master rhetorician” (xv). And finally, Betty Lee Sung, author of *Mountain of Gold*, wrote in *East/West* (1974):

I agreed with the drama critics. I simply did not like the play, nor did the audience, which kept dwindling act after act. My comments: [It] was an outpouring of bitterness and hatred mouthed through lengthy monologue after monologue. Not that it was Randy Kim’s fault (the main character actor) but it was Frank Chin showing through. (qtd. in McDonald xv)

Myron Simon offered a more critical review of one of the play’s productions in his essay, “Two Angry Ethnic Writers,” published in *MELUS* in 1976. He argued that Chin appeared to be writing “primarily if not exclusively—for the Asian-American community” (Simon also notes that there were about fifty people in the audience, more than half of whom were “Asians”), and that if he wished to be successful at targeting a wider audience, he must “acknowledge that he is an English language writer” (22-23). Simon also asserted that Chin’s “problem” was that he could not decide “for whom he wish[ed] to write” (23). While I agree with Simon’s observation, I also believe this was precisely the effect that Chin wanted his play to have on his audiences, for “[w]ithout a language of his own, [Tam] no longer is a man” (*Aiiiiieee!* 37), “so out comes everybody else’s trash that don’t conceive” (*Chickencoop* 7). Simon’s frustration with the play’s apparent contradictions is indicative of the “meta” speech act of the play that encourages recognition of cultural difference, instability, and indeterminacy. That he doesn’t take his

reading one step further to examine the rhetorical effect that this strategy may have on its audience does not mean the text is rhetorically ineffective. Rather, his response supports my argument that rhetorical analysis encourages us to see things from another perspective. Focusing on the text as a literacy narrative and on Tam as a hyperliterate subject helps to explain what Simon interprets as Chin's inability to determine "for whom he wishes to write." Instead of dismissing the text for its inconsistencies, I suggest that rhetoric invites us to inquire into what those inconsistencies might mean.

Simon's response to the production points to the fact that a play/text does not have to garner a positive reception in order to be considered rhetorically effective, and a play/text can be, and often is, effective rhetorically in ways unintended by the author or rhetor. While Chin's play may not have influenced his audiences in the ways that he intended, it was still persuasive because it called other, mostly oppositional, discourses and arguments into being, as we see in contemporary critical responses to his work. Chin's writing created a discourse about race, gender, sexuality, nation, and class that has helped shape the foundation of the field of Asian American studies.

Many contemporary Asian Americanist critics, most of who are responding to the written text, have criticized the play but have done so more in the context of Chin's larger cultural nationalist agenda. Specifically, critics have taken issue with the corpus of Chin's work for its apparent misogyny and reconstruction of Asian American masculinity through violence, aggression, and heroism. King-kok Cheung, for example, argues that in the contrast Chin draws between the "stock images" of Asian men and "other men of color," "one can detect not only homophobia but perhaps also a sexist preference for stereotypes that imply predatory violence against women to 'effeminate' ones" ("The

Woman Warrior” 237). Similarly, she argues that while Chin and his *Aiiieeeee!* cohort strive to redefine Asian American manhood, their counter definition “generates an equally singular interpretation of Chinese culture,” one that equates manhood with violence and machismo (“Of Men and Men” 177). Daniel Kim extends Cheung’s argument by suggesting that the homophobia in Chin’s work is not just “detectable,” but “palpable and central,” and that it is linked to the misogyny—by denouncing all things feminine, Chin decries not only women but also men who are characteristically feminine in some way (“Strange Love” 271). As well, Viet Thanh Nguyen sees certain works of Asian American literature written by men, in particular the works of Frank Chin and Gus Lee, as reproducing—in an effort to assert an Asian American masculine identity—the same kind of violence that was once used to subordinate Chinese Americans (“The Remasculinization” 130-31). Elaine Kim further notes that, “The only good woman in Chin’s stories is young, Chinese American, and dead. The old women—the mothers and the aunts—are like mortuary furniture...” (“Such Opposite Creatures” 76). While I acknowledge these criticisms against Chin and his masculinist and misogynistic language, I believe that *Chickencoop* has a great deal more to offer in terms of language use and its relationship to race and citizenship, especially when we read it through the analytic of literacy.

Frank Chin’s Rhetorical Strategies

Based on Frank Chin’s critical essays, one would expect *Chickencoop* to make a claim for a distinct Chinese American literacy—in other words, the ability to communicate in a language not governed by the logic of the “dominant discourse.”

According to Tam, he has no language with which to make sense of himself because the dominant discourse has constructed him in Orientalist terms. Therefore, he lays no claim to the dominant discourse but instead insists that he was forced to create his own.

However, *Chicken coop* suggests that no such language or literacy is possible. As we see from the text, this language or literacy is founded on miscommunication—no one really understands Tam, except perhaps “weird Robbie.” Tam remains a tragic figure, a fatherless, motherless, and incomprehensible man whose search for his “Chinaman” identity and language is forever in progress.

A close examination of Chin’s rhetorical strategies and the various languages and accents used by the characters reveals a much more complex view of Asian American male subjectivity than the text at first suggests. I begin with a discussion of form because it is the most conspicuous rhetorical strategy and because it helps to illuminate other rhetorical decisions that Chin makes in constructing this narrative of literacy. As with other forms of fiction, drama is often used for social or political commentary. When it is used didactically or to convey a particular message to its audience it is generally deemed to be “rhetorical,” that is, it contains features or qualities of argument or persuasion. Critics such as Wayne Booth, Kenneth Burke, Walter Fisher, and Richard Filloy, however, have a slightly different view of rhetoric. Booth is interested in the rhetoric of non-didactic fiction, “viewed as the art of communicating with readers—the rhetorical resources available to the writer of epic, novel, or short story as he tries, consciously or unconsciously, to impose his fictional world upon the reader.”⁷² Burke finds rhetoric in any form of literature or language that uses symbols to move audiences into action or to affect situations. In other words, symbols are used by the rhetorician or speaker as

motives to enact change or to induce the audience to feel, act, or think a certain way.

Walter Fisher and Richard Filloy, in “Argument in Drama and Literature: An Exploration,” take a similar position to that of Booth and Burke, but instead of focusing on “authorial techniques or specific individuated forms,” they focus on “audience response, the mental moves made by auditors in interpreting a work.” They argue that a work of fiction can be viewed as rhetorical insofar as it is considered “in regard to an audience’s response” (346). In other words, a work is rhetorical as long as the audience *experiences the work rhetorically*.

My own analysis will draw on the rhetorical theories of Booth, Burke, and Fisher and Filloy as a way of examining both how Chin controls his readers and how his readers respond to his text. As a drama that is now more often read than heard or performed, *Chickencoop* calls attention to the delivery of speech and the (oral) performance of the characters as rhetoric. Rhetoric and drama have a long history together, with many classical rhetoricians comparing their delivery to that of the dramatic actor. Aristotle’s use of examples from the theater throughout his *Rhetoric* attests to his conviction that rhetoric and drama share many of the same techniques and goals (Enders 66).

As an essayist, playwright and novelist, Chin’s decision to write *Chickencoop* in the form of a drama was clearly a deliberate move. In *Chickencoop*, Tam Lum literally performs his identity through acts of literacy. According to Jinqi Ling, Chin’s frustration over what he perceives to be the destruction of Asian American history and his resulting obligation to educate younger generations of their cultural heritage “demands that he go beyond the mere textuality of writing and seek ‘a style of excess’ (Chaney 1993, 22),” that is, “a style through which he can not only disturb the immobility of Asian America

that results from its internalization of racial inferiority but also force mainstream society to face its own complicity in creating such a situation” (81). I argue that Chin uses this “style of excess,” which I am identifying as hyperliteracy, to persuade readers that Tam has been constructed by American history, culture, and ideology as a cultural hybrid with no language of his own.

The Chickencoop Chinaman opens with Tam Lum arriving by plane in Pittsburgh, where he is going to visit his childhood friend, “Blackjap” Kenji. In his conversation with the “Hong Kong Dream Girl”/stewardess, described stereotypically as “Asian, beautiful, grinning, doll-like, and mechanical,” he asserts his identity as a Chinaman, a product of words, history, and culture: “Chinamen are made, not born, my dear. Out of junk-imports, lies, railroad scrap iron, dirty jokes, broken bottles, cigar smoke, Cosquilla Indian blood, wino spit, and lots of milk of amnesia” (6). Thus from the outset of the play, Chin draws on the history of Chinese railroad workers and their marginalized status to make a claim for Tam’s identity as a hybrid figure.

We are told in the stage directions that during the rest of this speech Tam “goes through voice and accent changes,” “[f]rom W.C. Fields to American Midwest, Bible Belt holy roller, etc. His own ‘normal’ speech jumps between black and white rhythms and accents” (6). Describing himself as if he were a mythic figure, Tam tells the Hong Kong Dream Girl,

I am the natural born ragmouth speaking the motherless bloody tongue.

No real language of my own to make sense with, so out comes everybody

else’s trash that don’t conceive. But the sound truth is that I AM THE

NOTORIOUS ONE AND ONLY CHICKENCOOP CHINAMAN

HIMSELF that talks in the dark heavy Midnight, the secret Chinatown
Buck Buck Bagaw. (7)

By drawing on America's history of exploitation, racialization, and cultural amnesia and by using the languages and dialects of its various minorities, Tam insists that Americans acknowledge his presence and his acts of literacy as articulations of cultural difference and that they further acknowledge their complicity in their construction of him as a hyperliterate, hybrid figure. Tam is the "presence [that] does not evoke a harmonious patchwork of cultures, but articulates the narrative of cultural difference which can never let the national history look at itself narcissistically in the eye" (Bhabha 168). Though Bhabha suggests that rhetoric takes place in the very articulation of cultural difference since identities are always "implicat[ed] in other symbolic systems, are always 'incomplete' or open to cultural translation" (162), rhetorical analysis is interested in how the effects are achieved. In order for readers to acknowledge their complicity, they must be persuaded by the discourse. The following analysis examines this process of persuasion by drawing on Burke's theory of identification and Jinqi Ling's astute reading of the text.

In his critical (nonfiction) work, Chin has insisted that language, specifically American English, has had a negative impact on "minorities" as it is presumed to be the standard to which all other languages and accents should conform. He writes,

The universality of the belief that correct English is the only language of American truth has made language an instrument of cultural imperialism. The minority experience does not yield itself to accurate or complete

expression in the white man's language. Yet, the minority writer, specifically the Asian American writer, is made to feel morally obligated to write in a language produced by an alien and hostile sensibility. His task, in terms of language alone, is to legitimize his, and by implication his people's, orientation as white, to codify his experience in the form of prior symbols, clichés, linguistic mannerisms and a sense of humor that appeals to whites because it celebrates Asian American self-contempt. Or his task is the opposite—to legitimize the language, style, and syntax of his people's experience. (*Aiiieeee!* 23-24)

As we see from this quotation and stage directions from the play, Chin has created a character who is struggling with the very issue of how to live, act, write, and speak as a "Chinaman," not a Chinese or a Chinese American, but one living on the borderland.

As I have suggested, Tam's hyperliteracy or use of language "in excess" to argue for his identity as a "Chinaman" is directly tied to his masculinity or, rather, sense of emasculation as an Asian American male. Represented and constructed by mainstream American culture as asexual, submissive, weak or "coded as having no sexuality" (E. Kim, "Such Opposite Creatures" 69), Asian American male writers such as Chin have struggled to redefine Asian American male sexuality through characters such as Tam Lum and "Blackjap" Kenji. Tam speaks of himself as a sexual being (and reveals himself as sexist) when he talks to the Hong Kong Dream Girl:

Now you, my Hong Kong flower, my sweet sloe-eyed beauty from the mysterious East, I can tell that your little fingers have twiddled many a chopstick. Your smoothbore hands have the memory of gunpowder's

invention in them and know how to shape a blast and I dare say, tickle out a shot. Let me lead your hands. (6)

But Lee, Kenji's racially ambiguous female roommate whom Tam believes is part Chinese, calls Tam on his insecurity as a man and recognizes his use of language to disguise his vulnerability. She tells Kenji,

He knows he's no kind of man. Look at him, he's like those little vulnerable sea animals born with no shells of their own so he puts on the shells of the dead. You hear him when he talks? He's talking in so many goddamn dialects and accents all mixed up at the same time ... you might think he was a nightclub comic. What'sa wrong with your Chinatowng acka-cent, huh? (24)

Critical reviews at the time of publication and when the play was first performed indicate that some readers/viewers were simply turned off by Tam's volubility and use of nonstandard English, alleging, for example, that Tam's monologues were "hot air, disguised as poetry" (Feingold; qtd. in McDonald xv). Lee's comment supports the reading that Tam's hyperliteracy is a direct result of his liminal status and insecurity as an Asian American male. That this point was overlooked by many of Chin's early audience members, as indicated by the reviews, suggests that Chin's rhetoric was not always effective or that, as Simon argues, he was writing primarily for an Asian American audience. And yet Chin's construction of Lee as a translator, or mediator, for audience members who might not recognize Chin's critique suggests that he was writing with a more mainstream audience in mind.

Jinqi Ling makes a compelling argument for Chin's strategic use of characters such as Lee and Tom (an assimilated Chinese American who is also Lee's ex-husband). Ling sees Chin employing a strategy using "shifting illocutionary acts," which Richard Fowler has adapted from Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, as a way of reaching or persuading an audience that is troubled by Chin's use of language. Ling explains,

According to Fowler, in a (counter)hegemonically designed communicative situation, the speaking agent assumes the role of an audience ideologically opposed to the author: the author presents the addressee's position as false by making the speaking agent act on the audience's beliefs, and the addressee cannot refute such a relationship because his or her own position is structurally implicated in the given communicative arrangement (1981, 88). (86-87)

Ling sees Lee and Tom, who both speak "standard" English, as playing the role of the speaking agent. They voice concerns that the audience might have as well, thereby "implicating" the audience in the discursive situation. Chin thus controls his audience in such a way that they become participants in the construction of the play. Their own views are challenged through the characters with whom they identify, and that identification, Burke tells us, results in persuasion (an influence on the audience's views).

Chin's construction of Tom as a quasi-alter ego figure to Tam is even more revealing. In the stage directions, Chin describes Tom as a "very neat, tidy, uptight hip Chinese American" who "speaks self-consciously, styling his voice like others style hair" (52). Tom serves as the play's "model minority"—a Chinese American Uncle Tom, if you will—who recognizes himself as a successfully assimilated Chinese American. As

such, Tom and Tam disagree on almost everything, and a close examination of their dialogue reveals Chin's assumptions about his audience and further illustrates his strategy of influencing his readers and viewers through their own participation in the construction of the play.

As an assimilated Chinese American, Tom's views mirror those of Chin's mainstream audience members/readers. He says to Tam,

You and me ... we're both Chinese. Now maybe you don't like being Chinese and you're trying to prove you're something else. I used to be like that. I wondered why we didn't speak up more, then I saw we don't have to. We used to be kicked around, but that's history, brother. Today we have good jobs, good pay, and we're lucky. Americans are proud to say we send more of our kids to college than any other race. We're accepted. We worked hard for it. I've made my peace. (59)

Tom's self-control and his statement that he "used to be like that" suggest that he is somehow more mature and self-aware than Tam. That he is writing a book on Chinese American identity further suggests that he is an "authority" on the topic. However, Tom is also insecure in his liminal identity. Tam identifies this insecurity when he urges Tom to see that Lee is not in fact white, but part Chinese:

Tom, you're beautiful. You wanted to be 'accepted' by whites so much, you created one to accept you. You didn't know Lee's got a bucket of Chinese blood in her? At least a bucket?.... Look at her. Go on up and get a good look, fella, and you tell me who's prejudiced against Chinese. You

wanted a white girl so bad, so bad, you turned her white with your magic eyes. You got that anti-Chinaman vision. (59-60)

Ling reads this, as well as Tom's remark that "in American eyes we don't appear as he-man types" (*Chickencoop* 59), as an indication that Tom is "more troubled by stereotyping than he admits" (88). Ling goes on to say that Lee's earlier comment in the play that Tom "wasn't a man" (*Chickencoop* 18) "implies that Tom's embrace of the promises of assimilation may be an act that has 'unmanned' him. Only by rejecting Tam's acute sense of his anomalous cultural position can Tom feel secure in his ideologically designated place in American culture as a successfully assimilated minority" (88). Because Lee and Tom see themselves as relatively comfortable in their identities, unlike Tam, they can ask him the same question audience members might be thinking: "Who do you think you are?" (*Chickencoop* 13; 88). Viewed as speaking agents voicing concerns of the audience, Lee and Tom encourage audience members to identify with them and thus force audience members to consider their own subject positions and ideologies in regards to Asian American identity and cultural difference. Through this identification, readers become participants in the rhetorical construction of the play and are perhaps persuaded to think differently about the characters' and possibly their own ambivalent identities.

Tam's and Kenji's use of black dialect throughout the play is also effective as a rhetorical strategy because black dialect is recognized worldwide as a form of American English, and because the play premiered during a period in U.S. history in which blacks and other "minorities" were rallying for equal rights. By using this dialect in his

construction of Tam and Kenji, Chin further argues for their construction as hybrid figures and forces his audiences to grapple with the changing race and class relations of the 1960s and 1970s. Chin asks audiences to question what it means, ideologically, for an Asian American to “talk black,” and to interrogate their own—perhaps contradictory, perhaps angst-ridden—responses. The very presence of black dialect spoken by characters that are not black indicates a clear rhetorical move on Chin’s part. According to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca,

By the very fact of selecting certain elements and presenting them to the audience, their importance and pertinency to the discussion are implied. Indeed, such a choice endows these elements with a *presence*, which is an essential factor in argumentation and one that is far too much neglected in rationalistic conceptions of reasoning. (116)

Hearing the dialect in an on-stage performance endows Tam’s and Kenji’s speech with presence; it acts “directly on [readers’] sensibilities” (116) in ways that reading a description of their speech as “black vernacular” would not. Moreover, seeing Asian Americans posture as blacks through their speech has a much more powerful effect than simply reading the dialogue and stage directions on paper. The effect of this incongruity is to give readers/audience members further “aesthetic proof”⁷³ that Chin/Tam has no language of his own, and to encourage them to consider what it means to perform a cross-racial linguistic impersonation.

Chin seems to argue that, for Tam and Kenji, the use of the dominant discourses is not so much an option as it is a necessity. That “black and white are the only options from which [Tam] has to choose,” argues Karen Shimakawa, “illustrates the way in

which for Chin Asian Americanness, as abject, simply does not figure in the subject/object relation of white/black race relations in U.S. American verbal discourse” (92). Kenji’s response to Lee’s accusation that he and Tam are “faking blackness” suggests that he, too, feels that he has no other recourse except to “act black”: “School was all blacks and Mexicans. We were kids in school, and you either walked and talked right in the yard, or got the shit beat outa you every day, ya understand?” (20). As David Li explains, “As products of the public school system, native-born monolingual English-speaking Asian Americans were caught in a linguistic orphanhood. First, while encouraged to celebrate the dominant language and culture, they were denied ownership of both: the races of Asia do not match the pale face of English” (39). Without a language or a Chinese American heroic tradition with which to identify, Tam and Kenji must borrow from/rely on “American” and African American aesthetic/cultural traditions.⁷⁴ We see this in Tam’s (and Kenji’s) linguistic impersonations as well as in Tam’s encounters with both the Lone Ranger and Charley Popcorn, as I discuss in further detail below.

By Act Two, we learn of Tam’s childhood fantasy that the Lone Ranger was a “Chinaman” as he describes his fascination with the “masked man” to his children in an interior monologue:

Listen, children, did I ever tellya, I ever tellya the Lone Ranger ain’t a Chinaman? I ever tellya that? Don’t blame me. That’s what happens when you’re a Chinaman boy in the kitchen, listening in the kitchen to the radio, for what’s happenin in the other world.... I heard of the masked man. And I listened to him. And in the Sunday funnies he had black hair,

and Chinatown was nothing but black hair, and for years, listen, years! I grew blind looking hard through the holes of his funnypaper mask for slanty eyes.... You see, I knew, children ... he wore that mask to hide his Asian eyes!.... I knew the Lone Ranger was the CHINESE AMERICAN BOY of the radio I'd looked for. (31-32)

Just as Tam must “talk the talk of orphans” (8) because he does not have a language of his own, so too must he create a fantasy “Asian” Lone Ranger because American culture has deprived him of any Chinese American mythical heroes. Despite their material contributions to U.S. history in the building of the transcontinental railroad, Chinese Americans have been erased from the popular imagination of the “American West.” The Lone Ranger thus becomes Tam’s idealized Chinese American hero; however, as Shimakawa observes, “Tam is able to construct this fantasy precisely because his experience of the Lone Ranger is primarily through the *radio*—the voice of the Lone Ranger comes to him completely disembodied; and it is only in this state of pure language and sound that a legitimate, speaking Chinese American subject is imaginable” (94).⁷⁵ Her observation highlights an important distinction that we must make as readers and critics, especially in a study of literacy acts, which is that audience members will experience the rhetorical force of the characters’ literacy acts in ways entirely different than readers will. For example, upon hearing Tam, the “multi-tongued word magician” (*Chickencoop* 3), speak and seeing his racialized body on stage, viewers of the production experience a disconnect not unlike what Tam feels when he sees the “real” white Lone Ranger. (Chin has both the Lone Ranger and Tonto appear on toy horses, the men “both old and decrepit” [*Chickencoop* 32].) It is especially significant that Chin

intended this work to be seen and heard as it points to the impossibility of a “legitimate, speaking Chinese American subject.” Such a figure may be *imaginable*, but only insofar as the racialized body is rendered invisible.

The play furthers the argument that America has constructed Tam (and by extension other racialized minorities) as a linguistic fraud through its depiction of Tonto, the Lone Ranger’s “Indian” sidekick. In two separate incidents, Tonto speaks “without accent,” causing the Lone Ranger to momentarily misrecognize his “faithful friend”:

TONTO: (*without accent*): Right, Kemo Sabay. Get off the horse now, Silver needs to rest a spell.

RANGER: (*cringing*): You’re not Tonto! Where’s my Kemo Sabay? Where’s my faithful Indian companion? Tonto!

TONTO: (*faking accent*): Ummk, Kemo Sabay. You get off horse now. (34).

The second time Tonto speaks without an accent, the Ranger tells him, “Not that way, Tonto. Be yourself. Kemo Sabay me” (36). Just as an accentless, English-speaking “Chinaman” or a Chinese American who speaks “black English” is unimaginable to Charley Popcorn (as well as to some audience members), Tonto is unrecognizable and unimaginable as the Ranger’s “faithful Indian companion” unless he uses the language that dominant (racist) culture has created for him. Chin’s characters’ movement among various discourses is, in effect, a verbal play with linguistic stereotypes. That Tonto can and does speak without an accent reinforces the (racialized) literacy act as performance, as social construct.

Of further significance is that these (racialized) literacy acts are performed since audience members are visually and aurally confronted with the literal Asian speaking body that, by speaking “in excess,” or by using hyperbole, disrupts the stereotypes of Asians/Asian Americans as passive, reticent, and only speaking accented English. In *Performing Asian America*, Josephine Lee argues persuasively for the performance of the stereotype by Asian or Asian American actors as subversive because stereotypes “cannot be reappropriated without evoking their racist history,” and that in revealing this history lies the “potential for [the stereotype’s] disruption” (96). She posits that what I call Tam’s “hyperliteracy” is in fact a necessary strategy for effecting this “disruption”: “To [disrupt the stereotype], one must highlight or foreground the anxiety inherent in the performance of the stereotype by overperforming its already exaggerated qualities, pushing violence into hyperbolic slapstick, or forcing its repetition until it becomes monotonous” (96). Tam’s hyperliteracy thus both represents and critiques America’s construction of him as a “foreign” “linguistic orphan,” while it also argues for his legitimacy by demonstrating his social and cultural literacy (i.e., knowledge of other types of social and cultural discourses). Though she does not identify it in rhetorical terms, Josephine Lee views the Asian American actor’s performance of stereotype as rhetoric because the actors are “playing stereotypes” out of “choice” or “compulsion”; that is, the playing of stereotypes must not be viewed as “mere performance,” but rather as a kind of “historicizing” that “works to provide a specific context for [the] performances, thus revealing the anxiety inherent in the historical encounters that call them into being” (98).

Chin further complicates the relationship between the Asian raced body and “American” English in his construction of Charley Popcorn as a speaking agent. Upon meeting Tam for the first time, Charley comments, “The way you talked, why, I took you for colored over the phone” (40). By expressing confusion over Tam’s speech, Charley’s character identifies and acknowledges a concern that Chin’s audiences share. Like Henry in *Native Speaker*, whose face does not match his voice, Tam is misrecognized and in fact inscribed as illegitimate precisely because neither his “black American” nor his other voices match his face. Like many of the audience members, Charley Popcorn has trouble identifying Tam and Kenji as “Americans,” nor can he imagine them speaking English without an accent. After Tam tells him “I’m an American citizen,” Popcorn replies, “You don’t talk like a Chinese, do ya?” (40). Through such speaking agents, Chin draw in his audiences by giving them characters with whom to identify, and then subverts those identifications by illustrating that the characters with whom they relate are on as unstable ground as Tam himself. In effect, through his use of multiple voices and accents and characters with questionable ethnic backgrounds, Chin challenges dominant culture’s racial discourse and constructs, destabilizing any notions of a universal national identity or a normative literacy.

In his construction of Tam, Chin has created a figure who is lost precisely because he feels he has no community, or that the community to which he ostensibly belongs is “fake” since it was created by dominant white culture. In contrast to the rhetorical situations of Kang’s and Bulosan’s texts, Chin is responding to an American history and culture that has effectively erased the contributions of Americans of Asian descent. As a

second-generation Chinese American, Tam legally belongs to this history and culture, and yet he is aware that as an Asian American he is denied recognition as a contributor to this history and culture. Tam alludes to this paradox in his conversation with Lee about his kids. He tells her, “I should leave them something ... I should have done some THING. One thing I’ve done alone, with all my heart. A gift. Not revenge. But they’ve already forgotten me. They got a new, ambitious, successful, go-for-bucks, superior white daddy” (27). And of the man his kids call “daddy,” Tam confesses, “I hear he’s even a better writer than me” (27). Finally, in an act that symbolizes Tam’s feelings of inferiority at not being able to contribute to cultural production by authoring or “fathering” a text (Chu), the Lone Ranger (in Tam’s dream/reflection) shoots him in the hand, thereby symbolically destroying his ability to write.

Tam’s fascination with the Lone Ranger, whose mask, he believed as a child, hid his “slanty” Asian eyes, also speaks to Tam’s experiences as a second-generation Chinese American. The Lone Ranger reveals himself to be a racist white man who urges Tam and Kenji to be “honorary whites”: “In your old age, as it were in your legendary childhood, in the name of Helen Keller, Pearl Buck, and Charlie Chan, kiss my ass, know thou that it be white, and go thou happy in honorary whiteness forever and ever, preserving your culture, AMEN” (37). By bestowing on them “honorary whiteness” and separating their culture from his own, the Lone Ranger refutes Tam’s belief, held since childhood, that he could claim American culture as his own. Chin’s use of the Lone Ranger to argue this point is particularly effective because the Ranger is a quintessential American male icon, a figure with whom all (especially male) American audiences can identify.

As in previous chapters, at the same time that Chin critiques dominant culture's systematic racialization and exclusion of Asian Americans from American cultural production and history, he also argues for his own Americanness through the act of writing. Though his mythic hero Tam has no language to call his own, Chin establishes himself as an agent of cultural production through his critique and demonstrated knowledge of American history and culture. In other words, Chin performs through his literacy act that which Tam cannot.

I turn now to an examination of the arguments that author Chang-rae Lee and his narrator-protagonist Henry Park make about literacy and citizenship. As with Chin and Tam, Lee and Henry's literacy acts can be read as direct responses to America's construction of them as illegitimate Others. Through the rhetorical processes of interpellation and identification as well as acts of hyperliteracy, both Lee and Henry illustrate the shifting, ambivalent ground of identification while creating the possibility of transforming readers' ideologies about race, literacy and U.S. citizenship.

Chapter 4: Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker*

Introduction

Native Speaker revolves around Henry Park's, the narrator-protagonist's, coming to terms with his identity as a second-generation Korean American spy. The novel reads like a confession as Henry recounts and reflects on his actions and identity as husband to his white American wife Lelia, father to a "half-breed" child named Mitt, son of a Korean-born immigrant, and mole for an independent intelligence agency that deals specifically with "ethnic minorities." When he is assigned to spy on a rising Korean American politician, John Kwang, Henry begins to question his own legitimacy as an American.

As a novel that foregrounds issues of language acquisition, proficiency and use, *Native Speaker* falls under the category of "literacy narrative." Though it has not been written about or discussed as such, *Native Speaker* raises important and complex questions regarding literacy in English and the articulation of Asian American subjectivity. Specifically, like *Chicken Coop*, it inquires into the possibility of a legitimate Asian American speaking subject and then destroys any hope for such a possibility through the narrator-protagonist's literacy acts. I argue that in his effort to suppress his "Asianness," Henry becomes hyperliterate, so much so that he ends up betraying himself by revealing the very "Asianness" he aims to suppress. By constructing Henry as hyperliterate in his meticulous use of language and his ability to move between different discursive worlds, Lee ties his narrator-protagonist's literacy practices to his racialized, gendered, and classed identity. Like Tam Lum, Henry Park realizes that, as an Asian

American, he has no legitimate claim on the English language. And like Tam, Henry is “caught in a linguistic orphanhood,” “encouraged to celebrate the dominant language and culture” and then “denied ownership of both” (Li 39). Moreover, by addressing the “different Englishes” spoken by the immigrants in his novel’s New York setting, Lee questions what the future holds for these newly arrived peoples as well as for those who have been in the country for years and who speak a kind of pidgin English or “borderland Discourse,” or speak no English at all.

While Tam’s hyperliteracy is enacted by his volubility and use of multiple accents and discourses, Henry’s hyperliteracy is enacted by speaking and writing impeccable English. The historical contexts undergirding the production of these texts help to illuminate the differences in Chin’s and Lee’s strategies. As I discuss in the previous chapter, as a product of the cultural nationalist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and as a text that was written by one of the staunchest proponents of that movement, *Chickencoop* suggests, albeit in strictly masculinist terms, that there is a “real” Chinese American history and identity. By contrast, *Native Speaker* presents a much more heterogeneous and multiracial portrayal of Asian America in its depiction of *Ahjuma* (the woman who comes to America from Korea to help care for Henry and his father when Henry’s mother dies); various Asian immigrant communities in New York; the concomitant “ethnic espionage” work that these communities engender; and John Kwang’s dealings with these communities as city councilman. *Native Speaker* thus engages recent trends in immigration and globalization as well as with the arguably problematic way in which America deals with the changing face of the nation.

Critical Reception

Lee's novel, published nearly three decades after the Civil Rights and cultural nationalist movements, appeals to an audience that, while perhaps better versed in multiculturalism than Chin's 1970s audiences, is also experiencing anxiety over the increasing number of immigrants from countries in Asia, the Americas, Eastern Europe, and Africa, as well as undocumented workers from Mexico and Latin America—the latter of which has caused increased anxiety, to which debates surrounding Proposition 187 attest.⁷⁶ Lee may seem to target a wider audience than Chin by writing a novel that fits the conventions with which his readers are more comfortable and familiar—the spy genre—but as I demonstrate below, an examination of his language and literacy practices reveals that, in fact, he is writing to a highly educated and elite audience and therefore excluding other readers who may hail from different (i.e., less privileged) socioeconomic backgrounds. The audiences to whom I am referring here include both real readers and fictional audiences constructed by the author.

Critical reception of the novel has focused on a number of topics, including Lee's examination of the difficulties faced by non-native English speakers in the U.S.; the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of using the spy genre to tell an immigrant story; Lee's prose style; his examination of the "immigrant myth"; the interracial relationship between Henry and his wife Lelia; and his depictions of Asian immigrants and Korean Americans.⁷⁷ While nearly all critics acknowledge the relationship between Henry's proficiency with language (and his evasive "Henryspeak," as Lelia calls it) and his identity as a Korean American spy, few focus their complete attention on this aspect of the novel. Mary Jane Hurst conducts what she calls a "case study" of the relationship

between language, gender, and community in Lee's *Native Speaker*. Hurst speaks as a scholar in the field of linguistics, and she argues for the value of linguistic analyses of literature because the two disciplines, to her mind, share the same cultural contexts and thus are closely connected. Hurst's "case study" resembles a literary analysis in its examination of the symbolism of Henry's use/misuse/nonuse of language and the effects that this has on his personal life in his relationship with his wife and in his job as a spy. In her examination of Henry's tactic of "distancing" or "masking" through language, she comes closest to combining linguistic and rhetorical analysis with literary analysis. However, Hurst maintains her focus on the theme of language use to express one's identity or individuality rather than analyzing the particularities of this form of language and the effects that it has on Lee's readers. Hers is a study in social linguistics, an exploration of how language is used in a social context in *Native Speaker* and what this means for the characters involved and their relationships to the community.

While I, too, value a socio-cultural approach to studying language, I also believe that an integral component of such an analysis is the impact the language use has on its larger audience—the readers of the text. Just as we can analyze the ways in which Henry and John Kwang use language to negotiate and argue for their respective places in the community, so too can we analyze the ways in which Chang-rae Lee uses language to influence or persuade his readers. Unlike *Chickencoop*, *East Goes West*, and *America Is in the Heart*, *Native Speaker* was written more recently (1995) and so cannot speak to the contemporaneous audiences of Chin's, Bulosan's or Kang's texts. Still, considering this text alongside the early immigrant narratives helps to illuminate the historical trajectory of conceptualizations of citizenship as it relates to literacy and race.

***Native Speaker* and Its Sociohistorical Context**

I want to emphasize again the importance in any rhetorical study of identifying the situation in which rhetoric occurs or, rather, the situation out of which rhetoric evolves. Viewed from this situational perspective, *Native Speaker* can be read as a response to Americans' ambivalence about the increasing number of immigrants in this country. According to You-me Park and Gayle Wald, *Native Speaker* was produced during a "moment of perceived crisis ... when anti-immigration sentiments were being fueled by collective anxiety about limited resources and job opportunities for 'legitimate' subject-citizens" (609). As I mentioned earlier, the enormous influx of both documented and undocumented immigrants and refugees in the last four decades resulting, in part, from the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which eliminated national-origin quotas, incited fears and anxieties that have since manifested themselves in both juridical and sociocultural ways.⁷⁸ For example, both the 1990 Immigration Act and Proposition 187 (passed in 1994) called for an increase in the border patrol between California and Mexico in an effort to restrict illegal immigration. Lowe notes that the latter policy, in its "attempts to deny schooling and medical care to illegal immigrants" is "[r]eminiscent of the nineteenth-century laws barring Chinese from naturalization, education, and safe working conditions" (20). Examples of America's anxiety about Asian immigrants abound, one recently publicized being the indictment of Taiwanese immigrant Dr. Wen Ho Lee. Allegations that Asian immigrants are operating as "sleeper spies" indicate how the "foreignness" of Asians is so deeply embedded in the imagination of the nation.

As history has taught us, anxieties about Asians have existed since the nineteenth century when Asian immigrants were seen as a "yellow peril" threatening to replace

European immigrants in the work force. For contemporary readers, however, the perception of the Asian immigrant has been influenced by other factors, including immigrant exclusion laws; the internment of Americans of Japanese ancestry during World War II;⁷⁹ U.S. political, military, and economic involvement in Asia; and, most recently, for some South Asians, the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and resulting anti-terrorism legislation. Lee's novel, in its portrayal of immigrant communities in New York, engages with U.S. immigrant history, including conditions in Asia that have resulted in both voluntary and involuntary migration.

As Sucheng Chan reminds us, the movement of Filipino, South Korean, and Vietnamese immigrants to the U.S. "has been part of a larger 'American connection'" to Asia (149). Ties between the U.S. and the Philippines have remained strong since the U.S. colonized the archipelago in 1898. Not only do most educated Filipinos speak English, as English has become the language of instruction in secondary schools and universities, but the very presence of the (now former) Clark and Subic Bay U.S. military bases along with infiltrations of American popular culture have accustomed most Filipinos to "American" ways of life. These factors, in addition to the political instability of the Philippines, the unequal distribution of income and wealth, and overpopulation have all contributed to Filipino migration to the U.S. (Chan 149).

South Koreans, though not "postcolonial" in the same way as Filipino Americans, also have close political ties with the United States as a result of U.S. involvement in the Korean War and the continued U.S. military presence on the peninsula. According to Chan, the South Korean government has, since 1962, actively encouraged emigration due

to overpopulation in Seoul. The government also recognizes that emigration is beneficial to the economy (151).

In addition to the ethnic groups listed above, refugees from Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam have been immigrating to the U.S. since the end of the Vietnam War, although unlike other immigrants, many have immigrated involuntarily and have also risked their lives trying to escape. Moreover, according to Evelyn Hu-Dehart, these “traumatized” immigrants often do not arrive with other family members, and they generally do not come equipped with the “social skills” and “human capital” that would assist them in their struggle to adapt to American society (17). She explains how KaYing Yang, executive director of the Women’s Association of Hmong and Lao in St. Paul, Minnesota does not envision the Hmong and Lao presence in America as an indication of improved U.S.-Asia relations, but rather she envisions them as “forever refugees” (18). According to the 2000 Census, the total number of Southeast Asian Americans is over 1.8 million, including approximately 1 million Vietnamese, 185,000 Hmong, 206,000 Cambodians, and 198,000 Laotians (Niedzwiecki and Duong 6).

Additionally, immigrants from China, Taiwan, and India have arrived in large numbers due to the 1965 Immigration Act, while Japan is “the only Asian country with close ties to the United States that has *not* sent large numbers of people to America since 1965.” Chan writes that this low figure is due to the fact that Japan is an industrialized nation and can therefore provide an adequate lifestyle for its citizens (151).

The 2000 Census shows that Asian Americans now account for between 3 and 4 percent of the nation’s population, numbering over 10 million. In just one decade, between 1990 and 2000, the population of Asian Americans grew by 48 percent

nationwide, second only to Latinos. In terms of ethnicity, Chinese Americans comprise the largest ethnic group at 2.4 million, while Filipino Americans number at 1.9 million, Asian Indian Americans at 1.7 million, Vietnamese Americans at 1.1 million, Korean Americans at 1.0 million, and Japanese Americans at 800,000 (Wu 20). It is estimated that the Asian American population will grow from roughly 10 million in 2000 to 34 million in 2050—an increase of about 4 percent of the population nationwide (Zhou 69).

Chang-rae Lee is one of the immigrants who arrived in the U.S. post 1965. As a Korean American immigrant, Lee is a postcolonial subject of both the Japanese and U.S. empires. Though Korea was never a U.S. colony, the United States' political and military involvement on the peninsula since its independence from Japan has effectively made South Korea a neocolony. Chungmoo Choi argues that the United States' presence in South Korea is a “‘postcolonial’ colonialism,” a “colonization of consciousness”: “American mass culture towered over Korea’s desolate cultural landscape as South Korea became one of the most heavily armed fortresses of the vast American empire. To live in this state of internal displacement and external dependency is to live in a state of colonialism” (81-82).

Although *Native Speaker* is situated in the U.S., identifying the ways in which it is “postcolonial” and “transnational” helps to illuminate the subject positionings of its characters and their literacy acts. For example, Henry’s ambivalent status as a second-generation Korean American is deeply rooted in his family’s postcolonial immigrant history and in his own experience as an American who, because of his race, is constructed as a foreigner and a speaker of accented English. Because of his fluency in both Korean and English, Henry can pretend to be an “illegal alien,” a newly arrived

immigrant, or an “Americanized” Korean depending on the situation or case on which he is called to work. The goal, as his boss Hoagland reminds him, is to speak in such a way as to gain the trust of his ethnic immigrant “clients,” meaning the people on whom Henry is hired to spy. He advises Henry to “[s]peak enough so they can hear your voice and come to trust it, but no more, and no one will think twice about who you are” (44). Because of his race, he can also, like Frank Wu, wear many different masks, which is precisely what makes him such a valuable spy. Significantly, Henry’s identity is very much tied to his occupation as a spy: “I had always thought that I could be anyone, perhaps several anyones at once. Dennis Hoagland and his private firm had conveniently appeared at the right time, offering the perfect vocation for the person I was” (127). We soon learn that Henry’s profession and, by extension, his means for survival as an espionage agent is entirely reliant upon the various postcolonial and transnational immigrant identities of his “clients.”

That Henry so strongly identifies with the people on whom he is instructed to spy also speaks to his ambivalent subject positioning as reflected in his acts of literacy. For example, although Kwang emigrated from Korea while Henry was born in the U.S., Henry sees the two of them as occupying the same liminal position as non-native speakers of English:

[Kwang] was how I imagined a Korean would be, at least one living in any renown. He would stride the daises and the stages with his voice strong and clear, unafraid to speak the language like a Puritan and like a Chinaman and like every boat person in between. I found him most moving and beautiful in those moments. And whenever I hear the strains

of a different English, I will still shatter a little inside. Within every echo from a city storefront or window, I can hear the old laments of my mother and my father, and mine as a confused schoolboy, and then even the fitful mumblings of our Ahjuma, the instant American inventions of her tongue. They speak to me, as John Kwang could always, not simply in new accents or notes but in the ancient untold music of a newcomer's heart, sonorous with longing and hope. (304)

Through identification and consubstantiation Henry argues that he (as a schoolboy) was like Kwang and his parents and all the “newcomers,” both racially and linguistically. Yet while his hyperliteracy, his flawless, unaccented, and lyrical language that he uses to make this claim may seem to suggest otherwise, I argue that its very excessiveness reveals what it aims to disguise: Henry's non-native speaker status.

Henry's identification with his “clients” and with the various immigrant and refugee communities of New York further impacts the way in which he uses language. As Henry ruminates on his U.S. citizenship status, he considers the plight of so many others in their journey or displacement to this nation:

By rights I am as American as anyone.... And yet I can never stop considering the pitch and drift of [these immigrants'] forlorn boats on the sea, the movements that must be endless, promising nothing to their numbers within, headlong voyages scaled in a lyric of search, like the great love of Solomon.

Yet, in the holds of those ships there is never any singing. The people only whisper and breathe low. Not one of them thinks these streets are

paved with gold. This remains our own fancy. They know more about the guns and rapes and the riots than of millionaires. They have heard stories of bands of young men who will look for them to beat up or murder. They know they will come here and live eight or nine to a room and earn ten dollars a day, maybe save five. They can figure that math, how long it will take to send for their family, how much longer for a few carts of fruit to push, an old truck of wares, a small shop to sell the dumplings and cakes and sweet drinks of their old land. (335)

Henry identifies with these recent immigrants; however, as reflected in his use of “us” and “they,” he is also aware of his privileged status as an assimilated Asian American and that, in many ways, he is not like them at all. In fact, by speaking for them, Henry suggests that they either cannot, or will not, speak for themselves.

In “Do I, Too, Sing America? Vernacular Representations and Chang-rae Lee’s *Native Speaker*,” Daniel Kim remarks on what he calls a “radical disjuncture between the language being described and the language of the narrator” (252). He argues that the “central irony” of Lee’s “immaculate prose style” is that it seems so removed from the “immigrant sensibility” it strives to express:

Henry’s melancholy attaches itself to a kind of language that he, as a wholly assimilated American subject, no longer speaks; with every word he utters, with every elegantly turned phrase, he marks his increasing distance from the “different English” he elegizes. While this is a novel that is attempting to give the broken Englishes that immigrants speak the status of an American vernacular, it can do so only through an English that

seems entirely cleansed of any defect or imperfection that would give away the *non*-native speaker. His is the language that remains when every last trace of the immigrant tongue has been scraped away. (253)

While I agree that Henry's language distances him from the immigrants in the novel, I do not agree with Kim that it signifies his status as "wholly assimilated"; on the contrary, in his attempt to suppress his difference, Henry speaks such polished English that it becomes a kind of hyperbolic gesture. I would extend Kim's argument and suggest that the novel does not even attempt to give broken Englishes the status of an American vernacular. If that were the case, Lee would have presumably allowed the immigrant characters (besides Henry's father and John Kwang) to speak. By having Henry speak for the immigrants and by describing their speech rather than allowing readers to hear their "different Englishes"—in other words, by maximizing the use of impeccable English throughout the novel, by using it "in excess"—Lee underscores both Henry's inability to successfully "pass" as a non-native speaker as well as the impossibility of a legitimate American immigrant vernacular.

By depicting the gradual defeat of John Kwang, an Asian immigrant on his way to becoming an esteemed political figure in the community, alongside Henry Park's struggle with his own identity as a father to a mixed-race son, a husband to a white wife, and a mole for an agency that specializes in ethnic espionage, Change-rae Lee responds to his audiences' fears, prejudices, anxieties, and concerns over the status of Asians in America. His novel suggests the futility of an Asian immigrant's and a second-generation Korean American's attempts to fully integrate into American politics, society and culture.

As I show in the analysis below, Lee constructs a rhetorically complex novel that situates the reader alongside the narrator as he tells his story. He presents an ideology that readers recognize as part of their own belief system. Lee then attempts to disrupt readers' positionings by persuading them that the very ideology with which they identified in the first few pages of the novel is precisely the ideology that has cast Asian Americans as "almost, but not quite" American. In other words, rhetorical analysis helps us see how *Native Speaker* becomes the "site of an ambivalent identification" (Bhabha 167), through which cultural difference is articulated and whereby the contradictions of American democracy are enunciated and negotiated.

Literacy as Capital

Like those in New Literacy Studies, Pierre Bourdieu is interested in linguistic exchanges for what they tell us about society, history, and culture—in short, for what they tell us about ourselves. Like Bakhtin, he is very much interested in examining the socio-historical conditions in which languages evolve. And like James Gee, Bourdieu emphasizes the importance of understanding the situated nature of literacies and the power relations that determine not just who gets to speak, but under what circumstances or in which social situations they are able to speak so that they will be heard. His views on speech acts and their social conditions resonate with my study of the kinds of speech acts we see operating in *Native Speaker*. He writes, "the efficacy of an utterance, the power of conviction which is granted to it, depends on the *pronunciation* (and secondarily the vocabulary) of the person who utters it" (70). Lee's narrator Henry Park is well aware of the "power and conviction" of utterances that are pronounced correctly,

but he is also aware that the “efficacy” of an utterance has as much, if not more, to do with the *person* who is uttering it. Bourdieu also acknowledges the significance of the position of the speaker and emphasizes the role that his or her social positioning plays in the production of discourses:

... the use of language, the manner as much as the substance of discourse, depends on the social position of the speaker, which governs the access he can have to the language of the institution, that is, to the official, orthodox and legitimate speech. It is the access to the legitimate instruments of expression, and therefore the participation in the authority of the institution, which makes *all* the difference—irreducible to discourse as such—between the straightforward imposture of masqueraders, who disguise a performative utterance as a descriptive or constative statement, and the authorized imposture of those who do the same thing with the authorization and the authority of an institution. (109)

Bourdieu’s focus on social position as a marker of one’s discourse is relevant to my study of *Native Speaker* because Henry speaks (and narrates with) the language of an intellectual. His speech is what Bourdieu would call an “authorized imposture” because it is the language of the educational system in which he was reared. However, Bourdieu fails to address the specifically racialized or ethnicized identity of the speaker and how that impacts the force or conviction of the utterance, although he does acknowledge the role that one’s body plays in the internally persuasive discourse of one’s “social worth”:

The sense of the value of one’s own linguistic products is a fundamental dimension of the sense of knowing the place which one occupies in the

social space. One's original relation with different markets and the experience of the sanctions applied to one's own productions, together with the experience of the price attributed to one's own body, are doubtless some of the mediations which help to constitute that *sense of one's own social worth* which governs the practical relation to different markets (shyness, confidence, etc.) and, more generally, one's whole physical posture in the social world. (82)

In Bourdieu's terms then, Henry's experiences with "different markets" and even the price of one's voice and body has made Henry acutely aware of his racialized and ambivalent physical presence and "posture in the social world," which is precisely what causes him to be hyperliterate.⁸⁰

By looking closely at Henry's literacy practices we see how he adopts the rhetoric of belonging to an American upper class (through his demonstrated vocabulary and articulateness, or his "linguistic capital") and yet simultaneously (if we read his articulations as hyperliterate) critiques the idea that full proficiency, even mastery of English, will make one any more American or endow one with "symbolic capital." Through the rhetorical processes of interpellation and identification, Henry positions his readers as voyeurs, like himself, and establishes a close relationship with them in order to then subvert their ideologies by making them question their assumptions/ideologies about literacy and its relationship to race and U.S. citizenship.

Interpellation and Identification

Using strategies of interpellation and identification, Lee constructs a critique of America by couching his discourse in the genre and language of the spy novel. His choice of genre is closely connected with his other rhetorical strategies as it interpellates readers in a way that is common to all spy novels. In other words, the role in which Lee casts his readers requires that they position themselves alongside the narrator as spectator or voyeur. That is, readers are called upon by the discourse to become investigators in much the same way as the spy in the spy novel. Choosing to write in this genre is itself a rhetorical tactic because it argues for Lee's Americanness in the same way that writing in the *bildungsroman* form did for Kang and Bulosan. Lee demonstrates his cultural literacy by writing in this popular form and hence he gains "symbolic capital" through the production of his work. As with the other authors' strategies which I discuss in this dissertation, Lee's strategy functions on two different (and conflicting) levels. While on the one hand Lee gains legitimacy or "symbolic capital" through the act of writing, his novel functions rhetorically to persuade readers that his Asian American narrator-protagonist, and by extension other "real" (i.e., nonfictional) Asian Americans, are not in fact viewed in the popular imagination as legitimate "American" subjects.

Interpellation, the term coined by Louis Althusser to describe the process by which subjects are "hailed" or formed as subjects through ideology, can also be used, in a modified form, to describe the process by which a rhetor establishes his/her identity with an audience. Although for Althusser, individuals *become* subjects in ideology, I use his term here to describe the rhetorical process of persuading a reader or listener to adopt another ideology. In other words, the act of interpellation, as I use the term, is rhetorical

in the sense that the subject is hailed as something other than what he/she already was and is therefore capable of being persuaded. In literature, readers are interpellated in many different ways, the most obvious being through the form of direct address. Lee uses this form in *Native Speaker* as a way of bringing his readers into the story and making them complicit in the narrative performance. Using direct address, he tells his readers at the end of the first chapter, just seven pages into the novel,

And yet you may know me. I am an amiable man. I can be most personable, if not charming, and whatever I possess in this life is more or less the result of a talent I have for making you feel good about yourself when you are with me. In this sense I am not a seducer. I am hardly seen. I won't speak untruths to you, I won't pass easy compliments or odious offerings of flattery. I make do with on-hand materials, what I can chip out of you, your natural ore. Then I fuel the fire of your most secret vanity. (7)

Though on the surface Henry seems to be referencing his work as a spy and addressing an ambiguous universal audience, I read this passage as a completely candid description of the very interpellation that he is enacting through his address. The illocutionary force of the speech act lies in his warning that he is interpellating his readers as complicit in America's construction of him. We see by novel's end that Henry has kept his word. He makes readers feel good about themselves through a process of identification; he remains honest to them throughout (or so he claims, and we have no reason to doubt him); and he "fuel[s] the fire of [their] most secret vanity" by demonstrating to his readers in the end that they are partly responsible for his acts of betrayal.

Henry directly addresses his readers at another pivotal moment towards the end of novel when he admits to them that he has betrayed one of his own. He narrates,

But I and my kind possess another dimension. We will learn every lesson of accent and idiom, we will dismantle every last pretense and practice you hold, noble as well as ruinous. You can keep nothing safe from our eyes and ears. This is your own history. We are your most perilous and dutiful brethren, the song of our hearts at once furious and sad. For only you could grant me these lyrical modes. I call them back to you. Here is the sole talent I ever dared nurture. Here is all of my American education.
(320)

It should first be noted that direct address is used infrequently in the novel and as such the occasions on which it is used must be studied carefully. Their positioning in the novel, as we shall see, is crucial to bringing about the effect of transforming readers' ideologies. As I mentioned above, Henry first directly addresses his audience in the opening pages of the novel. I argued that the effect of this address was twofold: while it encourages readers to identify with him and to see him as a credible narrator, it also interpellates them as complicit in America's construction of him as a hybrid, illegitimate subject. However, readers are not aware of this at the time because he is simply trying to establish a relationship with them. It is only at the end of the novel, when Henry himself admits to the awareness of his interstitial identity and readers have already been interpellated, that he can challenge their role in constructing him as a liminal subject. It is here that Lee makes his harshest critique by suggesting that America has taught Henry that in order to succeed and to be accepted, he must "learn every lesson of accent and

idiom.” The irony is that no matter how educated Henry is, no matter how proficiently or eloquently he speaks, he will always be an illegitimate, “false speaker of language” (6).

Like interpellation, identification is an act that transforms readers (or listeners) in some way that enables them to think, act, speak, or see the world differently—and for others to see them differently—simply because of this transformation. For Burke, all acts of persuasion, all forms of human communication, or “symbolic action” as he calls it, are essentially acts of identification. Furthermore, Burke notes that in being identified with another person, one is also “consubstantial” with that person. In other words, they share a substance—“sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes” (181), etc.—but remain unique individuals.

Whether intentional or not, Lee’s/Henry’s use of this strategy is effective on many levels. Henry uses a strategy of identification with his readers by writing a confessional of sorts, by admitting to his readers that he lied to Lelia. He tells us, “I will speak the evidence now” (6), and proceeds to disclose the details of his personal life, including his gravest acts of betrayal. Admitting these faults gains him the trust of his audience that he will be a reliable narrator. Once again, readers become the voyeurs of his life of betrayal as they read his confessional. An identification also occurs through Henry’s use of impeccable English as he convinces his audience that he has sufficiently assimilated or “mastered” the language and that he is part of an educated, elite class.

Henry draws a clear distinction, as early as his adolescence, between his own “educated” English and his father’s limited proficiency. Recalling an incident in which his parents were arguing over finances, Henry describes how he interrupted their

argument and started yelling at his father: “I kept at him anyway, using the biggest words I knew ... school words like ‘socio-economic’ and ‘intangible,’ anything I could lift from my dizzy burning thoughts and hurl against him” (63). Already Henry has learned the power of his acquired language to mark him as superior. He has also learned how language can function as a disguise as he recalls a moment from his childhood in which his father tried to show him off to his customers by urging him to speak “some Shakespeare words,” as though the more American they *sounded* the more American they actually *were*. Henry explains,

Instead, and only in part to spite him, I grunted my best Korean to the other men. I saw that if I just kept speaking the language of our work the customers didn’t seem to see me. I wasn’t there. They didn’t look at me. I was a comely shadow who didn’t threaten them. (53)

This particular confession is significant because it helps us see the formation of Henry’s ideological consciousness. He learns from a very early age how profitable—in the economic, cultural and symbolic senses—English proficiency can be, and he learns how language, uttered in the appropriate context, can make one invisible. It is only later in life that he realizes that, despite how well he manipulates his tongue, his racialized body will forever prevent him from being able to hide amongst his fellow Americans.

By novel’s end, we come to realize that Henry’s racial and cultural betrayal of John Kwang is juxtaposed with his wife’s betrayal of him by revealing his non-native speaker status. Lelia, a speech therapist, notices on their first meeting that he is not a “native speaker,” identifying him from the outset of the novel as a fraud. Lelia says that

it is not his accent that gives him away but rather how carefully he constructs the sounds of his syllables. She tells him, ““You speak perfectly, of course. I mean if we were talking on the phone I wouldn’t think twice.”” Henry suggests that her comment has racial implications: ““You mean it’s my face,”” he tells her. She responds, ““No, it’s not that.... Your face is part of the equation, but not in the way you’re thinking. You look like someone listening to himself. You pay attention to what you’re doing.”” Lelia, who refers to herself as “an average white girl” with “no mystery” (10) establishes herself here as the “standard-bearer” of language (12), assuming an authority over Henry, a foreign “mystery.”

Lelia assumes this power over Henry from the outset of the novel as she constructs a list of adjectives to describe him and to justify why she has left him. She includes the descriptors “surreptitious,” “illegal alien,” “emotional alien,” “Yellow peril,” “neo-American,” “stranger,” “traitor,” and “spy” (5), effectively hailing him as illegitimate. While Henry’s profession requires that he change his identity according to the job or how others wish to perceive him, Lelia’s construction and perception of him is perhaps the most significant as Lelia’s role, we are told, is to be the “standard bearer.” That Henry is “immediately drawn to her” when they first meet because “she could really speak” (10) is suggestive of both Henry’s self-consciousness about his own fluency or proficiency with language and his internalization of mainstream American ideology that privileges accentless speech and that equates whiteness with “standard” English. Henry’s complicity in racializing literacy is emphasized in his descriptions of nearly every white female character in the novel: Lelia’s whiteness and ability to “execute” the language; Mrs. Albrecht, the “ancient chalk-white woman” who “taught [him] with a polished

fruitwood stick” (233); the girl in his elementary school class, Alice Eckles, whose “words forming so punctiliously on her lips” he tried to mimic; and his remedial speech teacher whose “mottled milky skin” on her neck was always “damp with the sweat of other palms” as she instructed her students to feel the vibrations of certain sounds. As Crystal Parikh notes, the act of offering up Lelia’s body “as an instrument through which [the children] might be domesticated” (275) reinforces the connection between whiteness and language, the racialized body and the act of articulation.

When Lelia identifies Henry as a non-native speaker she is referring to his enunciation of words—something we cannot hear as readers—yet her betrayal of him is nonetheless thematically and rhetorically significant. For not only does his enunciation reveal his non-native speaker status but so does his writing. Early in the novel he describes the reports he writes on John Kwang as “an unbearable encroachment,” “an exposure of a different order, as if [he] were offering a private fact about [his] father or mother to a complete stranger” (147). In writing Kwang’s story—using a literacy practice that seemingly constructs Henry as a participant in American culture—Henry unwittingly reveals himself as an outsider like John Kwang. He tells us, “In every betrayal dwells a self-betrayal, which brings you that much closer to a reckoning” (314). “This forever,” he confesses, “is my burden to bear” (320). The “sole talent [he] ever dared nurture”—which he claims to have learned from his “American education” and which he hones in his profession as a spy—is the survival tactic of betrayal and exploitation—a not-so-subtle indictment of America and its “ugly immigrant truth” (319).

Other moments in the novel suggest that Lee is in fact critiquing America rather than reifying the American dream. For example, after Henry has been assigned to spy on John Kwang, he talks about the reports that he has collected and will continue to collect on the rising politician. In one scene, he imagines “one more version” of Kwang that he wants to write for his boss, Dennis Hoagland. Henry says that in this report he would detail

[w]here [Kwang] first went to a real school and learned to read and write and speak his new home language. And where he began to think of America as a part of him, maybe even his, and this for me was the crucial leap of his character, deep flaw or not, the leap of his identity no one in our work would find valuable but me. (211)

Though Henry refrains from passing judgment on Kwang’s “crucial leap” of character, the fact of Kwang’s failure to “belong”—that he naively saw America “as part of him” when America did not see him as part of her—suggests a critique of America.

Kwang’s job as a city councilman requires that he speak the language of politics and that he identify with the immigrant communities he claims to represent. However, his ultimate downfall, due to the exposure of his illegal fund-raising tactics, and return to Korea suggests that survival in America for an Asian immigrant politician requires more than knowing the language of politics. While Kwang may claim Americanness through his political speak, ultimately America dictates whether or not he “belongs.” At the end of the novel when Henry is touring the Kwang household he asks the realtor who “used to live in such a grand place.” America, as the realtor indicates, has decided that he does not belong. She tells Henry that they were “foreigners” and that they returned to “their

country” (347). By constructing Kwang as a public speaker capable of engaging audiences of all colors, national origins, or religions, Lee asks readers to consider the possibilities of an Asian American political figure who could represent such a diverse constituency. However, Lee destroys any hope for the possibility of such a figure by narrativizing Kwang’s subsequent downfall.

Both Henry and Kwang claim membership in the nation through their voices and literacy practices. Henry, in his eagerness to prove his literacy so as not to be identified as Other, becomes hyperliterate to the extent that his deliberateness with English betrays him. Henry is so self-conscious about his speech that he projects onto John Kwang his anxiety that he will somehow reveal his “foreign,” non-native speaker status. He narrates, “For despite how well [Kwang] spoke, how perfectly he moved through the sounds of his words, I kept listening for the errant tone, the flag, the minor mistake that would tell of his original race” (179). Henry is complicit here in the assumption that the face should match the voice. He has internalized the racist belief that Asian Americans are foreign and hence will invariably speak with an accent. He admits,

I couldn’t help but think there was a mysterious dubbing going on, the very idea I wouldn’t give quarter to when I would speak to strangers, the checkout girl, the mechanic, the professor, their faces dully awaiting my real speech, my truer talk and voice. When I was young I’d look in the mirror and address it, as if daring the boy there; I would say something dead and normal, like, ‘Pleased to make your acquaintance,’ and I could barely convince myself that it was I who was talking. (179-80)

That Henry is aware of his complicity, anxiety, and hyperliteracy adds to the rhetorical force of the novel. Henry establishes his ethos as a believable yet uncritical narrator in scenes such as the one described above. But perhaps more importantly, he functions here as a speaking agent for his readers. By asking himself the very questions his readers might ask if they were listening to a Korean American politician speak (that is, wondering when he would make the “minor mistake that would tell of his original race”), he appeals to his readers sensibilities and then later subverts their ideologies by demonstrating to them that he is no different from Kwang in the eyes of Americans.

Lee closes his novel with yet another indictment of America as he portrays Henry assisting his wife with an ESL lesson. While Lelia does the actual instruction, Henry dons a mask and acts as “the Speech Monster,” a creature who simply responds through comic gesture to the children’s recitations. As the children leave, both Lelia and Henry interpellate the children as Americans by naming and labeling each student with a sticker. Lelia hails them as “good citizens” as she bids them on their way, furthering the belief that one must learn English to be perceived as fully American. But as the last line of the novel suggests, no degree of literacy will make Asian Americans or Asian immigrants any more American. Henry identifies with the students, not Lelia, when he tells us, “I hear her speaking a dozen lovely and native languages, calling all the difficult names of who we are” (349). As the “standard bearer” of language, Lelia has the power to name and the power to grant or deny her students’ and husband’s legitimacies based on their literacies.

“Linguistic Survival”

In her book *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, Judith Butler examines language as action by focusing on the use of utterances not just to interpellate but also to inflict pain and to excite. She uses the term “linguistic survival” as a way of highlighting the connection between “linguistic injury” and “physical injury.” She writes, “To claim that language injures or, to cite the phrase used by Richard Delgado and Mari Matsuda, that ‘words wound’ is to combine linguistic and physical vocabularies. The use of a term such as ‘wound’ suggests that language can act in ways that parallel the infliction of physical pain and injury” (4). While Butler uses the term “linguistic survival” to refer to the ways in which the body is not only threatened by but sustains itself through language, the term can also be used more broadly to refer, for example, to the ways in which people who are immersed in a culture different from their own “survive” (i.e., get by) in the new culture or society. The term might also be applied to non-native speakers who are “linguistically vulnerable” both in the sense in which Butler uses the term (i.e., they are often the targets of racial epithets) and in the sense that their very survival in America is contingent upon their ability to speak English. Butler writes, “‘linguistic survival’ implies that a certain kind of surviving takes place in language” (4), meaning that to be fully literate and to speak without an accent enables one to enjoy certain rights and privileges. Conversely, to not be fully literate and/or to speak with an accent prohibits one from enjoying the benefits of full membership in American society and may even cost you your citizenship status.

Although the direct cause of his retreat to Korea has nothing to do with his language ability, John Kwang’s “failure” is symbolically paralleled by his loss of control

over his speech. At one moment towards the end of the novel, Kwang becomes angry at Sherrie and begins yelling at her in a kind of pidgin English: Henry narrates, “He’s yelling at the top of his voice. His accent is somehow broken, it comes out strained, too loud. ‘Maybe you leave! Take the goddamn car key! *Park Byong-go shih*, it will please me if you will drive her home, right now!’” (309). Lee’s use of Kwang’s deteriorating English as evidence of his gradual breakdown serves to illustrate the value our culture places on speaking “standard” English. Kwang’s downfall bolsters Henry’s fear of becoming victim to the same fate—he explains, “I am here for the hope of his identity, which may also be mine, who he has been on a public scale when the rest of us wanted only security in the tiny dollar-shops and churches of our lives” (328). In his identification with Kwang, Henry tells his audience (the readers of the text) that the same fate could befall him because of their shared race. Despite his legal citizenship status, as an Asian American he is denied the enjoyment of social equality.

For Henry Park, “survival” means more than just being able to “pass” as a native speaker of English. Because Henry’s job as a spy requires that he disguise himself in order to navigate different communities, he must adapt himself linguistically to the communities he infiltrates lest his “true” identity be revealed. “Speak enough so they can hear your voice and come to trust it,” Hoagland tells him, “but no more, and no one will think twice about who you are” (44). As Parikh notes, Henry’s voice “links him to a class that has ‘made it,’ has successfully assimilated to the dominant language and culture” (276), and yet, as my reading suggests, the reality is that he has not made it—he will forever be a linguistic fraud.

The Award-winning Author

While my analysis has so far focused on the characters in the novel and the readers of the text, I have not forgotten the author's role and strategies in constructing this narrative of literacy. Because, like Tam and Chin, I read Henry as Lee's alter ego, many of the same arguments that I make about Henry apply to Lee as well. In particular, I am interested in Lee's usage of highly crafted language to critique the myths of inclusion and participation in American culture. That Lee's debut novel received numerous awards including the PEN/Hemingway Award for Best First Fiction, the Oregon Book Award, and the Barnes and Nobel Discover Great New Writers Award attests to its positive reception. In addition, the book was included on the American Library Association Reference Service Association's list of "Notable Books 1993-1996," and, according to Martin Kich, the literary journal *Granta* "included Lee in its list of the fifty best American writers under the age of forty" (176). Lastly, and perhaps most significantly for my study, Lee's debut novel was considered for what a group of New York librarians, educators, bookstore owners, and others who expressed interest wanted to name as the book of New York in their "One Book, One City" promotion. Their idea, modeled after cities such as Chicago and Seattle, was to find a book that best represented the city and to create a citywide book club. Needless to say, the idea generated considerable debate over which book best represented the city, was most appropriate, least offensive, etc.; however, the idea was dissolved when they were unable to come to an agreement over which book to use. I mention that this honor was almost bestowed upon Chang-rae Lee because it is indicative of how well the book was received and also why it did not reach more audiences. A *New York Times* article suggested that some

members of the group thought that the novel might not be “engaging enough for high school students” (Kirkpatrick B1).⁸¹ Lee’s attempt to reach the widest possible audience is mirrored in John Kwang’s attempt to be the “fervent voice in the wide chorus that is New York” (36). And, like Kwang, he is manipulating the system by using the language and genre conventions with which his audience is most familiar in order to forge an identification and to gain his own cultural and symbolic capital.

Though Lee has commented that his work reaches a very diverse audience, I argue that its language is one that is associated with a highly educated or elite class (reflecting both Henry’s and Lee’s upbringings) and so excludes other, less privileged audiences. Henry assures his readers that he and Lelia are “solid” in the way of finances (2), his family having gotten “busier and wealthier” along with the other Korean immigrant families, while Lee himself lived in the affluent suburbs of Westchester County, New York and attended the prestigious Phillips Exeter Academy and Yale University. Before committing to a career as a full time writer and teacher, Lee worked for a year on Wall Street. After several years of serving as the Director of the MFA program at Hunter College, Lee was appointed professor in the Council of the Humanities and the Program in Creative Writing at Princeton University. Shortly after he arrived at Princeton, he was told that the Princeton community had selected his book for a new program called “Princeton Reads.” This program seems much more feasible given the size of the community compared to the entire population of New York. But it is also more feasible given that the Princeton community shares the same upper class language and background as Lee and his narrator Henry. Lee’s language puts him in conversation with this (and other) racialized white upper class audiences and, as a result, excludes

some of his more mainstream readers. That his work has appeared in publications such as the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times* and *Gourmet* magazine further suggests that his audience is comprised of America's educated and wealthy classes. Whether intentional or not, Lee's choice of language allows for identification with a racialized white upper class audience that in turn endows him with economic, cultural and symbolic capital. But it is also clear from the thematic content of the novel that Lee is astutely aware that belonging to this citizenry means more than just writing a novel in a particular language or style. To cite James Gee again, "what is important is not just *how* you say it...but *who you are* and *what you're doing* when you say it" (124).

Conclusion

In the previous two chapters I show how two very different texts—both in content and in form—have the potential to alter readers' ideologies about the relationship between literacy and U.S. citizenship. Both Tam and Henry argue that America has constructed them as "less than" even though they have proven their legitimacy through their literacy acts. As Asian American subjects, Tam and Henry will always occupy the space of the in-between. This is an empowering space to be in, however, as it is from the interstitial perspective that we can begin to envision and enact change.

The next and final chapter examines the use of dialect as a rhetorical strategy; however, instead of examining it from the perspective of hyperliteracy, I focus on the particularities of how both dominant and so-called "subordinate" languages function in the postcolonial context/site of Hawai'i.

Conclusion: Reconstructing Ideologies

This chapter furthers the argument that rhetorical analysis allows us to see more clearly the ambivalence that Bhabha suggests is a product of colonialism through an examination of Japanese American “local” author Lois-Ann Yamanaka’s *Blu’s Hanging*.⁸² As a text that is geographically situated in Hawai`i and written in both “standard” English and Pidgin, *Blu’s Hanging* further complicates the investigation of U.S. citizenship and subject formation as they relate to literacy. Moreover, the controversy surrounding her work, as I discuss at length below, raises questions about the politics of reading and writing practices and the ways in which subjectivity and nationness inform and are informed by those practices. It asks, in other words, that we consider critically the rhetorical and theoretical functions of “Asian American literature” and, as well, the ideological work that we do as readers and critics as we analyze those functions. That the controversy around Lois-Ann Yamanaka’s work raises questions about literacy, in terms of the ways in which her texts are read and interpreted, as well as legitimacy, in terms of who is authorized to speak about/write the nation/Hawai`i, points to the need for a more extensive dialogue on the use of literacy as a theorizing framework for the study of Asian American and local literatures, and on the interconnections among literacy, nation, and strategies of representation.

I also argue here that reading Yamanaka’s text as a literacy narrative opens up possibilities for analysis and interpretation that further challenge the modern discourse of citizenship and the dominant ideological construct of literacy that relies upon such a concept as “standard” English. *Blu’s Hanging* thematizes literacy in its juxtapositioning

of Pidgin and “standard” English, but it also invites the use of literacy as an analytic as it specifically addresses the unique and complex colonial history of Hawai`i and its resulting racial, class, and linguistic hierarchies. By shifting the focus to the context of Hawai`i, we are compelled to consider the conflicting configurations of literacy, citizenship, and nationness resulting from Hawaii’s history and relationship with the U.S. As a text like *Blu’s Hanging* demonstrates, one’s “Americanness” in Hawai`i has been and still is largely determined not by one’s country of birth but by one’s ability to speak “standard” English. And yet, as both the controversy and novel reveal, at issue is not just “Americanness” but also what it means to identify as “local” and “Native Hawaiian” and the conflicts in which these competing identities and nationalisms are engaged.

While my general focus is on the multiple and various literacy acts of the author and her characters, I also look specifically at the use of Pidgin and its rhetorical effects on the audience and characters in the novel. I explore the ways in which language is used in *Blu’s Hanging* as a form of oppression and subversion, and further how language use in the aftermath of colonialism is marked by ambivalence. That is, Yamanaka’s and her characters’ use of Pidgin is a performance of difference that, while “rupturing” the discourse of colonialism by being “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 86), also has the capability of transforming readers’ ideologies. Recognizing “Asian America” as postcolonial and transnational and attending to other nationalisms in studies of the local literatures and cultures of Hawai`i forces us out of an American-centered and binary colonialist critique and encourages us to think about how the competing anticolonial nationalisms of Native Hawaiians and locals impact one another, and how this shift in

focus can help change the way we conceive of what it means to engage in acts of literacy *as* national subjects.

Blu's Hanging presents us with characters who choose forms of communication and self-representation that are deemed inappropriate or “illegitimate” by dominant structures of power, and it is through such forms that we gain insight into their struggle for survival; it is also through such forms that they, as characters, gain agency as “authors of their own worlds,” as Henry Giroux so aptly describes (17). As I have argued in previous chapters, through the process of being confronted with alternative literacies, readers learn to confront their own stereotypes about what it means to write in and speak anything but the dominant language. The use of these alternative modes of narration thus serves a rhetorical function by persuading readers to consider the sociohistorical contexts in which the communication or act of literacy takes place as well as encouraging readers to recognize other literacies as legitimate.

In addition to putting pressure on our assumptions about normative modes of discourse and narration, *Blu's Hanging* also argues for the recognition of Yamanaka as a legitimate critic of American society, culture, and imperialism. As Patricia Chu states, “one proves one’s Americanness by showing one’s ability to question the idea of America, thereby fundamentally altering that idea for everyone else” (7). I would add to Chu’s statement that by representing other forms of discourse and knowledge production, Yamanaka, in ways similar to Cha and Chin, fundamentally alters our views on the ideology of literacy and what it means to be a “literate” “American.”

Embroidered in Debate: Local Cultural Nationalism and the Controversy over *Blu's Hanging*

In 1998, Yamanaka received the Association of Asian American Studies (AAAS) Fiction Award for *Blu's Hanging*, but it was rescinded the following day by the Association due to criticisms against Yamanaka for what many believed was a racist portrayal of the character Uncle Paulo, a Filipino Hawaiian who molests the two eldest of his four young nieces and rapes Blu at the end of the novel. The controversy around Yamanaka and her works dates back to 1993 when her collection of poems, *Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre*, was published.⁸³ At the time of publication, Yamanaka received staunch criticism for her stereotypical representations of Filipinos as oversexed miscreants, so when her second novel, *Blu's Hanging*, came out, critics of her first book were not just angry but felt justified in their claims that Yamanaka's work was racist. With the publication of *Blu's Hanging*, an even more contentious debate ensued over the artist's freedom of expression versus her responsibility as a writer—particularly an ethnicized writer—not to perpetuate damaging stereotypes.

The controversy over Yamanaka's fiction serves as a point of departure for my analysis because it directs attention to the unique historical conditions from which both the controversy and novel emerged and because it specifically addresses questions about literacy and legitimacy—we see, for example, the divisiveness and racism within the Asian American literary community as reading practices are ethnicized and hierarchized. Through the starkly different viewpoints expressed by the opposing groups in their critiques of *Blu's Hanging* we also see how a “real” reader's identity or world view can impact the way he or she responds to the text and thus how the same text can have

different rhetorical effects depending on the subject (audience) and context in which the text is read.

In order to better understand the Yamanaka controversy, one must first understand the context in which her work was produced. In her essay, “Between Nationalisms: Hawaii’s Local Nation and Its Troubled Racial Paradise,” Candace Fujikane explains how what she refers to as “Local cultural nationalism” “arose very specifically as a response to the ways Eurocentric standards of ‘literature’ invalidate Local narrations of identity” (27). The imperialistic influences that both Native Hawaiians and locals experienced and continue to experience can therefore be viewed as creating a rhetorical situation. In other words, the rhetoric developed by local cultural nationalists would not exist had locals not felt threatened by U.S. imperialism. While I posit that the authors in chapters 1 and 2 are simultaneously arguing for their and/or their characters’ Americanness while critiquing American democratic ideologies, Yamanaka simultaneously critiques American democratic ideologies while arguing for the recognition and legitimacy of a “local” culture that is distinct from “American” and Native Hawaiian cultures. By viewing Yamanaka’s work in this light, we can better understand the social, cultural, and historical context of her work and thus better understand the social, racial, and ethnic tensions that formed the basis of the controversy.

Although united in a common effort to resist domination, relations between (and among) settler groups and Native Hawaiians have always been fraught with power struggles. In “Sweeping Racism under the Rug of Censorship,” Fujikane looks at what Haunani-Kay Trask calls “identity theft”—the practice by which settlers, regardless of

race, attempted and succeeded in dominating Native Hawaiians, dispossessing them of their land, and then claiming it all as their own. By effectively wiping out Native Hawaiian peoples and their culture, settlers saw the land as an open space on which to stake their claims and build a unique culture of their own. Fujikane argues that when local writers, such as Yamanaka, fail to acknowledge Native Hawaiians in their own “imagined communities” of the text, they become complicit in U.S. imperialist practices. Moreover, as a dialect that evolved out of U.S. and British imperialism, the use of Pidgin as a resistant language also serves to reproduce colonialist ideologies. For Native Hawaiians, Pidgin is a constant reminder of colonialist authority and the subsequent deracination of indigenous peoples at the hands of the colonizer as well as Asian settlers. Thus, while a text like *Blu’s Hanging* performs an important social and cultural critique by problematizing the rhetoric of Americanization and the idea that being a good citizen means speaking perfect English, it is important to recognize how the text further reifies/perpetuates racial and nationalist stereotypes and thus continues the cycle of oppression.

At issue, among other things, during the controversy was the effect that this representation had on local Filipinos. As Fujikane points out, the production of Yamanaka’s first work created a discourse about literacy that in turn reflected institutional racism in the academy. She explains that local Filipinos who voiced criticism over *Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre* “were told by those from politically and socially dominant groups—Local Japanese, Chinese, and white writers and university professors—that if they read Yamanaka’s representations as racist, they do not know how to grasp the complexity of literature” (“Sweeping Racism” 168). The same attitude

persisted during the controversy over *Blu's Hanging*. Yamanaka's advocates were completely deaf to the charges that her depictions had psychological and material effects on local Filipinos and Filipino Americans and argued that any criticism leveled against Yamanaka for her stereotypical representations was a form of censorship. Protestations by Filipinos and other critics of Yamanaka's work were for the most part ignored until local Filipinos and Filipino Americans banded together to make their voices heard. In effect, Yamanaka's advocates (largely but by no means exclusively whites and non-Filipino Asian Americans) were dictating what constituted racism against local Filipinos and Filipino Americans. The literacy practices of local Filipinos and Filipino Americans were considered suspect and invalid, fueling their feelings of injustice and perpetuating the system of oppression. In this context, as in the context of the novel itself, race becomes a marker for (il)literacy and (il)legitimacy. The Yamanaka controversy can thus be read as a text that, like the other novels I examine, illustrates the presumption that one's degree of literacy is determined by one's membership in a particular ethnic or racial group.

An examination of the controversy and its context reveals the rhetoricity of the text in terms of the situation out of which it evolved and the situation or rhetorical discourse that it in turn constructed. In other words, the controversy illustrates Bitzer's and Vatz's respective views that situations call discourses into being while discourse also has the potential to create rhetorical situations. Such a reading illuminates the text's potential to effect change by urging and cautioning us to think more critically about our roles as writers, readers and critics and furthers our understanding of how rhetoric can

help us to see how subjectivity, language, and textual production, in the case of Yamanaka and her fiction, are structured around an ambivalence that is a product of U.S. colonization. “The colonial presence,” Bhabha writes, “is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference” (107).

Yamanaka’s work can simultaneously be read as a colonized subject’s response to U.S. imperialism, an act of “repetition and difference” of the “colonial text” (in this case, settler literature), and itself an example of colonial literature. As Fujikane maintains, the controversy over *Blu’s Hanging* made even more explicit the ways in which Native Hawaiians are rendered absent in settler literature. Yamanaka’s advocates, along with the media, praised *Blu’s Hanging* for its “quintessential” representation of life in Hawai‘i while the text failed to acknowledge its Native Hawaiian population. Such an “erasure,” she claims, constructs Hawai‘i as an “‘emptied’ space open to settler claims of ‘belonging’” (“Sweeping Racism” 164). In other words, while Yamanaka effectively critiques the “standard” English ideology, her stereotypical representations of Filipinos coupled with her erasure of a “Native Hawaiian presence” illustrates her complicity in U.S. imperialist practices that have been at work for well over a century.

U.S. Imperialism, the “Local Nation,” and the Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement

Though officially annexed in 1898 as a U.S. territory, Americans had exerted their religious and colonial influence in Hawai‘i from as early as the 1820s.⁸⁴ Eager to convert the indigenous peoples of the islands, Calvinist missionaries arrived only to find a significantly smaller population than expected. By 1840, the population of Native Hawaiians numbered fewer than 100,000, a decrease by nearly 90 percent in less than

seventy years. Captain James Cook's arrival in 1778 brought not only Christian imperialist ideologies and practices to the islands, but also fatal diseases that resulted in the extermination of hundreds of thousands of Native Hawaiians. These diseases reduced the native population from roughly one million upon Cook's arrival to less than 40,000 by 1890 (Trask, *From a Native* 6). From the beginning, Americans engaged in aggressive tactics of exploitation and military and economic expansionism, and in 1893, U.S. businessmen and missionaries overthrew Queen Lili'uokalani with the help of the U.S. military. In 1898, by order of U.S. Congress and "against great Native opposition," Hawai'i was officially annexed, effectively making Native Hawaiians a "colonized people" (Trask, "Settlers" 2). U.S. economic motivations and expansionist interests resulted in the decimation of the native population, the dispossession of their land, and a thriving tourist industry that exploits Native Hawaiian culture; these motivations also brought immigrant laborers to the islands, resulting in competing nationalist movements that continue to this day.

The self-described "local" population is made up of Asian "immigrants" and children of Asian "settlers," who by now far outnumber indigenous Hawaiians.⁸⁵ Local peoples' claim that Hawai'i is their "homeland" runs counter to Native Hawaiian sensibilities that directly link indigenous peoples to the islands. By asserting a claim to a history on the land, Fujikane notes, local cultural nationalists "lay a claim ... that balances on a fine line against claiming illegitimately acquired land itself" ("Between Nationalisms" 30). Moreover, as Trask argues, by asserting a claim to a "local nation," local people remain complicit in the subjugation of indigenous Hawaiians:

In truth, ideology tells a familiar, and false, tale of success: Asians came as poor plantation workers and triumphed decades later as the new, democratically-elected ruling class. Not coincidentally, the responsibility for continued Hawaiian dispossession falls to imperialist *haole* [white] and incapacitated Natives, that is, not to Asians. Thus do these settlers deny their ascendancy was made possible by the continued national oppression of Hawaiians, particularly the theft of our lands and the crushing of our independence. (“Settlers” 4)

The “local nation,” Trask argues, has evolved in response to the Native Hawaiian sovereignty movement out of fear that locals will lose many of the benefits that they have reaped from colonialist practices, including economic mobility and political power.⁸⁶

Trask summarizes the different issues that both nationalist movements face: for Hawaiians, these include the “indigenous land, “cultural rights,” and “survival as a people”; for locals, these issues “have merely to do with finding a comfortable fit in Hawai’i that guarantees a rising income, upward mobility, and the general accoutrements of a middle-class ‘American’ way of life” (“Settlers” 20). For Trask, non-Natives have but two options: “Either they must justify their continued benefit from Hawaiian subjugation, thus serving as support for that subjugation, or they must repudiate American hegemony and work with the Hawaiian nationalist movement” (20). The only just option, she claims, is for “serious and thoughtful individuals, whether *haole* or Asian ... to support a form of Hawaiian self-determination created by Hawaiians” (20).

The histories and politics of Native Hawaiian and local nationalist movements are indeed complex, and they push us to consider how studying articulations of Native and

local identities can effect a kind of “denationalization” (Wong) or “disowning of America” (Chuh), through critiques of the U.S. as an imperial power.⁸⁷ By acknowledging Hawaii’s colonial history and by examining local cultural nationalist production as “postcolonial,” we complicate and interrogate what it means to be Asian American in ways different from, but complementary to, what it means for postcolonial U.S. immigrant subjects from Korea, the Philippines, or Vietnam. Unlike these territories, Hawai`i is now legally incorporated into the U.S. as the 50th state and its inhabitants are official U.S. citizens. While many local Asian settlers (or their ancestors) were brought to Hawai`i as indentured laborers, as they were on the mainland, their settler “home” remains a conflicted and ambiguous territory as indigenous Hawaiians, locals, *haoles*, and commercial developers from Asia, particularly Japan, compete for ownership of property and land. Perhaps especially for locals, who occupy this liminal space in relation to Native Hawaiians and mainland “Asian Americans,” the forces with which they must contend (claiming Hawai`i as “home,” as distinct from the mainland, struggling with and battling intrasettler racism and disputes, and resisting colonial influences) creates an anxiety that is manifested in their literary production.⁸⁸ In this chapter, I examine one of these narratives for the way in which the literacy practices of its characters and author demonstrate colonial ambivalence while arguing for a distinct local national identity. Because my study’s focus is on the analytic of literacy, my particular interest is in how U.S. colonialist practices have impacted the politics of language use in Hawai`i, and how acts of literacy in Yamanaka’s work function rhetorically as articulations of identity.

Blu's Hanging: A Brief Synopsis

Blu's Hanging (1997), the second in a trilogy of works by Yamanaka, is narrated from the perspective of Ivah Ogata, the eldest of three children in a Japanese American family that is struggling to survive after the death of their mother. The Ogata family begins to disintegrate as a result of this tragic loss: Maisie, the youngest daughter, becomes mute; Blu, the only son, stuffs himself full of food, “[j]ust so he doesn’t feel Mama gone so far away” (105); and Poppy, filled with grief and remorse over the loss of his wife, becomes emotionally withdrawn, reliant upon drug use, and at times hostile to his children.

As an adolescent surrogate mother, Ivah not only faces the responsibility of caring for her siblings and father, but also confronts the issue of breaking ties with her family in order to have a life of her own. When the opportunity arises for Ivah to go to Middle Pacific Institute, a prestigious boarding school in Honolulu, she struggles with the decision over whether to be loyal to her family or to herself. Her ultimate decision to go to “Mid-Pac” stems in part from knowing that it may be the family’s only chance for survival. If Ivah is given this opportunity, her cousin Big Sis and teacher Miss Ito assure the family that she can then pave the way for her other siblings.

Though Ivah will always be able to communicate with her family, her move to Honolulu is seen as a threat because it signals her move to another, more prestigious discourse community. While the ultimate fate of the Ogata family is unknown, Ivah’s decision to leave them is at once hopeful for Blu and Maisie, who may follow in her footsteps, but also ominous, a portent of an uncertain future for the Ogata children as signified by Blu’s rape at the end of the novel.

Performing Difference

Blu's Hanging functions as a literacy narrative in multiple and complex ways. While, for example, Allos' journey towards literacy in *America Is in the Heart* includes his actual acquisition of English as well as his ability to write articles, letters and poetry and thus participate in cultural criticism, there are no characters in *Blu's Hanging* whose literacy is of primary concern. Rather, the ideology of literacy or the ways in which literacy is constructed and imagined in Hawai'i is challenged and problematized in this text through each of the three sibling's encounters with both people and institutions that serve to maintain the hierarchy of languages and power through the enforcement of "standard" English. Following the work of New Literacy Studies scholars such as James Gee and Brian Street, I take an "ideological" approach to the study of literacy, that is, I recognize and examine the ways in which literacy is inextricably tied to social, cultural and political practices. My analysis thus looks at the literacy practices of Yamanaka's characters, as well as the author herself, in order to explore the kinds of arguments they are making in regards to literacy and citizenship, and the rhetorical effects that their arguments have on the other characters and readers of the texts. As in the introduction, I aim to show here how a rhetorical analysis of *Blu's Hanging* furthers our understanding of literacy practices in the context of colonialism and how such an understanding has the potential to transform the way we think about our own and others' acts of literacy. I contend that the performance of difference in *Blu's Hanging* is expressed through the use of Pidgin and other literacy acts, and it is through these social articulations of difference that both Yamanaka and her characters participate in the formation and authorization of a "local" identity.

The languages Yamanaka's characters speak are largely dependent on their situation or social context, what New Literacy Studies scholars term "situated literacies." Choosing among the stratified languages that the characters have at their disposal as a result of Hawaii's colonial history is a balancing act as well as an effective illustration of how language is used as a survival tactic. As Fujikane writes, Pidgin "has come to represent for local writers a language of survival that enabled immigrant and Hawaiian peoples to form a hybrid culture of their own" ("Between Nationalisms" 28). And as Paulo Freire maintains, "Language makes explicit the ways in which people have been resisting. In other words, language gives you a glimpse of how people survive" (*Reading the Word* 137). For the Ogata children, survival is of their utmost concern as they effectively have been orphaned by the death of their mother.

The characters in Yamanaka's work utilize what James Gee calls "borderland Discourse" as part of their strategy for survival. According to Gee, borderland Discourses evolve out of situations in which people with "diverse primary and community-based Discourses" come together and interact. He uses this term to refer specifically to children marginalized by mainstream ideologies—that is, children who feel alienated by the school-based discourse who then create their own discourse in the spaces between home and school to communicate with students from other marginalized communities (162). Brought together by capitalist projects' labor needs on the plantations of Hawai'i, immigrants had to find a common language with which to communicate. Pidgin evolved out of this forced contact and later became the first language spoken by children born on the plantations. Although the children in *Blu's Hanging* were not born on the plantations, they may be said to belong to this latter group

that must contend with the “standard” English ideology as indoctrinated by their teachers at school.

Gee’s notion of borderland Discourses emphasizes the socially constructed nature of languages and literacy practices and the complex processes that students (and immigrants) encounter when dealing with conflicting and likely unfamiliar discourses and values. Though my analysis focuses on a particular literary work, Gee’s and Bhabha’s views on liminality and the borderland help to illuminate the nature of Pidgin or Creole languages both in the context of Hawai`i and for immigrant communities elsewhere in the United States. By drawing a connection between the Ogata children in Yamanaka’s fiction and Gee’s “real-life” examples of marginalized children (who are mostly from racial minority or disadvantaged socioeconomic groups) whose home-based Discourse conflicts in many ways with the school-based Discourse, I suggest that a text like *Blu’s Hanging* has the potential to inform and to encourage readers to think about the ways that discourses are used in our society, both consciously and unconsciously, not just to communicate but also to empower as well as disempower. Recognizing the material and psychological effects of our discourses is one way to work towards a more just and equal society.

The Politics of Pidgin: Hawai`i Creole English vs. “Standard” English

Hawai`i Creole English (HCE), or Pidgin, is a hybrid language that emerged from the plantation system when various immigrant groups, such as Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos, were brought to Hawai`i to work as indentured servants in the 1800s. Pidgin is thus a combination of the following different languages spoken by plantation owners and workers: English, Portuguese, Hawaiian, Japanese, Filipino, and Chinese. According to a

recent study conducted by a team of professors at the University of Hawai`i, there are approximately 600,000 speakers of Hawai`i Creole English in the state of Hawai`i.⁸⁹ Considered a “substandard” or “deviant” form of English, Pidgin was never used as a language of education and in fact, as Suzanne Romaine explains, “the State Department of Education has actively campaigned against it for many years in an effort to eradicate it completely” (531). In 1924, a system of English Standard schools was put in place. Admission to the schools was largely restricted to the white middle class by denying admission to those who could not pass a “standard” English test (i.e. nonwhites) (531). Romaine writes, “By institutionalizing what was essentially racial discrimination along linguistic lines, the schools managed to keep creole speakers in their place, maintaining distance between them and English speakers until after World War II” (531).

Though it continues to be viewed as a “substandard” language or dialect, since the mid-1970s local writers have used it with more frequency in their works to argue for its legitimacy as a literary language, its function as a marker and validation of local identity, and its symbolism as a form of protest against colonial influences.⁹⁰ In utilizing Pidgin for these rhetorical purposes, however, writers have had to consider the extent to which they would incorporate Pidgin and the stylistic ways in which they would represent the language based on the audiences they were (and still are) trying to reach. For example, Milton Murayama has stated that in order to reach the widest possible audience for *All I asking for is my body*, he limited his use of Pidgin in the novel to the dialogue (Romaine 535). Unsurprisingly, publishing houses in the 1970s were not yet ready to accept or acknowledge the legitimacy of Pidgin as evidenced by their response to the title of his

book. According to Romaine, “they regarded it as ‘ungrammatical’ with its missing copula, and wanted it ‘corrected’ to *All I’m asking for is my body*” (535).

That tension around the use of Pidgin still exists today is evident in contemporary local literatures and in a statement made by Hawai`i Governor Benjamin Cayetano in 1995: “One of the realities of life is that our kids may have to go out into the world beyond Hawaii, to compete for jobs, and certainly if they can’t speak the accepted means of communication well—English—then they’re going to have a hard time” (qtd. in Young 107). As Young observes, the prevalence of such an attitude towards language in today’s political discourse illustrates the strength of Pidgin as it continues to resist domination (110). Darrell Lum, editor of *Bamboo Ridge: The Hawaii Writers’ Quarterly*, also advocates the use of Pidgin as a way of “validating” the people: “We continue to deny the value of our language. Local literature is about validating a people. When you acknowledge a language, you acknowledge a people” (qtd. in Romaine 533). The rhetorical nature of literacy narratives again becomes clear: in the case of Hawai`i local literatures, the use of Pidgin is a strategic move both to undermine universalized “standard” English as well as to solidify and assert a “local cultural nationalism.”

By looking at the sociolinguistic context in which the text was written and published, we have a better understanding of the exigency for *Blu’s Hanging*. As a text that addresses the tensions around language use that I describe above, specifically in the academic setting, *Blu’s Hanging* introduces readers to the difficulties that both students and teachers in Hawai`i face, and presses upon readers the value of this so-called “substandard” dialect. Hawai`i Pidgin has never had its own recognized orthography, which is precisely why it has not been recognized as a legitimate literary language but

instead is viewed as a deviant or substandard form of English (Romaine 528). By reproducing Pidgin in written form and creating characters who learn to express themselves through writing, Yamanaka argues for the legitimacy of Pidgin as a *language* as opposed to a *dialect*.

Reading *Blu's Hanging* as a Narrative of Literacy

Reading *Blu's Hanging* as a literacy narrative is particularly challenging because of its narrative structure. Ivah narrates the story in “standard” English, but her dialogue throughout is in Pidgin. While one might argue that Yamanaka’s structuring of the text in this way privileges “standard” English over nonstandard English, I argue that what Yamanaka illustrates here is precisely how intimate the connections are between discourse and community. Ivah the narrator is not situated in the same region or place as Ivah the protagonist. She narrates the story in retrospect, after she has moved away from her family and community and adopted the language of her current social milieu (possibly Mid-Pac or Honolulu).

In her essay, “Translating Self and Difference through Literacy Narratives,” Mary Soliday writes that stories about literacy are

places where writers explore what Victor Turner calls ‘liminal’ crossings between worlds. In focusing upon those moments when the self is on the threshold of possible intellectual, social, and emotional development, literacy narratives become sites of self-translation where writers can articulate the meanings and the consequences of their passages between language worlds. (515)

While Ivah does not directly reveal to us “the meanings and consequences” of her movement through and among different discourse communities, we are persuaded by her actions—that is, her facility to move between different language worlds and, perhaps more importantly, her strategic use of the different discourses, either as a way of associating with a group or disassociating, as the case may be, attests to her awareness of the stratification of languages in Hawai‘i as well as the social and political implications of speaking a particular language in a given situation or social context. In Bourdieu’s terms, Ivah possesses “linguistic capital,” that is, the ability to “produce expressions” appropriate to a particular audience or “market” (18). As the narrator, Ivah profits symbolically by her ability to move between discourses. However, because Ivah only demonstrates her knowledge of “standard” English to her readers and not to the other characters in the novel, the rhetorical impact of her “linguistic capital” can only be analyzed through the effect that such a strategy has on the readers. As a character, Ivah demonstrates a strong ethos by showing her audience that she can in fact move between different language worlds. Her performance of her linguistic capabilities attests to her development and successful transition from her home life to a life of independence. This is not to suggest that speaking “standard” English ensures success; rather, Ivah’s ability to speak “standard” English, and by extension, Yamanaka’s use of both languages, enables her to reach and therefore persuade a wider audience. Both Ivah and Yamanaka use the strategy of identification to appeal to Pidgin speakers and “standard” English speakers. As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca write,

Every social circle or milieu is distinguishable in terms of its dominant opinions and unquestioned beliefs, of the premises that it takes for granted

without hesitation: these views form an integral part of its culture, and an orator wishing to persuade a particular audience must of necessity adapt himself to it. (20-21)

Had Yamanaka chosen Pidgin for Ivah's narration, she would have limited her audience significantly. Choosing to narrate the story in "standard" English enables her to reach the audience that needs the most persuasion.

By writing in both Pidgin and "standard" English and by creating a character like Ivah, who is caught between two different language worlds but who recognizes the values that are associated with each, Yamanaka creates and legitimates the interstitial space of identity where difference can exist "without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha 4). The implications of this for heightening the awareness and acceptance of difference are significant, for if Yamanaka's work has the rhetorical effect of creating an awareness of interstitial identities among (and even perhaps within) her readers, then her readers may adopt a new or different view towards what Bhabha envisions as the "beyond." That is, when readers look critically at themselves to see how their ideologies and/or ideological consciousness(es) are being reproduced or transformed in the act of reading, they are looking at themselves and their relationship to the text (and therefore culture) from an interstitial perspective. This perspective, Bhabha contends, can lead to "political empowerment, and the enlargement of the multiculturalist cause" (3) as readers/critical thinkers interrogate their positions in their respective communities and society at large. Bhabha goes on to say that "the boundary becomes the place from which *something begins its presencing* in a movement not dissimilar to the ambulant, ambivalent articulation of the beyond" (5). For the Ogata children, articulations of difference

through acts of writing and speaking Pidgin constitute the “enunciative boundaries” of which Bhabha is speaking in that it is through their articulations that the rhetorical force of the novel becomes clear. Reading *Blu's Hanging* from this perspective illuminates the text's potential for claiming this “beyond” space where real intervention becomes possible.

Blu also shows early signs of acquiring linguistic capital when he “pretends talk Haole” by mimicking the way his teacher, Mrs. Ota, speaks. Ivah describes the scene:

He disregards my remarks and continues in Mrs. Ota's voice, enunciating each syllable in a false British accent. “The haiku should be about nature. The first line must have five syllables, then seven in the second, then five again in the last line.” He flips through the pages of his tablet to act as though he were reading from a teacher's guide.

“Haiku does not rhyme like our other poems,” he scolds. “And finally, class, it came from the Japanese.” (195)

By appropriating or mimicking “standard” English in this context, Blu succeeds at illustrating the rigid nature of both the dominant language as well as the institution of education, where such a structure of linguistic hierarchies is actualized and reproduced. His act of mimicry here also demonstrates to his audience (both his immediate audience—the other characters in the novel—and readers of the text) that he is not only capable of speaking “standard” English but he is also aware, like Ivah, of the situated nature of literacies and, perhaps more importantly, the power and authority that “standard” English assumes. Both Ivah and Blu recognize the relationship between language and social spaces—that is, they are acutely aware of the social circumstances in

which both Pidgin and “standard” English are required or appropriate; that they choose not to follow the “rules” as dictated by the schoolteachers is evidence of their firm commitment to value their language as well as to resist linguistic domination by their oppressors.

In turn, by having Blu imitate his teacher’s discourse, Yamanaka critiques colonial authority and the passing on of academic knowledge. Though Blu finds in the medium of poetry a way to express his grief over the loss of his mother—recalling the “red church dress” which she gave to Ivah when she died and the “long eggplants and wild violets” that grew in her garden—his English teacher penalizes him for not writing poetry that “flows and rhymes” (185). On his second attempt, Blu gets a C-/D+ for writing another personal poem about his neighbor’s dying dogs, even though it rhymes. His final attempt—a poem that praises his teacher in rhyme and that his friend “Ed the Big Head Endo” helps him write—earns him an A+. By juxtaposing the “standard” English ideology that rewards students for writing structured but meaningless verse alongside Blu’s own Pidgin poetry, Yamanaka argues for a reconsideration of what constitutes “literary” language and a reconfiguration of what it means to be “literate.”

In addition to using “standard” English to critique the hegemonic nature and use of the language as well as the institution in which this language and dominant ideology are enforced and reproduced, Yamanaka figures the absence of verbal language in the youngest sibling, Maisie, as a mode of resistance. Ivah tells us, “Since mama died, Maisie said about five things: *I scared. Sleep with me. More. There she is. Mama*” (14). Maisie’s silence throughout most of the text, like the other characters’ acts of literacy, represents the in-between space of identity wherein her character argues for a recognition of the corporeal

effects of imposed language use. Her speechlessness can thus be read as both an effect of linguistic colonization and a strategy of resistance to that colonization. As Cheung notes, some Asian American women writers have employed silence—both thematically and rhetorically—to “question, report, expose—the silences imposed on themselves and their peoples” but also to “reveal, through their own manners of telling and through their characters, that silences . . . can also be articulate” (*Articulate* 3-4). Because Maisie does not speak in school, her teachers cannot scold her for using Pidgin; instead, they misread her vulnerability and body language that communicates her fear as “sociopathic behavior” (*Blu’s Hanging* 61). Maisie, just five and perhaps the most distraught over the loss of her mother, has trouble negotiating the two worlds that Pidgin and “standard” English represent. By reading her nonverbal forms of communication as legitimate speech acts, as “articulate silences,” we are reminded to focus not simply on the act itself, but on the person who performed the act, the witness or hearer, and the context in which the act took place. Yamanaka sets up the context for one of Maisie’s nonverbal acts of communication—wetting her pants in school:

“What did I ask you to do, Maisie Ogata?” asks Miss Tammy Owens in her Texas drawl. “Yet you continue to defy me day after day after day. Now I don’t know what the hell is going on in that manipulative little head of yours—but if I say read, you read. If I say share, you share. If I say change your underwear, then you—” (46)

Maisie’s response to Miss Owens becomes clearer to us when we look at it from a sociolinguistic perspective. We know that Maisie understands what Miss Owens is saying, but in the context of the classroom where Maisie and her peers and siblings are constantly made to feel inferior because of their language, it is no wonder that she feels

coerced into silence. While she is able to express her fears through body language (she wets her pants because she is afraid to ask to use the bathroom), her teacher is unable or unwilling to read or acknowledge this form of communication. Instead, Miss Owens punishes and humiliates her by forcing her to remain in school without wearing any underwear. The very act that gets Maisie into trouble stems not from her “manipulative mind” but rather her inability to deal emotionally with an authority figure who is going to scold her regardless of whether she speaks or not.

At the beginning of the novel, Maisie is not old enough to know how to defend herself, yet through the loving guidance and assistance of her new Special Education teacher, Miss Ito, she learns to become more confident in her writing, reading, and speaking abilities. In her first assignment, Maisie is asked to respond in letter form (in her notebook) to Miss Ito’s question, “Who do you love?” Maisie writes, “DeaR MiSS iTo, DaDDY The BeST, IvaH Cook, Blue ShaRe, MY Ka-SaN aND HoPPY, MaMa StiLL HeRe, YouRS TruLY, MaiSie o” (104). Significantly, Maisie begins speaking again shortly after she hears Miss Ito speak Pidgin for the first time. In response to Tammy Owens’ condescending remarks about how Miss Ito keeps her home, Miss Ito exclaims, “[Y]ou keep acting stupid, Tammy, you keep on lifting your haole nose in the air at me and my friends, you going hear worse things than ‘haole’ come out of this Jap’s mout” (128). Finally, one of Maisie’s teachers validates Pidgin, and the next day, on Maisie’s birthday, she reads aloud the directions on a box of cake mix, in a voice that Ivah’s describes as “raspy and low.” Maisie repeats after Miss Ito, “Mix ... three ... eggs ... with two sticks of ... butter” (130). Maisie’s speech act has a powerful effect on her listeners, as Ivah tells us, “I listen to the teacher speak each word as my sister repeats

them slowly. I keep each word as I would a precious stone. These are gifts from God. Listen to the voice that hangs in the air” (13).

Maisie continues to communicate through writing and speech, and by novel’s end we see how she has learned the persuasive function of language. For example, after Blu suffers the harrowing experience of rape at the hands of Uncle Paulo, Ivah and Maisie comfort him, “his whole body shaking with sobs.” In this moment, Blu finds the greatest consolation in hearing Maisie speak his name: “‘What my name?’ he whispers to her. She says nothing. ‘What my name? Tell me.’ Maisie touches his hair then presses her mouth to his ear. ‘Blu’” (248). In his most vulnerable moment, Blu asks Maisie for the gift of her voice to remind him who he is, and for the first time, Maisie uses her words to defend Blu when he is unable to defend himself. In her “updown handwriting,” in “dog shit ... cat shit ... and the red, red dirt that stains [their] heels,” she scrawls on the walls of Uncle Paulo’s house the words “MaLeSTeR HaNG i KiLL You HuMaN RaT” (251). This is Maisie’s first public act of literacy. Guilty and afraid of what others might think, Uncle Paulo “scrubs with Brillo, fast and furious, checking to see who’s looking, his walls stained for life” (251). Maisie is beginning to learn that she has the strength, the vocabulary, and the voice to defend herself and her siblings against violence and oppression.

And yet what the above scenes also poignantly illustrate is that the alternative to complying with the dominant ideology, what I have been identifying as strategic articulations of difference through use of a hybrid or “borderland” discourse, is not celebrated in the novel. The Pidgin that the children speak, while used as a resistant language, is still a product of colonialism; it is a language, in other words, that has been

forced on them by structures of domination. Thus, while I have argued for the subversive function of the Ogata children's multiple literacies, I also recognize the expense of achieving such fluencies. The children do not choose to have Pidgin at their disposal any more than they choose to be marginalized and oppressed by dominant culture.

What we see in *Blu's Hanging* is a reconfiguration of literacy that allows for multiple kinds of literacies and ways of knowing and understanding the world. While Blu suffers the most from abuse inflicted by his classmates, Uncle Paulo, and his own father, it is Blu who holds the family together. His resourcefulness and self-sacrifice suggest a kind of "domestic literacy" that provides the sisters with the emotional and financial resources necessary for survival. When Maisie has trouble sounding out her words or expressing her feelings, Blu articulates them for her, giving voice to her silence. And when Ivah is overwhelmed by her new maternal duties, it is Blu who writes down their mama's list of things to do:

Blu said, 'I write um all down in my tablet for help Ivah rememba, you like, Mama? What you said, Mama? Again? C'mon, you guys. Okay, tell me what to write, Mama. Tell me what I gotta do. We can write um all down. Thass how you remember important things, right, Ivah?' (44)

Finally, in one of the most moving scenes in the novel, Blu takes on the role of the mother in order to spare Ivah the shame of having to purchase sanitary napkins when she begins menstruating. As a Christmas gift, Blu buys Ivah "Kotex" and "Modess" and attaches a note in which he tells her,

So when I check under the bathroom sink, I saw that if Eugene was right and you had your rags then you had no pads and you probly was like Elsa which was shame! And since us got no mommy to go buy it, I went Friendly Market and look for sanaterry belt and pads. (Isle 4 near the Charmin and MD.) I not shame and I no care ‘cause you got no mommy to tell you about birds and bees. So here my Christmas present (Kotex) and birthday present (Modess) to you. Only had two kinds so wasn’t that hard. And I will buy for you again if you want me to.

Your brother,

Presley Vernon “BLU” Ogata (100-01)

Literacy moments such as these argue for alternative ways of thinking about what constitutes knowledge or learning and how knowledge is produced and transmitted.

Despite what I read as the novel’s argument for claiming Pidgin as a legitimate discourse, Yamanaka also validates “standard” English as she concludes the novel with Ivah’s departure for boarding school where, presumably, she will gain the cultural, linguistic and symbolic capital that will eventually free the family from poverty and trauma. Ivah’s fluency and participation in the dominant discourse does not suggest that she has rejected her home and family; rather, it illustrates her ability to move between and negotiate multiple discursive worlds. Furthermore, Yamanaka’s use of both languages suggests not that she privileges one language over another but that she wants her readers to question language hierarchies and the potential material, ideological and psychological effects of those hierarchies.

By viewing Pidgin as an effect of colonial hybridity or ambivalence, we see how the use of this language, by both the characters in Yamanaka's fiction as well as the author herself, functions as a "form of subversion."⁹¹ According to Bhabha, "The ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority enables a form of subversion, founded on the undecidability that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention" (112). The use of Pidgin thus serves a dual function: Yamanaka and her characters persuade their audiences/readers not of their identities as Asian Americans or Asian/Pacific Americans, but rather as locals while they also reveal the "problematic of colonial representation" (Bhabha 114). Bhabha writes that, "Hybridity reverses the *formal* process of disavowal so that the violent dislocation of the act of colonization becomes the conditionality of colonial discourse" (114). It thus follows, then, that hybrid or Creole languages such as Hawai'i Pidgin have both created and evolved out of two distinct rhetorical situations. The "violent" act of colonization produces a language that disrupts colonial authority through its "partial presence" (Bhabha 114), and every instance of its use thereafter is a reminder of this ambivalence and its colonial underpinnings.

Multiplying Literacies, Advocating Legitimacy

History has taught us that literacy crises evolve out of (and hence reflect) our culture's anxieties about shifting demographics. As an archipelago of islands that has been populated by an extremely diverse group of people, both before and since the inception of the plantation system in 1850, Hawai'i has much to teach us about handling such radical changes in demographics. Cultural representations of the tensions around

language use, such as those narrativized in Yamanaka's fiction, are particularly effective for increasing awareness about racial and linguistic discrimination—and in particular how the former continues to be masked by the latter.⁹² Such awareness furthers the understanding and acceptance of other forms of discourse and urges us to read literacy narratives not simply as narratives about language acquisition or proficiency, but as narratives that compel us to consider what we are doing and saying—about ourselves, our ideologies, and our culture—every time we read, write or speak. As teachers, we can also use Yamanaka's work to explore with our students other forms of discourse and acts of literacy that are considered “substandard” or “deviant” by mainstream America, and the possibilities as opposed to the limitations for those who are, like Ivah, either forcibly or voluntarily negotiating multiple discursive worlds.

Theorizing literacy in the context of Yamanaka's work further illuminates how the school becomes a site of conflicting voices and values or “contact zone” where, as a text like *Blu's Hanging* demonstrates, the relationship between knowledge and power becomes all too clear. In its depiction of teachers who dictate how knowledge is produced while students, like Blu and Maisie, vie to be “authors of their own worlds,” *Blu's Hanging* argues for a reconceptualization of literacy that examines how knowledge is produced through interactions among and between people from disparate cultures and language communities. While Blu's poetry, in the eyes of his teacher, does not “flow and rhyme,” it speaks to his own experiences and therefore has value and adds meaning to his life. Readers are asked to question what counts as “legitimate knowledge” as well as “legitimate literacy” in this text and to think through the value and potential of what Paulo Freire has theorized as “emancipatory literacy.”

According to Freire and Macedo, the objective of emancipatory literacy is to assist learners not simply in becoming functionally literate, but also in understanding the social and political forces that have led to their marginalization. Armed with this knowledge, learners can then work towards emancipating themselves, collectively or individually, from oppressive conditions and begin to feel empowered by finding their individual voices. Yamanaka creates characters that, despite their struggle with the dominant ideology that tells them they are inferior, demonstrate a maturity and strength of character well beyond their years. Though they are caught between the two incompatible discourses of home and school, the children are, to different degrees, aware of this incompatibility and even use it to their advantage.

With its use of Pidgin throughout more than half of the novel, this text constructs the (non-Pidgin-speaking) reader into the role of one who is, like the characters themselves, forced to engage in more than one literacy practice. From the outset of the novel, readers are not only faced with a language, or dialect, with which they may be unfamiliar, but they are also faced with their own prejudices about Pidgin. This prejudice (and sense of unfamiliarity) was expressed in the media when *Blu's Hanging* was first published. On May 4, 1997, Megan Harlan wrote in the *New York Times Book Review* that the book was “[t]extured with sometimes inscrutable streams of Hawaiian pidgin” (21). Harlan’s use of the word “inscrutable”—a term that has been used to stereotype Asians and Asian Americans—suggests a “foreignness” and illiteracy that is reminiscent of early reviews of Younghill Kang’s *East Goes West*. Her use of this stereotype is damaging to both the Asian/Asian Pacific American community and to her own ethos as a critic because it suggests an anxiety over being confronted with a dialect with which

she is unfamiliar. The orthography that Yamanaka uses for Pidgin is hardly “inscrutable”—though she may use a few words that readers have never heard before, “inscrutable streams” suggests whole passages that are difficult to comprehend.

For some readers, the white schoolteachers in *Blu's Hanging* function as speaking agents when they voice their prejudices against the children's speech. From a rhetorical perspective, we might say that the negative depiction of the white schoolteachers functions as aesthetic proof in support of Yamanaka's conclusion that Pidgin is a resistant and legitimate language. By portraying the schoolteachers negatively in contrast to her sympathetic portrayal of the children, Yamanaka gives the figure of the schoolteacher pertinency, or endows her with presence—another way of arguing for her importance to the message of the novel as a whole (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 116).

The arguments that proponents of Pidgin make in the debate over its use are not unlike those in the debates over Ebonics and bilingualism—at the core of those arguments is a fundamental belief in the rights of individuals to express themselves in the language they know best. Proponents also maintain that those who do not speak the same language or dialect should validate others' choice of language or dialect nonetheless. This belief was expressed by the resolution on language that the Executive Committee of the Conference on College Composition and Communication adopted in 1974, entitled “Students' Right to Their Own Language.” Committee members recognized the need to publicly address and act on the issue with which so many teachers of English and Composition were struggling. The committee not only acknowledged but affirmed students' “rights to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their

nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style” (*College Composition and Communication* 25).⁹³ The issue, or rather the controversy over the use of dialects, specifically in the classroom setting, is not new or unique to our culture and, despite the CCCC’s resolution, debates over differing language use and styles remain heated to this day. The two most prominent examples are the Ebonics debate, which became widely publicized in 1997 when the school board in Oakland, California requested that their teachers not only recognize black English as a legitimate language but also begin instructing their students in this language as a way to help them improve their overall academic skills, and the bilingual education debate, which traces its roots back to 1968 when Congress passed the Bilingual Education Act, which provided funding for schools trying to meet the needs of their non-native-English-speaking student populations.⁹⁴

Though these debates focus on different racial and ethnic groups with different linguistic and social histories, the arguments are fundamentally the same. With an ever-increasing number of immigrants arriving in this country, the issue is bound to involve greater proportions of society in the future. “Standard” English will likely always retain its elite status; what is perhaps not so obvious to mainstream American society is the effect that the “standard” English ideology has on those who speak nonstandard forms of English and for whom English is a second language. Lily Wong Fillmore has argued that, in America, where linguistic diversity is not valued, many young students lose their primary language as a result of learning English, which they are taught is their only real means for participating in society. The result, she claims, is often tragic for the family, for when a child loses her primary language, she can often no longer communicate

effectively with her parents. Fillmore writes, “What is lost is no less than the means by which parents socialize their children: When parents are unable to talk to their children, they cannot easily convey to them their values, beliefs, understandings, or wisdom about how to cope with their experiences” (343).

Continuing the exploration of literacy in a (post)colonial context begun in the introduction, this chapter examined the effects of Yamanaka’s strategic use of a dialect along with “standard” English. As with *Dictée*, though to a lesser extent, *Blu’s Hanging* constructs the reader into the role of a person with a compromised literacy. In grappling with a bilingual and heteroglossic text, readers become participants in the construction of the text and consequently are forced to reevaluate their own reading practices and views on what it means to be a literate speaking/writing subject of the nation.

Examining Yamanaka’s text as a literacy narrative helps to reveal certain contradictions in the discourse of American democracy and highlights an important link between the ways in which we talk about (and often conflate) literacy, race, and citizenship. Her work further compels us to recognize these contradictions and to better understand the debate over the use of Pidgin and the “standard” English ideology in order to work towards a more inclusive view of literacy and American citizenship. This concluding chapter points to both the increasing need for and difficulty of analyzing Asian American literacy narratives due to postcolonial and transnational migrations and shifting demographics within the U.S. Ever larger numbers of Asian Americans, many with little or no proficiency in English, but perhaps fluent in one or more other languages, pose a challenge to our conceptions of literacy as it relates to “Americanness.”⁹⁵ The

politics of language use in Hawai`i and the discursive production of identities in Hawai`i literacy narratives have much to teach us about the challenges we face in trying to theorize and conceptualize multiple literacies working with and against each other to both assert and resist nationalist and hegemonic ideologies.

Arif Dirlik has suggested that in order to understand Asian Americans, “it is no longer sufficient to comprehend their roots in U.S. history or, for that matter, in their countries of origin”; rather, he claims that we need to “understand a multiplicity of historical trajectories that converge in the locations we call Asian America but that may diverge once again to disrupt the very idea of Asian Americanness” (41). I argue that by examining certain Asian American texts through the analytic of literacy we come closer to understanding this multiplicity, and that by studying the rhetorical dimensions of these texts we are encouraged to see how authors use literacy to challenge or “disrupt” conceptions of “America” and “Asian America.”

Notes

¹ I use the term “America” throughout this dissertation to connote the United States as a hegemonic power. This connotation is derived in part from the deployment of the term “America” to designate the U.S. when in fact there are several (geographical and constructed) “Americas.” Recognizing the U.S. as empire and transnation both unveils the inadequacy of the term “America” to represent the geographic space or “imagined community” of the U.S. nation and highlights the power structures of colonization and domination embedded in the term. In other words, “America” is an epistemological object or term that, when employed and identified as such, calls attention to the very need to critique the ways in which the U.S. continues to establish itself as a dominant world power.

² I do not mean to suggest that in order for these works to be considered rhetorically effective, the authors or characters must be granted “legitimacy.” Rather, I see texts as performing a rhetorical function as long as they influence the reader in some way. And of course, readers can be influenced by the same text in different ways just as texts can serve multiple rhetorical functions.

³ Wong identifies these trends as 1) “the easing of cultural nationalist concerns as a result of changing demographics in the Asian American population as well as theoretical critiques from various quarters ranging from the poststructuralists to the queer”; 2) the increased “permeability” “in the boundaries between Asian Americans and ‘Asian Asians’ ... as well as between Asian American studies and Asian studies”; and 3) the trend of situating Asian Americans “in a diasporic context” (“Denationalization” 1-2).

⁴ A discussion of fantasy theme analysis appears in chapter 2.

⁵ “Literacy” is most commonly defined as “the ability to read and write”; however, this definition has been broadened to fit other contexts such that “literacy” is no longer solely about printed text—there is also “functional literacy,” “cultural literacy,” “computer literacy,” “visual literacy,” and “domestic literacy,” to name just a few of the many different ways in which people might be considered “literate.” Valerie Strauss, in a February 17, 2004 article in the *Washington Post* entitled “Schools Investing in Fiscal Literacy” discusses the dire need to begin teaching “financial literacy” to students from as early as the first grade in order to minimize personal debt and potential bankruptcy later in life.

⁶ See Arnold Leibowitz’s “The Official Character of Language in the United States: Literacy Requirements for Immigration, Citizenship, and Entrance Into American Life” (1984).

⁷ Social historian Harvey Graff is to be credited for coining this term in his groundbreaking study of the same title. In *The Literacy Myth* (1979), Graff challenges the widespread assumption (myth) that literacy inevitably leads to social advancement and political power.

⁸ It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to investigate the numerous critical discussions about the definitions and uses of the term “postcolonial.” For the purposes of this project, the term is used in reference to Asian Americans who migrated or fled from countries such as the Philippines, Vietnam, and India, which have been colonized by western imperial nations, as well as from countries such as Korea and China, which were both colonized by Japan. As I discuss in the conclusion, the term is also used in reference to Asian Pacific Islanders who hail from Hawai‘i, as this archipelago was colonized by the U.S. and later became a U.S. territory in 1898. Applied to Asian Americans, the term “postcolonial” complicates any notions about Asian Americans as a homogeneous group or Asian America as a specifically “American” construction. Reading Asian American literacy narratives through the lens of postcolonial studies emphasizes the effects of linguistic colonization and draws attention to the ways in which writers strategically enact a decolonization through their language use and literacy practices. As Susan Koshy argues in “The Fiction of Asian American Literature,” “The radical demographic shifts produced within the Asian American community by the 1965 immigration laws have transformed the nature and locus of literary production, creating a highly stratified, uneven and heterogeneous formation, that cannot easily be contained within the models of essentialized or pluralized ethnic identity suggested by

the rubric Asian American literature, or its updated post-modern avatar Asian American literatures” (315-16). For a particularly informative and engaging critique on the problems of using “postcolonial” as a descriptor for the U.S., see Jenny Sharpe’s “Is the United States Postcolonial? Transnationalism, Immigration, and Race” (1995).

⁹ “Transnationalism” denotes the complex flows of people, culture, and capital across national boundaries.

¹⁰ I use “read” here in the functional sense; that is, I do not mean to suggest that, by contrast, audiences can “read” Yamanaka’s works (i.e., that they can read the Pidgin and understand all of the cultural references). English speakers who are functionally literate will be able to read Yamanaka’s works, whereas not all English speakers who are functionally literate will be able to read *Dictée*.

¹¹ I thank Jeanne Fahnestock for helping me to frame my argument in this way.

¹² See Moira Roth’s “Theresa Hak Kyung Cha 1951-1982: A Narrative Chronology” in *Writing Self, Writing Nation* (1994) for a more detailed chronology of Cha’s life.

¹³ See n7 in Laura Hyun Yi Kang’s “The ‘Liberatory Voice’ of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictée*” in *Writing Self, Writing Nation*.

¹⁴ In addition to the works cited in this chapter see, also, Yi-Chun Tricia Lin’s bibliography in *Asian American Novelists: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* (2000). Theses and dissertations that address the text include, among others, Sue Kim’s “The Dialectics of Sensibility: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Thomas Pynchon, Bessie Head, and the Institutionalization of Postmodern Literary Criticism” (2003); Sandra Si Yun Oh’s “Martyrdom in Korean American Literature: Resistance and Paradox in *East Goes West, Quiet Odyssey, Comfort Woman, and Dictée*” (2001); Veronica Iulia Csorvasi’s “In Search of a New Syntax: Maxine Hong Kingston and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha” (1999); and Kristina Chew’s “Pears Buying Apples: Virgil’s *Georgics*, Plato’s *Phaedrus*, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictée*” (1995).

¹⁵ Though definitions of “mail art” vary widely, it is generally viewed as any form of artwork that is mailed via the postal service or other delivery services. According to the website “Mail Art: A Pathfinder,” “mail art forms include postcards created by or modified by artists, decorated envelopes, and artist’s books or other objects. Common characteristics include the design and use of rubber stamps and stickers, handmade paper, photocopying, collage, the design and use of non-official postage stamps, humor, and the incorporation of text into the artwork.”

¹⁶ These six include Donald Richie’s “The Asian Bookshelf: Transcendent Lives” (1983); Susan Wolf’s “Theresa Cha: Recalling Telling Retelling” (1986); Michael Stephens’ chapter in *The Dramaturgy of Style* (1986); Stephen-Paul Martin’s chapter in *Open Form and the Feminine Imagination* (1988); Trinh T. Minh-ha’s references in *Woman, Native, Other* (1989); and bell hooks in her book *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (1989). See Kang’s entry on *Dictée* in *A Resource Guide to Asian American Literature* (2001).

¹⁷ I am referring here to the cultural nationalist discourse/project of the 1960s and 1970s associated with Frank Chin and his cohort’s claim that in order to fight racism and social oppression, “real” Asian Americans (as opposed to “Americanized” Asians) must reclaim their history, culture, and language. For Chin et al., this reclamation is made possible through language and literature so long as (male Chinese, Japanese, or Filipino American) writers work towards recuperating an “Asian American sensibility” that is grounded in male privilege. Though they do not make this explicit claim about male privilege, their work demonstrates such a strong gender bias that some critics, including Elaine Kim, King-kok Cheung, Daniel Kim, and Viet Thanh Nguyen, among others, have labeled their language misogynistic. See Chapter 3 for a more extensive discussion of Chin’s cultural nationalist agenda.

¹⁸ While there were immigrants in America from other countries in Asia, these three groups had by far the largest numbers of immigrants. According to Ronald Takaki, the number of Asians in America in 1965 was roughly one million, or less than one percent of the total population of the U.S., while by 1985 that figure rose to roughly five million, or two percent of the U.S. population. The demographics of the Asian American population changed significantly as well. As Takaki notes, “in 1960, 52 percent were Japanese, 27 percent Chinese, 20 percent Filipino, 1 percent Korean, and 1 percent Asian Indian. Twenty-five years later, 21 percent of Asian Americans were Chinese, 21 percent Filipino, 15 percent Japanese, 12 percent Vietnamese, 11 percent Korean, 10 percent Asian Indian, 4 percent Laotian, 3 percent Cambodian, and 3 percent ‘other’” (420).

¹⁹ Chuh writes, “Neither space—in her work, represented by Korea (variously a Korea that is at once itself and a possession of Japan) and the United States—nor time, the progression of identity ordered through a narrative beginning, middle, and end, can be understood in terms of a single narrative of nation, according to *Dictée*. The time described is *transnationalist time*, which structures a narrative not developmentally but cornucopically. Distinctions between past and present, or foreigner and citizen, or outsider and insider, are maintained only through a deliberate erasure of the dynamic relations between the nation’s exterior and interior. Transnationalist time references the fracture between historic and lived time for the Asian American subject, and thus reconfigures the relations between a nation and its citizen-subjects” (“Imaginary Borders” 286).

²⁰ See Stella Oh’s “The Enunciation of the Tenth Muse in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictée*” (2002), Min Jung Lee’s “Baring the Apparatus: *Dictée*’s Speaking Subject Writes a Response” (1999), and Eun Kyung Min’s “Reading the Figure of Dictation in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictée*” (1998).

²¹ See Michael Rydzynski’s “New Technologies Inspired Works of Korean-American Artist,” available at <<http://www.irvineworldnews.com/Bstories/jan17/cha.html>>.

²² This quotation is taken from Elaine Kim’s “Poised on the In-between: A Korean American’s Reflections on Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictée*” in *Writing Self, Writing Nation*. Kim identifies Cha’s poem as a piece of mail art completed in 1977.

²³ For example, Ong argues that by beginning his narrative with “The late summer of that year” instead of identifying the precise year, Hemingway’s readers are instructed to occupy the position or role of one who was there with the narrator and hence does not need to be given any more information (13). Ong suggests that through this particular rhetorical technique Hemingway addresses his audience in such a way that they are made to feel familiar with the context/s in which the narrative takes place.

²⁴ A detailed explanation of Grice’s maxims appears later in this chapter.

²⁵ Mary Louise Pratt explains that we can assume the violations in literary works are not unintentional based on our knowledge of how literature gets produced and disseminated. Writers clearly edit and revise their work, as do their editors, so unintentional violations would presumably be noticed before the text was actually printed for publication. See pages 169-75 in *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*.

²⁶ Ong makes an exception in the case of two deaf people who might exchange words through writing in the presence of one another, or two Chinese speakers whose dialects are so different that they can only understand each other’s written language. I would add to this list the current possibility of two people conversing in the presence of one another over email or text messaging.

²⁷ J.L. Austin, in his book, *How to Do Things with Words*, examines the performative function of language and classifies types of utterances into one of three categories: *locutionary acts*, or uttering of a proposition such as, “I will bring my dictionary tomorrow”; *illocutionary acts*, or acts which the speaker makes in uttering the locution such as promising to bring the dictionary tomorrow when one says “I will bring my dictionary tomorrow.” This locution may perform multiple illocutionary acts, depending on the intention

of the speaker. The speaker may also or instead be making a prediction, a threat, or an assertion. Finally, when a speaker performs locutionary and illocutionary acts, she is also performing *perlocutionary acts*. In other words, she is performing an act that in turn produces effects or consequences on the audience.

²⁸ Grice identifies four different types of intentional violation: “1. [The speaker] may quietly and unostentatiously *violate* a maxim; if so, in some cases he will be liable to mislead. 2. He may *opt out* from the operation both of the maxim and of the Cooperative Principle; he may say, indicate or allow it to become plain that he is unwilling to cooperate in the way the maxim requires. He may say, for example, *I cannot say more; my lips are sealed*. 3. He may be faced by a *clash*: he may be unable, for example, to fulfill the first maxim of Quantity (Be as informative as is required) without violating the second maxim of Quality (Have adequate evidence for what you say). 4. He may *flout* a maxim; that is, he may blatantly fail to fulfill it” (30).

²⁹ Spahr’s argument for the ways in which the text calls for a “decolonizing practice of reading” points to one of the text’s most unique rhetorical effects. She claims that while critics acknowledge the formal aspects of postmodern works and their relation to “larger political issues,” they have been more attentive to the design or construction of these works than they have to the rhetorical effects that the works have on their readers (24). Spahr urges us to see how a fractured, postmodern text like *Dictée* does not alienate the reader or fracture the reader’s engagement with the text, but rather “forces the reader out of linear, absorptive reading practices and into vertical, circular, inter- and intra-cultural ways of reading all of which undermine the coercive aspects of postmodernism that [Frederic] Jameson would label colonialist” (25).

³⁰ Lowe writes that these terms “are attempts at naming the material contradictions that characterize Asian American groups” (67).

³¹ James Gee’s “borderland Discourse” theory is useful for understanding and interpreting the liminal space in which members of oppressed groups can communicate. I discuss this theory at greater length in the concluding chapter. According to Gee, “borderland Discourses” are spaces where “people from diverse backgrounds and, thus, with diverse primary and community-based Discourses, can interact outside the confines of public-sphere and middle-class elite Discourses” (162). Gee uses the capital “D” in “Discourses” to reflect his modified definition of the term. According to Gee, “Discourses are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes. A Discourse is a sort of identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize” (127). Excepting instances in which I quote Gee directly or refer to his ideas I will use the lower case “d” for “discourse.”

³² Although Bhabha’s theories and arguments are grounded in a specifically western context—that is, he draws from Lacanian psychoanalysis, Derridean deconstruction, and European postmodernism in order to construct his arguments about English colonialism—his work is useful to those studying other forms of oppression and subversion and negotiations of cultural difference operating outside of the realm of the postcolonial. Bhabha’s work is especially relevant today given that we live in an age of transnationalism, globalization, and diasporic societies. The tense relations, for example, among blacks, Latinos, and Korean immigrants in South Central, L.A., as demonstrated by the 1992 L.A. riots, might be theorized using Bhabha as a critical framework. Because his investigation focuses on the ways in which dominated peoples and cultures have not only survived but have impacted the lives and cultures of the oppressors, his theories can be (and have been) applied to many different types of comparative cultural studies. While there are certain advantages to this broad applicability—namely that using the discourse of colonialism might help to shed light on other forms of domination and strategies for resistance, there are significant drawbacks as well. Using colonialism analogously risks glossing over conditions and queries particular to other types of cultural study while at the same time eliding the complexities of the colonizer/colonized relationship.

³³ Though it was published in 1981, *Chickencoop* was produced for the first time in 1972 by the American Place Theatre of New York.

³⁴ The term “hyperliteracy” has been used to describe the linguistic practices of other fictional and non-fictional characters. Morris Young, for example, notes that Maxine, the narrator of Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, becomes “hyper-literate” in her kindergarten classroom as a result of her anxiety about language and “the performance she must enact” (100). Young writes, “While [Maxine] fumbles with language, she also takes painstaking care to be ‘hyper-literate’—the ‘complete, grammatical sentence that comes squeaking out at impossible length’—so that her legitimacy and citizenship will not be questioned though such unease will mark her nonetheless” (100-101). For Harryette Mullen, “hyperliteracy” connotes the ability to communicate in multiple languages and discourses. According to Mullen, Fran Ross’s Oreo is hyperliterate as she is an “accomplished code-switcher ... as capable of speaking vernacular black English with her grandmother as she is able to schmooz with her mother in Yiddish-inflected English” (115).

³⁵ For more detailed information on the various immigrant groups, including years of immigration, number of immigrants, legal status, exclusion laws, literacy rates, gender ratio, socioeconomic backgrounds, etc. see Takaki’s *Strangers from a Different Shore* (1989; 1998) and Sucheng Chan’s *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (1991).

³⁶ Poems written on the walls of Angel Island between 1910 and 1940 by Chinese immigrants while waiting to be admitted into the U.S. have been documented and translated in *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910-1940* by Him Mark Lai, Genny Lim, and Judy Yung (1980). Marlon Hom has collected recently translated Cantonese vernacular rhymes written in the early 1910s by Chinese Americans living in San Francisco’s Chinatown in *Songs of Gold Mountain* (1987). Janice Mirikitani has compiled the written and translated work of first-generation Japanese immigrants into an anthology called *Ayumi: A Japanese American Anthology* (1980). See also *Poets Behind Barbed Wire*, edited by Jiro Nakano and Kay Nakano (1983) for a collection of *tanka* poems written by first-generation Japanese Americans interned in wartime relocation camps. Early Korean immigrant writing appears in Brenda Paik Sunoo’s *Korean American Writings: Selected Material from Insight, Korean American Bimonthly* (1975). More recently, Xiao-huang Yin has published a book of Chinese American literature written in both English and Chinese and dating back to the 1850s. See *Chinese American Literature Since the 1850s* (2000).

³⁷ According to Sucheng Chan, attempts to exclude Asians began in 1855 in California, but the laws did not have any impact since they were declared unconstitutional by the higher courts. In 1882, Congress passed the first of several Chinese Exclusion Acts barring entry of Chinese laborers for ten years, but making exemptions for merchants, teachers, students, diplomats and travelers. In 1917, an immigration act was passed to prevent Asian Indians from entering the country. Japanese and Koreans were denied entry after the passage of the 1924 Act, and in 1934, the Tydings-McDuffie Act was passed, limiting the number of Filipinos allowed to immigrate to fifty persons per year. See pages 54-55 in Sucheng Chan’s *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (1991).

³⁸ See Sucheng Chan’s *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* and Ronald Takaki’s *Strangers from a Different Shore* for overviews of the history of Chinese immigrant workers in America.

³⁹ According to the chronology in the most recent edition of *East Goes West* (1997), Kang attended Harvard University in 1922 and again between 1925-1927 during which time he completed a Master’s degree in English education. From 1923-1925 he pursued studies at either Boston College or Boston University; it is unclear from existing records which university he attended.

⁴⁰ I am borrowing this phrase from Ronald Takaki’s book of the same title (1989; 1998).

⁴¹ Han is referring here to the naturalization law that denied citizenship to “Orientals.” According to the Naturalization Act of 1790, only “free whites” were granted citizenship by the United States government.

⁴² See Patricia Chu (2000); Elaine Kim (1990); and Rachel Lee (1999).

⁴³ I thank Jeanne Fahnestock for helping me to identify the situation in these terms.

⁴⁴ See Kyhan Lee's "Younghill Kang and the Genesis of Korean-American Literature" in *Korea Journal* (1991) and Sunyoung Lee's "The Unmaking of an Oriental Yankee" in the 1997 Kaya edition of *East Goes West*.

⁴⁵ According to historian Gary Okihiro, the origin of the term "yellow peril" dates back to the late 1800s when Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany commissioned a painting depicting Austria, England, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, and "'the smaller civilized states'" (represented as "women in martial garb") looking toward "an approaching 'calamity which menaces them'" (118). Wilhelm explains in the accompanying caption that the "threatening danger" is "in the form of Buddha" and that a "Chinese dragon" "represents the demon of Destruction" (qtd. in Okihiro 118). Okihiro notes that while Kaiser Wilhelm probably coined the term "yellow peril," the idea dates back as far as the fifth century B.C.E. when the Greeks and Persians were at war, or in the thirteenth century C.E., when the Mongols swept through and destroyed much of eastern Europe (119).

⁴⁶ Lee notes, based on Kang's own commentary in his Guggenheim Foundation fellowship application from October 1931, that while on the one hand "Death of an Exile" refers to the "tragic character of To Wan Kim," the "deeper meaning" lies in its allusion to what Kang himself described as "'the idea of rebirth in the soul of the hero, which had also been in exile. At the end of the novel, the romantic soul in him is dead, and the soul that remains and feels itself at home in the world is the soul that is facing life in the real sense, pragmatically'" (381). Given Kang's own interpretation and the more obvious reading that refers to To Wan Kim, it is understandable that Kang's publishers did not want to market the novel under this title; as Lee notes in a footnote to her essay, Maxwell Perkins at first suggested the titles, "The Americanization of Younghill Kang" and "Rebirth in America," while Thomas Wolfe's original contributions were "Yankee out of Korea" and "Oriental Yankee." The "eventual title and subtitle of the book," she writes, "were the result of a collaborative brainstorm" by Wolfe, Perkins and "presumably Kang" (397 n12).

⁴⁷ The second edition of *East Goes West* was published in 1965, though I have not found any reviews or critical commentary from this time period.

⁴⁸ Due to the U.S. colonization of the Philippines, Filipinos were considered "nationals" of the United States. As they were neither "aliens" nor "citizens," they could not be excluded on the same basis as other "Orientals." In order to restrict Filipino immigration, their status had to change. Under the 1934 Tydings-McDuffie Act, Filipino Americans were reclassified as "aliens" and immigration was restricted to a quota of fifty persons per year. As "aliens," Filipinos were now ineligible for certain assistance programs under the New Deal. Filipinos were also discriminated against as the Supreme Court determined that because they were not "white," they could not even apply to become naturalized citizens (Takaki 332). See also Ian Haney López's *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (1996) for an investigation of the ways in which race has been used by the court system to justify and manipulate legal definitions of citizenship.

⁴⁹ After the U.S. annexation of the Philippines in 1898, tens of thousands of Filipinos migrated to Hawai'i and the continental U.S. The vast majority were poor, uneducated laborers while, according to Takaki, "several hundred, possibly a few thousand—were *pensionados*, or government-sponsored students." According to Takaki, 84 percent of those who migrated to California between 1920 and 1929 were males under thirty years of age. The few Filipino women who migrated to Hawai'i did so at the request of their husbands or the HSPA (Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association), which determined that men with families were more reliable as workers than men who were single. Since migrants on the "mainland" were constantly moving from one location to another, wives did not often accompany their husbands but rather waited for them at home in the Philippines assuming, like their husbands, that their sojourn to America was only temporary (Takaki 58-59). See also Chan's *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* and E. San Juan's introduction to *On Becoming Filipino* (1995) for more information on the history of Filipinos in America.

⁵⁰ Although this period marked the first significant migration of Filipinos to the U.S., it was certainly not the first time Filipinos had set foot on U.S. soil. Forced to work on trading ships during the Spanish galleon trade era from 1565 to 1815, many Filipinos jumped ship on the bayous and settled in the Louisiana territory.

⁵¹ David Palumbo-Liu, in his introduction to *The Ethnic Canon* (1995), argues for a “critical multiculturalism” by encouraging “diverse and often contradictory modes of interpretation and critique within the specificities of history, national cultural politics, and transnational movements of cultural objects” (22). These critiques or “counterreadings” challenge such widespread beliefs by arguing against reductive and homogenous readings of ethnic literature as literature that simply represents the “ethnic experience.” While all literature may be said to represent experience, the issue here is that the experience being represented is seen as “foreign” to dominant culture and hence is marginalized.

⁵² While the book is generally read as a fictional autobiography, many critics claim that the narrator, Allos, represents not just Bulosan but other Filipinos in America. Carey McWilliams, in his introduction to the novel, expresses doubt that the experiences depicted in the novel were Bulosan’s alone and writes that “it can fairly be said . . . that some Filipino was indeed the victim of each of these or similar incidents” (vii); Marilyn Alquizola also identifies Allos as a fictive narrator who represents both the author and other Filipinos in her essay, “Subversion or Affirmation: The Text and Subtext of *America Is in the Heart*”; and E. San Juan Jr. calls the text a “novelistic synthesis of Filipino lives” and identifies Allos, the narrator-protagonist, as “Bulosan’s persona” (*On Becoming* 9-10).

⁵³ Other fantasy themes that I have identified in works by Asian Americans include the fight for the Korean independence movement in Ronyoung Kim’s *Clay Walls*, and the rhetorical visions of Japanese American men during World War II as expressed in John Okada’s *No-No Boy*. Those who answered “no” to two questions on the loyalty questionnaire were viewed by the Japanese as “loyal” and “true” Japanese, while those who answered “yes” to both questions were considered by the American government to be “loyal” Americans. Question 27 asked, “Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?” and 28 asked, “Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power or organization?” (Weglyn 136). The rhetorical visions of each group provided the members/characters with a sense of purpose and belonging at the same time that they motivated them to take action. As immigrants or second- or third-generation Asian Americans who were still perceived as “foreign,” these groups created fantasy themes as a way of dealing with their status as exiles, non-citizens, or racialized minorities who faced discrimination and marginalization despite their legal citizenship status.

⁵⁴ This is not to say that Filipinos were regarded as entirely unthreatening. Filipinos, like the other Asian immigrants who came before them, encountered racial discrimination and violence, especially during the first half of the twentieth century. In California, where anti-Filipino violence was most prevalent, a series of race riots triggered by racism and sex broke out in January 1930, leaving dozens injured and at least one dead. As Takaki explains, the riots were the result of “economic rivalry and sexual jealousy” (327). Euro-American farm laborers felt that Filipinos were taking job opportunities away from them and were incensed by what they considered improper mixing among Filipinos and white women. They were seen as a sexual threat to white men and reinforced already existing anxieties about “white racial purity” (Takaki 329). In order to “preserve the white race,” California Attorney General U.S. Webb “insisted that the anti-miscegenation law be applied to Filipinos” (Takaki 330).

⁵⁵ See Patricia Chu, *Assimilating Asians*; Susan Evangelista, *Carlos Bulosan and His Poetry*; Elaine Kim, *Asian American Literature*; Rachel Lee, *The Americas of Asian American Literature*; and E. San Juan, *Carlos Bulosan and the Imagination of the Class Struggle*.

⁵⁶ Lee argues that “part of the appeal” of these women “lies in their speaking an American inclusiveness that remains synonymous with the narrator’s dream of brotherhood.... these women, in their ‘maternal solicitude’ underscore the primacy of the male subject and the importance of his forging brotherly bonds with other men” (32).

⁵⁷ See, for example, Kandice Chuh (2003; 31-57) and Melinda L. de Jesús’ “Reclaiming History, Rewriting Desire: Reclaiming Queerness in Carlos Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart* and Bienvenido Santos’ *Scent of Apples*” (2002). For discussions on sexuality as it relates to Asian America see David L. Eng’s *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (2001); *Q&A: Queer in Asian America*, eds. David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom (1998); *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of the Gay and Lesbian Experience*, ed. Russell Leong (1996); Crystal Parikh’s “‘The Most Outrageous Masquerade’: Queering Asian-American Masculinity” (2002); Dana Takagi’s “Maiden Voyage: Excursion into Sexuality and Identity Politics in Asian America” (1996); and Jennifer Ting (1995, 1998).

⁵⁸ In Takagi’s discussion of the Filipino race riots of the 1930s, he quotes a number of sources that make explicit this stereotype. In one example, he cites remarks made by San Francisco Municipal Court Judge Sylvain Lazarus in a 1936 *Time* magazine article: “It is a dreadful thing when these Filipinos, scarcely more than savages, come to San Francisco, work for practically nothing, and obtain the society of these [white] girls.... Some of these [Filipino] boys, with perfect candor, have told me bluntly and boastfully that they practice the art of love with more perfection than white boys, and occasionally one of the [white] girls has supplied me with information to the same effect. In fact some of the disclosures in this regard are perfectly startling in nature” (qtd. in Takagi 329).

⁵⁹ See Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (1994).

⁶⁰ Wu also identifies prevalent stereotypes of Asian American women, though this list is less thorough: “My mother and my girl cousins were Madame Butterfly from the mail order bride catalog, dying in their service to the masculinity of the West, and the dragon lady in a kimono, taking vengeance for her sisters. They became the television newscaster, look-alikes with their flawlessly permed hair” (6).

⁶¹ According to Dorothy Ritsuko McDonald, *Chickencoop*, Chin’s first play, “won the East West Players playwrighting contest in 1971 and was produced by the American Place Theatre of New York in 1972” (xiv).

⁶² Despite the heterogeneity of Asian ethnic groups, Asians were and often still are lumped together as “Orientals” in the American imagination. Racial epithets, such as “gook” and “chink,” and stereotypes, such as the “inscrutable Asian,” which are used to discriminate against Asians in America regardless of ethnic background, reflect this homogenization. However some stereotypes are reserved for specific ethnic groups. Filipino Americans, for example, have historically been constructed as hypersexual as opposed to asexual or homosexual, while many South Asian Americans have been stereotyped as “techies,” cab drivers, convenience store clerks and, since September 11, 2001, terrorists who threaten their own nation’s security.

⁶³ Frank Chin and his narrator-protagonist Tam Lum are both American-born and claim English as their native language. Chang-rae Lee, on the other hand, was born in Seoul, Korea and moved to the United States when he was three years old (Cooper 24); Henry Park, as Lee writes, was born in America “at the end of a long plane ride from Seoul” (*Native Speaker* 334).

⁶⁴ Huang and Trie were at the center of the 1996 scandal in which both naturalized U.S. citizens were accused of illegal fundraising for President Clinton’s re-election and the Democratic National Committee. ‘Asia’ and ‘Asian America’ became conflated in this scandal, as represented in the political cartoon on the cover of the March 24, 1997 edition of the *National Review* in which President Clinton, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Al Gore were caricatured as buck-toothed and dressed in “Asian” garb. Wen Ho Lee, also a naturalized U.S. citizen, was indicted in 1999 for mishandling classified information. He was charged with

over 50 criminal counts and held in solitary confinement in New Mexico for nine months. According to Volpp, it has become clear that Lee is a victim of racial profiling. Several officers of the Los Alamos lab and the Energy department have admitted publicly that Lee was targeted because of his ethnicity. See also Frank Wu's discussion in *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White* (104-16 and 176-90).

⁶⁵ See E.D. Hirsch Jr.'s *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1987).

⁶⁶ Other t-shirts that Abercrombie & Fitch produced read "Rick Shaw's Hoagies and Grinders. Order by the foot. Good meat. Quick feet"; "Buddha Bash: Get your Buddha on the Floor"; and "Wok-N-Bowl." After numerous protests across the country Abercrombie & Fitch pulled the line of t-shirts from stores nationwide.

⁶⁷ Elaine Kim writes that according to the producer of the first Charlie Chan film, John Stone, the Charlie Chan character "was deliberately decided upon partially as a refutation of the unfortunate Fu Manchu characterization of the Chinese, and partly as a demonstration of his own idea that any minority group could be sympathetically portrayed on the screen with the right story and approach" (qtd. in E. Kim, *Asian American* 18). Other critical studies of stereotypical representations of Asian Americans in mass media and popular culture include James Moy's *Marginal Sites: Staging the Chinese in America* (1993); Darrell Hamamoto's *Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of TV Representation* (1994); Jachinson Chan's *Chinese American Masculinities: From Fu Manchu to Bruce Lee* (2001); and *Screening Asian Americans* (2002), edited and with an introduction by Peter X. Feng.

⁶⁸ Lee clarifies an important distinction between the terms "alien" and "foreign." He says that "'foreign' refers to that which is outside or distant, while 'alien' describes things that are immediate and present yet have a foreign nature or allegiance" (3). "The difference," he says, "is political"; the tourist is "foreign" because her presence is temporary whereas the immigrant is "alien" because she has no intention to leave (or her "declared intention is suspect"). Lee writes, "Only when aliens exit or are 'naturalized' (cleansed of their foreignness and remade) can they shed their status as pollutants" (3). On the construction of Chinese immigrants as "contaminated" and "diseased," see Nayan Shah's *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (2001).

⁶⁹ See Daniel Kim's "The Strange Love of Frank Chin" for an insightful discussion of homoeroticism and self-loathing in Frank Chin's works. According to Kim, Chin bears a "deeply ambivalent" identificatory relationship to the stereotype of the Asian "gay" man. He writes that although the stereotype "is presented in [Chin's] writings as an image of what Chin is not, it also represents what he believes he has become, what he irremediably feels himself to be: a yellow man who harbors a deep and abidingly strange love for the white man—strange because it is highly eroticized but antisexual, simultaneously libidinal and identificatory. Moreover this love is intimately intertwined with an equally profound hatred that is at once sadistic and masochistic" (270). See also King-kok Cheung's "The Woman Warrior versus The Chinaman Pacific: Must a Chinese American Critic Choose between Feminism and Heroism?" in *Conflicts in Feminism* (1990).

⁷⁰ In her book, *Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture* (1997), Susan Gubar looks at cross-racial (black/white) impersonations or imitations in various media such as film, fiction, poetry, photography, journalism, and painting and explores their impact on American culture. She writes that the term "racechange" is "meant to suggest the traversing of race boundaries, racial imitation or impersonation, cross-racial mimicry or mutability, white posing as black or black passing as white, pan-racial mutuality," and that representations of "racechange" "test the boundaries between racially defined identities, functioning paradoxically to reinforce and to challenge the Manichean meanings Western societies give to color" (5-6). To my knowledge, there is as of yet no broad study of literary representations of "racechanges" among Asians and blacks.

⁷¹ The critics/reviewers I cite here are commenting on the live production of the play and not on readings of the text. While analysis of literary critical reviews would be fruitful for comparative purposes, I have

chosen to limit my study mostly, but not entirely, to contemporaneous reviews of actual productions and critical examinations of the text as performance. The body of work focusing on the text of *Chickencoop* is especially large since so many people have taken issue with Chin's masculinist and misogynistic rhetoric. Precisely because of the volume of work aimed at criticizing Chin and *The Chickencoop Chinaman*, I have chosen to discuss only a few of the critics in order to illustrate how his work is rhetorical in ways that perhaps Chin did not intend or expect.

⁷² This quotation is from the unpaginated Preface to the 1961 edition of Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction*.

⁷³ Fisher and Filloy use the term "aesthetic proof" to refer to proofs that "have their origin in an aesthetic response to the work's elements" (347).

⁷⁴ I do not mean to suggest that these traditions have equal currency in U.S. culture, for it is obvious that they do not. As Shimakawa suggests, by appropriating black discourse, "all Tam and Kenji have succeeded in doing is moving from one position of subordination or site of oppression to another; that is, African American speech may have provided limited access to expression, but in the context of a larger U.S. American culture, the opportunities for expression via that avenue are limited indeed" (93).

⁷⁵ Shimakawa notes that while the play references the comic-strip version of *The Lone Ranger*, she believes the radio transmission is "more significant—both because of Chin's prop directions and because the trope connecting the radio and the Old West is picked up in the play's closing monologue" (174 n8).

⁷⁶ See *Shifting Borders: Rhetoric, Immigration, and California's Proposition 187* (2002) by Kent Ono and John Sloop for an illuminating analysis of the rhetoric surrounding Proposition 187 and its implications for the discourses of race and U.S. immigration and citizenship.

⁷⁷ See, for example, Min Song's review in *Amerasia Journal*; Mary Jane Hurst's "Presidential Address: Language, Gender, and Community in American Fiction at the End of the Century"; Rand Richards Cooper's "Excess Identities"; Tim Engles' "'Visions of me in the whitest raw light': Assimilation and Doxic Whiteness in Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker*"; Daniel Kim's "Do I, Too, Sing America? Vernacular Representations and Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker*"; Crystal Parikh's "Ethnic America Undercover: The Intellectual and Minority Discourse"; and You-me Park and Gayle Wald's "Native Daughters in the Promised Land: Gender, Race, and the Question of Separate Spheres."

⁷⁸ As Lowe explains, due to the increasing demand for low-wage labor in Asian and Latin American countries in the period after World War II, the proportion of U.S. workers in the manufacturing industry fell as the proportion working in the service industry increased. She writes that during this period, "the capital imperative came into greater contradiction with the political imperative of the U.S. nation-state." Transformations in the economy, she explains, "have produced increased demand for immigrants to fill minimum-wage, unskilled, and part-time jobs, yet these same economic processes have initiated new waves of anti-immigrant nativism and exacerbated the state's need to legislate immigration" (15). The 1965 Immigration Act "opened" immigration such that "low-wage, service-sector workers" as well as "proletarianized white-collar professionals" could enter (15; 189-90 n42). These post-1965 immigrants, Lowe maintains, represent an economic contradiction: "the state claims to be a democratic body in which all subjects are granted membership, while the racialized immigrant workers from whom capital profits are historically excluded from political participation in the state" (183 n19). In addition to these low-wage workers and white-collar professionals, approximately 1.5 million refugees have come to the U.S. since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. As well, immigrants from South Korea and the Philippines, two countries also affected by U.S. colonialism and neocolonialism, have arrived in large numbers since 1965. Lowe argues that "The post-1965 Asian immigrant displacement differs from that of the earlier migrations from China and Japan, for it embodies the displacement from Asian societies in the aftermath of war and colonialism to a United States with whose sense of national identity the immigrants are in contradiction precisely because of that history" (16). Moreover, Kandice Chuh points out that Asian nations can no longer be perceived, from a Eurocentric perspective, "primarily as sources of labor and raw materials for

‘Western’ capitalism.” She writes that instead, some Asian countries are now “recognized exporters of capital and are influential nodes in the multilateral trajectories of transnational capitalism.” Thus, in addition to the immigrant laborers described above, there is currently “a large professional, managerial class whose migrations may be multilateral and whose members are not necessarily interested in formally attaching themselves to the United States by way of citizenship” (*Imagine Otherwise* 7).

⁷⁹ Since many people could not (and still cannot) distinguish among Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, or Chinese Americans during this period in U.S. history, Korean Americans and Chinese Americans wore buttons that identified them as such in order to avoid suspicion. I mention this here because it reflects the stereotypical notion that “all Asians look alike”—a notion that, like the “yellow peril,” contributed to the racial formation of Asians in America.

⁸⁰ My understanding is that when Bourdieu uses the term “market,” he does not mean it in the purely economical sense; rather, a market is a social space in which relations among its members are determined by their various forms of “capital,” including economic, cultural, and symbolic. According to Bourdieu, economic capital refers to material forms of wealth; cultural capital refers to knowledge or skills related to the cultural arena; and symbolic capital refers to the recognition or acknowledgment that one receives from others for having or accumulating these other forms of capital. See Bourdieu’s *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991).

⁸¹ Based on my own experience teaching the novel to college students in an Asian American literature course I have found that students do not generally respond well to the text. Some find it confusing and would prefer that Chang-rae Lee had written a straightforward tale of an immigrant father and his son, while others would prefer that he had just written a “regular” spy novel without interweaving issues of immigration and assimilation.

⁸² Generally speaking, “local” is used in Hawai‘i to refer to those who were born and raised there, while Native Hawaiian refers to the indigenous population. Steven Sumida includes in his definition of “local” nonwhites (Native Hawaiians, Asian Americans, Samoans, or Puerto Ricans); those who have “historical,” “ethnic” origins in the “working classes of Hawai‘i,” such as Portuguese Americans or Spanish Americans; and some *haoles* (“local haoles,” or local foreigners) who have been raised amongst locals in Hawai‘i (*And the View* xiv). Moreover, he emphasizes that “‘Hawaiian’ is not a synonym for ‘local’ . . . A Hawaiian is quintessentially a local, but a local is not necessarily a Hawaiian” (xv). Because a significant portion of my discussion centers on conflicts between and among locals, *haoles*, and Native Hawaiians, the term, as I use it, will not include these latter two groups.

⁸³ For more information on the controversy over *Blu’s Hanging* and *Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre*, see, for example, Candace Fujikane’s “Sweeping Racism under the Rug of Censorship” (2000), “*Blu’s Hanging* and the Responsibilities Faced by Local Readers and Writers” (1998), and “Reimagining Development and the Local in Lois-Ann Yamanaka’s *Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre*” (1997). See also Donna Foote’s “Trouble in Paradise” (1998); Peter Monaghan’s “Asian-American Studies Group in Turmoil over a Rescinded Book Award” (1998); Scott Whitney’s “Naming All the Beasts: Lois-Ann Talks Back” (1998); and Jamie James’ “This Hawaii is Not for Tourists” (1999).

⁸⁴ I recognize that by beginning my discussion with U.S. and British imperialism I am complicit in the reading and writing of Hawai‘i from a “postcolonial” perspective. As Steven Sumida writes, “we of a postcolonial world are habituated to the notion that Hawaii’s history began in 1778 with Captain Cook’s arrival and the report of his expedition back to Great Britain. This colonial version of Hawaii’s history literally begins with Europeans writing and reading it” (“Sense of Place” 222). While I understand this logic and acknowledge my participation in colonialist discourse, I would argue that it only makes sense to begin here because my discussion centers on the effects of U.S. imperialist practices in Hawai‘i.

⁸⁵ I use quotation marks around these terms to reflect the conflicting ideologies of Asian settlement in Hawai‘i. Trask is especially critical of the use of the term “local” over “immigrant” or “settler” because

she believes it glosses over the history of Asian immigration and Asian settlers' "long collaboration in [Native Hawaiians'] continued dispossession, and the benefits therefrom" ("Settlers" 2). However, as Fujikane points out, the term was also used to reflect the "collective efforts" of locals and Native Hawaiians to resist continental imperialism in the form of immigration from the U.S. and Asia, as well the growing tourist industry ("Between Nationalisms" 26-27). She notes that the term is somewhat ambiguous because of its association with coalition politics and because it is also a way for locals and Native Hawaiians to distinguish amongst themselves—in other words, as a way of avoiding ambiguity. She writes, "For while the terms 'Local' and 'Native Hawaiian' are not necessarily competing terms, Native Hawaiians often find themselves in the position of having to choose the identity that most urgently needs to be represented. Within the context of current struggles for sovereignty, many Native Hawaiians align themselves with the Native Hawaiian Nation, and we need to look more closely at where this political struggle places the identity 'Local'" ("Between Nationalisms" 30). For a discussion of local literature and its politics, see Candace Fujikane's "Between Nationalisms: Hawaii's Local Nation and Its Troubled Racial Paradise" (1994). For a detailed introduction to the local literatures of Hawai'i, see Steven Sumida's *And the View from the Shore: Literary Traditions of Hawai'i* (1991).

⁸⁶ This is particularly the case for local Japanese who now hold more dominant positions, both economically and politically, than any other ethnic group in Hawai'i.

⁸⁷ By "disowning America" Chuh means a process by which the use of the term "postcolonial" critically interrogates Asian Americanist critique such that "Asian Americanist discourse might resist transformation into a depoliticized instrument of hegemonic nationalist pedagogy" (*Imagine Otherwise* 14). The larger aim of this project of "disowning America," then, is both to acknowledge how globalization and transnationalism have impacted Asian American subject formation and to work towards "garnering the economic and social advantages that accrue to achieving the national subjectivity of Asian-raced peoples in the United States" (114).

⁸⁸ Fujikane writes that while both Native Hawaiians and locals claim Hawai'i as a "homeland," "because the stakes for Native Hawaiian nationalism and local cultural nationalism seem asymmetrical, the latter produces highly ambivalent narratives" (24).

⁸⁹ See Ohama et al.'s "Evaluations of Hawaii Creole English and Standard English," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* (2000).

⁹⁰ According to Romaine, Pidgin and other varieties of Creole English were used for literary purposes in Hawai'i dating back to the early 1930s; however, it was not until after World War II that local writers "began to feel confident enough in their own experience to rely on local settings and local speech to convey their message" (534). See also Sumida (1991).

⁹¹ As Suzanne Romaine writes, "The very act of writing in a marginalized language whose status as a language is denied by the mainstream is symbolic of the appropriation of the power vested in the written word, and is at the same time a challenge to a key feature of colonial practice: the use of language policy as a means of social control and discrimination ... writing in HCE becomes, in the terms of Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985, an 'act of identity,' a counter-discourse in which a different reality of otherness is constructed" (533).

⁹² For example, as Brian Street explains in *Social Literacies* (1995), researchers have found that literacy tests developed by companies and given to prospective employees are often used for the purpose of screening out people from certain ethnic, class, or racial backgrounds rather than testing for skills that are necessary for the job (18).

⁹³ The resolution continues to read as follows: "Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for

speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language.” (*College Composition and Communication* 25)

⁹⁴ This act expired in 2002 as President George W. Bush garnered support for his new “school reform” bill known as “No Child Left Behind.” The new act strongly discourages instruction in languages other than “standard” English and, according to James Crawford, federal funding “will be spread more thinly than before—between more states, more programs, and more students” (2002).

⁹⁵ A recent article in the *Washington Post Express* titled, “Census: Less English in U.S. Homes,” reported that, according to the Census Bureau, “Nearly one in five Americans speaks a language other than English at home ... an increase of nearly 50 percent in the past decade.” Spanish is the most common language other than English spoken at home by people five and older, followed by Chinese, French, German, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Italian, Korean, and Russian (3).

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