

Introduction

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

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

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

Obasan's success

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

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

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

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

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



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

The polemics of success

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

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

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

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



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

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



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

Canadian context

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



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

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



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

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

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




Back?

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

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





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

Contributing to Kogawa-criticism

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


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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

From Kogawa's early published writings in

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


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

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




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

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



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



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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

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



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

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

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